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**ARTISANS, PLEBEIANS, AND RADICAL REFORM IN THE BRITISH
ISLES, NEW SOUTH WALES, AND UPPER CANADA, 1790-1838.**

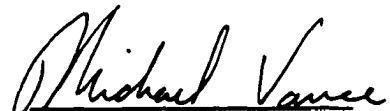
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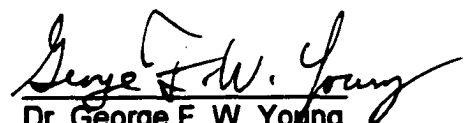
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Abstract

The principle aim of this of thesis is to examine connections between popular radical movements in the British Isles, and in New South Wales and in Upper Canada, between the 1790s and 1830s. This period, the first decade of which immediately followed the American Revolution and which witnessed the French Revolution, marked the point when members of the English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish lower orders began to conceive of themselves as citizens deserving of political rights, and yet un-represented by the established electoral structures. The elite, meanwhile, had no intentions of relinquishing their political hegemony, and thus the struggle for parliamentary reform was under way – a contest that would extend beyond the Great Reform Bill of 1832, into the Chartist disruptions of the late 1840s. From the 1790s onwards, from one British Isles nation to the next, efforts at popular parliamentary reform – whether moral or physical force – shared numerous points in common, as well as actual connections between labouring men's radical organizations.

The values of the British Isles parliamentary reform movement also infused the activities of exile and émigré working men to New South Wales and Upper Canada, turning these distant regions into theatres in which the old struggle was fought anew. At the same time, the peculiarities of these outposts shaped the contest between popular radicals and conservatives in new ways, and the original British Isles ideology was adapted to meet these new challenges. This thesis evaluates the ways in which the British Isles popular movements of the 1790s to 1820s were linked not only from nation

to nation at home, but to struggles for reform in New South Wales in roughly the same period, and in Upper Canada in the 1820s and 1830s.

Acknowledgments

I am very grateful to Dr. Michael Vance for his advice, assistance, and encouragement during the writing of this thesis, as well as for his years of instruction at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Thanks also to Dr. Richard Twomey for his suggestions on handling the American historiography, and for his thoughtful critique of an early chapter. Finally, I would like to thank my parents for their support and encouragement during my time at Saint Mary's.

Introduction

The involvement of English, Scottish, Welsh, and Irish plebeians and artisans in radical political reform during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a period of revolution overseas and of reactionary politics and domestic repression at home, has been noted by a wide variety of historians. Even conservative scholars such as J.C.D. Clark and Ian Christie, who would downplay the effects of political radicalism in revolutionary-era Britain and stress instead the stable, essentially conservative nature of British society, admit the existence of a disaffected plebeian consciousness dating from the 1790s, and admit too that the leaders of such sedition as did exist came usually from the ranks of the literate artisans.¹ Inasmuch as they can be reconstructed, the precise roles of plebeians and artisans in British Isles political radicalism have been examined by a number of generally sympathetic historians. Almost without exception, however, these studies have been approached from a national perspective – concentrating on English radicals, or on Irish radicals, or on Scottish radicals, rather than on the British Isles protest movement as a whole.

One of the earliest and most influential discussions to take this approach is E.P. Thompson's 1963 study *The Making of the English Working Class*. In his introduction, Thompson makes a point of limiting his discussion to "the English experience", arguing

¹ Clark: "Leaders of sedition in the 1790s came usually from the ranks of intelligent artisans", J.C.D. Clark, *English Society 1688-1832*, (Cambridge, 1985), p. 345; Christie: "[R]adical reform in the 1790s...was

that, for cultural reasons, this restriction is necessary, since the English radical experience was separate from, and "significantly different" from, that of the other British Isles nationalities.² Thompson's book gave a tremendous boost to the study of workingmen's radicalism between 1780-1830, but also fixed firmly the way in which the subject was to be approached. Subsequent scholarship has tended to follow the boundaries of nationality that Thompson prescribed. As a result, while there has been a good deal of attention given to the course of plebeian and artisan radicalism in this or that British Isles nation, international connections that existed between these various movements have not received similar consideration.

The decades between 1790 and 1840, moreover, were a time of considerable British and Irish emigration, and the focus on geographic nationality fails also to trace the transmission of radical workingmen from the British Isles to such distant British Empire outposts as, for example, New South Wales and Upper Canada. Because these connections are not often made, it is easy for historians such as Clark and Christie to underestimate the persistence of the British Isles plebeian radical movement, and the manner in which it persisted – and often flourished – in new locations. Adding to this difficulty is the fact that, for reasons of their own, historians of New South Wales and early Canada also tend to downplay this radical emigration from the British Isles. Much of the historiography surrounding early Australia tends towards preoccupation with the convict population, specifically with the question of whether they were or were not 'morally debased', and radicalism is treated as part of this moral issue – i.e., whether it constituted 'right' or 'wrong' behavior.³ For its part, Canadian historiography tends either to deny the existence of substantive radicalism altogether, or to stress the

stimulated by...the skilled craftsmen", Ian R. Christie, *Stress and Stability in Late Eighteenth-Century Britain*, (Oxford, 1984), p. 49.

² E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, (New York, 1963), p. 13.

alleged conservatism of British Isles émigrés while at the same time attributing political discontent solely to the influence of American republicanism. In general, it has been left to the American historians to discuss transatlantic radicalism in a North American setting, although their focus falls invariably on the Anglo-American transmission.⁴ As a result, the issue of the origins of colonial Canadian political radicalism has largely been overlooked.

It will be the purpose of this thesis to suggest that the connections among British Isles plebeian and artisan radicals were more substantial than has in general been shown by regionally based studies, and also that there was, via many of the plebeian and artisan émigrés to New South Wales and to Upper Canada, a continuation in these outposts of the British Isles popular parliamentary reformist spirit, which has not been highlighted in either Australian or Canadian historiography. But before going further, it is necessary to clarify, first, what is meant by the terms 'plebeian' and 'artisan', and secondly, what is signified by the notion of 'plebeian and artisan political radicalism'. 'Artisan' is an ambiguous term, but a definition serviceable for this thesis might be that artisans are usually men, primarily from the lower ranks of society, labouring for wages in pre-industrial, specialized trades, and doing un-mechanized, skilled work in workshops⁵; 'plebeians', meanwhile, we can describe as the unskilled working segment of the lower orders, the sweepers, farm and factory labourers, and so forth. It must be recognized that there was no distinctive artisan or plebeian mentality, and thus no single, distinctive notion of artisan and plebeian political radicalism. Certain broad strokes have been drawn, though, which help us toward a workable definition for this

³ See ft. 164.

⁴ See ft. 234.

⁵ This is not to imply that the line between skilled and unskilled labour – and thus, to some extent, between artisan and plebeian – is clearly defined. There were many gradations. In comparison to precise,

thesis. E.P. Thompson suggested that in the years between 1780 and 1830, most British working people, skilled and unskilled, urban and rural, came to feel an identity of interests as between themselves, and against their employers and the social elite. Although scholars of both Marxist and non-Marxist approaches have debated and challenged many of the implications of this interpretation – asking questions concerning the precise degree of class consciousness among plebeians; how quickly this perception arose; and what, exactly, is entailed by the notion of class – Thompson's model that posits an opposition between the common people and the elite remains a starting point for the majority of scholarly studies focusing on plebeian and artisan movements of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.⁶

technical tasks such as, for example, watch-making, trades such as shoe-making or tailoring probably were regarded by many as no more than semi-skilled.

⁶ The scholarship devoted to conflict between the lower and upper orders is enormous. In addition to those studies that focus on the political struggle between the two, other approaches are discernable. Much of the non-political conflict between lower and upper orders was directly concerned with trades issues and the defense of livelihoods against the forces making for proletarianization, and this has received a good deal of study. The Hammonds' three volume *Labourer* series, while written before Thompson's *Making of the English Working Class*, was an obvious influence on it, and foreshadows its model of plebeian opposition to the elite, although in primarily an economic context. See J.L. Hammond and Barbara Hammond *The Village Labourer, 1760-1832* (London, 1911) especially Chapter 9, "The Isolation of the Poor"; *The Town Labourer, 1760-1832* (London, 1917) especially Chapters 1, "The New Power", and 7, "The War on Trade Unions"; and, for the partial incorporation of political protest into the general theme of economic dissent, *The Skilled Labourer, 1760-1832* (London, 1919) Chapter 12, "Oliver the Spy". Other standard texts on plebeian economic resistance in Britain include E.J. Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men* (*Studies in the History of Labour*) (London, 1964) especially sections on Luddism and the labour aristocracy; George Rudé, *The Crowd in History, 1730-1848* (New York, 1964); Hobsbawm and Rudé, *Captain Swing* (London, 1969) especially Chapters 3, "The Village World", and 4, "From Waterloo to Revolution". For a useful general account of the varieties of the common peoples' protest in Scotland – such as meal mobs, militia riots, and industrial and economic disturbances – see Kenneth Logue, *Popular Disturbances in Scotland, 1780-1815* (Edinburgh, 1979). For plebeian economic protest in eighteenth century Wales, see David Jones, *Before Rebecca: Popular Protest in Wales, 1793-1835*, (London, 1973) especially Part One, "Pre-Industrial Unrest", and Part Two, "Industrial Unrest".

As a sidebar to this brief survey of the historiography of plebeian economic protest, it should also be noted that, while Thompson's model of opposition between the common people and the elite is widely accepted, the ultimate source of this antagonism has been variously attributed. It is not the purpose of this thesis to venture into a discussion of 'class', but numerous historians have treated plebeian and artisan radicalism as part of the class issue. For scholars coming roughly from the Marxist perspective, opposition between the two groups was very much a class struggle, heightened by the Industrial Revolution and the rise of capitalist enterprise. For an example of this approach, see Craig C. Calhoun, *The Question of Class Struggle* (Oxford, 1982), especially Chapter 6, "The Radicalism of Traditional Communities". See also Thompson's own work, especially "Eighteenth-Century English Society: Class Struggle Without Class?", *Journal of Social History*, vol. 3 (1978): 133-65; as well as that of the Hammonds; George Rudé; John Foster's *Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution* (London, 1974); F.K. Donnelly and J.L. Baxter, "Sheffield and the Revolutionary Tradition, 1791-1820", *International Review of Social History*, vol. 20 (1975), pp. 398-423; and Patrick Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England*

Yet the identification of 'class' antagonism is not sufficient for a testable definition of plebeian and artisan political radicalism. For this we need to turn to the association that several scholars have shown existed between labouring peoples' ideology and radical republican ideology beginning in the late eighteenth century.⁷ In general terms,

and the Question of Class, 1840-1914 (Cambridge, 1991). Most recently, David Gadian sees class divisions as the defining difference between the political message of the English lower orders and that of the middle orders, between the radicalism of the former and the mere liberalism of the latter; see Gadian, "Radicalism and liberalism in Oldham: a study of conflict, continuity, and change in popular politics, 1830-52", *Social History*, vol. 21 (1996), pp. 265-80. For the formation of the working class in the rural setting, see Ian Dyck, *William Cobbett and Rural Popular Culture*, (Cambridge, 1992), Chapter 3, "Discovering class: countrymen, labourers and new-fashioned farmers". For accounts stressing class conflict in the Scottish arena, see W. Hamish Fraser's *Conflict and Class* (Edinburgh, 1988), especially Chapters 1, "The Economy Transformed", and 3, 'The Emergence of Organization'; R.A. Houston, "Popular Politics in the Reign of George II: The Edinburgh Cordiners", *The Scottish Historical Review*, vol. 72 (1993), pp. 167-89; and Christopher Whatley's concise study *The Industrial Revolution in Scotland* (Cambridge, 1997). A second approach, meanwhile, identifies conflict between commoners and elite not as the result of widespread industrial capitalism, but as a long-standing feature of British society, attributable, in essence, to friction over local interests. For example, J.F.C. Harrison's *The English Common People* (Kent, 1984) traces the antagonistic relationship between upper and lower orders from 1880 back to the time of the Norman Conquest. Rodney Hilton's *Class Conflict and the Crisis of Feudalism*, (London, 1985) identifies a similar antagonism at the root of English popular movements of the fourteenth century such as economic protest (Chapter 7); see also Gary S. De Krey, "Political Radicalism in London after the Glorious Revolution", *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 65 (1983), pp. 585-617. Of larger import, though, both Harrison and the Marxists agree that, from wherever it came, the working people's perception of an opposition of interests existing between themselves and the elite, when combined with the transatlantic spread of republicanism characterizing the so-called 'age of revolution', was fundamental to the development of plebeian and artisan radicalism by the late eighteenth century; for Harrison's acknowledgement of this, see Chapter 8, "Protest and Revolt". For early artisan protest specifically, see Buchanan Sharp, *In Contempt of All Authority: Rural Artisans and Riot in the West of England, 1586-1660*, (Berkeley, 1980). As a final note, even those scholars who, concentrating on popular political protest, refute Thompson's claim that the lower orders were ever widely revolutionary, admit that this group perceived of a separateness between themselves and the elite. For example D.G. Wright dismisses claims of a widespread revolutionary class consciousness among British workers, but acknowledges that a generalized feeling of opposition "certainly existed": D.G. Wright, *Popular Radicals: The Working Class Experience, 1780-1880* (London, 1988) pg. 182.

⁷ This is a connection made frequently in American historiography. Notable examples include Richard J. Twomey, *Jacobins and Jeffersonians* (New York, 1989) especially Chapter 6, "The Jacobin Ideal and the Productive Classes"; Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic* (Oxford, 1984), especially Part 1, Chapter 2, "Artisan Republicanism"; Robert Babcock, "The Decline of Artisan Republicanism in Portland, Maine, 1825-1850", in *New England Quarterly*, vol. 63 (1990), pp. 3-34; James Walsh, "Mechanics and Citizens: The Connecticut Artisan Protest of 1792" in *William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 42 (1985), pp. 66-88; and Paul Gilje and Howard B. Rock, eds., *Keepers of the Revolution: New Yorkers at Work in the Early Republic* (Ithaca, 1992) especially Chapter 2, "Journeyman: The Quest for Respectability". In British Isles historiography, Thompson's *The Making of* remains a principle text, especially Chapter 8, "Artisans and Others". For another thorough general discussion of the workingmen's credo and its relationship to radical republicanism in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century England, see Iorwerth Prothero, *Artisans and Politics in Nineteenth Century London* (Kent, England, 1979), especially Chapter 2, "The London Artisan"; Chapter 5; "Gast the Radical"; and Chapter 6, "From Palace Yard to Cato Street"; and, more recently, Iorwerth Prothero, *Radical Artisans in England and France, 1830-1870* (Cambridge, 1997), Chapter 7, "Class and radicalism". In Scotland, the connection between labouring ideology and republicanism is well demonstrated by reading in succession two chapters in T.M. Devine and Rosalind Mitchison, eds., *People and Society in Scotland*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh, 1988): Christopher Whatley's Chapter 11, "The Experience of

radicalism is against privilege and for equality, and radical movements are not restricted to any one historical period. The transatlantic, pan-Western European spread of democratic republican ideology, however, belongs very much to a specific historical moment – roughly, the period between 1780 to 1830 – and the tenets of this ideology were largely set down, to the English-reading audience, in the work of a single contemporary pamphleteer, Thomas Paine. For this reason, it is generally referred to by scholars as ‘Painite ideology’, and as such it will be referred to in this thesis. As directed towards alleviating problems facing the common people in late eighteenth century Western society, it was a philosophy that advocated many reforms, not all of them political⁸, but those that *were* political were relatively well defined. Paine appealed to artisanal pride in productivity and skill – large components of working people’s ideology – as the basis for civic competence, and advocated a distinct

Work”, details the struggle for workplace control by Scots plebeians and artisans, while Hamish Fraser’s Chapter 13, “Patterns of Protest”, suggests how this defense of interests led to the demand for political rights and, in turn, to radicalism. For the link between the defense of workingmen’s interests and Irish plebeian radicalism, see Jim Smyth, “Freemasonry and the United Irishmen”, in D. Dickson, D. Keogh, and K. Wheilan, eds., *The United Irishmen: Republicanism, Radicalism and Revolution* (Dublin, 1993), Chapter 13. For an interesting discussion of the contribution of Irish plebeian radicals to the defense of workingmen’s interests in early nineteenth century America, see Howard Harris, “The Eagle to Watch and the Harp to Tune the nation: Irish Immigrants, Politics and Early Industrialization in Paterson, New Jersey, 1824-1836”, *Journal of Social History*, vol. 23 (1990), pp. 575-97. A primary text for linking the defense of workingmen’s interests with republicanism in Wales remains David Jones, *Before Rebecca: Popular Protest in Wales, 1793-1835* (London, 1973), especially Chapters 1-2. See also Gwyn A. Williams, “Locating a Welsh Working Class: The Frontier Years”, Chapter 1 in David Smith, ed., *A People and a Proletariat: Essays in the History of Wales, 1780-1980* (London, 1980), and J.P. Jenkins, “Jacobites and Freemasons in Eighteenth-Century Wales”, in *Welsh Historical Review*, vol. 9 (1979).

⁸ The specific proposals of Paine’s political reform agenda will be discussed in Chapter 1, Section 1 of this thesis. Broadly speaking, Paine argued that all men were created equal, and that they possessed inalienable natural rights that no government could legitimately abrogate. While these rights had, he claimed, been realized in America and France, they were violated in Britain through the tyranny of hereditary government. To recover them, Paine argued, the common people of Britain needed to a two pronged reform program, securing both a written constitution to check the tyrannical tendencies of the monarch – *The Rights of Man*, PART II, Chapter 4 – and an active and ongoing voice in the governing process through regular exercise of the voting franchise; *Ibid.*, Chapter 3. Until these goals were achieved, Paine advocated agitation up to and including revolution; *Ibid.*, Preface. Paine’s non-political reforms, to which many of his labouring readers did not subscribe, and which often were years in advance of the time, included expenditures for public education, old age pensions, state aid to the youth, and soldiers’ bonus. Also, his two part pamphlet *Age of Reason* (1794) advocated Deism. Finally, Paine’s last great pamphlet, *Agrarian Justice* (1795-6), argued for the taxation and redistribution of property. This last was a proposal that many plebeians and artisans disliked, and from which they felt it necessary to distance themselves, as we shall see in Chapter 1, Section 2. Properly speaking, the whole of this rather sweeping program could

program of parliamentary reform to give the working men the political influence that they deserved, but which the social and political elite would not voluntarily concede. By far the most important elements in this platform were the attainment of manhood suffrage – that is, the vote to nearly all men – and of annual parliaments. This 'Painite' response was articulated over and over again in popular political organizations, to such an extent that we are entitled to refer to it as almost the 'official' agenda of many of the plebeian and artisan political radicals. It is by testing for advocacy of these twin goals, by either moral suasion or physical force, that this thesis will identify plebeian and artisan political radicalism.⁹

The first chapter of this thesis will concentrate on the British Isles in the period 1790-1820. Without denying that cultural and religious differences existed between – and often among – English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish plebeian and artisan radicals, the discussion will highlight the similarities between these groups, and the connections with one another that they forged. In the second chapter, the focus will shift to New South

be put under the label 'Painite ideology', but as it is with *political* reform only that this discussion will be concerned, 'Painite' will be taken here to refer only to Paine's political agenda as outlined above.

⁹ This definition is, of course, necessarily simplistic. As acknowledged in the text, there was no one brand of artisan political radicalism, nor is it not to be thought that all artisans supported exactly this two-pronged parliamentary program. For example, the plebeian-born linen-draper, shop-keeper, and, later, London M.P., Robert Waithman, advocated a policy that stopped considerably short of universal suffrage and annual parliaments, calling only for triennial elections and the enfranchisement of copyholders and taxpaying householders. Though a friend and ally of the important bourgeois radical Sir Francis Burdett and of the artisan radical Thomas Hardy, Waithman's firm refusal to advocate universal suffrage led other prominent popular reformers, such as William Cobbett and Henry Hunt, to dismiss him as "weak headed", and more of a Whig than a radical. As well, some of the plebeian elements, jealous of Waithman's success as a retailer, belittled him as grasping and over-ambitious. The emotions generated by Waithman's ideas, and by his business and political careers, demonstrate that the popular movement was far from seamless. See J.R. Dinwiddy, "'The Patriotic Linen-Draper': Robert Waithman and the Revival of Radicalism in the City of London, 1795-1818", *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, vol. 46 (1973), pp. 72-94. As to the question of whether there existed a distinctly 'plebeian' brand of radicalism during this same period, Ian Dyck, for one, suggests that, in rural areas at least, there indeed was such a movement, and identifies William Cobbett as its leading proponent. In the immediate post-Napoleonic years, Cobbett attempted to appeal to agricultural workers with a populist platform that fought against large farms and capitalist agriculture, and tried eventually to merge this rural movement with that of the urban parliamentary reformers, and thus form a federal radical platform. He made contact with important radicals such as Major Cartwright and Samuel Bamford, but the proposed town-country axis was never wholly successful, in part because the interests of the urban artisans tended to predominate and set the agenda. See Ian Dyck, "William Cobbett and the rural radical platform", *Social History*, vol. 18 (1993), pp.

Wales in the years 1790-1810, to a discussion of the political convicts and the radical free settlers, their clashes with authority, and their roles in fomenting discontent, and oftentimes rebellion, in the colony. In the third chapter the focus will shift again, to Upper Canada in the early nineteenth century, and to a demonstration of the influence of radical plebeian, artisan, and emergent bourgeois émigrés on the province's political life, culminating with their roles in the Rebellion of 1837. Attempts will be made in all chapters, in both text and footnotes, to call attention to areas deserving of further investigation in future studies. Finally, as a related aspect of this last point, the thesis will conclude by characterizing briefly some of the approaches to the study of plebeian and artisan political radicalism taken by the burgeoning gender history movement, pointing too to some of the obvious ways in which these might affect our understanding of the subject.

185-204; for a more general discussion of Cobbett and the rural world, see Ian Dyck, *William Cobbett and Rural Popular Culture*.

Chapter 1 – The British Isles, 1790-1820

I

As John Brims observes, plebeian and artisan political radicalism in the late eighteenth century British Isles “did not...spring from its blocks” of its own accord, but was the result of contemporary international developments, reinforced by already-existing precedents for political rights from the British and Irish past.¹⁰ There is general agreement among scholars that the American War of Independence provided a dramatic focal point for the British Isles popular movement for parliamentary reform. In addition to demonstrating the conservative nature of British political life in general, the American example highlighted several specific failings of the prevailing system. The colonists' demand for no taxation without representation pushed the question of parliamentary reform to the foreground by laying bare the political powerlessness of the middling rank at home, and by publicizing the concept of taxable income, rather than property, as the grounds for manhood suffrage. They also showed that political equality could be reconciled with the defense of property. Finally, the establishment of the Federal Constitution provided empirical evidence that it was possible, without social

¹⁰ John Brims, “The Scottish Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution”, (unpublished University of Edinburgh Ph.D. Thesis, 1983), p. 16.

anarchy or civil war, to erect a government according to the will of the people and in defense of their sovereignty and their natural rights.¹¹

While there had been conception of it beforehand¹², the American Revolution heightened the lower orders' awareness of their near total lack of political influence by giving them something dramatic against which to compare the status quo. And they did make this comparison, often forcefully. In England, the artisan Joseph Gerrald, later to become one of the leading theoreticians of the radical reform organization the London Corresponding Society, drew a stark contrast between "the garden of Eden" that was America and 'Old Corruption' at home. "In America", he wrote, "the poor are not broken down by taxes to support the expensive trappings of royalty, or to pamper the luxury of an insolent nobility", and "the community is not there divided into an oppressed peasantry and an overgrown aristocracy, the one of whom lives by the plunder of the state, while the others are compelled to be the object of it."¹³ If the American experiment drew attention to the problems in Britain, it also suggested solutions. The prominent English radical Major John Cartwright noted in a 1777 pamphlet that the Pennsylvania constitution provided for manhood suffrage and annual election by ballot. There could no longer be any reason, he wrote, to deny such rights to the common

¹¹ For a concise discussion of the relationship between American events and the case for popular parliamentary reform in Britain, see John Brewer, *Party Ideology and Popular Politics at the Accession of George III* (Cambridge, 1976), Chapter 10, "American ideology and British radicalism". For general discussions of the American impact on English radicalism, see Arthur Sheps, "The American Revolution and the transformation of English radicalism", *Historical Reflections*, vol. 2 (1975), pp. 3-28; Colin Bonwick, *English Radicals and the American Revolution*, (Chapel Hill, 1977); James E. Bradley, *Popular Politics and the American Revolution in England*, (Macon, Georgia, 1986); and James E. Bradley, *Religion Revolution and English Radicalism*, (Cambridge, 1990), Chapters 6, 9-10.

¹² For pre-American Revolution reform, see Brewer, *Party Ideology*, Chapter 9, "Personality, propaganda and ritual: Wilkes and the Wilkites"; Linda Colley, "Eighteenth-Century English Radicalism before Wilkes", *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, vol. 31 (1981), pp. 1-19; J.G.A. Pocock, "Radical Criticism of the Whig Order in the Age Between Revolutions", in Margaret Jacob and James Jacob, eds., *The Origins of Anglo-American Radicalism*, (London, 1984), pp. 35-57; H.T. Dickinson, "The Precursors of Political Radicalism in Augustan Britain", in Clive Jones, ed., *Britain in the First Age of Party*, (London, 1987), pp. 63-84; and H.T. Dickinson, *The Politics of the People in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, (New York, 1994), Chapters 5-6.

¹³ Quoted in Bonwick, *English Radicals*, p. 232.

people of England: "where now is the impracticability of making our representation equal; where the difficulty, the expense, or trouble of annual elections?"¹⁴ Others, lower down the social scale and perhaps less theoretically inclined, nonetheless drew a similar lesson. The plebeian-born journalist Joel Barlow, a member of the popular London reform organization the Society for Constitutional Information, celebrated the American state formation for having established "FREE ELECTION" as a "right divine".¹⁵ Some of Barlow's associates, meanwhile, welcomed the Revolution as simply a harbinger of generalized changes to come. At one SCI gathering, for example, a toast was made to "the United States of America, and may the cause of Freedom flourish in every corner of the globe".¹⁶

The attraction to the American Revolution was shared by the plebeian-born and by artisans in other parts of Britain and in Ireland. In Scotland, the self-made Edinburgh lawyer and burgh reform leader Archibald Fletcher hailed the establishment of American independence as "one of those great events that serve to teach practical wisdom and moderation to old Governments".¹⁷ It is statements such as these that have led most Scottish historians to agree that popular movements for political reform in Scotland date from the period of the American Revolution.¹⁸ The impact of the American uprising was no less considerable in Ireland, and on the plebeian and artisan populations in particular; "the lower class are to a man attached to the Americans",

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 147.

¹⁵ Quoted in Clark, *The Language of Liberty*, p. 387.

¹⁶ Quoted in D. Hay and N. Rogers, *Eighteenth-Century English Society: Shuttles and Swords*, (London, 1997), p. 175.

¹⁷ Quoted in Andrew Hook, *Scotland and America: A Study in Cultural Relations*, (Glasgow, 1975), p. 233.

¹⁸ For discussions of the importance of the American impact in Scotland, see W. Straka, "Reform in Scotland and the Working Class", *Scottish Tradition*, vol. 2 (1972), pp. 32-50; Hook, *Scotland and America*, Chapter 7; Arthur Sheps, "The Edinburgh Reform Convention of 1793 and the American Revolution", *Historical Reflections*, vol. 5 (1975), pp. 23-37; O.D. Edwards and George Shepperson, eds., *Scotland, Europe and the American Revolution*, (Edinburgh, 1976); Logue, *Popular Disturbances in Scotland*, pp. 130-33; and E.W. McFarland, *Ireland and Scotland in the Age of Revolution*, (Edinburgh, 1994), pp. 49-55.

commented one contemporary.¹⁹ As a Templepatrick weaver named James Hope said, in a comment couched with the usual artisan emphasis on labour as the touchstone of political rights, "the American struggle taught people that industry had its rights as well as aristocracy, that one required a guarantee as well as the other".²⁰

Many of the Welsh also responded favourably to what they took to be the American Revolution's challenge to win full citizenship and political rights. The American struggle marked, in historian Ryland Wallace's words, "the genesis of political radicalism in Wales"²¹, infecting every radical and protest movement from the 1780s onwards. In books, leaflets, journals and graffiti, in the chanted slogans of pub goers, and in speeches at mass meetings, Welshmen, workingmen among them, invoked the American example as precedent for political enfranchisement. By 1782, three parliamentary reform petitions from Wales were presented to the House of Commons, voted by the population at large in Caernarfonshire, Denbighshire and Flintshire.²² Further fueling the Welsh identification with the Revolution was the legend of Madoc, the twelfth-century Welsh prince whose claims to have discovered America had been stressed by Welsh nationalists since the reign of Elizabeth. In the wake of American independence, Madoc was reinterpreted, becoming linked to the notion of political freedom, and thus acting as a further spur to Welsh popular radicalism. The Welsh artisan and part-time journalist William Jones wove the Madoc strand into a celebratory

¹⁹ Quoted in Kevin Whelan, *Fellowship of Freedom: The United Irishmen and 1798*, (Cork, 1998), p. 6. The Irish elite radicals were also quick to identify with the American struggle, seeing parallels between the constitutional position of the American colonies and the constrictions imposed on the Irish parliament. For an examination of the so-called 'Patriot' party as the elite radical response to the American revolution, see R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972*, (London, 1988), Chapter 11, "Americans, Volunteers, and the Politics of 'Patriotism'". For a general discussion of the American impact in Ireland, see Maurice R. O'Connell, *Irish Politics and Social Conflict in the Age of the American Revolution*, (Philadelphia, 1965).

²⁰ Quoted in Nancy Curtin, *The United Irishmen: Popular Politics in Ulster and Dublin*, (Oxford, 1994), pp. 17-18.

²¹ Ryland Wallace, *'Organise! Organise! Organise!' A Study of Reform Agitations in Wales*, (Cardiff, 1991), p. 7.

²² Gwyn A. Williams, "Beginnings of Radicalism", in T. Herbert and G.E. Jones, eds., *The*

address to the American radicals: "Permit me at this juncture to congratulate you on the agreeable intelligence lately received from America, viz, that the colony which Madog ab Owain Gwynedd carried over the Atlantic in the twelfth century are at this time a free and distinct people, and have secured their liberty".²³

Its inherent and obvious message of political liberty aside, the American Revolution had the legacy of exposing the British and Irish working people to the writings of Thomas Paine, one of the most vocal proponents of the American cause. There is no dispute among scholars that Paine played an enormous role in the transatlantic diffusion of republicanism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, both as advocate of American disengagement from Britain and as defender of, and later as participant in, the French Revolution. No less enormous, though, was his influence on the development of popular radicalism in Britain and Ireland during this same period. Paine's writings were instrumental in defining the political program of the workingman, and in articulating the doctrines that the plebeian and artisan radicals took to heart through the 1780s and beyond: absolute political democracy, root-and-branch opposition to monarchy and the aristocracy.²⁴ Paine also laid out their basic complaints and solutions: that government was parasitic and should be drastically downsized

Remaking of Wales in the Eighteenth Century, (Cardiff, 1988), p. 112; Peter D.G. Thomas, *Politics in Eighteenth-Century Wales*, (Cardiff, 1998), p. 239.

²³ Quoted in Williams in Herbert and Jones, *Remaking of Wales*, p. 129. For a general discussion of the Welsh parliamentary reform movement culminating in the First Reform Bill of 1831, see David Wager, "Welsh Politics and Parliamentary Reform, 1780-1832, *Welsh History Review*, vol. 7 (1974-5), pp. 427-49. Parliamentary reform was one Welsh response to the American Revolution; a second was emigration to America, a more direct route to enjoying American-style political liberty. For a discussion of Welsh emigration in the age of the American Revolution, see H.M. Davies, "Very Different Springs of Uneasiness': Emigration from Wales to the United States of America during the 1790s", *Welsh History Review*, vol. 15 (1990), pp. 368-98. The classic treatment of Wales, America, and the Madoc myth is by Gwyn A. Williams, *Search for Beulah Land*, (London, 1980).

²⁴ For Paine's influence in America, see Eric Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America*, (New York, 1976); and also J.P. Greene, "Paine, America, and the 'modernization' of political consciousness", *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 93 (1978), pp. 73-92. A concise discussion of Paine's influence on the creation of a popular political movement in Britain, and how workingmen related to his arguments, is in Gregory Claeys, *Thomas Paine: Social and Political Thought*, (Boston, 1989), Chapter 5, "A Great Awakening: the

through the abolition of nearly all of its institutions; that taxes were a form of robbery of the useful part of the nation to the profit of the useless and should therefore be abolished; and that the sovereignty of the people and the corruption of the system meant that reform should come about not through existing institutions but through a democratic national convention of the people.²⁵

Both Paine's critiques of the British system and his proposed remedies are worth examining in some detail. Paine argued that the British political system was unconstitutional and tyrannical, and that only a republican government was in accord with the what he termed 'the rights of man'. "All hereditary government", Paine wrote in 1792, in defense of the French Revolution, "is in its nature tyranny", and, in order to check this tendency, political power must be subjected to the sovereignty of the people. Only a written constitution could accomplish this, by placing limits on the power of the government, and by giving the citizenry, through regular exercise of the voting franchise, an active voice in the decision-making process.²⁶ An important implication of Paine's argument – and one which, more than anything else, made it seem seditious to the government and the elite in general – was his assertion that, unless and until the goal of a written constitution is achieved, revolution was morally and politically defensible, even necessary. Indeed, he argued that political revolution was already a welcome fixture of Western society, having erupted in both America and in France, and it was therefore to be expected – was, in fact, inevitable – that such an explosion would also occur in the British Isles. "As revolutions have begun", Paine wrote,

it is natural to expect that other revolutions will
follow...[the old, corrupt governments] have wearied out

birth of the revolutionary party". A recent biography of Paine is Jack Fruchtman, *Thomas Paine: Apostle of Freedom*, (New York, 1994).

²⁵ Prothero, *Artisans and Politics in Early Nineteenth-Century London*, pp. 83-4.

²⁶ See Philip Foner, ed., *The Life and Major Writings of Thomas Paine*, (New York, 1948), p. 364; see also H.T. Dickinson, *British Radicalism and the French Revolution, 1789-1815*, (Oxford, 1985), p. 14.

the patience, and exhausted the property of the world.
 In such a situation, revolutions are to be looked for.
 They are become subjects of universal conversation,
 and may be considered the *order of the day*.²⁷

This last was a crucial point. In addition to articulating a parliamentary reform program, Paine's views concerning the inevitability of revolution played an important psychological role in the development of the popular protest movement, by helping to break down what Gwyn Williams calls the British workingmen's "hard-set mould of deference". Paine was, Williams writes, someone "with nerve enough to tell them, what many of them...already knew[:]...that what they needed was common sense and resolution to act as their kin were acting in America and France."²⁸ The important *transatlantic* element to this psychological prodding is worth returning to. Paine worked to convince the disenfranchised of Britain and Ireland that the tide of history was running, as it were, in their favour; that, given the recent events in America and in France, "nothing of reform in the political world ought to be held improbable", as he himself phrased it, but that "everything may be looked for".²⁹ It was a linear conception that allowed radical reformers in the British Isles to view themselves as acting within an international continuum, a bracing world-view which, as we shall see, would sustain their popular movements through both advances and spectacular reversals.

While parts of Paine's message were heard eagerly by the bourgeois reformers (less so his thoughts on revolution), it was the tradesmen and plebeians with whom he resonated most strongly, and it was they, not elite missionaries, who were largely responsible for spreading his writings to the most remote rural areas of Britain and

²⁷ Quoted in Foner, *Thomas Paine*, p. 355.

²⁸ Gwyn A. Williams, *Artisans and Sans-Culottes: Popular Movements in France and Britain during the French Revolution*, (London, 1968), p. 17.

²⁹ Quoted in Foner, *Thomas Paine*, p. 258.

Ireland.³⁰ To modern ears, indeed, their praise of Paine can seem a trifle fulsome. "O, PAINE!", wrote an English artisan, "next to God, how infinitely are millions beholden to you for the small remnant of their liberties;...it was reserved to you...to break the shackles of despotism...and destroy the yokes of oppression".³¹ A London tailor expressed a similar sentiment, announcing loudly in a tavern that "Tom Paine...was a second Jesus Christ...[and] the only man to save this Country and the Whole World."³² However excessive, the important point is that this near-veneration was not merely an English trait, but was characteristic of Scottish, Welsh, and Irish workingmen.

In Ireland, for example, a contemporary press report noted that "Tom Paine's health was drunk with the greatest fervancy[sic] and enthusiasm [at a tavern gathering, and] when [his] health was given his picture was introduced and received a general embrace". An Irish government official emphasized "the avidity with which Paine's principles...have spread their influence. His works are in everyone's hands and in everyone's mouth. Large editions have been printed off...and sent over the country". And in an important twining of Anglo and of French radical strands, booksellers in such centers as Dublin and Belfast offered Paine's pamphlets together with a copy of the new French constitution.³³

The impact of Paine's writings is no less discernable among the Scots. As one observer described it, "the nation was flooded" with cheap editions and abridgements of Paine's work, often to good (or bad) effect: in the words of an artisan from the Scottish

³⁰ McFarland, *Ireland and Scotland*, p. 22.

³¹ Quoted in Thompson, *Making of...*, p. 100.

³² For Paine's impact on popular radicalism in England, see Thompson, pp. 86-103; also, Williams, *Artisans and Sans-Culottes*, pp. 12-18, 65-70. For Paine's influence on bourgeois English radicals, see Bonwick, *English Radicals*, pp. 226-31.

³³ David Dickson, "Paine and Ireland", in Dickson, Keogh and Whelan, *United Irishmen*, pp. 141, 144-6. Dickson's chapter provides a thorough discussion of Paine's impact on Irish radicalism in general. For concise examinations of Paine's impact on the parliamentary reform program of the United Irishmen, see Sean Cronin, "Thomas Paine and the United Irishmen", *Bulletin of the Thomas Paine Society*, vol. 6 (1980), pp. 93-6; and Curtin, *The United Irishmen*, pp. 22-4, 177-81.

town of Kilmarnock, Paine's writings "played sad havoc with the settled opinions of many a previously orthodox Kilmarnockian".³⁴ By November, 1792, Henry, Lord Spence was reporting that a Gaelic version of Paine's work was being circulated in the Highlands, and that "its Damnable doctrines" were being "eagerly embraced by the lower classes".³⁵ Paine did much to demystify the lower orders' perception of politics; as one Scotsman put it, "Politics is no longer a Mysterious System but Common Sence[sic]".³⁶ The price paid by some to satisfy popular appetite for Paine's writings could indeed be high; the radical Unitarian minister Thomas Fishe Palmer of Dundee, for example, was sentenced to seven years' transportation to Australia for encouraging the reading of Paine's works among the "low weavers and mechanics" in his parish.³⁷

Finally, translated into Welsh, copies of Paine's pamphlets "infested...the northern parts" of that nation, leading to "attacks [on] kingly Government", according to one government report.³⁸ Welsh workingmen often played a part in aiding this diffusion; a tavern-keeper named John Jones, for example, was responsible for bringing out two of these Welsh pamphlets. The English radical John Thelwall, touring Wales in the early 1790s, noted that the "staunch old Republicans" of Methyr held reading circles in artisan taverns, with Paine's work as the focus.³⁹ And the radical plebeian poet David Thomas (Dafydd Ddu Eryri) published his celebrated 'Can Twm Paen' (Tom Paine's Song), a work which, in essence, linked Paine's arguments and the Glorious revolution

³⁴ Quoted in Fraser, *Conflict and Class*, p. 108.

³⁵ Quoted in Eric Richards, *A History of the Highland Clearances: vol. 2: Emigration, Protest, Reasons*, (London, 1985), p. 318.

³⁶ Quoted in Claeys, *Thelwall*, p. 120.

³⁷ Quoted in Fraser, "Patterns of Protest", in Devine and Mitchison, *People and Society in Scotland*, p. 277. For Paine's impact on popular radicalism in Scotland, see Logue, *Popular Disturbances in Scotland*, pp.10-14.

³⁸ Williams, *Artisans and Sans-Culottes*, pp. 65-6; quoted in Wager, "Welsh Politics", p. 432.

³⁹ Williams, *Artisans and Sans-Culottes*, pp. 65-6.

of 1688 as guarantors of the fundamental political rights of the British subject.⁴⁰ Finally, literate Welsh tradesmen were able to follow the Paine's international impact through the radical Welsh journalist Morgan John Rhys, whose columns kept them up to date on the trials in England of those accused of reprinting Paine's work, illegal in Britain.⁴¹

Paine regarded the American Revolution as one example of a revolution that, in his words, 'had begun' in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. A second was the French Revolution, the decade-long series of violent political spasms that commenced in 1789. No less than the uprising in America, the French episode was a crucial component of the late eighteenth century 'age of revolution', and crucial too to the development of organized popular political protest in Britain and Ireland. The French Revolution was an enormous and complex event, both sudden and surprising, producing a political earthquake that sent seismic shocks throughout Europe. Its impact in Britain and Ireland, coming as it did on the heels of revolution in America – and thus to some extent amplified by it – was electrifying. It stimulated intense political debate within Britain and deeply polarized public opinion. To conservatives, still smarting from the American fiasco, the overthrow of the aristocracy was the source of yet more worry, and thus the focus of opprobrium; to radicals, it was a further indication of the inevitability of political reform, the more powerful for being so much nearer, geographically, than the American arena. As one English radical phrased this last aspect, "the lustre of the American Republics, like an effulgent Morning, arose with increasing vigour, but still too distant to enlighten our hemisphere"; by contrast, "the French revolution burst forth upon the nations in the full fervor of a meridian sun".⁴²

⁴⁰ Geraint H. Jenkins, "'A Rank Republican (and) A Leveller': William Jones, Llangadfan", *Welsh History Review*, vol. 17 (1995), p. 373.

⁴¹ Williams in Herbert and Jones, *Remaking of Wales*, p. 132.

⁴² Quoted in Bonwick, *English Radicals*, p. 296.

The historiography surrounding the French Revolution's impact on radicalism in the British Isles is immense, and it has been shown that the uprising was greeted by radicals from all corners as a harbinger of promising developments to come.⁴³

Although numerous British and Irish radicals were already committed to constitutional changes, the revolutionaries' experiments with the principle of the rotation of annually elected representatives gave even more impetus to a radical reform of Parliament as a means of correcting political inequality at home. The entire event thrilled the radicals, and the link between what was happening in France and what *might* happen at home was often made explicit in the congratulatory epistles of the British radicals themselves. The English 'Society for commemorating the Revolution in Great Britain' set a precedent followed by other groups when it declared its hope, in an address to the Frenchmen, "that the example given in France [will] encourage other nations to assert the unalienable rights of mankind".⁴⁴ There could be no doubt, especially among worried authorities, which were to be the 'other nations' thus singled out for future reform.

What has not been sufficiently emphasized by historians connecting French and British radicalism, is that it was among the lower orders, and in particular the artisans,

⁴³ For the impact of the French Revolution on English popular radicalism, see Thompson, *Making of...*, Chapters 1, 4-5; Albert Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty: The English Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution*, (London, 1979), Chapters 1, 4-10; and Hay and Rogers, *Eighteenth-Century English Society*, Chapter 11, "Popular Beliefs and Popular Politics". For its impact on popular radicalism in Britain as a whole, see Williams, *Artisans and Sans-Culottes*, Chapters 4, 6; John Stevenson, "Popular Radicalism and Popular Protest 1789-1815", in H.T. Dickinson, ed., *Britain and the French Revolution*, (London, 1984); Dickinson, *British Radicalism*; and Wright, *Popular Radicalism: The Working Class Experience*, Chapter 3, "Artisans and Jacobins". For the French impact on British society in general, see Ceri Crossley and Ian Small, eds., *The French Revolution and British Culture*, (Oxford, 1989). For discussions of the relative weight of loyalist versus Radical sentiment in Britain during the French Revolutionary period, see Mark Philip, ed., *The French Revolution and British Popular Politics*, (Cambridge, 1991). For the international aspects of the French Revolution from its outbreak until 1800, see R.R. Palmer, *The Age of Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760-1800*. (Princeton, vol. I, 1959; vol. II, 1964). A comparative study of English and French popular movements during the English Chartist period, and after, is Prothero, *Radical Artisans in England and France, 1830-1870*.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Goodwin, *Friends of Liberty*, p. 111.

that the impact of the French Revolution was felt most powerfully. E.P. Thompson is one scholar who does observe this, regarding the English: "the French Revolution precipitated a new agitation, and certainly this agitation took deepest root among...artisans and tradesmen".⁴⁵ Expressions from the English artisans themselves support this. The shoemaker and prominent English radical Thomas Hardy described himself as "glorying and...exulting" in the French Revolution, because it proved "that one order of society has no right...to plunder and oppress the other parts of the community".⁴⁶ An actual visit to Revolutionary-era France transformed the plebeian-born lawyer John Frost – later a co-founder, along with Hardy, of the London Corresponding Society – into a radical parliamentary reformer. As quoted by his friend the radical journalist John Thelwall, Frost returned to England believing the Revolutionaries' cause "glorious...everything goes on just as it ought", and saying that, as the result of what he had seen, "I am for liberty and equality and no king in England."⁴⁷

This interest in the French Revolution was shared fully by other British and by Irish labouring reformers. The Scottish historian Kenneth Logue notes that "it was not until revolution broke out in France that the ordinary people...began to show an active and widespread interest in political reform"⁴⁸, and contemporary testimony supports this. The Scots journalist Henry Cockburn remarked that "Everything rung, and was

⁴⁵ Thompson, *Making of...*, p. 24.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Claeys, *Thelwall*, p. 223.

⁴⁸ Logue, *Popular Disturbances in Scotland*, p. 10. The standard account of the French impact on radicalism in Scotland is Henry W. Meikle, *Scotland and the French Revolution*, (New York, 1912). See also John Brims, "The Scottish Democratic Movement" unpublished Ph. D. Thesis; Brims, "From Reformers to 'Jacobins': The Scottish Association of the Friends of the People", in T.M. Devine, ed., *Conflict and Stability in Scottish Society, 1700-1850*, (University of Edinburgh, 1990); and McFarland, *Ireland and Scotland*, pp. 63-6, 170-8. The studies above deal with generally enthusiastic responses to the French Revolution; for a recent discussion of resistance to the Revolution among conservative Church of Scotland ministers, see Emma Vincent, "The Responses of Scottish Churchmen to the French Revolution, 1789-1802", *Scottish Historical Review*, vol. 73 (1994), pp. 191-215.

connected with the Revolution in France... Everything, not this or that thing, but literally everything was soaked in this one event.” For his part, the liberal reformer Henry Brougham recalled hearing, as a small boy, an artisan kinsman’s praise of the uprising. “I well remember his referring to the events then passing on the Continent as the forerunners of far greater one which he saw casting their shadows before... [H]e was full of hope for the future, and his exultation was boundless in contemplating the deliverance of ‘so many millions of so great a nation from the fetters of arbitrary government.’”⁴⁹ The Paisley weaver, amateur poet and radical Alexander Wilson made this same connection between the French triumph and the inevitability of democratic reform at home:

Auld Monarchy, wi’ cruel paw,
Her dying pains is gnawing;
While democracy, trig [active] and braw [brave],
Is through a’ Europe crawling
Fu’ crouws [loudly and confidently] this day.⁵⁰

The emotional bond that many Scots’ formed with the French rebels during this period would find symbolic expression well into the next century in the planting, during virtually all radical outbreaks, of French Revolution-style ‘Trees of Liberty’.⁵¹ The contemporary Scottish authorities themselves were not blind to the links between the French Revolution and the rise of popular reformism in Scotland; as one anxious official in Glasgow noted in the 1790s, “the success of the French Democrats was had a most mischievous Effect here...it had led [radical leaders] to think of founding societies into

⁴⁹ Cockburn quoted in Vincent, “The Responses of Scottish Churchmen to the French Revolution”, p. 191; Brougham quoted in Meikle, *Scotland and the French Revolution*, pp. 41-2.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Brims in Devine, *Conflict and Stability*, p. 37.

⁵¹ Fraser in Devine and Mitchison, *People and Society in Scotland*, p. 284. On one occasion in 1792, “a thousand plebeians planted a tree of liberty in the market place in Dundee”, according James Young, *Rousing of the Scottish Working Class*, (London, 1979), p. 63.

which the lower Class of People are invited to enter...[and] when backed by the Mob, [these groups] become formidable."⁵²

A similar impact is discernable in Wales. As with Paine's writings, large quantities of French radical literature were translated into Welsh and circulated throughout the nation during the 1790s. The diffusion of French political ideas was deep and wide, and seeped into the remotest regions. A traveler who stopped in the tiny town of Bala in North Wales in 1796 found the tavern-goers drinking toast after toast to the "Jacobins" – and as Gwyn Williams, the student of this episode, notes "if Bala could produce 'Jacobins' in 1796, clearly lightening had penetrated the soil."⁵³ Welsh workingmen were quick to turn the French example into a precedent for political reform. Describing himself as "a Jacobin and a Republican", one Welsh plebeian further stated that he "knew a Republican government would be a much better one than the present and I'll lay a wager that there will not be a Crowned Head in Europe in three years time and that there will soon be a change in our Government."⁵⁴ Another plebeian Welshman, the self-taught poet William Jones had, prior to 1789, regularly composed loyalist carols and songs and had even celebrated the king's recovery from his first bout of madness. But with the fall of the Bastille, Jones became an advocate of republican government, with a passionate desire to expose the common peoples' political grievances, the world over:

The Despots all both great & small
From Lisbon to St. Peters-burg
Do now unite against all right
To cramp mankind with Fetters.

They think & say like Beasts of prey
We shall subsist by plunder
We'll load & lash the vulgar trash

⁵² Quoted in Logue, *Popular Disturbances in Scotland*, p. 11.

⁵³ Williams, *Artisans and Sans-Culottes*, p. 66.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Williams in Herbert and Jones, *Remaking of Wales*, p. 136.

To tame and keep 'em under.⁵⁵

The internationalist strand in Jones' poem is particularly significant; the French Revolution had not only given him a general conception of the workings of democracy, but his identification with the *sans culottes* allowed him to look past the borders of Wales, to find commonality between the lower orders across Europe.

Turning to the Irish, we see that, again, the influence of the French Revolution was powerful on the labouring population. In the Irish case, the diffusion of French radical ideals was helped by the fact that fashionable Irish people had always tended towards Francophilia.⁵⁶ There was thus a wide circulation of literature to do with the early Revolution, and much favourable comment in the newspapers, which diffused downwards to literate artisans. For the common people in general, the French experience was perceived primarily as a new resource in the old struggle against both religious intolerance and political exclusion. Both plebeians and artisans tended to express their support and excitement in verse, such as the following, taken from the United Irish chapbook *Songs on the French Revolution*:

It was in France that this spark did advance
To the glimmering light of reason;
It blazed upright to us unite, and to enlighten nations
It ne'er will cease, but will always blaze,
And keep its proper station,
Till it will consume all Luther's breed and Harry's generation.⁵⁷

The collection also contained a song entitled 'The Marseilles March'. The frontispiece of the first Belfast edition combines Irish and French iconography – the woman (Ireland)

⁵⁵ Quoted in Jenkins, "A Rank Republican", p. 372. For a concise discussion of Welsh popular radicalism in the period of the French Revolution, see Gwyn Williams' chapter in Herbert and Jones, *Remaking of Wales*. Welsh Jacobinism in the era of the French Revolution was nothing new; for an examination of Welsh Jacobinism in the 1740s, see Peter D.G. Thomas in Herbert and Jones, Chapter 6, "Jacobitism in Wales".

⁵⁶ Foster, *Modern Ireland*, p. 264.

with a harp unchained, holding a Liberty Cap on a pole. As in Scotland, the image of the Tree of Liberty was also evoked in show of solidarity, whether planted in the literal sense, or incorporated into verse celebrating democratic political principles: "More and more may the Tree of French Liberty flourish"; or "Let's be free, let's be free, let's be free / And with courage undaunted plant Liberty's Tree".⁵⁷ So powerful was the Irish radicals' belief in revolutionary France that, at the general level, it healed rifts between Catholics and Protestants, allowing them to forge what would previously have been considered an unnatural alliance, with no small impact on the shape of Irish organizational protest.⁵⁹

Its dramatic message of egalitarianism aside, there was one reason in particular why, throughout the British Isles, it was of all groups the artisans who felt most strongly in favour of the French Revolution: their conception of a link as existing between themselves and the archetypal French Revolutionary, the so-called 'sans culotte'. The latter was indeed a new political man on the European scene, a man of the 'little people', and, crucially, almost invariably he was an artisan. As Gwyn Williams observes, the 'typical' sans culotte was

⁵⁷ Quoted in Tom Dunne, "Popular Ballads, revolutionary rhetoric and politicisation", in H. Gough and D. Dickson, eds., *Ireland and the French Revolution*, (Dublin, 1990), p. 147.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 144-5.

⁵⁹ Marianne Elliot, *Partners in Revolution: The United Irishmen and France*, (1982), p. 52. While both Catholics and Protestants were attracted to the secular egalitarianism of the Revolution, the uprising nonetheless did have a religious message for some Irishmen. As Paul Weber observes, for many Catholics, in and out of the United Irish, the overthrow of a catholic king as well as of the church structure proved that Catholics could be free and overcome their priests; see Weber, *On the Road to Revolution: The United Irishmen and Hamburg, 1796-1803*, (Dublin, 1997), Chapter 2, "Flirting with French Ideas"; also, Eamon O'Flaherty, "Irish Catholics and the French Revolution", in Gough and Dickson, *Ireland and the French Revolution*. For Catholicism as a component of United Irish ideology, see Kevin Whelan, *The Tree of Liberty: Radicalism, Catholicism and the Construction of Irish Identity, 1760-1830*, (Cork, 1996). For discussions of the French impact on the United Irishmen, and subsequent United Irish involvement with French invasion plans, see Elliot, *Partners in Revolution*; Curtin, *The United Irishmen*; and McFarland, *Ireland and Scotland*, Chapter 4. For a general discussion of the impact of the French Revolution in Ireland, see Gough and Dickson, *Ireland and the French Revolution*; for the French impact on Irish popular culture in general, see Tom Dunne's chapter, "Popular Ballads", in Gough and Dickson. For actual Irish participation in the events in France, see Liam Swords, *The Green Cockade: The Irish in the French Revolution, 1798-1815*, (Dublin, 1989).

an artisan on the poorer side of the mean, the independent craftsman or smallest of small masters...[clad in] the uniform [of] short workingman's jacket, plebian trousers...[and with an] artisan's pipe – a *pauvre bourge* who gets up at dawn, sweats blood and tears at his craft to feed his family, puts in a couple of ferociously uncompromising hours at the Section for the egalitarian Republic, eats like a horse...[and] takes a patriotic glass...At all times he cherishes, with his brothers, the frugal virtues and fierce *collective* independence of the craftsman.⁶⁰

We should not be surprised to learn that such an image struck a chord among radical artisans, and those of artisan background, of every British Isles nationality. The English radical John Thelwall (his father was a silk mercer) declared, for example, "I am a SANS CULOTTE", and was always quick to defend the French rebels against attacks by the conservative British press. "*Sans Culottism*", he wrote on one occasion, is not inconsistent with the urbanity and mildness of polished life...[and was of] a character...essential to public utility."⁶¹

Adding further to the British artisans' identification with the sans culottes is the fact that the latter were *successful revolutionaries*, on a level outstripping even the Americans. As the French Revolution progressed, the sans culottes' manic zeal to be done for ever with aristocracy had won them more in the course of a year than the combined gains from England's own Glorious Revolution. Indeed, with their active involvement in the Jacobin purge in the summer of 1793, as well as their dominance of revolutionary popular societies throughout urban and rural France, the Revolution itself came to assume, to many observers, an image increasingly sans culottist. John Thelwall put his finger on this when he wrote, in 1795, that the French Revolution "is not the revolution of *Marat* or *Robespierre* – it is not the revolution of *Brissot* and the

⁶⁰ Williams, *Artisans and Sans-Culottes*, p. 3.

⁶¹ Quoted in Claey's, *Thelwall*, pp. 56, 364; for Thelwall's father, see Thompson, *Making of...*, p. 157.

Girondists – it is not the revolution of the Abbe Seyes, or of Tallien, and Bourdon of Oise – but the revolution of the people.”⁶²

One final source of the plebeian and artisan identification with the sans culottes came, intriguingly, from their viewing the French radicals as acting not so much within a European, as within a British, tradition of dissent.⁶³ This is a connection that, by adding an element of circularity to the British and Irish emulation of the sans culottes, helps to highlight what is too often dismissed by conservative scholars, the inter-locking dimensions of the transatlantic radical movement.⁶⁴ It also points us back to the British Isles itself as a commonality in the origins of English, Scottish, Welsh, and Irish popular parliamentary reform. And this is necessary, for it is a mistake to assume that the popular radical movements of the British Isles were entirely the creatures of outside influences such as the American Revolution and the French Revolution. Though certainly it fed on these international developments, the British Isles popular movement as a whole also drew on a host of ancient domestic precedents that did not form part of any package importation of ‘natural rights’ from France. Vague, yet persistent, memories of Saxon ideology, Magna Carta, and the Glorious Revolution of 1688, when taken together, reminded plebeians and artisans of the late-eighteenth century of a

⁶² Quoted in Claeys, *The Wall*, pp. 308-9.

⁶³ The outbreak of revolution in France coincided almost exactly with the centenary celebrations of the English Revolution of 1688, and radicals such as the Englishman Richard Price were quick to interpret the later event as a continental replication of the earlier. Nor were the French revolutionaries themselves blind to this. For the way in which it had marked the orderly transfer of power away from an absolutist government, the Glorious Revolution had been, in Simon Schama's words, “a lodestar of liberal French historical writing since Voltaire”. The chance to achieve the same in France was what drew many ordinary Frenchmen into Revolutionary-era reform politics for the first time. In Britain, meanwhile, radicals turned the French example to account by drawing parallels between it and even older English precedents for resistance, such as the legend of Saxon democracy, and the Magna Carta. For French emulation of English dissent, see Simon Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution*, (New York, 1989), pp. 288-90. For the English radicals' placing the sans culottes in the English dissent tradition, see John Stevenson, *Popular Disturbances in England, 1700-1870*, (London, 1979), p. 142; and Goodwin, *Friends of Liberty*, p. 121. For Richard Price, see Hay and Rogers, *Eighteenth-Century English Society*, pp. 179-81.

⁶⁴ Thus Ian Christie: R.R. Palmer's term ‘age of revolution’ is a misnomer”, Professor Christie claims, because “it impl[ies] that within [a] confine of time and space a number of countries were affected by a common experience, and that democracy was common theme running through them all...[and this] is

long continuum of dissent and hostility to the ruling oligarchy, stretching back into the island's distant past, to which they were heir. No less than did, say, Paine's argument about the inevitability of Western revolution, this conception of ancestral liberties – gathered together in the Revolutionary age into what E.P. Thompson calls the notion of the 'rights of the free-born Englishman' – was a common influence on radical workingmen throughout the British Isles.⁶⁵

A more contemporary background commonality between plebeians and artisans from throughout the British Isles was an often interconnecting tradition of economic protest, at both the urban and the rural level. Rural Ireland had been the place of much of this type of dissent in the decades leading up to the 1790s, particularly in the agrarian protest of rebels such as the Oakboys, the Levellers, and the Whiteboys. By giving forceful expression to plebian grievances, these groups provided a valuable example for the next generation of Irish *political* reformers, who would adopt the Whiteboy's use of oaths as a means of binding organizations together. Indeed, Irish historian James Donnelly suggests that, in their use of oaths to "fuse local activists into the wider network of a regional movement", the Oakboys, Levellers, and Whiteboys "should...be considered innovators" among Irish rebels, "a kind of halfway house" between localised rural protest prior to 1760 and the large-scale political reform movements of the 1790s and afterwards.⁶⁶

profoundly misleading[.]...the American, the Irish, and the French situations...[should be] considered separately". Christie, *Stress and Stability*, pp. 9-10.

⁶⁵ Briefly, legends of Saxon democracy identified an original and highly democratic constitution controlling pre-Norman English society, made manifest through the direct democracy of the *Witan*, the people's militia of the *fyrð*, and popular election of the king. See Christopher Hill, "The Norman Yoke", in Christopher Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution*, (New York, 1958), pp. 50-122. For the Saxon precedent as an influence on Scots reformers, see Meikle, *Scotland and the French Revolution*, pp. 250-1. The Glorious Revolution was perceived as a parallel to the quest for a Constitutional Monarchy; for its impact on British reformers, see Clark, *Language of Liberty*, "Introduction", section IV.

⁶⁶ James S. Donnelly, "The Whiteboy Movement, 1761-5", *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. 21 (1978), p. 54.

Irish Whiteboy activity was paralleled in that of various English, Welsh, and Scottish economic protestors dating from the pre-industrial period, perhaps most notably in machine breaking, or 'Luddism'. The precise impact of Luddism on political protest has long divided historians, and remains open to discussion still.⁶⁷ More importantly for our purpose, though, is the simple realization that machine breaking was a common form of dissent among the lower orders, in both rural and urban patches, in each of the British nations. Also, it offered potentially influential lessons for popular organizations with a radical political program. To begin, Luddism served as an example of a successful workingmen's dissent movement. Although often condemned as hopeless and backward looking, by both contemporaries and historians, Luddite activity was at any rate effective enough, when focused against small local employers, to force the government to station more than 12,000 troops in Luddite districts between Leicester and York during one period.⁶⁸ The experience of machine breaking also reinforced feelings among many of the working people throughout Britain that they were in confrontation with the state as well as the masters, possibly hastening the evolution of some into parliamentary reformers.⁶⁹

A second common strand of plebeian protest was the considerable, if ambiguous, tradition of the Mob. While in general economic, as evinced in the food riot and the

⁶⁷ E.P. Thompson and John Dinwiddy see very real links between machine sabotage and political reform: see Thompson, *Making of*, pp. 547-602; Dinwiddy, "Luddism and Politics in the Northern Counties", *Social History*, vol. 4 (1979), pp. 33-63. An opposite interpretation comes from Malcolm Thomis, who concludes that Luddism remained industrial in its origins and industrial in its aims: see Thomis, *The Luddites*, (Newton Abbot, 1970); and Thomis, *Politics and Society in Nottingham, 1785-1835*, (Oxford, 1969), pp. 77-99. Writing specifically about the Stockport district, Robert Glen concludes the same: see Glen, *Urban Workers in the Early Industrial Revolution*, (London, 1984), pp. 166-84. A middle view is taken by D.G. Wright, who concludes machine breakers were mostly, but not *only*, economic protesters: see Wright, *Popular Radicalism*, pp. 60-2. As an aside, Andy Wood sees Luddism as an important component of early nineteenth century plebeian culture. The common people, he suggests, perceived industrialization as going against their conception of law and custom, and this same conception justified them, in their own minds, in their machine-smashing activities. See Andy Wood, "The place of custom in plebeian political culture: England, 1550-1800", *Social History*, vol. 22 (1997), pp. 46-60.

⁶⁸ Eric Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour*, (London, 1964), p. 9.

⁶⁹ J.R. Dinwiddy, *From Luddism to the First Reform Bill*, (1986), p. 22.

price-fixing crowd action, at least one form of mob activity took on demonstrably political overtones in the years up to and during the French Revolution: the annual King's Birthday celebrations, held in towns and cities throughout Britain. This raucous event, the roots of which stretched back to the restoration of Charles II in 1660, was a major carnivalesque occasion in the restricted calendar of British popular culture, one which tapped into a widely understood vocabulary of festivity in England and Scotland, with parades, beating drums, pealing bells, and hoisted flags. Though traditionally an upbeat, deferential ceremony, orchestrated by the elite and supervised by the militia, the King's birthday ceremonies altered dramatically with the rise of the popular parliamentary reform movement. Celebrators with a new agenda, imbued with democratic enthusiasm, co-opted the event, in essence turning it from a respectful release of patriotism into a vehicle for political protest. They began to target those who seemed to have too much political power. The Lord Advocate, chief law officer in Scotland, was accosted on one occasion; the Lord Provost of Edinburgh, leader of the local oligarchy on another; and Henry Dundas, the British Home Secretary on still another. By the early 1790s, the celebration had taken on parliamentary reformist overtones that could be lost on no one. The occasion turned into a riot in Edinburgh in 1792, and a handbill given to authorities by protestors blamed the tumult on "His Majesty's most gracious Proclamation against Republicanism...[and his] contempt of...the Rights of Man". Reporting on the 1792 celebration staged in Perth, meanwhile, a newspaper correspondent observed that "The Lower Class of People talk of nothing but Liberty and Equality – 'No Dundas – No Bishops – and No King. Nothing but a Republic for us'. Such is the Spirit of the Times."⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Quoted in Henry Meikle, "The King's Birthday Riot in Edinburgh, June, 1792", *Scottish Historical Review*, vol. 7 (1910), p. 23; and Logue, *Popular Disturbances in Scotland*, pp. 154, 149. See also Christopher Whatley, "Royal Day, People's Day: The Monarch's Birthday in Scotland, c. 1660-1860", Chapter 8 in

II

The reporter's closing comment was indeed observant. Plebeian and artisan political radicalism in the British Isles came in response to the common man's belief that, in an era of burgeoning democracies, he did not enjoy the political influence to which his value as a male citizen and – for many – as a skilled worker, entitled him. Nor was this conviction without foundation. There is general agreement among historians of British Isles radicalism that, by the standards of political life in contemporary America and France, the lower orders in Britain and Ireland were sorely disenfranchised.⁷¹

Steep property qualifications imposed throughout the kingdom meant that only the most prosperous citizens possessed the right to vote; or, as one artisan phrased it, that "none but [the King's] Vassals could elect or be elected" to parliament.⁷² In both Britain and Ireland, prerequisite for the franchise was, until well into the nineteenth century, a

Roger Mason and Norman Macdougall, eds., *People and Power in Scotland*, (Edinburgh, 1992). It is interesting to note, in relation to the various influences on popular parliamentary reform in late-eighteenth century Scotland, the lack of influence derived from the covenanting tradition, which had been a part of that nation's heritage of protest since the late 1630s; there is nothing of a covenanting hue to be found, for example, in the pamphlets which were published by the Scottish Friends of the People beginning in 1792 to argue the case for annual parliaments and manhood suffrage. John Brims, for one, theorizes that the popular reformers' wariness of the covenanting tradition was deliberate, that they did not want to undermine their efforts by appealing to the example of men who had rebelled against their king and established a revolutionary government. See John Brims, "The Covenanting Tradition and Scottish Radicalism in the 1790s", in Terry Brotherstone, ed., *Covenant, Charter, and Party: Traditions of Revolt and Protest in Modern Scottish History*, (Aberdeen, 1989), pp. 50-62.

⁷¹ For discussions, and comparison, of franchise restriction in Ireland and Scotland, see McFarland, *Ireland and Scotland*, pp. 45-49. For Wales, see Gareth Elwyn Jones, *Modern Wales: A Concise History, 1485-1979* (Cambridge, 1984), p. 223. For acknowledgement by a conservative scholar of the inadequacy, and the strange anomalies, of the late eighteenth century electoral system in Britain as a whole, see John Cannon, *Parliamentary Reform, 1640-1832* (Cambridge, 1973), Chapter 2, "Pudding Time". Professor Cannon does, however, quarrel with left-wing scholars such as George Rudé for "under-estimat[ing] the size of the [English] electorate during this period": Cannon, p. 63, ft 3. For an alternative view, defending the existing system in the Scottish context, see Michael Fry, *The Dundas Despotism*, (Edinburgh, 1992).

⁷² Quoted in Edward Hughes, ed., "The Scottish Reform Movement and Charles Grey, 1792-94: Some Fresh Correspondence", *Scottish Historical Review*, vol. 35 (1956), p. 39.

freehold worth at least forty shillings, which few skilled, let alone unskilled, workers could satisfy. Just how few is made evident by even a cursory examination of electorate totals. In the English town of Bath, for example, only one man in a hundred could vote; less representative still was Portsmouth, which, despite being more than twice the size of Bath, had also a mere 100 electors. Plebian representation in Wales was no better. With the franchise restricted to no more than 4 per cent of the population, parliament was controlled either by the English aristocracy or by major Welsh landed families – in the end, then, it was their interests that were reflected. The same forty-shilling freehold existed in Ireland, and the 'political nation' was thus equally small and exclusive. While the Dublin electorate was comparatively high, numbering some 3,000 freemen during the late eighteenth century, the overwhelming majority of these were well-to-do Protestants, rather than plebeians and mechanics. Nor did the enfranchisement of Catholics in 1793 extend the vote to any sizeable degree, since the forty-shilling freehold remained in place. Although there was no forty-shilling freehold in Scotland, the system was essentially medieval in its composition, and representative of only the most substantial landowners. In 1790, the total number of those entitled to vote stood at about 2,655 – about half that of the city of Bristol, one fifth that of London, and one-seventh that of Westminster. Considered county by county, the dearth of voters approached the ridiculous: in Perthshire the electorate numbered 128, in Fife 153, in Midlothian 83, in Buteshire 12, in Orkney and Shetland 7, and a mere 3 in Bute.⁷³

⁷³ For representation figures in Bath and Portsmouth, see Cannon, *Parliamentary Reform*, p. 31. For Wales, see Jones, *Modern Wales*, p. 223, and also G. Roberts, "The Parliamentary representation of the Welsh Boroughs", *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, vol. 4 (1928-9), pp. 351-62. For Ireland, see McFarland, *Ireland and Scotland*, p. 48; and Foster, *Modern Ireland*, p. 236. For Scotland, see Straka, "Reform in Scotland", p. 23.

Franchise restriction of this nature flew in the face of the spread of democracy in America and revolutionary France, and neither British nor Irish working people were blind to this; as one Scots artisan phrased it, the surviving system was a holdover "of the forms of Feudal law long after that law virtually and substantially expired".⁷⁴ In general, the contemporary elite did not, however, see it in this light. Many believed, as did Robert Braxfield, Lord Justice Clerk in Scotland, that "the landed interest alone should be represented in Parliament, for they only hae an interest in the country." Given this outlook, they could not have been pleased by the growth of parliamentary reform clubs among the labouring population. "I like not their names", wrote the Scotsman Lord Henderland. "The Friends of the People, and a Club for Equality and Freedom! What occasion for such associations, with such names? Are not the people protected...in receiving the fruits of their industry?"⁷⁵

Subsequent generations of scholars have tended to be less hostile to the popular parliamentary reform movement, but while admitting that working people were relatively un-represented throughout the British Isles, many historians have not taken the logical next step of looking for connections in the common people's proposals to alleviate this situation. In part this is the result of the historiographical tendency to focus on nations as opposed to the British and Irish labouring population as a whole, and on national idiosyncrasies as providing a distinctive stamp to each movement – an approach that inclines toward contrast, not towards highlighting similarities. For example, R.F. Foster

⁷⁴ Quoted in Hughes, "Scottish Reform Movement", p. 39. In a recent article, Rosemary Sweet suggests that franchise restriction also offended against the common man's traditional sense of urban identity and provincial loyalty, important components of his national identity that tend, nonetheless, to be overlooked by scholars who discuss the growth of English nationalism in this period (Professor Sweet cites Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*, (New Haven, 1992) as an example). As much as international republican influences, it was, Professor Sweet argues, the lower orders' local pride, combined with their conception of the constitutional importance of boroughs, that fueled their demand for a political voice. See Rosemary Sweet, "Freemen and Independence in English Borough Politics, 1770-1830", *Past and Present*, no. 161 (1998), pp. 84-115.

⁷⁵ Quoted in F. O'Gorman, *The Whig Party and the French Revolution* (London, 1967), pp. 207, 243.

notes that the United Irishmen did advocate a parliamentary program influenced by both Paine and the French Revolution, but does not connect theirs to identical agendas advocated by British organizations at the same time. The Irish wanted to “break the [political] connection” with England, he writes. As far as it relates to Irish determination to end reliance on Westminster, this statement is true, but the Irishmen’s struggle corresponded to that of the English lower orders also battling against Westminster, and Foster could, without distorting the Irish picture, have drawn attention to this.⁷⁶

Also, there is a strain of historiography that, while acknowledging that British Isles lower orders were disenfranchised, refuses to recognize that plebeian and artisan radicals were after a specific form of parliamentary reform, as opposed to simply the overthrow of the established order in general. J.C.D. Clark, for example, while correctly noting that working radicals, from literate artisans on down, had been greatly influenced by Paine’s *Rights of Man*, proceeds to draw the unsupportable conclusion that “parliamentary reform was relatively unimportant” to them, and, furthermore, that the radicals’ real goal was “the total overthrow of established society”.⁷⁷ Assertions such as these, while true of several extreme cadres, are demonstrably inaccurate as a characterization of plebeian and artisan reformers as a whole. Popular radical organizations sought very specific parliamentary reforms, as a close look at the plebeians’ and artisans’ own petitions, showing both what many did and – as important – did *not* want, will demonstrate. And it can be seen, moreover, that, whatever the cultural differences between them, this reform program was strikingly similar from nation to nation throughout the British Isles.

Led by strict adherence to the principles of popular representation and legislative accountability, British and Irish plebeian and artisan radicals adopted overwhelmingly a

⁷⁶ Foster, *Modern Ireland*, p. 268.

two-pronged parliamentary reform program, one that had been most recently advocated by Thomas Paine: manhood suffrage and annual parliaments.⁷⁸ Testing for these two proposals, we find them advocated again and again, in reform clubs to which British and Irish working men belonged. In England, for example, an Address to the Nation published in August 1792 by the largely plebeian and artisan London Corresponding Society – the greatest of British popular organizations, called by Edmund Burke the “Mother of all Mischief” – advocated “annually elected parliaments [and] unbiassed and unbought elections”.⁷⁹ Similarly, the Sheffield Constitutional Society, a predominantly artisan organization founded “by five or six mechanics”, concluded a large outdoor meeting in 1795 with demands for annual parliaments and

⁷⁷ Clark, *English Society, 1688-1832*, pp. 345-6.

⁷⁸ See ft. 8. This was not, however, an original program of Paine's, either. As early as 1780, the middle class reformers of Britain's Westminster Association had included these two goals in their famous six-point reform program, along with demands for equal sized constituencies, the secret ballot, the abolition of property qualifications for MPs, and the payment of MPs; Dickinson, *British Radicalism*, p. 4. For a general discussion of the Westminster Association, see E.C. Black, *The Association: British extra-parliamentary political organization, 1769-93* (Oxford, 1963). Nor should it be thought that all supporters of parliamentary reform sought these goals as ends in themselves. W. Straka notes, for example, that groups of Scots weavers and calico-printers sought political change as a means to redress grievances of an economic nature: as one weaver claimed after an unsuccessful economic petition, “Had [we] possessed 70,000 votes for the election of members to sit in the House would [our] application have been treated with such indifference not to say inattention?” Quoted in Straka, “Reform in Scotland”, p. 39. A contemporary English poem makes essentially this same point:

“The rights of our freedom as tradesmen are lost
But those who've betrayed us shall feel to their cost,
Our rights as electors for ever shall be,
As dear to our lives for we'll ever be free.”

Quoted in Sweet, “Freemen and Independence in English Borough Politics”, p. 109.

⁷⁹ Burke on the London Corresponding Society quoted in Thompson, *Making of...*, p. 173. The LCS was, indeed, founded by an artisan, the Scots-born shoemaker Thomas Hardy in 1792. E.P. Thompson has shown that, despite middle class participation, the LCS was, in his words, “above all a society of artisans.” The register of one division shows, for example, that of ninety-eight members, there were 9 watchmakers, 8 weavers, 8 tailors, 6 cabinet-makers, 5 shoemakers, 4 cordwainers, 3 carpenters, dyers, and hairdressers, 2 merchants, ribbon-makers, butchers, hosiers, carvers, bricklayers, frame-work cutters, breeches-makers, bedstead-makers, and china-burners, and one stationer, hatter, baker, upholsterer, locksmith, wore-worker, musician, surgeon, founder, glazier, tinsplate-worker, bookseller, japaner [i.e., lacquerer], engraver, mercer, warehouseman, and labourer. Thompson, *Making of...*, p. 174. In addition to Thompson, pp. 129-35, 138-45, 152-7, 166-74, general discussions of the London Corresponding Society include Henry Collins, “The London Corresponding Society”, in John Saville, ed., *Democracy and the Labour Movement*, (London, 1954), pp. 103-34; J. Ann Hone, *For the Cause of Truth: Radicalism in London, 1796-1821*, (Oxford, 1982), Chapter 1, “Reactions to Repression”; and Dickinson, *The Politics of the People*, pp. 232-41. For a discussion stressing the ‘unrespectable’ (i.e., plebeian) elements in the LCS, see Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries and Pornographers in London, 1795-1840*, (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 8-14, 28-33.

manhood suffrage.⁸⁰ And as late as the second decade of the nineteenth century, the next generation of English working radicals were advocating these same goals.

According to the autobiography of the radical Lancashire weaver Samuel Bamford, the tradesmen of that city's Hampden Club passed resolutions in 1817 "declaratory of the right of every male to vote, who paid taxes; that males of eighteen should be able to vote; [and] that parliaments should be elected annually".⁸¹

This same two-pronged agenda found favour among workingmen throughout Scotland, Ireland, and Wales, as well; as one Scottish weaver, held under arrest on a charge of sedition in 1817, summarized the matter to authorities, "distress in [Britain] was attributed...to them [i.e., the workers] not having manhood suffrage and annual parliaments."⁸² And as in England, this preoccupation was reflected in the programs of

⁸⁰ Donnelly and Baxter, "Sheffield and the English Revolutionary Tradition", p. 401. Sheffield was populated by small masters and skilled craftsmen; and not surprisingly, then, there is general agreement among scholars that, despite some middle class leadership, the Sheffield Constitutional Society was essentially an artisan organization. "Most of the active members were small masters and skilled journeymen", according to Wright, *Popular Radicalism*, p. 170. Gwyn Williams agrees: the Sheffield Society, he writes, "was full of literate and self-conscious artisans and tradesmen"; Williams, *Artisans and Sans Culottes*, p. 60. For general studies of Sheffield radicalism in the 1790s, see Donnelly and Baxter, "Sheffield and the English Revolutionary Tradition"; A.W.L. Seaman, "Radical Politics at Sheffield, 1791-1797", *Transactions of the Hunter Archaeological Society*, vol. 7 (1957), pp. 215-28; and John Stevenson, *Artisans and Democrats: Sheffield and the French Revolution, 1789-1797*, (Sheffield, 1989).

⁸¹ Samuel Bamford, *Passages in the Life of a Radical* (London, 1967 edition), p. 10. No less than in the clubs of the 1790s, substantial artisan and plebeian involvement can be seen in the 1820s Hampden organizations. Though not exclusively artisan, most of the cells contained a large number of craftsmen, as Bamford makes clear. Present at one 1816 Hampden Club meeting in Lancashire, he wrote, were "John Knight...cotton manufacturer; William Ogden...letter-press printer; William Benbow...shoemaker; --- Bradbury...stonecutter; Charles Walker...weaver; Joseph Watson...clogger; Joseph Ramsden...woolen weaver; John Haigh...silk weaver; Joseph Taylor...hatter; Robert Pilkington...cotton weaver; John Johnson...tailor; and Joseph Mitchell...draper. Bamford, p. 11-12. Interestingly, at a later Hampden meeting occurred one of the rare instances where plebeian and mechanic political radicals proved receptive to the furthest implications of their own call for egalitarianism. On this occasion, Bamford himself suggested that women should vote, and describes the outcome: "the women, who attended numerously on that bleak ridge, were mightily pleased with it, and the men being nothing dissentient, when the resolution was put, the women held up their hands amid much laughter; and ever from that time females voted with the men at the radical meetings." Bamford, p. 165. The role of women in late eighteenth century popular political radicalism is, of course, one which is beginning to receive a good deal of attention by gender historians. To date, the most exhaustive study of women's status in the movement is Anna Clarke, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (London, 1995). For women in the Irish context, see Daire Keogh, ed., *The Women of 1798* (Dublin, 1998), especially Nancy Curtin, "Matilda Tone and virtuous republican femininity", pp. 26-46, an illuminating study of how, simply by being supportive as wives, mothers, and sisters, Irish women helped to further the radical cause.

⁸² Quoted in Fraser, *Conflict and Class*, p. 103.

the various popular radical societies. For example, the constitution of the 1790s-based Scottish Friends of the People – the largest, most noteworthy of the Scottish popular organizations was the Scottish Friends of the People, a collection of gentry, middle ranks and working class radicals – declared as the group's primary goals the attainment of "an equal representation of the people in Parliament and a frequent opportunity to exercise their right of election."⁸³ Scholarly discussion of the Scottish Friends organization has tended to focus on the involvement of the prosperous merchant and elite members.⁸⁴ Although the leadership of the movement did indeed often come from the ranks of the bourgeois, its strength was derived from the common people⁸⁵, and they must obviously have supported the organization's two-point parliamentary reform agenda, however much it fell to the elite to give it articulation. And the workingmen may have influenced the nature of the program more than has in general been recognized; as W. Straka suggests, the elite membership tended initially to favour mere limited extension of the franchise – it was the plebeian and artisans in the group, he argues, who insisted on the more thorough reform based on manhood suffrage and shorter duration of Parliament.⁸⁶ Nor was the labouring components' advocacy of these reform goals limited to membership in the Scottish Friends of the People. After the

⁸³ Quoted in Logue, *Popular Disturbances in Scotland*, p. 12.

⁸⁴ Elite involvement in the Scottish Friends organization has been stressed most recently in Brims, 'The Scottish Association of the Friends of the People', Brims in Devine, *Conflict and Stability*, pp. 31-50.

⁸⁵ The substantial artisan membership in the Scottish Friends can be explained, first, by the organizations' heavy representation in such weaving parishes as Thornliebank, Cupar, Kilwinning and Maybole; and secondly, by the low subscription rates of three pennies quarterly, designed specifically to attract members of the lower order into the movement. Straka, "Reform in Scotland", p. 37. This plebeian and artisan membership was often a cause for self-celebration; a Scottish Friends' poem of 1793 read:

"The worthy members of these worthy meetings
Are cobblers some, some brewers to their trade,
Weavers are some, some finely thrive by beatings,
And some by their smart feet do make their bread.
Old toothless schoolmasters, and furious tanners,
Tailors, hairdressers, deep-read butchers too,
All list with zeal under fair reform's banners,
And that they will be great men vow."

Quoted in Meikle, *Scotland and the French Revolution*, p. 93, ft. 2.

repression and dissolution of the Scottish Friends in the mid-1790s, plebeian and artisan former members, under the lead of the hand loom weaver George Mealmaker, would continue advocacy of these same goals in the United Scotsmen organization. And, as would occur in England, Hampden Clubs in Scotland – most with substantive plebeian and artisan membership – carried the push for this same agenda well into the nineteenth century. As late as 1816, Hampden Clubs in the cities of Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dundee, and Stirling undertook a petition drive for parliamentary reform, collecting an estimated 100,000 signatures in support of manhood suffrage and annual elections – of which a good many must inevitably have been from workingmen. In October of that same year, the largest meeting yet in Scotland in favour of parliamentary reform took place in Glasgow, sponsored by the Hampden Club and attended by some 40,000 people, mostly of the lower orders.⁸⁷

Returning our focus to the 1790s, we find that radicals in Ireland espoused a similar parliamentary reform agenda at that time: the official program of the Dublin United Irishmen, for example, contained twenty-three articles of parliamentary reform, composed by twenty-one members; and, while divided over some planks, the members were in unequivocal agreement over the necessity for manhood suffrage and annual parliaments.⁸⁸ The United Irishmen were the most important Irish reform club of the

⁸⁶ Straka, "Reform in Scotland", p. 37.

⁸⁷ M.I. Thomis and P. Holt, *Threats of Revolution in Britain, 1789-1848* (London, 1977) p. 38; Straka, "Reform in Scotland", p. 40.

⁸⁸ Curtin, *United Irishmen*, pp. 25-27. For concise discussions of the UI agenda, which was not entirely political but also – largely from a pressing need for sheer numerical strength – Catholic emancipationist, agrarian, and Irish nationalist, see Curtin, *ibid.*, Chapter 1, "Ideology and Aims"; and also R.B. McDowell, *Ireland in the Age of Imperialism and Revolution, 1760-1801*, (Oxford, 1979) pp. 364-68. Some historians have seen this wide-ranging program as proof that the idiosyncrasies of United Irish radicalism prevent its being considered alongside contemporary British popular movements: see for example W. Benjamin Kennedy, "The Irish Jacobins", *Studia Hibernica*, vol. 16 (1976) pp.109-21, which argues that Irish idiosyncrasies made the United Irish movement analogous to popular movements in France, but not Britain. In the past two decades, this view seems to have fallen from favour, however, and the newest generation of Irish radical historians have shown that – notwithstanding such disparate strands such as agrarianism, ultra-Catholicism, and Irish nationalism – the United Irish movement remained for a long while recognizably Painite political, and thus very much tied to the British popular movement. See, for

period – and, subsequently, probably the most thoroughly studied by historians. As with the scholarship surrounding the Scottish Friends of the People, however, there has been a tendency in United Irish historiography to highlight bourgeois involvement in the movement, at the expense of contributions from the working members.⁸⁹ It is undeniable that radical Irish bourgeois and mercantile elite were prominent in the organization's founding and, subsequently, at leadership levels throughout the decade of the 1790s; but it is also true – though rarely pointed out – that involvement among the lower orders, artisans in particular, was obvious from the outset, and that it increased as the movement grew, particularly in the north-east. A.T.Q. Stewart, for one, has shown that, among the founding members of the first United Irish club, in Belfast in 1791, was a woollen draper, a linen merchant, a tanner, and a watch-maker. All would become members of the Belfast group's Secret Committee, and thereby play important roles in shaping the specifics of the UI parliamentary reform program, as well as contributing to general strategy.⁹⁰

The involvement of workingmen in the United Irish organization may well have been, in fact, a crucial reason why the movement was thus able to expand. There is evidence to indicate that, in pushing outwards from urban centres, new UI chapters simply imposed their own structure onto pre-existing and receptive networks of Painite artisan clubs that had sprung up, throughout the countryside, in the wake of the French

example, Elliot, *Partners in Revolution*, Part 1, Chapter 1, "Reform to Republicanism"; Nancy Curtin, "The transformation of the Society of United Irishmen into a mass-based revolutionary organisation, 1794-6" *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. 24 (1985), pp. 463-91; Curtin, *United Irishmen*, especially Chapter 1, "Ideology and Aims"; and Dickson, "Paine and Ireland", Chapter 11 in Dickson, Keogh, and Whelan, *United Irishmen*.

⁸⁹ An early account stressing the bourgeois, mercantilist element of the United Irish is R.B. McDowell, "The personnel of the Dublin Society of United Irishmen, 1791-4", *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. 2 (1940), pp. 12-53. More recent examples of this approach include Nancy Curtin, *The United Irishmen*, which focuses in places on the United Irish barrister Arthur O'Connor; Eliot, *Partners in Revolution*, which tends to concentrate on elite radicals such as Wolfe Tone, Rev. William Jackson, and Archibald Hamilton Rowan; and David Wilson, *United Irishmen, United States*, (Ithaca, 1998), which (almost necessarily) discusses the elite among the United Irishmen, who were able subsequently to emigrate to America.

⁹⁰ A.T.Q. Stewart, *A Deeper Silence: The Hidden Origins of the United Irish Movement*, (London, 1993), pp. 154-55.

Revolution, clubs of journeymen and tradesmen with titles such as 'The Liberty Boys' and 'The Sons of Freedom'.⁹¹ And in the original urban strongholds of Belfast and Dublin, meanwhile, enthusiastic membership drives targeted specifically the lower orders, so that in these areas the absorption of plebeians and artisans into the UI kept roughly abreast with the burgeoning rural membership. As a result of this infusion, by at least the late-1790s the rank and file of the United Irishmen had become, as Elaine McFarland notes, "mostly artisan" – and while not all were political reformers attracted by the two-pronged Painite program, it seems reasonable to assume that many of these were.⁹²

A second Irish radical organization from this period, while commanding a good deal less scholarly attention than the United Irishmen, demonstrates perhaps even more clearly the commitment of many Irish workingmen to the twin causes of manhood suffrage and annual parliaments. Formed in 1792, the Irish Jacobin organization, a distant affiliate of the United Irish movement, released an inaugural address that closely resembled the United Irish platform, stressing the necessity for parliamentary reform as well as the union of Irish, English and Scottish reformers to establish a true constitution. And much more than were many of the UI chapters, the Irish Jacobins was a plebeian and artisan expression; the group's highest ranks were filled by skilled artisans: the first chairman and the secretary were both chandlers, for example, and so too was the club's founder, a "radical mechanick" named Rowley Osborne. The second chairman was a house-painter.⁹³

⁹¹ This model for UI expansion is set down in Jim Smyth, *The Men of No Property: Irish Radicals and Popular Politics in the Late Eighteenth Century*, (New York, 1992).

⁹² McFarland, *Ireland and Scotland*, pp. 133-35.

⁹³ For the Irish Jacobins, see Curtin, "The transformation of the Society of the United Irishmen", pp. 471-73. Aside from this article, and Professor Curtin's brief discussion of the movement in her 1994 study *The United Irishmen*, pp. 145-6, the Irish Jacobins have virtually been ignored in Irish radical historiography; one of the only other modern scholars to discuss the organization is Kennedy, "The Irish Jacobins" (see ft. 88).

Demonstrating preoccupation with these same reform issues among radicals in Wales is a slightly more difficult task, since, in part as the result of the linguistic barrier, radical Welsh workingmen were slower to form political organizations than were their counterparts in England, Scotland, and Ireland. As a result, polished and published reform proposals and manifestos from the late eighteenth century are lacking on a scale comparable to the rest of Britain. Moreover, the bulk of Welsh radical historiography is firm in asserting that popular Welsh radicalism did not come into its own until the Chartist movement of the 1830s.⁹⁴ Despite this consensus, it is possible to discern support for the ideas of universal manhood suffrage and annual parliaments among at least some of the Welsh working population in the 1790s. Towards the end of the decade, for example, the plebeian-born Welsh radical and journalist David Williams was writing in favour of manhood suffrage, and we should not be surprised if, much as did Paine's writings, William's pamphlets diffused from the literate artisans downwards to the plebeians. Perhaps not coincidentally, then, parliamentary reform was the subject of a number of public meetings and petitions in Wales during the period in which Williams – and Paine – were arguing in support of this cause. And beginning in 1815, English Hampden Clubs circulated literature to many parts of Wales, publicizing further the program of manhood suffrage and annual parliaments. A good indication of the strength of the parliamentary reform impulse in Wales is that it did not

⁹⁴ For a lucid explanation as to why it took until the Chartist period for Welsh radicalism to blossom, see Gwyn Williams, "Locating a Welsh Working Class", in Smith, *A People and A Proletariat: Essays in the History of Wales*. As much as any historian, Williams has laboured to highlight what there is to highlight of 1790s-era radicalism in Wales, and his chapter "Radical Awakening" in Herbert Jones, *Remaking of Wales* stands as perhaps the best summation yet of Welsh radicalism in the age of revolution. Ironically, William's eagerness to boost the 1790s 'movement' as much as possible gives an extra element of support to the popular notion that Welsh radicalism did not come into its own until Chartism, for if it *had* peaked earlier, we may be sure that he would have been the first to call attention to this. This view has been repeated most recently by Rosemary Sweet, who argues that Wales was, in general, a deeply conservative nation in the pre-Chartist period, and that such plebeian unrest as did occur in the late eighteenth century was an aberration, most often taking the form of food riots rather than advocating radical Painite reform; see Rosemary Sweet, "Stability and Continuity: Swansea Politics and Reform, 1780-1820", *Welsh History Review*, vol. 18 (1996), pp. 14-39.

diminish with time; translations of William Cobbett's *Political Register*, and Henry Hunt's speeches, both of which argued in favour of manhood suffrage and annual parliaments, were circulating in Wales as late as 1815, and both would become hallmark demands of the Welsh Chartist movement of the 1830s.⁹⁵

This constant repetition of the two-pronged parliamentary reform agenda of manhood suffrage and annual parliaments indicates that many of the British and Irish working radicals seemed clear, in their own minds, as to what, exactly, were the alterations they wanted to the existing structure. It can also be shown that some of them at least were no less certain of what they did *not* want. Few, if any, of the British or Irish reform organizations to which plebeian and artisan radicals belonged advocated programs intended for meaningful social or economic reconstruction; and many of the working radicals themselves rejected firmly any notion of equality of property – an idea that one United Irishman dismissed as “too absurd to imagine”.⁹⁶ Many were convinced that the roots of social and economic problems were traceable to political

⁹⁵ Wallace, *Organise! Organise! Organise!*, p. 7; Jones, *Modern Wales*, p. 224. For a general discussion of parliamentary reform in Wales during the period under consideration here, see Wager, “Welsh Politics and Parliamentary Reform”. Though primarily concerned with the passage of First and Second Reform Bills of March and September, 1831, Wager's article does offer hints that the urge for reform had struck chords among earlier generations of Welshmen: the plan of the Westminster Committee in 1780 was never really forgotten, he writes, and would be reaffirmed in petitions submitted periodically to the House of Commons throughout the nineteenth century; Wager, “Welsh Politics”, p. 430. In general, though, Wager supports the view that plebeian radicalism in Wales did not mature until the Chartist period.

⁹⁶ Quoted in Curtin, *United Irishmen*, p. 29. This is not to imply, of course, that social reform was shunned by all radical workers during the interregnum. The Spenceans in England, most of whom were plebeians and artisans, were social and economic levelers above all else, although supporters of political reform also; see Thompson, *Making of*, pp. 613-15, and McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, Part 1. In Scotland, meanwhile, it was reported by one observer that “an opinion got amongst the lower class that a division of property also should take place [along with parliamentary reform], and that they would be equally free and equally rich”; quoted in Meikle, p. 99, ft. 1. For a discussion of the leveling impulse among Scots reformers, see Young, *Rousing of the Scottish Working Class*, pp. 42-6. The inconsistency between a belief in the sanctity of property on the one hand, and economic leveling on the other, is perhaps best observed among the United Irishmen, simply because, in their need to attract as many of the disaffected as possible, the group's organizers could not afford to rule out equality of property as one of their many goals. The paradox in which this placed them is evident in their widely circulated ‘official’ manifesto of 1792: on p. 7 the catechism states that “no man shall be deprived of his liberty or property by others”, while on the very next page there is a promise of the division of the “ancient estates among the descendants of those Irish families who were pillaged by English invaders”; quoted in Curtin, “Transformation of the Society of United Irishmen”, p. 491, ft. 137. For a recent discussion of some of the

inequality; reform of parliament would be the panacea, then, for all ills. It should be noted that in this they differed with the man who had done so much to articulate their political agenda, Thomas Paine. Many of the labouring radicals studiously neglected Paine's writings on social welfare in Part Two of *The Rights of Man*.⁹⁷ But they did more than just neglect this type of reform; aware of the opprobrium that greeted the leveling charge, many specifically denied the intention to confiscate private property, often going so far as to publish handbills defending social and economic inequality. For example, members of an artisan organization in Manchester released a handbill in 1793, stating that

The equality insisted on by the friends of reform is AN EQUALITY OF RIGHTS... The *inequality* derived from labour and successful enterprise, the result of superior industry and good fortune, is an *inequality essential to the very existence of Society*, and it naturally follows, that the property so acquired, should pass *from a father to his children*. To render property insecure would destroy all motives to exertion, and tear up public happiness by the roots.[italics in original]

Artisans of the Sheffield Society for Constitutional Information were even more direct: as a handbill published by the club declared, "the visionary equality of property would desolate the world, and replunge it into the darkest and wildest barbarism."⁹⁸

All of which goes to disproving the misconception, voiced by J.C.D. Clark, that popular organizational radicalism was always merely an anarchic force, bent on overturning society's every aspect. Equally important, by demonstrating the capacity for selective reading, examples such as the above help to refute a second charge,

leveling schemes proposed by various UI members, see James Quinn, "The United Irishmen and social reform", *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. 31 (1998), pp. 188-201.

⁹⁷ See McFarland, *Ireland and Scotland*, pp. 70-1. Paine advocated many non-political reform programs, such as expenditures for public education, old age pension, state aid for the youth (*Rights of Man*, Part I); his discussion of the elimination of private property was begun in *Rights of Man* Part II, and was developed more fully in *Agrarian Justice* (1795-6), his last great pamphlet. While Paine never went so far as to call for limiting the accumulation of private property, *Agrarian Justice* did recommend that it be taxed and redistributed, a proposal to which, as we have seen, some of the plebeian and artisan reformers did not subscribe.

leveled both then and now against the popular radical movement: that plebeian and artisan radicals did not really internalize or understand the parliamentary reform program, but recited as mere unthinking mantra, handed down to them by the educated reform elite. "Scots peasants understand nothing of parliamentary reform...and other grievances of which the discontented in a higher rank of life complain" said one official in 1792 – a view repeated almost verbatim two centuries later by Ian Christie, who suggests that the parliamentary reform movement appealed only to "the thinking and sensible part of the nation...[and not] the lower orders of the people".⁹⁹

There are good reasons, however, for disbelieving this interpretation, and for instead concluding that radical workingmen both understood the reform agenda, and were, in the larger sense, capable of dissecting political tracts on their own, of retaining aspects they liked and rejecting those they did not. The refusal of many to follow Paine's lead into social reform, as seen above, is evidence of this in itself. In addition, there is a firm contemporary tradition concerning the lower orders' interest in, and ceaseless debating of, political issues. Disapproving slogans of the time such as "let the cobbler stick to his last and let the learned men write the books", and "preaching cobblers make bad shoes"¹⁰⁰, reflect an awareness on the part of the elite that the lower orders were not impervious to ideas – if anything, indeed, were too inquisitive to suit the liking of many. How to prevent the diffusion of ideas was an impossible mission, since labouring people seem to have discussed issues at whatever places they gathered. Oftentimes the workplace itself was a natural backdrop for political discussion. It was said of the Paisley weavers, for example, that when the *Glasgow Chronicle* arrived thrice a week all the looms stopped while its contents were read and eagerly discussed. Similarly, an

⁹⁸ Quoted in Dickinson, *British Radicalism*, p. 17.

⁹⁹ Quoted in Meikle, *Scotland and the French Revolution*, p. 99; Christie, *Stress and Stability*, pp. 50-2.

employer in England complained that “while at work...[the artisan] and his customer would...talk politics”, as opposed merely to talking trade.¹⁰¹ Even more conducive to the discussion of politics – and of just about every other topic under the sun – were the artisan taverns, known even at the time for doubling as meeting grounds for popular debating societies. As a 1771 poem centered around the Red Lion Tavern in Birmingham read: “The tradesmen weekly here repair/ to talk of this or that affair/ no matter what, in Church or State/ or anything that might relate/ to foreign or domestic news/ how times, or trade, or commerce goes/ and whilst Elections are depending/ where’s like to be a great contending”.¹⁰²

An important point of these gatherings, whether at work or held during off-hours at taverns, was that illiteracy – probably more common among the plebeians than the artisans – was not a block against exposure to the issues of the day. As the radical Lancashire weaver Samuel Bamford recalled in his autobiography, the literate – educated in the Sunday Schools – were more than willing to “encourage and direct” the illiterate towards an understanding of the parliamentary reform program. Bamford’s assertion is supported by John Money’s examination of popular articulacy in the workingmen’s taverns and clubs of the Birmingham area during this same period: Professor Money shows clearly that – one way or another, in one place or another –

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in E.J. Hobsbawm and Joan Wallach Scott, “Political Shoemakers”, *Past and Present*, vol. 89 (1980), p. 90.

¹⁰¹ Quoted in Straka, “Reform in Scotland”, p. 36.

¹⁰² Quoted in John Money, “Taverns, Coffee Houses and Clubs: Local Politics and Popular Articulacy in the Birmingham Area, in the Age of the American Revolution”, *The Historical Journal*, vol. 14, (1971), pp. 15-47: p. 37. Money’s article is a concise, lucid examination of the diffusion of radical ideas at workingmen’s convivial gatherings. More recently, but on the same topic, see McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, Chapter 6, “Tavern debating clubs”; and lowerth Prothero, *Radical Artisans in England and France*, Chapter 11, “The culture of radical clubs”. Moreover, as McCalman’s *Radical Underworld*, Chapter 7, “Blasphemous chapels”, makes clear, in addition to the workplace and the tavern, plebeian religious gatherings also served as an excellent backdrop for the debating of politics.

events of the day were dissected and understood by the lower orders.¹⁰³ In the end, then, while we cannot enter into the minds of the working radicals in order finally to prove that demands for manhood suffrage and annual parliaments were internalized and understood, we can suggest strongly that this was so by returning, first, to the simple fact that it was a demand so widely and so often voiced; secondly, to the contemporary slogans and observations showing that labouring people were in the habit of discussing political issues, at work and in leisure; and thirdly, to the rejection by some of Paine's social writings, evidence that plebeians and artisans were able to interpret material selectively. In the face of these points, the onus is on those scholars who believe that the plebeians and artisans did not understand their own reform program to demonstrate that this was so.

To this point, we have tested British and Irish plebeian and artisan organizational radicalism for commonality of reform aims, and found that virtually all of the noteworthy groups did indeed advocate the same two-pronged Paineite program. National idiosyncrasies notwithstanding, then, their aims, no less than their influences, were identical: in their commitment to the establishment of manhood suffrage and annual

¹⁰³ Bamford, *Passages in the Life of a Radical*, pp. 7-8. Literacy levels among plebeians and artisan of the time, and their families, are difficult to determine. In the Scottish context, a partial reconstruction has been attempted by Norman Murray, *The Scottish Hand Loom Weavers, 1790-1850: A Social History*, (Edinburgh, 1978), pp. 161-64. Certainly, artisans of the time prided themselves on being literate, and – as the result of day and Sunday schools – many probably were, to varying degrees. Contemporary observers certainly suggested that this was so: artisans “valued education highly”, a minister wrote, “both for themselves and their children. They sent their children to school, read books, pamphlets and newspapers avidly, and discussed all manner of topics with a knowledge that impressed their contemporaries”. Quoted in John Brims, “The Scottish Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution”, pp. 16-17. One artisan boasted that “persons possessing the advantage of a more refined education would hardly guess what an amount of knowledge and book-learning is to be met with amongst the members of my ancient trade”. Quoted in Hobsbawm and Scott, “Political Shoemakers”, p. 91. In his examination of Scottish craftsmen in the western region in the late eighteenth to mid nineteenth centuries, Norman Murray suggests that, as it happened, the revolutionary era marked a high point in the lower orders’ educational attainment before a falling off that began in the late 1830s: Murray, *Hand Loom Weavers*, p. 178. Whatever the literacy levels, sources agree, though, that those tradesmen who were literate liked to *think about* whatever they read; as was observed in a popular eighteenth century English poem that ran: “A cobbler once in days of yore/ Sat musing at his cottage door/ He liked to read old books, he said/ And then to ponder what he read”. Quoted in Hobsbawm and Scott, “Political Shoemakers”, p. 92.

parliaments, English, Scottish, Irish and Welsh popular radical organizations were as one. As a final observation, it is worth noting that the goals of the British Isles radicals also bore more than a passing similarity to those of the sans culottes in France, also advocates of expanded political rights and opponents of property qualifications. The French constitution of 1793 provided for manhood suffrage, single-member constituencies, and direct election. The radical answer to disenfranchisement was the same, then, on both sides of the Channel.¹⁰⁴ And since we have already seen that the French Revolution served as a major impetus to British Isles popular radicalism, the commonality of aims between French and English-speaking reformers need not surprise us, and certainly was not coincidental. To restate a central argument of this thesis, the British Isles working radicals clearly viewed themselves as acting within the same overarching Western European political continuum – Paine’s ‘age of revolutions’ – as the French, and before them the Americans. A connection of this kind is often made regarding the French and the Irish, and the French and the Scots, and the French and the English, but rarely do scholars observe it of popular radicalism in France and in the British Isles as a whole. It is worth repeating, though, that the British and Irish radicals were themselves aware of this rich transatlantic tradition. Their conception of their common position in a linear historical development was perhaps never better expressed than in the oath of the United Irishmen: “What have you got in your hand? A green bough. Where did it first grow? In America. Where did it bud? In France. Where are you going to plant it? In the crown of Great Britain.”¹⁰⁵ By the 1790s, the problem of establishing republicanism in a large state – which had been solved (for white society) in America, and which was in the process of being solved in

¹⁰⁴ See Gunther Lottes, “Radicalism, revolution and political culture: an Anglo-French comparison”, in Phillip, *The French Revolution and British Popular Politics*, pp. 87, 90.

¹⁰⁵ Quoted in Goodwin, *Friends of Liberty*, p. 255.

France – was, most British and Irish radicals believed, finally ready to be tackled, in turn, in the British Isles, through advocacy of manhood suffrage and annual parliaments. As one group of English artisans phrased the matter, in an LCS address to the French Legislative Assembly in 1792: “Frenchmen, you are already free, and Britons are preparing to become so”.¹⁰⁶

III

Efforts towards establishing this two-pronged program took several forms. An attempt to highlight plebeian and artisan involvement in these must overcome, however, two general historiographical tendencies. The first is the commonplace belief among scholars that there was an unbridgeable gap between polite and plebeian dissent, with effective participation in parliamentary reform confined to the privileged few, the prosperous merchants and elite of the radical organizations, while the lower orders, although technically enjoying membership status, were mere followers, in essence voiceless.¹⁰⁷ The second is the attention given, when discussing outright insurrectionary movements, to the question of whether these did, or did not, constitute

¹⁰⁶ Quoted in Wright, *Popular Radicalism*, p. 44.

¹⁰⁷ Thus J.H. Plumb: there were “two worlds of politics in the eighteenth century – a tight political establishment, linked to small groups of powerful managers in the provinces, who controlled parliament, the executive, and all that was effective in the nation, and outside this an amorphous mass of political sentiment that found expression in occasional hysteria and impotent polemic, but whose effective voice in the nation was negligible[;]...in spite of Tom Paine...the true working class...were still outside politics.” J.H. Plumb, “Political Man”, in James L. Clifford, *Man Versus Society in Eighteenth Century England: Six Points of View*, (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 12, 19. This view has been refuted most recently by Michael T. Davis, who examines the working friendship that the radical London printer Daniel Eaton enjoyed with, on the one hand, artisans such as Thomas Hardy, and, on the other, Romantic democratic poets such as Samuel Coleridge, William Wordsworth and Robert Southey. The fact that plebeian and elite dissent could overlap in the single person of Eaton shows, in Davis’ words, “just how close the two worlds of radicalism actually were.” See Michael T. Davis, “That Odious Class of Men Called Democrats’: Daniel Isaac Eaton and the Romantics, 1794-1795”, *History*, vol. 84 (1999), pp. 74-92.

a legitimate revolutionary threat in Britain¹⁰⁸, rather than in the less dramatic question of how some of the plots in England, Scotland, and Ireland might have been tied together, each a single manifestation of a larger conspiracy. And here, too, the involvement of one or two elite radicals in insurrectionary plots has tended to overshadow the much greater plebeian or artisan involvement in the same.¹⁰⁹ As a result, the prominent involvement of workingmen in parliamentary reform activity – peaceful and insurrectionary – has been under-appreciated. Roughly speaking, there were three stages of popular parliamentary radicalism between 1790 and the rise of the Chartists in the 1830s. First, the initial moral suasion of popular organizations such as the LCS and the Scottish Friends of the People, from the late-1780s until the mid-1790s; secondly, and immediately following, the underground insurrectionary activities of the United groups, in the 1795-1803 period; and thirdly, in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars, in 1815-1820, characterized by the resurgence of both moral and physical force strands. In each, leading involvement and international cooperation between radical workingmen throughout the British Isles can be demonstrated.

¹⁰⁸ Thompson argued that they did, and – as in so much else – scholars have approached the debate with his work in mind, either rejecting his argument or supporting it. These conflicting versions are presented in a debate in *Past and Present*, vol. 64 (1974), pp. 113-135: J.R. Dinwiddy, "The 'Black Lamp' in Yorkshire, 1801-1802"; J.L. Baxter and F.K. Donnelly, "The Revolutionary 'Underground' in the West Riding: Myth or Reality?"; and Dinwiddy, "A Rejoinder". For the continuing debate, see Baxter and Donnelly, "Sheffield and the English Revolutionary Tradition", which argues that, if anything, Thompson *underestimated* the revolutionary threat in these years. See also F.K. Donnelly, "Ideology and Early English Working-Class History: Edward Thompson and His Critics", *Social History*, vol. 2 (1976), pp. 219-238; J.A. Hone, "Radicalism in London, 1796-1802: Convergencies and Continuities", in *London in the Age of Reform*, John Stevenson, ed., (Oxford, 1977), pp. 79-101; Thomis and Holt, *Threats of Revolution in Britain*; Roger Wells, *Insurrection: The British Experience*, (Gloucester, 1983); and Christie, *Stress and Stability*. The relative weight of loyalist vs. radical sentiment during this period is debated in Philip, ed., *The French Revolution and British Popular Politics*. Another strain of the discussion: the involvement of a small number of poor labourers in organizational radicalism has, as D.G. Wright observes, led some historians to conclude that the movement was as much an expression of trade unionism as of anything else; Wright, *Popular Radicalism*, pp. 36-7. But such a pro-labour agenda seems more apparent than real; we know, though, that they were committed to a parliamentary reform program, and understood what that meant. Economic protest did sometimes use political symbols – e.g., in N. McCord and D.E. Brewster, "Some Labour Troubles of the 1790s in North-East England", *International Review of Social History*, vol. 13 (1968), pp. 366-83 – but should not be confused with political protest.

¹⁰⁹ As shall be seen below, too much importance has been given to elite insurrectionists such as Edmund Despard and Arthur Thistlewood, at the expense of their artisan accomplices.

There is no avoiding the fact that in some cases, although not always, the prosperous businessmen and gentry were indeed the ones to assume leadership roles in the 1790s, and were in those cases the ones to articulate reform goals. This is not the same as saying, however, that plebeian and artisans were without voice of any kind. In organizations such as the Sheffield Society for Constitutional Information (SSCI), founded and controlled, as we have seen, by artisans, radical workingmen would have been in a position actually to determine and articulate policy. Even in those organizations ostensibly under gentry and middle class control, however, such as the Scottish Friends of the People, there were ways in which the working membership could contribute to the furtherance of parliamentary reform. A principle weapon of dissenters of all stripes was petitioning, and it was a tactic readily used by the LCS, the SSCI, the Scottish Friends, and dozens of other political reform organizations in the early 1790s. In 1793 alone, the House of Commons received 36 parliamentary reform petitions, 24 of them from Scotland. 10,000 persons signed an SSCI petition of that year, 6000 an LCS petition, 3,700 a petition from a Norwich organization. In 1795, ninety-five petitions were presented to parliament, containing an astonishing 130,000 signatures. In all of these instances, plebeians and artisans must have contributed to the tallies, and probably in very large numbers.¹¹⁰

In addition to signing petitions, labouring members made important contributions to the parliamentary reform movement at the international level. An obvious example is the famous British Convention of November, 1793, held in Edinburgh – in hindsight, the culmination of the ‘first stage’ of moral force reform. Traditionally, the Convention has

¹¹⁰ Wright, *Popular Radicalism*, p. 45; Donnelly and Baxter, “Sheffield and the English Revolutionary Tradition”, p. 401.

been interpreted as a gathering of the radical movement's elite.¹¹¹ In fact, it was almost as much characterized by involvement by the lower orders, at several levels.¹¹² To begin, the Convention's co-initiator was an artisan, the Scots-born, London-based radical Thomas Hardy, leader of the LCS. At a lesser level, the Convention drew not only prosperous delegates from throughout England and Scotland, but plebeian and artisan representatives as well, from English radical societies in Sheffield, Leeds, and Nottingham.¹¹³ From Scotland, meanwhile, the Dundee representative was the stocking-maker James Peat, and other tradesmen formed part of the representation from societies from Glasgow, Stirling, Newton St. Boswells, Laurieston, and Edinburgh itself.¹¹⁴ Thus, the resolutions passed supporting manhood suffrage and annual parliaments at the Convention probably were as much the result of plebeian and artisan, as of bourgeois, input.¹¹⁵

Many of the societies, such as the LCS and the Scottish Friends, had built-in constitutional proscriptions against subversive activity, and, in the wake of the Convention, when governing classes refused to concede reform and resorted instead to repression and persecution, these organizations fell apart, as many members from the gentry lost heart. A minority of reformers, mostly artisans, were prepared, however,

¹¹¹ See for example John Brims' account of the Convention, "The Scottish Association of the Friends of the People", Brims in Devine, *Conflict and Stability*, pp. 31-50: pp. 41-4; also, T.M. Parssinen, "Association, Convention, and Anti-Parliament in British Radical Politics, 1771-1848", *English Historical Review*, vol. 88 (1973), pp. 504-33.

¹¹² In fact, more than did the workingmen, the bourgeois reformers shied away from the Convention. The largely middle class London Society of the Friends of the People declined to send delegates, because, in their own words, they "fear[ed] it will furnish the enemies of reform with the means of calumniating its advocates, and so far from forwarding the cause, will deter many from countenancing that which they approve"; quoted in Parssinen, "Association", p. 513, ft. 8. In retrospect, these fears were justified: as John Brims notes, the Scottish public at large was "outraged" by the Convention's "mad proceedings" – which included nods to the French revolutionary tradition such as delegates addressing each other as 'citizen', meeting in 'sections', and titling 1793 as 'The 1st Year of the British Convention' – and, with widespread approval, the government proceeded to crush the radical reform movements in both England and Scotland. Brims in Devine, *Conflict and Stability*, pp. 46-7.

¹¹³ Williams, *Artisans and Sans-Culottes*, pp. 76-9.

¹¹⁴ Meikle, *Scotland and the French Revolution*, pp. 274-5.

¹¹⁵ Brims in Devine, *Conflict and Stability*, p. 46.

to continue challenging the existing electoral system, and turned to conspiracy and violence as the means of advancing the parliamentary reform program.¹¹⁶ For the next six or seven years, with the evolution of some of the workingmen from the LCS, the SSCI, and others into the United Englishmen, and of some of their counterparts from the Scottish Friends of the People into the United Scotsmen, the radical reform movement was clearly under the control of reformers from the lower orders.¹¹⁷

As with any underground organization, there is much that cannot be determined about the United Englishmen and the United Scotsmen; the exact membership levels, for example, remain elusive.¹¹⁸ But there is possibly unanimous agreement among scholars regarding the vocations of those involved, as well as their political agenda. More than the LCI or the Scottish Friends, the United groups in Britain were composed almost exclusively of workingmen. In England, for example, all of the members of the Sheffield branch were "mechaniks". Almost all of the members of the Stockport chapter appear to have been textile workers, while virtually the entire workforce at some of the town's spinning shops were brought into the UE. Similarly, of the twenty-six United Englishmen arrested during an 1801 meeting in Lancashire, all were artisans, fifteen of

¹¹⁶ The shift from moral to physical force might well have been hard to avoid under any circumstances. As John Belcham notes, there was no clear-cut division between the reformist and revolutionary politics. Popular constitutionalism always evoked an emotive spirit of confrontation. The mass platform, with its provocative stance, and its need to embarrass the government, had always pointed towards collective violence, the physical force strand of radicalism seen previously in later stages of the French Revolution. See John Belcham, "Republicanism, popular constitutionalism and the radical platform in early nineteenth-century England", *Social History*, vol. 6 (1981), pp. 1-32.

¹¹⁷ For discussions of this evolution in England, see Thompson, *Making of...*, 472-79; also, Donnelly and Baxter, "Sheffield and the English Revolutionary Tradition"; and Wells, *Insurrection*, pp. 72-77. Among working radicals in Scotland, see P. Berresford Ellis and Seumas Mac A' Ghobhainn, *The Scottish Insurrection of 1820*, (London, 1970), pp. 72-79; and McFarland, *Ireland and Scotland*, pp. 154-62.

¹¹⁸ While membership levels must remain speculative and conjectural, more is known about the number of United cells throughout Britain. There seems to have been at least thirty-five chapters of the United English, in centres such as London, Cheshire, Sheffield, West Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and perhaps other parts of the Midlands; Dickinson, *British Radicalism*, p. 51. There were twenty-six known United Scots chapters, meanwhile: 8 in Fife, 5 in Forfarshire, 4 in Ayrshire, 2 in Stirling, and 1 each in Renfrew, Dumbarton, Lanark, Thornliebank, Cupar, Kilmarnock, and Maybole (these last four were principally weaving parishes); McFarland, *Ireland and Scotland*, p. 161.

them weavers.¹¹⁹ In general, members of the United Scotsmen shared this occupational background. The movement's leader was the Dundee handloom weaver, and former member of the Scottish Friends, George Mealmaker. And according to Norman Murray, the members of the twenty-six known United Scottish Societies were almost entirely artisans, "those who wrought at the hand loom" in particular being "heavily involved in the movement".¹²⁰ Nor is there much doubt about their ultimate political program. Copies of the 'Resolutions and Constitution' of the London cell of the United English and the Glasgow cell of the United Scots, brought before a 1799 House of Commons inquiry, advocated the by-now traditional demands for annual parliaments and manhood suffrage.¹²¹

In addition, there is little doubt but that, as their name implies, both groups were modeled consciously after the United Irishmen, and in part this reflected actual contact between British plebeian and artisan radicals and United Irish émigré workingmen. The United Irish weaver James Craigendallie was, for example, reported to be "a great man" among the artisan radicals living in Perth. Another plebeian Irishman, Edward Doherty, "a true democrat and fine fellow", helped establish a United Scots movement in Perthshire, and, reportedly, was also "much around Auchterarder, a democratic nest, as well as Dunning." Testifying before the authorities, the radical Thornliebank cotton spinner James Jarve said that, concerning United Irish emigration into Scotland, he "never saw any but the lowest order".¹²²

¹¹⁹ The leadership committee of the Sheffield branch consisted of two silversmiths, two inkstandmakers, a shoemaker, a pressman, and a tailor. Donnelly and Baxter, "Sheffield and the English Revolutionary Tradition", pg. 408. For Stockport, see Wells, *Insurrection*, p. 72; for Lancashire, Wells p. 52.

¹²⁰ Murray, *Scottish Handloom Weavers*, p. 212. Tony Dickson and Tony Clark agree, calling the United Scotsmen almost "exclusively proletarian"; Dickson and Clark, "The Birth of Class?", in Devine and Mitchison, *People and Society in Scotland*, p. 297.

¹²¹ McFarland, *Ireland and Scotland*, p. 154.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 153. The spread of United Irish missionaries, many of them either skilled or unskilled workers, throughout Scotland beginning in the late-1790s is a focus of Professor McFarland's work, both in her 1994 study *Ireland and Scotland*, and, most recently, in her "Scottish Radicalism in the Later Eighteenth

United Irish influence extended to organizational matters. Most of the United Scots cells adopted same constitution as the United Irishmen, and swore United Irish-style oaths of loyalty in which they dedicated themselves to parliamentary reform. Indeed, Elaine McFarland calls the process nothing less than “a conscious remoulding of Scottish radicalism in the Irish image.”¹²³ United English chapters also adopted the structure of the United Irishmen, with cells organized in a pyramidal fashion from local branches through district and county up to provincial levels. United Irish, United English, and United Scots activity tended to merge in London, which became for a time Britain’s insurrectionary center. A central committee, composed of Irish, English and perhaps Scottish radical workingmen, was set up with the task of combining and coordinating the efforts of the United revolutionary groups in England and Scotland.¹²⁴

This focus on London notwithstanding, the culmination of United radical activity occurred in Ireland, with the Rebellion of 1798, the most concentrated episode of violence in Irish history, and certainly the major episode of British Isles sedition of this,

Century: ‘The Social Thistle and Shamrock’”, Chapter 17 in T.M. Devine and J.R. Young, eds., *Eighteenth Century Scotland: New Perspectives* (East Linton, Scotland, 1999).

¹²³ Ibid., p. 158.

¹²⁴ Dickinson, *British Radicalism*, pp. 50-52. The Welsh should be mentioned at this point. As mentioned in ft. 94, formal popular political organizations did not take widespread root in Wales until the Chartist period. There is, however, some evidence to indicate that, this barrier notwithstanding, radical plebeian Welsh organizations, admittedly immature, sprung up beginning in the 1790s, with links of sorts to both British popular movements and to the wider transatlantic scene. David Jones had identified “a vigorous Jacobin society” – if not quite a fully developed radical organization – in the town of Brecon in the mid-1790s, and another in Hereford. Also, fragmentary evidence indicates that the English radicals from the LCS established contact with other Welsh radicals during this same period. In the town of Merthyr Tydfil, for example, John Thelwall, a reform journalist and leading member of the LCS, appeared, apparently with the intention of setting up a chapter in that town. And there may have been an offshoot of the LCS in Cardiff, as well. See Jones, *Before Rebecca*, pp. 28, 33. We are on surer ground in asserting that that there were certainly individual members of the LCS living in Wales, both during and after the 1790s. Thelwall was one; he lived in the village of Lyswen from the late 1790s until well into the nineteenth century. Another was the artisan John Jones of Anddren, who, beginning in 1792, made a minor career of translating LCS resolutions into Welsh for distribution; Wager, “Welsh Politics”, pp. 431-2. Later, speeches by Hunt and Cobbett were forwarded to Wales by Hampden Clubs in England; the secretary of the Hampden association, Thomas Cleary, planned, although never actually undertook, a tour of the Welsh countryside in 1815, for the purpose of establishing Hampden chapters in Wales; and, even despite Cleary’s failure, a Hampden branch may still have been established in Newport; Wager, “Welsh Politics”, p. 433. While Welsh plebeian and artisan radicals clearly wanted to reform parliament, their contribution to popular insurrectionary activity seems limited: at the most, some may have had rudimentary, advance

and perhaps of any, period. The Rebellion was a massive affair, plotted by United Irish agents at home and in France and Hamburg, Germany, and flaring up helter-skelter in numerous counties in the east, west, and southwest, drawn out over a three month period, and involving an assortment of protesters – tens of thousands in number and representing such disparate strands of as Irish separatists, agrarian rebels, ultra-Catholics, ultra-Presbyterians, and others merely swept along by their neighbors.¹²⁵ No less massive is the historiography surrounding the event.¹²⁶ It is not our purpose to delve into either the Rebellion or its scholarship in detail, but to highlight instead three points relevant to our discussion.

First, despite both the often violently sectarian agendas of some insurrectionists – resulting in appalling massacres of Catholics by Protestants, and vice versa – and the complete lack of agenda of others, the Rebellion was, originally, a United Irish political

knowledge of, though not involvement in, the Despard conspiracy: see Williams, 'Beginnings of Radicalism', in Herbert and Jones, *Remaking of Wales*, p. 128.

¹²⁵ For United Irish agents in France, see Elliot, *Partners in Revolution*; for a discussion of United Irish activity in Hamburg, which served as a communications centre between Ireland and France, see Weber, *On the Road to Rebellion: The United Irishmen and Hamburg, 1796-1803*. For an estimate of the rebels' numbers, county by county, see Curtin, *United Irishmen*, p. 267.

¹²⁶ For the rebellion in Leinster, see Thomas Pakenham, *The Year of Liberty: the story of the great Irish rebellion of 1798*, (London, 1978), pp. 123-93, 213-317; for the rising in Wexford, see Daniel Gahan, *The People's Rising: Wexford, 1798*, (Dublin, 1995), and Daire Keogh and Nicholas Furlong, eds., *The Mighty Wave: The 1798 Rebellion in Wexford*, (Dublin, 1996); for the rebellion in the north, see Charles Dickson, *Revolt in the North: Antrim and Down in 1798*, (Dublin, 1960), and A.T.Q. Stewart, *The Summer Soldiers: The 1798 Rebellion in Antrim and Down*, (Belfast, 1995). Regarding the organizational structure of the Rebellion, historical opinion runs the gamut: Pakenham describes the insurrection as having been confused and aimless, pp. 141, 143; in contrast, Roger Wells portrays it as having been reasonably well-focused: Wells, *Insurrection*, Chapter 7. For an examination of how the United Irishmen attempted to retain control of the rebellion in Wexford, see L.M. Cullen, "The 1798 Rebellion in Wexford: United Irishmen organisation, membership, leadership", in Kevin Whelan, ed., *Wexford: History and Society*, (Dublin, 1987), pp. 248-95; for their attempts to retain control in Wicklow, see L.M. Cullen, "Politics and Rebellion in Wicklow in the 1790s", in Ken Hammigan and William Nolan, eds., *Wicklow: History and Society*, (Dublin, 1994), pp. 411-501. For studies of United Irish involvement overall, see Elliot, *Partners in Revolution*, pp. 165-240; and Curtin, *United Irishmen*, pp. 254-81. The recent bicentenary of the Rebellion was marked by a spate of commemorative studies, invariably from Irish publishing houses, running the gamut of topics, from illustrated general histories of United Irish involvement, to regional accounts of revolt, to discussions of Irish-French partnership, to personal narratives of individual United Irishmen, to gender studies. See, for example, Kevin Whelan, *Fellowship of Freedom: The United Irishmen and 1798*, (Cork, 1998); Liam Chambers, *Rebellion in Kildare, 1790-1803*, (Dublin, 1998); Peter O'Shaughnessy, ed., *Rebellion in Wicklow: General Joseph Holt's Personal Account of 1798*, (Dublin, 1998); Liam Kelly, *A Flame Now Quenched: Rebels and Frenchmen in Leitrim, 1793-1798*, (Dublin, 1998); Michael Durey, ed., *Andrew Bryson's Ordeal: An Epilogue to the 1798 Rebellion*, (Cork, 1998); and Daire Keogh and Nicholas Furlong, eds., *The Women of 1798*, (Dublin and Portland, 1998).

movement. While it quickly became spontaneous, the Rebellion was not so at the outset. It had a consciously political purpose: it was to be a quick, controlled struggle against an illiberal government by those who despaired of obtaining their ends by constitutional means. The written and oral statements of captured United Irish leaders such as Thomas Emmet, William James MacNeven, Arthur O'Connor, plebeian-born shopkeeper Oliver Bond, and watchmaker-turned-journalist Samuel Neilson all support this: in the words of one, they strove for "an independent... democratic Irish republic."¹²⁷ Not all were workingmen, but they can probably stand as articulators of the goal of the majority of United Irish rebels never interviewed by the authorities. Roger Wells is surely correct, then, in describing the Rebellion as wedding of insurrectionary politics to the popular democratic campaign, the resort to insurgent tactics and treasonable alliances by sectors of movements originally committed to political reform on democratic principles.¹²⁸

Secondly, there must have been considerable actual participation in the Rebellion by radical workingmen, both inside and outside of the United Irish organization.¹²⁹ Of course, with so many thousands of rebels, a statistical reconstruction of their occupational status is an impossibility. There could scarcely have been other than significant plebeian and artisan involvement among the rank and file, though. Specific glimpses of tradesmen activity can be seen here and there: it has been shown, for example, that blacksmiths were largely responsible for arming the insurgents in some areas, producing large quantities of pikeheads. At higher levels, two of the identifiable

¹²⁷ Quoted in Curtin, *United Irishmen*, p. 281.

¹²⁸ Wells, *Insurrection*, p. 154.

¹²⁹ There was a concerted effort by United Irishmen to spread United Irish principles from urban strongholds into the countryside in the months leading up to the Rebellion; as a member of a landed family in Wexford described the situation in April, 1798, "the principles of United Irishism have been industriously disseminated by constant emissaries from Dublin..."; quoted in Corish in Whelan, *Wexford*, pp. 278-9.

United Irish leaders in County Wexford were artisans, and Philip Cunningham, the United Irish leader in Moyvane, County Derry, was a stonemason.¹³⁰

Finally, there was a British dimension to the 1798 Rebellion. Scholars have drawn attention to this in general terms, but plebeian and artisan prominence in this adjacent movement has not been widely acknowledged.¹³¹ The conduit between the Dublin United Irish on the one hand and the LCS and the United English on the other seems to have been the radical tailor Benjamin Binns, who promised the Irishmen that a “formidable division” would commence in London and elsewhere “in favour of Ireland” once the UI standard was raised. This failed to happen – neither the fading LCS nor the United English could command that level of support – but LCS and United English members such as Binns, his brother John (also a tailor), the shoemaker Joseph Stuckey, and the plebeian-born Irish journalist William Bailey (a member of the LCS since its formation) did their best to act as another element to the episode in Ireland, both by drawing potentially sympathetic cells into the radical camp, and by putting out propaganda favourable to the projected landing in Ireland of supporting French troops.¹³²

In addition, some of the Scots radicals also did what little they could to assist the Irish rebels. At the Rebellion's height, in June of 1798, sympathizers in Glasgow attempted, for example, to persuade Scottish troops called up to quash the uprising not to leave for

¹³⁰ Wells, *Insurrection*, p. 140; Corish in Whelan, *Wexford*, p. 287. For Cunningham, see Anne-Maree Whitaker, *Unfinished Revolution: United Irishmen in New South Wales, 1800-1810*, (Sydney, 1994), p. 203. Cunningham's radical career was far from over in 1798: transported to New South Wales, he went on to become a leading figure in the failed 1804 Castle Hill Rebellion, and was hanged, without trial, by authorities; Whitaker, p. 203.

¹³¹ For discussions of Rebellion-era connections between the United Irishmen and both the LCS and various United English cells, see Marianne Elliot, “Irish Republicanism in England: The First Phase, 1797-9”, in Thomas Bartlett and D.W. Hayton, eds., *Penal Era and Golden Age: Essays in Irish History, 1690-1800*, (Belfast, 1979), pp. 204-221. The ‘second phase’ is, in Elliot's estimation, the Despard episode, which she examines in “Despard Conspiracy Reconsidered”. Irish-English connections are also discussed in Elliot's *Partners in Revolution*, pp. 144-50, 178-89, 252-7. See also Wells, *Insurrection*, Chapter 11. An early account is A.W. Smith, “Irish Rebels and English Radicals, 1798-1820”, *Past and Present*, vol. 7 (1955), pp. 78-85.

Ulster, by thrusting what authorities referred to as “very seditious” papers under the barracks gate. Others, like the weavers David Black and James Paterson, vindicated the Rebellion at gatherings in workingmen’s pubs by representing the Irish insurgents as people “groaning under oppression, and struggling in defense of their just rights”.¹³³

United-style radical reform did not die with the failure of the 1798 Rebellion. Four years later, the so-called Despard Conspiracy was hatched in London, an ambitious United English insurrectionary plot nipped in the bud by authorities. Traditionally, historians have studied this episode by focusing on plot’s namesake, the tragic, and possibly insane, Colonel Edmund Despard, an Irish upper classman.¹³⁴ Largely

¹³² Elliot, *Partners in Revolution*, pp. 174-6.

¹³³ Quoted in McFarland, *Ireland and Scotland*, p. 199. Black was subsequently sentenced to five years transportation; p. 204. The 1798 was also characterized, of course, by significant French involvement. United Irish emissaries such as Wolfe Tone and Napper Tandy had for years been shuttling back and forth between Ireland and Paris, and the small French force which landed in support of the 1798 rebels was not the first, but the second to cross the channel for Ireland during the second half of that decade. A long period of United Irish diplomatic activity in Paris, headed by Tone, resulted in the sailing for Cork, in December, 1796, of a 43-ship fleet, carrying 15,000 Frenchmen, and Tone himself. They came “within a hair’s breadth of successfully landing”, in R.F. Foster’s words, but were split up by storms, disagreed about landing sites, and returned home. Despite this whimpered, almost comical, ending, the 1796 expedition was a serious undertaking, and, had the force landed, even official opinion admitted that, with a mere 11,000 troops in the area to combat the invaders, Ireland could not have been saved; the whole episode remains, again in Foster’s words, “a great might-have-been in Irish history”. Foster, *Modern Ireland*, p. 278. Even the French expedition which set sail for Ireland during the Rebellion, while smaller by far than that of 1796, was not negligible, and – more importantly – demonstrates continued ties between Frenchmen and United Irish radicals. As totaled by R.B. McDowell, the 1798 force constituted Napper Tandy with a small group of United Irishmen on a brig from Dunkirk; the French general Jean Humbert with just over 1,000 men carried on three frigates; and the French general Jean Hardy with a force of 3,000 carried on a ship of the line and eight frigates. R.B. McDowell in T.W. Moody and W.E. Vaughan, eds., *A New History of Ireland: Vol. IV, Eighteenth-Century Ireland, 1691-1800*, (Oxford, 1986), pp. 359-60. And despite the remote locales in which the invaders landed, United Irishmen familiar with their plans made concerted efforts to join them; for example, six or seven hundred managed to push through to Sligo in an attempt to link up with Humbert’s force. For French military plans relative to the Irish Rebellion, see Marianne Elliot, “The Role of Ireland in French War Strategy, 1796-98”, in Gough and Dickson, eds., *Ireland and the French Revolution*. For a thorough discussion of French and radical Irish connections in this period, see Elliot, *Partners in Revolution*.

¹³⁴ That Despard was insane was a popular view from contemporary times until recently: the memoirs of Lord Cloncurry, an elite of the period, implied strongly that Despard was insane: *Personal Recollections of the Life and Times of Valentine Lord Cloncurry*, (Dublin, 1849), p. 47; this view was repeated in C. Oman, *The Unfortunate Colonel Despard and other studies*, (London, 1922). The tendency to focus on Despard himself is even more widespread, evident even in Thompson’s *Making of*, pp. 478-84. One of the first scholars to suggest looking beyond merely Despard is Marianne Elliot, “The ‘Despard Conspiracy’ Reconsidered”, *Past and Present*, vol. 75 (1977), pp. 46-61. Professor Elliot noted that the Despard episode was not an isolated, localized incident, but part of a wider conspiracy; even in her discussion, though, the artisanal backgrounds of Despard’s collaborators were not stressed. Acknowledgment of this last did not come until Hone’s *Cause of Truth*, especially pp. 105-06. In addition to Hone, pp. 86-121, useful re-constructions of the Despard episode are Elliot, *Partners in Revolution*, pp. 282-322; and Wells,

overlooked is the fact that, of the thirty conspirators arrested at the Oakley Arms when the scheme was foiled, Despard was the only one of social rank. His companions in court, and the six men on the scaffold with him, were, in addition to soldiers, either plebeians or artisans. Moreover, others from the labouring population, whose complicity the government could not absolutely prove, seem to have been involved as well, including several former LCS members not technically a part of the United English movement, such as the shoemakers Charles Pendrill, William Curry, J. Hartley and Thomas Pemberton. The affair was, then, as much an artisan as a bourgeois plot.¹³⁵

Scholarly preoccupation with Despard, and with discussions of his sanity and of the apparent foolhardiness of the scheme, has tended to cloud our understanding of the impetus behind the conspiracy as well, which was not crazily anarchic, but parliamentary reformist. The conspirators themselves confirmed this, telling authorities that their goal was the "overturning of Parliament...[N]o private property [was to have been] meddled with on any pretence whatsoever."¹³⁶ As a final point, this republican plot was far from the isolated scheme that some historians have made it out to be¹³⁷; it demonstrates, in fact, the widespread links between cells of the United English throughout England, and between the English insurrectionists and Irish revolutionaries at home. The seizure of parliament in London would, it was hoped, trigger uprisings by tradesmen in the 'Black Lamp' movement in Yorkshire, and by United Englishmen in

Insurrection, pp. 237-50. For an examination of both the mental world and the wide-ranging radical connections of the London braces-maker, LCS and United English member, marginal 'Despardian', and future Spencean Thomas Evans, see McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, Chapter 1, "Jacobin-Spenceans: Thomas Evans and the revolutionary underground".

¹³⁵ Hone, *Cause of Truth*, pp. 105-06. The conspiracy would have had even more labouring involvement than it did already had not some artisan reformers refused to join: for example, Thomas Hardy was approached, but, in the words of one conspirator, "wou'd not help"; Wells, *Insurrection*, p. 243. As it was, support from the working community held true right to the end: local carpenters refused to build the scaffold from which Despard and his plebeian and artisan associates were to be hanged; Hone, p. 116.

¹³⁶ Quoted in Wells, *Insurrection*, p. 238.

¹³⁷ Thus Thomis and Holt, *Threats of Revolution*, p. 22: "Despard and his...conspirators had little in common with the discontents of the urban working classes".

centers such as Sheffield, Wakefield and York, as well.¹³⁸ This English uprising was itself intended to tie into a contemporaneous rebellion in Ireland led by Robert Emmet, a United Irishman with close ties to France; Emmet's rebellion had been planned originally to coincide, in turn, with a French invasion in the autumn of 1802.¹³⁹ It is reasonable, then, to regard the Despard episode as one example of artisan insurrectionary activity, widely plotted if fatally flawed, with a parliamentary reform purpose.

In the years following the Despard plot, radical parliamentary reform, which had fallen into disrepute initially as a result of the excesses of the French Revolution, fell further as the result of the Napoleonic Wars, when it was perceived as treasonous. It was revived at the public level beginning roughly in 1815, in large part through the efforts of the Hampden Clubs.¹⁴⁰ Traditionally, the tendency among historians discussing the Hampden Clubs has been to concentrate on the role of Major John

¹³⁸ Thompson, *Making of...*, pp. 481-2; Wells, *Insurrection*, pp. 247-87. See also Donnelly and Baxter, "Sheffield and the English Revolutionary Tradition", p. 421; and Dinwiddy, "The 'Black Lamp' in Yorkshire", pp. 120-1.

¹³⁹ Ironically, the conspiracy's very breadth and intricacy seemed to work against it, for the exposure of one segment threatened to disrupt the whole; and the failure of the Despard cell seems for a time to have paralyzed the entire movement. Noting the "almost total dearth" of United English and United Scottish activity in the immediate years afterwards, Roger Wells speculates that this silence "suggests that the organization's vitality had evaporated" along with the Despard plot; Wells, *Insurrection*, p. 239.

¹⁴⁰ Popular radicalism did not dry up entirely during the period of the Napoleonic Wars, of course. The radical patrician and MP Sir Francis Burdett, a constant critic of the Pitt government, attracted plebeian and artisan support beginning in 1807 by the way he treated parliamentary reform as a means of reducing taxation. While the Burdett campaign was orchestrated by the gentry and middle class, the rank and file supporters were plebeians, and it was they who rioted in London when, in 1810, Burdett was imprisoned in the Tower for clashing with the House of Commons over its privileges. If not quite a persistent parliamentary reform campaign, the Burdett movement nonetheless marked a high point of popular political radicalism between 1802 and 1815. See J.R. Dinwiddy, "Sir Francis Burdett and Burdettite radicalism", *History*, vol. 65 (1980); Hone, *Cause of Truth*, pp. 156-61; and Wright, *Popular Radicalism*, pp. 58-9. A second radical reform movement of the period to enjoy support among workingmen was the Spencean Society, founded in 1801 by former Newcastle schoolmaster Thomas Spence, and carried on after Spence's death in 1814 by his successor, the artisan and former LCS member Thomas Evans. The Spenceans were London-based arch-political reformers, bordering on agrarian socialists, but were extremely few in number: there were perhaps sixty dedicated activists during the first decade of the nineteenth century, growing in post-war years to 200-300. . An extremely thorough examination of the Spencean movement is Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld*. However marginal, the Spenceans, along with the Burdettites, helped to keep political opposition to the state alive among the lower orders during the Napoleonic Wars, and some of the borderline Spenceans – such as the Jacobin surveyor Arthur Thistlewood – would go on to play active roles in the post-war radical revival.

Cartwright, an elite touring radical in the immediate post-Napoleonic years, to explain the resuscitation of the parliamentary reform program among the lower orders.¹⁴¹

Certainly Cartwright played an important role in the revival, but it is a mistake to conclude that the plebeians and artisans of the Hampden Clubs were incapable of spreading the parliamentary reform message themselves, amongst people of their own rank. This point is made forcefully by Samuel Bamford: by 1816, "Hampden Clubs were...established in many of our large towns, and the villages and districts around them," he wrote,

nor were there wanting men of their own class, to encourage and direct the new converts; the Sunday Schools of the preceding thirty years, had produced many working men of sufficient talent to become readers, writers, and speakers in the village meetings for parliamentary reform; some also were found to possess a rude poetic talent, which rendered their effusions popular, and bestowed an additional charm on their assemblages: and by such various means, anxious listeners...and then zealous proselytes, were drawn from the cottages...to the weekly readings and discussions of the Hampden clubs.¹⁴²

As we have already seen, most of the Hampden Clubs were predominantly artisan, and committed to achieving manhood suffrage and annual parliaments, by moral, rather than physical, force.¹⁴³ An additional point, though, is that, as had the LCS and the Scottish Friends of the People, Hampden cells coordinated their activities throughout Britain. For example, in December, 1816, delegates of the Sheffield chapter were sent

¹⁴¹ Thus Ellis and Mac A' Ghobhainn, *Scottish Insurrection*, p. 91: "the leading figure at the Hampden Club was Major John Cartwright"; and Straka, "Reform in Scotland", p. 40: "Major Cartwright...rekindl[ed] the smouldering desire for radical reform." See also N.C. Miller, "John Cartwright and radical parliamentary reform, 1808-19", *English Historical Review*, vol. 83, (1968); and Cannon, *Parliamentary Reform*, pp.152-3, 160-1.

¹⁴² Bamford, *Passages in the Life of a Radical*, pp. 7-8.

¹⁴³ Hampden Club cells in Sheffield were responsible for a mammoth petition of grievance forwarded to parliament in October, 1816, containing 17,000 signatures urging parliamentary reform; Dickinson, *British Radicalism*, 76. An early general account of the Hampden Clubs is in H.W.C. Davis, *The Age of Grey and Peel*, (London, 1929), Chapter 8. The overall usefulness of the Hampden Clubs has been questioned by

to an enormous rally at Spa Field, London, organized by the London Hampden Clubs; Britain-wide, other Hampden cells agreed to alter their tactics to conform with whatever was decided at the Spa Fields meeting.¹⁴⁴

When the Hampden Clubs were declared illegal in early 1817, in essence ending hopes for moral force parliamentary reform, some of the radicals were quick to turn to insurrectionary activity. Without going into great narrative detail, three plots of the post-Napoleonic period – the Pentrich Rebellion, the Cato Street Conspiracy, and the Scottish 'Radical War' of 1820 – can be tested successfully for both plebeian and artisan involvement, and the pursuit of a Painite parliamentary reform program. The Pentrich uprising occurred in June, 1817, when some 300 mechanics and labourers marched on Nottingham in the mistaken belief that they would gather enough men to move on to London and there overthrow the government. The tendency among historians to identify the illiterate stocking-maker and Luddite Jeremiah Brandreth as the rebellion's leader has, intentionally or not, created the impression that the rebels were not so much political radicals as backwards-looking anti-industrialists.¹⁴⁵ As Malcolm Thomis and Peter Holt have shown, however, the real architect of the Pentrich episode was in fact the frame-work knitter Thomas Bacon, a veteran parliamentary supporter, zealous Painite, and former Hampden Club member. And the rebellion was not a reaction against industrial modernization. In Bacon's own words, the rebels' purpose was "to change the government", and the government's awareness of this fact

John Cannon: "never has an institution done less to earn its posthumous fame"; Cannon, *Parliamentary Reform*, p. 161.

¹⁴⁴ The gathering in fact turned into a riot, as a small group of Spenceans attempted to incite an insurrection, and then tried to force their way into the Tower of London. Another mass gathering, staged by the Manchester Hampden Clubs in St. Peter's Fields in August, 1819, drew inadvertent attention to the reform cause when troops sent to disperse the huge crowd killed eleven people in the process – the notorious Peterloo massacre. See Donald Read, *Peterloo: The 'Massacre' and its Background*, (Manchester, 1958).

¹⁴⁵ See for example Thompson, *Making of...*, pp. 656-69.

was reflected in the Crown's brief against him, which described Bacon as "an active Supporter of the Doctrines of Liberty and Equality".¹⁴⁶

Three years after Pentrich came the 'Cato Street Conspiracy', a plot to assassinate the Cabinet members in London – thereby unseating the government – that was uncovered and foiled by the authorities, with five men going to the gallows as a result. In general, historians have treated the Cato Street episode rather as a pathetic gamble by a desperate and isolated cadre of extremists than as a serious plot.¹⁴⁷ Desperate it may well have been, and hopeless also, but it is noteworthy here for two points, both of which have in general been under-appreciated. First, while not often portrayed as such, the conspiracy was primarily an artisanal affair. The plot's purported prime mover, Arthur Thistlewood, was certainly middle class, having been at one time a prosperous lieutenant and later the inheritor of a sizeable estate, and it is he who tends to attract scholarly attention.¹⁴⁸ But, as had been the case with Colonel Edmund Despard, all of Thistlewood's known accomplices, in court and on the scaffold, were workingmen. Of the nine men arrested with Thistlewood, four were shoemakers, three carpenters, one a butcher and one a tailor. Moreover, the highly-conspiratorial, Jacobin-Spencean underworld through which Thistlewood moved was itself largely a plebeian environment, as Iain McCalman has shown. In his study of underground radicalism in early nineteenth century London, McCalman highlights Thistlewoods' close connections with such active and influential artisan radicals as Robert

¹⁴⁶ Quoted in Thomis and Holt, *Threats of Revolution*, pp. 48-54; Thompson, *Making of...*, p. 656. Thompson's and Thomis and Holt's are two of the most thorough modern accounts of the Pentrich Rebellion; an early study is John Neal, *The Pentrich Revolution*, (London, 1898, reissued Derby, 1966).

¹⁴⁷ See for example John Stanhope, *The Cato Street Conspiracy*, (London, 1962), a sympathetic general account that nonetheless emphasizes the quixotic nature of the scheme.

¹⁴⁸ For example, in John Stevenson's account of the Conspiracy, the focus is firmly on Thistlewood himself. Thistlewood's co-conspirators are barely mentioned, and their status as workingmen not mentioned at all; Stevenson, *Popular Disturbances in England*, pp.197-8.

Wedderburn, Thomas Evans, the Pentrich rebel Joseph Bacon, and the United Irish emissary William McCabe.¹⁴⁹

Secondly, despite its implausible violence, the Cato Street conspiracy was ultimately an extension of the Painite parliamentary reform movement. To varying degrees, this was made a part of some of the conspirators' defenses during trial; the shoemaker William Tidd, for example, attempted to rationalize the conspiracy as a misguided attempt to "procure redress in Parliament". Another of the conspirators assessed the Painite reform influence negatively; he had been "seduced", he said, "by the works of Tom Paine".¹⁵⁰

Finally, contrary to some accounts, the Cato Street radicals were not operating in isolation, either from current reform movements or from older precedents. Their scheme had been precipitated by the shock of Peterloo, and, as Hamish Fraser suggests, they may have been intending to tie it together with the general risings set for the north of England and for Scotland two months later.¹⁵¹ And in the broader sense, the Cato Street conspiracy was, as E.P. Thompson points out, deliberately of a piece

¹⁴⁹ McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, p. 138. Interestingly, two of the artisan radicals associated with Thistlewood and the Cato Street affair were black: the tailor Wedderburn, a marginal figure in the incident, although a major figure in London's Jacobin-Spencean underworld; and the cabinet-maker William Davidson, who was deeply involved in the plot and one of the five men to be executed. In this respect, the apparent lack of colour prejudice among many in the British popular reform movement stands out, especially in comparison with the racism of white workingmen in contemporary America, which often prevented powerless whites from seeing blacks as potential partners in reform; see for example David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, (London, 1991). Nonetheless, failures in the British radical movement could bring racial tensions to the surface, as when the black cabinet-maker and Cato Street conspirator William Davidson accused the judge who sentenced him to death of discriminating against him; Stanhope, *Cato Street*, p. 121. A concise discussion of race (along with other issues) and the transatlantic plebeian community in the revolutionary age is Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, "The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves and the Atlantic Working Class Community in the Eighteenth Century", in Colin Howell and Richard Twomey, eds., *Jack Tar in History: Essays in the History of Maritime Life and Labour*, (Fredericton, New Brunswick, 1991), pp. 11-36. For race in the context of British radicalism, see Patricia Hollis, "Anti-Slavery and British Working Class Radicalism in the Years of Reform", in Christine Bolt and Seymour Drescher, eds., *Anti-Slavery, Religion and Reform: Essays in Memory of Roger Anstey* (Folkstone and Hamden, 1980), pp. 294-315; and Iain McCalman, "Anti-Slavery and Ultra-Radicalism in Early Nineteenth-Century England: The Case of Robert Wedderburn", *Slavery and Abolition*, vol. 7 (1986), pp. 99-117.

¹⁵⁰ Quoted in Stanhope, *Cato Street*, pp. 121, 114. One of the Cato Street conspirators had had a side-line business making busts of Thomas Paine; Thompson, *Making of....*, p. 702.

with the French Revolutionary tradition, a conscious extension into the nineteenth century of the Jacobinism of the 1790s, with Thistlewood and his co-conspirators addressing one another by the term 'Citizen', for example.¹⁵²

The Cato Street affair may also have been intended to be of a piece with the Scottish 'Radical War' of April, 1820, a combination of armed rebellion and mass work stoppage. Scholarly interest in the incident has been on the increase since the resurgence of Scottish nationalism in the 1960s, and while conflicting interpretations have been forwarded¹⁵³, the consensus since the mid-1790s has been that the Radical War was a mixture of economic discontent and political action – the sense among the labouring population that a deeply conservative political structure was unresponsive to economic distress, and that, in Hamish Fraser's words, "only a new political system would bring change".¹⁵⁴ This last aspect is obviously a point of importance for this discussion. There is substantial evidence to indicate that, in the years and months leading up to the insurrection, parliamentary reform was once again a popular topic among the Scottish lower orders. For example, on October 29, 1816, it was estimated that 40,000 working people attended a massive Scottish radical demonstration in Thrushgrove, outside Glasgow, which became known as the Thrushgrove Meeting; the result was a petition for parliamentary reform, sent to Westminster. After Thrushgrove,

¹⁵¹ Fraser, *Conflict and Class*, pp. 109-10.

¹⁵² Thompson, *Making of...*, pp. 705, 702.

¹⁵³ The Radical War is presented as a secessionist or separatist movement of Celtic liberation in F.A. Sherry, *The Rising of 1820*, (Glasgow, 1968), and in Ellis and Mac A' Ghobhainn, *Scottish Insurrection*. An interpretation that downplays Scottish nationalism and instead connects the uprising with British-wide parliamentary reform and with discontent in northern England is F.K. Donnelly, "The Scottish Rising of 1820: A Re-Interpretation", *Scottish Tradition*, vol. 6 (1976), pp. 27-37. This latter view is repeated in Fraser, *Conflict and Class*, pp. 109-112.

¹⁵⁴ Fraser in Devine and Mitchison, *People and Society in Scotland*, p. 286. For the economic background to the rising, see W.W. Straka, "Reaction of the Scottish Working Classes to Economic and Social Changes in Scotland, 1782-1832", *Scottish Tradition*, vol. 1 (1971).

a spate of public radical meetings were held throughout the industrial belt of Scotland, most of which were characterized by prominent plebeian and artisan involvement.¹⁵⁵

Some gatherings were not held in public, but the reform agenda seems to have been the same. The weaver and government informer Alexander Richmond attended a secret meeting of Glasgow artisans in 1817, and reported that those present took an oath to "persevere in [the] endeavour to obtain for all the people of Great Britain and Ireland not disqualified by crimes or insanity the elective franchise at the age of 21 with free and equal representation and annual parliaments".¹⁵⁶ Whether held in secret or not, the climate created by these gatherings in the months leading up to the insurrection was obvious to elite observers: one noted that the "simple peasantry and...mechanics" were "agog with politics".¹⁵⁷ And if there had been any doubts as to the occupational status of many of those at the forefront of this emerging movement, these were dispelled when a government raid at a secret meeting in February, 1820, resulted in thirty "weavers and cottonspinners" being arrested; according to the Lord Provost, they were "a set of men who wanted to have a Radical Reform, Universal Suffrage, and Annual Parliaments".¹⁵⁸ Nor were Scots the only nationality of tradesmen stoking the reform fires at this time; in Lanarkshire, the Duke of Hamilton complained that his part of the country was "unfortunately surrounded by idle Irishmen, weavers and colliers, who created a general uneasiness" – some of these probably were United Irish émigrés.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁵ Ellis and Mac A' Ghobhainn, *Scottish Insurrection*, pp.102-3. At an 1819 reform meeting in Paisley, a Cap of Liberty was placed on the chairman's head; Meikle, *Scotland and the French Revolution*, p. 226

¹⁵⁶ Quoted in W.M. Roach, "Alexander Richmond and the radical reform movements in Glasgow in 1816-17", *Scottish Historical Review*, vol. 51 (1972), pp. 4-5.

¹⁵⁷ Quoted in Young, *Rousing of the Scottish Working Class*, p. 60.

¹⁵⁸ Quoted in Thomis and Holt, *Threats of Revolution*, p. 72.

¹⁵⁹ Quoted in McFarland, *Ireland and Scotland*, p. 240.

A second important point concerning the Radical War is that, when we turn to examine the occupations of those tried for their part or implicated in the uprising itself, we find that tradesmen were no less involved here than in the pre-rebellion agitation. For example, the three Parkhead rebels who wrote the radical Proclamation that was released as the outbreak erupted were weavers. And of the eighty-eight rebels against whom charges of high treason were brought, most were artisans. Far and away the largest number of the indicted were weavers – thirty-eight – but many other trades were represented as well, including ten nailors, two shoemakers, and one each from the following trades: labourer, blacksmith, bookbinder, tailor, muslin sinder, smith, cabinet maker, stocking maker, grocer, changekeeper, and wright. Moreover, two wanted rebels still at large were cotton spinners. Also, the large majority of those who struck work in support of the rebels were artisans too, weavers in particular, but also cotton spinners, masons, and wrights. The entire episode was, then, almost wholly an artisan affair, with very little elite participation. And it is worth returning to the fact that the insurrection's ultimate goal was parliamentary reform; as one of the Glasgow leaders, the weaver Andrew Hardie, said, when questioned shortly before his execution, "I went out with the intention to recover my rights". When asked what rights he wanted, he replied "annual parliaments and Election by Ballot".¹⁶⁰

Finally, it is an error to consider the Scottish Radical War in isolation, as an attempt at liberating Scotland from the Union with England of 1707, as some interpreters have done.¹⁶¹ Rather than a separatist-nationalist manifestation, the rising was in fact fraternal and internationalist, a spirit captured in a letter from the Glasgow radicals to

¹⁶⁰ Occupational breakdown of rebels in Fraser, *Conflict and Class*, pp.108, 110-111; Scottish rebel Andrew Hardy quoted in Donnelly, "The Scottish Rising", p. 33. Hardie was one of three rebels to be executed after the rebellion – all were artisans. In addition, sixteen rebels were dispatched to Australia: Fraser, *Conflict and Class*, p. 112

those in Lancashire, sent shortly before the affair, which began: "Dear Brothers", and concluded: "We remain yours in Bonds of Union and Liberty". In between, the communication declared the Scotsmen's loyalty to the larger cause: "We consider ourselves as Scotchmen....ready at anytime to act upon a plan that would wear any probability of success." This letter to the Lancashire cell, and other contacts between the Glasgow radicals and English reformers in such towns as Manchester in the weeks before insurrection, no doubt settled the point, for the Scotsmen, that the Scottish rising in April would constitute their part in this larger plan. Even with the foiling of the Despard plot two months before, there was still a clear expectation among the rebels that the outburst in Scotland would be accompanied by similar risings in at least the north of England. With the minor and inconsequential exception of some 200 Sheffield tradesmen who armed themselves and spent a full day in April charging about the town chanting "the Revolution, the Revolution", this Anglo-Scottish pact broke down; Northern England did not rise, and the Scots rebels knew enough to realize that this doomed their own efforts. "We are so much discouraged", wrote one in the days afterwards, "at our brethren not coming forward in a more tumultuous form that we are at a loss which way to pursue. It was useless for us to persevere unless England would have stepped forward with a helping hand."¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ For an (approving) account of how the Radical War has, over generations, been used by the Celtic fringe to further the cause of Scottish nationalism, see Ellis and Mac A' Ghobhainn, *Scottish Insurrection*, pp. 294-99.

¹⁶² Donnelly, "The Scottish Rising", pp. 34-5; Donnelly and Baxter, "Sheffield and the English Revolutionary Tradition", pp. 419-20.

IV

This present chapter has had several objectives. First, it has shown that, rather than separate and distinctly national factors, there were common influences serving to radicalize plebeians and artisans throughout the British Isles by the 1790s: the American Revolution, the French Revolution, the writings of Thomas Paine, and – older than these, yet reinforced by them – an awareness of the 'rights of the free-born Englishman' as established under precedents such as Saxon democracy, the Magna Carta, the Glorious Revolution, and a rich heritage of economic protest. Taken together, these factors highlighted for radical workingmen the unresponsiveness of the prevailing political system, and in most cases, also offered solutions. Secondly, the chapter has highlighted the working population's involvement in both popular petitioning clubs such as the London Corresponding Society and the Scottish Friends of the People, and in the United-style insurrectionary organizations, in order to show that, at both the moral and the physical force levels, labouring men throughout the British Isles were active in attempts to push forward the two-pronged program of manhood suffrage and annual parliaments. Finally, we have seen that, contrary to a good deal of scholarship, neither plebeians nor artisans were the mere followers in these matters of the gentry. Samuel Bamford reminds us that the lower orders were fully capable of disseminating reform principles among themselves, that it was not incumbent upon the more educated elite – the Major Cartwrights, for example – to teach these things to them. And examples such as the Pentrich rebellion and the Scottish Radical War remind us that they were capable too of taking larger matters into their own hands, of deciding, on their own, to resort to physical force if convinced that the constitutional avenue was blocked. It is to a discussion of how these same parliamentary reform

goals were pursued by British and Irish working émigrés in two diverse corners of the Empire that the second chapter of this thesis will now turn.

Chapter 2 – New South Wales, 1790-1810

Few officials or visitors to early Australia entertained any doubts about the 'moral character' of that colony's population of British and Irish convicts. An "incorrigible band of rogues[,] ...wicked, abandoned [and] irreligious" was the description given of them in 1798 by the Governor of New South Wales, and it was an opinion rarely, if ever, questioned by the middle class reading public in nineteenth century Britain and Australia.¹⁶³ It is a characterization that has also cast a long shadow over Australian historiography, with the result that other issues relating to the convicts have rarely been discussed on their own terms, but as part of the question of whether or not they constitute evidence of 'moral debasement'.¹⁶⁴ One of many issues left thus

¹⁶³ Quoted in L. Evans and P. Nichols, eds., *Convicts and Colonial Society, 1788-1868*, (Melbourne, 1984), p. 166.

¹⁶⁴ The first concerted scholarly defense of the convicts' overall character – and that which was to begin a decades-long see-saw debate – was offered by George Wood, who argued that they were "children of misfortune", not vicious, hardened criminals; see G.A. Wood, "Convicts", *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, vol. 8 (1922), pp. 177-208; 181. Subsequent advocates of this view include Brian Fitzpatrick, *British Imperialism and Australia*, (London, 1939), pp. 3-63; Russell Ward, *The Australian Legend*, (Melbourne, 1958), pp. 15-42; and George Rudé, "Early Irish Rebels in Australia", *Historical Studies*, vol. 16 (1974-5), pp. 17-31, and Rudé, *Protest and Punishment: the story of the Social and Political Protestors transported to Australia, 1788-1868*, (Oxford, 1978). A rough counter-interpretation – not necessarily painting the convicts as wholly black, but arguing that most were indeed members of a profession criminal class rather than victims of economic and political oppression – can be found in studies such as C.M.H. Clark, "The Origins of the Convicts transported to Eastern Australia, 1787-1852", *Historical Studies*, vols. 26, 27 (1956), pp. 121-35, 314-27; Lloyd Robson, *The Convict Settlers of Australia*, (Melbourne, 1965); A.G.L. Shaw, *Convicts and the Colonies*, (London, 1966); J.B. Hirst, *Convict Society and its Enemies*, (Sydney, 1983); and Robert Hughes, *The Fatal Shore: A History of the Transportation of Convicts to Australia, 1787-1868*, (London, 1987), pp. 158-202. Hughes' book, published in the year prior to the centenary, became an integral part of the celebration, and helped anchor firmly what Hamish Maxwell-Stewart and James Bradley call the "convict-detritus" interpretation (literally, 'convicts-as-waste'): Maxwell-Stewart and Bradley, "Behold the Man": Power, Observation and the Tattooed Convict", *Australian Studies*, vol. 12 (1997), p. 71. An important recent exchange between advocates of the two views is in

undeveloped is that of popular political radicalism in early Australia; surprising, since, by any estimate, at least hundreds of those exiled to the colony beginning in the 1790s had been convicted of sedition in Britain or Ireland, among them such leading figures of popular reform as the advocate Thomas Muir, the founder of the Scottish Friends of the People; Maurice Margarot, the first president of the London Corresponding Society; the artisan George Mealmaker, founder of the United Scotsmen; and the United Irishman Joseph Holt, one of the last major rebel leaders to surrender in 1798. Here, too, however, the scholars potentially best able to discuss this subject – those who have discussed radicalism in other contexts, for example – have in general approached it with a concern for the convicts, treating political radicalism as part of this larger discussion of moral worth – i.e., whether radical activism was 'right' or 'wrong' in the abstract – and rarely exploring other aspects of the issue.¹⁶⁵ Also largely overlooked in

Historical Studies, vol. 22 (1987): in the convicts' defense, David Neal, "Free Society, Penal Colony, Slave Society, Prison?", pp. 497-518; supporting their representation as a criminal class, J.B. Hirst, "Or None of the Above: A Reply", pp. 519-24. A concise and useful summation of this historiographical debate, from the 1920s to the present, is Stephen Garton, "The Convict Origins Debate: Historians and the Problem of the 'Criminal Class'", in Gillian Whitlock and Gail Reekie, eds., *Uncertain Beginnings: Debates in Australian Studies*, (Queensland, Australia, 1993), pp. 39-52. A burgeoning sub-category of the convict debate centers around the women transported during this period, and *their* collective character. For a summation of the different viewpoints of this debate, see Whitlock and Reekie, *Uncertain Beginnings*, Part 3, "Female Convicts: Worse than the Men?", which presents discussions by Anne Summers, Portia Robinson, and Deborah Oxley. A final strand of the convict scholarship debates, as it were, the debate itself, as well as what the discussion of the convicts reveals about wider questions concerning the Australian national identity. See for example Ged Martin, ed., *The Founding of Australia: The Argument about Australia's Origins*, (Sydney, 1978); Stephen Nicholas and Peter R. Shergold, "Unshackling the Past", in Whitlock and Reekie, pp. 75-88; and Alan Frost, *Botany Bay Mirages: Illusions of Australia's Convict Beginnings*, (Melbourne, 1994).

¹⁶⁵ Accepting the equation of radicalism with amorality, one response from those who defend the convicts has been to deny the radicalism, and thus the convicts' amorality. G. A. Wood, for example, devoted considerable space to both plebeian and artisan exiles in his studies in the 1920s, as well as some of the middle class Scottish Martyrs, but, to further his defense of all, downplays their careers as radicals in Britain, portraying them less as committed political reformers than as essentially harmless victims, and innocent, certainly, of the charge of having pursued sedition in Australia. Wood, "Convicts", p. 197. A second response is to refute the equation of radicalism with amorality, a course taken by George Rude, for example. But even Rude, while not denying that many convicts had been active as radicals in the British Isles – he has, indeed, done much to document popular radicalism in Britain – or that radicalism was in anyway inappropriate, gives less space to the careers of the radicals as radicals than to chronicling the ways in which exiles 'made good'. In this attempt to show how they remade themselves in Australia, Rude oversteps himself, dismissing the notion that some might have maintained ideological ties to the British Isles parliamentary reform movement. "There is nothing in their later careers" in Australia, he concludes, "to suggest that [the convicts] brought with them...any particular ideology, or political opinions or outlook"

this absorption with the convict population are the many Britons and Irishmen who came to colonial Australia as free settlers during this same period, some of whom had scarcely been less radical in their homeland than had Muir or his fellow political exiles. With one or two notable exceptions, little attempt has been made to learn how these individuals responded to some of the constraints imposed by the colonial regime, or to show, through them, ways in which radical reform ideology could clash with ultra-conservative colonial regimes.¹⁶⁶

Nor, as a rule, have the many historians of popular radical movements in the British Isles added greatly to our understanding of political protest in early Australia. Often confining their focus to geographic nationality, as opposed to individuals – to English radicals, or Scottish radicals, or at most, to British radicals – these scholars are thus prevented from shifting their discussion to such distant outposts as Australia, despite the fact numerous radical reformers, from whichever nation, ended up in the colony.¹⁶⁷

– a dubious assertion, as we shall see. E.J. Hobsbawm and George Rudé, *Captain Swing*, (London 1970), p. 279.

¹⁶⁶ And these constraints were formidable: as C.A. Bayly observes, colonial governance grew *more*, rather than less, autocratic during the revolutionary era – in the wake of the American War of Independence, British Empire authorities were determined not to lose any other overseas possessions, and practiced to that end “the politics of neo-absolutism”. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World*, (London, 1989), “Introduction”. One radical free settler who has drawn scholarly attention is the Birmingham merchant John Boston, the subject of a 1985 discussion by T.G. Parsons, “Was John Boston’s Pig a Political Martyr? The Reaction to Popular Radicalism in Early New South Wales”, *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, vol. 70 (1985), pp. 163-76.

¹⁶⁷ Examples of discussions of plebeian and artisan movements for radical parliamentary reform that do not follow political exiles to Australia are legion: Thompson, et al. Ironically, Rudé is one of the few with a national focus to do so, charting the radical transmission from Britain to Australia – I say ‘ironically’ because his purpose in so doing is precisely to undercut the notion that the political convicts remained politically subversive in the colonies. In general, it is in biographical examinations of individual radicals that the shift from radicalism at home to radicalism in Australia is best seen, such as M. Donnelly’s *Thomas Muir of Huntershill, 1765-99*, (Tillicoultry, Great Britain, 1975), and Michael Roe’s short articles on the Scots parliamentary reformers and political exiles Maurice Margarot and George Mealmaker: “Maurice Margarot: A Radical in Two Hemispheres, 1792-1815”, *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, vol. 31 (1958), pp. 68-78; and “George Mealmaker, the Forgotten Martyr”, *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, vol. 43 (1957), pp. 284-98. This second piece is doubly unique in that its subject is a workingman rather than a member of the elite. A recent exception is Anne-Maree Whitaker’s *Unfinished Revolution: United Irishmen in New South Wales 1800-1810*, (Sydney, 1994), which follows United Irish exiles en masse from Ireland in 1798 to New South Wales. In recent years, good opportunities to link Irish radicalism with New South Wales radicalism have consistently been missed by Peter O’Shaughnessy in his studies of the United Irishman and 1798 rebel Joseph Holt. O’Shaughnessy’s *A Rum Story (Joseph Holt in New South Wales)*, (Sydney, 1988), recounts Holt’s experiences in exile, but the question of his

The implication of this national approach, perhaps unintended, is that banishment to Australia marked the obvious end of a radical's career, by placing him, as it were, beyond the pale. And while it is true that such outstanding figures as Muir, who famously escaped exile in New South Wales to return in a blaze of glory to the European stage, have attracted scholarly notice, such rare instances as this only add to the problem, by diverting attention from the many radicals who remained in Australia to struggle against overarching authority, and thus making it all the easier to assume that the experiences of the 'average' political exile can add nothing to our understanding of popular movements for radical reform.¹⁶⁸

For all of these reasons, then, transatlantic radical influences on colonial Australia have been under-appreciated. In particular, little attempt has been made to trace the connections that existed between popular protest in Australia and contemporary radical reform movements in the British Isles, despite a steady transmission of both political exiles and radical free settlers from Britain and Ireland to the colony in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. It will be the purpose of this present chapter to suggest that, as shown in the experiences of both convicts and émigrés, this transoceanic connection was substantial, and deserving of closer attention. The discussion will begin by charting the transmission of convicted radicals, plebeians and artisans in particular, from Britain and Ireland to colonial Australia in the years between 1790-1810, and by observing in the conditions that met them on arrival the impetus for continued resistance and reformism. The focus will then shift to an examination of four ways in which radicals drew on the ideology of the British Isles movement as a means

involvement in New South Wales radicalism is never broached; in the same fashion, *Rebellion in Wicklow: General Joseph Holt's Personal Account of 1798*, edited by O'Shaughnessy, presents Holt's recollections of the Rebellion, culled from his *Memoirs* and interspersed with O'Shaughnessy's biographical account of Holt, but with very little mention from O'Shaughnessy of Holt's subsequent exile to New South Wales.

of confronting and altering these conditions. Firstly, two responses that were designed to secure escape from the colony and allow exiles to rejoin radical movements at home: lone or small scale stowaway attempts, and mass insurrection for the purpose of seizing a ship. Finally, the discussion will move to an examination of two responses designed instead to improve living conditions for those committed to remain in Australia: political and non-political reform schemes, and efforts among working émigrés, or émigrés with labouring backgrounds, to achieve economic prosperity.¹⁶⁹ It will be suggested that even a cursory survey such as this demonstrates the persistence of radicalism among British Isles plebeians and artisans in New South Wales, in both the exile and the free settler communities, as well as the ways in which the underlying ideological tenets of British Isles popular radical reform could be adapted to confront the unique conditions of colonial society.

I

As was seen in the preceding chapter, artisan-led revolutionary organizations – the United Irishmen, the United Englishmen, the United Scotsmen and other, smaller, ultra-radical cadres – burst onto the British political scene beginning in the 1790s, marking the beginning of an insurrectionary movement directed ultimately towards parliamentary reform that would endure, albeit often just barely, through the next three decades. Whether thwarted early and easily, as with the Cato Street and the Despard

¹⁶⁸ A detailed account of Muir's escape and eventual return to Europe is given in Frank Clune, *The Scottish Martyrs: Their Trials and Transportation to Botany Bay* (London, 1969), Chapters 13-16; see also Rudé, *Protest and Punishment*, pp. 182-83, and Donnelly, *Muir of Huntershill*, pp. 19-24.

¹⁶⁹ This is not to imply that these four were the only responses available – protest could be registered in numerous ways. In an interesting, if verbose, discussion, Hamish Maxwell-Stewart and James Bradley argue that dissent in Australia was often expressed through tattooing; thus the tattoo of a Scots convict named John McLean: 'Nemo Me Impune Lacessit' – Scotland's national motto, which, in English, translates into "don't mess with me". Maxwell-Stewart and Bradley, "Behold the Man", pp. 71-97.

conspiracies, or suppressed only after extensive open fighting, as with the Irish Rebellion of 1798 and the Scottish 'Radical War' of 1820, this continuum of protest caused a great deal of concern among government officials and the elite in general. If apprehended, the leaders of these episodes were dealt with in established fashion: some speedily executed, as was Despard, various Irish leaders of 1798, and some of the Scots leaders of 1820; others given lengthy prison sentences. But problems arose over what to do with the many others either captured during open revolt or convicted of sedition on other occasions, often through questionable evidence. Public sympathy would not allow them to be executed en masse, nor could they be incarcerated for long because of prison overcrowding – neither, though, could they simply be set free, since they posed a clear threat to the established order. Transportation was the obvious solution, for several reasons.

Firstly, and most obviously, transporting radicals removed them, and their potentially 'contagious' political ideologies, from contact with the rest of British Isles society – susceptible lower orders in particular – without making them martyrs through execution. Secondly, transportation served as a harsh example to future would-be protesters. Thirdly, it bolstered the much-needed colonial workforce. And (a distant) fourth, it was thought to benefit the exiles themselves, by providing them with an opportunity to turn over a new leaf in a different environment, one in which, in the words of one official, "they could...earn their livelihood by honest work."¹⁷⁰ But the transportation of

¹⁷⁰ For the history of transportation in early British criminal justice, see Shaw, *Convicts and the Colonies*, Chapter 1, "Crime and Transportation before the American Revolution"; also J.M Beattie, *Crime and the Courts in England, 1660-1800*, (Oxford, 1986). Also, H.J.M. Johnston, *British Emigration Policy, 1811-1830*, (Oxford, 1972). Useful general histories of transportation to Australia are Shaw, *Convicts and the Colonies*; and Hughes, *The Fatal Shore*. For actual shipboard experiences, see Charles Bateson, *The Convict Ships*, (Glasgow, 1959), and Frank Clune, *Bound for Botany Bay: Narrative of a Voyage in 1798 Aboard the Death Ship 'Hillsborough'*, (Sydney, 1964). For the development of the central penal outpost in colonial Australia, the notorious Botany Bay, see Mollie Gillen, "The Botany Bay Decision, 1786: Convicts not Empire", *English Historical Review*, vol. 97 (1982), pp. 740-66; Alan Frost, "Botany Bay: An Imperial Venture of the 1780s", *English Historical Review*, vol. 100 (1985), pp. 309-30; and Alan Atkinson, *The*

convicted protestors to Australia also had a fifth, unintended, consequence: it allowed for the transmission of radical political reformers from Britain to this distant corner of the Empire.

Is it possible, though, to determine how many radicals were thus transported? And, more importantly, can it be shown that plebeians and artisans numbered prominently among them? To take up this second task is to contradict the tendency of a good deal of historiography, which – as is the case with much of the British-based radical scholarship – focuses on exiles from the social elite, such as the Scottish 'Martyrs' Thomas Muir, an advocate, and Maurice Margarot, a Scots-born, university educated reformer; and the United Irishman and prosperous farmer Joseph Holt.¹⁷¹ Fortunately, well-preserved government records have allowed historians of convict transportation such as Lloyd Robson, A.G.L. Shaw, and George Rudé to determine precisely whom, and of what status and which occupation, were those exiled to Australia from the beginning of its time as a penal colony. Synthesizing the earlier findings of Robson and Shaw, Professor Rudé concludes that, of the approximately 162,000 British and Irish men and women transported to New South Wales, Victoria, Western Australia and Van Dieman's Land in the years between 1787 and 1868, 3,600 of these – or about one in forty-five – had been sentenced as political protesters. And of these, at least 400 from the period 1790-1820 can be identified either as artisans or plebeians: 329 United Irishmen, 6 Scots Jacobins of 1798, 14 artisans of the Pentrich Rebellion of 1817, 19 Scots radical weavers of the 1820 uprising, 5 artisans of the Cato Street

Europeans in Australia: A History. Vol. 1, The Beginning, (Melbourne, 1997), Chapters 3 and 4. For the development of the other central convict outpost, Norfolk Island, see Raymond Nobbs, ed., *Norfolk Island and its First Settlement, 1788-1814*, (Sydney, 1988).

¹⁷¹ For example, Frank Clune's lengthy narrative of Muir's experiences, *Scottish Martyrs*, Chapters 13-16; and Peter O'Shaughnessy's studies of Joseph Holt (see ft. 167).

Conspiracy, and 12 Yorkshire radical weavers.¹⁷² At least one of these was a leading figure in the popular parliamentary reform movement, the Dundee handloom weaver George Mealmaker. The only artisan among the famous five Scottish Martyrs, Mealmaker had been, as we have seen, an Edinburgh Convention delegate in 1793 and after that the founder of, and moving force behind, the Painite ultra-radical United Scotsmen until his transportation in 1795.

Clearly, then, there can be little doubt about either the pre-transportation political activism, or the plebeian or artisan antecedents, of some of the convicts shipped to colonial Australia beginning in the 1790s. Was their radicalism transferred as well, though? Scholars who defend the exiles' moral character assert that it was not. Echoing the contemporary hope that the convicts would turn over a new leaf in Australia, the argument has been made that the political exiles were too busy tending to their own affairs – raising families, making money, working on either their own or other settlers' land – to take part in radical protest. For example, after describing the authorities' anticipatory feelings of foreboding and alarm concerning the presence of the radicals in the infant colony, George Rudé tries to demonstrate that such fears were unwarranted. The great majority of transported former rebels simply "melt[ed] into the crowd", he writes, "appear[ing] to have led comparatively peaceful lives". This includes the artisans too, who, he continues, tended to settle originally in Sydney, but eventually

¹⁷² Rudé, *Protest and Punishment*, pp. 9-10. Using figures compiled by the near-contemporary observer Sidney Sheedy, J.E. Gallagher reaches a higher total regarding the United Irishmen: 600, with no attempt at an occupational breakdown, and to this he adds another 500 Irishmen who, while not UI members, were no less hostile to "Anglo-Saxon tyrann[ny]". J.E. Gallagher, "The Revolutionary Irish, 1800-1804", *The Push from the Bush*, vol. 19 (1985), pp. 3-4. On a different note, there was a great and general demand in the burgeoning colonial society for artisans, even – or perhaps especially – those who were convicts, of whichever nationality, and the influx of both convict and free settler tradesmen did not satisfy it: as late as 1827, a contemporary colonist observed that "New South Wales could have employed an additional 500 artisans in 1827...and that Van Diemen's Land could have taken some more." Johnston, *British Emigration Policy*, p. 117.

scattered outwards as new communities grew and new opportunities beckoned.¹⁷³

Along with the plebeian and elite rebels, then, they were too busy building careers, supposedly, to become politically active, let alone a threat to the established order.

As far as it goes, such a reconstruction is not altogether wrong. Many, probably even most, of the political convicts, did indeed work hard to make a fresh start in Australia by living quietly and well, and by achieving financial security. This is not the same, however, as saying that they abandoned their Painite reform ideology. The first wish of the middle class English political exile John Grant, declared on his stepping ashore in 1804, was "to make money", and yet he remained a critic of the colonial authorities, often savaging them in the poems that he wrote in his spare time.¹⁷⁴ Nor was Grant the only radical to tread a line between commerce and protest; as we shall see in more detail further below, the quest for economic prosperity quite often led both exiles and radical émigrés into clashes with colonial authority. On a more obvious level, though, Professor Rudé's interpretation does not allow for the fact that others among the exiles might have clashed directly with the authorities over substantive ideological issues, precisely as the latter had feared would happen. And even a cursory glance at the conditions faced by the exiles, both labourers and elite, reveals why this was so, why it was that resistance, tending towards reform of some kind, must have seemed to at least some of the political exiles a natural undertaking from the outset.

Even by contemporary standards, penal Australia was a brutal setting; according to no less an authority than the first Chief Justice of New South Wales, Francis Forbes, "the government of the colony was that of the gaol, and the first law little more than

¹⁷³ Rudé, "Early Irish Rebels in Australia", p. 26. Not surprisingly, this is also the view running throughout Rudé's *Protest and Punishment*, and the Australian sections of *Captain Swing*.

¹⁷⁴ Atkinson, *The Europeans in Australia*, p. 261.

prison discipline".¹⁷⁵ From the moment of arrival, the assumption was that transported men and women were servants whose first obligation was to the state, their master. Not only were the convicts completely politically disenfranchised, but other rights as such were very limited. Although technically they were permitted, for example, to own property, in reality this privilege barely existed; property could be confiscated according to the bare caprices of local authority figures. Nor were they permitted to control their own time. As part of the penal system's dual goals of training convicts to become honest citizens while at the same time satisfying the demand for labour in burgeoning colonial communities, most were sentenced to perform what in essence amounted to mere chattel slavery, toiling alone or as members in chain gangs on farms, roads, and so forth, for at least a two to four year period, during which they received no wages for their work and had no power to refuse the assignments given them.¹⁷⁶ Order was maintained through force. Spells on the treadmill, solitary confinement, and being put on bread and water were punishments handed down for every imaginable misdemeanor, while the more savage punishment of flogging was administered for such serious offences as refusal to work, disorderly conduct, or disobedience or insolence to one's employer.¹⁷⁷ In some regions, an average of one flogging per man per year was ordered, with the result that, even in its own time, the colony developed an unsavory reputation for the freedom with which the whip was

¹⁷⁵ Quoted in Marian Aveling, "Imagining New South Wales as a Gendered Society, 1783-1821", *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 25 (1992), pp. 11-12. With regard to their lack of political rights, Alan Atkinson describes the convicts, compellingly, as "anti-citizens" – a negative status reinforced in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, with the increasingly neo-absolutist rule practiced in overseas colonies in reaction to the American Revolution. For a discussion of some of the tensions between the convicts' negative legal status and the burgeoning liberal ideology of the day, see Alan Atkinson, "The Free-born Englishman Transported: Convict Rights as a Measure of Eighteenth-Century Empire", *Past and Present*, vol. 144 (1994), pp. 88-115.

¹⁷⁶ Shaw, *Convicts and the Colonies*, pp. 214-15.

¹⁷⁷ The severity of convict punishments is detailed in Rudé, *Protest and Punishment*, Part 4, Chapter 2, "The Convict System". For recent general discussions of the administration of justice in early Australia, see David Neal, *The Rule of Law in a Penal Colony: Law and Power in Early New South Wales*,

used.¹⁷⁸ Regarding this lack of freedom in general, and draconian punishments in particular, the middle class English convict John Grant did not appear to be exaggerating when he complained, in verse, that “tho’ Britons rule the Waves,/ Great George’s subjects – Britons – here are slaves”.¹⁷⁹

Grant was surely not the only convict so to conclude, and these same sentiments can probably be attributed to a good many of the political exiles from the lower orders. After all, they had already shown themselves dissatisfied with the comparatively enlightened system in the British Isles; why should it be assumed that they would *not* have resented the near-authoritarian regime of penal New South Wales? It is important, however, to isolate the true source of their outrage. While certainly they must have resented on a personal level the constant work and no the less constant threats of punishment, many of the exiles were also offended by their virtual enslavement for a deeper, less individualistic, reason. As a 1794 letter from the middle class reformer Maurice Margarot to the governor of New South Wales makes clear, what angered the political exiles above all was the larger implication of their plight, the fact that, by violating an established code, the penal labour system harmed British society as a whole. “I conceive my sentence to be fulfilled on my arrival here”, Margarot wrote,

that Sentence being Transportation and not Slavery, the latter
unknown to our Laws and directly contrary to the British

(Melbourne, 1991); and Paula J. Byrne, *Criminal Law and Colonial Subject: New South Wales, 1810-1830*, (Melbourne, 1993).

¹⁷⁸ Rudé, *Protest and Punishment*, p. 179. For contemporary impressions regarding punishments, as well as various other aspects of life in New South Wales, see H.C. Forster, “Tyranny Oppression and Fraud’: Port Jackson, New South Wales, 1792-1794”, *Royal Australian Historical Society*, vol. 60 (1974), pp. 73-88, in which excerpts from the journal of a crew member on the visiting store-ship *Britannia* are sampled.

¹⁷⁹ Quoted in Atkinson, *The Europeans in Australia*, p. 267. Grant did not let the matter rest with the writing of mere poetry; he also bombarded the Governor with angry letters, such as that of May 8, 1805: “Now Sir, I ask you, as an independent Englishman, viewing with astonishment the miserable state to which thousands of unfortunate men are reduced in this Colony, by what authority do those in power at Home – by what right to you – make slaves of Britons in this distant quarter of the globe?”; quoted in Clune, *Scottish Martyrs*, p. 168.

Constitution as it was established at the Revolution of 1688, which place the present Family on the Throne for the immediate purpose of more effectually protecting British Freedom. It would therefore not be doing Justice to my Countrymen, while cheerfully undergoing a long exile for their sakes, were I silently to suffer in my own person so great a violation of their Charters. This case applies not to me alone but to every Briton; for if the Executive power can make one Slave it may make all so.¹⁸⁰

Above all else, then, the penal labour system offended the *political* sensibilities of the radical exiles. They regarded themselves as defenders of ancient British parliamentary rights, not as criminals deserving of brutal floggings and virtual enslavement, and as Margarot makes clear, they interpreted their work assignments as constituting a dangerous abrogation of these rights, the lineage of which they understood to stretch back not only to the Revolution of 1688, but, as we have seen, to stretch back to the Norman period itself; rights which, they believed, could not be broken in Australia without having detrimental effects on the exiles' 'countrymen' in Britain and Ireland. There can be no more basic affirmation of transoceanic republican solidarity than this. Far from seeing a universal desire among the convicts to 'make good', then, we can see that the particularly harsh conditions of penal Australia in fact set the stage for the resistance of at least some to the established order.

At the same time, however, the unique conditions of early New South Wales altered both the manner and the goals of plebeian and artisan convict resistance, raising problems for this present discussion. Given the serious constraints upon their personal liberty, it would have been nonsensical for the convicts to press for either manhood suffrage or annual parliaments – that program was out of the question, with the realities of their situation. Their concerns were necessarily much more basic. It would therefore be unrewarding to test rigidly for advocacy of this specific program, as was done in the

¹⁸⁰ Quoted in Whitaker, *Unfinished Revolution*, p. 127.

previous chapter. But, if it can be assumed that a good many of the workingmen exiles beginning in the 1790s had had experience with Painite parliamentary reform at home – and this seems a reasonable assumption, given our above statistical analysis of the exiles of this period – it is no less reasonable to conclude that their subsequent protest activity in Australia would have seemed, to them, a mere extension of this basic political philosophy, even perhaps an extension of the same generalized struggle against overweening British authority. Because of the peculiarities of the Australian experience, then, what this Australian discussion will test for is not adherence to any one well-developed response to the convict system, but for any response reflecting the ideology at the root of the British parliamentary reform movement – what we have seen E.P. Thomson refer to as the 'rights of the free born Englishman' – as well as any response that demonstrates the exiles' continued commitment to actual, ongoing political reform movements in the British Isles, from which they had been forcibly expelled.

II

This resistance took several forms. For some exiles, the simplest and most obvious remedy to the hardships in Australia was escape from the colony altogether, by stowing away on the outbound ships that departed almost daily. In some instances, these escape attempts were large scale affairs. In September, 1800, for example, some 30 or so United Irishmen and Scottish radicals, desirous, as they later admitted, of capturing a government ship and sailing home, were apprehended shortly before a planned uprising outside of Sydney. The culmination of such mass escape plans, and the only uprising in New South Wales to reach a scale comparable to even the most

minor British Isles' outbreak, was the failed Castle Hill Rebellion of March 4, 1804, the rallying call for the estimated 300 to 400 rebels involved in which was "death or liberty and a ship to take us home".¹⁸¹ Such relatively rare instances as these notwithstanding, the majority of would-be escapees acted either alone or in groups of two or three, and it is these that will be discussed at present.

To the extent that stowaway attempts have received scholarly attention at all, the tendency has been to treat them in isolation, removed from the backdrop of republicanism, and in dramatic narrative fashion besides: as a Robert Louis Stevenson-esque yarn come to life, with little regard for motives – or rather, treating motive as self-evident, given the harsh conditions of the penal regime.¹⁸² More detailed examination often reveals, however, that stowaway attempts by political exiles were in fact evidence of continued dedication to the British Isles radical movement. Far from simply obeying the negative urge to flee *from* Australia, radical stowaways – some of whom were actual veterans of the 1790s parliamentary reform movement – were following instead the positive urge to return *to* the British Isles, to re-join their colleagues in the unfinished business of political revolution at home – revolution that, due to the scarcity of accurate overseas news in Australia, they often wrongly believed was on the verge of success.¹⁸³ In 1801, for example, three United Irish exiles – among them a tallow chandler – were captured attempting to stow away on an American ship, and subsequently told authorities that they had been convinced "that the revolution had been achieved in England, [that] a decisive battle [had been fought] in Ireland, and

¹⁸¹ Quoted in K.S. Inglis, *The Australian Colonists: An Exploration of Social History, 1788-1870* (Melbourne, 1993), p. 179.

¹⁸² See for example the dramatic account of Muir's escape in Clune, *Scottish Martyrs*, Chapters 13-16.

¹⁸³ The unreliable, second- and third-hand nature of much of the political exiles' information concerning affairs at home is revealed in a journal entry by Maurice Margarot, dated March 1, 1801: "Mr. Barnes [a middle class radical associate of Margarot's] dined with us and reported a conversation he heard in church. This gives us reason to believe that the Revolution has succeeded in England." Quoted in Clune, *Scottish Martyrs*, p. 166.

[that] the English navy...had been exterminated...by the Russians".¹⁸⁴ Similarly, a spate of escape attempts came in February, 1804, when news reached the colonies of both the recently-thwarted Despard conspiracy in England, and Robert Emmet's Rebellion of 1803 in Dublin.¹⁸⁵

A discussion of radical stowaway attempts must also overcome the tendency among historians to focus on the celebrated 1797 escape of the Scotsman Thomas Muir – as it happens, a member of the educated elite. This concentration on Muir is understandable: he was one of the most prominent of the political exiles, and his escape was both successful and sufficiently hair-raising to make for a good story.¹⁸⁶ But Muir's should not be allowed to overshadow the numerous escape attempts in which political exiles from the lower orders were involved, often prominently. The attempt involving our Irish tallow chandler is one such; another, also unsuccessful, involved two exiles, both workingmen: the stonemason and United Irish leader of 1798 Philip Cunningham, and the United Irish weaver Cornelius Shean. When captured, they freely admitted their intention to escape and thus return to the reform struggle in Ireland.¹⁸⁷

In the end, whether radical stowaways did or did not actually escape is not of the essence for this discussion. More important is the fact, generally under-appreciated, that the ultimate goal of some, plebeians and artisans included, was to return to the

¹⁸⁴ The complicity of both American and French crews in assisting some of the political exiles to escape from New South Wales adds an important layer of international republican solidarity to the stowaway phenomenon; both American and French sailors were instrumental in helping Thomas Muir to escape in 1796. Also, Anne-Maree Whitaker observes that the presence of American and French whaling ships often triggered spates of escape attempts throughout the first decade of the nineteenth century. Whitaker, *Unfinished Revolution*, p. 93.

¹⁸⁵ Whitaker, *Unfinished Revolution*, pp. 84, 90, 63-4.

¹⁸⁶ Muir, the exiled leader of the Scottish Friends of the People, escaped from New South Wales in 1796 on the American ship *The Otter* with the full knowledge and co-operation of the captain and crew, was eventually captured at Cadiz by the Spanish, and finally rescued by the French and brought to Paris 1797 as an honoured guest, alongside the United Irishman Wolfe Tone, of the revolutionary Directory. Muir's is the only stow away incident to be discussed in Rudé, *Protest and Punishment*, for example, pp. 182-83; and it is a focus in Clune, *Scottish Martyrs*.

contest for parliamentary reform in Britain. When viewed in the proper international context, then, lone or small-group escape attempts appear the opposite of isolated actions, and less a betrayal of republican solidarity than a demonstration of its strength. The exiles most commonly attempted to escape Australia directly after they received news of revolutionary outbreaks in the British Isles, and chose, by stowing away, the only practical method by which they could return home quickly enough to take part in unfolding events. And they chose this method, it should be noted, in full knowledge of the considerable risk of their being discovered by the outbound ship's crew, returned to colonial authorities, and punished severely.¹⁸⁸

For those radicals who lacked the opportunity, or who doubted the practicality, of stowing-away, an alternative means of resistance was open revolt. More than in any other aspect of our discussion, however, it is here that we run head-on into the historiography that, as noted at the outset, attempts to defend the exiles against charges that they were of debased character and morals. George Rudé, for example, treats skeptically all claims that British and Irish political radicals were involved in openly subversive activity, the better to highlight what he calls the "exemplary records" of the "great majority" of transportees. Rudé writes that

several [exiles] were believed, often on the most flimsy evidence, to have been involved in the succession of 'conspiracies' and 'insurrections' that occurred...at Parramatta in September 1800 and September 1802 and, most dramatically, at Castle Hill in March 1804...[but] in spite of the violent response of authority and the panic these events aroused in Government and magisterial circles...doubt remains as to whether they may be linked with the United Irish or other [British] rebels...¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷ Whitaker, *Unfinished Revolution*, p. 79.

¹⁸⁸ For example, a United Irishman discovered attempting to stow away in 1801 was sentenced to be flogged and then placed in a chain gang; Whitaker, *Unfinished Revolution*, pp. 63-4. Cunningham and Shean were sentenced to 100 lashes each; Whitaker p. 80.

Without denying that many political exiles, among them such leading figures the Irishman Joseph Holt, appear to have remained free from involvement in radical conspiracies and insurrections, it is on the face of it difficult to believe, given the widespread dissatisfaction with the colonial regime noted above and the fact that plots of this kind were clearly in the tradition of British Isles parliamentary reform protest, that none were involved. And, indeed, Rudé's narrative has come under challenge in recent years. J.E. Gallagher, Anne-Maree Whitaker, and Alan Atkinson have all drawn attention to the fact that, far from remaining uninvolved, political exiles often were in the insurrectionary vanguard.¹⁹⁰ Gallagher and Whitaker, in particular, have documented a near-continuous series of persistently plotted insurrections, both actual and aborted, throughout the first decade of the nineteenth century; at least one planned insurrection each year, some engineered by – and all involving – exiled Irish and British labourers. For example, the foiling of a small cadre of exiles who had planned a rising for September, 1800, resulted in four would-be rebels receiving between 100 and 300 lashes each: one was an Irish shoemaker named Michael Fitzgerald. An aborted rising scheduled for Christmas of that same year might have involved as many as 600 English and Irish convicts; here, too, a good many of these must inevitably have been workingmen. And the pre-eminent artisan exile, George Mealmaker, was himself implicated in yet another thwarted uprising, set in this instance for March, 1802; taken into custody, Mealmaker was held for several days and then released when it was learned that some of the evidence against him was procured by the torture of flogging.¹⁹¹ And as with several of the stowaway attempts, insurrectionary activity

¹⁸⁹ Rudé, "Early Irish Rebels in Australia", p. 25.

¹⁹⁰ See Gallagher, "Revolutionary Irish", pp. 2-26; Whitaker, *Unfinished Revolution*, *passim*, and Chapters 3-6 in particular; and Atkinson, *The Europeans in Australia*, Chapters 12-13.

¹⁹¹ For the plot of September, 1800, see Whitaker, *Unfinished Revolution*, pp. 51-56; for that staged for Christmas of the same year, see Gallagher, "The Revolutionary Irish", p. 10, and also Whitaker pp. 56-59;

seems frequently to have been plotted with an eye towards protest movements at home. Several United Irish convicts, for example, were in contact with Robert Emmet in Dublin, shortly before Emmet initiated that city's Rebellion of 1803. The goal, apparently, was to co-ordinate uprisings in the two hemispheres, but, while Emmet's rebellion came off, that of the Irish radicals in the colony did not, having been foiled early by authorities.¹⁹²

In addition to connections in timing, in various of their superficial features virtually all of the prematurely thwarted plots were sufficiently analogous to those of British insurrectionary and parliamentary reform movements to suggest strongly links of symbolism between the two. In almost all of the known instances of planned rebellion in New South Wales during this period, familiar British Isles – indeed, pan-European – radical symbols were employed, such as pike-making, the planting of Trees of Liberty, the exchange of passwords, and the reiteration of the familiar slogan "Death or Liberty". Ironically, this adherence to British and Irish rituals, intended as a source of strength, often worked against the rebels, for it allowed the authorities – familiar with such things from accounts of insurrections in Britain and Ireland – to uncover burgeoning plots in the colonies by spotting early these warning signs. A number of risings were checked before they had even begun by the discovery of hidden caches of pikes and liberty poles, and by leaks about secret passwords.¹⁹³

for George Mealmaker's arrest in March, 1802, see Roe, "George Mealmaker, the Forgotten Martyr", p. 292. Roe believes that Mealmaker was uninvolved in the 1802 affair, but concedes that the Scotsman was, overall, a "contribut[or] to the...demand for constitutional rights" in New South Wales; p. 294. J.E. Gallagher identifies five specific projected risings between February, 1800, and January, 1804; Gallagher, "Revolutionary Irish", p. 14.

¹⁹² Whitaker, *Unfinished Revolution*, pp. 89-92. For a concise account of Emmet's Rebellion in Ireland, see Marianne Elliot, *Partners in Revolution*, pp. 302-22. Professor Elliot makes a strong argument for regarding the Emmet uprising as having been linked to the contemporaneous Despard Conspiracy in London.

¹⁹³ See for example Whitaker, *Unfinished Revolution*, pp. 53-4. For a discussion of revolutionary-era symbolism in general, see J. David Harden, "Liberty Caps and Liberty Trees", *Past and Present*, vol. 146 (1995), pp. 66-102.

The main piece of insurrectionary activity during this time – and, in retrospect, the only substantive uprising in New South Wales – was the Castle Hill Rebellion of 1804. Of all events in the period under consideration, it has attracted the most scholarly attention, and the basic facts of the incident have never been in dispute. On the night of March 4-5, 1804, a rebel force numbering roughly 300 to 400 converged in the settlement of Castle Hill, north of Parramatta, overpowered officials, and seized arms and ammunition. Following an address by the United Irish stonemason Philip Cunningham – during which he set out their plan of conquering the colony, seizing a ship and sailing it to the British Isles – the rebels marched to Parramatta, other men joining them on the way, and then northwest towards the settlement of Hawkesbury. Intercepted by a larger and much better armed force from the New South Wales Corps, a rather uneven battle broke out, and the rebel line quickly was broken. Without losing a single man, the soldiers killed between twelve to twenty rebels, wounded roughly another six, and captured an additional twenty six. Cunningham was hanged immediately, in public and without trial, at Hawkesbury, and, by March 10, eight other rebels had been executed as well. An additional nine were subsequently sentenced to heavy floggings, and another thirty or so packed off to the most distant penal settlements.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁴ As recounted in Inglis, *Australian Colonists*, pp. 209-11. For the recollections of the United Irish exile Joseph Holt of the public flogging of several of the Castle Hill rebels, reprinted from his *Memoirs*, see O'Shaughnessy, *Rebellion in Wicklow: General Joseph Holt's Personal Account of 1798*, pp. 168-9. Although the broad outline of what happened, where and in what order, during the Castle Hill Rebellion is not in dispute, the exact number of rebels involved has never been determined. In its March 11, 1804, account of the incident, the *Sydney Gazette* totaled the rebel force at 233 (almost certainly an underestimate), but it did not claim to know the number of those killed, other than that it totaled more than nine. The *Gazette* article is reproduced in full in Frank Crowley, ed., *Colonial Australia, 1788-1840*, (West Melbourne, 1980), pp. 126-28. Historians have tended to increase greatly the number of rebels involved – Alan Atkinson puts it at between 400 and 600, for example – and most have placed the number of rebels killed at twenty or so; Atkinson, *The Europeans in Australia*, pp. 255-56. George Rudé is an exception; as part of what seems an overall effort to downplay the incident, he reduces the number of rebels to a mere 200; Rudé, "Early Irish Rebels", p. 25.

While agreeing over this much, scholars have clashed in interpreting the incident. In general, however, the event has been viewed in either one of two ways. The first interpretation views the revolt as having been a convict rebellion only, an anarchic, unthinking, response to harsh penal conditions, with no obvious links either to the political exiles of the 1790s, or to their Painite political ideology. One advocate of this approach is George Rudé. Drawing attention to the preponderance of convict labourers among the insurgents, for example, Rudé expresses "some doubt... as to how closely they may be linked with the United Irish of other rebels of '98." Precisely what the rebellion was directed towards if not reform of some sort Professor Rudé does not say – in itself probably his comment on its lack of purpose. That he does not, at any rate, consider it to have been a conspiracy in the accepted sense – i.e., by the standards of radical uprisings in Britain and Ireland – is shown in his ironical placing of quotation marks around the words 'conspiracy' and 'insurrection' on the rare occasions in which he does refer to Castle Hill.¹⁹⁵

Alternatively, the Rebellion has been interpreted as an Irish event, a proud and tragic response to British cruelty towards the Irish patriot population. Lending itself as it does to Irish nationalism, perhaps the most passionate accounts of Rebellion slant towards this second interpretation, with the rebels portrayed as the mere dupes of a machiavellian colonial regime, which, the argument goes, goaded the Irishmen into rebellion in order to quash them the more fully – as had been done in Ireland in 1798, according to nationalist mythology. This is the narrative set down by Sidney Sheedy (a descendant of a Castle Hill rebel) in his pioneering 1910 study of the United Irishmen in

¹⁹⁵ Rudé, "Early Irish Rebels", pp. 25-26. Other accounts that present the insurrection as a convict affair include R.W. Connell, "The Convict Rebellion of 1804", *Melbourne Historical Journal*, vol. 5 (1965), pp. 27-37; A.G.L. Shaw, "Violent Protest in Australian History", *Historical Studies*, vol. 15 (1973), pp. 545-61; R.M. Younger, *Australia! Australia! Vol. 1, The Pioneer Years*, (Netley, South Australia, 1975), Chapter 6, "Groundswells of Discontent"; and Hirst, *Convict society and its enemies*, pp. 133-55, "Rebellion and security".

New South Wales, and repeated as late as 1986 by Patrick O'Farrell. What drove the Irish rebels at Castle Hill, O'Farrell argues, was not radical reform ideology, but "frustrations, sickness of heart, and impulses of affront: in a word, pride."¹⁹⁶

Both of these interpretations, it may be observed, downplay involvement in the Rebellion by political radicals – or, in the Irish nationalist version, by non-Irish radicals – and dismiss entirely the role of reform ideology as a spur to the incident. This is done either consciously, as in Professor Rudé's emphasis on the convict labourers, or perhaps unconsciously, as with the Irish nationalist emphasis on the Irish as victims rather than reformers. Both views, however, can be shown to err in these oversights, for the Castle Hill episode is best – perhaps only – understood as a British and Irish expression of political discontent, involving not so much the criminal convicts as the political exiles, and traceable in the end to the influence of the British Isles popular parliamentary reform movement.

To begin, the month of March, 1804, was not selected at random by a convict segment, nor simply the point at which oppressed Irishmen were provoked into resistance by British colonial oppression¹⁹⁷, but was purposely chosen, by watchful political exiles, because it fit into a wider pattern of contemporary British and European reform activity. This is a fact not generally noted by either of the traditional interpretations, both of which tend to examine the insurrection in isolation, without

¹⁹⁶ Sheedy's account, "United Irishmen in New South Wales, 1800-6", is in the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, but is quoted extensively (mostly as a 'straw man') in Whitaker, *Unfinished Revolution*. See also Patrick O' Farrell, *The Irish in Australia*, (Sydney, 1986), p. 38. Interpretations of Castle Hill as an Irish phenomenon are as old as the incident itself: New South Wales Governor Philip King referred to it as "the short-lived insurrection of those deluded Irish". Quoted in Inglis, *Colonial Australia*, p. 178. Also stressing Irish involvement in the Rebellion (minus the nationalist fervor), as well as discussing the Irish mindset in Australia in general, is Gallagher, "Revolutionary Irish".

¹⁹⁷ It is on this issue of the timing, and thus the motive, of the Castle Hill Rebellion that the Irish nationalist approach seems to err most egregiously. By suggesting that March, 1804, was merely the month when, as it happened, the Irish could no longer restrain themselves, scholars misread the collective character of the United Irishmen in New South Wales. Veterans of the 1798 Rebellion in Ireland, they were among the most seasoned, hard-core revolutionary strategists of the time, deferred to by English and Scottish radicals alike – hardly the type, then, to be provoked at will by the British colonial authorities.

reference to the international scene. There is substantive evidence, though, to demonstrate that the rebels themselves, at least, regarded their revolt as part of a larger pattern of protest, connected to two episodes in particular: the 1802 Despard Conspiracy in London, and the July, 1803, rising in Ireland led by Robert Emmet. Such exiles as the Scotsman Maurice Margarot and the United Irishman Joseph Holt were in contact with reformers at home (a raid on Margarot's home produced letters from LCS chairman Thomas Hardy and from Tom Paine himself, as well papers of Margarot's own, filled with what Governor King called "Republican Sentiments") and thus they – and others too, probably with access to news from British, French, and American ships – were aware of these burgeoning conspiratorial movements in England and Ireland (although it would have taken some time for news to reach New South Wales, which explains the lapse between these incidents and Castle Hill). Margarot, for one, was reasonably well-informed about the Despard affair, and probably shared his knowledge with Holt and others in the United Irish camp, with whom he was close socially. News of Emmet's Rebellion, meanwhile, seems to have been almost common knowledge in radical circles, despite the authorities' attempts to keep it from the exile population; after the Castle Hill affair had ended, one of the captured rebel leaders, the Irish tradesman William Johnson, told authorities that Emmet's revolt "had been talked of amongst them to his Knowledge for more than a month." The political exiles were aware of these outside developments, then, and the ensuing state of generalized expectation among them probably was accurately, if cryptically, reflected in Margarot's journal entry of January 16, 1804: "Great hopes on all sides". So great, indeed, that seditious talk went beyond the radical community, with others becoming aware that

something was afoot; as Margarot noted towards the end of January, the non-political convict Sir Henry Hayes had visited him, and “seems to *fear a R*”.¹⁹⁸

The argument for seeing the Castle Hill rising as a political manifestation, with a connection to reform-oriented insurgencies in the British Isles, is further strengthened when we recognize what was the rebels' ultimate goal. As with several of the lone or small-group stowaway attempts, the Castle Hill incident was in fact a mass escape attempt – so large an effort, indeed, and involving so many, that it can be difficult to recognize it as an escape attempt, rather than as simply an effort somehow to seize power in the colony. Seizure of power in at least the Castle Hill area was a part of the plan, but only as a means to a greater end: the seizure of a ship. The rebels' rallying cry was, as mentioned earlier, “death or liberty *and a ship to take us home*”, and it is worth returning to this – in the heat of rebellion, when this slogan was uttered repeatedly, they would have gained nothing by misrepresenting their plans.¹⁹⁹ Nor was Castle Hill even the first escape attempt for some; a number of the rebels had already made escape attempts, including United Irishmen such as the tailor Bryan Byrne, the stonemason Philip Cunningham, and labourers Lawrence Dempsey and John Walsh.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ For Margarot and his connections with Hardy and Paine, see Whitaker, *Unfinished Revolution*, p. 90; for Margarot's diary entries, see Whitaker, pp. 84, 91. Margarot's letters to English radicals were carried back by his friend Naval Lieutenant James Tuckey; Whitaker, p. 124. For the impact of Emmet's Rebellion on United Irish exiles, see Whitaker pp. 91-6. Accounts of Margarot's close connections with the United Irishman Joseph Holt are in Roe, “Maurice Margarot”, pp. 73-74; and Clune, *Scottish Martyrs*, Chapter 20. Not all of the exiles approved of the Castle Hill attempt, however; Margarot's close associate Joseph Holt was convinced that the uprising was doomed to fail. He not only declined to take a leading role at Castle Hill, but took the dangerous step of warning some of his fellow exiles in writing not to “attempt any such thing”; quoted in Whitaker, p. 92; see also ft. 207, below. His (justified) pessimism notwithstanding, Holt well understood that the impetus behind Castle Hill lay in large part in the exiles' affinity with Despard, Emmet and their followers, and that they would respond in kind to news of British and Irish uprisings; indeed, one of his reasons for thinking that the rebellion would not succeed was precisely the fact that so many knew of it beforehand – knew, that is, that word of the British Isles plots would lead to insurrection in New South Wales; Gallagher, “Revolutionary Irish”, p. 25.

¹⁹⁹ Further confirmation that the Castle Hill rebels were indeed after political liberation, as opposed merely to violence, comes from an unusual source: a cartoon of the time, showing their defeat near Hawksbury. In it, a rebel is depicted addressing New South Wales Corps' leader Major George Johnston with the cry “Death or Liberty Major”, to which Johnston, pointing a pistol at him, replies, “You Scoundrel. I'll liberate you”. Reproduced in Atkinson, *The Europeans in Australia*, p. 255.

²⁰⁰ Whitaker, *Unfinished Revolution*, p. 114.

Despite previous failures, there were particular reasons both for them and for other rebels to feel confident of escape by the time of Castle Hill. Firstly, the tenure of New South Wales' Governor Philip King was sufficiently unpopular with the public at large to convince the rebels that others would be willing to join the cause once it was underway. And second – and perhaps more importantly – the number of political exiles had increased during the previous years, past the number at which Governor Philip explicitly had asked the British authorities to stop sending “republicans”, on the grounds that, if they did so, he would no longer be able to control the colonial population. By March, 1804, perhaps one-third of the New South Wales population were United Irish alone.²⁰¹ With such numbers on their side, the task of seizing a ship probably appeared a relatively simple one, especially if widespread support could be gained quickly. Added to which, returning to home appeared all the more attractive since, as we have seen Maurice Margarot wrongly observe, the exiles believed the radical reform cause there to at last be on the verge of success.

If both the timing and the goal of the Castle Hill Rebellion demonstrates the exiles' continued belief in, and commitment to, radical reform in the British Isles, so too do some of the external trappings that characterized the incident. In many ways, the rebels attempted to link themselves symbolically to popular movements at home. For the United Irishmen, an obvious precedent for insurrection at Castle Hill was the Rebellion of 1798. This was a connection that some of the rebels certainly made, invoking the common slogan of 1798, 'Liberty or Death', at Parramatta. Also, a retrospective link was made, as they named the place where the soldiers felled some of the rebels and scattered others 'Vinegar Hill', after the hill near Wexford where the Irish

²⁰¹ Gallagher, “Revolutionary Irish”, p. 25. Professor Whitaker agrees that escape was the rebels' ultimate goal: *Unfinished Revolution*, Chapter 5, “The Castle Hill rebellion of 1804”.

rebels had been defeated by the British in June, 1798.²⁰² Symbolic connections were also made to the wider British Isles radical reform tradition, as they had been in other, aborted, insurrectionary attempts. In addition to the use of passwords ("St. Peter"), these included pike-making and Trees of Liberty. Indeed, the rebels spent valuable time in planting a Tree of Liberty at Government House in Parramatta, instead of in gathering much-needed weapons – a fatal error, as it turned out, for the Rebellion collapsed precisely because the rebels were outgunned by the soldiery.²⁰³

Finally, a closer examination of the rebel rank itself reveals considerable plebeian and artisan involvement in the episode, and also refutes the popular assertion that the rebellion was solely an Irish affair. This involvement has been hinted at already; veteran would-be escapees Byrne, Cunningham, Demsey and Walsh – tradesmen and plebeians – were among those at the rebellion's forefront. Indeed, the stonemason Cunningham, a leader during the 1798 Irish rebellion, was in fact, *the* leader during Castle Hill, inasmuch as any one figure can be given that title, and he was the first to be executed, on the night of March 5-6. In addition, two of the rebels executed within the next week were workers: the Irish carpenter Samuel Humes, and the Irish labourer William Johnson. This would indicate that they, too, had probably played prominent roles in the affair.²⁰⁴ Attempts to characterize the status of the rebels' rank and file, meanwhile, are hampered by the fact that only a mere handful of the 300 to perhaps 500 who were involved were ever identified. No one from the ranks of the socially prominent, though, has been shown to have been a participant, nor – with the

²⁰² Inglis, *Australian Colonists*, p. 211.

²⁰³ Younger, *Australia! Australia!*, p. 76, and Inglis, *Australian Colonists*, p. 178; see also Whitaker, *Unfinished Revolution*, p. 97. In addition to demonstrating adherence to traditional republican symbols, Castle Hill reveals also the manner in which the usual British and European rituals could be modified to reflect the peculiar goals of insurrection in Australia – as when rebels altered the traditional slogan 'Death or Liberty' to 'Death or Liberty, and a ship to take us home'.

²⁰⁴ Whitaker, *Unfinished Revolution*, p. 207.

exception of Maurice Margarot, to be examined below – is there any allusion in the Castle Hill historiography to involvement by bourgeois radicals in even the planning stage of the rising. The refusal of the United Irishman Joseph Holt to become involved may well have been representative, then, of elite exile response in general – and Holt himself noted that the rebels sentenced to public flogging were either unskilled labourers, or, in the case of the Irishman Mick Fitzgarrel, shoemakers.²⁰⁵

And while it cannot be denied that the majority of the Castle Hill rebels were indeed Irish, the uprising was nonetheless much more multi-national than has in general been recognized. To begin, a probable architect of the uprising, although not an actual participant, was the Scots-born London Corresponding Society president Maurice Margarot – so far as is known, the sole member of the educated elite to have been involved, at any stage, in Castle Hill. Obviously, Margarot did not advertise this complicity himself, but his actions in the days and weeks leading up to March 4 suggest strongly his involvement. We have seen, for one, that during this period he was reasonably attuned to the contemporary insurrectionary movement at home, although greatly misinformed as to its level of success. At this same time, as his biographer Michael Roe notes, local spies recorded the damaging fact of “constant visits to Margarot’s home by the most discontented and unruly section of the colonial community...among them several United Irishmen”. And finally, Margarot burnt most of his papers just days before the outbreak – hardly an act indicative of innocence. Margarot’s probable involvement in planning the rebellion serves as a strong link between popular parliamentary reform at home and radical protest in Australia; while

²⁰⁵ O’Shaughnessy, *Rebellion in Wicklow: General Joseph Holt’s Personal Account of 1798*, p. 169. Holt claimed in his memoirs to have been approached by exiles several times during February, 1804, to lead the rising, but always refused: “I told them, as for my part, I wanted have nothing to do with it,...[as] they had not army enough, nor could they ever rally or get together,...so I washed my hands of the mess”; quoted in Whitaker, *Unfinished Revolution*, p. 92.

not himself a workingman, he had, as a leading figure in the largely-artisan LCS, worked for years alongside those who were, in furtherance of the cause of manhood suffrage and annual parliaments.²⁰⁶

At lesser levels, too, others beside the Irish were involved at Castle Hill. The United Irishman Joseph Holt would later write of the Rebellion that “the English got as much attached to the business as the Irish”, a contention supported by the fact that two of the ten ring-leaders executed after the Rebellion’s suppression were English labourers, as were at least two of the twenty rebels sentenced to be flogged. And even the Welsh seem to have played a role at Castle Hill, at least according to the governor of New South Wales, who described a Welsh rebel with whom he was familiar – a plebeian-born former sailor sporting “a Jacobin-style cropped haircut” – as having been “very active in the Insurrection.”²⁰⁷

²⁰⁶ Roe, “Maurice Margarot”, pp. 69-70.

²⁰⁷ Whitaker, *Unfinished Revolution*, pp. 92, 103, 109. The involvement of this former naval seaman, one Josiah Glover Maude, raises the question as to whether members of any other branches of the military were involved in the Castle Hill Rebellion. J.E. Gallagher has unable to find evidence of this, although he suggests that the rebels themselves “might have expected to receive...support...from the New South Wales Corps”. It is not inconceivable that, among the hundreds of unidentified rebels, some might have been members, either former or current, of the militia. If so, this would contradict the bulk of Castle Hill historiography, according to which the soldieries’ only involvement was on the government side, crushing the insurrection in brutal fashion outside of Hawksbury. This view was repeated most recently in Whitaker, pp. 99-102; there seems no doubt, to Professor Whitaker, that the Corpsmen were, to virtually a man, against the rebels. This same general charge is made, in relation to the soldiery and radical free settlers such as John Boston, in Parson’s “Was John Boston’s Pig a Political Martyr?” There is reason to doubt this interpretation, however. As J.E. Gallagher and Alan Atkinson point out, the line between loyal and disloyal parties in the colony was remarkably unclear during this period, and soldiers often trod an uncertain path between the two: “Read Paine’s *Rights of Man*”, one Corpsman told another in 1793, “he says many true things”; quoted in Atkinson, *The Europeans in Australia*, pp. 251-52. Certainly the New South Wales Corps, en masse, did not always support authority figures; many were involved, for example, in the constitutional overthrow of Governor William Bligh in Sydney in January, 1808 – less than four years after Castle Hill. Perhaps more tellingly, it has been shown by both Gallagher and Atkinson that freemasonry – in many ways a politically republican ideology – had strong connections to the Corps. At the least, this might have disposed some of the soldiery to regard political exiles somewhat sympathetically; we have seen, for example, that a Naval Lieutenant named James Tuckey was friendly with Maurice Margarot, and regularly carried Margarot’s letters back to England: see ft. 198. Certainly several of the colonial authorities were concerned about freemasonry acting as a spur to sedition; Governor Philip King called it an “incendiary” philosophy, and ordered that “the most decided means be taken to prevent” its spread. Despite this, there were almost certainly freemasons among the soldiers. See Gallagher, “Revolutionary Irish”, pp. 5-7; and Atkinson, *The Europeans in Australia*, pp. 243-51. The efforts of Gallagher and Atkinson aside, little has been done by scholars to explore the connections between freemasonry among the New South Wales Corps and political radicalism in early Australia – hopefully, further investigation is not far off. Even at this point, though, we can see that the British Army

III

The failure of the Castle Hill Rebellion probably served as final proof for many of the exiles that United Irishman Joseph Holt had been right all along in predicting that insurrection in New South Wales would never be successful; at any rate, Castle Hill was the last serious attempt at mass escape, after which insurrectionary plotting seems to have diminished sharply.²⁰⁸ Simply leaving the colony had never been the only radical response to the penal regime, however. Two other responses are discernable, both centered around acceptance of remaining in Australia, both involving free settlers as well as exiles²⁰⁹, and both reflecting the values of the British Isles popular political reform movement. The first of these was the attempt to reform the despotic penal regime itself, as well as efforts to effect the liberalization of various other institutions

may not have been the unfailing bastion of conservatism and patriotism that scholars such as Linda Colley portray it: see Colley, *Britons – Forging the Nation*, pp. 300-08. (Contemporaries seemed to recognize this: for example, the 1887 novel *The Revolution in Tanner's Lane*, by the English author Mark Rutherford, tells the story of a workingmen's parliamentary reform club, in Napoleonic-era London, led by a British Army Major.) To return to the Australian historiography, the connection between freemasonry and some of the radical convicts themselves has been made even less frequently. A notable exception is Hugh Anderson, "The Hard Case of Sir Henry Hayes", Chapter 3 in Bob Reece, ed., *Irish Convict Lives*, (Sydney, 1993), which recounts Hayes' life as an aristocratic Irish radical, a freemason, and a convict in New South Wales. As an aside, the subject of freemasonry has been well-discussed in relation to contemporary American radicalism: see for example Steven C. Bullock, "A Pure and Sublime System: The Appeal of Post-revolutionary Freemasonry", *Journal of the Early Republic*, vol. 9 (1989), pp. 359-73; Bullock, "The Revolutionary Transformation of American Freemasonry, 1752-1792", *William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 47 (1990), pp. 347-69; and Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, (New York, 1991), pp. 223-5.

²⁰⁸ Although not entirely. In May, 1807, there were rumours of a projected rising in the Hawksbury district by the notorious United Irish veteran of 1798 Michael Dwyer and several of his UI colleagues – the 'Wicklow State' prisoners. Dwyer and seven other Irish convicts were brought to trial, and two convicted of plotting sedition (although not Dwyer himself). Governor Bligh disregarded the six 'not guilty' verdicts, however, and had Dwyer and the others re-tried; this time found guilty, they were banished to Norfolk Island. The transparent prejudice of the authorities aside, whether there was an actual conspiracy among the Wicklow State convicts remains an open question. B.W. O'Dwyer, for one, acquits him of the charge of plotting insurrection; see O'Dwyer, "Michael Dwyer and the 1807 Plan of Insurrection", *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, vol. 69 (1983), pp. 74-82. For other discussions, see Ruan O'Donnell, "Michael Dwyer: The Wicklow Chief", in Reece, ed., *Irish Convict Lives*, Chapter 2; and Whitaker, *Unfinished Revolution*, Chapter 7, "The Wicklow State Prisoners, 1806 to 1807".

central to the quality of life in Australia; while the second was the attempt to assimilate into New South Wales society, in order to gain control over one's environment.

As in so much of their protest activity, efforts by the exiles to reform the penal system were shaped by contemporary events in the British Isles. In contemporary London, the philosopher Jeremy Bentham, long an advocate of penal reform, was campaigning to abolish transportation in favour of humanely administered penitentiaries at home. In 1803, Bentham wrote a pamphlet entitled *A Plea for the Constitution*, in which he attacked the legal status of the New South Wales penal regime, drawing particular attention to the plight of the convicts. Bentham's views had not originated in a vacuum; they were the result of a philosophical framework shared by liberals throughout Western Europe – and were also in keeping with opinions that exiles such as Maurice Margarot had been voicing for years, as we have seen. But Bentham's pamphlet, while not asserting anything particularly original, was the most articulate attack on the penal system to that date, and its subtitle captured perfectly the *political* basis of the exiles' outrage: "Shewing the enormities committed to the oppression of British subjects, innocent as well as guilty, in breach of the Magna Charta, the Petition of Right, the Habeas Corpus Act, and the Bill of Rights...and...including an inquiry into the right of the Crown to legislate without parliament in [the] British colonies."²¹⁰

By early 1805, copies of *A Pleas for the Constitution* had reached several of the radicals in New South Wales²¹¹, and it is from this point that it is possible to date the exiles' first concerted push to reform the convict system. Beginning in that same year, numerous petitions challenging the legality of penal servitude, drafted and signed by

²⁰⁹ Not surprisingly, there seems to have been little to no free settler involvement in escape attempts, nor should we expect there to have been – it is not unlikely, though, that radical émigrés such as John Boston would have been sympathetic to these efforts.

²¹⁰ Quoted in Whitaker, *Unfinished Revolution*, pp. 128-29.

²¹¹ Whitaker, *Unfinished Revolution*, p. 129.

members of the exile community – and all couched in the language of the current debate in England – were sent first to Governor Philip King, and then to his successor William Bligh. An 1805 petition drafted by the English exile John Grant, for example, declared that “arbitrary power...in violation [of] the Constitution of England...[and the] sacred Magna Charta...is the cause of the disaffection of the people here[;]...liberty droops, and all around is misery”. Grant seems to have been a leading figure in the effort to convince authorities that the convict system was unconstitutional; he bombarded officers in the New South Wales Corps, in the Navy, and a Deputy Commissary in Parramatta with letters characterizing New South Wales as a “slave state”, with the result that, in late 1807, he received a five year sentence to Norfolk Island for sedition. Despite, or perhaps because of, this transparent attempt to make an example of Grant and thus nip the burgeoning penal reform movement in the bud, workingmen remained conspicuously involved in the gathering and dispatching of reform petitions; in 1808, for example, George Mealmaker was among those responsible for collecting some 850 signatures in an Address to Governor William Bligh.²¹²

Given the highly personalized nature of colonial rule – with its concentration of near-autocratic power in the office of the Governor²¹³ – it was almost inevitable that efforts at

²¹² 1805 petition quoted in Whitaker, *Unfinished Revolution*, p. 129; for Mealmaker’s involvement in 1808 signature collection, see Roe, “George Mealmaker, the Forgotten Martyr”, p. 294.

²¹³ The Governor’s powers were indeed sweeping. He regulated “the police; the roads; the market, the importation of supplies, the cultivation of provisions, and even the price of every article of daily consumption”, according to Francis Forbes, the first Chief Justice of New South Wales. Quoted in Aveling, “Imagining New South Wales”, p. 12. In addition, the office increasingly came to be embellished by aristocratic trappings. Shortly after taking office in 1800, for example, Governor Philip King gave himself a mounted personal bodyguard, assumed the full title of ‘Excellency’, and began issuing his public orders under the splendid title ‘proclamations’. In addition, as he admitted at one point to his under-secretary, he in fact invented many of these orders himself, without instructions from Britain, in essence assuming monarchical power himself. See Atkinson, *The Europeans in Australia*, p. 267. A concise discussion of the autocratic tendencies of official British rule in colonial Australia (and in contemporary Upper Canada) is Bayly, *Imperial Meridian*, Chapter 7, “Proconsular Despotisms: The British Empire, c. 1800–40”. For a technical discussion of the constitutionality of the early Australian system, see Enid Campbell, “Prerogative Rule in New South Wales, 1788–1823”, *Royal Australian Historical Society*, vol. 50 (1964), pp. 162–89.

penal reform eventually would target this man at the top, whomever he might be. Long in conflict with a string of New South Wales' Governors²¹⁴, the contest between radical exiles and this supreme authority figure reached perhaps its peak with the 1808 movement to overthrow the tyrannical Bligh – in retrospect, an important point in the shift from absolute to gubernatorial rule in early Australia. While it is true that Bligh was toppled primarily as the result of a coup carried out by members of the New South Wales Corps, and for reasons not primarily political, the radical exiles helped to conduct a 'preliminary campaign' against Bligh that made him appear violent and rash, even by the standards of his predecessors.²¹⁵ To the exiles at least, Bligh's shortcomings were measured in political terms, and, the push to remove him from office was represented as the culmination of a wide variety of radical reform precedents, some of which had been long used to justify popular parliamentary reform in the Britain Isles: the Glorious Revolution of 1688, the French Revolution, and (for the Irish) the Rebellion of 1798. A Scots-born tavern keeper in Sydney, for example, erected a public sign showing a Highland officer drawn to resemble Bligh's successor, with one foot on a snake (i.e., Bligh) impaled on his sword, and a female figure holding the Jacobin emblem, a Cap of

²¹⁴ This conflict could be waged either openly, as during the Castle Hill Rebellion, or with a great degree of subtlety, as during the following exchange, in 1800, between Governor King and Maurice Margarot, recorded in Margarot's journal:

M.M. – I hope, sir, my behaviour has given you no cause of suspicion.

G[overnor] King – No, sir, no; to be sure, we have not found you out yet; but take care, sir, mind you do not give any reason for complaint; sir, go along.

M.M. – Sir, I know my duty, and you may depend upon my fulfilling it.

Margarot's reputation being what it was, his parting comment almost certainly was *not* intended as the pledge of loyal submission it sounded at first. Quoted in Atkinson, *The Europeans in Australia*, pp. 265-66.

²¹⁵ Numerous United Irish signatures were found on two petitions in support of Bligh's removal, for example; Whitaker, *Unfinished Revolution*, p. 173. Demonstrating Bligh's difficult temperament was no difficult task: his verbal abusiveness and general heavy-handedness were storied even at that date as a result of the *Bounty* incident, in 1790; for a detailed discussion of these failings, and their role as precipitating factors in the *Bounty* mutiny, see Greg Denning, *Mr. Bligh's Bad Language*, (Cambridge, 1992). There was, however, more to Bligh's downfall than simply his knack for insulting and offending his subordinates. Bligh was pro-agrarian and anti-trade at a time when many in New South Wales believed the colony should be moving towards urbanization and industrialization; unfortunately for Bligh, these included some of the officers of the New South Wales Corps, who were deeply involved in colonial commerce. He was overthrown, then, for economic, rather than for political, reasons. For a recent

Liberty. A United Irish hotel keeper, meanwhile, painted the traditional UI symbol of a Harp outside his building, under which was the motto 'It is new strung and shall be heard'. Reading the exiles' values correctly and desirous of securing their continued support, Bligh's replacement, John Macarthur, proclaimed (somewhat disingenuously) on assuming power, that "Liberty and Equality Reigns" – as if to show that a break with past procedure had occurred.²¹⁶

To some of the political exiles, however, the task of correcting the New South Wales regime demanded more than the replacement of one Governor with another – demanded, in fact, sweeping reforms that transcended the realm of politics altogether. Maurice Margarot, for one, advocated a series of economic and social reforms that – while deviating from Painite parliamentary reform per se – drew nonetheless from the same basic framework of values, in order to address local peculiarities. In order, for example, to solve the basic problem of preventing both exiles and free settlers from mortgaging all their property to extortionate profiteers in return for rum and other necessities of life, Margarot suggested that residence on farms should be compulsory,

account of the revolt against Bligh, see Atkinson, *The Europeans in Australia*, Chapter 13, 'Sydney's Rebellion'.

²¹⁶ Whitaker, *Unfinished Revolution*, p. 173. The overthrow of Bligh has been approached from the gender perspective by Marian Aveling. She suggests that this incident, an important moment in the movement from absolute to qualified gubernatorial rule, had a detrimental effect on the colony's female convict population, since penal authority – which, despite its repressive nature, had often allowed convict women an early release into public, commercial life – gave way to the growth of masculine politics, under which most women's interests were narrowed. "Freed women", she writes, "were locked more tightly into marriage and domesticity" after Bligh than they had been before; in the end, then, "[they] probably lost more than they gained" from the episode. See Aveling, "Imagining New South Wales as a Gendered Society". Professor Aveling's argument appears an important refinement of the established view of women and politics held by Australian gender historiography, which is that the early state was despotic in its control over women's minds and bodies. A pioneering expression of this view is Anne Summers, *Damned Whores and God's Place: The Colonization of Women in Australia*, (Harmondsworth, 1975); more recently, it was essentially restated (although with greater allowance for individual female initiative) in Portia Robinson, *The Women of Botany Bay*, (Melbourne, 1988). Though much of the feminist scholarship surrounding early Australia is concerned with the large issue of patriarchy, some discussions focus instead Australian women in their daily spheres. For general discussions of the female convict experience, see Hughes, *The Fatal Shore*, Chapter 8, 'Bunters, Mollies and Sable Brethren'; and Jennifer Harrison, 'The Very Worst Class': Irish Women Convicts at Moreton Bay', in Reece, ed., *Irish Convict Lives*, pp. 178-98. For female experience among the social elite, see Hazel King, *Elizabeth Macarthur and Her World*, (Sydney, 1980). The subject of women as radicals or reformers in New South Wales has not yet received attention.

a maximum fixed on all retail prices and interest rates, and a colonial currency established. Other of Margarot's proposals flirted with those of socialist movements of a later time; he argued that commerce "should be limited within very narrow bounds", so that no one could make a living solely by moneymaking; and that no one should be allowed to own more than sixty acres of land. This last was not, in fact, a deviation from Painite ideology at all; in his 1795 pamphlet *Agrarian Justice*, Paine advocated a similar land reform scheme, as Margarot – a friend and correspondent of Paine's – would surely have known. Margarot pushed for these reforms so vigorously that, in July, 1805, Governor Philip King had him shipped first to Norfolk Island, and thence to the island prison of Van Dieman's Land (modern Tasmania).²¹⁷

Margarot's were not the only attempts at non-governmental reform to be undertaken by the exiles during these years. Others members of the community spoke out in favour of such issues as freedom of the press (not granted until 1824), and reform of the courts. Legal reform was considered to be of particular importance in the general contest against the colonial regime because, with no elected forum and no free press, the courts were, in theory, the colonists' only defense against the abuse of power. In reality, the courts – indeed, all pieces of colonial legal machinery – were firmly under the thumb of the Governor. Philip King, for example, was notorious for using the legal system to pursue vendettas against those he perceived to have insulted him – this had been one of the reasons, in fact, for the banishment of Maurice Margarot, whom King particularly hated and feared, to Van Dieman's Land. Exiles concerned with legal reform wanted the establishment of juries for criminal and for civil trials – no-one in New South Wales at this time, convicts or otherwise, was allowed trial by jury, for the ostensible reason that it was considered impossible to recruit suitably responsible

²¹⁷ Roe, "Maurice Margarot", pp. 74-5.

juries. The movement was spearheaded by John Grant, and also involved political exiles such as George Mealmaker, and the United Irish lawyers Florence McCarty and Matthew Sutton. Other than Grant's being transported to Norfolk Island for sedition in 1805, however, the drive for legal reform was without result.²¹⁸ For our purposes, however, efforts towards legal reform and towards establishing freedom of the press in New South Wales are noteworthy because they overlapped with concurrent popular liberties movements in the British Isles – yet another example of the dovetailing of reform in these two regions.²¹⁹

But in apparent contrast to those who, as we have seen to now, challenged the penal system, either as reformers, as stowaways, or as insurrectionists, numerous other exiles – possessed of proven credentials as radicals before their transportation – instead accepted positions in the workforce that seem actually to have reinforced the existing structure, in all its despotism. As historians of transportation such as Frank Clune, George Rudé, Margaret Macfarlane and Alastair Macfarlane, and Ruan O'Donnell observe, a good many of the political convicts took employment as gaolers, poundkeepers, overseers and superintendents, jobs seemingly at odds with the reformist impulse.²²⁰ In a notable instance, the small farmer's son and United Irish exile Michael Dwyer – famous as the 'Wicklow Chief', the last radical leader to be captured after the 1798 Rebellion – would eventually become a police constable in New South Wales, responsible by 1810 for enforcing law and order in the George's River district, and eventually dying in 1825 while holding the office of Chief Constable at Parramatta

²¹⁸ Whitaker, *Unfinished Revolution*, pp. 129-30; Roe, "George Mealmaker, the Forgotten Martyr", p. 294; and Atkinson, "The Free-Born Englishman Transported", p. 110.

²¹⁹ For example, for contemporary efforts to establish a free press by popular reformers in England, see Thompson, *Making of*, pp. 718-33; the movement has been discussed more recently in Aled Jones, *Powers of the Press: Newspapers, Power and the Public in Nineteenth-Century England*, (Hants, England, 1996), Chapter 1, "The liberty of the press".

(ironically, the very site of the Castle Hill Rebellion).²²¹ Professor Rudé uses this, and other similar examples, to undercut suggestions that political exiles remained actively radical once arrived in New South Wales, arguing that, far from being the “ne’er-do-wells” of popular lore, “the great majority” of former rebels attempted to ‘make good’ in Australia by becoming the most solid of citizens.²²² Taking a slightly different approach, Frank Clune interprets George Mealmaker’s successful application, in 1806, for the position of Superintendent of a linen factory in Parramatta as signaling the de facto end of the Scotsman’s career as a reformer. Mealmaker was by this time an alcoholic, and thus, Clune writes, “of no use to the [radical] community” – the unsubtle implication being that, had Mealmaker still been ‘of use’ to the radical community, he would not have wanted so staid an appointment in the first place.²²³

Characterizing acceptance of positions of authority as betrayals of radical reform ideology, or as failures of will brought about by personal factors such as poverty or addiction to drink, misses, however, the hidden value that these appointments possessed, both for the exiles and for other members, and families, in their circle. Such positions, in fact, provided the opportunity for radicals – the workingmen in particular – to regulate their communities, and to avoid the petty injustices and harassment otherwise all too likely to occur under the near-authoritarian New South Wales regime. Thus, to return to Clune’s example, George Mealmaker may well have kept himself solvent and in drink by becoming a factory Superintendent, but he was also able to serve as a much more protective overseer to his employees than would

²²⁰ See Rudé, *Protest and Punishment*, Margaret Macfarlane and Alastair Macfarlane, *The Scottish Radicals*, (Australia, 1981), and O’Donnell, “Michael Dwyer: The Wicklow Chief”, in Reece, *Irish Convict Lives*.

²²¹ For Michael Dwyer, see O’Donnell in Reece, *Irish Convict Lives*, especially pp. 39–41.

²²² Rudé, *Protest and Punishment*, p. 247; see pp.186–87 for his account of Dwyer’s career in New South Wales.

²²³ Clune, *Scottish Martyrs*, p. 162.

others – friends of the Governor, for example – who might have been appointed in his place. Likewise, the ‘Croppy constables’, as the Irish policemen were called, were able to protect their communities, whereas others in that position might have used this authority to oppress them. And, with their military experience, United Irishmen such as Dwyer were simply the natural recruits for this role. Far from departing from the republican tradition, then, at least some of those exiles who accepted jobs as constables, overseers, and so forth, likely were actuated by precisely those motives as had spurred popular radicals in not only the British Isles, but in revolutionary-era America and France as well: the achievement of communal self-determination, and of control over the daily conditions of their own lives – the ultimate goal, in the end, of popular reform movements throughout Western Europe.

There was, of course, an additional inducement for accepting such steady employment: the opportunity for some of the exiles to make money for themselves. But self-interest of this kind was not incongruous with the professed aims of popular political reform; the rights of the individual had always been an underlying principle of republican ideology, and most, if not all, radical workingmen believed in the bourgeois ideal of the career open to talent. In the desire for economic gain, the exiles were as one with numerous radical émigrés who had journeyed voluntarily to New South Wales not only to escape the political situation at home, but to satisfy their own economic ambitions as well. And while easy to overlook in the glare cast by United Irishmen and other exiles, some of these free settlers also clashed on occasion with conservative colonial authority, in ways that can shed further light on the tensions between the pursuit of individual self-determination on the one hand, and absolutist rule on the other.

In general, radical free settlers have not received a great deal of scholarly attention, and, again, the cause of this neglect would seem to be the near-magnetic pull, on historians, of the convicts, and of the convict debate.²²⁴ An exception is the Birmingham-born radical émigré John Boston, the main or partial focus of several scholarly discussions.²²⁵ Although often characterized as a member of the bourgeoisie, Boston was at least knowledgeable of several crafts. In a letter introducing himself to the New South Wales under-Secretary at the time of his arrival in the colony in 1794, Boston wrote, "I was brought up as a surgeon and apothecary, but have never since followed that profession...preferring trade and business. [I] Have...a knowledge of brewing, distilling, sugar-making, vinegar-making, soap-making, etc."²²⁶ Wisely omitted from Boston's brief autobiography was any mention of his prior connections to the radical parliamentary reform movement, which were in fact substantive. He was, for example, a friend of the Scottish Martyrs Palmer, Skirving, Margarot, and Muir, and also of the famous gentleman reformer Dr. Joseph Priestley. The latter was a target of the 1791 anti-radical 'Church and King' riot in Birmingham, and Boston always claimed that it had been he who had knocked on Priestley's door to warn him of the approaching mob. As a result of such acquaintances, as well as for his defense of parliamentary reform and probable involvement in radical activity, Boston had been the longtime subject of the suspicions of the Birmingham authorities, and they were glad to see him depart for New South Wales – and for good reason, for, despite pledges to colonial authorities of his good intentions, Boston had mellowed not at all by the time he left England. A shipmate later related that Boston vented republican views during the

²²⁴ Also, it can be difficult to determine precisely who was, and was not, a 'radical' settler, since – unlike the political exiles – most of the free settlers had not been convicted of radical activity in the British Isles.

²²⁵ For example, as the title indicates, Boston is the subject of T.G. Parsons' "Was John Boston's Pig a Political Martyr?"; also, he is an important figure in Clune's *Scottish Martyrs*, especially Chapters 11 and 19.

length of the voyage, drank “Damnation to the King” and lectured all who would listen on “The Rights of Man, the Tree of Liberty, [and] the French Revolution”, all the while wearing a Cap of Liberty and a National Cockade.²²⁷

Settled in Sydney, Boston tread a line between loyalty to the radical movement and the pursuit of his own financial advancement. He maintained ties with some of the *Scottish Martyrs* – was, indeed, a business partner with one, the Rev. Thomas Palmer – and provided employment for other radicals, such as the United Irishman Edward Dogherty, an outspoken republican also on close terms with the *Scottish Martyrs*, and charged on two occasions with uttering seditious language.²²⁸ At the same time, Boston was an aggressive mercantile capitalist. Indeed, often too aggressive, for his efforts at money-making as a merchant and a livestock trader brought him into conflict with government-sanctioned economic monopolies, the latter manifested physically in those members of the New South Wales Corps with side-line businesses in the same concerns as Boston. Nor did these clashes fail to produce effect. On one notable occasion in October, 1795, for example, a band of Corpsmen shot a pig belonging to Boston that was valued at some 15 guineas, leading to a physical altercation between him and the soldiers.²²⁹ It was an incident rife with political overtones, for although some in the Corps at large treated the radicals sympathetically, others did not; and Boston’s pig-killers almost certainly numbered among the latter – at least, it is difficult otherwise to account for the violent heat of the episode.

If, then, we interpret this particular clash as one of opposing ideological camps, rather than simply an illustration of the lawless nature of colonial society, it is possible to discern a dimension to popular radicalism in Australia other than that merely of

²²⁶ Quoted in Clune, *Scottish Martyrs*, p. 62.

²²⁷ Parsons, “John Boston’s Pig”, pp.168-9.

²²⁸ Whitaker, *Unfinished Revolution*, p. 204.

conflict between the government and a relatively small number of political convicts. The individual economic ambitions that powered much of plebeian and artisan radical reform were, in their own way, as great a source of worry to the old order as was outright insurrection, since the first, no less than the second, challenged the control of the conservative elite. For those in power, it followed, then, that the response to challenges on the financial front should in nature be the same as in the case of actual rebellion. As the Rev. Thomas Palmer – co-owner with Boston and the radical free settler James Ellis of a trading operation in Sydney – complained in 1796,

[Governor] Hunter is a furious one, and sees with no friendly eyes those of opposite principles. This my friends Boston and Ellis and I...woefully experience. He has defeated or discouraged every attempt of theirs to benefit the colony or themselves. We are told by a person high in rank and high in his confidence that it is [his] intention to do so, in order to drive them into the woods to a farm, or from the country...²³⁰

Obviously, Hunter recognized – as no doubt did the Corpsmen in slaying Boston's pig (his economic property) the year before – that reformers could be an *economic* as well as a political threat. And Hunter may or may not have realized what, at our remove, cannot be doubted: that both dangers sprang ultimately from the same source, the republican ideology that lay at the root of radical parliamentary reform.²³¹ This opposition between the economic goals of workingmen and newly emergent bourgeoisie, and the financial hegemony of the elite was, in theory, no less real in the

²²⁹ The incident is described in, and gives title to, Parsons, "John Boston's Pig", pp. 163-64.

²³⁰ Quoted in Parsons, "John Boston's Pig", p. 170. In January of 1801, Boston, Ellis and Palmer were indeed forced to leave Sydney as the result of pressure from the authorities. Palmer died in Guam in 1802; Boston was killed by natives in Tonga, New Zealand, in 1804; of Ellis, it is reported merely that he died shortly after Palmer. See Clune, *Scottish Martyrs*, Chapter 19.

²³¹ In addition to that of Western European republicanism, the urge of some of the free settlers to make money in the colony might be traceable to an even more fundamentally British influence: the Scottish Enlightenment. Gregory Melliush sees a substantive connection between the Enlightenment tradition and English and Scottish émigré commercialism; see Melliush, "Justifying Commerce: The Scottish Enlightenment Tradition in Colonial New South Wales", *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, vol. 75 (1989/90), pp. 122-31.

contemporary British Isles, but is better observable in the New South Wales arena, a rudimentary society in which elite control was insufficiently established to prevent economic challenges from coming to a boil.

IV

T.G. Parsons has alluded to the tendency among historians of early Australia to treat any and all disruptions, from open convict insurrection to the killing of a pig, as being indicative of the lawless, violent nature of life in New South Wales.²³² This present chapter has demonstrated that, far from merely anarchic, protest involving many of the political exiles and radical free settlers to New South Wales had an obvious purpose: the struggle for self-determination, political and economic. It was a contest that was, in essence, an extension of the struggle for political reform in the British Isles, involving on the one hand a good many combatants fresh from the United movements in Ireland, England and Scotland; and on the other, the colonial officials who served as representatives of British conservative hegemony in this distant Empire outpost. But it was not only that. It has been shown, indeed, that the contest was, if anything, *more* intense in New South Wales than at home, because the situation in the colony was in every way more extreme. The regime itself, constructed around prison discipline, was more authoritarian by far than the old order as it existed in Britain, and, consequently, the political exiles forced to endure it were that much more determined to either escape from it or shape it into something less oppressive and intrusive.

We have also seen that, this difference notwithstanding, whatever the radical reaction to the unique conditions of colonial Australia, connections are discernable to

popular reform in the British Isles. Attempts to escape the colony altogether – singly or as small groups of stowaways, or in mass efforts such as the Castle Hill Rebellion – almost invariably were timed with an eye towards rejoining outbreaks of popular radicalism at home. Those remaining in New South Wales, meanwhile, pursued a variety of reform programs – political, social, legal – that drew no less significantly from British Isles precedents; or alternatively, sought simple communal self-determination and individual advancement, in accordance, again, with the basic tenets of the popular political reform movement, the so-called ‘rights of the free-born Englishman’. And, in each type of reaction, radical workingmen – as exiles, and as free settlers – were involved conspicuously²³³, and usually were among the first to be hanged or flogged as a result. Early New South Wales was not, however, the only Empire outpost to receive radical plebeian and artisan settlers. It is to a discussion of the manner in which British and Irish working radicals pursued this same fundamental political aim in a second region, at a slightly later time – Upper Canada, in the 1820s and 1830s – that the final chapter of this thesis will turn.

²³² Parsons, “John Boston’s Pig”, p. 165. An early exception is M.H. Ellis, who recognized in 1955 that the killing of Boston’s pig probably had political overtones; see Ellis, *John Macarthur*, (Sydney, 1955), p. 82.

²³³ Nor did British émigré involvement in Australian popular political reform cease after the 1800s. Cliff Cumming notes that, between the late-1830s and early-1850s, émigré Scots radicals were at the forefront of a movement that sought to introduce full responsible government to the New South Wales – a movement no probably influenced by the British Chartists. See Cumming, “Scots Radicals in Port Philip, 1838-1851”, *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol. 37 (1991), pp. 434-45. Also, Stuart MacIntyre identifies an active Scottish presence in the 1920s and 1930s Australian labour movement, although in this case the influence seems less the British Isles than Soviet Russia: most of the Scots émigrés involved in the movement were Australian Communist Party members, and one – the Lankashire-born miner Bill Orr – represented the Australian Party at a 1934 gathering in Moscow. See MacIntyre, “Bloodstained Wattle or Red Heather? The Scottish Strain in the Australian Labour Movement”, *Australian Studies*, vol. 12 (1997), pp. 91-103.

Chapter 3 – Upper Canada, 1817-1838

Traditionally, discussions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century transatlantic migration of British and Irish political radicals to North America have tended to concentrate on the United States. In part, this reflects the interests of many of the historians themselves, and the issues that they have wished to study through the vehicle of transatlantic radicalism.²³⁴ So strong is the 'pull' of the United States, however, that even those studies that treat solely with Canadian radicalism have often tended to stress the influence of America at the expense of other relevant experiences. For example, in an examination of the Upper Canadian radical William Lyon Mackenzie, J.E. Rea correctly complains that it "has become a cliché of Canadian historiography that [Mackenzie's] political thought...was deeply influenced by the

²³⁴ Richard Twomey, for example, is concerned with analyzing Anglo-American radicalism as a means of exploring questions relating to the formation of working class consciousness in America, and, insofar as he deals with plebeian radicalism, to the often rocky relations that existed between masters and journeymen and what this reveals of the capitalist and non-capitalist tendencies in American republican thought; see Richard Twomey, *Jacobins and Jeffersonians: Anglo-American Radicalism in the United States 1790-1820* (New York, 1989). Michael Durey, on the other hand, is less concerned with class analysis than with studying Anglo-American radicals as individuals, by examining the many ways in which radical British and Irish émigrés to the United States attempted to realize in that nation a vision of a just and democratic society denied them in their homelands; Michael Durey, "Transatlantic Patriotism: Political Exiles and America in the Age of Revolution", in *Artisans, Peasants and Proletarians, 1760-1860: Essays Presented to Gwyn A. Williams*, Clive Emsley and James Walvin, eds., (London, 1985), pp. 7-31; Durey, "Thomas Paine's Apostles: Radical Émigrés and the Triumph of Jeffersonian Republicanism", *William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 44 (1987), pp. 661-88, and Durey, *Transatlantic Radicals and the Early American Republic*, (Kansas, 1997). Most recently, David Wilson approaches the subject with a concern for United Irishmen alone, but here too the focus is on American experiences – the ways in which the radicals' Irish background helped to shape the character of their democratic republicanism, as well as the manner in which, according to Wilson, 1790s emigration marked the true beginning of Irish-American nationalism; David Wilson, *United Irishmen, United States: Immigrant Radicals in the Early Republic*, (Ithaca, 1998).

values and objectives of Jacksonian Democracy". But, he continues, this interpretation is false not because it ignores completely the fact that Mackenzie was born in Scotland and might thus have been familiar with British radical ideas, but because "it makes no allowance for the varieties and inconsistencies of the Jacksonian faith". It errs, then, in misrepresenting the American experience, rather than by being dismissive of a connection between the British Isles and the development of radical political reform in Upper Canada.²³⁵

As the example of Mackenzie indicates, the impact of transatlantic radicalism in early nineteenth century Upper and Lower Canada has commanded little attention. This reflects, in part, scholarly preoccupations with the United States and with the American influence on the political life of Canada. More tellingly, though, is that the inability to discern connections between radical political reform in colonial Canada and the British

For an introduction to the importance of British and Irish radical émigrés for early American radicalism, see M. Jacob and J. Jacob, eds., *The Origins of Anglo-American Radicalism* (London, 1984).

²³⁵ J.E. Rea, "William Lyon Mackenzie – Jacksonian?", *Mid-America*, vol. 50 (1968), pp. 223-35; 223. See also "William Lyon Mackenzie", *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* [hereafter DCB], Vol. IX, 1861-1870, pp. 497-510. Most recently, Mackenzie's alleged debt to the American influence is stressed in S.F. Wise, *God's Peculiar Peoples: Essays on Political Culture in Nineteenth Century Canada*, (Ottawa, 1993), Chapter 3, "Canadians View the United States: Colonial Attitudes from the Era of the War of 1812 to the Rebellions of 1837". The American influence on Upper Canadian reformers in general has been stressed no less recently, in Sid Noel, "Early Populist Tendencies in the Ontario Political Culture", *Ontario History*, vol. 90 (1998), pp. 173-87. An early example of this argument is G.M. Craig, "The American Impact on the Upper Canadian Reform Movement before 1837", *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 29 (1948), pp. 333-52. Inasmuch as Mackenzie was influenced, to some extent, by Jacksonianism, it is worth understanding what this ideology entailed. While there was no single Jacksonian 'type', no one representative set of political, economic, and social values to which all Jacksonians subscribed, the Jacksonian philosophy did have an identifiable moral orientation, centered around what the Jacksonians believed was a deep-rooted conflict between 'producers' and 'non-producers' – that is, between the labouring population on the one hand, and the business community on the other. In general, the Jacksonian program was anti-industrialist, anti-wage labour; it sought to preserve the simple agrarian values of the 'Old Republic' for the benefit of farmers and labourers, by controlling the power of the capitalistic groups. In this, Jacksonians tended to see themselves as the inheritors of the Jeffersonian tradition. The conflict between Jacksonians and capitalists reached perhaps its peak in the 1830s, during Jackson's war against Nicholas Biddle and the national banking monopoly. In addition to curbing the banks, Jacksonian goals included reapportionment of state legislatures, and the popular election of judges. The historiography surrounding Jacksonianism is enormous; notable studies include Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Jackson*, (Boston, 1953); Marvin Meyers, *The Jacksonian Persuasion: Politics and Belief*, (Stanford, 1968); and Robert Remini, *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Democracy, 1832-1845*, (New York, 1984). For scholarly debate about the merits and values of Jacksonianism, see Edward Pessen, ed., *The many-faceted Jacksonian era: New Interpretations*, (Westport, Conn., 1977). For the relationship between Jacksonianism and America's plebeian and artisan communities, see Walter Hugins, *Jacksonian Democracy and the Working Class*, (Stanford, 1960).

Isles tradition also reflects longstanding assumptions among many of those who write Canadian history. Unique among English-speaking nations, Canada has rarely been equated with political radicalism, either by most of its historians, or, over the course of generations, by the majority of the public at large.²³⁶ Perhaps this reflects a widespread belief that conservatism was a Canadian trait from the very outset, bequeathed by the United Empire Loyalists, and reinforced by subsequent influxes of conservative British Isles émigrés.²³⁷ With radicalism apparently alien to the Canadian experience, we should not be surprised that the nation's historiography lacks, in Allan Greer's words, "precisely the language and conceptual tools needed to make sense of revolutionary matters", in itself a further inhibition to the study of protest in Canada.²³⁸

More surprising is the failure of the many non-Canadian historians – who would seem, as a matter of course, to possess these conceptual tools – to bring Canadian radical movements into the fold, as it were, of the Western European 'age of revolution', by linking reform in early Canada to influences beyond merely that of American republicanism, to revolutionary episodes in continental Europe and in the

²³⁶ Thus George Rawlyk, *Revolution Rejected, 1775-1776*, (Scarborough, 1968), p. 9: "In Canada we have no revolutionary tradition." Two noteworthy dissenting views are Aileen Dunham, *Political Protest in Upper Canada, 1815-1836*, (Toronto, 1937), and S.D. Clark, *Movements of Political Protest in Canada, 1640-1840* (Toronto, 1959).

²³⁷ For an (approving) account of the conservatism of the colonial population, see Arthur M. Lower, *Colony to Nation: A History of Canada*, (Toronto, 1946), Chapter 10, "A Second Chance for Empire"; see also Rawlyk, Parts I and II. For an account downplaying the impact of the Loyalists' conservatism, and stressing instead the 'frontier' mentality brought to the province by American settlers, see Jane Errington, *The Lion, The Eagle, and Upper Canada: A Developing Colonial Ideology*, (Kingston, 1987), Chapter 3, "Upper Canada: an American Community?". For an account that stresses the conservatism of the British Isles émigrés, see Laurier La Pierre, *Genesis of the Nation: British North America, 1776-1867*, (Ottawa, 1967), pp. 25-6. Professor Errington sees a psychological reason the propensity of many Canadians to downplay radicalism: the need to differentiate themselves from their neighbors to the south. See Errington, pp. 3-5. Before Errington, this interpretation received much attention from S.F. Wise. See S.F. Wise, "God's Peculiar People", in W.L. Morton, ed., *The Shield of Achilles*, (Toronto, 1968); "Upper Canada and the Conservative Tradition", in Edith Firth, ed., *Profiles of a Province*, (Toronto, 1967); and "Sermon Literature and Canadian Intellectual History", in J.M. Bumsted, ed., *Canadian History Before Confederation: Essays and Interpretations*, (Georgetown, 1972). For a recent analysis of the creation, evolution, and uses, by contemporaries and historians, of the Loyalist tradition, see Norman Knowles, *Inventing the Loyalists: The Ontario Loyalist Tradition and the Creation of Useable Pasts*, (Toronto, 1997).

²³⁸ Allan Greer, "1837-38: Rebellion Reconsidered", *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 76 (1995), p. 7.

British Isles.²³⁹ In particular, little has been done to explore the possible link between, on the one hand, the exodus of British and Irish radicals, workingmen among them, to Canada after the collapse of the 1815-1820 radical resurgence, and, on the other, the growing push in Canada for responsible government, highlighted by the Rebellion of 1837.²⁴⁰ This is despite the fact that Scottish immigrants held leadership positions in the responsible government movement and in the Upper Canadian segment of the insurrection, and that Scottish, English, and Irish immigrants, many from plebeian or artisan backgrounds, were clearly represented in the rebels' rank and file in both provinces.²⁴¹ It is much to be regretted that these connections remain largely unmade, for without such a broad understanding, no complete picture of Canadian radicalism is possible. This was recognized as long ago as 1927 by Aileen Dunham, who wrote that the political life of Canada could not be fully understood unless it is "related to that of the rest of the world".²⁴²

It will be the purpose of this present chapter to suggest that the British influence on radical political reform movements in early nineteenth century Upper and Lower Canada, particularly the roles of plebeian and artisan radical émigrés, deserve closer attention. Without denying the considerable impact of either American ideals or Americans themselves, it will be argued that political radicalism in the colonial Canadas

²³⁹ A notable exception is George Rudé, whose study *Protest and Punishment* contains two sections discussing political protest in early Canada: pp. 42-51, and 82-88. Even in this instance, though, a relative unfamiliarity with aspects of the Canadian material is revealed in Professor Rude's mistaken assertion (p. 47) that William Lyon Mackenzie never returned to Canada after the failure of the 1837 Rebellion.

²⁴⁰ The Rebellion was, of course, a precipitating factor that brought Lord Durham to the province in the summer of 1838; Durham's famous Report, released the following year, recommended Responsible Government, conditional on the union of Upper and Lower Canada. This union took place in 1841, and the right of Canada to self-government was recognized in 1849. A concise, useful account of Durham's tour and the putting together of his recommendations is Chester New, *Lord Durham's Mission to Canada*, edited and introduced by H.W. McCready, (Toronto, 1963). A selection from Lord Durham's *Report on the Affairs of British North America* is available in the Carleton Library Series (Toronto, 1963); the complete Report is contained in an edition prepared by Sir Charles Lucas (Oxford, 3 vols., 1912).

²⁴¹ See Colin Read and Ronald J. Stagg, eds., *The Rebellion of 1837 in Upper Canada*, (Ottawa, 1988), pp. lxxv, 16, 103; and Colin Read, *The Rising in Western Upper Canada: The Duncombe Revolt and After*, (Toronto, 1982), p. 175.

should be understood as reflecting the values of this transatlantic connection as well. The chapter will begin by providing a brief analysis of the generally under-valued impact and influence of a lone British Isles reformer in Upper Canada, the Scotsman Robert Gourlay, slightly before 1820. The focus will then shift to a discussion of some of the more prominent émigrés active in the responsible government movement – mostly emergent bourgeois, but with plebeian backgrounds – in order to highlight their connections to the British, and continental European, traditions of popular political reform. Following this, the chapter will examine the influx of plebeians and tradesmen during the 1820s and 1830s. Finally, the discussion will move to an examination of the Rebellion of 1837 – probably the single most important radical episode in Canadian colonial history – in order to examine the roles of both emergent bourgeois and workingmen émigrés in the push towards insurrection and in the insurrection itself. The chapter will conclude by suggesting that even a cursory survey such as this demonstrates the important roles that the émigrés, and through them the British Isles radical tradition, played in early nineteenth century Upper and Lower Canadian political reform, and that this undercuts traditional assumptions about the dominance of the American influence.

I

The importance of viewing radicalism in early nineteenth century Canada in the context of not only Jacksonian America, but that of the wider transatlantic movement – the pan-European ‘age of revolution’ – has been pointed out by Allan Greer. “Not”, he is quick to note, “that the Canadas had the same experience as Belgium and Poland in

²⁴² Dunham, *Political Protest in Upper Canada*, p. 138.

1830, as Argentina and Venezuela in 1808", but that, if nothing else, "we cannot even begin to identify elements that are peculiarly and specifically Canadian in the absence of a comparative framework... a broader international view might provide useful concepts and points of comparison".²⁴³ Steps toward this broader understanding can begin by drawing attention to the events surrounding Robert Gourlay's tour of Upper Canada. Gourlay, Scots-born and English-raised, was a one-time prosperous farmer, self-professed agrarian radical, and associate of prominent reformers such as John Wilkes and Henry Hunt. Gourlay's fortunes collapsed in 1816, and, his wife having inherited land in Upper Canada, he emigrated the next year.²⁴⁴ Hoping to make his mark in this new surrounding, he charged himself with the task of surveying and compiling an account of the province's agricultural situation, in order to convince the British government of the need for substantial propertied settlers from Great Britain. In its general outlines, Gourlay's story has not been ignored by Canadian historians.²⁴⁵ The British context of Gourlay's career as an agricultural fact-finder in Upper Canada has been noted, as well: in his introduction to a reprint of Gourlay's 'Statistical Account', R.F. Mealing points out the long Scottish intellectual tradition for using statistics as a means of solving problems of agriculture, and that Gourlay was merely applying this to Upper Canada.²⁴⁶ Gourlay's connection to the tradition of transatlantic political radicalism has not, however, been similarly noted, and we are entitled to be surprised by this, since he is at least as well known for stirring up political discontent as for his

²⁴³ Greer, "1837-38: Rebellion Reconsidered", p. 9.

²⁴⁴ "Robert Gourlay", *DCB*, vol. IX, 1861-1871, pp. 330-336.

²⁴⁵ An early account of the Gourlay episode is E.A. Cruikshank, "The Government of Upper Canada and Robert Gourlay", Ontario Historical Society, *Papers and Records*, vol. 23 (1926), pp. 65-179. The standard full length biography of Gourlay is Lois D. Milani, *Robert Gourlay, gadfly*, (Thornhill, 1971). In addition to this, and the entry by S.F. Wise in *DCB*, vol. IX, pp.330-36, there is a substantive discussion of Gourlay in Craig, *Upper Canada: The Formative Years*, Chapter 5, "A Briton Banished and a Union Averted", pp. 85-105; and in Clark, *Movements of Political Protest in Canada*, pp. 331-48, 464-68. Gourlay's *Statistical Account of Upper Canada* has been reprinted (Toronto, 1974) with an introduction by S.R. Mealing.

role as an agricultural reformer. In fairness, some historians have grasped parts of this connection. S.F. Wise observes that Gourlay, by his own admission, inherited his radicalism from his father – “who had welcomed the French revolution” – but does not connect this to the shaping of the son's political reform program in Canada.²⁴⁷ Likewise Gourlay's biographer, Lois Milani, while noting his particular fondness, from boyhood onwards, for the writings of Tom Paine – in particular Paine's attacks on the inequalities of the British constitution – does not take the logical next step of connecting this with Gourlay's later political radicalism. The tendency has been to portray Gourlay as primarily a cantankerous harasser of the Upper Canadian ruling class, a designation summed up in Milani's titling him a ‘gadfly’.²⁴⁸

But Gourlay's political career in Upper Canada suggests that he, at least, had not forgotten this wider continuum. His British radical antecedents were indeed considerable, and aspects of his reform philosophy were not dissimilar to the traditional two-pronged program advocated by popular organizations beginning with the LCS and the Scottish Friends of the People. In 1809, Gourlay wrote a Paine-esque pamphlet entitled *A specific plan...for obtaining reform independent of parliament...to the people of Fife...of Britain!* In it, he attacked the existing British government as a conspiracy of the powerful to defraud the people of their rights by “mysterious ceremonies” and “subtle machinery”. To correct this, Gourlay advocated the establishment in Britain of a voting system based on literacy suffrage, with qualified voters electing county representatives to a national assembly once a year, whose job it was to petition the king. Thus would government be responsive to the will of the people. In charging that

²⁴⁶ Mealing in Gourlay, *Statistical Account*, pp. 9.

²⁴⁷ “Robert Gourlay”, *DCB*, p. 330. The tendency among historians to dismiss Gourlay as a mere crank continues to the present time: in 1998, Sid Noel dismissed Gourlay as “an eccentric Scot”, whose “grasp of...politics was uncertain at best”; Noel, “Early Populist Tendencies”, p. 180.

²⁴⁸ Milani, *Robert Gourlay*, pp. 32-3.

the existing system was unresponsive, Gourlay was, as his biographer Milani suggests, echoing similar complaints leveled not only by Thomas Paine, but by William Cobbett as well – both of whom influenced Gourlay's thought, as well as scores of popular parliamentary reformers throughout the British Isles. And his reform proposals in the *Fife* pamphlet were, in essence, intended to attain much the same result as were demands for manhood suffrage and annual parliaments voiced by contemporary popular reform movements.²⁴⁹

And it was this popular radical ideology, a blend of British Isles influences, that would inform Gourlay's activism in Upper Canada. Touring the province in 1817 to compile his statistical account, he dropped his grand scheme of emigration as, the more he saw, the more he decided that, as was the case with Britain itself, Upper Canada was politically mismanaged. The Constitutional Act of 1791, which set up constitutions in both Upper and Lower Canada, remained in effect at this time, and placed little value on popular parliamentary rule. Executive function was exercised by a Governor appointed by the Crown, assisted by an Executive Council also appointed by the Crown; the legislative council was made up of members appointed for life by the Crown on the nomination of the Governor. At the bottom of this pyramid was a legislative assembly elected on a limited franchise, by prosperous landholders, and which at any rate exercised little control over the finances and government of the province.²⁵⁰

Gourlay first criticized the system in an address 'To the Resident Land-owners of Upper Canada' published in October 1817 in such leading papers as the *Kingston Gazette*

²⁴⁹ For the influence of Paine and Cobbett on Gourlay's 1809 pamphlet, see Milani, *Robert Gourlay*, Chapter 6, *People of Fife!...of Britain!* For a concise summary of Gourlay's proposals in the *Fife* pamphlet, see "Robert Gourlay", *DCB*, pp. 330-31. Recent studies of Cobbett include George Spater, *William Cobbett: The Poor Man's Friend*, (Cambridge, 1982), and Dyck, *William Cobbett and Rural Popular Culture*. The relationship between Cobbett's and Paine's ideas is discussed in David Wilson, *Paine and Cobbett: The Transatlantic Connection*, (Montreal and Kingston, 1988).

²⁵⁰ As summarized in New, *Lord Durham's Mission to Canada*, pp. 16-17.

and the *Niagara Spectator*. The status quo, Gourlay charged, was deeply flawed, and must be radically changed or even overturned. Its basic fault lay in the governor's power to dispense patronage –

to give away land at pleasure...to dispose of all places and pensions – to make and unmake magistrates – to appoint militia officers, custom-house officers, inspectors, school-masters, registers – to grant licenses, pardons and I know not what; – to be worshiped as 'His Excellency', and to have sufficient means to provide dinners and drink to all and several, suplicants and sycophants.²⁵¹

It was a complaint voiced since at least the 1780s by the plebeian and artisan reformers of the British Isles, with whom Gourlay felt particular sympathy. The traditional description of Gourlay as having been a gentleman farmer in Britain carries with it the implication that, when he turned to political reform in Upper Canada, he naturally associated with the more bourgeois radicals. In fact, Gourlay considered the labouring population to be the best agent for political change; reform would come not from the "tainted pool" of the elite, he wrote in the *Fife* pamphlet, but from "the dwellings of the poor". Suiting action to word, Gourlay spent most of his time as an active reformer in Upper Canada speaking in taverns and in artisan clubs; with these people he seems to have gotten along well, while he almost invariably clashed with the more bourgeois radicals.²⁵² In many ways, then, Gourlay was an advocate of the popular political reforms espoused by plebeians and artisans in the British Isles.

The plan that Gourlay advocated to reform the Upper Canadian political system was remarkably similar to that which he had set down, for Britain, in his earlier *Fife* pamphlet. The only hope for bringing change to the province, Gourlay informed the colonists, lay in the population at large having regular exercise of voting rights. Upper

²⁵¹ Quoted in Craig, *Upper Canada: The Formative Years*, pp. 95-6.

Canadians, he declared, should demand “an immediate Parliamentary inquiry” directed towards gaining these political reforms. Failing this, he proposed a scheme of township meetings at which representatives would be chosen, who would later meet in a provincial procession “to dispatch commissioners to England with...parliamentary reform petitions” to be given to the prince regent.²⁵³

Gourlay's complaints and his solutions, which he repeated over and over again in interviews with reformers in clubs and at open air meetings throughout the province, were quick to strike a chord with Upper Canadians; a 'Traveller' noted in 1817 that Gourlay's addresses “have lately awakened [Upper Canadians'] attention”. Pursuant to Gourlay's plan, by June, 1818, township meetings had been held and representatives selected to attend a projected convention to be held at York on July 6. At this the government, which had watched with growing alarm as Gourlay's influence spread, was horrified. The electric word 'convention' had direct overtones to the American and French Revolutions, and the British Convention in Edinburgh in 1793, memories lost on no one, least of all Gourlay and the Upper Canadian reformers, native and British-born. In quick succession, a new law was adopted to prohibit the assembling of conventions, Upper Canada's equivalent to the Six Acts passed a year later in England; and then Gourlay himself was arrested under the terms of the provincial Sedition Act of 1804, which was appropriate, given that the act had originally been inspired by fears that United Irishmen might enter the province following the Rebellion of 1798. Designed to combat one species of transatlantic radical, it was now used to silence another. Gourlay was given ten days to leave Upper Canada and was put in jail for eight months when he refused. Following this, he was again ordered to leave the province; he

²⁵² “Robert Gourlay”, *DCB*, vol. IX, 1861-1871, pp. 331-333. In this commitment to the lower orders, Gourlay resembled this fellow middle class Scotsman James Lesslie; see ft. 263.

²⁵³ Craig, *Upper Canada: The Formative Years*, p. 96.

crossed into New York State the following day, and was back in England before the end of the year.²⁵⁴

In the short term, the government seemed to have won the contest, as, after Gourlay's departure, the excitement and widespread desire for reform died down. In the longer term, however, the legacy of the Gourlay affair was troublesome for the authorities, and significant to the course of Upper Canadian radicalism. For one thing, Gourlay was not forgotten by reformers. As an organized radical movement began to take shape in the 1820s and 1830s, it returned again and again to the Gourlay episode, raising questions about the actual application of the British constitution in a colonial setting and increasing demands for a broader and more flexible political system. In G.M Craig's words, "the 'Banished Briton' came to be regarded as a martyr who had been ruthlessly broken by an arrogant oligarchy", and Gourlay's memory would be evoked periodically for almost the next half-century as a standing proof of the shortcomings of British rule in the Canadas.²⁵⁵

Equally significant was the organizational structure that Gourlay had proposed for bringing reformers in line and thus increasing their effectiveness. It was a system provincial in extent, organized on three interrelated levels in pyramid form, at the apex of which was the central provincial body. The subdivision and the intercommunication that the structure permitted facilitated management and effective action. Though designed by Gourlay as a temporary arrangement, its basic features would be copied by virtually all groups of reformers in the decades to come. As Eric Jackson notes, Gourlay had, in a way, "created the model after which subsequent Reform organization

²⁵⁴ Errington, *The Lion, The Eagle and Upper Canada*, p. 108. The responsiveness of the Upper Canadians to Gourlay's township meetings, which were clearly political, contradicts Sid Noel's recently expressed view that such gatherings tended to be more about minor matters such as road work, fence inspection, fire prevention, etc., than about the important issue of local government. See Noel, "Early Populist Tendencies", pp. 174-5.

in Upper Canada was to be constructed", a model based on that used previously by the British and by the French popular reformers in their pursuits of voting rights. Though rarely recognized as such, Gourlay was, then, the man who gave to Upper Canadian radicals their first systematic organization on a provincial scale, as well being anchored in the minds of many as the province's first 'martyr' to the parliamentary reform cause.²⁵⁶

II

Robert Gourlay was far from the only British-born radical to have a decisive impact on political reform in Upper Canada. Indeed, many of the key leaders of the province's

²⁵⁵ Craig, *Upper Canada: The Formative Years*, p. 99.

²⁵⁶ Eric Jackson, "The Organization of Upper Canadian Reformers, 1818-1867", *Ontario History*, vol. 53 (1961), pp. 96-7. A recent gendered deconstruction of the Gourlay episode – i.e., the manner in which Gourlay equated the push for political reform as a 'manly' endeavor, while at the same time attacking government agents by portraying them as effeminate and luxury-loving – is Cecilia Morgan, *Public Men and Virtuous Women: The Gendered Languages of Religion and Politics in Upper Canada, 1791-1850*, (Toronto, 1996), pp. 61-69. Morgan notes too that contemporary authorities responded in kind, attacking Gourlay and, later, reformers such as Mackenzie as "hysterical" and "overly emotional", descriptions generally associated with women and effeminacy. Professor Morgan's efforts are part of a growing body of gendered analyses of Canadian society. Approaches range from re-examining specific incidents and outstanding women from Canada's past, to reconstructing the everyday experiences of anonymous women in general. Examples of the former include Cecilia Morgan, "Of Slender Fame and Delicate Appearance": The Placing of Laura Secord in the Narratives of Canadian Loyalist History", in Joy Parr and Mark Rosenfeld, eds., *Gender and History in Canada*, (Toronto, 1996), pp. 103-119, which traces various interpretations, from the contemporary period to the present, of Secord's famous walk; and James Doyle, "Barbara M. Hanley: The First Woman Mayor in Canada", *Ontario History*, vol. 84, (1992), pp. 133-40. It is not possible to list all the examples of the latter; concerning the time period in question, though, see, for example, Leslie Biggs, "The Case of the Missing Midwives: A History of Midwifery in Ontario from 1795-1900", *Ontario History*, vol. 75, (1983), pp. 21-36; Cecilia Morgan, "Gender, Religion and Rural Society: Quaker Women in Norwich, Ontario, 1820-1880", *Ontario History*, vol. 82, (1990), pp. 273-89; Elizabeth Jane Errington, "Ladies and Schoolmistresses: Educating Women in Early Nineteenth-Century Upper Canada", *Historical Studies in Education*, vol. 6, (1994), pp. 71-96; and Errington, *Wives and Mothers, School Mistresses and Scullery Maids: Working Women in Upper Canada, 1790-1840*, (Montreal, 1995). For the 'average' experiences of females among the elite, see Marian Fowler, *The Embroidered Tent: Five Gentlewomen in Early Canada*, (Toronto, 1982); Katherine M.J. McKenna, "The Role of Women in the Establishment of Social Status in Early Upper Canada", *Ontario History*, vol. 82 (1990), pp. 179-206; and Katherine M.J. McKenna, *A Life of Propriety: Anne Murray Powell and Her Family, 1755-1849*, (Montreal, 1994). For discussions of the gendered discussion itself, see Gail Cuthbert Brandt, "Postmodern Patchwork: Some Recent Trends in the Writing of Women's History in Canada", *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 72 (1991), pp. 468-92; Joy Parr, "Gender History and Historical Practice", *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 76 (1995), pp. 354-76; Veronica Strong-Boag and Anita Clair Fellman, eds., *Rethinking*

reform movement during this period were British Isles immigrants. One obvious example is William Lyon Mackenzie, the Dundee native and Upper Canadian radical who, as we shall see, would serve as putative leader of the 1837 Rebellion in that province. Mackenzie has been far from ignored by scholars²⁵⁷, but, as mentioned at the outset, in general his American interests have been stressed at the expense of a close study of his early experiences in Scotland and the manner in which these might have informed his later political career in Upper Canada. Even a cursory look at his early experiences, both in Scotland and elsewhere, shows them to have been an obvious factor in shaping his subsequent activities as a political rebel. In Mackenzie's roots were combined both plebeian and radical strains: his father was a weaver (and Mackenzie himself was apprenticed to several tradesmen as a boy), while his mother was an early convert to the Secession or anti state-support branch of Presbyterianism, which often produced reformers. His maternal grandfather, a farmer named Calum Dubh, had been a Jacobin volunteer in 1745, and had followed Prince Charles Edward into exile in France, a fact of which Mackenzie was proud, and in his adulthood enjoyed repeating. Much of Mackenzie's early reading reflected this iconoclastic strain. With meticulous care he listed by year and type the 958 books he read from 1806 to 1820, the time of his emigration to Canada, many of which were politically radical, including works by John Locke and by Thomas Paine – the latter, of course, a leading theorist of the transatlantic radical movement. The young Mackenzie also visited France, from

Canada: The Promise of Women's History, (Toronto, 1997); and Elizabeth Jane Errington, "And What About The Women?": Changing Ontario's History", *Ontario History*, vol. 90, (1998), pp. 135-55.

²⁵⁷ Studies of Mackenzie begin with the near-contemporaneous *Life and Times of William Lyon Mackenzie*, (Toronto, 1862, reprinted Toronto, 1910), written by his son-in-law, Charles Lindsey. Modern studies include William Kilbourn, *The Firebrand: William Lyon Mackenzie and the Rebellion in Upper Canada*, (Toronto, 1956); David Flint, *William Lyon Mackenzie: rebel against authority*, (Toronto, 1971). A less favourable treatment, suppressed for decades as the result of a suit filed by Mackenzie's grandson, the future Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King, is W.D. LeSueur's 1913 biography *William Lyon Mackenzie: A Reinterpretation*, edited by A.B. McKillop (Toronto, 1979).

which, to judge from some of his later newspaper articles, he developed an interest in the history of the Revolution, and developed sympathy for the sans culottes.²⁵⁸

And Mackenzie's connections to the British Isles tradition did not end with his emigration to Canada. Despite his growing absorption with politics in Upper Canada, he remained interested in, and enthusiastic over, the popular reform movement in England, and was in correspondence with at least one of the leaders of that movement, the MP Joseph Hume, an ally of such important English radical workingmen as the artisan and London Corresponding Society chairman Francis Place. Mackenzie's connection to the English radicals was strengthened when, journeying to London in 1832 in order to lay the case for reform in Upper Canada before the Colonial Office and other authorities, he became intimate with Hume, and met many other British Isles radicals then living in the city, including the Irishman Daniel O'Connell. Mackenzie was present at a dinner given to the distinguished upper class parliamentary reformer Major John Cartwright – a veteran of the 1790s protest movement and, later, a founding member of the Hampden Clubs – and replied to the toast on colonial reform. He even made a point of journeying into the countryside in order to visit William Cobbett, a preeminent radical of the early 1800s.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁸ "Mackenzie", *DCB*, vol. IX, 1861-1870, pp. 496-7; Lindsey, *Life and Times*, (1862 edition) Vol. 2, App. D, 334-5; for Mackenzie's grandfather, see Lindsey, *Life and Times* (1910 reprint), p. 36; and Ellis and Mac A' Ghobhainn, *The Scottish Insurrection*, p. 293. For Mackenzie's later references to the French Revolution, see Anthony W. Rapsorich, *William Lyon Mackenzie*, (Toronto, 1972), pp. 50-1.

²⁵⁹ During his 1832 trip to Britain, Mackenzie also spent time in his native Dundee, although whether he formed ties at this time with Scots radicals there is not known; Lindsey, *Life and Times* (1910 reprint), pp. 238-9. For Mackenzie's ideological and personal connections to contemporary English radicals, see R.A. Mackay, "The Political Ideas of William Lyon Mackenzie", *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, vol. 3 (1937), pp. 1-22, esp. 12-13. A letter from Joseph Hume to Mackenzie written on March 29, 1834, was published in Mackenzie's newspaper the *Colonial Advocate*: with what proved to be remarkable prescience, Hume hoped that Mackenzie's recent election to the assembly would "hasten that crisis which is fast approaching in the affairs of the Canadas, and which will terminate in INDEPENDENCE AND FREEDOM FROM THE BANEFUL DOMINION OF THE MOTHER COUNTRY and the tyrannical conduct of a small and despicable faction of the colony". 'The Celebrated Letter of Joseph Hume, Esq., M.P. to William Lyon Mackenzie – Toronto, 1834.' *Canadian Institute of Historical Microreproductions: Pre-1900*. F 1001 C1155, no. 21440. For a brief discussion of Mackenzie's Scottish radical background and how it influenced his Canadian career, see Ellis and Mac A' Ghobhainn, *The Scottish Insurrection*, pp. 292-4.

Arrived back in Upper Canada, Mackenzie continued to allude to transatlantic influences as often as to American ones, for example invoking the memory of the French Revolution as a precedent for national "regeneration". Other of Mackenzie's precedents for reform, to which he harked back repeatedly, was the vision of the glorious "Scotch race" bending under the weight of oppressive government, and the memory of Scots radicals cruelly "murdered and banished and fined and imprisoned and tortured by the tyrants and bloodhounds of 179.." (i.e., during the suppression of that nation's 1790s radical movement). This last example was of particular value, since, as Mackenzie well knew, many of the émigrés who would prove so useful to the reform movement were Scotsmen themselves, upon whom the invocation of the 1790 episode would not be lost. Further, as justification for reprinting Paine's 'Common Sense' in his paper *The Constitution*, Mackenzie noted that the pamphlet had not only been praised by American democrats, but also by such British Isles radicals as the small farmer and United Irish insurgent Robert Emmet, Major Cartwright, and "the celebrated Muir", the Scots radical and former leader of the Scottish Friends of the People who, as we have seen, was banished to Australia in the early 1800s.²⁶⁰

Mackenzie was also quick to identify a continuum of English-speaking revolutions, beginning with the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and leading to the American Revolution of 1776, the political principles behind which, he asserted, justified "the formation of Upper Canada into a separate government".²⁶¹ The examples of 1688 and 1776 were, as we have seen, precisely those that had been used by British Isles radicals from 1780 onwards to justify their demands for radical political reform. Mackenzie's use of

²⁶⁰ For Mackenzie's reference to Emmet – whom he described in a newspaper article as "so young, so intelligent, so generous, so brave" – see Margaret Fairley, ed., *The Selected Writings of William Lyon Mackenzie, 1824-1837*, (Toronto, 1960), pp. 278-79; for his references to Cartwright and to Muir, see Rapsorich, *William Lyon Mackenzie*, pp. 50-2, 62.

²⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 47-8.

them, in turn, to justify similar reform in Upper Canada can be seen in, for example, his 1828 election platform as a candidate to represent York county in the provincial legislature. The first of Mackenzie's twenty-three campaign pledges spelled out his support for the people's right "freely to elect their representatives in parliament", in accordance with "their privileges as British subjects".²⁶² Far from a colonial reformer influenced only by Jacksonianism, then, both Mackenzie's own writings and the political program that he advocated, together with many of his personal experiences, reveal him to have been a transatlantic radical, operating, as it happened, in Upper Canada, and one with substantial ties, both personal and ideological, to the British Isles parliamentary reform movement in particular, and with a firm grasp of the 'rights of the free-born Englishman'.

Moving beyond the example of Mackenzie, we find a cadre of other Scotsmen with artisanal and labouring roots who played meaningful roles in pre-Rebellion era reform, many also with considerable experience of political radicalism in Britain. The Dundee native James Lesslie, a book-binder's son, was eighteen and living in Scotland at the time of the 'Radical War' of 1820, and would thus have had at least some understanding of the popular reform ideology behind that revolt. Arriving in Upper Canada in 1822, Lesslie became an ardent supporter of Mackenzie – a friend of Lesslie's father – and seconded his nomination as mayor in Toronto's first civic administration. In 1834, Lesslie, by then a merchant and journalist, also served as president of the Canadian Alliance, which was intended to spread advanced reform ideas throughout the province, many traceable to the British Isles parliamentary reform movement, such as an elective constitution and the secret ballot. Lesslie's commitment to responsible government was absolute, and he became so influential and notorious a radical that he

²⁶² Quoted in Fairley, ed., *Selected Writings*, p. 178.

was arrested and imprisoned during the Upper Canadian Rebellion, despite the fact that no evidence was ever produced that linked him to the uprising. Even after the Rebellion, Lesslie continued to crusade for responsible government, albeit backing a more moderate program than in previous years.²⁶³

Another Upper Canadian radical of Scots descent active in the early to late 1830s was Malcolm Cameron. Although born in Lower Canada, Cameron's parents were Scots natives. Cameron grew up in a thoroughly plebeian atmosphere. His father ran a tavern in Lanark county, and, as a consequence, Cameron spent his formative years imbibing the sentiments of the Scottish radicals who had settled in the area, in particular a large number of radical Lowland weavers and artisans of the Bathurst district.²⁶⁴ These British radical views were reflected, in turn, in the Bathurst reform newspaper that Cameron founded with his brother in 1834. Cameron worked hard in trying to ensure that a political reform agenda be maintained in the Bathurst paper even after he had sold it, by offering the editorship to another Scots émigré, the former artisan Thomas McQueen. McQueen turned the offer down, and by the mid-1840s had established his own reform newspaper in the newly settled Huron Tract.²⁶⁵ For their part, both Cameron and James Lesslie, along with the Edinburgh-born farmer David Christie and the English journalists Charles Lindsay and Charles Clark, would go on to form the backbone of the 'Clear Grit' movement of the 1850s which, while more properly a part of the Chartist movement and thus beyond the specific scope of our inquiry, put forward a radical platform strikingly similar to that long advocated by British Isles radicals, in particular the call for universal manhood suffrage, biennial Parliaments

²⁶³ "James Lesslie", *DCB*, vol. XI, 1881-1890, pp. 516-519. Although an emerging bourgeois, Lesslie always retained an interest in elevating the lower orders; together with the English watchmaker Joseph Bates, Lesslie helped establish, for example, a mechanics' institute in Toronto in 1831; "Lesslie", p. 516.

²⁶⁴ "Malcolm Cameron", *DCB*, vol. X, 1871-1880, pp. 124-126; see also Michael Vance, "Scottish Chartism in Canada West?: An Examination of the 'Clear Grit' Reformers", *Scottish Tradition*, vol. 22 (1997), pp. 4-5.

and the removal of property qualifications. Tellingly, Michael Vance notes that since this 'Clear Grit' platform was first outlined in a speech given by Peter Perry, a radical with an American background, that movement has been dismissed by historians as merely an offshoot of American theory and practice, rather than as the British-based expression that it so clearly was.²⁶⁶

Of course, such exceptional, emergent bourgeois reform leaders as Mackenzie, Lesslie, and even Cameron, do not represent the totality of the radical transmission from Britain to Upper Canada. By the 1830s, there was a history of politically dissenting plebeians and artisans departing to North America, often as the result of crackdowns on British Isles popular protest movements. The first such 'wave' occurred in the late 1790s, after the collapse of the United organizations, which culminated in the failure of the 1798 Irish Rebellion. Boats departing for North America during this period were crammed with political refugees, as evinced by one alarmed passenger who reported of a 1797 voyage to New York that "we had a set of Steerage Passengers ripe for every Species of Disorder".²⁶⁷ The majority of these radical émigrés were bourgeois, but perhaps one-third were artisans and small producers.²⁶⁸ Some made their way to Upper and to Lower Canada.²⁶⁹ Most, however, settled around the eastern American seaboard, and it is these that have attracted the attention of American historians of transatlantic radicalism.²⁷⁰

This pattern of radical transmission was repeated beginning roughly in 1820, although with two notable differences. Firstly, it was largely government sponsored,

²⁶⁵ "Thomas McQueen", *DCB*, vol. IX, 1861-1870, pp. 528-9.

²⁶⁶ Vance, "Scottish Chartism in Canada West?", pp. 7-9, 1.

²⁶⁷ Quoted in Wilson, *United Irishmen, United States*, p. 6.

²⁶⁸ Durey, *Transatlantic Radicals*, p. 7.

²⁶⁹ G.M. Craig, *Upper Canada: The Formative Years, 1784-1841*, (Toronto, 1963), Chapter 1, 'Loyalists Make a New Province'.

²⁷⁰ See ft. 234.

and thus open to scores of working people, reformers among them, who in normal circumstances would not have been able to afford to emigrate. Secondly, rather than in America, many settled this time in the Canadas.²⁷¹ Accounting as it does for the migration of numerous undoubted plebeian and artisan radicals to Upper and Lower Canada, the 1820s migration is worth exploring in some detail, the more so as the orthodox view of British Isles immigrants to the colonies holds that they were almost unfailingly conservative. In the wake of such artisan-led disturbances as Peterloo and the Cato Street Conspiracy in England, and the 'Radical War' of 1820 in Scotland, nervous British officials felt justified in offering financial assistance to the labouring population, on the assumption that, as a contemporary newspaper phrased it, emigration "would do more service in thinning the ranks of Radicalism than all the military array of the country".²⁷² The government's intention seems to have been, in effect, to 'transport' un-convicted radicals to Upper Canada – as those formally convicted had been transported to the Australian colonies between 1790-1810 – by making the emigration process too affordable for many to refuse; and chief among those targeted were tradesmen – specifically the Paisley and Glasgow weavers, who had played so large a role in the 1820 uprising.²⁷³

²⁷¹ An 1820-21 assisted emigration scheme centered around the Glasgow area targeted artisans in particular; see Michael Vance, "Advancement, Moral Worth and Freedom: Some Possible Meanings of 'Independence' among Early Nineteenth-Century Glasgow Emigrants to Upper Canada", in N. Landsman, ed., *Nation and Province in the First British Empire*, (East Linton, forthcoming). For a discussion of assisted emigration in the Scottish context, see Michael Vance, "The Politics of Emigration: Scotland and Assisted Emigration to Upper Canada, 1815-26", in T.M. Devine, ed., *Scottish Emigration and Scottish Society*, (Edinburgh, 1992), pp. 37-60. See also Johnston, *British Emigration Policy*. Of course, some of the British Isles émigrés of this period did settle in the United States, as well, and American labour historians have long noted the roles of some in the development of early nineteenth century working class radicalism in America. See Howard Rock, *Artisans of the New Republic: The Tradesmen of New York City in the Age of Jefferson*, (New York, 1979); Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850*, (Oxford, 1984); and Howard Harris, "The Eagle to Watch and the Harp to Tune the Nation": Irish Immigrants, Politics and Early Industrialization in Paterson, New Jersey, 1824-1836", *Journal of Social History*, vol. 23 (1990), pp. 575-597.

²⁷² Vance in Devine, *Scottish Emigration*, p. 45.

²⁷³ Ibid.

That the radicals themselves were aware that the government's intention was to disperse their numbers, and thus their effectiveness, is obvious from the hostility which many displayed towards these emigration schemes; as H.J.M. Johnston notes, radical leaders attempted to dissuade artisans from emigrating by "insisting that [this] was not the answer" to the continued problems at home.²⁷⁴ Despite their efforts, large numbers of radical workingmen did indeed emigrate, likely for a combination of political, personal, and economic reasons.²⁷⁵ Further aiding in this transmission was the fact that political protesters themselves occupied positions in many of the emigration societies, and were thus in a position to pick friends and associates and then help them through the process. The radical weaver Robert Beath, previously arrested for political agitation, was the leader in the 1820s of one Scottish emigration society, and it is not unlikely that he, and others like him, made special efforts to help distressed fellow radical tradesmen to settle overseas. Certainly the societies themselves were aware of the presence of radicals such as Beath in their midst; by the 1850s, measures were introduced to control their tradesmen membership in order to remove any taint of radicalism.²⁷⁶ But for authorities in the Canadas, though, it was, in a manner of speaking, too late; as was the British government's intention, untold numbers of

²⁷⁴ Johnston, *British Emigration Policy*, pp. 28-30.

²⁷⁵ There is debate among historians over the motives inducing plebeian and artisan Scots to emigrate to the Canadas during the early nineteenth century, the dawn of industrialization in much of Scotland – an attempt to resolve what T.M. Devine calls the "paradox of Scottish emigration": i.e., the fact that Scotland experienced a high level of emigration despite an industrial boom; Devine, "The Paradox of Scottish Emigration", in Devine, ed., *Scottish Emigration and Scottish Society*, pp. 1-13. A first approach views emigration as flight from this boom, an effort to preserve a pre-industrial, pre-modern lifestyle; see J.M. Bumsted, "Scottish Emigration to the Maritimes 1770-1815, A New Look at an Old Theme", *Acadiensis*, vol. 10, (1981), pp. 65-85; and *The People's Clearance: Highland Emigration to British North America, 1770-1815*, (Edinburgh, 1982). A second portrays emigration as less reactionary, more personally assertive; as the Scots émigré and stonemason John Gemmil reported glowingly to his son, emigrants could, with some little work, find themselves "independent of their fellow creatures" in Upper Canada. Quoted in Vance, "Advancement, Moral Worth and Freedom", p. 5; see Vance's essay for a full exposition of the motives impelling disaffected Scots to emigrate.

²⁷⁶ Vance in Devine, *Scottish Emigration*, pp. 48, 58.

radicals had already made their way to both Upper and Lower Canada long before the emigration societies could begin thus to crack down.

And even the many British émigrés arriving during this period who, undoubtedly, were not radicals per se would nonetheless have had experience – as had, for example, James Lesslie – of the highly charged political atmosphere of the time, and thus been well-versed with the aims of popular radicalism; in Michael Vance's words, they brought "radical baggage" to Upper Canada.²⁷⁷ As much as the hardcore radicals, they too could prove receptive to Canadian reform movements; Lesslie, as we have seen, would go on to become a leading reform figure. A final proof, if one were needed, that the Canadas did indeed receive Britons who were at least familiar with the radical political views of the time comes from the reminiscences of some of those who chanced to cross their paths. As one gentleman traveler making his way through Upper Canada observed, for example,

many of the...Scotsmen...I saw had been on shore a few hours only...yet they...already [displayed] those absurd notions of independence and equality, which are so deeply engrafted in the minds of the lowest individuals of the American nation.²⁷⁸

What this gentleman failed to understand, however – and what some historians fail to see – is that the émigrés' 'absurd notions' of independence and equality were not the products of an American influence, as is implied at the end of the observation, but also of the radical reform climate of the British Isles. It follows, then, that the ramifications – involving émigrés, certainly, but Canadian born colonists near whom they lived, and with whom they worked – of these notions of independence and equality on the political life of Upper Canada were no less the product of the British Isles' influence.

²⁷⁷ Vance, "Scottish Chartism in Canada West?", p. 25.

III

The fact that it took an influx of English, Scottish, and Irish radical émigrés in the 1820s and 1830s to finally create in the provinces a revolutionary situation demonstrates this influence clearly. Despite dwelling for decades alongside the famous republican stronghold that was the United States, Canadian reformers as a whole never developed what might be called a revolutionary consciousness, never challenged in any real way the established political system at the behest of the Americans. Allan Greer likens the colonists during this time to the French before 1789, the Russians before 1917, and most of the European populations before 1848.²⁷⁹ Operating on his own initiative, the Briton Gourlay created a political stir comparable to that of the entire Jacksonian philosophy. But even Gourlay's impact pales in comparison to the boost given to the radical reform movement by the arrival of thousands of British Isles émigré workingmen, some of whom, it is worth repeating, were veterans of the political agitation in Great Britain in 1819 and 1820.²⁸⁰ Only with the aid of these often hardened insurgents, in conjunction with efforts of other Scots and English émigrés and native-born reformers, would political protest finally progress beyond isolated expressions of popular sentiment and reach the next stage, that of 'associational' or 'proactive' violence intent on claiming rights and privileges not enjoyed by the a large segment of the population. And this stage was reached in the Rebellion of 1837, an explosion that, for all its failings, would serve as Canada's nearest equivalent to the American or the French Revolution, uniting British Isles émigrés, American settlers, and French and English-speaking reformers in single cause for the

²⁷⁸ Quoted in Vance in Devine, *Scottish Emigration*, p. 52.

²⁷⁹ Greer, "1837-38: Rebellion Reconsidered", p. 12.

²⁸⁰ Vance in Devine, *Scottish Emigration*, p. 59.

first and last time, and in the process transforming the Canadas from the last stronghold of supposedly loyalist sentiment in North America into the northernmost outpost of transatlantic radicalism.

While scholars of all stripes have recognized that the Rebellion of 1837 in Upper and Lower Canada represents the principle episode of radicalism in Canadian history, they have traditionally been able to agree on little else. The Rebellion was a large and complex event, uniting various strains of discontent, not all of them political. In addition to political reformers, the rebel ranks contained farmers upset with provincial land policies, agricultural labourers embittered by poor local working conditions, French patriots, as well as a fair sprinkling of opportunists – businessmen, lawyers, and so forth – seeking their own advancement by disrupting the status quo.²⁸¹ This range of motive has led some historians to characterize the Rebellion as largely non-political. For example, Donald Creighton sees the Rebellion as the final episode in the lengthy battle between merchant and agrarian interests, with the rebels as backwards-looking pre-industrialists in losing cause against more modern-minded urban commercial merchants.²⁸² As historians such as Edwin Guillet and Allan Greer note, however, interpretations such as these overlook the largely political grievances that served as the initial spark for the conflagration, and the belief among some of the reformers that armed resistance had become the only means to effect change.²⁸³

²⁸¹ Michael Cross, "1837: The Necessary Failure", in Michael Cross and Gregory Kealey, eds., *Readings in Canadian Social History, Volume 2: Pre-Industrial Canada, 1760-1849*, (Toronto, 1996), p. 152.

²⁸² See Donald Creighton, "The Economic Background of the Rebellion of Eighteen Thirty-Seven", *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, vol. 3, (1937), pp. 322-334; and Creighton, *The Commercial Empire of St. Lawrence*, (Toronto, 1938), pp. 255-320. Class conflict as the root of the Rebellion is put forward also in Stanley Ryerson, *1837: The Birth of Canadian Democracy*, (Toronto, 1937); and Greg Keilty, *1837: Revolution in the Canadas*, (Toronto, 1974).

²⁸³ The political motive for rebellion is made evident in Guillet, *The Lives and Times of the Patriots: An Account of the Rebellion in Upper Canada, 1837-1838 and of the Patriot Agitation in the United States, 1837-1842*, (1938, reprinted Toronto, 1968), Chapter 1, "The Agitation for Reform". In both provinces, radical movements pushing for parliamentary reform met with firm resistance from a British government determined to preserve its control over legislation and policy by exercising sole power over appointments to the upper house, the Legislative Council, and the post of lieutenant-governor. In his *Letters From Van*

A second tendency has been to regard the Rebellion as two separate, unrelated uprisings, one occurring in Upper Canada and the other in Lower Canada. This may be attributable in part to what we have seen Allan Greer describe as the lack, among most Canadian scholars, of the language and the conceptual tools needed to make sense of revolutionary matters, borne of their relative inexperience in discussing revolution; and in part as well to what he describes as the “yawning chasm separating studies of Lower Canada and works on Upper Canada” in general.²⁸⁴ At any rate, this misapprehension too is finally being corrected. While insisting on the importance of local conditions and allowing for a range of motivations among rebels, historians such as George Rudé, Colin Read, Ronald Stagg, Michael Cross, and Allan Greer all stress the greater importance of viewing the Rebellion in Upper and Lower Canada as in many ways a single phenomenon, and – given that the previous two decades have seen this

Dieman's Land, the exiled rebel Benjamin Wait (an Upper Canadian carpenter) summarized the insurgents' complaints thus: “total want of responsibility in the government party: in a word, the existence of an arbitrary, arrogant, vindictive, and fraudulent oligarchy.” Benjamin Wait, *Letters from Van Dieman's Land: written during four years' imprisonment for political offences*, (Buffalo, 1843; reprinted *Canadian Institute of Historical Microreproductions: Pre-1900*. F 1001 C1155, no. 21440), “Introduction”. A still useful introduction to the politics of the day is Dunham, *Political Unrest*. For many reformers, the final straw came in March, 1837, with the passage of the ‘Ten Resolutions’, allowing government by executive decree in Lower Canada. Fearing similar treatment in Upper Canada, rebellion broke out in that province first, in December, 1837, and then in Lower Canada in November, 1838. For a scholarly discussion of the rebels' political complaints, see Rudé, *Protest and Punishment*, pp.42-47. It reveals much about Canadian historiography that some of the scholars who do recognize the political motives of the rebels for this very reason approve of the Rebellion's failure. The foolish rebels, they apparently believe, were simply unable to appreciate the blessings of the British constitution, and their defeat was a good thing, not just because it called forth Durham, who set in motion the liberalizing machinery that would eventually produce Responsible Government, but because it validated anti-republicanism as a Canadian trait. Thus, A.R.M. Lower: “[t]he Rebellions were blessings in disguise[;]...the colonies had had a house-cleaning...and rehardened their hearts against the Americans”, thus reestablishing “anti-Americanism” as “a corner stone of Canadian nationhood”; *Colony to Nation*, pp. 256, 259. Others who take this same view include J.M.S. Careless, *Canada: A Story of Challenge*, (Toronto, 1963), pp. 164-87; S.F. Wise, “Upper Canada and the Conservative Tradition”, in Firth, ed., *Profiles of a Province*; and Kenneth McNaught, *The Pelican History of Canada*, (London, 1969), pp. 85-9.

²⁸⁴ Greer, “1837-38: Rebellion Reconsidered”, p. 7. Greer's article contains a perceptive discussion of the difficulties of synthesizing French and English-speaking historiography of the Rebellion. George Rudé has also noted this chasm between the English and French Rebellion specialists: “Canadian historians, possibly due to their lack of a common culture [and] language...have tended to keep the two rebellions in separate compartments”. Rudé, *Protest and Punishment*, p. 42. Even so astute an observer as S.D. Clark treats the uprising as two different provincial episodes, claiming that one sprang from sources alien to the second: “the Lower Canadian reformer could draw upon the political philosophy of the French revolution in a way that...the Upper Canadian reformer could not”. Clark, *Movements of Protest*, p. 331.

viewpoint expressed more and more often – we are entitled by now to say that this has largely been shown to be true.²⁸⁵

For all their willingness to consider the uprisings in Upper and Lower Canada as, in many ways, one event, some of the scholars listed above – and a good many others besides – still insist, however, on seeing the incident as primarily a product of exposure to American ideas.²⁸⁶ Certainly America, and Americans themselves, played roles of no small importance during the Rebellion. Rebels were, to varying degrees, inspired by the United States as an ideal. More practically, American settlers numbered among the rebels of both provinces, while Americans in towns and cities along the border offered the rebels munitions, supplies, and, ultimately, a safe haven in the wake of the Rebellion's collapse.²⁸⁷ Little attempt, though, has been made thus far to show how the Rebellion was connected to British Isles popular radicalism, although there is considerable evidence to demonstrate that this was in fact the case.

One obvious example indicative of a British Isles influence in the Rebellion is the Scottish origin of William Lyon Mackenzie, the immediate instigator of the Upper Canadian revolt. Mackenzie's role in the uprising has had more than its share of scholarly study, but, as should come as no surprise by now, almost invariably the focus

²⁸⁵ See Rudé, *Protest and Punishment*, pp. 42-51; Read and Stagg, *The Rebellion of 1837 in Upper Canada*, pp. xxi, 48, 54-5, 62-3, 71-2, 85-6, 103-4, 107-8; Cross, "1837: The Necessary Failure", pp. 141-58; and Greer, "1837-38: Rebellion Reconsidered". But the separatist approach to the rebellion is not dead yet: the Canadian Historical Association recently commissioned two Historical Booklets on the rebellion, one devoted to Upper Canada, the other to Lower Canada. (Colin Read, *The Rebellion of 1837 in Upper Canada*, (Ottawa, 1988), and Jean-Paul Bernard, *The Rebellions of 1837 and 1838 in Lower Canada*, (Ottawa, 1996)).

²⁸⁶ George Rudé, for example, stresses American involvement in the Rebellion, both from American settlers in the provinces, and sympathetic Americans across the border; Rudé, *Protest and Punishment*, pp. 48-50. G.M. Craig also draws attention to the American role, Craig in J.K. Johnson, ed., *Historical Essays on Upper Canada*, (Toronto, 1975), pp. 318-20.

²⁸⁷ American involvement is concisely summarized in Orrin E. Tiffany, *The Relations of the United States to the Canadian Rebellion of 1837-1838*, (Buffalo, 1905, reprinted 1980); and more extensively in Guillet, *The Lives and Times of the Patriots*, especially Chapter 18, "The United States and the Patriot War". More recently, see Jean-Paul Bernard, "Vermonters and Lower Canadian Rebellions of 1837-1838", *Vermont History*, vol. 58, (1990), pp. 250-263.

has been on his American connections as a way of explaining his motives.²⁸⁸ By identifying Mackenzie so closely with the United States, historians have, purposely or not, fixed the image of America firmly at the very birth-point of the Rebellion.

But it is very easy to overplay Mackenzie's connections with America in the months leading up to the revolt at the expense of British Isles influences, and in general this is what has been done. It is not often pointed out, for example, that Mackenzie quarreled with some of the Americans in his camp over the degree to which support from sympathetic American groups should be integrated into the uprising. They wanted as much American aid as possible, so as to lay the groundwork for a liberated Upper Canada's absorption into the United States. Mackenzie, meanwhile, insisted that the Rebellion remain Canadian-directed (that is to say, under the control of British émigrés such as himself), with independent Canadian purposes. He went so far, indeed, as to charge some of his American colleagues with being paid agents of the United States government – hardly a sign of slavish devotion to Jackson.²⁸⁹

By freeing us of the hoary interpretation of his having been overly-enamoured with, and overly-trustful of, the United States, vignettes such as the above prepare us for the realization that British Isles influences played a role in Mackenzie's – and by extension, in other Upper Canadian radicals' – progression towards rebellion. To begin, despite his very real appreciation of American republicanism, it does not follow that Mackenzie cast off the British Isles as a source of justification for the uprising. As we have seen, his Scottish radical antecedents were far from negligible. Moreover, Mackenzie's quoting from Paine's writings to set the stage for, and in some ways to justify, the

²⁸⁸ J.E. Rea, for example, points to such things as Mackenzie's 1829 trip to the United States, to his meeting with Andrew Jackson, to his supposed infatuation with Jacksonianism, to his reprinting of Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* – the clarion call of the American Revolution – in his paper *The Constitution* in the months leading up to the Rebellion, as being the influences that spurred him towards insurrection; Rea, "William Lyon Mackenzie – Jacksonian?", p. 234.

Rebellion speaks as much to an international, as to an American, precedent, for Paine was above all a transatlantic, rather than a purely American, radical. On more than one occasion in newspaper articles in the weeks before rebellion, Mackenzie also invoked the precedent of the Glorious Revolution of 1688, a tested precedent of British Isles parliamentary reformers from at least the 1780s onwards.²⁹⁰ And, despite the importance given by historians to Mackenzie's frequent invocations of Jackson and American republicanism at reform meetings just prior to the outbreak, he just as often made reference to the British Isles parliamentary reform tradition in these final days. As Colin Read notes, *The Constitution* reprinted, at Mackenzie's instruction, a number of resolutions passed at reform meetings in late 1837 proclaiming loyalty to the "British connection"; and Mackenzie himself alluded, in print and in speeches, to the United Irish rebel Robert Emmet, whom he called the "warm-hearted defender of his country's rights".²⁹¹

Further, many of Mackenzie's key associates during the Rebellion had British, not American, connections. Perhaps the most notable was John Rolph, a radical assemblyman born in England. Rolph was widely known among reformers for his constant harking back to the wrongs done to Robert Gourlay, the 'Banished Briton'. As one of Mackenzie's chieftains, Rolph was deeply implicated in the Rebellion, urging radicals to arm themselves to join with Mackenzie's men. In the end, his commitment to the rebels cost him dear: he was thrown out of the assembly, and forced into exile in the United States after a 500 pound bounty was offered by the government for his

²⁸⁹ Cross, "1837: The Necessary Failure", p. 154.

²⁹⁰ Rapsorich, *William Lyon Mackenzie*, pp. 52, 47-8.

²⁹¹ Colin Read, *The Rising in Western Canada, 1837-8: The Duncombe Revolt and After*, (Toronto, 1982) p. 69; and, as R.A. MacKay has shown, by "British connection" Mackenzie obviously was referring to the English parliamentary reform tradition, with which he was well versed. For Mackenzie's reference to Robert Emmet, see Fairley, ed., *Selected Writings*, p. 354.

capture.²⁹² Another of Mackenzie's men was David Gibson, a radical surveyor born in Scotland to family of farmers. Although he questioned the wisdom of open insurrection, Gibson – a close friend of Mackenzie – sided with the rebels because, in the words of his biographer Ronald Stagg, he thought "it could bring denied reforms" to the colony. Gibson guarded loyalist prisoners held in a Toronto tavern and, like John Rolph, would suffer for his involvement, his farm being ordered burned by Sir Francis Bond Head.²⁹³

In addition, there were numerous other British radicals, uninvolved in the actual Rebellion, who nevertheless were active alongside Mackenzie in the agitation leading to the uprising. Two of these reformers are familiar to us: the Scots-born radical publisher James Lesslie, and the Scots-descended publisher Malcolm Cameron – whose political ideology, it may be remembered, had been influenced by the Lowland radical weavers and artisans of the Bathurst district, and who was wrongly arrested for suspected involvement in the Rebellion. Additionally, a close reading of the many petitions and resolutions drafted by radicals in the months and weeks leading up to the insurrection reveals that numerous other British Isles émigrés, many of them from labouring backgrounds, also played parts in helping to build resolve among reformers, and thus steer the reform movement towards open conflict. For example, the 'Resolutions of the Toronto Political Union', taken at a reform meeting in March, 1837, formally accused Francis Bond Head, Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada, of having been "arbitrary, tyrannical and unconstitutional"; the resolution, which called for the people's right to regularly elect their own representatives, was seconded by an English carpenter named James Bolton. Another resolution from this same meeting, invoking

²⁹² "John Rolph", *DCB*, vol. IX, 1861-1870, pp. 683-89.

²⁹³ "David Gibson", *DCB*, vol. IX, 1861-1870, pp. 312-14. Gibson's 1843 Patent of Pardon is reproduced in Guillet, *Lives and Times of the Patriots*, Appendix Q, pp. 297-98.

the right of resistance to arbitrary colonial authority, was seconded by a Scottish clerk named James Reid, the son of one of Mackenzie's classmates in Scotland. A second meeting of the Toronto Union, held in July, 1837 – perhaps the largest assemblage of reformers in Upper Canada to that date – was chaired by John Mills, a Scots-born hatter. Included among committee members present at a third Toronto meeting, three days later, was the Scots grocer Robert McKay and the Scots axe-maker John Armstrong. In the Upper Canadian township of Westminster, meanwhile, émigrés were no less active in the push towards rebellion. At a reform meeting held in that town in October, less than two months before the insurrection, four Scots artisans and one English artisan either moved or seconded resolutions linking the cause of reform in Westminster with that of the Toronto movement, and, in general, supporting the notion of armed revolt as a means of establishing responsible government, specifically the right of electing representatives.²⁹⁴ There can be no doubt, then, that British craftsmen were among the revolutionary vanguard during the summer and autumn of 1837.

And Mackenzie knew that this was so. For all his hopes for the wide scale involvement of Americans and native Lower Canadians in the Rebellion, he seems to have believed that the insurrection's ultimate success depended in large part on the British Isles workingmen. In seeking to convince his readers that Upper Canadians had both the will and the means to make good their independence, he boasted in *The Constitution* in July, 1837, that "there are thousands, aye, tens of thousands, of poor Englishmen, Scotchmen, and above all, of Irishmen, now in the United States, who only wait till the standard be planted [in Canada] to throw their strength and numbers on the side of democracy."²⁹⁵ He was exaggerating, certainly, but there was truth in this claim nonetheless. British Isles émigrés, many from plebeian and artisan backgrounds, were

²⁹⁴ Read and Stagg, *The Rebellion of 1837 in Upper Canada*, pp. 51-2, 50, 63, 83-7.

clearly represented in the rebels' rank and file. Colin Read's statistical analysis of the nationality of 135 identified rebels captured during the so-called 'Duncombe' rising in Western Upper Canada reveals a respectable, though not overwhelming, British presence: fourteen Englishmen and another fourteen Irishmen, two-thirds of whom were either craftsmen or labourers. This figure becomes more impressive, though, in light of the fact that, as Professor Read further notes, British immigration to the disaffected townships in the Duncombe area was in fact quite limited. That few or no Scots seem to have been involved in this section of the uprising does not suggest lack of interest on their part; a number of Lowland Scottish settlers in Dumfries township had supported the responsible government movement, and appear to have been excluded only because news of the uprising did not reach them until it was too late to participate.²⁹⁶

British émigré involvement, from workingmen and emergent bourgeois, appears to have been greater in the Toronto-based uprising headed by Mackenzie, this time with Scots involvement standing out in particular. Whether this was because Mackenzie himself was a Scot is not known; taken together, though, the two facts certainly explain why some termed the Toronto uprising "a Scotch Rebellion." One contemporary observer, indeed, wrote that, at one point, Toronto seemed overrun "by a nest of Scotch radicals of the worst sort." Nor were Scots radicals outside Toronto less committed to insurrection. In Nassagaweya, near Nelson Township, the predominantly Scots population organized a meeting of twenty-five or thirty radicals, mostly Highland plebeians, and held it in Gaelic. Deciding to support Mackenzie, they scattered in search of arms; before they could regroup and march to the rebels' side, however,

²⁹⁵ Quoted in Craig, *Upper Canada: The Formative Years*, p. 245.

²⁹⁶ For Read's statistical analysis of the rebels, see *The Rising in Western Canada*, pp. 178-9; for the Scots in Dumfries, see pp. 50, 182-3.

Mackenzie and his men had gone down in defeat. Like the Dumfries Scots, they were fully committed, but simply too late.²⁹⁷

The émigré presence in the Lower Canadian affair, meanwhile, came generally of a different British Isles nationality, the Irish; along with Americans, they were heavily represented among Lower Canadian rebels. At the leadership level there were men such as the prosperous Irishman Dr. Edmund Bailey O'Callaghan, one of the major organizers and theoreticians of the movement in that province, and the rebel leader Louis Papineau's close associate.²⁹⁸ At a lesser level, Irish workingmen formed a substantial block of the rebels in Montreal.²⁹⁹ In fact, radical labourers – émigré and native-born – formed, in George Rudé's words, the "shock troops" of rebellion in both provinces.³⁰⁰ And, while shock troops many may have been, the involvement of some artisan immigrants can be traced to higher levels. For example, one Scots émigré, the wagon-maker and blacksmith Robert Armstrong, served as the commander of the Guelph contingent of rebels.³⁰¹ A second Scotsman, the artisan James Gemmell, was a leading figure at the Short Hills raid, near St. Catharines.³⁰²

²⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 183, 109.

²⁹⁸ Allan Greer, *The Patriots and the People: The Rebellion of 1837 in Rural Lower Canada*, (Toronto, 1993), p. 231. For a brief biography of O'Callaghan, see Jack Verney, *O'Callaghan: The Making and Unmaking of a Rebel*, (Ottawa, Carleton Library Series, 1994).

²⁹⁹ Greer, *The Patriots and the People*, p. 8; see also Cross, "1837: The Necessary Failure", p. 151.

³⁰⁰ Rudé, *Protest and Punishment*, p. 49. The involvement of workingmen extended to Canadian-born, also; in Western Upper Canada, Colin Read's analysis of the 135 identified Duncombe rebels reveals that forty-nine, or thirty-five percent, were skilled workers; Read, *The Rising in Western Upper Canada*, p. 172. Along with British Isles émigrés, Mackenzie targeted these native-born labourers, appealing to both "Farmers of Upper Canada" and "Mechanics of Upper Canada" to join him in rebellion; Fairley, ed., *Selected Writings*, pp. 182, 184. As in the Irish Rebellion of 1798, it fell to the blacksmiths to forge pikes for the rebels in both Canadian provinces in 1837; Guillet, *Lives and Times of the Patriots*, pp. 2-3.

³⁰¹ Read and Stagg, *The Rebellion of 1837 in Upper Canada*, p. lxxv.

³⁰² Guillet, *Lives and Times of the Patriots*, p. 202, ft. 18. Gemmell was a friend of Benjamin Wait, an Upper Canadian sawmill owner, prominent rebel, and correspondent of the radical English MP Joseph Hume, and Gemmell's and Wait's post-Rebellion careers were remarkably similar: both were captured, and transported to Van Diemen's Land in late-1838; both escaped in 1842 (Wait on a small hired boat, Gemmell on an American whaler); and both settled (for a time) in the United States. Their stories, along with those of many other Upper and Lower Canadian insurgents exiled to New South Wales, are reconstructed in Jack Cahill, *Forgotten Patriots: Canadian Rebels on Australia's Convict Shores*, (Toronto, 1998) – see Cahill's Appendices 1 and 2 for listings, respectively, of Upper and of Lower Canadian rebels transported to Van Diemen's Land and New South Wales. Cahill (a journalist, not a professional historian)

The involvement of the British and Irish-born radicals in the Rebellion served as a sort of physical link between the reform movement in British North America and that in the British Isles itself, reminding us that, for all the connections that are made between the rebels and American republicanism, the push for responsible government in the provinces was sufficiently analogous to popular protest in Britain and Ireland to attract those who must have been, at the very least, familiar with the European popular reform tradition, if not actively involved in protest before emigration. Often the debt to this wider tradition was acknowledged symbolically. The Lower Canadian uprising, for example, was characterized from the start by the display of a series of popular symbols so closely associated with transatlantic radical culture as to have become a revolutionary weapon in and of themselves. Throughout that province, rebels planted liberty poles, flew tricolours, and adopted the ritual headgear of the red bonnet à la the sans culottes of the French Revolution. By so doing, they were linking their cause directly to that of 1798 – and, for the Irish émigrés among the rebels, to that of the Rebellion of 1798, during which these same symbols had been evoked. Lower Canadian rebels, plebeians in particular, had also conducted dozens of political charivaris in the months leading up to rebellion, precisely as had, for example, Scottish radicals in the period immediately before their own 'Radical War' in 1820. The former

aside, academic interest in the Canadian rebels sent to New South Wales has been rare. Mary M. McRae provides short accounts of some of the exiles' experiences; see McRae, "Yankees from King Arthur's Court: a Brief Study of North American Political Prisoners Transported from Canada to Van Diemen's Land, 1839-40", *Tasmanian Historical Association*, vol. 19 (1972), pp. 147-62; and Fred Landon's study *An Exile from Canada*, (Toronto, 1960), concentrates largely on one rebel, the Windsor insurgent Elijah Woodman. In addition, George Rudé's *Protest and Punishment* contains brief references to the Canadians. Beyond these efforts, little scholarly work has been done on the Canadian exiles at all, and, with the exception of Rudé, who discusses them alongside Irish exiles of 1848, virtually no attempt has been made to connect them to international currents of protest; see Rudé, *Protest and Punishment*, pp. 218-21.

may not have been aware of this last precedent, of course, but clearly they were drawing from the same popular radical culture as had the Scots.³⁰³

Rebels of both provinces connected themselves to the transatlantic movement, and to the British Isles in particular, in more direct ways, as well. One Upper Canadian manifesto, released shortly before the outbreak, drew a parallel between that province's political situation and the need for political reform in Ireland:

Ireland, from which many people of this country...emigrated, has suffered severely...by an executive government which public opinion has seldom reached[;]...by native...[and] foreign legislatures...which only used their power to rivet the fetters on the country[; and] by parties caring only for ascendancy ... Upper Canada, from like causes, has been compared to a 'girdled tree with its drooping branches' standing in the middle of the North American Continent, overshadowed by 'the tree of abuse', which latter our lieutenant governors daily water...³⁰⁴

Some of the British radicals were themselves aware that the Canadians were working in the context of an international democratic tradition. This last is a crucial point, and has not been acknowledged widely among historians. Even at this date, Aileen Dunham is virtually alone in observing that British radicals were aware of the

³⁰³ For the display of liberty trees and liberty poles by Lower Canadian rebels, see Greer *The Patriots and the People*, pp. 196-7. For the use of these symbols in Ireland, see Curtin, *The United Irishmen*, pp. 249-51; for their appearance in Irish revolutionary poetry, see Georges-Denis Zimmerman, *Songs of the Irish Rebellion: Political Street Ballads and Rebel Songs 1780-1900*, (Hatboro, Pennsylvania, 1967), pp. 127-8, 310-11. For liberty trees and poles in Scotland, see Fraser, "Patterns of Protest", in Devine and Mitchison, *People and Society in Scotland*; as a part of English radical iconography, see James Epstein, "Understanding the Cap of Liberty: Symbolic Practice and Social Conflict in Early Nineteenth-Century England", *Past and Present*, vol. 122, (1989), pp. 75-118; in Revolutionary America, see Peter Shaw, *American Patriots and the Rituals of Revolution*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), pp. 180-84; in Revolutionary France, see Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*, (Berkeley, 1984), p. 59; and by British Isles political exiles in colonial Australia, see Whitaker, *Unfinished Revolution*, p. 97. For political charivaris in Lower Canada, see Greer, *The Patriots and the People*, pp. 242-56; for political charivaris in Scotland around the time of the 'Radical War', see Christopher Whatley, "Royal Day, People's Day", in Mason and Macdougall, *People and Power in Scotland*, pp. 182-3.

³⁰⁴ Quoted in Read and Stagg, *The Rebellion of 1837 in Upper Canada*, p. 71.

Canadian's reform efforts, and that the two groups shared very similar concerns, centered around vote by ballot.³⁰⁵

And, while prevented by distance from offering practical aid in the manner of the Americans, British radicals gave whatever moral support they could to the Canadian rebels, on one occasion urging them forward in a published address. Composed by the members of the artisan-led parliamentary reform club 'The London Working Men's Association', the message read as follows:

Friends in the Cause of Freedom - Brothers under Oppression: - and Fellow-Citizens living in Hope - we have witnessed with delight the noble spirit you have evinced against the despotic ordinances and tyrant mandates of your oppressors - inspired by the justice of your cause, you have nobly begun the glorious work of resistance. May the spirit of perseverance inspire you onward until your constitutional rights and wishes...[are] respected [and] your independence secured by a charter won by your bravery!... Onward, therefore, Brothers, in your struggle - you have justice on your side and good men's aspirations that you win...

This declaration, sent to newspapers in both Canadian provinces, ends, importantly, with its authors' acknowledgment of having "received, with considerable satisfaction" a copy of the rebels' "resolutions approving of our humble exertions in your behalf"³⁰⁶ – a statement that illustrates a back and forth pattern of communication, one which did not end with the Rebellion's failure. In December, 1837, the captured Upper Canadian carpenter, and later journalist, Benjamin Wait wrote, on behalf of himself and other rebels facing stiff punishments, to the English MP Joseph Hume – whom Mackenzie had met in London, remember – asking that Hume and his colleagues try to convince

³⁰⁵ "English radicals", writes Professor Dunham, "were in sympathy with the pretensions of the Canadian radicals; in fact, their programs of reform were almost identical. Retrenchment, abolition of monopolies,...vote by ballot, etc., were agitated equally in Great Britain and Canada." Even at this contemporary period, though, it seems that Canadian radicalism was already being interpreted in an American context: as Professor Dunham also notes, the English "took delight in foretelling [in Canada] a second American Revolution"; Dunham, *Political Protest in Upper Canada*, p. 139.

the British courts and the British government to free them. The British radicals responded by sending numerous letters and petitions, urging mercy, to authorities on both sides of the Atlantic, but without result.³⁰⁷

In the end, then, despite the importance of local conditions, and of local grievances which, for some rebels, justified involvement for non-political reasons, the Rebellion of 1837 is best understood as part of a wave of popular political reform which swept across the Western world in this period, a continuum stretching back to the disturbances of the 1780s and 1790s, and not as a mere domestic problem in the Canadas. Mackenzie's allusion to the Glorious Revolution of 1688 as justification for the insurrection was in perfect keeping with the British tradition of popular parliamentary reform, as was the movement for responsible government from which the Rebellion sprang. Further links to the British, and French, tradition were evinced during the Rebellion in the French Revolutionary symbols which characterized the Lower Canadian episode, and afterwards in the cross communication between rebels and radicals in Britain. Taken together, surely these argue for more than merely an American influence as a motivation for the uprising. Michael Cross, indeed, links the Rebellion to such wide-ranging episodes as the Decembrist revolt in Russia in 1825, the revolutions of 1830 in western and central Europe, the Chartist movement in Britain, and the revolutions of 1848 across Europe, and these do not seem outlandish connections to make. As he asks, why should Canada, alone among all other Western

³⁰⁶ 'The Address of the London Working Men's Association to the People of Canada, 1838.' *Canadian Institute of Historical Microreproductions: Pre-1900*. F1001 C1155, no. 36365.

³⁰⁷ For Wait's account of this, see Wait, *Letters from Van Dieman's Land: written during four years' imprisonment for political offenses*, p. 117; for a recent account, see Cross, "1837: The Necessary Failure", p. 145.

nations, “have avoided the contagion of freedom...everywhere striking against outworn autocracies”³⁰⁸ – of which British colonial rule in the Canadas was so obviously one?

To answer Cross's rhetorical question, the 'contagion of freedom' obviously was not avoided in colonial Canada. Widespread public support for the reform proposals of Robert Gourlay, the growing push for responsible government in the 1820s and 1830s, and of course the Rebellion itself are all evidence of this. Each was characterized by involvement either from British Isles émigré workingmen or British-born emergent bourgeois with labouring roots and with connections to the popular reform tradition. Gourlay was a Scotsman, the friend of leading English reformers such as Hunt and Cobbett, and in firm sympathy with the lower orders. The movement for responsible government was headed by plebeian-born Britons such as Mackenzie – admirer of the English radicals and friend of Joseph Hume – and James Lesslie. And the Rebellion was led by Mackenzie himself in Upper Canada, and characterized in both provinces by heavy involvement of English, Scottish, and Irish labouring immigrants. Of course, Americans and exposure to American republicanism were factors in early Canadian political life as well, but this has been well and often noted by historians. Generally speaking, the British Isles' connection has not.³⁰⁹

IV

Although this chapter has focused on such crises as the Gourlay episode and the 1837 Rebellion in order to highlight some of the obvious links between early Canadian

³⁰⁸ Cross, “1837: The Necessary Failure”, p. 147.

³⁰⁹ Nor did the transatlantic influence come to an end after the heat of the 1830s. Michael Vance observes numerous similarities between the 'Clear Grit' radical reform movement of 1850s Upper Canada and the contemporaneous British Chartist movement, indicating that colonial reform remained for decades tied to

radicalism and popular parliamentary reform in the British Isles, we need not look only to such outstanding examples as these to discern this connection. Evidence of this link can be found in even the simplest passages, provided only that we adjust our manner of interpretation. In his study of the Rebellion in Lower Canada, for example, Allan Greer cites an instance in 1837, when a shoemaker in the Lower Canadian village of Nicolet was overheard to state that democracy was the ability of “the people” to “place the crown” on the head of whichever individual they chose – “and if he did not behave properly as king, [to] replace him”. In this fashion, the shoemaker continued, “we should make ourselves independent like the American government.”³¹⁰ It may have been, as Greer admits, unsophisticated thinking, owing more to charismatic leadership than to the carefully articulated Paineite principles, but its essential thrust was republican nonetheless, and of course it demonstrated the familiar awareness of the American example. What the shoemaker himself probably missed, however – and what many later historians have certainly missed when citing such statements in order to strengthen claims concerning the impact of America on Canadian radicalism – is that the acknowledgment of American influence was itself a part of the British Isles tradition. After all, the use of American images to argue for reform had “a long history in British radicalism.”³¹¹ What is often needed to see the British influence, then, is simply an awareness of the circularity of transatlantic radicalism, of the ways in which influences ricocheted from nation to nation during that era, with one radical precedent reinforcing another. With this understanding, even such slight remarks as that of our shoemaker can be seen to point towards a transatlantic dimension not otherwise discernable. It is

wider movements of popular protest, in ways that only now are beginning to be examined. See Vance, “Scottish Chartism in Canada West?”.

³¹⁰ Greer, *The Patriots and the People*, p. 195.

³¹¹ Vance, “Scottish Chartism in Canada West?”, p. 11.

hoped that future discussions of early Canadian radicalism will explore this connection more fully.

Conclusion

If, as Elaine McFarland contends, the outward-looking and internationalist spirit of late eighteenth century popular radical activity has received too little attention from modern historical scholarship, then a similar argument can be put forward in regard to connections between popular reform movements in the British Isles and Imperial outposts such as New South Wales and Upper Canada.³¹² As has been demonstrated in this thesis, these connections were in fact considerable. The opening chapter showed that English, Scottish, Welsh, and Irish popular reform movements, beginning in the 1790s and lasting, despite a lull during the period of the Napoleonic Wars, into the 1820s, had numerous qualities in common. First, all were influenced by the American Revolution, the writings of Thomas Paine, the French Revolution, and an assortment of home-grown traditions of dissent. Secondly, all put together a nearly identical two-pronged parliamentary reform program consisting of manhood suffrage and annual parliaments. And thirdly, each was marked by a preponderance of plebeians and artisans among the rank and file, and often at higher levels, who clearly viewed themselves as working within a single overarching British Isles movement.

³¹² McFarland, "Scottish Radicalism in the Later Eighteenth Century", in Devine and Young, *Eighteenth Century Scotland*, p. 275.

The second chapter proceeded to trace the experiences of many of the British and Irish radical workingmen as political exiles in penal New South Wales in the 1800s, as well as others arriving at that period as free settlers to the colony, and to find in their activities – whether escape attempts, open rebellion, reformism, or efforts to achieve economic independence – a connecting ideological thread linking them to the Painite parliamentary reform movement at home. Finally, the third chapter demonstrated that, contrary to many accounts that stress an American influence only, radical British and Irish émigrés to Upper Canada in the 1820s and 1830s, both workingmen and emergent bourgeois, had a profound impact on the course of that province's political life, the push for responsible government and the Rebellion of 1837 in particular, and that, as in New South Wales, the values that powered these activities are traceable to the British Isles popular parliamentary reform movement.

Of course, this thesis has been far from exhaustive in its scope. An obvious issue that has remained largely unexplored is the gendered dimension of popular parliamentary reform.³¹³ With the rise of gender history since the 1960s, revisions have been offered concerning virtually all aspects of Western European history, and in recent years some of these revisions have been applied to popular radicalism in the revolutionary age. In some ways, this is despite the intentions of the radicals of the time, who in general showed little or no concern with attempting to extend voting rights to women between 1790 and 1830.³¹⁴ Grounded in the assumption that the skill and

³¹³ Brief gendered discussions have been conducted in some of this thesis' discursive footnotes: see nos. 81, 216, and 256.

³¹⁴ It was not until late 1839, when the failures of a planned general strike and insurrectionary plots made it necessary for the Chartists – originally a masculine movement based around chivalrous manhood – to expand their membership base, that labouring women were invited (albeit grudgingly) en masse into a popular parliamentary reform movement. In particular, Chartists needed to appeal to women workers in the north of England, where women composed over half the labour force in the cotton industry. Nor, in general, were Chartist leaders disappointed with the results: by the year's end, there were over a hundred and fifty female Chartist associations in England, and at least twenty-five in Scotland, and in both nations women were active in mass demonstrations, the gathering of signatures on petitions, and the boycotting of

respectability which qualified one to vote was a masculine monopoly, the artisan ethos was democratic in only a limited sense, and by definition exclusive of women. While it is true that some radicals, such as the weaver and Hampden Club member Samuel Bamford, welcomed women's political participation at reform meetings, such open-mindedness was rare.³¹⁵ Despite the egalitarian implications of Paineite ideology, for most radicals of the period "the Rights of Man really were the rights of man", as David Wilson dryly phrases the matter.³¹⁶ Consequently, where women were seen in a consistent protest capacity at all during these decades, it was usually – though not always – in economic revolt, particularly in informal, community-based crowd actions such as price-fixing food riots, rather than in formal political agitation.³¹⁷

Since the question of gender was hardly raised at the time, a problem for modern historians, then, is how to approach political reformism with a concern for the female

shopkeepers who refused to support the movement. Despite this, masculine bias returned as the organization regained strength in the mid-1840s, and women were pushed out of the movement. For discussions of the female Chartist experience, see David Jones, "Women and Chartism", *History*, vol. 68 (1983), pp. 1-21; Jutta Schwarzkopf, *Women in the Chartist Movement*, (London, 1991); and Anna Clark, "Manhood, Womanhood and Class in Britain, 1790-1845", in Laura Frader and Sonya Rose, ed., *Gender and Class in Modern Europe*, (Ithaca, 1996), and Clark, *Struggle for the Breeches*, Chapter 12, "Chartism", and Chapter 13, "Chartism and the Problem of Women Workers". The literature on Chartism is very large; a thorough overview of the movement is Dorothy Thompson, *The Chartists: Popular Politics in the Industrial Revolution*, (New York, 1984).

³¹⁵ As mentioned in ft. 81, Bamford initiated a motion to allow women to vote at meetings; see Bamford, *Passages in the Life of a Radical*, p. 165.

³¹⁶ Wilson, *United Irishmen, United States*, p. 143. For recent discussions of masculinity as a prerequisite for political rights, see Clark, *Struggle for the Breeches*, Chapter 8, "Manhood and Citizenship"; and Keith McClelland, "Rational and Respectable Men: Gender, Class, and Citizenship in Britain, 1850-1867", in Frader and Rose, eds., *Gender and Class in Modern Europe*. For masculinity as an important component of the artisan self-image, see Keith McClelland, "Masculinity and the 'Representative Artisan' in Britain, 1850-80", in Michael Roper and John Tosh, eds., *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800*, (London, 1991).

³¹⁷ See, for example, Ruth L. Smith and Deborah M. Valenze, "Mutuality and Marginality: Liberal Moral Theory and Working-Class Women in Nineteenth Century England", *Signs*, vol. 13 (1988), pp. 277-98; John Bohstedt, "Gender, Household and Community Politics: Women in English Riots, 1790-1810", *Past and Present*, vol. 120 (1988), pp. 88-122; and Catherine Hill, "The Tale of Samuel and Jemima: Gender and Working-Class Culture in Early Nineteenth-Century England", in her *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History*, (Cambridge, 1992). Pre-Chartists exceptions include Irish women serving, to a limited extent, as activists with the United Irish organization, and also, in a more general sense, as symbols of an oppressed nation. See Nancy Curtin, "Women and Eighteenth-century Irish Republicanism", in Margaret MacCurtain and Mary O'Dowd, eds., *Women in Early Modern Ireland*, (Edinburgh, 1991), pp. 133-44. And economic riots themselves often were intended to act as

experience, without claiming larger experience than can be supported by the evidence.³¹⁸ To this point, several approaches have been tried. Firstly, scholars have attempted to understand the origins of the exclusion of women from active political participation, by exploring the psychological and sexual tensions within contemporary artisan communities, and thereby identifying the source of the 'separate spheres' ideology that relegated women to a domestic role. Anna Clark, for example, suggests that England's male artisan population, feeling increasingly emasculated in their public capacity by the industrialization of the workplace, were that much more determined to reaffirm their private authority as men, by domination of the household and of the female family members within it. Clark concludes that, ironically, reform among the labouring population was less, rather than more, radical as a result of external economic pressures, because the patriarchy, and even the misogyny, inherent in artisan culture prevented working men from seeing women as potential partners, and thus from forging what could perhaps have been a formidable united front between the sexes. Their radicalism muted by sexual antagonism, Clark's interpretation of the early nineteenth century labour movement casts it, in the end, as "a tragedy rather than a melodrama".³¹⁹

A second gendered approach resists this first interpretation, and stresses instead the inter-penetration and symbiotic nature of the separate spheres, exploring the ways in

complements to male political protest; see John Stevenson, "Food Riots in England", in *Popular Protest and Public Order*, J. Stevenson and R. Quinault, eds., (London, 1974).

³¹⁸ A problem explored by Joan Wallach Scott, in her *Gender and the Politics of History*, (New York, 1988), Part 1, "Toward a Feminist History".

³¹⁹ Clark, *Struggle for the Breeches*, p. 271. In suggesting that artisans felt emasculated by industrialization, Clark is merely echoing a contemporary viewpoint; for example, in his landmark 1845 study *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, Friedrich Engels charged that the factory system "virtually turned [men] into eunuchs". Engels, *Condition of the Working Class in England*, W.O. Henderson and W.H. Chaloner, eds., (Stanford, 1968 edition), p. 162. Clark's *Struggle for the Breeches* is, by the author's own admission, a conscious attempt to construct a gendered version of Thompson's *Making of the English Working Class*, a book that was criticized by Joan Wallach Scott for ignoring women; see Clark, *Struggle for the Breeches*, pp. 1-4, and Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, p. 74.

which, despite the prohibition against active political involvement, women found ways to aid the reform movement from behind the scenes, by being supportive and care-giving as mothers, wives, and sisters. This is the narrative told, for example, by Nancy Curtin concerning the life and activities of Matilda Tone, wife of United Irish leader and 1798 rebel Wolfe Tone. "Tone", Curtin concludes, "could never have done what he did without Matilda's republican virtue – her encouragement, and...her ability to manage their affairs so skillfully as to leave him free to bustle in the world."³²⁰ Comparable is Jack Cahill's discussion of Maria Wait, the wife of the 1837 Upper Canadian rebel Benjamin Wait. No less an opponent of what she termed the "legalized oppression" of the Family Compact than was Wait himself, Maria Wait supported her husband in his resistance, and, after the Rebellion's collapse, became famous among the captured rebels for what one called her "devoted and heroic services" to their collective welfare, pleading, often successfully, for mercy on their behalf.³²¹ This is a gendered vision similar to that of 'republican motherhood' offered in the context of early America, according to which view women were consciously educated in the principles of

³²⁰ Nancy Curtin, "Matilda Tone and virtuous femininity", in Keogh and Furlong, eds., *The Women of 1798*, pp.26-46; p. 45. Professor Curtin centres a similar discussion around one Mary Ann McCracken, the sister of the United Irish activist and 1798 rebel Henry McCracken, and herself a fervent republican; see Margaret MacCurtain and Mary O'Dowd, eds., *Women in Early Modern Ireland*, (Edinburgh, 1991), Chapter 8, "Women and Eighteenth-Century Irish Republicanism".

³²¹ Quoted in Cahill, *Forgotten Patriots*, p. 145. Maria Wait's accomplishments on the Canadian rebels' behalf were indeed impressive. Campaigning in both England and Upper Canada, she succeeded in having her husband's death sentence commuted to transportation to New South Wales, helped the rebel James Gemmell to settle in America after his escape from exile aboard a whaling vessel, and was instrumental in the process of securing eventual tickets of leave for almost all of the Upper Canadian state prisoners in Van Diemen's Land who chose to return home. Nor was even this the extent of her reform activity. While in England, she met and worked briefly with the famous prison reformer Elizabeth Fry, organizing prayer meetings for convicts in England and in New South Wales; she was also, in letters to her exiled husband (which were published in Wait's *Letters from Van Diemen's Land*), outspoken in her opposition to the "demon" of American slavery, and attended a London abolitionist conference. In addition, she was a keen observer of English political affairs, and wrote of the transportation of the Chartists, the "odious" church rates, and of an excursion to hear the Irish radical Daniel O'Connell. Maria Wait's own account of her post-Rebellion activity is contained in her numerous and lengthy letters to Wait, which constitute roughly the last third of his *Letters from Van Diemen's Land* – for which book, in its original edition, she justly received co-author credit; for the activities listed above, see *Letters from Van Diemen's Land*, pp. 300-8, 309, 315-16. Most recently, her career is recounted in Cahill, *Forgotten Patriots*; see Chapter 3, "A Remarkable Women", and also pp. 50-52, 143-45.

republicanism for the greater good of the community, becoming the 'republican mother' and the 'republican wife' who would teach, in turn, future generations to act honourably and democratically. In this interpretation, the domestic world is itself politicized, the status of women transformed from an ancillary role into one in which they serve both as examples of republican probity, and as important transmitters of republican values.³²²

Thirdly, work has been done to show the ways in which political discourse was itself gendered, shaping the references by which political power was conceived, legitimated, and criticized, and defining the types of behavior and morality needed to sustain a desirable political system. For example, in the context of Upper Canadian radicalism, Cecilia Morgan observes the common tactic of both conservatives and reformers to brand the other side with labels associated with femininity – such as 'hysterical', or 'unmanly', or 'effeminate' – hoping thereby to show them as unworthy of participation in political affairs, which was after all a masculine privilege and prerogative.³²³ Of course, ad hominem attacks were neither new nor unique to Upper Canada – rather, they have always been a central component of democratic politics. But what has not been

³²² See Linda K. Kerber, "The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment – An American Perspective", *American Quarterly*, vol. 27 (1976), pp.187-205; Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America*, (Chapel Hill, 1980); Jan Lewis, "The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic", *William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 44 (1987), pp. 689-721; and, in the context of United Irish émigrés in early America, in Wilson, *United Irishmen, United States*, Chapter 7, "No Excluded Class". The notion of the 'republican mother' fits into the larger framework of a contemporary debate over the nature of women's education: should the emphasis be on teaching them facts or morals, on cultivating their minds or their sensibilities? See A. Browne, *The Eighteenth-Century Feminist Mind*, (Detroit, 1987).

³²³ As mentioned previously in ft. 278, Professor Morgan observes that Robert Gourlay campaigned for political change in Upper Canada by attacking the manliness of the conservatives in authority, describing them as luxury-loving, degraded, and immoral, opposite qualities to what he called the "manly spirit" that was needed to guide to province. Twenty years later, the same masculine-feminine juxtaposition was used in the war of words that led up to the 1837 Rebellion. William Lyon Mackenzie, for example, was mocked by members of the Upper Canadian establishment for, among other things, wearing a hairpiece, which they believed symbolized not only his "unmanly vanity", but also his political hypocrisy, since it allowed him to hide his true appearance as well as, it would follow, his true motives; Mackenzie responded with gendered attacks of his own, referring to the colonial elite as "Old Ladies"; Morgan, "Ranting Renegades and Corseted Sycophants: Political Languages in Upper Canada", Chapter 2 in Morgan, *Public Men and Virtuous Women*. Anna Clark makes a similar observation concerning contemporary English politics; "radicals", she suggests, "attempted to buttress their demands for parliamentary reform and universal

sufficiently noted by historians, Morgan claims, is the gendered nature of such epithets, revelatory of the way in which, even in the physical absence of women, political struggles were shaped by images of the feminine. The *idea* of women, and the issue of their protection, was central, then, to men's participation in political life and the state, however much women themselves were considered unfit to participate, a fact which modern scholarship is only now beginning to recognize.

A second topic neglected in this thesis is popular political radicalism and race in the context of the British Isles, New South Wales, and Upper Canada. There is a reason for this omission: as with women, white plebeians and artisans generally considered blacks, natives and mulattos as undeserving of political rights, and consequently made little effort to bring such groups into the fold of the reform movements. This fact notwithstanding, one cannot help but be struck by the relative lack of British, Australian and Canadian scholarship relating to the colour question, especially when compared to the sophisticated historiography surrounding race and reform in America³²⁴. Regarding English radical workingmen and race, Iain McCalman has studied the mulatto artisan Robert Wedderburn, but in essence concludes only that Wedderburn's skin colour did not seem to have been a factor in his career as a reformer.³²⁵ Concerning New South

manhood suffrage by attacking the masculinity of their aristocratic opponents, thus undermining their claims to rule." Clark, *Struggle for the Breeches*, pp. 154-57.

³²⁴ Notable studies include Bernard Mandel, *Labor: Free and Slave: Workingmen and the Anti-Slavery Movement in the United States*, (New York, 1955), Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*, and Paul Gilje and Howard Rock, *Keepers of the Revolution: New Yorkers at Work in the Early Republic*, (Ithaca, 1992), Chapter 5, "African Americans: Extending the Bounds of Republicanism". There are also, in the American context, studies focusing on Native Americans and radical revolutionary politics; see George F.G. Stanley, "The Six Nations and the American Revolution", *Ontario History*, vol. 56, (1964), pp. 217-32; and Barbara Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution*, (Syracuse, 1972).

³²⁵ See McCalman, "Anti-Slavery and Ultra-Radicalism in Early Nineteenth-Century England: The Case of Robert Wedderburn", *Slavery and Abolition*, vol. 7 (1986), pp. 99-117; and McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, pp. 124-48. Although McCalman uses Wedderburn's life partly as a vehicle to discuss race and anti-slavery in the context of English plebeian society, the circle in which Wedderburn moved – filled with down-and-out tradesmen, prostitutes, pornographers, and midget shoemakers such as Samuel Waddington and an individual known only as 'Warry' – seems unrepresentative, and Wedderburn's experiences therefore somewhat atypical. The situation was atypical too in that Wedderburn and his colleagues were Spencean, rather than Painite, reformers.

Wales and Upper Canada, in which native populations were pushed forcefully aside by whites in the quest for settlement, much has been done, especially in recent years, to explore the tensions and other aspects of the relations between the two groups³²⁶. As of yet, however, this interest has not translated into attempts to bring aboriginal groups into the study of early political reform.³²⁷ Perhaps this is because radicalism in Imperial outposts strikes modern scholars as having been so obviously a white man's prerogative, and thus by definition an unrewarding field for study. As with the American historiography, though, the limitations of the white workingmen's egalitarianism are well highlighted when considered in the context of race, and explorations of why it was that blacks, mulattos and natives were considered unworthy of a political voice could reveal much about the everyday assumptions of life in New South Wales and Upper Canada.

Gaps in the historiography surrounding popular radicalism in the British Isles and Imperial outposts caused by the relative dearth of gender and race studies do not prevent us, however, from making several confident conclusions about plebeian and artisan political protest in the years between 1790 and 1838. We have seen that, in each British Isles nation, workingmen's parliamentary reform movements had similarities of origin, of goals, and of agitation methods. We have also seen that these movements were transferred, and on occasion modified, to confront the peculiar

³²⁶ In the New South Wales context, see for example A.T. Yarwood and M. Knowling, *Race Relations in Australia: A History*, (Sydney, 1982); Hughes, *The Fatal Shore*, Chapter 8, "Bunters, Mollies and Sable Brethren"; A. Hamilton, "Fear and Desire: Aborigines, Asians and the National Imagery", *Australian Cultural History*, vol. 9 (1990), pp. 22-39; and Ann McGrath, "The White Man's Looking Glass: Aboriginal-Colonial Gender Relations at Port Jackson", *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 24 (1990), pp. 189-206. In the context of Upper Canada, see Peter S. Schmalz, *The Ojibwa of Southern Ontario*, (Toronto, 1991), and Olive Patricia Dickason, *Canada's First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times*, (Toronto, 1997).

³²⁷ For example, the only reference to native reaction to the Rebellion of 1837 in Olive Dickason's otherwise exhaustive study of Canada's Indians is a brief reference to the Saugeen Ojibwa tribe, who volunteered to help the authorities crush the rebels. The need never developed, however. See Dickason, *Canada's First Nations*, p. 212. For later periods, scholarship does exist regarding Canadian aboriginal people and political dissent. The 1885 Metis Rebellion has commanded a good deal of study, for example. See Thomas Flanagan, *Riel and the Rebellion: 1885 Reconsidered*, (Saskatoon, 1983), and Bob Beal and Rod Macleod, *Prairie Fire: The 1885 North-West Rebellion*, (Edmonton, 1984). For natives and reform in

conditions facing political exiles in penal New South Wales in the 1800s, and radical émigrés to Upper Canada in the 1820s and 1830s, without losing certain recognizably British ideological values. And finally, we have seen, in the process of this thesis, that British Isles popular political reform in the age of revolution was neither anarchic nor ill-defined, and that, contrary to the opinion of some scholars, its tenets were understood and absorbed by the labouring men who formed the rank and file in various movements', as well as those workers who often assumed higher positions. It is hoped that subsequent studies will expand upon what has been demonstrated in this thesis, particularly regarding popular radicalism in the comparatively neglected contexts of New South Wales and Upper Canada.

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