William Tyler | Robert Peel: The First Modern Politician 06-12-23

- My talk today is about Politics, or really about a politician, and I suppose if we think about British Victorian politicians. We probably think of the two great giants of Disraeli and Gladstone, yet that's not my subject for today's talk. My subject today is a prime minister who preceded both Disraeli and Gladstone. Instead, it's the story of a man called Sir Robert Peel, P-E-E-L. You could argue, and I, in their sort of balloon debates I would be prepared to take on that you could argue that Peel was the greater of the three of Peel, Disraeli, and Gladstone. Like both Disraeli and Gladstone, Peel was also interested in, and concerned about social reform. But Peel did something else. He changed the very nature of British parliamentary democracy, turning it away from the rather chaotic politics or party politics of the 18th century where you had a leader and followers, and it's all very fluid rather like a sort of child's kaleidoscope. You shook it and then all the parts changed. He set up a structured party. His own party was the Tory Party, and he constructed that a new, and it had a new name the Conservative Party, although, as all of you probably know whether you are British or not, the Party today, can be called Tory or Conservative. The terms are used interchangeably that doesn't matter. It's Peel that changed the old into the new and he created a party system in a sense that all democracies today have in Britain-Conservative Labour in America Democratic-Republican. The parties were now not as fluid as they were in the 18th century. Peel himself has a fascinating background.

He's very unusual, he's a Northern. He comes from Lancashire. That in itself is fairly unusual but what is particularly unusual about Peel is that his family were in industry. They were in the cotton industry at a place called Berry outside of Manchester in Lancashire. They're Northerners, and they're industrialists, and it is from industry, from the cotton industry that the Peel family made their money. And I'll come back to that right at the end of the talk today. We always call him Sir Robert Peel because he had a hereditary title. His father was the first one to be given the title Sir, and his father was also an MP and got it for services to both politics and to industry. And in those days, a knighthood was hereditary. Your son inherited the title. Today, for the benefit of Americans, Canadians, and others listening, you do not, if your father is knighted or services, whatever, to industry shall we say, you do not inherit the title of Sir. It dies with the person who is given the title. However, there are still some knights who do inherit titles from the old system and you can always tell them, "If I'd been given a knighthood for services to Rock University, I would be Sir William Tyler and my son would not inherit the title, it would die with me." But if I inherited the title from my father who'd inherited it from his father and back, and back, then my name would be Sir William Tyler Bart, B-A-R-T after it. And that is the clue to know whether it's a hereditary or simply a personal title. Anyhow, that is why we always refer to him as Sir Robert Peel.

Now, Peel was a Tory as I've said but, nevertheless, as I've also said he was anxious for social reform. He wanted to better the conditions of the industrial working class which he was very familiar with from his family's mills in Lancashire. Now, there are two ways of viewing his concern about reform. One is that he genuinely believed in reform as a moral duty and there's elements of that clearly, with Peel. But there's also the other view, a rather cynical view that he wanted reform but not too much. Peel didn't want to go overboard with reform, gradual reform, small reforms in the name. He wanted gradual reform and gradual reform would enable the manufacturing class from which he came to remain what shall I say, to remain really in charge of the whole system of Britain because they wanted to prevent revolution.

They're always worried at the beginning of the 19th century about revolution breaking out in Britain. After all, in 1800, it was only 11 years since the French had stormed the Bastille and England had witnessed the appalling atrocities of Robespierre’s reign of terror in Paris and across France. In 1800, all

of that is very new and we don't know in 1800, for example, where it's going to end, and the fear always is that this virus of revolution could spread across the channel from France to Britain. And if it was going to spread, their thought was it would be in the industrial areas of the North and Midlands where it'll break out, and so, reforming those areas would ensure, goes the argument, that they would have enough concessions made that the bulk of people would not think about revolution at all.

Now, you can take, you can look at this and slice it in different ways. My own view is they'd probably repeal with both things are press that is, he felt, a moral obligation. And secondly, that he was well aware that if changes weren't made then revolution could break out. You see, there had been a lot of trouble since the French Revolution in Britain itself and there'd been decades of the 19th century were not easy ones. Sometimes we see representations of Victorian Britain in sort of BBC fashion dramas of the period and it's all terribly middle class and all terribly nice. But the truth is that Britain was a boiling pot at the beginning of the 19th century. There was both civil unrest and political unrest, all of which could have led to revolution.

Now, before we leave Peel, now, not only was he a member of the manufacturing classes and a Northerner which might have sort of, you might say, "Well, how did somebody like that ever come to be a Tory Conservative Prime minister?" Well, because his father who'd earned, and a lot of money, became extremely rich, put it partly into his son's education, in fact, there is a story that he told his son that "I'm spending all this money on your education because one day, boy, you'll be Prime Minister." I think it's probably just one of those stories but, nevertheless, the young Robert Peel was sent first, to Harrow School. From there, he went to Oxford. Now, there is a tendency to think that such a root in the 19th century, indeed, you might argue during the 20th century did not mean that somebody was very bright but in Peel's case, had to be quite wrong. He got a double first in Oxford but not only a double first, but he got 'em in quite disparate subjects. He got it in Classics and in Mathematics. This is a man of considerable intellect. He isn't the sort of person that you would wish to invite to a dinner party. He's a bit of a bore, to be honest, but sometimes, bores make the best prime ministers and the best presidents. Sometimes, they don't but in Peel's case, he was the right man at the right time.

Now, as I say, there was a lot of revolutionary thought going on inward but also action. In 1819, in the August, there is a mass meeting of workers in Peterloo Fields which was a open area in the city of Manchester. And it was really a family thing. And families came, wives, children, and it was a fun day out, I mean, that's what it will be called today, a fun day at Peterloo Fields. Unfortunately, there were speeches. They were not particularly inflammatory. They didn't ask people to go and burn down houses in Manchester but they were radical speeches and the authorities in Manchester that is to say the Justices of the Peace called the Militia in, the Military in, and they lost complete control and charged an unarmed crowd causing a number of deaths and many more injuries. It became a byword for Government Oppression. And because it was St Peter's Fields, it gained this name afterwards Peterloo, a play on the word "Waterloo". It was a most appalling moment.

I worked in Manchester, I was principal of the College of Adult Education Manchester in the 1980s. And if you were talking to a group of adults in a class on History and you had men there from the old cotton industry, then the Peterloo Massacre as it became known, was a live issue for them. And they felt bitter against those down in London. The following year, there was even an assassination attempt on the whole Cabinet in London known as the Cato Street Conspiracy.

In 1832, as I mentioned last time, there was an enormous step forward, not so much in its practical form but more in its symbolic form, the Great Reform Bill of 1832, there had been mass rioting as I

think I mentioned last week, in my home city of Bristol where both the Lord Mayor of the City and the Bishop of Bristol were in danger of losing their lives in the riots in support of the Reform Bill. And, again, the magistrates in Bristol called the Military in, and again, there are deaths. But the Reform Bill was passed even though there was a Tory Government, well, there wasn't a Tory Government. It was a Liberal Government but the Tories were the controlling party in the House of Laws. And at that time, they could vote any legislation produced by the Commons now, so the Liberal Government and the Commons was defeated by the Tory majority in the House of Commons. Now, that isn't an unusual thing in American terms in terms of the Senate and the House. It's exactly, the same situation except, of course, that the House of Lords at that time and today, is not elected. There was a hereditary house in Wales.

Now, there are many other examples of trouble in the Industrial North and, after all, Bristol in 1830s was a great commercial city. Not in the North but, nevertheless, a very great commercial city. But there was trouble also in rural areas and in the South of England, particularly, the Southeast of England during the 1830s, were a number of riots on farms called the Swing Riots, called Swing because there was a mythical leader of the riots called Captain Swing. No one's quite sure why they took Swing as a name but it, I put my money on the idea is if you don't pay us a living wage we'll swing for it, in other words, "We'll hang you," was the message to the landowners and to the farmers.

All of this was extremely worrying for anybody whether a Whig or Tory who became prime minister around this time, indeed, there's the beginnings of a rather different movement and that is in the same period the development of trade unions. Trade unions were spreading and many, many in the middle classes viewed them as extremely dangerous because they didn't believe they only wanted industrial reform, they believed that they wanted political reform, and in the end, of course, by the 20th century, part of the trade union movement has backed a new party. The Labour Party, which in the 20th century oust the Whigs/Liberal Party and replace it with Labour. So, we still have the system that Peel set up of two parties. Now, we have the Conservatives or Tories, choose which words you want to use, and we have the Labour Party, we have two. The Liberals still exist but are not a major party in the way that the Conservative and Labour Party are, at least, as I speak this evening. Because it may be both here and in the states that the old 19th and 20th-century solutions to democratic parties may not hold. We may be in a moment of great change again in terms of political parties and how Parliament or Congress, whatever you call it, actually, operates and we shall have to see that. And this isn't just a British movement or an American movement, it's a movement across all the liberal democracies of the Western world.

And that's what makes Peel interesting because Peel did this back in the beginning of the 19th century and it's lasted 200 years. Whether it will last much longer is, I think, an open question. Peel served twice as prime minister. First of all, for a matter of months between 1834 and 1835 when he took over from the Duke of Wellington, and secondly, between 1841 and 1846. So, he straddles Victoria's accession to the throne 1834/35 before she comes to the throne in 1837, and 1841 to '46 after she was queen, and indeed, after Albert had become Prince Consort. He became prime minister at a time of change.

Now, I've got a quotation here from Gordon Carr's book on the Victorian era which I wanted to share. I'm not answering the question I was asked last week about numbers of the working-class and middle-class because I want to do that next week. What I want to do now is to talk about increased populations and Carr writes, "There were extraordinary times that brought changes not only to the economy but also to society." There was massive population growth. Now, rises in population and

decline in population are vitally important to measure and to monitor. Rises in population lead to the problem of how do you feed the people you got, declines in population, lead to the problem of how do you run your industry, your society, and indeed, how you support those who are too young or too old to work. There were extraordinary talent brought changes not only to the economy but also to society. There was massive population there. The population of England and Wales increased from 16.8 million in 1851 to 305 million in 1901. Why is 1851, 1901 over censuses? It had gone in 50 years from under 17 million people living in England and Wales to over 30 million. Now, that is some increase in population. The population of Scotland rose too, from 28 million in 1851 to 4.4 million in 1901. Ireland's population went the other way due to the devastating potato famine that ravaged Ireland in the 1840s. This led to a debt on a huge scale and mass immigration. A million people died and another million immigrated in search for a better life, many to the States. Immigration was not limited to Ireland. A further 50 million left Scotland, Wales, and England for Canada, the United States, South Africa, New Zealand, and Australia. So, we'll come back to the whole issue our population and numbers next week.

But you…, Peel is Prime Minister at the very beginning of this surge, and remember that their statistical base for making decisions in the middle of the 19th century is not a great one. I mean, today, we'd have information provided to prime ministers and presidents at the touch of a button. They ask a question, and someone is on the computer finding out, drawing up models, modelling population. What will the population of a higher or the population of Somerset be in 50 years' time. Press the buttons and the answer comes out. Sometimes even correctly comes out. But before Peel became Prime Minister for the first time in 1834, five years previously, he had piloted through Parliament when he was home secretary, the Metropolitan Police Act. And I suppose if you asked the general public in Britain today what they know of Robert Peel, most would say they didn't know anything. But those who would know would say he set up a Police Force for London, the Metropolitan Police Force in 1829. The first time London and, indeed, Britain had a professional Police Force. This Force was moreover a civilian force. It wasn't locally recruited and it was unarmed. And thus gave a positive alternative to the authorities when in times of trouble, they called out the soldiers. Now, they could call out the police unarmed except with wooden truncheons. Local men who understood what was going on of the same class as those who were rioting or doing civil unrest as civilian police force.

Interestingly, although we arm our police more now, it is still an unarmed police force. It's still, in that sense, civilian. It's not military whereas in Europe, we have Militias appointed rather than a Militia sort of force-armed, or take France, for example, here it's different. What is interesting is at the time they were given various names because they wore blue uniforms, they were called raw lobsters because before lobsters are cooked to be eaten they're blue, not red. So, they were called lobsters. They were called Peelers because Sir Robert Peel set them up. But the name that stuck in Britain was Bobbies, named after Peel. Now, there's something about the name Bobby which is unthreatening, oh, William, Bobby's going to come and call on you tonight to see why you parked your car in the wrong place. Somehow, the word Bobby still has an association with something that isn't going to knock on your door, knock your door down and come in armed or guns blazing. What they do with things like drug cases but in the name, that's not how it is Very difficult how they're viewed in Britain it's very difficult because we've had so many cases recently particularly with the Metropolitan Police which are very worrying in concerns of racism, homophobia, sexism, rape, all sorts of things have come to light. But there's still this underneath.

Mind you, when this Act went through Parliament in 1829, it had to go through the House of Lords and one elderly peer stood up and said, "I don't quite agree with this at all." He said, "You see, I think it's every Englishman's right to break the law if he wants to," I mean, what a fantastic argument. Every

Englishman's right to break the law if he wants to. But that's the past. The new world is now, although, after 1829, gradually, the word is gradually, did the police forces spread across the country. Originally, it was voluntary whether you set up in say Somerset, for example, which I've mentioned when you set up a Somerset Police Force was voluntary but eventually, it becomes compulsory. But the huge benefit of a police force unarmed civilian and local is that you do not have to call that soldiers in. But as Asa Briggs, the great historian sadly, no longer with us, gave an example from 1839 that's 10 years after the Police Act in London. Authorities were still calling out the army and it was a gradual process. Everything about Victoria, Britain is I think, gradual. Don't look for huge change, you know, like the fall of communism or whatever, it is like that. It's a gradual change. It's not revolution but evolution.

And in 1839, your authorities called out the Militia, the soldiers in order to deal with Charters. Now, Charters were a very British organisation. They were mainly working class with lower-middle-class leadership. And what they wanted, and they'd written it in the Charter were certain points. They wanted elections not to be public, electing members of Parliament. They wanted it to be done in private. secret ballot, indeed. The only thing they asked for which we still don't have is they wanted annual elections. Well, they've not had that. Everything else over a period of time they gained. But in the 1840s and 1830s, they're seen as a threat to society. We're a very divided, maybe every society's always very divided but we seem to be extremely divided then. And there was great fear amongst the middle-class landing, middle-class landowners, middle-class industrialists, middle-class professional men that the Charters had to be controlled. And as Briggs says, Briggs sent out. They sent out people, military to sort them out, and you say, "Well, William, that seems pretty straightforward." That would be the story in any country in the sort of first half of the 19th century.

But Britain is not predictable. Victorian, Britain is particularly not predictable and Asa Briggs goes on to tell this story which is an amazing story. The Government appointed a man called Napier, a senior military officer. "Napier was a loyal," says Briggs, "And a distinguished soldier." He was put in charge of the army's response to Charters' write. The appointment of Napier, a loyal and distinguished soldier who wants to be transferred to India after two years in the North. they put him in the North that's where the trouble is. That's where the industry is. That's where the working class revolution is. Think about Peel's loose, Massacre of 1819. So, Napier is sent but, and it's a huge but, Briggs adds "Napier was sympathetic to the Charters." He believed that quote, "Manufacturers, produce, corrupted morals, bad health, uncertain wages, and dependence on the foreign market." Wow, corrupted morals gives you a clue for where Napier is coming from. He's coming from a Christian moral base, a corrupted morals, well, that's a typical middle-class foreign view of how the working class lives. They have no morals but it's more than that because as as he said, and this is Napier's words. He had bad health, that was an issue. Bad health, why bad health? Because of bad housing, the slum conditions which I'll talk about next week, they had, and because of the appalled situations in factories no health and safety. So, bad health, uncertain wages, you could be locked out and given no money at all. If times were bad, the manufacturer, the industrialists locked the doors and you were out with no money. And then, finally, dependence on the foreign market. If we couldn't sell the cotton goods we had produced then there was no work for them. There was no state intervention to provide a blanket to catch them in. if they failed, they failed.

And this is the man put in charge of the Military Operation to deal with them. Briggs says, "In politics, Napier was a radical sympathetic to the Charter and objecting equally to Whig, Liberal imbecility," his words, Napier's, "And Tory or Conservative injustice. The doctrine slowly reforming when men are starving is of all things the most silly." He said, "Vanishing men cannot wait." Now, that's really radical. He doesn't say, "We want gradual change," he says, "We must have change." The doctrine of slowly

reforming when men are starving is of all things the most silly vanishing men cannot wait, and yet he was the man in charge of securing peace in the North. And he did so, and he deployed soldiers. But this begins to show a different side of Victorian Britain. It begins to say that the old unconcern of the middle-class and upper-classes as regards to working-class is disappearing. It's being replaced by a sense of responsibility and in Christian theology to those less well off in any sort of way than yourselves, it's Judeo Christianity in action. And so, it brings us back to this whole issue of Victorian Christianity was Napier hypocritical, because he believed that there should be serious reform and yet he was prepared to send troops. The word hypocritical as I said last week is very difficult in terms of the Victorians and particularly in terms of Victorian moral judgments based upon what I think we would describe as Evangelical Christianity the left-wing theology of the large parts of the Church of England. But let's move on.

This is your Pius, now, your Pius the Pope, he said this in 1812, so that's a long time before the 1830s and '40s that I'm talking about with the Charters in 18, as long goes 1812, Byron wrote this, I'll find it somewhere quickly. In his maiden speech in the House of Lords in 1812, Lord Byron said, "Nothing but absolute what could have driven a large and want honest and industrious body of the people into the commission of excesses so hazardous to themselves, their families, and their community. You may call the people a mob but do not forget that a mob too often speaks the sentiment to the people. Is there not blood enough upon your Penal Code that more must be brought forth through ascend to and testify against you? How will you carry this Bill into effect? Can you commit a whole country to their own prisons? Who you erected in every field and hang men like scarecrows?" Well, that's also a radical statement but 1812, that's over 200 years ago. And a statement in the British Parliament in the House of Lords, not much different than some of the debates in the House of Lords concerning the sending of immigrants to Rwanda for assessment. This is a modern Britain that's emerging in the 19th century where the middle classes and the upper classes, people like Napier, people like Byron, have a genuine concern and a genuine wish to find out why. Why are you revolting? Why are you demanding things? And the answer is because the government doesn't care. Because the government doesn't act.

But I've got to look at the time I'm getting carried away. I didn't mean to spend so much time but I think you probably gathered from my enthusiasm that Peel is really quite a hero of mine. The legislation for the Metropolitan Police was introduced in 1829, and 1829 we also saw another important piece of legislation which was the Catholic emancipation which meant that Roman Catholics had equal rights to Protestants across the United Kingdom and Great Britain, in other words in Ireland too. And that 1829 Act was opposed by the Tories. Some of you may have heard the phrase that the Tory Party, the Conservative Party is the Church of England at prayer. Well, I don't think we should say that today, but when I was younger you might have been able to say that. And certainly, in 1829, you would said it, and both Peel and the Duke of Wellington were entirely opposed. And, again, they could defeat the Whigs, the Liberals through a Conservative majority in the House of the Lords. But Wellington asked the Tory Lords to stay away from parliament so the Bill could get through, and Peel changed his view earlier in his life. He'd been called Orange Peel orange because that's the colour of Protestants in Ireland, and he changed his view. He has been both then and now criticised for being a politician that swung from one view to the alternative view.

Now, you can look at politicians in two ways. Either you look at those who are real politic politicians who see that the time has come to change and do. And in modern British history, you can look at Harold Miller as being one of those, a rare politic politician, or you can take a view that you want a politician who has a clear view, a message and they will stick to that. Whatever. Mrs. Thatcher, for example, in modern politics, I'm in favour of rare politic politicians who have the flexibility to change as

circumstances change. And I would not level that as a charge against Peel. You may take and are entitled to take a quite different view of politicians and, therefore, you would find yourselves in the band of critics of Peel. How could you trust this man who suddenly switched to a different viewpoint? Well, the Bill went through, and it needed to go through. And it was another step towards a modern Britain.. There was no threat from Catholics by 80. The threat from Catholic came from the Jacobites from the House of Stuart but that had been defeated at Coello, less than well 80-odd years before in 1746.

But now we had to catch up with the reality of the situation, and the reality was, we could not hold on to the beliefs of your youth, in fact, Peel was born in the year that the brother of Bonnie Prince Charlie that Cardinal Henry Duke of York died in Rome. And so, there was still that light 11 years only in 1800 where everyone aware of the French Revolution in the late 1780s, they were still aware of the Stuarts but it's gone by 1829. I'm not sure that one can say that things were going faster and faster in the 19th century because I think every century, things go faster and faster. But what you can say is that was driven by a view of progress rationality in the 19th century in Britain. And it's the rationality of argument and the belief in progress that saw even the Duke of Wellington, an art Conservative small sea and big sea who dropped his opposition to Catholic emancipation. In 1834, during his, in December 1834, during his first stint as Prime Minister was when Peel shifted the tectonic plates of British politics. On the 18th of December, in his own parliamentary constituency of Tamworth in the Midlands, he issued what became known as the Tamworth Manifesto and afterwards, it was printed and distributed throughout the country. He laid out the basis in this for a modern Conservative Party different from the old Tory Party.

In his book on Parliament, Chris Bryant, now Sir Chris Bryant, Labour MP, who written two volume history of Parliament which is absolutely in my view outstanding, writes this. "The Conservatives had by 1834 plenty of the building blocks on a new party to hand." Edmund Burke had pointed the way with his exhalation that, quote, "When bad men combine the good must associate as they will form one by one an unfitted sacrifice in a contempt struggle." Well, I offer that as advice across all the countries that you all listening represent. Burke said, "When bad men combine the good must associate, else they will fall one by one, an unfitted sacrifice in a contemptible struggle," and Burke's concept of a party was "A body of men united for promoting by their joint endeavours the national interest upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed." And that is the basis from which Peel begins to issue this extraordinary statement in the Tamworth Manifesto, this is what he said. There were only 586 electors in Tamworth. Don't think this is democratic Briggs.

In the 1830s, it isn't, we've got to wait for further reforms under Disraeli so that we extend the franchise amongst men and we have to wait until the end of the First World War until we extend the franchise into some women to have the vote. Well, this is part of what he said, what Peel said in Tamworth, the 18th of December 1834, it's a seminal moment in British Parliamentary and constitutional history. "I am addressing through you to that great an intelligent class of society of which you are a portion and a fair and acceptable representative to that class which is much less interesting the contentions of party than in the maintenance order and the cause of good government that frank exposition of general principles and views which appears to be anxiously expecting, and which you not to be the inclination and cannot be the interest of a minister of this country to withhold." Now, he went on to say this. "Now, I say it once that I will not accept power on the condition of reclaiming myself and apostate from the principles on which I have acted. At the same time, I will never admit that I have been either before or after the Reform Bill, the defender of abuses, or the enemy of judicious reforms. I appear with confidence to the active part I took in the great question of the currency in the

consolidation and amendment of the Criminal War in the revival of the whole system of trial by juries of proof that I have not been disposed to acquiescent acknowledge evils either from the mere superstitious reverence or ancient usages, or from the dread of Labour or responsibility in the application of a remedy. That was the basis of modern Conservatism and became the basis of modern liberalism. The basis of modern liberalism.

Once Gladstone, who was first elected a man with power, a member of the Conservative Party took those who had formally supported Peel. Peel's running office by then, and joined the Whigs and established a Liberal Party. And so, by the end of the 1850s, we have a modern Conservative Party and a modern Liberal Party. One left of centre, one right of centre. And although the policies might be different, the issues were agreed to be the same. The solutions might be different but that is why the system has worked well up 'til now. I'm not going to get an argument with British listeners on whether it still exists in my view it's broken. I don't need to tell Americans that it's broken. But we had a system in which we could move from Conservative to Labour governments here. From Democrat to Republican governments in the states without society collapsing or the constitution collapsing. And after a period of time, we have elections, and the party whose held power may go on and win a second election or they may not, and that is how our system has worked. But its never been a system that has undermined the state which is the issue in the states today, with Trump but also to some of us. And if you're in Britain with what I would describe as a new Conservative government.

So, what he's doing is setting up a clear view of the politics of Britain that is the last 200 years if you like, whether it will continue I don't know, I'm not sure in either the States or in Britain, or maybe you can add Australia and Canada to that as well. It's difficult to say where liberal democracy is going but Peel's achievement whilst to serve Britain well throughout the 20th century and for the remainder of the 19th century, as happens in politics, it may have been brilliant. But he still lost the general election in 1835. He was out of power for six years but he thought about it and he introduced an extremely modern way of dealing with being out of power and of planning how to get back into power after six years in opposition. And it is, Chris Bryant writes in this way, and it's wrote with stages. "Following his defeat in 1835, people brought the and often indiscreet and foul mouth MP Billy Holmes together with another MP of Francis Bonham described as rough, faithful, honest in de facto war, the depository of a thousand secrets and the betray of love. Peel asked these two men to organise registration campaigns and coordinate the work of local Conservative associations which now sprung up across the country. Other Conservatives saw the importance of this new campaigning techniques. So, when even Peel was prepared to urge people to register, they now had the makings of a Conservative Party that could win a general election. And indeed, the Conservative Party has been the party that held power most since those days. The years in which Conservative Party in power outnumbered those, the Liberal Party have been in power and later, those at the Labour Party have been in power, so Peel had not only made an appeal intellectually and morally but he also set up a structure. And all of that is really important as we know in modern politics.

Although today, we are worried about such structures across liberal democracy cause of the way that it can be influenced by modern media, by outside sources, by AI, by all sorts of things. He now began in his second administration. He begins to plan to introduce further reforms. One reform was after rather sad incident. In 1843, an unbalanced, mentally unbalanced Scotsman attempted to assassinate Peel in London but in those days before television, and indeed, photographs in newspapers, he didn't really know what Peel looked like. And instead of assassinating Peel, he managed to assassinate Peel's secretary. But what is important about that they didn't string him up. A change to the law came in which introduced the defence of insanity. Now, that might seem an obvious thing but he wasn't

obvious in 1843. There's another example of a step-by-step progress. In 1846, Peel repealed the Corn Laws and it destroyed the Conservative Party for two decades. They were out of Office and yet, as many historians believe the repeal of the Corn Laws saved Britain from revolution. Why did he repeal the Corn Laws? What did the Corn Laws do? Well, the Corn Laws said that you couldn't import foreign grain at cheap prices during times of dearth of our homegrown corn. And what spurred the action was a potato famine in Ireland. Now, as it happened the repeal of the Corn Laws didn't really help the situation in Ireland. Well, that's a different story. Let's stick with the main story. Peel's repeal of the Corn Laws is bread. By repealing the Corn Laws, he allowed cheap grain to come in and, therefore, for the prices of bread on which the industrial workers relied, could be brought down. It was a hugely important thing. We had had bread riots forever in Britain, and they had bread riots in France leading up to the revolution of 1789. By bringing in foreign grain, bread prices could be reduced but, of course, the problem for the British farmers and landowners was that their profits dipped considerably. It is said that the repeal of the Corn Laws benefited 90%, benefited 90% population and only 10% lost out. But the 10% are the influential 10% in Parliament.

And Peel was excoriated by Tories across Britain. He'd let them down, he'd let his own members down and Peel didn't bother, why? Because Peel put country ahead of party. That's an argument that we are having in Britain and I'm sure elsewhere across the liberal democracy. It's the downside of parties where you put party above country. But Peel who introduced the new party system with the repeal of the Corn Boards had put country above party, and that was so important, so, so important. After all, two years later, revolution spreads across Europe in 1848, and it didn't come here, why? Well, for a number of reasons but one of the reasons is undoubtedly the repeal of the Corn Laws. The only thing that happened in 1848 here was some middle-class supporters of the Charters who went to Downing Street and asked permission to hand in a petition to number 10 rather British, I suppose afterwards, they went away and had a cup of tea and a bun, but it wasn't revolution as a cost Europe, we avoided it and we were always going to avoid revolution in Victorian England because the politicians whether Tory or liberal would always make the reforms necessary, even if those reforms were the least they could do. And even if they made them at the 11th hour, they made them, and it's because Peel that both parties, not only the Liberal Party on the center-left, but the Tori Concerted Party on the center-right believed that that was the important thing to do. Country before party, concessions, and reform, and progress before revolution, partly out of a moral obligation to working people who are much less well off than we are but partly also because they're fearful of revolution as I said earlier.

Peel was thrown from Office on the same day as the repeal of the Corn Laws went through Parliament. He was thrown out of Office on another issue. But by then, the concerted party was deeply divided and he's out of politics, and the story moves in different directions. In 1850 to 1850, he dies, a relatively young man in his 60s, he was thrown by his horse whilst riding, and the horse fell upon him and he didn't recover. But before we leave his successes, I should mention two things which we will come back to on a later meeting. He passed in 1842 during the Mines Act, which banned the employment of women and children underground in the mines. In 1844 he passed the first Factory Act that limited the number of hours women and children could work in factories. All this is very Victorian, we're moving forward. It's so easy to criticise the past according to the morality of today, appointing Compton.

One of the biographers of Sir Robert Peel who's book I put on my book list, I hadn't originally put it on, because it was written in the 1970s but I then decided I would put it on. So, if you looked at the book list earlier, you wouldn't have seen it. I put it on later today. A man called Norman Gash. And Norman Gash wrote this in his "The Great Conservative Patriot, a pragmatic gradualist as superb his grasp for fundamental issues as he was a joint in handling administrative detail, intelligent enough to see to

abstract theories, a conciliator who put nation before party, and established consensus politics." Well there's the quote for an essay, isn't it? "Peel put nation before party and established Consensus politics discussed." And that has served Britain well, and I would suggest serve other liberal democracies in the Anglosphere equally, well, whether it serves in the future.

Open question. So, is everything about Peel positive? Well, in this day and age, we have problems with positivity. Peel's reputation has come under attack in the last few years in his home county of Lancaster, in both his hometown of Berry and in Manchester. There have been courts for the towns and city to tear down statues of Robert Peel, and parks in his memory, and streets named after him. The reason? Every American can answer that without thinking slavery. In 1794, Peel's father spoke in the House of Commons, warning of the consequences that will occur in Britain's African colonies if slaves were freed. Moreover, he said the slaves were contented to be slaves. Now, that is a view which is abhorrent to everyone today, but it was a fairly common view in 1790s. In 1806, his father opposed the Foreign Slave Trade Abolition Bill, saying it was a threat to the Lancaster Cotton industry. And today, in the 2020s, Sir Robert Peel, the son who was 18 when his father made some of these speeches, is accused of being implicated in those father's views because he benefited from the prophets of slavery and thus should be condemned. And all the good things that he did which I've talked about, should be forgotten because his father made two inflammatory speeches about slaves inflammatory today but not then, and a father who benefited from slaves. They didn't own slaves incidentally. The case against Peel has been put by a present Mancunian called Sami Pinarbasi who said, "Sir Robert Peel is an icon of hate and racism. Peel Street and Sugar Lane in Manchester may no longer exist but the racism and inequality that they created and represent does." Now, I leave those judgments to you.

Do you think that Peel should suffer for the sins of his father which at the time, were not sins and that all the good that he did should simply be forgotten? Or do you think rather that he should be judged in the temperature of the times? Your choice, and then he writes, with a few direct quotations from Peel himself, first of all, about the police. He said, "The police are the public and the public are the police. Even in Britain, we've gone a long way away from that." And then, what I think another important quotation is, he said, "No minister ever stood or could stand against public opinion. In a democracy, public opinion determines public policy." But he goes on to say this. This is the real key. He goes on to say, "Public opinion is a compound of folic, weakness, prejudice, wrong feeling, right feeling, obstinacy, and newspaper paragraphs" We would now say television and the internet. "Public opinions are compounded folic, weakness, prejudice, wrong feeling, right feeling, obstinacy and newspaper paragraphs." How? Do we give the public more say? If we are dealing with an uneducated public, how do we reconcile democracy? By having representative democracy which all the countries listening to me, representative democracy. How do we reconcile that with a public opinion? Maybe which may hold quite different views, for example, the majority in the House of Commons of a vast majority were against Brexit. But they said they had to follow public opinion as expressed their referendum were to have a referendum, for example, on bringing back the death penalty. Then, I have no doubt that the majority would vote to do so. And would Parliament then say, "We're all against it but we'll follow public opinions."

This is a question of our age. How do we cope in a modern age with representative democracy when our educational systems fail to educate our children into what democracy means? And how to make judgments on what is truth and what is untruth? Finally, Peel said, "There seems to me to be very few facts at least ascertainable facts in politics." Okay. Now that does cause us in a terrible position. Now, in Britain during a general election, anytime politicians can say whatever they like and it doesn't actually have to be truth. There is no way other than the press saying, "But that isn't true." There's no way of

bringing them to a tent for saying untruths. It is a major problem that democracy faces. Peel solves the question of democracy in his own day. Somehow or other, we have to find in Britain another Peel. And in other countries, you have to find another whoever you look back to as someone who believed in consensus politics.

Q&A and Comments:

Thank you very much for listening. I'm sure there's lots of questions and disagreements. Let's have a look.

Q: Mark. Why don't you refer to the cotton industry as agricultural?
A: Well, it isn't agricultural. The cotton was imported into Britain and so the industry in Britain is the manufacturer of cotton in cotton mills. It was a factory organisation. We don't grow cotton in Britain. I'm not sure I can answer that, Mark, in any other way.

Q: Anthony says, "Did he or his father have any connection with slavery?"
A: No, except that the cotton that comes in has slaves. American cotton. American cotton comes in until later in the century when we then bring in Indian and Egyptian cotton but at that time, it's American cotton. Wasn't Byron also a bare-knuckle fighter? Yes, a lot of the aristocracy engage in knuckle-fighting, why? Because they could earn money by it. Not paid, but on the bits taken alongside a bare-knuckle fighting.

Q: And Tony says, "Was PS police funded or were members volunteers?"
A: No, they were funded. It's not like today's special constables, no funded. I don't believe it is too accurate, said Mrs. Satris. Like in too accurate, I think, yeah, T-O-O, okay. Astute real politic, might be a straight anti-communist to famously remarked after meeting Gorbachev as someone with whom we can do business." Yeah, that's true. But on the other hand, I'm not sure you could describe Gorbachev by that stage as a communist.

Thank you, Sheila, that's nice of you.

Q: Why didn't it help the Irish families?
A: Because we didn't send enough corn and the corn we did send was mallard ministered in Ireland. Incidentally, not only by the English but by the Irish. I've had a long conversation with Irish historians at the conference a few years back, and they were adamant that the story is not a much more complex one than the simplistic one that the British simply didn't do anything. It's not quite like that but basically, the grain did not reach the people it should have reached.

Q: Shelly, what did Albert think about Peel's reform?
A: Oh, Albert's all in favour of reform. Albert is a great believer in reform.

Hello, Irene, and what, surely, some of those support would agreed but others were not put in country before parties, they were avoid. Yeah, that I mean, that's the issue. You can take that view, as I say, it's a difficult view, on the other hand, the anti-law league was a very left-wing league led by two intriguing people Compton and Bright. And they were fascinating people. The first meeting I ever went to as an adult educator was a conference held in Compton's House here in, I think it was Compton's right? Compton's House here in Sussex, and that was way back in, oh, goodness, I don't even want to think

that, 1969. Oh, thanks for that. I was going to, I was... It was on the tip of my tongue to give the Bible reference. The Prophet Jeremiah said, "The fathers eat unripe, son's teeth."

Yep. Ed, it is not Peel who may suffer from woke politics, it is today's people have the right to debate and decide on presenting facts as they were. Gladstone many plaques about Gladstone's family history of slave ownership. Yeah, I mean the whole woke debate is a difficult one and a particularly difficult one for historians. Wait until I get to imperialism. That's really difficult. My own personal view is there is nothing wrong with reassessing some of the polasc. There's nothing wrong in presenting two different views but there is something decidedly wrong in making moral judgments on people in the past who live in that past. How, like that is what I find difficult and I think to condemn Peel in the way that he's been condemned, it's just frankly, it's rather silly. It doesn't mean to say, of course, he doesn't mean to say that I'm in favour of slavery. But it doesn't mean to say that you have to judge the actions at the time and not in future. Yes, we would like Queen Elizabeth I to have, oh, I don't know, invented the aircraft or denounce slavery but I mean that's just asking for impossibles.

Q: "How does one judge reform," says Michael. Oh, that's good, "Reducing working arts and factories or banning child Labour will lead to higher production costs and ultimately, to the industry being lost to countries where these factors are less restricted? Isn't it a question of time span?"
A: Oh, Michael, I can't answer that question. That is a really good question which deserves a much better answer than something off the cuff from me tonight. That's a really good question. Yes, all reform carries consequences. All actions carry consequences and politicians have to minimise those consequences and maximise the benefits of working, of reducing working out in factors of banning child Labour were very important. It didn't necessarily lead to higher production costs. It could actually lead to greater efficiency, the... Our problem in Britain with the decline in industry is not through those reforms. Our problem is lack of investment particularly in the aftermath of the first World War. That is what held us back, well, that is in the economic decline of the 1880s and 1890s. I would argue not where Peter was but, Michael, your question is such a really important one. We could spend days looking at that.

Oh, thank you, Joe, yeah. I wanted to make those statements about where we are today, because I thought those were the sorts of questions that we should address We live in changing and interesting times and we must as individuals. What was it that Burke said? "Good men and women must stand up in the face of bad men and bad women," sometimes it's difficult to judge who is bad and who is good, and there can be alternative views on that. But stand up for what you believe in must be a lesson that the Victorians can teach any of us today.

Thank you ever so much for listening. I've come to the end I think with the questions, and I'm going to say, oh, have I got some more? No, I don't think so, unless somebody's put some more in. Hang on. There is, I'm going swimming in a moment, James says, "Agree about the deputy making moral adjustments there about historical figures. There have been some fair balanced recent history of the British empire which acknowledge the positive whether negative e.g. Nigel Biggar." Ah, Nigel Biggar's book is very problematic. Very problematic. There are a lot of errors in the book. I would like to say that his book is brilliant because he went to the same school as I did. But it's not. It's Nigel Biggar's book on colonialism is more of a prelimbic and that's a problem. Wait until I get to the end, I'm dreading doing the empire for you but I will and I'll talk about Nigel Biggar when I do, and there's another book that's been produced. This is for children called "Stolen History" This come out this week, "The Truth about the British Empire" by Sathnam Sanghera. It's a children's version of his earlier book, adults called "Empireland". Now, that book worries me as much as Nigel Biggar's book worries me. And I think we've

got to take as balance of you as we can and we also as historians have to make sure that as far as possible the facts are right, I don't claim that in any talk I give that all the facts are right. All I will claim is I try to make sure that all the facts I give are right. And when I make an opinion, you are all clear that that is an opinion. And I don't have to talk to you as though you are, the 16-year-olds, you're perfectly capable of knowing that I'm expressing an opinion and can disagree. But we do have to try and get the facts accurately. And that will be my criticism of Norman Biggar's book. But I will say something what, I'm not saying it's a bad one. And I'm not saying the intention isn't a good one, and I'm not saying there isn't good things in it but it's difficult. And I'm not saying that Sanghera's book "Stolen History" for the children is all wrong. It isn't, but there are certain things that worry me about it. We are living in a very divided world and I don't like division. It's not right and proper that we should have division. We should be seeking a, what the British call compromise or what Peel called consensus. I think I should open up. I think I've got to the end of the questions. I better stop and get my swimming trunks on then into the sea in five minutes' time.