CHAPTER 15

Muddling Through: The Rhetoric on Conservatism and Revolution in the London *Times*, 1789–2010

Joris van Eijnatten

> [...] the British tradition of ad hoc answers and muddling through becomes quite appealing when compared with the continental tradition of constitutional reform through coup, revolt, revolution or conquest.
>
> TIM HAMES

•••

> Britain's unrivalled history of success as a moderate, tolerant and democratic nation has always been based on the principle that evolution is preferable to revolution.
>
> ANATOLE KALETSKY[1]

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1 Introduction

This article examines the way a major British newspaper, the London *Times*, defined "conservatism" in relation to "revolution" in over two centuries of journalism. The understanding that conservatism first arose in contradistinction to the French Revolution, that it "had its origins in a movement of opposition hostile to the progressive potential of 1789", with Edmund Burke as its main British progenitor, is a trope commonly adhered to by philosophers, historians and

1 Tim Hames, "Year of the constitution," *Times* (4 January 1999); Anatole Kaletsky, "To the barricades, my fellow irrationalists," *The Times* (19 June 2003). All references to the Times are through *The Times Digital Archive* (https://www.gale.com/intl/c/the-times-digital-archive, accessed 31 October 2020).

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political ideologues.[2] True, there are exceptions to this commonly held view; not all writers define conservatism explicitly as a movement that understood itself as a self-conscious alternative to the French Revolution. The index of philosopher Roger Scruton's *How to Be a Conservative* has no entry on 'revolution' but refers his readers to "socialism" instead, leaving it to them to assess the relationship between the two.[3] Nor does E.H.H. Green's *Ideologies of Conservatism* waste any words on the French Revolution, although he does mention "Bolshevism", if only on three pages.[4] Yet in all cases a revolution of sorts is implied. Few will dispute that conservatism derives its meaning at least in part from the philosophical, historical and moral opposition to everything the term revolution evokes: social rupture, grand schemes, political speculation, left-wing utopianism and at times ostensibly less dramatic manifestations of change such as technological progress and Western modernity. How did the view of conservatism as something 'anti-revolutionary' play out in public opinion over a longer period of time? That is the question this chapter seeks to address.

A newspaper like the *Times* is a general newspaper. Most accounts mentioning revolution or counter-revolution or conservatism are news items that attempt to report objectively, factually and dispassionately, and give little or no insight into the nature of British conservative rhetoric. The newspaper articles that do offer such insight are those that comment directly on revolutions from the perspective of conservative ideas, or otherwise imply a relation between the one and the other. The challenge, then, is to find the articles that do this (such as letters to the editor, editorials, reports on parliamentary proceedings, and so on), and to construe a general pattern on the basis of these articles. To achieve this end, a combination of methods was used. The digitized *Times* data set, spanning the years between 1785 and 2010 and available 'in bulk' as a series of XML (eXtensible Markup Language) files, was first extracted in csv (comma separated values) format. This data was then analyzed using self-developed tools coded in the computer language Python and consisting of a reader, an n-gram viewer and tools for the analysis of collocations and so-called word embeddings. 'Close reading' was performed using the reader, on the basis of a selection of all items containing both "conserv*" and "revolut*" as keywords. To accommodate errors produced by faulty optical character recognition

2 Richard Bourke, "What is Conservatism? History, Ideology and Party," *European Journal of Political Theory* 17 (2018), 449–75. I refer to this insightful article for further literature on conservatism.

3 Roger Scruton, *How to Be a Conservative* (London: 2014).

4 Ewen Henry Harvey Green, *Ideologies of Conservatism. Conservative Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: 2002).

(ocr), the keywords were written as regular expressions. N-grams, contiguous sequences of words derived from the textual data, were generated in a range of n = 1 to n = 5; where n = 2, the n-grams are called bigrams. Collocations were derived used the Python package nltk,[5] based on bigrams with a window of 9 left and 9 right, and taking into account only bigrams with a frequency higher than 2. Word embedding models were generated using Python package Gensim,[6] on chronologically plausible subsets of at least 100 million words each, using a window size of 10 and 12 iterations.[7]

Together, the tools were used to trace so-called "value-laden semantic fields". These semantic fields involve ideas and beliefs, have normative connotations, are highly iterative and vary over time. In our case, they involve the conceptual relationship between conservatism and revolution, two normative terms that have sufficiently high scores to be meaningfully approached in this way. Between 1785 and 2010 'revolution' occurs more than 160,000 times, 'conservative(s)' approximately 400,000 times and 'conservatism' around 13,000 times. How anti-revolutionary was British conservatism? To what extent does the notion of 'revolution' figure in conservative rhetoric in the *Times* between 1785 and 2010? To elicit an answer from the data these terms need to be examined from the different perspectives afforded by the tools. Table 15.1 offers an initial entry into the semantic field in question by looking at bigrams containing the word 'revolution'. Plainly, 'French Revolution' is the most popular bigram, while "counter" and "glorious revolution", which have an evident bearing on conservatism, respectively rank 13 and 14. In fact, most bigrams have a relation with conservatism, and in most cases that relation is a negative one: in the eyes of conservatives, Bolshevik and sexual revolutions tend to be morally reprehensible. But what, exactly, was the relation between the two?

In what follows, I will trace patterns evidencing the semantic relationship between conservatism and revolution through the whole *Times* corpus. The results of the analysis have been divided over four chronological sections, respectively ending around 1840, 1890, 1960 and 2010. In each case the focus is on what appears to be the dominant theme in the semantic field connecting revolution with conservatism.

5 https://www.nltk.org/ (accessed 31 October 2020).

6 https://radimrehurek.com/gensim/models/word2vec.html (accessed 31 October 2020).

7 The methods used for this article are outlined at greater length in Joris van Eijnatten and Ruben Ros, "The Eurocentric Fallacy. A Digital-Historical Approach to the Concepts of 'Modernity', 'Civilization' and 'Europe' (1840–1990)," *International Journal for History, Culture and Modernity* 7 (2019), 686–736.

TABLE 15.1 The productivity of 'revolution' in the *Times* between 1785 and 2010. The table shows the top 20 adjectival bigrams (in which the word 'revolution' is preceded by a qualifying adjective), arranged according to the frequency of their occurrence over the whole corpus

Bigram	Corpus frequency
French revolution	8,483
industrial revolution	4,486
cultural revolution	3,632
Russian revolution	2,466
social revolution	2,074
American revolution	1,163
great revolution	1,063
world revolution	829
complete revolution	814
Islamic revolution	801
October revolution	720
quiet revolution	689
counter revolution	670
glorious revolution	603
political revolution	577
technological revolution	560
Bolshevik revolution	529
green revolution	468
first revolution	456
sexual revolution	453

2 Glorious Revolution: A Foreign Event

It does not come as a surprise that in the aftermath of the "Age of the Democratic Revolution" all things revolutionary would be mentioned in the papers.[8] "French Revolution" was a common enough bigram, with sixty-two hits in 1791, and much more frequent in this period than 'American Revolution' (see Table 15.2).

8 Robert Roswell Palmer identified that age as the period between 1760 and 1800 in his *The Age of the Democratic Revolution* (Princeton: 1959).

TABLE 15.2 Absolute frequency of four bigrams in the *Times*, 1785–1839, per five-year period

	French revolution	American revolution	Counter-revolution	Glorious revolution
1785–1789	20	4	0	29
1790–1794	208	1	67	15
1795–1799	154	2	6	7
1800–1804	75	0	1	1
1805–1809	24	1	0	7
1810–1814	28	1	2	3
1815–1819	135	4	5	14
1820–1824	110	1	18	18
1825–1829	101	4	6	17
1830–1834	300	4	7	84
1835–1839	170	12	9	20
Totals	**1325**	**34**	**121**	**215**

In time, these particular bigrams became real concepts rather than just descriptive terms, denoting more than just specific events located in time and space; they came to be laden with meaning, and associated with such values as "freedom" and "equality".

This did not apply to a whole range of related bigrams that appeared in newspaper articles in the early decades of the 19th century and referred to the Spanish, Polish, Neapolitan, Piedmontese, Greek, Belgian and other local or national revolutions. In the newspapers these remained just what they originally were: mere events. For the *Times*' writers there was often something less than pleasant about these events. Collocations are useful here, using a measure to determine the strength of a relationship between words.[9] In this case, words that collocated strongly with "revolution" in the early decades were "horrors", "anarchy" and "excess". Such negative terms perhaps reflect a "conservative" position, although most newspapers (and most readers) would have rejected mutiny and violence. Hence the many other negative associations with "revolution", such as "abyss" (1819, 1830), "diabolical" (1821), "frightful" (1822), "disaster"

9 Based on a PMI score of words to the left of "revolution". "Strongly" means a PMI score of 5.0 or higher and a frequency of the collocating word (in this case, "horrors") of 10 or higher.

(1823), "horrible" (1827), "dread" (1828), "misery" (1829), "abusive" (1832), "disastrous" (1834), "folly" (1838) and "atrocity" (1840).[10] As for the term "counter-revolution", this began to appear frequently from the 1820s onwards, when it indicated a specific movement or event that contested a specific insurrection. The word was not used at the time as a generic opposition to revolution.

Surprisingly, despite its association with turmoil and violence, "revolution" was frequently also framed positively. There is an explanation for this. Given that the French Revolution was still used very straightforwardly as a revolution that happened to take place in France, the most frequently occurring, value-laden, multi-purpose bigrammic soundbite of the time was 'glorious revolution' (see Table 15.2). Even more surprisingly perhaps, in most cases the bigram 'glorious revolution' did not refer to 1688, as one might have expected in an English newspaper. All contemporary revolutions that overthrew tyrannical despots while ensuring a degree of respectable stability in the aftermath were considered glorious. True, a collection of particularly bad poetry from 1791 praised, with a good measure of irony, the recent glorious revolution in France "by which Twenty-five Millions of civilized People are reduced from a great and ancient Monarchical Government to a Savage Anarchy."[11] More characteristic for the transnational mobility of meanings, however, was an 1830 sonnet that lauded the French Revolution of that particular year as glorious for having restored a constitutional monarchy.[12] The *Times* quoted the French liberal *Journal des Débats*, which had made a point of framing revolution as in essence something conservative:

> (…) the revolution in its object, in its true spirit, is in the eyes of this party regarded far more conservative than destructive. It overthrew a dynasty, but only to preserve the laws. It expelled men, only to save things. It has done what the restoration should have done, by establishing a monarchy truly constitutional.[13]

Even when the home-grown British revolution of 1688 was meant, it was not necessarily invoked in an anti-revolutionary spirit. The Revolution Society in

10 "Anarchy" collocates particularly strong to the right of "revolution" after 1818, under the same conditions as in the previous note.

11 "Songs, Parodies, and Choruses, for the Celebration of The Glorious Revolution in France", *The Times* (14 July 1791).

12 Robert Folkestone Williams, "Sonnet, On the Late Glorious Revolution in France," *The Times* (28 August 1830).

13 "London, Monday, September 13, 1830," *The Times* (13 September 1830).

London, established at the 1788 centenary, advertised in the *Times* that the Glorious Revolution be "celebrated with zeal and spirit by every Friend to the British Constitution". But the Revolution Society was an association of radicals and not a conservative club.[14]

Not everyone who commended the Glorious Revolution of 1688 was necessarily conservative in the sense of being a Tory; most self-respecting Whigs, too, valued 1688 as the anchor of British politics.[15] In the Commons the "true" meaning of the British Glorious Revolution was regularly contested, however, and this brings us closer to "conservatism". For example, the Irish Tory John Leslie Foster defended the unity of church and state that had been "permanently established" in 1688. "It had grown up with our civil freedom," he said, "and was necessary for its security."[16] Around 1829 such religious exclusivity was a certain sign of Tory politics. One Whig opponent commented on a Tory politician, who, in praising the "principles" of the Glorious Revolution,

> appeared by his speech to know of no reason for his attachment to that cause than its antiquity, and who so resolutely advocated the continuance of laws excluding the Catholics from the benefit of the constitution, not on account of their expediency or necessity, but merely because they were old; as if bad laws, like good wine, became better by keeping.[17]

Such, it seems, was the intellectual quality of conservative debate at the time. It was the kind of criticism that would dog conservative politicians and writers for another two centuries. What, exactly, was conservatism? The tension between continuity and change was not very amenable to being theorized, which was something most conservative thinkers would have disliked doing anyway.

Another way of determining the relevance of "revolution" to "conservatism", apart from bigrams and collocations, is to examine whether these words occurred in similar semantic contexts. In terms of methodology, this means determining whether they shared similar distributions of words. We can do this by using vector space models ("word embeddings") to calculate the words "most similar" to a specific keyword, in either a synonymic or antonymic sense. A couple provisos are in order. "Revolution" and "conservatism" are not

14 "Sixteenth Time. Theatre Royal, Covent-Garden," *The Times* (29 October 1790).

15 Cf. the political advertisement placed by the Whig politician Lord William Russel in 1796: "Opera Concert, Great Room, Haymarket," *The Times* (16 May 1796).

16 "House of Commons, Monday, May 3," *The Times* (4 May 1819).

17 "Newark Election," *The Times* (9 March 1829); the quote is by a "Mr. Pearson" and refers to the Tory Michael Thomas Sadler.

direct antonyms (one might expect a word like "progressivism" to work better), while the method is less precise for the early 19th century because of the less than perfect ocr quality of the data. Nevertheless, some conclusions can be drawn. Word embeddings for the *Times* between 1811 and 1830 result in a range of synonyms for "revolution": "anarchy", "insurrection", "overthrow", "commotions", "troubles", "rebellion", "revolt", and so on (Fig. 15.1). Antonyms include "despotism", "dynasty" and "monarchy" but not "conservatism". This absence was to be expected, given that the word "conservatism" only began to be used as such in the 1830s.

Newspaper discourse thus built on 18th-century concepts: revolution was suggestive either of *ancien régime* anarchy or a variety of "glorious"

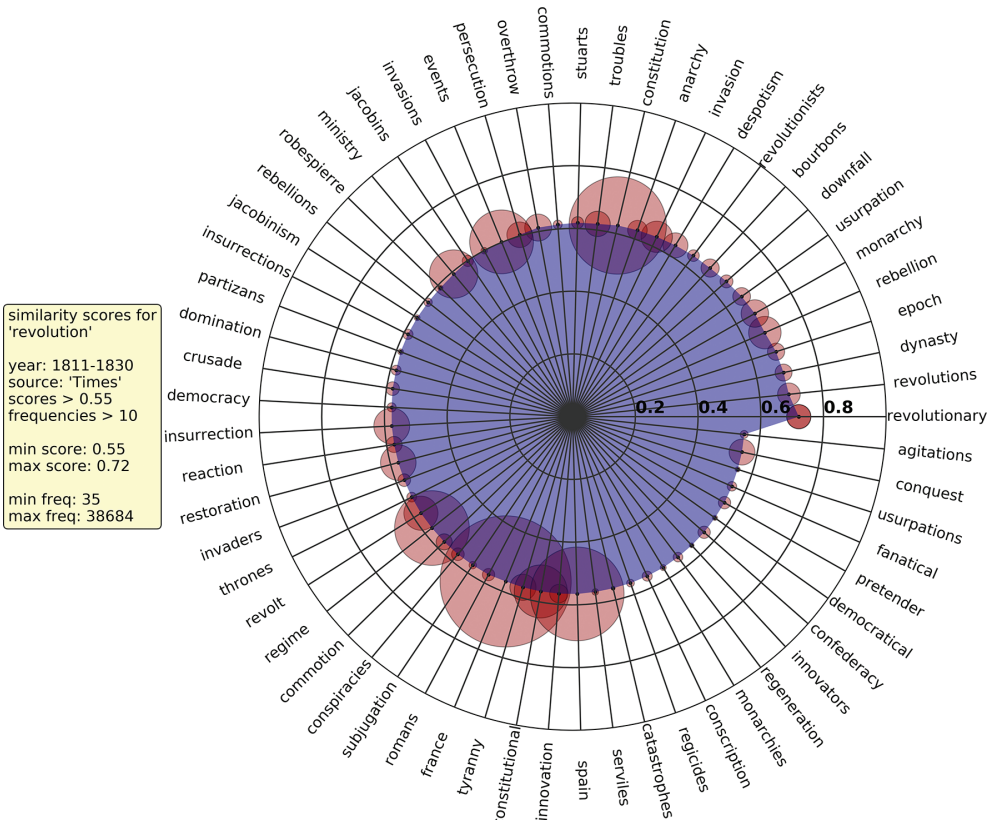

FIGURE 15.1 Similarity scores for the words "revolution", based on unigram embeddings of the *Times* (1811–1835). The radial graph shows the similarity score of each word in relation to the word "revolution", for all values equal to or higher than 0.55; the higher the score, the greater the similarity. The red circles reflect the occurrence of each word in the dataset for the period in question; words with frequencies lower than 10 have been discarded

constitutional antidotes, both British and foreign. Terms like "revolutionary principles", "revolutionary projects" or "revolutionary spirit", which implied that "revolution" was more than just a political event but had become an idea, were absent before 1840 but became more common later in the century. Unlike other European languages, the simple word "anti-revolutionary" never figured largely in British English. The OED mentions the bigram "anti-revolutionary wars" as an early instance, dating from 1830.[18] However, in the *Times* the only 19th-century bigram worth mentioning in this respect is "anti-revolutionary bill", which only appeared in 1895. The term, incidentally, is distinctly transnational, deriving from the ant-socialist legislation in the German Empire (the so-called *Umsturzvorlage*).[19]

3 Destructives and Unionists: Against Reformism and Separatism

The most important conclusion to be drawn from vector space models is that the word "revolution" does not, in fact, occur as an antonym of "conservatism", even once the latter began to be used. However, the models for words most similar (and dissimilar) to "conservatism" rather than "revolution" display some interesting relationships. Obviously, "conservative" and "conservatives" have a very strong semantic relationship with "conservatism"; for that reason these words were excluded. In the model for the *Times* between 1831 and 1840 (Fig. 15.2), "Tories" and "Toryism" turn up, as do their opposites "Whigs" and "Whiggism". "Principles", a common term of the time suggesting something of an ideology, and often reflected in the presence of words ending in "ism" (like conservatism), is prominent as well.[20]

For the purpose of this article it is of greater interest to look at words that are antonymic to "conservatism". Most telling are "reform" and "reformer(s)", as well as "radicalism" and "radical(s)", next to "chartism" and, curiously, the word "destructives". While "chartism" remains on the journalistic agenda for a while, "destructives" is limited to the 1840s. The term brings us a little closer to conservatism as an anti-revolutionary "ideology" or movement. Thus, the

18 "anti-, prefix1," *OED Online* (Oxford University Press); https://www-oed-com.proxy.library.uu.nl/view/Entry/8501?redirectedFrom=antirevolutionary (accessed 27 May 2019); the reference is to T.P. Thompson, *Exercises* (1842) I. 241.

19 "Index," *The Times* (9 April 1895): The "Anti-Revolutionary Bill (…) has been in great measure transformed by the Ultramontane and Conservative sections (…)".

20 See Joris van Eijnatten, "On Principles and Values: Mining for Conservative Rhetoric in the London Times, 1785–2010," *Digital Scholarship, Digital Classrooms: New International Perspectives in Research and Teaching. Proceedings of the Gale Digital Humanities Day at the British Library, May 2, 2019* (Farmington Hills, MI: 2020), 1–26.

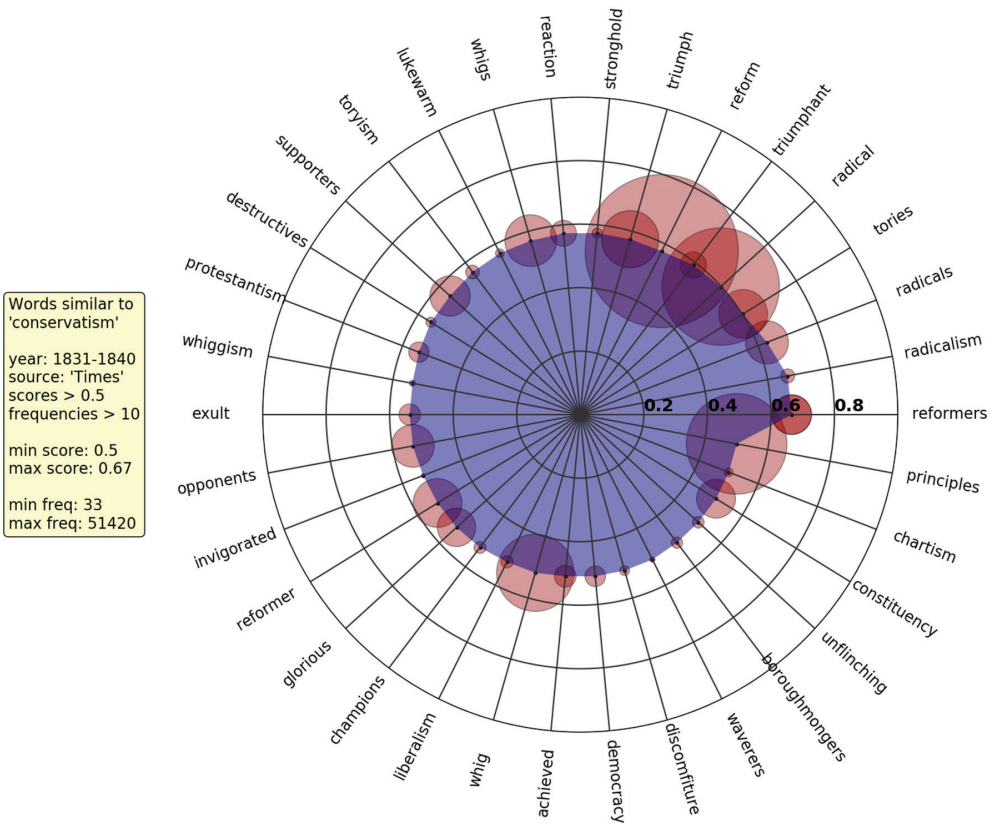

FIGURE 15.2 Similarity scores for the words "conservatism", based on unigram embeddings of the *Times* (1831–1840). The radial graph shows the similarity score of each word in relation to the word "conservatism", for all values equal to or higher than 0.5

conservative Sir Robert Harry Inglis, commenting on the Reform Bill of 1832, pointed out that its "object was not restoration, but revolution, and that its effect would be destructive, not conservative."[21] His opponents in similar vein accused "impudent Conservatives" of denouncing reform as "not English, but forced, exotic, and destructive of all our institutions."[22] The use in these years of the nounal form of destructive allowed conservatives to lump together "all classes of Reformers, Destructives, and Revolutionists"[23] and to call for a halt to the "career of the Destructives". Had the "immortal Burke" not said that "when bad men combine, good men should unite"? So too the current "friends

21 "House Of Commons, Monday, March 19," *The Times* (20 March 1832).
22 "London, Wednesday, May 30, 1832," *The Times* (30 May 1832).
23 "London, Monday, June 1, 1835," *The Times* (1 June 1835).

of social order" should come together under a common banner to resist "the assaults and threats of revolution", or, as another conservative put it, to arrest "the revolutionary march of that three-headed monster" of destructiveness, infidelity and sedition.[24]

Examining word vector models generated for later periods, we find that other, newer words used in contexts similar to "conservatism" began to appear between 1841–1850, such as "liberalism" and "liberals", in addition to "republicanism" and "democratical". In later years "peelite", denoting a conservative who defended (liberal) free trade, turns up as the counterpart to "protectionist". Another interesting word is "tendencies". The radical and liberal Richard Cobden, for example, arguing for universal suffrage in 1858, observed that "if the working classes had votes they would be quite as Conservative in their tendencies" as any other social group, since they would then have something to preserve or conserve. Unfortunately, people tended to elect as their leaders persons from a higher station than their own, which is why the middle classes voted for aristocrats.[25] In other words, the British working class just did not exhibit revolutionary proclivities, so that both Liberals and Conservatives could claim them as their own. In the context of the Irish question, "separatism" occurs in the 1880s, as does "unionists", meaning those who conservatively rejected Irish calls for independence. Liberal "gladstonianism" speaks for itself. At the very end of the century, "socialism" emerges. In brief, 19th-century British conservatism was not much given to distancing itself specifically from revolution: reformism, radicalism and liberalism were closer to the mark.

What about the adjective "conservative"? Does this give rise to "revolutionary" as its semantic opposite in vector space models? Between 1785 and 1810, we get "Tribunate", "Legislative" and "Senate", three governing bodies established under Napoleon in 1800. The third French body was the *Sénat Conservateur*, which in effect accounts for the early British use of this foreign word, as in "conservative senate".[26] In the 1830s this changes, when the words "conservative", "conservatives" and "conservatism" begin to appear in the newspapers as English words. Once "conservative" becomes a commonly used word, we obtain as its antonyms not "revolutionary" but "radical", "reformer", "whig'" and, again, "destructive". Another word also crops up, "sta(u)nch", a term used mostly in a political context and implying ideological steadfastness. The adjective went both ways, to the Left and to the Right: there were "stanch reformers" but also

24 "Bath Conservative Dinner," *The Times* (12 December 1835).

25 "Mr. Cobden on Reform in Parliament," *The Times* (23 January 1858).

26 The *OED* offers a number of examples of British word use from the 1830s, but refers to *parti conservateur* (1827) as an earlier French instance, as well as the journal *Le Conservateur* (1818).

"stanch conservative principles". In the 1840s we get "liberals" and "chartists", as well as another kind of radical: the "repealers", those who argued for a repeal of the Acts of Union of 1800 between Great Britain and Ireland. "Progressists" referred to foreign liberals in France, Spain, Bavaria, Belgium and Sweden, "Septembrists" to the Portuguese rebels of 1845. If anti-reform factions count as "anti-revolutionary", the "Adullamites" of the 1860s, a group of British MPs who opposed a second Reform Act, might qualify as such; however, they were Liberals, not Conservatives.

In response to the Irish question, the "unionists" sometimes came closest to being identified as anti-revolutionaries. In the 1880s "separatist" crops up as an antonym for "conservative", again in the context of Irish nationalism and the question of Home Rule; variations on the same theme are "federalist", the eponymous adjectives referring to Irish leaders ("Parnellite", "Dillonite", "Healyite") and "Nationalist", all referring to things that conservatives should reject. Nevertheless, while "revolutionary" itself was never used as an antonym for "conservative", conservative positions were often framed in a rhetoric related to revolutions. For example, an opponent of Irish Home Rule, the Liberal A.V. Dicey, repudiated the "revolutionary methods" of the nationalists, contrasting "constitutional, pacific, argumentative reform" with "revolution carried out by force".[27] In 1900 a later Conservative leader even published a novel on revolution, the moral of which seemed to be that revolutions generally come to nothing. "Mr. Winston Spencer Churchill is a good war correspondent," observed a critic, "but he is not a novelist".[28] The plot was set in the fictional country "Laurania", bringing home the point that, to the British, revolution was not transnational but mostly foreign.

4 Socialist Scourge: The Rise of Labour

Thus in the 19th century, British conservatism was hardly ever explicitly framed as an anti-revolutionary movement or ideology; revolutions and revolutionaries were to be found mostly abroad. Terrible things happened beyond the national borders, and such examples served as a warning to firebrands at home. In the 1840s, revolutions had been seen as convulsions, insurrections, anarchy, commotions, agitations, revolts, massacres, crises and rebellions,

27 "Unionism at Mossley," *The Times*, 1 November 1887.

28 *Times* (13 April 1900) on Winston S. Churchill, *Savrola: A Tale of the Revolution in Laurania* (London: 1900).

mostly associated with France.[29] In the second half of the 1910s, revolutions were understood in terms of bolshevism, communism, anarchy, socialism, the proletariat, disintegration, uprising, revolt, assassination, bloodshed, catastrophe, agitation, upheaval, terrorism, intellectuals, usurpers, disruption, conflict and Jacobins, mostly associated with Russia.[30] This would remain the general pattern until the second half of the 20th century, after which "revolution" began to be associated more generally with ideology (communism, socialism, Marxism), with class (proletariat, peasantry, bourgeoisie) and with post-colonial, nationalist aspirations.

If the French Revolution did not inspire British conservatives to identify themselves as anti-revolutionaries, the Russian Revolution and, more importantly, the associated isms (socialism and communism) certainly did. In the debates preceding the Parliament Act of 1911, on a reform of the House of Lords, Arthur Balfour framed tensions in terms of a "revolutionary or anti-revolutionary struggle". The term "anti-revolutionary" was now accepted more than before in the self-description of Conservatives, who also distanced themselves from 'Heaven forbid! – Socialists, Radicals, and Nationalists'.[31] It was the British Labour Party, which had gained a substantial number of seats in Parliament in 1918, that inspired both Liberals and Conservatives to identify themselves, in the words of Lloyd George, as "anti-revolutionary forces" united against the socialist "peril", a revolutionary party entertaining "subversive" Marxist doctrines.[32] As a Liberal, Lloyd George did try to distinguish himself from the Conservatives. He ironically observed that the Tories discovered to their chagrin "that the prevalent mood of the electorate of this country was definitely anti-revolutionary but quite positively progressive – that is, it was Liberal."[33] Conservative writers too appropriated the language of their foes, such the letter-writer who observed: "A peasant class is a stable, anti-revolutionary force, and provides a permanent counterweight to Socialism".[34]

Yet this anti-revolutionary rhetoric applied mainly to the 1920s. More often than not, "anti-revolutionary" was used as a foreign epithet. Foreign conservatives were styled as anti-revolutionary, such as the Italians, whose conflict with the Vatican deprived them "of the strongest anti-revolutionary elements

29 Word embeddings for "revolution," *The Times*, 1841–50.
30 Word embeddings for "revolution," *The Times*, 1916–20.
31 "Mr. Balfour In The City" *The Times*, 5 March 1910.
32 "Close The Ranks," *The Times*, 24 March 1921.
33 "Parties and their principles," *The Times*, 4 August 1928.
34 "Points from letters," *The Times*, 23 December 1924.

in the national character."[35] Above all the Netherlands was associated with a politically institutionalized anti-revolution, by virtue of the fact that a (Protestant) party of that name existed there. The pre-war *Times* initially identified it explicitly as the "Conservative 'Anti-Revolutionary' Party" but in later years described it as "Calvinist", which was closer to the truth.[36] At the same time, things "anti-revolutionary" continued to imply resistance to communism outside Britain. "Communism, it was discovered in Bulgaria this year", the paper reported rather gleefully in 1959, "has not, after all, abolished crime, especially among the young". The latter succumbed to "anti-revolutionary hooliganism", the root cause of which was an addiction to such Western, "anti-revolutionary cankers" as rock & roll, duffle coats, narrow trousers and pony tails.[37] In the Cold War era, revolutionism subsequently expanded far beyond Soviet Bloc politics and culture. In 1964 the *Times* noted: "In most of Africa and Asia today it is as important to have had a revolution as it was in 19th-century Europe to have a constitution." Nasser's Egypt, which regarded itself as revolutionary, saw Britain as "actively anti-revolutionary".[38] The term cropped up repeatedly after 1966 in the context of Mao's cultural revolution and the extermination of anti-revolutionary elements in China,[39] and incidentally in places ranging from Libya and Greece to Portugal and Ethiopia.

At home the debate on radical reform circled more traditionally around continuity versus change. The Left could still afford an outright rejection of permanency. "For we are the party of change", declared Labour Party leader Harold Wilson: "We seek not to conserve but to transform society (…) The greatest enemy that lies in our path in creating the kind of Britain we want to create is conservatism in all its forms."[40] Yet Labour now preferred to be not branded as revolutionary. The kind of change the Minister of Housing and Local Government in Wilson's government, Richard Crossman, advocated bordered on the conservative: "It was better for the reformer to be chastised as a laggard than branded as an irresponsible revolutionary", he quipped.[41] Soon outspoken socialists even began to describe themselves explicitly as "anti-revolutionary",

35 "After a prolonged period of doubt and difficulty," *The Times*, 17 May 1899.
36 "Elections in Holland," *The Times*, 28 April 1933; "Cabinet's Clash With Crown In Dutch Crisis," *The Times*, 10 February 1964.
37 "Bulgaria's Bleak Delights," *The Times*, 7 February 1959.
38 "The Thinning Mist," *The Times*, 23 July 1964.
39 "Chou believed to be checking Chinese hotheads," *The Times*, 27 February 1967.
40 "We Have Right To Nation's Backing," *The Times*, 5 October 1966.
41 "Parliamentary Commissioner seen as extra weapon for M.P.s," *The Times*, 19 October 1966.

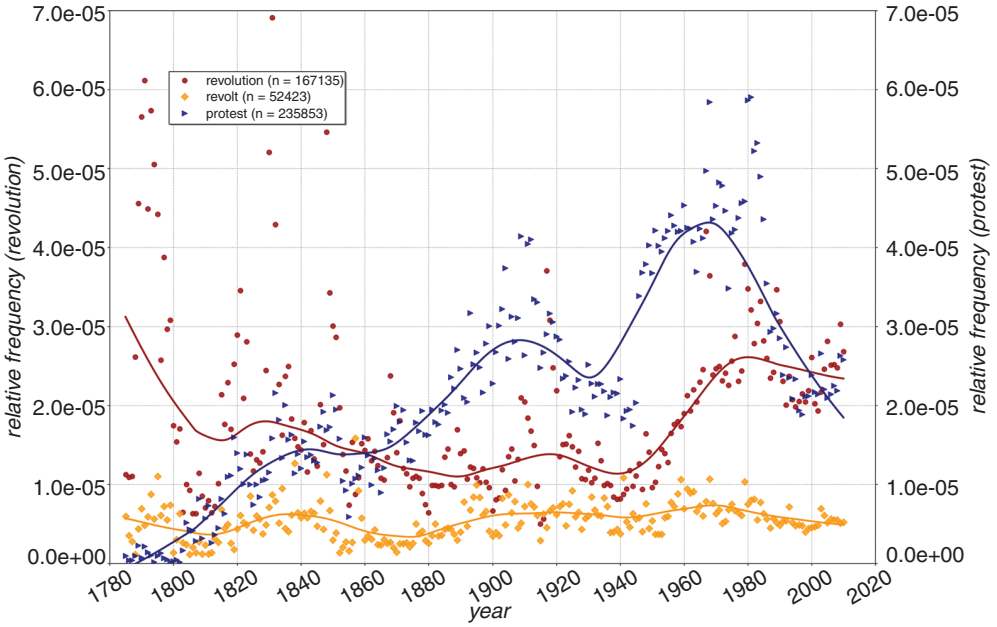

FIGURE 15.3 The relative frequency of the words "revolution", "revolt" and "protest" in the *Times* (1785–2010)

such as the Labour politician Denis Healey. Asked about his views on the redistribution of wealth, he proclaimed: "I'm a great believer in gradualism".[42]

In a cultural rather than political sense the distinction between radicals and conservatives came as prominently to the fore in the 1960s and 1970s as it had done in the 1920s. It even fed into theology. Conservatives – Billy Graham, for instance – were "proponents of personal and instant salvation" who did not believe that man could radically change the world, or even that he needed to. Christ would take care of that. Radicals like Martin Luther King, on the other hand, believed fervently that religious truth demanded social change. The *Times* associated Trevor Huddleston, an Anglican bishop known for his opposition to apartheid, with Dr. King's take on truth. It was for the Church "to recognize that that truth is revolutionary and that it is a most powerful solvent of traditional social ideas."[43] The protest movement of the Sixties added fuel to what had still been relatively moderate flames a decade before. As Fig. 15.3

42 "A Times Profile," *The Times*, 17 March 1975.

43 "Are religion and politics the same thing?," *The Times*, 5 November 1966, citing Trevor Huddleston's *Naught for Your Comfort* (1960).

shows, the years between 1940 and 1970 shows an enormous increase in the relative frequency of "revolution" and "protest", and to a lesser extent "revolt".

The later Labour politician David Triesman, introduced in 1970 as a "Marxist sociologist", distinguished between "three periods of rebellion" in British history, each of them brought about by the working class. The first coincided with the industrial and French revolutions; the second witnessed the rise of trade unionism at the beginning of the 20th century; the third had begun around 1968. It was marked by Labour's sell-out to the bourgeoisie and "by the collapse of ideology (…) into mere advertising slogans."[44] Ironically, the ideological polarization in the wake of the Sixties now put erstwhile opponents – social-democratic Labourites and all Conservatives – into the same dismal camp as anti-revolutionaries.

5 Disarming Revolution: Ironies and Paradoxes

In the aftermath of the Sixties, and despite the polarization, not many people would have expected a violent revolution to take place on British soil. Commentators began to play with the terms "revolutionary" and "anti-revolutionary" – a certain sign that they had begun to mean something different from before, when revolutions still occurred in earnest, as actual social events. The one exception that would remain deadly serious for decades was the Iranian Revolution of 1979. But that event, too, was paradoxical. As a very large number of newspaper accounts, particularly in the 1990s and 2000s, made abundantly clear, it had been a revolution engineered and institutionalized by (religious) conservatives. In other contexts, revolution became a fun idea, a useful metaphor for journalists to toy with, a term of moderate opprobrium for political commentators to tease with, and an intellectual windmill for quixotic traditionalists to battle with. The hardline, communist-style use of the word "anti-revolutionary" persisted after the 1970s, but that term too soon became a bit of a joke. In a prefiguration of the #Me Too movement, the *Times* reported with evident delight that Gerry Healy, the leader of the Workers Revolutionary Party, a Trotskyist splinter group in the UK, had committed "anti-revolutionary" acts of a sexual nature with more than twenty-six women.[45]

Revolutionism had become all but harmless. How did that affect conservatism? To understand the semantic field of this period, it is helpful to look at

44 "Making Britain safe for motherhood," *The Times*, 10 October 1970.

45 "Disciplinary panel studies WRP sex claims delay," *The Times*, 2 November 1985.

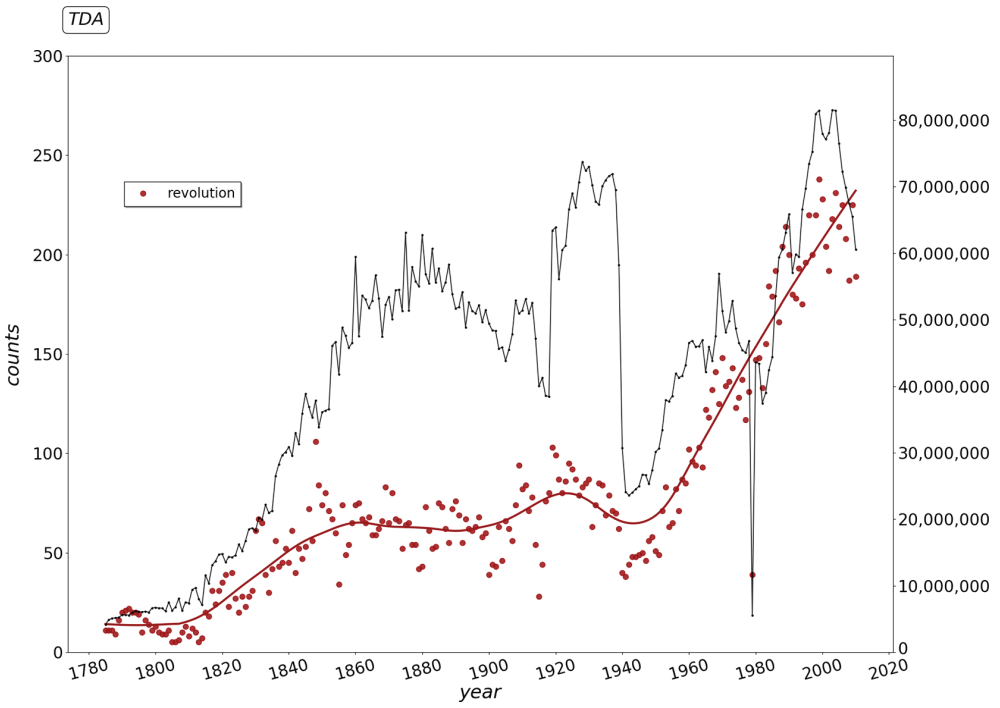

FIGURE 15.4 The bigram productivity for 'revolution' in the *Times* (1785–2010); only words of more than three characters have been taken into account. The black line represents the number of unique unigrams (i.e. words) per year, which can be taken as a tentative measure for the richness of the vocabulary; the values are displayed on the y axis to the right

the popularity of the word 'revolution'. This can be illustrated by its "bigram productivity", understood as the number of times the word occurs in combination with a unique adjective within a given time span (see Fig. 15.4).

The average productivity per year for each of six (unequal but historically cogent) periods is as follows: 23 unique bigrams (1785–1839), 63 (1840–1899), 73 (1900–1939), 48 (1940–1949), 102 (1950–1979) and 195 (1980–2010). Fig. 15.4 demonstrates an increase in productivity over the years, with a dip during World War II, and the highest degree of productivity (or rhetorical resourcefulness) between 1980 and 2010. The overall annual top scorer is 1999, with 238 different bigrams. The bigrams that occurred in the three final decades can be classified in a variety of ways: according to nation (French, Russian, American, Cuban, Mexican), date (1789, 1830, 1905, 1946, 1979), socio-economic domain (agricultural, technological, retail), media (TV, PC, digital, internet, information), religion and ideology (Islamic, communist, Bolshevik, feminist, Protestant), eating (food, culinary, gastronomic), fashion (punk, rock, raja),

entertainment (matrix, coconut), science (Newton's, medical), generation (teenage, youth), behavior (sexual), process (armed, violent, bloodless, peaceful, velvet, palace, silent, quiet), symbol (rose), months (October, December, February), politicians (Reagan, Thatcher, Gingrich, Blair) and, of course, color (orange, saffron, red, blue). "Blue" did not refer to Tories but to aquaculture; however, there was also a 'conservative revolution'.

Concerning the relation between conservatism and revolution in this period three paradoxes can be identified. The first suggested that blue conservatives and red revolutionaries often actually shared the same ideals. In 1971 the writer of an item called "Romantics to revolutionaries" noted that the radical Left, "the many voices of protest, the anarchists, the hippies, the followers of Marcuse", strongly resembled early 19th-century conservatives. Both "the extreme right, the literary Tories, Scott, Wordsworth and Southey" and the modern Marcusians rejected the (or rather some) outcomes of modernity, such as "depersonalized structures", "the growing centralization of discussions" and "the horrors of urbanization".[46] The second paradox followed Hannah Arendt's observation to the effect that the "most radical revolutionary will become a conservative on the day after the revolution" – a one-liner cited in a "memorable quotes" section in the *Times* in 2010.[47] And indeed, it is a well-known sociological paradox that the protest generation of the 1960s ultimately settled down, landed good jobs, made lots of money and bought large houses. But if they mostly remained leftist after 1968 that did not apply to their descendants. By 1984, the University of California, Berkeley, the cradle of the 1960s student protest movement, had become "a stronghold of conservatism, and born-again Christianity".[48] The revolutionary had turned conservative.

But the opposite also held, which leads to the third paradox: conservatives could, in effect, be revolutionary themselves. It was Margaret Thatcher who was consistently praised as the paragon of revolutionary conservatism. Initially this was not the case. With Labour still in power, Thatcher in 1976 published a statement of conservative aims called *The Right Approach* (playing with words increasingly became a political marketing strategy in these years, as spin doctors gained influence); it was meant to serve as "a call to arms for a counter-revolutionary blow against the advance of socialism". Yet in practice it was "classless, non-ideological, pragmatic" and focused on the political center.[49]

46 "Romantics to revolutionaries," *The Times*, 17 April 1971.

47 "The Daily Universal Register" *The Times*, 6 October 2010.

48 Ian Bradley "Make money, not revolution," *The Times*, 3 September 1984.

49 "Conservatives sound call to arms against the advance of socialism," *The Times*, 4 October 1976.

A year later the *Times* had completely changed its perspective. While Labour was described as the party of "pragmatism and compromise", Thatcher's political philosophy was seen not just as theological, ideological and dogmatic but as utterly radical and revolutionary.[50] Thatcherites themselves preferred to call the new conservatism "counter-revolutionary" because it rejected the broadly social-democratic effort to build the welfare state in which post-war conservatives themselves had participated.[51] Opponents likewise used the term "counter-revolutionary", but in a negative sense – as nothing less than revolutionary. "Mrs Thatcher has treated the middle ground with contempt" noted one member of the British SDP. "Where previous Conservative governments have stood for consolidation and continuity, hers stands, quite explicitly, for a counter-revolution".[52]

Thatcher's "economic, cultural and moral revolution"[53] divided opinion and led to a marked loss of direction among all parties. What kind of conservative was she? One opponent suggest that perhaps she was "a right-wing counter-revolutionary trapped in an essentially social democratic state", a radical compelled to abide by institutional rules.[54] In due course this conflation between the revolutionary and the counter-revolutionary was taken for granted, and critics and supporters simply denounced or praised Thatcher and all she stood for as outright revolutionary.[55] In the top twenty adjectival bigrams containing "revolution" printed in the *Times* between 1980 and 2010, the "Thatcher(ite) revolution" holds the seventeenth position with 206 hits. The term was usually not intended as a compliment. One of the "wets" during Thatcher's ministry typically censured her clique as a bunch of "politically deaf, dogmatic, ideological, unbalanced, and insensitive extremists".[56] Others lauded Thatcher's policies as the "Conservative meritocratic revolution of the 1980s"[57] which had paradoxically turned Labour into a conservative, counter-revolutionary party,

50 "Entry of religion into new Conservative politics," *The Times*, 17 April 1978.

51 Such as Nigel Lawson, quoted in "Tories have embarked on counter-revolution," *The Times*, 5 August 1980.

52 "Now we must turn hope into votes," *The Times*, 6 September 1983; the reference is to David Marquand.

53 "More than a creed of greed," *The Times*, 11 April 1988.

54 "The whirling thoughts of Mrs Thatcher," *The Times*, 8 May 1981.

55 Cf. Andrew Adonis and Tim Hames (eds.), *A Conservative Revolution? The Thatcher-Reagan Decade in Perspective* (Manchester: 1994).

56 "They cannot forgive her," *The Times*, 26 June 1984; the reference is to Francis Pym.

57 "The voters who want Tony Blair to be bold and William Hague to go have a clear choice in the European elections," *The Times*, 20 May 1999.

focused on "defending Britain against the Thatcher revolution".[58] Not entirely surprisingly, the bigram "Blair revolution" also occurred with some frequency, indicating Labour's about-turn from working-class socialism to middle-class managerialism.

Some conservative commentators, such as Conservative politician Norman Blackwell, believed it necessary "to carry forward a radical second stage of the revolution Margaret Thatcher started." But, he warned (apparently without any irony): "Revolutions are not comfortable."[59] More dispassionate observers suggested that Conservatives might be throwing out the baby with the bath water. One journalist noted that Thatcher had ejected the conservative appreciation of "the English nation as one unique and even mystical social, tribal, political and spiritual community" out of the window in favor of an "arena of conflicting interests."[60] Commenting on Prime Minister Tony Blair's 1999 conference speech, in which he opposed the left-wing "forces of modernity" with the right-wing "forces of conservatism", the journalist Anatole Kaletsky pointed out that the Tories under Mrs. Thatcher had "ceased to be conservatives and turned into Maoist radicals, believers in permanent revolution for its own sake". The people had accepted "the revolution of Thatcherite market fundamentalism" as something that needed to be implemented for a while, but Blair had come to power precisely because he was "a cautious, incremental, managerial sort of a leader, a 'safe pair of hands'."[61] If Tories wanted power, argued Kaletsky, they should stop acting like "passionate, sincere and wild-eyed revolutionaries' and start resembling more the "managerial automata" of New Labour.[62]

In time, the term 'revolutionary' became a self-imposed conservative sobriquet. The Conservative Society at UCL presented its society song in 2007. To the tune of *John Brown's Body* (which in the chorus became 'Tory Tory Alleluia'), students sang: "Maggie Thatcher walks on water, Maggie Thatcher walks on water, Maggie Thatcher walks on water, When the blue revolution comes".[63] William Hague had earlier launched his ill-fated Common Sense Revolution, declaring to draw on the "instincts of the people".[64] According to its critics,

58 "Alternative capitalism," *The Times*, 16 July 1987.
59 "Bring back the Tory revolution, William," *The Times*, 28 December 2000.
60 "More than a creed of greed," *The Times*, 11 April 1988.
61 "The madness of King Tony," *The Times*, 30 September 1999; the article was reprinted as "Dishonest and stupid — but still popular," *The Times*, 10 May 2007.
62 "Taxing our credulity," *The Times*, 7 October 1999.
63 "People," *The Times*, 2 March 2007.
64 "Hague savages 'the cult of Blair'," *The Times*, 4 October 1999.

the program was not just oxymoronic[65] but boiled down to "a right-wing revolution with a multibillion-pound price tag".[66] A few years later in Prague, Iain Duncan Smith called for a "democratic revolution", to achieve his vision of a Europe of national democracies rather than "soulless supranational institutions".[67] David Cameron suggested that an "intellectual revolution" might be a good idea,[68] and subsequently proposed a "responsibility revolution to create an opportunity society" ("in which everybody is a somebody, a doer not a done-for").[69] This was duly followed by a "rehabilitation revolution", a policy unveiled by Cameron to combat overcrowding in prisons.[70] A giggly journalist in the *Times* newsroom quoted Cameron on yet another conservative revolution, in this case a radical redistribution of power. "It was a John Lennon moment but then Dave ruined it by saying: 'Power to the people is one of the most deeply held Conservative ideas.'"[71] Revolution had become a conservative rallying cry; but the upheaval these politicians envisaged was a toothless revolt, and in fact a synonym for measured change.

One writer to the editor had his doubts about this right-wing lapse into revolutionary rhetoric: "can Conservatives claim to be setting up a revolution and still be Conservatives?" Perhaps the Conservative Party had been trying to change too much, rather than conserving what was worthwhile.[72] Wasn't it past time to pursue "stability, social harmony, continuity and the removal of conflict"?[73] Even worse, Conservative politicians actually began to speak in abstractions, something they had always found left-wingers guilty of. Under the influence of neoconservative ideology (although "ideology" was an abstraction to be avoided) they, too, used "metaphors of reform, rebirth and renaissance".[74] There seemed to be little difference anymore between left and right-wing rhetoric.[75] The ideas launched by David Cameron illustrate the way modern conservatives wrestled with their tradition. When he launched his idea for a "massive, sweeping, radical redistribution of power", Cameron contended that his "philosophy of progressive Conservatism – the pursuit of progressive goals through Conservative means" would make this possible. As

65 "Traditional values or off their trolley?," *The Times*, 8 October 1999.
66 "Heseltine stokes war on Europe," *The Times*, 5 October 1999.
67 "Tory chief taking us out of EU, says Clarke," *The Times*, 11 July 2003.
68 "Choose your poison, Tories," *The Times*, 7 November 2005.
69 "'Built to Last' manifesto given running repairs," *The Times*, 17 August 2006.
70 "Tories plan to reward successful prisons," *The Times*, 4 March 2008.
71 Ann Treneman, "A speed-dater's approach to history," *The Times*, 6 June 2007.
72 "Tory policy 'revolution'," *The Times*, 5 January 2001.
73 "Balancing the Tory ticket," *The Times*, 27 April 1989.
74 "The Tories must speak the language of earthlings," *The Times*, 10 May 2003.
75 See Van Eijnatten, "On Principles and Values".

a *Times* writer observed, this way of arguing was reminiscent of "new Labour Third Way thinking", that is a blend of left and right-wing political philosophy. "It means a little bit less every time you say it."[76]

The taming of conservatism had been some time in the making. The rhetoric of progressive change in the context of the welfare state had already figured prominently in the post-war conservatism of Macmillan and Heath. Asked why conservatives would carry through something as revolutionary as membership of the Common Market, prime minister Edward Heath replied: "Socialism is the doctrine of stagnation, conservatism is the policy of change." Conservatives survive because they adapt.[77] The aims of traditional Conservatism, observed Francis Pym, is "to conserve what is good and improve what is bad".[78] The argument harked back to the 19th century, but from the 1980s onwards it began to imply to commentators that conservatism lacked both content and color. One writer deplored the "vision-speak" vented by Conservative politicians and their "marketing quacks", relentlessly selling "big dreams and visions, new beginnings, fresh starts and change – always change". If real change were brought about such messages would make an impact, but if, as was more often than not the case, "the mission is managerial, the change gradual, and the core purpose continuity rather than revolution, vision-speak stales".[79]

There were always dissenting views, of course. The philosopher Roger Scruton, for instance, gave the "conservatives-as-anti-revolutionaries" thesis a twist by proclaiming that old-style socialists were actually anti-conservatives. It was the conservatives who over the 20th century had prevented Labour from blowing itself up, by deflecting it from its "revolutionary purpose" and forcing it to operate in an institutional, and hence non-revolutionary mold.[80] And to top it all, one journalist portrayed Karl Marx, on the occasion of the 1983 centenary of his death, as a staunch conservative ally. Marx's followers might imagine society to be one happy family, but their spiritual leader never thought of life in that way: "it is red in tooth and claw, without happy endings or solutions. Marx's tragic sense of life, his social pessimism, his anti-egalitarianism, his Homeric sense of the grandeur of conflict, his splenetic contempt of wets, his deep disbelief in people's good nature, is deeply acceptable to the conservative." And thus even Marx had become indispensable to the conservative struggle.[81]

76 "There is only one way out of this national crisis: a massive, sweeping, radical redistribution of power," *The Times*, 27 May 2009.

77 "Mr Heath in search of 'personality' of Ten," *The Times*, 18 February 1972.

78 "They Cannot Forgive Her," *The Times*, 26 June 1984.

79 "Cameron hasn't sealed the deal. Thank heaven," *The Times*, 3 October 2009.

80 "Why we need to conserve Labour," *The Times*, 8 March 1983.

81 "Marx: a theory for all parties," *The Times*, 16 March 1983.

6 Conclusion

Tracing semantic fields involving "conservatism" and "revolution" over time, this article has identified four broad temporal clusters; in each the tension between revolution and conservatism took on a different form. Before 1840 revolution was seen as something that ought to be spurned because it led to anarchy, but often it was also appreciated positively as the glorious installation of a traditional monarchy. In the second half of the 19th century the revolution was contextualized, above all, in terms English anti-reformism and Irish unionism, two political processes allied to conservatism. Particularly between the two world wars and during the first half of the Cold War, conservatism was defined as the nemesis of socialism and communism, both obviously closely connected to revolution, especially in its Russian guise. Finally, following the Sixties, revolution was rendered a harmless metaphor for hot-headed ideologues keen on subverting what they saw as an increasingly dysfunctional post-war welfare state, and ultimately an ironical epithet to be bestowed upon, or appropriated by, just about anybody.

Was all this "transnational"? To some extent perhaps: the semantic field in which revolution co-existed with conservatism owed its texture partly to un-British manifestations of untidy revolts and heated rebellions in foreign places. In that sense British conservative self-definitions in the *Times* are part and parcel of a broader European phenomenon. At the same time, conservatism in the *Times* was more about anti-reformism than anti-revolutionism. The "anti-revolutionary" element in British political thought never gained the semi-mystical status of a religious-philosophical principle, as it did at some points in time in France, Germany and the Netherlands.

This longitudinal analysis of a single semantic field needs to be augmented by similar analyses based on other comparable quality newspapers (such as the more left-wing *Guardian*),[82] in as many languages as possible. Given the combination of "close" and "distant" reading used in this article, pursuing this research agenda seems like a tall order. It is doable nevertheless, since this kind of digital historical research is a cumulative enterprise, in the sense that datasets can easily be combined to perform analyses based on the outcomes of this initial inquiry.

82 https://search.proquest.com/hnpguardianobserver (31 October 2020).

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