Abstract

Nineteenth-century British politics cultivated the idea that it was Britain's responsibility to enforce its virtues upon the rest of the world. Domestic and foreign issues became linked by fundamental themes as new forces of liberalism, political reform and religious pluralism challenged the old English regime. The Belgian Revolt, and its diplomatic and political aftermath, had a tremendous impact on the ideological struggle in Parliament. The opinion and interest for the Belgian case and the appropriate British response to it led to many intense parliamentary debates in the years 1830-1834. Furthermore, the Belgian question influenced discussions on other significant issues in British politics, such as parliamentary reform, repeal of the union with Ireland, collaboration with the Concert of Europe, France and the Holy Alliance. As foreign policy and domestic affairs became integrated through fundamental themes, an ideological struggle erupted and political parties presented themselves as more patriotic than their rivals. Consequently, the Belgian question became the battleground on which English intellectual, cultural and moral ideas were projected.

The Belgian Revolt in British politics, 1830-1834.

Charlotte Harte

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Abbreviation

*HPD*3	*Hansard Parliamentary Debates,* 3rd ser. (1830-1891).

Introduction

In the shadow of history irony always lurks. On 12 June 2015 Belgium celebrated the 200th Birthday of the Battle of Waterloo. Many have observed that the divided country seized the celebrations to promote national unity within the country as a kind of nation building.[1] The Battle initiated a period that can defined by the creation of modern nation states and nationalism. It stood at the beginning of a chain of events that eventually resulted in Belgian unity and independence. The Belgian nation state came into existence after several conferences of the Concert of Europe (Concert), also known as the Congress System. The Austrian Empire, France, Great Britain, Prussia and the Russia Empire were united in the Concert. They met on a regular basis in London to address the unrest in the southern provinces of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands after the outbreak of the Belgian Revolt in August 1830. The kingdom was a melting pot of different cultures, economies, religions and languages. King William I (1772-1843) aspired to unite the Northern Netherlands with the southern provinces but he was met with fierce civil opposition in the south.[2] The Concert felt a responsibility to take care of the settlement of the Belgian Revolt since the Dutch kingdom had been a creation by the four great European powers at the Congress of Vienna in 1814-1815. It was a carefully construed plan to create a buffer state in order to contain France and bring stability to the European mainland.[3] Furthermore, revolutions were severely condemned by the Concert's conservative members, Austria, Prussia and Russia, who were united in the Holy Alliance. They feared

[1] Piet van Asseldonk, 'Pikante rol Willem-Alexander bij herdenking Waterloo', [http://nos.nl/artikel/2040978-pikante-rol-willem-alexander-bij-herdenking-waterloo.html] (accessed on: 12 June).
[2] J.S. Fishman, *Diplomacy and revolution. The London Conference of 1830 and the Belgian Revolt* (Amsterdam 1988) 25-6.
[3] Rolf Falter, *1830: De Scheiding van Nederland, België en Luxemburg* (Lannoo 2005) 19.

revolution would spread across the continent as the July Revolution in France had already shaken up the European continent that year.[4]

The aim of this thesis is to show that the Belgian Revolt, and its diplomatic and political aftermath, had a tremendous impact on the British ideological struggle in Parliament, in the years 1830-1834. According to historian Jonathan Parry, European problems made patriotism a major political issue because not only the British governments' ability to promote British affairs and interests abroad lay under scrutiny, but also the representation of English political values at home and on the international stage.[5] In his book *The Politics of Patriotism English Liberalism, national identity and Europe, 1830-1886*, Parry demonstrates that 'domestic, foreign, imperial and Irish issues all involved similar underlying themes – of the responsibility of political leaders and the political nation to forge a strong and beneficent national community on healthy principles.'[6]

It is relevant to consider the settlement of the Belgian question in the broader debate on the development of patriotism and English identity, because it is overlooked in Parry's work. This paper will argue that the settlement of the Belgian question is very relevant to the ideological struggle among the political parties and that this struggle erupts earlier than Parry argues. This is demonstrated by the frequent and intense parliamentary debates on the Belgian Revolt and the subsequent negotiations. It is also demonstrated in the specific time period of 1830-1834. This period entails two different governments that adhered to very different political philosophies, namely the Tory Wellington and Whig Grey governments. The period of 1830-1834 is also of

[4] Fishman, *Diplomacy and revolution,* 19, 41.
[5] Lord Aberdeen, *HPD*3 15:104, 5 Feb. 1833.
[6] Jonathan Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism. English Liberalism, national identity and Europe, 1830-1886* (Cambridge 2006) 2.

interest to the British ideological struggle because all the political parties were confronted with internal dissonance due to developments and changes in British society.

The opinion and interest for the Belgian case and the appropriate British response to it led to many heated debates in both Houses of Parliament. Furthermore, the Belgian question influenced other momentous issues in Parliament. In debates on foreign policy, comparisons were often made between Belgium and other international crises. Belgium became either the example for the way the British government should respond internationally, or rather the lesson learned how not to act in domestic and foreign affairs. Debates on the settlement led to questioning geopolitical structures and mechanisms, and England's place therein. What is even more interesting is that the Belgian Revolt and the subsequent negotiations were used as precedents, for context or for comparison in parliamentary debates on domestic issues. Many times the Belgian question is introduced unexpectedly as parliamentarians utilise it to reinforce their arguments on domestic policy. The Belgian Revolt also led to questioning the means of revolution in general and these discussions in particular were conducted in patriotic language.

The parliamentary debates will be the dominant source for this thesis. As the focus will be on language and rhetoric quotes are used to engage the reader in actual speeches. To avoid not seeing the wood for the trees the thesis is structured around certain themes that are often discussed in relation to the Belgium question. These themes reflect both issues of domestic and foreign policy. A short introduction of the events and context precedes the chapters on the actual parliamentary debates.

Throughout the paper, British and English are used interchangeably and England is used to mean the British state and nation.[7]

[7] Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism*, 13, 38.

Chapter 1 – British politics in 1820-1830s

It is often said that the revolutions of the eighteenth-century led to the birth of political ideology, resulting in the politicisation of society as a whole.[1] Britain changed immensely during the last two decades of the eighteenth-century and the political landscape transformed in the years 1827-1832.[2] The end of Britain's *ancien régime* came sudden as Anglican privileges were legislated away in 1828, the Protestant privileges were removed in 1829, and finally the Great Reform Act dismantled the influence and power of the monarch and the House of Lords in 1832.[3] New forces of liberalism, political reform and religious pluralism challenged the old patriarchal regime. As the *ancien régime* felt threatened, a neo-conservative ideology developed as a reaction against the progressive ideologies associated with recent revolutions.[4] According to historian Boyd Hilton (1944) 'political, religious, and intellectual disputes cut much more deeply after 1783, as the English became locked in 'a war of ideas'.[5]

1.1 Domestic issues

Three parties ruled British politics. The Tories, a conservative party, had a strong attachment to traditional institutions and adhered to Protestant ideals. They tried to portray themselves as a patriotic party. The Whig party considered themselves as the true advocates of the historic English constitution and defenders of popular liberties.[6] They often accused the Tories of ignoring liberalising trends in Europe because they were unwilling to support effective liberal policies abroad.[7] The Radicals were strong

[1] Hilton, *Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People? England 1783-1846* (Oxford 2006) 31.
[2] Hilton, *Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People?* 24.
[3] Ibid., 24.
[4] Ibid., 25, 30.
[5] Ibid., 30.
[6] Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism,*10.
[7] Ibid., 11.

supporters of parliamentary reform and Catholic emancipation. They objected to Grey's Whig government on grounds of class and religion.[8]

In the first half of the nineteenth-century the parties were internally divided. The Tories were particularly divided on social and economic issues, in liberal and high or ultra-Tories, but most differences were related to emphasis rather than substance.[9] They had different notions on the role of the government. Both favoured delegating authority to local officials and they agreed that the central government had certain core tasks like law and order, diplomacy and defence. The ultra-Tories believed that the government needed constant monitoring and managing, whereas the liberal Tories wanted the state to operate neutrally. The division in the Tory party was especially strong during the late 1820s and 1830s as liberal views were increasingly used in a positive sense in 1827.[10]

The year 1830 was characterised by demands for reform and these calls penetrated all areas of institutional life as everything became political.[11] The effects of an ever-increasing industrialisation and urbanisation caused a polarisation of values between the landed interest and the rest. As political unions emerged in 1830, the issue of parliamentary reform slowly began to stir. The issue had seemed dead but was unexpectedly revived as a consequence of the fall of the Wellington government.[12] The prime minister, the Duke of Wellington (r. 1828-1830), had announced opposition to reform and it resulted in a divergence over reform across Britain. The Whigs gained national popularity as they supported reform and the Grey government (r.1830-1834) passed the Reform Bill in June 1832.[13]

[8] Ibid., 12.
[9] Hilton, *Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People?* 315.
[10] Ibid., 315-6, 375.
[11] Ibid., 32.
[12] Ibid., 411.
[13] Ibid., 419-1.

Another important topic in domestic affairs concerned Ireland. A decade of turmoil had dominated Ireland when the British government decided to dissolve the Dublin Parliament in 1800-1 and ceded legislative sovereignty to Westminster.[14] The following decades British politics was concentrated on making the union with Ireland work while it was constantly confronted with fear for disorder, instability and revolution.[15]

1.2 British foreign policy

British politicians believed it was Britain's destiny to play a strong role on the international stage. They felt it was their responsibility to secure an influential position for Britain in international, especially European, politics. Whatever the particularities of an issue abroad, it always came down to Britain's standing opposite powerful rivals. Discussions on British domestic policies were linked to foreign affairs by patriotic themes.[16] As British politicians projected an image of a Britain that represented constitutionalism, humanitarianism and rule of law, they believed the British political community provided a counterweight to threatening autocratic regimes on the continent.[17]

Nineteenth-century British politicians considered many European powers rivals, especially France and Russia. Consequently, British society was often mirrored to regimes across the channel. The formation of the British national identity was strongly influenced by the opposition between Britain and continental Europe. The continent was narrowed down to France as the stereotypical continental state. A popular image of the continent consisted of notions of authoritarian Catholic regimes and a poor and ignorant

[14] Ibid., 31.
[15] Ibid., 31.
[16] Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism,* 2, 5-6.
[17] Ibid., 3.

population, while Britain was linked to political freedom, Protestantism, constitutionalism, rationalism, enlightenment, prosperity and overall superiority.[18]

The general aim of British foreign policy was to consolidate national power by promoting equilibrium and peace abroad, and by maintaining restraint during international crises.[19] The Congress System provided a stage on which Britain could project its values and consolidate its influence. Justification for British foreign politics became increasingly cloaked in constitutional and humanitarian rhetoric. British politicians began to cultivate the idea of Britain's responsibility to enforce its virtues of constitutionalism, peaceful relations and free trade upon the rest of the world. At the same time they wanted to avoid war and refrain from entering into continental commitments in order to maintain room to manoeuvre and uphold a balance of power.[20] The spread of British commerce would set in motion a process of cultivating English constitutional liberalism abroad. In this manner, liberal policy united domestic and foreign policy and it acted as a powerful tool to strengthen political power at home. During interventions on the European mainland, the British government would often justify the interference as a means to install superior, English, political values in countries suffering under the burden of reactionary forces.[21]

1.3 Patriotism and nationality in British politics

One of the major themes in nineteenth-century British *elite* politics 'was the image of itself that Britain should project – whether on the diplomatic stage, in its self-presentation *vis-à-vis* the continental powers, or in internal affairs.'[22] British politicians

[18] Pieter François, 'Belgium – country of liberals, Protestants and the free: British views on Belgium in the mid nineteenth century', *Historical Research* 81 214 (November 2008) 669.
[19] Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism*, 6.
[20] Ibid., 6.
[21] Ibid., 6-9.
[22] Ibid.,1-2.

used international politics as a stage on which their foreign policy could act as a means to exhibit British superiority concerning constitutional and ethical values. Ideological terms were used to stigmatise certain foreign issues as 'un-English'.[23] Political debates on foreign affairs became governed by discussions on the values and purposes British politicians should profess in general. The nineteenth-century historiographical debate has considered British foreign policy separate from the main domestic issues due to their specialist nature and the conviction that foreign policy was never a preeminent electoral issue. However, members of Parliament raised general issues of foreign policy that had implications on domestic policy.[24]

[23] Ibid., 4.
[24] Ibid., 2, 4.

Chapter 2 – The Belgian question in Parliament

The king's speech on opening the session in November 1830 ushered in a period, covering several years, in which the settlement of the Belgian question would regularly lead to heated parliamentary debates. At the outbreak of the Belgian Revolt, British politicians were aware of the responsibility Britain held towards the Dutch Kingdom as its existence and form was a predominantly British idea.

The British government considered the parliamentary questions and discussion relating to the Belgian question as a threat to the success of the negotiations. Foreign Minister Lord Palmerston (r. 1830-1834) spoke in patriotic terms as he condemned the inquiries during 'negotiations of the greatest importance, not only to this country, but to all Europe,' as having a paralysing effect on the prerogatives, namely of making war and peace, of the Crown and indirectly his advisers.[1] However, former home secretary and Tory Robert Peel (r. 1828-1830) felt that 'in the whole of the annals of England never was there a case which so imperiously demanded explanation—never was there a series of transactions on which, at a period when the members of his Majesty's Government should be released from the obligations of secrecy…'[2] Particularly, Peel continued

> 'at a moment when the king of France had declared…that the tricoloured flag was floating on the walls of Lisbon—at a moment when the French army was occupying the fortresses in the Netherlands—at a moment when, according to appearances, the only signs of military activity on the part of the British Government were directed against its two most ancient allies, Portugal and Holland,—did the hon. Member think, that such was the moment at which men who were anxious for the interests, and still more

[1] Lord Palmerston, *HPD*3 6:246, 18 Aug. 1831.
[2] Robert Peel, *HPD*3 6:258-9, 18 Aug. 1831.

anxious for the honour, of England, were to be precluded from seeking information from his Majesty's Government?'[3]

In the years 1830-1834 the government's policies regarding the settlement of the Belgian question lay under continuous scrutiny of Parliament. It was a highly debated topic in both Houses and it also influenced discussions on domestic issues. In the parliamentary debates concerning the Belgian question was regularly put forward by the parties and used to reinforce their arguments, either relating to foreign or domestic affairs.

The aim of this chapter is to show that the Belgian question made patriotism a political issue and underlying theme in British foreign policy in 1830. It will try to illustrate how political parties used the question to project their interpretation of English political values in general. Several themes can be identified in de debates on Belgium that were controversial. To the parties, it all came down to the appropriate English reaction to the Concert, the Vienna treaties, the principle of non-interference, British collaboration with France and with the Holy Alliance.

2.1 The Concert of Europe and the balance of power

The British involvement in the Concert had always been met with criticism and British foreign policy towards it had changed over the years. In November 1830 the Tories were the only party that believed in the power of collaboration within the Congress System in order to settle the Belgian question.[4] Members of the conservative party believed that the Concert offered a balance of power that not solely meant any equality of power or of territory, but especially an equality of rights in the European political society. Above all, the equilibrium protected weaker against 'the encroaching ambition of powerful States'.[5]

[3] Peel, *HPD*3 6:259, 18 Aug. 1831.
[4] Lord Grimstone, *HPD*3 1:56, 2 Nov. 1830.
[5] Colonel Evans, *HPD*3 6:102-3, 16 Aug. 1831.

The 3rd Marquis of Londonderry (1778-1854), known as a hard-line Tory and former Foreign Minister Lord Castlereagh's (r.1812-1822) stepbrother, considered the preservation of the Concert as the ultimate way to bid defiance against international mischief.[6] So he defended the current government's recourse to the Concert. In light of the 'patriotic deeds' of his late stepbrother he shared his admiration of the way in which Lord Castlereagh enabled England to influence and control the other powers of the continent. As a result of Castlereagh's efforts at Vienna, he had given 'his country a fair and honourable, - a courteous and considerate, - a spirited and courageous standing amongst the other nations of the world… and our then high and elevated position.'[7] However, when the Whigs came to power Londonderry felt that the Grey Ministry had given away England's high position as he described the 'deplorable condition in which our foreign relations throughout Europe are now placed, and especially at this crisis, as relating to our recent transactions in Belgium.'[8] Londonderry still believed that England's fate in international politics could be turned and he advised the Whig government

> 'to take up a higher tone than that which they have hitherto used in these negotiations. I can assure them, that if they do assume such a tone, they will find Austria, Prussia and Russia, ready to chime in with it. At present, those Powers dare not assume that tone, whilst the French are allowed to domineer, as they recently have domineered, in the Conferences.'[9]

The Radical party had been sceptical towards the Concert from its very beginning, they referred to it as '…a system which had been condemned by all good men, from its first establishment, as founded for the express purpose of putting down liberty and supporting

[6] Marquis of Londonderry, *HPD*3 1:248, 8 Nov. 1830.
[7] Londonderry, *HPD*3 5:969, 9 Aug. 1831.
[8] Londonderry, *HPD*3 5:970, 9 Aug. 1831.
[9] Londonderry, *HPD*3 5:991, 9 Aug. 1831.

despotism all over Europe.'[10] The Radicals did not understand how the English government could cooperate with 'the despots of Europe', who worked to 'stifle liberty, even in the cradle', according to Radical parliamentarian Joseph Hume (1777-1855).[11]

Throughout the settlement of the Belgian question the Grey government justified its participation in the Congress System by expressing that it was the best way to preserve both peace on the continent and the honour of Britain.[12] Despite the fact that the course taken by the current government was initiated by their predecessors, the prime minister recounted that 'there was no other safe path for the Government to follow, save that in which it had fortunately walked.'[13] At first, when the Tories were still in power, the Whigs were not in favour of the king's plan to settle the issue in concert with its allies. The Whigs, opposing absolute rule and supporting constitutional monarchism, regarded the Concert as 'a gathering together of Kings' which 'must always be viewed with terror and alarm.'[14] They asserted that authority to decide on the Belgian fate was not with the Congress. However, when the Whigs led the government they changed their tune as British cooperation with the Concert was continued.

The collaboration was increasingly criticised by both the Tories and the Radicals because they felt that it had pushed the English government to abandon the Dutch king and his people. Former Foreign Secretary the Earl of Aberdeen (r. 1828-Nov. 1830) lamented the change of course in British foreign policy, as the strict alliance with Holland was broken. He described how over time foreigners considered the core value of British foreign policy its loyalty to its allies.[15] Aberdeen denounced the current government as they tarnished England's standing by treating an ancient ally with neglect and being

[10] Joseph Hume, *HPD*3 1:78 2 Nov. 1830.
[11] Hume, *HPD*3 1:80 2 Nov. 1830.
[12] Earl Grey, *HPD*3 9:873, 26 Jan. 1832.
[13] Grey, *HPD*3 9:863-866, 26 Jan. 1832;
Grey, *HPD*3 9:873, 26 Jan. 1832
[14] Lord Brougham, *HPD*3 1:112, 2 Nov. 1830.
[15] Aberdeen, *HPD*3 5:1016-7, 9 Aug. 1831.

'guilty of an abandonment of principle, in violation of solemn treaties and engagements.'[16] The neglect was even more corrupt, according to Aberdeen, since the Dutch king had acted throughout the whole of the negotiations 'with the utmost degree of fairness, candour, and good faith.'[17] He spoke in the firmest words of patriotism 'When he saw all sympathy withdrawn from one of the most ancient Allies of this country, and every means taken to promote the success of the unconstitutional encroachments of a Revolutionary State, he could not, however, avoid expressing his opinion, that the Government was pursuing a course unjust, impolitic, unstatesmanlike, and un-English.'[18] The English ministers, Aberdeen continued, should have shown more respect and consideration towards the king's 'firmness and patriotism'.[19] The so-called neglect of an ancient ally was all the more poignant for England, according to the Tories, because 'the House of Orange, a House to which not only England, but Europe, indeed, the world at large, was more indebted for its services on the score of religious and civil liberty, than any other in existence.'[20]

To make matters even worse for British reputation on the international stage, the Tories believed that the rest of Europe judged Britain as 'crouching to France, —that we were yielding up our allies to their enemies, and that we were alone occupied at home in attempting to revolutionize our own country.'[21] The Tories' criticism was rebutted by the government as being unpatriotic as their accusations were leading England straight into a revolutionary war on the continent: 'And was there an honest man—was there an Englishman who considered the consequences of such a war, who did not feel, that

[16] Aberdeen, *HPD*3 5:1016-7, 9 Aug. 1831.
[17] Aberdeen, *HPD*3 5:1020, 9 Aug. 1831.
[18] Aberdeen, *HPD*3 5:1024, 9 Aug. 1831.
[19] Aberdeen, *HPD*3 5:1021, 9 Aug. 1831.
[20] Lord Baring, *HPD*3 6:251, 18 Aug. 1831.
[21] Earl of Carnarvon, *HPD*3 5:1026, 9 Aug. 1831.

everything ought to be done to prevent a cannon being fired in Europe?'[22] The Tories were openly accused of using strong and dangerous language in order to provoke the ministers and to distract attention from domestic issues they resented, such as parliamentary reform.[23] The accusations only invigorated the patriotic language used by the Tories to denunciate the government's foreign policy:

> 'In the days of Lord Chatham [William Pitt (1708-1778) former prime minister (r.1766-1768)] England was respected by all the nations of Europe, but in these days she had abandoned all her ancient principles, and ought to blush at the name of Chatham—she had abandoned her old and faithful allies, rushing forward to grapple with the weak, and perfectly ready to truckle to the strong. If this system were continued, the English name would be a by-word for all that was base and dishonourable.'[24]

The Radicals also accused the government of abandoning an old ally. However, they felt much sympathy for the Belgian case. 'Did not the House see, that the ill-treated but glorious Belgians had been parcelled, out like so many pigs to a purchaser, in a manner disgraceful to Europe, but especially disgraceful to England, that had suffered such a parcelling?'[25] The conservative politicians were not susceptible to the Radicals' compassion for Belgium. They disapproved of the Belgians for taking recourse to violence and war. In particular considering that the Belgians themselves had suffered so much from the horrors of war and being conscious of its history as the arena 'on which

[22] Lord Holland, *HPD*3 5:1029, 9 Aug. 1831.
[23] Holland, *HPD*3 5:1030, 9 Aug. 1831.
[24] Lord Brudenell, *HPD*3 5:1297, 12 Aug. 1831.
[25] Hume, *HPD*3 1:82-3, 2 Nov. 1830.

the great Powers of Europe decided their quarrels', they still decided not to address their grievances in a more reasonable way.[26]

The criticisms on England's participation in the Concert never left the table. Aberdeen complained repeatedly about the hypocrisy of the Whig ministers. The same ministers had constantly objected to Congresses when they were not in power, while they now rendered the Concert indispensable for the negotiations and eventual execution of the final terms of settlement.[27] But the ministers were not only self-contradictory regarding the role of the Concert, they had also not committed to their policy of active mediation as Holland was left out of the settling of the final terms of agreement, 'a power whom you have ever, hitherto, found to be worthy of respect, and between whom and other foreign powers you have always understood an honourable connexion to have subsisted.'[28]

2.2 The Vienna treaties

The 1815 peace agreement was fundamentally undermined when the Netherlands lost half of its territory and two-thirds of its population after the Belgian Revolt. In 1830, the king's speech emphasised the necessity of respecting the Low Countries' sovereignty in dealing with its internal affairs. At the same time it held the conviction that the arrangements of the Vienna treaties should be preserved because they offered the best security to maintain stability in the world.[29] Earl Grey was soon to react as he denied the existence, ever, of unity in the United Kingdom of the Netherlands. 'We have here an instance of two nations, possessing no natural attraction, but rather a very great repulsion, to each other, pounded together in the great mortar of the chemists of Vienna'.[30] Above all, he felt ashamed that

[26] Robert Dundas, *HPD*3 1:58-9, 2 Nov. 1830.
[27] Aberdeen, *HPD*3 9:848-9, 26 Jan. 1832.
[28] Aberdeen, *HPD*3 9:855, 26 Jan. 1832.
[29] King's speech, *HPD*3 1:9, 2 Nov. 1830.
[30] Grey, *HPD*3 1:41-2, 2 Nov. 1830.

the two were ever united at the Congress of Vienna and that foreigners considered the kingdom 'as raised out of deference to England, at the special demand of Lord Castlereagh!'[31] He did not see how Britain was to be involved in the settlement of the Belgian question because he believed that Britain was not bound by the Vienna treaties to do so. Above all, he argued that those treaties had not contributed to the tranquillity on the continent, and thus will not restore peace if applied to the current unrest in the Netherlands. He strongly advocated the principle of non-interference in a state's internal affairs.[32]

Ultra-Tory Richard Vyvyan (1800-1879) believed that the Congress System was doomed to fail because it could only serve the balance of power that existed before 1789. Not only the system failed, the agreements in the Vienna treaties were also not fit to meet the challenges of a post-1789 Europe.[33] Wellington, prime minister at that time, was of the opinion that the treaties had rather secured a period of longest, uninterrupted peace in Europe. This showed 'that by common conciliation and management, the country would get over the present difficulties as it had got over others; and the course necessary to pursue was, to make the general interests of the different Powers of Europe compatible with the good government and welfare of their people.'[34] And this was exactly the policy of the Wellington Ministry in the negotiations on the Belgian question. The separation of Holland and Belgium became an unavoidable reality to most politicians and particularly the government.

The Radicals did not believe that the treaties pacified Europe because the treaties had already proven to have exactly the opposite effect of pacification. Thus the continued adherence to the treaties by the Wellington Cabinet was not viable:

[31] Grey, *HPD*3 1:41-2, 2 Nov. 1830.
[32] Grey, *HPD*3 1:39, 2 Nov. 1830.
[33] Vyvyan, *HPD*3 6:231, 18 Aug. 1831.
[34] Wellington, *HPD*3 1:49, 2 Nov. 1830.

> ‘It was for the House, on behalf of the people of England, to tell the Ministers that it would not concur in supporting those treaties. Was it not time for the House to hesitate, to doubt that policy which might formerly have appeared wisdom, but which was now proved not to be so?’[35]

Whig Earl Grey had always been critical towards the Vienna treaties. Even as prime minister he expressed his contempt: ‘for in the treaties concluded by the noble Duke [Wellington], which had for their object the settlement of Europe, were laid the seeds of those distractions and changes which had taken place every year since they were concluded, and which were still going on.’[36] The Marquis of Londonderry wanted to remind the House of the enthusiasm with which the treaties were received at the time:

> ‘I beg the Noble Earl [Grey] to contrast his own opinion with what was the general opinion of the British Nation, and of the British House of Commons at the period in question… I remember well the proud day, when, on his [Lord Castlereagh] return from abroad, the negotiator of these treaties was received with the general acclamations of a British House of Commons, and when men of all parties, and, without one individual exception, Tories, Whigs, and Canningites, stood up to receive him, and gave him that enthusiastic and long-continued cheering which his great and successful labours had so well earned.’[37]

2.3 Principle of non-interference

The principle of non-interference had always been a matter of contention in British foreign policy. Consequently, it became a dominant topic in the debates on British involvement in the settlement of the Belgian question. British politicians approved of intervention

[35] Hume, *HPD*3 1:82, 2 Nov. 1830.
[36] Hume, *HPD*3 4:307, 24 Jun. 1831.
[37] Londonderry, *HPD*3 5:972, 9 Aug. 1831.

depending on whether it was in line with liberal patriotic ideas. However, non-interventionism was a long-standing tendency in Britain's old diplomatic system and it was in line with Britain's objectives of maintaining peace abroad and avoiding continental entanglements. On top of that, Britain did not have the aspiration to acquire territory on the European mainland, thus it did not need to take action under the guise of intervention.[38] The principle was particularly popular in British politics after the Congress of Vienna. Mainly because many liberal politicians believed that Britain did not need recourse to war in order to impose its strong and progressive values. However, efforts by the great powers to suppress national and liberal movements across the continent were considered as hostile, particularly by Radical politicians.[39] In addition, the inherency of patriotism in British politics made the principle of intervention necessary to put force to the patriotic claim abroad. Above all, there had always been the idea that Britain should cooperate with other powers for the preservation of honourable peace and stability.[40]

The Earl Grey considered the principle of non-interference every country's duty and he reacted surprised by the allusion in the king's speech that the side of the Dutch government had been chosen. He felt that in this way the principle was thrown out of the window since the Belgians were condemned as *revolted subjects* against an enlightened government.[41] As a reaction the Wellington Ministry defended the king's speech and its own behaviour as acting as a mediator between the Netherlands and Belgium. Grey still considered the expressions in the king's speech as unjust and impolitic. He could not see how England could act as a mediator because the government had already publicly chosen sides. The prime minister defended the king's support for the Dutch king as the Belgian Revolt was directed at King William's legal and established government. Above all, Britain and the

[38] Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism,* 9.
[39] Ibid., 9.
[40] Ibid., 9, 10.
[41] Grey, *HPD*3 1:40, 45, 2 Nov. 1830.

Netherlands had been close and near allies.[42]

The Radicals were the most ardent antagonists of intervention. Hume even went so far as to pronounce that

> 'all men who were friends of freedom- all who felt for the true interests of this country, would deeply regret such an interference. Every man who loved liberty admired the Belgians for turning out the Dutch, who had acted in such an infamous manner.'[43]

They were surprised that Britain adhered to the principle of non-interference in Portugal but not for Belgium, they wondered out loud how these two choices of conduct could be harmonised:

> 'they could not be reconciled; and such conduct, instead of adding to the character of England, would heap disgrace upon it. It would be a disgrace to England to boast of her own liberty, and yet force slavery on other nations.'[44]

Home Secretary Peel defended the interference by making the observation that there existed a wide distinction between the affairs in the Netherlands, as well as between the causes of the events which had taken place in the two countries.[45] He insisted that

> 'the Belgian provinces had always been the ground on which the great conflicts of Europe had been determined. For this reason, the condition of these Provinces had always been a subject of deep interest to every State in

[42] Wellington, *HPD*3 1:43, 47, 2 Nov. 1830.
[43] Hume, *HPD*3 1:81, 2 Nov. 1830.
[44] Hume, *HPD*3 1:83, 2 Nov. 1830.
[45] Peel, *HPD*3 1:91-2, 2 Nov. 1830.

> Europe, and especially to England,—not with regard to the form of government, but with respect to their tranquillity.'[46]

On top of that the minister stated that the Treaty of 1814 authorised interference through mediation, it was a right possessed by all parties to that treaty.[47] However, this argument was undermined in the House of Lords in which a Whig

> 'could not find in the whole of it the shadow of a shade of anything which could impose on us the duty of interfering in any manner whatever in the affairs of the Netherlands, or of guaranteeing any particular form of Government in that country. If, then, there were no duties imposed by treaties, he thought that no consideration of interest or of expediency could possibly arise which would justify or induce this country to adopt any other course than that of total abstinence from all interference.'[48]

Earl Grey agreed and came to the conclusion that 'If we are not so bound, I repeat, my Lords, with my noble friend, that, in my opinion, sound policy, justice, and respect for the independence of other people, as well as regard for the interest of this country, enjoin us on the present occasion not to interfere with the internal affairs of Belgium.'[49] Foreign minister Aberdeen replied that either way 'the interests of this country were at all times so intimately connected with those of the Netherlands, that it was impossible for the Government to look with indifference at the situation in which they were placed.'[50] To which some Tories, including the Duke of Wellington's son, believed that in order to prevent that which was already bad from becoming worse, a system of complete non-intervention had to be

[46] Peel, *HPD*3 1:91-2, 2 Nov. 1830.
[47] Peel, *HPD*3 1:93, 2 Nov. 1830.
[48] Marquis of Lansdowne, *HPD*3 1:246, 8 Nov. 1830.
[49] Grey, *HPD*3 1:256, 8 Nov. 1830.
[50] Aberdeen, *HPD*3 1:247, 8 Nov. 1830.

imposed.[51]

Future Lord Chancellor and Whig Henry Brougham (r. 1830-1834) condemned the principle of interference and was convinced that the principle would drag England into war:

> 'I know no way in which these blessings [of peace] may be more securely preserved—there is nothing, I take it, more clear, more indisputable, more unquestionable, than that a firm resolution—not to interfere with others is the best way to preserve peace; and nothing is more certain, in the circumstances of the country, to encourage war, nothing could more tend to destroy that peace, than to involve the country in foreign interference with neighbouring States. I know of no danger which can render hostilities more certain, and none more liable to bring them home to us—nothing more liable to make widespread war abroad crush and overwhelm us, than for us to adopt those principles of the Holy Alliance which are contained and embodied in the King's Speech.'[52]

He pointed out to the House that the principle could be reversed against the interests of Britain. As an example he referred to the unrest in Ireland as he sketched the scenario in which the Dutch King considers British governance in Ireland tyrannical and he subsequently intermeddles between the English and Irish.[53] The Lord Chancellor's standpoint was taken by Radical Hume a year later and used against the then Lord Chancellor's government: 'Holland or Belgium, or any of the continental Powers, had as much right to dictate the terms upon which a separation should take place between England and Ireland, as this country had to interfere in the dispute between Belgium and Holland.'[54]

[51] Arthur Wellesley, *HPD*3 1:74, 2 Nov. 1830.
[52] Brougham, *HPD*3 1:113, 2 Nov. 1830.
[53] Brougham, *HPD*3 1:109, 2 Nov. 1830.
[54] Hume, *HPD*3 9:105 7 Dec. 1831.

As the new administration defended their devotion to the principle of non-interference, Radicals referred to the Concert's interference in the fixing of the limits and the selection of the future king for Belgium as proof that the English government was governing the independent Belgian state.[55] The selection of a sovereign to rule the new Belgian state was a controversial affair among the five powers united in the Concert.[56] In Parliament the point in question became strongly related to the discussion on the principle of non-interference: 'If foreign powers arrogated to themselves to choose or exclude particular individuals from the sovereignty of a State, what became of that undoubted power which the noble Earl contended was inherent in any nation to choose its own government.'[57] Eventually, the decision to install Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg (r. 1831-1865) was much to everyone's satisfaction because he was closely connected to Britain through his marriage to Princess Charlotte Augusta of Wales (1796-1817), once heiress to the British throne. Due to Leopold's closeness with Britain he proved to be the ultimate candidate for the Belgian throne to the political parties as

> 'that individual, by his long residence here, had received lessons of tolerance, and had probably acquired a prudent and temperate, but, at the same time, energetic mode of meeting occasional violence, which would render him a most valuable Sovereign for Belgium, and he thought from the connection of that noble person with this country…that he was remarkably well qualified for the office. With such a Sovereign he had no doubt that Belgium would take her rank among the scale of European nations,

[55] Hume, *HPD*3 2:696-8 18 Feb. 1831.
[56] Fishman, *Diplomacy and revolution,* 106-115.
[57] Aberdeen, *HPD*3 9:889-0, 26 Jan. 1832.

guarding with jealousy their common privileges which she was called upon to share.'[58]

However, notwithstanding Prince Leopold's competences, the selection of a Belgian sovereign remained a controversial issue. Foreign Minister Lord Palmerston maintained that his government did not interfere with Belgium's domestic affairs because the external boundary of a state was not a state's internal concern. Besides, he considered that for the reason that Belgium had never before been an independent state and since its union with the Netherlands was arranged for the purpose of contributing to the peace and security of Europe, the powers had every right to concern themselves with those circumstances in which their own interests, as well as those of Belgium and the Netherlands, were involved.[59] In regard to the government's involvement in the selection of the future king Palmerston believed that 'any country in such a case had a right, by the law of nations and of justice, to interfere so far as to prevent any Sovereign being elected, or at least to say, that they would not acknowledge any one, whose election would necessarily produce war with any other Power.'[60] Lord Althorp, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and Leader of the House of Commons (r. Nov. 1830-1834), insisted that 'the object of the Government had been to do everything in its power to preserve the peace of Europe (because, if the peace of Europe were broken the peace of this country must be hazarded)'.[61]

Lord Grey's ministry received some praise for its efforts and its sense of duty from certain Tories, particularly those who had been members of the Wellington Ministry. They trusted that the government was solely guided by the permanent interest of Britain as they were aware that Belgium's situation 'to be pregnant with danger' to British interests.[62] But

[58] Earl of Mulgrave, *HPD*3 4:100, 21 Jun. 1831.
[59] Palmerston, *HPD*3 2:701-2, 18 Feb. 1831.
[60] Palmerston, *HPD*3 2:705, 702, 18 Feb. 1831.
[61] Lord Althorp, *HPD*3 2:704, 18 Feb. 1831.
[62] Peel, *HPD*3 2:710-1, 18 Feb. 1831.

some Tories also felt that the peace that the government was so anxious to keep 'might be too dearly purchased, and, assuredly, it would be too dearly purchased, if to preserve it, our honour was compromised….the conduct which had been adopted in the case which he was about to notice did compromise the honour of this country, and was likely most seriously to affect its interests.'[63]

The king's speech on the opening of the session in June 1831 was more carefully construed on the issue of interference. The government added an extra condition to the applicability of the principle: 'under the sole condition, sanctioned by the practice of nations, and founded on the principles of public law, that in the exercise of that undoubted right the security of neighbouring States should not be endangered.'[64] Despite acknowledging that the condition was an old argument used by despotic powers to justify interference in the domestic affairs of other nations, the Tories welcomed the extra condition.[65] Former Foreign Minister Aberdeen proclaimed:

> 'Now, in that principle he expressed his entire concurrence, but he was compelled to add, that no State in Europe, however arbitrary and despotic, need fear any obstacle being opposed to its views by the adoption of the principle of non-interference so explained and so limited. No State ever threatened to interfere in the internal affairs of another country without pretending apprehension for the security of itself, or of the neighbouring States. Those despotic Powers who interfered in the domestic affaire of other nations did no more than the parties to the Conferences at London had done—namely, constitute themselves the sole judges of the degree of danger which affected the security of other States. The truth was, that this principle of non-interference was

[63] Lord Valletort, *HPD*3 6:98, 16 Aug. 1831.
[64] King's speech, *HPD*3 4:84, 21 Jun. 1831.
[65] Aberdeen, *HPD*3 4:298, 24 Jun. 1831.

> of a very elastic nature, and had already received from the plenipotentiaries at London a very great latitude of interpretation.'[66]

He felt alarmed by the developments as the principle was given a very accommodating nature by the powers as

> 'he could not help entertaining serious apprehensions of what might be the result of these Conferences upon the interest and welfare of this country… He must say, that looking at what had passed, he could not help entertaining the most serious apprehensions for the result, particularly as to the effects on our future relations with foreign States, and even for the preservation of peace itself.'[67]

The prime minister, Earl Grey, justified the king's speech because he believed that the principle was subject to exception for a higher purpose and that in the Belgian case there was no choice left for Britain for she was impelled to adopt the course

> 'in conformity with the first law of nature, that of self-preservation. She was, therefore, bound to interfere.'[68]

Wellington changed his tone towards the government's policies as he asserted 'that the arbitration was most tyrannical, for the parties were never called on to hear the reasons of the sentence which was passed on them, nor had they any opportunity of making their defence until the sentence had been pronounced to be irrevocable.'[69]

[66] Aberdeen, *HPD*3 4:298, 24 Jun. 1831.
[67] Aberdeen, *HPD*3 4:299, 24 Jun. 1831.
[68] Grey, *HPD*3 5:995, 9 Aug. 1831.
[69] Wellington, *HPD*3 9:874, 26 Jan. 1832.

2.4 Collaboration with France

In order to avoid the continental countries from ganging up against Britain, and to continue to exercise political control on the European continent, Britain occasionally engaged in an informal or formal alliance with France. An entente would prevent France from gaining strategic benefits over Britain while at the same time acting as a check against Russian threats.[70] But Belgium grew out to become a Catholic, French-speaking, politically divided state that was considered to be an easy target for the French.[71] Before becoming prime minister Grey felt that mediation could only be conducted in a proper manner if it were done 'in concert with France, so as to effect a new and amicable settlement of the country.'[72] According to the prime minister, Wellington, England could not attempt to pacify the Netherlands and Belgium alone as all five signatories of the Treaty of Vienna 'would claim their indisputable right to give their opinion upon the future explanation of the articles.'[73] The same maxim applied to France, 'nor could any other Power use an effort to pacify or reconcile existing differences alone; the object must be attempted by all the parties in concert, and that concert, whatever the arrangements were, must include France.'[74]

Wellington and Grey's statements did not prevent the general suspicion in Parliament towards France from growing. The distrust towards France peaked after French troops entered the southern provinces to meet King William's forces in August 1831. Conservative parliamentarians even believed that France was using Belgium to destabilise Britain. The Tories believed England's honour and stability was endangered as the ruling French party was deliberately driving France into a war with England as 'every thing was done to revive old grievances and old prepossessions against the English nation.'[75] Since the Tories

[70] Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism,* 7, 8.
[71] François, 'Belgium – country of liberals, Protestants and the free', 667.
[72] Grey, *HPD*3 1:40, 2 Nov. 1830.
[73] Wellington, *HPD*3 1:48-9, 2 Nov. 1830.
[74] Wellington, *HPD*3 1:48-9, 2 Nov. 1830.
[75] Vyvyan, *HPD*3 6:240, 18 Aug. 1831.

considered France a growing threat to Britain, they implored that Britain had to 'for the honour of England, for the safety of the country, and for the peace of Europe, to make a firm, and a bold, and a determined resistance to the line of policy which that party [revolutionary party] in France would wish to pursue.'[76] The Marquis of Londonderry feared that it was already too late as he witnessed that 'the time has arrived…when France takes the initiative in settling the affairs of Europe.'[77] He considered the French ambassador in London, Prince Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand (1754-1838), the biggest threat to England:

> 'I tremble for the position in which this country is placed. I see nothing offered in the way of explanation by the representative of the four Powers, - I see no remonstrance from England ; but I see France overawing us all by the aid of her skilful and active politician here, and I fear that he has in his hands the power of decision, and exerts that, which I shall call a domineering influence, over such of political arrangements of Europe as are carried on and decided upon in this country, which formerly were always directed by the wisdom and genius of England.'[78]

He even went so far as to allege that the English ministers were consorting with Talleyrand:

> '… this individual was constantly near the King's closet, that despatches were shewn to him in that quarter before they reached the public, and that his Majesty's Ministers went one after another to him, appearing to consult, invite, and to wait for his decision, he, as an Englishman, heard of such proceedings with some degree of disgust.'[79]

[76] Vyvyan, *HPD*3 6:238-9, 18 Aug. 1831.
[77] Londonderry, *HPD*3 5:26, 9 Aug. 1831.
[78] Londonderry, *HPD*3 5:17, 9 Aug. 1831.
[79] Londonderry, *HPD*3 7:797, 29 Sept. 1831.

The Tories were met with enmity and ministers accused them of plunging England needlessly into a war with France and getting it involved in one common hostile Europe.[80] The Lord Chancellor argued:

> 'I solemnly and in my conscience believe, that the breaking the peace of Europe will, over England, Ireland, and Scotland, be the most hated act that any Government could be guilty of; that it would draw down universal, loud, and unsparing execrations on the Government; and I do in my conscience believe, that those execrations would not be more loud, universal, and unsparing, than, according to the soundest view of the interests of this country, and the honour of the Crown which I serve, and which I think I more faithfully serve the more I give utterance to these opinions, they would be merited by the advisers of so insane and criminal a course.'[81]

In particular the Marquis of Londonderry fell victim to these accusations and he denied that he intended war. He believed that embracing France would make

> 'all the concessions made by this country—all the efforts made to preserve peace—the abandonment, of our allies, and our acquiescence in their degradation—the robbery of the Portuguese fleet—the demolition of the fortresses—the occupation of Belgium—the Belgian army's being officered by French officers, would then all go for nothing.'[82]

With Londonderry many Tories believed that history had proven that France was Britain's natural rival and enemy, and that the Dutch had been an ancient ally:

[80] Brougham, *HPD*3 7:16, 14 Sep. 1831.
[81] Brougham, *HPD*3 7:16-7, 14 Sep. 1831.
[82] Londonderry, *HPD*3 7:795, 29 Sep. 1831.

> 'Not to keep you in suspense as to precedents, your Lordships must recollect that remarkable instance to-wards the close of the 17th century, when Parliament, in a situation not dissimilar from the present, attempted, in the reign of Charles 2nd, to detach that Monarch from his unnatural connexion with France, and recommended to him in lieu thereof to form an alliance more creditable to his character and to the honour and interest of the country, by cultivating a closer and more cordial intimacy with the Dutch nation. A similar course had been pursued by Parliament on other occasions.'[83]

Grey dismissed the words of Tories by reminding them that the world had changed:

> 'we had not to treat with old-established governments, but with two new governments, emanating from two Revolutions. In candour I must state, that I found France influenced by sound views and just principles of policy. The French government is entitled to the more credit for moderation, since it has been continually assailed and goaded on by a furious party aiming at nothing but war.'[84]

But France's action over the months resulted in an increased sense of apprehension towards its growing influence in Europe.[85] Many parliamentarians feared for British honour and interests, as the country grew closer to France.[86] They feared that 'ancient allies and foreign governments in general' denounced the 'new order of things.'[87] The arguments were repudiated by Grey by repeating 'that the first object of an English Minister was the careful guardianship of the hopes and interests of England, and in repeating that sentiment then, he

[83] Aberdeen, *HPD*3 9:835, 26 Jan. 1832.
[84] Grey, *HPD*3 9:863, 26 Jan. 1832;
[85] Peel, *HPD*3 10:1230, 7 Mar. 1832.
[86] Wellington, *HPD*3 11:304, 16 Mar. 1832.
[87] Londonderry, *HPD*3 10:729, 27 Feb. 1832.

would add, that it was on it he based the necessity of a close union between France and this country.'[88] The Radicals supported the Grey government on this point, as they believed

> 'that nothing could be more for the peace of Europe than the continuance of a close alliance between the two countries. France was our nearest neighbour, and our richest neighbour—it was the richest country in Europe; and the more intercourse we had with it, the more it would be for the benefit both of France and of England.'[89]

2.5 Collaboration with the Holy Alliance

The Tories were not supporters of the act of revolution but they were aware of the imminent threat of the intensification and spread of revolts outside of France and Belgium. Regardless of their antipathy towards revolution, many Tories were satisfied to witness revolts in countries ceded by the Holy Alliance to different sovereigns. These countries 'had been prevented by the power of the sword from giving expression to the feelings which animated them' and this was a bigger evil than revolution.[90]

During the Wellington Ministry the Whigs and Radicals condemned British collaboration with the Holy Alliance. Parliamentarians believed that the government was interfering with the internal affairs of Belgium, and they tended to associate the British government with the Holy Alliance:

> 'Would it not say, it a following-up of the system of the Holy Alliance, which our present ministers, when out of office, had condemned? What! The people of England— the friends of freedom,—they who made choice of a Sovereign for themselves—they who would let none interfere with their choice,—they who maintained their choice —ought a Minister of

[88] Grey, *HPD*3 11:310, 16 Mar. 1832.
[89] Hume, *HPD*3 15:319, 7 Feb. 1833.
[90] Wellesley, *HPD*3 1:73, 2 Nov. 1830.

> England to join with despots to force on a free people the king that should rule them?'[91]

The parliamentarians considered British policy similar to the Holy Alliance's method of dealing with unrest: 'that we, like the Holy Alliance, will take upon ourselves, in the first place, the police of the Netherlands; and in the next place, like that famous Alliance, the police of the rest of Europe.'[92] The Earl Grey despised the way in which Britain had traded the principle of the balance of Europe,

> 'which would protect the weak against the strong,' for alliances built on 'principles of confiscation and division, in accordance with which we have transferred one kingdom to another, without regard to the sentiments or to the interests of those who were transferred. From the first moment, those transfers have never allowed to Europe an hour's security.'[93]

Radical Hume regretted

> 'to see, that the members of Government, who had always declared themselves hostile to the principles of the Holy Alliance, should now turn round and act in accordance with those principles, by an interference with Belgium, which neither of the parties affected by that interference thanked them for…The Belgians protested, and the Dutch protested, against the interference of this country, and, by that interference, he contended that this country had, in fact, become a member of the Holy Alliance, and was supporting its principles.'[94]

[91] Hume, *HPD*3 2:698, 18 Feb. 1831.
[92] Brougham, *HPD*3 1:112, 2 Nov. 1830.
[93] Grey, *HPD*3 1:39, 2 Nov. 1830.
[94] Hume, *HPD*3 9:105-6, 7 Dec. 1831.

Aberdeen had a different approach as he considered Britain's conduct towards the Netherlands, even worse than the Holy Alliance's intermeddling with other states:

> 'I say, give me the Holy Alliance in preference to an Alliance which justifies its conduct towards a friendly power by such an evasion. I do not wish to extend the comparison further; but so far as the declaration at Aix-la-Chapelle, and the manner in which the claim of the king of Holland under that declaration has been treated, I say, that the Holy Alliance appears to great advantage—for, although they might condemn, they did hear.'[95]

With the terms of settlement of the Conference of London on the table in October 1831, but still unknown to Parliament, former Foreign Secretary Aberdeen once again emphasised that the Dutch cause was the cause of England too. He expressed his regret that the Dutch government received support from Russia and Prussia by their reluctance to accept anything harmful to Holland's rights:

> 'I regret to see the Emperor of Russia the protector of Holland. I regret to see him occupy the place which I had hoped belonged to England.'[96]

Grey defended his government's policies for they were not to blame for the separation of the Dutch kingdom, neither for the existence and functioning of the Concert. Moreover, he regarded the attacks as unfair as he had found Britain involved 'in all the difficulties into which my predecessors had brought it' on coming into office.[97] Above all, Grey contended

[95] Aberdeen, *HPD*3 9:856, 26 Jan. 1832.
[96] Aberdeen, *HPD*3 9:838, 26 Jan. 1832.
[97] Grey, *HPD*3 9:863, 26 Jan. 1832.

that his object for the negotiations was to obtain a security against war, 'whilst he endeavoured to preserve the honour of this country, and of all the countries concerned.'[98]

[98] Grey, *HPD*3 9:873, 26 Jan. 1832.

Chapter 3 – Order and Revolution

The Belgian Revolution caught British society and its politicians off guard. The events on the continent excited Britain, but it also made some English feel alarmed. Particularly conservative politicians felt worried that the unrest would cross the channel and instigate controversial issues at home. Overall, British politicians felt concern for order in British society. The sudden outbreak, to the British, of civil unrest in the Netherlands, made British parliamentarians apprehensive to motions on parliamentary reform, on repeal of the union with Ireland and it led to general debates on the legitimacy of means of revolution. Some parties used the example of the Belgian Revolt to plainly show how disruptive revolution is to a society, while others applauded the power of revolution. Patriotic language went back and forth across the benches in Parliament as parties accused the other of using the Belgian example to either elicit or prevent reform. From the opening of the session in November 1830 at least until 1834, the Belgian question became an integral part of parliamentary debates and it was used in the patriotic language of parliamentarians to support arguments on domestic issues. This chapter will try to show how the Belgian question influenced these debates, and how it led to discussions on matters that were politically and ideologically sensitive.

3.1 Order in Britain

The bulk of the English electorate held moderate views in 1830. They acknowledged the imperfect character of the British constitution and the majority hoped for reform, but few could see similarities between the French political situation and the English.[1] Nonetheless, the government felt concern for domestic law and order, especially in the northern industrial

[1] Gash, 'English Reform and French Revolution', 269-270.

districts in the months following the July and Belgian Revolts.[2] Home Secretary Peel noted in October 1830 that

> 'The success of the Mobs and either the unwillingness or inability of the soldiers to cope with them in Paris and Brussels, is producing natural effects in the Manufacturing districts here, calling into action the almost forgotten Radicals of 1817 and 1819, and provoking a discussion upon the probable results of insurrectionary movements in this country."[3]

Already upon the opening of the session on 2 November 1830 in response to the king's speech, patriotic language was used by a Tory to emphasise the greatness of Britain in comparison to the continent. He was convinced that the discontent and the disorder that had manifested in various parts of Europe were proof 'of the high character which this great and happy country had acquired in the civilized world.'[4] Many conservative parliamentarians made similar comparisons and took it a step further by also emphasising that despite the rule of disharmony around it, Britain remained at peace and on a good footing with the world at large: 'Through the storm which agitated society throughout Europe, and endangered the existing institutions of all the States over which it rolled, our ship still rode triumphant'.[5] The Tories celebrated that the English people enjoyed uninterrupted prosperity under their 'excellent' constitution for over one-hundred-and-forty years. England 'was the great birth-place of rational liberty' and continued to protect the liberties of the people.'[6] Only in England there existed the greatest perfection of alliance of social order with good government, in which

[2] Ibid., 265.
[3] Robert Peel to Sir Henry Hardinge (14 October 1830), *in:* Gash, 'English Reform and French Revolution', 266.
[4] Marquis of Bute, *HPD*3 1:13-14, 2 Nov. 1830.
[5] Lord Grimstone, *HPD*3 1:56, 2 Nov. 1830.
[6] Dundas, *HPD*3 1:59, 60, 2 Nov. 1830

> 'the laws and the religion of this country formed its security and its safeguard… While other nations groaned under the yoke of tyranny and oppression, and while the people of other countries either suffered without relief or subverted their Government and institutions, the Constitution of England had remained untouched and unaffected, like that sacred chain of nature which binds the jarring elements in peace.'[7]

Notwithstanding the laudation of England's greatness, some Tories were worried about the state of the country as they experienced 'a distress, indeed, so deep and extensive, that unless means were taken to mitigate it, the most serious and alarming consequences might ensue.'[8] The conservative Marquis of Londonderry feared for domestic tranquility and he deemed it the duty of the House and the aristocracy, especially the noble lords of the Whig party, to stand by the Throne and the executive so that subversive influences could be silenced.[9] He felt that some members of the British aristocracy failed England by supporting and interfering with revolutions abroad. He perceived major inconsistencies in the foreign policy of the Grey Ministry and he feared it would bring down Britain.[10]

3.2 Revolution

Both the July and the Belgian Revolution had a significant impact on British politics and society. There is no doubt that the July revolution aroused great interest, but the question is whether the British public were prepared to draw analogies between the contemporary situation in France and in Britain. According to historian Norman Gash (1912-2009) some British definitely were and most of them belonged to the extreme wings of English politics,

[7] Dundas, *HPD*3 1:59, 60, 2 Nov. 1830
[8] Lloyd Kenyon, *HPD*3 1:214, 5 Nov. 1830
[9] Londonderry, *HPD*3 1:248, 8 Nov. 1830.
[10] Londonderry, *HPD*3 5:27, 9 Aug. 1831.

namely the ultra-Radicals and the ultra-Tories.[11] Shortly after the July Revolution, British politicians used liberal successes in France to urge all English reformers to unite at what they considered were favourable times for the reform movement at home.[12] Englishmen were united in their support for the second French Revolution but not many were inspired to see the French as an example for their own political behaviour.[13] Radical Hume thought too highly of Britain to believe that a French analogy would take place he hoped that the people of England would be as apprehensive of their rights as the French.[14]

The Tory party was split on the legitimacy of the means of revolution. Some Tories regarded the July Revolution in a more positive light than the Belgian one. The Wellington Ministry was often attacked by the high-Tories for their support of the French revolutionaries. At the time, the British government had lost no time in recognising Louise Philippe. Wellington acknowledged that by recognising the new French king they had approved the principle of revolution. However, they had done so to preserve 'the friendly understanding between the two countries entire.'[15] Being a liberal Tory, Wellington was often criticised by fellow Tories as he supported the means of revolution. To try and convince his peers Wellington, and fellow liberal Tories, often made references and comparisons to England's Glorious Revolution in 1688. Wellington 'was not sorry that Charles 10th had been driven from the Throne of France, as James 2nd had been from the Throne of England, for attempting to subvert the institutions and liberties of his country…'[16] Ultra-Tories considered the comparisons out of place: 'He trusted, that even the noble Lord himself would hardly say that the present case and that of Charles 2nd were parallel, so far

[11] Norman Gash, 'English Reform and French Revolution in the General Election of 1830', 263, *in:* Richard Pares and A.J.P. Taylor eds, *Essay presented to Sir Lewis Namier* (London 1956).
[12] *The Times* (17 July 1830), *in:* Gash, 'English Reform and French Revolution', 263.
[13] Gash, 'English Reform and French Revolution', 268.
[14] *The Times* (6 August 1830), *in:* Gash, 'English Reform and French Revolution', 263, 264.
[15] Wellington, *HPD*3 11:305, 16 Mar. 1832.
[16] Wellington, *HPD*3 6:237, 18 Aug. 1831.

as the reasons of the course pursued in the two cases were concerned.'[17] Former Home Secretary Peel tried to bring nuance in the liberal Tory stand as he called resistance on the continent justifiable notwithstanding that revolution led those engaged in irremediable ruin, especially the working classes.[18]

The ultra-Tories made use of the July Revolution. They were preoccupied with what they assumed were the dangers of Catholicism. Besides their admiration of the anticlerical character of the French Revolution, they felt deeply dissatisfied with the Wellington government. The ultra-Tories did not convince many others among the general conservative population, perhaps because many saw their propaganda as a continuation of their hostility towards Wellington that had begun with the government's decision to impose Catholic emancipation in 1829.[19] Richard Vyvyan, an English landowner and an ultra-Tory, led the anti-Wellington campaign and he argued that the Catholic emancipation was a component in the larger struggle on the continent between liberalism and representative government on one side, and tyranny and despotism on the other.[20]

The Whigs on the other hand, joined the liberal Tories in making comparisons to England's own revolution. Despite referring to revolutions as 'evils in themselves', Grey considered revolution a justified and necessary, even a noble principle, in the event that the liberties of a people were attacked. This applied particularly to the case of the Glorious and the July Revolution and Grey appraised the purity of patriotism in these acts of revolution.[21] The Marquis of Londonderry denounced the glorification of the July Revolution by the

[17] Viscount Goderich, *HPD*3 9:884-5, 26 Jan. 1832.
[18] Peel, *HPD*3 1:1388, 20 Dec. 1830.
[19] Gash, 'English Reform and French Revolution', 266.
[20] *Standard* (9 August 1830), *in:* Gash, 'English Reform and French Revolution', 267.
[21] Grey, *HPD*3 1:38, 2 Nov. 1830;
Grey, *HPD*3 1:257, 8 Nov. 1830.

Whigs. He could not understand how English noble lords could glorify the continued spill of blood on the European mainland.[22]

The Radicals applauded the European revolutions. They felt that the French had finally obtained what England had secured a century and an half earlier, namely a free press and a representative government.[23] Radicals attacked the Tories for not supporting the Belgians 'a great people rising in their strength, and wrestling their liberties from the unwilling hands of their despots…'[24] They wondered how England could be considered a country of liberty when parliamentarians regretted such occurrences.[25] However, the analogy was subsequently used by the Tories to contradict the Radical's demand for a similar change in England because why should Englishmen start "mimicking those who are imitating us?"[26] As Hume claimed that British bayonets forced the Bourbons from the throne so that a constitution and chartered rights could be imposed, he was compelled to hear the king and Parliament regretting that tyranny had been overcome and that liberty was restored in France. Hume explained that these institutions saw their own practices, privileges and monopolies endangered by the revolutions, 'Such men might, and did, condemn the proceedings of the French, but honest Englishmen did not.'[27]

The British had not expected an outbreak of upheavals in the southern provinces of the Netherlands because they were largely unaware of the extent of discontentment over King William's despotic government and authoritarian policies concerning religion, commerce and language. Before the outbreak of the revolution, British politicians considered King William a good and moderate king and they associated his country with constitutionalism and political freedom. They believed the histories and fates of the two countries to be firmly

[22] Londonderry, *HPD*3 1:248, 8 Nov. 1830.
[23] Gash, 'English Reform and French Revolution in the General Election of 1830', 266.
[24] Hume, *HPD*3 1:79, 2 Nov. 1830.
[25] Hume, *HPD*3 1:79, 2 Nov. 1830.
[26] *Leeds Mercury* (21 August 1830), Norman Gash, 'English Reform and French Revolution', 266.
[27] Hume, *HPD*3 1:80-1, 2 Nov. 1830.

intertwined.[28] The initial British reaction to the Belgian revolt was also divided along party lines. According to historian Pieter François contemporary periodicals show how fundamentally opposed the Whig and Tory attitudes were. The periodicals that supported the Grey government considered the Belgians a misunderstood people and their revolution deserved British support and sympathy. They regarded the Treaty of Vienna a foolish Tory mistake. Especially because it was evident from the outset that it would be impossible to create a viable union between people with different religions, languages, histories and perhaps even divergent national identities. The Whig periodicals blamed the Wellington government for spreading negative responses and thus influencing public opinion on the Belgian Revolt in the first weeks after its outbreak.[29] Both the Radicals and the Whigs had to face accusations in Parliament for trying to provoke unrest in Britain through their promotion and support of the Belgian Revolt. The Whigs were described by an ultra-Tory as

> 'that revolutionary party who had been at work for years, and who sought to produce the same confusion in this country which those who were actuated by an equal spirit had already effected in France and Belgium, and would gladly spread from one part of Europe to the other.'[30]

These accusations were especially strong in debates concerning parliamentary reform and the question of the repeal of the union. The Tory periodicals considered the Belgians as an ungrateful people who rebelled against their legitimate monarch. They deemed the Belgian Revolution not a proper revolution on its own. It was a group of ignorant people who were lured into revolution by French conspirators less than a month after the July Revolution.[31] Some Tories argued that while the French resisted arbitrary authority, the Belgian

[28] François, 'Belgium – country of liberals, Protestants and the free', 667.
[29] François, 'Belgium – country of liberals, Protestants and the free', 668.
[30] Earl of Winchilsea, *HPD*3 12:219-0, 11 Apr. 1832.
[31] Ibid., 668-9.

Revolution was an unjust and unprovoked rebellion.[32]

The Wellington government considered the Belgian uprising a threat to the European balance of power, and it supported Britain's long-time ally King William.[33] The Whigs on the other hand, immediately approved of the efforts and demands of the Belgian revolutionaries. The Radicals supported the cause of the Belgian revolutionaries even more fervently than the Whigs. The Grey government soon realised that creating an independent Belgium and keeping it from falling into French hands would prove a challenge, but defending this policy in Parliament would prove their biggest challenge. [34]

3.3 Parliamentary reform

Parliamentary reform became an important issue in Parliament since the fall of the Wellington Ministry and as the public's attitude towards reform was considerably influenced by the revolutions in France and Belgium.[35] The Duke of Wellington attributed his parliamentary defeat in November 1830 to the excitement: "The administration was beaten by two events. First, the Roman Catholic question; next, the French revolution."[36] The Wellington Ministry abruptly resigned in November on an issue that they would rather evade and give the responsibility to address it to their successors. The issue of parliamentary reform became inescapable for the Grey government.[37] Further division was provoked by the question whether the overpowering demand for reform was the culmination of a deep domestic agitation, or the result of the English election coinciding with a revolution in France.[38]

The Whigs believed that the demand for reform was a 'deep-rooted feeling' that was not

[32] Vyvyan, *HPD*3 6:238, 18 Aug. 1831.
[33] Ibid., 664.
[34] François, 'Belgium – country of liberals, Protestants and the free', 668.
[35] Lord Darlingon, *HPD*3 2:1176, 2 Mar. 1831.
[36] Duke of Wellington, *Despatches,* new series, vii., 382-3, *in:* Gash, 'English Reform and French Revolution', 258-9.
[37] Gash, "English Reform and French Revolution in the General Election of 1830", 260.
[38] Ibid., 260-1.

engendered by the events in France and Belgium.[39] But the Whigs did feel that the July and Belgian Revolutions had made debate on reform possible because 'by at once removing those fears which had been so long and deeply impressed in the minds of all classes in this country as to the danger of Reform.'[40] People in support of reform were mostly members of the middle and the lower classes as they expected the reform of the representative system would increase their influence on parliamentary decisions.[41] The Radicals refined the Whigs' assertion and attacked opponents of parliamentary reform. They accused the Tories of putting the country in danger as they repudiated resistance in Europe against 'unconstitutional encroachments on the rights and liberties of the people…'[42] Radicals felt that by doing this, feelings of anarchy and disappointment, which the Tories described as prevailing on the continent, would create civil unrest in Britain if the Tories did not abstain from opposition 'to a measure of which the whole people of England approved, and in return for the success of which they would have given their lasting gratitude and affection.'[43] The Radicals ascribed the Grey government a responsibility to push for reform 'for Europe was looking to England, and if the latter submitted to a military Government, the hopes of freedom in France, Belgium, and other countries, would be materially depressed.'[44] Tory John Croker (1767-1845), principal contributor to the ultra-Tory *Quarterly Review*, agreed with the Radicals' standpoint that the government had a responsibility towards the continent. However, he considered it in a different light:

> 'hitherto England had been the sheet-anchor of rational liberty and constitutional monarchy—now it was about to assume a different character: heretofore we had protected those principles both at home and abroad—

[39] John Stanley, *HPD*3 11:652, 22 Mar. 1832.
[40] General Palmer, *HPD*3 7:1214, 4 Oct. 1831.
[41] Darlington, *HPD*3 2:1176, 2 Mar. 1831.
[42] Thomas Duncombe, *HPD*3 8:431, 10 Oct. 1831.
[43] Duncombe, *HPD*3 8:432, 10 Oct. 1831.
[44] Hume, *HPD*3 12:1086-7, 18 May 1832.

> now we were abandoning them everywhere…by a similar impulse, but in a different direction, would this Bill produce a re-action here and elsewhere, by giving undue encouragement to the democratic spirit. And to say nothing of the direct and immediate changes to be produced by the measure at home, could we, if democracy prevailed elsewhere, be sure of retaining our monarchy, our aristocracy, and all the other institutions under which this nation had so long prospered, and of which she had so long been proud?[45]

The political parties were not only split on the issue amongst each other, they were also internally divided. For example, Whig parliamentarian Lord Darlington (1788-1864) was ready to admit that the current system was not perfect 'but the country had, for a period of more than 150 years, enjoyed a degree of prosperity, under existing institutions, which was unparalleled at any antecedent period.'[46] Darlington had the support of Tory politicians, like Sir Robert Peel whose words on the subject were imbued with patriotic sentiment:

> 'I ask them to look back upon a period of 150 years—to bear in mind that their Constitution, in its present form, has so long endured,—and I ask them where, among the communities of Europe, do you find institutions which have afforded the same means of happiness, and the same security for liberty? I conjure them to bear in mind the result of every attempt that has hitherto been made to imitate our own institutions. In France, in Spain, in Portugal, in Belgium, the utmost efforts have been exhausted to establish a form of government like ours, —to adjust the nice balance between the conflicting elements of royal, aristocratical, and popular power—to secure the inestimable blessings of limited monarchy and

[45] John Croker, *HPD*3 13:446, 5 Jun. 1832.
[46] Darlington, *HPD*3 2:1176-7, 2 Mar. 1831.

> temperate freedom. If power can be so safely intrusted to the people—if they are so competent to govern themselves—such enlightened judges of their own interests, why has it happened that, up to this hour, every experiment to establish and regulate popular control over executive government has, with one single exception, failed?'[47]

The Tories also agreed with Darlington's arguments because they felt that the times were too turbulent for domestic reform.[48] Especially with all the 'experimental governments afloat' in Europe: 'When all Europe was in a state of insurrection and distraction, was it for us to go to sea under the flag of the new Admiral of England, to try an experimental cruise in quest of a new Constitution?'[49] Earl Grey also used the discussion on the settlement of the Belgian question to assert the proper policy towards reform. He was of the opinion that in the current dangers of time the government should not find recourse in arms, but defend itself

> 'by securing the affections of your fellow-subjects, and by redressing their grievances, and—my Lords, I will pronounce the word—by reforming Parliament. Through my whole life I have advocated Reform, and I have thought that, if it were not attended to in time, the people would lose all confidence in Parliament, and we must make up our minds to witness the destruction of the Constitution.'[50]

Whig politicians tried to stress that parliamentary reform would be constructed on the 'ancient days of the Constitution of this country', and that the object was not 'revolution but restoration – to restore the representation to that state in which it ought to be, not change it

[47] Peel, *HPD*3 2:1351, 3 Mar. 1831
[48] Vyvyan, *HPD*3 2:631-2, 21 Mar. 1831.
[49] Charles Wetherell, *HPD*3 2:1228, 2 Mar. 1831.
[50] Grey, *HPD*3 1:37, 2 Nov. 1830.

from what it had been – to repair, not to pull down.'[51] The Tories tried to link the way the government dealt with the Belgian question, to the way the government should handle the issue of parliamentary reform.[52] Tory politicians linked the current misery of the lower classes in Belgium and France, the people who called for revolution, to the fate of the lower classes if the constitution was changed. They were convinced that the English lower classes, who demanded reform, would be the first to suffer 'and they, therefore, must be weaned from these errors, by the more intelligent classes.'[53] Former Whig but now ardent Tory Lord Wynford (1767-1845) contemplated on the effects of the sudden changes in the form of governments in France and Belgium, and he concluded that it was thought better 'to preserve the ancient forms of Government… From France let them travel to Belgium, and then ask the poor man if he could wish for Reform when Reform was followed by such disastrous changes?'[54]

3.4 Ireland

Discussion in Parliament concerning Ireland was also linked to the example of Belgium in order to reinforce arguments. Most supporters of repeal could not understand how antagonists

> '…forget what had taken place in different parts of Europe since that time? France had been revolutionized—Belgium had been revolutionized—England had been reformed. Why then was Ireland to remain quiet under the burthen of her numerous grievances, which all allowed to exist, and to some of which his Majesty's Ministers said they would apply remedies?'[55]

[51] Brougham, *HPD*3 1:54-5, 2 Nov. 1830.
[52] Peel, *HPD*3 2:711, 18 Feb. 1831.
[53] Baring, *HPD*3 2:1316, 3 Mar. 1831.
[54] Lord Wynford, *HPD*3 12:349, 13 Apr. 1832.
[55] Andrew Lynch, *HPD*3 16:520, 11 Mar. 1833.

Another example is the introduction of a proposition by an Irish Whig who proposed changes in order to make the system more conformable to the wishes of the Irish people. He supported his argument by comparing the Irish situation to the Belgian. In Belgium, culture was also in shackles with resistance and revolution by the people as a result, 'which an enlightened Government ought surely to have foreseen'.[56] Another Whig felt that the cuts on the defence budget threatened the successful protection of the country as '…the question now was, not whether we were to abstain from interference with others, but whether others were not likely to interfere with us. Had not the case of Holland and Belgium been instanced as similar to that of England and Ireland?'[57]

The language of patriotism was especially strong with leader of the Radicals, and Irishman, Daniel O'Connell (1775-1847) who rejoiced the success of the Belgians, as he believed that they had lived in a state of slavery. O'Connell believed that 'excepting the Union of Great Britain with Ireland, there is a fouler blot in the page of history than the annexation of Belgium to Holland.'[58] He definitely did not want the Irish to hold the same fate as the Belgians but he shared with the House his opinion that he felt he

> 'had a difficult task to perform, for I had to teach Government its duty to the people, and I had to teach the people how to obtain its rights from Government. I wished to restore Ireland to her proper rank among the nations of the earth.'[59]

The Whigs found the comparisons out of place. They argued that the Radicals had misinterpreted and misapplied the events because the Netherlands and Belgium, unlike Britain and Ireland, were 'totally different countries; and they were forcibly united by the

[56] Thomas Wyse, *HPD*3 1:1209, 16 Dec. 1830.
[57] Joseph Yorke, *HPD*3 2:717, 18 Feb. 1831.
[58] Daniel O'Connell, *HPD*3 1:99, 2 Nov. 1830
[59] O'Connell, *HPD*3 2:1024, 28 Feb. 1831.

Ministers and men of the Holy Alliance, and nothing but force kept them together.'[60]

Some conservative politicians acknowledged that English society was not perfect. However, the imperfections were due to the people: 'Disorders, it was true, there had been, and attempts, he knew, were not wanting to excite discontent and dissatisfaction; but they arose not from any defect in that Constitution, but from the depravity of human nature… He was convinced…among the intelligent and enlightened portion of the people of this country, a bond of union which was unknown to others; and having that bond of union'[61] Peel tried to appeal to the aristocracy by asserting

> 'that great changes in any government could not take place without exciting alarm and despondency, and without materially and injuriously influencing property in the country in which the Revolution took place. He called on the House—he called on all people of property—to be fully aware of the mistake they would be committing, in dividing this country and Ireland, and to be aware of the irreparable evils that must result to both from such a measure.'[62]

But he also trusted that the inhabitants of Dublin would renounce repeal after they had questioned whether the Irish had the 'same justifiable cause of opposition to the Government', and that they would 'well consider what was the present condition of those countries in which Revolutions had taken place, and compare it with the state in which they were before the Revolutions had begun.'[63] Radical parliamentarian Hume condemned the tendencies in Parliament of making 'unnecessary' comparisons to Belgium, with the intention to create 'prejudice' among the government and the House on issues of reform.[64]

[60] Brougham, *HPD*3 1:116-7, 2 Nov. 1830
[61] Dundas, *HPD*3 1:60, 2 Nov. 1830.
[62] Peel, *HPD*3 1:1389, 20 Dec. 1830.
[63] Peel, *HPD*3 1:1388, 20 Dec. 1830.
[64] Hume, *HPD*3 1:1389, 20 Dec. 1830.

He agreed with Peel that the revolutions in France and Belgium led to much misery but he was convinced 'that timely Reform and retrenchment would be the means of preventing such a Revolution here.'[65]

The ideological battle among the parties was most openly debated when ultra-Tory Vyvyan challenged the intentions of the Radical party for their support of the Belgian Revolution. He accused the Radicals of endeavouring to unleash a revolt in Ireland, similar to the one in Belgium:

> 'An opportunity had long been wanted to expose the machinations of that party which had calumniated the king of the Netherlands, and the time had at length arrived, to tear the mask off a party that had done, and was doing, so much mischief in Europe. The machinations of that party had given rise to what had taken place in Belgium, and it was now pretty plain that the efforts of the same party were at work, to create a somewhat similar explosion in another quarter, with which the hon. member for Kerry [Radical O'Connell] might be acquainted, and to which he (Sir Richard Vyvyan) should not more particularly allude. That party which associated with Liberals, while it professed despotic principles, was the cause of the revolution in France. It was in consequence of the system which that party carried on in Belgium that the revolt succeeded there, and the same party was desirous to provoke a similar resistance elsewhere. Although the explosion had first taken place in Belgium, it was intended to extend much further. It was indeed time for the Government to look about it. The centre of the bigoted army was in Paris; the right wing was at Brussels, while the left wing was looking on in Dublin. There was still time left to unmask

[65] Hume, *HPD*3 1:1390, 20 Dec. 1830.

> such a party, and to counteract its efforts. It was an unholy alliance of bigotry and despotism which endeavoured to work on the passions of the people.'[66]

Vyvyan was not the only parliamentarian who was suspicious of other parties' intentions. A Whig also felt

> 'compelled to guess at the intentions and meaning of the repeal advocates, some of whom had declared that they wished to see Ireland independent like Belgium. But did they forget, that Belgium was described in history as the "prize-fighting ground" of Europe; and that if Ireland were to be in the same way separated from England, it would, in the same way, become the prize-fighting ground of Europe?[67]

The Grey government fell under attack as supporters of repeal considered the members of the government as acting inconsistent with the principles they held before they came to power:

> 'In England they were Reformers—in Ireland coercionist…They adopted an anti-union policy abroad. In Belgium they were anti-unionists, while they were unionists at home. Abroad they were anti-unionists even to the death—they were unionists at home even to the death.'[68]

Overall, British politicians considered the Belgian question as an serious international crisis in itself that had to be dealt with as soon as possible. But the issue also became a convenient 'political football' that parties used to carry and justify what they considered was the most appropriate British response to domestic issues and manifestations.

[66] Vyvyan, *HPD*3 6:235, 18 Aug. 1831.
[67] Hussey Vivian, *HPD*3 18:641, 12 Jun. 1833.
[68] James Rorke, *HPD*3 15:404, 8 Feb. 1833.

Conclusion

The study of parliamentary debates has shown that the Belgian Revolt was a highly debated issue in Britain and it should not be overlooked when studying patriotism in nineteenth-century British politics. Politics of patriotism characterised the ideological struggle between the political parties and by November 1830 it was already invigorated by the Belgian question. Belgium became an integral component in the ideological struggle between parties but it also created a growing division within the parties. The Tories were particularly divided and the Whigs had a hard time to remain consistent with their liberal beliefs during the Grey Cabinet.

The government's policy in the settlement of the Belgian question lay under close scrutiny and it remained a point of discussion in the period 1830-1834. The political parties differed on what the appropriate British reaction should be on issues that were closely related to Belgium, such as the principle of non-interference and the collaboration with the Concert, France and the Holy Alliance. It led to intense ideological disputes on the meaning of liberal English values and how they were applied abroad. Negotiations with the Concert and particularly the collaboration with the Holy Alliance and France, made parliamentarians question the direction of British foreign policy and they feared that English principles were not properly looked after. They feared for England's honour and reputation in international politics as France's influence was increasing. Many felt that the British destiny to enforce political freedom, constitutionalism and enlightenment abroad had been compromised by the government's actions during the negotiations with the other great powers.

Debates on the appropriate British response were not confined to issues of foreign policy. The Belgian question was also used to contest domestic affairs such as parliamentary reform and repeal of the union with Ireland. Political parties reflected the manner in which Belgium was handled and evaluated, onto the way domestic matters should be approached. With fear

for domestic unrest British politicians regularly put fundamental matters such as sovereignty, order and the legitimacy of the means of revolution on the table. They wanted to avoid creating precedents, based on the government's actions and statements in the Belgian question, which could lead to disturbances in Britain and/or Ireland. As foreign policy and domestic affairs became integrated through fundamental themes in British politics, all political parties presented themselves as more patriotic than their rivals. Consequently, the Belgian question became the battleground on which English intellectual, cultural and moral ideas were projected.

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