

Legalised Trade Unions, Compulsory Primary Schooling, Enhanced Higher  
Education – the Legacies of Anthony John Mundella, 1825-1897

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A thesis submitted for the degree of  
Ph.D.

Faculty of Arts  
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February 2020

## Table of Contents

<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	<b>ii</b>
<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>iv</b>
<b>Thesis Declaration</b> .....	<b>v</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>vi</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Research Questions.....	3
Literature Overview .....	5
Primary Sources .....	9
Structure of the Thesis .....	11
<b>Chapter 1: Politics and Social Issues in Mundella’s Time</b> .....	<b>13</b>
Position at Mid-Century .....	15
The Second Reform Act.....	18
A Period of Social Reform .....	20
Mundella and laissez-faire .....	25
Developments through to the end of the century.....	26
Conclusions - Mundella's position on laissez-faire and state intervention .....	27
<b>Chapter 2: The Man – His Background and Career</b> .....	<b>28</b>
Historiography.....	29
Early Years in Leicester.....	33
Mundella’s Early Working Life .....	36
The Successful Nottingham Hosier .....	38
Conciliation and Arbitration.....	43
Mundella and the Improvement of Education .....	44
Involvement in Municipal Affairs .....	45
Mundella and the Politics of Sheffield .....	49
The Sheffield Election of 1868 .....	50
Mundella’s National Recognition.....	52
Conclusions - Mundella’s Character.....	52
<b>Chapter 3 – The Battle to Improve Factory Working Conditions</b> .....	<b>55</b>
Historical Background .....	55
Historiography.....	59
Mundella’s Factory Initiatives .....	62
Mundella’s Political Involvement in Factory Legislation.....	64
Supporters and Opponents.....	71
Other Workplace Matters .....	75
Conclusions - Mundella’s Place in the Factory Acts Movement .....	77
‘Sound Lungs and Impressive Gestures’ .....	79
<b>Chapter 4 – Legitimising the Trade Union Movement</b> .....	<b>80</b>
Historical Background .....	81
Historiography.....	82
Mundella’s Early Involvement with the Union Movement.....	86

Arbitration and Conciliation .....	89
The Royal Commission on Trade Unions.....	91
Mundella and Other ‘Friends’ of the Unions .....	94
In Parliament .....	97
Repeal of the Criminal Law Amendment Act .....	99
Conclusions - Mundella’s Battle for Union Rights.....	100
<b>Chapter 5 – Educating the Nation.....</b>	<b>103</b>
Historical Background .....	104
Historiography.....	107
Before Parliament .....	107
Mundella and the 1870 Education Act.....	117
The Ongoing Fight .....	126
Taking Responsibility for Education .....	135
The National Education Association .....	148
Conclusions - Education was Mundella's passion .....	150
<b>Chapter 6: Improving Technical and Higher Education .....</b>	<b>152</b>
Historiography.....	155
Efforts before 1868 and Parliament.....	161
In Parliament .....	164
In Opposition.....	168
The Success, or Otherwise, of Increased Technical Education .....	174
Conclusions - Mundella's Battle for Technical Education .....	177
<b>Chapter 7 - National Commercial Issues .....</b>	<b>178</b>
Historical Background .....	178
Historiography.....	182
Mundella and Labour Legislation.....	190
Mundella and the Railways .....	195
Mundella and Maritime Reforms.....	200
Conclusions - Mundella’s Board of Trade Experiences .....	202
Final Portrait.....	204
<b>Chapter 8 – The Forgotten Mundella.....</b>	<b>205</b>
Contemporary References and Opinions.....	205
The Fictional Mundella.....	211
Mundella’s Resignation from the Ministry .....	212
Reputations That Have Lasted .....	218
Remembering Mundella, or not.....	220
Conclusions - The ‘Forgotten’ Man .....	223
<b>Conclusions .....</b>	<b>225</b>
Thesis Summary .....	225
The Questions Posed and Answered .....	227
Contribution to the Discipline .....	231
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>237</b>
Primary Sources .....	237
Secondary Sources .....	243

## **Abstract**

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the British state had an increasing impact on the everyday lives of the people. However, there were widely differing views between those who supported increased state involvement in matters such as education and factory working conditions, and those who resisted such action. By the end of the century, these positions had been at least partly reconciled and reforming legislation passed.

This thesis explores how some of these conflicts were resolved by discussing the influence of the Liberal politician, Anthony John Mundella (1825-1897), on labour law, education, and other issues. Both as an MP and as a government minister, Mundella exercised an important role in improving working conditions in factories and mines, and in legalising the trade union movement. He was responsible for ensuring that all children in Britain received an elementary education and he increased the availability of higher and technical education.

This thesis argues that Mundella was an important reformer who introduced legislation which is still pertinent today. It will show that Mundella was an unusual politician by virtue of his ability to achieve results by compromise. He sought to better the position of the working man and was prepared to accept a less than perfect solution. Mundella's political activities received considerable attention during his lifetime but later histories of the period have not recognised the significance of his work. This thesis endeavours to rectify this situation and to provide a re-interpretation of Mundella's importance.

## Thesis Declaration

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint award of this degree.

I give permission for the digital version of my thesis to be made available on the web, via the University's digital research repository, the Library Search and also through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the University to restrict access for a period of time.

I acknowledge the support I have received for my research through the provision of an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship.

Signed:

On: \_\_10\_\_ / \_\_02\_\_ / \_\_2020\_\_

## Acknowledgements

I am most grateful to Gareth Pritchard for being my principal supervisor during the researching and writing of this thesis. His help has been invaluable. Gareth stepped into the breach when Clem Macintyre went to London to provide political advice to the Australian High Commissioner. Thankfully, Clem continued to be involved as co-supervisor and I am grateful for his insights into British politics. My greatest gratitude is to my wife, Lois, for her continued encouragement of this elderly student. I am also grateful to our daughter, Rebekah, and grand-daughter, Matilda, for their help in typing and formatting this thesis. Elite Editing efficiently completed the final formatting to provide a respectable final product.

I am most thankful to the many librarians and archivists who cheerfully helped source documents. In particular I am grateful to Margaret Hosking, who, as the History Research Librarian at the Barr Smith Library, for most of the time I was researching, always had a solution for any issue. I also acknowledge the considerable help of several archivists in the Special Collection and Archive section of the University of Sheffield Library, especially Val Harding, who has responded so quickly and efficiently to my frequent requests. Finally I thank local Nottingham historian, Ken Brand, Barry Start at the Ruddington Framework Knitters' Museum, and Mundella's great-great-nephews, Anthony John Mundella and Robin Houston for their considerable assistance in the provision of material used in this thesis.

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## Introduction

This thesis examines the influence of Anthony John Mundella on legislation in nineteenth-century Britain that improved working conditions, legalised trade unions, and instituted a better education system. He was a Radical Liberal and a convinced free trader. However, throughout his political career, he supported causes seen by some of his colleagues as contrary to their laissez-faire philosophy. How he came to his views and how he persuaded others of their virtue, is explored in this thesis. Mundella's origins and working life provide some explanation, but it is argued that his recognition of the growing political importance of the working class and the need for a better educated workforce were more significant factors.

Mundella was born in Leicester in 1825, the son of an Italian father and an English mother. He completed an apprenticeship as a hosier in Leicester, and then moved to Nottingham. There, he was a partner in a successful hosiery business, one of the first to introduce a factory-based production system. He was elected as a Liberal MP for Sheffield in 1868 and remained in that position until his death in 1897. Mundella served as a minister in three Liberal governments. He was responsible for education from 1880 to 1885 and President of the Board of Trade in 1886 and again from 1892 to 1894.

The period between the election of Gladstone's first government in 1868 and his retirement in 1894, after the rejection of the second Irish Home Rule Bill, saw profound changes to many aspects of community expectations and political activity in Britain. It almost exactly covered the period that Anthony John Mundella was a member of parliament. Both Liberal and Conservative governments during the period covered by this thesis brought in legislation that improved the conditions of working-class people. Issues such as working conditions, trade-union legitimisation and education are dealt with later in this thesis. There were, however, numerous other Acts which were aimed at ameliorating working-class concerns. For example, the 1870 Married Womens' Property Act, which was improved in 1882, provided for the assets of married women to be better protected.<sup>1</sup> The 1872 passage of the Bastardy Laws

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<sup>1</sup> Ben Griffin, *The Politics of Gender in Victorian Britain: Masculinity, Political Culture and the Struggle for Women's Rights*, Cambridge University Press, 2012, 5.

Amendment Act forced fathers of children born out of wedlock to contribute to the child's upkeep and education.<sup>2</sup>

Although this thesis explores Mundella's work in bettering the lives of working-class people, it also highlights Mundella's commitment to increased state involvement in social issues. The matter of increasing state intervention in nineteenth-century Britain has received considerable scholarly attention since A.V. Dicey delivered his famous lectures at the Harvard Law School and Oxford University at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> Dicey's argument is discussed in Chapter 1, along with the contrary views of other.

Mundella was a devoted follower of Richard Cobden, who has so often been identified as a champion of laissez-faire and individualism.<sup>4</sup> The anomaly of this position when compared with Mundella's support, for example, of improved working conditions and the formal recognition of trade unions, is discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. The Parliament elected in 1868, in which Mundella first served as an MP, was the most radical since 1832, and the Liberal Party contained a strong 'advanced wing'.<sup>5</sup> It was not, however, until Gladstone's 1880 ministry that there were sufficient radicals in powerful positions to assert that 'the powers of state could be exercised constructively to ease social tensions'.<sup>6</sup> The enactment of policy which saw state involvement in both economic and social areas 'brought sharp controversy into nineteenth-century political life'.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, the movement towards increased state involvement proved continuous and eventually led to the establishment of the British welfare system.<sup>8</sup>

Mundella's recognition that government must be involved in matters previously unregulated or voluntary is illustrated in each of the areas covered by this thesis. He had seen, in his own business, how good working conditions were beneficial both to

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> A.V. Dicey, *Lectures on the Relation between Law and Public Opinion in England during the Nineteenth Century*, London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1962 (first published 1905).

<sup>4</sup> Speaking in July 1884, Mundella called Cobden 'the greatest statesman and prophet of this century' and went on to call himself a 'disciple' of Cobden. Quoted in W.H.G. Armytage, A.J. *Mundella 1825-1897: The Liberal Background to the Labour Movement*, London: Ernest Benn Ltd, 1951, 32.

<sup>5</sup> S. Maccoby, *English Radicalism 1853-1886*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1938, 150.

<sup>6</sup> Peter T. Marsh, *Joseph Chamberlain: Entrepreneur in Politics*, Yale University Press, 1994, 137.

<sup>7</sup> Arthur J. Taylor, *Laissez-Faire and State Intervention in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, London: Macmillan, 1972, 39

<sup>8</sup> David Roberts, *Victorian Origins of the British Welfare State*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960, vii.



his employees and to his factory's efficiency. All manufacturers did not accept this view, so it required both legislation and an efficient inspectorate for any changes to become effective. Through the work of his Nottingham Arbitration and Conciliation Board, Mundella recognised the importance of the union leadership in settling issues before disputes developed. Therefore, he helped to provide legal protection for unions immediately after entering parliament in 1868. Later, when he was President of the Board of Trade, he established a Labour Department that provided industry with assistance in conciliation matters. He was an early advocate of compulsory elementary education, because he recognised that some parents saw the schooling of their children as a deprivation of wage income. Compulsion was one of the first measures enacted when Mundella became responsible for education in 1880. He later introduced more state control over schooling with a stronger inspectorate and a new Code for the sector. His later work at the Board of Trade increased the government's overview of railway freights and safety matters and of improvements to the shipping industry.

Mundella's embrace of more state involvement in both social and economic areas may be regarded as simply the actions of a pragmatist who wanted to get things done. Nevertheless, he was a man who appreciated the opportunities which the changing political climate presented, and he seized them.

### *Research Questions*

The purpose of this thesis is to explore Mundella's role in introducing or supporting legislation that improved factory working conditions, legalised the trade unions, and enhanced education. He was persistent, and apparently persuasive, in his efforts. Prominent in debates in the Commons, a frequent speaker at many functions around the country, and a responsible witness before Royal Commissions and parliamentary inquiries, Mundella was a well-known advocate of reform. It is difficult to assess his direct personal influence on other MPs. He was, however, characterised as firm of purpose by one contemporary, and as irrepressibly energetic, by another.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> J. Morrison Davidson, *Eminent Radicals in Parliament*, London: E.J. Francis & Co., 1879, 112; Geo. Dawson, *Phrenological Character of Mr. Mundella*, Sheffield: J. Morton, 9 November 1868, 2.

Mundella's experiences as a factory owner, and his relationship with the Tory campaigner for better working conditions, Lord Shaftesbury, were strong influences on his attitude to improving the treatment of factory operatives. His position was contrary to that of most of his fellow manufacturers, who saw better working conditions for shop-floor workers and shorter working hours as an attack on their profits. He was also opposed on philosophical grounds by the extreme free traders, who believed in the right of individuals to negotiate their own conditions of labour. He showed great strength of purpose in arguing against one of his heroes, Richard Cobden. One of the questions addressed in this thesis is why Mundella saw the improvement in working conditions as so important that he worked with an evangelical Conservative. This alliance seemed unusual as Shaftesbury had voted against the First Reform Act and was accused of ignoring the conditions under which his agricultural labourers worked.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless they supported each other in efforts to improve working conditions generally. Most of Mundella's Liberal Party colleagues were opposed to any legislation to improve working conditions.

Mundella had long appreciated the value of a strong trade union movement. This is why he played a key role in the establishment, in 1860, of the Nottingham Hosiery Arbitration and Conciliation Board. He recognised that, for negotiations to be successful, the proper representation of the worker was necessary. It was, however, fortuitous that he was asked to give evidence at the Royal Commission on Trade Unions in 1868.<sup>11</sup> For the first time, this gave him a national stage in the year he decided to stand for parliament. Once in the Commons, he became a champion of trade unionism and worked for its legalisation. The influence of his experiences as a large employer of labour and his embrace of a formal conciliation and arbitration system will be shown to be the major factors in his call for the legalisation of trade unions.

Education, however, was Mundella's passion. His own formal education was cut short due to the fact that his family needed another wage earner, but he persevered

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<sup>10</sup> Edwin Hodder, *The Life and Work of the seventh Earl of Shaftesbury, K.G.*, London: Cassel & Co., 1887, Vol. II, 27.

<sup>11</sup> *Tenth Report of the Commissioners appointed to inquire into the organisation and rules of trade unions and other associations: together with minutes of evidence, 1867-8*, 73-83.

with additional studies during his teenage years. Initially he favoured the aims of the National Education League, which promoted free, compulsory and secular elementary schooling. Once in parliament, however, he was an important supporter of Forster's 1870 Education Act, which provided for some sectarian teaching. Mundella displayed his pragmatism in opposing influential non-conformists in his own party to pass a Bill which, for the first time, provided a national primary education system. Why he dropped his support for the League's policies and became a significant promoter of the less prescriptive 1870 Act will be discussed in this thesis.

During his time as the minister responsible for education, Mundella was instrumental in advancing technical instruction. He recognised that Britain was rapidly losing its industrial dominance to countries such as Germany and the United States. One of the reasons for this was that the technical training in Germany, both at the engineer and artisan levels, was well ahead of that provided in Britain. In 1881, Mundella established a Royal Commission to inquire into this problem, but it was left to a Conservative government to pass the subsequent Act.<sup>12</sup> Mundella once more showed his pragmatism by helping frame that legislation. This thesis discusses the factors which drove Mundella's campaign for improved technical education in Britain.

### *Literature Overview*

Whilst there is some variation in the level of information given by the many historians who have written on these topics, this writer believes that Mundella has not been given the credit that his contributions deserved. Despite his many years of leadership, both at a local and national level, the literature usually acknowledged only two of Mundella's achievements. The establishment of a successful arbitration and conciliation system is often mentioned in histories of labour relations, and his legislation for compulsory elementary schooling in 1880 received attention in histories of education.

As might be expected, there is a huge amount of secondary literature covering the social and political history of the nineteenth century. It ranges from straightforward narratives, such as biographies and the recounting of specific events,

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<sup>12</sup> *Report of the Royal Commission on Technical Instruction, 1881-4.*

through to careful analyses of important issues. Books dealing with specific aspects of the matters which interested Mundella are common. Several unpublished theses also address some of the matters covered by this thesis. Those of Margaret Higginbotham in 1941 and David Fletcher in 1972 covered liberalism in Sheffield during the period when Mundella was one of the city's MPs.<sup>13</sup> The only biography of Mundella was written by W.H.G. Armytage and published in 1951.<sup>14</sup> It presented Mundella's life in a chronological format and consequently the continuity of Mundella's influence in each of his areas of interest is less apparent. This thesis addresses the problems thematically, and hence emphasises Mundella's persistence, despite some setbacks. Nevertheless, Armytage's research has been of considerable benefit in the writing of this thesis.

Histories of the campaigns to improve working conditions in factories and mines were published as early as 1857, with the release of 'Alfred's' *The History of the Factory Movement*.<sup>15</sup> It provided an important contemporary account. Other histories followed, for example that by B.L. Hutchins and A. Harrison, first published in 1903, running through several editions including a reprinting in 1966.<sup>16</sup> Several more followed including some more recent research, such as *Factory Production in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, edited by Elaine Freedgood and released in 2003.<sup>17</sup> Although Mundella's involvement came relatively late in the movement's history, it is surprising that he has received so little attention. Lord Shaftesbury was the movement's most celebrated champion and is the subject of several biographies. Mundella can be regarded as Shaftesbury's successor in the factory reform movement, yet he was barely mentioned in any of Shaftesbury's biographies.

Labour histories dealing with the development of the trade union movement and the arguments about combination during the period covered by this thesis are

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<sup>13</sup> Margaret Higginbotham, *The Career of A.J. Mundella with Special Reference to his Sheffield Connections*, M.A. Thesis, University of Sheffield, May 1941; David Edward Fletcher, *Aspects of Liberalism in Sheffield 1849-1886*, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Sheffield, September 1972.

<sup>14</sup> W.H.G. Armytage, *A.J. Mundella 1825-1897: The Liberal Background to the Labour Movement*, London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1951.

<sup>15</sup> 'Alfred' (Samuel H.G. Kydd), *The History of the Factory Movement*, New York: A.M. Kelley, 1996 (reprint of the work first published in 1857).

<sup>16</sup> B.L. Hutchins and A. Harrison, *A History of Factory Legislation*, London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1966 (first published in 1903).

<sup>17</sup> Elaine Freedgood (editor), *Factory Production in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, Oxford University Press, 2003.

numerous. The classic text is Sidney and Beatrice Webb's *The History of Trade Unions*, first published in 1894.<sup>18</sup> Frederic Harrison's autobiography provided much information on the development of labour law.<sup>19</sup> Harrison was a member of the 1868 Royal Commission on Trade Unions and drafted the Commission's minority report. Several histories of the development of the British industrial relations system and the increasing power of the trade union movement were published during the middle years of the twentieth century. Hamish Fraser's comprehensive history of the union movement, published in 1974, is a good example of this.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps the most important recent work is Mark Curthoys' 2004 history of the trade union legislation of the 1870s.<sup>21</sup> Most works limit any discussion on Mundella's contribution to the reform of the labour market to his work on arbitration and conciliation and his support in the Commons for the legalisation of unions.

Histories of education are even more common than those on labour issues. Many, however, deal with education in Britain from early times to their date of publication, and hence the events that concerned Mundella are usually only briefly mentioned. For example, Armytage's 1964 work, which covers 400 years of English education, gave only one chapter to the reforms enacted between 1868 and 1889, the period covered by this thesis.<sup>22</sup> A history of British education by S.J. Curtis was aimed at students at universities and training colleges and comprised 706 pages.<sup>23</sup> First published in 1948, it ran to at least five editions, but contained only one reference to Mundella – a brief mention of his role in the 1880 Act. Fortunately, there are several publications which addressed the major changes enacted in the late nineteenth century, especially in regard to the ground-breaking Act of 1870. Mary Sturt wrote a comprehensive history of primary education in the nineteenth century.<sup>24</sup> Published in 1967, Sturt specifically addressed the development of universal education as a

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<sup>18</sup> Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism*, Clifton: Augustus M. Kelley, 1973 (first published in 1894, revised edition 1920).

<sup>19</sup> Frederic Harrison, *Autobiographic Memoirs*, London: Macmillan & Co., 1911.

<sup>20</sup> W. Hamish Fraser, *Trade Unions and Society: The Struggle for Acceptance 1850-1880*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1974.

<sup>21</sup> Mark Curthoys, *Governments, Labour, and the Law in Mid-Victorian Britain: The Trade Union Legislation of the 1870s*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004.

<sup>22</sup> W.H.G. Armytage, *Four Hundred Years of English Education*, Cambridge at the University Press, 1964.

<sup>23</sup> S.J. Curtis, *History of Education in Great Britain*, London: University Tutorial Press, 1963 (Fifth edition).

<sup>24</sup> Mary Sturt, *The Education of the People: A History of Primary Education in England and Wales in the Nineteenth Century*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967.

function of the state. Two later works of importance are Gillian Sutherland's 1973 monograph on policy making in elementary education after 1870 and Patrick Jackson's 1997 biography of W.E. Forster.<sup>25</sup> Both mention Mundella's influence in bringing Forster's 1870 Education Act into law.

There are several comprehensive works on the development of the hosiery industry. William Felkin, in his 1867 *History of the Machine-Wrought Hosiery and Lace Manufactures*, wrote of Mundella's impact on the introduction of the factory system into the hosiery industry and on industrial conciliation.<sup>26</sup> Both Charlotte Erickson in 1959 and Stanley Chapman in 1967 and 2002 produced detailed histories of the industry, which confirmed Mundella's importance in the hosiery business.<sup>27</sup>

Histories of the Board of Trade are fewer than for other areas with which Mundella was involved. Hubert Llewellyn Smith, who was the Permanent Secretary of the Board from 1907 until 1919, produced a comprehensive history in 1928.<sup>28</sup> It encompassed 300 years, from the Board's origins in 1621, and hence covered much ground. A more recent history written by Susan Foreman in 1986 is essentially a descriptive work.<sup>29</sup> Both works discussed Mundella's contribution solely in terms of his establishment of a Labour Department within the Board. Specialist histories on the British railway system and its merchant fleet refer to Board of Trade decisions which had an impact on those industries and reference Mundella's involvement.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Gillian Sutherland, *Policy-Making in Elementary Education, 1870-1895*, Oxford University Press, 1973; Patrick Jackson, *Education Act Forster: A Political Biography of W.E. Forster*, Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997.

<sup>26</sup> *Felkin's History of the Machine-Wrought Hosiery and Lace Manufactures*, Centenary Addition, Newton Abbott: David & Charles, 1967.

<sup>27</sup> Charlotte Erikson, *British Industrialists: Steel and Hosiery, 1850-1950*, Cambridge at the University Press, 1959; Stanley Chapman, *The Early Factory Masters: The Transition to the Factory System in the Midlands Textile Industry*, Newton Abbott: David & Charles, 1967; Stanley Chapman, *Hosiery and Knitwear: Four centuries of Small Scale Industry, c.1589-2000*, Oxford University Press, 2002.

<sup>28</sup> Sir Hubert Llewellyn Smith, *The Board of Trade*, London: G.P. Putnam's Sons Ltd., 1928.

<sup>29</sup> Susan Foreman, *Shoes and Ships and Sealing Wax: An Illustrated history of the Board of Trade*, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1986.

<sup>30</sup> For example; Henry Parris, *Government and the Railways in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965; Ian Friel, *Maritime History of Britain and Ireland c.400-2001*, London: British Museum Press, 2003.

### *Primary Sources*

There is little contemporary information about Mundella's Leicester years other than confirmation of his birth date. Most of what is known about that time is derived from later accounts of his life and in his own letters, mostly written after 1867.<sup>31</sup> There is more information concerning his life and work in Nottingham. As he became active in business, municipal affairs and local politics there, newspaper reports were more common. Details of the successful hosiery business which he and Benjamin Hine operated in Nottingham are sparse. The Hine family had long been involved with the hosiery industry in Nottingham, initially as framework knitters, but moving into merchandising in the late eighteenth century.<sup>32</sup> Sensational events, such as the 1859 fire that extensively damaged their factory, were covered by the local newspapers, but little was recorded on the operating aspects of the business. There are some financial papers covering later years held by the Ruddington Framework Knitters' Museum, but a more overall picture is provided by Mundella himself in letters written after his election to parliament.

The bulk of the primary source material about Mundella's life and career is contained in letters, newspaper reports and parliamentary papers. Mundella was first involved with national politics as an important witness at two Royal Commissions held just before he entered parliament. He appeared before the Taunton Commission in 1867 to give evidence on technical education, and in 1868 before the Erle Commission inquiring into the trade union movement.<sup>33</sup> Transcripts of his evidence are used extensively in this thesis. An earlier parliamentary inquiry into factory working conditions was that chaired by Michael Sadler in 1832.<sup>34</sup> This was regarded by later historians as a most valuable source of accurate data on the actual conditions at the time.<sup>35</sup> Once in parliament, the reporting of debates gives us an insight into Mundella's contribution. *Hansard* is an important source of what Mundella said and how he reacted to changes in support and opposition.

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<sup>31</sup> *Mundella Papers*, University of Sheffield Library: Special Collections and Archives, 1861-1932.

<sup>32</sup> Erickson, *British Industrialists*, 88.

<sup>33</sup> *Schools Inquiry Commission, Report Relative to Technical Education, 1867*, 27-29; *Minutes of Evidence (Inquiry into trade unions, 1867-68)*, 73-83.

<sup>34</sup> *Report from the Committee on the Bill to regulate the Labour of Children in the Mills and Factories of the United Kingdom, 8 August 1832*.

<sup>35</sup> Hutchins and Harrison, *A History of Factory Legislation*, 34.

Mundella himself wrote of his long involvement with the factory movement in his introduction to Ernst von Plener's history of English factory legislation.<sup>36</sup> Published in 1873, and dedicated to Lord Shaftesbury, it provided a contemporary recognition of Mundella's standing in the movement.

Newspaper reports are of particular importance in researching this period. They not only reflected the facts, but provided useful commentary. Given that Mundella was an MP for Sheffield, the two local papers, the *Sheffield Independent* and the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, are key sources, in terms of both events that they reported and their differing views on Mundella. The *Independent* was owned and edited by Robert Leader, a prominent Liberal, who became a confidant of Mundella.<sup>37</sup> As could be expected, the *Independent* supported Mundella. The *Telegraph* was the Conservative journal, owned and edited by Christopher Leng.<sup>38</sup> Articles critical of Mundella often appeared in the *Telegraph*, some of which commented dismissively on his humble family background. Mundella's responses provide useful information on his early life and career. It is impossible not to mention the importance of *The Times* in any study of British history. There are many reports referring to Mundella in this newspaper, covering both his parliamentary activities and his many speaking engagements. Several of these are used in this thesis. Mundella also received attention from many newspapers and magazines around the country, which indicated his importance at the time.

The most relevant of the manuscript sources are the Mundella Papers, held in the University of Sheffield Library. They comprise 23 boxes of letters, largely of a political nature, dating from 1867 when Mundella was seeking pre-selection for a Sheffield seat at Westminster. The Papers also include correspondence received by Mundella from many of the eminent men of his day, such as W.E. Gladstone, John Bright, W.E. Forster, Frederic Harrison, the Comte de Paris, and Lord Shaftesbury. Such important figures provide some commentary on Mundella's political involvements.

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<sup>36</sup> Ernst von Plener, *The English Factory Legislation*, translated by Frederick L. Weinmann, with an introduction by Anthony John Mundella, Esq. M.P., London: Chapman & Hall, 1873.

<sup>37</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, accessed on [www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk](http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk).

<sup>38</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, accessed on [www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk](http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk): A.H.Millar, revised by Dilwyn Porter, 'Leng, Sir William Christopher (1825-1902), journalist and newspaper proprietor', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, accessed 8 February 2019.



There are also a number of more personal letters between Mundella and Leader. Several of these have been useful in providing information, albeit from Mundella himself, on Mundella's pre-parliamentary life. Unfortunately, these papers have not been catalogued, although they have been placed in chronological sequence. The Papers do not include a personal diary, and there is no suggestion anywhere that Mundella kept one.

Armytage used the Mundella Papers extensively in his 1951 biography and these are an important primary source for this thesis. Considerable searching has not found other significant primary documents except for some references in Robin Houston's family history and Grandmaison's article in *Revue des Deux Mondes*. Both add to our knowledge of Mundella's father and the father-son relationship. These are discussed in Chapter 2.

There are a number of other worthwhile manuscript sources which have been consulted. The most important of these are the Gladstone and the Althorp Papers in the British Library, the Howell Papers held by the Bishopsgate Institute in London, the Chamberlain Papers in the University of Birmingham Library, and the Huxley Papers lodged in the Imperial College Archives. The catalogue of the National Archives contains reference to all of these manuscript sources and to some other minor correspondence.

### *Structure of the Thesis*

This thesis comprises eight chapters and its approach is essentially thematic. Five of the chapters cover the main areas of Mundella's political achievements. They address his work to improve the working environment in factories and mines, the campaign to provide trade unions with a legal basis, his commitment to ensuring that all children received an adequate primary education, his ongoing efforts to improve the efficiency of British industry by increasing the availability of technical education, and finally his work at the Board of Trade during which he established a Labour Department.

The two remaining chapters approach Mundella on a more personal level. The first is essentially biographical, and outlines Mundella's family, business and pre-political life. The final chapter attempts to explain why Mundella's achievements have not been fully recognised.

The chapters dealing with the major imperatives in Mundella's political career are arranged to trace his reasons for championing a particular issue, his method of attacking it and the measure of his success. It is not argued that Mundella initiated all of the reforms with which he was associated, but it is clear that his persistence and pragmatism were important factors in the successful passage of reforming legislation. In this regard, the early influence of Shaftesbury on working conditions, the industrial conciliation process developed in France by the *Conseils des Prud' Hommes* in the early nineteenth century, and the introduction of the 1870 Education Act by Forster, provide evidence for this. However, this thesis shows that, without Mundella's input, most of the reforming legislation would have been more difficult to pass through Parliament.

## Chapter 1: Politics and Social Issues in Mundella's Time.

The second half of the nineteenth century saw significant changes in attitudes towards important social issues, both by politicians and the general population. Boyd Hilton believed there was 'a whiff of epiphany in the air at the mid-century'.<sup>1</sup> Hilton identified free trade, pacifism, education, civil and religious equality and moral reform as the major areas which changed.<sup>2</sup> Legislation, however, was slow to react to public opinion. For example, Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, published in 1776, argued the case for free trade against mercantilism. But it was not until 1846 with the repeal of the Corn Laws that this principle was converted into major legislation.<sup>3</sup> In the case of religion, 'Englishmen of Intelligence' had for years questioned the retention of penal laws against Roman Catholics.<sup>4</sup> It was not until 1829 and the passing of the Catholic Relief Act that this discrimination was removed.

A.V. Dicey, the celebrated jurist, delivered a series of lectures at the turn of the twentieth century which traced 'the relationship, during the last hundred years, between the progress of English law and the course of public opinion'.<sup>5</sup> He argued that the nineteenth century could be divided into three overlapping periods, during each of which a different stream of opinion predominated.<sup>6</sup> His first period (1800-1830) was a time of 'Legislative Quiescence' with little social legislation; the second (1825-1870) Dicey identified as 'Individualism', which was an era of considerable parliamentary activity to promote personal freedom; the third (1865-1900) was a period of 'Collectivism', which saw increased state intervention with the resultant reduction of individual freedom.<sup>7</sup> Later historians have often disagreed with Dicey's analysis and their assertions are discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

The repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 was a pivotal event in changing political and economic thinking in Britain. It emphasised the benefits of free trade in developing a

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<sup>1</sup> Boyd Hilton, 'Moral Disciplines', in Peter Mandler (editor), *Liberty and Authority in Victorian Britain*, Oxford University Press, 2006, 231.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> A. V. Dicey, *Lectures on the Relation Between Law and Public Opinion in England during the Nineteenth Century*, London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1962 (first published 1905), 28-29.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, *Preface to the First Edition*, ix.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 62-64.

more peaceful world.<sup>8</sup> The passing of the second Reform Act in 1867 saw the emergence of a powerful working class whose vote altered the make-up of parliament.<sup>9</sup> These two pieces of legislation were fundamental to the economic and social changes which occurred in the second half of the nineteenth century as they heralded the contradictory positions of laissez-faire and state intervention. Such an interpretation was not shared by all scholars. In a 1948 paper, John Bartlet Brebner, an eminent Canadian historian, dismissed laissez-faire as 'a powerful myth' and blamed Dicey for its perpetuation.<sup>10</sup> The importance or otherwise of free trade and state intervention is discussed in this chapter.

Anthony John Mundella's public life encompassed the last 50 years of the century, from his rise as an influential manufacturer to his time as a cabinet minister. An outline of his life is given in Chapter 2, and his main achievements are detailed in the remaining chapters. Mundella appeared to have had contradictory attitudes towards a laissez-faire environment and increased state involvement. He was a devoted follower of Richard Cobden, the champion of free trade and individualism. He co-operated with Cobden in framing the conditions for the trade of hosiery and lace with France during Cobden's 1860 negotiations on a trade treaty.<sup>11</sup> In the only detailed account of the development of this treaty, Arthur Louis Dunham asserted that it was 'inseparable' from the free trade movement in England.<sup>12</sup> Mundella was later to declare that:

Cobden was the greatest statesman and prophet of the century.  
His speeches are an inspiration. A man whose disciple I am  
willing to confess I am.<sup>13</sup>

Despite his enthusiasm for free trade, Mundella recognised that the state needed to be involved in areas such as improving working conditions and the formal recognition of trade unions. These matters are discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

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<sup>8</sup> Anthony Howe, *Free Trade and Liberal England 1846-1946*, Oxford University Press, 1997, 2.

<sup>9</sup> F.B. Smith, *The Making of the Second Reform Bill*, Melbourne University Press, 1966, 3-9.

<sup>10</sup> J. Bartlet Brebner, 'Laissez Faire and State Intervention in Nineteenth-Century Britain', *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 8 (S1), 1948, 60.

<sup>11</sup> Ronald G. Walton, *The History of the Nottingham Chamber of Commerce, 1860-1960*, Nottingham: Chamber of Commerce, 1962, 23.

<sup>12</sup> Arthur Louis Dunham, *The Anglo-French Treaty of Commerce and the Progress of the Industrial Revolution in France*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1930, 110.

<sup>13</sup> Speech, 4 July 1884, quoted in Armytage, *A.J. Mundella*, 32.

### *The Position at Mid-Century*

It can be argued that Britain's free trade era began with the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846. It can also be seen as the first instance in which a radical reform succeeded nationally, ironically through the efforts of Robert Peel's Conservative government.<sup>14</sup> Much has been written about the Anti-Corn Law League, from Archibald Prentice's 1853 account to Anthony Howe's 1997 appraisal.<sup>15</sup> The League itself was far from the first or the most influential agitator for repeal. Indeed, a Whig peer, Lord King, had argued for it in 1822.<sup>16</sup> A common view is that Peel decided on repeal to relieve the miseries of the 'hungry forties' exacerbated by the potato famine in Ireland.<sup>17</sup> The arguments about reasons and influence are unimportant for this thesis; it is the effect on future actions that will be discussed here. In his review of Howe's book, Alan Sykes commented that not only did repeal free governments from the domination of vested interests, but reinforced the strength of British power, particularly in a moral sense.<sup>18</sup>

Other important opinions widely held at mid-century, at least in the context of this thesis, were the support for voluntarism and the suspicion of combination. Both emphasised the primacy of individual decision making and the suspicion of any official interference. Writing about the attitudes to state intervention in education in the years before the passing of the 1870 Education Act, James Murphy highlighted four main principles which were used in opposition to a national system of schooling. Although discouraging freedom of thought and downgrading the value of education were important matters, Murphy emphasised that the reduction in personal initiative and the discouraging of voluntary activity were widely held views.<sup>19</sup> The concept of workers combining to improve their working conditions and wages was anathema to many in mid-Victorian Britain. Combination was often characterised as a threat to individual

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<sup>14</sup> Norman McCord, *The Anti-Corn Law League 1838-1846*, London: Unwin University Books, 1968, 15, 25.

<sup>15</sup> Archibald Prentice, *History of the Anti-Corn Law League*, London: W. & F.G. Cash, 1853; Howe, *Free Trade*, 1997.

<sup>16</sup> Jonathan Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian Britain*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993, 143.

<sup>17</sup> Howe, *Free Trade*, 6.

<sup>18</sup> Alan Sykes, 'Review of Howe, *Free Trade*', *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 114, No. 456 (April 1999), 498.

<sup>19</sup> James Murphy, *The Education Act 1870: Text and Commentary*, Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1972, 9-10.

liberty, a brake on industrial progress and a potential source of public violence.<sup>20</sup> The majority of business owners supported a laissez-faire approach in all aspects of industrial activity. Even the devout Quaker, John Bright, argued that combinations were as injurious to the working man as to his employer.<sup>21</sup> This attitude seems to have moral overtones as a Methodist newspaper in 1869 declared that the legalisation of trade unions would lead to the workers dictating to their employers.<sup>22</sup>

The question of whether the mid-nineteenth century did constitute a real period of laissez-faire which later gave way to extensive state intervention has been much debated by historians.<sup>23</sup> P.W.J. Bartrip used the cases of factory and coal-mine legislation to argue that, despite considerable legislation to control the employment of women and children and improve safety issues, something like laissez-faire continued to operate in Britain for much of the nineteenth century.<sup>24</sup> In his 1967 paper, R.L. Crouch also concluded that although the state acted in some areas, particularly in those involving the underprivileged, a laissez-faire attitude was common in economic matters.<sup>25</sup> It seems obvious that the line between laissez-faire and state intervention often changed during the second half of the century, but that absolute non-intervention would have 'generated unsustainable social tensions'.<sup>26</sup>

Mundella was only a boy during the difficult economic times of the 1830s and 1840s. By the time he was in early manhood and entering into business, Britain was in a stable and prosperous state. W. L. Burn called the years between 1852 and 1867 *The Age of Equipoise*, which he used as the title for his history of the period.<sup>27</sup> Burn defined this period as one 'in which the old and the new, the elements of growth, survival and

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<sup>20</sup> Alan Fox, *History and Heritage: The Social Origins of the British Industrial Relations System*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985, 134.

<sup>21</sup> Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism*, London: Longman, Green & Co., 1896 (Second Edition), 277-278.

<sup>22</sup> Kenneth D. Brown, 'Nonconformity and Trade Unionism: The Sheffield Outrages of 1866', in Eugenio F. Biagini and Alistair J. Reid (editors), *Currents of Radicalism: Popular radicalism, organised labour and party politics in Britain, 1850-1914*, Cambridge University Press, 1991, 92.

<sup>23</sup> P.W.J. Bartrip, 'State Intervention in Mid-Nineteenth Century Britain: Fact or Fiction?', *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Autumn 1983), 63.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>25</sup> R. L. Crouch, 'Laissez-Faire in Nineteenth Century Britain: Myth or Reality?', *The Manchester School*, Vol. 35, Issue 3, September 1967, 215.

<sup>26</sup> Philip Harling, 'The Powers of the Victorian State', in Mandler, *Liberty and Authority*, 26-27.

<sup>27</sup> W. L. Burn, *The Age of Equipoise: A Study of the Mid-Victorian Generation*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1964, 15.

decay, achieved a balance which most contemporaries regarded as satisfactory'.<sup>28</sup> Burn argued that state involvement did increase during this period, but he claimed that it was mainly in matters which were paternalistic or of a moral nature.<sup>29</sup> Asa Briggs used a similar time frame, beginning with the Great Exhibition of 1851 and ending with the second Reform Bill of 1867, to discuss developments.<sup>30</sup> Briggs believed that the national mood was influenced by economic prosperity, a sense of national security, a trust in existing institutions and a moral code that was shared by most groups.<sup>31</sup> After this period, government became more and more involved in virtually all public activity as the century progressed and this thesis shows how Mundella made full use of this development.

Despite Mundella's support for the principles of free trade, he recognised that government had to be involved in matters previously unregulated or voluntary. In his own business, he had seen how good working conditions and better wages were beneficial both for his employees and for his factory's efficiency. All manufacturers did not accept this approach, thus it required both legislation and an efficient inspectorate for change to occur. He recognised the importance of the union leadership in settling issues before a dispute developed through the work of his Nottingham Arbitration and Conciliation Board. Therefore, He argued that there should be legislation to place trade unions on a proper legal footing immediately after entering parliament in 1868. Later, when President of the Board of Trade, he established a Labour Department which provided industry with assistance in conciliation matters. He was an early advocate of compulsory elementary education on the grounds that many working-class parents saw schooling of their children as a deprivation of wage income. He later introduced more state control over schooling with a strengthened inspectorate and a new Code covering a broad range of educational matters. His work at the Board of Trade increased the state's overview of railway freight charges and safety issues. He also introduced greater control of several issues in the maritime industry. These matters are discussed in more detail later in this thesis.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>30</sup> Asa Briggs, *Victorian People: A reassessment of persons and themes 1851-67*, The University of Chicago Press, 1972, 1.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

The second half of the nineteenth century saw the Liberal Party moving gradually from a dedication to free trade and laissez-faire to an acceptance of the need for state intervention. As an influential member of parliament with an involvement in many important policy areas, Mundella was a key figure in this transition. His pragmatism, and willingness to work with the Conservatives, helped to forge a new consensus around the need for more state regulation.

### *The Second Reform Act*

In 1843, Mundella had heard Richard Cobden speak on the reform of the Corn Laws.<sup>32</sup> Thereafter Mundella often expressed his admiration for Cobden and his policies. This is mentioned several times in this thesis. The principles of free trade must have resounded with the young man.

The repeal of the Corn Laws ushered in the era of free trade and a general liberalisation of economic matters. The Reform Act of 1867 brought more men into mainstream politics and provided increased representation for the burgeoning industrial cities. Jonathan Parry suggested that 'Britain had, it appeared, become a democracy'.<sup>33</sup> Although the 1867 Act was brought in by a Conservative government, there had been repeated unsuccessful attempts by the Whigs to introduce parliamentary reform. The name of Lord John Russell is always associated with this. Russell was indefatigable in his efforts to achieve parliamentary reform and introduced several bills during the 1850s and 1860s. None of these were successfully finalised, due, in Parry's view, to a disinterest not only on the part of many parliamentarians but also by the country as a whole.<sup>34</sup> Things were to change in 1865 with Russell now prime minister and Gladstone the Liberal leader in the Commons. A modest reform bill was proposed with some reduction in the franchise qualification and a redistribution of seats taken from small boroughs. Despite its moderation, a rebel group of Liberal MPs, famously called the 'Adullamite Cave' by John Bright, voted with the Conservatives to defeat the Bill. Russell resigned and Derby formed a Conservative ministry. After voting against the moderate Liberal bill in 1866, it was surprising that the new Conservative

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<sup>32</sup> Armytage, *A.J. Mundella*, 18.

<sup>33</sup> Parry, *The Rise and Fall*, 217.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.



government should introduce a more radical version the following year. A simplistic explanation of this turnaround is the strength of the protest movement, exemplified by the Hyde Park riots of 1866, which concerned politicians of both persuasions.<sup>35</sup>

The Bill was passed in August 1867. Coincidentally perhaps, Russell resigned the Liberal leadership at the end of 1867, and was succeeded by Gladstone. In early 1868, Derby also stepped aside passing the premiership to Disraeli. The contest between Conservatives and Liberals thereafter was exemplified by the rivalry between these two formidable politicians. The governments headed by these two men achieved much needed social reform between 1868 and 1880.

Jonathan Parry discussed, in some detail, the extensive, and varied, legislation passed by the first Gladstone government.<sup>36</sup> Parry categorised these as social and moral improvements, the development of the democratic principle, Irish issues, and the reduction of costs together with improved efficiency in government administration. Although not yet a minister, Mundella was actively involved with several of these initiatives. They included the 1870 Education Act, the 1870 Factories and Workshop Act, the 1871 Trade Union Act and the 1872 Mines Regulation Act. These are analysed in some detail later in this thesis.

The Act extended the vote to a larger number of men than the defeated Liberal Bill had proposed and gave more parliamentary seats to the large industrial cities.<sup>37</sup> Mundella's Sheffield electorate comprised many new voters and he was consistent in his gratitude for the ongoing support of working men and was conscious of his indebtedness to them. A major effect of the change in electorates was to increase their importance in determining which party governed.<sup>38</sup> Parry noted the novelty of governments resigning in 1868, 1874 and 1880 without losing a parliamentary vote.<sup>39</sup> The constituencies and the voters now decided who should govern.

The increased influence of the newly enfranchised voter saw parties ensuring that every new elector was on the electoral register and, hopefully, a signed-up

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<sup>35</sup> Smith, *The Making of the Second Reform Act*, 126.

<sup>36</sup> Jonathan Parry, 'Gladstone, Liberalism and the Government of 1868-1874', in David Bebbington and Roger Smith, *Gladstone Centenary Essays*, Liverpool University Press, 2000, 95-97.

<sup>37</sup> Smith, *The Making of the Second Reform Bill*, 232-233.

<sup>38</sup> Parry, *The Rise and Fall*, 221.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

member of their organisation. These measures could be expected to turn into favourable votes.<sup>40</sup> The more formal involvement of electors led to what Angus Hawkins called a 'more sober and respectable' way of promoting political ideas.<sup>41</sup> Meetings moved from being open-air hustings to ticketed indoor functions, and print began to replace oral and visual symbols showing political partisanship.<sup>42</sup> Mundella was in his element, with his public speaking eloquence and the support of Robert Leader, the prominent Sheffield Liberal, and proprietor of the *Sheffield Independent* newspaper.

Parry argued that the Liberals' response to the changes wrought by the extension of the franchise was 'to fashion a new political system'.<sup>43</sup> This was a party which integrated working men into a system which was still dominated by landowners and prosperous businessmen. The election of 1868 also saw a significant increase in the number of non-conformists entering parliament, which meant that just about every major issue had religious connotations.<sup>44</sup> This was particularly apparent in the area of education, in which Mundella was deeply involved. This is addressed in some detail in Chapter 5. Some of the leading parliamentarians of the period were those sitting for working-class constituencies.<sup>45</sup> This group included Mundella, who endeavoured to translate working-class ambitions into legislative action.

### *A Period of Social Reform*

The Liberal victory in 1868 was something of a watershed in British politics. The Party achieved a large majority, a different type of member was returned for many of the boroughs, and an important programme of social change was initiated.<sup>46</sup> In his 1972 study of the Liberal leadership, D.A. Hamer argued that the government of 1868-74 was so successful because it embodied 'liberation' and the curbing of privilege, 'which

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<sup>40</sup> Hawkins, *British Party Politics*, 136-137.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Parry, *The Rise and Fall*, 227.

<sup>44</sup> St. John, *Gladstone*, 150.

<sup>45</sup> Parry, *The Rise and Fall*, 230.

<sup>46</sup> G. Kitson Clark, *The Making of Victorian England*, London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1963, 57.

unified, inspired and directed'.<sup>47</sup> Angus Hawkins contended that, although by 1873 the Liberal Party was tearing itself apart, the first three years of Gladstone's government 'proved itself the greatest reforming ministry of the century'.<sup>48</sup> Mundella was a back-bench MP during these years but he made his mark by introducing legislation to legalise trade unions and by his vigorous support of the 1870 Education Act.

After the excitement of the second Reform Act, the Government settled down to pass legislation on a number of home issues, not all of which received total support. These included the abolition of university religious tests, reform of the civil service, legalisation of trade unions, national elementary education, the introduction of the ballot and Irish reform. Ireland was one of Gladstone's long-standing concerns and Eugenio Biagini considered it the most important to him, 'some of the others he regarded with caution, if not open aversion'.<sup>49</sup> The achievements of some Radical Liberals, including Mundella, in promoting some legislation not wholeheartedly supported by the prime minister are discussed later in this chapter.

The enlarged electorate engendered a greater interest by many voters in the mechanism of government and how legislation could be influenced.<sup>50</sup> This stimulated the development of more formal party organisations in many constituencies and the beginning of national forums where these constituencies could argue their point of view.<sup>51</sup> The 1868 election also saw the emergence of a group of backbenchers whom Jonathan Parry described as 'earnest, commercial and with the same values'.<sup>52</sup> Parry included Mundella in this group and regarded them as the 'interpreters and guides of urban working-class opinion'.<sup>53</sup> Parry also saw them as having a 'businesslike impatience' with lengthy parliamentary procedures, wanting to get on with legislation.<sup>54</sup> This was especially true for Mundella, as this thesis emphasises.

The difficulties in passing legislation which improved the social and moral condition of the working class are exemplified by the problems experienced with the

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<sup>47</sup> D.A. Hamer, *Liberal Politics in the Age of Gladstone and Rosebery: A Study in Leadership and Policy*, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1972, 37.

<sup>48</sup> Hawkins, *British Party Politics*, 141.

<sup>49</sup> Eugenio F. Biagini, *Gladstone*, Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd., 2000, 47-48.

<sup>50</sup> Jenkins, *Parliament, party and politics*, 111.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Parry, *The Rise and Fall*, 229.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

1870 Education Act. Mundella was deeply involved with this and its finalisation was an important early step in the development of his political career. It is discussed in detail in Chapter 5. It was an Act which saw the state involved in an area which had previously operated on a local and voluntary basis. It alienated the established Church by providing for board schools and displeased non-conformists by continuing a measure of financial support for Anglican establishments. Despite the controversies, the Act did establish the right of access to schooling for all children and provided a foundation for future improvements. Some historians have supported the view that the passage of this Act was an important step in increasing the opportunities for advancement of the working class, but many others have dwelt on its negative political repercussions.<sup>55</sup> The loss of non-conformist support is generally cited as the major reason for the Liberal loss at the 1874 election, although Jonathan Parry has suggested that the fear of diminishing financial support for Anglican education had an adverse impact on southern borough seats.<sup>56</sup> Gladstone was allocated some blame because of his half-hearted support for the Bill and his ambivalence towards religious teaching.<sup>57</sup> W.E. Forster, the minister responsible for education, had initially planned for only non-denominational religious instruction; the High-Anglican Gladstone took a more rigid view.<sup>58</sup> The compromise Cowper-Temple clause pleased few.

The predominant characteristic of governments from Gladstone's success in 1868 through to Disraeli's loss of power in 1880 was the promotion of reforms which would improve the lives of the masses.<sup>59</sup> The extension of the franchise in 1867 and the election of members, including Mundella, who were sensitive to working-class concerns has been discussed earlier in this chapter. Additionally it was a period during which Britain was not involved in major military activity, and thus governments could concentrate on domestic affairs. It is not surprising, therefore, that there was a greater emphasis, both in parliament and throughout the country, on social reform than in earlier years. Some of the most obvious examples, such as improving the working

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<sup>55</sup> St. John, *The Historiography of Gladstone and Disraeli*, 123-124.

<sup>56</sup> Parry, *Democracy and Religion*, 403.

<sup>57</sup> St. John, *The Historiography*, 124.

<sup>58</sup> Parry, *Democracy*, 289.

<sup>59</sup> Simon Heffer, *High Minds: The Victorians and the Birth of Modern Britain*, London: Windmill Books, 2014, 765-766.

conditions in factories and mines, legitimising trade unions and providing a nationwide education system, are treated in some detail in this thesis because of Mundella's involvement. There were, however, other legislative measures which were aimed at increasing efficiency, reducing costs and removing, in some measure, privilege. These included opening up entry to the Civil Service and the Army's officer corps to a wider group of men. Mundella was not directly involved with these reforms and it was long before they benefitted the working class. Nevertheless it did show that change was happening. Mundella's efforts for the working class complemented these other reforms and together changed the life of many.

Historians have written about the Liberal Party in the period being discussed as lacking 'any set of ideas, creed or philosophy relevant to contemporary needs'.<sup>60</sup> Biagini disagreed with this assertion and argued that Gladstonian Liberalism not only supported a Protestant religious culture and a Whig constitutional consensus, but also relied on the positions taken by such political economists as Mill and Cobden.<sup>61</sup> Mundella's position in these ideological issues seems at odds with these assertions. Certainly he supported Gladstone as leader of the Party, but he was not a follower of the Whig tradition. He was one of the first prominent parliamentarians to recognise the increasing influence of the working man, both electorally and morally, and he understood the need for state involvement to resolve working-class issues.

The increased emphasis on social issues continued through the subsequent Conservative administrations. It naturally led to a greater state involvement in areas which had previously been ignored or were essentially voluntary. Mundella's support for Conservative legislation which improved working-class life, showed his consistent approach to such reforms.

Much has been written about the significant social reforms enacted by both parties in the years following the passing of the 1867 Reform Act. Paul Smith started his 1967 work on Conservative actions by asserting that Disraeli's ministry of 1874-80 'presided over the most notable instalment of social reform undertaken by any single

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<sup>60</sup> Hamer, *Liberal Politics*, xi.

<sup>61</sup> Biagini, *Liberty*, 4.

government of the century'.<sup>62</sup> Interestingly, Hawkins used similar words to describe Gladstone's first ministry, (see page 21 of this chapter).

The 1866-68 Derby Conservative administration's activities were, of course, dominated by the debates over electoral reform. There were, however, some important reform legislation which benefitted the working man and the poor. The Factory Acts Extension Bill and the Hours of Labour Regulation Bill were both passed in 1867 with little opposition from the Liberals.<sup>63</sup> It was during this period that Mundella first appeared on the national scene. He was an important witness at the Royal Commission on Trade Unions which sat in 1867-68, immediately before Mundella's election to parliament. This is discussed in Chapter 4.

The Home Secretary, Lancashire solicitor and businessman, Richard Assheton Cross was responsible for establishing the Royal Commission to review trades union legislation and in passing a Factory Act to limit the hours worked by women and children, both in 1874, immediately after taking office. The following year, Cross was instrumental in passing the Employers and Workmen Act which freed striking workmen from the possibility of criminal prosecution for breach of contract.<sup>64</sup> At the same time, he brought in the important Conspiracy and Protection Act which legalised peaceful picketing.<sup>65</sup> These were measures which the Liberals had failed to bring in, despite Mundella's efforts. His support for the Conservative legislation is discussed in Chapter 4.

Elementary education was not neglected by the Conservatives. Lord Sandon sponsored an Education Act in 1876 which went some way to providing for compulsion. It paved the way for the uncontroversial 1880 Mundella Act which finally mandated nationwide compulsory elementary schooling. This is examined in some detail in Chapter 5.

All this social legislation did not necessarily mean an embrace of state intervention and regulation by the Conservative government. Hawkins argued that it merely protected those who could not help themselves – women and children, the

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<sup>62</sup> Paul Smith, *Disraelian Conservatism and Social Reform*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967, 2.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 49-50.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

poor and agricultural labourers.<sup>66</sup> Disraeli saw these reforms as simply aligning the working class to the Conservative banner. His real interest was in patriotism – the Empire and the Crown.<sup>67</sup>

### *Mundella and laissez-faire*

Mundella was a prominent businessman, and then politician, through most of the years discussed at the beginning of this chapter. His apparent ambivalence in regard to laissez-faire philosophy and increased state involvement reflected the changing attitudes of both the parliament and the people. As we have seen, he was a great admirer of Richard Cobden and that gentleman's espousal of free trade principles. Mundella, however, would not accept Cobden's views on factory working conditions, trade union legalisation, and education. Cobden held that these were matters for individual decision making. He seemed not to accept that there was already significant state involvement in social issues in the 1830s and 1840s, at a time when he was fighting for the repeal of the Corn Laws.<sup>68</sup> Mundella played a small role in Cobden's 1860 negotiations with Michel Chevalier on the Anglo-French Treaty of Commerce.<sup>69</sup> He advised on the hosiery trade and spent a month in Paris with Cobden's delegation.<sup>70</sup> However, the two men were never parliamentary colleagues, as Cobden died six years before Mundella's election. Cobden clearly impressed the young Mundella, but by the time he was able to influence legislation, the mood had changed and the state became more and more involved in social issues.

Mundella's business experience was an important factor in the forming of his views on state intervention. He recognised the importance of better working conditions in improving factory efficiency, he saw the importance of trade unions in pre-empting industrial disputes and he believed that a better educated workforce was necessary if British manufacturing was to compete with developing nations. Many other businessmen argued that introducing such legislated measures would adversely

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 193-194.

<sup>67</sup> Smith, *Disraelian Conservatism*, 267.

<sup>68</sup> Eric J. Evans, *Social policy 1830-1914: Individualism, collectivism and the origins of the Welfare State*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978, 4.

<sup>69</sup> Walton, *The History of the Nottingham Chamber*, 23.

<sup>70</sup> Armytage, *A.J. Mundella*, 31.

affect their profits. Mundella believed that state laws covering such matters were necessary if the nation's industry was to prosper. These issues are discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters.

### *Developments through to the end of the century*

The principle of laissez-faire applied to social reform had been widely supported even before the doctrine of free trade was introduced. For example, the influential journal, the *Economist*, which was first published in 1843, and subtitled 'Free Trade Journal', took an extreme position.<sup>71</sup> Its writers considered the Factory Acts to be an attack on the right of women and children to work when they wished. They argued that improving sanitary arrangements introduced a protectionist bureaucracy, and that public education was unnecessary.<sup>72</sup> Although this attitude was reasonably common at all levels of society on social issues, there was a much more general acceptance of laissez-faire policies in economic matters.<sup>73</sup> It was recognised that government interference in the country's commerce could reduce its effectiveness by engendering a measure of complacency.<sup>74</sup> A divergence of views on the necessity for the freedom to trade as one wished and the use of state powers in social reforms became more marked as the century continued. Mundella's position in this dichotomy has been discussed earlier.

There had long been concerns about the increasing threat to British manufacturing from Germany and the USA, but it was not until the recession of the 1890s that laissez-faire was seriously questioned. In his influential 1896 work, Ernest Williams compared British industry with that of Germany.<sup>75</sup> He showed how the volume of German export goods had increased substantially against those of Britain in the period from 1883 to 1889 and enumerated the reasons for this.<sup>76</sup> Williams concluded that the main factor was the financial assistance to manufacturing provided by the state, through tariffs on imported goods and cheap transport on the state-

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<sup>71</sup> Alexander Zevin, *Liberalism at Large: The World According to the Economist*, London: Verso, 2019, passim.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 39-42.

<sup>73</sup> Evans, *Social Issues*, 5.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>75</sup> Ernest Edwin Williams, *Made in Germany*, London: William Heinemann, 1896, passim.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-13.



owned railways.<sup>77</sup> Whilst he strongly argued the merits of protectionism for British industry, he also acknowledged the country's inferior technical education system compared with that of Germany.<sup>78</sup> This was also a major theme of Mundella's arguments on education; he recognised the need for a better educated factory operative. This matter is discussed in Chapter 6.

The trend towards more government intervention in social issues and the gradual dismantling of the laissez-faire system is evidenced in the career of one influential politician, Joseph Chamberlain. His *Radical Programme* of 1885 envisaged that social change would be the major concern for future governments.<sup>79</sup> In a speech in January 1885, during which Chamberlain argued some of the points in his *Programme*, he said, 'We are told that this country is the paradise of the rich; it should be our task to see that it does not become the purgatory of the poor'.<sup>80</sup> By the turn of the century, Chamberlain had become concerned with the vast increase in German and American industrial competition and became an advocate of protectionism.<sup>81</sup> By this time, of course, Mundella was dead, but no doubt he would have campaigned against it.

#### *Conclusions – Mundella's position on laissez-faire and state intervention*

Mundella supported the free-trade principles espoused by Richard Cobden. However, he did not subscribe to the extreme laissez-faire doctrine which evolved after the repeal of the Corn Laws. He believed that the state had a responsibility to help those citizens who were disadvantaged. His work to improve factory working conditions and to legalise the trade union movement exemplified his concern for the betterment of the working-class condition. Mundella was a transitional figure in the change from a largely voluntary system to one in which governments would influence peoples' lives.

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 130-141.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>79</sup> Peter T. Marsh, *Joseph Chamberlain: Entrepreneur in Politics*, Yale University Press, 1994, 168.

<sup>80</sup> *The Times*, 'Mr Chamberlain at Ipswich', 15 January 1885.

<sup>81</sup> Marsh, *Joseph Chamberlain*, 564.

## Chapter 2: The Man – His Background and Career

The factors which make up a person's character and influence their lifetime achievements and failures are many. The purpose of this chapter is to describe Mundella's life prior to his entry into parliament and to identify the factors that came together to define his political priorities. The development of his character, his strengths and weaknesses, his ambitions and goals, will be addressed. Mundella did not have the benefit of a normal education. This is, probably, the reason why he was so passionate about universal education. He worked at the grass-roots level of the hosiery industry, and it was this experience that gave him an understanding of, and sympathy for, the working man. Other important influences are identified later in this chapter.

The early life of Anthony John Mundella was different from almost all of those who served alongside him in Parliament. Whilst this was obvious when considering the aristocrats and landed gentry, whose numbers still dominated those sitting in the Commons, it was also true of his fellow manufacturers. Mundella was the son of a refugee from Italy; he served an apprenticeship and, in his youth, was involved in Chartism. He received little formal education and was part of a family with a limited income. These differences were considered in some detail in an earlier thesis written by the current author.<sup>1</sup>

Despite his humble background, Mundella enjoyed a very successful career in industry. In 1848, at the age of just 23, he became a partner in a large hosiery manufacturing company. His development of this business, through the identification of improved techniques, astute financial management, and the cultivation of better relationships with unions and his workforce, made him wealthy. This allowed him to seek election to Parliament at a time when MPs were still unpaid. The success of his business methods convinced him that similar improvements would benefit British industry generally. However, better working conditions and legalised unions were not embraced by the majority of manufacturers and Mundella soon realised that some

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Davey, *Businessmen in the British Parliament, 1832-1886: A Study in Aspiration and Achievement*, M.A. Thesis, University of Adelaide, February 2012.

state involvement was required if attitudes were to change. Once in parliament, he supported legislation which increased intervention and regulation.

### *Historiography*

Most nineteenth-century luminaries were the subject of a biography, usually hagiographic, soon after their deaths. For prominent politicians, this was even more likely to happen. For those with a substantial claim to fame, revisionist biographies, volumes of letters and speeches and analyses of their work, continued to flow for the next century. In her 1941 master's thesis on Mundella's period as MP for Sheffield, Margaret Higginbotham believed: 'It would be idle to claim for Mundella a position in the front rank of Victorian statesmen.'<sup>2</sup> This thesis will argue that Mundella's political achievements were significant and that he deserved greater recognition. He was prominent in the affairs of the nation for 30 years. It is surprising, therefore, that a contemporary biography was not written. His unmarried daughter, Maria Theresa, had intended to write a biography of her father and assembled much of his correspondence.<sup>3</sup> However, she had not begun the work by the time of her own death in 1922. Ultimately, the papers were presented to the University of Sheffield Library and are now held in the Special Collections and Archives area. They are essentially of a political nature, dating from his initial interest in representing Sheffield in Parliament, but there are some insights into his earlier life in letters to his long-time supporter, and eventually close friend, Robert Leader.

His only biography was published in 1951. It was written by W.H.G. Armytage, and it is extensively quoted in this thesis.<sup>4</sup> It is a comprehensive work, covering all facets of Mundella's life and work. It was arranged chronologically. Armytage concentrated on Mundella's political career and covered virtually all the issues that involved Mundella. He made extensive use of primary sources, such as the Mundella-Leader correspondence, contemporary newspaper articles, and *Hansard*. He did not have the benefit of some important secondary sources published subsequently. For

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<sup>2</sup> M. Higginbotham, *The Career of A.J. Mundella with Special Reference to his Sheffield Connections*, M.A. Thesis, University of Sheffield, May 1941, 141.

<sup>3</sup> *Mundella Papers*, University of Sheffield Library: Special Collections and Archives, undated, 3.

<sup>4</sup> W.H.G. Armytage, *A.J. Mundella 1825-1897: The Liberal Background to the Labour Movement*, London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1951.

example, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Stanley Chapman and Charlotte Ericson published several useful works on the history of the hosiery industry. Eugenio Biagini's work of the early 1990s on popular radicalism and organised labour and Mark Curthoys' 2004 work on trade union legislation made a significant contribution to the understanding of the dynamics of these issues. All of these writers are often quoted in this thesis. This current work covers the most important aspects of Mundella's work thematically, showing how he was intimately involved with some important social reforms. A few years before the publication of the biography, Armytage wrote a short article to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Mundella's death, titled 'A.J. Mundella – The Man Who Has Been Forgotten'.<sup>5</sup> He did not suggest any reasons as to why he had been forgotten. He simply provided a potted history of Mundella's life and achievements. Armytage, an educationist himself, concluded his article by asserting that one of Mundella's aims, the provision of better technical education, had not yet been achieved. The shortcomings of the British technical education system to provide a better workforce were of concern, not only to Mundella, but to other industrialists. The loss of competitiveness by British manufacturing was blamed partly on the protectionism exercised by Germany and the USA, and partly on the inferior training provided to factory operatives in Britain. This failure is discussed in some detail in Chapter 6.

The earliest account of Mundella's life was provided by J. Morrison Davidson in 1879 in his monograph on eminent radicals.<sup>6</sup> Davidson provided no clue about where he obtained this information, but many details are repeated in later works by other authors, who presumably used Davidson as their source. Davidson is somewhat critical of Mundella for adopting apparently inconsistent positions. For example, he saw Mundella's staunch Anglicanism as anachronistic to his work for religious equality and similarly his radicalism seemed contrary to his support for royal grants. Some of these issues will be discussed later in this chapter.

In his autobiography, published in 1882, Thomas Cooper, the prominent Leicester Chartist of the early 1840s, mentioned an action of the youthful Mundella.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> W.H.G. Armytage, *Nottingham Journal*, 22 July 1947.

<sup>6</sup> J. Morrison Davidson, *Eminent Radicals in Parliament*, London: E.J. Francis & Co., 1879, 111-118.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Cooper, *The Life of Thomas Cooper*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1882, 169-170.

Cooper's comments are an important reflection, not only on the young Mundella, but on what he stood for in later life. Cooper wrote that: 'he [Mundella] did not belong to the poorest ranks' and that, during a local Chartist meeting in 1840, Mundella had 'declared himself on the people's side.' Mundella remained a friend of labour for the rest of his life. Mundella also received a passing reference in A. Temple Patterson's history of radicalism in Leicester.<sup>8</sup> He is mentioned as the Secretary who signed the 1848 Leicester declaration supporting a National Assembly. This body was to sit until the Charter became law. Patterson referred to Mundella's earlier support for Chartism, quoting Cooper, and commented that there was no evidence of his involvement during the intervening years. A 1959 review of Chartism in Leicester did not mention Mundella.<sup>9</sup>

Dorothea Charnwood, Mundella's grand-daughter, mentioned him in two books of personal reminiscences published in the 1930s, but in little detail.<sup>10</sup> She did, however, include some background on his Italian father. There is considerable contradiction in the accounts of Antonio Mundella's life before he reached England, probably at some point between 1814 and 1816. An unpublished family history recounted some family tradition about Antonio Mundella's origins.<sup>11</sup> The author, Robin Houston, is a great-great nephew of Anthony John Mundella, and he cautioned that his work was for the private interests of descendants and was not for publication. Anything used later in this chapter is with Houston's consent.

A local Nottingham historian, Ken Brand, wrote several useful pieces in the late 1990s and early 2000s, on Mundella's life, his business career and parliamentary activities. An article published in a community newspaper outlined these and detailed his achievements.<sup>12</sup> Brand also wrote a pamphlet about a prominent Nottingham architect who designed a new factory for Mundella's company.<sup>13</sup> The architect, T.C.

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<sup>8</sup> A. Temple Patterson, *Radical Leicester: A History of Leicester, 1780-1850*, University College Leicester, 1954, 359-363.

<sup>9</sup> J.F.C. Harrison, 'Chartism in Leicester', in Asa Briggs (editor), *Chartist Studies*, London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1959, 99-146.

<sup>10</sup> Lady Charnwood, *An Autograph Collection and the making of it*, London: Ernest Benn, 1930, 220; Lady Charnwood, *Call Back Yesterday*, London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1938, 232.

<sup>11</sup> Robin Houston, private communication.

<sup>12</sup> Ken Brand, 'The most eminent resident', *Park News*, May 1999.

<sup>13</sup> Ken Brand, *Thomas Chambers Hine: Architect of Victorian Nottingham*, Nottingham Civic Society, 2003.

Hine, was the brother of Mundella's partner in the hosiery manufacturing business and the factory was the first to use power-driven hosiery knitters. Mundella's involvement with the local militia unit was outlined in a 1975 publication which was part of a series of booklets on *Victorian Nottingham* published by the Nottingham Historical Film Unit.<sup>14</sup>

There are numerous histories of the development of the hosiery industry in the English Midlands, and all of them refer to Mundella to a greater or lesser extent. William Felkin published an early book on the hosiery and lace manufacturing industry in 1867 and he knew Mundella well.<sup>15</sup> In addition to his manufacturing activities, Felkin translated the rules of the *Conseils des Prud' Hommes*, the French arbitration system on which Mundella based his Nottingham Board. Felkin and Mundella served together on the Nottingham Council. Other important histories which provide some detail of Mundella's work in the hosiery industry are Erickson's review of hosiery industrialists from 1850 and Chapman's monumental work describing the history of the industry over four centuries.<sup>16</sup> F.A. Wells' 1935 history of the industry included several references to Mundella, but all are related to his work on arbitration.<sup>17</sup> The development of the hosiery industry, and Mundella's influence on its progress, will be dealt with later in this chapter.

Details of Mundella's life and achievements are included in several biographical dictionaries. He is listed in the 1901 Supplement to the First Edition of the *Dictionary of National Biography* and in the updated *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* published in 2004.<sup>18</sup> Mundella is also included in dictionaries of businessmen and

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<sup>14</sup> Richard Iliffe and Wilfred Baguley, 'The Robin Hood Rifles', Volume 15, *Victorian Nottingham*, The Nottingham Historical Film Unit, 1975.

<sup>15</sup> *Felkin's History of the Machine-Wrought Hosiery and Lace Manufactures – Centenary Edition*, Newton Abbott: David and Charles, 1967.

<sup>16</sup> Charlotte Erickson, *British Industrialists: Steel and Hosiery, 1850-1950*, Cambridge at the University Press, 1959; Stanley Chapman, *Hosiery and Knitwear: Four Centuries of Small Scale Industry in Britain, c.1589-2000*, Oxford University Press, 2002.

<sup>17</sup> F.A. Wells, *The British Hosiery Trade: Its History and Organisation*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1935.

<sup>18</sup> *Dictionary of National Biography*, Vol. III, 1901 Supplement, 209-212; *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Jonathan Spain, 2004.

educationists.<sup>19</sup> Although much is repeated in these entries there is always something that contributes to a better understanding of Mundella.

Published information on Mundella's early life, and indeed, his business career is sparse and often repetitive. Most commentators relied on Davidson's 1879 article and on the 1901 *Dictionary of National Biography*. Contemporary newspaper reports and Mundella's letters to Leader provided additional useful information, although there are obvious factual differences between sources. These will be explored in this chapter.

### *Early Years in Leicester*

Mundella was born in Leicester on 28 March 1825.<sup>20</sup> His father, Antonio Mundella (sometimes spelled Mundello or Mundelly) was born around 1795 in Monte Olimpino, Lombardy, Italy. At that time, Lombardy was part of the Napoleonic-dominated Cisalpine Republic which morphed into the Kingdom of Italy in 1805.<sup>21</sup> Following the defeat of Napoleon and the subsequent Congress of Vienna, Lombardy was returned to Austrian administration.<sup>22</sup> Thus, in his formative years, Antonio Mundella was exposed to some of the more egalitarian ideas generated by the French Revolution. Under Austrian control, the term of military conscriptions was increased to eight years and service was nearly always outside Italy.<sup>23</sup> This may have influenced Mundella's decision to leave his homeland. Davidson recorded that Mundella took part in an insurrectionary movement against the Austrians in 1820 and was driven into exile.<sup>24</sup> Lady Charnwood had a slightly different version, asserting that her great-grandfather refused to serve in the Austrian army against his countrymen and escaped over the Swiss mountains to England.<sup>25</sup> His first years in England were difficult; he was penniless

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<sup>19</sup> David J. Jeremy and Christine Shaw (editors), *Dictionary of Business Biography: A Biographic Dictionary of Business Leaders Active in Britain in the Period 1860-1980*, London: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1984-6; Richard Aldrich and Peter Gordon, *Dictionary of British Educationists*, London: Woburn Press, 1989.

<sup>20</sup> *England and Wales, Non-Conformist and Non-Parochial Registers, 1567-1970*, Leicestershire County Records Office, Wigston Magna.

<sup>21</sup> Harry Hearder, *Italy in the Age of the Risorgimento, 1790-1870*, London: Longman, 1983, 50-52.

<sup>22</sup> Christopher Duggan, *A Concise History of Italy*, Cambridge University Press, 2014, 99.

<sup>23</sup> Stuart Woolf, *A History of Italy 1700-1860: The Social Constraints of Political Change*, London: Routledge, 1979, 238.

<sup>24</sup> Davidson, *Eminent Radicals*, 112.

<sup>25</sup> Charnwood, *Call Back Yesterday*, 232.

and without any knowledge of the English language.<sup>26</sup> He went first to Bradford before settling in Leicester.<sup>27</sup> Here again there are differing accounts of his activities. Davidson said that he tried to earn a living teaching languages, whereas Lady Charnwood believed that he had joined the army as a private soldier. There is no confirmation of this, and he was certainly in Leicester by mid-June 1824. He married Rebecca Allsop there on 17 June.<sup>28</sup>

The 1841 census gave Antonio's profession as 'business broker'. This must have meant that he dealt in anything that he could buy and sell at a profit. Some of his activities reached the Leicester Magistrates' Court. In 1842 he bought oil and paint that had been obtained under false pretences by the vendor. In 1845 he was fined five shillings for selling goods on the causeway. In 1846 he bought stolen buckets. In 1849 he purchased a stolen gun.<sup>29</sup> Fortunately, his business activities improved. By the time of his death in 1867, he was engaged in a successful wool-broking business.<sup>30</sup> In his will Antonio left 30 pounds to his wife, for her 'immediate occasions', and 25 shillings a week for life, to be paid from a trust fund established from the sale of his assets. A local newspaper had earlier called the most significant part of his assets: 'a very handsome warehouse in Mansfield Street, adding much to the general appearance of the neighbourhood'.<sup>31</sup> On the occasion of the opening of the warehouse, Mundella congratulated the builders over a 'sumptuous' dinner, and was clearly able to speak adequate English and to be comfortable with addressing a group. His position in the community is confirmed by an earlier report in which it is recorded that he had supported a testimonial to a local ward secretary. Mundella thanked the gathering for 'placing him in a respectable position in society (hear, hear).'<sup>32</sup>

Mundella seldom mentioned his father in his later letters, in contrast to the several tributes he paid to his mother's influence. Although this might be interpreted as a lack of mutual interests, one reference showed that Antonio's enthusiasm for

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 'but he never learned to speak his wife's language.'

<sup>27</sup> *Mundella Papers*, letter to Leader 8 August 1868.

<sup>28</sup> *England, Select Marriages, 1538-1973*, accessed online at [ancestry.com.au](http://ancestry.com.au).

<sup>29</sup> *Leicester Chronicle*, 5 November 1842, 3 May 1845, 24 January 1846, 20 October 1846.

<sup>30</sup> Will proved on 7 September 1867, accessed online at [gov.uk](http://gov.uk), 'Find a Will'.

<sup>31</sup> *Leicester Journal*, 12 April 1867, 'More Improvements in the Borough'.

<sup>32</sup> *Leicester Mercury*, 6 December 1856, 'Testimonial to Mr. W. Parker'.



radical politics was shared by the young Anthony John.<sup>33</sup> Published in 1898, after Mundella's death, the article in *Revue des Deux Mondes* was a tribute to Mundella's work in improving employer-employee relationships, but it included some brief information on Mundella's life. Antonio is said to have sold radical and union newspapers, including *Voix du Peuple*, *Poor Man's Advocate*, and *Mechanics Weekly Journal*. Importantly, the young Mundella 'devoured' these publications, and presumably father and son discussed their implications. The writer, however, went on to say that Mundella's own good sense and his mother's influence prevented these ideas from taking hold.<sup>34</sup>

Mundella's mother, Rebecca, was born in Leicester on 9 April 1792 to Thomas and Hannah Allsop.<sup>35</sup> Davidson called her 'a remarkable woman' and asserted that she was:

a lady richly endowed mentally, and possessed of some little property. She was an adept in lace embroidery, then a remunerative art, and her skill and unremitting industry in the main supported the Mundella household for the first ten years of her married life.<sup>36</sup>

Mundella himself paid tribute to his mother, 'to whom I owe everything, [she] is a woman of unusual excellence and intelligence whose chequered life has from early youth been sustained by strong Christian fortitude'.<sup>37</sup> There is no evidence that either of his parents influenced his religious beliefs. Both the son and his mother were baptised by Non-Conformist ministers, and presumably his father remained a Roman Catholic. Indeed Davidson suggested that Antonio had trained for priesthood in the Roman Church before leaving Italy.<sup>38</sup> Antonio and Rebecca, however, were married in an Anglican Church, the only option before the passing of the 1836 Marriage Act. It seemed an unlikely union. Houston reported family speculation that either Rebecca was bowled over by this 'romantic Latin' or, as she was 32, 'time was running out.'<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ch. Le Cour Grandmaison, 'Mundella et les Conseils d'Arbitrage en Angleterre', *Revue des Deux Mondes*, April 1898, 592-594.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 534.

<sup>35</sup> *England and Wales, Non-conformist and Non-parochial Registers*.

<sup>36</sup> Davidson, *Eminent Radicals*, 113.

<sup>37</sup> *Mundella Papers*, letter to Leader, 1 September 1868.

<sup>38</sup> Davidson, *Eminent Radicals*, 113.

<sup>39</sup> Houston, private communication.

Anthony John was thus brought up in a very different family environment to most other Englishmen of those times.

Mundella's early schooling at St. Nicholas' National School must have defined his Anglicanism, which remained strong throughout his life.<sup>40</sup> The School's curriculum was somewhat limited. It centred on the reading the Bible and English poets, especially Milton, aloud.<sup>41</sup> Both Davidson and the *Dictionary of National Biography* asserted that Mrs Mundella 'had a wide knowledge of English literature and was a diligent Shakespearean scholar'. It is inferred that his education was more due to his mother's teaching than any formal schooling, as he had to leave St Nicholas' when only nine years old.

#### *Mundella's Early Working Life*

Whilst Antonio was developing his business activities, his mother's skill in embroidery was the main income earner for the family. Rebecca's eyesight deteriorated to the extent that she could no longer undertake the delicate work required and so the family needed the additional income of a child's earnings. Mundella was first employed in menial work at a printing office. However, at the age of 11 he was apprenticed to Mr William Kempson, a hosiery manufacturer in Leicester.<sup>42</sup> Kempson was a man of some significance in the town, serving as a councillor for an unbroken 28 years, including two terms as mayor. He was described in his 1893 obituary as 'a sound Liberal, and very highly respected by all classes of the community'.<sup>43</sup> Mundella must have benefited from serving such a master. He acknowledged his gratitude, when, speaking in Leicester in 1893, he recognised the help and advice that Kempson had provided to him.<sup>44</sup> In a report on Mundella's death in 1897, *The Times* mentioned that whilst an apprentice, Mundella slept at the premises and on one occasion was involved in the apprehension and conviction of a group of burglars.<sup>45</sup> The judge complimented Mundella on the courage and discretion he had shown. *The Times* writer asserted

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<sup>40</sup> *DNB*, 1901, 209.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Leicester Journal*, 13 October 1893, 'Death of Alderman William Kempson, J.P. of Leicester'.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *The Times*, 29 July 1897, 'The Late Mr. Mundella', 10.

that this clearly impressed the young man, who, 'from that moment was stimulated to prove myself through life worthy of the praise bestowed'.<sup>46</sup>

Mundella must have shown considerable promise, both as a worker and as an individual, for, when he had completed his apprenticeship, he became an overseer in the warehouse of Harris and Hamel.<sup>47</sup> He prospered, and by the time he was 22 he earned £200 a year and received a share of the profits.<sup>48</sup> There is no evidence that Mundella was involved in political activity in the period between 1840, when he declared his support for Chartism, and 1848, when newspaper reports show that he was very active.<sup>49</sup> He seconded a resolution, at a meeting held on 17 April 1848, criticising Members of Parliament for disregarding Chartist petitions, and was listed as attending a meeting on 21 April called to 'inquire into the present state of the Representation of the People in the House of Commons'.<sup>50</sup> Perhaps Mundella's renewal of interest in parliamentary reform was encouraged by his employer's senior partner, Richard Harris, who was a Chartist sympathiser.<sup>51</sup> Harris was elected to Parliament in September 1848 and, coincidentally, the Leicester Chartist movement lapsed. Mundella, however, was heading to Nottingham and a prosperous business life which led to more conventional politics.

There is no information as to how, and even exactly when, Mundella became involved with the Hines in Nottingham. The British hosiery industry was not large, and predominantly based in the East Midlands. Presumably, therefore, business owners knew of the activities and personnel in other establishments. Mundella had been successful at Harris and Hamel and so the Hines probably knew of his intelligence and energy. It is also intriguing to speculate about how Mundella found the funds to buy into the partnership. Chapman admitted that little was known about the early years of Hine and Mundella, but suggested that the initial capital was £45,000, with Hine contributing £30,000 and Mundella £15,000.<sup>52</sup> It is impossible to believe that, at the age of 23 Mundella would have been able to find such a sum. A variation on this

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Jeremy and Shaw, *Dictionary of Business Biography*, 381.

<sup>48</sup> *Mundella Papers*, Letter to Leader, 11 October 1875.

<sup>49</sup> *Leicestershire Mercury*, 22 April 1848, 2.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Jeremy and Shaw, *Dictionary of Business Biography*, 381.

<sup>52</sup> Chapman, *Hosiery and Knitwear*, 134.

version is given by Jeremy and Shaw.<sup>53</sup> They suggested that Hines, a small firm of merchant hosiers, had decided to build a hosiery factory, but lacked both the technical knowledge and finance to do this. The technical innovation was supplied by Mundella and the finance is presumed to have been supplied by the London merchant bankers, Overend, Gurney & Co. One of the Hines had married a daughter of one of the Bank's partners. Mundella himself mentioned nothing about the circumstances under which he was offered this partnership, but the fact that it happened shows that he had established a reputation as an innovative and energetic businessman. This was a remarkable achievement for a man of his age and background.

Before leaving Leicester, Mundella married Mary Smith, of whom little is known despite the fact that they enjoyed 47 years 'of perfect union'.<sup>54</sup> She was a daughter of William Smith, a warehouseman, formerly of Kibworth Beauchamp in Leicestershire.<sup>55</sup> The writer of Mundella's entry in the 1901 Supplement attributed 'much of his success, as well as the joyousness of his life to this union with a woman of rare strength, sweetness and dignity of character'.

#### *The Successful Nottingham Hosier*

The hosiery industry was a significant influence on Mundella's life. It provided the comfortable financial position which allowed him to enter Parliament and it gave him the incentive to work on improving the lives of working-class people. Something, therefore, should be said about the development of this industry.

An often repeated story is that a machine to knit stockings was invented by an Anglican clergyman in Nottingham in the sixteenth century.<sup>56</sup> If this is so, it considerably predates the spinning and weaving machines which drove the Industrial Revolution. A silk hosiery industry was, initially, established in London, but by the mid-eighteenth century the East Midlands counties of Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and

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<sup>53</sup> Jeremy and Shaw, *Dictionary of Business Biography*, 381.

<sup>54</sup> Mundella Memorial, Rock Cemetery, St Mary's Church, Nottingham.

<sup>55</sup> *DNB 1901 Supplement*, Vol III, 209.

<sup>56</sup> Negley Harte, 'Wm. Lee and the Invention of the Knitting Frame', in John Milligan and Stanley Chapman (editors), *Four Centuries of Machine Knitting*, Leicester: Knitting International, 1989, 14-20.

Derbyshire dominated the industry, using wool and worsteds and cheaper labour.<sup>57</sup> The knitting was performed on machines called frames which were operated by a combination of hand and foot movements.<sup>58</sup> The stocking frame was developed to produce other garments, but it remained a domestic industry, with most frames being installed in the knitters' own homes, until the mid-nineteenth century. A large hosiery factory was built for Hine and Mundella in 1851 in Station Street, Nottingham, and was the first to use steam operated stocking frames.<sup>59</sup>

Mundella's early life as stockinger was a period in which the framework knitters' hours of work increased and earnings decreased. In his chapter covering the years 1836 to 1846, Felkin recorded the lifetime work of a Nottingham stocking-maker who started his apprenticeship in 1795 and died in 1838:

When he began life, the usual hours of labour were ten, five days a week, and one Saturday was allowed for taking in work and marketing. In middle life twelve hours work was necessary. At its close, fourteen to sixteen hours a-day scarcely sufficed for obtaining a bare maintenance by those who depended on this kind of labour.<sup>60</sup>

In 1837, an assistant poor-law commissioner reported on the 'great distress in the hosiery business' and again in 1840 a report detailed the 'low wages, poverty, and sufferings of the stocking-makers'.<sup>61</sup> Conditions continued to deteriorate. In 1843, a petition, signed by thousands of framework-knitters, was presented to the House of Commons complaining of the low rates of pay and the long periods of unemployment.<sup>62</sup>

The petition called for an inquiry into a number of issues. The major matters of concern were low wage rates, high frame rents, prohibition of foreign hosiery, and severe punishment for those paying by truck, that is, with goods instead of cash.<sup>63</sup> A single commissioner, R.M. Muggerridge, was appointed in 1844 and reported in February 1845. His conclusions provided little comfort for the workmen. Although he

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<sup>57</sup> D.H. Smith, 'The British Hosiery Industry at the Middle of the Nineteenth Century: An Historical Study in Economic Geography', *The Institute of British Geographers: Transactions and Papers*, No. 32, June 1963, 128-129.

<sup>58</sup> Christopher Weir, *As Poor As A Stockinger: Framework Knitting and The Luddites in Nottinghamshire*, Nottinghamshire County Council, 2007, 2.

<sup>59</sup> Brand, *Thomas Chambers Hine*, 6.

<sup>60</sup> *Felkin's History*, 451-452.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 452-453.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 468.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 409.

agreed that the framework rental system and truck payment needed reform, he believed that the main problems were the high availability of labour and the introduction of machines with a lower labour requirement.<sup>64</sup> He placed the first issue firmly back on the workmen 'by abstinence from early or improvident marriages or by bringing up their families to other occupations' and the second on an 'increased application of taste and skill, in the designs and patterns of the articles manufactured'.<sup>65</sup> Writing in 1887, Mundella himself recognised the squalor and misery of towns like Leicester and Nottingham in earlier years, comparing them with the now handsome and flourishing cities.<sup>66</sup> He also recognised the need to improve the manufacturing process, and it was the firm of Hine and Mundella, led by Anthony John, that took the lead in industry innovation.

For centuries the stocking machine had produced a flat mesh which was finished by hand-sewing into the required shape. In 1815, a naturalized Englishman of French descent, Marc Isambard Brunel, invented the round hosiery frame.<sup>67</sup> Brunel was an inveterate inventor.<sup>68</sup> He passed this ability to his famous son, Isambard Kingdom Brunel, but he failed to have his *tricoteur* adopted commercially. Eventually a Belgian, Peter Claussen, patented an improved version of Brunel's machine in England in 1845. He took one of these machines to Nottingham, where he sought acceptance by the industry. After a demonstration, one industry figure 'fully acquiesced in opinion as to its immense power of production, but expressed the sorrow he felt in contemplating the evils it might entail'.<sup>69</sup> Felkin went on to assert that many master hosiers decided not to encourage use of this development. Additionally, it was recognised that the Claussen machine needed to be power-driven to provide a high production rate. This was seen as a barrier by many manufacturers. The antipathy to the circular machine committed the industry to the domestic system. It was not until 1851 that Claussen's circular frame was introduced into Nottingham, and there is sufficient evidence to show that this was done in the new factory of the Hine,

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 470.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 470.

<sup>66</sup> A.J. Mundella and G. Howell, 'Industrial Associations', in Thomas Humphrey Ward (editor), *The Reign of Queen Victoria: A Survey of Fifty Years of Progress*, London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1887, Vol. II, 52.

<sup>67</sup> Chapman, *Hosiery and Knitwear*, 118.

<sup>68</sup> *Felkin's History*, 495-496 includes the entry on Brunel in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 8<sup>th</sup> edition.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 498.

Mundella Company. In a book published in 1853, W.H. Wylie clearly identified the introduction of the circular frame with the move to large factories and steam power.<sup>70</sup> He added that the new factory was the 'best specimen of the new class'. A later reference in *Knitters' Circular*, June 1897, referred to Hine, Mundella as the 'firm [which] claimed to be the first to produce stockings, shirts, pants and other articles by steam power'.<sup>71</sup>

Following the establishment of the new factory, the Hine, Mundella Company pursued many improvements to the existing technology by working with inventors, often operatives, and sharing in their patent applications. Felkin described some of these, in considerable technical detail, such as an improvement of the original circular ribbing machine in 1853 and a narrowing device with which 'from two to ten hose can be made at once with less labour to the workman, at less cost, and with increased production'.<sup>72</sup> The most significant development was an invention patented in 1864 by William Cotton, a Loughborough machine manufacturer. According to Chapman, this was the invention 'which established the principle on which power driven full-fashioned hosiery and knitwear has been produced since that time'.<sup>73</sup> The patent rights were assigned to the two leading manufacturers, Hine, Mundella and I. and R. Morley.<sup>74</sup> Hine and Mundella won a Gold Medal at the Paris Exhibition of 1855, showing stockings with knitted ribs down the side.<sup>75</sup>

A major setback occurred in February 1859 when the factory was burned down.<sup>76</sup> It was quickly rebuilt and new, improved machines were installed. Of particular importance was the purchase of the English patent of a circular machine

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<sup>70</sup> W.H. Wylie, *Old and New Nottingham*, quoted in Chapman, *Hosiery and Knitwear*, 119-120.

<sup>71</sup> Quoted in Wells, *The British Hosiery Trade*, 144.

<sup>72</sup> *Felkin's History*, 502.

<sup>73</sup> Chapman, *Hosiery and Knitwear*, 126.

<sup>74</sup> Morley's was a long-established Nottingham firm initially utilising domestic hand framework knitters. Their products were marketed out of a London warehouse. They entered factory manufacture later than Hine and Mundella but became a much larger company, eventually being taken over by Courtaulds in 1965. (See Stanley Chapman, 'I and R Morley: Colossus of the Hosiery Trade and Industry 1799-1965', *Textile History*, 28 (I), 1997, 11-28,).

<sup>75</sup> W.H.G. Armytage, 'A.J. Mundella and the Hosiery Industry', *The Economic History Review*, Vol. 18, No. 1/2, (1948), 95.

<sup>76</sup> *Nottingham Review*, 4 February, 1859.

invented by the American, William Clark Gist. This allowed striped work of different colours to be produced at a high rate, a major step forward.<sup>77</sup>

Mundella's experience during his years with Harris in Leicester had shown him the importance of technological improvements to enhance the profitability of the industry and he encouraged operatives to develop better machines. Mundella's name was often included on the patents he found useful and, by the time he entered Parliament, he had 25 British patents to his name.<sup>78</sup> However, he did not claim any of the credit for these. In 1872, he told the Select Committee on Letters Patent that: 'I have never invented anything, nor [have] any of my partners; we have no inventive capacity. Every invention that has been made, and which we have patented, (and some of these have created almost a revolution in the trade), have been inventions of overlookers, or ordinary working men, or skilled working mechanics in every instance'.<sup>79</sup> This is another example of Mundella's concern to recognise the contribution of the working class. Other manufacturers were less scrupulous.<sup>80</sup>

Significant as were Mundella's achievements in introducing improved technology to the hosiery industry, his work on labour relations provided a more profound social change, not only in his industry, but in the wider community. Reviewing Roy A. Church's book on Victorian Nottingham, J.M. Prest asserted that not only did Mundella save the jobs of many handloom hosiers by the establishment of large-scale manufacturing, but he also introduced a system for organised capital to negotiate with organised labour.<sup>81</sup> Mundella was very much a major transitional figure for his industry, a characteristic he was to show in his other endeavours. We have noted earlier his understanding of the need for state involvement in social issues both of an industrial and moral nature. Prest encapsulated Mundella's position as an agent

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<sup>77</sup> *Felkin's History*, 507.

<sup>78</sup> Christine Macleod, 'Negotiating the Rewards of Invention: The Shop-Floor Inventor in Victorian Britain', *Business History*, 41:2, 1999, 19.

<sup>79</sup> *Select Committee on Letters Patent*, 'Minutes of Evidence', 8 May 1872, XI, 521-3.

<sup>80</sup> Macleod, 'Negotiating the Rewards', 19.

<sup>81</sup> J.M. Prest, review of Roy A. Church, *Economic and Social Change in a Midland Town: Victorian Nottingham*, London: Frank Cass & Co., 1966, in *The Economic History Review*, New Series, Vol. 22, No. 1 (April 1969), 152.



of change, when he wrote that ‘the eighteenth century met the nineteenth and the nineteenth met the twentieth in A.J. Mundella’.<sup>82</sup>

### *Conciliation and Arbitration*

The hosiery industry experienced a cyclical downturn in the late 1850s which resulted in a large increase in unemployment. Trade levels improved in 1860 but demand was for the factory produced rotary and circular machine products, not the older type produced by hand-framework knitters.<sup>83</sup> The significant difference in wages between the factory workers and the hand knitters led to a series of strikes by the latter, which lasted many weeks. As the factory hands helped those on strike by contributing some of their wages, many manufacturers considered introducing a lock-out. To forestall such a possibility, it was agreed that the manufacturers should confer with the workmen. Mundella was one of those appointed from the factory owners. It was agreed that a Board of Arbitration and Conciliation should be established to prevent future disputes in the industry.<sup>84</sup>

Much has been written on the beginnings of courts of conciliation, arbitration and regulation in Britain. Felkin suggested that they followed on from the French *Conseils des Prud’ Hommes* which were established in 1806 to govern ‘every question that can arise in manufacturers and trade, except that of fixing a rate of wages’.<sup>85</sup> In 1835, Felkin himself translated the French laws and widely circulated them. This appeared to have had little impact, as in his book he quickly moves on to discuss the origins of the Nottingham hosiery arbitration board.<sup>86</sup> Henry Crompton, a lawyer who published an influential book on industrial conciliation in 1876, had ten years earlier written an account of the development of collective bargaining.<sup>87</sup> He dated the beginning of a permanent system to 1860 and asserted that Mundella and Rupert

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>83</sup> Roy Church, ‘Technological Change and the Hosiery Board of Conciliation and Arbitration 1860-1884’, *Bulletin of Economic Research*, Vol. 15, Issue 1, May 1963, 54.

<sup>84</sup> Church, *Economic and Social Change in a Midland Town*, 269.

<sup>85</sup> *Felkin’s History*, 479.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 483.

<sup>87</sup> M.C. Curthoys, ‘Crompton, Henry (1836 – 1904), barrister and positivists’, *ODNB* (accessed 5 September 2012). Crompton is called ‘a well-informed and influential analyst of contemporary trends in industrial relations’.

Kettle were the initial drivers.<sup>88</sup> He added that Kettle came to it from a legal point of view, whilst, of course, as a manufacturer, Mundella came to it from a practical and moral position.

This assertion of Mundella's influence on establishing the conciliation and arbitration process continued into more modern scholarship. In a detailed analysis of the overall effects of several boards' operations, published in 1970, J.H. Porter declared that 'the primary source of the concept of conciliation and arbitration was the Nottingham hosier, A.J. Mundella'.<sup>89</sup> Mundella himself spoke about arbitration and conciliation many times, in order to promote his ideas. For example, he addressed a meeting of The Reform League at St James Hall in London in December 1867 on 'Arbitration and Strikes'.<sup>90</sup> He later presented a paper to the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science in which he defined arbitration as 'an arrangement for open and friendly bargaining'.<sup>91</sup> Later, in Parliament, Mundella was to exert a significant influence on the improvement of labour relations and this will be discussed in Chapter 3.

### *Mundella and the Improvement of Education*

Throughout his business career, busy as he was with advancing hosiery manufacturing processes and the development of the formal arbitration and conciliation system, Mundella involved himself in education. His lack of formal schooling has already been noted, but he did attend a Sunday School during his apprenticeship and subsequently taught there.<sup>92</sup> The nineteenth-century Sunday School movement was much more than a feeble attempt to imbue some sense of the scriptures into young children. It was an important provider of conventional education to the poor.<sup>93</sup> John Wesley called

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<sup>88</sup> E. Renals, 'On Arbitration in the Hosiery Industry Trades of the Midland Counties', *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, Vol.30, No. 4 (December 1867), 556.

<sup>89</sup> J.H. Porter, 'Wage Bargaining under Conciliation Agreements, 1860-1914', *The Economic History Review*, Vol. 23, Issue 3 (Dec. 1970), 461.

<sup>90</sup> Pamphlet sourced at Bishopsgate Institute.

<sup>91</sup> A.J. Mundella, 'In What Manner can Arbitration and Conciliation be best applied in the Settlement of Disputed between Employers and Employed', *Transactions of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science*, Birmingham Meeting, 1868, London : Longmans, Green, Reader & Dyer, 1869, 527.

<sup>92</sup> Edwin Richmond, *Mr. Mundella: A Sketch of his Career*, an Address before the Brightside Liberal Council, 30 May 1892, Sheffield: Leader and Sons, 1892, 4 (Sheffield Local Studies Library).

<sup>93</sup> K.D.M. Snell, 'The Sunday-School Movement in England and Wales: Child Labour, Denominational Control and Working-Class Culture', *Past and Present*, No. 164 (August 1999).

it 'one of the noblest institutions that has been seen in Europe for some centuries', and Frank Smith, a modern historian of education, concluded that 'it was through the Sunday School that the idea of universal education was first conceived as possible'.<sup>94</sup> Mundella was first involved on the administration side of schools whilst still in Leicester as secretary-superintendent of the Sunday School where he taught, but was even more so following his move to Nottingham. There he helped manage both denominational and non-denominational schools.<sup>95</sup> He was involved with the Ragged Schools, which had been established to provide some teaching to destitute children, supported by philanthropic donations.<sup>96</sup> Lord Shaftesbury was the president of the Ragged Schools Union from its establishment in 1844 until the 1870 Education Act provided for Board Schools.<sup>97</sup> This is an early connection, without any confirmation, of Mundella and Shaftesbury's association. Mundella was also one of the trustees who established The People's College in Nottingham which was specifically established for the education of the working classes. It was the predecessor of the University of Nottingham. His commitment to improving the country's educational system reached its peak when he was appointed Vice-President of the Committee on Education of the Privy Council, essentially the Minister of Education, in 1880. Mundella's work in the fields of primary, technical and higher education are discussed in depth in Chapters 5 and 6.

#### *Involvement in Municipal Affairs*

Mundella's move to Nottingham in 1848 to become a partner in a very successful hosiery manufacturing business has been discussed earlier in this chapter. He quickly established himself as a man of energy and ideas. Such was his reputation that, after only five years in Nottingham and at the age of 28 he was elected Sheriff of Nottingham.<sup>98</sup> In proposing Mundella for this position, a Mr Steegman described him 'as a gentleman fitted in every respect to fill the ancient and honourable office with

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 123-124.

<sup>95</sup> *Mundella Papers*, Nelly Thorpe (Mundella's eldest daughter) to J.D. Leader, 24 November, 1884.

<sup>96</sup> *The History of the Ragged Schools*, accessed on [www.maybole.org/history](http://www.maybole.org/history).

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> *Nottingham Journal*, 11 November 1853, reporting on a meeting of the Nottingham Town Council on Wednesday 5 November 1853.

credit to himself and the town'.<sup>99</sup> He went on to say that Mundella had raised his business 'to a position which was second to none, besides having at all time shown his willingness to do his utmost to promote the welfare of the town at large'. A Mr Wadsworth seconded the motion and referred to Mundella's high reputation 'not only amongst those with whom he came more immediately into contact, but with all parties who had occasion to consult with him on matters of public and private business'.<sup>100</sup> The motion was carried unanimously. The role of Sheriff had become something of an honorary position by this time, as it did not require membership of Council. It was not long, however, before Mundella was elected as a councillor, in December 1856. He succeeded Felkin, who had been elected to the aldermanic bench.<sup>101</sup> He continued to serve as a member of the Nottingham Town Council until his election as a member of parliament for Sheffield in November 1868. Writing to Leader days after the poll declaration Mundella said:

The Council of Nottingham I hear have resolved to elect me Alderman without asking any discharge of duties. I have written to the Mayor a letter which he can read declining this and telling them I must resign all local appointments in order that I may devote myself exclusively to the serving my constituents.<sup>102</sup>

Mundella's civic activities in Nottingham were varied and were clearly driven, not just by his willingness to serve the community, but also by his desire, and ability, to lead. One of his most important activities was his contribution to the establishment a Chamber of Commerce in Nottingham, of which he was a founding member. The first employers' organisations dated back to the eighteenth century, but they were usually ad hoc, single-issue, groups. The first to use the title 'Chamber of Commerce' was an organisation of employers which was formed in Leeds in 1785.<sup>103</sup> This group, however, was short lived. Although there had been several attempts in the first half of the nineteenth century to form a Chamber in Nottingham, it was not until April 1860 that one was formed which survived.<sup>104</sup> Mundella was prominent during the initial discussions, and spoke forcefully on the necessity for a Chamber of Commerce in the

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Armytage, *A.J.Mundella*, 27.

<sup>102</sup> *Mundella Papers*, letter to Leader 23 November, 1868.

<sup>103</sup> A.R. Ilersic, assisted by P.F.B. Liddle, *Parliament of Commerce: The Story of the Association of British Chambers of Commerce, 1860-1960*, London: Newman Neame Limited, 1960, 2-3.

<sup>104</sup> Walton, *The History of the Nottingham Chamber*, 21.

city. He proposed that a deputation should be sent to the inaugural Congress of Chambers Commerce which would shortly be held in London.<sup>105</sup> Mundella was one of the Nottingham delegation to the London Conference, and he was also elected to the provisional committee of management of the embryonic Nottingham Chamber. He later served as President in 1867-8.

From 1858, Mundella was an early and active participant in the formation of Nottingham's Volunteer Rifle Corps, the *Robin Hood Rifles*. Following Felice Orsini's assassination attempt on the life of French Emperor, Napoleon III, in January 1858, there was concern in Britain of a French invasion and of the inadequacy of the regular army, most of whom were abroad.<sup>106</sup> Addressing this concern, the Secretary of State for War issued a circular letter on 12 May 1859 which authorised County Lieutenants to form volunteer rifle corps.<sup>107</sup> The Lord Lieutenant of Nottinghamshire, the Duke of Newcastle, convened a meeting shortly after the issue of this circular and it was agreed to form the *Robin Hood Rifles* immediately.<sup>108</sup> Mundella was one of the original six gentlemen who presented for the first drill held on 28 May 1859, and was amongst the first three officers appointed in July. He was promoted to captain in November.<sup>109</sup>

As we have seen, Mundella's involvement in national politics had started with his declaration of support for the Chartist movement. There is no evidence of any continued activity in espousing this view in subsequent years, and indeed overall Chartism declined in Leicester following the imprisonment of the leading Chartist, Thomas Cooper, in 1842.<sup>110</sup> There was a brief re-emergence of Chartism in the turbulent year of 1848 and Leicester declared in favour of a 'National Assembly' that would sit until the Charter was law.<sup>111</sup> This declaration was signed by A.J. Mundella as Secretary. He also delivered what Armytage called 'a rousing speech':

The majority of the present members of the House of Commons, while professing to be representatives of the people, unequivocally exhibit their purely aristocratic

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 22-23.

<sup>106</sup> Early Brownlow, 'The British Volunteer System', *The North American Review*, Vol. 170, No. 522 (May 1900), 747-748.

<sup>107</sup> 'War Office Circular, 12 May 1859', accessed on [www.researchpress.co.uk/volunteers](http://www.researchpress.co.uk/volunteers), on 20 December 2012.

<sup>108</sup> Iliffe and Baguley, *The Robin Hood Rifles*, 5.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 15-16.

<sup>110</sup> Patterson, *Radical Leicester*, 353.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 359.

character by uniformly opposing all proposals for retrenchment, by disregarding and treating with contempt all petitions for the concession of popular rights, and by assaulting with division with hooting and bellowing, those honest and independent representatives who were true to the interests of the nation.<sup>112</sup>

Soon after this Mundella sat on the platform of a Leicester meeting of Richard Cobden's 'People's League', which was formed to advance universal suffrage through a middle- and working-class alliance.<sup>113</sup> The 'People's League' soon collapsed, and in any case Mundella had departed for Nottingham. While he remained in some ways a radical, Mundella thereafter became part of the conventional Liberal Party. Not long after his election to the Nottingham Town Council, Mundella became Vice-Chairman of the local Liberal Party and presided over committee meetings dedicated to policy making.<sup>114</sup> Armytage suggested that Mundella's strength at this time was as a 'wire-puller'. Mundella's powers of persuasion seemed to have been able to bring together the Whig and radical elements of the Nottingham Liberal Party.<sup>115</sup>

Nottingham politics at this time was quite violent. During the 1865 election campaign, there were disruptions to Liberal meetings by 'rough-looking groups' and a police presence was required.<sup>116</sup> Matters worsened the following week when what the *Nottingham Journal* described as 'riot and disorder' broke out.<sup>117</sup> Sir Robert Clifton, the Conservative candidate, accused his opponents of bringing framework knitters in the employ of Liberals into Nottingham from outside the town. It was asserted that it was these men who had been responsible for the violence. These charges were heard before a magistrate, and Mundella took part in the hearing. A deputation from the Liberal Party appeared to refute the charges. Mundella took a leading role in the hearing, saying that 'it devolved upon him as a member of Messrs Paget and Morley's (the Liberal candidates) committee to state the facts of the case'.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> *Leicester Chronicle*, 22 April 1848.

<sup>113</sup> Armytage, *A.J. Mundella*, 20.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> *The Nottingham Journal*, Friday, 16 June 1865, 'Uproarious Meeting at Lenton'.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, Tuesday, 27 June 1865, 'Election Riots in Nottingham'.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, Wednesday, 28 June 1865.

### *Mundella and the Politics of Sheffield*

The violence seen in Nottingham was commonplace in Britain at this time, and Mundella was about to become involved with an area where it reached a notorious extreme. The actions of the trade unions had been severely restricted by the Combination Act of 1825, which banned unionists from intimidating their employers and fellow workers. Strike action was still possible, provided notice was given and contracts not broken. The increasing strength of the unions in the 1840s, 1850s and 1860s provided the impetus for them to take widespread industrial action against their employers. The most common disputes involved the lowering of wage rates for existing unionist workers and employing non-unionists at low wages. Such actions reached a peak in 1866-7 with a series of explosions and murders carried out by the militant Sheffield Saw Grinders Union.<sup>119</sup> They became known as 'The Sheffield Outrages'. According to an 1895 article in *The Anarchist*, 'Sheffield, then the capital of English trade unionism, was the only town where the decrees of the union were enforced by the blowing up of factories or shooting of capitalists.'<sup>120</sup> The owner of the Conservative *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, William Leng, who 'was fearless in advocacy of what he deemed the public interest', successfully lobbied the government to appoint a Royal Commission to inquire into the actions of the Sheffield unionists.<sup>121</sup>

The Commission, appointed by the Conservative government of Lord Derby in April 1867, eventually proved to be a turning point in the history of the trade union movement. The Minority Report, signed by Lord Lichfield, Thomas Hughes and Frederic Harrison was eventually taken up by a later Liberal government which brought in the Trade Union Act of 1871.<sup>122</sup> By this time Mundella was a member of parliament and he was much involved in the success of the legislation. His influence in this will be discussed in some detail in Chapter 4. Before his election, however, he gave evidence

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<sup>119</sup> *Sources for the Study of The Sheffield Outrages*, Sheffield City Council, accessed on [www.sheffield.gov.uk/archives](http://www.sheffield.gov.uk/archives) provided a good summary and a comprehensive list of documents, books and photographs on the subject.

<sup>120</sup> Sheffield Local Studies Library: MP1744S.

<sup>121</sup> A.H. Millar, rev. Dillwyn Porter, 'Leng, Sir William Christopher (1825-1902), journalist and newspaper proprietor', *ODNB*, (accessed on-line 16 November 2014).

<sup>122</sup> Frederic Harrison, *Autobiographic Memoirs*, London: Macmillan and Co, 1911, Vol. 1, 323.

before the Commission. Harrison was delighted with Mundella's testimony and called it 'first rate', and asserted that Mundella was 'a regular Unionist by nature'.<sup>123</sup>

The *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* was a constant critic of Mundella throughout his parliamentary career and he was subject to some abuse before and during the 1868 election. In letters to Leader, Mundella spoke of an anonymous letter, published in the *Telegraph*, that raised questions of his origin and another that called his mother 'a Nottingham factory worker'.<sup>124</sup> He was particularly angry about the slur on his mother, as it inferred that she was of the lower class. It seems somewhat anomalous that a man, who, throughout his life, championed the working class, should get so upset by this reference to his origins. His mother, as we have seen, was not of the lowest class and Mundella was devoted to her. Whilst this may have been the main reason for his anger, the social snobbery of the period could also be responsible.

#### *The Sheffield Election of 1868*

Mundella's road to Westminster was not easy. He had to win the trust of the newly-franchised Sheffield working men and displace one of the existing Liberal members. These were George Hadfield, who had first been elected in 1852 and John Arthur Roebuck, first elected for Sheffield in 1849.<sup>125</sup>

At that time of his first election, Roebuck was considered a Radical, especially in regard to the extension of the franchise.<sup>126</sup> His position seems to have been somewhere between the views of moderate Liberals and those with Chartist inclinations.<sup>127</sup> Writing to a Sheffield Liberal just before the 1849 election, he declared his sympathy for working men and believed that he would be able to promote 'good feelings' between employers and employed.<sup>128</sup> Roebuck's position changed considerably over his years as an MP for Sheffield.

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<sup>123</sup> Letter from Harrison to Professor E.S Beesly, 25 July 1868, quoted in Royden Harrison, *Before the Socialists: Studies in Labour and Politics, 1861-1881*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965, 286.

<sup>124</sup> *Mundella Papers*, 8 August 1868 and 1 September 1886.

<sup>125</sup> David Edward Fletcher, *Aspects of Liberalism in Sheffield 1849-1886*, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Sheffield, 1972, 77.

<sup>126</sup> Robert Eadon Leader (editor), *Life and Letters of John Arthur Roebuck P.C., Q.C., M.P.: With Chapters of Autobiography*, London: Edward Arnold, 1897, 219.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 220, 'Letter to William Fisher, 13 April 1849'.



In 1867 Roebuck voted with the Conservative government to pass the Reform Act, which annoyed some Liberals. He apparently upset many of his Sheffield supporters with his increasingly contentious views.<sup>129</sup> Roebuck sat on the Royal Commission of 1867-8, which, as has been previously noted, was established to investigate the 'Sheffield Outrages' and the overall position of the unions in Britain. His criticism of the trade union movement was angrily received by many working-class voters. Roebuck opposed Gladstone's efforts to disestablish the Irish church and his assertion that Gladstone's actions were 'dictated by a desire for personal aggrandisement' aroused much disquiet.<sup>130</sup> Roebuck repeated these sentiments at a town meeting in Sheffield in April 1868.<sup>131</sup> His colleague, Hadfield, reported that Roebuck's speech 'was silently received'.<sup>132</sup> Leader commented that: 'it was the last straw that broke the back of the long-suffering Sheffield Liberal Camel'.<sup>133</sup>

Mundella's first visit to Sheffield in connection with his candidature was in October 1867 when he addressed a large crowd composed almost entirely of working men on the 'Relations of Capital and Labour'.<sup>134</sup> He was enthusiastically received and was favourably remembered when a group representing the 'Reform League', various religious organisations and the trade unions met in June 1868 to discuss the selection of another Liberal candidate to contest the upcoming election. They chose Mundella, who was formally adopted on 20 July. Before accepting the nomination, he justified his decision to stand by noting that 20,000 more working men had been added to the constituency and they wanted someone who better reflected their views.<sup>135</sup> They would not support Roebuck. It was a spiteful campaign, but eventually Mundella was elected, together with the lead Liberal candidate, Hadfield, and Roebuck lost his seat.<sup>136</sup>

Mundella's success in 1868 came on the back of his nurturing of the working class and he repaid that backing throughout his years in parliament. Armytage

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<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 315.

<sup>130</sup> Higginbotham, *The Career of A.J. Mundella*, 39.

<sup>131</sup> Leader, *John Arthur Roebuck*, 320.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 22 October 1867.

<sup>135</sup> *Mundella Papers*, letter to Leader, 27 June 1868.

<sup>136</sup> Higginbotham, *The Career of A.J. Mundella*, 39-46 provides a detailed account of the events leading up to Mundella's election.

suggested that Mundella was ‘the pre-eminent Lib.-Lab. of his generation’.<sup>137</sup> He was from a working-class background but he had never been a trade unionist. He was a highly successful manufacturer and, although he championed unions, he would not have identified with the later trade-unionist Liberal MPs. Indeed Mundella shared with many of his Liberal colleagues a certain respect for the aristocracy.<sup>138</sup> Davidson referred to Mundella’s support of the monarchy and his ‘curious disposition to adorn his conversation with quite unnecessary allusions to the opinions of “Lords” and other great people of his acquaintance’.<sup>139</sup>

This attitude of keeping the best company is also reflected in the diary of Samuel Collinson, Secretary to the Nottingham Rifle Corps. He wrote on 1 November 1859, ‘it was decided to divide the Castle Company into two Companies. Starey to be the Captain of one and Mundella of the other; Mundella cannot bear to be a Lieutenant under Starey’.<sup>140</sup>

#### *Mundella’s National Recognition*

When Mundella gave evidence about his Nottingham arbitration and conciliation system, to the Royal Commission on Trade Unions in 1867, he achieved recognition as a national figure. Arbitration was not new, but Mundella aimed to settle the terms of future contracts, not just resolve disputes on existing agreements.<sup>141</sup> The outcome of the Royal Commission, and its ramifications, are discussed in some detail in Chapter 3. Mundella was one of the promoters of the legislation which finally legalised trade unions after he entered Parliament in 1868.

#### *Conclusions – Mundella’s Character*

In some ways Mundella led a different life to other businessmen-politicians of his time. His parentage, family life and education were unusual for one who later achieved success in the public sphere, but his life as a major manufacturer and a Liberal MP was

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<sup>137</sup> Armytage, *A.J. Mundella*, 335.

<sup>138</sup> Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society*, 366.

<sup>139</sup> Davidson, *Eminent Radicals*, 118.

<sup>140</sup> Iliffe and Baguley, *The Robin Hood Rifles*, 16.

<sup>141</sup> Mark Curthoys, *Governments, Labour and the Law in Mid-Victorian Britain: The Trade Union Legislation of the 1870s*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004, 90-91.

commonplace in the nineteenth century. The aim in detailing Mundella's life is to show how the various phases moulded his character, his approach to issues and, particularly, his work to improve the conditions of the working class.

His lifelong efforts in this area are recognised by most historians of the period. As early as 1879, Davidson, who was often critical of Mundella, wrote that 'no working man has striven more earnestly and intelligently for the elevation of the mass than the member for Sheffield'.<sup>142</sup> Higginbotham, who also sometimes dwelt on Mundella's shortcomings, acknowledged that his career was dictated by the desire to remove social evils.<sup>143</sup> Falconer Larkworthy, who worked with Mundella in business ventures during Mundella's parliamentary career, commented on Mundella's character in his memoirs published in 1924.<sup>144</sup> He credited Mundella with high natural abilities and a dedication to his duties.<sup>145</sup> He also characterised Mundella as 'a most earnest advocate of education for all classes'.<sup>146</sup> However, he considered him vacillating and uncertain when important decisions were needed.<sup>147</sup> This view seems at odds with Mundella's business and parliamentary achievements, and will be further explored in Chapter 8.

His success in the hosiery industry showed a flair for innovation which transformed an old-fashioned, home-based craft into a modern factory-based business. His abilities were obviously recognised by his peers, as evidenced by his business and municipal progression. In parliament he persisted with legislation in which he believed, even if it took years to achieve success. It was the measure of a convinced individual.

It is surprising that an arcane report published just after Mundella's first election reflected his character so accurately. George Dawson, a phrenologist, observed that 'the motive or osseous system is present to a very marked degree – while the mental or nervous temperament is fully developed. This combination

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<sup>142</sup> Davidson, *Eminent Radicals*, 114.

<sup>143</sup> Higginbotham, *The Career of A. J. Mundella*, 141.

<sup>144</sup> Larkworthy, *Ninety-One Years*, 400-401.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 400.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 401.

renders its possessor powerful, efficient, executive, persistent, firm of purpose, rather slow but sure – men with this temperament it is who do the world's work'.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Geo. Dawson, *Phrenological Character of Mr. Mundella*, Sheffield: J. Morton, 9 November 1868.

### Chapter 3 – The Battle to Improve Factory Working Conditions

The prevalence of poor and dangerous working conditions in the factories and mines of early nineteenth-century Britain was of concern to some people long before Mundella's involvement. The length of hours worked and the employment of women and children were also issues that appalled reformers. The most prominent of the agitators for changes to be legally enacted was the evangelical nobleman, Lord Shaftesbury. Although there was considerable resistance to any state involvement, parliamentary legislation was gradually introduced which bettered factory conditions. Mundella had recognised the importance of a contented workforce in his own business, and once in parliament he was a committed supporter of Shaftesbury's efforts. In many ways he was Shaftesbury's heir in the sphere of workplace reform. Following a brief overview of earlier initiatives, this chapter will evaluate Mundella's part in improving the lot of working people.

The early reformers had achieved some limited success by the time Mundella became involved. Nevertheless, there was still much to do and Mundella entered the battle with commitment and energy. He had introduced innovative work methods and limited hours in his own factories.<sup>1</sup> The improved performance convinced him that better working conditions would benefit workers and employers alike. He believed that only national legislation, with an effective inspectorate, could achieve this.

#### *Historical Background*

The development of the factory system of production had started much earlier than Mundella's involvement in manufacturing. The concept of an 'industrial revolution' in Britain was first discussed by the economic historian, Arnold Toynbee, in a series of lectures delivered at the University of Oxford in 1881-2.<sup>2</sup> He took the year 1760 as the beginning of the move from hand to factory production. The change, however, was slow and erratic. For example, in 1850 less than half of the country's textile workers

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<sup>1</sup> Roy A. Church, *Economic and Social Change in a Midland Town: Victorian Nottingham, 1815-1900*, London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1966, 332.

<sup>2</sup> Arnold Toynbee (the late), *Lectures on the Industrial Revolution in England: Popular Addresses, Notes and other Fragments*, London: Rivingtons, 1884, xxx.

were employed in factories.<sup>3</sup> Early factories used water power, and were often located in remote areas. With the wider use of steam, from the early years of the nineteenth century, factories were increasingly built to access better transport links. This led to a massive increase in the populations of towns like Manchester and Birmingham. The poor working conditions in these factories were recognised by some observers, and often reported in horrendous detail.<sup>4</sup>

The first Act of Parliament passed to regulate labour in factories was 'The Health and Morals of Apprentices Act' of 1802. It was promoted by the immensely wealthy calico printer and MP for Tamworth, Sir Robert Peel, the first baronet. It was aimed at improving the working conditions and moral welfare of the thousands of pauper children employed as apprentices in the country's cotton mills. It covered such diverse matters as cleansing working areas by two annual washings of quicklime, the admission of fresh air by having sufficient windows, the annual supply of suitable clothing, the prohibition of night work and 'excessive labour', and the provision of Christian instruction.<sup>5</sup> B.L. Hutchins and A. Harrison, writing in 1903, considered that it 'was in reality not a Factory Act properly speaking, but merely an extension of the Elizabethan Poor Law relating to parish apprentices'.<sup>6</sup> Even an Act with such a limited scope was a failure, due to the lack of proper inspection. This responsibility was delegated to local justices, often mill owners themselves. Additionally, the employment of 'free children' circumvented the pauper apprentice system. With the advent of steam power in the early nineteenth century, mills could be located in centres of population, and not only in areas where water power was available. Mill owners no longer needed to house, feed, and clothe apprentices.<sup>7</sup>

There was little debate about working conditions and hours for children, let alone adults, for the next thirty years. Although the movement of labour from

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<sup>3</sup> Elaine Freedgood (editor), *Factory Production in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, Oxford University Press, 2003, 1.

<sup>4</sup> John Phillips Kay Shuttleworth, *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester*, London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1970 (first published in 1832), *passim*.

<sup>5</sup> Ian Fife and E. Anthony Machin, *Redgrave's Factory Acts*, (Twenty-first Edition), London: Butterworth and Co., 1966, 1.

<sup>6</sup> B.L. Hutchins and A. Harrison, *A History of Factory Legislation*, London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1966 (first published 1903), 16.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-19.

agriculture to manufacturing continued, there were several periods of industrial depression. Unemployment was estimated at over 20 percent during the 1820s and 1830s.<sup>8</sup> The growing popularity of free-trade principles and the economic rationalism of the Manchester school held that, if children did not work, they would starve. The issue of children's working conditions was ignited in 1830, when Richard Oastler wrote a letter to the *Leeds Mercury* in which he denounced what he called 'Yorkshire Slavery'.<sup>9</sup> He argued that the champions of negro liberty should have looked closer at conditions in England, where:

innocent victims at the accursed shrine of avarice, who are *compelled* (not by the cart-whip of the negro slave-driver) but by the dread of the equally appalling thong or strap of the over-looker, to hasten, half-dressed, but *not half-fed*, to those magazines of British infantile slavery – *the worsted mills in the town and neighbourhood of Bradford!!!*<sup>10</sup>

Oastler, the steward of a Yorkshire estate, had worked as a young man with William Wilberforce during his campaign against slavery.<sup>11</sup> He later claimed to have been 'awakened' to the evils of child labour after visiting textile mills in Bradford.<sup>12</sup> Oastler's recognition of these issues developed into a crusade which eventually became an important national issue.<sup>13</sup> He recognised that parliamentary action was needed to correct the problem and prevailed upon Michael Thomas Sadler, MP for Newark, and a colleague in the anti-slavery movement, to take up the challenge in the House of Commons. Sadler introduced his 'Ten Hours Bill' at the end of the 1831 session and moved its second reading on the 18 March 1832, in 'a speech of extraordinary eloquence'.<sup>14</sup> His opponents, however, argued that his statements were

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<sup>8</sup> Phyllis Deane and W.A. Cole, *British Economic Growth, 1688-1859: Trends and Structure*, Cambridge at the University Press, 1969, 149-150.

<sup>9</sup> Cecil Herbert Driver, *Tory Radical: The Life of Richard Oastler*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1946, 42-44.

<sup>10</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 16 October 1830.

<sup>11</sup> Cecil Driver, *Tory Radical*, 19.

<sup>12</sup> Stewart A Weaver, 'Oastler, Richard (1789-1861), factory reformer', *ODNB*, (accessed online 29 July 2015).

<sup>13</sup> 'Alfred' (Samuel H.G. Kydd) *The History of the Factory Movement*, New York: A.M. Kelley, 1966 (reprint of work first published in 1857), Vol.1, 108-109.

<sup>14</sup> Edwin Hodder, *The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury K.G.*, London: Russell & Co. Ltd., 1892 (first published in three volumes in 1886), 80.

exaggerated and inaccurate. Although no legislation resulted, a select Committee was appointed with Sadler as Chairman.<sup>15</sup>

Hutchins and Harrison called the report of this Committee 'one of the most valuable collections of evidence on industrial conditions that we possess'.<sup>16</sup> This view is emphasised by John and Barbara Hammond in their 1923 book on Shaftesbury.<sup>17</sup> They called the Report of Sadler's Committee one of the main sources of our knowledge of the conditions of factory life at the time. They highlighted the problems and quoted some findings of the committee. Some factory workers were old at twenty, a seven-year-old worsted spinner worked from five in the morning to eight at night, a youth of sixteen died from a spinal affection due to his work, and children under the age of nine in a flax spinning mill were splay-footed and otherwise deformed.<sup>18</sup>

Unfortunately for the proponents of reducing hours of work in factories, Sadler lost his seat at the election following the passage of the First Reform Act. Another Commons champion had to be found. Oastler and his colleagues were fortunate that the 32 years-old Lord Ashley agreed to become that champion. Elected to parliament when only 25, Ashley showed an early interest in humanitarian issues with his support of measures to improve conditions in lunatic asylums.<sup>19</sup> Ashley's involvement with the factory movement was almost coincidental. He later wrote in his diary that:

In the autumn and winter of 1832, I read incidentally in *The Times* some extracts from the evidence taken before Mr Sadler's committee. I was astonished and disgusted; [it was] proposed to me to take up the question that Sadler had necessarily dropped. I can perfectly recollect my astonishment, and doubt, and terror at the proposition.<sup>20</sup>

Ashley asked for time to consider the proposal and returned home to decide 'after meditation and prayer, and "divination" (as it were) by the word of God'.<sup>21</sup> His course was clear to him and, as he later wrote to Oastler, 'I entertain such strong opinions on the matter that I did not *dare*, as a Christian, to let any difference, or love of ease,

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Hutchins and Harrison, *Factory Legislation*, 34.

<sup>17</sup> J.L. Hammond and Barbara Hammond, *Lord Shaftesbury*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Limited, 1939 (first published 1923), 24-25.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Hodder, *Shaftesbury*, 96.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 82.



prevail over the demands of morality and religion.<sup>22</sup> Ashley succeeded to the Earldom of Shaftesbury in 1851, and will be referred to by his title hereafter in this thesis. He was to work to improve the lot of the working class throughout his life. Undoubtedly, his philosophy and actions influenced Mundella's attitude to workplace legislation.

Shaftesbury, and his fellow reformers, faced many obstacles in the ongoing fight for better working conditions. Writing towards the end of his life, he said 'I had to break every political connection, to encounter a formidable array of capitalists, mill owners, doctrinaires, and men, who, by natural impulse, hate all "humanity-mongers"'.<sup>23</sup> He went on to identify some of his most ferocious opponents. Peel, he thought was hostile and malevolent. Bright was his most malignant opponent.<sup>24</sup> Cobden, though bitterly hostile, was better than Bright. He was equally scathing of Gladstone, and said that he was the only member who endeavoured to delay the Bill that delivered women and children from mines and pits, and 'never did he say a word on behalf of the factory children'.<sup>25</sup> The difficulties in convincing the free traders to accept state involvement in manufacturing issues were apparent.

During a speech in the Commons in 1874, Mundella also highlighted the long opposition to factory reform by many important politicians. This will be discussed later in this chapter. He was more forgiving than Shaftesbury, and recorded that most of them had changed their views. Mundella had a practical approach to reform having had personal experience of factory life. He had seen significant improvements to working conditions in a relatively short period of time.

### *Historiography*

Much has been written about the campaigns to improve working conditions in factories and mines. One of the earliest books on the subject was published in 1857 by 'Alfred' (Samuel H. G. Kydd).<sup>26</sup> It related the history of the factory movement from 1802, the year of Peel's Act, to the enactment of the Ten Hours' Bill in 1847. The

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 377.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 377-378.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 378.

<sup>26</sup> 'Alfred', *The History of the Factory Movement*, passim.

author claimed that it was compiled from authentic sources.<sup>27</sup> Written shortly after the events related, it is an important contemporary account. Of course, given the time of his book, 'Alfred' did not mention Mundella.

B.L. Hutchins and A. Harrison first published their history of factory legislation in 1903.<sup>28</sup> In his *Preface* to the second edition of 1910, Sidney Webb noted that the demand for the book since its first publication 'has more than justified the high opinion of its merits'.<sup>29</sup> Its importance can be judged by the fact that a third edition was published in 1926, and was reprinted in 1966. Following an initial chapter which reviewed the origins of factory legislation, Hutchins and Harrison took the 1802 Act as their starting point. Succeeding chapters described the progress up until 1910. Mundella received a single mention, namely his introduction into Parliament in 1873 of the failed Nine Hours Bill for the textile industry.<sup>30</sup>

Many books deal to a greater or lesser extent on the factory acts. In a general industrial history of England, published in 1914, George Perris discussed the factory legislation from 1802 until 1910.<sup>31</sup> The author referred to Mundella's establishment of the Nottingham hosiery conciliation board, but said nothing of his efforts to improve working conditions generally. Two more recent books, by J.T. Ward (1970) and Elaine Freedgood (2003), dealt with the factory system and provided much background information.<sup>32</sup> Both used contemporary quotations to illustrate the conditions and the remedies proposed, but contained little analysis of the issues. They both concentrated on the period up until the mid-nineteenth century. Within this time frame Mundella is not mentioned. In his 1960 study of the development of the British welfare system, David Roberts discussed the reform of factory working conditions.<sup>33</sup> He concentrated on the work of senior public servants and the inspectorate, rather than the political processes involved. Some of the early campaigners, such as Oastler, Sadler and Shaftesbury are covered, but again not Mundella.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., Preface, v.

<sup>28</sup> Hutchins and Harrison, *A History of Factory Legislation*.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., xv.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>31</sup> George Herbert Perris, *The Industrial History of Modern England*, London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1914.

<sup>32</sup> J. T. Ward, *The Factory System*, Newton Abbott: David & Charles, 1970; Freedgood (editor), *Factory Production in Nineteenth-Century Britain*.

<sup>33</sup> David Roberts, *Victorian Origins of the British Welfare State*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960.

As we have seen, the seventh Earl of Shaftesbury was the most celebrated of the reformers seeking improved working conditions for factory operatives. A conservative in politics, an Anglican evangelical in his religious views, he devoted the 60 years of his adult life to such work. He was revered by many, to the extent that Geoffrey Finlayson, in his 1981 biography, saw fit to head his final chapter 'Epitaph to a Saint'.<sup>34</sup> Shaftesbury has been the subject of many biographies, with the first, by Edwin Hodder, published in 1887 shortly after Shaftesbury's death. Despite this proliferation and the many references in Hansard and contemporary newspapers, there is only one mention of Shaftesbury and Mundella co-operating on advancing factory legislation. Wesley Bready, in his 1926, rather hagiographic, biography of Shaftesbury, mentioned the work that both men did in relation to children working in brick yards.<sup>35</sup> This will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Two very detailed histories of the hosiery industry were published over a century apart.<sup>36</sup> William Felkin's was first published in 1867, Stanley Chapman's in 2002. Both acknowledged Mundella's work in developing the factory system for hosiery production and his pioneering of arbitration and conciliation. Neither mentioned anything about his efforts to improve working conditions generally.

As might be expected, Armytage recorded Mundella's work over the years in advocating and sponsoring various Bills to improve working conditions.<sup>37</sup> This provided useful information, particularly in reference to parliamentary debates. However, Armytage barely touched on the development of Mundella's interest and his influence in the area.

Most of the published works discussed here either ignore or minimise Mundella's efforts to influence the passing of the Factory Acts. This is difficult to understand as, in 1873, Mundella was asked to write the introduction to Ernst von

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<sup>34</sup> Geoffrey B.A.M. Finlayson, *The Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury 1801-1885*, London: Eyre Methuen, 1981, 599.

<sup>35</sup> J. Wesley Bready, *Lord Shaftesbury and Social Industrial Progress*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1933, (first published 1926), 323-326.

<sup>36</sup> *Felkin's History of the Machine-Wrought Hosiery and Lace Manufactures*, (Centenary Edition), Newton Abbott: David & Charles, 1967; Stanley Chapman, *Hosiery and Knitwear: Four Centuries of Small Scale Industry in Britain, c. 1589-2000*, Oxford University Press, 2002.

<sup>37</sup> Armytage, *A.J. Mundella*.

Plener's book on English factory legislation.<sup>38</sup> The book is dedicated to the Earl of Shaftesbury so, presumably, he approved of Mundella's involvement. It was a contemporary recognition of Mundella's standing in the factory reform movement. In his *Introduction*, Mundella wrote of his long experience of the Factory Acts and argued forcibly for continued improvements to be made.<sup>39</sup>

The historiography of factory reform thus neglected Mundella's part in the later reforms to workplace conditions. This is an issue repeated in other areas of his endeavours. It is hard to understand why this was so.

### *Mundella's Factory Initiatives*

Mundella was, of course, a child during the early years of Shaftesbury's campaigns and was then occupied in developing his business career. Much later, Shaftesbury and Mundella were to co-operate on further workplace reform. Mundella's attitude towards working conditions is well illustrated by the design of the factory and warehouse built for the Hine and Mundella Company in 1851. The architect, Thomas Chambers Hine, was an uncle of Mundella's partner and a renowned practitioner of the era.<sup>40</sup> W.H. Wylie's 1852 book on Nottingham described the factory as the 'best specimen of the new species of factory yet erected'.<sup>41</sup> Wylie went on to say that 'with its tiers of broad galleries running around the principal rooms, reminds one of the Crystal Palace'.<sup>42</sup> It also impressed the journalist and magazine publisher, Eliza Cook.<sup>43</sup> In the May 1852 issue of her *Journal*, she recorded that 'there was not only cleanliness and light, but elegance, about which I had been led to consider all smoke and uncleanliness'.<sup>44</sup> Mundella's commitment to better factory working conditions was thus in evidence well before his parliamentary career and his support for improving legislation.

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<sup>38</sup> Ernst von Plener, *The English Factory Legislation*, translated by Frederick L. Weinmann, with an introduction by Anthony John Mundella, Esq., M.P., London: Chapman & Hall, 1873.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, v-vi.

<sup>40</sup> Ken Brand, *Thomas Chambers Hine: Architect of Victorian Nottingham*, Nottingham Civic Society, 2003.

<sup>41</sup> William Howie Wylie, *The Nottingham Handbook and Guide to Places of Interest in the environs*, Nottingham: C.N. Wright, 1852, 72.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>43</sup> Solveig C. Robinson, *Cook, Eliza (1812-1889) poet and journalist*, ODNB, (accessed 5 August 2015). The *Journal* was published between 1849-1854, providing 'a steady and free communion with Truth'.

<sup>44</sup> *Eliza Cook's Journal*, 15 May 1852.

Mundella and Hine were conscious not only of the physical aspects of factory work, but also of working hours and education. After much of the building was destroyed by fire in 1859, the rebuilt warehouse was described in the 1862 report of the Parliamentary Commission on Child Labour as 'airy and light'.<sup>45</sup> In his evidence to that Commission, Hine touched on hours of work and educational levels. He reported that, 'our usual hours being nine, exclusive of a dinner hour, ten hours or so, besides meals, would be nearly always sufficient'. On the education of the children he said that, 'all the girls can read and keep and account of their own work'.<sup>46</sup> Mundella was most conscious of the need to work efficiently in order to maximise production. His embrace of new equipment and techniques has been discussed in the previous chapter.

Mundella understood more clearly than most manufacturers that, with the change to the factory system, it was necessary to use more sophisticated production methods and to employ more skilled workers for shorter hours.<sup>47</sup> He introduced improved material handling methods, such as a steam hoist, and arranged work practices to better utilise the available labour.<sup>48</sup> The need for better labour was his constant theme. In 1860, the *Nottingham Review* quoted Mundella as saying that: 'we require more of brains and less of brute labour'. This article further reported Mundella's views that the hours of work were too long for 'operatives to work with vigour and attention which the complicated machinery of the present day demands'.<sup>49</sup>

His attitude was reciprocated by the workforce who entertained the owners to a dinner shortly after the opening of the new works in 1851. The local newspaper reported the workers' opinion:

You have already laid before us those rules that you thought necessary to regulate this establishment, and we cannot help noticing the good feeling which is manifested in them towards us, raising as it does a corresponding one in our minds towards you. We hope to convince you that it will not stop here, that our exertions will show that we are reserved to carry out your wise endeavours to make this house

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<sup>45</sup> *Children's Employment Commission* (1862), First Report of Commissioners, 1863, 268.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Nottingham Review*, 3 October 1851.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 February 1855.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 17 February 1860.

as one noted for punctuality and correctness, that we all know tend to mutual satisfaction and prosperity.<sup>50</sup>

Mundella was proud of his achievements in raising the effectiveness of the operatives in his factory and particularly in the increased wages he was able to pay. In a letter to Leader in 1868 he asserted:

I only entered Nottingham in 1848 and without boasting I have worked as no other man ever did to improve the condition of the trade and to raise the character of the workman. And there is no parallel in England of such rapid improvement as in this trade since 1852. In '48 there was not a factory in the town. Yesterday I looked through the wages books of our 3 factories and found men earning from £1 to £3.<sup>51</sup>

Another of Mundella's achievements during his time as a manufacturer, and before his election to parliament, was the establishment of a Board of Arbitration and Conciliation for the Nottingham hosiery industry. This Board was arguably the first really successful organisation of its type.<sup>52</sup> It was later copied in other industries and is still recognisable in today's industrial relations arrangements. One of the reasons for its success was Mundella's cordial relationship with the trade unions. He understood the dynamics of employer and employee, perhaps, because of his early years as an apprentice. He also recognised the importance of dealing fairly with his workmen. In an 1868 letter to Leader, he wrote: 'Why do all the Trade Unions stand by me so firmly? Because I have helped to double and quadruple their wages.'<sup>53</sup>

The reasons for Mundella's support of the trade union movement, his relationship with them in the resolving of industrial disputes and his actions to provide a legal basis for them once he was in parliament are discussed in Chapter 4.

#### *Mundella's Political Involvement in Factory Legislation*

Mundella and Shaftesbury co-operated on at least one piece of workplace reform. This was concerning the regulation of child labour in brickyards. In a speech in the House of Lords, Shaftesbury noted that children employed in brickyards were excluded from the protection of the Factories Act Extension Act and the Workshops Act of 1864, 'for what

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 3 October 1851.

<sup>51</sup> *Mundella Papers*, 6 September 1868.

<sup>52</sup> Ian G. Sharp, *Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration in Great Britain*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1950, 2-3.

<sup>53</sup> *Mundella Papers*, 6 September 1868.

reason I cannot say'.<sup>54</sup> This issue was highlighted through the efforts of George Smith.<sup>55</sup> Smith had worked as a child in a brickyard and devoted many of his adult years to lobbying for reform. In an address to a Social Science Congress, he described his work thus:

At nine years of age my employment consisted in continually carrying about 40lbs of clay upon my head from the clay-heap to the table upon which the bricks were made. When there was no clay, I had to carry the same amount of bricks. This labour had to be performed, almost without intermission, for thirteen hours daily.<sup>56</sup>

Shaftesbury quoted extensively from Smith's accounts of his experiences as a child labourer in the brickfields and urged that these children should be brought under the protection of the Factory Acts. Mundella, however, had already introduced a Bill into the Commons the previous month that sought to rectify this anomaly.<sup>57</sup> The main provisions of the Bill were to ensure that no female under the age of 16, and no boy under the age of 10, would be employed in a brickfield under any circumstances.

Shaftesbury wrote to Mundella after the Lord's debate wishing Mundella 'success and a crown of laurels'.<sup>58</sup> There was eventually no need for a separate Act as the provisions were incorporated into an Amended Factory and Workshop Act which was passed on 16 August 1871.<sup>59</sup>

Mundella was concerned with the plight of working children more broadly. It was not only the conditions under which they laboured, but also their lack of education which worried Mundella. The 1872 National Congress of Trades' Societies was held in Nottingham and Mundella used the occasion to appeal to the union leaders for their help in this cause. At a breakfast, which he and other Liberal M.P.s gave for the delegates:

He urged them, in the midst of their great and growing power to help themselves, not to forget those who had no such power. In that very town there were little children who had, at 6 o'clock every winter morning, to turn out to work, some having to trot two miles to reach it, and to remain at it for ten hours. Members of his own family, teaching in a night school, told him that the tired-out little things in the

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<sup>54</sup> *Hansard*, 11 July 1871, Vol. 207, cc. 1401-14.

<sup>55</sup> George K. Behlmer, 'Smith, George, social reformer (1831-1895)', *ODNB* (accessed 30 March 2018).

<sup>56</sup> Courtney Dainton, 'George Smith of Coalville', *History Today*, Vol. 29, Issue 9, Sept. 1979, 570.

<sup>57</sup> *Hansard*, 13 June 1871, Vol. 206, c. 2044.

<sup>58</sup> *Mundella Papers*, 11 July 1871.

<sup>59</sup> *Hansard*, 16 August 1871, Vol. 208, c. 1737.

evening leaned their heads on the desk and went to sleep instead of learning. They ought not to forget such things as these.<sup>60</sup>

Mundella's appeal to the trades' union leaders to fight for children's rights, and their reluctance to do so, was also commented on by the Webbs, who suggested that the trade union leaders fought for shorter working hours behind the petticoats of their womenfolk.<sup>61</sup>

In order to further the cause of removing children from factory work and get them into schools, the Factory Acts Reform Association was formed in early 1872 with Lord Shaftesbury as its inaugural chairman. Shaftesbury was over 70 years of age at this time and so the task of pursuing this aim fell to Mundella. During a conference held in March 1872, Mundella was asked to introduce a Bill into the parliament that would restrict the hours of work in mills and factories for young persons and females to 54 hours per week. He eagerly accepted this responsibility and argued that parliamentary action was the only way that would resolve an issue that resulted in so many strikes.<sup>62</sup>

Mundella quickly took to the task and introduced a Bill into the House of Commons, in April 1872, aimed at defining the hours of work for children, youths, and women.<sup>63</sup> The Second Reading was delayed until July but it did not proceed.<sup>64</sup> Mundella vowed to re-introduce the Bill on the first day of the next session. He was able to bring a new Bill before the parliament quite early in the 1873 session, on the fourth day, 11 February.<sup>65</sup> As with the aborted earlier attempt, the Bill sought to reduce the hours of work for children, young persons, and women. It contained some specific amendments. It raised the age at which children could be employed at half-time from eight to ten, but allowed half-time work to continue until 14. It also abolished any exemptions for silk factories. Mundella concluded by confirming that 'he had never contemplated interference with male adults employed in factories'.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> *The Times*, 11 January 1872, 4.

<sup>61</sup> Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism*, Clifton: Augustus M. Kelley, 1973 (first edition 1894), 311.

<sup>62</sup> *The Sheffield Independent*, 22 March 1872.

<sup>63</sup> *Hansard*, 15 April 1872, Vol. 210, c. 1304, 'Factories Hours of Labour'

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 31 July 1872, Vol. 213, c. 213.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 February 1873, Vol.214, c. 283.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*



The Bill died a slow, but interesting, death. The Second Reading, on 11 June, was 'talked out' by Mundella himself after the Speaker adjourned the debate because of time constraints.<sup>67</sup> Reintroduced the following day, time ran out and Gladstone, who had taken no part in the proceedings, would not commit to a date for debate to continue.<sup>68</sup> Mundella was still a back-bencher, and, without the wholehearted support of the prime minister he faced a daunting task. Nevertheless, the Bill returned to the Commons and the adjourned debate resumed on 30 July. Henry Fawcett dominated the debate with a lengthy speech opposing the Bill.<sup>69</sup> Fawcett was Professor of Political Economy at Cambridge University as well as being the Liberal MP for Brighton.<sup>70</sup> He was regarded as an 'Advanced Liberal', and espoused causes such as votes for women. His argument against Mundella's Bill was that it would discourage the employment of women. He was also against state intervention in the private sector, as indeed were many other Liberals. Mundella withdrew the Bill a few days later, but received strong support from Thomas Hughes, who stridently criticised Fawcett.<sup>71</sup> The divisions in the Liberal Party in regard to increased state involvement in this, and other, areas were evident.

There was considerable opposition to the Bill outside parliament, despite the fact that it was considered by *The Times* as 'not extravagantly drawn'.<sup>72</sup> As might be expected, there was a considerable difference of opinion within the factory-owning community. During the parliamentary debates on Mundella's Amendments to the Factory Acts, the Association of Employers of Factory Labour issued some observations on a report dealing with the health of women and children employed in factories.<sup>73</sup> Dr J.H. Bridges and Mr T. Holmes had prepared a report for the Local Government Board in which they recommended a reduction in the hours worked by factory women on health and morality grounds. The Association argued that this assertion was unproven and used it as an attack on Mundella's Bill. Millicent Garrett Fawcett, the wife of

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 11 June 1873, Vol. 216, cc. 819-828.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., Vol. 216, cc. 841-2.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 30 July 1873, Vol. 217, cc. 1288-1303.

<sup>70</sup> Lawrence Goldman, 'Fawcett, Henry (1833-1884), economist and politician,' *ODNB* (accessed 6 April 2018).

<sup>71</sup> *Hansard*, 4 August 1873, Vol. 217, cc. 1544-53.

<sup>72</sup> *The Times*, 12 June 1873, 'Mr. Mundella yesterday lamented his misfortune'.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 12 June 1873, 'Mr. Mundella's Bill.'

Henry, wrote an impassioned letter to *The Times*, in which she criticised the unions, factory owners and the Bridges-Holmes report.<sup>74</sup> She was a woman who sought a better life for all women, and later became a leader in the women's suffrage movement.<sup>75</sup> It is therefore surprising that she should consider unhealthy working conditions preferable to 'making a living that is not honest in the streets of our towns and cities'.<sup>76</sup> With such a wide range of opposition to his modest proposal for the amendment of the existing Factory Acts, Mundella quietly let it drop. He raised it again in the following year, but the Liberals were soon out of government.

The Liberal Party was decisively beaten in the 1874 election, and the Conservatives formed government under Benjamin Disraeli in March of that year. Despite the fact that he was now in opposition, Mundella introduced a Second Reading of the Factory Acts Amendment Bill to the Commons on 6 May 1874.<sup>77</sup> In so doing, he noted that it was the third occasion on which he had tried to do this, but that this was the first opportunity for a full discussion on the merits of his proposal. His previous attempts had been frustrated by the lack of time available for debate and an apparent disinterest by the leaders of his party. He had previously been speaking from the Government benches but now he brought it on as a private members' bill. He believed that factory legislation had been something which had raised 'bitter hostility and personal acrimony' to an unprecedented extent.<sup>78</sup> He characterised the situation as 'country against town, the landed gentry against the manufacturers, and Tory against Whig'.<sup>79</sup> However, he felt that these differences had reduced considerably. He went into some detail about the long opposition to the measures he proposed:

even so recently as the year 1844, factory legislation had arrayed against it some of the most illustrious statesmen and political economists of the present century. Lord Brougham, Sir Robert Peel, Mr Macaulay, Sir James Graham, Mr Cobden, my hon. and learned Colleague (Mr Roebuck), Mr John Stuart Mill and many other distinguished men were strong and almost bitter and acrimonious in their opposition

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 June 1873, 'Women's Privileges and Disabilities.'

<sup>75</sup> Janet Howarth, 'Fawcett, Dame Millicent Garrett (1847-1929) leader of the constitutional women's suffrage movement and author', *ODNB*, (accessed 6 April 2018).

<sup>76</sup> *The Times*, 7 June 1873.

<sup>77</sup> *Hansard*, 6 May 1874, Vol. 218, cc. 1793-1803.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, c.1742.

to factory legislation. But, all or nearly all of these men lived to see the error of their opinions, and frankly, generously, and magnanimously acknowledge their error.<sup>80</sup>

Mundella was generous in thanking the new, Conservative, government for their support of his Bill. He wanted to see reform of working conditions and reduced hours of work and was prepared to work with anyone who shared those ambitions. He emphasised his view of the importance of the Bill by repeating the sentiments of the Duke of Argyll that the two 'great [political] discoveries' of the century were the abolition of trade restrictions and imposition of labour restrictions.<sup>81</sup> This quite succinctly emphasised the embrace of the *laissez-faire* principle in economic affairs and the acceptance of state involvement in matters dealing with the improvements to the living standards of the working class. Mundella asserted that his aims were the same as those he had proposed in his earlier Bill. After much debate, including harsh criticism from both sides, the Home Secretary, Assheton Cross, indicated that 'the Government were deeply impressed with the importance of the matter', and would deal with it 'comprehensively and finally'.<sup>82</sup> He advised the House that the Bill was now being drafted. Cross was a supporter of Disraeli's 'Tory Democracy' and 'favoured social reform rather than political reconstruction'.<sup>83</sup>

The Factories Health of Women and Children Bill was introduced by the Government in June 1874.<sup>84</sup> Although it was confined to the textile trades, Cross asserted that it would give him great satisfaction to consolidate all of the Factory Acts. He thought that they were in a 'state of confusion'.<sup>85</sup> After considerable debate, Mundella conceded that a government Bill would have a much better chance of success in passing both Houses than one introduced by a private member.<sup>86</sup> He said that the differences between his Bill and that of Cross were small and that he would thankfully accept the Bill. He gave it 'his most cordial and loyal support'.<sup>87</sup> The Bill continued through the Committee stage, with more arguments between Mundella and

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 1740.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 1790.

<sup>83</sup> W.C. Lubenow, review of Dennis J. Mitchell, *Cross and Tory Democracy: A Political Biography of Richard Assheton Cross*, in *Albion*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (Winter 1992), 680.

<sup>84</sup> *Hansard*, 11 June 1874, Vol. 219, c. 1415-71.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 1463.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

Fawcett, and was read for a third time and passed on 29 June 1874.<sup>88</sup> It passed the Lords the following month.

In the debate in the Lords at its Second Reading, Shaftesbury spoke of Mundella's 'great vigour and ability' in presenting the matter and expressed the deep gratitude of both the operatives and himself.<sup>89</sup> He also complimented Mundella on graciously giving up his own proposals and embracing those of the Government in support of a good cause.<sup>90</sup>

It was not until 1878 that the various Factory Acts were consolidated as Cross had foreshadowed. The consolidation was achieved following an inquiry by a Royal Commission established by Cross in 1875.<sup>91</sup> Mundella welcomed this initiative and emphasised the importance of considering educational as well as health issues. A typically voluminous report was presented to Parliament in February 1876.<sup>92</sup> In April 1877, Cross brought in a Bill to effect this consolidation.<sup>93</sup> He acknowledged the work of the Royal Commission, and thanked them for their labours and for the mass of evidence they had presented.<sup>94</sup> Mundella's evidence before the Commission received high praise from the Chairman, Sir James Fergusson, a Conservative member of parliament and a former Governor of South Australia.<sup>95</sup> His remarks clearly showed the national standing which Mundella had achieved in matters of workplace reform. Fergusson wrote:

Turning then from the evidence of those who appeared on behalf of the employers and the employed, I should wish to quote the evidence of a gentleman whose opinion of these matters must, I think, carry weight; I refer to Mr. Mundella, who, although an employer, has always taken the side of the workpeople. The interest which Mr. Mundella has taken in the question is so well known, his labours in the cause of the well-being of the operatives of this country are so generally appreciated, and his knowledge of the legislative provisions affecting labour in

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 29 June 1874, Vol. 220, cc. 672-3.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 9 July 1874, Vol. 220, c. 1330.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 19 February 1875, Vol.222, c. 556-567.

<sup>92</sup> *Report of the Commissioners appointed to inquire into the Working of the Factory and Workshops Acts, with a view to their Consolidation and Amendment*, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1876 (accessed on [parlipapers-proquest-com.rp.nla.au](http://parlipapers-proquest-com.rp.nla.au), 10 April 2018).

<sup>93</sup> *Hansard*, 6 April 1877, Vol. 233, cc. 756-763.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., c. 757.

<sup>95</sup> Peter Harnetty, 'Fergusson, Sir James, of Kilkerran (1832-1907), politician and colonial governor', *ODNB* (accessed 9 April 2018).

almost every country in the world is so extensive, that his opinion must receive the highest respect.<sup>96</sup>

This was a considerable endorsement of Mundella's efforts over many years, and is especially important coming from a Conservative politician. Mundella gave his wholehearted support to the Bill when debated in the Commons, and Fawcett continued his objections.<sup>97</sup> The Bill successfully completed its Third Reading in the Commons on 29 March 1878. Such legislation to improve working conditions was only part of a broader social reform programme taken up by the Conservatives and opposed by many Liberals. Paul Smith has argued that Disraeli's ministry of 1874-80 was 'the most notable instalment of social reform undertaken by any single government of the century'.<sup>98</sup>

### *Supporters and Opponents*

The vastly different attitudes to working hours and conditions in factories between the two parties is usually explained, albeit simply, as Radical Liberal industrialists concerned with increased labour costs on one side, and paternalistic, land-owning Tories looking to working-class votes on the other. Mundella's position illustrated that there were considerable variations on this. He was a Radical and a manufacturer yet, during the Second Reading of the Factory Acts Amendment Bill in 1874 he said:

It has always been recorded to the honour of the party opposite that they were the promoters of factory legislation when the party with whom I sit were its opponents, and for this the working classes feel to this day that they owe a debt of gratitude to the party now in power.<sup>99</sup>

One eminent and influential Liberal member who was opposed to legislative changes to working conditions and hours of work was Richard Cobden. Despite the disparity in their ages and the fact that their political careers did not overlap, Mundella was a great admirer of Cobden. He declared in 1884 that 'Cobden was the greatest statesman and prophet of this century. A man whose disciple I am willing to confess I am.'<sup>100</sup> Yet Cobden was the principal architect of Free Trade and a strong believer in

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<sup>96</sup> *Report into Working Conditions*, Vol. 1, cx.

<sup>97</sup> *Hansard*, 29 March, Vol. 239, c. 267.

<sup>98</sup> Paul Smith, *Disraelian Conservatism and Social Reform*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967, 2-3.

<sup>99</sup> *Hansard*, 6 May 1874, Vol. 218, c. 1744.

<sup>100</sup> Speech, 4 July 1884, quoted in Armytage, *A.J. Mundella*, 32.

the right of a worker to negotiate the conditions and hours he worked. As early as 1836 he wrote of the Ten Hour Bill:

Have they considered that it would be the first example of a legislature of a free country interfering with the freedom of adult labour? Have they reflected that if we surrender into the hands of the Government the power to make laws to fix the hours of labour at all, it has as good a right, upon the same principle, to make twenty hours the standard as ten?<sup>101</sup>

Later in the letter Cobden suggested that government involvement in setting the hours of labour was going back to feudal times with the privileged few dictating outcomes. He did not believe that the 'industrious classes' wanted nor needed legislation to protect their working arrangements and he himself was very much against government involvement.<sup>102</sup> Although Cobden claimed 'a hearty good-will towards the great body of the working classes', he was critical of Shaftesbury's philanthropic approach.<sup>103</sup> He argued that it was patronising, and denied the independence of the worker. He believed that self-respect and the desire for self-improvement were more important.<sup>104</sup>

Mundella's other political hero was Gladstone. He called Gladstone 'the most wonderful man I ever met', and pondered on his natural intelligence and work ethic.<sup>105</sup> Gladstone, however, was somewhat negative in his attitude towards unions and factory legislation. In 1865, before he became Prime Minister, he criticized trade union control, asserting that: 'the labouring classes have the great lesson to learn respecting the rights of minorities' and repeated Cobden's argument that legislation 'may tend to interfere with the moral right that every man has to carry his own labour individually into what he thinks the best market'.<sup>106</sup> In the same speech, he also touched on the hours worked by women and children and argued that limiting these hours cut off employment opportunities for the entire family.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Letter to W.C. Hunt, October 21, 1836, appended to Vol. 1, John Morley, *The Life of Richard Cobden*, London: Chapman and Hall, 1881, 465.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 466.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 467.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> *Mundella Papers*, letter to Leader, 8 October 1874.

<sup>106</sup> *The Times*, 2 November 1865, 'Mr. Gladstone in Scotland'.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

However, there was one senior Liberal minister and successful manufacturer, W.E. Forster, who shared Mundella's views on factory issues. Seven years older than Mundella, Forster was a Yorkshire mill owner who entered parliament in an 1861 by-election. He soon became an influential member taking 'to parliamentary life with almost boyish enthusiasm'.<sup>108</sup> There are many contemporary references to his tireless exuberance. He was also a great admirer of Shaftesbury, and was one of the principal speakers at a dinner in April 1881 to celebrate Shaftesbury's eightieth birthday. Forster praised Shaftesbury's life work and the manner in which he achieved results:

The good conduct on the part of the population was in great measure due to the moderating influences which were brought to bear on them by Lord Ashley. How I do wish that all agitators, when they are advocating the removal of great and real grievances, would take an example from the way in which Lord Ashley conducted that agitation, and remember with what care they should consider both the immediate effect of what they say upon those who are suffering.<sup>109</sup>

Once in parliament, Mundella formed a close relationship with Forster, initially supporting him in his pragmatic decision to include religious provisions in the 1870 Education Act. At that time, Mundella believed that Forster was 'the best Liberal in the Government, if not the best in the House'.<sup>110</sup> Even before his election to parliament, Forster was 'taking a line at variance from Liberal orthodoxy'.<sup>111</sup> This was shown as early as 1846, when, at a meeting in Bradford at which Shaftesbury spoke, he moved a resolution supporting the Ten Hours Bill. He asserted that 'working long hours in factories was prejudicial to the best interests of the country, inasmuch as it retards moral improvement and prevents a good understanding between employer and employed'.<sup>112</sup>

Most Liberal employers took quite the reverse position. This was especially true of the influential and vocal John Bright. Writing of Bright late in the century, George Holyoake, a prominent free thinker, wrote:

Working men distrusted Mr Bright when he first become known to them because he was against the Factory Acts, which he regarded as opposed to free trade between

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<sup>108</sup> Patrick Jackson, *Education Act Forster: A Political Biography of W. E. Forster (1818-1886)*, Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997, 74.

<sup>109</sup> Hodder, *Life and Work of Shaftesbury*, Vol. III, 423.

<sup>110</sup> *Mundella Papers*, letter to Leader, 10 March 1870.

<sup>111</sup> Jackson, *Education Act Forster*, 54.

<sup>112</sup> *Bradford Observer*, 12 March, 1846.

employer and workman, and did not see that where humanity comes in, humanity is to be respected, and is not to be subjected to laws of barter.<sup>113</sup>

Bright long maintained his animosity towards Forster, and bitterly opposed those who supported Forster during the selection of Liberal leader following the resignation of Gladstone in 1874. In a letter to Gladstone in January 1875, Bright wrote of Forster that 'he cares nothing for expenditure, and is fond of Factory Bills, and the rotten legislation that has come so much into favour of late years'.<sup>114</sup>

Mundella, by contrast, was a prominent supporter of Forster's leadership credentials.<sup>115</sup> In June 1874, Mundella wrote to Leader expressing his view that 'Forster is the strongest man on our side, and in every way the best in the absence of Gladstone. Our non-conformist friends are violent in their dislike of him.'<sup>116</sup> Mundella campaigned strongly for Forster, but ultimately the opposition was too great, and Hartington was elected leader.<sup>117</sup>

The alliance between the radical Liberals, and mill owners, Mundella and Forster, and the patrician, land-owning Shaftesbury seemed contradictory. Both Mundella and Forster were dedicated free traders and strong supporters of Gladstone. Shaftesbury, on the other hand, when sitting in the Commons as Lord Ashley, voted against the repeal of the Corn Laws. Mundella and Forster recognised the benefits of improved working conditions and were prepared to work with the evangelical Tory nobleman to pass appropriate legislation. The antipathy of many Liberals to the reform of factory conditions has been discussed previously and, although Mundella contended that many had changed their minds, this was due to the inevitability of a Conservative government enacting such legislation.

Following its success in the election of 1874, the new Conservative government was faced with the growing importance of the labour movement. Union membership had increased from 375,000 in 1872 to 1,200,000 in 1874 and presented a very real

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<sup>113</sup> George Jacob Holyoake, *Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life*, London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1906, Vol. III, 271.

<sup>114</sup> Donald Read, *Cobden and Bright: A Victorian Political Partnership*, London: Edward Arnold, 1967, 212.

<sup>115</sup> John P. Rossi, 'The Selection of Lord Hartington as Liberal Leader in the House of Commons, February 1875', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 119, No.4, August 1975, 311.

<sup>116</sup> *Mundella Papers*, letter to Leader, 16 June 1874.

<sup>117</sup> Armytage, *A.J. Mundella*, 154-157.



issue to any government.<sup>118</sup> William Romaine Callender, a Conservative member for Manchester and also a substantial cotton spinner, recognised the importance of the Nine-Hour Bill which Mundella had promoted in the previous parliament. He was determined that the new government should receive the credit for such legislation. Writing to Montagu Corry, Disraeli's private Secretary, in 1874, Callender argued that the support of factory reform would not only benefit the nation's health, but would strengthen the position of the Conservative Party.<sup>119</sup> Mundella may have had difficulties in persuading his Liberal colleagues that factory reform was needed, but his persistence helped to push a Conservative government into passing legislation.

### *Other Workplace Matters*

It was not only improvements to factory working conditions and hours that showed Mundella's concern for working people. He spoke passionately in 1870 about amending the Truck Act and, in 1872, about the employment of women and girls in coal mines. The truck system of worker payment had two aspects, the first of which was the compulsion of employees to take part of their wages in over-priced goods from a company-owned store. The second aspect was that advances on wages could only be repaid through the company store.<sup>120</sup> There were a number of unsuccessful attempts to outlaw these practices in the first 30 years of the nineteenth-century.<sup>121</sup> The 1831 Act was a comprehensive attempt to overcome these issues, but, as G. W. Hilton asserted, its influence was negligible.<sup>122</sup> By 1870, it was clear that the situation had not improved. Reports from factory inspectors showed continued violations of the Act, in several industries and in different parts of the country.<sup>123</sup> In that year Mundella moved that a Commission of Inquiry should be appointed to investigate the systematic evasion of the Truck Acts.<sup>124</sup> He proposed an investigation into Scottish and Welsh

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<sup>118</sup> Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *History of Trade Unionism*, 326.

<sup>119</sup> Quoted in Smith, *Disraelian Conservatism*, 16 February 1874, 213.

<sup>120</sup> G. W. Hilton, 'The Truck Act of 1831', *The Economic History Review*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (1958), 470.

<sup>121</sup> George W. Hilton, *The Truck System: including a History of the British Truck Acts, 1465-1960*, Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1960, 88.

<sup>122</sup> Hilton, 'The Truck Act of 1831', 479.

<sup>123</sup> Hilton, *The Truck System*, 131.

<sup>124</sup> *Hansard*, 12 July 1870, Vol. 203, cc. 137.

collieries and the stocking trade.<sup>125</sup> As might have been expected, Mundella provided a considerable amount of evidence on the hosiery industry to the Commission. He asserted that the major manufacturers did not flout the truck laws; it was the middlemen, and the system of frame rents, which were the culprits.<sup>126</sup> The Commission reported in 1871 but the Government prevaricated. By 1872 another Conservative MP, Albert Pell, was asking when a Bill would be brought before parliament.<sup>127</sup> Pell had served on the Select Committee and asserted that the truck system continued unchecked. Despite such appeals, neither Liberal nor Conservative governments were interested in pursuing amendments to the Act. It was not until September 1887 that a more comprehensive Bill controlling the truck system was passed. Mundella played only a minor role in this, since by that time he was fully occupied with promoting the advancement of technical education.<sup>128</sup>

In regard to the issue of women and girls working in coal mines, Mundella was an important contributor to debates on the Coal Mines Regulation Bill in 1872. The Bill's main purpose was to limit the age of children who could be employed to those over ten and prohibiting the employment of women and girls on the pit bank. Mundella described this latter practice as 'degrading and disgraceful to the nation'.<sup>129</sup> He highlighted the fact that young girls, not being free agents, were sent to work by their parents. After marriage this compulsion often continued, with the wife being 'very much the slave of the husband'.<sup>130</sup> In an impassioned speech during the Third Reading of the Bill, Mundella accused opponents of the Bill, one of whom was his long-time critic, Fawcett, of seeking to protect 'the pockets of the rich against the attacks of the poor'.<sup>131</sup> He argued that the Bill was to protect human life and provide for the wellbeing of young children. Mundella's contribution helped the passing of the Bill into law.

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<sup>125</sup> Hilton, *The Truck System*, 131.

<sup>126</sup> *Report of the Commissioners appointed to inquire into The Truck System*, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1871. xxx.

<sup>127</sup> *Hansard*, 31 July 1872, Vol. 213, cc. 210-213.

<sup>128</sup> Armytage, *A.J. Mundella*, 270-271.

<sup>129</sup> *Hansard*, 21 June 1872, Vol. 212, c. 30.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 16 July 1872, Vol. 212, c. 1277.

### *Conclusions - Mundella's place in the Factory Acts movement*

Mundella advocated improved working conditions in factories, workshops and coal-mines, both in terms of the physical environment and the hours worked, throughout his years as a hosiery manufacturer and later as a parliamentarian. His early interest in these matters stemmed from his personal experiences in the hosiery industry. Mundella quickly recognised that improved machinery and factory layout, a reduction in working hours and increased wages, provided improved productivity and better quality finished goods. He was consistent in this approach throughout his time in parliament and did not waiver from this conviction despite opposition from many within his own party, including some he held in high regard.

Mundella's independent spirit is well illustrated by the Factory Acts saga. He was not deterred by the views of Cobden and Gladstone, both of whom he almost revered. Each of them opposed the call for shorter working hours, Cobden because he saw it as against his principle of freedom of action, Gladstone because of a concern with the increasing strength of the unions. Mundella was not swayed by their views, and consistently followed his own agenda in pursuit of reform in the workplace.

Mundella was unable to see his own Bill through parliament whilst the Liberals were in power but then worked constructively with a Conservative government to ensure it was finally passed. He was generous in his praise for the positive actions taken by the Tory Home Secretary, Assheton Cross. He wanted these reforms and he was prepared to compromise in order to get a result. Mundella's persistence, and his willingness to work constructively with the Conservatives, again shows his pragmatism and his very real desire to improve working conditions. He followed his own agenda which was based on his working experiences and his moral position.

It is difficult to understand why recognition of Mundella's achievements was not better documented in the many accounts of the history of the Factory Acts. As we shall see, the failure to acknowledge his contribution is true in regard to the historiography of other areas of his political activity. His major role in improving working conditions was well recognised at the time. He co-operated with, and was praised on several occasions by, the doyen of factory reform, Shaftesbury. He became the parliamentary voice of the movement when Shaftesbury stepped back. His work made him the obvious person to write the introduction to von Plener's important book

on the English factory system. He was a significant, and influential, witness at the several inquiries into working conditions. His standing was exemplified by Fergusson's comments during the 1886 investigation into consolidating the several Factory Acts.

VANITY FAIR.

Dec. 11, 1871.



No. 100.

STATESMEN, No. 99.

"Education and Aristocracy."

*'Sound Lungs and Impressive Gestures'*

## Chapter 4 – Legitimising the Trade Union Movement

The relationship between employer and employed changed markedly during the mid-nineteenth century. The development of large-scale industries employing many hundreds of workers at a single location meant that the previous, more personal, contact between a business owner and his workman was no longer possible. The long-held opposition, by many employers and politicians, to ‘combination’ continued to be prevalent. However, the better organisation of workers into unions, and the power of numbers, necessitated a different approach. A better understanding of the place of unions in the country’s business life developed from mid-century. Mundella was one who took a pro-active role in promoting the value of unions. His consistent approach to bringing unions, and hence their members, into the mainstream industrial relations system will be analysed in this chapter.

The first half of the nineteenth century saw a growth in the membership of trade unions and a spread into workplaces, such as cotton mills and coal mines, not previously widely unionised.<sup>1</sup> This increase in the influence of unions was not accompanied by their general acceptance as a legitimate part of society, especially by the middle class. Nor did it lead to a legal status for their activities.<sup>2</sup> The battle to rectify these anomalies ultimately reached the parliamentary arena following the report of the Royal Commission on Trade Unions of 1867-68. However, it took another ten years for all aspects of the legalisation which were agreeable to the unions to be passed.

Mundella was closely involved throughout the period leading up to, and during, the sittings of the Commission. He was one of the few radical Liberal members and manufacturers who consistently supported the resulting legislation. This chapter will show how Mundella’s experience as a large employer of labour, and as a passionate practitioner of conciliation and arbitration, gave him a unique perspective on

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<sup>1</sup> George Howell, *Labour Legislation, Labour Movements and Labour Leaders*, London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1902, 58, 113; E.H. Phelps Brown, *The Growth of British Industrial Relations: A study from the standpoint of 1906-14*, London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1965, xvii; Chris Wigley (editor), *A History of British Industrial Relations 1875-1914*, Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1982, 13.

<sup>2</sup> Curthoys, *Governments, Labour, and the Law*, 2-3.

employer-employee relationships. It will also discuss his significant influence in achieving an outcome which changed those relationships for the better.

### *Historical Background*

The development of trade unions was gradual, and they experienced many legal hurdles as they sought to assert an influence in the workplace. In their classic work of the history of trade unions, the Webbs asserted that they were unable to discover any evidence of the existence, prior to 1700, of continuing associations of wage-earners for maintaining or improving the conditions of their employment.<sup>3</sup> The Webbs argued that the craft guilds of earlier times were not unions in the modern sense, but some later writers have suggested that guilds did exercise some measure of influence in their workplace. Hamish Fraser, for example, pointed to the often held monopoly position of the guilds by controlling entry to their trade and influencing prices.<sup>4</sup>

There were, of course, many instances before the late eighteenth century of workers in particular industries joining together, but they were small groups in particular areas and usually pursuing specific issues. Employers also had the necessary legal backing, through English common law, to deal with any action taken by their workers. The heightened tension generated by the French wars and the concern of French political ideas infiltrating the British working class led to the passing of the Combination Acts of 1799 and 1800. The 1800 Act remained in force until 1824 and the modern history of the trade union movement can really be dated from then.<sup>5</sup>

By this time the numbers of, usually, unskilled, or partially skilled through on-the-job experience, workers, had considerably increased. Employees in factories and mines in the new industrial districts worked in far worse and more dangerous conditions than the skilled craftsman or even the agricultural labourer. They worked long hours and could easily be replaced by rural migrants, often from Ireland. They usually lived in single-industry districts with little chance of finding alternative employment. There was less in common between the master and the men than there

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<sup>3</sup> Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism*, 13.

<sup>4</sup> W. Hamish Fraser, *A History of British Trade Unionism 1700-1998*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999, 2.

<sup>5</sup> Royden Harrison, *Before the Socialists: Studies in Labour and Politics, 1861-1881*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965, 6.

had been in the smaller craft-based businesses. The only solution for the workers was to band together in as large an organisation as possible.<sup>6</sup> Eugenio Biagini asserted that there was also some support for trade unions amongst influential economists, who held that effective unions were necessary in an ordered market.<sup>7</sup>

The increase in workers combining also led business owners to join together and to invoke whatever coercive measures were available. It was the beginning of effective Chambers of Commerce and Industry.<sup>8</sup> The frequency and size of some of the confrontations between employers and their workers led to governments becoming more involved in industrial matters.<sup>9</sup> It was into this era that Mundella was born, grew up and developed his own business.

### *Historiography*

Probably the first objective study of English trade unions and their place in the national economy was published, in French, in 1869.<sup>10</sup> Written by the Pretender to the French throne, the Comte de Paris, it was later translated into English, and edited, by Thomas Hughes, someone who played an important role in legitimising the trade union movement.<sup>11</sup> In his preface, the author hoped that his book would remove the 'fatal notion' that capital and labour need be opposed to each other.<sup>12</sup> The Comte described Mundella's work in establishing the Nottingham Board of Arbitration and Conciliation in some detail.<sup>13</sup> Sidney and Beatrice Webb first published their massive *History* in 1894, and which they revised in 1920. They exhaustively searched the records of most trade societies throughout Britain, and appropriate Parliamentary records, to document the political history of the movement.<sup>14</sup> In this incredibly detailed study,

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<sup>6</sup> Eugenio F. Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform: Popular Liberalism in the Age of Gladstone, 1860-1880*, Cambridge University Press, 1992, 148.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> A.R. Ilesic assisted by P.F.B.Liddle, *Parliament of Commerce: The Story of the Association of British Chambers of Commerce, 1860-1960*, London: Newman Neame Limited, 1960, 6-7.

<sup>9</sup> Alastair J. Reid, *United We Stand: A History of Britain's Trade Unions*, London: Allen Lane, 2004, 45.

<sup>10</sup> Comte de Paris, *Les Associations Ouvrieres en Angleterre*, Paris: G. Bailliere, 1869.

<sup>11</sup> Edward C. Mack and W.H.G. Armytage, *Thomas Hughes: The Life of the Author of 'Tom Brown's Schooldays'*, London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1952, 167.

<sup>12</sup> Comte de Paris, *Les Associations*, iv.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 205-213.

<sup>14</sup> Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism*, London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1896 (second edition), viii.



Mundella featured quite prominently. The earliest references are to his work in establishing the Nottingham Hosiery Board and his evidence before the 1868 Royal Commission on Trade Unions.<sup>15</sup> His efforts in parliament to push the 1869 Bill formally legalising trade unions are fully detailed. The Webbs acknowledged Mundella and Hughes as being almost alone in pressing for the full demands of the unions to be met and noted Mundella's later parliamentary work on the Nine Hour Bill and the repeal of the Criminal Law Amendment Act.<sup>16</sup>

The introduction of formal systems of arbitration and conciliation was integral to the acceptance of the legitimacy of the role of trade unions. Mundella was more conscious of this than most employers. In his 1876 study of the development of industrial relations, Henry Crompton sensibly asserted that the independence of the working class was inevitable.<sup>17</sup> Mundella would have shared this view. Crompton was an important supporter of the campaign to give workers the same legal rights as employers.<sup>18</sup> He wrote a detailed article on arbitration and conciliation in 1869, which provided much information on Mundella's Nottingham Board.<sup>19</sup> In this article, he acknowledged that the success of this scheme was largely due to Mundella's personal character.<sup>20</sup> Another early commentator on the labour movements was A.W. Humphrey. He is, perhaps, best remembered for his 1912 history of the working man entering parliament.<sup>21</sup> However, of more importance to this thesis is his biography of the influential trade-unionist, Robert Applegarth.<sup>22</sup> Mundella and Applegarth's common enthusiasm for the importance of arbitration led to a long and fruitful friendship.<sup>23</sup> Applegarth was also instrumental in effecting Mundella's candidature, and subsequent election to parliament, for Sheffield in 1868.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 338-339.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 282.

<sup>17</sup> Henry Crompton, *Industrial Conciliation*, London: Henry S. King & Co., 1876, 2.

<sup>18</sup> M.C. Curthoys, 'Crompton, Henry (1836-1904), barrister and positivist', *ODNB* (accessed 5 September 2012).

<sup>19</sup> Henry Crompton, 'Arbitration and Conciliation', *The Fortnightly Review*, May 1869.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 627.

<sup>21</sup> A.W. Humphrey, *A History of Labour Representation*, London: Constable & Co. Ltd., 1912.

<sup>22</sup> A.W. Humphrey, *Robert Applegarth: Trade Unionist, Educationist, Reformer*, Manchester: The National Labour Press, 1913.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 34-35.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 63-64.

Both men were involved with the National Education League but did not always agree on the most appropriate course of action.<sup>25</sup> Mundella was passionate about improving education in Britain, as we shall see in Chapters 5 and 6. An important work, written by one of those intimately involved with advancing labour reform, was Frederic Harrison's autobiography, published in 1911.<sup>26</sup> Harrison, a lawyer, was a member of the Royal Commission on Trade Unions, which sat from 1867 to 1869, and was the author of the Commission's minority report.<sup>27</sup> This report was the basis for the Mundella-Hughes Trades Unions Bill of 1869. Mundella and Harrison developed a close friendship. Harrison described Mundella as 'the one capitalist and manufacturer of his time who had perfect knowledge of the lives and aspirations of the workmen'.<sup>28</sup>

Mid-twentieth century works, such as those by Ian Sharpe, published in 1950, and Phelps Brown in 1959, primarily traced the development of the British industrial relations system.<sup>29</sup> Both authors discussed Mundella's work in establishing the Nottingham hosiery board and credit him with ground-breaking work in this area. Both asserted that this was the first successful, long-term, board in the country. Thirty years later, Alan Fox also wrote a useful work which gave insights into both public and political attitudes to the growing influence of the trade unions.<sup>30</sup> Fox noted Mundella's pragmatism in recognising that the unions were the only vehicle which could get workmen to accept the principles of arbitration and conciliation.<sup>31</sup>

There was something of a resurgence in the publication of labour histories during the 1990s and early 2000s. Examples are Hamish Fraser's comprehensive history of the union movement, published in 1999, James Jaffe's analysis of arbitration prior to the union legalisation campaigns, published in 2000, and Donald MacRaild and David Martin's analysis of the developing national status of the working class, also

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 202.

<sup>26</sup> Frederic Harrison, *Autobiographical Memoirs*, London: Macmillan & Co., 1911.

<sup>27</sup> Martha S. Vogeler, 'Harrison, Frederic (1831-1923), positivist and author', *ODNB* (accessed 1 May 2015).

<sup>28</sup> Harrison, *Memoirs*, Vol.II, 71-72.

<sup>29</sup> Ian G. Sharp, *Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration in Great Britain*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1950; Brown, *The Growth of British Industrial Relations*.

<sup>30</sup> Alan Fox, *History and Heritage: The Social Origins of the British Industrial Relations System*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 131.

published in 2000.<sup>32</sup> Mundella is mentioned in most of these, usually in regard to his establishment of the Nottingham Arbitration and Conciliation Board and his role as a 'friend' of the unions in parliament. Jonathan Spain, however, in a 1991 article, paid tribute to Mundella's vision and his awareness of the threat of social conflict if unionism was unrecognised.<sup>33</sup> Spain asserted that Mundella's support for trade unions and arbitration, factory legislation and education reform was a well-thought-through programme to help the working class.<sup>34</sup> Apart from Armytage, Spain was the sole historian to analyse Mundella's motivations, rather than simply recording his actions. Spain, however, had a deeper interest in Mundella the man, shown by his authorship of the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography's* most recent article on Mundella, which was published in 2004.<sup>35</sup>

Mark Curthoys' 2004 book on the trade union legislation of the 1870s is an important work which examined how politicians eventually devised a legal framework to overcome the worst aspects of the frequent industrial disputes of the period.<sup>36</sup> Mundella's contribution to this process was fully recognised by Curthoys, starting with Mundella's work on conciliation in the 1860s, through to his parliamentary activities in the late 1870s.<sup>37</sup> Curthoys also highlighted that, mainly as a result of Mundella's co-operation with the Conservative government during the passage of the 1875 labour Bills, the sometimes shaky alliance between organised labour and the Liberal Party was maintained.<sup>38</sup>

Armytage, of course, dealt extensively with Mundella's involvement with trade unions. As with several of the works quoted above, Armytage covered Mundella's time as a manufacturer, particularly his establishment of the Nottingham Board, to his

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<sup>32</sup> W. Hamish Fraser, *A History of British Trade Unionism 1700-1998*, Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1999; James A. Jaffe, *Striking a bargain: Work and industrial relations in England 1815-1865*, Manchester University Press, 2000; Donald M. MacRaild and David E. Martin, *Labour in British Society, 1830-1914*, Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 2000.

<sup>33</sup> Jonathan Spain, 'Trade Unionists, Gladstonian Liberals and the labour law reforms of 1875', in Eugenio F. Biagini and Alastair J. Reid (editors), *Currents of Radicalism: Popular radicalism, organized labour and party politics in Britain, 1850-1914*, Cambridge University Press, 1991, 116.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>35</sup> Jonathan Spain, 'Mundella, Anthony John (1825-1897), hosiery manufacturer and politician' *ODNB*, (accessed 9 April 2009).

<sup>36</sup> Curthoys, *Governments, Labour, and the Law in Mid-Victorian Britain*, 2004, *passim*.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 90-92, 200, 228.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

support of the union movement in parliament. He called Mundella's attitude to the unions 'unique' for those times.<sup>39</sup>

Mundella fares better in the historiography of the legalisation of the trade union movement than in other areas discussed in this thesis. Nevertheless, apart from Armytage, and to a lesser extent Curthoys, discussion of Mundella's work was severely limited to two matters. The first was his espousal of an ongoing, and workable, arbitration and conciliation system, evidenced by the Nottingham Hosiery Board. The second was his bi-partisan work to ensure the passage of the 1875 labour reform legislation. This chapter will explore not only these two important matters, but also Mundella's personal and political relationships with the trade union leadership. These were important in satisfying the union's ambition for legal recognition, but also as a bridge between labour and the Liberal Party before the later surge of real Labour parliamentary representation.

#### *Mundella's Early Involvement with the Union Movement*

There is no evidence that Mundella was ever a member of a trade union and, as he became an overseer immediately after completing his apprenticeship, this would have been unlikely. His attitude towards trade unions, as a major employer, was shown by his evidence to the 1868 Royal Commission on Trade Unions. Answering a question from Hughes, Mundella asserted that dealing with the workers' representatives was the only way of avoiding confrontation.<sup>40</sup> He was asked to detail his experiences of conciliation and arbitration based on the system he had developed in Nottingham. He spoke of the relationship between masters and workmen before the establishment of the Board as being in a 'dreadful state' and explained the circumstances leading to its formation. His submission, prompted by questioning from most of the Commissioners, dwelt on the history and the mechanics of the Nottingham Board, but he also stated that 'we could have done nothing without the organisation of the union'.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Armytage, *A.J. Mundella*, 318.

<sup>40</sup> *Tenth report of the Commissioners appointed to inquire into the organisation and rules of trade unions and other associations: together with minutes of evidence, 1867-68*, 76.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 35

As we saw in Chapter 2, Mundella showed an early sympathy with the working class when, as a fifteen-year-old he declared himself 'on the people's side' at a Chartist meeting in Leicester.<sup>42</sup> His affinity with the working class, and especially with trades' union leaders, continued throughout his life. He wrote a revue of the development of industrial relations up to 1887, in Ward's book which celebrated Queen Victoria's fifty-year reign, and stated his firm view of the importance of unionism.<sup>43</sup> Additionally, he paid tribute to the 'marvellous' way in which the working classes had co-operated with both their leaders and their employers.<sup>44</sup>

Mundella's cordial relationship with his own workmen was discussed in Chapter 2, but he also enjoyed a high reputation with the working class more broadly. When approached to stand for a Sheffield House of Commons seat at the 1868 election, he was conscious of the increase in the number of working-class voters who 'were resolved to have a representative who would be more in accordance with their wishes'.<sup>45</sup> Two months later he was confident that 'the working men and some of the really influential men are with me'.<sup>46</sup> Those sentiments were most likely generated from remarks he made in addressing a meeting of the Sheffield Chamber of Industry the previous year. His subject was *Boards of Arbitration and Conciliation* and was given to an audience which included many working men. In his introduction he outlined his background and working life and went on to say:

All my early associations and my early sympathies were with the working class, from which I sprang, and I venture to say without being deemed egotistical that there are few persons in this hall who know more of the struggles of honest poverty, of the difficulties and temptations of the working man, than I do, and there are few that have seen more of, or felt more deeply interested in the contest between capital and labour, and the mistakes which both have made in respect to each other.<sup>47</sup>

A later letter to the *Sheffield Independent* asserted the importance of the working-class vote in the forthcoming election and believed that 'Mr Mundella's claims to enter Parliament in the working-class interest are indisputable'.<sup>48</sup> The writer went

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<sup>42</sup> Cooper, *The Life of Thomas Cooper*, 169-170.

<sup>43</sup> Mundella and Howell 'Industrial Association' in Ward (editor), *The Reign of Queen Victoria*, 81.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Mundella Papers*, letter to Robert Leader, 27 June 1868.

<sup>46</sup> Letter to George Howell, 29 August 1868 (Howell Papers, Bishopsgate Institute).

<sup>47</sup> *The Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, 22 October 1867.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 June 1868, 6.

on to note that Mundella had continued a sensible relationship with the working class, compared with many other manufacturers. After suggesting that Mundella should have stood for Nottingham rather than Sheffield, 'a town which is sadly in want of a good member', the writer, J.W. Burns, expressed his 'very favourable opinion of his (Mundella's) services in the industrial interest'.<sup>49</sup>

An article headed 'Mr Mundella's Political Opinions' appeared in the same edition of the *Independent*. It reported Mundella's reply to a question asked at a meeting the previous evening, during which he outlined his major policy objectives. Although he started by calling for further electoral reform and espoused a national education programme, he also emphasised his work on arbitration and conciliation and his continued commitment to those principles. He told the electors that, if he became their representative, it would indicate: 'that Sheffield was in favour of burying the dissensions of the past, and of dealing with trade questions in a spirit of justice and conciliation in the future'.<sup>50</sup> An equally telling statement was that:

[I] have long been of the opinion that without association labour is weaker than capital and is not on a fair and equal footing in bargaining for the sale of labour. Just and legitimate combination, therefore, ought not to be liable to be construed into conspiracy; and the funds of trade societies ought to be protected against the thief as effectually as the funds of the Bank of England, or any other joint stock company.<sup>51</sup>

Mundella exhibited consistent support for working-class aspirations throughout his life, in areas such as working conditions, education, and the vote. In the context of the trade union movement, which is the focus of this chapter, he was a strong advocate of recognising unions as a legitimate and indeed necessary part of the business environment of his day. Mundella may have been motivated in part by altruism, for he himself had experienced poverty and hardship in his early years. Mundella was, however, an intelligent and hardworking factory owner who recognised the advantages to be gained by cultivating the support of his workers and especially of the union leaders. This may have also been influenced by enlightened self-interest. His work with the Nottingham Arbitration and Conciliation Board, not the first of its kind but arguably the first successful one, was based on the understanding he developed

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., Saturday 27 June 1868, 6.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

with the operative members of the Board. These were those who could carry the mass of workers with them on the decisions agreed to and who were invariably elected to leadership roles in their unions.

In many ways, Mundella was an anomaly amongst both manufacturers and radical Liberals. Unions were looked upon by most of the middle class as violently intimidating organisations which pressurised non-unionists into strike action and machine breaking.<sup>52</sup> The very idea of working men combining to improve their bargaining power with their employers seemed unmanly, even to such enlightened men as Richard Cobden and John Bright. In particular, Bright believed that workers cherished 'the love of independence, the privilege of self-respect, the disdain of being patronised and the ambition to rise'.<sup>53</sup> But it was Mundella's approach which became accepted, and remains so today. He recognised that it was the efficient management of resources which would produce the best profit. He sought out and used the best processes and machinery available, he bought raw materials effectively, he recognised market needs, and he ensured that he had the best workmen to achieve these ends.<sup>54</sup>

#### *Arbitration and Conciliation*

The origins of the Nottingham Hosiery Board of Conciliation and Arbitration have been briefly discussed earlier in this thesis. Mundella was clearly the prime mover in its initial establishment and, as President through its first years, his leadership continued until he entered parliament.<sup>55</sup> The use of arbitration to settle industrial disputes was not in itself novel, and it certainly was not invented by Mundella. It was routinely used to resolve arguments between employers and workers well before the developments of mid-century that are discussed in this chapter.<sup>56</sup> In those cases, arbitration was used after the event, to settle a dispute which was current. The Nottingham Board, and

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<sup>52</sup> Alan Fox, *History and Heritage*, 134.

<sup>53</sup> Read, *Cobden and Bright*, 212.

<sup>54</sup> Roy Church, "Technological Change and the Hosiery Board of Conciliation and Arbitration, 1860-1884", *Yorkshire Bulletin of Economic and Social Research*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (May 1963), 55-57.

<sup>55</sup> Crompton, *Industrial Conciliation*, 33; J.R. Hicks, 'The Early History of Industrial Conciliation in England', *Economica*, No.28 (March 1930), 27.

<sup>56</sup> J. A. Jaffe, *Striking a Bargain: Work and Industrial relations in England, 1815-1865*, Manchester University Press, 2000, 223.

indeed that established by Rupert Kettle for the building trades in the Midlands in 1865, were aimed at agreeing conditions and wages before strike action resulted.<sup>57</sup>

Crompton unreservedly asserted that Mundella was 'the inventor of systematic conciliation'.<sup>58</sup> In an article published in 1869, Crompton unequivocally stated that Mundella's Board was 'the best scheme that has yet been wrought out'.<sup>59</sup> He also believed that the system developed by Mundella was superior to that of Kettle because of its practicality. He contended that Kettle's was too legally based.<sup>60</sup> Mundella was able to get both the majority of manufacturers and workmen to refer issues to the Board before an actual dispute arose. It was recognised by both sides that market conditions change and that, particularly, wage rates might also have to change.<sup>61</sup> From the outset, Mundella sought unanimity in Board decisions and never exercised a casting vote.<sup>62</sup> Crompton quoted a statement by Mundella that the Board had not taken a vote in recent years.<sup>63</sup> He sought agreement, and got it. These actions created an atmosphere of goodwill and co-operation which had not previously prevailed in the hosiery industry. An article in *The Times* reviewed the first six years of the Nottingham Board and declared that 'the simplest, most humane and rational method of settling all disputes between employer and employed is arbitration and conciliation'.<sup>64</sup> It is clear that Mundella was the architect of this improvement.

Another important Mundella initiative was the reliance he placed on the trade unions as the proper representatives of the workmen.<sup>65</sup> He found that union leaders were 'generally the most intelligent men' and 'the most straightforward to deal with'.<sup>66</sup> Mundella's recognition of the value of the unions was something of a breakthrough at a time when they were regarded with widespread suspicion. Indeed, they were illegal, if generally tolerated. It was some years after the formation of the Nottingham Board that unions achieved legal recognition. In 1869, Crompton called for

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<sup>57</sup> Hicks, 'Early History of Industrial Conciliation', 31; Curthoys, *Governments, Labour, and the Law*, 90.

<sup>58</sup> Crompton, *Industrial Conciliation*, 33.

<sup>59</sup> Henry Crompton, 'Arbitration and Conciliation', *The Fortnightly Review*, May 1869, 622.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Curthoys, *Governments, Labour, and the Law*, 91.

<sup>62</sup> Renals, 'On Arbitration in the Hosiery Industry', 551-552.

<sup>63</sup> Crompton, 'Arbitration and Conciliation', 625.

<sup>64</sup> *The Times*, 29 January 1867, 'How To Avoid Strikes.'

<sup>65</sup> Fraser, *Trade Unions and Society*, 110-111.

<sup>66</sup> Crompton, 'Arbitration and Conciliation', 626.



the legalisation of the unions in strong terms. He said: 'The demand of the unions is strong, because it is right. It is simply for justice and equality before the law.'<sup>67</sup> This legalisation process is the subject of this chapter, but clearly Mundella was ahead of most public opinion.

The coincidence of the general election and the report of the Royal Commission on Trade Unions, in 1868, thrust Mundella onto the national scene. His selection to run in Sheffield was endorsed by many newly enfranchised working-class voters and his evidence before the Royal Commission was welcomed by the two peer commissioners, Lords Lichfield and Elcho.<sup>68</sup> Lord Lichfield, together with Harrison and Hughes, signed the Royal Commission's minority report.

### *The Royal Commission on Trade Unions*

The Royal Commission of 1867-8 was established to inquire into the trade union movement generally and especially into the matter of the relationship between masters and their workers. It provided the spark that eventually led to the legalisation of unions and their activities. Mundella gave evidence before the Commission on 14 July 1868 to inform them of his experience with arbitration, especially the reasons for the success of the Nottingham Board. His evidence covered ten closely printed pages in the Tenth Report of the Commissioners and contained much useful information on the state of the hosiery industry, the affect of overseas competition, and the relative levels of technical education.<sup>69</sup> His attitudes and reactions to these matters will be discussed in Chapter 6.

One of the Commissioners who questioned Mundella was John Arthur Roebuck, then MP for Sheffield and later that same year a bitter opponent of Mundella's for Liberal selection to contest the 1868 election. Roebuck had already alienated the Sheffield Liberal Committee by his anti-union position, by his attacks on the Liberal leader, Gladstone, by his actions against parliamentary reform, and his stance against

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 628.

<sup>68</sup> Curthoys, *Governments, Labour, and the Law*, 92.

<sup>69</sup> *Tenth report of the commissioners appointed to inquire into the organisation and rules of trade unions and other associations: together with minutes of evidence, 1867-8*, 73-83.

restrictions to liquor sales.<sup>70</sup> The meeting of the Committee was held towards the end of June. Roebuck attended, and some influential members decided that his ambivalence towards mainstream Liberal policy was such that they would not support his re-election. They then 'threw the whole weight of their influence into the cause of Mr Mundella'.<sup>71</sup> This was the position when Roebuck questioned Mundella at the Royal Commission. The 1868 election in Sheffield was an important step in Mundella's life.

For some years before the establishment of the Royal Commission, the trade unions were in the anomalous position of 'equipoise', with what was accepted as a temporary balance of forces.<sup>72</sup> They existed and generally functioned, but they had no legal status and no protection of their assets. Their main purposes, the negotiation of terms of employment and the organisation of actions such as strikes, could result in punitive action taken against them under common law. This uneasy situation came to a head largely due to two incidents; the Sheffield outrages of 1866 and the *Hornby v Close* case of 1867.<sup>73</sup>

Sheffield had long been a stronghold of militant unionism. In the 1850's and 1860's, several non-union saw grinders had been murdered, usually by gunpowder explosions.<sup>74</sup> In October 1866, a house occupied by the family of a saw grinder, who had not been a member of the union for twelve months, was badly damaged in an explosion.<sup>75</sup> This incident, and the increasing political uncertainty caused by agitation for parliamentary reform, persuaded the Conservative Home Secretary, Spencer Walpole, to institute an inquiry into the trade union movement.<sup>76</sup> Coincidentally, the judgement on the *Hornby v Close* case was handed down in January 1867, a month before the formal announcement of the Royal Commission. Although this was a simple

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<sup>70</sup> Robert Eadon Leader (editor), *Life and Letters of John Arthur Roebuck P.C., Q.C., M.P., with chapters of autobiography*, New Delhi: Isha Books, 2013 (first published 1897), 321.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> N.L Burn, *The Age of Equipoise: A Study of the mid-Victorian Generation*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1964, 82.

<sup>73</sup> Curthoys, *Governments, Labour and the Law*, 68-73.

<sup>74</sup> Much detailed information is contained in a Study Guide, *Sources for the Study of the Sheffield Outrages*, [www.sheffield.gov.uk/archives](http://www.sheffield.gov.uk/archives), 2011.

<sup>75</sup> *The Times*, 9 October 1866, 'A House Blown Up By Trade Unionists'.

<sup>76</sup> Curthoys, *Governments, Labour and the Law*, 65-66.

case of the misappropriation of funds by the treasurer of a branch of the United Society of Boilermakers, it developed into an issue of the security of union funds.<sup>77</sup>

Curthoys discussed the several determinations and opinions in some detail.<sup>78</sup> Whatever interpretation is given, it was perhaps the final reason for the formal re-evaluation of the place of trade unionism in British society. An anonymous leader in *The Times* expressed the position clearly:

The condition of Trades' Unions is daily acquiring more importance and engrossing more attention. There are, indeed, abundant reasons why we may be excused for looking upon Trades' Unions with suspicion, but none, we think, for the neglect and apathy with which their organisation and legal position have hitherto been regarded. Few inquiries would be more interesting than an investigation of their origin and legal position. Yet, strange to say, little or nothing has been done in this direction.<sup>79</sup>

Curthoys has since found that this unnamed writer was Robert Lowe, a former Liberal Home Secretary, and usually an enemy of trade associations.<sup>80</sup> Lowe had called unions 'a sort of legal monster' in an earlier Commons debate.<sup>81</sup> Thus, even those most opposed to unions recognised the inevitability of their legalisation and possibly their potent power. There were, however, suggestions that the Conservative Home Secretary set up the Royal Commission to keep the issues being raised about the legality of trade unions out of the Commons at a time when the matter of parliamentary reforms was being debated. Whatever the motivation, it was a seminal step for the trades' union movement and for Mundella himself.

The Commission's initial draft report was very much dictated by the extreme free-trade arguments, which, had long been expounded by men such as Cobden and Bright. Its author regarded unions as monopolistic and anti-competitive organisations that prevented men from pursuing their own best interests.<sup>82</sup> Harrison recorded that this report was 'fought line by line' and was modified considerably.<sup>83</sup> He also recognised the important role of the two peers 'who were the only truly impartial

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 68-73.

<sup>79</sup> *The Times*, 9 October 1866, 8.

<sup>80</sup> Curthoys, *Governments, Labour and the Law*, 72-73.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 97-98.

<sup>83</sup> Harrison, *Autobiographic Memoirs*, Vol.1, 323.

members of the Commission'.<sup>84</sup> Despite the changes which were made, the majority report did not satisfy all the Commissioners, and certainly not the unions. Harrison produced an alternative report which he, Hughes, and Lichfield signed.<sup>85</sup> Their report contained two essential provisions required by the unions. The first was that unions should be treated in law as any other entity, and, secondly, that a workman in combination should have the same rights as an individual.<sup>86</sup> To overcome the problem of a union being financially crippled by litigation, Harrison proposed to bring unions under the Friendly Societies Acts, which protected their funds from theft or fraud.<sup>87</sup> The minority report was taken up by the Liberal government in 1868 with Mundella and Hughes leading the fight for legislation.

#### *Mundella and Other 'Friends' of the Unions*

Until his appearance before the Royal Commission, Mundella had only been involved in the politics of Nottingham, and much occupied with his business activities. He had, however, developed the friendship of a group of men inclined to his position on unions and the working class generally. One of these was Thomas Hughes, better known today as the author of the popular novel, *Tom Brown's Schooldays*. A successful, Oxford-educated lawyer, Hughes had an early involvement with the Christian Socialist movement and its initiatives such as the Working Men's College and the Society for Promoting Working Men's Associations.<sup>88</sup> Elected to Parliament in 1865, he was very much involved in promoting the aims of the working man in Commons' debates and outside Parliament was one of the legal advisors to the trade union movement.<sup>89</sup> He indirectly represented the unions as a Commissioner on the 1867-68 inquiry and was a signatory to the minority report which was so influential in shaping trade union legislation. Mundella joined Hughes in Parliament after the 1868 elections and, in August 1869 they together introduced the reforming legislation based on Harrison's minority report.

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Webb, *The History of Trade Unions*, 270.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 271.

<sup>88</sup> Mack and Armytage, *Thomas Hughes*, 57-61.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 122.

Other important colleagues with whom Mundella worked in the field of trade union legislation were Goldwin Smith and George Howell. Smith was a celebrated classical scholar, historian and journalist of the late nineteenth century who actively addressed the political issues of the day.<sup>90</sup> His early career as an Oxford University don culminated in his appointment, in 1858, as Regius Professor of modern history. His political views, however, were radical. Amongst other issues, he fought for the removal of Anglican restrictions at Oxford and for national electoral reform. In this latter regard he became associated with Howell, initially a building trade union activist but later secretary of the Reform League and of the parliamentary committee of the Trades Union Congress.<sup>91</sup> Howell was instrumental in persuading Smith to support Mundella's 1868 election campaign in Sheffield. This was welcomed by Mundella, who wrote to Howell in August of that year, asserting that 'Mr Goldwin Smith could do much and secure ultimate success'.<sup>92</sup> Smith spoke at a meeting on 14 October in support of Mundella, who, in seconding the vote of thanks said:

He is here, it is true, somewhat through me, but a friend of both of us said to him 'Mundella is fighting a tough battle in Sheffield, could you, before you leave England, go and help him?' I received a letter by the next post from Mr Goldwin Smith to this effect 'I will go anywhere and do anything that I can to serve you.'<sup>93</sup>

Smith sailed to the United States soon after addressing this Sheffield meeting and spent the rest of his life there and in Canada. He did, however, keep up a vigorous correspondence with both Howell and Mundella in which he discussed such matters as republicanism, British government involvement in Canadian domestic issues, and Disraeli's pro-Turkish policy.<sup>94</sup> Royden Harrison calls Howell 'one of the most important Labour leaders of his day', and he and Mundella corresponded on labour legislation for many years.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Christopher A. Kent, 'Smith, Goldwin (1823-1910), journalist and historian', *ODNB* (accessed 24 August 2017).

<sup>91</sup> F.M. Leventhal, 'Howell, George (1833-1910), politician and writer', *ODNB* 2004, (accessed 4 May 2016).

<sup>92</sup> 29 August 1868, *Howell Collection*, Bishopsgate Institute.

<sup>93</sup> *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, Thursday, 15 October 1868, 3.

<sup>94</sup> W.H.G. Armytage, 'Goldwin Smith: Some Unpublished Letters', *Queen's Quarterly*, Vol. LIV, Winter, 1947, 452-460.

<sup>95</sup> Harrison, *Before the Socialists*, 47.

The third person who was influential in Mundella's development as spokesman for the working class in parliament was Robert Applegarth. He was the Secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners, most prominent in the great building dispute of 1859-60, and later a member of the group of London full-time trade-union secretaries that the Webbs called the 'Junta'.<sup>96</sup> He played an important role in the hearings of the Royal Commission on Trade Unions. Asa Briggs called Applegarth: 'the star of the proceedings', who spoke with 'unquestionable integrity'.<sup>97</sup> Perhaps it was during the sitting of the Commission that Mundella and Applegarth came to know, and respect, one another. It was Applegarth who advised William Dronfield, Secretary of the Sheffield Association of Organised Trades, to seek out Mundella as a candidate for the 1868 election.<sup>98</sup> Once Mundella had decided to stand, Applegarth collected testimonials which were published in the *Sheffield Independent* under the heading 'Mr Mundella: The Cloud of Witnesses'.<sup>99</sup> The letters were supplied by members of parliament, prominent employers, public figures and working-class organisations, and largely dealt with Mundella's success with the Nottingham Arbitration Board. They also included responses from some of his supporters already mentioned. Hughes wrote: 'he has carried us a great way further towards the solution of the great labour question than almost any other man', and Smith called him: 'the great promoter of union between two great classes – the employers and the employed'.

Applegarth's quest for support extended to the United States. An article in the *Philadelphia Gazette* strongly supported Mundella:

Mr Mundella is a man of Liberal views, the favourite of the working men, and a staunch friend of the great Republic. His election would be hailed with particular gratification in America, and as the trade of Sheffield is so largely with the United States, it seems rather singular and ungracious that an enemy of ours like Roebuck should so long have represented the town in Parliament.<sup>100</sup>

The writer was referring to Roebuck's support of the Confederacy during the Civil War.

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<sup>96</sup> Asa Briggs, *Victorian People: A reassessment of persons and themes, 1851-67*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972, 175.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

<sup>98</sup> A.W. Humphrey, *Robert Applegarth: Trade Unionist, Educationist, Reformer*, New York: Garland Publishing, 1984 (originally published Manchester, 1915), 63.

<sup>99</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 27 October 1868, 6.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

Applegarth approached the Liberal leader, Gladstone, to provide an endorsement for Mundella. He went as far as to include what appeared to be an extract from a speech by Gladstone in the testimonials he had published in the *Sheffield Independent*. In this, Gladstone characterised Mundella as: 'a man who has at no small sacrifice devoted his time, and his not common abilities and energies, to organising methods of friendly and systematic communication between workmen and capitalists, which have produced the most happy results'. Humphrey, however, quoted Gladstone's response to Applegarth's request as less than enthusiastic:

My opinion respecting Mr Mundella is a very strong and decided one, and there would probably be no occasion on which it would not be both a duty and a pleasure to state it, except on the occasion in connection with which you write. But as I understand the matter, there are three candidates in the field for Sheffield in connection with the Liberal opinion or the Liberal party, two of whom are in direct opposition to each other, Mr Mundella being one. Now, it appears to me that it is for the people of Sheffield only to decide between them, and that any opinion given by me, at this moment, respecting the abilities, character, or services of any of the candidates, would constitute a virtual interference, and would carry me beyond the line of duty. Under these circumstances I am sure you will excuse my silence.<sup>101</sup>

The electors of Sheffield went to the polls on 18 November 1868 and two of the three Liberal candidates were elected for the borough. The long-serving George Hadfield topped the poll and Mundella was elected in second place, displacing the unpopular Roebuck. Nationally, the Liberal Party achieved a landslide victory in this election, which was the first following the enfranchisement of many working-class men. Mundella was only one of the many Liberal candidates elected to parliament for the first time. Mundella must have made an early impression on the Party's leaders. Armytage refers to 'his natural confidence of bearing', but he was also recognised as a pioneer of industrial arbitration. Thus he was selected to second the reply to the Address from the Throne at the opening of Parliament in early 1869.

### *In Parliament*

Of more importance in the context of trade union legislation than his formal first speech, was Mundella's position in introducing a Bill based on Harrison's Royal Commission minority report. As might be expected of a new member, he wanted to

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<sup>101</sup> Humphrey, *Robert Applegarth*, 65.

get the feel of the House before embarking on a private member's Bill.<sup>102</sup> There was little support within the Liberal Government for such legislation.<sup>103</sup> The union movement, however, forcibly led by Applegarth, pressured members across the country and organised 'a great meeting in Exeter Hall where the workmen gave their approval to the measure'.<sup>104</sup> Both Hughes and Mundella spoke at his meeting and undertook to pilot the Bill through Parliament. The Home Secretary, Henry Austin Bruce, however, believed that it was more appropriate for the Government to introduce such a Bill rather than private members, so consideration was deferred.<sup>105</sup> Bruce brought in the Liberal Government's Trade Union Act in early 1871 which gave unions a legally recognised status. The trade union leaders, however, were not pleased with the continuation of the penal provisions contained in the Act.<sup>106</sup> These covered the 'crimes' of intimidation, abuse and coercion and maintained the position that criminal law action could be taken against workers during strikes. The government did make something of a concession to the unions and their parliamentary supporters by putting the criminal provisions into separate legislation, the Criminal Law Amendment Act, passed in June 1871. This was not an acceptable remedy for the unions because it made the activities of workers during strikes illegal but did not penalise employers for blacklisting individual employees.<sup>107</sup> During the 1874-5 Royal Commission on the Labour Laws, several union leaders asserted that the Act was too one-sided.<sup>108</sup> They argued that it was impossible to convict employers, yet blacklists were similar to coercion and intimidation by the men. Additionally, the punishments prescribed under the Act were much more severe than under common law.<sup>109</sup> The Secretary of the Durham Association of Miners provided an example, claiming that, if a worker was knocked down during a strike, the assailant would receive three months

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<sup>102</sup> *Mundella Papers*, letter to Leader, 3 January 1869.

<sup>103</sup> Webb, *History of Trade Unionism*, 258.

<sup>104</sup> Humphrey, *Applegarth*, 167.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>106</sup> Curthoys, *Governments, Labour and the Law*, 142-143.

<sup>107</sup> *Royal Commission on the Labour Laws, 1874-5*.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.



imprisonment. If the same incident occurred privately, a five shilling fine would apply.<sup>110</sup>

Mundella supported the unions in their antagonism towards the penal clauses of the proposed Trade Union Act. In early March 1871 he arranged for a deputation of union leaders to meet the Home Secretary who promised to reconsider their grievances.<sup>111</sup> It seems that Mundella may have been instrumental in dividing the Bill's clauses as a few days after the delegation he wrote to Leader saying:

The unionists complain of the third clause on account of its very complicated and obscure chapter of offences, and its implications that they ratten.<sup>112</sup> They are willing that the offences as described by Mr Bruce shall be severely dealt with, but that interference with the freedom of Labour shall be dealt with by the Criminal Law and apply equally to all classes.

I think they are right, but if the objectives are only sentimental, I think it would be wise to take them at their word, and by the simple expedient of dividing the bill, settle the question.<sup>113</sup>

Mundella continued to protest strongly against the penal provisions and 'denied that the offences in question were peculiar to workmen, and it was in every way desirable that there should be the alternative of a fine'.<sup>114</sup>

#### *Repeal of the Criminal Law Amendment Act*

Following the passing of this Act the union leaders and their supporters in the Commons persistently tried to persuade the Government to amend it. One year after its passage, Gladstone, refused to bring in an amending bill, noting that there had only been 'three or four objections out of hundreds of decisions'.<sup>115</sup> The Liberal Party continued to procrastinate on further labour reform until their defeat in the general election of March 1874. Indeed, the Webbs claimed that Gladstone's Cabinet 'steadfastly refused, right down to its fall, even to consider the possibility of altering

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Armytage, *A.J. Mundella*, 96.

<sup>112</sup> 'Ratten' is a now obsolete North of England word meaning the sabotage of the tools of a workman who opposed the union.

<sup>113</sup> *Mundella Papers*, 11 March 1871.

<sup>114</sup> *Hansard*, 4 April 1871, Vol. 205, c. 1178.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 15 July 1872, Vol. 212, c. 1132.

the Criminal Law Amendment act.<sup>116</sup> Soon after the installation of a Conservative government the trade-unionist journal, *The Bee-Hive*, asked:

What right has the Liberal Party to expect that workmen will favour its return to power when its most representative men show such hostility to workmen's interests?<sup>117</sup>

It was Disraeli's Government, through the Home Secretary, Assheton Cross, which finally repealed the Act in 1875 to ensure that labour disputes were civil and not criminal matters. It seemed an apparent contradiction that the Liberals showed considerable reluctance to embrace labour law reform yet the Conservatives, both in the matter of union legislation and in working conditions, were more amenable. The strong support of both Mundella and Hughes for the trade unionists' demands during the debate on the Trade Union Bill has been discussed earlier in this chapter. According to the Webbs, these two 'stood alone' in that support but, given the apathy of the Liberal leadership, they had limited success.<sup>118</sup>

Through the next few years Mundella was much occupied with other causes, such as further reform of the Factory Acts, safety at sea, and his constant passion, education. He must have been frustrated with his failure to get his party, in government during those years, to repeal the Criminal Law Amendment Act. However, he took the opportunity with a new government in power to bring the issue before the Commons.<sup>119</sup> The Home Secretary deferred consideration as he awaited the report of the Cockburn Royal Commission established to inquire into the provisions of the Act. It was to be over a year before the actual repeal. Mundella continued to play an important role and ensured, during the committee stage, that the replacement Acts properly embodied the necessary protection for trade unions and their members.<sup>120</sup>

### *Conclusions - Mundella's Battle for Union Rights*

It was a long struggle to establish that workmen who combined in unions could do so legally so that they could pursue improvements in pay and working conditions. Support

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<sup>116</sup> Webb, *History of Trade Unionism*, 268.

<sup>117</sup> *The Bee-Hive*, 16 May 1874, 3.

<sup>118</sup> Webb, *History of Trade Unionism*, 266.

<sup>119</sup> *Hansard*, 24 March 1874, Vol. 218, c. 286.

<sup>120</sup> Webb, *History of Trade Unionism*, 274.

for these aims came from groups of middle-class professionals and academics, such as the Christian Socialists and the Social Science Association, but few members of parliament championed them. The main exceptions were Hughes and Mundella.

As we have seen earlier in this chapter, Hughes was a middle-class lawyer and something of an idealist. Mundella's background was quite different. Both his business career and his political life showed that he was very much the pragmatist. His strength of conviction for the legalisation of the trade union movement, against the position of most of his fellow Liberals and many businessmen, says much for his determination to improve the life of so many of his fellow men. Although he strongly supported Cobden's laissez-faire principles in economic affairs, he did not agree that such principles should be extended into issues directly affecting the mass of people. Some state involvement was necessary to help those with little influence, such as union members. Some courage was required for this half-Italian, lower-class politician to stand against his leaders and in fact triumph. Whilst he was dedicated in his work for the trade-union movement he was soon in a position to actively improve the national education system and this will be treated in the following chapter.

Mundella championed the legislation of trade unions not simply on the basis of comparative legal rights. He had seen first-hand that it was more profitable to work with the union leaders than to be constantly at odds with them. He used a co-operative approach to enhance his own business by sponsoring inventors, improving work practices, and retaining a trained workforce. His leading role in establishing the hosiery industry's arbitration and conciliation board ensured that strike action was minimised. During Mundella's 20 years as a major manufacturer, he always worked constructively with the unions and recognised the importance of such a relationship. It was clear to him that the unions required proper legal recognition for them to play a useful role in Britain's changing social system.

Mundella was not the only player in the campaigns to bring the unions into the country's mainstream industrial life. There were, of course, the unions themselves, there were the several intellectuals who supported them, and there were a few 'advanced' Liberals in parliament. Mundella, however, was a constant throughout the battle. His work in this area is better recognised in the historiography than some of his other achievements. Nevertheless, his establishment of the first successful arbitration

and conciliation board often overshadowed accounts of his earlier practical work and his later parliamentary activities.

## Chapter 5 – Educating the Nation

Education has long been seen as an issue which embodied social progress and brought a measure of equality to people.<sup>1</sup> Many espoused this view in nineteenth-century Britain, but to succeed in providing a national system some state involvement seemed necessary. This issue was a much vexed question at that time. This chapter will deal only with elementary education. Chapter 6 will address the difficulties in the sphere of technical and higher education.

Before the 1870 Education Act, only a minority of children received an adequate elementary education. Many members of the upper and middle classes saw no benefit in educating children who were fated to spend their working lives in the fields, the factories, or the mines. And, indeed, many of the working class disliked the thought of primary education, as it robbed them of a wage earner. Fortunately there were people like Mundella, who not only saw the advantages both to the individual and to the nation, but was also able to do something about it. This chapter will discuss the somewhat tortuous path to a better primary education system and will argue that Mundella was the constant factor for many years.

A.J. Mundella is chiefly remembered by historians of the English education system for his introduction of the 1880 Act, which enforced compulsory elementary schooling. A distinguished historian of education, Richard Aldrich, writing in 1998, included Mundella with W.E. Forster, Arthur Balfour, H.A.L. Fisher, and R.A. Butler, in a list of the most significant politicians in the field of education.<sup>2</sup> He included Mundella on the basis of the 1880 Act. This is, however, a far too narrow an interpretation of Mundella's efforts to improve the nation's educational training, which he did at several different levels. Education was more important to him than his achievements as a manufacturer, his work to legalise trade unions, or his modernization of the Board of Trade.<sup>3</sup>

Mundella's own education was minimal, for he started his apprenticeship as a stockinger when he was only 11 years old. As we have seen, he showed an early

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<sup>1</sup> Gary McCulloch, *The Struggle for the History of Education*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2011, 1.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Aldrich, *Lessons from History of Education: The selected works of Richard Aldrich*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2006, 86.

<sup>3</sup> W.H. G. Armytage, 'A.J. Mundella, 1825-1897', *The Journal of Education*, Vol.79, No.936, July 1947, 375.

commitment to education by teaching in, and later superintending, a Sunday School in Leicester, and sitting on the board of the People's College in Nottingham.<sup>4</sup> He was a consistent proponent of compulsory primary education well before his election to parliament. He often adversely compared the English voluntary system with that of Germany, where compulsion ruled.<sup>5</sup>

This chapter will start by reviewing developments in the English education system from the late eighteenth century until Mundella's election to Parliament in 1868. An analysis of Mundella's own experiences, from his schooling until his involvement with Forster's 1870 Act, will show his continuous, and influential, commitment to reform. His work in framing and ensuring the passage of the 1870 Act will be discussed. Mundella was given responsibility for education policy in 1880, and he eventually achieved his aim of making primary schooling compulsory. It will be argued that Mundella exerted a significant influence in the improvement of education over a considerable period of time, but that his contribution has not been generally recognised.

### *Historical Background*

The idea that every child in England was entitled to some level of education did not really take hold until the early nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, parochial schools had been widely established in Scotland during the seventeenth century, based on the importance attached to a man's ability to read the Bible for himself.<sup>7</sup> Radical thinkers had called for universal education in the eighteenth century. For example Thomas Paine, in 1792, argued that: 'A nation under a well-regulated government should permit none to remain uninstructed. It is monarchical and aristocratical government only that requires ignorance for support.'<sup>8</sup> Moreover, he proposed a costed plan that

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<sup>4</sup> Ken Brand, 'The Most Eminent Resident', *Park News*, Nottingham, May 1999, 19.

<sup>5</sup> Robin Betts, 'A.J.Mundella, Robert Wild and Continental compulsory systems of education 1884-1889: conflicting views on the status of teachers', *History of Education*, 17:3 (1988), 221-222.

<sup>6</sup> Mary Sturt, *The Education of the People : A History of Primary Education in England and Wales in the Nineteenth Century*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967, 1.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man*, Toronto: Broadview Press, 2011, Part 2, Chapter 5, 270.

involved a payment, out of surplus taxes, to poor families provided they sent their children to school.<sup>9</sup>

The latter part of the eighteenth century into the early nineteenth century saw the development of the monitorial system and the establishment of Anglican and Nonconformist societies charged specifically with educating the children of the poor.<sup>10</sup> It was during this period that the first parliamentary action to establish parochial schools in England and Wales was attempted.<sup>11</sup> Samuel Whitbread, an erratic and radical Whig politician, championed schemes to reform the poor laws. These included a proposal to establish a national system of education. A Bill to provide this passed the Commons in 1807, after amendments to make it optional, but was rejected by the Lords.<sup>12</sup> Another inconsistent and populist Whig politician, Henry Brougham (later first Baron Brougham and Vaux, Lord Chancellor), introduced an Education Bill into the Commons in 1820.<sup>13</sup> Although it was a Bill aimed at establishing schools where they were needed, it foundered on sectarian grounds. Both the Church of England and the Nonconformists opposed it. It was left to Forster and Mundella, men with a very different education and outlook on life from Whitbread and Brougham, to improve the British educational system.

No new education proposals were presented to Parliament for over ten years after Brougham's attempt. However, following the election after the Reform Act of 1832, new members were ready to debate the requirement for a national system of education.<sup>14</sup> Brougham's stance was taken up by the Member for Bath, John Arthur Roebuck. As we saw in Chapter 3, Roebuck was a denigrator of trade unions, a supporter of the Confederate cause during the American Civil War, and a bitter opponent of Mundella during the 1868 Sheffield general election. However, in 1833, he proposed that parliament should: 'devise a means for the universal and national Education of the whole People', and argued 'that to this end the aid and care of the

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 266-267

<sup>10</sup> S.J. Curtis, *History of Education in Great Britain*, London: University Tutorial Press Ltd., 1963, 207-208.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, 208-209.

<sup>12</sup> D.R. Fisher, 'Whitbread, Samuel (1764-1815), politician', *ODNB* (accessed 17 November 2016).

<sup>13</sup> Curtis, *History of Education*, 220.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

state are absolutely needed'.<sup>15</sup> Later that year he moved a Bill which included several aspects subsequently included in the 1870 and 1880 Acts. These were the legal obligation on parents to send their children between six and 12 years of age to school, and the introduction of State Schools.<sup>16</sup> The government did not pursue this Bill, but in mid-August it voted to provide £20,000 for education and, arguably, this was the beginning of state control. In the event, however, there was no mechanism in place for the allocation of these funds, so the government simply made the existing denominational societies responsible for their use.<sup>17</sup>

The move towards greater state involvement in education was enhanced by the creation of a Committee of Education in 1839. This was a committee of the Privy Council and consisted of the great officers of state, who, perhaps, had little interest in the education of young boys and girls.<sup>18</sup> In 1856 this Committee became the Education Department. Although it was still the responsibility of the Lord President of the Council, it was represented in the House of Commons by a Vice-President, who controlled the administration and expenditure of the department.<sup>19</sup> This was a position eventually occupied by both Forster and Mundella, and it was on this basis that they made the great reforming changes to the English education system. Several eminent politicians served in this role but it was Mundella who made the greatest impact, at least with the teaching profession. The following quotation from *The Journal of Education* in 1897, shortly after Mundella's death, showed the admiration that was felt for Mundella within the teaching profession:

Mr Mundella will be remembered as the first English statesman of Cabinet rank who put education before politics. We are not forgetting the more conspicuous service that Mr Forster rendered to the cause of national education in 1870, but the great Act that bears his name was, after all, but an incident in his career. Mr Mundella was a leading member of the Education League long before he entered Parliament, and his interest in schools and teachers continued unabated to his dying day, though for the last twelve years of his life he had ceased to have any official connection with them.

His belief in education as the mainspring both of individual well-being and of national prosperity was unbounded, and he was never weary of enforcing his beliefs

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<sup>15</sup> *Commons Journal*, Vol. LXXXVIII, p615, 30 July, 1833 (accessed on UK Parliamentary Papers).

<sup>16</sup> *Hansard*, 31 July 1833, Vol. 20, c. 153.

<sup>17</sup> Sturt, *The Education of the People*, 69.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 77-79.

<sup>19</sup> Curtis, *History of Education*, 248.



in both Parliament and on the platform, with a robust and sturdy eloquence that always gained him a hearing.<sup>20</sup>

### *Historiography*

With such a resounding endorsement of Mundella's role in improving education it would be reasonable to expect that he would be well represented in the historiography of education. A contemporary account of the battle for a national primary education system was written by Francis Adams in 1882.<sup>21</sup> Adams was the secretary of the National Education League and wrote the book to 'outline the struggle to obtain a legal recognition of the duty of the State to give elementary instruction to its children'.<sup>22</sup> Asa Briggs called Adams' work: 'the most useful single monograph on the subject', and warned that no historian of English education in the nineteenth century could afford to neglect it.<sup>23</sup> Adams mentioned Mundella several times, mainly in regard to his membership, and criticism, of the League. He did, however, note the quick passage of the 1880 Act, and commented on Mundella's 'well-known views upon compulsion'.<sup>24</sup>

In later general histories, however, Mundella is barely mentioned and then usually only as the initiator of the 1880 Act. In their history of English education published in 1973, John Lawson and Harold Silver referred to Mundella only twice, and one reference is erroneous, confusing the statesman with his nephew.<sup>25</sup> Admittedly they attempted to cover their subject from Anglo-Saxon times through to 1972, so detail is somewhat sparse. Another general history, written by S.J. Curtis, was first published in 1948 and ran to at least five editions.<sup>26</sup> It was specifically written: 'to meet the needs of students in University Education Departments and Training Colleges'. It contained 706 pages from 'English Schools before the Reformation to

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<sup>20</sup> Occasional Notes, *The Journal of Education*, London, 1 August 1897.

<sup>21</sup> Francis Adams, *History of the Elementary School Contest in England*, London: Chapman and Hall, 1882, (reprinted by The Harvester Press in 1982).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, *Introduction*, iii.

<sup>23</sup> Asa Briggs, 'Struggle: Fighting for the Education Act, 1870', *The Collected Essays of Asa Briggs*, Vol.3, No. 15, Brighton: Harvester Press, 1985-1991, 246.

<sup>24</sup> Adams, *History of the Elementary Contest, School*, 334.

<sup>25</sup> John Lawson and Harold Silver, *A Social History of Education in England*, London: Methuen, 1973, 329 and 369.

<sup>26</sup> S.J. Curtis, *History of Education in Great Britain*, London: University Tutorial Press, 1963 (fifth edition).

Recent Developments in British Education' (to 1962). There was but a single reference to Mundella, which again referred to the 1880 Act. It did mention his framing of by-laws compulsory on all School Boards and School Attendance Committees and concluded: 'Thus the question of compulsion was definitely settled'.<sup>27</sup> Frank Smith, writing in 1931, said more about Mundella. He praised Mundella for 'the conspicuous help' he gave Forster in framing the 1870 Bill and noted that teachers welcomed his appointment as Vice-President, 'for he had the reputation of being a liberal reformer and a keen educationist'.<sup>28</sup> However, Smith diminished Mundella's role by asserting that the real power in the Department was the Secretary, Mr. Cumin, 'who was not disposed to alter things that were'.<sup>29</sup>

Recent histories of education, which concentrated more on the nineteenth century, generally gave more space to Mundella. Writing in 1967, Mary Sturt made 'an attempt to show how, during the nineteenth century, the idea grew up that the provision of universal education was one of the functions of the state'.<sup>30</sup> Sturt, who was the Vice-Principal of a Teacher Training College, wrote from a teacher's point of view, and she criticized Mundella for insisting on regulation and control of the education system.<sup>31</sup> She accused Mundella and his Secretary of encouraging the inspectors to punish teachers suspected of immorality and embezzlement with suspension of their registration.<sup>32</sup> Sturt seemed to think Mundella somewhat devious and wrote:

When Mundella had to answer questions on it [the Code, i.e. regulations governing educational practice] in Parliament he adopted a tone of reasonableness and compromise; but as applied by inspectors it was inflexible and oppressive – and it was with the inspectors that power lay.<sup>33</sup>

She did, however, pay him a somewhat backhanded compliment by quoting from *Schoolmaster*, which said 'that teachers could not wait till Mr Mundella had reformed

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 283.

<sup>28</sup> Frank Smith, *A History of English Elementary Education 1760-1902*, University of London Press, 1931, 291, 315.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 316.

<sup>30</sup> Sturt, *The Education of the People*, Preface, v.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 344.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 347.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

the body of inspectors'.<sup>34</sup> This seemed to show that Mundella was conscious of the problem and was prepared to address it. Mundella was mentioned, briefly, in two more recent histories of education, by H.C. Dent in 1970 and Michael Sanderson in 1995.<sup>35</sup> Both wrote about his 1880 Act and its introduction of compulsory elementary education.

A.S. Bishop, in his study of the increasing centralized control of education, referred to Mundella frequently and in complimentary terms. He described Mundella as 'a politician who possessed all of his predecessor's independence of thought and considerably more imagination'.<sup>36</sup> Mundella had succeeded the Conservative, Lord George Hamilton, who had found education 'terribly meticulous and dull'.<sup>37</sup> Contrary to the assertions of several of the writers previously discussed, Bishop is quite clear that Mundella was conscious of the shortcomings of the inspectorate and, immediately after his appointment, he set about correcting the problems.<sup>38</sup> Although Bishop is uniformly positive about Mundella's work, he gave more attention to the internal operations of the Department. In particular Bishop discussed the policies and actions of the Secretaries and the inspectorate rather than their political masters. Mundella's work to improve the operation of the Department and the School Boards is dealt with later in this chapter.

Gillian Sutherland, in her 1973 study of policy making in education during the final thirty years of the nineteenth century, discussed Mundella's achievements in considerable detail. She complimented him as being 'of all Vice-Presidents, the most bustling, the most eager to get things done'.<sup>39</sup> Sutherland illustrated Mundella's pragmatism by quoting from a letter he wrote to Leader in 1876 during the argument on Church-based schools:

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 348, quoting *Schoolmaster*, 18 March 1882, 289.

<sup>35</sup> H.C. Dent, *1870-1970: Century of Growth in English Education*, London: Longman, 1970, 17; Michael Sanderson, *Education, Economic Change and Society in England, 1780-1870*, Cambridge University Press, 1995, 17.

<sup>36</sup> A.S. Bishop, *The Rise of a Central Authority for English Education*, Cambridge at the University Press, 1971, 103.

<sup>37</sup> John Ramsden, 'Hamilton, Lord George Francis (1845-1927), politician', *ODNB* (accessed 28 May 2015).

<sup>38</sup> Bishop, *The Rise of Central Authority*, 115.

<sup>39</sup> Gillian Sutherland, *Policy-Making in Elementary Education, 1870-1895*, Oxford University Press, 1973, 92.

I know the result of the measure cannot be satisfactory to Nonconformists or Educationalists, but are we to leave the rural districts in ignorance until we have disestablished the Church? That is practically what it comes to.<sup>40</sup>

Mundella introduced a New Code in 1882 which came under considerable criticism; nevertheless, he defended it in an unusually confrontationalist style.<sup>41</sup> This will be explored later in the chapter.

In his 1977 Ph.D. thesis, Lionel Ward reviewed the influence of the political parties on British education from 1870 until 1918, and thus covered the vast majority of Mundella's time in parliament.<sup>42</sup> Surprisingly, Ward paid scant attention to Mundella's contributions in improving the British educational system. Ward dismissed the significance of the 1880 Act by stating that, at the time it was passed, compulsory education was no longer a serious political issue.<sup>43</sup> In his conclusions, however, Ward included Mundella, alongside Forster, Acland and Fisher as the most 'able and enthusiastic personalities who influenced events' in education.<sup>44</sup>

A relatively recent biography of Forster by Patrick Jackson contained many insights into Mundella's position on education. At the beginning of his parliamentary career, Mundella supported Forster's 1870 Act. Mundella greeted Forster's speech presenting the Bill 'with the most unqualified satisfaction'.<sup>45</sup> Later, when Mundella was responsible for education, Forster was equally collaborative.<sup>46</sup> Their positions were reversed when Forster praised Mundella for overriding objections to setting up School Boards, and commented that he was 'acting exactly as he would have done himself'.<sup>47</sup> Jackson sounded one sour note by suggesting that 'Mundella supported Forster staunchly during the passage of the Bill, but tended to exaggerate the extent of his own influence'.<sup>48</sup> The influences of one on the other are important in the development of education policy and will be pursued further in this chapter.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 144, ( *Mundella Papers*, Mundella to Leader, 26 June 1876).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>42</sup> Lionel Owen Ward, *An investigation into the educational ideas and contribution of the British political parties (1870-1918)*, Ph.D. Thesis, University of London, 1977.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 426.

<sup>45</sup> Jackson. *Education Act Forster*, 161.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 261.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 307.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., n.66, 340.

It is, perhaps, not surprising that those historians writing more sweeping accounts of the development of the English educational system paid little attention to one minister in the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, the introduction of compulsory elementary schooling should be viewed as a major step forward in educating the nation, and it was Mundella who achieved this. The works of Bishop and Sutherland dealt more deeply with the period covered by this thesis and concentrated on the political imperatives concerning education. As a result, Mundella is better represented in their histories. Bishop acknowledged Mundella's position of strength under both the Presidents of Council, Earl Spencer and Lord Carlingford, whom he served, showing him as the initiator of policy.<sup>49</sup> Sutherland also accepted his achievements, and commented on his style as 'bustling'.<sup>50</sup>

Armytage was a most prolific writer on Mundella and on English education in general. Following his death in 1998, three colleagues paid tribute to Armytage, and called him 'an indefatigable historian of education', and 'the last of the great liberal historians of education and in many ways the best'.<sup>51</sup> He first published a paper on Mundella in 1947.<sup>52</sup> This short article was a straightforward record of Mundella's life and achievements but in recording the compulsory attendance clause of the 1880 Act, Armytage argued: 'By this he crowned the agitation of a lifetime.'<sup>53</sup> Armytage followed this article with a lengthier paper detailing Mundella's five-year tenure as Vice-President of the Council.<sup>54</sup> This generally praised Mundella's work. For example, his opinion on Mundella's initial efforts was as follows:

For his first year's work it was most impressive. Everyone was delighted. At Sheffield his constituents gave him a great reception and when he protested, they shouted 'you're worth it'. The doyen of the inspectorate, Matthew Arnold, was similarly impressed.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Bishop, *The Rise of Central Authority*, 105.

<sup>50</sup> Sutherland, *Policy-making*, 92, 144.

<sup>51</sup> Brian Simon, David Bradshaw and Gary McCulloch, 'Professor Harry Armytage', *History of Education*, Vol. 28, No. 2, (June 1999), 219.

<sup>52</sup> Armytage, 'A.J. Mundella', *The Journal of Education*, July, 1947.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 376.

<sup>54</sup> W.H.G. Armytage, 'A.J. Mundella as Vice-President of the Council, and the Schools Question, 1880-1885,' *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 63, No. 246, (January 1948), 52-82.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

In sub-titling his biography of Mundella, 'The Liberal Background to The Labour Movement', Armytage suggested that Mundella 'unbeknown to [himself], laid the foundations of the Labour Movement'.<sup>56</sup> When he reviewed Mundella's place amongst the statesmen of the period, Armytage concludes: 'He was the pre-eminent Lib.-Lab. of his generation though he would have scorned the title. His nature made it inevitable. Supple, diplomatic, humane, he had few interests outside the blue books'.<sup>57</sup> The biography devotes but one chapter, 34 pages in a book of over 300, to Mundella's time as Vice-President of the Council, but of course Armytage had already published several papers on this topic.

In 1964, Cambridge University Press published Armytage's *Four Hundred Years of English Education*. In this work, Armytage commenced with a discussion of the importance of education in maintaining Protestantism in Elizabethan England and moved through to the complex system operating in 1959.<sup>58</sup> As with other general histories of education, Armytage devoted only one chapter to the reforms enacted between 1868 and 1889, the period covered by this thesis. He mentioned Mundella in regard to two matters. Firstly, inevitably, Armytage discussed the enforcing of compulsory elementary schooling. Secondly, he described Mundella's long-standing advocacy for better technical education in Britain and his appointment of the Samuelson Royal Commission to enquire into this issue.<sup>59</sup> It was a somewhat disappointing coverage of Mundella's work, especially from an historian who had written extensively and enthusiastically about him. In a lecture given at King's College, London, in 1951, Armytage called Mundella 'one of Forster's closest friends – indeed almost his unofficial adjutant', when discussing the 1870 Act.<sup>60</sup> He went on to acknowledge 'Mundella's shrewd supple intelligence and enlightened social conscience'.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Armytage, *A.J. Mundella*, inside cover.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 335.

<sup>58</sup> W.H.G. Armytage, *Four Hundred Years of English Education*, Cambridge at the University press, 1964, *passim*.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>60</sup> W.H.G. Armytage, 'W.E.Forster and the Liberal Reformers', in A.V.Judges, *Pioneers of English Education*, London: Faber & Faber, 1952, 214.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

In his 1986 work on the political debates on religious policy in the early years of Gladstone's first ministry, J. P. Parry referred, favourably, to Mundella's involvement with education reform.<sup>62</sup> He noted, for example, Mundella's suggestion for a timetable conscience clause in the 1870 Act which would confine religious teaching to the beginning or end of the school day.<sup>63</sup> Although not writing a history of education, Parry clearly showed the influence of religion on education policy during and after the passing of the Act. He did, however, mistakenly refer to Mundella as a lace manufacturer.<sup>64</sup>

Despite Armytage's promotion of Mundella and particularly of Mundella's work in the field of education, more recent writers on education have relegated Mundella to 'the minister who made primary education compulsory'. According to Gary McCulloch, interest in the remarkable changes to the English education system during the period covered by this thesis 'has rather dried up'.<sup>65</sup> This historiographical review has relied on works written at least 20 years ago and thus a fresh appraisal is justified. Overall, the literature does not give Mundella the credit for his persistence and for the influence he asserted on other politicians and on public servants. It is an issue that requires addressing.

### *Before Parliament*

Mundella had a life-long commitment to improving the education of working people, both at the elementary and adult levels. Armytage quoted him as telling an audience: 'You must forgive me, but, when a man rides his hobby, he rides it hard.' Mundella's hobby was education.<sup>66</sup> As we have seen, Mundella's early schooling was minimal. He attended St Nicholas' National Society School for only a few years, but his education

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<sup>62</sup> J.P. Parry, *Democracy and Religion: Gladstone and the Liberal Party, 1867-1875*, Cambridge University Press, 1986, 336-337.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 297.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>65</sup> Professor Gary McCulloch, International Centre for Historical Research in Education, UCL, email 12 December 2016.

<sup>66</sup> W.H.G Armytage, 'A.J. Mundella, 1825-1897', *The Journal of Education*, Vol. 79, no. 936, July 1947, 375.

was supplemented by his mother's teaching. Mundella persisted with organised education during his apprenticeship years, attending evening classes at the Mechanics Institute.<sup>67</sup>

Although Church Schools of varying sorts had long existed, the concept of teaching reading and writing to working-class children on Sundays was initiated by Robert Raikes in 1780.<sup>68</sup> This system was originally designed to prevent children who were working six days a week in factories or mines from being troublesome on their single day off. It was a concept adopted by most denominations and brought some measure of education to a group not previously involved with any schooling at all. By 1870, membership of these schools had reached three and a half million. This was a much faster growth than the national birth rate, or the recruiting rate of the churches.<sup>69</sup> Mundella attended the All Saints Sunday School in Leicester and ultimately became a teacher and superintendent.<sup>70</sup> He also attended debating classes at the Gallowtree Gate Congregational Chapel, where, presumably, he first developed his skill as a public speaker.<sup>71</sup> His urge to better himself thus started early, and foreshadowed the ambitious and energetic man of his adult life. His involvement with these poor schools would have shown him the importance of education to the full strata of society and his experiences would have shown him the reservoir of untapped talent available.

After moving to Nottingham in 1848, Mundella continued his dedication to the education of the poor, despite the initial demands of his business. He took an active management role in several schools, both Anglican and Nonconformist, and was a trustee of the newly established People's College.<sup>72</sup> Founded in 1846, and opened in 1847, the inscription above the entrance reads:

The People's College, Erected by Voluntary Contributions and Vested in the Hands of Ten Trustees for the Education of the Working Classes of Nottingham and the Neighbourhood for Ever AD MDCCCXVI<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Armytage, *A. J. Mundella*, 16.

<sup>68</sup> Philip B. Cliff, *The Rise and Development of the Sunday School Movement in England 1780-1980*, Nutfield: National Christian Education Council, 1986, 2.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>70</sup> 'Death of MP and former hosiery manufacturer', *Knitter's Circular and Monthly Record*, August, 1897.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Higginbotham, *The Career of A.J. Mundella*, 6.

<sup>73</sup> Website of 'The People's College, Nottingham', ([www.peoplescollege.co.uk](http://www.peoplescollege.co.uk)) (accessed 17 January 2017).



The aim of providing an education to those who had not previously had the opportunity was embraced by Mundella, who had been unable to access a similar institution himself. The success of this venture can be gauged by its longevity.<sup>74</sup> Although changing its character to one of a technical college, it survived until 2006. Mundella's years in Nottingham were occupied with growing his business, becoming involved with municipal affairs, taking a leading role in establishing a Chamber of Commerce, and, not least, developing a successful arbitration and conciliation tribunal for the hosiery industry.

Although there is little direct evidence of Mundella's ongoing involvement in educational matters, it is significant that in 1867 he was asked to comment on a letter written by Dr. Lyon Playfair on the effectiveness of British technical education. Playfair was one of the country's most eminent scientists, and was often called upon to provide governments with expert advice.<sup>75</sup> At that time, Lord Taunton was chairing a Royal Commission inquiring into the level of education being provided by endowed secondary schools. Following reports that the International Exhibition at Paris had highlighted Britain's manufacturing deficiencies, Taunton asked Playfair to provide his opinion on technical education.<sup>76</sup> In turn, this was referred to sixteen gentlemen, one of whom was Mundella. It asked for their views on what was Playfair's very negative assessment of Britain's technical training.<sup>77</sup> This showed not only Mundella's continued interest and knowledge of the subject, but also acknowledged his expertise in the field. Although Playfair was specifically addressing technical education, Mundella's response started with his views on primary teaching:

In the main I agree with Dr Lyon Playfair's letter of the 15<sup>th</sup> ultimo, but I am of the opinion that art and industrial education without a thoroughly organised system of primary instruction will not remove the danger that threatens our manufacturing and commercial supremacy.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Graeme, J.M. Goodey, *Playfair, Lyon, first Baron Playfair, (1818-1898), politician and chemist ODNB*, (accessed 20 January 2014).

<sup>76</sup> Schools Inquiry Commission, *Report Relative to Technical Education*, London, 1867.

<sup>77</sup> Those asked to comment were academics, businessmen and representatives of the various professional institutions.

<sup>78</sup> Schools Inquiry Commission, 1857, 27.

He goes on to detail his observations 'on a subject in which I have long been deeply interested'.<sup>79</sup> He compared the education level of the workmen in his English hosiery factories with those in France and Germany and considered that the contrast was 'humiliating' and 'the frightful ignorance is disheartening and appalling'.<sup>80</sup> Towards the end of his letter, he argued that England should follow the German practice and compel parents to send their children to school: 'If we continue the fight with our voluntary system, we shall be defeated.'<sup>81</sup> He was consistent in his views concerning compulsory elementary education. Forster, as the then Vice-President, was a member of the Taunton Commission, and later quoted Mundella's letter in his arguments for his own 1870 Education Act.<sup>82</sup>

In later years, and especially in his obituaries, Mundella's drive for improved education is often portrayed as altruistic. A panel on his memorial in Nottingham's Rock Cemetery reads:

LOVING KNOWLEDGE FOR ITS OWN SAKE HE  
STROVE TO DIFFUSE IT AMONG HIS COUNTRYMEN

His earlier actions and statements clearly showed that his main concern for better education, both at the elementary and technical levels, was to produce a better quality worker for the manufacturing industries. He recognised that a good workman was vital, firstly for his developing business, and later to compete against a burgeoning foreign competition. Mundella's actions in encouraging workmen to develop better machinery, in supporting responsible trade unionism, in developing a workable arbitration and conciliation system and in advocating a better education process, showed a pragmatic, rather than an ideological, approach to the labour problems of the mid-nineteenth century.

Mundella was not, of course, the first to embrace such sentiments. He was much influenced by Richard Cobden. Cobden had warned in 1851 that:

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 28

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>82</sup> Jackson, *Education Act Forster*, 143.

The very security, the trade and the progress of a nation depend, not so much on contest of arms, as on the rivalry in science and the arts, which must spring from education.<sup>83</sup>

Such a sentiment impressed Mundella. He was later to say: 'I believe there is one thing more than any other wanted in this country, and it is a Cobden for education.'<sup>84</sup> Armytage suggested that Mundella intended to fill that role himself.<sup>85</sup> Cobden was involved in the formation of the 'National Public School Association' in 1850 which aimed at energising public opinion for education improving legislation.<sup>86</sup> It was, however, the 'National Education League', established in 1869, which was the most significant organisation in advocating radical education reform.

The League's main objective was to secure primary education for every child in Britain, but they also wanted it to be free and non-religious. This was contrary to Forster's aim, which was to supplement the existing voluntary system. Mundella was working closely with Forster in 1869, yet he had attended the first meeting of the League and took up membership, albeit with 'marked reservations'.<sup>87</sup> Members of the League were prominent in their opposition to Forster's Bill and later tried to amend the Act after it had been passed.

#### *Mundella and the 1870 Education Act*

The many failed attempts to introduce a national elementary education system in England and Wales during the first 70 years of the nineteenth century have been discussed earlier in this chapter. The objections to state involvement in education were numerous. Some of the most often expressed revolved around a perceived reduction of personal initiative, a loss of freedom of thought, the discouragement of voluntary charitable activity, and the view that some personal payment should be made towards schooling costs.<sup>88</sup> Some of these objections reflected antagonism towards state involvement. The most significant hurdle, however, was that of religious

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<sup>83</sup> J. Bright and J.E.T. Rogers (editors), *Speeches on Questions of Public Policy by Richard Cobden M.P.*, London: Macmillan, 1878, 609.

<sup>84</sup> Speech, 28 August 1868, quoted by Armytage, *A.J. Mundella*, 38.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> Adams, *History of the Elementary School Contest*, 155.

<sup>87</sup> Briggs, *Struggle*, 261.

<sup>88</sup> James Murphy, *The Education Act 1870: Text and Commentary*, Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1972, 10.

teaching. Many elementary schools were operated by either the Anglican National Society or the Nonconformist British and Foreign Schools Society. Both received some state funding. Most Anglican churchmen believed that the provision of education was the prerogative of the Established Church and that the Anglican catechisms should be taught in schools.<sup>89</sup> The British Society wanted education to be non-sectarian. There were several variations on these positions.

Mundella had long been an advocate of an improved education system, and once in Parliament was an enthusiastic supporter of enabling legislation. He provided important backing to Forster during the passage of the 1870 Education Act through his statements in the Commons. There is also some evidence of his influence on Forster's thinking and his behind-the-scenes advocacy. Mundella wrote to Leader in November 1869 after dining with Forster. He reported that Forster had urged him 'to work away at the [education] question and stir up the public mind as much as possible'.<sup>90</sup> The following month he told Leader that Forster had requested him to visit him to discuss the upcoming Education Bill.<sup>91</sup> His dedication to improving education continued unabated after the passing of the Act and eventually he was able to enact legislation directly as Vice-President of the Council.

We have seen that many MPs argued against universal education, doubting the value of providing schooling to the working class. The passing of the 1867 Reform Act changed the views of some influential men. The Act extended the franchise to a larger proportion of the working class, many of whom were uneducated. This presented a dilemma to some members of parliament, expressed famously by Robert Lowe in an often quoted speech during the Third Reading of the Parliamentary Reform-Representation of the Peoples' Bill:

I shrink from the notion of forcing education on people. The whole question has completely changed. All the opinions I held on that subject are scattered to the winds by this measure of the Government.

Sir, it appears to me that before we have intrusted the masses – the bulk of whom are all uneducated – with the whole power of this country we should have taught them a little more how to use it.

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<sup>89</sup> Darlow W. Humphreys, *Education in 1870: A lecture to commemorate the Centenary of Forster's Education Act*, Lyndale House Paper: University of Bristol School of Education, 9 March 1970, 4.

<sup>90</sup> *Mundella Papers*, letter to Leader, 7 November 1869.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 December 1869.

I believe it will be absolutely necessary that you should prevail on our future masters to learn their letters.

You have placed the government in the hands of the masses, and must therefore give them education.<sup>92</sup>

Lowe, a Liberal, and former Vice-President of the Council, and previously an implacable opponent of State involvement in education, clearly articulated the necessity for it after the extension of the franchise.

Forster had long been involved in advocating a national education system and he, together with Henry Austin Bruce, had introduced bills in 1867 which had been withdrawn. He took the lead early in 1868 with a long speech, during which he asked if the Conservative Government would soon bring forward a Bill to provide for improved elementary education.<sup>93</sup> Forster touched on most of the issues which were debated during the passage of his 1870 Act. Interestingly, in addressing the matter of religious teaching, he thought that a Conservative Government might: 'better deal with the question as they would carry with them more completely the clergy of the country'.<sup>94</sup> He noted that there had been a positive change in support for educational reform but, perhaps in response to Lowe's opinion given above, he said:

If the Reform Bill was likely to do harm, the harm would have been done before their educational measures took effect; and, on the other hand, he believed that the great good of the Reform Bill would be shown before those measures took effect.<sup>95</sup>

Forster rejected the view that the passing of the Reform Act necessitated an improved education level for the working class. He saw education as a working-class entitlement, the demand for which had been opened up by parliamentary reform.<sup>96</sup>

Earlier that year, Forster spoke at a Reform League meeting held at St James' Hall in London.<sup>97</sup> He spoke passionately about educating every child:

So as to read intelligently and thoughtfully, write legibly and correctly, and practice ciphering usefully, and should also acquire some knowledge of grammar, geography, and history.

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<sup>92</sup> *Hansard*, 15 July 1867, Vol. 188, c. 1549.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 February 1868, Vol. 190, c. 734.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 738.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 740.

<sup>96</sup> Jackson, *Education Act Forster*, 145.

<sup>97</sup> *The Times*, 8 January 1868, 10.

In this speech, Forster paid tribute to Mundella and quoted his letter to the Royal Commission on Education in which Mundella espoused the need for technical education but said that literacy must come first. Forster concluded by 'exhorting the working classes to assist in securing a system of education such as would keep England in its proud position'.<sup>98</sup> He supported Mundella's call for a better elementary education as a necessity for better technical training.

The pressure to provide general elementary education continued to mount. In January 1868, the Manchester Educational Committee convened a National Education Conference to discuss a Bill which Forster and Bruce planned to introduce into the Commons. Mundella, not yet a member of parliament, spoke on compulsory schooling. He told of his experiences in Saxony, where his firm employed 700 people, and said that:

The system worked in a most harmonious manner, without the semblance of police interference. The most that was done was to read the school code to negligent parents. National sentiment enforced the law. He thought the system might be adopted in this country. It would be the schoolmaster's business to see that children attended school, and not the policeman's.<sup>99</sup>

In May 1869, and now in Government, Forster addressed a 'large gathering of the friends of education', which included Mundella, now a member of parliament. He reiterated Mundella's views on the superiority of the German system saying that:

He would never be contented until he saw in every town in England a good day school, like those in Prussia, where a child could, at a comparatively small sum, have an excellent education, and at the same time live in his father's house, and enjoy his father's care and his mother's love.<sup>100</sup>

He received laughter and applause when he said that 'he was sure that Mr Mundella, who was younger than he was, would live to see it' [elementary education for all the population of England]. This seems to show an intimacy somewhat closer than that of just parliamentary colleagues. Briggs asserted that Forster was seeing a lot of Mundella in late 1869.<sup>101</sup> Mundella's letters to Leader in November and December of that year, and quoted earlier in this chapter, confirm this. Jackson, also, noted that Forster

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> *Manchester Times*, 18 January 1868.

<sup>100</sup> *The Times*, 21 May 1869, 9.

<sup>101</sup> Briggs, *Struggle*, 261.

consulted 'like-minded friends' such as Mundella at this time.<sup>102</sup> Allowing for the reticence of Victorian manners, Forster wrote to Mundella in early 1870 and addressed it 'My dear Mundella'. He went on to say 'finally we may drop the Mr'.<sup>103</sup>

Gladstone formed his first ministry in December 1868, having inherited a system which H.C.G. Matthew called 'essentially minimalist'.<sup>104</sup> In particular, the state's responsibility for education was through the Church of England and its schools, with small grants to a few non-conformist establishments. By 1870, however, there was a general recognition that a national system was needed.<sup>105</sup> Forster was appointed Vice-President of the Committee of Council on Education and as such had responsibility for educational policy in the Commons, but he was not in the Cabinet. His nominal superior, the Lord President of the Council, was Lord de Grey, who sat in the Lords and was a member of the Cabinet. Murphy suggested that this Cabinet 'approached its task [of introducing national elementary education] in a most remarkable state of indecision'.<sup>106</sup> All the members of Cabinet, with the exception of the Quaker John Bright, were Anglicans.<sup>107</sup> The Cabinet was thus hardly representative of the Liberal Party as a whole, which had seen much of its electoral success coming from the support of non-conformists and radicals. This fact was frequently raised during the debates on the 1870 Act.

Jackson stated that: 'The evolution of the 1870 Education Act was a complex and confused process, for which Forster was by no means wholly responsible.'<sup>108</sup> This complexity has been pursued at length by a number of writers.<sup>109</sup> It is not the purpose of this thesis to re-analyse the somewhat tortuous progress of the Bill through the Commons and the Lords until it received royal assent on 9 August 1870, but to discuss Mundella's influence on its passage. He was pleased when Forster introduced the Bill

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<sup>102</sup> Jackson, *Education Act Forster*, 152.

<sup>103</sup> *Mundella Papers*, 20 January 1870.

<sup>104</sup> H.C.G. Matthew (editor), *The Gladstone Diaries: Vol. VII, January 1869 – June 1871*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982, xxv.

<sup>105</sup> Murphy, *The Education Act*, 36.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> Matthew, *The Gladstone Diaries*, xxxi.

<sup>108</sup> Jackson, *Education Act Forster*, 150.

<sup>109</sup> David Roland, *The Struggle for the Elementary Education Act and its Implementation*, Oxford: B. Litt., 1957 (Jackson calls this 'the pioneering work on the 1870 Education Act'); Joseph Coghill, *The Politics of Education: Party Loyalty and the Passage of the 1870 Education Act*, Melbourne: MA, 1991; Murphy, *The Education Act*; Humphreys, *Education in 1870*; and of course Patrick Jackson's *Education Act Forster*.

on 17 February 1870, and complimented Forster on the 'boldness and sagacity of his character'.<sup>110</sup>

During the Second Reading, Mundella spoke forcibly about both religious instruction and compulsory attendance. He introduced his remarks on religious teaching by 'confessing that he had never felt so deeply the necessity of complete separation of Church and State'.<sup>111</sup> He believed that the Church would be better for being relieved of state-sponsored education. Mundella continued to advocate non-sectarian education throughout his life, even serving as president of the National Education Association on its foundation in 1889.<sup>112</sup> His involvement with this essentially non-conformist group is discussed in the final chapter of this thesis. He was against the teaching of catechisms which had been 'his special abomination when at school'.<sup>113</sup> He did, however, favour Bible reading, which 'was to him a delight'.<sup>114</sup> Mundella's contribution to the debate was soundly endorsed by the Prime Minister, who said 'I cannot fail to name as pre-eminent the admirable speech delivered by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield.'<sup>115</sup>

It was during the debates in Committee that William Francis Cowper-Temple suggested the famous clause, often named after him, which eventually settled the teaching of religion issue. His amendment instructed schools which were established by local rates, not to teach any catechism or religious formulary which was distinctive of any particularly denomination.<sup>116</sup> Mundella strongly supported this amendment and reiterated his view that 'no sectarianism should be taught in our schools'.<sup>117</sup> The Committee stage of the Bill dragged on, which seemingly annoyed Mundella. He complained that 'the postponement of the measure to another session would be a great calamity'.<sup>118</sup> He continued to argue for compromise on religious teaching, using

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<sup>110</sup> *Hansard*, 17 February 1870, Vol. 199, c. 477.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 237.

<sup>112</sup> Arnold P. Derrington, 'The National Education Association of Great Britain 1889-1959: A Short Account and Bibliography', *History of Education Society Bulletin*, No. 11 Spring 1973, 19.

<sup>113</sup> *Hansard*, 18 March 1870, Vol. 200, c. 244.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 329.

<sup>115</sup> *Hansard*, 18 March 1870, Vol. 200, c. 292.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 16 June 1870, Vol. 202, c. 275.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 June 1870, Vol. 202, c. 896.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*



the 'Time Table Conscience Clause' as the answer.<sup>119</sup> This provided for religious instruction to be at the beginning or end of school hours which allowed optional attendance.

It has been noted several times that Mundella strongly supported compulsion, asserting that 'he had never yet known a working man to hold up his hand against compulsory education'.<sup>120</sup> He went on to quote his experience of the German system where 'compulsion was only needed in the existing generation, for it was sure to become voluntary in the next'.<sup>121</sup> This view was not held by all who heard it. Sir Charles Adderley, a Conservative, and a previous Vice-President of the Council, considered that Mundella was: 'endeavouring to shame this country and to excite rivalry by describing a state of education as existing in other countries which we could hardly hope to attain'.<sup>122</sup> Adderley was referring to Mundella's frequent references, both inside and outside of Parliament, to the superior education system he had seen in countries such as Prussia and Saxony. Adderley also ridiculed Mundella's enthusiasm for the cultural aspects of Prussian education, and asked 'whether we should hope to see our housemaids pass their leisure with Shakespeare and the boys know history whom poverty places early in life at the plough's tail?'.<sup>123</sup> According to Armytage, Adderley was to become one of Mundella's strongest critics on matters of education.<sup>124</sup> Later in the debate, Mundella endeavoured to re-introduce the issue of compulsion. He moved an amendment, unsuccessfully, to change the 'may' to 'shall' in regard to a School's Board enforcing attendance.<sup>125</sup>

Forster moved the Third Reading of the Bill on 22 July 1870 and it passed that day. Mundella did not speak but there was an ominous warning from George Dixon. He rose to say that 'it was his intention, early in the next session to amend the Act'.<sup>126</sup> Dixon was MP for Birmingham and chairman of the National Education League, and thus wanted free, compulsory, and secular education. The 1870 Act did not meet all

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<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 June 1870, Vol. 202, c. 1406.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 March 1870, Vol. 200, c. 237.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 21 June 1870, Vol. 202, c. 637.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> Armytage, *A.J. Mundella*, 94.

<sup>125</sup> *Hansard*, 8 July 1870, Vol. 202, c. 1752.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 22 July 1870, Vol. 203, c. 737.

the aims of the League. Dixon had a long term commitment to the establishment of a general education system.<sup>127</sup> He was backed by a formidable organisation, which by the end of 1870 had 315 branches and Joseph Chamberlain as vice-chairman.<sup>128</sup> The education fight was not yet over and Mundella continued to be in its midst. In a debate on 4 August 1870, on a Lord's amendment concerning the ballot for the election of School Boards, Mundella spoke effusively. He thanked the House for what it had done for education, and he paid tribute to Forster, saying that: 'He did not believe that any man in England could have done the work so well'.<sup>129</sup>

Thus, there is much evidence of Mundella's sincere support for Forster's endeavours and for his own desire to ensure that the Bill should be as comprehensive as possible. He continued his active support even when some of his wishes were modified or lost. His aim to get national education started and not delayed until everyone was satisfied was amply demonstrated.

It is more difficult to ascertain the 'behind-the-scenes' influence Mundella exerted, both on Forster's formulation and finalisation of the details of the Act, and on any influence on how members voted. The issues were not simple, and there were many inconsistencies within political parties and religious groups.<sup>130</sup> Mundella himself must have believed his interest and knowledge of education was important. Writing to Leader towards the end of the debates on the Bill, he said 'others have said if ever Forster leaves his place we should like to see you in charge of Education'.<sup>131</sup> Some evidence of the personal relationship of Mundella and Forster has been mentioned earlier. They spoke together at various meetings called to advance the national education cause, they corresponded privately and they praised one another in Parliament. The names of Mundella and Forster were sometimes bracketed together, and not always in the most complimentary way. In early 1872, with the divisions over the 1870 Act still an open sore, Dixon moved an amendment to the Act which declared it defective and working unsuccessfully. This was supported by Auberon Herbert, an

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<sup>127</sup> Adams, *History of the Elementary School Contest*, 195.

<sup>128</sup> Briggs, *Struggle*, 273.

<sup>129</sup> *Hansard*, 4 August 1870, Vol. 203, c. 1560.

<sup>130</sup> W.A Haywood, 'M.P.s and the 1870 Education Act: A Study in Human Motivation', *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 4:1, 1971, 20.

<sup>131</sup> *Mundella Papers*, letter to Leader, July 5 1870.

aristocratic Liberal member.<sup>132</sup> Herbert received several letters of congratulations on his speech in support of the resolution, but one, in particular, denigrated both Mundella and Forster. Henry Crompton, who had praised Mundella's establishment of the Nottingham Arbitration and Conciliation Board, wrote to Herbert:

The more I think over it, the more pleased I am, that there should be one man to protest in the House of Commons against the doctrine that Education is the function of the state. It is high time that the monstrous and absurd pretensions of men like Mundella to educate the nation should be subdued ... and it is a serious evil that high education should be encouraged and directed by a well-meaning, honest, but uneducated man like Forster – who is quite incompetent to understand the intellectual movement.<sup>133</sup>

There is no evidence as to whether Mundella knew, or cared, about Crompton's views, but his friendly relationship with Herbert continued.

Mundella was not always the staunch defender of Liberal policies, particularly in the field of education, nor in Forster's efforts which he had so effusively praised. Writing to Leader in 1875 he said:

I know from my own long study of the Education and Labour questions how difficult it is to make the truth penetrate even the most Liberal minds. Forster never fully grasped the idea of a National system because he never thoroughly studied it but I see it steadily making progress through all difficulties.<sup>134</sup>

Although Mundella's involvement in the development and passing of the 1870 Act may not have been crucial, it was important. Well before his election to Parliament he had espoused the need for widespread elementary education, and linked it to continued technical education and a competitive industry. Forster, himself, acknowledged Mundella's argument in his speech introducing the Bill at its First Reading. The finalised Act did not include everything that Mundella wanted, but he believed that it was more important to develop a national system than to get side-lined in dogmatism.

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<sup>132</sup> Herbert was the youngest son of the Earl of Carnarvon, a Conservative member of the House of Lords, but he was elected as a Liberal member for Nottingham in 1872, 'with powerful assistance from Mr. Mundella'. See S. Hutchinson Harris, *Auberon Herbert: Crusader for Liberty*, London: Williams & Northgate Ltd., 1943.

<sup>133</sup> Quoted in Hutchinson, *Auberon Herbert*, 133 (letter of 12 March 1872).

<sup>134</sup> *Mundella Papers*, letter to Leader, 27 December 1875.

### *The Ongoing Fight*

Mundella continued his advocacy for further reform during the ten-year period from the passing of the 1870 Act through to his appointment as head of the education department. He visited schools, both in Britain and overseas, he spoke on education at many public meetings, he endeavoured to find some common ground with non-conformists opposed to certain clauses of the Act, and he spoke in the Commons when education matters were debated.

He was a consistent defender of the Act against the non-conformist lobby and those who saw the education of the working class as dangerous. Nevertheless, he tried to extend its coverage on several occasions, especially in regard to compulsory attendance. Much of the time was spent in Opposition after the Liberals were defeated in the 1874 election. It was a period of unrest and disquiet within the Liberal Party, during which Gladstone stepped down as leader.<sup>135</sup> Mundella's involvement in the resulting contest for his replacement was discussed in Chapter 3, as it says something about the relationship between Mundella and Forster. His support for Forster during the evolution of the 1870 Act has been discussed earlier, but it did not stop Mundella from espousing change to some aspects of the legislation.

With the Education Act passed, but with continued dissent from radical and non-conformist Liberals, Mundella travelled to the United States in September 1870. He was well known and popular in the northern states having, as has been noted earlier, defeated Roebuck, a supporter of the Confederacy during the Civil War, in the 1868 Sheffield election.<sup>136</sup> During the three months spent in the United States, he visited several public schools, mainly in New York and Boston, and addressed large audiences on arbitration and conciliation.<sup>137</sup> Mundella already had some knowledge of American education and was enthusiastic about its achievements. In a letter to *The Times*, written to correct an earlier report on a speech he had made in 1869 at the

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<sup>135</sup> William Henry Maehl, 'Gladstone, the Liberals, and the Election of 1874', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, Vol. 36, Issue 93 (May 1963), 53-54.

<sup>136</sup> W.H.G. Armytage, 'Mundella in America', *Queen's Quarterly*, Vol. LV, No. 1, Spring 1948, 46.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 48-52.

Birmingham Education Conference, he went into the details of both the system and its benefits.<sup>138</sup>

Mundella's enthusiasm for the Prussian and Saxon primary schooling systems has been highlighted earlier. He was equally enthusiastic about the American system, at least in the New England states, and often used it as a yardstick by which to measure the deficiencies of English education. For example, in an address to the Stockport Sunday School Band of Hope, in January 1871, he praised 'the comfort, the beauty, and the completeness of the American school system'.<sup>139</sup> A few days later he spoke at a function in Sheffield which was raising funds for the Ragged Schools. He again spoke with enthusiasm of the American education system.<sup>140</sup> The following day Mundella supported the Radical member for Halifax, James Stansfield, at a meeting of the latter's constituents. Stansfield spoke at some length about the 1870 Act, which he characterised as a comprehensive measure, and supported the inclusion of some religious teaching.<sup>141</sup> He quoted Mundella's views on the American system at several points in his speech, and especially noted his position on religious teaching and compulsory school attendance. Mundella had found that, although the American system was purely secular, most schools provided some religious instruction which did not offend anyone. He also emphasised that parents should be compelled to send their children to school. Although it was required by the American system, it was seldom needed. Parents recognised the value of the process. Mundella spoke after Stansfield's speech and re-iterated his views on compulsion and religious teaching. He 'expressed his warm approval of the American system and gave a detailed description of the mode in which it was conducted'.<sup>142</sup> Mundella's proselytising on education, and especially his frequent adverse comparisons of the British with his favourite foreign systems, must have been a little obnoxious to some.

One of the members for Nottingham, and admittedly something of a Mundella protégé, Auberon Herbert, spoke on education at a meeting of his constituents in January 1871. He repeated some of Mundella's views on the importance of a good

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<sup>138</sup> *The Times*, 18 October 1869, 'Mr. Mundella on American Schools'.

<sup>139</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 10 January 1871, 'Mr. Mundella, M.P., on Education and Intemperance'.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 17 January 1871, 'Mr. Mundella upon His Recent Visit to America'.

<sup>141</sup> *The Times*, 18 January 1871, 'Mr. Stansfield at Halifax'.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

elementary system so that secondary and technical education could prosper, again referring to America and Germany. Herbert also expressed his disappointment at ministerial appointments, when he said:

He thought the introduction of vigorous Radical blood was wanted in the Cabinet, and he would have liked Mr Stansfield and Mr Mundella to have been admitted into it.<sup>143</sup>

Late in 1871 Mundella spoke at several functions, and repeatedly aired his views on education. He addressed the Leeds Young Men's Christian Association in 1871 before presenting prizes and certificates to successful candidates in evening science classes.<sup>144</sup> During his address, Mundella deplored the general level of science teaching in the country and the 'very meagre, very mean, and very parsimonious' support provided by the Government. As might be expected at such a gathering, Mundella praised Christian teaching, saying that 'he owed everything that he had and all that he was to the early Christian teaching that he received in the Sunday Schools'.<sup>145</sup>

Mundella spoke at the Dewsbury Mechanics Institute, in October 1871, and again linked the neglect of elementary education with the partial failure of the technical training provided at Mechanics' Institutes.<sup>146</sup> He also added his usual plea for compulsion and criticised the tardiness of local authorities in electing school boards. Mundella not only preached this message in the north of England, where the bulk of the newly enfranchised working men lived, but also did so in the south. In December 1871, he spoke at a school function in Devon, and, whilst still airing his views on compulsion and school boards, mentioned some other important issues. These touched on middle-class education, which he called 'a pretentious and hollow sham', and the poor education provided for girls.<sup>147</sup> He mentioned that, as a large employer, he received many job applications from young men educated at boarding schools. However, he had found that they 'were a hundred percent behind lads from national schools'. In regard to the education of girls, it was perhaps a measure of the times, that Mundella should see a well-educated woman as 'a great blessing' to many men.

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 12 January 1871, 'Members Out of Town'.

<sup>144</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 7 October 1871, 'Mr. Mundella, M.P., on Christian Education'.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 27 October 1871, 'Mr. Mundella, M.P., on the Education Act'.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 9 December 1871, 'Mr. Mundella, M.P., on the Education Question'.

Whether it was because he was addressing an audience in the south-west of England, different from his usual Yorkshire crowd, but he concluded with a somewhat jingoist call for education. He believed that in educating every child in the country:

There was in reserve for this grand old country a grander history than she had ever experienced in the past, and she would achieve greater heights of mental, moral and material progress than had ever been dreamt of.

This dramatic statement was greeted with much applause.<sup>148</sup>

Mundella also expressed his favourable impressions of American Schools in a Commons debate in July 1871. Sir John Lubbock had moved to modify the New Code of Regulations, which had resulted from the passing of the 1870 Act, to encourage the teaching of history, geography, elementary social economy and other extra subjects in elementary schools.<sup>149</sup> Lubbock, although primarily a banker, had a lifelong interest in natural history and was an important supporter of a better education system, including the teaching of science and modern languages.<sup>150</sup> Mundella enthusiastically seconded this motion, pointing out that schools in North Germany taught the subjects proposed by Lubbock.<sup>151</sup> He could not help himself, and extolled the excellence of the American schools and spoke of the superiority of the German system. Once more he incurred the criticism of Sir Charles Adderley, who, although he supported Lubbock, attacked Mundella for criticising English education by ‘painting in glowing colours’ that of other countries.<sup>152</sup> Mundella spoke in more measured terms of the Act itself, characterising it as ‘excellent, but partial and incomplete’. Forster defended the Education Department and thought that it was too soon after the introduction of the Act and its Code to make changes. The amendment was withdrawn.

Despite his support for the 1870 Act, at the beginning of the 1872 parliamentary year, Mundella gave notice to the Commons that he would support a resolution, proposed by Dixon, condemning the 1870 Act.<sup>153</sup> Dixon, had foreshadowed this during the debates that saw the passing of the Act, and, although it had only been

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<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> *Hansard*, 21 July 1871, Vol. 208, c. 102.

<sup>150</sup> Timothy L. Alborn, ‘Lubbock, John, first Baron Avebury (1834-1913), banker, politician and scientific writer’, *ODNB* (accessed 15 June 2017).

<sup>151</sup> *Hansard*, 21 July 1871, Vol. 208, col. 115.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, cc. 128-130.

<sup>153</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 5 March 1872, ‘Parliamentary Sketches.’

in operation for 18 months, his criticism was scathing.<sup>154</sup> He argued that the operation of the School Boards was unsatisfactory in regard to their election procedures and the use of funds levied on ratepayers. Presumably, and much to Mundella's satisfaction, Dixon called for attendance to be made compulsory. He also echoed some of Mundella's comments on the superiority of the German system, and adversely compared a national school in Birmingham with one in Hamburg. His most vitriolic criticism, however, was reserved for the religious aspects of the Act. Not only did he disagree with the allocation by some School Boards of ratepayers' money to denominational schools, but he felt that any religious instruction 'provoked religious discord and violated the rights of conscience'. Although Dixon was a practicing Anglican, he was strongly critical of the general attitude of the Church of England to the management of its schools. In particular, he was concerned with their control of the teaching process. The Resolution was seconded by the former Congregationalist minister, Henry Richard, who characterised the Act as 'encouraging, extending, consolidating and perpetuating sectarian education'.<sup>155</sup>

Mundella's notice was that, if Dixon's motion was amended by the Government, he would move a similar, but simpler, one. This covered the election of school boards, compulsory attendance for all children of school age, and the modification of the clauses that compelled payment of fees.<sup>156</sup> Forster spoke forcefully against Dixon's motion, arguing that there had not been enough time to evaluate the Act in operation.<sup>157</sup> He went on to note Mundella's notice and said that he was willing to consider such modifications next year.<sup>158</sup>

Dixon's motion was decisively defeated, with only 94 Ayes against 355 Noes. After Forster moved to maintain the *status quo*, Mundella did not submit the motion he had foreshadowed, and Forster's motion was carried by a majority of 225. *The Sheffield Independent* concluded that: 'Mr Mundella thought the first division sufficient, although the majority was much larger than the Government expected'.<sup>159</sup> It

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<sup>154</sup> *Hansard*, 5 March 1872, Vol. 209, cc. 1395-485.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 1416.

<sup>156</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 5 March 1872.

<sup>157</sup> *Hansard*, 5 March 1872, Vol. 209, c. 1419.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 1434.

<sup>159</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 6 March 1872.



was surprising that Mundella should have tabled his notice in the first place as it seemed to challenge Forster's, and indeed the Government's, position on the Act. That Mundella did not bring forward his motion after Forster promised to review the working of the Act the following year, must have satisfied Mundella.

In December 1872 Mundella again 'expressed his opinion that without compulsion there never would be successful education in England'.<sup>160</sup> His speech at the annual prize giving of the Bristol Trade and Mining School, emphasised the need for more and better technical education. He argued that this was necessary to provide workers who could face the challenge presented by an increasingly competitive German industrial sector. He adversely compared the English technical education system with that of Germany, and said that some had 'charged him with want of patriotism'. This was an often repeated criticism of Mundella's lauding of German and American education, and often attached to allusions about his ancestry and appearance. He countered by asserting that 'he loved his country as dearly as any man, but when he saw these things it was his duty to cry aloud, and spare not'.<sup>161</sup> Mundella was not a man who stepped back from his views.

Armytage called Mundella 'The Prop of the Party' during the years 1874 to 1876 when internal turmoil rent the Liberal party.<sup>162</sup> He was steadfast in his values, he tried to bring the non-conformists back into the mainstream party, and he was at the forefront of support for Gladstone's leadership. The issues surrounding religious education, which caused much dissent during the debates on the 1870 Act, were not the only divisive matters within the Liberal party in 1873-4. The defeat of the Irish University Bill in March 1873 and successive by-election losses weighed heavily on Gladstone.<sup>163</sup> Additionally a growing group of left-wing Liberals, headed by Joseph Chamberlain and Charles Dilke, were increasingly critical of the Government's performance.<sup>164</sup> These pressures led Gladstone to call a general election in 1874, in which he was soundly beaten. Following this defeat, Gladstone determined to surrender the leadership of the Liberal party. Mundella played an important role in

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<sup>160</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 23 December 1872, 'Mr. Mundella at Bristol'.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>162</sup> Armytage, *A. J. Mundella*, Chapter Nine, 142- 167.

<sup>163</sup> Maehl, 'Gladstone, the Liberals, and the Election of 1874', 53.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

trying to persuade him to remain.<sup>165</sup> He did this, at least initially, on the urging of Forster who asked him to organise a petition signed by members with radical credentials.<sup>166</sup> Mundella was somewhat perplexed by this, writing to Leader a few days later that: 'it seems strange that I should be selected as the medium, but it is thought that the work should be begun by independent members'.<sup>167</sup> That a senior minister should ask a back bencher to lobby a prime minister is indeed strange, but reflected well on Mundella's performance and promise.

Six years of opposition did not blunt Mundella's enthusiasm for better elementary and technical education. When Disraeli and the Conservatives came to power in 1874, Lord Sandon was appointed Vice-President of the Council, with responsibility for education.<sup>168</sup> Sandon was one of the few Conservatives interested in education. He was a strong supporter of the voluntary system and of religious instruction, but more importantly he wanted compulsory education.<sup>169</sup> Sandon had immense difficulty in persuading his superior, the Duke of Richmond, and the entire cabinet, of his views. With progress stalled, an amendment to the 1870 Act was brought into the Commons in April 1876, by Dixon, Mundella, Lubbock and Trevelyan.<sup>170</sup> Although Dixon moved the Bill by arguing that the country was ready for compulsion, Mundella spoke passionately of the benefits it had achieved in other countries. He dwelt particularly on its role in reducing juvenile crime. As usual he listed the several countries that had successfully used compulsion.<sup>171</sup> As could be expected, without government support, consideration of the Bill was deferred.

Sandon brought in the Conservative government's own Elementary Education Bill in May 1876.<sup>172</sup> It did not include a provision for compulsory schooling. Mundella was bitterly disappointed. He pointed out that Scotland had compulsory education and this produced a higher standard of education than in England.<sup>173</sup> Nevertheless, he

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<sup>165</sup> Rossi, 'The Selection of Lord Hartington as Liberal Leader', 309.

<sup>166</sup> *Mundella Papers*, Forster to Mundella, 12 January 1875.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, letter to Leader, 15 January 1875.

<sup>168</sup> H.C.G. Matthew, 'Dudley Ryder (1831-1900), politician', ODNB (accessed 28 June 2017). Ryder used the courtesy title of Lord Sandon until succeeding his father as the third Earl of Harrowby in 1882.

<sup>169</sup> Sutherland, *Policy Making*, 130-131.

<sup>170</sup> *Hansard*, 5 April 1876, Vol. 228, cc. 1251-1300.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, cc. 1273-77.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 May 1876, Vol. 229, cc. 29-65.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 955.

committed himself to assisting the Government in making it a better Bill than that now proposed. Mundella opened the Second Reading of the Bill on 15 June with a lengthy speech.<sup>174</sup> He started by moving an Amendment that called for the inclusion of a clause enforcing the attendance of children at school. The Government would not, of course, accept such an amendment. After this, Mundella angrily called the Bill 'utterly feeble and ineffective'.<sup>175</sup> He also returned to a familiar topic in pointing out how a deficient elementary education system adversely affected the ability of British industry to compete with their foreign rivals.

Mundella played an active role, as he had promised, in helping to shape the Bill during the Committee stage. He used a recommendation from the recent Royal Commission on the Factory and Workshops Acts to further his call for direct compulsion and won some concessions. Little as it was, he accepted the inclusion of a general statement on parental responsibility for the education of their children.<sup>176</sup> He also spoke on religious education and the dissolution of school boards. Mundella supported Sandon on religious teaching because he believed that the existing conscience clause allowed parents to decide whether or not their children received such instruction.<sup>177</sup> As usual Mundella was being quite pragmatic. He would accept some religious teaching in order to give children a basic elementary education. He was particularly concerned with a proposal that provided for the dissolution of school boards and joined with Forster in preventing this. Sandon accepted a series of Liberal amendments which satisfied them.<sup>178</sup> The final Act may not have been entirely to Mundella's satisfaction, but it did provide some improvement.

*The Times* reported the end of the Committee stage with little enthusiasm:

The country will learn with a sense of relief that the Elementary Education Bill has at length passed through the confusions of Committee, which it is to be read a third time today, and that we have probably, therefore heard the last of it for some time.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 June 1876, Vol.229, cc.1879-1906.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 1898.

<sup>176</sup> Sutherland, *Policy Making*, 144.

<sup>177</sup> *Hansard*, 10 July 1876, Vol.230, cc.1245-7.

<sup>178</sup> *Hansard*, 25 July 1876, Vol. 230, cc.1890-911.

<sup>179</sup> *The Times*, 5 August 1876, 9.

The leader writer paid considerable attention to the question of compulsion. He noted that the success of the measures to get children to school was doubtful. He thought that Parliament would eventually have to adopt direct compulsion.

After the passage of Sandon's Act in 1876 there was little parliamentary appetite for more changes to the elementary education system. Joseph Chamberlain thought that 'the education fight is over for the next seven years' and Sandon said that 'it was now Tory policy to keep the whole question quiet'.<sup>180</sup> Mundella, however, did not go quietly. In October 1877, speaking at a school prize giving function, he expounded his belief in a universal elementary system on the grounds that it led to better technical education. This, he said, 'would improve the quality of our artisans a hundredfold'.<sup>181</sup> As usual, he then went on to compare the British experience with that of Germany. Mundella also took the opportunity during a Commons debate in August 1878 to make several points. The new Conservative Vice-President, Lord George Hamilton, moved the Education Vote that reported on the previous year and sought the finance for the following year.<sup>182</sup> Mundella's speech was wide ranging, and included his familiar call for direct compulsion.<sup>183</sup> He contended that a large number of children were not being properly educated and would not be until parents were forced to send them to school. He criticised the voluntary system, by saying that board schools generally produced superior results. He also launched an attack on some aspects of the 1876 Act, during the course of which he argued that the bureaucratic measures which had been introduced, increased the workload of teachers. He also suggested that it was iniquitous that teachers could not rise in their profession. Inspectors, examiners, and even clerks were appointed as a result of political influence. Again, he asserted that teachers in Germany and Switzerland had a much higher status than in England. He returned to this argument in 1879 during a debate on school inspectors, Mundella argued that the inspectorate was deprived of practical experience if teachers were not promoted.<sup>184</sup> Mundella continued his support of

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<sup>180</sup> Sutherland, *Policy Making*, 145.

<sup>181</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 6 October 1877, 'Mr. A.J. Mundella, M.P., on Education.'

<sup>182</sup> *Hansard*, 5 August 1878, Vol. 242, cc. 1219-69.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, cc. 1228-37.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 21 February 1879, Vol. 243, cc. 1607-19.

teachers, and indeed of the inspectorate, throughout his term as Vice-President of the Council.

In the ten years between the passing of Forster's ground-breaking 1870 Act and his own in 1880, Mundella persistently called for improvements to elementary education. His main argument was that the working class needed to be literate and numerate so that industry could prosper. He saw a better educated worker as a more productive and inventive worker and more able to benefit from technical training. For this to happen, he believed that elementary education had to be made compulsory. He hammered away at this in Parliament and in the many meetings he addressed. He was one of the few politicians who recognised the increasingly uncompetitive level of British manufacturing against their German and American equivalents. He had studied foreign education systems and was involved with both primary and secondary schools at home. Such practical experience must have been immensely valuable to him in arguing his case.

#### *Taking Responsibility for Education*

After the frustration of the years in opposition, Mundella must have been exhilarated to be appointed Vice-President of the Committee of Council on Education. Now he was in a position to influence legislation and to direct the bureaucracy of the Education Department. One might wonder what Mundella thought of the other responsibility of the Vice-President – to oversee veterinary functions throughout the country. Mundella vigorously attacked what he saw as the shortcomings of the education system. His first action was to make elementary school attendance compulsory. This was something that he had long advocated, and he was able to do it quickly and without much opposition. Later he introduced a new Code to govern the activities of the Department, and was involved with new, sometimes minor, matters. For example, he instituted a more participatory rule, which sought suggestions for improvement from school boards. He had a deep interest in the wellbeing of the children, and even promoted the provision of cheap school meals.

Mundella's educational reforms spread wider than the elementary sector. He re-organised tertiary technical education and introduced higher education to Wales. He was a strong advocate for separating the ministries of education and agriculture

and removing the complicated system of reporting through the Privy Council. During his tenure he was denied cabinet status. His superior, the Lord President of the Council, sat in the Lords and was a member of cabinet. His relationship with the two Lords President under whom he served was quite different and often influenced his approach to reform. There was still resistance from proponents of the voluntary system, who objected to any interference from the Education Department. This often led to conflict with both the established Church and the Nonconformists, the main operators of these schools. The increasing influence of the Roman Catholic Church in educational matters was another difficult area which Mundella had to address. Nevertheless, Mundella's five years in charge of education were years of progress, although he acknowledged there was still much to be achieved when he left office in 1885.

Mundella was re-elected for Sheffield at the 1880 general election, but with a reduced majority. He was bitterly disappointed by this result, and also by the fact that, for the first time, the constituency had not returned a second Liberal.<sup>185</sup> With a substantial Liberal majority in the Commons, the Queen called on the party leader, Lord Hartington, to form a government.<sup>186</sup> The Queen's Journal of 22 and 23 April 1880 related, in some detail, Hartington's reluctance to accept, and his recommendation that the Queen call on Gladstone. Her dislike of Gladstone was made clear, but eventually she was persuaded and Gladstone returned to power. He started selecting his ministers for submission to the Queen; she was not pleased with his suggestions:

Windsor Castle, 28<sup>th</sup> April 1880 – Another letter from Mr. Gladstone, submitting more unexpected names! Mr. Mundella (one of the most violent Radicals) for President of the Board of Agriculture (not in the Cabinet), the equally violent, blind Mr. Fawcett, as Postmaster-General (not in the Cabinet).<sup>187</sup>

Gladstone praised Mundella to the Queen, 'saying he was a very religious man, was much for religious education, and had never said anything offensive'.<sup>188</sup> Mundella was appointed to the Vice-Presidency and thus assumed responsibility for education, not

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<sup>185</sup> He wrote to Leader (nd) that he was 'hurt and inconsolable, and every man I meet questions me in a note of reproach', Quoted in Armytage, *A.J. Mundella*, 198.

<sup>186</sup> George Earle Buckle (editor), *The Letters of Queen Victoria: A Selection of Her Majesty's Correspondence and Journal between the years 1862 and 1885*, Second Series (Third Volume), London: John Murray, 1928, 80-85.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

agriculture as the Queen had thought. By June, however, she complained again. In a letter to Earl Granville, she talked of the problem of the Commons having a 'democratic tendency'. This she blamed on the 'new people like Mr. Chamberlain, Sir C. Dilke, Mr. Mundella and others'.<sup>189</sup> There is no evidence that Mundella ever knew of the Queen's view of him, and he just got on with the job.

The new Parliament was opened on 29 April 1880, and the first sitting of the Commons took place the following day. Procedural matters took up some time, as did the problem of the newly elected atheist and republican, Charles Bradlaugh, who refused to take the parliamentary oath of allegiance.<sup>190</sup> It was not until 21 May that the real business of the House started. At that time, newly appointed ministers had to stand for re-election in their constituency. Mundella was unopposed in the subsequent election.<sup>191</sup> The *Sheffield Independent* editorial that day noted that 'the electors appreciate the selection Mr. Gladstone has made' and that 'Mr. Mundella is emphatically the right man in the right place'.<sup>192</sup> Mundella might have been the right man, but he had to convince his superior, the Lord President of the Council, and the rest of the cabinet that his agenda was appropriate. John Spencer, fifth Earl Spencer, was Lord President during the first three years of Mundella's term. He was a long-serving politician, mainly in the House of Lords, and played a significant role in Irish affairs through to the end of the century.<sup>193</sup> He seems to have let Mundella take the lead in educational matters, probably because he had no experience in this field.<sup>194</sup> Spencer was criticised by the Reverend R.H. Quick, an education lecturer at the University of Cambridge. He asserted that Spencer had been given the education portfolio because he was not wanted in Ireland.<sup>195</sup> He went on to say that Spencer had 'no notion on the subject and merely echoed what he had been told by Mundella'.<sup>196</sup> A

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<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 June 1880, 108.

<sup>190</sup> *Hansard*, 3 May 1880, Vol. 252, cc. 20-9.

<sup>191</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 8 May 1880.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>193</sup> Peter Gordon, 'Spencer, John Poyntz, fifth Earl Spencer, (1835-1910), politician and viceroy of Ireland', *ODNB* (accessed 13 July 2017).

<sup>194</sup> F. Storr, (editor), *Life and Remains of the Rev. R.H. Quick*, Cambridge: At the University Press, 1899, 81.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*

more amusing opinion of the Spencer-Mundella relationship was given by the famous chemist, Sir Henry Enfield Roscoe:

The wags at South Kensington, when as Vice-President he accompanied the Lord President, used to say jokingly (for he was most popular in the office), 'Here comes Lord Mundella and Mr. Spencer'.<sup>197</sup>

Some contemporaries were not kind to either man. Again, Quick considered that Mundella did not understand what 'good' education was.<sup>198</sup> This remark was made in relation to Mundella's wish to widen the syllabus to include subjects such as chemistry and English literature. 'Poor Mundella does not understand, and wants to have all sorts of things "taught" in the schools'.<sup>199</sup> John Morley believed that Spencer 'had a slow mind and was an awkward speaker', however, his 'devotion to public duty was in his innermost fibre'.<sup>200</sup>

The relationship between the two men seemed, however, to have been fruitful and friendly. Writing to him after Spencer had been appointed Viceroy of Ireland, Mundella expressed his satisfaction that he was to remain President of the Council, and 'still my Chief'.<sup>201</sup> Another letter addresses Spencer as 'My Dear Chief'.<sup>202</sup>

Presumably, it was Mundella who took the initiative to introduce compulsory school attendance. A meeting of the Committee of the Council was held in early June 1880, attended by Spencer and Mundella and also Forster, a Mundella ally. Spencer then submitted a memorandum on the proposed legislation to Cabinet on 21 June.<sup>203</sup> The Cabinet approved and Spencer introduced the Bill to the Lords on 28 June.<sup>204</sup> This was surprising as both the 1870 and 1876 Elementary Education Bills were first introduced into the Commons. It quickly passed the Lords without amendment and Mundella presented its first reading to the Commons on 12 July 1880. Amazingly, there is no mention of the Bill's progress through the Commons in *Hansard*, although each stage is listed in the index. According to the *Parliamentary Archives*, *Hansard* did not

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<sup>197</sup> *The Life and Experiences of Sir Henry Enfield Roscoe, D.C.L., LL.D., F.R.S.*, written by Himself, London: Macmillan, 1906, 289.

<sup>198</sup> Storr, *Life and Remains*, 140.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>200</sup> John Morley, *Recollections*, 1, London: Macmillan, 1918, 220.

<sup>201</sup> British Library, Add. MS 76926, *Althorp Papers*, 26 December 1882.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, Add. MS 76927, 22 January 1883.

<sup>203</sup> *Gladstone Papers*, British Library, Add M.S., 44308, 22-24. Quoted in Sutherland, *Policy Making*, 151.

<sup>204</sup> *Hansard*, 28 June 1880, Vol. 253, c. 949.



provide a full record of everything said in Parliament until 1909, when it became the Official Report.<sup>205</sup> At the time of interest to this thesis, *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates* were largely reliant on newspaper reports. However, the *Parliamentary Archives* also asserted that no debates took place on any of the stages of the Bill. This seems to be confirmed by a short sentence in *The Times*, reporting on events in Parliament on 6 August 1880, which simply states: 'The Elementary Education Bill passed through Committee.'<sup>206</sup> After receiving Royal Assent on 26 August 1880, the Bill quickly became an Act.<sup>207</sup> The speed of this probably reflected the limited nature of the Bill and the cross-party support. In his 1977 thesis, Ward suggested that 'compulsion was not a daring measure but merely the acceptance of an idea which had come of age'.<sup>208</sup> The main thrust was to oblige local authorities to enact byelaws to compel children to attend school.<sup>209</sup> If this had not occurred before the end of 1880, the Education Department was obliged so to do.

An accusation was made that Mundella had simply taken a Bill already prepared by his Conservative predecessor, Lord George Hamilton.<sup>210</sup> Mundella strongly denied this, responding to Sandon:

I knew nothing of the provisions of Lord George's Bill till my own was *passed*. I found it a very different measure to my own, much less effective.

Sandon apologised, but what is interesting is Mundella's reference to the Bill as 'my own'. The 1880 Act has gone down in history as the 'Mundella Act' with Spencer's contribution generally omitted, except in the most detailed accounts. Even before the final passage of the Bill, the *Sheffield Independent* newspaper, which was always supportive of Mundella, called it 'Mr. Mundella's Education Bill'.<sup>211</sup> A very detailed, legally based, work written by William MacKenzie a decade later summarized it thus:

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<sup>205</sup> Personal Communication, email 8 July 2017, *Parliamentary Archives*.

<sup>206</sup> *The Times*, 7 August 1880, 'House of Commons'.

<sup>207</sup> 43 & 44 Vict. C 23.

<sup>208</sup> Ward, *An investigation*, 419.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 2.

<sup>210</sup> *Hansard*, 8 August 1881, Vol.264, c. 1302 (Viscount Sandon).

<sup>211</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 21 August 1880.

In 1880 Mr. Mundella's Act established direct compulsion by the school authority, in contra-distinction to the optional compulsion of Mr. Forster's Act and the indirect compulsion of Lord Sandon's Act.<sup>212</sup>

Every modern history of education referred to 'The Mundella Act', perhaps by convention. One must conclude that Mundella was indeed the driver of this legislation and the credit for compulsory schooling was his.

Further evidence of Mundella's dominance of matters pertaining to education is given by reports of his presentation of the Education Estimates in early August 1880. *The Times*, which reported his speech in the Commons in some detail, commented on the facts and figures produced as 'startling'.<sup>213</sup> The article concluded by noting Mundella's faith in compulsion. Although questioning its effectiveness, the writer believed that it 'often turned a scale where it has hung doubtfully before'. The *Sheffield Independent* reported the 'chorus of congratulation on the success of the first important speech Mr. Mundella had made in his official capacity as Vice-President of the Council'.<sup>214</sup> *The Spectator* noted 'with unfeigned satisfaction, the appearance of a new statesman on the scene who can make figures talk, and whose power is evidently stimulated, instead of attenuated, by the responsibilities of office'.<sup>215</sup> The *Independent* echoed this view by comparing Mundella's 'simple information and mature judgement' with Lord George Hamilton's 'superficial volubility'.<sup>216</sup> It might be argued that most of the praise for Mundella came from the partisan Sheffield press, but the great detail which was reported in *The Times* indicated the interest and importance that was attached to his appointment to the education portfolio. The opinion of *The Spectator*, reflecting Mundella's first major speech in office, foreshadowed the influence he was expected to exert.

Very soon after his appointment Mundella was concerned with the rationalization of technical education at South Kensington and the establishment of higher education in Wales. His next move in the elementary education field was to bring in a new Code. The Code was essentially a set of regulations governing state

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<sup>212</sup> William W. Mackenzie, *A Treatise on the Elementary Education Acts, 1870-1891*, London: Shaw & Sons, 1892, Preface x.

<sup>213</sup> *The Times*, 4 August 1880.

<sup>214</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 4 August 1880.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 9 August 1880.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 10 August 1880.

grants to elementary schools, but over the years it had become a much broader set of instructions. They covered everything from where, and of what size, schools could be built, to curriculum matters, record keeping and the inspectorate. One of the most significant earlier codes was Robert Lowe's 'Revised Code' of 1862 which introduced the contentious 'payment by results' scheme.<sup>217</sup> This measure was still included in the Code when Spencer and Mundella came to office in 1880. However, according to Mundella's predecessor, Lord George Hamilton, the Code had become almost impossible to administer. He later wrote:

I had to administer about three Acts of Parliament under a code. That code consisted of 150 regulations and 7 schedules. It dealt with the minutest detail connected with school life, and so tied the managers and teachers with red-tape regulations that all individuality and initiative was knocked out of them.<sup>218</sup>

Before Mundella's accession to power, the method for making changes to the Code had been for the Education Department to draw up any proposed alterations. They would then be laid on the Table of both Houses of Parliament for 30 days, during which time members could peruse them and comment.<sup>219</sup> This explanation was given in a speech from the Duke of Richmond and Gordon, the outgoing Tory Lord President, in response to a motion calling for the revision and simplification of the Code. In answering this call, the recently appointed Liberal Lord President, Spencer, said that he and the Vice-President had decided not to introduce any controversial issues into the Code that year but promised that 'it would receive full and careful consideration'.<sup>220</sup> He went on to compliment Mundella by saying that:

He would take advantage of the valuable assistance of the Vice-President, who for many years had taken the deepest interest in the primary education of the country.

He also echoed Mundella's arguments about teaching extra subjects, particularly science, at primary school. This, he contended would produce a better workman, one whose efforts would provide more competition to overseas industries. Spencer was clearly impressed by Mundella's knowledge and ambitions. The opinion, previously noted, that Spencer simply repeated Mundella's sentiments seemed justified. A few

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<sup>217</sup> Sutherland, *Policy Making*, 8-9.

<sup>218</sup> Lord George Hamilton, *Parliamentary Reminiscences and Reflections, 1868-1885*, London: John Murray, 1916, pp 151-154. (Quoted in Bishop, *The Rise of a Central Authority*, 103.)

<sup>219</sup> *Hansard*, 31 May 1880, Vol. 252, c. 751.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 761.

days later, Mundella made it clear to the Commons that the Government was not going to remove the extra subjects from the Code.<sup>221</sup> He also asserted that ‘we leave ourselves absolutely free to deal with the entire Code before the time comes to lay a new Code on the Table of the House’.<sup>222</sup>

By the time Mundella was to present his *Statement on the Education Vote* to the Commons in 1881, he was ready to unveil his plan for revision of the Code.<sup>223</sup> As might be expected from a man involved in the consultative process of industrial arbitration, he instituted a less autocratic system than that previously used. He invited the school boards, the inspectors, the teachers, and anyone interested in education to make suggestions for improving the Code. More importantly, he formed a Committee to review submissions. This comprised the Departmental Secretary and his two assistants, and three inspectors representing the Training Colleges, presided over by Mundella himself.<sup>224</sup> He planned to put their work ‘through a finer sieve and call on additional critics’. To this end he included additional experts, one being Matthew Arnold, doyen of the inspectorate and Forster’s brother-in-law.<sup>225</sup> The resulting New Code was laid before Parliament on 6 March 1882.

The New Code was less controversial than some had expected. There were a number of questions from members of both Houses, which were easily satisfied. The more substantial contributions came from Sir John Lubbock, in the Commons, and Lord Norton in the Lords. Norton was the ennobled Sir Charles Adderley, who had been critical of Mundella’s educational sentiments during the debates on the 1870 Act. Lubbock complained about the subjects that were to be taught and repeated an earlier plea for more science to be included.<sup>226</sup> This debate went on until the early hours of the morning, which explains Gillian Sutherland’s comment that the parliamentary reaction was tame, probably due to ‘sheer exhaustion’.<sup>227</sup> In the Lords, Norton attacked the New Code as being complex and favouring the over-education of the

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<sup>221</sup> *Hansard*, 28 June 1880, Vol. 253, c. 957.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>223</sup> *Hansard*, 8 August 1881, Vol. 264, cc. 1210-36.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 1224.

<sup>225</sup> Jackson, *Education Act Forster*, 40.

<sup>226</sup> *Hansard*, 3 April 1882, Vol. 268, cc. 599-602.

<sup>227</sup> Sutherland, *Policy Makers*, 236.

working class.<sup>228</sup> He continued his criticism by suggesting that Mundella had assumed responsibility for educating the entire nation. He should be concentrating on the elementary schooling of the lower classes. Norton believed that only sufficient education was needed for someone 'to fulfil the duties each might be fit for'.<sup>229</sup> Norton, however, withdrew his motion for a parliamentary committee to examine the New Code and it passed into use. Its introduction was important in stamping Mundella's authority on the elementary education system, even though it did not achieve all that he aimed for. He later said that 'he was prepared to stand or fall by the Educational Code of England'.<sup>230</sup> He modified this position only months later, when he declared that: 'I do not want the state to lay down a hard-and-fast line'.<sup>231</sup> The New Code, in general, was well received and stood the test of time. In reviewing the operation of the Code in 1885, *The Times*, in a long article, decided that it provided certainty for school boards, teachers and inspectors.<sup>232</sup> The writer went on to say that, before 1882, when Mundella's Code was introduced, 'very few had the faintest notion of the exact instructions under which their schools were examined'. With the revision of the instructions annually they 'provided a guide to inspectors and a protection for managers and teachers'.

Not everyone was pleased with Mundella's policies. Virulent attacks came from two contrasting entities. The unease which the 1870 Act had engendered in the voluntary sectors, especially within the Church of England school's community, and the issue of religious education which troubled the Nonconformists, have been discussed previously. Now the increasingly powerful Roman Catholic Church and some sectors of the Anglican community joined forces to defend their voluntary school systems. The Nonconformists, led by Joseph Chamberlain and the National Education League, espoused universal free education.<sup>233</sup> These were the differing forces that Mundella faced in his later years as Vice-President of the Council.

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<sup>228</sup> *Hansard*, 19 May 1882, Vol. 269, cc. 1067-70.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 1068.

<sup>230</sup> *Gloucester Citizen*, 14 January 1884, 'Mr. Mundella and the Educational Code.'

<sup>231</sup> Speech at Manchester, 8 July 1884, quoted in Armytage, *A.J. Mundella*, 211.

<sup>232</sup> *The Times*, 18 June 1885, 'Revised Instructions to Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools, 1885.'

<sup>233</sup> Adams, *History of the Elementary School Contest*, 197-198.

Elementary education was of little importance to the 'old' Catholic families of England, who were mainly of the nobility or major landowners. The massive Irish immigration of mid-century changed this. Cardinal Wiseman established the Catholic Poor Schools Society in 1851, based on the existing Anglican and Nonconformist systems.<sup>234</sup> Thereafter, the Catholics received grants from the Committee of Council but the equitability of these was always questioned. Henry Edward Manning, a convert from Anglicanism, succeeded Wiseman as Archbishop of Westminster in 1865. He was a strong and consistent advocate of elementary schooling for the poor. Soon after his appointment he called for help for the '20,000 uneducated Catholic children running wild in the streets of London'.<sup>235</sup> Manning was critical of the existing system, which he saw as an attack on voluntarism and religious teaching.<sup>236</sup> He was also unhappy with the way that the grants system was administered.<sup>237</sup>

By mid-1883 there was increased pressure to improve the grants to voluntary schools, this time with a combined Anglican-Catholic thrust. In June 1883, Mundella wrote to Lord Carlingford, now Lord President:

I have felt for more than a year past that this demand would be made. Cardinal Manning and Canon Gregory have struck up an arrangement (in which they have endeavoured, but unsuccessfully, to include the Wesleyans) to agitate for increased grants to voluntary schools.<sup>238</sup>

Robert Gregory was the Anglican Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral and a long standing critic of state involvement in education.<sup>239</sup> According to Gregory, Manning sought his advice on how to counter what he saw as an attack on 'distinctive religious teaching'.<sup>240</sup> Gregory recommended that both Churches petition for a Royal Commission.<sup>241</sup> The contest between school boards and voluntary organisations simmered on until eventually a Commission was appointed.<sup>242</sup> A. S. Bishop asserted that, as the terms of

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<sup>234</sup> Vincent Alan McClelland, *Cardinal Manning: His Public Life and Influence 1865-1892*, London: Oxford University Press, 1962, 29.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>236</sup> Armytage, *A.J. Mundella*, 217

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>238</sup> Mundella to Carlingford, 4 June 1883, quoted in Armytage, *A.J. Mundella*, 219.

<sup>239</sup> Robert Gregory, 1819-1911, *Being the Autobiography of Robert Gregory, D.D., Dean of St. Paul's*, prepared for the Press, with Notes, by W.H. Hutton, London: Longman's, Green & Co., 1912, 129-135.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>242</sup> Bishop, *The Rise of a Central Authority*, 118.

reference were 'to inquire into the working of the Elementary Education Acts', the field of inquiry was huge.<sup>243</sup> The work of the Commission did not, however, commence until after Mundella had stepped down as Vice-President, and after the Liberals lost the 1885 general election.

The new Conservative Government initiated the Cross Commission in January 1886. Both Manning and Gregory were members. Mundella was 'sincerely anxious' about efforts to destroy the compromise established by the 1870 Act and believed that the continued agitation from the church school sector could lead to 'the complete severance of religious teaching in education'.<sup>244</sup> He had always spoken in favour of some general, but not dogmatic, religious instruction. Mundella seems to have been able to keep much of this agitation at bay. However, Manning made a provocative speech just fifteen days after the government's resignation, when he declared that Christian education was in great peril.<sup>245</sup> Of more concern was his assertion that, as the state had entered into education so the clergy could enter into politics.<sup>246</sup> Armytage wrote that 'Mundella was furious', as a result of which Manning wrote to Mundella with some sort of apology.<sup>247</sup>

The developing state system of education was attacked not only by church interests, but also by those who advocated purely secular teaching. The National Education League was the most prominent organisation in this regard.<sup>248</sup> The League's main aims were to ensure there were enough elementary schools, that they should be free of charge, being funded by local rates and government grants, that they should be non-sectarian in terms of religious teaching, and that attendance should be compulsory.<sup>249</sup> Dixon's opposition to the 1870 Act has been discussed earlier, Chamberlain was equally active. J. L. Garvin, in his massive biography of Chamberlain describes him as being 'prompt, tenacious, resourceful, blistering in attack'.<sup>250</sup> His long interest in educational policy is shown by the fact that he devoted his maiden speech

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> Mundella to Carlingford, 4 June 1883, quoted in Armytage, *A.J. Mundella*, 219.

<sup>245</sup> *The Times*, 25 June 1885, 'Cardinal Manning on Education'.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> Armytage, *A.J. Mundella*, 228.

<sup>248</sup> Peter T. Marsh, *Joseph Chamberlain: Entrepreneur in Politics*, Yale University Press, 1994, 37-38.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

<sup>250</sup> J.L. Garvin, *The Life of Joseph Chamberlain*, London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1935, 109.

to the Commons, in 1876, to an Amendment of the 1870 Act.<sup>251</sup> He apologised for speaking so soon after his election, but ‘he was so deeply interested, and one in that he had taken so considerable a part personally’.

Chamberlain was catapulted into Cabinet as President of the Board of Trade when the Liberal’s formed government in 1880. No-one had risen to Cabinet status after so short a time in Parliament since the younger Pitt.<sup>252</sup> Mundella and Chamberlain had known one another for many years. Both had been early members of the League and fellow candidates for Sheffield in the 1874 general election. Although they were often characterized as ‘radical’ or ‘advanced’ Liberals, their policies and actions were often different. Mundella did not agree with all aspects of the League’s agenda.<sup>253</sup> He wrote, ‘I am not in favour of free schools and I am sure the word “secular” will not go down at present.’ By 1885, however, Mundella embraced free schooling but not secular. He made an important speech during the 1885 election campaign that refuted the arguments against free schooling but supported teaching the Bible.<sup>254</sup> During this speech he made a somewhat facetious reference to Chamberlain’s support of free schooling, but he had been more direct on other occasions. Commenting on Chamberlain’s attitude to Hartington, who was then Liberal leader in the Commons, Mundella called Chamberlain ‘a spoilt child, vain, irritable and ambitious’.<sup>255</sup> He went onto say that ‘what Chamberlain wants is to have a phalanx of marionettes with the wires pulled by him from Birmingham. I at least will not be one of these puppets’. Chamberlain himself poked mild fun at Mundella, when he wrote to a friend from his home in Birmingham, ‘Mundella the Great is coming here’.<sup>256</sup>

Chamberlain campaigned energetically for free education during the 1885 general election campaign. According to C.H.D. Howard, it was one of the three most important issues contained in Chamberlain’s ‘unauthorised programme’.<sup>257</sup> In this regard he was in conflict with Gladstone’s official position which, admittedly, was

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<sup>251</sup> *Hansard*, 4 August 1876, Vol. 231, cc. 539-43.

<sup>252</sup> Garvin, *The Life*, 302.

<sup>253</sup> *Mundella Papers*, letter to Leader, 20 September 1869.

<sup>254</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 22 October 1885, ‘Mr. Mundella in Brightside: His Views on Free Schools’.

<sup>255</sup> *Mundella Papers*, letter to Leader, 10 July 1879.

<sup>256</sup> JCL Add. /607, Birmingham University Library, 28 December 1882.

<sup>257</sup> C.H.D. Howard, ‘Joseph Chamberlain and the “Unauthorized Programme”’, *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 65, No. 257 (October 1950), 484.



somewhat ambivalent.<sup>258</sup> Mundella must have been alarmed at these differing views, warning Chamberlain that:

It is a fact that some of my best supporters who are Radical on other questions are not yet convinced about 'free schools'. And I shall have to put forth all my powers of reasoning and persuasion to satisfy them. The truth is the matter is only just beginning to be thought over and discussed, and the ratepayers in the large towns are so poor just now, that they are frightened out of their wits at the prospect of increased demands for education.<sup>259</sup>

Mundella not only gave Chamberlain his support but tried to rescue the Liberal Party from ignominy. The election result was inconclusive. Although the Liberals lost seats they were still the largest party, but this advantage was negated when the Irish home rulers agreed to support the Conservatives.<sup>260</sup> Gladstone believed that Chamberlain's stance on education had adversely affected their vote in the boroughs, as Mundella had feared.<sup>261</sup> *The Times* also placed the blame for the result on Chamberlain, asserting that he had caused 'irredeemable disruption' to the Liberal Party.<sup>262</sup>

In his five years in office, Mundella secured full compulsion for primary education and reformed the Code system by appointing a permanent committee to regularly review it. He did not succeed in providing free education and the abuse of payment by results remained. Nevertheless, he improved elementary education in England and Wales. He suffered from the lack of interest in education shown by Gladstone, but he persisted. His departmental business was often relegated to the early hours of the morning. The journalist Henry Lucy, writing as 'Toby, M.P.' in *Punch* in 1883, mentioned the absence of many members from the Commons, with most that were there asleep, but:

Mr. Mundella was wide awake on the opposite bench. He had last night all to himself and his department. Of the many happy fittings of men and office that mark the present Government none has been more felicitous than the appointment of Mr. Mundella to the Education Department. An enthusiast on behalf of education, it might perhaps have been supposed that he would go too far, and incur the odium of

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<sup>258</sup> *The Times*, 19 September 1885, 'Mr. Gladstone's Manifesto'.

<sup>259</sup> Mundella to Chamberlain, 11 October 1885 (Chamberlain Papers, University of Birmingham), quoted in Howard, *Joseph Chamberlain*, 487.

<sup>260</sup> Armytage, *A.J. Mundella*, 232.

<sup>261</sup> Gladstone to Grosvenor, 27 November 1885, quoted in J.L. Hammond, *Gladstone and the Irish Nation*, London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1964, 398.

<sup>262</sup> *The Times*, 26 November 1885.

gentlemen opposite, whose views on the working of the Education Act do not at all points coincide with those of Liberal administrators. But, as abundant testimony was borne out last night, the Education Department under Mr. Mundella works with unparalleled smoothness and success.<sup>263</sup>

A more personal tribute came from the composer, Sir John Stainer, whom Mundella had appointed inspector of music in elementary schools and training colleges in 1883. He wrote to Mundella in 1895 and reflected on this work, he added:

I hope that the result will justify you in the confidence you placed in me by appointing me inspector, a confidence that will always make me feel bound to you by a debt of gratitude, as well as by that sincere respect and regard that all Englishmen owe to you as a man and as a statesman.<sup>264</sup>

Mundella was obviously highly regarded by a diverse group of people. There were those who admired his parliamentary work, with its pragmatism, compromise and persistence, and those who were touched personally. It is hard not to admire the work he did and the results he achieved.

#### *The National Education Association*

Mundella's active involvement in educational reform did not end with his time as Vice-President of the Council. He was president of an organisation formed in 1888 in response to the recommendations from a Royal Commission which had inquired into the efficacy of the various Elementary Education Acts.<sup>265</sup>

The increased influence of the Roman Catholic Church on schooling issues in the mid-1880s was noted earlier. With the Irish vote being so important in the Home Rule elections of 1885 and 1886, the Conservatives promised Cardinal Manning that they would appoint a Royal Commission to review the current system of education.<sup>266</sup> Commissioners were nominated in January 1886, presided over by Richard Assheton Cross, a former Conservative Home Secretary. The Commission was to inquire into the Elementary Education Acts of England and Wales and produced a five hundred page

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<sup>263</sup> Henry W. Lucy, *A Diary of Two Parliaments: The Gladstone Parliament 1880—1885*, London: Cassell & Co. Ltd., 1886, 359.

<sup>264</sup> Stainer to Mundella, 1895, quoted in Armytage, *A.J. Mundella*, 235.

<sup>265</sup> Armytage, *A.J. Mundella*, 275.

<sup>266</sup> Bishop, *The Rise of Central Authority*, 118.

report in 1888.<sup>267</sup> Most Liberals considered that the recommendations contained in the majority report 'reactionary'.<sup>268</sup> A minority report was submitted by a group of commissioners headed by the Liberal M.P., Lyulph Stanley.<sup>269</sup> They were particularly concerned with recommendations that voluntary schools could receive financial assistance from rates and that religious teaching should be provided in board schools. Mundella, also, was critical. He felt that the majority report was aimed at breaking the compromise of 1870, and 'plunge us into a sectarian controversy'.<sup>270</sup>

The National Education Association was formed in November 1888 to protest against the proposals arising from the Cross commission majority report.<sup>271</sup> Armytage called it 'yet another pressure group', Derrington called it 'an apparently obscure pressure group', and the catalogue of the London Metropolitan Archives asserted that the NEA 'acted as the education sub-committee of The Liberation Society'.<sup>272</sup> Mundella, the politician, was the Association's inaugural president, and his nephew, also Anthony John, was secretary. The involvement of the two Mundellas in a sub-committee of The Liberation Society was somewhat anomalous. The Society objected to the churches having a major influence on education and believed that disestablishment would help overcome this issue.<sup>273</sup> The younger Mundella was a Unitarian, so presumably sympathetic to the broader views of the Society.<sup>274</sup> The elder was a life-long Anglican, but the two were close. The nephew had been his uncle's private secretary during his time as Vice-President of the Council.<sup>275</sup> Both appear to have been moderate reformers, and indeed the Association aimed at maintaining the compromises on religious teaching incorporated in the 1870 Act. Although the

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<sup>267</sup> *Final Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Elementary Education Acts, England and Wales*, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1888.

<sup>268</sup> Armytage, *A.J. Mundella*, 274.

<sup>269</sup> *Final Report, Elementary Education Acts*, 237-249.

<sup>270</sup> Armytage, *A.J. Mundella*, 274.

<sup>271</sup> Arnold P. Derrington, 'The National Education Association of Great Britain 1889-1959: A Short Account and Bibliography', *History of Education Society Bulletin*, No. 11, Spring 1973, 18-19.

<sup>272</sup> Armytage, *A.J. Mundella*, 275; A.P. Derrington, 'Anthony John Mundella – Uncle and Nephew', *History of Education*, 4:1, 1975, 32; 'National Education Association', *London Metropolitan Archives*, Collections Catalogue, A/NEA, 1887-1959.

<sup>273</sup> L.O. Ward, 'The Liberation Society: An Educational Pressure Group', *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, Vol. 11, Issue 1, 1979, 19.

<sup>274</sup> Derrington, 'Anthony John Mundella', 32.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*

Association focused on the political actions of non-conformists, several prominent Anglicans, other than Mundella, were members.<sup>276</sup>

There is little published information on the success of the Association in opposing the recommendations of the Cross commission. The differences of opinion between the majority and minority reports made it impossible for the Government to introduce any firm legislation. One recommendation was acted upon in 1890 by a modification to the Code.<sup>277</sup> It abolished the system of payment by results.<sup>278</sup> Mundella had sought this reform for some years.<sup>279</sup> Mundella's commitment to improving the British education system continued to the end of his life. His final speech in the House of Commons was made on 17 June 1897, during a debate on state funding for education.<sup>280</sup> He noted the improved level of attendance in primary schools, but adversely contrasted this with the level achieved in continental schools.<sup>281</sup> He complained that compulsion was not being enforced by some magistrates, especially in rural areas, and that many children were allowed to enter half-time work before they had completed rudimentary schooling. In this regard, he returned to his often voiced praise for the German system where full-time education was compulsory to the age of 14.<sup>282</sup> He concluded his speech with his often repeated warning that Britain was losing its industrial supremacy because of its inferior education system.<sup>283</sup> He was consistent in his position and arguments right up until his death a month later, on 21 July 1897.

### *Conclusions – Education was Mundella's passion*

Mundella was involved in many facets of education during his early days in business and throughout his parliamentary career. He had received little formal childhood education and sought other schooling alternatives throughout his youthful and early adult years. His knowledge of education was recognised before his entry into

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<sup>276</sup> Derrington, 'The National Education Association', 19.

<sup>277</sup> Bishop, *Rise of Central Authority*, 121.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>279</sup> Armytage, *A.J. Mundella*, 274.

<sup>280</sup> *Hansard* (Fourth Series), 17 June 1897, Vol.50, cc. 293-353, 'Payment for Public Education in England'.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*, cc. 304-5.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*

parliament when he was invited to comment on Britain's technical education system before the Taunton Royal Commission of 1867. After entering parliament he was an influential supporter of Forster's 1870 Education Act. He was a regular speaker on education matters whether in government or opposition. Mundella was an effective minister responsible for education and during his tenure introduced compulsory elementary schooling. He continued to contribute to parliamentary debates on education matters throughout his life.

## Chapter 6: Improving Technical and Higher Education

This chapter analyses the development of technical and higher education in Britain during the second half of the nineteenth century. It will be argued that Britain's failure to promote technical education was one of the contributory factors underlying the country's relative industrial decline. Mundella's initiatives to improve the level of training in science and engineering will be discussed, and his successes and failures identified.

Technical education covers a large range of activities from tertiary degrees in science and engineering to the training of skilled workers. Mundella, at different stages of his career, was involved with the full spectrum. The work he did to improve his hosiery manufacturing business by identifying and encouraging inventions was discussed in Chapter 2. During his time as Vice-President of the Council, he actively promoted the South Kensington science and engineering facility and was involved in the establishment of some of the new university colleges. His motivation was to enable British industry to compete with those of Germany and America, a position which he frequently repeated. He, and others, were concerned with the lack of technological progress in Britain. It was not, however, a cause that attracted widespread support and Mundella was often frustrated with the slow pace of change.

Mechanics' Institutes had been started in the 1820s to provide instruction in the scientific principles which underlaid the tradesmen's work.<sup>1</sup> The aim of the Institutes aligned exactly with Mundella's, namely, to improve the efficiency of manufacturing. However, by the 1850s, the Institutes had virtually stopped attracting tradesmen and had become literary and philosophical schools for the middle class.<sup>2</sup> J.W. Hudson, writing in 1851, identified the problem as one of irregular attendance at the elementary level classes.<sup>3</sup> He asserted that, in 1848 at the Nottingham Institute, with which Mundella must have been familiar, only 80 attended elementary classes that had been designed for 400.<sup>4</sup> Mundella's argument for compulsory elementary

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen F. Cotgrove, *Technical Education and Social Change*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1958, 13; D.S.L. Cardwell, *The Organisation of Science in England*, London: Heinemann, 1972, 41.

<sup>2</sup> Cotgrove, *Technical Education*, 13.

<sup>3</sup> J.W. Hudson, *The History of Adult Education*, London: Longman, Green, 1851, 147-148.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

education was based on the incapacity of many workers to understand technical instruction.

Changes to university education, which slowly saw the introduction of scientific and engineering studies, were a feature of the middle of nineteenth century. Until then, the two ancient English universities essentially provided training for the Anglican clergy and the professions. Only practicing Anglicans could attend until the Test Acts were repealed in the mid-1850s. The teaching concentrated on divinity and the classics, although by mid-century Cambridge did have courses in mathematics. This was, however, taught as an intellectual exercise, remote from any practical application.<sup>5</sup> Cambridge did not establish its first chair in engineering until 1875, over 30 years after this had occurred in the new foundations of University and King's Colleges in London.<sup>6</sup> University College was founded in 1826 to provide tertiary education for those unable to gain access to Oxford or Cambridge due to financial or religious constraints.<sup>7</sup> Some Anglicans were dismayed at the establishment of this 'godless institution' and founded King's College, also in London, in 1829.<sup>8</sup> These two colleges, however, came many years after tertiary technical education had started in Scotland. The Andersonian Institute (now the Strathclyde University) was founded in 1796 for the study of science and practical subjects.<sup>9</sup> John Anderson had been Professor of Natural Philosophy at the University of Glasgow, and opened up his mathematics' and physics' lectures to mechanics and artisans.<sup>10</sup> His will suggested the establishment of a new university which was to provide scientific training to anyone who was capable of benefitting from it.<sup>11</sup> There is no evidence that Mundella knew of Anderson's efforts to provide technical training to tradesmen, but he would surely have approved.

Although the Great Exhibition of 1851 was viewed as an assertion of Britain's industrial dominance, it engendered a complacency which was later shocked by the

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<sup>5</sup> John Lawson and Harold Silver, *A Social History of Education in England*, London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 297.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 300.

<sup>7</sup> Cardwell, *The Organisation of Science*, 45.

<sup>8</sup> Sir James Mountford, *British Universities*, London: Oxford University Press, 1966, 14-15.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>10</sup> James Muir, *John Anderson: Pioneer of Technical Education*, Glasgow: John Smith & Son, 1950, 8.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

advances in technical education in other European countries.<sup>12</sup> The President of the Royal Commission charged with organising the Exhibition was Albert, the Prince Consort. The Prince had been prominent in establishing the Royal College of Chemistry in 1845 and the Geological Survey Training School (later renamed the Royal School of Mines) in 1851.<sup>13</sup> Ultimately, the profit from the Exhibition was used to purchase land at South Kensington and there to establish science-based colleges and museums.<sup>14</sup> Even after the decision was made to centralize such schools at South Kensington, progress was slow. However, once Spencer was appointed Lord President of the Council and Mundella Vice-President, these plans came to fruition.<sup>15</sup> The Royal Commission continued, and is still operating today, but a new Board of Management was appointed in 1881 to run it.<sup>16</sup> Mundella was a member of that Board.

‘The nineteenth century was the golden age of Royal Commissions’, asserted Michael Argles at the beginning of an article published in 1959, which discussed the 1881 Commission on technical instruction.<sup>17</sup> A series of inquiries into various aspects of education were initiated during the mid- to late-nineteenth century. This showed the increased importance placed on improving the capabilities of the population. They also influenced the move towards state involvement in education and presumably reinforced Mundella’s thinking. Some of the later Commissions were set up under Mundella’s direction. He was responsible for the Aberdare Report of 1881 on higher education in Wales, and the Samuelson Report of 1882-4 on technical instruction.

This chapter will argue that Mundella’s interest in technical education stemmed from his recognition that the British working man had much to offer in improving manufacturing processes, but was hampered by his lack of basic knowledge. Mundella sought a better elementary educational system which would provide the basis for further studies in technological subjects. His was not a simple desire to see a better

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<sup>12</sup> Hermione Hobhouse, *The Crystal Palace and the Great Exhibition: Art, Science and Productive Industry: A History of the Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851*, London: Continuum, 2002, 85-89.

<sup>13</sup> Sir Patrick Linstead, *The Prince Consort and the Founding of the Imperial College*, London: Imperial College of Science and Technology, 1961, 5-9.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>15</sup> W. H. G. Armytage, ‘J. F. D. Donnelly: Pioneer in Vocational Education,’ *The Vocational Aspect of Education*, 2:4, (1950), 12.

<sup>16</sup> Hobhouse, *The Crystal Palace*, 212.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Argles, ‘The Royal Commission on Technical Instruction 1881-1884: Its Inception and Composition’, *The Vocational Aspect of Education*, 11:23, (1959) 97.



educated working class, but to provide a counter to the increasing competitiveness of overseas manufacturing. He also recognised that scientific and engineering studies at a high level were needed as part of this objective. He was much involved both with the establishment of what became the Imperial College of Science and Technology and with new university colleges. He was not of course alone in these endeavours, and his relationships with other proponents of better technical training will be explored. Nevertheless, it was a frustrating time for Mundella, who struggled to convince others of the need for improving this type of education.

### *Historiography*

Specialized histories of technical education in nineteenth-century Britain are relatively few and tend towards reviews of developments in the tertiary sector. There was, however, no lack of contemporary interest in working-class scientific training. As early as 1851, Dr. J.W. Hudson wrote a very detailed survey of Britain's 'Mechanics' and Literary Institutions.<sup>18</sup> He was quite pessimistic about their operation and usefulness, as has been noted earlier.

The general histories of education consulted for this thesis were mostly written between 1950 and 1970 and they invariably included a section on adult education. These referenced technical and tertiary studies, but they made little or no mention of Mundella's activities in promoting improvements in these fields. Surprisingly, discussion and analysis of the 1881-84 Royal Commission on Technical Education in these works seldom referred to him. This seems somewhat ungenerous, as Mundella established the Commission. Although not attributing anything directly to Mundella, Dr. S.J. Curtis, in his comprehensive history of British education, clearly articulated Mundella's aim. Curtis asserted that 'the report stimulated the authorities to realise the need not only of first-class technical institutions, but also of an adequate supply of secondary schools in that the instruction given would lay the foundations for later technical training'.<sup>19</sup> John Lawson and Harold Silver, in their 1973 *History of Education in England*, only said that the Royal Commission's report 'gave a typical warning of the

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<sup>18</sup> Hudson, *The History of Adult Education*, passim.

<sup>19</sup> S.J. Curtis, *History of Education in Great Britain*, London: University Tutorial press Ltd., 1963, 496-497.

danger from foreign competition'.<sup>20</sup> Again there was no acknowledgement of Mundella's involvement.

A comprehensive volume on education in England between 1789 and 1902 was first published in 1930, and reprinted over 30 years later in 1964.<sup>21</sup> Its author, John William Adamson, was, at the time of publication, Emeritus Professor of Education at the University of London. He was described by Richard Aldrich and Peter Gordon as 'the most distinguished historian of education of his day'.<sup>22</sup> One might have thought that, writing only 33 years after Mundella's death, his influence would be well remembered. Adamson mentioned Mundella only twice, once in relation to the 1870 Education Act, and once in regard to his 1868 submission to the Taunton Commission, which was inquiring into middle-class education.<sup>23</sup> Mundella had written this following a request from the Commissioners to provide his views on technical education. He compared that currently available in Nottingham, adversely, with that in Saxony. Adamson said that this reply was 'exceptional in presenting constructive proposals'.<sup>24</sup> This is an important link in Mundella's technical education chain and so is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Harold Dent was another eminent educationist of the mid-twentieth century. A long-time editor of the *Times Educational Supplement* and later professor of education at Sheffield University, he wrote a useful overview of a century of education subsequent to the 1870 Education Act. He barely mentioned Mundella, but, perhaps because of his Sheffield connection, Dent told of Mundella's involvement with the foundation of the city's university. This stemmed from a series of university extension lectures, financed by Mark Firth, a local steel manufacturer, and supported by Mundella and other friends.<sup>25</sup> Nothing is said of Mundella, nor of Samuelson, in regard

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<sup>20</sup> Lawson and Silver, *A Social History*, 346.

<sup>21</sup> John William Adamson, *English Education, 1789-1902*, Cambridge at the University Press, 1964 (first published in 1930).

<sup>22</sup> Richard Aldrich and Peter Gordon, *Dictionary of British Educationists*, London: The Woburn Press, 1989, 5.

<sup>23</sup> Adamson, *English Education*, 320.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> H.C. Dent, *1870-1970: Century of Growth in English Education*, London: Longman, 1970, 43.

to the Royal Commission on Technical Instruction. The Commission was seen only as the antecedent of the Technical Instruction Act of 1889.<sup>26</sup>

W.H.G. Armytage's general history of education, which was published in 1964, has been noted in Chapter 4. He attributed the appointment of Samuelson's Royal Commission to Mundella, something often ignored by other historians.<sup>27</sup> Armytage also recorded that, in 1887, and now in opposition, Mundella was part of a group of eminent scientists, educators and businessmen who formed a society to lobby for more industrial education.<sup>28</sup> This was an important development which is not given any prominence in other general histories and will be further considered later in this chapter.

In a book, published in 1971, A.S. Bishop examined the impact of government intervention on the developing national education system.<sup>29</sup> Because he was dealing with a shorter time frame, Bishop paid more attention to Mundella's work than some of his fellow contemporary researchers. He complimented Mundella on his 'dynamism' and praised his stand against the Lord President, Carlingford, on the appointment of a new Education Department Secretary.<sup>30</sup> He was quite emphatic that it was Mundella who persuaded a somewhat reluctant government to appoint the Royal Commission on Technical Instruction in 1881.<sup>31</sup> Although this work is confined to a relatively narrow field and to a restricted time period, it is heartening to read of Bishop's generally favourable view of Mundella. He did, however, suggest that progress was slow and that innovations were few.<sup>32</sup>

The specialist histories of technical education are not extensive, and many are concerned with quite specific aspects or individuals. Professor Donald Cardwell, a historian of science and technology, examined the conversion of pure science into useful industrial technology.<sup>33</sup> He detailed the impact of scientific thought and

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>27</sup> W.H.G. Armytage, *Four Hundred Years of English Education*, Cambridge at the University Press, 1964, 169.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> A.S. Bishop, *The Rise of a Central Authority for English Education*, Cambridge at the University Press, 1971, passim.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Cardwell, *The Organisation of Science*, passim.

experimentation on various industries and showed how British practice was influenced by advances on the Continent. More importantly, for this thesis, he went into some detail on the establishment of the Samuelson Royal Commission on Technical Instruction. He firmly attributed the appointment of the Commission to Mundella, and described him as 'a firm friend of technical education'.<sup>34</sup> Cardwell believed that Mundella's initiative resulted from a pamphlet written by Felkin in 1881, which described the educational efficiency seen in Saxony.<sup>35</sup> Whilst this pamphlet might have some significance, Mundella's argument about the superiority of the German system long preceded its publication. Mundella and Felkin were contemporaries, perhaps even friends, in Nottingham, as has been detailed earlier. Mundella succeeded Felkin as a member of the Nottingham council and they were both involved in the hosiery industry. They would have discussed many issues, including technical education.

In the preface to his book on English technical education since 1851, published in 1964, Michael Argles firmly placed the Department of Science and Art and its associated institutions at the heart of technical instruction for the subsequent 100 years.<sup>36</sup> Despite writing in some detail about the work of this department and those charged with its operation, he did not refer to any of its political masters, one of whom was Mundella. Even whilst he acknowledged that technical education in England made rapid strides forward after 1881, he did not connect Mundella's appointment as Vice-President of the Council with that date.<sup>37</sup> Argles called the appointment of the 1881 Royal Commission on Technical Instruction, the 'opening trumpet blast' for this advance, however, he did not acknowledge Mundella as the minister responsible.<sup>38</sup> In a journal article written before the publication of his book, Argles discussed the origin of the Commission in much more detail.<sup>39</sup> In this article he mentioned the centrality of Mundella in the establishment of the Commission. Argles suggested that the members of the Commission were men already committed to an improved and enlarged

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>36</sup> Michael Argles, *South Kensington to Robbins: An Account of English Technical and Scientific Education since 1851*, London: Longman's, Green & Co. Ltd., 1964, xii.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Argles, 'The Royal Commission', 97-98.

technical education sector. He asserted that their conclusions were thus predictable. However, he acknowledged that the findings were valuable.<sup>40</sup>

In 1958, the sociologist Stephen Cotgrove produced a perceptive study of how technical education was required to adapt over time to meet changing needs.<sup>41</sup> Although not strictly a history of the subject, Cotgrove reviewed developments and their underlying causes. Like many other writers, he emphasized that the push for better technical education resulted from the concern that Britain's industrial base was under threat.<sup>42</sup> He identified the lack of scientific instruction for the mass of ordinary workers as a problem at a time when manufacturing technology was becoming increasingly complex.<sup>43</sup> Unsurprisingly, in a work on social change, the influence of the politicians received negligible comment.

Interest in the development of technical education in nineteenth-century Britain seems to have lapsed in the early 1990s. No major histories were published; however, some journal articles addressed specific issues. For example, Andy Green published an article in 1995 which compared technical education in nineteenth-century England and France.<sup>44</sup> Green repeated the usual view that technical education in England, throughout the nineteenth century, was inferior to that of the major countries of northern Europe.<sup>45</sup> He asserted that elementary education for the working class was too sparse and narrow to provide the basis for any type of scientific study and that the public and grammar schools were still 'frozen in the classical mould'.<sup>46</sup> He cited many of the references already given in this thesis in support of this view. Green asserted that, as a consequence of the lower level of technical education, British industry was disadvantaged against its continental rivals. This is a common conclusion. In searching for the reasons for this delayed development, Green discarded one often-expressed view that it was due to the anti-industrial and anti-utilitarian culture of the

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>41</sup> Cotgrove, *Technical Education*, passim.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 43-44.

<sup>44</sup> Andy Green, 'Technical education and state formation in nineteenth-century England and France', *History of Education*, Vol. 24, No. 2, 1995, 123-139.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

Victorian political elite.<sup>47</sup> He argued that the slowness in realising that better technical education was required was that the English were complacent because of the success of the first Industrial Revolution.<sup>48</sup> Green also highlighted the widespread antipathy to state involvement in the field.<sup>49</sup> This idea of self-sufficiency and resistance to authority was also a factor in the reform of elementary education which was discussed in the previous chapter. Mundella consistently argued that the state had to be involved for a national education system to be successful. His work to achieve this is a measure of his persistence, often against the positions taken by some of his more senior colleagues.

In 2000, Lawrence Goldman published an article that examined the political influence on the English working class of adult education driven by middle-class intellectuals.<sup>50</sup> Although politicians received scant mention, this work does show some modern interest in Victorian educational development. Of more direct value is a very detailed paper, published in 2001, on the 1881 Aberdare report on higher education in Wales.<sup>51</sup> Gordon Roderick asserted that it was Aberdare himself who initiated the inquiry, but does attribute the makeup of the committee to Spencer and Mundella.<sup>52</sup>

In his biography of Mundella, Armytage dealt with some aspects of Mundella's attitude to, and involvement in, technical education. Mundella's belief in the need for a better technical educational system to assist British industry and his work to consolidate the science and mining schools in South Kensington is mentioned.<sup>53</sup> As has previously been noted, the biography is arranged chronologically, thus references to technical education are scattered. Additionally, it barely recognised Mundella's consistent championing of this aspect of education.

Although improvements to technical and higher education were recognised as an important part of Britain's industrial future, the issue received only intermittent attention from politicians and manufacturers. The historiography reflects this. Mundella was one who was different. He persistently called for better technical

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Lawrence Goldman, 'Intellectuals and the English working class 1870-1945: the case of adult education', *History of Education*, Vol. 29, No.4, 2000, passim.

<sup>51</sup> Gordon W. Roderick, 'A fair representation of all interests? The Aberdare report on intermediate and higher education in Wales, 1881', *History of Education*, Vol. 30, No. 3, 2001, passim.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 235-236.

<sup>53</sup> Armytage, *A.J. Mundella*, 206-207.

training and attempted to encourage the introduction of such training during his period in office. This is often ignored in many of the works on the subject. This may be due to his relative failure to achieve his aims.

#### *Efforts before 1868 and Parliament*

Mundella's early interest in technical and adult education was shown by his involvement with the Nottingham Peoples' College and his support for better education for his own workforce. These matters are discussed in Chapter 4. His interest came at a time when others were starting to recognise the poor level of technical education in Britain. Historians of education invariably identify 1851 and the Great Exhibition as the turning point in the recognition that improvements were needed.

The Society of Arts organised a series of lectures after the closure of the Exhibition to review the results and identify the lessons learned.<sup>54</sup> One important lecture was given by Lyon Playfair, the eminent chemist and confidant of the Prince Consort. Although Playfair entitled his lecture 'The Chemical Principles Involved in the Manufactures of the Exhibition', he also addressed the relative decline of English industry and proposed a solution.<sup>55</sup> He contended that 'abstract' science was needed for advancing manufacturing processes and that industrialists should be treated as professional men, alongside clergymen, lawyers and doctors.<sup>56</sup> His answer was to call for the establishment of Industrial Colleges.<sup>57</sup> Later, in his memoirs, Playfair spoke of the slow, but steady, response to this, and identified his lecture as the beginning of public recognition of the need for technical education.<sup>58</sup>

Playfair referred to his lecture in a letter written in May 1867 to Lord Taunton, who, as has been noted previously, at that time presided over a Royal Commission inquiring into education.<sup>59</sup> Lord Granville, then Chancellor of the University of London, used it in commenting on the findings of British jurors at that year's Paris Exhibition.

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<sup>54</sup> Cardwell, *The Organisation of Science*, 80.

<sup>55</sup> *Results of the Great Exhibition on the Progress of Art and Science*, London: David Bogue, 1852.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 152-153.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>58</sup> Wemyss Reid, *Memoirs and Correspondence of Lyon Playfair*, London: Cassell & Co., Ltd., 1899, 153.

<sup>59</sup> *The Times*, 29 May 1867, attached to a letter from Lord Granville, 'Industrial Education'.

The shock at the recognition of the parlous state of British technical education led to a flurry of inquiries and reports. Bernhard Samuelson, the ironmaster responsible for the Cleveland iron and steel industry, was central to this process.<sup>60</sup> In 1867, he personally investigated technical education in those Continental countries seen as England's main industrial rivals.<sup>61</sup> Samuelson's report was not entirely damning of the British system. Although he found that some countries had indeed introduced superior educational systems, he argued that this had not always led to technological improvements. Indeed, much of the equipment used was of English manufacture or copies of English machines or techniques.<sup>62</sup> He did suggest that industrial unrest was a problem in England, but said 'even as I write I am rejoiced to learn from Mr. Mundella, that the lacemakers of Nottingham have followed the example of the kindred trades of that town'.<sup>63</sup> He was, of course, referring to Mundella's Nottingham hosiery arbitration and conciliation board. Samuelson's comment indicated an established relationship between the two men. Armytage asserted that they became close friends.<sup>64</sup>

The Taunton Royal Commission was established in 1864. It was to inquire into the education given in schools that had not been included in the earlier Newcastle and Clarendon reports.<sup>65</sup> Its terms of reference did not include any mention of technical education. However, in July 1867, it issued a 'Report Relative to Technical Education', because, 'our attention has been incidentally called to the evidence considered to be afforded by the International Exhibition at Paris, of the inferior rate of progress recently made in manufacturing and mechanical industry in England compared with that made in other European countries'.<sup>66</sup> The Report went on to reflect that this 'alleged' inferiority was said to be due to a lack of technical education. The Commissioners decided to determine whether this was correct by asking a number of

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<sup>60</sup> W.F. Spear, rev. Ian St. John, 'Samuelson, Sir Bernhard, first baronet (1820-1905), ironmaster and promoter of technical education', *ODNB* (accessed 3 August 2017).

<sup>61</sup> *Letter from Mr. Samuelson, M.P., to the Right Honourable Lord R. Montagu, the Vice-President of the Committee of Council for Education, 'Industrial Progress and the Education of the Industrial Classes in France, Switzerland, Germany'*, 16 November 1867.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>64</sup> Armytage, *A.J. Mundella*, 52.

<sup>65</sup> J. Stuart Maclure, *Educational Documents: England and Wales, 1816-1963*, London: Chapman & Hall, 1965, 89.

<sup>66</sup> *Schools Inquiry Commission*, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1867, 3. (accessed on House of Commons Parliamentary Papers 8 August 2017).



what they called 'eminent' English jurors of the Exhibition for their views. Mundella was one of the sixteen invited to answer this question, and one of the few without post-nominals.<sup>67</sup> This was a singular complement to Mundella's status as a major manufacturer and a long-term advocate of national education. He replied on 29 June 1867: 'I am of the opinion that art and industrial education without a thoroughly organised system of primary instruction will not remove the danger that threatens our manufacturing and commercial supremacy'.<sup>68</sup> He went on to compare the hosiery trade of England with those of France and Germany. In particular, he claimed that machines invented by uneducated English workmen were often used in those countries. Such machines were sometimes improved in those countries by men of a 'superior technical education'. He thought that the introduction of such training in England would be pointless until the workers could read and write.<sup>69</sup>

In 1868, Samuelson chaired a Select Committee of the Commons, appointed to look into the teaching of theoretical and applied science to the 'industrial classes'.<sup>70</sup> The Committee went about its investigation by examining witnesses from government departments, tertiary institutions, secondary schools and industry. Mundella was one of the witnesses. He gave evidence on 11 June 1868, covering eleven pages of questions and answers.<sup>71</sup> Much of what he said was a comparison of the hosiery industry of England and Germany and he frequently used examples to illustrate the advantages of a better educated workforce. He was adamant on the need for improved elementary education as a preliminary to any technical training.<sup>72</sup> And he was equally clear that this must be compulsory: 'it would be the greatest boon that could be conferred on this country', he said.<sup>73</sup>

Mundella spoke at some length on the problem of technical education in his own city of Nottingham. Apart from the repeated assertion of sub-standard elementary education, he listed the difficulty of finding teachers trained in technical

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 5, 'Correspondence Relative to Technical Education'.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>70</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on Scientific Education*, 15 July 1868 (accessed on House of Commons Parliamentary Papers online).

<sup>71</sup> *Minutes of Evidence Taken Before the Select Committee on Scientific Instruction*, 232-243.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 233, para. 4587.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 240, para. 4737.

instruction and the general lack of interest from both manufacturers and workers.<sup>74</sup> He inferred that this was a national problem. Mundella's evidence must have impressed the Committee. His was the first name mentioned in the *Report* presented to the Commons. He asserted that improved elementary education was an absolute necessity before technical education was attempted.<sup>75</sup> The Committee, accurately, interpreted Mundella thus:

The little rudimentary knowledge acquired at school is rarely retained after the young people have been at work two or three years, and elementary scientific instruction is thus entirely beyond the reach of a large portion of our industrial population.<sup>76</sup>

It is clear that Mundella was an influential voice in the technical education debate almost from his move to Nottingham until his election to Parliament. He appeared at inquiries, wrote reports and spoke at public meetings. This continued right up until he was campaigning for selection as a Liberal candidate for Sheffield at the 1868 general election.

#### *In Parliament*

Once in Parliament Mundella took an important role in the reform of elementary schooling and the improvement of tertiary, both technical and general, education. There is no evidence that he was active in pursuing legislation to extend state involvement in technical education for workers during his term as Vice-President of the Council. Armytage suggested that advocating technical education incurred 'suspicion of secularism' and the opposition of the voluntaryists and denominationalists.<sup>77</sup> The increasing influence of the Anglican and Roman Catholic school interests in elementary education towards the end of Mundella's Vice-Presidency has been discussed in Chapter 4. It is, perhaps, logical to expect that this position extended to technical education.

Mundella was soon active in pursuing improvements in the teaching of science at tertiary level. Although there were private initiatives to establish science-based

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 4635-4648.

<sup>75</sup> *Report from the Select Committee*, iii.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, iv.

<sup>77</sup> Armytage, *A.J. Mundella*, 273.

colleges in some of the major manufacturing districts, the state-supported institutions in London were dispersed and despondent. The Royal College of Chemistry had been established in 1845, the School of Mines in 1851, and the proposed site for scientific education in South Kensington purchased after the Great Exhibition, but there was little political impetus for development.<sup>78</sup> The main agency for technical education was the Science and Art Department. Formed as part of the Board of Trade in 1851, it was transferred to the Department of Education in 1857 and thus became responsible to the Vice-President of the Council.<sup>79</sup> Mundella, therefore, assumed control of technical education when appointed to the Ministry in 1880.

This Department had responsibility for the science and mining schools in central London and for the development of the South Kensington site with its museums. Several attempts had been made to rationalize the situation but they had been frustrated by the conservatism of senior officers and the lack of political intent.<sup>80</sup> Mundella supported a proposal for a normal school of science at South Kensington, and addressed this in a letter to the Treasury in 1881.<sup>81</sup> He followed the recommendations of Lieut. Col. Donnelly, R.E., Secretary of the Science Section of the Department, to move the dispersed schools to a unified site at South Kensington.<sup>82</sup> Mundella concluded this letter by urging the Treasury to make an early decision so that everything could be in place for the beginning of the next session of the school in October 1881.<sup>83</sup> Whether it was this bluntness, or the opposition to the move by the professor of mining, Warrington Smyth, the Treasury decided against the totality of the proposal.<sup>84</sup> It was agreed, however, to establish a Normal School of Science at South Kensington. With T.H. Huxley as Dean, it opened in October 1881.<sup>85</sup> At the same time, a proposal was made by the ancient City Companies, the successors to the medieval guilds, to establish a technical university to provide training in applied art and

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<sup>78</sup> Argles, *South Kensington to Robbins*, 9-10.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-19.

<sup>80</sup> Bishop, *Rise of Central Authority*, 182.

<sup>81</sup> *Correspondence between the Science and Art Department and the Treasury as to the Organisation of the Normal School of Science and Royal School of Mines*, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1882 (Mundella's letter was dated 19 March 1881).

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 3, 'Correspondence', (Mundella to Lord Frederick Cavendish, M.P., Secretary to H.M. Treasury).

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>84</sup> Armytage, 'J.F.D. Donnelly', *The Vocational Aspect of Education*, 12.

<sup>85</sup> Armytage, *A.J. Mundella*, 207.

science.<sup>86</sup> Eventually it was decided that this institution should be built in South Kensington and the City and Guilds Institute was opened in 1884. It took some years, however, to achieve Mundella's aim of creating a first-class technical university. The three schools at South Kensington were eventually amalgamated to form Imperial College in 1908.<sup>87</sup>

A second important initiative taken by Mundella was the appointment in 1881 of a Royal Commission to investigate technical education both in England and overseas. Argles suggested that Mundella was 'curiously unenthusiastic' about such a move.<sup>88</sup> It is apparent that the establishment of the Commission was somewhat confused and probably reflected the disinterest of the Government, and most members of Parliament. The initial proposal for a Royal Commission was made to the Commons by George Anderson, a Liberal M.P. for Glasgow, in April 1881.<sup>89</sup> Mundella responded by recognising the importance of technical education, but then asserted that a semi-official enquiry would be preferable to a Royal Commission.<sup>90</sup> It was a short debate, with no Conservative members present, and quickly adjourned because the House was not quorate. The matter came on again on 21 July 1881.<sup>91</sup> Once more, Mundella asserted that the information could be obtained without the cost of a Royal Commission.<sup>92</sup> He advised members that he had been in contact with four gentlemen, two of whom, Messrs. Samuelson and Slagg, a prominent free trader and President of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce, had agreed, at their own expense, to investigate the 'whole question'. No further mention of the alternatives was made in the Commons and yet the Commission was authorised by the Queen on 25 August 1881.<sup>93</sup> It must be presumed that Mundella had received sufficient support from the Prime Minister and Cabinet to proceed with this.

The Commission was given wide Terms of Reference:

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<sup>86</sup> Hobhouse, *The Crystal Palace*, 206.

<sup>87</sup> Cardwell, *Organisation of Science*, 197.

<sup>88</sup> Argles, 'The Royal Commission', 97.

<sup>89</sup> *Hansard*, 1 April 1881, Vol. 260, cc. 525-548.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, cc. 535-544.

<sup>91</sup> *Hansard*, 21 July 1881, Vol. 263, cc. 1473-1475.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 1474.

<sup>93</sup> Argles, 'The Royal Commission', 98.

To inquire into the instruction of the industrial classes of certain foreign countries in technical and other subjects for the purpose of comparison with that of the corresponding classes in this country; and into the influence of such instruction on manufacturing and other industries at home and abroad.<sup>94</sup>

Ultimately, the Commission spent three years on a most comprehensive survey. They visited institutions as diverse as the Edgbaston High Schools for Girls and the Imperial Polytechnic in Moscow.<sup>95</sup> The Commission's findings were not surprising. They recognised that the improvements in continental industry could not have been achieved without a high level of technical knowledge, and particularly of original research work.<sup>96</sup> Their main recommendations must have pleased Mundella; he had said the same for some years. They called for radical improvements in both elementary and secondary education in England, an increase in government funding, and the establishment of technical schools.<sup>97</sup> Although it took some years for all these aims to materialise, the Samuelson Commission was their catalyst, and the Commission was of Mundella's making.

Another early Mundella initiative was the setting up of a Departmental Committee, in 1880, to report on higher education in Wales. The poor state of both secondary and higher education in that country had been highlighted in 1879 by the member for Glamorgan, Hussey Vivian, during the time of a Conservative government.<sup>98</sup> Nothing came of this. After the election of a Liberal government in 1880, however, the important Welsh politician, Henry Austin Bruce, first Baron Aberdare, suggested the appointment of a Royal Commission to report on Welsh education.<sup>99</sup> It was eventually decided that a Departmental Committee was more appropriate. The makeup of the committee was the most contentious issue. Gordon Roderick described this in much detail and showed the influence of both Mundella and Spencer on its final composition.<sup>100</sup> Mundella announced the formation of the

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<sup>94</sup> Stuart Maclure, *Educational Documents: England and Wales, 1816-1963*, London: Chapman & Hall, 1965, 121.

<sup>95</sup> Cardwell, *Organisation of Science*, 133.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>98</sup> *Hansard*, 18 July 1879, Vol. 247, cc. 1141-1183.

<sup>99</sup> Roderick, 'A fair representation of all interests?', 235.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 236-238.

Committee and its membership in August 1880.<sup>101</sup> The Committee was chaired by Lord Aberdare, at that time probably the most influential Liberal politician representing a Welsh constituency.<sup>102</sup> That only one nonconformist but five Anglicans were appointed excited some criticism.<sup>103</sup> Nevertheless, the Committee speedily completed its work, and its report was published in late 1881. The report covered both secondary and tertiary education in the Principality. The existing secondary system was severely criticised, firstly in regard to the quality of the instruction given, secondly in that most were Anglican schools serving a predominantly nonconformist population.<sup>104</sup> It recommended an increase in the number of non-denominational grammar schools and the establishment of intermediate schools charged with advancing technical education. It also sought the establishment of two more university colleges, one at Cardiff, one at Bangor, to compliment Aberystwyth, which was small and difficult to access.<sup>105</sup> These sentiments certainly supported Mundella's broader educational reform agenda. At the opening of the Bangor University College in 1884, Mundella was to say: 'If there is one thing on that Lord Spencer and I have set our hearts, it is that we should make in this corner of Great Britain a model, a complete model, of educational organisation worthy of the imitation of the great English people.'<sup>106</sup>

The slowness of progress in increasing the numbers participating in technical training of any sort was frustrating for Mundella. He was in an influential position as Vice President of the Council and had some important supporters, both in parliament and in academia. Nevertheless, there seemed to have been considerable disinterest by the leaders of both parties in this area of education and Mundella did not achieve all that he had hoped for.

### *In Opposition*

Mundella's term as Vice-President of the Council ended with the defeat of the Liberal government in 1885. A period of significant political instability followed, with events

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<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

<sup>102</sup> Dent, *Century of Growth*, 41.

<sup>103</sup> Roderick, 238.

<sup>104</sup> Maclure, *Educational Documents*, 112 (The Aberdare Report).

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> Speech at the opening of University College, Bangor, 18 October 1884 (quoted by Armytage, *A.J. Mundella*, 359).

dominated by the issue of home rule for Ireland. Gladstone was able to form his third ministry for a few months in early 1886, and Mundella was appointed President of the Board of Trade with a seat in cabinet. He had just six months in this role before, once more, the problem of Irish Home Rule led to a Liberal defeat. Mundella was to return to the Board of Trade in Gladstone's final ministry in 1892, and this time had a longer tenure. His work in this area will be discussed in the next chapter.

The freedom of opposition saw Mundella able to further pursue his 'hobby horse', education, generally. He was buoyed by the report of a Royal Commission formed to inquire into the parlous state of the British economy at that time. Many of the Commission's conclusions were of a financial nature, but it also recognised the deficiency of British technical education as compared with that of some foreign manufacturing competitors.<sup>107</sup> The Commission was chaired by Lord Iddesleigh, formerly Stafford Northcote, and a long-serving Conservative politician.<sup>108</sup> Although there were several minority reports, which reflected the increased calls for trade protectionism, Iddesleigh managed to produce a report which supported the current free-trade orthodoxy.<sup>109</sup> Of more interest to this thesis was the emphasis on the problem of the lagging British teaching of scientific and technical subjects. One of the minority reports was quite firm in its view that continual improvement in technical training, of both employers and workmen, was necessary in order to compete with foreign manufacturing.<sup>110</sup> The main report also highlighted deficiencies in commercial education and the poor level of foreign-language competency.<sup>111</sup> Mundella, too, thought these matters important. Speaking at a conference convened by the London Chamber of Commerce in late 1887, he argued that commercial education was necessary for the clerks and warehousemen working in the City of London.<sup>112</sup> He asserted that this could be funded by the Charity Commission. He suggested that the London School Board should introduce the teaching of modern languages into their

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<sup>107</sup> *Final Report of the Royal Commission Appointed to Inquire into the Depression of Trade and Industry*, London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1886, xxiv (97).

<sup>108</sup> W.D. Rubenstein, 'Northcote, Stafford Henry, first earl Iddesleigh (1818-187), politician' *ODNB* (accessed 3 October 2017).

<sup>109</sup> *Report into the Depression of Trade*, 11.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, lxiii (112).

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, xxiv (97).

<sup>112</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 15 December 1887, 'Mr. Mundella, M.P., on Commercial Education'.

curriculum.<sup>113</sup> Mundella was an accomplished businessman with factories in Germany and so would have seen the value of training in these areas.

Mundella quickly used Lord Iddesleigh's words to advance the technical education message. In a speech during the Second Reading of the Technical Instruction Bill in August 1887, he emphasized a Commission finding that one of the greatest causes of trade depression was that British technical training had fallen behind that of several foreign countries.<sup>114</sup> As he had often done before, he emphasized the German experience:

I have advocated the cause of technical education for 30 years, for I have seen how, year by year and step by step, the Germans, more than any other country, have made advances through the superior instruction of their people.<sup>115</sup>

Mundella would have been excited by what Sir William Hart-Dyke, the Conservative Vice-President of the Council, said in his concluding remarks to the debate. He acknowledged that British industry was disadvantaged against some foreign countries because of the lack of technical and of commercial training.<sup>116</sup> He proposed to allow local authorities to rate for the purpose of establishing technical schools.<sup>117</sup> Mundella congratulated Hart-Dyke on this initiative and pledged Liberal support for the Bill.<sup>118</sup> Despite this bipartisan approach, it took another two years before the Technical Instruction Act was finally passed.<sup>119</sup> With the apparent good intentions of the Government and with the support of both parties it is surprising that it took so long.

A national movement to advance technical education was formalised in July 1887 with the foundation of the National Association for the Promotion of Technical Education.<sup>120</sup> The prominent scientists, T.H. Huxley and Henry Roscoe, had been at the forefront of calls to ensure that the recommendations of the Samuelson Royal Commission were carried out.<sup>121</sup> It required, however, the political influence of

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<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> *Hansard*, 9 August 1887, Vol. 318, cc 1848-1850.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, c 1465.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, c 1467.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, c 1474.

<sup>119</sup> *Hansard*, 28 August 1889, Vol. 340, cc. 805-817, 'Bill read for the third time and passed.'

<sup>120</sup> Cardwell, *The Organisation of Science*, 158.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*



Mundella and Hartington to bring it to fruition.<sup>122</sup> These two quite different men took up the task of furthering technical education. Enough has been said previously of Mundella's position on this and his reasons for wanting better technical and commercial education.

Spencer Compton Cavendish, Marquis of Hartington, came from a very different background to Mundella. His father, the seventh Duke of Devonshire, was the first chancellor of the University of London, and later of Cambridge University. He was chairman of the Royal Commission on Scientific Instruction and the Advancement of Science from 1872 to 1875.<sup>123</sup> He also provided for the establishment of the famous Cavendish Laboratory at Cambridge.<sup>124</sup> Hartington must have been much influenced by his father's interest in education as he also encouraged technical, scientific and higher education. In early 1887, when addressing the Polytechnic Young Men's Christian Institute in London, he emphasized the need for providing technical training for factory operatives.<sup>125</sup>

Hartington split from the Gladstonian Liberal Party over home rule for Ireland and became leader of the Liberal Unionists. He was appointed Lord President of the Council in 1895 in Salisbury's coalition government and steered through the 1902 Education Act which gave local authorities responsibility for secondary education. Mundella and Hartington had a shared interest in advancing educational standards but differed in other areas. Mundella remained loyal to Gladstone and supported his espousal of Irish Home Rule. They came from very different social backgrounds, but nevertheless formed a formidable partnership in improving the British education system.

The National Association for the Promotion of Technical Education was an important force in the technical education debate and became increasingly influential after its aims were extended to include secondary education in 1889.<sup>126</sup> It published a *Record* regularly which kept its arguments before decision makers and educationists

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<sup>122</sup> Armytage, *A.J. Mundella*, 270.

<sup>123</sup> Maclure, *Educational Documents*, 106-111.

<sup>124</sup> F.M.L. Thompson, 'Cavendish, William, seventh Duke of Devonshire (1808-1891), landowner and industrialist', *ODNB* (accessed 8 October 2017).

<sup>125</sup> *The Times*, 17 March 1887, 'Lord Hartington on our Industrial Position.'

<sup>126</sup> Armytage, *A.J. Mundella*, 272.

generally.<sup>127</sup> The Association ceased to exist in 1906 but is usually given credit for two important developments during its short life. The first of these was the passing of the Technical Instruction Act in 1889, which allowed local authorities to rate for the purpose of technical training.<sup>128</sup> The second was the decision of the Chancellor of the Exchequer to divert moneys, which had been intended to compensate publicans who had lost their licenses, to provide for an increase in the availability of technical education.<sup>129</sup> This so-called 'whiskey money', although dependent upon the consumption of beer and spirits in the country, was substantial.<sup>130</sup> In 1891 the sum raised by this tax was over £700,000 and by 1900 over £1,000,000. It was thus a very important funding vehicle for technical education. Mundella was a vice-president of the Association and strongly supported its aims through his speeches in parliament.

Mundella repeatedly assailed the Conservative Government for its failure to move on the Technical Education Bill. During a debate in February 1888, centred on the Queen's Speech, he criticized the Vice-President of the Council, Sir William Hart Dyke, and the First Lord of the Treasury, W.H. Smith, for the delay in finalising the Bill which had been presented the previous year.<sup>131</sup> A few months later, during a debate on Public Works and Buildings, when he successfully supported a grant to complete the construction of the South Kensington museums, he pointedly asked about the status of the Bill.<sup>132</sup>

Mundella was not the only Liberal member to badger the Government. A recently elected Liberal, Arthur Dyke Acland, another member of the National Association and later to be appointed Vice-President of the Council, was one of these.<sup>133</sup> In April 1888, Acland moved a resolution calling on state involvement with secondary schooling, which he termed 'middle-class' education.<sup>134</sup> He argued that Britain would never have a worthwhile technical and commercial educational system

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<sup>127</sup> Argles, *South Kensington to Robbins*, 33.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 35 and Armytage, *A.J. Mundella*, 271.

<sup>129</sup> P.R. Sharp, 'Whiskey Money and the Development of Technical and Secondary Education in the 1890s', *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, Vol. 4, Issue 1 (1971), 32.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>131</sup> *Hansard*, 10 February 1888, Vol. 322, c. 162.

<sup>132</sup> *Hansard*, 6 April 1888, Vol. 324, c. 623.

<sup>133</sup> Anne Ockwell, 'Acland, Sir Arthur Herbert Dyke, thirteenth baronet, (1847-1926), politician and educational reformer', *ODNB* (accessed 10 October 2017).

<sup>134</sup> *Hansard*, 27 April 1888, Vol. 325, cc. 813-814.

without a sound secondary system, which needed state support.<sup>135</sup> Acland, like Mundella before him, adversely compared the British and German systems. Mundella, naturally, became actively involved. He quoted the German Emperor as saying that higher education must be accessible to the entire population.<sup>136</sup> Mundella asked, rhetorically, 'why should the English people stand lower in this respect than the Germans, or any other nation?'<sup>137</sup>

The National Association for the Promotion of Technical and Secondary Education was a powerful body, which claimed cross-party support. Its Annual Conference in 1890 was chaired by the Marquis of Hartington and attended by several past Vice-Presidents of the Council, both Liberal and Conservative, including Mundella, and the serving Vice-President, Sir William Hart Dyke.<sup>138</sup> In his opening remarks, Hartington emphasized the practical aim of technical instruction in improving the efficiency of labour in manufacturing and commerce. He also spoke of the importance of continuous government funding for technical training and noted that he had received some assurance of this from the Chancellor the previous day.<sup>139</sup> Mundella strongly supported this view in a speech during the Conference, and also raised the issue of providing industrial training for the blind, the deaf and the dumb.<sup>140</sup> He wrote of this again the following year in a programme which he developed to address the growing social unrest between capital and labour. In an article in the *Review of Reviews* for April 1891, he listed several educational imperatives, including 'training the blind', following the German example.<sup>141</sup>

Mundella did not let a long period in opposition deter him from his promotion of extended and improved educational systems for the British people. The period, from 1886 to 1892 saw an increased emphasis on secondary and technical education, which extended across party lines. Some of the important figures in this movement have been identified previously, but progress was slow and the results difficult to assess. The impact of this apparently strong drive to improve the level of technical

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<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 816.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 854.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> *The Times*, 6 December 1890, 'Education and the Local Taxation Act, 1890'.

<sup>139</sup> *Hansard*, 4 December 1890, Vol. 349, cc. 528-529.

<sup>140</sup> *The Times*, 6 December 1890.

<sup>141</sup> Armytage, *A.J. Mundella*, 280-281.

training in order to maintain Britain's industrial strength is briefly considered in the final section of this chapter.

### *The Success, or Otherwise, of Increased Technical Education*

The promotion of technical education at the tradesman, factory worker, foreman level, can be viewed as one of Mundella's few failures. Those who followed him did not have any marked success either. In his article written on the fiftieth anniversary of Mundella's death, Armytage reflected: 'His work is still unfinished. Technological change is still as pressing as ever, and his creed of the dignity of technical instruction still needs assertion.'<sup>142</sup> In a journal article published in 1983, which dealt with the technical education movement in the late nineteenth century, Bill Bailey concluded that things had changed little since Mundella's time.<sup>143</sup> A series of papers presented at the annual conference of the History of Education Society in December 1997 explored the relationship between education and economic performance.<sup>144</sup> In her article, Alison Wolf concluded that the issues then current could only be compared with those of the late nineteenth century, which are discussed in this thesis.<sup>145</sup> She suggested that the ministers involved with formulating education and training policy in the 1980s and 1990s 'would have done better to have skipped lunch and returned to desks with Sir Bernhard Samuelson's report.'<sup>146</sup> As recently as April 2018, Sheila Lawlor argued that England was still being left behind by Germany and France in the development of technical education.<sup>147</sup> Apparently, nothing much has changed.

This lack of success in improving technical education in the nineteenth century is surprising. The proponents of technical education carried significant weight. Mundella and Hartington were both senior and influential members of the Liberal Party, and Roscoe and Huxley were the most important educators of the period. As we have seen, several commentators on technical education noted the widespread

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<sup>142</sup> Armytage, *Nottingham Journal*, 22 July 1947.

<sup>143</sup> Bill Bailey, 'The Technical Education Movement: A Late Nineteenth Century Educational "Lobby"', *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, Vol. 7, Issue 3 (1983), 67.

<sup>144</sup> Gary McCulloch, 'Education and economic performance', *History of Education*, 27:3, 1998, 203.

<sup>145</sup> Alison Wolf, 'Politicians and economic panic', *History of Education*, 27:3, 1998, 232.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>147</sup> Sheila Lawlor, 'Reversing decline: Vocational Training and Education for a Skilled Workforce', Brussels: *New Direction – The Foundation for European Reform*, April 2018, 28-29.

disinterest by both politicians and manufacturers in this area. There was a peculiar complacency about education generally, after the sustained activity of the 1870s and 1880s. The unfounded feeling of Britain's industrial superiority was common at the highest levels of government.

This slowness in the advancement of technical education was but one of the factors that saw other countries successfully compete with British industry. In retrospect, it seems obvious that British manufacturing could not expect to maintain the world dominance it achieved after giving birth to the First Industrial Revolution. The unification of the German states and the rapid development of the United States led to an inevitable increase in manufacturing capacity in those countries and, as with many movements, those that followed had the benefit of lessons learned. Not everyone thought that technical education was the panacea that Mundella and his like-minded contemporaries believed. The support for protectionism in the minority reports of the Iddesleigh Royal Commission in 1886 has been noted previously. The issue was highlighted in an influential book published ten years later. In this, Ernest Edwin Williams accepted that England could not expect to maintain a manufacturing monopoly and listed the reasons 'Why Germany Beats Us'.<sup>148</sup> One significant reason for Germany's success, he believed, was state help through protectionism, and he criticised the English unqualified support for the 'Free Trade Fetish'.<sup>149</sup> He also recognised the importance of technical education, but thought that England had gone about it in an 'insignificant and half-hearted' way.<sup>150</sup> He compared German and English technical education as 'an electric lamp to a rush light'.<sup>151</sup>

Martin J. Wiener's argument that it was the indifference of the elite to industry and commerce which was responsible for the decline in the dominant English position, received widespread acceptance after the publication of his book in 1981.<sup>152</sup> He argued that the British persisted with its workshop methods of development because science was looked upon as not quite respectable by the upper class. Vocational training had

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<sup>148</sup> Ernest Edwin Williams, *Made in Germany*, London: William Heinemann, 1896, 8-9.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 140-141.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>152</sup> Martin J. Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850-1980*, Cambridge University Press, 1981.

the stigma of being for a practical purpose only.<sup>153</sup> The many commissions, enquiries and organisations investigating and promoting technical education in this period seemed not to have thought these matters that important. The Samuelson Report on Technical Instruction of 1882-4, for example, still asserted that: 'taking the state of the arts of construction and the staple manufactures as a whole, our people still maintain their position at the head of the industrial world.'<sup>154</sup> The report did, however, recognise deficiencies in the English educational system, specifically in drawing taught to adult artisans and the 'general diffusion' of elementary schooling, compared with the Continent.<sup>155</sup>

The British concern about industrial decline was focused on basic manufacturing which had flourished in the previous hundred years, but new industries, such as a massive chemical industry, were being developed, particularly in Germany.<sup>156</sup> British governments had been unwilling to take responsibility for any education other than elementary, despite the efforts of the technical educationists. Robin Betts, however, saw a deeper problem; the lack of commercial education.<sup>157</sup> He pointed out the huge disparity in business graduates from Germany and the USA and, by the turn of the century, Japan, with those from Britain. He quoted Wiener in asserting that industry not only had to produce what was wanted, but had to know how to buy and sell to the greatest advantage.<sup>158</sup> In a paper published in 1983, Bill Bailey also concluded that there was little effort made by governments to promote the distinctive but diverse needs of technical education.<sup>159</sup> In fact it was given a low priority in the educational provisions at that time.

Britain's diminishing industrial dominance was the result of several issues, not simply that of an inferior technical education system. There seems to have been a strange complacency amongst both Liberal and Conservative governments and the industrialists themselves. Perhaps that was due to the more momentous issues of

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<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-19.

<sup>154</sup> *Report of the Royal Commission on Technical Instruction, Volume 1, Second Report (1884), Part IV, 506-511.*

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> Robin Betts, 'Persistent but misguided?: the technical educationists 1867-89', *History of Education*, Vol. 27, No. 3, 1998, 273.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 276-277.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>159</sup> Bailey, 'The Technical Education Movement', 67.

parliamentary reform and Irish home rule taking precedence. Britain was later to face a Germany whose military and naval capability had benefited from a more advanced and efficient technical capability. Although Mundella could not have forecast a conflict of the magnitude of the First World War, his call for better technical training may have somewhat countered this disaster.

*Conclusions – Mundella’s Battle for Technical Education*

Mundella understood the need for better technical education in Britain when he saw the training that his German workers had received. He believed that Britain’s industrial superiority was being eroded by the inferior training given to the country’s engineers and tradesmen. During the period when he was the minister responsible for education, he attempted to improve tertiary technical training by developing the South Kensington complex. His efforts were not entirely successful. Even today, some commentators argue that the British technical education system is still inferior to that of some other nations.

## Chapter 7 - National Commercial Issues

Mundella showed considerable commercial acumen in developing his hosiery business. Although he completed an apprenticeship as a hosier he was not an inventor, as were some artisans and successful manufacturers. His abilities in labour relations, in recognising the market demand for his products, and in being able to source raw materials economically, were key factors in the financial success of his business.

Earlier chapters of this thesis have concentrated on Mundella's interest in non-commercial matters, particularly education. In this chapter, his control and reform of broader issues are analysed. Mundella served two short periods as President of the Board of Trade, the first six months of 1886 and then two years between 1892 and 1894. The Board was the arm of government responsible for trade and industry. Mundella embraced this involvement in areas new to him, and introduced some important reforms.

This chapter will discuss his work in overseeing a greater involvement in labour matters, in rationalising problems of rail freight, and in reforming several maritime practices. Whilst these seem rather routine matters when compared with the heady stuff of work-place reform, legalising the trade-union movement, pioneering successful arbitration and conciliation, and introducing compulsory elementary education, they were important issues to a manufacturing and trading nation such as Britain. As the final acts of Mundella's ministerial career, it is necessary to review his wide understanding, and desire to improve, these matters of national significance.

### *Historical Background*

The origins of the Board of Trade went back to 1621 when a Committee of the Privy Council was constituted to deal with merchants' complaints and protect England's overseas trade interests.<sup>1</sup> Trade matters received only intermittent attention during the turbulent years of Civil War, the Commonwealth and Restoration periods. It was not until 1696 that the Board of Trade was re-established. It was given the task of

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<sup>1</sup> Sir Hubert Llewellyn Smith, *The Board of Trade*, London: G.P. Putnam's Sons Ltd., 1928, 1.



promoting trade and improving the efficiency of the American plantations.<sup>2</sup> The usefulness of this organisation lessened to such an extent that it was abolished in 1782, only to be reconstituted two years later to sort out the trade implications of the American Revolution.<sup>3</sup>

The power of the Board declined during the early years of the nineteenth century, when the Foreign Office and the Treasury took on some of the functions previously carried out by the Board.<sup>4</sup> This raised concerns within the business community because of the more complicated procedures involved and the resultant delays in decision making. In 1864, the major Chambers of Commerce submitted a petition to parliament on the matter. This resulted in W.E. Forster moving for the appointment of a Select Committee to review the arrangements between the Board of Trade and the Foreign Office.<sup>5</sup> Forster presented the findings of the Committee a year later.<sup>6</sup> These recommended a more prominent role for the Board in general trade decisions, more equality with the Foreign Office in determining overseas activities, and suggested that the political head of the Board should always be a cabinet member.<sup>7</sup> The recommendations of the Committee had little effect, and the functions of the two departments scarcely changed. The Foreign Office continued to have the prime responsibility for overseas trade, whilst the Board of Trade simply remained an advisory body.<sup>8</sup> The dominance of the Foreign Office was enhanced in 1872 when a Commercial Department was established and given the sole responsibility for trade diplomacy.<sup>9</sup> It was not until 1882, with Joseph Chamberlain in charge, that the previous arrangement by which the Foreign Office was required to consult the Board of Trade on commercial policy was reinstated.<sup>10</sup>

With the appointment of Chamberlain as President of the Board of Trade in 1880, a significant change occurred. State involvement in trade and industry became

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>5</sup> *Hansard*, 15 April 1864, Vol. 174, cc. 1083-1120.

<sup>6</sup> *Hansard*, 17 March 1865, Vol. 177, cc. 1850-1858.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 1855.

<sup>8</sup> J.W.T. Gaston, 'Trade and the Late Victorian Foreign Office', *The International History Review*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (August 1982), 317.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 319.

<sup>10</sup> Smith, *The Board of Trade*, 69-70.

accepted by most politicians and businessmen and officially by the Liberal Party. Chamberlain quickly implemented reform in many areas. These included grain cargo arrangements, seamen's wages, employers' liability, electric lighting, bankruptcy and patents. Chamberlain's business and local government experience was brought to the national scene for the first time.<sup>11</sup> In 1882, Chamberlain was the first President to insist on closer ties between Departmental officials and representative commercial bodies, such as the major Chambers of Commerce.<sup>12</sup> Four years later, Mundella also championed the views of the Associated Chambers of Commerce when he criticised the way in which British trade was ignored by British consuls abroad.<sup>13</sup>

The early years of the nineteenth century saw Britain move towards a major reliance on manufacturing.<sup>14</sup> During the period dealt with in this thesis, the British economy experienced periods of prosperity and of depression.<sup>15</sup> It would, therefore, seem obvious that a government department charged with protecting and expanding the country's trade would rank high in national priorities. The changing responsibilities of the Board of Trade highlighted the somewhat unhelpful relationships with the Foreign Office and Treasury. J.W.T. Gaston summed up the problem pithily:

One of the curiosities of Victorian Britain is that official responsibility for its overseas trade rested with the Foreign Office, a department of state barely able to conceal its scorn for the trading classes, or its ignorance of economics.<sup>16</sup>

This lack of support for British export businesses was no doubt another factor that contributed to the relative decline of Britain's once dominant manufacturing industries in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>17</sup> Other problems that contributed were discussed in the previous chapter on technical education.

The position, and influence, of the President of the Board of Trade fluctuated not only with its changing responsibilities, but also with the individual appointed. It is hard not to see the position being used either to test an up-and-coming politician, or

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 408-437.

<sup>12</sup> Smith, *The Board of Trade*, 70.

<sup>13</sup> *The Times*, 1 March 1886, 'The Associated Chambers of Commerce'.

<sup>14</sup> Phyllis Deane and W.A. Cole, *British Economic Growth, 1688-1859: Trends and Structures*, Cambridge at the University Press, 1969, 145.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 290-292.

<sup>16</sup> Gaston, 'Trade and the Late Victorian Foreign Office', 317.

<sup>17</sup> Phyllis Deane, *The First Industrial Revolution*, Cambridge University Press, 1979 (first published 1965), 232-233.

somewhere to park an aging, but eminent one. Gladstone was appointed to the Presidency in 1843 at the age of 34 despite the fact that he had no prior knowledge of trade and finance.<sup>18</sup> Joseph Chamberlain was older but he was, as has been noted, a novice in the field of national politics. However, he possessed considerable experience of municipal politics and a great deal of ambition. Of the older men appointed, John Bright and Anthony Mundella stand out. Bright had by far the greater reputation. He was at the forefront of the fight to repeal the Corn Laws, he worked hard to reform the electoral system, he was consistent in his pacifism, and he was a skilled orator. He had, however, been in parliament for 25 years before he achieved ministerial rank. Almost as a sop to the increasing radical element in the Liberal Party, Bright was appointed President of the Board of Trade in 1868. Although he had a business background, he achieved little and was shown to be a poor administrator.<sup>19</sup> Mundella was older than his predecessors as President, but he had considerable previous ministerial experience with his responsibility for education. He was 61 years old in 1886, and the Prime Minister, Gladstone, may have seen this appointment as an easier task for him. Reform and action, however, were still dominant in his makeup.

The Board of Trade's activities and influence varied considerably over time. By the 1880s, with strong, active Presidents, particularly Chamberlain and Mundella, it had become an important arm of government. Llewellyn Smith recalled that, when he joined the Board of Trade in 1893, 'the only subjects which the Board never touched were Banking and the Established Church'.<sup>20</sup> During the period of interest to this thesis, there were, perhaps, four broad areas of national importance. The Board's responsibility for advising government on trade matters, together with its facilitating manufacturers' and traders' activities, increased.<sup>21</sup> Control of the country's railway system, in regard to freight costs and safety, required close supervision by the Board.<sup>22</sup> The Merchant Shipping Act was passed in 1875 after some years of agitation by many

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<sup>18</sup> Lucy Brown, *The Board of Trade and the Free-Trade Movement*, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1958, 225.

<sup>19</sup> T.W. Reid, *Cabinet Portraits: Sketches of Statesmen*, London: Henry S. King & Co., 1872, 69.

<sup>20</sup> Sir H. Llewellyn Smith, 'The Board of Trade', *public administration*, Vol. 8, Issue 2, April 1930, 164.

<sup>21</sup> Roger Prouty, *The Transformation of the Board of Trade 1830-1855*, London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1957, 99.

<sup>22</sup> T.R. Gourvish, *Railways and the British Economy 1830-1914*, London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1980, 51-52.

parties, but always now associated with Samuel Plimsoll.<sup>23</sup> There were still many aspects of merchant shipping for which the Board of Trade was responsible in the final years of the nineteenth century. Protection of British shipping overseas, the safety of passengers and crew, navigational aids, conditions of crew employment, ship owners' liability, were some of the major matters involved.<sup>24</sup> A significant later development was the establishment in 1893 of a labour department within the Board of Trade. This was an initiative of Mundella's during his second term as President. Although initially a statistical bureau, it grew into the body which controlled industrial conciliation and arbitration, unemployment policy, and minimum wage legislation.<sup>25</sup>

### *Historiography*

The development of British industry and trade during the nineteenth century has been covered in many works. Generally, however, they dealt with specific industries or broader economic aspects. The influence of government involvement in issues which arose in this area was not often addressed and thus the role of the Board of Trade received little attention. It is not surprising, therefore, to find few references to Mundella's short tenure as President of the Board.

The most detailed treatment, as might be expected, was provided by Armytage. He devoted two chapters to the period Mundella spent as President of the Board of Trade.<sup>26</sup> This seems an extraordinary imbalance for just over two years of office compared to his five years as Vice-President of the Council, when he had the responsibility for education. This period is covered by a single chapter. However, Armytage went into the problems created by the disunity within the Liberal Party over Irish Home Rule in the first chapter, and Mundella's problematic business dealings and resignation from Parliament in the second. These, of course, were important issues which affected Mundella's life and which therefore required analysis in a biography.

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<sup>23</sup> Nicolette Jones, *The Plimsoll Sensation: The Great Campaign to Save Lives at Sea*, London: Little, Brown, 2006, passim.

<sup>24</sup> Smith, *The Board of Trade*, 90-91.

<sup>25</sup> Roger Davidson, 'Llewellyn Smith, the Labour Department and Government Growth 1886-1909', in Gillian Sutherland (editor), *Studies in the Growth of Nineteenth-Century Government*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972, passim.

<sup>26</sup> Armytage, *A.J. Mundella*, Chapter 12, 'President of the Board of Trade, 3 February to 10 July 1886', 237-266, and Chapter 14, 'President of the Board of Trade, 11 August 1892 to 3 May 1894', 289-305.

Mundella's successes at the Board of Trade are of consequence to this thesis and will, therefore, receive some additional attention. His work on the rationalisation of railway legislation, the establishment of a labour department and some maritime reforms, will be discussed in some detail later in this chapter.

Hubert Llewellyn Smith's history of the Board of Trade has been referred to several times earlier in this chapter. It is an authoritative, although now dated, account. Llewellyn Smith was Permanent Secretary to the Board from 1907 until 1919, having joined in 1893 as the first Labour commissioner in the newly established labour department.<sup>27</sup> Llewellyn Smith traced the history of the Board from 1621 until 1924 and addressed its major functions throughout that period. Given the broad chronological scope of the book, it is not surprising that Smith paid little attention to Mundella. Llewellyn Smith did credit Mundella with establishment of the *Board of Trade Journal*, which published information useful to British manufacturers such as tariff changes, movements of overseas trade, and possible openings for British products.<sup>28</sup> Llewellyn Smith also noted Mundella's chairmanship of a 'Trade and Treaties Committee' sometime after his resignation from the ministry. This Committee reviewed the tariffs and commercial relations with several Continental countries and is credited with establishing a permanent 'Commercial Intelligence Committee' within the Department.<sup>29</sup>

Works dealing specifically with the history of the Board of Trade are few, as indeed are references to the impact of the Board's actions, in general economic histories. The most recent, and most comprehensive, history of the Board was written by Susan Foreman and published in 1986.<sup>30</sup> Foreman deals thematically with much of the Board's history, although her final chapters treated events chronologically from the beginning of the First World War. Foreman has written a descriptive, not analytical work, and covers much ground. She made two references to Mundella, both of which have been noted earlier. Following Mundella's establishment of the labour department

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<sup>27</sup> Roger Davidson, 'Smith, Sir Hubert Llewellyn (1864-1945), civil servant and social investigator, *ODNB* (accessed 21 November 2017).

<sup>28</sup> Smith, *The Board of Trade*, 70-71.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>30</sup> Susan Foreman, *Shoes and Ships and Sealing-Wax: An illustrated history of the Board of Trade, 1786-1986*, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1986.

in 1893, Foreman gave an unidentified quote which epitomised Mundella's character and continued faith in the arbitration and conciliation system. Speaking on his new labour department, Mundella claimed that it was 'a big thing – larger and more important than the Government apprehends. It will do great work in the future.'<sup>31</sup> Foreman also mentioned Mundella's chairmanship of the Trade and Treaties Committee in 1890 when the Liberals were out of office. She credited its recommendations with the establishment of a permanent commercial intelligence branch of the Board in 1897.<sup>32</sup>

Two works were published in the late 1950s which described the development of the Board of Trade into the organisation described in this thesis. According to Roger Prouty, in a society which was rapidly industrialising and urbanising, there was an increased public demand for better regulatory and safety measures.<sup>33</sup> He showed how government intervention increased in many areas which had not previously been subjected to any control, and how much of this work had fallen on an enlarged Board of Trade.<sup>34</sup> Given the time span covered by Prouty, it is not surprising that Mundella is not discussed. Nor was Mundella mentioned in Brown's analysis of how the Board of Trade coped with the growing free-trade agitation from the 1840s.<sup>35</sup> She showed how the Board was influential in arguing against the existing British tariff system which led to the adoption of free-trade measures by both the Whigs and the Tories in 1841-42.<sup>36</sup> Peter Mathias also highlighted the role played by officials of the department in influencing politicians to embrace free trade.<sup>37</sup> In a 1974 thesis, Newell Dalton Boyd II analysed the Board's increasing role in colonial trade and commerce.<sup>38</sup> Boyd recounted the earlier history of the Board and then discussed how it handled imperial affairs in areas such as industry, commerce, merchant shipping and statistics. He concluded that the Board influenced legislation in the colonies, even in those seeking increased

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>33</sup> Prouty, *The Transformation of the Board of Trade*, 1.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>35</sup> Brown, *The Board of Trade and the Free-Trade Movement*, passim.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 214.

<sup>37</sup> Peter Mathias, *The First Industrial Nation: An Economic History of Britain, 1700-1914*, London: Methuen, 1983, 269.

<sup>38</sup> Newell Dalton Boyd II, *The Role of the British Board of Trade in Empire Affairs, 1868-1906*, Texas Tech University, Ph.D., 1974.

independence, because all of them patterned themselves on the mother country.<sup>39</sup> This is hardly a surprising conclusion. Boyd mentioned Mundella only once, in passing, in regard to the formation in 1886 of the department to collect labour statistics.<sup>40</sup>

The pioneering work on Britain's economic development was that of Phyllis Deane and W.A. Cole, published in 1962.<sup>41</sup> This quantitative study, claimed to be the first to tell economic history in statistical terms.<sup>42</sup> However, the authors did suggest reasons for the changes which occurred but did so by reference to the considerable data they had accumulated. They did not discuss government influence, nor mention the Board of Trade, much less Mundella. Later works in this area usually followed the Deane and Cole methodology, but in 1985 N.F.R. Crafts reviewed the alternative arguments advanced to explain the relatively poor performance of the British economy in the late nineteenth-century.<sup>43</sup> The conventional view was that Britain's early industrialisation and concentration on simple products meant that later adjustments to newer products and changing demands were difficult. Opposed to this is what Crafts called the 'McCloskey exoneration'.<sup>44</sup> Donald N. McCloskey argued in a 1970 paper that the belief that British manufacturing declined in the second half of the nineteenth century was overplayed. In neither work was government action mentioned as a factor. A more recent work, by Charles Feinstein, at the time Professor of Economic History at the University of Oxford, again showed the retardation of British economic growth in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>45</sup> He concluded that the increase in foreign industrialisation was important, but only one of the factors responsible.<sup>46</sup> Although this review of the economic histories is far from exhaustive, it does show that little emphasis had been placed on government influence in manufacturing and trade

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 250.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 183-184.

<sup>41</sup> Deane and Cole, *British Economic Growth*.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 'Preface to the First Edition', xviii.

<sup>43</sup> N.F.R. Crafts, *British Economic Growth during the Industrial Revolution*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985, 155-158.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 156, and see Donald N. McCloskey, 'Did Victorian Britain Fail', *Economic History Review*, Vol. 23, Issue 3 (December 1970), 446-459.

<sup>45</sup> Charles Feinstein, 'Exports and British Economic Growth (1850-1914)', in Peter Mathias and John A. Davis (editors), *International Trade and British Economic Growth from the Eighteenth Century to the Present Day*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1996, 76-95.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 95.

matters. The Board of Trade was the main interface between the state and business, but it is never mentioned in the works discussed above.

By mid-nineteenth century transport, both internally and externally, was of major importance to the British industrial and trading economies. The railway system serviced most of the cities, towns and villages of the country and the British merchant fleet was the world's largest. Derek H. Aldcroft, an economist who wrote extensively on transport issues, started the introduction to his 1974 work on the history of British transport by stating: 'There is no shortage of writers on transport history.'<sup>47</sup> He went on to assert that much of this is reflected nostalgia or personal reminiscences.<sup>48</sup> Aldcroft showed that, by 1865, the British railway system contributed about 10 per cent to the national income and asserted that no other innovation could have had such a large impact on the economy.<sup>49</sup> With such a large proportion of the nation's income involved, any government would want some oversight of the industry. In analysing the efficiency of the railway system during the period 1870 to 1914, Aldcroft referred to the obligation of railway companies to improve passenger comfort and safety and government's supervision of freight rates.<sup>50</sup> He noted that rail freight rates increased through an amendment to the Railway and Canal Traffic Act of 1888.<sup>51</sup> However, neither the Board, which was the controlling authority, nor Mundella are mentioned. A prolific business historian, T.R. Gourvish, in his book on the impact of the development of the railway system on the British economy, referred to the 'government interference with the freedom to charge'.<sup>52</sup> The argument between rail operators and users concerning freight charges is dealt with, in much detail, in two journal articles.<sup>53</sup> They are important in analysing Mundella's influence on both the 1888 and 1894 Acts and will be discussed later in this chapter.

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<sup>47</sup> Derek H. Aldcroft, *Studies in British Transport History 1870-1970*, Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1974, 1.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-19.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>51</sup> *Hansard*, 1 May 1894, Vol. 24, c. 139.

<sup>52</sup> Gourvish, *Railways and the British Economy*, 44.

<sup>53</sup> W.H.G. Armytage, 'The Railway Rates Question and the Fall of the Third Gladstone Ministry', *The English Historical Review*, Vol.65, No. 254 (Jan. 1950), pp. 18-51; P.J. Cain, 'Traders Versus Railways: The Genesis of the Railway and Canal Traffic Act of 1894', *The Journal of Transport History*, New Series, Vol. II, No. 2, September 1973, 65-84.



By the end of the nineteenth century, the British merchant fleet accounted for one-third of the world's shipping, and was recognised by its competitors to be the most up-to-date and efficient.<sup>54</sup> Here was not only a major British industry but one of particular importance to the development and exploitation of its colonial possessions. Clearly, government needed to be involved, and it was. The Navigation Acts were a series of laws enacted by parliament to restrict colonial trade to British vessels. They protected merchant ships for 200 years until the Mercantile Marine Act of 1849 was passed.<sup>55</sup> This Act defined the regulatory function vested in the Board of Trade and was an important milestone in the Board's responsibility for shipping.<sup>56</sup> Thereafter, the Marine Department of the Board of Trade became increasingly involved with the oversight of the industry. Mundella's two short terms as President of the Board included some initiatives in the shipping industry, which will be discussed later.

General histories of the British merchant shipping industry usually span a lengthy time period. For example, the dust cover summary claims that Ronald Hope's 1990 book ranged from the Stone Age to the Falklands War and is 'the first complete history of British merchant shipping for over a hundred years'.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, Hope did show how government, usually through the Board of Trade, increasingly exercised control over many aspects of merchant shipping. He described the 1848 *Act for improving the conditions of Masters, Mates and Seamen and maintaining discipline in the Merchant Service* as the 'foundation for a sizeable edifice of paternal legislation'.<sup>58</sup> The Marine Department gradually introduced certificates of competency for masters and engineers, appointed marine surveyors, enforced navigation laws and mandated draught markings.<sup>59</sup> This last issue aroused considerable public and parliamentary disputation, in which Mundella was actively involved. Although this was before his appointment to the Presidency of the Board of Trade, it showed his early interest in the industry.

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<sup>54</sup> Aldcroft, *Studies in British Transport History*, 53.

<sup>55</sup> Sarah Palmer, *Politics, Shipping and the Repeal of the Navigation Laws*, Manchester University Press, 1990, passim.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>57</sup> Ronald Hope, *A New History of British Shipping*, London: John Murray, 1990.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 287.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 288-290, 321.

Two other general histories, published more than a century apart, also cover a long time period but provide some information on the topics addressed in this chapter. Edward Blackmore was a master mariner and naval architect. His history of the British merchant navy was published in 1897, and was aimed at educating young sailors.<sup>60</sup> In addition to writing on the development of merchant shipping from early times, he provided detail on the personnel, the education and the discipline in the contemporary British merchant fleet. Blackmore went into considerable detail about what he called: 'the extraordinary amount of legislation relative to the affairs of the merchant service which has taken place in the past half century'.<sup>61</sup> He noted that 81 separate Acts had been enacted in the period from 1840 to 1894 and he welcomed the passing of the Consolidation Act of 1894.<sup>62</sup> Blackmore did not mention that it was Mundella, as President of the Board of Trade, who brought in this motion to consolidate the many enactments relating to the industry.<sup>63</sup> Mundella resigned from the ministry only days later over his involvement with the New Zealand Loan and Mercantile Agency, which is dealt with in more detail in Chapter 8 of this thesis. This did not stop Mundella from speaking at the short third reading of the Bill. In his speech, he told of the 'enormous amount of money, time and labour that had been expended on it'; he considered it a complete Shipping Code.<sup>64</sup> The Bill passed and the Act received Royal Assent on 25 August 1894.

Blackmore devoted several pages to a detailed account of Samuel Plimsoll's campaign to prevent the overloading of cargo ships.<sup>65</sup> Blackmore asserted that the number of unseaworthy vessels was greatly overstated and considered that Plimsoll was 'carried away by extreme fanaticism'.<sup>66</sup> He was horrified by Plimsoll's unseemly performance in the Commons during the debate on a Bill to amend the Shipping Act in

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<sup>60</sup> Edward Blackmore, *The British Mercantile Marine: A Short Historical Review*, London: Charles Griffin, 1897, Preface, vii.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Hansard*, 2 May 1894, Vol. 22, c 1216, 'Merchant Shipping Bill: First Reading'.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 August 1894, Vol. 28, cc 363-366.

<sup>65</sup> Blackmore, *The British Mercantile Marine*, 104-111.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

1875.<sup>67</sup> Mundella was involved and spoke in the debates, but although sympathetic to the cause had little regard for Plimsoll the man.<sup>68</sup>

Governments of differing persuasions were generally indifferent to labour affairs. The first significant government involvement was the decision to collect and publish comprehensive labour statistics.<sup>69</sup> In his paper on the increasing involvement of government in labour matters, Roger Davidson traced the provision of such statistics from the initial call by George Howell in 1869 to the successful implementation in 1886.<sup>70</sup> Although this occurred when Mundella was President of the Board of Trade, his part in the legislation was only mentioned in passing. Davidson wrote more about Mundella's work in establishing a Labour Department within the Board.<sup>71</sup> In her study on English social policy, José Harris asserted that throughout the nineteenth century both Liberal and Conservative governments were generally unwilling to consider labour issues.<sup>72</sup> She discussed the problem of increasing unemployment between 1886 and 1896 in some detail, addressing such issues as an eight-hour day and public employment.<sup>73</sup> With Mundella's long-term involvement in labour and union matters, and his ministerial position during this period, it is difficult to understand why Harris did not recognise his input.

Although much has been written on different aspects of British trade and industry, only very specific histories address the role of the Board of Trade and Mundella's involvement. This chapter uses parliamentary debates, Royal Commission reports and newspaper articles to provide a deeper analysis of Mundella's impact on labour issues and transport matters.

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>68</sup> Armytage, *A.J. Mundella*, 158.

<sup>69</sup> J.A.M. Caldwell, 'The Genesis of the Ministry of Labour', *public administration*, Vol. 37, Issue 4, (December 1959), 367.

<sup>70</sup> Roger Davidson, 'Llewellyn Smith, the Labour Department and government growth 1886-1909,' in Sutherland (editor), *Studies in the Growth of Nineteenth-Century Government*, 229-231.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 235-237.

<sup>72</sup> José Harris, *Unemployment and Politics: A Study in English Social Policy 1886-1914*, Oxford at the University Press, 1972, 100.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 58-90.

### *Mundella and Labour Legislation*

Mundella had a long-term commitment to improving the lot of the working class. Earlier chapters in this thesis have discussed his initiatives in improving working conditions, legalising the trade union movement and providing compulsory education for all children. It is not surprising, therefore, that when he became President of the Board of Trade he turned his attention to passing legislation that provided more information on the state of the labour market.

During his maiden speech in the Commons in 1869, Mundella had made several references to his commitment to the working class. He had been selected to second the *Address to Her Majesty on Her Most Gracious Speech*, and used it to show his concern for labour matters.<sup>74</sup> He asserted that he had been selected by the working class of Sheffield to represent them in parliament. They wanted their grievances to be addressed, and unemployment reduced.<sup>75</sup>

His work to improve working conditions, to legitimise the union movement, and to provide the working class with a better education, has already been discussed. Following his appointment as President of the Board of Trade, he had to turn his attention to other labour matters which, although mundane, were nevertheless, important. In the early days of Mundella's first term as President, Charles Bradlaugh addressed the Commons on the collection of labour statistics in the USA and Canada and moved that similar information should be made available in Britain.<sup>76</sup> He argued that the publication of information such as the numbers employed in the various industries, the wages paid and the capital employed 'would be most useful in preventing and diminishing labour strife'.<sup>77</sup> Mundella responded enthusiastically to this suggestion and immediately created the office of Labour Correspondent of the Labour Statistical Department and appointed its first incumbent.<sup>78</sup> The ultimate

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<sup>74</sup> *Hansard*, 16 February 1869, Vol. 194, cc. 52-89.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 March 1886, Vol. 302, cc. 1768-1804.

<sup>77</sup> Charles Bradlaugh, *Labour and Law*, London: R. Forder, 1891, 195-196.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

implementation of a labour statistical programme was carried through by a Conservative Government in July 1886.<sup>79</sup>

With the return of a Liberal Government in August 1892, Mundella again became President of the Board of Trade. He seemed to have anticipated both the result of the election and his own ministerial appointment. On 9 June 1892, he wrote to Gladstone and suggested that a Labour Department, under the President of the Board of Trade, should be established.<sup>80</sup> As he usually did when excited by a worthwhile idea, Mundella moved quickly. In January 1893, a Correspondent wrote an article in *The Times* which stated that the labour section of the Board of Trade was to be expanded into a *British Labour Bureau*.<sup>81</sup> The writer asserted that this was being undertaken on the Government's own initiative, by which he presumably meant by Mundella, who had floated the idea earlier. The nature of the Bureau was speculatively discussed, but the writer believed that the collection of information on labour matters would 'throw a light' on many issues. He emphasised that an examination of the reasons for intermittent employment, 'one of the greatest troubles of the present day', would be most useful. He concluded by saying, 'but in the meanwhile one thing absolutely certain is that Mr Mundella has got "something up his sleeve".'<sup>82</sup>

Before the end of January, *The Times* again wrote at length about the new Labour Department.<sup>83</sup> The writer congratulated himself on forecasting that Mundella had something 'up his sleeve' by establishing a distinctly separate department within the Board of Trade. The department was charged with the oversight of labour issues and Llewellyn Smith was appointed the Commissioner for Labour. As well as continuing the collection of labour statistics, but in more detail, the new department was to concern itself with providing information on strike activity and immigration. It was also to publish a newspaper containing information on the state of trade and the labour market in different parts of the country. The paper was aimed at the working classes, which, *The Times* called 'a somewhat startling novelty'. After reading the first number

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Quoted in Davidson, 'Llewellyn Smith', 235.

<sup>81</sup> *The Times*, 13 January 1893, 'The Government and the Labour Question'.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 25 January 1893, 'The New Labour Department'.

of the *Labour Gazette*, *The Times* thought it provided ‘a good deal of enlightenment’ and was ‘certainly a generous pennyworth’.<sup>84</sup>

The establishment of a Labour Department had the support of both parties. It had been suggested in early 1892, during the time of a Conservative Government, but, with an election imminent, it lapsed.<sup>85</sup> It is impossible to know if Mundella took up this idea and used it in his letter to Gladstone quoted earlier, but it was he, as President of the Board of Trade, who got it moving. The new Parliament first met on 31 January 1893, and by 7 February Mundella was already referring to the activities of the Labour Department.<sup>86</sup> In this debate, Keir Hardie, newly elected to Parliament as the first Labour representative, spoke about the problem of unemployment.<sup>87</sup> Interestingly, he was supported by two Conservative members who took the opportunity to criticise the Government. Mundella was scathing in his response, arguing that all the Conservatives had to offer was protectionism. He went on to say that the Government was proposing to introduce several Bills which would assist the working class. He himself had listed three Bills, one dealing with the hours worked by railway employees, another with the notification of industrial accidents, and the third to promote conciliation in labour disputes.<sup>88</sup>

These, and other labour issues, were debated against the background of the long-running Royal Commission on Labour which finally reported in June 1894.<sup>89</sup> An early call for a Royal Commission to investigate the high level of unemployment among the labouring classes was made by a Conservative member in early 1888.<sup>90</sup> As Mundella argued later, this proposal may have been to promote protectionism, and indeed the proposer, Col. Howard Vincent, was later to found The United Empire Trade League.<sup>91</sup> W.H. Smith, the Conservative Leader in the Commons, was not enthusiastic.

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<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 May 1893, ‘The “Labour Gazette”.’

<sup>85</sup> *Hansard*, 10 February 1892, Vol. 1 c. 160, ‘Motion of Mr. Ernest Spencer’.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 February 1893, Vol. 8 c. 763, ‘Motion for Address (Adjourned Debate)’.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, cc. 724-733. For details of Hardie’s life, see *ODNB*, Kenneth O. Morgan, ‘Hardie (James) Keir (1856-1915), founder of the Labour Party (accessed 15 January 2018).

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 761.

<sup>89</sup> *Fifth and Final Report of the Royal Commission on Labour*, London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, June 1894, (accessed through House of Commons Parliamentary Papers Online).

<sup>90</sup> *Hansard*, 14 February 1888, Vol. 322, cc. 382-383, ‘Distress among the Labouring Classes – Appointment of a Royal Commission’.

<sup>91</sup> Reginald Lucas, revised Clive Emsley, Vincent, Sir (Charles Edward) Howard, (1849-1908), politician and police administrator, *ODNB* (accessed 16 January 2018).

He said that the Government would consider what could be done, but in any case trade was improving.<sup>92</sup> Smith adopted a different position three years later when questioned about an article in *The Times*.<sup>93</sup> The article started:

The Government are about to take a step of very great importance, which ought to be an answer to the reproach, if it is to be seriously urged in any quarter, that they do not adequately appreciate the magnitude and urgency of what is known as the labour question.<sup>94</sup>

This time, Smith responded positively, saying that the report in *The Times* was true, but he could provide little information as the establishment of the Commission had only been decided upon three days earlier. By this time British industry was in severe recession.<sup>95</sup>

Smith provided full details of the Commission in a speech to the Commons in April that year.<sup>96</sup> The terms of reference were broad:

To inquire into the questions affecting the relations between employer and employed, the combinations of employers and employees, and the conditions of labour which have been raised during recent trade disputes in the United Kingdom; and to report whether legislation can with advantage be directed to the remedy of any evils that may be disclosed; and, if so, in what manner.

Mundella was named as a Commissioner, and later accepted the position as Chairman of one of the three Committees formed to inquire into different trade groupings.<sup>97</sup> He was, initially, reluctant to serve, for he believed that the Commission was simply a delaying tactic to put off any legislation until after the expected election.<sup>98</sup> The following year, however, speaking in a debate on the *Mines Eight Hour Bill*, he said that 'if I had any doubt when I went upon the Royal Commission as to its necessity I have none now'.<sup>99</sup> He did, however, say that its procedures were laborious and time consuming.<sup>100</sup> Writing shortly after the publication of the Commission's final report, Beatrice Webb declared: 'Never had any Royal Commission spent so much money on

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<sup>92</sup> *Hansard*, 14 February 1888, quoted earlier.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 February 1891, Vol. 350, cc. 1473-1475.

<sup>94</sup> *The Times*, 24 February 1891, p.9.

<sup>95</sup> Deane and Cole, *British Economic Growth*, 171.

<sup>96</sup> *Hansard*, 10 April 1891, Vol. 352, cc. 228-229, 'Royal Commission on Labour Questions'.

<sup>97</sup> *Report of the Royal Commission on Labour*, 3 (the Committee chaired by Mundella covered, appropriately, Textile, Clothing, Chemical, Building, and Miscellaneous Trades).

<sup>98</sup> *Mundella Papers*, letter to Leader, 21 March 1891.

<sup>99</sup> *Hansard*, 23 March 1892, Vol. 2, c. 1619.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

investigation, cast so wide a net, or provided so great a bulk of printed matter.’<sup>101</sup> After a detailed analysis of the Report, Webb concluded that ‘from every point of view, [it has] been a lamentable fiasco’.<sup>102</sup> It is hard to disagree with this assessment when, in their Concluding Observations, the Commissioners wrote:

Many of the evils to which our attention has been called are such as cannot be remedied by any legislation, but we may look with confidence to their gradual amendment by natural forces now in operation which tend to substitute a state of industrial peace for one of industrial division and conflict.<sup>103</sup>

Even though Mundella signed the Commissioners’ Final Report, he must have been frustrated by its slow progress. It had held its first meeting on 1 May 1891 and the Report was not published until 24 May 1894, a full three years later. Despite the Commission’s ongoing deliberations, Mundella introduced *A Bill to make provision for Conciliation and Arbitration in Labour Disputes* into the Commons in April 1893.<sup>104</sup> He described it as ‘tentative in character, elastic in its provisions and voluntary in its operation’. Other events, especially those involving Ireland, overtook the continued passage of this Bill. However, in the following session he re-introduced it as *A Bill to make better provision for the Settlement of Labour Disputes*.<sup>105</sup> It was a stronger Bill, which included the provision for the Board of Trade to intervene in a deadlocked dispute. Mundella was not able to steer this legislation through parliament as he resigned his ministerial position a few days later. The circumstances of this are discussed in the final chapter of this thesis. It is a tribute to Mundella’s commitment to the working class that he continued to progress mechanisms for resolving labour disputes at a time when he was under considerable personal pressure.

Mundella’s commitment to industrial conciliation continued into his time at the Board of Trade when he was involved in attempts to resolve two significant disputes. Following increased national unrest on the waterfront in 1891 and 1892, a major confrontation developed in Hull in 1893 which became violent.<sup>106</sup> Mundella intervened, unofficially, and Gladstone affirmed that, although the government had no

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<sup>101</sup> Beatrice Webb, ‘The Failure of the Labour Commission’, *The Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 36, July 1894, 2.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>103</sup> *Royal Commission on Labour*, 112 (363).

<sup>104</sup> *Hansard*, 17 April 1893, Vol. 11, cc. 459-460.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 29 March 1894, Vol. 22, cc. 913-919.

<sup>106</sup> H.A.Clegg, Alan Fox and A.F. Thompson, *A History of British Trade Unions Since 1889*, Volume 1: 1889-1910, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1964, 80-81.



right to become involved, he 'viewed with great sympathy and goodwill his [Mundella's] intervention, and very cordially desired that he might bring about a settlement'.<sup>107</sup> Gladstone had not previously been so enthusiastic towards Mundella's embrace of conciliation and his statement shows a wider acceptance of the process. Also in 1893 a general lock-out in the nationwide coal industry defied formal conciliation. Mundella brought the two sides together in November of that year but failed to resolve the dispute.<sup>108</sup> The dispute was settled with the involvement of Lord Rosebery, who would shortly become Prime Minister. Rosebery acknowledged how hard and unselfishly Mundella had worked to end the matter.<sup>109</sup>

### *Mundella and the Railways*

Alongside his work on labour law reform, Mundella addressed the contentious issue of rail freight charges. He had to balance the desire of railway owners for high prices with the demand from the users of the system for competitive rates. His problems were exacerbated by the strong railway interest of many parliamentarians.

The British railway system was extensive and provided significant service to manufacturers and traders. The operation of many lines and the level of freight charges were often of concern. This was an area that occupied much of Mundella's final years as a minister. The Railway Department at the Board of Trade was set up in 1840, some 15 years after the introduction of mechanical power to railways.<sup>110</sup> In 1839, a petition had been presented to the House of Commons complaining about the monopolistic nature of railways carrying goods from London to Birmingham and Manchester.<sup>111</sup> The *Railways Regulation Act* was passed the following year which gave the Board of Trade some measure of control over the railway system.<sup>112</sup> Railways spread to every part of the country during the subsequent years, often accompanied

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<sup>107</sup> *Hansard*, 2 May 1893, Vol. 11, c. 1744.

<sup>108</sup> Clegg et al, *A History of British Trade Unions*, 108.

<sup>109</sup> *Mundella Papers*, Letter from Lord Rosebery, 18 November 1893.

<sup>110</sup> Henry Parris, *Government and the Railways in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965, 1.

<sup>111</sup> *Hansard*, 27 March 1839, Vol. 46, cc. 1220, 'Railway Monopolies'.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 31 July 1840, Vol. 55, cc. 1179-1184, 'Railways'.

by an abuse of power exercised by companies, and indeed by individuals.<sup>113</sup> There was no significant increase in the government's power to regulate the operation of railways until the passage of *The Regulation of Railways Act 1868*.<sup>114</sup> This was essentially concerned with safety measures, particularly to provide a means of communication between passengers and the train's guard. Minor changes were subsequently made but it took the shock of the Armagh accident of 1889, in which 80 people were killed, for an Act which compelled the use of safety devices to be passed.<sup>115</sup>

Of more importance in the context of this thesis were the issues arising from the monopolistic nature of railway companies. It was with such matters that Mundella had to deal when President of the Board of Trade. In 1884, *The Times*, surprisingly for that conservative journal, complained about the self-seeking behaviour of most railway companies.<sup>116</sup> The reporter was critical:

It is idle to contend that railways are in no need of state interference which they very naturally dislike. They are too powerful to be left without control to do just as they please. These great corporations have portioned out the country among them. In its own district each claims to be supreme, and is capable in point of fact of exercising almost supreme powers. The tariff and train service of a great railway can be so arranged as to make or unmake a neighbourhood, to favour a firm or ruin it, to forbid an industry or to give it an undue advantage.

The position adopted by *The Times* showed just how far the acceptance of government involvement in commercial matters had come since the first embrace of laissez-faire principals. This, then, was the situation faced by Mundella in February 1886 when he became President of the Board of Trade.

Mundella inherited a series of failed attempts to regulate the railways more effectively. When President of the Board of Trade in 1884, Joseph Chamberlain had tried to bring in such legislation and in 1885 the railway companies themselves prepared a Bill. Later that year, the Conservative Government had drafted a Bill aimed at controlling rail freight rates.<sup>117</sup> This draft awaited Mundella when he assumed office but, perhaps more importantly, his friend and ally in other areas, Sir Bernhard

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<sup>113</sup> See, for example, Richard S. Lambert, *The Railway King 1800-1871: A Study of George Hudson and the business morals of his time*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1934, passim.

<sup>114</sup> Parris, *Government and the Railways*, 212-216.

<sup>115</sup> Gourvish, *Railways and the Economy*, 52.

<sup>116</sup> *The Times*, 4 January 1884, 'The Meeting of the Association of Railway Shareholders'.

<sup>117</sup> Parris, *Government and the Railways*, 223.

Samuelson, had just released his report comparing British and continental rail freights rates.<sup>118</sup> Samuelson had been asked by the Council of the Associated Chambers of Commerce to provide information on the tariffs current in several European countries. He concluded that charges in Britain were significantly higher than their equivalents on the continent and argued that this reduced the competitiveness of British trade. One important suggestion made by Samuelson, and later taken up by Mundella, was that the Railway Commissioners should 'exercise greater powers of control and direction over the railways than at present, for the protection of the public and of traders'.<sup>119</sup>

In early March 1886, Mundella introduced a Bill to improve the regulation of Railway and Canal Traffic.<sup>120</sup> He spoke at some length about attempted legislation since 1854 and provided considerable detail on comparative capital and operating costs between Britain and other countries. He did not refer to Samuelson's report, but took up his suggestion of increasing the legal powers of the Railway Commission by making it a Permanent Court of Record headed by a judge of the High Court. He also included a clause that obliged every railway company to submit a revised schedule of rates and charges to the Board of Trade within 12 months of the commencement of the Act.<sup>121</sup>

Opposition to the Bill by the railway companies and by members of parliament with railway interests was immense. Several of the larger companies arranged meetings of their shareholders to discuss the 'gravity of the situation' and decide upon a course of action.<sup>122</sup> A prominent railway company director saw the Bill as a political issue and called on the Government to withdraw it, otherwise the railway interests would 'turn out Mundella'.<sup>123</sup> This agitation was carried out amidst the controversy of Gladstone's Irish Home Rule Bill. Armytage was of the view that that the Railway and Canal Traffic Bill played a major role in in the Government's downfall by providing a platform for claims that both Bills were attacks on private property.<sup>124</sup> This is arguable, but certainly the Home Rule issue overwhelmed any idea of regulating the railway

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<sup>118</sup> *The Economist*, 9 January 1886, Issue 2211, p. 35-37, 'English and Continental Railway Rates.'

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>120</sup> *Hansard*, 11 March 1886, Vol.303, cc. 553-598.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 567.

<sup>122</sup> *The Times*, 25 March 1886, that included a letter from the Chairman of the Midland Railway Company.

<sup>123</sup> Armytage, *The Railway Rates Question*, 30.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

system. Undaunted, Mundella pressed on with the Second Reading of the Bill.<sup>125</sup> This was, however, the final phase. Gladstone resigned in July 1886 and the Conservatives decisively won the subsequent general election.

The Salisbury Government moved quickly to bring forward their own Railway and Canal Traffic Bill. It was introduced into the Lords by the new President of the Board of Trade, Lord Stanley, in February 1887.<sup>126</sup> The Bill was read for a third time on 5 May 1887 and sent to the Commons the following day. There it languished and eventually, on 1 August 1887, it lapsed due to time constraints.<sup>127</sup> This was fortunate as amendments from the Lords had weakened many of the controls contained in Mundella's Bill.<sup>128</sup> In 1888, however, a Bill was passed which included the changes Mundella had proposed in 1886.<sup>129</sup> Mundella was jubilant:

He ventured to say, having had the honour to introduce the Bill of 1886, that the present Bill contained all that the former did, and many other desirable features besides. It was a first step in the direction of the State control of railways, and a very important step, showing how far they might be able to go in the future.<sup>130</sup>

Mundella's efforts to control the freight rates charged by the railway companies and the resultant benefit to British industry had finally been rewarded. He again showed his willingness to co-operate with the Conservatives to achieve an outcome he wanted. *The Times* commented that 'Mr Mundella regards it with pardonable parental fondness.'<sup>131</sup> The Board of Trade had become the arbitrator for railway freight rates.

The Liberal Party returned to power in August 1892, but with fewer seats than the Conservatives and Unionists. They had the support of the 81 Irish Nationalists and thus Gladstone was able to form a government. Irish Home Rule continued to dominate debate in subsequent sessions. Mundella again became President of the Board of Trade and was immediately faced with the railway freight issue. Extensive negotiations between the Board and the railway companies had taken place after the passing of the 1888 Act. It is not necessary to go into these in any detail as Mundella

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<sup>125</sup> *Hansard*, 6 May 1886, Vol. 305, cc. 380-466.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 February 1887, Vol. 311, c. 689.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 August 1887, Vol. 318, c. 723, 'Ministerial Statement'.

<sup>128</sup> Armytage, 'The Railway Rates Question', 46-7.

<sup>129</sup> *Hansard*, 25 July 1888, Vol. 329, cc. 434-456.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 439.

<sup>131</sup> *The Times*, 11 May 1888.

was not involved and they are discussed extensively in a paper by P.J. Cain.<sup>132</sup> The outcome had initially appeared satisfactory with the Board of Trade giving the companies maximum rates for many freight classifications. Therefore, it came 'with a sense of shock' that, on 1 January 1893, the companies announced that they had abolished many special rates and introduced new maximum charges.<sup>133</sup> Questions were soon asked in the Commons, but Mundella seemed to have avoided any real commitment to action.<sup>134</sup> He used such phrases as 'I can only express the hope that the daily negotiations between the Board of Trade and the companies may have such a result as to render Parliamentary interference unnecessary' and 'I think we had better wait until the occasion [lack of agreement on rates] arises.' This showed an unusually tentative Mundella, unable to make a firm decision, and perhaps reflected the power of the railway lobby in Parliament.<sup>135</sup>

Less than a month later Mundella, when answering further criticism of the rates, conceded that a Select Committee should be established to inquire into the issues.<sup>136</sup> Later that day a long debate ensued on the effect of the higher freight charges.<sup>137</sup> Ultimately, both parties agreed on the need for a Select Committee. The Committee's Report must have been a disappointment to Mundella and the traders. Although they condemned the actions of the railway companies and sympathised with the traders, the Committee did not support giving the Board of Trade enforcement powers.<sup>138</sup> Without any draconian recommendations from the Committee the Government prepared a Bill which did little to satisfy the traders. It made provision for a railway company to prove that a disputed rate change was reasonable and made changes in the personnel make-up of the Railways Commission.<sup>139</sup> By the time the Bill was passed, Mundella was no longer President of the Board of Trade and his successor, James Bryce, piloted it through the Commons. The 1894 Act did prove to have some

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<sup>132</sup> Cain, 'Traders Versus Railways', 65-67.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>134</sup> *Hansard*, 7 February 1893, Vol. 8, cc. 659-661.

<sup>135</sup> *Bradshaw's Railway Shareholders Guide* for 1886 listed 84 railway directors as members of the House of Commons and 46 as members of the Lords (cited in Armytage, 'The Railway Rates Question', 27.)

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 March 1893, Vol. 9, c.974.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, cc. 1024-1066.

<sup>138</sup> *Select Committee on Railway Rates and Charges*, 14 December 1893, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, accessed in *UK Parliamentary Papers Online*, 30 January 2018.

<sup>139</sup> Cain, *Traders Versus Railways*, 78.

positive effect in restricting freight rate increases.<sup>140</sup> This had always been Mundella's aim and the Act was largely his work.

### *Mundella and Maritime Reforms*

Another important area which required Mundella's attention whilst at the Board of Trade concerned various aspects of the British maritime industry. Some of these may have seemed minor issues, but Mundella attacked them with his usual energy. They ranged from the control of fishing through to the manning of vessels.

As an island nation with a worldwide empire, the sea was of overwhelming importance to Britain, both for defence and trade. The sea also sustained a significant fishing industry. By the late nineteenth century the country's herring industry was the largest in Europe and white fish catches had increased considerably as the railway system opened up access to the major inland cities.<sup>141</sup>

During a speech in the Commons in 1886 calling for the establishment of a Fisheries Board, the Conservative MP, Edward Birkbeck, highlighted the importance of the fishing industry.<sup>142</sup> He said that the industry comprised 37,000 vessels crewed by 120,000 seamen, with a similar number being employed onshore, and that the annual income was in excess of £10 million. He noted that there were no fewer than seven government entities involved in different aspects of the industry. It clearly made both administrative and financial sense to have one responsible department. Here again we see the acceptance of state control of a commercial enterprise. In responding to this suggestion, Mundella, who had been appointed to the Presidency of the Board of Trade only a month before, went into some detail on how a new department would operate. Clearly he knew of the problems and had prepared a plan ahead of the request.

Britain's most famous scientist, Professor T.H. Huxley, was extremely critical of the functions proposed for the new entity.<sup>143</sup> He was against increased government involvement in any industry and especially in any research function. He contended that

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<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>141</sup> Ian Friel, *Maritime History of Britain and Ireland c.400-2001*, London: British Museum Press, 2003, 220.

<sup>142</sup> *Hansard*, 5 March 1886, Vol. 303, cc. 53-67, 'Institution of a Fishery Board'.

<sup>143</sup> *The Times*, 30 March 1886, 'Professor Huxley on the Proposed Fishery Board'.

only the Royal Society was competent to supervise such work. Mundella and Huxley had had a close relationship in matters concerning the South Kensington educational and museum development, thus it might have been expected that some correspondence between them would have occurred over the fisheries issue. This does not appear to have been the case. Mundella had been ill during the passage of the Bill and may not have been as involved as much as he usually was. Indeed, during its Third Reading, Birkbeck claimed that it was not as effective as it might have been if the President of the Board of Trade had not 'been prevented by ill-health from devoting that amount of attention to it that it would otherwise have received from him'.<sup>144</sup> Thus the Fisheries Department was formed within the Board of Trade, but Mundella lost control with the defeat of the Government less than a month later.

In his second term as President of the Board of Trade, Mundella was responsible for several minor reforms of the maritime industry. The first of these, in early 1893, was an arrangement he made with the Postmaster-General which allowed for the payment, through the post office network, of seamen's wages anywhere in the country.<sup>145</sup> Up to that time most seamen had to wait in the port in which their ship had docked to be paid and were often 'the prey of the crimp and land shark'.<sup>146</sup> Mundella was pleased with this achievement. He called it his 'first completed piece of administrative work' and 'a good thing done, and the result of combined effort'.<sup>147</sup>

A Bill to bring into effect an International Convention controlling liquor traffic in the North Sea had been passed in 1888 when a Conservative government was in power.<sup>148</sup> Because of some changes in Convention participants, it was up to Mundella to seek further ratification.<sup>149</sup> Although agreed in principle by both parties, it continued to be debated. Mundella got quite heated over 'the floating grog ships'.<sup>150</sup> The Bill was finally passed after further contributions from both sides, but Mundella was still a little

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<sup>144</sup> *Hansard*, 16 June 1886, Vol. 306, c.1653.

<sup>145</sup> *The Times*, 3 January 1893, 'Transmission of Seamen's Wages'.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> *Mundella Papers*, letter to J.D. Leader, 1 January 1893.

<sup>148</sup> *Hansard*, 4 June 1888, Vol. 326, c. 1149, 'North Sea Fisheries Bill'.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 13 March 1893, Vol. 9, c. 1962.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 March 1893, Vol. 10, c. 1319.

annoyed. He argued that there was nothing left to discuss, and said that 'I hope we will go through with this Bill.'<sup>151</sup>

Another maritime Bill that Mundella initiated but did not see passed was the Merchant Shipping Bill that was designed to consolidate several earlier Acts and particularly to address the under-manning of ships.<sup>152</sup> An important Mundella initiative was the establishment of a Select Committee to inquire into the preservation and improvement of Britain's fishing areas.<sup>153</sup> This was aimed at better defining and controlling such matters as catching immature fish, agreeing closed seasons and introducing safer fishing methods. In the event, the Bill had not been introduced into the Commons by the time of Mundella's death on 21 July 1897. His successor at the Board, C.T. Ritchie, was still promising this at the end of July.<sup>154</sup>

### *Conclusions - Mundella's Board of Trade Experiences*

The Board of Trade was a ministry which encompassed a wide range of responsibilities. Its main functions were to provide advice, to other government entities and to industry organisations, and to supervise a number of commercial and industrial activities. Mundella had two, relatively short, spells as President, in total only 26 months. His tenure was overshadowed by the Irish Home Rule issue and the resultant split in the Liberal Party. Nevertheless, the normal business of government went on and Mundella at the Board of Trade contributed to this. In some ways, what was happening at the Board reflected the changes to national life. It continued, indeed increased, government involvement in areas which had previously been the responsibility of individuals. Mundella was repeatedly criticised for his actions on workplace reform, union legalisation and primary education. He continued this interventionist approach at the Board of Trade.

With his long-term interest in labour matters, it is not surprising that Mundella moved quickly to establish a Labour Department. From the collection of statistics to the conciliation of labour disputes, the new department became increasingly involved

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 19 May 1893, Vol. 12, c. 1380.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 24 August 1893, Vol. 16, c. 1067.

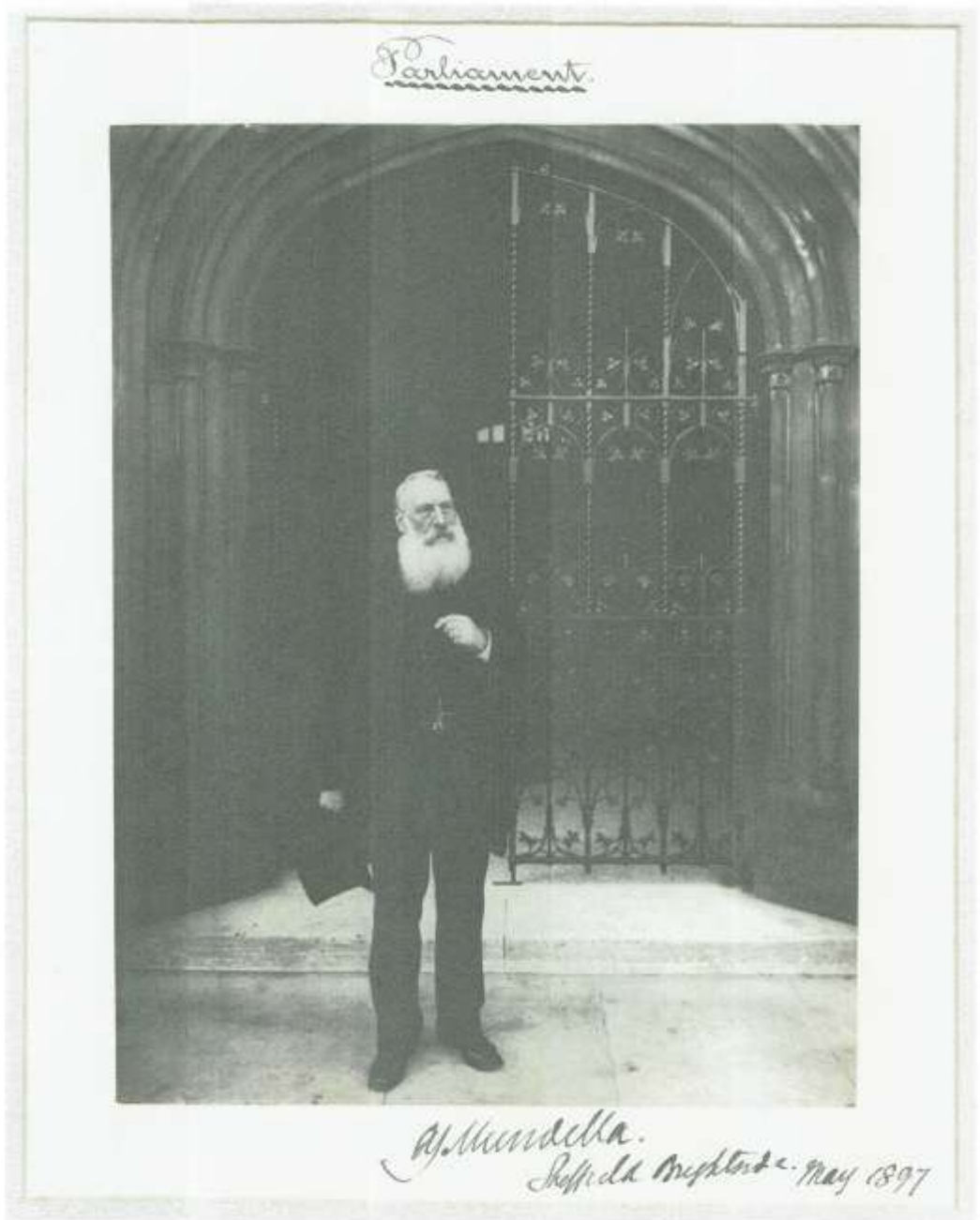
<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 27 March 1893, Vol. 10, c. 1296, 'Sea Fisheries'.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 30 July 1897, Vol. 51, cc. 1590-1591, 'Fishing Regulations'.



with the private sector. Ultimately it was to become a ministry in its own right, with considerable power. As President of the Board of Trade, Mundella necessarily became involved with the railway system and those who controlled it. Whilst some issues involved improving safety measures, most of the debate centred on freight charges. Mundella firmly supported the users rather than the owners. During his time as a hosiery manufacturer he could well have found his business disadvantaged by the high cost of rail transportation. Mundella was from the Midlands and would have had little knowledge, or interest, in maritime issues. He did, however, reform some matters affecting the employment of seamen, thereby continuing his efforts to help the working class. His work to introduce greater control over the fishing industry was not particularly successful and, towards the end of his time as a minister, he showed signs of frustration and also experienced ill health.

The diversity of responsibilities within the Board of Trade presented challenges to any minister. Mundella embraced them, but rail freights and fishing rights must have seemed rather small issues compared with national education and workers' rights. Overall Mundella's achievements at the Board of Trade did not compare with the successes of his earlier years. This was partly because of the matters with which the Board dealt and partly, perhaps, due to Mundella's age and health. Although the issues would have been important to those directly involved, none of them were of general national significance. Few would have been excited by the publication of labour statistics or the control of fishing rights. Mundella's personal problems are discussed in the final chapter of this thesis.



*Final Portrait*

## Chapter 8 – The Forgotten Mundella

Several references have been made in this thesis to Armytage's article in the *Nottingham Journal* of 22 July 1947.<sup>1</sup> The article was written to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Mundella's death. Armytage entitled the piece 'A.J. Mundella – the man who was forgotten', but did not suggest reasons why this had happened. The historiographical reviews given in each chapter of this thesis confirm the paucity of information on Mundella's achievements other than on two matters. These were his championing of labour arbitration and conciliation systems, especially in the establishment of the Nottingham Hosiery Board, and piloting a Bill through parliament which made elementary education compulsory throughout Britain. This chapter will suggest reasons why a man, who was prominent in his own lifetime, should have been neglected so quickly after his death.

### *Contemporary References and Opinions*

During his years in Leicester and Nottingham, Mundella became increasingly involved in local affairs, including politics, and was often mentioned in the regional newspapers. It was not until he entered parliament in 1868, however, that his name became known nationally. His appearances before several Royal Commissions significantly increased his profile, as did his contributions to parliamentary debates. He was an inveterate public speaker and his speeches were widely reported by the newspapers. The more important of these areas of his activity are detailed in this chapter.

After ten years in parliament, Mundella was sufficiently well known to be included in Morrison Davidson's study of twelve 'Eminent Radicals', published in 1879.<sup>2</sup> This group included such luminaries as William Ewart Gladstone, John Bright and Joseph Chamberlain, each of whom has been the subject of much more subsequent analysis than Mundella. This thesis does not argue that Mundella exerted the influence, or had the public profile, of Gladstone, Bright and Chamberlain, but it does raise the question of why he has been so neglected. It has to be acknowledged that some of the other names on Davidson's list are equally 'forgotten'. However,

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<sup>1</sup> Armytage, *Nottingham Journal*, 22 July 1947.

<sup>2</sup> Davidson, *Eminent Radicals in Parliament*, 111-118.

none of these achieved cabinet rank, as did Mundella, and they were mainly prominent in their time for the support of such issues as pacifism and temperance.

The *Dictionary of National Biography* was first published in 1885. All those whose biographies were included were already dead.<sup>3</sup> It was extended by a series of supplementary volumes which brought in important people who had died after the first edition. Mundella was included in the third of these supplements, which was published in 1901.<sup>4</sup> This early inclusion, just four years after his death, indicated the measure of his importance at that time. The unnamed author listed 'private sources', *Hansard*, the 1898 article in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, and a pamphlet biography published in 1897 by the *Sheffield Independent*, as his sources. It can be presumed that the author had adequate access to the opinions of Mundella's contemporaries. His paragraph on Mundella's character is, thus, of some importance. In particular, he asserted: 'Few strenuous partisans have counted in their circle of friends so many of their foremost opponents.'<sup>5</sup> This emphasised the argument for Mundella's pragmatism, which has often been highlighted in this thesis.

There was a plethora of Royal Commissions during the second half of the nineteenth century, and Mundella was a prominent witness at several of them. All of these have been mentioned earlier in this thesis but some of the earlier ones will be re-visited in this section. They are important because they brought Mundella from the local to the national stage. Mundella had been a juror, representing the English hosiery industry, at the Paris International Exhibition of 1867.<sup>6</sup> He was, later, amongst a group of jurors who were asked to comment on the state of British technical education by the Taunton Royal Commission.<sup>7</sup> Because of comments made in 1867 by the eminent educationist, Lyon Playfair, which adversely compared British with European technical education, the commissioners decided to investigate that matter.<sup>8</sup> Mundella responded with a lengthy letter arguing that a national system of technical education

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<sup>3</sup> 'History of the Dictionary of National Biography', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* website, accessed 5 June 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Mundella, Anthony John (DNB01), *Dictionary of National Biography*, Vol. III, 1901 Supplement, 209-212.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>6</sup> *Paris Exhibition*, 'Return of the Names of all Persons employed or engaged by the Department of Science and Art in connection with the Paris Exhibition', 2 June 1867, 184.

<sup>7</sup> *Schools Inquiry Commission*, 'Report Relative To Technical Education', 1867, 27-29.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-7.

was required to adequately compete with continental countries.<sup>9</sup> Those asked their opinion were a mix of important academics and industry leaders. That Mundella was included indicated that his knowledge was well recognised by his contemporaries.

There must have been a general acceptance of Mundella's expertise in education generally, and particularly technical education, as he was also called upon to give evidence, in 1868, before a Parliamentary Select Committee.<sup>10</sup> Mundella's evidence ran to eleven pages and is discussed in some detail in Chapter 6 of this thesis. The depth of his understanding, and the ready acceptance of his views, is evidenced by his being the first individual name mentioned in the Report.<sup>11</sup> He is quoted airing one of his perennial arguments that primary education seldom prepared the individual for further training in the technical aspects of his work.

The third important inquiry in the 1867-68 period, which provided a national stage for Mundella, was the Royal Commission on Trade Unions.<sup>12</sup> Mundella gave evidence in mid-1868 and dwelt extensively on the methodology, and success, of his Nottingham Hosiery Board.<sup>13</sup> More detail of Mundella's evidence to the Commission, and the impact of the findings, has been discussed in Chapter 4.

It is clear that, in the year or so before his election for Sheffield, Mundella was recognised nationally as an authority on education and industrial relations. His contemporaries appear to have held him in high regard, which adds more questions as to why subsequent generations did not. In an address to the Brightside (Sheffield) Liberal Council in 1892, Edwin Richmond asserted: 'To-day he [Mundella] is recognised as one of the greatest authorities in the kingdom upon all educational and commercial matters'.<sup>14</sup> Richmond went on to remind his audience that Mundella had often been misrepresented by both the Sheffield Tory press and his political opponents, but he believed that 'long after their names have perished the name of Mundella will be held in grateful remembrance and respect'.<sup>15</sup> His forecast has proved to be incorrect.

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 27-29.

<sup>10</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on Scientific Instruction*, 15 July 1868.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, iii.

<sup>12</sup> *Royal Commission Appointed to Inquire into the Organisation and Rules of Trade Unions and Other Associations*, 12 February 1867.

<sup>13</sup> *Tenth Report of the Commission Inquiring into Trade Unions, 1867-8*, 73-83.

<sup>14</sup> Richmond, *Mr. Mundella: A Sketch of His Career*, 3.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

A resounding endorsement of Mundella's significance as a social reformer was provided by Mr. Stead in the *Sheffield Independent* in 1891.<sup>16</sup> Presumably this Mr. Stead was the famous William Thomas Stead, a pioneer of investigative journalism and the editor of the *Review of Reviews* at that time.<sup>17</sup> The *Independent* reported an interview by Stead with Mundella, which started by asserting: 'Anyone looking over the ranks of the Liberal leaders would find no difficulty in deciding that if a social programme is to be drawn up by any one on the front Opposition bench the man to do it is Mundella.'<sup>18</sup> The writer went on to praise Mundella's work on arbitration and conciliation, factory working conditions, education and the establishment of a Labour Board.<sup>19</sup> When asked about a possible social programme, Mundella put caring for children as his first priority and educating them properly as his second.<sup>20</sup> Naturally, Mundella spoke at length on the improvements he wanted to see in the field of education. Surprisingly, he also identified land usage reform, temperance, and a progressive taxation system, as important issues which he wished to pursue.<sup>21</sup> Each of these, he believed, would help the working man. He wanted a simpler land transfer system to encourage more small freeholders, temperance to reduce crime and pauperism, and income tax which would 'press more heavily on the rich and make life easier for the working man'.<sup>22</sup> There is no evidence that Mundella advanced any of these matters in Party discussions, but that Stead mentioned them showed Mundella's wide interest in many social problems.

Mundella was a frequent public speaker, both before and after entering parliament. Most of these meetings were recorded in newspaper reports, which brought his name and his causes to a wide audience. As might be expected, after his nomination in 1868 to contest a Commons seat for Sheffield through to his death, he figured prominently in the city's two rival papers. The *Sheffield Independent* was the town's Liberal newspaper, and could be relied upon to report Mundella's speeches

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<sup>16</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 6 April 1891, 'Mr. Mundella and the Social Programme'.

<sup>17</sup> Joseph O. Baylen, 'Stead, William Thomas (1849-1912), newspaper editor and spiritualist', *ODNB* (accessed 29 January 2019).

<sup>18</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 6 April 1891.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

favourably. The Conservative newspaper, the *Sheffield Telegraph*, frequently criticised Mundella. These were both regional journals, but reports of Mundella's speeches often appeared in the major nationals. Readers of *The Times*, the *Daily News*, and the *Spectator* would have been familiar with Mundella's political position and the measures he was taking. In a time when newspapers were the only means of mass communication, the frequency of reports on Mundella would have ensured that anyone interested in education, working conditions, industrial affairs or the union movement would have known of Mundella.

Evidence of the recognition of Mundella's eminence in these matters is shown by the fact that he was chosen to write the introduction to Ernst von Plener's 1873 book on British factory legislation.<sup>23</sup> He also co-authored, with George Howell, a chapter on industrial relations in Thomas Humphry Ward's 1887 book which celebrated achievements during the reign of Queen Victoria.<sup>24</sup> He was well known in Europe, and particularly in France. The extensive references to his work on conciliation in the Comte de Paris' 1869 book on English trade unions and the detailed coverage of his life in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* in 1898, attest to such interest.<sup>25</sup> Both works are dealt with earlier in this thesis. Mundella's relationship with the trade union leaders was criticised by Karl Marx in a letter written to Wilhelm Liebknecht in 1878.<sup>26</sup> Marx thought that the English working class had become no more than an appendage of the Liberal Party and complained bitterly of 'the Gladstones, Brights, Mundellas, Morleys, and the whole gang of factory owners'.<sup>27</sup> Mundella was clearly seen as someone of significance, worthy of Marx's opprobrium.

Finally, his death in 1897 was widely reported throughout Britain and, indeed in other parts of the world. The Melbourne *Argus* carried a short piece on 23 July 1897 which announced Mundella's death and summarised his life. *The Times* announced his death on 22 July and noted the large number of callers who offered their sympathy.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ernst von Plener, *The English Factory Legislation*, London: Chapman & Hall, 1873.

<sup>24</sup> A. J. Mundella and G. Howell, 'Industrial Associations', in Thomas Humphry Ward, *The Reign of Queen Victoria: A Survey of Fifty Years of Progress*, London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1887, 43-82.

<sup>25</sup> Comte de Paris, *Les Associations; Revue des Deux Mondes*, April, 1898.

<sup>26</sup> Gareth Stedman Jones, *Karl Marx: Greatness and Illusion*, First Harvard University Press, 2016, 530.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *The Times*, 23 July 1897, 'Death of Mr. Mundella'.

Telegrams were received from the Queen and the Prince and Princess of Wales.<sup>29</sup> A funeral service was held on 26 July at St. Margaret's, Westminster, the church where Mundella worshipped when in London, and a second on 27 July at his Nottingham church, St Mary's. Both services were reported at length in every newspaper in Britain. In reporting the funeral service itself, *The Times* listed the important mourners, including a representative of the Queen and many individuals mentioned in this thesis.<sup>30</sup> The article commented on the large number of floral tributes, including one from the Queen. *The Times* also reported the Nottingham funeral at length and noted that the route to the cemetery was lined with crowds of mourners.<sup>31</sup>

The *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* of 23 July reported extensively on the double funeral arrangements, but also included comments on Mundella's work which had appeared in different newspapers.<sup>32</sup> Several opinions highlighted Mundella's work on arbitration and conciliation as his most important legacy. The *Manchester Courier* asserted that in future he would be regarded as the 'Father of Arbitration'.<sup>33</sup> The *Leeds Mercury* wrote that Mundella had proved himself to be one of the 'most enlightened' Ministers of Education, and the *Manchester Courier* thought that he had done his best work in the area of technical education.<sup>34</sup>

In regards to his personal attributes, *The Times* called him a 'fighting man' who was not satisfied until he had removed a perceived evil; the writer asserted that such a character was more useful than any number of cynical critics.<sup>35</sup> Although the *Nottingham Guardian* agreed with this assessment, the writer thought that Mundella was a man of 'narrow ideas' who could not understand the arguments of opponents.<sup>36</sup> The *Westminster Gazette*, however, summed up his life as one in which 'his services to the cause of progress will not be forgotten by those who know how well and earnestly

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 27 July 1897, 'The Late Mr. Mundella'.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 28 July 1897, 'Funeral of Mr. Mundella'.

<sup>32</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 23 July 1897, 'The Late Mr. Mundella, M.P.; The Press on Mr. Mundella'.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.



he fought for it'.<sup>37</sup> Finally, and perhaps reflective of the times, the Leicester Liberal Association mourned his loss and felt that 'a prince had fallen in Israel'.<sup>38</sup>

There seems to have been genuine, and widespread, grief at Mundella's death. This may have been due to the fact that it occurred without much warning, but it also indicated real respect for his achievements. He had suffered periods of ill health throughout his life but he was still active in the Commons just a month before his death.<sup>39</sup> Although he was no longer a minister, he spoke extensively during the debate on the education expenditure for the coming year. He argued that better school attendance was needed to ensure that the country had the educated people to drive industry. This, of course, was a familiar theme of his, but it indicated a man who was still combative and politically engaged. That several reports of his death and of his funeral services unambiguously stated that his legacy would live on, makes it all the more perplexing that it did not.

### *The Fictional Mundella*

An unusual endorsement of Mundella's wide recognition, shortly after his death, can be found in his fictional portrayal in a 1907 novel published in Australia.<sup>40</sup> Annie Bright, the author of this autobiographical novel, was born in Nottingham in 1840, but, after her marriage, migrated to Australia in 1864.<sup>41</sup> In a journal article published in 1992, Lurline Stuart asserted to the veracity of Bright's narrative, as the 'main events can be confirmed through other sources, including personal references in her articles'.<sup>42</sup>

In her book, Bright introduced Algernon James Fortuna as 'a partner in a leading firm doing immense business in one of the staple trades of Laceborough'.<sup>43</sup> She characterised Fortuna as 'a keenly intellectual man, an eloquent speaker, and distinctly

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> *Edinburgh Evening News*, 23 July 1897, 'Leicester Liberals and Mr. Mundella'.

<sup>39</sup> *Hansard*, Vol. 50, cc. 293-353, 17 June 1897.

<sup>40</sup> Annie Bright, *A Soul's Pilgrimage*, Melbourne: George Robertson & Co., 1907.

<sup>41</sup> Lurline Stuart, 'Bright, Annie (1840-1913), journalist and spiritualist', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, 2005 (accessed online 19 January 2019).

<sup>42</sup> Lurline Stuart, 'This World and the Next: Annie Bright's Progress as a Writer and Editor', *The LaTrobe Journal*, No. 50, Spring 1992, 20.

<sup>43</sup> Bright, *A Soul's Pilgrimage*, 69.

superior to the average merchant of the place'.<sup>44</sup> She referred to a youthful Fortuna 'springing on a platform at a Chartist meeting and later of him speaking of 'conciliation in trade disputes will be a leading plank in my political platform, and I shall also work for higher education all round'.<sup>45</sup> This could only be a snapshot of Mundella.

The extent of Mundella's renown shortly after his death is exemplified by Bright's final reference to 'Fortuna', 'whose fame as an able statesman has spread throughout the Empire'.<sup>46</sup> Although Bright was originally from Nottingham, and might have had an especial interest in Mundella's career, she had been living in Australia for over 40 years when she wrote of him. His activities must have been well reported in local newspapers.

#### *Mundella's Resignation from the Ministry*

The reason for Mundella's resignation from the Liberal ministry in 1894 has been briefly discussed in Chapter 2 as part of an overview of his life. The circumstances of his resignation, and the criticism he received, may have had some influence on subsequent evaluations of his place in the political history of the period. Mundella had taken on a number of company directorships after entering parliament in order to provide the income needed to allow him to devote himself to politics. Two of these were with the Bank of New Zealand and its associated company, the New Zealand Loan & Mercantile Agency Company Limited.

The Mercantile Agency was incorporated in 1865 to provide long-term lending for Australian and New Zealand land purchases.<sup>47</sup> The Company was established by the Bank of New Zealand to engage in lending activities considered inappropriate for a bank. There were numerous common directors between the two companies, which allowed New Zealand's outstanding commercial figure of the time, Thomas Russell, to

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 70-71.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 289.

<sup>47</sup> Falconer Larkworthy (edited by Harold Begbie), *Ninety-One Years*, London: Mills & Boon Limited, 1924, 352.

dominate both organisations.<sup>48</sup> Although the Company's businesses were largely in Australia and New Zealand, its Head Office was in London and three-quarters of its capital was held in Britain.<sup>49</sup> The Company paid regular dividends from its inception until 1893, when payments were suspended 'as an indirect consequence of the recent financial disturbances in Australasia'.<sup>50</sup> A Scheme of Arrangement was approved by creditors in August 1893, which recommended the formation of a new company 'to acquire the undertaking and property of the old company'.<sup>51</sup> An Official Receiver was appointed and he presented his report in February 1894.<sup>52</sup>

Financial problems had surfaced some years earlier, in 1888, when the Company had to raise additional capital to support 'the conduct of the mercantile portion of the business'.<sup>53</sup> By this time, Mundella had long been involved with the Loan Company, having been appointed a director in 1869.<sup>54</sup> He took something of a lead in endeavouring to sort out the problems facing the Company by authorising Falconer Larkworthy, the London-based Managing Director, to visit Australia and New Zealand 'to inspect and report on the position and business of the company throughout those Colonies'.<sup>55</sup> He was clearly aware of the difficulties facing the Company, for he himself was a director. He wrote to Leader that same year and mentioned the 'anxiety this business has caused me and my colleagues'.<sup>56</sup> He went on to tell Leader that he had suffered both mentally and financially over it, and asserted that he could 'stand the latter better than the former'.<sup>57</sup>

Mundella, and presumably his fellow directors, were to suffer ongoing anguish as matters dragged on until 1894. Those directors included other prominent politicians in addition to Mundella himself. Sir James Fergusson was a Conservative member of parliament who had previously served as a colonial governor in South Australia, New

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<sup>48</sup> R.C.J. Stone, 'Russell, Thomas 1830-1904, Lawyer, businessman, politician, financier, land speculator', *Te Ara Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, September 2010 (accessed 20 September 2017).

<sup>49</sup> *The Times*, 11 July 1893, 'The New Zealand Loan & Mercantile Agency'.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> New Zealand Loan and Mercantile Agency Company Limited, *Scheme of Arrangement*, 9 January 1894 (held in the State Library of New South Wales).

<sup>52</sup> *The Times*, 16 March 1894, 'In Re New Zealand Loan & Mercantile Agency Company (Limited).

<sup>53</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 16 April 1888, 'The New Zealand Loan & Mercantile Agency Co.'

<sup>54</sup> Armytage, *A.J. Mundella*, 300.

<sup>55</sup> Larkworthy, *Ninety-One Years*, 365-366.

<sup>56</sup> *Mundella Papers*, letter to R.E. Leader, 3 October 1888.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

Zealand and Bombay.<sup>58</sup> Sir John Gorst was another Conservative M.P. He had been a magistrate and civil commissioner in New Zealand when younger.<sup>59</sup> Sir Edward Stafford was a former premier of New Zealand who had returned to live in London. He had been offered, but declined, several safe Tory seats in the Commons.<sup>60</sup> These men made a sharp contrast to Mundella. They were colonial administrators with extensive experience of New Zealand and they were Conservatives. Perhaps more importantly, none of them seems to have had any background in business. They must have relied heavily on Mundella for advice on the financial and governance aspects of the Company's operations.

Following the report from the Official Receiver, an order was made by Mr. Justice Vaughan Williams for the winding up of the Company and for the public examination of the directors.<sup>61</sup> The directors appealed against this order.<sup>62</sup> The case received considerable attention in the more politically interested newspapers and magazines. It was called one of the 'few *causes célèbres*' that came before Vaughan Williams.<sup>63</sup> It also raised questions of Mundella's probity.

An article in *The Times*, in March 1894, noted that one of the directors of the Company being examined was head of the department charged with the care of British trade and commerce.<sup>64</sup> The writer suggested that 'the public will view with astonishment their attempt to escape by appeal to another Court'. A subsequent letter to the editor went further. The writer argued that 'the Board of Trade, over which Mr. Mundella presides, has been endeavouring to stifle the report of the Official Receiver'.<sup>65</sup> The *Economist* criticised Mundella for being involved in proceedings

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<sup>58</sup> Peter Harnetty, 'Fergusson, Sir James, of Kilkerran, sixth baronet (1832-1907)', politician and colonial administrator, *ODNB* (accessed 13 September 2018).

<sup>59</sup> E.J. Feuchtwanger, 'Gorst, Sir John Eldon (1835-1916), politician and lawyer, *ODNB* (accessed 19 September 2018).

<sup>60</sup> James Belich, 'Stafford, Sir Edward William (1819-1901), premier of New Zealand, *ODNB* (accessed 11 September 2018).

<sup>61</sup> *The Times*, 16 March 1894, 'In Re New Zealand Loan & Mercantile Agency Company (Limited)'.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 21 March 1894.

<sup>63</sup> P.A. Landon, revised by Steve Hadley, 'Williams, Sir Roland Lomax Bowdler Vaughan (1838-1916), judge, *ODNB* (accessed 11 September 2018). Ralph Vaughan Williams, the composer, was his nephew.

<sup>64</sup> *The Times*, 20 March 1894, 'Students of our law reports are probably not'.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 21 March 1894, 'To the Editor of *The Times*, A.B.

'against an official of the department which is directly under his charge'.<sup>66</sup> Attacks on Mundella's position continued. Some commentators called for his resignation.

By May 1894, the *Economist* was of the view that 'Mr Mundella's position is absolutely untenable, and in his own interest as an honourable public man he should at once resign his office, and thus remove any suspicion of interference in the proper course of justice'.<sup>67</sup> *The Times* also called for Mundella's resignation. In a leading article on 10 May 1894, the details of the case against the board of New Zealand Loan were given in somewhat emotive language.<sup>68</sup> It called the policy and conduct of the Company 'of the most scandalous kind', believed that the accounts to 'have been cooked', and asserted that the directors used their position to 'saddle the loan company with quantities of worthless shares'.<sup>69</sup> The article criticised all the directors, and suggested that Sir John Gorst and Sir James Fergusson should be censured if the Conservatives were returned to power. However, it reserved its harshest criticism for Mundella, whom, with his public position, had a greater obligation to keep himself above suspicion.<sup>70</sup> The writer was quite clear on responsibility:

The man who directs the machinery for dealing with defaulting companies ought not to be interested in concealing the wrongdoing of a defaulting company, nor ought a present or past director to have any power to control the Official Receiver of that company.

The article concluded by suggesting that if Mundella could not understand this, the Prime Minister, now Lord Rosebery should take some action.

It did not seem so clear cut to everyone. A letter to the Editor of *The Times* commented on these 'outspoken views' by quoting another, although unnamed, journal which defended Mundella.<sup>71</sup> This article noted that Mundella's cabinet colleagues did not believe he should resign and that any action by the Board of Trade in the Loan Company case should be handled by the permanent officials without reference to the President.<sup>72</sup> Throughout this difficult period, Mundella enjoyed the support of the leaders of his party. Gladstone wrote to Morley in February 1894, and

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<sup>66</sup> *Economist*, 24 March 1894, 'The New Zealand Loan & Mercantile Agency'.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 May 1894, 'The New Zealand Loan Company'.

<sup>68</sup> *The Times*, 10 May 1894, 'Mr. Mundella has not resigned the Presidency'.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *The Times*, 12 May 1894, 'Mr. Mundella's Position', letter from *LEX*.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

said that: 'He [Mundella] is a very good fellow and has done himself much credit in the present government'.<sup>73</sup> Gladstone's successor, Lord Rosebery, praised Mundella, in March 1894, for the establishment of the labour department and the publication of the *Labour Gazette*.<sup>74</sup> An important cabinet minister, William Harcourt, Chancellor of the Exchequer, and by then Liberal leader in the Commons, wrote to Mundella on 14 March 1894, to express his deep sympathy for the 'the undeserved trouble that has come upon you'.<sup>75</sup> Harcourt went on to say that 'all your loyal friends will stand by you for whom they feel the most sincere respect and regard'.<sup>76</sup>

Mundella was still answering routine questions in the Commons, which covered such mundane matters as overcrowding on workmen's trains and the manning of merchant ships, on 10 May.<sup>77</sup> However, he resigned as President of the Board of Trade days later and made a personal statement in the Commons when sittings resumed later in May.<sup>78</sup> In his explanation, Mundella stated that he had placed his position at the disposal of the Prime Minister 'some weeks ago'. He inferred that Gladstone had persuaded him to continue, but, as time passed, he himself had come to the conclusion that this was impossible. Mundella's resignation speech was received by members with 'cheers' and cries of 'hear, hear'.<sup>79</sup> This seemed to indicate the sympathy felt for him by most of his fellow MPs. In concluding his statement, Mundella emphasised the efforts he had made, over many years, to bring forward legislation for the benefit of the people, and asserted that throughout his life he had been 'free from stain or dishonour'.<sup>80</sup>

The *Economist*, which had been one of Mundella's most outspoken critics, was generous in its report of his resignation.<sup>81</sup> According to the *Economist*, the fact that the Prime Minister and Mundella's Cabinet colleagues had wanted him to remain in office, placed his conduct in a different light, and 'absolved him from the charge of clinging to

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<sup>73</sup> Gladstone's Letter Book, 11 February 1894, *British Library*, Add. MSS 44549, f. 371.

<sup>74</sup> Armytage, *A.J. Mundella*, 300.

<sup>75</sup> *Mundella Papers*, 14 March 1894.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Hansard*, 10 May 1894, Vol. 24, c. 770.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 May 1894, Vol. 24, cc. 1191-1192.

<sup>79</sup> *Daily News*, 25 May 1894, 'Mr. Mundella'.

<sup>80</sup> *Hansard*, 24 May 1894, Vol. 24, c. 1192.

<sup>81</sup> *Economist*, 26 May 1894, 'Mr. Mundella's Resignation'.

office'.<sup>82</sup> The *Illustrated London News* was equally forgiving, expressed much sympathy and insisted that Mundella had incurred no personal discredit.<sup>83</sup> This was also the view of a London solicitor, W. W. Paines, who, writing to Sir James Fergusson in July 1894, asserted that 'there is no question of fraud' and the matter was not of a 'moral nature but purely legal in consequence of the infringement of a technical rule'.<sup>84</sup>

Mundella was rather defensive of his position. Writing to a fellow Sheffield MP, H.J. Wilson, shortly after his resignation, he argued that if he had been in any other office he would not have had to resign.<sup>85</sup> He assured Wilson that he would visit his electorate at an early date for a 'renewal of their confidence'.<sup>86</sup> However, Wilson was advised by the eminent barrister, Sir Henry James, that Mundella should delay any such meeting until it was clear that there would be no further legal inquiries into the affairs of the company.<sup>87</sup>

It was not until December 1894 that Mundella met with his constituents.<sup>88</sup> He started by telling his audience that, on joining the ministry in 1892, he had resigned all his directorships. This was not something that seemed to have weighed much with his critics. Admittedly the Loan Company had experienced financial difficulties before that time. Mundella went on to detail the sequence of events that led to the liquidation of the company and asserted that there had been no reference of this to him in his capacity as President of the Board of Trade. He spoke freely of his fellow board members as three of them were 'distinguished members of the House of Commons who sit on the Opposition benches'.<sup>89</sup> He concluded by saying that he had nothing to fear from any man's censure and was buoyed by the support that 'political opponents and friends alike have shown me'.<sup>90</sup> Finally he confirmed that he would be honoured to continue to serve them in parliament. And indeed he did, until his death in 1897. Mundella's speech was again received with much cheering. The Tory *Sheffield Evening*

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> *Illustrated London News*, 19 May 1894.

<sup>84</sup> Private communication 25 August 2019, from Geordie Fergusson. The letter is held in the Fergusson archives at Kilkerran.

<sup>85</sup> *The Times*, 15 March 1894, letter to Mr. H.J. Wilson, 12 May 1894.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, 26 May 1894, 'Mr. Mundella and His Constituents'.

<sup>88</sup> *Standard*, 17 December 1894, 'Mr. Mundella at Sheffield'.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

*Telegraph* sounded a slightly sour note; it reported that Mundella had asserted that many people felt his resignation premature and his action Quixotic.<sup>91</sup>

The circumstances of Mundella's resignation from the ministry would have been a blow to him, but he continued to be an active parliamentarian. His abilities were recognised by his fellow members with his appointment to various committees soon after his resignation.<sup>92</sup> Except for Armytage, the issue of Mundella's probity in this issue was not mentioned in the historiography. It is concluded that the manner of his resignation played no part in 'forgetting' Mundella.

### *Reputations That Have Lasted*

Mundella's life spanned the office periods of some of Britain's truly great prime ministers. The names of Grey, Peel, Gladstone and Disraeli are at the forefront, but others such as Wellington, Russell and Derby also rank highly. These men led the nation and generally dominated their parliamentary colleagues. There were, of course, other famous players in the country's development. Richard Cobden and John Bright are still justly recognised for their fight to repeal the Corn Laws. Others, such as Joseph Chamberlain, Randolph Churchill and Charles Dilke, were notorious for their disruptive ways.

The next level of prominent politicians of the era, in which Mundella should be included, comprised a mix of the aristocrat and landowner with the businessman. This dichotomy has been explored in an earlier thesis by this author.<sup>93</sup> This showed that, whilst many businessmen were elected to the Commons in the nineteenth century, few made an impact. Anthony John Mundella was certainly one who made a significant contribution to the nation's development.

Six businessmen who became important politicians were discussed in this writer's 2012 M.A. thesis. Two of them are comparable to Mundella, because they were successful both in business and in politics: W.E. Forster and W.H. Smith. Both men were prominent businessmen before entering parliament, and both achieved

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<sup>91</sup> *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, 18 December 1894, 'London and Mr. Mundella'.

<sup>92</sup> *Hansard*, 28 June 1894, Vol. 26 c.515, 'Laws relating to keeping, selling and conveyancing petroleum'; 24 August 1894, Vol. 29 cc. 421-422, 'Management of pauper schools'.

<sup>93</sup> Davey, *Businessmen in the British Parliament*.



cabinet rank, as did Mundella. However, both Forster and Smith were touted as potential prime ministers, although neither became premier. Mundella was never considered for that position. Both are better recognised in the historiography than Mundella. One of the reasons for this may be that both of them were the subject of an extensive biography shortly after their deaths. Forster died in 1886 and Wemyss Reid's biography was published in 1888.<sup>94</sup> Smith died in 1891 and Sir Herbert Maxwell's biography appeared in 1893, going to a second edition in 1894.<sup>95</sup> Mundella died in 1897 yet it took until 1951 for his one and only biography to be published.

It was the widows of both Forster and Smith who were the drivers of these early biographies. Forster had married Jane Arnold, a daughter of Dr. Arnold of Rugby School fame, and sister of the equally famous poet, Matthew Arnold. She was well educated and devoted to Forster.<sup>96</sup> After her husband's death, she engaged Wemyss Reid to write his biography. She actively co-operated with him, whilst keeping a watchful eye over its contents.<sup>97</sup> Maxwell wrote the Smith biography with some help from Smith's widow, who gave the writer access to Smith's many letters.<sup>98</sup> Mundella's wife died in 1890, some years before he did, so the matter of a biography was left to his daughters.

The Forster and Smith biographies were tributes, even homages to their subject. A very different approach can be seen in the case of another successful businessman/politician, Joseph Chamberlain. Such was his fame, or notoriety, that three biographies were published before his death. The first of these, written by Murrell Marris, was published in 1900. Marris claimed that that he could not find a book dealing with Chamberlain's life and that he wanted to make a 'just estimate' of Chamberlain's character and work.<sup>99</sup> At the beginning of the book, Marris asserted that

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<sup>94</sup> T. Wemyss Reid, *Life of the Rt. Hon. W.E. Forster*, London: Chapman & Hall, 1888, (reprinted 1970).

<sup>95</sup> Sir Herbert Maxwell, *Life and Times of the Right Honourable William Henry Smith, M.P.*, Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1893.

<sup>96</sup> Jackson, *Education Act Forster*, 35.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 34, 40.

<sup>98</sup> Viscount Chilston, *W.H. Smith*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965, x.

<sup>99</sup> N. Murrell Marris, *The Right Honourable Joseph Chamberlain: The Man and the Statesman*, New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1900, Preface v.

the interest in Chamberlain centred on his personality and the attention he attracted.<sup>100</sup>

Two other biographies quickly followed that of Marris, and each again emphasised the public interest in Chamberlain's life and political career. In 1904, Louis Creswicke noted 'the desire of the public to know more of this most remarkable man'.<sup>101</sup> Sir Alexander Mackintosh, a renowned political journalist, published his biography of Chamberlain in 1906, and called him a man of 'political genius and bold action'.<sup>102</sup> This, apparently widespread, interest in Chamberlain's political antics is in marked contrast to that of Mundella's steady and supportive position. It is easy to understand that commentators quickly found that Chamberlain had a much wider appeal to their potential readers than did Mundella's straightforward approach.

#### *Remembering Mundella, or not*

There is no evidence of changing perceptions of Mundella after his death which would explain the rather rapid decline in interest in his work. Some possibilities are advanced here but must be considered as that only.

The absence of a contemporary biography was a significant impediment to retaining ongoing knowledge of Mundella. Reference has already been made to the speed in which biographies of politicians of a similar stature to Mundella appeared. Mundella's unmarried daughter, Maria Theresa, intended to write her father's biography, but had not commenced before her own death in 1922.<sup>103</sup> There is no information as to why she prevaricated for so long. Perhaps she found her skills were insufficient for so grand an undertaking.

Even if details of his life were long missing from the record, it might have been expected that his achievements would have been recognised in some way. In the historiographic sections of earlier chapters of this thesis it has been concluded that only Mundella's championing of conciliation and arbitration to settle industrial

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<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>101</sup> Louis Creswicke, *The Life of the Right Honourable Joseph Chamberlain*, London: The Caxton Publishing Company, 1904, Prefatory Note, v.

<sup>102</sup> Sir Alexander Mackintosh, *Joseph Chamberlain: An Honest Biography*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1906, 1.

<sup>103</sup> *Mundella Papers*, u/d, 2.

disputes, and his 1880 Education Act, that provided for compulsory primary education, were consistently mentioned. His work to improve factory working conditions, to ensure that trade unions were legally recognised, and to improve technical education have not received extensive treatment.

Whilst these issues were contentious at the time, and violently argued both in parliament and throughout the wider community, within a few years they were accepted as normal. During Mundella's last years, and certainly by the turn of the century, it would have been difficult to find anyone who would have advocated the removal of state support and opposed the regulation of education, or to outlaw trade unions. This was recognised by the *Westminster Gazette* when it reported Mundella's death in July 1897. The writer recognised Mundella's consistency and the respect given him by both sides of politics, but also suggested that the younger generation would forget his services on matters no longer controversial.<sup>104</sup>

Perhaps a contributing factor to Mundella's lack of better ongoing recognition was his uncontroversial personality. Despite his somewhat exotic family background and his early life as an apprentice hosier, he seemed to have fitted quite seamlessly into Nottingham's upper business echelon. As we have seen, he was soon elected to the Town Council, was involved with the formation of the Chamber of Commerce, and became an officer in the local militia unit. These were the usual activities for a man with a social conscience, and normal for someone aspiring to climb the social ladder, keen to be part of the local establishment. Although he did become involved with Liberal Party activities during his Nottingham years, there was no suggestion that he coveted a seat in parliament.

He seems to have had an equable nature, and did not, generally, take personal insults too seriously. Armytage recorded political broadsheets published in Nottingham in 1860 and 1861 poking fun at Mundella's rather prominent nose.<sup>105</sup> He referred to the *Fish Stall Gazette* of September 1860 advertising a book on *Concology – by Captain Bundella – with portrait and proboscis*, and in November 1861 *The Extraordinary Gazette* offered its readers a form guide in the local election stakes, and gave short

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<sup>104</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 23 July 1897, 'The Press on Mr. Mundella'.

<sup>105</sup> Armytage, *A.J. Mundella*, 29.

odds on 'Mr Bundell's Proboscis'.<sup>106</sup> Armytage asserted that Mundella was subject to jokes about his facial features for the rest of his life.<sup>107</sup> However, he does not appear to have been unduly worried about such jibes. When accused by the *Sheffield Telegraph* during the 1868 election campaign of being a Frenchman, he wrote to Leader and contended that 'I am just as foreign as the Prince of Wales himself'.<sup>108</sup> He clearly did not see this assertion as an insult.

In the sometimes divisive political climate of the nineteenth century, Mundella always sought continuity and compromise. He was a consistent supporter of Gladstone whom he admired for his intellect and hard work.<sup>109</sup> Even before Mundella's election, there seems to have been a developing relationship between the two men. Gladstone must have recognised Mundella's strengths, and potential, when he asked Mundella to second the address in reply to the Queen's speech at the opening of Mundella's first parliament. Mundella commented on this in a letter to Leader, and said that Gladstone's letter was 'couched in the handsomest of terms'.<sup>110</sup> He further said that Gladstone laid 'great stress on my success in having received the confidence of both Employers and Employed'.<sup>111</sup> Mundella was disappointed when Gladstone resigned the leadership of the Liberal Party after losing the 1874 election. He wrote to Leader in January 1875 asserting that Gladstone retired 'from higher motives than activate the ordinary run of men'.<sup>112</sup> But, in that same letter, he quickly got down to the practicalities of the situation; Forster and Hartington are identified as the only sensible alternatives.<sup>113</sup>

Mundella's standing within the Liberal Party was considerable at this time. He was asked by Forster to organise a petition from amongst radical members of parliament to urge Gladstone to stay as leader.<sup>114</sup> This indicated the influence that Mundella had, at least with this group, within the Party. He became a significant player in the subsequent debates on who was to succeed Gladstone, and, as might be

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<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> *Mundella Papers*, 8 August 1868.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 October 1874.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 4 February 1869.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> *Mundella Papers*, 15 January 1875.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> *Mundella Papers*, Forster to Mundella, 12 January 1875.

expected was a strong backer of Forster.<sup>115</sup> His role in this matter is mentioned by Rossi, but not in the more general histories of the period.

### *Conclusions - The 'Forgotten' Man*

Margaret Higginbotham concluded the final chapter of her 1941 thesis on Mundella thus:

By most members of this day and age, Mundella is forgotten or vaguely remembered as 'the educationist', but he deserves a better fate. To him and those like him, for his career is typical of many, we owe a great deal and his name should not be allowed to die.<sup>116</sup>

She had recognised the very rapid loss of interest in Mundella and his achievements, even in the city he had served as MP for nearly 30 years.

A number of reasons have been identified for his loss of recognition over such a short period of time. Without wishing to place any of these as being more important than any other, the most likely are the lack of a contemporary biography, his identification with issues no longer controversial, and the greater interest shown by the public in more charismatic individuals.

It was unusual for a prominent Victorian figure not to have their life immortalised in print soon after their death. There is no explanation for Mundella's family not engaging a professional writer to do this. There was thus no reference for anyone interested in Mundella's life other than the 1901 entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

Even by the time of his death in 1897, many of the causes that Mundella championed had passed into common practice. Working conditions in factories and mines, especially in terms of the employment of women and children and the hours of work had improved considerably. Trade unions had been recognised legally and labour dispute conciliation was widely practiced. Primary schooling was compulsory, with much greater state support, both financially and regulatory. Higher educational establishments, particularly for technical and industry related studies, had grown considerably. Mundella had played an important role in achieving all of these reforms.

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<sup>115</sup> Rossi, 'The Selection of Lord Hartington', 1975, 309.

<sup>116</sup> Higginbotham, *The Career of A.J. Mundella*, 1941, 146.

Leaving aside the two long-serving prime ministers of the period, who commanded so much of the public's attention during the second half of the nineteenth century, there were many other individuals with a high profile. The writers of fiction, Charles Dickens and Anthony Trollope, and the scientists Charles Darwin and Thomas Huxley, are but a few of those now known as 'celebrities'.<sup>117</sup> Of the politicians, the three most notorious and therefore most written about, were Joseph Chamberlain, Charles Dilke and Randolph Churchill. It is not surprising that Mundella's doings would not compare with such as these.

Whatever the reasons for the obvious loss of interest in Mundella, it is sad that it has happened. Despite Armytage's almost single-handed efforts during the 1950s to promote Mundella's achievements, the historiography shows that his work has not received the recognition it deserved.

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<sup>117</sup> Nigel Starck, *The First Celebrity: Anthony Trollope's Australian Odyssey*, Tusmore: Writes of Passage, 2014.

## Conclusions

### *Thesis Summary*

This thesis analyses the contribution of the radical Liberal MP, Anthony John Mundella, to the reform of several important social areas during the second half of the nineteenth century. It was an era which saw considerable political change. The passing of the Second and Third Reform Acts significantly altered the character of the House of Commons, and brought in more radical thinking. The general acceptance of a free trade philosophy introduced a more laissez-faire attitude in matters other than business. Countering this trend was the rise of increased state involvement in areas previously considered essentially voluntary. Parliament started considering problems such as improving the working conditions in factories, workshops and mines, recognising the increased importance of organisations, trade unions and Chambers of Commerce, to collectively represent employers and employees, and the need to understand initiatives for the establishment of a national education system. Mundella was deeply involved in each of these matters.

The issues are addressed in a thematic manner, with separate chapters discussing the areas in which Mundella was most influential, and most successful. He pursued legislative changes which, generally, improved the life of the average working man and his family, but were not simply benevolent or charitable acts. Mundella saw more clearly than most that the working class was not only becoming more politically important but provided a valuable resource for the country. His dedication to this work saw him find allies on the Conservative side of politics and disagreements with some of his natural friends – manufacturers, radical liberals, free traders and education reformers. His great assets were his singlemindedness and his long term thinking; he was prepared to embrace immediate solutions but kept pushing towards the ultimate goal.

Mundella realised the need for good working conditions and adequate wage levels during his many years as a successful hosiery manufacturer. He was able to produce superior products at a satisfactory price, and was not subject to strikes and other work interruptions. Once in parliament he co-operated with Lord Shaftesbury, an

evangelical Tory, against the arguments of Liberals he respected, particularly Cobden and Gladstone.

His establishment of an arbitration and conciliation board to oversee employer/employee relationships in the Nottingham hosiery industry reinforced his view on the importance of a legalised trade union movement. He was an important witness at the Royal Commission on Trade Unions in 1868, and upon entering parliament later that year became a vocal advocate for the union movement.

Improving the educational standards of the nation, at several levels, was Mundella's life-long aim. He himself received minimal schooling, but seized every opportunity to improve himself by attending Sunday school, night school and going to lectures throughout his teen years. Although he saw education as a means of improving the position of the working man, he also believed that a better educated workforce was necessary to maintain, indeed regain, Britain's industrial pre-eminence. Thus he embraced both adequate elementary schooling for the operatives and more higher and technical training for engineers and managers. There was considerable opposition to each of these, but Mundella was firm in his objective and was prepared to compromise to achieve these ends. Some believed that education was unimportant to the working class as they could not use it in their future lives. Others questioned Mundella's emphasis on technical education, generally supporting the classical training then prevalent in secondary schools and universities. One of the major issues that confronted efforts to establish a national education system was that of religious teaching. Many nonconformist-Liberals opposed any concessions to the existing church schools. The 1870 Education Act might have foundered without the efforts of such pragmatists as Mundella.

There is a considerable historiography addressing the major issues with which Mundella was involved. Many cover an extensive period of time. This is especially so in the field of British education where histories often cover the topic from mediaeval to modern times. As might be expected in such works, the impact of one education minister received minimal recognition. Even when Mundella is mentioned, it is inevitably in regard to his 1880 Act which introduced compulsory primary education. It might have been expected that in histories of labour relations, Mundella, as arguably the most successful expounder of arbitration and conciliation at that time, would have



received more attention. Despite his parliamentary work to legalise the trade unions, he is often mentioned only in regard to the Nottingham board.

One of the aims of this thesis is to rectify the lack of acknowledgement of Mundella's successes, both in the fields of education and labour law. Some suggestions as to the reasons for this are advanced in the final chapter. Although his exit from the ministry in 1894 was over a conflict of interest between his private business affairs and his public office, there was no suggestion of any real impropriety. There were no indications that his former successes were negated by this episode. It is, therefore, suggested that because he was a straightforward individual who espoused causes that later generations regarded as uncontroversial, he has been neglected by most historians who have concentrated on the more colourful politicians of the day.

#### *The Questions Posed and Answered*

The overarching question posed in this thesis is just how important were Mundella's contributions to the introduction of social reforming legislation. The issues involved were of major significance at the time and required the support of both Conservative and Liberal Parties. This was not always forthcoming and some constancy of purpose was provided by Mundella. Of course, no single individual can be credited with everything that was achieved, but it is argued that Mundella has not been adequately recognised for his persistent efforts in several important areas. A case is made for his pragmatism in pursuing change when others, sometimes for ideological reasons, others through want of commitment, gave up. Mundella took to parliamentary life with relish. Almost immediately he was promoting a Bill, together with Thomas Hughes, to provide for the legalisation of trade unions. He continued to be at the forefront of many important reforms throughout his long parliamentary career.

A number of subsidiary questions arose from the prime question, each of these is addressed below. It is argued that Mundella pursued legislation which he, personally, believed beneficial, both to the working class and the nation, irrespective of the difficulties involved and the opposition against him. He was not afraid to support Conservative Party initiatives nor to dispute issues with his political friends. He

showed that he was a man of principle who was prepared to fight for his beliefs. These were usually founded on his own personal life experiences.

As a large scale manufacturer, he had the practical knowledge of how better working conditions improved productivity. He introduced better machinery, improved factory layout, and more sophisticated material handling systems into his factories. He also increased the wages of his operatives. Such initiatives made for a prosperous business and Mundella believed that such actions would be beneficial to most enterprises, as well as to the working man. Very few of his peers accepted this approach. Many manufacturers and mine owners believed that such improvements would simply increase costs. In parliament, Mundella found that he agreed more with Shaftesbury than Cobden, Bright and Gladstone, when it came to working conditions. Shaftesbury had long fought for improvements in many areas of commercial work, but had done so from the point of view of a devout evangelical. He was also an anti-reform Tory. It seemed an unlikely alliance, but Mundella and Shaftesbury did co-operate to pass legislation improving working conditions. In 1872, Mundella was asked by the Factory Acts Reform Association to take over, from Shaftesbury, the campaign to shorten the working hours of women and children in textile factories. Mundella's approach was to work with anyone who shared his views on a particular issue, irrespective of policy differences elsewhere.

Mundella's long period as an employer, but more importantly his experience of negotiating employment conditions with union leaders during his presidency of the Nottingham Hosiery Board, gave him an understanding of the reality of labour combination. He recognised the value of working constructively with the unions, through their leaders, so that outcomes satisfactory to both employers and employees were reached. This approach was amply demonstrated by Mundella's evidence at the 1868 Royal Commission on Trade Unions. He asserted that, by negotiating with union leaders, the decisions reached would be accepted by the rank and file. Many employers at that time believed that unionisation would only lead to more and more demands, which would increase the cost of doing business.

Mundella was also conscious of the increased role that organised labour would have in the country's future. Demonstrations by working men, and women, to secure a greater involvement in the political process had started after the end of the

Napoleonic Wars. Despite the efforts of the Chartist Movement and the passing of the First Reform Act, little changed until more of the working class were enfranchised following the passing of the 1867 Reform Act. Many in the upper and middle classes feared the change, even to the point of expecting violent revolution. Any acceptance of working class action, especially unionism, was anathema to such people. Others, including Mundella, saw that compromising with labour forces was the sensible approach to take. Not only would it forestall mass action, but it would provide a valuable resource for the state.

Probably harder for Mundella to oppose, was the argument that the working man was losing his individual dignity by allowing a union to negotiate with his employer on his behalf. This was a view held by the extreme free traders who took the laissez-faire attitude to its ultimate. Richard Cobden was one of the foremost political leaders who espoused this view. He was also a man much admired by Mundella. Thus it would have taken not just courage, but some heart-searching, to oppose him. Nevertheless Mundella was firm in his aim to have trade unions legalised and his ongoing efforts eventually succeeded.

Although Mundella was a significant employer for over 20 years before his election to parliament, he did come from a working-class background. In this he was different from most, perhaps all, of his colleagues. It is not surprising, therefore, that he had a greater understanding of, and a greater sympathy with, the working man. His early life and working career were fundamental in shaping his attitude, not only in regard to the unions, but in other areas such as education.

Much has been made of Mundella's lifelong commitment to education in this thesis. The question of just how important was Mundella's input into many facets of national education is argued in some detail. His championing of better schooling started early. He was the Superintendent of a Sunday School in Leicester and, later, member of a group that established a working men's college in Nottingham. Once in parliament, he was a major supporter of Forster's 1870 Education Act. The Bill was much criticized on several counts, but most critically on the issue of religious teaching. The strength of the non-conformist vote at the 1868 election provided considerable backing to those MPs who were troubled by the continuation of the Church of England's influence on elementary education. The Bill could easily have failed without

the Cowper-Temple clause, which forbade the teaching of specific catechisms in board schools. Mundella embraced this, despite his lifelong Anglicanism. He saw more clearly than most that dogmatic opposition to any religious teaching would condemn many children, particularly in rural areas, to ignorance. He provided something of a bridge between the voluntarists and the non-conformists. Throughout his political life he showed a sensible willingness to compromise.

Mundella was a consistent defender of the 1870 Act when representatives of the National Education League sought amendments in 1872. He was, as always, enthusiastic about one aspect of these demands. He had ever been an advocate of compulsion in the primary sector, and saw any move to amend the Act as an opportunity for this. When this became unlikely, Mundella, as ever pragmatic, backed Forster and the League's proposals were defeated.

Six years in opposition did not dent Mundella's commitment to education. He repeatedly spoke, both in parliament and at public meetings, on compulsion and the importance of good primary education to provide the base for technical and higher studies. He was concerned at the rapid progress being made in both elementary and technical education in some continental countries, and feared for the future of British industry if Britain did not keep up. Mundella was active in shaping the Conservative Education Act of 1876 and achieved some concessions, but not compulsion. This had to wait until the Liberals returned to government and Mundella was appointed Vice-President of the Council. At long last he achieved his aim of compelling every child to attend school. Appropriately, the 1880 Act is usually referred to as the 'Mundella Act'. His consistency over many years was a measure of his influence on legislation that improved educational standards.

Mundella also had a lifelong interest in promoting better technical education. This presumably stemmed from his manufacturing experience, but was also influenced by his recognition that better tradesmen and engineers were needed by British industry. During his time as the minister responsible for education he finally achieved the consolidation of the state supported South Kensington science and engineering colleges and the establishment of the 1881 Royal Commission which investigated the position of technical education in Britain. Again in opposition, Mundella supported the long awaited Technical Instruction Act. He was also prominent in the foundation, and

actions, of the National Association for the Promotion of Technical Education which played an important role in seeing through the Act, and getting state funding for technical education. Mundella was one of the constant factors in extending technical and higher facilities.

### *Contribution to the Discipline*

The changing attitudes to many social issues during the second half of the nineteenth century are discussed in this thesis. It uses the efforts of Anthony John Mundella, in improving factory working conditions, legalising trade unions and enhancing the nation's educational standards, to illustrate the changes that occurred. Although the emphasis is on Mundella's imperatives and actions, the overall situation is, of necessity, analysed. The use of an individual's position on issues now considered uncontroversial, but at the time provoking vehement opposition, provides an insight into the thinking at the time.

The opposition to the improvements eventually legislated was often considerable. Many influential and respected men were ranged against Mundella and his fellow reformers. The arguments that ensued reveal just how public opinion was changing as the make-up of parliament and the electorate was becoming more democratic. Mundella, in many ways, was the symbolic representative of this change. He came from working-class origins but had succeeded in business. He represented one of the most radical constituencies in the country and had to satisfy a predominantly working-class voter. This combination made him a rather different politician to most of his colleagues and helps explain his persistence in pursuing reform. He had fought hard to reach his final position and he was conscious of the obstacles he had overcome. He wanted to ensure that others like him had better tools to achieve success. There was another side to his efforts that showed him to be a patriotic Englishman. He recognised that British industry was losing its world leadership and he was dedicated to ameliorating this with a better educated work force. It is not suggested that Mundella was the only man to pursue these aims, but his life's work is symbolic of the times.

A repeated theme running through this thesis is the lack of recognition of Mundella's work subsequent to his death in 1897. During his business career and

whilst in parliament, his activities received considerable attention, particularly in the press. He lectured and wrote extensively and was much in demand as a labour dispute conciliator. The support from his electorate was shown by him being returned in every election he contested. The subsequent historiography is detailed in the earlier chapters of this thesis. Apart from Armytage's biography and Higginbotham's thesis on Mundella's Sheffield connection, Mundella is only recognised for his establishment of the Nottingham hosiery arbitration and conciliation board and his introduction of compulsory primary education.

The final chapter of this thesis advances reasons that may account for the lack of comment on Mundella's achievements. Although his work was often opposed, both in parliament and amongst the public, the changes he supported quickly became accepted by almost everyone. There was little for historians to debate. In some ways he was an exotic character, with his unusual parentage and working-class background. In his early life he was often portrayed as 'foreign', even Jewish, but this lessened after he entered parliament and became more prominent. He did not, however, accept any persona other than that of a thoroughgoing decent Englishman. Mundella could not compete for the public's attention with the likes of Disraeli, Chamberlain, Dilke and Parnell. Whilst the main aim of this thesis is not to boost Mundella's status, it does endeavour to re-establish his importance in the areas discussed.

Irrespective of the issues which Mundella espoused, and the success or failure of his efforts, his character has received some analysis in this thesis. He was not an intellectual, nor even a very original thinker. He had followed Shaftesbury in agitating for improved factory working conditions. He had used the French *Conseils des Prud' Hommes* as the model for his Nottingham Arbitration and Conciliation Board. He was only one among many who championed an extended national education system. Mundella, however, brought several assets to the battle to improve each of these elements of Britain's social fabric. He adopted a practical approach that allowed him to compromise to achieve some of his objectives. He co-operated with political opponents when it was necessary and rejected the dogmatic positions often adopted by his Liberal Party colleagues. He consistently demonstrated the attitude of a pragmatic businessman. Above all else, Mundella exhibited a tenacity and constancy of

purpose that few others showed. His lifelong efforts to improve education, especially for the working class, amply illustrate this.

Armytage sub-titled his biography of Mundella, *The Liberal Background to the Labour Movement*. The first recognised working-class members of parliament were the two mining union officials, Alexander MacDonald and Thomas Burt, both elected in 1874. This was only a few years after Mundella was first returned. MacDonald and Burt were supported in their election by the Liberal Party but were paid by their unions. This was the beginning of the Lib-Lab MP, a temporary phenomenon before the formation of the Labour Party. Mundella would never have been classified as a Lib-Lab. Everything he did and said showed him to have been a mainstream, if radical, Liberal. Nevertheless he was one of the first MPs to come from a working-class background. His successful parliamentary career must have shown other working-class men just what could be achieved.

Mundella's achievements may be looked upon as typical of the upward mobility of late-Victorian society. The aristocratic and landed gentry's hold on parliament was diminishing. There was a greater emphasis on state involvement in everyday life. Mundella was part of these changes and deserves better recognition than he has been accorded, if only because his story so well represents the changing times.

Although this thesis specifically deals with Mundella's contribution to important social reforms, it also reflects both the priorities of the era and how later historians have viewed them. This was the time when Britain was, by a long way, the most powerful country in the world. It was, however, already facing challenges from the United States and Germany. This was recognised, somewhat reluctantly it seems, by some, but generally there was a feeling of complacency. Most British industrial businesses were still family controlled, without professional management. Little attention was given to such matters as cost accounting and production control. The existing higher education system did little to produce managerial and technical people for industry.

There were a number of matters, other than that of education, which contributed to the decline of Britain's industrial dominance. The emphasis in this thesis, because of Mundella's priorities, is on the impact of inadequate technical and

commercial education. There was a general feeling that there was something un-English in a state-directed technical education system.

Much has been written on the development of labour law during Mundella's time. Today it is difficult to believe that during his lifetime trade unions went from being illegal, although widely tolerated, to having their representatives elected to parliament. This thesis identifies the combination of doctrine and fear as the main determinants of attitudes towards unionism. Both sides of politics believed in 'self-help' and adherence to laissez-faire ideas. The idea that an Englishman needed to combine with others to achieve improvements in working conditions and wages was ridiculed by many influential men. Luminaries such as Richard Cobden and John Bright were typical. Many business owners feared that effective unionism would simply lead to increased production costs. The evidence presented at the 1868 Royal Commission on Trade Unions, and particularly the minority report, triggered legislation that eventually led to legal status for unions. Mundella was part of this movement and his role is highlighted in this thesis.

Education was the most important issue that concerned Mundella. The connection between technical education and Britain's relative manufacturing decline has been discussed earlier in this section. However, the debate on state-sponsored primary education was more widespread, and often heated. Up until the passing of the 1870 Education Act, the provision of elementary education had been dominated by religious bodies, particularly the Church of England. Many individuals had argued that free, compulsory, non-sectarian education should be provided for all young children. This became a well organised political movement in 1869, with the formation of the National Education League. Although its origins were in Birmingham, it found supporters nationally. However, its driving forces continued to be from that city. The most important of these were George Dixon, a Birmingham MP and an Anglican, and Joseph Chamberlain, a Unitarian. Although often portrayed as a non-conformist organisation, the League did attract some Anglicans, including Mundella. Chamberlain's religious affiliation and his dedication to improving primary education provided the springboard for his entry into municipal and national politics. Arguments from members of the League and others with strong views on the issues reached a peak during the Commons debates and public meetings leading up to the passing of



the 1870 Act. Much of this, although concentrating on Mundella's input, has been analysed in Chapter 3 of this thesis. The compromises necessary to achieve the Bill's passage meant that controversy and attempts to amend the Act continued for many years.

Mundella's political career encompassed some ground-breaking social reforms which, at the time, provoked considerable argument. By analysing Mundella's work, the changing priorities of a society which was increasingly subject to state involvement, are highlighted. This increase is discussed in the introductory section of this thesis. Most of the historiography of this movement concentrated either on the changes over time or its impact on specific industries or organisations. Little was said about the individual parliamentarians who enabled the state to become more involved in matters which, in general, improved the life of working people.

Virtually all of Mundella's legislative achievements involved the state becoming more involved in the everyday life of the British people. They ranged from improving the working conditions of young boys in brickwork clay pits to ensuring that British seamen were paid at home and not at a foreign port. His main successes were in the areas of industrial relations and education, with government becoming more involved in direct control and the extension of detailed reporting.

Mundella had dedicated much of his career to improving the relationship between employers and unions. His personal effort in his own hosiery through the Nottingham Arbitration and Conciliation Board emphasised the need for co-operation between the parties, free from outside influences. Once in parliament, however, he quickly saw that the legal recognition of unions was necessary to facilitate the more general use of the conciliation process. Although the passing of the 1871 Trade Union Act might be seen simply as a recognition of the already tolerant attitude to union activities, it was state involvement, and Mundella was in the middle of the campaign which achieved it.

In regard to education, something which had concerned Mundella since his own minimal schooling days, he was an important supporter of Forster's 1870 Act which aimed to provide elementary education for all children. The Act was not without its flaws, and was severely criticised by, especially, many Nonconformists for its support for continuing sectarian education. Mundella worked hard to ensure that the

Bill passed, accepting its shortcomings, in order to better educate the nation's youth. Both Forster and Mundella saw that state involvement was necessary to provide a universal system. Mundella again used legislation to introduce compulsory elementary school attendance in his 1880 Act.

These changes probably received more attention at this time as Britain was essentially at peace throughout the period. Domestic issues were thus thrust into the limelight. Towards the end of the 1880s international issues started to become more important. The problem of home rule for Ireland and the increasing military build-up in Germany began to influence political priorities, and perhaps began to distract contemporaries from the achievements of men such as Mundella.

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