

**From the Corn Laws to Free Trade: Interests, Ideas, and Institutions in Historical Perspective.** By Cheryl Schonhardt-Bailey. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006. xiii; 426 pp. \$47.50.

Why did the British Conservative party split in 1846 over the repeal of the Corn Laws? Cheryl Schonhardt-Bailey's answer is that, until then, the Tories were held together by the thoroughly Conservative idea of the "territorial constitution"—that the country should be ruled by the owners of its acreage. It was Peel's skill that he subverted this idea, claiming that free trade in corn, once an enemy of the territorial constitution, was now a concession it must make for its survival. Otherwise the forces building up under the tutelage of the Anti-Corn Law League would not stop at the repeal of the Corn Laws but march on to a universal suffrage democracy.

It is this thesis that Schonhardt-Bailey defends with some ingenious statistical techniques. Initially she explores the power of the Anti-Corn Law League. Any such pressure group, she argues, must be both concentrated and diffuse in order to succeed—concentrated enough to give a connected handful of leaders a major personal stake in its success, but diffuse enough to recruit widespread parliamentary support across the country. It sounds plausible, although the statistical evidence the author produces is anything but conclusive. Local donations to the league are regressed on the amount of export industry in the area and on a dummy variable for Lancashire. The export factor, though correctly signed, comes out as insignificant in all six regressions. Lancashire, by contrast, is highly significant, but this proves nothing as to whether concentration qua concentration built the league's success. If Lancashire was anyway predisposed to support the league, concentration away from Lancashire might have been worse than no concentration at all.

Chapter 5 tests and confirms the hypothesis that the MPs' votes depended partly on their constituents' interests. Chapter 6 employs NOMINATE, a program for arranging politicians along an ideological scale. The author takes every division in the 1841–47 Parliament and classifies each vote on each issue on a Left-Right axis. Each MP thus gets an ideological score. But now, to find his "true" ideology, she regresses all MPs' scores on the character of their constituencies and their party allegiances. The residual in each case is personal ideology.

Regressing MP votes about repeal on ideology thus measured, Schonhardt-Bailey gets a striking result—the collapse of ideology into insignificance, suddenly and

in 1846. This, she argues, supports her thesis that Peel, by cutting the link between Protection and Conservatism, freed his MPs to take up their constituents' economic interests. The tension between the roles of trustee and delegate was resolved in favor of the latter. But can the figures in fact bear this interpretation? Surely the imperative of the territorial constitution would either have held back ideological self-expression (in which case Peelite liberation would have *strengthened* the influence of ideology) or else would itself have been a part of the MPs' general ideology, in which case ideology changed so drastically in 1846 that NOMINATE scores cannot be projected beyond 1845.

It is in the second half of the book that the most interesting innovation comes in. Correspondence analysis looks for linguistic patterns held in common by particular groups (Peelites, landowners, people speaking at the first reading) and the differences of pattern between each of these groups. Having found one such "pattern of patterns," you winnow it out of the speeches and see if you can do the trick again with the residual. If you stop there (as Schonhardt-Bailey does), you are left with two "factors," and positions can be plotted on a two-dimensional diagram. Correspondence analysis does not of itself tell you what these dimensions represent, but Schonhardt-Bailey makes a good case for seeing the first one as economic versus political argumentation. This in turn draws out the contrast between the mainly political themes in the first reading of the repeal bill in 1846, and the much more economic arguments of the third reading. "Once victory seemed probable," the author interprets, "it is clear that MP's were keen to go on record advocating free trade for reasons that secured the interests of their constituents" (188).

This is an ambitious book. As the author comments, most previous work on the subject has viewed it through the filter of ideas *or* interests *or* institutions—the filter being chosen to suit the writer's preferred methodology, which in turn all too often depends on what he or she is least bad at doing. *From the Corn Laws to Free Trade* sculpts the three approaches into a whole, and in doing so gives the story an original and persuasive interpretation. It is a modest as well as an ambitious book so far as Schonhardt-Bailey is scrupulous in pointing out the limitations of her techniques along the way. As has been implied, this reviewer thinks there are one or two points where she might have been more modest still. But, whatever its flaws, this is a better and much more invigorating book than the safe, polished, and narrow effort that many an economic historian would have regarded as adequate.