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Landlordism and Liberty: Aristocratic Misrule and the Anti-Corn-Law League

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From the time of its formation in 1839 until the repeal of the corn laws seven years later, the Anti-Corn-Law League agitated virtually without interruption for the total and immediate repeal of those laws which restricted by high import duties the importation of foreign grain into Britain. Headed by prominent northern industrialists including Richard Cobden, J. B. Smith, George Wilson, and John Bright, and centered in the cloth-manufacturing capital of Manchester, the League was the best financed and the most highly organized political pressure group that Britain had ever witnessed. It made its appeals not only to middle-class manufacturers but also to industrial workers, agricultural laborers, and tenant farmers as well. The League sent lecturers and delegations all across the country to proselytize, raise funds, organize, and petition. It published and distributed scores of tracts, pamphlets, handbills, circulars, and books, and regularly issued a succession of its own newspapers: The *Anti-Corn-Law Circular, Anti-Bread-Tax Circular,* and *The League.* The ACLL organized debates, public lectures, conferences of ministers of religion, mass meetings, highly successful petition drives, and canvasses of constituencies in numerous parliamentary elections. Though the ACLL concentrated its efforts upon repeal of the corn and provision laws, the League, as individuals and as an organization, took considerable interest in a great many other reform issues of the 1830s and 1840s.[1]

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The members of the Anti-Corn-Law League were very much interested in liberty though they did not often discuss the concept in abstract philosophical terms. The members of the League were practical men, better able and more willing to identify and condemn specific political, social, or economic impediments to freedom than to enumerate its philosophical hallmarks. One of the themes found most frequently among the reform ideas of the ACLLers is their abiding distrust and disdain for what they termed aristocratic misrule and class legislation. The members of the League regarded the corn laws as the most glaring example of aristocratic misrule, but in their opposition to this perceived foundation of landlordism, they often found themselves expressing opposition more broadly to what they termed the vestiges of feudalism or the legacy of the so-called Norman Yoke. Their desire to rid Britain of aristocratic misrule and class legislation prompted many Leaguers to oppose not just the corn laws but landlordism, the established church, and all the traditions and privileges that in their view restricted liberty.

The members of the Anti-Corn-Law League tended to view aristocratic privilege and influence in political and social institutions as well as economic relationships as forms of monopoly, and monopoly was something Leaguers opposed in *all* its variations. This fact is central to an understanding of the nature and scope of opposition to aristocratic misrule by the ACLL. Leaguers were part of an emerging liberal consensus that placed a very high value on freedom from the constraints of the state, particularly with respect to economic affairs; they opposed the legacy of medieval restrictions and regulations on manufacturing and trade, and deeply resented the continued influence of a privileged landed aristocracy. This developing and cardinal liberal doctrine is in many ways summed up in opposition to monopoly in all its manifestations, and the ACLL was no small contributor to this tradition. Leaguers sometimes recognized monopoly in facets of life that seemed removed from economics.

The Anti-Corn-Law League regarded free trade as an issue of liberty no less than as a matter of economic practicality. Edward Baines, a prominent spokesman for the ACLL and editor of the *Leeds Mercury*, linked free trade and liberty in *The League* when he declared:

> "Free Trade" means *perfect freedom for every kind of industry;* and it includes liberty to every man to employ his money or his labour in the way that he himself thinks most advantageous, and to buy and sell wherever he can do so with the greatest profit.
>
> This freedom is man's natural *right.* Of course it ought not to be invaded in society, unless such invasion can be shown to be necessary for the general good of the community. . . . It is obvious that this *must* be the *general* rule and practice in every community. . . . And upon this rule all Governments *do* and *must* act in 999 out of 1000 cases. This rule of *Freedom of Industry*—which contains in it, when practically applied, an admirable self-regulating and self-adjusting principle—determines how many men shall engage in each particular employment, so as to keep the wants of the community duly supplied.[2]

In his argument Baines advanced two important and related ideas: that freedom was a matter of *natural right* and that it was economically sound. He accused landed protectionists of inflicting a great and oppressive evil upon the country by violating the principle of freedom of industry with the continuation of the corn laws.[3] In his declarations Baines echoed the assertions of Adam Smith who had concluded that protectionism was harmful economically, internationally, and socially. Smith had argued that Britain's protectionist policies were posited upon two fallacies: (1) the balance-of-trade fallacy or the notion that it was always better to make goods at home, and (2) the political assumption that a government-led economy would progress more rapidly than a natural one.[4] Smith believed that mercantilism not only slowed economic progress but also produced domestic social inequalities. In his view, the solution to an intolerable system of privilege was a self-regulating system of natural liberty.[5]

Richard Cobden, J. B. Smith, and Joseph Brotherton were other League leaders who shared the views of Baines on the relation between natural right and natural law. As early as 1837 J. B. Smith expressed on behalf of Brotherton, who was then a candidate in the Salford parliamentary election opposition to the entire "system of the *Corn* Laws," as well as "*all other monopolies* which interfere with & obstruct the general prosperity of the country."[6] Cobden emphasized the inexorable power of freedom of trade as a matter of natural law in his early pamphlet, *England, Ireland, and America,* arguing that "violence and force never prevail against the natural wants and wishes of mankind; in other words that despotic laws against freedom of trade can never be executed."[7] Cobden not only equated restrictions on commerce with tyranny but also believed that free trade marked the rebirth of man's right to exchange freely the products of his labor, intelligence, and capital rather than serving the interests of the privileged classes.[8]

The agitation against the corn laws embodied by the Anti-Corn-Law League gave a focus to the sentiment opposing all forms of monopoly; many Leaguers believed that the corn laws were the foundation of an entire system of economic, social, and political privilege and that the whole edifice of aristocratic misgovernment and landlordism would be undermined if the corn laws were removed.[9] The *Bread Eater's Advocate,* the organ of the short-lived National Daily Bread Society, which the League attempted to launch in 1841, made explicit the view that the corn law was "*the keystone by which other monopolies are upheld,* monopoly in trade, monopoly in legislation, monopoly in religion,"[10] and hailed the repeal of the corn laws as "the first of a series of deep and searching reforms."[11]

That the Anti-Corn-Law League opposed monopoly in all its variations does not diminish the fact that monopolies of trade were the form of monopoly most directly related to its interests, and clearly the corn laws were the most irksome and significant of these. Of this more will be said in a moment. Particularly in a period of acute economic distress, the ACLL tended to judge issues of monopoly and reform by the standard of how directly they affected the condition of trade,

but it was difficult to view the corn laws as an issue entirely separable from politics. After all, the corn laws had been enacted by the legislature; thus the monopoly of the corn laws seemed to be an obvious example of a political monopoly of power held by the aristocratic landowners.

The danger of political monopoly was a theme often found in League newspapers. The League took the view that piecemeal reforms could have little effect so long as the real problem was with the system of monopoly.[12] In 1840 the *Anti-Corn-Law Circular* declared, "The disease is in the SYSTEM, and there it must be attacked. It arises from HEAVY TAXATION AND especially from the LANDLORD'S TAX UPON BREAD."[13] Later that year the same League organ criticized "*the present imperfect state of the House of Commons,*" and accused the landed interests in Parliament of plundering the nation of millions of pounds annually and of causing widespread suffering by their unprincipled and extravagant conduct of the government.[14] The *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular* went further in its criticism of parliament, characterizing it as "a landowners club or trades' union assembly, passing laws to enrich themselves by the impoverishment of the millions they pretend to represent."[15]

In 1843 the League newspaper asserted that the monopoly of the corn laws was the instrument by which a despotic aristocratic government maintained its arbitrary power, and the following spring *The League* published a letter from William Griffiths, a Wesleyan minister, which stated that the landocracy "as much represents the inhabitants of the moon as the *people*. . . ."[16] Griffiths' letter linked the struggle for civil and political liberty:

> The Corn law is one fruit of class legislation; and class legislation is at variance with the principles of the British constitution, and deeply prejudicial to the rights of the people. . . . The League is teaching the people of this country in what way most effectively, and yet most peaceably, to work out their civil and political emancipation. It aims to enlighten the public mind, and, by means of guiding public opinion, of effecting important political changes.[17]

The Leaguers believed that the industrial revolution had brought about fundamental changes in society and economy and that a political system based upon an aristocratic monopoly of power was no longer appropriate. To free-traders the corn laws were not only the most glaring example of the abuses of such a political structure, they were its very foundation. Repeal of the corn laws, in their view, would strike *directly* at aristocratic misrule and landlordism, for once the monopoly of power of the landed interests was broken by putting an end to protection, the existing system could not long remain unaltered.[18]

The Anti-Corn-Law League was concerned with forms of monopoly apart from politics as well. Leaguers tended to view the established church as a monopoly of religion and the military as a monopolists' institution, and about these issues more will be said in a moment. Free-traders were also highly critical of the extent to which the corn laws tended to provide a monopoly of capital to the landed

interests, literally at the expense of industry, labor, and commerce. A pamphlet by one Leaguer charged landowners with sacrificing the commercial and monetary interests of the nation at "the unholy shrine of Baronial avarice."[19] Similar feelings were expressed at League meetings, in lectures, and in the *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular.*[20] Leaguers believed that the effect of the corn laws was to divert some capital to agriculture and to misdirect capital toward foreign investments, to the detriment of Britain.[21] Leaguers were jealous of the capital that went abroad and dismayed at the extent to which landlords tended not to use the capital which was diverted to agriculture for improvements.

One should not forget that the main focus of the Anti-Corn-Law League was upon the repeal of the corn laws and that they were especially interested in the effect repeal could have upon the state of the economy as a whole.[22] The League regarded the monopoly of the corn laws as having been imposed by a parliament dominated by landlords who passed the laws in order to raise their own rent receipts and to hinder competition. Competition was defined by the League as "the great balance of power between commercial classes and individuals, whether agriculturalists, manufacturers or merchants. . . ."[23] Leaguers viewed monopoly—especially one upon a necessity of life—as being both evil and absurd.[24] An article by Edward Baines in the *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular* condemned the shortsightedness of monopolist policies and argued that by refusing to take the corn of foreign nations, such nations were prevented from obtaining the capital with which to purchase British manufactured goods. Over time, according to Baines, other nations would be driven to manufacture things for themselves and would develop to such an extent that they would begin to threaten British manufactures on the world market. Baines cited the examples of Saxon production of hosiery, Prussian manufacture of cutlery, and Swiss printing of calico.[25]

Perhaps the most sophisticated analysis of the effects of the monopoly of the corn laws by a member of the League was James Wilson's *Influences of the Corn Laws,* first published in 1839. In this book Wilson advanced three closely related propositions: (1) that the corn laws produced consequences harmful to *all* classes of the community; (2) that the agricultural interest itself derived great injury from the existing corn laws and that the value of their property would be enhanced by adoption of "a free and liberal policy with respect to trade in corn"; and (3) that manufacturing interests and the working classes would also derive incalculable benefit from free trade and that the average rates of both wages and profits would be increased by the general increase in prosperity that would result from repeal.[26]

It was Wilson's conviction that the prosperity of the whole community was derived from the prosperity of its several parts and that no single interest could be helped by monopoly to the injury of others and still be of benefit to the whole.[27] In his argument for an identity of economic interests, Wilson outlined the main features of aristocratic misrule with respect to the corn laws and attacked the assumptions upon which protection had been based. At the heart of Wilson's argu-

ment was the insight that the corn laws, instead of stabilizing prices, had in fact contributed to their fluctuation inasmuch as agriculture, in contrast to industrial production, required a relatively greater lead-time for shifts of production to become felt in the marketplace. Wilson argued that the repeal of the corn laws would raise agricultural prices in relation to the costs of production as well as avoid wild fluctuations in price by stimulating capital improvements in agriculture and encouraging greater economy of labor by introducing machinery. The advantage of this competitive free-trade economy over the existing corn monopoly would be, according to Wilson, the stimulation of productivity increases, and increased productivity of grain was Wilson's solution to the threat of foreign competition. He stated that supply would increase

> by the application of more ingenuity, labour and economy, causing altogether so much lessened cost, that the lower price at which an article can profitably be sold will always cause consumption to keep pace with production; and in this case, as the article still yields a profit at the low price, no reaction will ensue.[28]

A moment ago it was suggested that members of the Anti-Corn-Law League found that their opposition to what they regarded as the foundation of landlordism led them to criticism of landlordism itself. The term landlordism was often employed by the League, but it was seldom more than vaguely defined. It referred broadly to the political power, social influence, and economic control on the part of those who lived on receipts from their rent rolls, but it also referred, more narrowly, to the laws, traditions, and privileges that determined the relations between landowners and tenants. Members of the ACLL were opposed to the legacy of medieval regulation of trade and industry, and they regarded landlordism as a pernicious vestige of feudalism that the progress of a new industrial age should have swept away. Landlordism was the source of aristocratic power and misrule, and Leaguers believed that if the foundation of landlordism, the corn laws, could be undermined, the hold of landed aristocrats upon the reins of economic, social, and political control would be broken or at least seriously weakened.[29]

The League depicted the struggle against the corn laws as a struggle against the landowners and suggested that class legislation was responsible for the condition of the country. That this view was espoused by the propaganda machine of the League does not diminish the fact that it was sincerely held. The problem, according to the League newspaper, was a political and social system in which power resided in a parliament of landlords:

> The Imperial Parliament is a landlord Parliament. Its laws are the decrees of landlords. The internal and subordinate government of the country, the county management, the quarter sessions, the labours of the magisterial office,—all or nearly all, is in the hands of the landlords.[30]

The *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular* reported on a lecture by J. C. Fitzgerald in Liverpool, in which he asserted that destruction of the barriers to trade would open a breach in the citadel of aristocratic power and corruption through which the middle and working classes would then pour.[31] And in a letter to Cobden, W. Cooke Taylor, a prominent League writer, described the repeal agitation as the latest campaign in the old war against the Norman Yoke.[32]

That the Anti-Corn-Law League took considerable interest in landlordism as a system of economic control, political power, and social influence seems clear enough, but they also demonstrated concern with those elements of landlordism which pertained to the relationship between landlord and tenant. The League gave a fair amount of attention to the plight of farmers and agricultural laborers, and it placed a good deal of emphasis on conditions of distress in agricultural districts as well as in urban areas.[33] The League blamed the corn laws, and thus the landowners, for the degradation of agriculture and demanded better living and working conditions for farm laborers, facilitation of improvements, fair rents, changes in landholding tenure, and abolition of the game laws. At the height of the ACLL appeal to agriculture in late 1843, *The League* declared,

> Until the landowners of this country have abandoned their monopoly, surrendered their obsolete feudalities, and granted long and rational leases, we trust that whenever the hypocritical exhortations of the lords of the soil to tenants to "perform their duty to the labourers" are heard some tenant-farmers will start up and say, "YOU, THE LANDOWNERS, ARE ALONE TO BLAME FOR THE PRESENT CONDITION OF THE AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS, BECAUSE YOU HAVE SACRIFICED THE WELFARE OF THE COMMUNITY AND THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE TENANT-FARMER TO YOUR GREED FOR RENT, YOUR DELIGHT IN SELFISH PLEASURES, AND YOUR LUST FOR POLITICAL POWER."[34]

The appeal of the ACLL to farmers contained two main arguments: the first was that the corn laws protected the interests of landlords by raising rents more than they protected the interests of farmers by raising prices; and the second was that the general economic prosperity they believed would result from repeal would be of greater benefit to farmers than that which they might derive from the protection of high duties on corn.[35] The problem that faced British agriculture, with or without protection, was profitability. Leaguers believed that agriculture could remain profitable only so long as its productivity showed signs of increase, and improvements were, in their view, essential to this process.[36]

At the annual meeting of the Anti-Corn-Law League in January of 1843, an entire session was devoted to discussion of the effects of the corn laws upon the agricultural classes. One important theme of this discussion was the need for agricultural improvements. R. H. Greg, a well-known member of the ACLL, expressed the view that agricultural productivity could be as much as quadrupled

if capital were reinvested in agriculture rather than siphoned off in higher and higher rents.[37] Resolutions were passed without opposition which asserted that profitability could be restored to agriculture by better management and that repeal of the corn laws was the fastest method by which to relieve agriculture by permitting the tenant farmer to "be better able to enter into new arrangements with his landlord, experience less wasting of his capital, and be stimulated to increased production."[38]

The Anti-Corn-Law League urged "high farming" as a solution to the difficulties of agriculture because it regarded productivity increases as essential to sustained prosperity. The League asserted that improved farming required longer leases and fairer rents to permit efficient capitalization and investment for competitive production.[39] In 1845 the League announced plans to purchase a model farm in Buckinghamshire to demonstrate that insecurity of tenure and high rents were the reasons that farmers lacked sufficient capital to make essential improvements for profitable agricultural production.[40]

One member of the Anti-Corn-Law League, Charles Sherriff of Gloucestershire, argued at the 1843 annual meeting of the League that during the Napoleonic Wars farmers had made money not because prices were high but because they were relatively higher than the rates for which rents had been calculated. Sherriff stated that as soon as existing engagements between landlords and tenants had expired, rents were increased and farmers made no more money than they had before prices had begun to rise at all. Since the reimposition of the corn laws in 1815, asserted Sherriff, farmers had benefited only from *rising* prices and not from *risen* ones. Sherriff expressed the conviction, amidst the approving shouts of his listeners, that every lowering of the corn duty on the sliding scale without a corresponding abatement of rents further damaged the position of farmers.[41]

In addition to concern for the problems of high rents, the Anti-Corn-Law League expressed considerable sympathy with the desire of farmers for greater security of tenure, seeing such a development as crucial to improvements. Late in 1843 the League advocated "long and rational leases" and attempted to give this demand definition in their newspaper. *The League* suggested leases of twenty-one years' duration with provisions for punctual payment of rent; rights of tenants to consume the hay, straw, and roots produced on their holdings; and provisions to leave fallow an appropriate amount of land to prevent exhaustion of the soil. The League also called for provision of decent cottages and for such improvements as drainage and removal of fences and hedgerows.[42]

The aspect of the relationship between tenants and their landlords that received the greatest attention from the Anti-Corn-Law League was the aristocratic privilege of the game laws. The game laws were those statutory provisions which reserved the hunting of wild game to the owners of the land and imposed what were often stiff criminal penalties for poaching. These laws were an enormous irritation to farmers who annually lost a portion of their crops to hares and birds, which they

were prohibited from controlling, and the game laws were an impediment to those who might like to supplement their meager diets—particularly in times of such severe economic distress—with fresh meat from the hunt.

League newspapers carried articles that complained about the game laws, and such reports became a regular feature of *The League* from the spring of 1844 until repeal of the corn laws. These articles pointed out the damage to agricultural production caused by wild game, attempted to show connection between rural crime and the game laws, and lamented the penalties imposed upon those convicted of poaching.[43] In reports written by the Anti-Corn-Law League and those reprinted from other newspapers, the game laws were characterized as a legacy of the Norman Yoke and as a prime example of aristocratic privilege and landlordism. The game laws, complained one article in the League organ, had made wild animals the private property of the landowners, giving them additional income from the sale of game, saying that the landlords had personal pecuniary interest in protecting game because,

> . . . the more game there is, the more profit for them; and this is the more admirable because the increase of game is attended with no increase of expense, and all the game is . . . kept by the farmers. The hares and rabbits, the pheasants and the partridges feed on the farmer's corn; but he dares not touch one of them; though fed by him, the game, whether bird or beast, is claimed by the landlord as *his* property. The English landlord, in verity is a man who gathers what another has sown; to take what another had fed, claims it as his property, sends it to market, and places the money got from the sale in his own pocket. This is the landlord's notion of equity, justice, and fair dealing.[44]

The ACLL attributed much rural crime to the game laws, charging landlords with taking land out of production for preservation of game and with imposing by class legislation the economic conditions that led to poaching. The League regarded arrests for poaching as a measure of economic distress, reporting that between 1842 and 1843 poaching offenses had increased by well over 100 percent.[45]

Anti-Corn-Law Leaguers opposed landlordism as a vestige of feudal privilege and as an impediment to progress, but their antipathy to aristocratic misrule and the social and political domination of landlords went quite beyond agricultural considerations and economic relationships. In a variety of ways the Leaguers viewed the established church as a noxious example of aristocratic misrule. Leaguers were dismayed at the lack of support the Church of England displayed for what Leaguers perceived as a fundamental issue of morality, and they accused the established church of having a pecuniary interest in a continuation of the corn monopoly. A great many Leaguers bitterly opposed tithes and church rates and expressed strong sentiments in opposition to establishment itself.

One of the few Anglican clergymen who took an active part in the agitations of the League was the Reverend Thomas Spencer of Hinton near Bath. Spencer and other Leaguers emphasized almost from the beginning that repeal was a

religious question and that alleviation of the sorrows of the poor and the feeding of the hungry were moral duties to be fulfilled by opposing the corn laws. In 1839 Spencer appealed to Dissenters, urging them not to gratify Anglicans with indifference to the issue and not to be intimidated by charges which might come from churchmen that opposition to the corn laws was somehow subversive in nature. He wrote,

> . . .nothing gratifies the high churchman more than to see a timid line of conduct on the part of dissenters, in any question in which their principles are involved. He rejoices to see a man silent, and shrinking from the post of danger, lest he should be called a political dissenter, the ally of Papists and Socinians, the companion of radicals and infidels.[46]

Four years later Spencer argued in another pamphlet that religious men had an obligation to be politically active and called on men of conscience to "use all peaceful means to accomplish wise and salutary reforms in church and state."[47]

The Anti-Corn-Law League was disappointed with the degree of support they received from the clergy of the established church. Only a handful of Anglicans were among the more than 800 clergymen who attended the Conference of Ministers of Religion in August of 1841.[48] Support from and participation by the Anglican clergy was so slight that the League felt it necessary to counter charges that the conference was a sectarian meeting of Dissenters from which Anglicans had been excluded and which amounted to "a conspiracy for overthrow of Mother Church."[49]

The League accused the clergy of the Church of England of opposing repeal because they were themselves beneficiaries of the corn monopoly. The *Anti-Corn-Law Almanack* published a list of "mitred bread taxers" in 1840, and the League urged the widest possible distribution of the almanacks, including placement in all public locations.[50] In 1842 the League accused its clerical opponents in the Church of England of opposing repeal because they had "a direct pecuniary interest in raising the price of bread . . . and in starving the poor."[51] The prominent spokesman of the League, Col. T. P. Thompson, explained in the *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular* that tithes had been converted,

> not into a permanent payment in money, but into a permanent payment of so many quarters of corn, or the value thereof. And what is the effect of this? Manifestly to attach the interests of the clergy for ever, and for ever to the conservation of the corn laws. A clergyman is to receive annually the value of, say 100 quarters of corn. If corn is at 80s. a quarter, he is to have £400 a-year; and if at 20s., he is to have £100.[52]

The League asserted that the selfish interests of the landlords were the same as those of the clergy of the established church in a variety of ways. An early issue of the *Anti-Corn-Law Circular* explicitly included the established church in its indictment of aristocratic misrule and urged denunciation of the corn laws

as exactions of the Church of England.[53] League leader J. B. Smith assured Sidney Smith just prior to the latter's departure on a lecture tour in 1839 that the state church was "fair game," though he advised that it would be best to avoid sectarian views and remarks that might give offense on religious grounds.[54] In a report denouncing tithes and Sir Robert Peel's defense of the corn laws as just compensation for the tax burdens borne by the landed interest, the *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular* relied on a characterization from the *Nonconformist*. The latter asserted that the state church was peculiarly an institution of the landed aristocracy, describing it as "a convenient and pleasant pasture ground upon which younger sons and dependent relatives may feed in quiet—a luxuriant prairie offering abundance to those who would else be supernumeraries on the estate."[55] An anonymous pamphlet, *The Church and The League*, published by the Anti-Corn-Law League printer, John Gadsby, charged the aristocracy and its church establishment with opposing cheap bread and declared,

> That the Bishops and the hosts of Clergymen who are sighing for Episcopal dignities should hate and oppose the Anti-Corn-Law League will not be a matter of surprise to those who have studied the history of Priestcraft. The League is the foe of aristocratic injustice, and the State-Church is the creature and tool of the Aristocracy.[56]

Perhaps the boldest assertion of a coincidence of interests between the established church and the landlords to be published by the League appeared in the form of a letter to the editor of the *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular* in 1841. The letter included an extract from the *Dorset Chronicle* in which, "with blushing effrontery it is acknowledged that the existence of the Church of England is staked on the corn laws."[57] The extract from the *Dorset Chronicle* charged Dissenting ministers with opposing the corn laws, in part, because they knew,

> that with the corn laws, and the farmers, and the landlords, *the Church itself will fall:* that bound as they are by the Tithe Commutation Act; the clergy of the Church of England are dependent upon the price of corn. . . .[58]

Tithes, even in commuted form, and church rates were sources of considerable resentment to many Leaguers, especially to Dissenters. Leaguers regarded tithes as a form of church taxation that, by its nature, infringed upon political and religious liberty; many Leaguers expressed the view that tithes were a land tax not fairly borne by the landowners themselves.[59] As an organization the Anti-Corn-Law League did not express strong opposition to church rates, but many prominent members of the League were openly critical of such taxes.[60] John Bright was the most outspoken League critic of church rates, particularly following the highly controversial referendum over church rates in Rochdale during the summer of 1840.[61]

Opposition to tithes and church rates was an expression of something more than an unwillingness to contribute to the operation or upkeep of the Anglican

Church; it was a manifestation of a general antipathy to established religion. Several leading spokesmen of the Anti-Corn-Law League opposed establishment on principle; Bright, W. J. Fox, and other Leaguers opposed the Maynooth Grant in 1845 on grounds that it was tantamount to establishment of a second religion in Ireland.[62] W. J. Fox asserted that the tendency of any church establishment, regardless of form or creed, to impinge upon liberty was

> of a most pernicious description, and altogether incompatible with the equality that ought ever to prevail among different classes constituting a community: and . . . the existence of a priestly order, is unfavourable to human knowledge, freedom, or happiness, and had always been so; in any nation, at all times, and under all circumstances.[63]

Fox believed that a church establishment infringed on political equality and that the privileges of an established religion implied restrictions and exclusion on all those who did not subscribe to it.[64]

Perhaps the most outspoken opponent of an established church among the Anti-Corn-Law Leaguers was Edward Miall, the editor of *The Nonconformist* and founder of the Anti-State-Church Association. In his book, *The Nonconformist's Sketch-book,* Miall called for a complete separation of church and state, which would forbid any public funds from supporting a church, abolish all privileges connected with the profession of an authorized creed, and repeal all laws that empowered civil magistrates to exercise authority in religious matters. Miall described the Church of England as "an engine admirably suited to work out the purposes of the aristocracy"—which he identified as the throne, monopoly, education, and war.[65]

Members of the Anti-Corn-Law League were not the only ones to associate opposition to the corn laws with opposition to the established church. As early as 1839, the League newspaper reported that the *Conservative Journal* had charged the ACLL with promoting the cause of popery by advocating repeal of the corn laws. Opponents of the League suggested that repeal of the corn laws would "uproot the Protestant aristocracy, and utterly ruin the farmers of England of whom it may be truly said, they constitute the most thoroughly Protestant portion of the community."[66] The *Anti-Corn-Law Circular* quoted the *Conservative Journal* as saying,

> The uses to which the Papists would turn the triumphs of "philosophical" Radicalism would not, moreover, terminate with the overthrow of the Protestant Church, and the Protestant aristocracy. No; the establishment of Popery might be expected to follow almost as a matter of course.[67]

The opposition of the members of the Anti-Corn-Law League to the privileges of landlordism and the implications of aristocratic misrule led them naturally to criticism of other institutions (in addition to the established church) that many Leaguers associated with the privileges of the landlord class. Such institutions included the universities, the army and navy, and the diplomatic service.

The papers and publications of the Anti-Corn-Law League do not reveal an overwhelming interest in the universities, but such references as there are leave little doubt that the universities were regarded as bastions of protectionism and privilege. Relations between Leaguers and academics got off to an inauspicious start when two League lecturers, Sidney Smith and J. H. Shearman, sent to Cambridge in May of 1839, were attacked by "a gang of unfledged ruffians in gowns and caps."[68] The Leaguers at Cambridge joined in the fracas with considerable enthusiasm, and Shearman brought back torn pieces of caps and gowns to the League headquarters in Manchester as proof to the Council that the ACLL had gotten the best of the fight.[69] Four years later, in 1843, *The League* published a review of V. A. Huber's *The English Universities*, which while admitting that the intent of the volume was to recommend the character of British universities to Prussia, was nonetheless highly critical of British universities for their antipathy to free trade, their aristocratic privilege and religious exclusion, and the impracticality of their emphasis on classical education.[70]

Opponents of the corn laws, particularly Richard Cobden, tended to associate protectionism and aristocratic privilege with the military establishments, including the army, navy, and militia.[71] League leaders regarded the interests of the aristocracy in the military establishment as contrary to the interests of the nation. The army and navy, in the view of some Leaguers, were too much a source of place for the younger sons of the nobility, a drain on capital that retarded progress, and a distraction from necessary domestic reform.[72] Cobden argued, even before the formation of the Anti-Corn-Law League, that an important "source of government patronage & of patrician power" would be reduced if the willingness of aristocratic government to employ military intervention abroad could somehow be checked.[73] In *England, Ireland, and America* and in his later pamphlet, *Russia*, Cobden argued that aristocratic diplomats were too willing to defend English honor to the exclusion of her real commercial and manufacturing interests, and such opinions were later reflected in League newspapers.[74] W. J. Fox summed up the view of many opponents of the privileges of the aristocracy and their association with the military when he wrote,

> War is the aristocratical trade; war is the aristocratical passion; war is the aristocratical convenience for bringing forward the junior members of titled families, instead of providing for them out of the family property.[75]

The Anti-Corn-Law Leaguers can be said to have regarded free trade as an issue of fundamental liberty, but they rarely discussed liberty in abstract, theoretical, or philosophical terms. The members of the League were practical men who opposed the privileges of landlordism as aristocratic misrule, and they regarded the corn laws as the clearest example of class legislation and the foundation of a system of aristocratic privilege entirely inappropriate to the spirit of the age. Clearly, opponents of the corn laws believed that freedom of trade was fundamental, both as a natural right and as an economic practicality.[76]

The League regarded free trade as being ordained by both natural and divine law, which superseded the artificial restrictions of selfish aristocratic lawmakers. At one League meeting the corn laws were described as outmoded and contrary to the one principle of nature that would ensure harmony: "Freedom—universal freedom."[77] Reflecting the widest possible application of the principles of laissez faire in an unmistakably male fashion, the League speaker, Mr. Bayley, implied that use of such artificial restrictions as the corn laws impeded the operation of natural law in such a way as to obstruct the divine will, and he suggested that the corn laws were ridiculous as the belief once held by "our ladies" that "their bodies would not grow out to their proportions, unless squeezed in here and enlarged there, (Laughter) just as the Chinese have adopted."[78]

The League regarded the corn laws as an instrument of despotic power, and Thomas Milner Gibson argued before an aggregate meeting of the League in 1843 that Leaguers had taken up their struggle not under the pressure of momentary distress of the country,

> but on the solemn conviction that the Corn Law is that invasion of our civil rights as free citizens, that whether there be poverty or plenty, we have an equal right to demand their repeal. (Loud Cheers.)[79]

Gibson told his listeners that the cause of the ACLL was more than the revival of trade; it was the cause of the citizens of England and of liberty itself.[80]

Perhaps the clearest statement by a member of the League on the fundamental nature of freedom of industry and trade came from John Bright in a speech before the Liverpool Anti-Monopoly Association during the summer of 1843. Bright asserted that the freedom to exchange the produce of one's labor for that of his fellows anywhere in the world was the most fundamental of rights. Bright argued that

> there was no liberty without this liberty, which was simply the liberty to live. The right of voting for members of parliament, the right of electing members of the legislature, the right of electing even the crown, if that were so,—all this liberty was a very small value without the liberty to live by their industry. (Cheers.) Civil liberty was nothing, religious liberty was nothing; the liberty of the press was nothing, for so long as an increasing population was allowed to labour under restrictions on the means of living, all this liberty would be insufficient to give them prosperity, to enable them to advance in the career of improvement, to enable them to become what they were destined to be. . . .[81]

The Anti-Corn-law Leaguers associated their cause with the cause of liberty. To many opponents of the corn laws, political, religious, and civil liberties were to some extent dependent upon freedom of exchange, or at the very least, they were liberties that could not be fully enjoyed without freedom of industry and exchange.[82] Leaguers opposed monopoly in all its variations, and monopoly was

the antithesis of freedom of exchange. The Leaguers' opposition to the corn law monopoly led them to oppose landlordism wherever it was to be found: in the military, the universities, the established church, the traditional relations between landlord and tenant, and the political life of the nation. In the eyes of the members of the Anti-Corn-Law League the battle for the repeal of the corn laws was a fight against aristocratic misrule and class legislation; it was a crusade against the vestiges of feudal privilege which restricted progress, economic well-being, and freedom.

Notes

Works frequently cited have been identified by the following abbreviations:

ABTC	*Anti-Bread-Tax Circular.*
ACLC	*Anti-Corn-Law Circular.*
AD-MCRL	Archives Department, Manchester Central Reference Library.
SSL-MCRL	Social Science Library, Manchester Central Reference Library.
WS-PRO	West Sussex County Public Record Office.

1. The organizational structure, parliamentary tactics, and methods of propaganda of the Anti-Corn-Law League were the subject of Norman McCord's *The Anti-Corn-Law league, 1838–1846* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1958), and for these features of the ACLL, McCord's study remains the standard work. Archibald Prentice's *History of the Anti-Corn-Law League*, 2 vols. (London: Cash, 1853), an insider's account written just after the dissolution of the ACLL, is devoted to explaining in considerable detail how the League triumphed in getting the corn laws repealed in 1846. Much of Prentice's account is given over to a narrative of election and agitation tactics, and there is very little discussion of issues apart from free trade. Several other studies, including Augustus Mongredien's *History of the Free Trade Movement in England* (London: Cassell, 1881) and G. Armitage-Smith's *Free Trade Movement and Its Results* (London: Victorian Era Series, 1898), focus on parliamentary activity and methods of agitation rather than on the reform ideas of the ACLL. Surveys of the corn laws in English history, such as those by Donald Barnes in *History of the English Corn Laws from 1660 to 1846* (New York: Routledge, 1930) and Charles Ryle Fay's *Corn Laws and Social England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), are so broad in scope as to devote only a single brief chapter to the issue of repeal; they do not consider corollary issues. Studies of the ACLL have given too much attention to the structure of the organization and the nature of its agitation activities at the expense of examining more closely the meaning of the doctrine of free trade in its implications and corollaries.

   Biographies of prominent members of the Anti-Corn-Law League including Cobden and Bright—John Morley, *Life of Richard Cobden* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1881); G. M. Trevelyan, *Life of John Bright* (London: Constable, 1913); Herman Ausubel, *John Bright: Victorian Reformer* (New York: Wiley, 1966); Keith Robbins, *John Bright* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979); and Donald Read, *Cobden and Bright: A Victorian Political Partnership* (New York: St. Martin's, 1968)—properly treat the participation of their subjects in the activities of the ACLL as only one aspect of the public lives of these men, and several do not have the period of the ACLL as their central focus. Biographies of league leaders have from time to time taken up the theme of aristocratic misrule and class legislation, but such discussions have been generally intended to provide insights into personal character or as part of a general context rather than as an outgrowth of free-trade ideology or as an explanation of the views on liberty held by members

of the Anti-Corn-Law League. The present discussion is intended to outline the main elements of aristocratic misrule and landlordism as seen by members of the League and to illustrate how opposition to the foundation of landlordism—monopoly—led quite naturally to criticism of a "system" of landlordism itself.

2. "To the Right Honourable The Earl of Harewood, President of the Yorkshire Society," *The League*, 16 March 1844.
3. Ibid.
4. Frank Fish Walker, Jr., "British Liberalism: Some Philosophical Origins: The Contributions of Adam Smith, Thomas Robert Malthus, Jeremy Bentham, and Herbert Spencer" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1957), pp. 35–38. Walker provides an analysis of Smith's *Lectures of Justice, Police, Revenue and Arms.*
5. Ibid., pp. 37–38.
6. "To the Inhabitants of the Borough of Salford," Election Address of Joseph Brotherton, 28 June 1837, J. B. Smith Papers, AD-MCRL. The manuscript is in Smith's hand, and his daughter, Lady Durning-Lawrence, states that her father wrote the address on behalf of Brotherton.
7. Richard Cobden, *England, Ireland, and America* (London: Simpkin, 1835), p. 3. Cobden provides an analysis of the effectiveness of Napoleon's Continental System. See also John MacCunn, *Six Radical Thinkers* (New York: Russell, 1907), pp. 88–95. The League expressed a quite similar view in "Exportation of Machinery. Effects of the Corn Laws," *ACLC*, 2 July 1840.
8. "Liberté et protection, lettres de M. Richard Cobden," offprint from *Journal des économistes*, pp. 235–39, Cobden Papers, WS-PRO.
9. On the general theme of the corn laws as the focus of a variety of reform interests, see William Cunningham, *Rise and Decline of the Free Trade Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1905), pp. 67–74; Alexander Llewellyn, *The Decade of Reform: The 1830s* (New York: St. Martin's 1971), pp. 142–43; and McCord, *Anti-Corn-Law League*, pp. 15–21.
10. "Address to the Council of the National Anti-Corn-Law League," *Bread Eater's Advocate*, 1 September 1841; see also Fay, *Corn Laws and Social England*, pp. 402–3.
11. Ibid. See R. B. McCallum, *The Liberal Party from Earl Grey to Asquith* (London: Gollancz, 1963), pp. 46–47; G. S. R. Kitson Clark, "The Repeal of the Corn Laws and the Politics of the Forties," *Economic History Review*, 2nd Series, 4(1951–1952): 12–13; Fay, *Corn Laws and Social England*, pp. 396–402; and the contemporary pamphlet, Joseph Barker, *Blessings of Free Trade . . . and How They May Be Increased and Made Lasting* (N.P.: n.p., 1846), pp. 10–11. Opponents of repeal feared the truth of such assertions; see, for example George Calvert Holland, *Suggestions Towards Improving the Present System of Corn Laws* (London: Ollivier, 1841), p. 3. Referring to the corn law, Holland wrote, "It is the key-stone of the arch on which rest the present orders of the state, and to disturb its position would ultimately introduce insecurity and anarchy." See also Robert M. Stewart, *The Politics of Protection: Lord Derby and the Protectionist Party, 1841–52* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), passim. Opponents of the Anti-Corn-Law League charged that the organization regarded repeal as the first step toward the redistribution of property and republicanism. The League denied such charges, which had appeared in the *Berkshire Herald*, in "Groundless Alarms, Who's Afear'd?" *ABTC*, 5 May 1841.
12. "When Will Trade Improve?" *ACLC*, 16 July 1840. Members of the League were quite concerned with what they regarded as the increasing threat of foreign competition in manufacturing from both Europe and America, which they believed presented Britain with imminent danger of permanent loss of markets and domestic economic decline. They were very much aware of the dependence of British manufactures on foreign trade and regarded increased foreign trade as essential to economic revival and progress. See, for example, "untitled," *ACLC*, 28 May 1839; "Machinery for Belgium," 17 September 1839; "Dr. Bowring's Mission," 15 October 1839; "American Manufacture," 10 December 1839; "Rather Ominous," 10 December 1839; "German Commercial League and Dr. Bowring," 23 June 1840; "Progress of Trade Between England, the Great Manufacturing Country, and Russia, Germany, and Prussia, the Great Corn Growing Countries," 21 May 1840; and "Expulsion of Another Manufacturing Process," 31 December 1840. See also "Operatives—Our Dependence on Foreign Trade," *ACLC* 28 May 1839; and Sidney Smith's lectures in the *ACLC*, 11 June and 9 July 1839. See "To the Right Honourable The Earl of Harewood, President of the Yorkshire Society," *The League*, 16 March 1844; and definitions of "competition" and "corn laws" in "Correspondence," *ABTC*, 14 February 1840.

13. "Address to the Working Classes," *ACLC*, 26 March 1840.
14. "Corn Laws and the Agricultural Population," *ACLC*, 10 September 1840 (reprinted from Prentice's *Manchester Times*); "The Burden of the Food Taxes Estimated in Money," 19 November 1840; "The House of Commons Itself Charging the Aristocracy with Plundering the Nation of Fifty Millions a Year," 19 November 1840. Charles Pelham Villiers made similar charges in his motion to resolve the House of Commons into a committee to consider the corn laws in 1838, *Annual Register, 1838*, vol. 80 (London: Knight, 1839), pp. 171–72. For an indication of the sort of suggestions the ACLL received on the issue of political reform, see A. Woodrow to G. Wilson, 18 April 1840, G. Wilson Papers, AD-MCRL. Woodrow called the mixed theory of government a "Monster of Absurdity" and advised the League Chairman, "Before you can reasonably expect to get rid of the corn laws you must strike at the root from whence they spring—change your form of government from the 'Aristocratic' to a 'Representative.'"
15. "Circular," *ABTC*, 24 March 1842. The article went on to denounce the income tax as a tool introduced when landlords first "warred with the nascent liberties of Europe."
16. "Monopoly Viewed in Connexion with Despotism," *The League*, 25 November 1843.
17. "To the Secretary of the Anti-Corn-Law League," *The League*, 23 March 1844. For a discussion of the ACLL use of public opinion and the advantage of the large body of public sentiment to which the League directed its appeal, see G. S. R. Kitson Clark, "The Electorate and the Repeal of the Corn Laws," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th Series, 1(1951):109–26. There is also some evidence to suggest that opponents of repeal saw the corn laws as essential to the existing political and social system of the nation. Opponents of the 1838 Villiers motion in the House of Commons—the annual test of repeal strength in the Commons—argued in the debate that it was essential to preserve the corn laws "as a political institution—that they were essential to the preservation of our old constitutional system." See *Annual Register, 1838*, vol. 80, pp. 171–72.
18. For a discussion of Cobden and the "new dispensation" of civilization wrought by industrialization, see MacCunn, *Six Radical Thinkers*, pp. 88–98. See also Cunningham, *Rise and Decline of Free Trade Movement*, pp. 66–84, and Llewellyn, *Decade of Reform*, pp. 142–64.
19. A Member of the Anti-Corn-Law Association in the Hundred of Bassetlaw, *The Corn Laws a National Evil . . .* (Chesterfield: Atkinson, 1840), p. 3.
20. The *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular* carried a report of a free trade demonstration held in Edinburgh in early 1843, at which the following lengthy resolution was adopted:

> That the agriculture of Great Britain has been greatly improved, and the value of land immensely enhanced, by the aid of her manufactures and commerce, while the landowners have ill-requitted the advantages which they have derived from capital, enterprise, and industry of their fellow-subjects, by imposing shackles on trade, and especially by the imposition of the corn and provision laws, which are at once unjust in principle, immoral in tendency, and disastrous in operation, and will be ruinous in their ultimate consequences, as well as to agriculture and landowners themselves, as to the manufacturing and mercantile classes; and that this opinion has been abundantly verified by the experience of the last four years, during which the nation has been reaping the fruits of its unwise, unnatural, and oppressive legislation, in the decline of its trade, the destruction of capital, and the physical, moral, and social deterioration of its operative population.

See "Provincial Meetings," *ABTC*, 24 January 1843.

21. "George Richardson Porter, Esq.," *ABTC*, 21 April 1841; "James Deacon Hume, Esq.," *ABTC*, 21 April 1841; "Why Is Employment So Scarce?" *ACLC*, 10 September 1840. See Barnes, *History of English Corn Laws*, pp. 265–66, especially Cobden's speech to the Commons. Capital for agricultural improvement was an important consideration in the implementation of repeal of the corn laws. D. C. Moore has given considerable attention to this issue in "The Corn Laws and High Farming," *Economic History Review*, 2nd Series, 18(1965–1966):544–62. See also Betty Kemp, "Reflections on the Repeal of the Corn Laws," *Victorian Studies* 5 (March 1962):189–204; and "The Great Anti-Corn-Law Meetings and Banquets in Manchester," *ABTC*, 7 February 1843, at which R. H. Greg discussed the need for agricultural capital for improvements in order to increase productivity.

22. "When Will Trade Improve?" *ACLC,* 16 July 1840.
23. "Correspondence," *ABTC,* 14 February 1843. See also Morley, *Cobden,* p. 179.
24. Ibid.
25. "Address to the Boroughs, and c. of England," *ABTC,* 16 June 1841, reprinted from the *Leeds Mercury.* Similar assertions may be found in the account of the debate on Villiers' motion in 1839 for a committee of inquiry, found in the *Annual Register, 1839,* vol. 81, pp. 30–31.
26. James Wilson, *Influences of the Corn Laws, As Affecting All Classes of the Community, and Particularly the Landed Interests* (London: Longman, 1840), pp. v–vii, 1–6.
27. Ibid. In his discussion of the period from 1815 to 1839, Wilson identified two interests with regard to the corn laws. The first was the interest of the landowners who, in Wilson's view, had used the corn monopoly to protect the value of their property, maintain their contracts and leases, and protect their industry from foreign competition. The second was the interest of the merchants, manufacturers, and mechanics who argued that protection increased the prices of the necessities of life and caused distress and unemployment, as well as a host of other social and economic ills. Wilson argued for a coincidence of interests and suggested that "*individuals, communities or countries* can only be prosperous in proportion to the prosperity of the whole."
28. Ibid., pp. 57–58. To the problem of demand for grain being relatively inelastic, Wilson argued that population increases would cause demand to keep pace with productivity increases in agriculture. Wilson demonstrated his conclusions concerning price fluctuations, improvements, and competition by means of a fairly detailed statistical analysis of agricultural production and price levels during the period 1815–1839. He argued, for example, that the low prices of 1814–1815 had had the effects of discouraging production of domestic corn, attracting less capital for improvement, and reducing the demand for arable land as well as for labor. The result of this situation, in Wilson's analysis, was significantly less cultivation of corn in 1816; this decrease, coupled with a particularly bad season, produced the shortages and the extremely high corn prices of 1817. In Wilson's view, the high prices of 1817—94s./quarter—tended to encourage production, which led to oversupply and ruinous prices by 1822, when wheat sold for as little as 43s.3d./quarter. See pp. 16–23. The impact of Wilson's book was considerable. The book itself and its main arguments were cited many times by the League in its newspapers and by League leaders and spokesmen in their speeches and writings. Archibald Prentice, for example, employed not a few of Wilson's arguments in the series of lectures he delivered in northern agricultural districts in 1842. See "Farmers and the Corn Laws," *ABTC,* 13 December 1842, reprinted from the *Chester Chronicle.*
29. Apart from opposing landlordism as antithetical to free trade, as a vestige of feudal privilege, or as the political or social system of the corn laws, the League had other incentives for criticism of the elements of landlordism. Leaguers actively sought the support of both tenant farmers and agricultural laborers; this was especially so after the spring of 1843, when the League began a direct and extensive effort to obtain support from agriculturalists for repeal of the corn laws. There is little doubt that expression of sympathy for the problems and aspirations of tenants and laborers was of considerable importance in the effort to attract their support.
30. "The Landowners. What Have They Done?" *The League,* 30 December 1843.
31. "Lecture by Mr. J. C. Fitzgerald, A.B.," *ABTC,* 14 March 1843.
32. Taylor to Cobden, ?December 1841, Cobden Papers, WS-PRO. Taylor wrote:

> Viewed merely in a historical point of view, the struggle between the industrial spirit of the Saxon race, & the military despotism of the Normans is one of the most interesting on record. Every insurrection from 1066 to the present day was more or less designed to set industry free from the trammels which had been imposed upon it by feudalism. Wat Tyler took up arms against an unjust system of taxation; Ship-money, tonnage and poundage were the main causes of the Great Civil War, & the Hanoverian succession was chiefly effected by mercantile interests.

Taylor's historical analysis may be open to question, but his letter illustrates the extent to which free-traders viewed their agitation as a battle against feudal privilege and landlordism. James Wilson took a view of the repeal agitation quite similar to that of Taylor. See James Ashley Moncure, "James Wilson and *The Economist,* 1805–1860" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1960), pp. 166–67.

Cobden, Bright, Fox, and other prominent League spokesmen took up the themes of feudal privilege and landlordism in their agitation against the corn laws. See *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, vol. 78 (London: Hansard, 1803–1891), pp. 785–810. This speech by Richard Cobden to the House of Commons was also cited by Prentice in *History of the Anti-Corn-Law League*, pp. 305–9. See also John W. Derry, *The Radical Tradition: Tom Paine to Lloyd George* (New York: St. Martin's, 1967), p. 216; McCord, *Anti-Corn-Law League*, pp. 20–21; and Barnes, *History of English Corn Laws*, pp. 211–16. See "Specimens of the Aristocratical Contempt for the People," *ABTC*, 19 May 1841. The ACLL advertised in *The League*, 23 December 1843, a book highly critical of artistocrats by J. J. Macintyre entitled *The Influence of Aristocracies on the Revolutions of Nations Considered in Relation to the Present Circumstances of the British Empire*. See also M. A. Fitzsimons, "Britain in the 1840s: Reflections in Relevance," *Review of Politics* 31 (October 1969):52; "Miscellaneous. The League Agitation," *The League*, 6 April 1844, reprinted from *Tait's Magazine*.

For more on the theme of the Norman Yoke, consult Theodore Barth, "A Jubilee of Free Trade and Democracy," in Henry Dunckley, et al., eds., *Richard Cobden and the Jubilee of Free Trade* (London: Unwin, 1896), pp. 122–66 and especially p. 133. See also Cobden, "Liberté et protection," offprint from *Journal des économistes*, pp. 236–38, Cobden Papers, WS-PRO; Ausubel, *Bright*, p. viii; Richard B. O'Brien, *John Bright* (London: Nelson, 1913), pp. 28–52 passim; John Bright, Notes for a Speech at Free Trade Hall, 10 January 1849, Bright Papers, British Museum Add. MSS. 43,392; and John Bright, Notes for a Speech on the Irish Question at Free Trade Hall, 25 October 1849, Bright Papers, British Museum Add. MSS. 43,392. See too Richard Garnett, *Life of W. J. Fox, Public Teacher and Social Reformer*, 1786–1864 (London: Lane, 1910), pp. 264–65, speech delivered by Fox at Covent Garden Theatre on 7 August 1844.

33. See, for example, "The Labourers of Dorsetshire," *ABTC*, 21 March 1843.
34. "Agriculture," *The League*, 30 December 1843.
35. Richard Cobden, *Total Repeal, Speech by R. Cobden, Esq., M.P., in the House of Commons on Monday, May 15* (Manchester: ACLL, 1843): "The Protection-to-Labour Fallacy Exploded," *ACLC*, 27 August 1840; "The Farmers' Interests Best Consulted by a Regular Importation of Corn," *ABTC*, 13 December 1842; and "The Great Anti-Corn-Law Meetings and Banquets in Manchester," *ABTC*, 7 February 1843. The widely distributed League tract, *Facts for Farmers* (Manchester: Gadsby, n.d.) argued (pp. 1–4) that neither tenants nor agricultural laborers derived any real benefit from the corn laws and accused landlords of being "guilty of all the evils, crimes, miseries, and physical and moral deteriorations which are inflicted upon the people by the corn laws."
36. "Improvements in Agriculture the Best Protecting Duty," *ACLC*, 3 September 1839; "Improved Farming—Who is to Begin?" *The League*, 21 September 1844; "High Farming *vs.* Monopoly," *The League*, 21 September 1844. Cobden had long held the view that aristocrats stood in the way of capital improvements in general; see Cobden, *England, Ireland, and America*, pp. 30–34, as well as Cobden to Bright, "private," 1 October 1849, Cobden Papers, British Museum Add. MSS. 43,649.
37. "The Great Anti-Corn-Law Meetings and Banquets in Manchester," *ABTC*, 7 February 1843.
38. Ibid.
39. "Improved Farming—Who is to Begin?" *The League*, 21 September 1844; and "High Farming vs. Monopoly," *The League*, 21 September 1844. The importance of better management of estates and agricultural improvements in the process of repeal of the corn laws was perhaps first recognized by D. C. Moore in "The Corn Laws and High Farming" in *Economic History Review*. Moore was interested in those elements of Peel's 1846 Corn Importation Bill which were intended to encourage and facilitate high farming. Moore emphasized that Peel was largely an agriculturalist in outlook and recognized the value of high farming. Under Peel's bill, repeal was not immediate but to be phased in over a period of three years. The heart of Moore's analysis is his discussion of the specific provisions of the bill and Peel's general scheme for agricultural improvement, which was to facilitate the development of high farming. Of great significance, according to Moore, was government assistance for loans to improve drainage, which, though not of an enormous amount, did much to popularize high farming through introduction of technological improvement. Moore asserts that Peel's Corn Importation Bill was an aid to agricultural improvement and that the provisions of the bill that dealt with improvements were

of considerable importance in getting a sufficient number of agriculturalists to accept repeal. The Anti-Corn-Law League opposed "compensations" to farmers in the form of drainage loans, arguing that such loans drawn from the public treasury bore "a strong family likeness to protection against competition" and were "marvelously apt to be metamorphosed, when the public is not looking, into *gifts.*" See "The Compensation," *The League,* 31 January 1846.

40. *Annual Register, 1845,* vol. 87; pp. 63–65. Cobden spoke on March 13, 1845. In a letter to George Wilson, Richard Cobden described the project as "a model farm with a model lease—model offices & model cottages with gardens to prove our faith in our principles that the soil is capable of as great & profitable development as manufactures." See Cobden to Wilson, undated, Friday, G. Wilson Papers, AD-MCRL. The letter was almost certainly written on Friday, 14 March 1845, for in it Cobden refers to his speech on Thursday. In the letter Cobden outlined his discussion of the project with John Bright and mentions that purchase of such an estate could lead to the creation of a thousand new county voters. He suggests that the money be raised in £60 shares and believes that it could be collected within a fortnight. Cobden emphasizes that some "first rate farmer" should take the lease and that for the time being nothing should be said about the creation of new electors.
41. "The Great Anti-Corn-Law Meetings and Banquets in Manchester," *ABTC,* 7 February 1843. According to Sherriff,

> This is the way farmers have been protected, protected from every thing but poverty, dependency, and debasement. I see no prospect of better times for the farmer until prices get down as low as they can. Open the ports, and prices and rents will fall at once, and not in the slow farmer-killing way they have done since the war. Your manufactures would revive; your operatives would fill themselves; the consumption of the country would increase amazingly. Ships would clear out, laden with goods, and return with corn. I think the prices of farm produce would begin to rise, and farmers reap the benefit; rents would also rise.

In its appeals to landlords, the ACLL employed the argument that repeal of the corn laws would at the very least not diminish rents and would likely have the effect of increasing them. On the surface it may appear that this view was inconsistent with the assertions the League made with respect to rents in its appeals to farmers, and one must remain cautious in accepting the assertions of a propaganda machine. Yet, there is considerable evidence to suggest that Leaguers believed that under a system of free trade, profits, prices, and wages would all increase—and that they would do so faster than rents; thus rents might increase absolutely while declining in relative terms. See "The Free Importation of Foreign Corn Must Raise the Landlords' Rents," *ACLC,* 20 August 1839. See also "Dialogue Between a Landlord and a Merchant," *ACLC,* 20 August 1839; Arthur Morse, *Agriculture and the Corn Law. Prize Essay Shewing Injurious Effects of the Corn Law Upon Tenant Farmers, and Farm Labourers* (Manchester: Haycraft, 1842), pp. 1–16.

42. "Agriculture," *The League,* 30 December 1843. See also "The Great Anti-Corn-Law Meetings and Banquets in Manchester," *ABTC,* 7 February 1843; "Land Tenure Inquiry in England," *The League,* 16 December 1843; "Security of Tenure," *The League,* 13 September 1843; and "Leases Essential to Agricultural Improvements," *The League,* 31 August 1844, reprinted from *British and Foreign Review.*
43. "The Bread Taxers' Hunt," *ACLL,* 17 December 1840, reprinted from *The Sun;* "Game & Crime," *The League,* 30 March 1844. See also "Game"; "A Country Gentleman on the Game Laws"; "Game-Preserving and Incendaries"; "The Game Laws: The Farmer's Bane, the Peasant's Curse"; and "Poaching Extraordinary"—all in *The League,* 13 July 1844, and all reprinted from the *Brighton Herald.* See P. B. Munsche's recent study, *Gentlemen and Poachers: The English Game Laws, 1671–1831* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) as well as "Rural Crime—The Game Laws," *The League,* 8 June 1844; "Effects of the Game Laws," *The League,* 24 August 1844, reprinted from the *Leeds Mercury;* "What Make [sic] Poachers," *The League,* 31 August 1844; and "Anti-Game-Law Meeting," *The League,* 27 June 1846.
44. "Game," *The League,* 13 July 1844, reprinted from the *Brighton Herald.* See also "Game-Law Oppression. The Modern Forest Laws," *The League,* 2 November 1844. Harriet Martineau's book, *Forest and Game Law Tales,* 3 vols. (London: Moxon, 1845), emphasized the same theme. See "Review," *The League,* 17 January 1846.

45. "Rural Crime—The Game Laws," *The League*, 8 June 1844; "Effect of the Game Laws," *The League*, 24 August 1844; "Game and Crime," *The League*, 30 March 1844; and numerous reports under the heading "The Game Laws," in *The League*, 11 January 1845.
46. "The Repeal of the Corn Laws a Religious Question," *ACLC*, 26 November 1839, reprinted from *The Patriot*. The League itself appears to have tried to use the moral argument to encourage greater support from the Anglican clergy, or at the very least to demonstrate their indifference to suffering, when it published a review of a book that detailed the conditions of the laboring poor and that was directed specifically to Anglican clergymen. See "Review," *ACLC*, 7 October 1841. The book being reviewed was *An Address to the Clergy of the Established Church Showing the Tendency of Starvation to Engender Epidemic Disease*, by "A Physician," and published in London by Houlston and Hughes in 1841.
47. Thomas Spencer, *Religion & Politics: Or, Ought Religious Men to Be Political?* (London: Green, 1843), passim. Spencer, who became known as the Anti-Corn-Law Curate, produced a pamphlet in 1840 that was designed to appeal to his co-religionists. *The Prayerbook Opposed to the Corn Laws: Or, Who Are the Nonconformists?* used the church catechism and the scriptures to explain that the corn laws were contrary to the prayer of Jesus that each man should have his daily bread. The League took considerable interest in this pamphlet, publishing portions of it in the *Anti-Corn-Law Circular*, and Spencer apparently had a thousand copies sent to the League during the summer of that year. Two years later the League published an address to farmers that cited the teachings of Thomas Cranmer, in which the Anglican martyr had asserted that the excessive corn prices of his time were equivalent to theft in the eyes of God. Thus the ACLL attempted to enlist the support of Anglicans as well as Dissenters, though not often with great success. See Thomas Spencer, *The Prayer Book Opposed to the Corn Laws: Or, Who Are the Nonconformists?* (London: Green, 1840), passim. This pamphlet was extracted by the ACLL as "The Prayerbook Opposed to the Corn Laws; Or, Who are the Nonconformists?" in *ACLC*, 21 May 1840. See Spencer to ACLL Office (Wilson?) 25 July 1840, ACLL-Letterbook, AD-MCRL. References to Thomas Cranmer appeared as "An Address to Farmers, at Over, in Cheshire," *ABTC*, 3 November 1842. The address had originally been delivered by Rev. Gilbert Elliott on 26 October 1842, when Prentice had met with a deputation from Northwich to plan a conference of farmers.
48. Two issues of the *ABTC* were entirely devoted to this conference—12 August 1841 and 26 August 1841. See also the ACLL's *Report of the Conference of Ministers of All Denominations on the Corn Laws* (Manchester: Gadsby, 1841).
49. "Opinions of the Press Regarding the National Conference of Ministers at Manchester," *ABTC*, 29 July 1841. The charge of conspiracy had first appeared in the *Blackburn Standard* on 21 July and had been reported by other papers including the *Bolton Free Press*. See "To the Editor of the *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*," *ABTC*, 29 July 1841. This letter from Rev. J. W. Massie denies the charges and emphasizes that the clergy from the Church of England had been invited and that some were in fact planning to attend.
50. "The Anti-Corn-Law Almanack," *ACLC*, 19 November 1840.
51. "Corn Law Consistency—Our Clerical Opponents," *ABTC*, 27 December 1842. Cogden repeated the same charge at an ACLL meeting in Bradford, which was reported in "Provincial Meetings," *ABTC*, 11 January 1843.
52. Ibid.
53. "The Corn Law the Cause of Revolution," *ACLC*, 1 October 1839. The article complained that the opponents of repeal in the Church of England "will insolently thrust in our face their fat establishment, and make the necessity of preserving it in its plethoric condition one of the chief arguments for supporting pauper robbery."
54. J. B. Smith to Sidney Smith, 3 July 1839, J. B. Smith Papers, AD-MCRL. Smith warns his reader not to reveal his Unitarian views, writing, "Above all do not let the cloven foot be seen [Unitarianism] such is the ignorance & prejudice of people that the fact of a man being a Socinian is enough to destroy the effect of everything he says on any other subject."
55. "Sir Robert Peel," *ABTC*, 15 August 1841.
56. The Church and the League (Manchester: Gadsby, n.d.), pp. 1–8.
57. "The Parsons and the Corn Laws," *ABTC*, 29 July 1841.
58. Ibid.

59. McCord, *Anti-Corn-Law League,* pp. 15–17; "A Voice from the Board of Trade," *ACLC,* 26 March 1840; J. D. Hume, *Evidence on Import Duties* (Manchester: ACLL, n.d.). The League newspaper published a parable from Bulwer's *England and the English* which depicted Industry as a great giant fettered by tithes and bounties. See "The Giant Industry in Fetters," *ACLC,* 10 September 1840. See also "Questions for the Times," ACLL Circulars and Tickets, SSL-MCRL, and W. J. Fox, "The Political Influence of a Church Establishment," in *Lectures Addressed Mainly to the Working Classes 1845–49,* 4 vols. (London: Charles Fox, 1845–1849), vol. 1, pp. 285–99. Leaguers opposed tithes also as a land tax not fairly borne by the landowners themselves. The ACLL reprinted pamphlets by J. D. Hume on this subject, including extracts from a series of letters by Hume in *Evidence on Import Duties,* in which Hume was highly critical of the corn laws, asserting that they acted as a form of tax-relief for landlords by shifting the burden of land taxation to laborers and manufacturers. W. J. Fox took a quite similar view.
60. Joseph Brotherton was an early opponent of church rates and so was Joseph Hume; in 1834 both men supported Lord Althorp's plan for removal of church rates and for putting the cost of upkeep and repair of church property on the land tax. See Brotherton to J. B. Smith, 21 April 1834, J. B. Smith Papers, AD-MCRL. J. B. Smith emphasized his opposition to church rates when he stood for Parliament at Blackburn in 1837. See Election Broadside of J. B. Smith, 19 July 1837, J. B. Smith Papers, AD-MCRL. Rev. Thomas Spencer mentioned church rates as among laws that religious men with the welfare of mankind at heart should examine—and oppose—in order to accomplish necessary reforms of both church and state. See Spencer's pamphlet, *Religion & Politics,* pp. 14–16.

    In an address to electors published in *The League* for the City of London by-election of 1843, the League author followed the example of the Council and disavowed participation in general politics, but he called the attention of electors and readers alike to the fact that the monopolists' candidate, Mr. Baring, supported the perpetuation of church rates and that he had endorsed the education bill during the previous parliamentary session. See "To the Electors of the City of London," *The League,* 14 October 1843, and "Questions for the Times," ACLL Circulars and Tickets, SSL-MCRL.
61. John Bright, *Address to the Inhabitants of Rochdale on the Late Church Rate Contests with some Remarks on an Address by the Vicar of Rochdale* (Rochdale: James and Crosskill, 1840), p. iii and pp. 1–24 passim. Bright railed against the maintenance of a system of worship by compulsion and was outraged at what he regarded as fraudulent voting at the Rochdale poll and intimidation of opponents of the rates by calling out troops. Bright's blistering pamphlet indicted church rates in general and the Rochdale poll and rate proposal in particular, and it was republished numerous times. Bright complained that the established church had ten places of worship in Rochdale that had been provided by government funds already, and that the forty-four chapels of Dissenters in the parish had been constructed from private contributions and provided "for the decent maintenance of Divine Worship, without *compelling* from any, much less such of their neighbors as never enter them." See also William Robertson, *Life and Times of the Rt. Hon. John Bright, M.P.,* 2 vols. (London: Cassell, 1877), vol. 1, pp. 98–110; Read, *Cobden and Bright,* pp. 90–92; and Robbins, *Bright,* pp. 25–27. In 1841 Mr. Easthope offered a motion in the House of Commons to abolish church rates and to empower members of the Church of England to rate themselves for pews, seats, and repairs. See *Annual Register, 1841,* vol. 83, pp. 82–83.
62. John Bright, *Speeches on Questions of Public Policy,* ed. J. E. T. Rogers (London: Macmillan, 1868), 16 April 1845, p. 296. See Also Trevelyan, *Bright,* pp. 160–62. Cobden, an Anglican, was far more willing than Bright and other Leaguers to accept the position of the established church in English society. See William Harbutt Dawson, *Richard Cobden and Foreign Policy: A Critical Exposition With Special Reference to Our Day and Its Problems* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1926), p. 72; Morley, *Cobden,* pp. 117–22, 486. Bright tended to see privilege, whether religious or political, as part of a single exclusive system maintained by Anglican landed aristocrats

and gentry. See Read, *Cobden and Bright*, pp. 90–91. Ebenezer Elliott, the Corn Law Rhymer, favored disestablishment of the Church of England, too. See Simon Maccoby, *English Radicalism (London: Allen and Unwin, 1935)*, p. 181.

63. Fox, "The Maynooth Grant," in *Lectures*, vol. 1, p. 336.
64. Fox, "The Political Influence of a Church Establishment," in ibid., pp. 285–99; and "The Political Influence of a Church Establishment, 2nd Lecture," in ibid., pp. 300–17.
65. Edward Miall, *The Nonconformists's Sketch-book: A Series of Views of a State-Church and Its Attendant Evils* (London: Aylott and Jones, 1845), passim; Arthur Miall, *Life of Edward Miall, formerly Member of Parliament for Rochdale and Bradford* (London: Macmillan, 1884), pp. 33–123. Miall's book was a collection of articles written for the *Nonconformist* from 1841 to 1845. The avowed object of Miall's journal was disestablishment of the Church of England. In the book, Miall attacked the argument that government should provide for the religious instruction of its subjects, argued that a state church was contrary to Christianity, and blamed established religion for a wide variety of social evils. See *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 13, pp. 324–26. Consult the anonymous pamphlet, *The Church and the League*, published by Gadsby, for a similar view.
66. "Conservative Journal," *ACLC*, 10 December 1839. See also "'No Corn Laws' versus 'No Popery,'" *ACLC*, 5 November 1840, reprinted from *The Examiner*.
67. Ibid.
68. "*Proceedings of the Lecturers*," *ACLC*, 28 May 1839.
69. Ibid.
70. "Review," *The League*, 25 November 1843. The book reviewed was *The English Universities*, trans. F. W. Newman (Manchester: Sims and Dinham, 1843).
71. "Unholy Alliance of the War Party and the Bread Taxers," *ACLC*, 22 October 1840; "Important Meetings at Warrington Union of Chartists With Other Reformers in Favour of Repeal," *ACLC*, 3 December 1840.
72. Cobden to Sturge, 16 October 1852, Cobden Papers, British Museum Add. MSS. 43,653. In this letter Cobden reflected upon the depictions of the militia utilized by the ACLL in the 1840s and argued that the British aristocracy continued to oppose general disarmament because the younger sons of the nobility benefited from place and position in the military establishment. See also same to same, 6 September 1846, Cobden Papers, British Museum Add. MSS. 43,655; and same to same, 14 September 1852, Cobden Papers, British Museum Add. MSS. 43,653.
73. Cobden to Tait, 4 June 1835, Cobden Papers, British Museum, Add. MSS. 43,664. For discussion of Cobden's view that agitation was the key to reducing military misadventure and aristocratic misrule as well as the threat Cobden believed these posed for democracy, see Edward Hughes, "The Development of Cobden's Economic Doctrines and His Methods of Propaganda: Some Unpublished Correspondence," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 22 (1938):407–8.
74. Same to same, 14 June 1836, Cobden Papers, British Museum Add. MSS. 43,665. See also Cobden to Place, 11 May 1838, Francis Place Papers, British Museum Add. MSS. 37,949; Cobden, *England, Ireland, and America*, pp. 3, 35–36; "National Honour," *The League*, 10 August 1844. The last-named reports on the speech of Thomas Milner Gibson on the subject of self-interest of the aristocracy in foreign intervention and war at a League meeting 7 August 1844. See also Dawson, *Cobden Foreign Policy*, pp. 7–8, 249–57.
75. W. J. Fox, "English Wars: Their Causes, Cost, and Consequences," cited in Garnett, *Fox*, pp. 271–72. See also Trevelyan, *Bright*, p. 273.
76. See pp. 214–216.
77. "Weekly Meeting of the League," *ABTC*, 27 December 1842. The speaker was identified only as Mr. Bayley; it is not clear whether this was Henry, William, or Charles Bayley, all of whom resided in Stalybridge and were members of the League Great Fund General Committee.
78. Ibid.

79. "The National Anti-Corn-Law League," *The League,* 28 October 1843; and "Monopoly Viewed in Connexion with Despotism," *The League,* 25 November 1843.
80. Ibid.
81. "Great Free Trade Demonstration in Liverpool Amphitheatre," *ABTC,* 5 September 1843.
82. "To the Right Honourable The Earl of Harewood, President of the Yorkshire Society," *The League,* 16 March 1844; "Review," *The League,* 30 March 1844; and "The Anti-Corn-Law Conference," *ABTC,* 14 July 1842. For a discussion of the primacy of liberty in all things in the mind of P. A. Taylor, see J. Morrison Davidson, *Eminent Radicals In and Out of Parliament* (London: Stewart, 1880), pp. 29–38. For a discussion of Cobden's belief in individual liberty, free markets, freedom of opinion, and free exchange, see Francis W. Hirst, *Richard Cobden and John Morley* (Swindon: Swindon Press, 1941), pp. 36–37. For an assertion of the Christian origins of Joseph Sturge's views on liberty, see Stephen Hobshouse, *Joseph Sturge: His Life and Work* (London: Dent, 1919), pp. 51–56. See also the interesting contemporary treatise by John Francis Bray, *Labour's Wrongs and Labour's Remedy: Or, The Age of Might and the Age of Right* (Leeds: David Green, 1839), esp. pp. 12–18.