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Introduction

In Britain, the early decades of the nineteenth century saw the qualified development of a two-party representative system different in key respects from earlier periods of party rivalry. Few observers in 1800 would have predicted the revival of the Foxite Whigs or the post-1832 political structure in which organized parties with popular support beyond Westminster alternated in office. Those changes fostered a broader political nation in which provincial opinion carried greater weight in national political discussion at Westminster. Together they laid the foundation for nineteenth century parliamentary liberalism and the Whig–Liberal ascendancy that lasted until William Gladstone split the party over Irish Home Rule in 1886. The political scene in which the Foxite Whigs reestablished themselves as an effective opposition between 1808 and 1830 thus provides valuable insights into the development of modern British politics.

With the end of a formal Whig–Tory rivalry in the 1750s, the concept of party had only a tenuous legitimacy until Edmund Burke crafted a systematic defence for concerted opposition to George III's ministers by the Rockingham Whigs. Cautious references to outside agitation and public opinion were only outdoor gestures by the Rockingham Whigs in support of an essentially indoor struggle, and Burke's own insistence that Parliament maintain its independence from external pressure set limits on how a ministry's critics appealed beyond Westminster.[1] Splits within the opposition provided another problem that set the government against competing factions rather than a solid opposition. Despite ministerial reshuffles in the 1760s, Lord North, William Pitt the Younger, and Lord Liverpool successfully piloted what was effectively a one-party state into the 1820s.[2]

The Foxite Whigs in the first decades of the nineteenth century stood between their undistinguished recent past and uncertain prospects for

the future. Excluded from office, save for Charles James Fox's short-lived Whig-dominated Talents Ministry in 1806–7, the party saw its ranks thinning and prospects for office slim. Byron's *Don Juan* quipped that 'Nought's permanent among the human race/Except the Whigs *not* getting into place', and a later historian argued persuasively that 'the Whigs had established a powerful claim to be considered the least effective party of modern times, doomed to permanent opposition'.[3] The political scene changed dramatically with the turmoil that followed Lord Liverpool's crippling stroke in 1827 and the Tory split over Catholic Emancipation. The Whigs had established their claims as a credible governing party by 1830, and they formed the core of Earl Grey's reform ministry later that autumn. The Reform government and its Whig successor under Lord Melbourne initiated a decade of reform through such measures as the Reform Act of 1832, the New Poor Law of 1834, and the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 and thereby solidified the coalition that came to define parliamentary liberalism. By the 1840s, the very success with which the coalition of Whigs and liberal reformers had recast political discourse obscured the scale of their achievement.

Henry Brougham, a leading Whig MP, barrister, and publicist, played a key role in his party's revival by building an alliance with provincial interests. Where Edmund Burke had earlier crafted an intellectual justification of party activity, Brougham applied the concept and extended it beyond the House of Commons to the nation as a whole. His appeal to provincial merchants and manufacturers frustrated at their exclusion from influence helped transform a faction of aristocratic, metropolitan-oriented Foxites into a national party. Although his career peaked in 1830, he transformed British politics through an achievement whose significance was clouded only by the later eccentricities that ended Brougham's chances to hold office or remain a serious political figure.

Several facets of Brougham's approach fit together in his effort to bring the Whigs from opposition to office. Brougham pioneered a new style of parliamentary opposition through 'petition and debate' tactics that combined local petitioning meetings with press reports and debates in the House of Commons to create a cycle linking provincial opinion with the political contest at Westminster. The tactic helped Brougham defeat the regulatory Orders in Council in 1812 and the income tax in 1816, and Richard Cobden used Brougham's campaign against the Orders as a model for the Anti-Corn Law League in the 1840s. Opening county and borough politics through contested parliamentary elections served as

another way to extend the party contest from Westminster to constituencies. Brougham's efforts to capture a seat in Westmorland controlled by the Earl of Lonsdale's interest attracted national attention as a symbolic confrontation between the Whigs and Lord Liverpool's Tory government, and his 1818 canvass in Westmorland prefigured William Gladstone's Midlothian crusade in 1879–80. Observers viewed Brougham's election in July 1830 as MP for Yorkshire, England's largest county, as a declaration of popular support for reform. Parliamentary opposition and election campaigns both involved extensive work with the press, and Brougham used periodicals along with both London and provincial newspapers to make the Whigs' case. His strategy eventually harnessed in support of the Whigs many middle class activists who drove the period's liberal reform movements. More than any other figure of the time, he educated public opinion and brought it to bear on national affairs.[4]

As Donald Read has shown, the nineteenth century was the great age of provincial consciousness with cities like Manchester and Birmingham shaping national politics more than before or since.[5] Expansion of the political nation between 1808 and 1830 to include new interests throughout the country made possible the provincial role that Read describes. During the early and mid-eighteenth century, the city of London and borough of Westminster led extra-parliamentary opinion in spirit and organization. This reinforced the importance of the metropolitan world focused on London that included established commercial interests along with high politics in Parliament, government administration, and the court. Popular activism in the borough of Westminster, with what amounted to manhood suffrage and a well organized plebeian radical interest, provided another facet to the political context.

The need to describe interests developing beyond London gave the term provinces a new application in the 1780s. Groups like Christopher Wyvill's Yorkshire Association established in 1779 and the General Chamber of Manufacturers that followed in 1785 marked the beginning of organized provincial interests, especially in Northern England and the Midlands, with perspectives distinct from those of metropolitan London. The growing reach of provincial newspapers after 1790 encouraged their growth, but Brougham's campaigns accelerated it and made it a political force at Westminster. He described public opinion and the press in 1812 as the main check on Lord Liverpool's government, and public opinion by the 1820s was associated with the provincial middle classes.[6] Such respectable groups had a standing within the community that their radical counterparts lacked, and Whigs uneasy with popular agitation found them more agreeable partners in finding new issues on which to

challenge the government. Agitation by London radicals had less of an impact than slow and profound shifts of allegiance in the country at large and the ways in which politicians learned to turn those changing attitudes to their advantage.[7]

Opposition to monopolies in commerce, religion, and politics gave Whigs and the provincial interests Brougham cultivated an ideological bond that became the foundation for a more effective challenge to the Pittite Tory ascendancy than Foxite efforts before 1812. During those years Whigs had stressed divisive issues like retrenchment, scandal, and peace that lacked coherence as a programme and looked back to eighteenth century country party rhetoric. Besides creating differences among Whigs by drawing Foxites into uncomfortable relations with metropolitan radicals, opposition along those lines painted Whigs as factious and self-interested. Brougham's developing strategy in the 1810s and 1820s fitted better with Whig principles that emphasized liberty and resistance to arbitrary power. It also helped move the party from its eighteenth-century obsession with secret influences and the power of the Crown toward a wider concern with the liberties of other groups within the realm that was more likely to draw support beyond their own aristocratic circle. Campaigns highlighted Whig ideological differences with the government as well as questions of policy, painting ministers as part of an incorrigible Tory establishment.[8] Brougham's critique drew provincial reformers towards the Whigs and informed the changes in public attitudes that laid the foundations for Victorian liberalism. Jonathan Parry has defined nineteenth century liberal government as a system in which potentially incompatible interests accepted an overall code that guaranteed a variety of liberties. The open politics that liberals practised reflected their desire to respond to popular grievances, and liberals defined themselves as opponents to government by class, sect, or interest.[9] Attention to public opinion and the importance of debate seen in what the Victorian journalist Walter Bagehot described as Parliament's role in articulating grievances felt in the country followed from this approach which contrasted with the Pittite regime's administrative mentality and exclusive ethos.[10]

Despite the metropolitan orientation of most Foxites, a number of Whigs shared Brougham's awareness of politics beyond metropolitan London and the opportunities it provided for cooperation with middle class interest groups. The fact that the middle classes were defined by a coherent set of 'respectable' cultural and moral values that gentry and aristocrats could appropriate rather than strictly economic criteria removed barriers to exploring common ground.[11] Lords Milton and

Althorp, whose views had been shaped by their families' parliamentary interests and social role in Yorkshire and Northamptonshire, appreciated the dynamics of local politics and sought to establish the Whigs as leaders of 'popular' elements in the country that their party's leaders had neglected. Accordingly, they lent support during the 1820s to movements favouring parliamentary reform and removal of disabilities on religious nonconformists.[12] Others appreciated the growing desire among the middle classes for a voice in government policy and understood that the Whigs must provide leadership or risk 'falling into contempt…as an incapable and useless body'.[13] Even during the bleak days following Fox's death in 1806, the Edinburgh-raised economist and politician Francis Horner saw in the respectable middling orders a broad foundation for a popular party.[14]

Nonetheless, Brougham brought a unique perspective and energy to the Whig opposition that merits close attention. A provincial man raised in Edinburgh and steeped in the Scottish Enlightenment, his awareness of commercial society and communities in Britain whose concerns differed from metropolitan preoccupations shaped an outlook different from other Foxites. Brougham's family originated across the border in Westmorland where his father had been a Whig squire, but his formidable mother Eleanor Syme was the niece of William Robertson, a distinguished historian and principal of Edinburgh University. The Virginia orator and patriot Patrick Henry was Brougham's cousin on his mother's side, and both families acknowledged the relationship. Robertson had traced Europe's transition from rudeness to refinement through the development of commercial society and was a moderate Whig who opposed slavery and sympathized with the American colonies.[15]

Raised in a culture that stressed self-improvement by study and practice, Brougham displayed an early penchant for classics and mathematics at the Edinburgh High School before entering the University at fourteen where he studied with Dugald Stewart and John Playfair. Two papers on scientific topics that he wrote in his teens were read before the Royal Society and later published in its *Transactions*. A firmly empirical intellectual environment marked Brougham's adult writings and set him apart from radicals and utilitarians like Jeremy Bentham. From an early age, Brougham strove to pose as a prodigy and displayed an impressive range of interests throughout his career.[16] Friends within his circle founded the *Edinburgh Review* in 1802, and within five years he had taken the lead in what became the most influential periodical of the age. Youthful exuberance combined with Edinburgh's vibrant

intellectual milieu set the journal's early tone. Brougham's essays not only covered a remarkable range of topics, but also showed a gift for invective that often went beyond prudence.

Exclusion from preferment as a young Whig in Scotland under Henry Dundas's Tory hegemony sharpened Brougham's stridency along with his political views. Admitted to the Scottish bar in 1800, he found few briefs and filled his time with writing. Brougham moved to London in 1804 and built his career in England as a barrister on the Northern Circuit. Francis Horner, who had preceded Brougham and developed ties with the Holland House circle, introduced him to Whig society. Brougham's *Inquiry into the Colonial Policy of the European Powers* drew national attention when it appeared in 1806 and established him as an authority on political economy. Lord Holland persuaded him to write a pamphlet defending the Talents ministry in 1806, and Brougham received his first political appointment that year as secretary to a failed diplomatic mission to Portugal. He managed the press campaign for the Whigs during the 1807 general election and, with some assistance from Holland and John Allen, wrote most of the party's material. According to Holland, he 'filled every bookseller's shop with pamphlets, most London newspapers and country ones without exception with paragraphs'.[17] Brougham's awareness of the most effective ways to influence public opinion through the press made him peculiarly well fitted for the task, but he disliked compromising his independence by remaining long in a subordinate capacity as a hired pamphleteer.[18] Ambition spurred Brougham to gain a seat in Parliament and claim a leading public role.

Brougham's wit drew an audience from an early age, and his achievements as a barrister and parliamentarian reflected a passion to be seen. As a young man he attended a theatre performance in which every attempt at humour over four acts had misfired. When the curtain rose for the next act with the stage set for a dinner scene, an actor called for a toast. Brougham replied from the audience, 'I humbly propose "good afternoon"', the customary toast for ending a party, and waved his hat for others to follow as the theatre emptied behind him. Pranks and wild boisterousness among Brougham's Edinburgh circle showed a different side of his personality than treatises on colonial policy. He boasted that a closet in his father's house contained brass knockers torn from doors in Edinburgh's new town. Brougham and a group of friends pulled the bronze sign from Manderson's druggist shop after a banquet, and on another occasion he called out the city watch as a prank on his companions after instigating a similar expedition for the

sign from another apothecary.[19] Conviviality drew forth the same energy as work and scholarship, while all revealed an erratic streak.

Temperament defined the course of Brougham's career as much as anything else. A man with tremendous presence, Brougham had a depressive personality in which periods of frenetic activity and gaiety alternated with periods of blackest gloom. Periodic retreats to his Westmorland estate punctuated his busy social and professional life. Impatience and querulousness spoiled Brougham's charm over time. Whig aristocrats and intellectuals alike became suspicious of their awkward, headstrong colleague.[20] Grey once likened Brougham to Edmund Burke as the most eminent man of his day, and, like the Irish-born Burke, Brougham served as the intellectual mentor and strategist for the Whig party of his generation.[21] The two men shared other attributes that merit attention: both were perceptive outsiders with a shrewd grasp of the political scene and both proved difficult colleagues who pushed their fellow Whigs to raise questions that they otherwise hesitated to press in such strident tones.

Brougham entered the House of Commons in 1810 for Camelford and quickly became the Pittite government's most formidable parliamentary critic. Connections from legal work, particularly representing Liverpool merchants petitioning against the Orders in Council prior to entering the Commons, and the campaign against slavery and other reform movements, such as the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, helped build formidable support in the country. Although his interest in these issues was sincere, political ambition drove Brougham's multifarious activities.[22] Involvement with reform efforts and educational initiatives enhanced his image and provided contacts with networks of respectable supporters across the country. Consequently, few other Whigs and no radicals could match Brougham's influence over liberal opinion in the provinces that played so important a role in the Whig revival.

This study of the Whigs' move from opposition to office contributes to a substantial recent literature on early nineteenth century British political culture. Richard Brent, Jonathan Parry, and Peter Mandler have explored the development of liberal politics with an emphasis on events after 1830, and Mandler's work captures the aristocratic Whig style whose influence persisted into the 1840s. His analysis of the Foxite connection explains much of their cohesion and survival through decades of opposition. Broader studies by Frank O'Gorman and H.T. Dickinson of the Hanoverian electoral system and popular politics over the long eighteenth century indicate a more vibrant and participatory scene than earlier accounts credit. Public opinion and political activity existed

largely within the framework of local and constituency politics that formed a political culture of its own, and elites devoted considerable attention to maintain their influence. Only in the early nineteenth century did national parties at Westminster systematically engage constituency networks as part of their struggle for advantage.[23]

Each of these works, however, largely examines developments between the collapse of the Talents ministry and Grey's accession to office in 1830 as part of another story rather than closely engaging the period on its own terms. Older narratives of the Whig years in opposition by Michael Roberts and Austin Mitchell focus on the manoeuvres of high politics among party leaders and thereby neglect the impact of questions related to civil and religious liberty, commercial interests, and opinion beyond Westminster during these years in opposition. Far from being the defeated and fragmented force that Roberts presents, the Whigs showed the capacity to expand by seeking new issues and appealing to new constituencies. While the factionalism he and Mitchell describe impeded attempts to revive the party, Whigs nonetheless sustained a bond in opposition that provided the basis for their subsequent revival. Close study of manuscript sources, newspapers, and other print media of the period indicates the importance of building provincial support during the halting process of Whig revival that profoundly changed British politics. Analysis of the shift in the two decades before 1830 thus requires close attention to trends beyond the parliamentary struggle at Westminster that past accounts or scholarship focused on other periods do not provide.

This book presents the Whig revival as a key episode in the political history and party development between 1808 and 1830. Chapter 1 opens with a discussion of parliamentary politics and the factors behind the Whigs' exclusion from office before addressing the specific issues on which Brougham and his party drew support and the limits they faced in exploiting their tactical success. Chapter 2 sets high politics into the broader context of social and economic forces beyond Westminster and considers the role of the press and local politics. Subsequent chapters examine Whig efforts to seize advantage over the government between 1818 and 1830. Election campaigns in Westmorland and Yorkshire gave Brougham a prominent platform outside Parliament and served a similar objective of building support, as did issue-oriented campaigns in the Commons. Each of those elections provides insight into Brougham's developing strategy, its effectiveness, and political tensions of the period. Political conflict and the struggle for power itself became the catalyst for change, and Whig efforts at responding to its exigencies played

a vital part in developing the liberal approach that emerged in the 1820s. The Whigs' halting progress underlines their difficulty in gaining traction against the government. Brougham nevertheless combined electioneering with pressure tactics that gradually shifted opinion in the country to establish the Whigs as a viable governing party and allowed them to seize the opportunity presented by the final Tory split in 1830.

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