9 1821: Fundholders and Landholders

He dreaded the possibility of a conflict of which they had already seen some symptoms between the landed and the funded proprietor, as to the share which each should bear in the general calamity... One of the most baneful consequences, first of the vast creation of monied capital by the paper system; and secondly, of the great comparative depreciation of all other property, was, the increased influence of the monied interests on the institutions and government of the country.

Edward Ellice
House of Commons, 9 April 1821

The conflict between King and Queen dragged on. The affair continued to demand the attention of both Houses and to prejudice the chances of survival of the government. On three occasions during this year, parliament was to be obliged to debate the question of the inclusion of the Queen’s name in the liturgy, and the current of social unrest which accompanied these debates was not to subside until the Queen’s death on 7 August 1821. As members gathered early in the year for the opening of the new session, the whigs were optimistic about their chances of a return to power. The ministry had lost the confidence of the King because of the manner in which it had handled the royal scandal. The able George Canning had felt it necessary to resign his Presidency of the Board of Control. In addition, the tories were extremely unpopular in the country at large. Liverpool’s administration had clearly reached a major turning point.

Towards the end of 1820 there had been signs of revival in cotton manufacturing in both Lancashire and Scotland. The situation continued to improve throughout 1821 and other areas of secondary industry seemed to have begun to recover from the slump during the year. Nevertheless, the difficulties of the rural sector continued. Prices remained low and harvests were inferior to those of 1820. These trends were reflected in

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parliamentary debate, as puzzled agriculturalists tried to come to grips with the new but shadowy power structure that was groping towards the shaping of English society into a more perfect vehicle for industrial revolution.

Among intellectuals, Ricardo's reputation gained ground. Indicative was the query of Thomas De Quincey in his *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*: 'Could it be that an Englishman, and he not in academic bowers, but oppressed by mercantile and senatorial cares, had accomplished what all the universities of Europe and a century of thought, had failed even to advance by one hair's breadth?'

Some of those who were willing to answer this question in the affirmative joined the newly launched Political Economy Club which in the opinion of at least one of its founders, James Mill, was to act as a platform for the dissemination of the Ricardian gospel. The decision to start the Club was taken at a meeting in London during April. As well as Mill, those present included Tooke, Torrens and Mushet of the Mint.²

In this year a third edition of Ricardo's *Principles* was published, and James Mill gave a 'popular' exposition of the new creed in his *Elements of Political Economy*. Potential believers who might find either of these books difficult were offered a fourth, and improved, edition of Mrs Marcet's *Conversations on Political Economy*, as well as a series of simple expositions of Ricardo's teachings in *The Champion: Weekly Review of Politics and Political Economy*. Ricardianism did not go unchallenged in the literature of political economy, with works by John Craig and 'Piercy Ravenstone' providing some of the most notable opposition. Mill's treatise was not regarded favourably by all reviewers in contemporary periodicals.³

**A PETITION FROM BIRMINGHAM**

In the Lords on 5 February Earl Grey introduced a petition from Birmingham concerning the distress which prevailed there.⁴ Grey claimed that the data included in the petition showed that the problems of the nation's secondary industries were no longer those of transition from war to peace. Rather he detected the emergence of a pattern of industrial fluctuations governed by variations in expectations concerning the state of foreign markets. This, he believed, was a totally new phenomenon. The problems of agriculture, on the other hand, were different in origin. These stemmed from a heavy weight of taxation which had been aggravated by parliament's attempt to prevent further depreciation of the currency.

The next speaker for the opposition, Lansdowne, attacked the idea that rural difficulties were due to over-production of food.⁵ It was absurd to claim that 'the country, which did not grow enough for its own consumption when prices were high, should all at once grow too much when they had fallen.' The fundamental problem in the economy (as he