***Punch* and the British occupation of Cyprus in 1878**

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This article explores the criticisms levelled by the satirical illustrated newspaper Punch at the Beaconsfield Government's decision to occupy Cyprus in July 1878. The Government's public response to these in the media and Parliament will be analysed through the iconography of cartoons, poems and satirical commentaries and placed in their historical context. While historians have tended to use the cartoons as light-hearted comic relief and the poems and commentaries not at all, such material has real substance. The peculiar acquisition of Cyprus by the Beaconsfield Government excited passions, both euphoric and reproachful, in British political and newspaper circles. In order to determine the extent to which Punch's arguments were accurate, this article compares the actual policies with the views of the Beaconsfield Government and with those of Punch.

Background

Britain occupied Cyprus by virtue of the Anglo–Turkish Convention signed on 4 June 1878. Russia's victory in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–8 gave it the power to force the sultan to sign the Treaty of San Stefano on 3 March 1878, which overturned the balance of power in European and Asiatic Turkey. The Conservative Government of Lord Beaconsfield (Benjamin Disraeli) believed this to be a direct threat to British interests. Since the Treaty of Paris of 1854 had established that everything pertaining to the integrity of the Porte was for the joint cognisance of all the European Powers, the British Government managed to force another conference, in Berlin, with German and Austrian support, to overturn provisions in the Treaty of San Stefano and limit the perceived new Russian strategic advantage. British diplomacy managed to restrict Russian gains in Europe but had to accept a new strategic order in Asiatic Turkey. The Beaconsfield Government had foreseen this outcome and on 4 June 1878, before Europe began to debate the revision of the Treaty of San Stefano at the Congress of Berlin (12 June–13 July 1878), it secretly forced the sultan to sign the Anglo–Turkish Convention. In this agreement, Britain promised to defend Asia Minor alongside the Porte against further Russian attack in exchange for Ottoman administrative reforms there. So that this military obligation could be

fulfilled, the administration and occupation of Cyprus was ceded to Britain, though the island's international status remained unchanged. The Beaconsfield Government planned to convert Cyprus into a military and naval stronghold (or a *place d'armes*), from which to defend British interests in the Near East. The Conservatives wanted to protect the Ottoman Empire, especially in Asia, and secure a place to 'watch over' Egypt. In 1875 Beaconsfield (then Benjamin Disraeli) had purchased a substantial minority share for Britain in the Suez Canal, thus ensuring that this strategically vital economic and political lifeline that connected India, the 'jewel of the empire', with the Mediterranean became doubly important, while any further Russian penetration at the expense of Ottoman dominions in Asia would threaten the land barrier protecting India.¹

Punch

Punch or the London Charivari was one of the most popular satirical illustrated newspapers in the world. Its longevity attested to this; it ran for over 160 years.² The satirical French daily, *Charivari*, inspired wood engraver Ebenezer Landells and writer Henry Mayhew to found *Punch or the London Charivari* (or simply *Punch*). The first weekly issue appeared on 17 July 1841. To signify its intent to be humorous and satirical, *Punch* took as its name and masthead figure the anarchic glove puppet Mr Punch. Initially the paper defended the oppressed and adopted a Radical political orientation, but by the late 1850s it had moderated its views, was openly hostile towards Liberals as well as Conservatives and was looked upon less seriously and more as a light-hearted periodical.³ Coinciding with Beaconsfield's last and most significant Ministry (1874–1880) — which was dominated by the Eastern Crisis — was Tom Taylor's editorship of *Punch*. Under Taylor, *Punch* returned to its Radical roots by tackling the pressing issues of the day — especially the international issues — with an incisive approach.⁴ It did not shift from its main aim to amuse the public, but now politicians from both sides claimed to fear it.⁵ During the Eastern Crisis, *Punch* openly espoused an anti-Turkish stance without supporting the Russian cause. It was suspicious of Beaconsfield's foreign policies and steadfastly supported William Gladstone, Liberal Prime Minister from 1868–1874. These observations can be concluded from the views, arguments and perceptions made by *Punch* on the acquisition of Cyprus, one of the branches of the Eastern Question.

'Humpty-Dumpty!'

The first caricature, titled 'Humpty-Dumpty!', appeared on 20 July 1878⁶ and was the creation of John Tenniel, the famous illustrator of *Aesop's Fables*, *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*. Beginning at *Punch* in 1851, Tenniel succeeded John

Figure 1 'Humpty-Dumpty', *Punch*, 20 July 1878

Leech as chief cartoonist in 1864 and held this post until he retired in 1901. He was instrumental in turning *Punch* into a biting and satirical newspaper and a national institution.⁷

In 'Humpty-Dumpty!' Cyprus is depicted as a woman, a traditional allegorical figure in the nineteenth century — Britain had 'Britannia', Greece had 'Helen' and there are equivalents for France, the US and Australia. Tenniel had a predilection for the allegorical female,⁸ who usually represented liberty, virtue and justice and often a historical figure, as in the case of 'Helen', who was meant to conjure up images of 'Helen of Troy'. In the case of Cyprus, Tenniel probably had in mind Aphrodite, the goddess who according to tradition had risen from the foamed waves of Paphos in the south-west of the island. His choice implies that the media perceived Cyprus to be an island of eternal beauty and an earthly paradise where every man's desires would be met.

Tenniel was one of the few Conservative supporters to work with *Punch*, but this did not prevent him from satirising, often in a most critical way, the policies of the Beaconsfield Government.⁹ His particular way of depicting Beaconsfield, in a rather elevated pose, looking sharp and pompous, with a hint of arrogance, emphasised his aristocratic features, especially his curls, rather than his Jewish heritage, which many other cartoonists like 'Vincent' and 'Ape' (Carlo Pellegrini) of *Vanity Fair* had drawn attention to.¹⁰

Abdul Hamid II, Ottoman sultan from 1876–1909, is depicted as 'Humpty-Dumpty', a figure resembling Tenniel's Humpty-Dumpty from *Through the Looking Glass*. He is

drawn as a lovable and placid, with his hands folded, but in reality Abdul Hamid II was a ruthless tyrant who presided over a number of atrocities against his Christian subjects. The cartoon has Beaconsfield with Cyprus/Aphrodite putting the sultan back on his wall, which represents the 'Asiatic Frontier' or Asiatic Turkey, as was the aim of the Conservative Government in the Anglo-Turkish Convention. This interpretation is also clear from the verse:

Humpty-Dumpty!

Humpty-Dumpty sat on a wall;
Humpty-Dumpty had a great fall:
Dizzy, with Cyprus, and all the Queen's men,
Hopes to set Humpty-Dumpty up again.

In the traditional nursery rhyme mention is made of 'all the King's men', but here 'all the Queen's men' are referred to, in an allusion to Queen Victoria. Behind the wall arms pull ropes tied to the sultan, further suggesting he is a puppet 'Humpty-Dumpty'. The arms belong to the Queen's men, and probably refer to the military consuls that the British Government was to install throughout Asiatic Turkey to advise the Ottoman authorities on the implementation of reforms.

Punch and Tenniel are arguing in the cartoon that it requires Beaconsfield (representing the British Government) and Cyprus (the island), as well as the Queen's men, to secure the frontiers of the Ottoman Empire; perhaps it is also saying there are too many hands at work.

The actual deal — the Anglo-Turkish Convention or, as it is popularly known, the Cyprus Convention — is seen by *Punch* as a stain on British politics because of the secretive and underhand way it was obtained. This view is made evident by the way Beaconsfield is shown standing over a gutter, implying that he had followed the tactics of 'gutter-politics'.

The most fascinating part of the cartoon is the depiction of two doves, which represent the peace established. Joined together as in the traditional wedding custom, they cannot fly independently of each other. Perhaps Tenniel is saying that the British Government has tied/married itself to the Ottoman Empire, and that one cannot go anywhere nor do anything without the other. In addition, one bird (perhaps the Ottoman Empire) seems to be pulling the other (Britain). Peace is contingent on the Ottoman Empire pulling Britain into a war with Russia if Russia again threatens the Porte. On the other hand, it could be that the British are pulling the Ottomans, since the British considered that reforms in Asia Minor were the key to preserving peace. In an opposite interpretation, the birds could represent the 'marriage' of Cyprus (Aphrodite) and Beaconsfield. Indeed, one caricatured map of the time saw the Anglo-Turkish Convention in such a way.¹¹

Thus, within two weeks of the British occupation of Cyprus, *Punch*, in 'Humpty-Dumpty!', was openly attacking the Beaconsfield Government for taking upon itself an onerous responsibility. It also hinted that the Anglo-Turkish Convention was an embarrassment to British national prestige and the manner in which the Beaconsfield Government went about acquiring Cyprus was 'gutter politics'.

The Gladstone and Beaconsfield show

On 21 July, the day after publication of the ‘Humpty Dumpty’ cartoon, Gladstone, who had led the attack against the Beaconsfield Government’s support of the Ottoman Empire against Russia,¹² made a spirited speech against the Cyprus policy. Having resigned from the Liberal Party leadership in 1875 (which *Punch* thought premature), Gladstone believed in the removal of the Turks ‘bag and baggage’ from Europe: he was now scathing. In his 21 July speech he called the Anglo–Turkish Convention an ‘insane covenant ... [and] an act of duplicity not surpassed and rarely equalled in the history of nations’.¹³ In a speech six days later Beaconsfield lost his composure in attacking Gladstone. He asked his audience who they would ‘believe most likely to enter into an insane convention?’

A body of English gentlemen, honoured by the favour of their sovereign and the confidence of their fellow-subjects ... or a sophistical rhetorician, inebriated with the exuberance of his own verbosity.¹⁴

This exchange indicates the political conflict that existed over the subject of the occupation of Cyprus. For Conservatives and other supporters of the Cyprus policy, Beaconsfield’s speech was a stunning rejoinder to Opposition criticism, but to Liberals it was evidence that Beaconsfield was feeling the heat. The personal banter between the two great leaders was not surprising, given their diametrically opposed views on the Eastern Question. It is clear from the beginning where the sympathies of *Punch* lay — with the Opposition, as had been the case through the latest phase of the Eastern Crisis.

‘A Blaze of Triumph’

On the morning of Beaconsfield’s speech, another caricature appeared in *Punch*, which again accused Beaconsfield of committing Britain to onerous responsibilities. ‘A Blaze of Triumph’, also drawn by Tenniel, appeared on 27 July 1878;¹⁵ it was as overtly against the Government’s actions as the first cartoon of the previous week. When Beaconsfield returned from the Congress of Berlin he had proclaimed that he was bringing back ‘Peace with Honour’ — he had returned in ‘A Blaze of Triumph’. In this caricature, he carries the sultan piggyback and balances on a tightrope on which ‘Congress’ is written, while etched on each end of the balancing stick are ‘peace’ and ‘war’, to the cheers of ‘Anglo–Turkish Convention’ and ‘Cyprus’. Beaconsfield is revelling in the adulation accorded to him for his showmanship.

‘A Blaze of Triumph’, like the previous cartoon, hints at the burden that Beaconsfield has committed Britain to bearing, but he is doing so effortlessly, with one hand on the stick and the other gesturing. He does not seem troubled by the burden, and the ‘peace’ banner in the background indicates that he is successfully performing his ‘balancing peace routine’.

Figure 2 'A Blaze of Triumph', *Punch*, 27 July 1878

Punch and Tenniel are here mocking Beaconsfield, whose 'triumph' is just a show because underneath it all he is carrying on his shoulders a heavy burden, literally as well as metaphorically. The show is part of the political mentality, or jingoism, that prevailed in Beaconsfield's Government — the manipulation of public and media opinion by aggressive and flamboyant acts and policies of a pro-war nature. According to *Punch*, the Cyprus Convention had not brought 'peace with honour', but peace with dishonour, since the island was commandeered for warlike aims. Tenniel's cartoons attacked the actions of the Beaconsfield Government over the move to acquire Cyprus.

Sir Garnet courts Aphrodite

On 3 August 1878 it was the turn of another celebrated *Punch* cartoonist, Edward Linely Sambourne, to make a statement on the Cyprus acquisition.¹⁶ The caricature, titled 'Sir Garnet Wolseley Courting Cyprus', was a more decorative drawing, reflecting the different drawing styles of the two cartoonists. Sambourne, although having more political connections than Tenniel, was less remembered for his political cartoons.¹⁷ This is perhaps why historians in various general histories on Cyprus have preferred to publish Tenniel's two Cyprus caricatures.

Figure 3 'Wolseley Courting Cyprus', *Punch*, 3 August 1878

There is a shift in focus in this less familiar caricature, which deals with the justification for acquiring the island. Sambourne is damning of British policy in Cyprus and, in general, of such territorial acquisitions and the imperial mentality.

The central figure in the cartoon is Lieutenant-General Sir Garnet Wolseley, the eminent soldier the Beaconsfield Government chose to carry out the task of converting Cyprus into a *place d'armes*. Wolseley was fast becoming the Wellington of the Victorian age, with his heroic successes during the Ashanti War of 1874–1875. He had around him a group of friends who became known as 'The Ashanti Ring', many of whom served under him in Cyprus. Wolseley was a very popular and public figure; but he was not a hero to all. He was the exemplar for the 'modern Major-General' in the Gilbert and Sullivan operetta *The Pirates of Penzance*.¹⁸

Published three weeks after his arrival in Cyprus, the cartoon shows Wolseley courting Cyprus, who clearly represents Aphrodite, by kissing her hand and with flowers. But he is also carrying his helmet and lance. The paradox is clear; Cyprus will be under British military occupation but the British 'came bearing gifts', to romance and bring prosperity to the Cypriots.

Aphrodite/Cyprus is draped in the British flag. This indicates that the Cypriots welcomed the British, which was in fact the case for both the majority Christian and minority Muslim population. It also implies submissiveness. In the background are Grecian columns — another link to Aphrodite. Constant images of the ancient past were

also a strong imperialist weapon. The poem that appears with the cartoon (possibly a parody of another poem) is the key to understanding Sambourne's message:

Venus Loquitur

No pilgrim to my Paphian shrine
Now gather as of yore:
The gems, that through this isle of mine
Once sparkled, shine no more.

But more than all its gems of old,
My Garnet, comes with you,
Whose Government brings British gold,
My Cyprus to renew!

Emblem of might and right at home,
Emblem abroad, of 'Swag',
Le Venus, daughter of the foam,
Draped in the British flag!

The title translates as 'Aphrodite Speaks', meaning that it is her voice or the voice of Cyprus that is heard. The first stanza presents Cyprus's glorious past and recent misfortune under Ottoman rule. There have been no pilgrims to Aphrodite's shrine for a very long time, but now she has awakened again with full attention — British attention. This interest is welcomed in the second stanza, where she greets the British as saviours: coming with gold to renew Cyprus's fortunes, they reveal a prominent imperial theme — the renewal of the prosperity of colonial acquisitions through capitalist enterprises.

The third stanza has nationalistic and imperialistic overtones, as Aphrodite recognises that in Britain there is justice — just institutions and open government — but abroad the British Government has a different reputation; an emblem of 'swag' — a heap of acquisitions that typifies Britain as a power that simply accumulates imperial possessions. This is what Gladstone argued and this is Sambourne's message. The British have added Cyprus to their large swag of colonies and extended their reputation as a nation that seeks to extend its empire by subjugating peoples, in contrast with justice at home.

In the first two stanzas, the poem reveals how the justification for acquiring Cyprus had changed. First, Cyprus was to be converted into a place of arms, but now it is to be transformed into the earthly paradise that it once supposedly was. Many commentators repeated that the island would return to its former glory days, when under the Venetians it was 'peopled by a million of happy and prosperous souls':

Under the aegis of England those days will come again; once more Cyprus will boast of abundance, healthiness, and happy homes, and the inhabitants will recognise what they have been strangers to for hundreds of years, the wholesomeness of industry, and the security of State promises.¹⁹

Punch thus implied that British imperialists were in the habit of acquiring 'strategic' places, only to find them useless for this purpose, and so consequently altered the

justification for occupying them. *Punch* mocks imperialists and specifically the notion of renewing the prosperity of imperial acquisitions, in the traditional Radical mistrust of imperial adventure at play. *Punch* considers that Cyprus is just another trophy for the Cabinet and that the notion that it will be ‘renewed’ is an empty imperialist rant.

Child’s work

The Liberals and sections of the media accused the Conservatives of not researching into the wisdom of acquiring Cyprus. They claimed that, apart from Lord Salisbury’s perusal of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, the Government knew nothing about the island.²⁰ They maintained that Cyprus was acquired on a whim, based largely on the romantic appeal it held for Beaconsfield, who had foretold in his 1847 novel, *Tancred or The New Crusade*:

The British want Cyprus and they will get it ... [they] will not do the business of the Turks again for nothing.²¹

Punch agreed with this hypothesis in its caricature of 31 August 1878 entitled ‘An Unforeseen Consequence’.²² Probably drawn by Sambourne, the caricature has a young boy and girl outdoors, holding a cricket bat and tennis racquet respectively. The girl says to

Figure 4 ‘An Unforeseen Consequence’, *Punch*, 31 August 1878

the boy, 'What's your holiday task, Archy?' The boy replies, 'Oh, the geography of the Mediterranean! This comes of Dizzy finding out Cyprus — bother it!'

There could have been no greater insult to the Beaconsfield Government. The implication that a child was being made to research into the position of Cyprus in the Mediterranean because the Government did not do so before it decided to acquire it was the ultimate affront. But were these criticisms justified?

The troops crisis

Cyprus's climate became an issue almost immediately after it was occupied. The Liberal Peer Lord Oranmore and Browne first confronted the Government about Cyprus's sanitary condition a week before Wolseley landed at Larnaca.²³ Abroad, he claimed, Cyprus's climate was considered 'deadly' and warned the Government to consider the health of the 10,000 British and Indian troops camped at Larnaca, near the Salt Lake, during the fever season. The Government should have demanded a healthier place to station the troops until Cyprus was made healthy, he asserted.²⁴

The Government, understanding that it was being criticised for want of forethought, defended its policy. Ridiculing the idea of a temporary station, it claimed that Cyprus was a 'splendid garden' that could even serve as a 'sanatorium for the invalids of Europe', while a European colony would thrive there.²⁵ Beaconsfield was at pains to stress that it was 'a great error to suppose that they decided upon the occupation of Cyprus without being in possession of adequate information'.²⁶

Most of the reporting tended to support the Government and play down the criticism that Beaconsfield had made a great blunder in sending so many troops to an insalubrious island that was suffering an abnormal heat-wave. On 28 July the camp at Cheflik near Larnaca was reported to be 'most healthy', and barring a few casualties from sunstroke there was 'no cause for apprehension of trouble from the climate'.²⁷

Yet there were signs that not all was well. A letter from Malta, dated 29 July 1878, disclosed the departure for Cyprus of the eminent surgeon Sir Anthony Home and his medical staff. On 6 August Wolseley left Nicosia because of the heat, though no reason was provided for his departure.²⁸

In mid-August the situation began to unravel. On 10 August the *Illustrated London News* claimed that it was 'tolerably clear that the climate of the island is anything but salubrious'.²⁹ Three days later a small passage in *The Times* revealed that the troops were 'suffering considerably from the local form of fever usually prevalent at this season'.³⁰ Then the *Daily News* correspondent Archibald Forbes decided to investigate. In a series of articles, he revealed the extent of the troops' suffering, which he summarised in 'The "Fiasco" of Cyprus', published in the October issue of *The Nineteenth Century*. His initial euphoria had led him to Cyprus where he found the situation intolerable. Forbes charged the Government with gathering inadequate, irrelevant, and obsolete information. He

ridiculed the choice of Cyprus, ‘this eligibly situated strategic position’ that had no harbour and was so unhealthy that ‘before the unhealthy season proper had fairly set in, 25 percent ... of the total strength of the troops... were officially reported on the sick list’.³¹ For a month the experts searched for a sanatorium from which the ‘fever demon might ... be exorcised’, but when found, all that Anthony Home could do was draw a long breath, before wiring to the War Office that the new place was worse than the first:³²

It is from the fever-stricken camp of Chiflick, and the miasmatic ‘sanatorium’ of Dali, that Lord Beaconsfield, like a modern Canute — *absit omen!* — says to Russia, ‘Thus far and no further’.³³

This stinging attack on the Government caused a furore in the media and gave more ammunition to the Liberals. It also prompted *Punch* to publish a sardonic poem:

‘The Fiasco of Cyprus’
When Forbes, stout special, his recital
Of blunder thus baptises,
As to the meaning of the title
Perhaps, some doubt arises.

Figure 5 Arrival in Camp of Mr. [Archibald] Forbes, *The Graphic*, 17 August 1878

Fiasco's Italian for 'bottle',
 But 'mull' means metaphorically;
 Why? — it would puzzle Aristotle
 To answer categorically.

But Cyprus wine, or Cyprus mull,
 Cost, fever, and the rest of it,
 There's only one course for John Bull, —
 To gulp, and make the best of it.³⁴

Punch resisted saying 'I told you so' — Forbes, other reporters and Liberals, had already exposed the weakness of the Government's research and 'cover-up'. In fact, *Punch* was mature about the 'fiasco' — the English nation, as represented by John Bull, had to make the best of a bad situation. Indeed, when Gladstone returned to power in April 1880 — with a vitriolic campaign against the Cyprus policy³⁵ — that is precisely what he did.

Famagusta Harbour

The Liberals cast doubt on the choice of Cyprus for naval purposes even before its climate had been questioned. Cyprus had no serviceable harbour: the only harbour capable of being converted into a naval station, that at Famagusta, was clogged up and required extensive, and according to some experts expensive, development. On 11 July 1878, three days after the occupation of Cyprus was announced, the leader of the Liberal Peers, Earl Granville, together with Sir Julian Goldsmid in the Commons, asked whether there was a harbour at Cyprus. In reply Algernon Egerton, the Secretary to the Admiralty, answered that 'technically speaking, there is no harbour; but there are three very fair anchorages, from which it is usually easy to land on the Island'.³⁶ In the House of Lords the Duke of Richmond and Gordon provided an identical answer to Granville's question.³⁷ Four days later Granville charged the Government with covering up its lack of research into the merits of Cyprus as a naval station:

The information I have in regard to the harbour is, that there is no harbour at all in the popular sense of the word; that the roadsteads are quite open; and that, so far from the shores being easy access, it is exceedingly difficult to pass from one side to another.³⁸

A week later, Granville took matters a step further:

The fact is, the Government have adopted a system of secrecy which I never remember before in the practice of Her Majesty's Government of this sort.³⁹

Granville claimed that secrecy was the order of the day from the application of the policy to the agreement, down to the planned administration of the island and information respecting its condition. He surmised that the secrecy respecting Cyprus's state stemmed

from a lack of research before the acquisition, or from a lack of trust in that information. Granville asked whether Cyprus was 'of any use to us, as adding to our strength?' He ventured to answer it himself:

No one can say that it will add to our military or naval strength to take that which is not a good naval station; and I have great doubt ... whether the Government can quote any opinion which they received previous to the Convention favourable to the Island in that character. For myself, I do not know a single naval officer, of high or low command, who has not pronounced against it as a naval station.⁴⁰

Beaconsfield defended the policy of secrecy and promised that material relating to the occupation of Cyprus would be published when there was no danger of injury to the public service.⁴¹ As a naval station, there could not have been a better choice than Cyprus:

With regard to the ports of Cyprus, it is, or course, easy to pick out musty details from obsolete gazetteers, and say 'there are no ports in Cyprus'; but I venture to say your Lordships will find by this time next year that there are ports sufficient to accommodate British ships.⁴²

This stinging rejoinder to the criticism that the Government had not investigated the state of Cyprus's naval capabilities was a bold prophecy that, if unfulfilled, was open to attack.

Punch weighed into the Famagusta Harbour debate on the day that the Wolseley caricature was printed and ten days after Beaconsfield's prediction. The newspaper mocked the Government by claiming that a 'factitious harbour' could be built, for 'everything is possible to British enterprise and capital ... but the powers of the most enterprising British Government are limited by considerations of supply'.⁴³ *Punch* was again mocking the idea of revitalising the island economically, as it had done in the Wolseley caricature. The effect was that five days later an editorial in *The Times* asserted with self-assurance that it was 'not proposed to make Cyprus a naval fortress, like Malta and Gibraltar, and probably a very small garrison will ultimately suffice for its occupation'.⁴⁴ It was an astonishing admission from the leading newspaper that had eulogised the 'peace with honour' triumph and backed Whitehall's Cyprus venture.

The two Solons of London

Although the heat and prevailing fever in Cyprus had cast doubt over the island's suitability as a place to station troops and the Opposition and press were questioning Cyprus's naval value, the Government had still to decide on whether the island could fulfil the strategic role assigned to it upon its occupation. The local government had already made some decisions. Although the British tended to concentrate the civilian and military headquarters in one centre, and Wolseley wanted to continue this tradition in Cyprus, he found Nicosia, the capital of Ottoman Cyprus, unsuitable. In his diary to his wife he wrote:⁴⁵

I am very anxious to get out of Nicosia, for I am sure if we remained in it we should all suffer: it is one great cess-pit into which the filth of centuries has been poured.⁴⁶

Wolseley rejected the house selected for him in Nicosia in deference for the open spaces of the Metochi of St Prokopios, about a mile beyond the walls of the city, which Archbishop Sophronios permitted him to occupy, and where he established Monastery Camp, his headquarters.⁴⁷ A few weeks later he reiterated his views on Nicosia to Foreign Secretary Lord Salisbury, revealing that he had sent men to examine sites for a military cantonment where he would establish the capital.⁴⁸ On 3 September he informed Salisbury that a summer station was a necessity.⁴⁹ The decision to build a hill station stood in stark contrast to the uncertainties over the military and naval value of the island.⁵⁰

These uncertainties, however, were soon to unravel. In October 1878 the First Lord of the Admiralty, W.H. Smith, and the War Secretary, Colonel Stanley, were sent to Cyprus to investigate.⁵¹ *Punch* could not restrain itself and came up with this witty diatribe.

Some two thousand five hundred years ago, Solon, the wise head of Greece, went on a tour to Egypt first, and then to Cyprus, to remodel one of the native states of the island.

Now, as we have no Solon to send, we send instead Colonel Stanley and Mr. Smith, the wise heads of the War Office and Admiralty, not to see if we have made a huge blunder — that may be taken for granted — but whether there is any, and what, way out of it. What a pity the Solon geese preceded the Solons!⁵²

Punch could not have been closer to the truth. The trip drastically altered plans to use Cyprus as a station for troops. Stanley abolished the command of the Major-General of the Forces in Cyprus,⁵³ and when Smith and Stanley inspected the troops, they immediately recommended their removal.⁵⁴ When the 71st Regiment left on 15 December it signalled the exodus of all the original regiments; only a handful of soldiers of the 20th Regiment from Halifax and two companies of Royal Engineers remained.⁵⁵ After repeated discussions, Wolseley revealed to his wife that Stanley and Smith, ‘in common with the Cabinet, feel that Cyprus does not answer the purpose for which it was acquired ... [as] a spot where a considerable force could rendezvous and be organised for employment either in Asia Minor or in Egypt’.⁵⁶ This admission vindicates what the Liberals and *Punch* were arguing all along about the inadequacies of the Beaconsfield Government’s research. Indeed, by August 1879, the British forces in Cyprus only amounted to fewer than 400 men.⁵⁷

The decision on that ‘Factitious Harbour’

Stanley and Smith were also able to see for themselves the potential of developing a harbour at Famagusta and to discuss the matter with Wolseley and Vice-Admiral Sir

Figure 6 First Lord of the Admiralty and Secretary of State for War in Cyprus: The Party Leaving Nicosia, *Illustrated London News*, 30 November 1878

Geoffrey Phipps Hornby, Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Fleet. Landing at Larnaca on 29 October, Stanley and Smith proceeded four days later with Wolseley to Famagusta, where they entered and anchored in the outer harbour, joining Vice-Admiral Hornby. Stanley noted that a reef running from the old harbour parallel with the shore constituted a breakwater 'almost as good as Plymouth within which large ships can lie in perfect safety'.⁵⁸ Wolseley believed that Famagusta would make a 'good coaling station for a fleet watching the northern end of the Suez Canal', but felt it would never be a healthy locality.⁵⁹ The next day Hornby opined that with dredging and a new pier, Famagusta would make a fine coaling station for a fleet watching over Egypt. Wolseley warned that only if the marshes were drained and trees planted could Famagusta be made healthy and thus useful for British imperial interests.⁶⁰

The report made to the Admiralty by Captain Harry H. Rawson, a summary of a more comprehensive investigation by Staff Commander John Millard, confirmed Hornby's opinion that a harbour at Famagusta could be formed at a 'small expense which would shelter more ironclads than the grand harbour at Malta'.⁶¹ The construction of a breakwater a mile long at the outer harbour would allow fourteen ironclads to moor under shelter a cable length apart. Similar moorings were afforded at Malta, but for only nine ironclads at three-quarters of a cable apart.⁶² Hornby claimed that Famagusta might even be preferred to Malta after the dredging of the inner basin to 24 feet, giving a basin of 80 acres and the construction of a breakwater.

That part of Malta Harbour which is given to the mercantile marine, viz., from a line drawn between Hanzir Point and the Marina Gate to the upper part of the extension works, comprises an area of 90½ acres, but the outer part, a full half, is much exposed to the Grengale. Merchant vessels, as well as men-of-war, might therefore be better accommodated at Famagousta than at Valetta.⁶³

Rawson's summary, though scanty, was praised by both Hornby and the hydrographer Frederick Evans.⁶⁴ But even with these experts supporting the development of Famagusta harbour into a first-class naval station, the Beaconsfield Government upheld the prediction made by *Punch* on 3 August. In mid-March 1879 the Government was asked whether it intended to go ahead with the proposals.⁶⁵ Salisbury replied that

The harbour of Famagousta has, undoubtedly, been selected, and such improvements are to be made in it as may be required to make it fit for the purposes of a great Power. I do not believe the expenditure would be a large expenditure; but, whatever it may be ... if Famagusta is to be made a harbour for Imperial purposes, the necessary expenditure ought to be borne out of Imperial funds. When the harbour is completed, it will, I believe, be a considerably finer harbour than that of Malta ...⁶⁶

He wanted the complete transformation of Famagusta harbour from its useless state into the finest harbour in the Mediterranean. But he revealed that

... in reference to the expenditure, it happens that the Imperial Government has a good deal to do with its money at present; and they may, therefore, be willing to put off this particular work until they may have less expense upon their hands. Before proceeding with the construction of the harbour works, some steps must be taken towards making the place more healthy. That is one of the reasons why it seems to me to be advisable that we should not move too hastily in the matter.⁶⁷

As Wolseley advised, the sanitary condition of Famagusta needed rectification, but there was no urgency. Salisbury summarised Rawson and Millard's recommendations for improving the 'detestable sanitary arrangements' by draining the lagoons and moats, and planting trees.⁶⁸ But 'all these things are questions of money', and since he considered such undertakings to be of local, rather than imperial necessity, Cyprus would have to rely on its own revenue, only one-fifth of which was applicable to public works. Moreover, there were more pressing matters than the sanitary works: roads to the capital; the construction of larger prisons; post offices, and so forth. He was unsure if these sanitary works could be tackled in the next financial year.⁶⁹ But he made reassurances that

The Government think that the harbour of Famagousta is one of great importance, and that every means to adapt it to our convenience should be used as quickly as is consistent with other circumstances. The work, however, is not pressing in point of time ... but ... we cannot conceal from ourselves the fact that the time may arrive when England will have to look actively after her interests in that part of the world, and when she would have to give forcible effect to her policy. I hope that time is far distant, and therefore we do not wish to incur any financial extravagance for the purpose of accomplishing works of this kind with unnecessary speed.⁷⁰

Clearly, the sarcastic prediction made by *Punch* on 3 August was right. The Beaconsfield Government had determined that although sanitary works were a prerequisite for spending imperial funds on constructing a first-class harbour at Famagusta, the sanitary works were not of imperial necessity and would be paid for by local revenues. This would

happen only when local revenues permitted and only after other pressing and costly matters were resolved. Furthermore, only if Asiatic Turkey were threatened again by Russia would the development of Famagusta Harbour be reconsidered. Therefore, Cyprus was being held as an insurance for when it would be needed as a place from which to defend Asiatic Turkey. Salisbury's comments gave effect to the criticisms of the Opposition that Cyprus was strategically worthless, and Granville, realising this, ridiculed Beaconsfield's July 1878 prediction of a harbour at Famagusta:

We were told that this year we should have a sufficient harbour ... but it would seem ... that we may have to wait 15 or 20 years before the harbour is begun.⁷¹

Granville was almost right; it was not for another twenty-four years, in 1903, that the development of Famagusta harbour was begun; while *Punch* had been right with its prediction of 3 August; questions of supply had indeed played a pivotal role in preventing the Beaconsfield Government from developing Famagusta harbour into a naval station.

Conclusion

Clearly, *Punch* was wholeheartedly against the Beaconsfield Government's acquisition of Cyprus and its plans there. It adopted a method of ridicule and allegory to criticise the policies of the Government that had led to the Cyprus Convention. Although not referring to the Liberal Opposition, it advocated the Liberals' line of criticism, which was remarkably effective for the Liberal position.

Punch was also extraordinarily consistent and prophetic at times in its sarcastic caricatures and comments. The argument that the Beaconsfield Government had committed Britain to onerous responsibilities while knowing little about its new acquisition was justified by the fact that Cyprus did not become the *place d'armes* the Government had planned.

It would be appropriate to conclude with *Punch*'s own words. On 4 January the paper published the following short poem:⁷²

Cyprus – The Ideal and the Real

'Lawn — as white as driven snow;

Cyprus — black as any crow,'

Sings Autolycus.

Beaconsfield, as Autolycus, was singing this not-so-dainty little ditty. Having days earlier given a speech to a group of San Francisco dignitaries on the present and future of Cyprus, *Punch* mused on how 'strange so astute a man should go out of his way to paint for his Frisco admirers a picture of Cyprus in *couleur de rose*, which lies open to the flat contradiction of facts'. He was a master of 'party steering', asserted *Punch*, but Beaconsfield's come-uppance was going to come:

When one thinks of the precious lives sacrificed, and the good men left with shattered constitutions, by the imbecile mismanagement which disgraced the installation of our troops in Cyprus — always allowing for the cold-blooded sacrifice of the health, comfort, and convenience of ten thousand to the momentary triumph of one great political player at the game of brag, — *Punch* feels apt to fall back into the impatient wrath of Crimean times, and to ask, with all respect for our well-meaning Commander-in-Chief — ‘whom shall we get rid of?’ If not, *totidem verbis*, — ‘whom shall we hang?’⁷³

In the event, as previously mentioned, the British electorate did dismiss Beaconsfield in the 1880 parliamentary elections, and when he died in 1881 Tenniel and *Punch* remembered his ‘Peace with Honour’ declaration with a caricature with that title. A forlorn Britannia, with her back to his grave, laments the death of the man and the policy that had led to the ‘Peace with Honour’ declaration and the occupation of Cyprus.⁷⁴

Punch is an excellent source for the history of political caricature. From the cartoons of Tenniel and Sambourne to the sarcasm of the writers there is a telling record of criticism, forthright evaluation and prediction of the Beaconsfield Government’s failed Cyprus venture.

Notes

1 See Dwight E. Lee, *Great Britain and the Cyprus Convention Policy of 1878* (Cambridge, MA, 1934).

2 Publication ceased in 1992, but *Punch* was relaunched, with much fanfare, by Mohamed Al Fayed in September 1996. Publication has again been discontinued.

3 R.G.G. Price, *A History of Punch* (London 1957) 46–83.

4 *Ibid.*, 111–13.

5 *Ibid.*, 110, 113.

6 *Punch or the London Charivari*, 20 July 1878, 19, hereafter *Punch*. Although the Anglo–Turkish Convention was signed on 4 June 1878, it was not made public until the Congress of Berlin had almost ended, on 8 July — over a month later.

7 Price, *A History of Punch*, 74.

8 Roger Simpson, *Sir John Tenniel: Aspects of His Work* (New Jersey 1994) 58–9.

9 Price, *A History of Punch*, 74.

10 See Robert Blake, *Disraeli* (London 1966), facing 708.

11 See the map entitled ‘Cyprus’, captioned ‘Marriage of the Earl of Beaconsfield and Miss Cyprus observed by Mr Gladstone’, in Rodney W.

Shirley, *Kitchener’s Survey of Cyprus 1878–1883: The First Full Triangulated Survey and Mapping of the Island* (Nicosia 2001) 36, figure 8.

12 See Gladstone’s famous pamphlet, *Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East* (London 1876).

13 Gladstone was speaking at Southwark on 21 July. See Philip Magnus, *Gladstone: A Biography* (London 1954) 252.

14 The speech was given at a lavish banquet at which he and Lord Salisbury were entertained in the Riding School at Knightsbridge. John Morley, *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone*, 3 vols (London 1903) 579.

15 *Punch*, 27 July 1878, 27.

16 *Punch*, 3 August 1878, 46.

17 Price, *A History of Punch*, 114, 118–19.

18 Shirley, *Kitchener’s Survey of Cyprus 1878–1883*, 15.

19 Anon., *Cyprus: Its Value and Importance to England* (London 1878) 5.

20 *Hansard* (Commons), vol. 252, 1 June 1880, Col. 898.

21 Benjamin Disraeli, *Tancred: or, The New Crusade* (1847), Book IV, Chapter 1, 280–2.

- 22 *Punch*, 31 August 1878.
- 23 *Hansard* (Lords), Lord Oranmore and Browne, 241, 15 July 1878, 1433–4.
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 *Ibid.*, The Duke of Richmond and Gordon, 241, 15 July 1878, 1434–5.
- 26 *Ibid.*, Lord Beaconsfield, 242, 23 July 1878, 27.
- 27 *The Times*, 8 August 1878, 8.a.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 9 August 1878, 5.a.b.d.
- 29 *The Illustrated London News*, Saturday 10 August 1878, 13.
- 30 *The Times*, 13 August 1878, 3.d.
- 31 Archibald Forbes, ‘The “Fiasco” of Cyprus’, *The Nineteenth Century* 4 (October 1878), 609–26, 617.
- 32 *Ibid.*, 617.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 615.
- 34 *Punch*, 19 October 1878, 173.
- 35 See W.E. Gladstone, *Midlothian Speeches*, 1879 (Leicester 1971).
- 36 *Hansard* (Commons), 241, 11 July 1878, 1243.
- 37 He said, ‘... there is no harbour in the large or extended sense of the word; but there are excellent roadsteads’. *Hansard* (Lords), 241, 11 July 1878, 1225–6.
- 38 *Hansard* (Lords), 241, 15 July 1878, 1435.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 242, 23 July 1878, Col. 22.
- 40 *Ibid.*, 23–4.
- 41 *Ibid.*, 27.
- 42 *Ibid.*, 28.
- 43 *Punch*, 3 August 1878, 45.
- 44 *The Times*, 8 August 1878, 7.c.
- 45 Wolseley’s diary was edited by Anne Cavendish and published by the Cyprus Popular Bank Cultural Foundation as Sir Garnet Wolseley, *Cyprus 1878: The Journal of Sir Garnet Wolseley*, ed. Anne Cavendish, Cyprus Popular Bank Cultural Centre (Nicosia 1991); it is hereafter cited as Wolseley, diary.
- 46 Wolseley, diary, 31 July 1878, 33.
- 47 Wolseley, diary, 31 July 1878, p. 33.
- 48 Wolseley Papers, British Library, MSS 41324, Wolseley to Salisbury, 12 August 1878, ff. 9. Wolseley’s exact words to Salisbury were: ‘Nicosia is no more than a cess-pit of filth.’
- 49 Wolseley Papers, 41324, Wolseley to Salisbury 3 September 1878, ff. 19–20.
- 50 Paper entitled ‘Maintaining Britishness in a Setting of their Own Design: The Troodos Hill Station in Cyprus during the Early British Occupation’, given at the British World Conference III, University of Melbourne, 2–4 July 2004.
- 51 *Ibid.*, 31 October 1878. The tour was documented in *The Times*. See, *ibid.*, 2 November 1878, 5.c; *ibid.*, 4 November 1878, 5; *ibid.*, 5 November 1878, 7. They were accompanied by: First Naval Lord Admiral George Wellesley; Sir Massey Lopes, a Lord Commissioner of the Admiralty; Admiral Sir W. Houston Stewart, Controller of the Navy; Algernon Egerton, First Secretary to the Admiralty; Captain Codrington, of the Royal Navy and the private secretary to the First Lord; R. Dalyell, private secretary to Colonel Stanley; Captain Fitzgeorge, of the Intelligence Department of the War Office; Lord Colville of Culross; Sir Henry Holland; and Sir George Elliot.
- 52 *Punch*, 30 November 1878, 251. The reference to Solon is to the Athenian lawmaker who introduced political, economic and constitutional reforms to the Athenian State.
- 53 Wolseley Diary, 1 November 1878, 120; *ibid.*, 5 November 1878, 125; *The Times*, 19 November 1878, 10.a.
- 54 Wolseley Diary, 4 November 1878, 123–4.
- 55 Robert Hamilton Lang, ‘Cyprus — Is it Worth Keeping?’ *Macmillan’s Magazine* 40 (1879) 441–8, 443.
- 56 Wolseley Diary, 5 November 1878, 126.
- 57 *Hansard* (Commons), Colonel Stanley, 249, 8 August 1879, 507.
- 58 W.H. Smith, diary, 3 November 1878, in Sir Herbert Maxwell, *Life and Times of the Right Hon. William Henry Smith, M.P.*, 2 (London 1893) 355.
- 59 Wolseley Diary, 3 November 1878, 123.
- 60 *Ibid.*, 4 November 1878, 124.
- 61 *Reports Made to the Admiralty on the Anchorages etc. of the Island of Cyprus*, 2244 (London 1879), 3. Rawson, a distinguished naval officer, who hoisted the British Flag at Nicosia, and was for one month Military Commander to the Government, had reported on the defence of the Suez Canal in 1878.
- 62 *Ibid.*, 3.
- 63 *Ibid.*
- 64 *Memorandum on the anchorages of Cyprus; and on other questions, chiefly nautical, connected with that Island, by the hydrographer to the*

Admiralty (accompanied with a plan of Famagousta harbour from an Admiralty survey in progress), 1878, in Reports Made to the Admiralty on the Anchorages etc. of the Island of Cyprus, 2244 (London 1879).

65 Hansard (Lords), 244, 21 March 1879, 1411.

66 *Ibid.*, 1413.

67 *Ibid.*, 1413–14.

68 *Ibid.*, 1414–15.

69 *Ibid.*

70 *Ibid.*, 1416.

71 *Ibid.*, 1417.

72 *Punch*, 4 January 1879, 310.

73 *Ibid.*

74 Cosmo Monkhouse, *The Life and Work of Sir John Tenniel*, R.I. (London 1901) 6, 15.

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