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Crown, Church, and Constitution: Popular Conservatism in England, 1815–1867.

By *Jörg Neuheiser*. Translated by *Jennifer Walcott Neuheiser*. Studies in British and Imperial History, volume 4. Edited by *Andreas Gestrich*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2016. Pp. viii+310. \$110.00.

Whatever happened to plebeian conservatism in the decades after Waterloo? There is a well established tendency to assume it more or less disappeared until Disraeli brought it back in the guise of “Tory democracy” in the late 1860s. Scholars who focus on popular politics in the second quarter of the nineteenth century devote virtually all their attention to mass agitations for franchise reform—the one achieved in 1832 and the far more radical one championed by the Chartists that went down to its final defeat in 1848. The common assumption is that the two decades of Liberal hegemony that followed thereafter was achieved through the support of the “respectable workingman” as well as that of the burgeoning middle ranks of the world’s most prosperous nation. The post-Com Law Conservative party, it is assumed, had precious little demotic appeal. While Palmerston and Gladstone were widely venerated in working class households, Derby seemed like an old-fashioned toff who stubbornly held close to a protectionism that taxed the people’s loaf. The story commonly goes that it was only after Disraeli gambled his way into a much larger electorate after 1867 that the “Conservative workingman” finally reappeared on the political scene after a protracted absence.

Jörg Neuheiser begs to differ with this conventional tale. He argues with some success that popular conservatism remained alive and kicking in the early and mid-Victorian decades. It is no coincidence, he contends, that the loyalist patriotism that explained the success of the Conservative party in the last third of the nineteenth century so closely resembled the “Church and King” patriotism of the French Revolutionary era. This is because, in his analysis, loyalist patriotism flourished in the interim, even if historians have long tended to ignore it. In a massively researched book that focuses on the greater London area, the West Riding of Yorkshire and its major city of Leeds, and on the Bolton area in Lancashire, he argues that popular conservatism continued to flourish at the local level of politics. First of all, the monarchy remained a central element of national identification. The common people turned out in droves for royal celebrations, and despite the occasional unpopularity of George IV, these were frequently straightforward venerations of the monarchy as a focus of national pride. Second, the Operative Conservative Associations of the 1830s that Neuheiser examines especially closely were staunch in their veneration of the Anglican Church as well as the monarchy as the pillars of England’s glorious constitution. Third, Protestant nationalism remained a strong focus of popular politics. Anti-Catholicism, fueled by mass Irish immigration and the “Papal Aggression” of the early 1850s, remained an occasional source of demotic mobilization at the local level. Guy Fawkes Day, for instance, clearly remained associated with anti-Catholicism and demonstrations of loyalty to the Anglican Church, State, and Crown. Fourth, according to Neuheiser, Tory radicalism had a local following in the 1840s. Factory reform was championed not only by Michael Sadler and Richard Oastler but by plebeian Tories in the North, as well. There was of course massive radical support for factory reform and the repeal of the New Poor Law. But Tories could and did agitate for the same things from a conservative angle—as a means of restoring a paternalist social order that they perceived to be under attack from the forces of unbridled *laissez faire*. Finally, Neuheiser contends, at the local level popular Toryism was not monopolized by publicans. Some of the demotic appeal of Conservatism rested on its promise to defend the honest worker’s right to drink his pint in the face of the threat to it posed by Liberal teetotalism. At the same time, there were plenty of local Conservative leaders who championed a rather different kind of stout manliness that focused not on the public

house but on abstinence, respectability, and an orderly household. Thus there was more than one sort of plebeian way of being in the world to which Tories could and did appeal.

Neuheiser's dense and sometimes ponderous tome makes a valuable point. He demonstrates beyond the shadow of a doubt the abiding popularity of a conservative understanding of the English constitution that was predicated on loyalty to the Crown and the Church and on the belief that an important key to England's greatness was its Protestantism. What is more problematic is his assumption that this conservative understanding translated directly into political support for the Tory party. Mid Victorian Liberalism rested on similar values, and this goes far in explaining its abiding electoral success. Palmerston was an avowed Church and Queen man, and his bellicose nationalism appealed to the well nigh universal conviction that England was the greatest nation the world had ever known. The most prominent critic of the "Papal Aggression" of the early 1850s was Lord John Russell. Liberal governments were able to convince a great many voters that it was possible to grant concessions to Dissenters and Catholics in ways that could uphold rather than undermine the Anglican Church until Gladstone's bid for Irish Home Rule finally split the party asunder. But of course popular liberalism rested on one value that the Conservatives rejected early on, and on which they were ever after considered highly suspect: free trade. The Liberals were widely seen as the champions of the "people's loaf" and of the commitment to a modicum of social fairness across classes that it was seen to represent. It is no exaggeration to say that free trade came to seem no less resonant a mark of England's peculiar greatness than Church and Queen. For all the potency of the conservative values that Neuheiser explores, for the longest time the Tory party was unable to capitalize on them because the Liberal alternative was widely seen to uphold them through other means and to champion free trade as well.

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