

### SHORT ABSTRACT:

This thesis focusses upon the political career of one of the most popular radicals of the early nineteenth century, and yet a politician whose significance has been vastly underestimated. The thesis argues that Sir Francis Burdett's position inside the established political world, he was M.P. for Westminster from 1807 to 1837, made him absolutely vital to grassroots political radicalism. His willingness to champion the cause of parliamentary reform enabled a national rejuvenation of the radical cause to take place after the success of Pitt's repressive legislation in the 1790s. Following a chronological pattern, this thesis therefore traces Burdett's early campaigns for Middlesex in 1802 and 1804; his election for Westminster in 1807; his protest against the government in 1810; his leadership of the reform cause up to 1815; his break with other radical leaders in 1817; his subsequent role as an independent politician, and his part in the passing of the Reform Bill.

The thesis argues that Burdett was not a wildly inconsistent politician, a view shared by contemporaries and historians, but was the very model of an early eighteenth century country gentleman. He was obsessed with independence, both as a political creed and code, and espoused an essentially moderate, and intrinsically English reform programme. Burdett's career is therefore a striking illustration of the immense longevity and popularity of early eighteenth century values right up to 1832. This thesis hopes to reveal the vital importance of the aristocratic politician to popular politics in the period, and to emphasise the eccentric, insular and retrospective character of English radicalism in these years.

### ABSTRACT:

The purpose of this thesis is to trace and explain the political career of the radical politician, Sir Francis Burdett. Although a vast amount of research has been centred upon radical politics from the 1790s to 1832 in the years after the publication of E.P. Thompson's 'A History of the English Working Class', Burdett himself has received no specific attention. Previous to this thesis, there was an uncritical study of Burdett's life and times by M.W. Patterson published in 1931. John Dinwiddy, in his article in *History* 1980, 'Sir Francis Burdett and Burdettite Radicalism', pointed to the absence of any readily available modern scholarship upon Burdett and this thesis now aims to provide a study to fill that gap.

Historians have often described the forty years before the first Reform Bill as a period in which men from outside the circle of a hitherto largely aristocratic and landowner dominated political world, began to flex some sort of organised political muscle, and to demand, with increasing vigour, the revision of a political system that appeared restrictive and full of anomalies in the context of a developing social and economic nation. Much research has therefore been focussed on, for example, the political clubs and societies that appeared in Britain as a result of the example of the Revolution in France, on the results of extended channels of political information reaching men of many social ranks, and on the attempts to organise working men during the years after the conclusion of the war against France in 1815. But the pressure exerted by men outside the electoral system in favour of Parliamentary Reform has all too often in the past been described as a constant and increasingly powerful factor upon the political scene in general. This thesis rather takes its place alongside those who see any progress towards the 1832 Reform Bill as a far less inexorable and uncertain movement, and it would hope to reveal that the radical leadership, in these years, was far from united; that it comprised men who had different aims, and who were forced together in an uneasy alliance by the pressure of a wartime

situation up to 1815. It argues that these men turned against each other with the same hostility as the established political world showed to reformers in general after that date. Recent biographies of Major John Cartwright, William Cobbett and Henry Hunt have provided valuable portraits of three of the leading radical personalities of these years. There has, however, been no recent study of Burdett, even though he was a hugely popular political hero for many radicals all over the country up to 1820, and even though he was feared, in equal measure as a potential demagogue by men in government. In short, he was one of the most widely publicised political figures of his day.

In contrast to the other leading personalities in the radical movement named above, Burdett was one of the few radical leaders who had a seat inside the House of Commons before 1830. For much of the period, he was the only M.P. in the House who consistently championed the grievances, and articulated some of the aspirations about Parliamentary Reform, of those men who had no recognised political voice themselves. Remove Burdett from the political scene and it would be difficult to envisage any other politician who would have filled such a role. The reform reputations of Lord Cochrane and Sir John Hobhouse came from their association with Burdett himself. Lord Folkestone was prepared to raise his voice against specific measures of repressive government legislation but would not embrace the cause of parliamentary reform. Other potential popular champions, such as Whitbread and Brougham, were ultimately too closely connected and concerned with the direction of the Whig party for them consistently to champion radical causes. As a leading man of property who was, nevertheless, prepared to voice the cause of parliamentary reform at a time when his social peers were closing ranks against the discussion of the subject, and as a man of property who was prepared to challenge the passage of legislation designed to silence the voice of the unenfranchised, Burdett demands close attention.

Several historians have focussed on the metropolitan radical scene in which

Burdett played a leading role. The organisation of the Capital's radical politics, the activities of the radical press there, and the social projects promoted by men like Francis Place have all received attention and Burdett's participation in many of these areas has been charted to some degree. But there is a case for directing attention specifically towards him for he was the one figure opinion outside parliament expected to spearhead many radical projects.

This thesis aims to explain how it was that Burdett became involved with radicals outside his own social sphere, and it aims to assess his value both to these men and to those in the established political world who were, from time to time, his more natural political associates. This thesis focusses upon Burdett's own political aims and programme, and where these conflict with the policies of men like Cobbett and Hunt, it suggests that a far more diverse picture of the content of English radicalism should be acknowledged. Indeed, this thesis seeks to prove that the political programme championed by Burdett belongs to the 1720s and 1730s rather than to his own day, and in the light of this discovery, an attempt is made to explain both its suitability and limitations as a remedy for a range of political issues before 1832. The thesis examines whether Burdett's ideas were workable, and attempts to evaluate for how long they answered the needs of radicals both nationally and in the Westminster constituency whose representative he was from 1807 to 1837.

Source material that is central to studies of the radical movement in general has obviously been of great value in compiling a study of Burdett. The collection of radical sources in the Place MSS. in the British Library has been invaluable, as has the most prominent radical journal of the time, Cobbett's *Political Register*. But whilst using these sources, a critical eye has, at the same time, been cast over some of their conclusions. With government sources, and in particular with the reports of various spies in Westminster circles back to officials at the Home Office, it is hoped to demonstrate that Burdett had quite different aims from those ascribed to him by hostile critics. The wide variety of

conclusions about Burdett, from both friend and foe, have thus been questioned. In order to gain an assessment of Burdett and his ideas, rather more attention has been directed to his own speeches, to the Burdett MSS. in the Bodleian Library, and to the manuscript collections of friends and associates. Of particular interest and value have been the letters between Arthur O'Connor and Burdett in Dublin, the correspondence between Grey and Burdett for the years 1830 to 1832, located in the Bodleian Library and Durham University Library, the personal correspondence between Burdett and Sir George Sinclair in MSS. belonging to Lord Thurso, and the correspondence between Burdett and Sir John Hobhouse in the British Library.

Chapter 1 of the thesis reveals the path by which Burdett strayed into radical and Foxite circles, and it details his friendship with both the Irishman Arthur O'Connor and the English radical, John Horne Tooke. The chapter sets out a chain of events that is completely neglected or unexplained in Patterson's biography. It also provides the historical background and context for the reform ideas Burdett was to champion throughout his career. This background centres upon the elaboration of an opposition 'country' creed in the 1720s and 1730s to what was perceived to be the increasing and destabilising influences of various sorts of corruption promoted, chiefly by Walpole, in the political world. From the very start of his own career, Burdett, like these earlier 'country' politicians, is revealed to be obsessed with the battle against corrupt placemen and against those whose wealth derived from extended credit operations to support a huge National Debt.

Chapter 2 describes the various aspects of the peculiarly English reform programme that Burdett inherited from John Horne Tooke and the opposition politicians of the 1730s, and it focusses upon Burdett's first presentation of these ideas in the House of Commons in the years 1796 to 1802. Both these chapters establish a clear distinction between Burdett's ideas and those of reformers who looked rather to Painite reforms based on theories of natural

rights. The chapter goes on to examine Burdett's investigation into the abuses at Cold Bath Fields Prison. This is shown to result in his promotion as a radical candidate for Middlesex in 1802 and 1804 and the consequences of Burdett's new role as a radical champion are discussed. The repercussions of his activities in these years extend to his father-in-law, the banker, Thomas Coutts; to his political allies up to this point, the Foxite Whigs; and to new radical supporters in the metropolis.

Chapter 3 traces Burdett's disillusion with the Talents Ministry, and argues that this was the impulse to the campaign for 'independence' which resulted in Burdett's successful return for Westminster in 1807. The implications of Burdett's attachment to independence for radicals in the Capital, and for the Whig party, to whom Burdett showed an increased hostility, are discussed. The differences in political creeds between Burdett and the Whigs receive particular attention, especially their conflicting views about party. The chapter goes on to focus upon Burdett's campaigns against corruption; it explains his reasons for opposing it, and it discusses his remedy, a Reform motion in Parliament in 1809.

Chapter 4 concentrates firstly upon Burdett's dramatic protest on behalf of John Gales Jones, which resulted in his imprisonment in the Tower from April to June 1810. The incident is shown to mark the apotheosis of Burdett as the champion of traditional English liberties, and to result in him gaining a nationwide political reputation as a popular champion. But the second half of the chapter suggests the important differences amongst radical leaders that became increasingly visible in the period 1810 to 1815. Burdett's preferences about the direction and aims of reformers, and in particular his support for the Hampden Clubs, are discussed in detail for they emphasise the consistency of his own programme, and indicate the potential areas of disagreement in later years with other radical leaders.

Chapter 5 describes the fragmentation of the radical leadership in the period 1815 to 1821, and the series of stormy Westminster elections that were

the result of these public disagreements. The chapter seeks to prove that during his defence of his position in Westminster, Burdett was entirely consistent in his reform ideas and in the methods he sought for their implementation. The chapter discusses how he answered his radical critics' accusations that he had abandoned the cause of reform. Burdett's progress to an independent political position, free of all party ties is traced. Particular notice is taken of Burdett's relationship with the Whigs in 1819, and it is suggested that despite a series of superficial and acrimonious exchanges with them, it was Burdett's aim to encourage a broad, non-party consensus in favour of moderate reform. The chapter concludes by focussing on the results of Burdett's unequivocal response to the Peterloo massacre in 1819.

Chapter 6 attempts to assess whether or not Burdett's political programme had any value, or provided any real remedy, for a range of problems in Britain in the 1820s. The limitations of Burdett's constitutional ideas are highlighted during the political crisis of 1827, but his shortcomings in this sphere are seen to be more than counterbalanced by his important role as an independent politician during the campaign for Catholic Emancipation and in the negotiations to form the Canning government. The chapter argues that in contrast to the vast majority of M.P.s, Burdett was most at his ease in these issues that cut across all party lines, and that this was a natural result of his abiding attachment to the eighteenth century ideal of independence.

Chapter 7 hinges upon Burdett's interpretation of the 1832 Reform Bill. His ideas about the Bill are stressed for they are shown to dictate all his subsequent political actions in the 1830s. The chapter argues that events in 1835 bear witness to the inadequacy of Burdett's rigid eighteenth century constitutional ideas. Prior to this conclusion, however, Burdett's value as a reform spokesman is highlighted by describing in detail his role as a mediator between Grey and radicals outside the House of Commons in the period 1830 to 1832.

What are the wider results of this study of Burdett? Firstly, his

relationship with the Whig party sheds yet more light upon that party's internal disunity, and in particular, it clearly indicates the great differences in the party over the commitment to reform. The disagreements between Burdett and the Whigs about party loyalty also contribute to the complex picture of the way in which party feeling promoted or hindered decisive political action in these years.

Secondly, the distinctive stamp of Burdett's Reform programme raises questions about the content and diversity of English radicalism before 1832. The promotion of this 'country' creed weaves an important strand in to the blossoming picture of the radical movement. Burdett's popularity reveals that although his ideas were deeply embedded in the past, and were, to a large degree, based on popular myths, they were, nevertheless, particularly suitable vehicles through which to articulate a range of political, social and economic grievances in early nineteenth century Britain.

Thirdly, this study questions the often assumed amount of influence exerted by radicals outside the House of Commons upon the political scene as a whole. This thesis would like to suggest that men such as Place and Cobbett needed a person of Burdett's standing to give the cutting edge to the reform cause, and to give publicity about reform ideas to men of all social ranks. Such a conclusion would suggest a vital role, as agents of change, for men from within the established political world of the House of Commons in the years before 1832.



THE POLITICAL CAREER OF SIR FRANCIS BURDETT



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## ABBREVIATIONS AND SHORT TITLES

Bodl. Lib.	:	Bodleian Library
B.L. Add. MSS	:	British Library, Additional Manuscripts
Beds. C.R.O.	:	Bedford County Record Office
Eng. Hist. Rev.	:	English Historical Review
I.S.P.O.	:	Irish State Paper Office
P.R.O./H.O.	:	Public Record Office, Home Office Papers
P.R.O./P.C.	:	Public Record Office, Privy Council Papers
P.R.O./T.S.	:	Public Record Office, Treasury Solicitor's Papers
<i>An Authentic Narrative</i>	:	<i>An Authentic Narrative of the Events of the Westminster Election, 13 Feb. to 3 Mar. 1819, compiled by Order of the Committee appointed to manage the Election of Mr. Hobhouse</i> (London 1819)
Lord Broughton, <i>Recollections</i>	:	Lord Broughton, <i>Recollections of a Long Life</i> , ed. Lady Dorchester, 6 vols. (London 1909)
Colchester	:	<i>The Diary and Correspondence of Charles Abbot, Lord Colchester</i> , ed. 2nd Lord Colchester, 3 vols. (London 1861)
Greville, <i>Journal</i>	:	<i>A Journal of the Reigns of King George IV, King William IV and Queen Victoria by the late C.F. Greville</i> , ed. H. Reeve, 8 vols. (London 1882)
Patterson	:	<i>Sir Francis Burdett and His Times</i> , M.W. Patterson, 2 vols. (London 1931)
<i>Pol. Reg.</i>	:	<i>Cobbett's Political Register</i>
<i>A Report .... of the late contested Election for Middlesex</i>	:	<i>A Report of the Proceedings during the late contested election for the County of Middlesex including the state of each day's Poll with the addresses and speeches of Messrs. Byng, Mainwaring, and Sir Francis Burdett with many other interesting particulars</i> (London 1802)
Stevens, <i>Journal</i>	:	<i>The Journal of the Revd. William Bagshaw Stevens</i> , ed. G. Galbraith (Oxford 1965)

## CHAPTER 1: THE FOUNDATIONS OF A RADICAL

The foundations of Sir Francis Burdett's involvement with political radicalism receive very unsatisfactory treatment in the biography by M.W. Patterson, *Sir Francis Burdett and his Times*.<sup>1</sup> This chapter aims to give a far more scholarly and accurate explanation. The chapter traces the fortuitous path by which Burdett strayed from an impeccable, country gentleman background into extremely radical, potentially treasonable, associations. It reveals his friendship with his estate's chaplain, the Rev. William Bagshaw Stevens,<sup>2</sup> a man of reforming sympathies; his introduction to Lansdowne circles through his marriage into the Coutts family; and thence his progression into Foxite Whig, Irish and English radical circles. This path has hitherto been totally obscure; much of the material that has been drawn upon was unavailable, and indeed unknown to Patterson.<sup>3</sup> Burdett's early associations and the views he then absorbed are crucial to an understanding of his politics for they establish the foundations for views that he held consistently throughout his career.

The chapter argues that despite his country gentleman background, Burdett revealed a startling political rootlessness and consequently a desire for a guide and political mentor, first in the shape of Stevens, then the Irishman, Arthur O'Connor, and finally the English radical, John Horne Tooke.<sup>4</sup> This desire for a political mentor is one that was to prove a constant feature of Burdett's career and it is the first crucial point to be grasped. The second point, and one of even more importance, is that the friendship with Horne Tooke provided Burdett with a political creed. This creed was an exclusively English political reform

<sup>1</sup>M.W. Patterson, *Sir Francis Burdett and his Times* (London 1931), 2 vols.

<sup>2</sup>Rev. William Bagshaw Stevens (1755-1800) Headmaster of Repton School and Domestic Chaplain to the Burdetts at Foremark.

*The Journal of the Rev. William Bagshaw Stevens*, ed. G. Galbraith (Oxford 1965)

<sup>3</sup>This applies specifically to *The Journal of the Rev. William Bagshaw Stevens*, ed. G. Galbraith (Oxford 1965); I.S.P.O. 620/15/3/21-6 (Rebellion Papers) for correspondence between Burdett and O'Connor; William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Shelburne Papers, 1,6,7,8,10,11 for correspondence between Coutts and Lansdowne.

<sup>4</sup>Arthur O'Connor, 1765-1852, for more details see below pp. 7-14; John Horne Tooke, 1736-1812, for more details see below pp. 15-24.

programme that had its roots in the early eighteenth century. A clear understanding of this fact is central to the argument of this thesis for it dictated Burdett's reform programme, his political expectations and behaviour throughout his career.

Francis Burdett was born on 25 January 1770. His grandfather<sup>1</sup>, the fourth Baronet, presided over the family estates centred on Foremark in Derbyshire. The Burdetts had held land there ever since the Conquest and the family could thus claim to be one of the oldest members of those ranks of landed country gentlemen that were so central to the structure of English political and social life. The landed wealth of the Burdetts was extensive. Stevens, the resident Chaplain at Foremark, calculated that Francis would inherit an income of about £13,000 p.a. on the deaths of his grandfather, father and aunt.<sup>2</sup> Stevens gives a vivid picture of life at Foremark, a life typical of the provincial landowner. Sir Robert's sentiments were the essentially Tory principles of the country gentleman. In typical backwoods fashion, life on the estate and gossip about its inhabitants and neighbours was the order of the day rather than any concern with national affairs. There was one overwhelming priority: 'The Bart. cannot exist without his evening rubber.'<sup>3</sup> This then was Burdett's family and home background.

He underwent the traditional education of a gentleman attending Westminster School and Christ Church, Oxford.<sup>4</sup> Burdett kept only a year at Christ Church and left in the spring of 1788.<sup>5</sup> From there he embarked on the 'Grand Tour' of Europe. In April 1789 he was at Paris; he went on to Switzerland, Italy, Austria, Germany and returned to London in July 1791. As with all English aristocrats on the continent, Burdett went to balls, assemblies,

<sup>1</sup>Sir Robert Burdett, 4th Bt. (1716-97)

<sup>2</sup>Stevens, *Journal*, p.107. Burdett's father was Francis Burdett (1743-94); his aunt was Lady Jones, co-heiress of Sir William Jones of Ramsbury Manor, Wilts. with Burdett's mother, Eleanor. She died in 1783 and Lady Jones died childless in 1800.

<sup>3</sup>*ibid.* p.15

<sup>4</sup>M.W. Patterson, i. 6-8.

<sup>5</sup>Information on Burdett's career at Christ Church is supplied by kind permission of Mrs. J. Wells, Archivist. Christ Church MSS. li.b.2.

kept the best company and was presented to the Emperor.<sup>1</sup> Although there is no positive confirmation, all the available information points to Burdett meeting his future bride, Sophia Coutts, at some stage during his Grand Tour. Thomas Coutts, the royal banker sent two of his three daughters to Paris in July 1787 to finish their education. The whole family was in Paris in the spring of 1789 and went on to an Italian tour in 1790. Both these periods correspond with Burdett's visits to these places, and although there is no record of a meeting, they must have socialised in the same aristocratic circles. This supposition is confirmed by a letter from the Duke of York to Coutts in May 1791: 'I take care to see all the gentlemen you was so good as to recommend to me', and he distinguished only one by name, Mr. Burdett.<sup>2</sup> One can only presume from this that Burdett did meet Sophia on the continent. The two would be hardly likely to have met otherwise for Burdett's family was unlikely to mix with a royal banker who had no landed property. Sir Robert was indeed exceedingly suspicious of the Coutts's.<sup>3</sup> Thomas Coutts's own comment confirms that the match was indeed the result of a chance meeting between the pair.<sup>4</sup> Sophia and Francis were married quietly in London on 5 August 1793.<sup>5</sup> Besides inheriting a handsome dowry of £25,000<sup>6</sup>, Burdett also inherited a stifling family atmosphere and was simply incorporated into the Coutts's circle. They all went on holidays together and Coutts provided a house for Burdett and Sophia close to his own in Piccadilly.<sup>7</sup> To escape from this, Burdett invited Stevens to come and live with them as resident friend and tutor.<sup>8</sup> The request was a continuation of the friendship formed between the two at Foremark on Burdett's return from his

<sup>1</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. d.93, ff. 50-51, 53-54, 56-7. Burdett to Lady Jones, 19 April 1789 (Paris), Sept. 1789 (Vevay), 8 Nov. 1790 (Vienna), 22 July 1791 (London); MSS. Eng. Lett. c.61, ff.73-6, Burdett to his father, Francis, 7 July 1790, describing his Italian tour of Florence, Pisa, Lucca, Livorno, Genoa, Rome and Venice.

<sup>2</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. d.92, f.62, Frederick, duke of York to Thomas Coutts, 24 May 1791; MSS. Eng. Hist. d.215, ff.52, 59 provide Patterson's sources for the French and Italian tours of the Coutts family.

<sup>3</sup>Stevens, *Journal*, p.125.

<sup>4</sup>E.H. Coleridge, *Life of Thomas Coutts, Banker*, (London 1919) ii. 29, Coutts to the Countess of Chatham, 16 Aug. 1793, 'The match was of their own choice.'

<sup>5</sup>Stevens. *Journal*, pp. 93, 95.

<sup>6</sup>*ibid.* pp. 80, 86.

<sup>7</sup>Stevens, *Journal*, pp. 95, 125, 133.

<sup>8</sup>*ibid.* p.141.

Grand Tour. In the summer of 1792, Burdett had requested Stevens to help him on a programme of study in an attempt to fill the huge gaps left by his conventional, but not studious, education. 'At Westminster he learned nothing, literally nothing', recorded Stevens<sup>1</sup>, and Burdett thus laboured again over his lost Latin. Stevens seems to have exerted a considerable influence over Burdett and inspired him with views that stood in stark contrast to his family's backwoods Toryism.<sup>2</sup>

Early in 1794, Burdett again turned to Stevens for guidance, but the latter tactfully refused to become 'a permanent fixture in a married man's house'.<sup>3</sup> Burdett's reaction to the smothering atmosphere of the Coutts's family life was increasingly to turn in on himself, becoming morose and silent, visiting no one and spending most of his day studying with another friend, Chevalier.<sup>4</sup> The path by which Burdett came to be friendly with Chevalier is important because in the long term it proved to be the path by which he fortuitously came into radical circles. Chevalier was introduced into the Coutts circle by Lord Lansdowne and is described by him as Burdett's tutor.<sup>5</sup> Coutts and Lansdowne were themselves close friends in the 1790s, a friendship that seems to have originated in Coutts's professional capacity as Lansdowne attempted to sort out his increasingly grave financial difficulties. The friendship developed and Coutts became the close personal friend of Lansdowne, mediating between him and his

<sup>1</sup>*ibid.* p.53.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.* pp. 66, 70. Stevens and Burdett spoke in favour of early events in the French Revolution in contrast to Sir Robert who 'clings to the powers that be'.

<sup>3</sup>Stevens, *Journal*, p.141.

<sup>4</sup>Jean-Baptiste Chevalier (1752-1836). He first came to England c.1784 and met the Foxes and Lansdownes; he went to Turkey with the French Ambassador to the Porte, the Comte de Choiseul-Goffier; in 1791 he published 'Tableau de la Plaine de Troye'; he returned to England in 1795 and met Thomas Coutts. After Robespierre's death he was commissioned to arrange for the return of prisoners of war and went back to France.

<sup>5</sup>William L. Clements lib. Shelburne Papers, No. 8, Lansdowne to Coutts, 5 Nov. 1794. 'I am very glad that Mr. Chevalier has succeeded so well with your society, as I take him to be a very worthy man and conceive that he must possess a great fund of useful and entertaining instruction.'

son, Lord Wycombe.<sup>1</sup>

In return for financial help from Coutts, Lansdowne took a particular interest in Burdett and, perhaps at Coutts's request, attempted to bring him out into society and distract his mind from dissatisfaction with his new family atmosphere. On 3 July 1794, Lansdowne was writing to Coutts: 'I will ride with Mr. Burdett, and talk with him as long as he pleases, upon whatever he pleases.'<sup>2</sup> Stevens noted that Lord Lansdowne was 'particularly attached to Mr. Burdett' and 'has drawn him out a scheme of reading.'<sup>3</sup> On 23 November 1794, Lansdowne was hoping that Wycombe and Lord Holland would have returned from the Continent in time for them to accompany Burdett upon an expedition.<sup>4</sup> The designs of Coutts and Lansdowne for Burdett are perfectly clear. According to Stevens, these designs came not a moment too soon, for Burdett's long hours of secluded reading led to an attempt, naively and rigidly, to impose the fruits of his reading upon his immediate family. He attempted to bring up his child and order his house according to the dictates of Rousseau<sup>5</sup>: 'there was no wine set on the table to poor Chevalier's discomfiture', and Burdett announced that he should like to spend his days in Switzerland. This morose and anti-social behaviour reached a climax when he hinted that he desired a separation from Sophia.<sup>6</sup>

The impression of Burdett at this stage is one of astounding social and political rootlessness. Despite the entrance into aristocratic social and political circles that both birth and marriage had given him, Burdett revealed an unwillingness to enter those circles. He desired rather to pursue an individual,

<sup>1</sup>Information on the Lansdowne/Coutts friendship has been kindly provided by Mrs. Arlene Shy, University of Michigan. In 1791, Lansdowne began to work out a family settlement with Wycombe. Part of this was a mortgage of £20,000 on Lansdowne's property in Middlesex that was passed from Coutts to Burdett as part of the Sophia/Burdett marriage settlement. There is no evidence however that Lansdowne was interested in promoting the Coutts/Burdett marriage in return for financial favours from Coutts. Lansdowne only met Burdett through Coutts.

<sup>2</sup>Shelburne Papers, No. 5, Lansdowne to Coutts, 3 July 1794.

<sup>3</sup>Stevens, *Journal*, p.155.

<sup>4</sup>Shelburne Papers No. 10. Lansdowne to Coutts, 23 Nov. 1794.

<sup>5</sup>Stevens, *Journal*, p.276 records that 'no one is to notice it, speak to it or play with it.'

<sup>6</sup>*ibid.* pp. 274-5.

idiosyncratic line of his own. It is a characteristic worthy of note for throughout his career Burdett never seemed to fulfill the role that birth and connections naturally mapped out for him by the social standards of the time. In the aftermath of the French Revolution, he ought to have been a respectable member of the elitist political world of the day whether under the Pittite or Foxite banners. Instead, Burdett fell into the radical camp that was critical of the existing political system and it involved him in dealings with men very definitely not of his social standing. To his political contemporaries this was an inexplicable and irresponsible stand. Burdett's behaviour and motives throughout his career were to remain a mystery to most observers and frequently caused him to be labelled 'inconsistent'. This thesis does not deny that Burdett's associations were often very odd for a man of aristocratic standing, but it does argue that underneath this individual and eccentric façade there was a man who advocated an astoundingly consistent and well-established political programme. But that is to anticipate events.

In 1796, to prevent the ultimate catastrophe of a separation between Burdett and Sophia or the second possibility, hardly less disastrous to a family man such as Coutts, of a departure abroad by Burdett and his wife, Coutts, with Lansdowne's backing, effected his main plan to bring Burdett back into aristocratic society. He purchased a parliamentary seat for him. The seat was Boroughbridge and Coutts purchased it for six years from the Duke of Newcastle.<sup>1</sup> The purchase was quite obviously the sole desire of Coutts, for Burdett had professed himself, 'not at all anxious about getting into Parliament.'<sup>2</sup> This lack of interest already seems to stem from a vague dissatisfaction with the operation of the parliamentary system. As Burdett confided to Stevens: 'it is certain that I am to represent one of the rotten parts of our Constitution, which is the envy and admiration of the world.'<sup>3</sup> It was the influence of the personalities Burdett was to meet in the next two years that was to result in a

<sup>1</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Hist. b.195, ff. 122-4, Knight and Mason's Trustee Memo between the duke of Newcastle and Thomas Coutts.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.* ff. 113-6, Burdett to Coutts, 30 April 1795.

<sup>3</sup>Stevens, *Journal*, p.372, Burdett to Stevens, 29 May 1796.

transformation of that latent dissatisfaction into a desire to reform the corrupt system.

In May 1796, however, the idea that Burdett should enter parliament belonged to Coutts, with Lansdowne's backing. The latter had confided to Stevens that Burdett's morose and anti-social behaviour must,

'grow much worse if he does not fall into some public employment or some society, a political one of his own Age, he thinks would be most likely to save him from seclusion and solitude.'<sup>1</sup>

There are hints that the remedy seems to have taken effect. The Lansdowne connection had already resulted in Burdett gaining an entrance into Foxite circles<sup>2</sup>; now he recorded a blossoming interest in the fortunes of those circles. He attended various stages of the 1796 Westminster election, noting that Fox carried all before him.<sup>3</sup> But the results of Burdett's connections with Foxite circles were far more extensive than a fleeting interest in the political fortunes of that group. Indeed, they were to develop in a direction not anticipated, and certainly not desired, by Coutts. In the summer of 1796, Burdett met two personalities who were in various ways to have a profound influence upon his subsequent political career. They were the United Irishman, Arthur O'Connor, and the English radical already with a turbulent history behind him, John Horne Tooke. The two were not themselves connected<sup>4</sup> although Burdett's entry into their respective circles was to be through the same broad path.

Arthur O'Connor had already been adopted by opposition Foxite Whigs after a striking speech in favour of Catholic Emancipation in May 1795. The connection between Foxites and Irish circles was already a close one thanks to personalities such as Fox's Irish cousin, Lord Edward Fitzgerald. Burdett must have met O'Connor in these circles at some stage in the summer of 1796.<sup>5</sup> He was

<sup>1</sup>*ibid.* p.301.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.* p.146, 18 April 1794, Stevens records a dinner at Burdett's house when Adam, Lord Wycombe and Fox were present.

<sup>3</sup>Stevens, *Journal*, p.372, Burdett to Stevens, 29 May 1796.

<sup>4</sup>Mrs. C. Bewley, at present engaged upon a study of Horne Tooke, notes that he revealed no interest at all in the affairs of Ireland. A point worthy of note in view of the close connection between English and Irish radicals in this period.

<sup>5</sup>M. Elliott, *Partners in Revolution, The United Irishmen and France 1796-1821*, (Yale 1982), p.100.

introduced, at the same time, into Tookeite radical circles, by Irishmen friendly with O'Connor, in particular William Maxwell of Carriden and Robert Cutlar Fergusson. They were both members of the London Corresponding Society, a focus for Tookeite radical activity in these years.<sup>1</sup> Burdett's meetings with O'Connor and Horne Tooke were extremely significant. The association with the latter was significant for its long term influence upon Burdett's political programmes; the meeting with O'Connor was immediately significant for it brought Burdett into potentially treasonable activity, with financial consequences for himself. It also established him in the government's mind as a suspicious figure whose movements were to be closely monitored.

Having met O'Connor in the summer of 1796, Burdett then made a visit to Ireland during the following October. This visit was a complete surprise to friends at Foremark, unaware that Burdett had any acquaintance in Irish circles. A message to Stevens hints at Burdett's first connections with O'Connor and Irish affairs. He 'persisted in saying that he must go, necessity not choice called upon him ... he said this was so particular a time he must go.'<sup>2</sup> On his return at the end of October, Burdett was in close correspondence with O'Connor. This correspondence is revealing for several reasons. Once again, it strikingly emphasises Burdett's rootlessness and his desire for a political mentor. He was quite obviously infatuated by the personality of O'Connor. On one occasion he wrote that he could never 'sufficiently regret your not being with me.' Several weeks later he protested that he could not live without O'Connor; 'you are the only man I ever knew who made me really better for living with.' This is the tone of the letters in the period October 1796 to January 1797.<sup>3</sup> Burdett constantly sought O'Connor's advice on the style and content of his first essay into parliamentary oratory, advice on that composition 'in which you excel so much, I mean political composition.'<sup>4</sup> He openly acknowledged his complete dependence on O'Connor for I am,

<sup>1</sup>P.R.O., Privy Council, Series 1/40/A.129; P.C.1/48/A138.

<sup>2</sup>Stevens, *Journal*, pp. 395-6, William Jones Burdett to Stevens, 9 Oct. 1796.

<sup>3</sup>I.S.P.O. (Rebellion Papers) 620/15/3, ff. 23-4,26. Burdett to O'Connor, 19 Nov. 1796, Jan. 1797 and 15 Jan. 1797.

<sup>4</sup>*ibid.* f.22. Burdett to O'Connor, 29 Oct. 1796.

'so dissatisfied with whatever I do myself and so little able to judge whether it may or may not be errant nonsense that unless I had someone I had opinion of I hardly know how to bring anything before the Publick Eye.'<sup>1</sup>

This is a startling admission of a lack of confidence in his own capacity for political judgement. Infatuation, dependence and the desire for advice, these are the three factors that on Burdett's side dominate his new friendship with O'Connor. The letters also confirm that Burdett was in Irish, Foxite circles. There are several references to a friendship with Fitzgerald and his wife, and even an offer of financial help to them.<sup>2</sup> He also clearly began to absorb views in opposition to the policies of the Pitt government; its policies of repression and corruption in particular. Beginning a theme he was to pursue for many years, Burdett bemoaned that 'all over the Country one meets nothing but soldiers and every village almost has a barrack, such a system surely cannot last.'<sup>3</sup> He expressed an interest in the grievances of Ireland and pressed O'Connor for more information on this subject.<sup>4</sup> A letter to Stevens in November confirmed Burdett's sympathy for views that were directly critical of the Pitt government.<sup>5</sup> But the crucial question behind the friendship between Burdett and O'Connor is the inevitable one; how far was Burdett directly implicated in the treasonable activities of the United Irishmen? After studying Burdett's behaviour to the period following O'Connor's arrest for treason in February 1798, an attempt will be made to answer this difficult question.

Burdett's letters to O'Connor in this period do include several remarks which raise the possibility of involvement in suspicious activities. He himself seems to have recognised that he was taking up politically extreme views,

<sup>1</sup>*ibid.* f.23. Burdett to O'Connor, 19 Nov. 1796.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.* ff. 22, 24 & 26. Burdett to O'Connor, 29 Oct. 1796, Jan. 1797, 15 Jan. 1797. The chapter goes on to argue that Burdett's wealth must be the key to his involvement in Irish political circles.

<sup>3</sup>*ibid.* f.22. Burdett's views were in line with the disparate opposition stand to Pitt's government. Opposition to a standing army was a feature of eighteenth century 'country' views and Burdett's preoccupation with the subject at this early stage may be an indication that he was already absorbing the views of Horne Tooke. In his next letter to O'Connor he mentions, 'the divine Horne'  
<sup>4</sup>*ibid.* f.23. More discussion of Burdett's absorption of Tooke's views occurs later in the chapter, pp. 18-23.

<sup>4</sup>*ibid.* f.23.

<sup>5</sup>Stevens, *Journal*, p.398. Burdett to Stevens, 9 Nov. 1796.

confiding to O'Connor: 'I wish I could send you a sketch of my intended essay but I am afraid to trust the Post.'<sup>1</sup> Early in January, Burdett warned O'Connor to take care of himself and not to risk, unnecessarily, his life, which may be of consequence to his country. In the same letter there was news that he had tried to get O'Connor's pistols repaired in London, 'knowing you would want them.'<sup>2</sup> Perfectly innocent remarks and activities perhaps, except that O'Connor was arrested in Dublin early in February for allegedly treasonable practices.<sup>3</sup> Burdett talked of going to Ireland to help him and wrote to Stevens that, 'I am assured the Government bloodhounds cannot touch my friend O'Connor.'<sup>4</sup> This was not the reassuring news Burdett intended it to be to those at Foremark. Stevens fervently hoped that he would keep out of all O'Connor's scrapes but feared that already Burdett's letters to O'Connor must be in ministerial hands.<sup>5</sup>

Certainly Burdett was sufficiently involved with Irish circles to feel strongly enough to make his first parliamentary speech on the subject. On 27 March 1797, he seconded Fox's motion on a restoration of tranquillity to Ireland and defended O'Connor as a personal friend whom he believed to be incapable of treason to his country.<sup>6</sup>

Although Burdett did not hold pure Foxite views on political issues<sup>7</sup>, his involvement in Irish and Foxite circles means that he must be counted amongst the declining numbers of those who stood firmly in opposition to the Pitt

<sup>1</sup>I.S.P.O. (Rebellion Papers) 620/15/3 f.23, Burdett to O'Connor, 19 Nov. 1796.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.* f.25, Burdett to O'Connor, Jan. 1797

<sup>3</sup>Stevens, *Journal*, p.410, M. Elliott, *Partners in Revolution* pp. 125-6. The reason for O'Connor's arrest on 2nd Feb. was his letter, 'To the Free Electors of the County of Antrim' of 20 Jan. which was, in reality, propaganda to the United Irishmen in order to disperse doubts after the Bantry Bay failure in 1796.

<sup>4</sup>Stevens, *Journal*, pp. 410, 412.

<sup>5</sup>*ibid.* p.414. There is a hint in this entry that Burdett really was extensively influenced by the members of the United Irishmen circle. His grandfather died on 15 Feb. 1797 and Burdett therefore inherited the title. Stevens seems to hint that he may have considered rejecting it; 'Sir Francis he must be or all the fat will be in the fire.' Lord Edward Fitzgerald (cousin of Fox and Burdett's new Irish friend) rejected his title in France in 1792. Could Burdett have been thinking of his friend's example? In the event he did not reject his title.

<sup>6</sup>*Hansard*, 1797-8, xxxiii. 155-7. Motion defeated 220 to 84.

<sup>7</sup>The background to Burdett's political views and how they were distinct from Foxite Whiggery will be discussed later in the chapter when evaluating the influence of Horne Tooke upon Burdett. See below pp. 18-23.

government at this time. This group was, by 1797, centred solely on the Foxite Whigs, the small group attached to Charles James Fox, who still refused to see the French Revolution as the greatest threat to the English political system but rather distrusted the policies of the Crown. To Foxite minds, Pitt, as the minister beholden to the Crown, sought to increase executive power to an alarming extent at the expense of the legislature. Grey was to present the Foxites' last real attempt at reform in the following May when he tried to gather support in the Commons for a cleansing of this Pitt system. But the extremism of the French Revolution, and its success in inspiring others to similar courses, dominated the minds of the English political and propertied élites. Their fears about rebellion in Ireland and rumours of Jacobinism at home meant that support for the Foxites and Burdett was virtually non-existent. More than that, these remaining few in opposition were increasingly regarded as potential revolutionaries themselves. Burdett acknowledged this atmosphere of increasing suspicion at, 'this time when no man seems to know who to trust.'<sup>1</sup>

Burdett's activities in the spring and summer of 1797 were only to increase the government's suspicions about him. On 19 May 1797, he chaired a parliamentary reform meeting at the Crown and Anchor tavern, a position he must have attained through his Irish connections in the London Corresponding Society.<sup>2</sup> Such involvement with popular radical causes on the part of a leading man of property in the atmosphere of 1797 was, however, not likely to be well-received. Acquaintances in the Foremark neighbourhood plainly told Stevens that Burdett, 'deserved hanging for his conduct at the Crown and Anchor.'<sup>3</sup> In more measured tones, Lord Morpeth was of the same opinion, reporting Burdett's parliamentary speech of 26 May. It was,

<sup>1</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. c.61. f.31. Burdett to Thomas Coutts, n.d. The letter is a eulogy of Charles Fox, 'that wonder of the age'. Burdett was always a very warm admirer of Fox himself although not of Foxite principles or party behaviour as a whole.

<sup>2</sup>*Morning Chronicle*, 19 May 1797; P.R.O. P.C.1/vol. 40, A129; P.C.1/48, A.138. Lords Stanhope, Oxford, Burdett, Fergusson, Maxwell and Sturt were all voted honorary members of the London Corresponding Society by Division 2 on 7 Aug. 1797.

<sup>3</sup>Stevens, *Journal*, p.429.

'probably the same ..... as that he had addressed to the citizens at the Crown and Anchor. It did not appear however, to make so much sensation in the House of Commons, the audience not sympathising so much with his violence or partaking of his republicanism.'<sup>1</sup>

Burdett was clearly beginning to be regarded as a potential revolutionary demagogue by the men of property. By 1797, they were primarily interested in preserving the stability of the established order against all Jacobinical assaults.

In November 1797, Burdett seceded from Parliament with the Foxites<sup>2</sup>, a move which left him free to increase his entanglement with O'Connor in the opening months of 1798. From January to April, the indications are that Burdett was heavily involved financially with O'Connor. In January, Stevens gloomily recorded, 'Patriotism is an expensive virtue ..... at this moment he is borrowing £3000 to lend a friend as he calls him.'<sup>3</sup> Exactly a month later, instructions came from Burdett to his Foremark steward to sell some of his Leicestershire and Norfolk estates.<sup>4</sup> In April, he was still insisting on the necessity of a sale and confirmed to Stevens that Arthur's brother, Roger O'Connor, was with him in Town. Burdett added, somewhat mysteriously, 'we must all take our turn', presumably referring to Roger's late imprisonment. Stevens could only regret, 'the curse of misguided zeal! ..... Better for him if the O'Connors had been hanged ten years ago!'<sup>5</sup> It is quite clear that Burdett was involved very closely in an attempt to give O'Connor some sort of financial help. But for what purpose? Did Burdett fully realise the extent of the tangled web of potential rebellion and intrigue with which he was involving himself?

The 'Recollections' of the radical, John Binns, states that Arthur O'Connor was staying at Burdett's town house in February 1798.<sup>6</sup> During the same month, O'Connor also met O'Coigley, an Irish priest. On 28 February O'Connor, O'Coigley and Binns were arrested at Margate whilst trying to procure a boat to

<sup>1</sup>Saltram MSS. quoted Aspinall, *The Later Correspondence of George III*, (Cambridge 1963), ii. 582.

<sup>2</sup>The Foxites withdrew until January 1800, in protest against the government's conduct of the French War. Burdett returned to the House in 1798.

<sup>3</sup>Stevens, *Journal*, p.450.

<sup>4</sup>*ibid.* p.455.

<sup>5</sup>*ibid.* p.460.

<sup>6</sup>*Recollections of the life of John Binns*, (London 1854), pp. 83-4.

cross to France. The government alleged that they intended to seek French help for an invasion of Ireland. Binns claimed that Burdett was to finance O'Connor's passage.<sup>1</sup> Undoubtedly Burdett's financial needs were closely connected with O'Connor. Earlier in the month, O'Connor had been ordered to appear before the Dublin Court of King's Bench to answer the seditious libel charges on which he had been bailed in the summer of 1797. His friends advised him not to return for fear that the government would press far more serious charges, but instead to go abroad to France. Burdett was to form part of a channel by which the rents from O'Connor's estates were to finance his stay there. The rents were to be collected by Roger O'Connor and a friend, sent to Burdett as ostensible proprietor and thence transmitted to France.<sup>2</sup> O'Connor was arrested before the scheme could materialise. Burdett attempted to procure proper legal defence for his friend,<sup>3</sup> evidently not confident of O'Connor's reassurance that the Government could prove nothing against him.<sup>4</sup> At the ensuing trial, many prominent Whigs testified to O'Connor's good character<sup>5</sup>, and indeed he was acquitted, although a warrant was issued for retrial in Ireland. A riot ensued in the court room at Maidstone when Burdett, Lord Thanet, Fergusson and George Smith attempted to prevent the serving of the warrant. Fergusson and Thanet were fined and imprisoned for a year, whilst society gossip recorded that only Coutts's influence with the King ensured Burdett's omission

<sup>1</sup>*ibid.* pp. 83-4. *Personal Recollections of the life and times of Valentine Browne Lawless, Lord Cloncurry*, (Dublin and London 1849) pp. 66-7. E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, (London 1963) p.187.

<sup>2</sup>I.S.P.O. 620/42/18 for Erskine's advice to O'Connor; 620/35/139 for O'Connor's preparations. M. Elliott, *Partners in Revolution, The United Irishmen and France*, p.181 traces the complex plans for the transfer of O'Connor's rents.

<sup>3</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. c.66 f.1. Burdett to the Duke of Portland, 14 April 1798.

<sup>4</sup>P.R.O. Treasury Solicitor's Papers, 11, 689/2187. O'Connor to Burdett, 1 Mar. 1798.

<sup>5</sup>Whigs included Fox, Sheridan, Gratton, Erskine, the Duke of Norfolk, Lord John Russell and Whitbread. Burdett did not testify. Perhaps he was already too suspicious a character himself to help O'Connor's cause? *Morning Chronicle*, 19 April 1798, lists the witnesses called.

from the prosecution.<sup>1</sup> But government eyes were quite clearly focussed upon Burdett. Portland contemplated letters from the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland on the possibility of proceeding against Burdett and others possibly implicated in the transactions of the United Irishmen.<sup>2</sup>

So how far was Burdett implicated in the mysterious and confusing cause of the United Irishmen? There is absolutely no evidence to suggest that Burdett was in favour of, or would support any plan for a rebellion in Ireland with French help. All the evidence points merely to a very close friendship with O'Connor, a friendship which certainly, in government eyes, involved Burdett sailing as close to the winds of treason as it was possible to be without being directly implicated in any activity that could clearly be construed as treason. As this chapter has revealed, Burdett was completely infatuated with O'Connor personally. With remarkable naïvety and irresponsibility, he plunged very quickly into O'Connor's circle, and revealed himself willing to throw his extensive financial resources into their cause.<sup>3</sup> This is surely the motive behind O'Connor and his Irish friends taking up the young, politically inexperienced but wealthy Burdett in the first place. But his admiration for O'Connor personally<sup>4</sup> is, however, still a long way removed from direct support for treason and rebellion. Although Burdett's political career was to centre on both groups and causes that the political élite regarded as, at best, highly irresponsible and, at worst, dangerous to society's stability, there is never any concrete evidence that he

<sup>1</sup>*The Journal of Elizabeth, Lady Holland, 1791-1811*, ed. Earl of Ilchester, (London 1909), i. 121. M. Elliott, *Partners in Revolution*, pp. 184-5, narrates the trial. Only O'Coigley was convicted and executed. The government was reluctant to reveal the sources for its valuable spy evidence in court and was unable to produce any other manifest proof. O'Coigley came to be regarded as the sacrificial lamb for the United Irishmen after O'Connor helped to shift all the blame upon the priest during the trial, an act from which, concludes Elliott, his reputation never quite recovered.

<sup>2</sup>*The Later Correspondence of George III*, ed. A. Aspinall, iii. 32, Portland to George III, 17 Mar. 1798.

<sup>3</sup>The offer to help Fitzgerald and all the financial requests sent to Foremark certainly indicate this. I.S.P.O. (Rebellion Papers) 620/15/3 22, Burdett to O'Connor, 29 Oct. 1796; Stevens, *Journal*, pp. 450, 455, 460.

<sup>4</sup>O'Connor was clearly an extremely charismatic and magnetic personality. One only has to consider the numbers of eminent Whigs who were prepared to testify at his trial despite the fact that the friendship was politically damaging. Cartoon prints dogged Fox and Burdett about the friendship. Dorothy George, *English Political Caricature* (Oxford 1959) p.41.

ever contemplated changing the political system by force. Burdett desired a purification of the corruption within the political system, but he never desired to change or overthrow that system. Two factors support this argument for this early period in his career. First, Burdett spent the remainder of 1798 quietly with his family at Foremark, perhaps needing to draw back from the dangerous associations with which he had so easily become embroiled.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, there was the growing influence of John Horne Tooke upon Burdett. Tooke was a man who the government certainly regarded as a dangerous radical, but who, in reality, bequeathed to Burdett a political reform programme with a very respectable history, and one that was essentially extremely moderate in both its content and aims. Attention must therefore now be given to the political background of Tooke and to the extent of his subsequent influence upon Burdett.

It has already been noted that Burdett met Tooke at some stage in the summer of 1796.<sup>2</sup> Burdett was introduced by his Irish acquaintances in the London Corresponding Society. He followed Tooke's progress in the Westminster election of May 1796 and, at about the same time, took a house at Wimbledon next door to Tooke's.<sup>3</sup> By November, in a letter to O'Connor, he was referring to 'the divine Horne.'<sup>4</sup> Certainly by the autumn, Burdett was in attendance at Tooke's social Sunday dinners, where a strange mixture of guests often assembled. They included the Earl and Countess of Oxford<sup>5</sup>, the Whig lawyer, Erskine, who had defended Tooke at the treason trial of 1794, the poet Samuel Rogers, intellectual friends like Gilbert Wakefield and Richard Porson, radical acquaintances from the Society for Constitutional Information such as

<sup>1</sup>Stevens, *Journal*, pp. 466-76.

<sup>2</sup>See above p.7.

<sup>3</sup>Stevens, *Journal*, pp. 369, 372; A. Stephens. *The Memoirs of John Horne Tooke*, (London 1813) ii. 306.

<sup>4</sup>I.S.P.O. (Rebellion Papers) 620/15/3/23, Burdett to O'Connor, 19 Nov. 1796.

<sup>5</sup>For details of Burdett's affaire with Lady Oxford see M.W. Patterson, *Sir Francis Burdett*, i. 304-10.

Joel Barlow, and very frequently the 'bon vivant', Colonel Bosville.<sup>1</sup> It was a strange assembly drawn from various stages of Tooke's past career and certainly did not universally comprise people of Burdett's own social rank. Why did Burdett find this group a congenial one and why in particular was he attracted to Tooke?

The latter filled that role of intellectual mentor that Burdett had first found in Stevens and then O'Connor. Tooke and Burdett studied together examining many of the Latin authors and discussing politics.<sup>2</sup> Tooke's past efforts in the cause of parliamentary reform must have stimulated Burdett's blossoming interest in this radical cause.<sup>3</sup> But unlike the relationship with O'Connor which seems to be a very one-sided affair stemming from Burdett's infatuation with O'Connor's personality, the friendship with Tooke was far more of an equal partnership, and there seems to have been a genuine mutual regard between the two.<sup>4</sup> But this fact does not deny the claim that there were distinct advantages for Tooke in taking up Burdett. In many ways, Tooke's career had been a long and increasingly bitter struggle against the various administrations in power since the 1770s, a struggle that culminated in his trial for treason in 1794.<sup>5</sup> With the exception of his candidacy for Westminster in

<sup>1</sup>P.W. Claydon, *Rogers and his Contemporaries* (London 1889) i. 4.45. Thomas Erskine (1750-1823) Lawyer and Foxite M.P.; Gilbert Wakefield (1756-1801); Col. Bosville, a Yorkshire gentleman who was uncle to Sir George Sinclair, later a close friend of Burdett's. Bosville served in the American War, was a member of the Society for Constitutional Information and contributed to many radical causes. He died in 1813. Society gossip claimed that Bosville and Burdett alternately bore the costs of Horne Tooke's Sunday dinners. M.W. Patterson, i. 121, Richard Porson (1759-1808), Greek scholar.

<sup>2</sup>A. Stephens, *Memoirs of John Horne Tooke* ii. 233. The difficulty of obtaining specific information about Tooke, and his friendship with Burdett, should be stressed. Tooke's MSS. were destroyed, on his own order, at his death and there is no correspondence available between the two, presumably due to the fact that their Wimbledon residences were only yards apart. These facts, however, do not prohibit an evaluation of the extent of Tooke's influence upon Burdett. Other sources of information are comments Burdett makes about Tooke in other correspondence; the frequent comments in contemporary diaries and letters which acknowledge Burdett as Tooke's disciple, and most obviously the similarity of the political programmes put forward by the two.

<sup>3</sup>For this reason certain aspects of Tooke's reform career will shortly be discussed. See below pp. 18-24.

<sup>4</sup>Patterson, i. 130. Burdett to Lady Burdett, 8 Aug. 1809.

<sup>5</sup>A. Stephens, *Memoirs of Horne Tooke*, ii. 119; E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 148-9.

1796, after the trial Tooke kept a much lower public profile and appeared to be far more cautious and circumspect in his open criticism of the political establishment. It was an understandable pathway to tread for a man who had been tried for his life. This did not make him, however, any less critical of the corrupt parliamentary 'Pitt system'<sup>1</sup>, nor indeed any less bitter personally at the treatment he had received at the hands of that system.<sup>2</sup> His desire was still to challenge, in any way he could, the system to reform itself. Burdett must have represented the ideal channel through which to attack the government. This point is of immense significance for it is the key to understanding Burdett's subsequent political career. Burdett was invaluable to Horne Tooke as he was later to be to reformers in Westminster and, for a time, to reformers in the nation at large. He was invaluable because his aristocratic birth and social standing gave him an automatic political platform both inside the House of Commons and outside it. The political and propertied élite were so uniformly fearful of Jacobin plots that any dissentient voices against the government were liable to immediate imprisonment without charge at the government's pleasure.<sup>3</sup> Members of the lower ranks in society who were thus imprisoned had virtually no means of redress or appeal in an atmosphere of fear that weighted the opinions of the political classes so forcibly against such protesters. An aristocrat such as Burdett, however, could not be treated quite so dismissively. His birth, social position and connections, and wealth all gave him a voice in the political world and made it potentially far more difficult for the government to

<sup>1</sup>To be discussed later in the chapter in detail. Essentially critics of the Pitt administration portrayed it as one maintained in power solely by the favour of the Crown and by a system of placemen and rotten borough nominees. Such men were tied to the administration by financial self-interest, and the proliferation of them in the Commons was supposed to be at the expense of the real representatives of the nation, the men of landed property, who had a real and permanent stake in the interests of the country.

<sup>2</sup>His experiences were certainly such as to warrant this growth of bitterness: 1777 he was tried for sedition; 1779, 1782, 1794 he was refused admission to the Bar; 1794 he was imprisoned for seven months without being charged and then indicted for high treason with little justification; later in 1801 he was denied a Parliamentary seat after a ruling passed after his election, and there was also the death of his scholar friend, Gilbert Wakefield after two years imprisonment for alleged sedition.

<sup>3</sup>Under the terms, for example, of the 1793, Traitorous Correspondence Act (extended in 1798 to cover correspondence with Holland as well as France), the Suspension of Habeas Corpus in 1794 and the Seditious Meetings Act of 1799.

send him quietly to prison, secure in the knowledge that no one would protest on his behalf. As one of the natural rulers of the country, Burdett was entitled to a political voice. The government might not like the tone or views of that voice, and might therefore begin to monitor his movements carefully, but it could not assume that it could immediately and effectively silence his voice. The increasing receptivity of Burdett to views in opposition to the government, and the increasing willingness to voice those views, made him an ideal organ of protest for the rapidly diminishing numbers of radicals in the 1790s, and particularly the ideal mouthpiece of the increasingly cautious reformer, Horne Tooke.

To understand the political programme Tooke bequeathed to Burdett, the main points and significance of Tooke's own career must be outlined.

His first participation in politics had been as an organiser in the Wilkite campaign in Middlesex in the 1760s. On the practical side, Tooke was responsible for the distribution of handbills and banners and for the provision of carriages to convey Wilkite supporters to the poll.<sup>1</sup> Intellectually, the reformers who congregated around Wilkes presented a programme of reform comprising many of the early eighteenth century 'country' aims. These included the purging of placemen from the House of Commons and the demand for more frequent elections, whether annual or triennial.<sup>2</sup> This 'country' platform had originated in the early eighteenth century in response to various circumstances.

The first was the fears of all landowners about the size of the National Debt after the wars of William III. The immense size of the Debt appeared to be a destabilising element in society, especially since it had resulted in the elevation to power of moneyed men whose position resulted from their ability to raise credit to finance the wars, and not from the possession of the only permanent stake in society, the ownership of land. The fears of aristocratic and gentry landowners were only increased when, in the aftermath of the collapse of the South Sea Company in 1720, Walpole appeared to institute a Whig hegemony

<sup>1</sup>J. Brewer, *Party Ideology and Popular Politics at the Accession of George III*, (Cambridge 1976) p.191.

<sup>2</sup>J. Cannon, *Parliamentary Reform 1640-1832* (Cambridge 1973) pp. 44-6.

in the political nation. It was closely identified with moneyed interests and was maintained in power, so its opponents claimed, by the distribution of places and pensions. It was, in short, a wholesale manipulation of the political system. To those outside this system in the 1720s and 1730s, it seemed as though the dominant place and influence of land in the political scene was being directly threatened. The response to this was to call for a purging of government nominees and placemen from parliament; for an increase in the numbers of county representatives, who were almost exclusively members of the landowning élite, and for a call for shorter parliaments in order to root out the corruption that was seen to be behind the manipulation of the political system in the long term. Bolingbroke's journal, *The Craftsman*, gave these 'country' opposition aims of the landowners a coherent voice.<sup>1</sup> The overwhelming fact about this 'country' programme that must never be lost sight of, is its claim to be exclusively English and to look for a return to the 'ancient constitution'. This originated, in theory, in an age of Saxon freedom when liberties were enshrined in law and custom, and guarded by the forerunner of parliament, the Saxon Witangemot. Even across the awkward gulf of the Norman Conquest, English liberties had been secured by statute and precedent and were itemised for time immemorial in Magna Carta.<sup>2</sup> 'Country' views thus leant heavily upon the idea of the 'ancient constitution' and the traditional liberties of Englishmen. Such views can be traced in Bolingbrokean opposition to Walpole's manipulation of the political system and his unconstitutional establishment of a standing army, and also in the

<sup>1</sup>I Kramnick, *Bolingbroke and his Circle, the Politics of Nostalgia in the Age of Walpole*, (Harvard 1968) pp. 10,24. Bolingbroke helped to provide a programme for the disparate opposition elements to Walpole, but it certainly cannot be claimed that Bolingbroke's operations were free of self-interest. See Q. Skinner's article, 'The Principles and Practice of Opposition; the case of Bolingbroke v. Walpole' in *Historical Perspectives, Studies in English Thought and Society in honour of J.H. Plumb*, ed. N. McKendrick (London 1974) pp. 93-128. For examples of some of Bolingbroke's ideas, see below, ch.4, p.113.

<sup>2</sup>J. Brewer, *Party ideology and Popular Politics*, p.255. A Pallister, *Magna Carta, the heritage of liberty* (Oxford 1971) pp. 52,58,60,65,68,69. R.J. Smith, *The Gothic Bequest, Medieval institutions in British Thought*, (Cambridge 1987).

Wilkite programme of opposition to a further arbitrary executive manipulation of the political and legal system in the 1760s and 1770s.<sup>1</sup>

In March 1771, Horne Tooke was one of a group of reformers who had seceded from the largely self-interested Wilkite 'Society for the Support of the Bill of Rights' to form a separate 'Constitutional Society' which was to disseminate reform ideas. By the beginning of the 1780s, Tooke was deeply involved with the metropolitan side of the reform movement, headed by Wyvill and the County Associations, and sporadically encouraged, first by the Rockinghamite Whigs, and then by the younger Pitt.

Of importance for this study is the fact that in 1782 Tooke himself published a plan of reform. It clearly owed a debt to 'country' ideas and was based on the framework of a direct tax-paying franchise, the holding of annual elections and the preservation of the constitutional prerogatives of the Crown.<sup>2</sup> Tooke's insistence on the constitutional prerogatives of the Crown being placed 'high, brilliant and independent' is of immense significance for it places the 'country' programme in a different sphere from Foxite ideas. Foxites were soon to witness the event that was to crystallise their ideology, the dismissal by George III of the Fox/North coalition in 1784. This dismissal confirmed, once and for all, Foxite fears about George III. They claimed that this ambitious and arbitrary monarch sought to increase the influence of the executive at the expense of the legislature, and thus disrupt the balance of power between King, Lords and Commons. Foxite politicians became obsessed with the battle against Crown influence.<sup>3</sup> Tooke was similarly engaged in a battle against influence and the manipulation of the political system, but his essentially 'country' sentiments distrusted the corruption of boroughmongers and their placemen nominees in Parliament, rather than any supposedly sinister designs of the monarch. This distinction must be grasped if Burdett's subsequent political career is to be

<sup>1</sup>Q. Skinner, 'The Principles and Practice of Opposition', pp. 124-5; I Christie, *Wilkes, Wyvill and Reform*, (London 1962), pp. 1-2, 15.

<sup>2</sup>A. Stephens, *Memoirs of John Horne Tooke*, i. 35. Tooke's plan deliberately denounced universal suffrage as 'improper and impracticable'.

<sup>3</sup>L.G. Mitchell, *Charles James Fox and the Disintegration of the Whig Party*, (Oxford 1971) pp. 92, 238.

correctly interpreted. He inherited this 'country' fondness for the just powers of the monarch, and never subscribed to the Foxite fear of undue Crown influence. Tooke's candidacy for Westminster in 1790 and 1796 symbolised this theoretical distinction for it took the 'country' challenge to the heart of Foxite Whiggery, Fox's own seat. Burdett himself was to continue this challenge in 1807.<sup>1</sup> In 1790, Tooke's election address deplored the destructive party spirit that extinguished public principle.<sup>2</sup> This anti-party stand was central to 'country' thought, which, by calling for a purification of the parliamentary system, aimed to free both that system and the monarch from self-interested factions. It would return control of the political system to independent country gentlemen. The latter would naturally act in favour of public, and not self-interest because their landed wealth meant that they had a permanent stake in the country and hence its prosperity and stability. Landed wealth also gave to country gentlemen a financial independence which freed them from a dependence upon government places and pensions. This financial independence would thus also, in theory, increase the proportion of disinterested political views in the Commons. The independent, country gentleman was the central instrument for the fulfillment of the 'country' programme. Burdett was to epitomise *par excellence* this ideal.

Tooke's declaration against party spirit meant that he equally deplored its means, the enormous sums spent on election bribery. He continued this attack on the corrupt system during his second candidacy at Westminster in 1796, when he again declared his independence and his determination never to be involved in party spirit and its machinations. 'Every man's honour ought to be in his own keeping', he declared.<sup>3</sup> If this was the determinator of political behaviour, kings would see that there would be no need to rely on 'faction and partiality, and corruption and bribery, all indirect and underhand management'.<sup>4</sup> The independent reformer's stand did not triumph against the Foxite and government

<sup>1</sup>See Chapter 3.

<sup>2</sup>A. Stephens, *Memoirs of Horne Tooke*, ii. 84.

<sup>3</sup>A. Stephens, *Memoirs of Horne Tooke*, ii. 170-72.

<sup>4</sup>*ibid.*

election machines, however, and at both elections Tooke came third behind Fox and the ministerial candidate.<sup>1</sup> But it must be noted that the votes for Tooke were far from negligible.<sup>2</sup> There was a significant proportion of electors who responded to the anti-party, independent call; a fact Burdett was to capitalise upon in a dramatic fashion when he himself contested Westminster in 1807 on an independent ticket, at a time when disillusion with the Talents Ministry was at its greatest.

Tooke's candidacy at Westminster in 1796 was his last public gesture for reform. Most of his time in the late 1790s was spent at his Wimbledon home, increasingly in the company of Burdett. In 1805, he published the second volume of his etymological work, *The Diversions of Purley*.<sup>3</sup> It took the form of a dialogue between Tooke and Burdett, a tribute to the many hours spent together in discussion. Amongst the main body of linguistic argument<sup>4</sup> various political comments can be found. They point, yet again, to the very Englishness of Tooke's reform programme. This deserves to be stressed for it is all too easy to assume that all English reformers in the 1790s were influenced by the example of the French Revolution and the works of Tom Paine. This inspiration certainly did exist but it was not universal. Tooke's reform views owed nothing to the iconoclastic, levelling doctrines of Paine. In the insular, early eighteenth century tradition of English reform, Tooke aspired not to follow a theoretical blueprint for the establishment of a new society by destroying the old, but merely to purify the existing political structure of corrupt influences and return to something that was perceived to be grounded in verifiable English law and custom, the splendid 'ancient constitution'.<sup>5</sup> Paine was often a visitor to Wimbledon in the 1790s but it is recorded that 'he was never a favourite there.

<sup>1</sup>*ibid.* pp. 83-4, 170-2.

<sup>2</sup>In 1790 he polled 1,679 votes; in 1796, 2,819.

<sup>3</sup>John Horne Tooke, *The Diversions of Purley*, ii. (London 1805).

<sup>4</sup>Analysed by Olivia Smith in *The Politics of Language* (Oxford 1984), Chapters 2 & 4.

<sup>5</sup>It could of course be argued that the 'ancient constitution' was just as much a theoretical blueprint as Paine's ideas since it did not exist in any written form, but the important point is that its tenets, such as a full and free Parliament, could be found in a number of statutes.

His principles never accorded with those of Mr. Tooke.<sup>1</sup> Whether or not this comment is authentic, the views of the two reformers have only to be juxtaposed to reveal the stark contrast. Paine's revolutionary views argued that, 'there is an unnatural unfitness in an Aristocracy to be legislators for a nation'; monarchical sovereignty he denounced as 'the enemy of mankind' and 'source of misery'. Shaking men in authority to the core, he announced that 'men are born, and always continue, free and equal in respect of their rights.'<sup>2</sup> For Tooke, however, a man's right was only 'that which it is ordered he shall have'. He had the greatest respect for established authority: 'I revere the Constitution and constitutional laws of England', and he pledged that he had entered into,

'a strict engagement to belong for ever to the established government, to the established Church and to the established language of our country because they are established. Establish what you please; do but establish, and whilst that establishment shall last, we shall be perfectly convinced of its propriety.'<sup>3</sup>

In Tooke's reform ideas, there was absolutely no room for the idea that it was necessary to build a new Jerusalem. All that was required was to return to the uncorrupt form of the constitution. It proved to be a tremendously attractive theory to many English reformers as Burdett's political career was so strikingly to demonstrate. The old-fashioned, retrospective 'country' reform programme was to spearhead the renaissance of the English reform movement in the early 1800s precisely because many Englishmen had a strong notion of their traditional liberties as enshrined in statutes such as Magna Carta and protected by the processes of Common Law. The Pitt system of corrupt and arbitrary government that by-passed Common Law and flouted what Tooke perceived to be the fundamentals of the constitution, he loathed above all else. The country was in a state of siege and 'there appears no encouragement at present but for the invention of new taxes and new penalties, for spies and informers which swarm amongst us.' This was the state that an 'obstinate system of despotism and corruption' has achieved.<sup>4</sup> The system had to be purified of corruption. This

<sup>1</sup>A. Stephens, *Memoirs of Horne Tooke*, ii. 323.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man*, (London 1966), pp. 62 & 135.

<sup>3</sup>John Horne Tooke, *Diversions of Purley*, ii. 8, 14, 490.

<sup>4</sup>*ibid.* ii. 141.

was the 'country' aim of Tooke. Burdett, the independent country gentleman, was to be the instrument for achieving this return to the 'ancient constitution'. This chapter has illustrated that Burdett had the social status, connections and wealth to embark on this task.

Before his friendship with Tooke, various comments hinted that Burdett might indeed find the 'country' platform an attractive one. In November 1793, responding to Stevens's request for a living, he was already bemoaning the consequences 'of a Government carried on systematically by corruption'.<sup>1</sup> He welcomed the acquittal of Hardy and Tooke in 1794 as a triumph over 'court corruption'<sup>2</sup> and, on entering Parliament in 1796, he held up the ideal of political independence as his guiding star: 'I shall be callous to every feeling but that of self-approbation.'<sup>3</sup> Burdett's discipleship with Tooke transformed his vaguely 'country' reactions into coherent political aspirations. They were exclusively English ones that venerated and contrasted the constitutional perfections of the past with the corruptions and legal innovations of the Pittite present. But the numbers of the political élite who were prepared to assert that this system of government was either tyrannical or unnecessary in the light of the necessity to prosecute a vigorous war against Revolutionary France, and to root out and crush Jacobin conspiracy at home, were diminishing rapidly in the late 1790s. Only small groups of radicals outside Parliament in an uneasy alliance with a handful of aristocratic Foxites were left to challenge the methods of the Pitt government.

As this chapter has demonstrated, Burdett had acquired footholds in both radical and Foxite camps and he had revealed himself increasingly enthusiastic in the cause of opposition to Pitt. By birth and marriage he had the social status and financial wealth to command a political voice and to pursue a political career. From Tooke, he had gained a political creed that was inherently congenial to him, and proved itself peculiarly applicable to the political situation at the opening of the nineteenth century. But the avenues detailed in this

<sup>1</sup>Stevens, *Journal*, pp. 109-10.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.* p.209.

<sup>3</sup>*ibid.* pp. 376-7.

chapter by which Burdett had come to the threshold of his political career had a double edge. His friendships with Arthur O'Connor and John Horne Tooke may have inspired him with an enthusiasm for politics and provided him with a political programme, but they also marked him out to the government as a potentially disruptive radical. The French Revolution bequeathed an atmosphere of fear to the political nation in Britain, and the prosecution of a long, bitter and expensive war against revolutionary France. Against such a background, men like Horne Tooke and Arthur O'Connor appeared to be dangerous revolutionaries, their aims and activities little short of treason. The government's spies watched them closely. Burdett's involvement with them meant that he too was to be closely monitored. Chapter 2 therefore demands both a study of the emergence of Burdett as a prominent radical politician and also of the government's reaction to such a political platform in the period 1798 to 1804.

## CHAPTER 2: THE EMERGENCE OF A RADICAL

In the years 1798 to 1804 Burdett acquired a political reputation. To the government and its many supporters, this reputation deserved rather to be labelled, 'notoriety'. To them it seemed that Burdett assumed the role of radical demagogue, and in that role was responsible for rekindling a popular metropolitan radicalism that the Pittite legislation of the 1790s had successfully chastened and, to a large degree, eradicated. To the metropolitan populace, however, Burdett presented himself as a new radical champion. He was almost the only voice in the political world who was prepared to champion the cause of those members of society's lower ranks suffering under Pittite legal penalties. The Foxites had retreated from their tentative embrace of popular causes in the 1790s, and thus it was to fall increasingly to Burdett to be the parliamentary spokesman for popular grievances. It was his exposure of the sufferings of inmates at the Cold Bath Fields Prison in Middlesex that in a large measure created his political reputation, and it was his continued use of the subject in the Middlesex elections of 1802 and 1804 that enabled him to emerge as a new radical champion. In the parliamentary sessions during these years, Burdett demonstrated the extent to which he had absorbed Horne Tooke's English radicalism. Burdett's contributions to these sessions deserve to be studied, for in them he established the 'country' themes he was to pursue throughout his political career. The suitability of the early eighteenth century 'country' themes to the politics of the late seventeen-nineties and early eighteen hundreds becomes apparent, and provides the key to understanding why this far from radical set of policies was nevertheless increasingly taken over by metropolitan radicals.

The main thrust of Burdett's criticism of the Pitt government was that its methods were a violation of the constitution. Burdett maintained that corruption was the instrument by which Pitt and his ministers were maintained in power; the proof was in the huge numbers of government placemen in parliament. Burdett had first voiced this theme in support of Grey's reform motion the

previous year,<sup>1</sup> and in 1798 he returned to it.<sup>2</sup> In particular, his charge was that by the 'hollow vote of a corrupt Parliament', Pitt proposed to enforce the Union with Ireland.<sup>3</sup> The result of large numbers of placemen was not only an 'incapable' and 'profligate administration' but one that was also able to pass an Indemnity Bill to protect ministers and their hirelings.<sup>4</sup> Burdett's charges about the numbers of corrupt placemen in the Commons drew on two sources. They were a continuation of Grey's accusation in 1797,<sup>5</sup> that around one hundred and fifty boroughmongers returned a majority in the Commons, but that charge was in itself the development of a theme originating at the turn of the seventeenth century. In the reigns of William and Anne, country gentlemen's fears were centred on the influence of moneyed men and Crown dependents who seemed to threaten the place of men like themselves in the political system. Burdett's protest was in the same vein, the protest of an independent landowner who did not wish for, or need, office from the Crown, and wished to return the membership of the Commons to men like himself. It was to the landed gentlemen of the nation that Burdett appealed. Securing their own interest was 'the best way of securing the interest of the public'; the course of honour for the gentry was to stand forward in defence of the just rights of the people.<sup>6</sup> This call was reminiscent of Bolingbroke's and *The Craftsman's* in the 1730s.<sup>7</sup>

Burdett continued the 'country' protest theme in his objection to the

<sup>1</sup>*Hansard*, 1797, xxxiii. 681-4.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.* 1155-62, 1183.

<sup>3</sup>*Hansard*. 1799, xxxiv. 954; By the Act of Union the Irish Parliament was dissolved and instead the Irish received four spiritual and twenty-four temporal peers in the Lords, and one hundred representatives in the Commons. George III's refusal to concede to Pitt's intended accompanying legislation, Catholic Emancipation, led to Pitt's resignation in February 1801.

<sup>4</sup>*Hansard*, 1800, xxxv. 802, 1802, xxxvi. 512-3. Burdett's motion for an enquiry into the conduct of the late administration was defeated by 246 to 39. Burdett's obsession against corruption can also be seen in his private correspondence. To the radical sympathiser, Earl Stanhope, he deplored that 'the government's means of corruption are increasing in a proportion far beyond that of the numbers to be managed.' Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. lett. c.64, f.78, Burdett to Earl Stanhope, 24 Jan. 1799.

<sup>5</sup>*Hansard* 1797, xxxiii. 644-70.

<sup>6</sup>*ibid.* 1798, xxxiii. 1453; Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. lett. c.64, f.78, Burdett to Earl Stanhope. 24 Jan. 1799.

<sup>7</sup>I. Kramnick, *Bolingbroke and his Circle*, pp. 31, 81-2. For the extent to which Burdett's 'country' programme reflected Bolingbroke's 'country' ideas, see below p.113 footnote 1 which gives examples of Bolingbroke's ideas.

French War. Linking it with the earlier American War, he maintained that the government's prosecution of these struggles both threatened the country's liberty and needlessly squandered its wealth.<sup>1</sup> This two-fold opposition to the war was a fusion of the traditional 'country' call for cheap government and the Foxite idea that the real reason for Pitt's prosecution of the French War was to extend the power of the executive at home. Burdett's opposition to the French War reflected, therefore, not only the 'country' foundations of his political creed, but also the extent to which he was still socially and politically on Foxite fringes. These two strands in Burdett's opposition platform were to remain in an increasingly uneasy alliance for the next few years.

Another strong 'country' theme in Burdett's opposition to Pittite government measures was his dislike of a permanent, professional standing army. According to Burdett, the validity of 'country' reliance upon a volunteer army, operating in conjunction with public measures promoted by an honest parliament, was proved by taking the example of Ireland. In 1782, when tempted by French overtures during the American War, the Irish had remained loyal because they possessed in great measure these 'country' priorities for good government. In the present day, the Irish were disaffected because they had been subjected to the despotic rule of a corrupt English parliament and standing army.<sup>2</sup> Burdett revealed a particular dislike for a standing army and constantly criticised the system of erecting barracks across the nation.<sup>3</sup> Opposition to a standing army had always been a theme dear to 'country' sympathisers. It drew heavily on seventeenth century, Whig political theory, which directly equated the establishment of a professional standing army with the suppression of a nation's liberties.<sup>4</sup> On a practical level, 'country' gentlemen in opposition had always disliked standing armies, because they represented a victory for expensive

<sup>1</sup>*Hansard*, 1797-8, xxxiii. 682, 1155-62. In particular he blamed Pitt as the man who has 'squandered the wealth and ... annihilated the liberties of the people of England'. *ibid.* 1157.

<sup>2</sup>*Hansard*, 1802, xxxvi. 515-22.

<sup>3</sup>*Hansard*, 1797, xxxiii. 683; 1802, xxxvi. 510.

<sup>4</sup>See Q. Skinner, *The Principles and Practice of Opposition; the case of Bolingbroke v. Walpole*, pp. 113-21. Burdett himself wished for the spirit of these seventeenth century Whig heroes, Harrington, Milton, Locke and Sidney, to be emulated. Bodl. Lib. MSS. c.64, f.78, Burdett to Stanhope, 24 Jan. 1799.

centralisation under executive control at the expense of cheap local government as personified by a volunteer militia under the command of the local country landowner.

Burdett's fears about the influence of corrupt placemen in the political system, his fears that English liberties were being suppressed by statute at the behest of a packed parliament, and his dislike of government by spies and a standing army, all revealed him to be a pupil of Horne Tooke and the 'country' creed. But how and why did these 'country' beliefs become potential radical standard-bearers?

The potential link between the two was a direct result of what critics of the government interpreted as governmental flouting of traditional liberties in the 1790s. To the government, it seemed that extraordinary legislation was required in order to root out Jacobin conspiracy at home. Suspension of Habeas Corpus and other repressive legislation resulted in many members of the popular societies that had sprung up, under the impetus of the French Revolution's example, being arrested and sent to prison. Burdett was tireless in his opposition to all the readings for the suspension of Habeas Corpus. In his opinion, it was striking at the most admirable and important part of the constitution. 'If any part of our constitution was preferable to another, it was this act, which when removed, left very little difference between one government and another.'<sup>1</sup> The numbers in the House who were prepared to vote against the suspension of Habeas Corpus, had dwindled to a mere handful.<sup>2</sup> In these minorities, Burdett voted largely with Foxite critics of the government. His personal admiration for Fox, as 'the greatest and wisest man in the country',<sup>3</sup> remained, and government spies assiduously stressed the connection between the two.<sup>4</sup> But although Burdett's personal admiration for Fox remained, there were

<sup>1</sup>*Hansard*, 1800, xxxiv. 1468. Other occasions when Burdett opposed the suspension of Habeas Corpus were 21 Dec. 1798; 19 Feb, 11, 15 & 18 Dec. 1800; 14 April & 27 May 1801. *Hansard*, 1798-1800, xxxiv. 120-1, 1468-9, 1476-7; 1800-1, xxxv. 731-2, 746-7, 1281-4, 1509.

<sup>2</sup>On 21 Dec. 1798, Burdett was one of only eight who opposed suspension. The others were Sir Francis Baring, Hon. E. Bouverie, W.J. Denison, M.A. Taylor, C.C. Western. Tellers for the Noes were G. Tierney and Alderman Combe.

<sup>3</sup>*Hansard*, 1801, xxxv. 1041.

<sup>4</sup>P.R.O. P.C.1/3535, Powell to Sir Richard Ford, 25 Dec. 1801.

signs that Burdett's strident opposition was not welcomed wholeheartedly by all other Foxites. The Speaker, Abbot, noted that Sheridan, Grey and Burdett differed much with each other, and these Foxites indeed regretted Burdett's opposition to the session's opening Address.<sup>1</sup> Such regret would seem to indicate that the Foxites wished to draw Burdett under their wing as a much-needed recruit to their small numbers remaining in opposition to the government, but their desire was increasingly to be frustrated by Burdett's own behaviour. His vociferous campaign in favour of prisoners at Cold Bath Fields Prison in Middlesex indicated a willingness to associate with popular elements in politics that was distrusted by the band of aristocratic Foxites. The Cold Bath Fields Prison issue and the subsequent Middlesex elections indicated sources of tension and a possible severing of the connections between Burdett and the Foxites. At the same time, however, these issues forged the link between Burdett's 'country' creed and popular radical politics.

It is difficult to trace from whom came the initiative to expose the scandals in the prison. Francis Place,<sup>2</sup> the Westminster radical, later claimed that the imprisoned members of the London Corresponding Society smuggled out letters, which the newspapers refused to publish, and sent them to likely sympathisers in Horne Tooke's Wimbledon circle.<sup>3</sup> Help was indeed forthcoming from this quarter, and a subscription for the wives and dependents of those detained on suspicion of treasonable practices was raised and distributed in April 1798. The subscribers included several from the disparate radical, Irish and Foxite groups hostile to Pitt's government.<sup>4</sup> With a steady flow of information coming out to Wimbledon throughout 1798, it is not unreasonable to assume that Tooke must have seen in the issue a good opportunity to harass the government,

<sup>1</sup>*The Diary and Correspondence of Charles Abbot, Lord Colchester*, ed. by his son, Charles, Lord Colchester. (London 1861), i. 210; 11 Nov. 1800, *The Letters of Richard Brinsley Sheridan*, ed. Cecil Price. (Oxford 1966), i. 142. Sheridan to Charles Grey, 23 Nov. 1800.

<sup>2</sup>Francis Place (1771-1854); *The Autobiography of Francis Place*, ed. M. Thale (Cambridge) 1972).

<sup>3</sup>B.L. Add. MSS. 27808 (Place Papers) f.111.

<sup>4</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Hist. c.296 f.17. Subscribers included Lord Oxford £5.5s.; Burdett £5.5s.; Horne Tooke £1.1s.; Robert Fergusson £2.2s.; Charles Grey £5.5s.; Samuel Whitbread £5.5s. The total raised was £75.7s.

and he encouraged Burdett to use the debate on the suspension of Habeas Corpus in December to raise the subject in parliament.<sup>1</sup> From that point, all the public moves were made by Burdett.

Several years later, reflecting on Burdett's political career, Lord Holland commented that, 'he had, at all times, the great merit of feeling with sincerity and expressing without fear, great indignation and horror of all personal cruelty and oppression.'<sup>2</sup> This quality was a hallmark of Burdett's personality. He revealed it in his many attempts to promote the abolition of flogging in the army; in his concern for the social and political ills of Ireland, and his generous responses to the many appeals made to him over the years for private charity. His exposure of the harsh conditions within the Cold Bath Fields Prison was the first of many occasions when he demonstrated this concern for the victims of rigorous and often arbitrarily interpreted legal penalties. Burdett's instinctive reaction in favour of the prisoners' complaints, and Horne Tooke's desire to criticise and expose a government under whose hands he too had suffered, make it easy to see why the issue was pressed with such vigour by the Wimbledon circle.

Amongst the letters smuggled out to Burdett were ones from members of the London Corresponding Society and also from seamen involved in the Spithead and Nore naval mutinies of 1797.<sup>3</sup> All told the same story of the terrible conditions in the prison. The Governor, Thomas Aris, was a corrupt rogue, who refused the prisoners the basic necessities of life such as a mattress to sleep on or warm food to eat. Prisoners who had not been charged were treated as convicted criminals and chained all day in solitary confinement. The coroner's verdict on the deaths of two inmates, Ryan and Rowe, was death 'by visitation of God', but Patrick Duffin, a United Irishman imprisoned for gaming and lottery offences, protested to Burdett that the verdict should have been 'death from

<sup>1</sup>*Hansard*, 1798, xxxiv. 120-1.

<sup>2</sup>Lord Holland, *Further Memoirs of the Whig Party 1807-21*, (London 1905), p.102.

<sup>3</sup>For details on the individual backgrounds of the imprisoned members of the L.C.S. see J.A. Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, (Oxford 1982), pp. 48, 121-3; for details of the naval mutinies see E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 183-5.

hunger and cold'. 'This is a place of deception and wretchedness concealed in every corner', he revealed to Burdett.<sup>1</sup> Aris manufactured affidavits and false evidence for the County Sessions, sold prisoners to the army and navy, and made financial profits from those prisoners who had friends to pay the gaoler, in order that they might obtain the luxury of a small fire in the middle of winter. The tales of misery were unending.<sup>2</sup>

Burdett's response was to make several visits to the prison. His first was at the end of November 1798 with his Wimbledon friend, William Bosville, and a fellow M.P., John Courtenay, and his third and last was at the end of December. At the same time, he began his campaign of public exposure by citing the terrible conditions in the prison during the second reading for the continued suspension of Habeas Corpus on 21 December.<sup>3</sup> Courtenay confirmed his statements about the prison conditions. It was common knowledge that Cold Bath Fields was known locally as 'The Bastille'. There was virtually no support for Burdett's accusations and the continued suspension of Habeas Corpus was accepted by ninety-six votes to six.<sup>4</sup> The government were clearly not threatened in Parliament by Burdett's accusations, but they did foresee the potential propaganda a person like Burdett, with radical backing, might make from the issue outside the walls of the House. Ministers therefore took three steps against him: he was banned from further visits to the prison; prisoners' mail was rigorously searched to prevent more letters reaching him, and some attempt was made to force some of the imprisoned seamen to implicate Burdett in the mutinies of 1797.<sup>5</sup> Further confirmation of the ministers' wish to prevent

<sup>1</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Hist. c.295, ff.72-89; Patrick Duffin to Burdett.

<sup>2</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Hist. c.294, ff. 19-24, 32, 69-73, prisoners' letters to Burdett; c.295, ff. 1-2, observations on cell conditions; ff. 3-18, Joel Rance's account of his treatment and conditions; ff. 72-89, Patrick Duffin to Burdett; f.93, narrative of Manchester prisoners taken to Cold Bath Fields Prison; ff. 104-33, petition of London Corresponding Society prisoners to the House of Commons; f.134, memos. and letters about the case of Colonel Despard including letters from his wife to the Duke of Portland; c.296, ff. 12-15, narrative of prisoners arrested under the suspension of Habeas Corpus; ff. 18-22, case of John Smith, bookseller imprisoned for selling the pamphlet *The Duties of Citizenship*; f.63, narrative of T. Evans on use of government spies and terrible conditions in the prison.

<sup>3</sup>*Hansard*, 1798, xxxiv. 120-1, 129-30.

<sup>4</sup>See above p.29, footnote 2.

<sup>5</sup>P.R.O.,H.O., 43/11, f.29, Portland to Aris; Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Hist. c.294, f.55, Joel Rance to Burdett; ff. 56-60, Douty, seaman, to Burdett.

any propaganda spreading came with the order for the publication of the Middlesex magistrates' reports of investigations into proceedings at Cold Bath Fields Prison on 5 March 1799.<sup>1</sup> These reports confirmed that Burdett's visits had made prisoners unruly and troublesome, confirmed that cells were clean and dry, and denied that prisoners had lost huge amounts of weight because of starvation rations. Forestalling Burdett's planned motion on the prison's conditions, Dundas called for a parliamentary Select Committee on the subject. On 19 April, the packed Committee confirmed the magistrates' good reports and praised their laudable vigilance on behalf of the public.<sup>2</sup> J.A. Hone has discussed in detail the aims of the government's parliamentary proceedings.<sup>3</sup> This study seeks to focus solely on Burdett's reaction to the Cold Bath Fields Prison debate and explain how that reaction fitted him for the role of radical champion.

Burdett's own memoranda clearly reveal that it was intended to make the Cold Bath Fields Prison debate a high profile issue, firstly inside and then outside, the Commons. He gathered information on the Acts regulating prisons and sheriffs and noted down the rules on supply, extortion and solitary confinement. His melancholy conclusion was that,

'it is not credible what extortions and oppressions have thereupon ensued. So dangerous a thing is it to shake or alter any of the rules or fundamental points of the common law which in truth are the main pillars and supporters of the fabric of the commonwealth.'<sup>4</sup>

On 21 May 1799, Burdett moved for recommittal of the Select Committee's report. His motion was seconded by R.B. Sheridan.<sup>5</sup> Burdett protested against the treatment he had received from the Commons and against the government's attempts to stigmatise both his own character and motion. He launched into a bitter attack upon Wilberforce, who, although vehement against the cruelties inflicted upon negro slaves, yet acquiesced in this system of home-grown 'slavery'. Burdett illustrated that, 'a fouler, premeditated system of torture and

<sup>1</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Hist. c.296, ff. 43-60.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.* ff. 39-40; J.A. Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, p.123.

<sup>3</sup>*ibid.* pp. 124-5.

<sup>4</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Hist. c.296, ff. 1-2.

<sup>5</sup>More details about the Burdett/Foxite co-operation over the Cold Bath Fields issue will be given later in the chapter. See below pp. 35-6.

iniquity never existed', by citing examples from the material sent to him by the prisoners. This tyranny was suffered to exist because of 'our new-fangled system of politics' which he detailed in classical 'country' style as 'profuse bestowal of peerages ..... national revenue lent out to West India merchants and planters, private speculators and money jobbers', a National Debt of four million pounds, the erection of barracks, repressive legislation, private prisons and pensioned J.P.'s.<sup>1</sup> Burdett's list of grievances were such as might have commanded a substantial body of independent gentlemen support in the 1730s, sympathetic to a tirade against stock-jobbers, government influences and the alarming size of the National Debt. In the late 1790s, however, fear of Jacobin conspiracy at home reduced this support to a mere six. The essential point to grasp is that Burdett's catalogue of grievances is not in any way a radical one but rather a moderate list of well-established, 'country' fears. It was the legacy of the French Revolution that had made that list unpalatable to those who, in earlier years, would have been its obvious supporters in the Commons; had obscured the 'country' content of its grievances; and now made such a moderate programme attractive to those radicals from the lower ranks who had first begun to attempt to flex some sort of political muscle in the popular societies of the 1790s. In other circumstances, such a 'country' and radical alliance would have been virtually impossible to forge. In the 1770s and early 1780s, just such an alliance had foundered because of the differences in method and aims between Wyvill's County Associations and the metropolitan radicals.<sup>2</sup> Now the pressure of war and the fearful, repressive attitude of the ministry towards any form of political opposition obscured the differences between 'country' and radical stances and brought the two together once again.

Burdett's second motion the following year called for a Royal Commission into the management of the Cold Bath Fields Prison. In this speech, Burdett chose safer ground upon which to assail the House. He omitted all reference to

<sup>1</sup>Bodl. Lib. Pamph. *The Speech of Sir Francis Burdett on Cold Bath Fields Prison in the House of Commons on 21 May 1799*, and Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Hist. c.296 ff. 32-8. The motion was defeated by 147 to 6.

<sup>2</sup>I. Christie, *Wilkes, Wyvill and Reform*, pp. 72, 94, 115.

prisoners from the popular societies, a reference that was likely to be fraught with Jacobinical connotations for his listeners. He focussed instead on cases like that of Mary Rich, a girl of thirteen who had been mistakenly imprisoned and then raped. Her case, Burdett maintained, was 'damning proof of the magistrates' negligence and insensibility'.<sup>1</sup> On this occasion, Dundas was forced to deplore such treatment and only a minority of members supported the Middlesex M.P., Mainwaring's view that Mary Rich was better off in prison because her home conditions were so dreadful. The House passed Burdett's request for the establishment of a Royal Commission.<sup>2</sup> It sat from September to November 1800, and its report vindicated many of Burdett's charges.<sup>3</sup>

There are two important aspects to consider as a result of Burdett's championing of the Cold Bath Fields Prison issue. The first is the continuation of his political partnership with the Foxites. Sheridan seconded both Burdett's motions and revealed his pleasure at this opportunity for the Foxites to embarrass Pitt's government. 'In short, we carried our point ..... the Gallery was immensely full and the result gives universal satisfaction', he recorded after the success of Burdett's second motion.<sup>4</sup> Scoring points against Pitt and his followers was the aim of the small Foxite opposition, and, as long as Burdett's volleys against the government were within the forum of the House, the established arena for political debate, the Foxites could see advantages to working with him. It was the volatile, popular enthusiasms of the unenfranchised ranks with which the Foxites dreaded too intimate an association.

But the principal importance of this issue for Burdett was, of course, precisely the association the Foxites most disliked. Cold Bath Fields Prison was essentially a popular issue, and Burdett's championing of the suffering inmates made him a popular metropolitan hero. The pamphlet, *An Impartial Statement of the Inhuman Cruelties Discovered! in the Cold Bath Fields Prison*, containing the

<sup>1</sup>*Hansard*, 1800, xxxv. 464-5.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.* 470.

<sup>3</sup>*Report from the Commissioners appointed .... to enquire into the State and Management of H.M. Prison in Cold Bath Fields, Clerkenwell*, 1 Nov. 1800. Printed 18 Dec. 1800.

<sup>4</sup>*The Letters of Richard Brinsley Sheridan*, ed. C. Price, ii. 135, Sheridan to his wife, 23 July 1800.

magistrates' report and Burdett's speeches ran through seven editions.<sup>1</sup> The whole affair had ingredients that inevitably caught the public imagination. It gave vivid personal details of the sufferings of particular individuals at the hands of arbitrary government, and it therefore emphasised, with dramatic clarity, the consequences for ordinary people of the results of measures such as the suspension of Habeas Corpus. On the mere suspicion of seditious activity, a man might find himself in prison without charge, possibly languishing there for several years, with no means of redress and no source of support from his family. Burdett's illumination of such perils provided the capital with an emotive issue the like of which had not been seen since the Wilkite campaigns of the 1760s.

John Stevenson and J.A. Hone have clearly demonstrated that there were many strands of discontent within the metropolis, all of whose supporters could see good reasons for promoting Burdett's criticism of the ministry.<sup>2</sup> These areas of discontent ranged from City merchant and business interests angry at the ministry's conduct of the war, political radicals in Tookeite circles, to popular grievances about the high war-time price of bread. Many of these groups had little in common with each other yet all might, for their own reasons, support Burdett's mounting criticism of the government. He was essential to any protest movement for his aristocratic background and connections indubitably entitled him to a political voice. Most importantly, and most inexplicably to social peers like his Foxite allies, Burdett did not appear to recoil from involvement in popular protest politics. For this reason, his value to several groups who would not otherwise have a political voice in their own right was immense.

<sup>1</sup>*An Impartial Statement of the Inhuman Cruelties Discovered! in the Cold Bath Fields Prison, by the Grand and Traverse Juries for the County of Middlesex, and reported in the House of Commons on Friday, 11 July, by Sir Francis Burdett, bart. etc.* (7th edn. London 1800); *A Further Account (being Part ii) of the Cruelties Discovered in the Cold Bath Fields Prison, as reported in the House of Commons on Tuesday, 22nd July 1800, in the Speeches of Sir Francis Burdett, bart. and R.B. Sheridan esq.* (4th edn. London 1800); J.A. Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, p.125. The pamphlets were published by J.S. Jordan and J. Smith, two former L.C.S. booksellers with first-hand knowledge of the prison.

<sup>2</sup>J. Stevenson, 'Disturbances and Public Order in London, 1790-1821', (Oxford Univ. D.Phil. 1973) p.91; J.A. Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, pp. 130-1.

Stevenson's conclusion is absolutely correct:<sup>1</sup> the influence of a single personality as a unifying force in such a complex metropolitan society was very considerable indeed and should not be underestimated at the opening of the nineteenth century. This unifying role was to be Burdett's until about 1815.

The government, quite naturally, did not welcome the prospect of Burdett as a unifying force for voices critical of its politics. Having suspected him of treasonable activities with Arthur O'Connor, there is evidence that ministers now sought further signs of seditious activity arising from the Cold Bath Fields Prison campaign. The government spy, Powell, had been reporting on the connections between the Wimbledon circle and the London Corresponding Society since 1796. With particular reference to Burdett, he now reported to Sir Richard Ford at the Home Office a series of sensational comments that purported to be Burdett's account of a conversation between himself and Fox, which was then in turn, told to Alexander Galloway.<sup>2</sup> Powell reported that, 'the only chance of political emancipation at present was that he and the whole of the friends of liberty should solely turn their minds to the soldiery'. There were details of a projected motion from Fox to abolish the monarchy and Burdett's supposed reaction that, 'he would have gloried to have gone to the Tower under such circumstances'.<sup>3</sup> But just how credible is this evidence? In the same bundle of papers, Home Office Officials charged Powell with negligence, and shortly after these tantalising snatches of incriminating conversations were duly reported back. Although Home Office monitoring of Burdett's activities appears to suggest that ministers would have liked to construct a case against him, there was never any concrete evidence produced from which to form the basis of a set of charges. Burdett did undoubtedly mix with people, who had histories of radical activity and whom the government suspected of Jacobinism, but neither Burdett nor his mentor, Tooke, were the type of leaders to man the barricades or even encourage others to do so. Tooke's methods of agitation at Westminster had all

<sup>1</sup>J. Stevenson, 'Disturbances and Public Order in London, 1790-1821', (Oxford Univ. D.Phil. 1973) p.338.

<sup>2</sup>Alexander Galloway was a member of the London Corresponding Society and Tooke's radical circles.

<sup>3</sup>P.R.O. P.C.1/3535, Powell to Sir Richard Ford, 25 Dec. 1801.

taken a constitutional form, and he had deliberately distanced himself from the ideas of Tom Paine which seemed to threaten the established hierarchy in society. Similarly, although the delivery of Burdett's speeches against the government was fiery enough, the content belonged, as has been discussed, to an essentially very moderate creed, the aims of which sprang from the concerns of the independent, 'country' politician. It was precisely the constitutional aims of Burdett and Tooke that were most amply demonstrated by Burdett's decision to accept the invitation to stand for Middlesex in 1802.

The invitation came from nineteen Middlesex freeholders early in June. A closer look at the nineteen reveals that two, Robert Knight and Thomas Holt White, were friends of the veteran reformer Major Cartwright; two others, Michael Pearson and Hugh Bell, were frequenters of Horne Tooke's Wimbledon circle, and several more were members of the Independent Livery, a group which included many radical activists and sympathisers.<sup>1</sup> On 26 June, Burdett responded to their invitation in the affirmative. If they cared to entrust their cause to him, he would accept the offer from this free, informed constituency.<sup>2</sup> Burdett was to contest the seat against the present incumbents, the Whig, George Byng, and more particularly, the government banker, William Mainwaring, who had defended the conduct of Governor Aris in parliament. It was thus immediately clear that the contest was to be a deliberate extension of the hotly contested Cold Bath Fields Prison debate. Burdett indeed maintained that it was Mainwaring's conduct over Cold Bath Fields that had provoked his opposition.<sup>3</sup> The populace immediately picked up the theme, and after the candidates had dined together at the White Hart Inn in Uxbridge, Burdett was chaired to Lady Rockingham's house to the accompanying cry of, 'Burdett for ever and no Bastilles!'<sup>4</sup> It was to be the rallying cry for Burdett's supporters throughout the

<sup>1</sup>J.A. Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, p.131.

<sup>2</sup>*A Report of the Proceedings during the late contested election for the County of Middlesex including the state of each days poll with the addresses and speeches of Messrs. Byng, Mainwaring, and Sir Francis Burdett Bt. with many other interesting particulars.* (London 1802) pp. 9-10. Bodl Lib. MSS. Eng. Hist. b.200, f.1. Burdett to the freeholders of Middlesex.

<sup>3</sup>*A Report ... of the late contested election ... for Middlesex*, p.12.

<sup>4</sup>*ibid.*

election. The obvious popular enthusiasm demonstrated by the chairing of Burdett hinted that the turbulent tone of the election and the degree of popular participation was likely to be reminiscent of the Wilkite contests of the 1760s. On nomination day, Burdett's carriage processed from Devonshire House to the Brentford hustings accompanied by crowds sporting his dark blue and Byng's light blue and orange cockades. Burdett was proposed by the Foxite, Alderman Combe<sup>1</sup> who stressed that Burdett's independent fortune placed him beyond the reach of corruption and that his conduct had proved his support for the liberties of the people. Burdett's reply to the electors was an appeal to them as honest, free-born Englishmen. A vote for him meant a vote for the restoration of old and just laws and against new, cruel and illegal types of imprisonment.<sup>2</sup> The ideas behind Burdett's appeal are clear. They were in the 'country' tradition that looked back to the constitutional perfections of the past. Restoration of the constitution by a purification of the political system was to be Burdett's aim rather than any innovation. It was innovation of which Pitt was accused. This moderate, backward-looking, and exclusively English constitutional dogma was to be spiced up by the use of examples from the horrors of Cold Bath Fields Prison in order to illustrate the evils of innovative, arbitrary, legal practices.

Alderman Combe's stress upon Burdett's independent fortune which placed him above corruption should also be noted. The idea of the independent gentleman with means, who could thus have no self-interested desire for political power and office, was absolutely central to the 'country' tradition, which aimed to purify the Commons of those whose financial dependence upon a ministry tied them to its policies. Burdett's candidacy thus had all the ingredients of the English 'country' platform of the early eighteenth century; it had no points of similarity with the example of the French Revolution to which radicals at Nottingham appealed.<sup>3</sup>

The contest covered the period 13 to 27 July and 'never was a contest for

<sup>1</sup>The relationship between Burdett and the Foxites at the contest will be discussed in detail later in the chapter. See below pp. 41-3.

<sup>2</sup>*A Report ... of the late contested election ... for Middlesex*, pp. 18-19, 23-5.

<sup>3</sup>J.A. Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, p.133.

Middlesex carried on with more zeal', recorded one observer.<sup>1</sup> But though the popular support was overwhelmingly in favour of Burdett, he only overtook Mainwaring on the final day of the poll.<sup>2</sup> The election clearly illustrated the difficulties of the independent candidate when he attempted to compete against entrenched interests and party machines. It was also evident that in the atmosphere of 1802 the factor of huge popular support could be a disadvantage. Although mud-slinging and riots during a poll were in the mainstream of English electoral traditions, they automatically assumed more sinister overtones in the aftermath of the French Revolution and must have dissuaded many electors from voting for Burdett. To many observers, Burdett's election promised more rabble-raising and an increased influence for those with seditious and perhaps treasonable ambitions.<sup>3</sup> Burdett's personal political platform, however, was designed to promote the very opposite of these fears. Above all else, he emphasised the constitutional nature of his campaign. Electors must defend their remaining rights and privileges by every legal means in their power.<sup>4</sup> On several days, Burdett attacked the ministry's corrupt interference in the election. It reached its most absurd heights, he claimed, when government office-holders in the form of Westminster Abbey bell-ringers and cooks were rounded up to vote for Mainwaring.<sup>5</sup> In a deliberately stark contrast, Burdett himself directed his appeals for support to independent freeholders, and urged them not to be menaced by Mainwaring and the 'pensioned magistracy'.<sup>6</sup> The appeal to

<sup>1</sup>A Report .... of the late Contested Election .... for Middlesex, p.27.

<sup>2</sup>A Report .... of the late Contested Election .... for Middlesex, pp. 27-66. The figures for each day of the poll were as follows:

Day	Byng	Mainwaring	Burdett	Day	Byng	Mainwaring	Burdett
1	1303	1097	699	9	2841	2464	1955
2	2005	1659	1192	10	2925	2534	2032
3	2252	1880	1386	11	2973	2582	2079
4	2382	2016	1509	12	3059	2642	2079
5	2445	2093	1564	13	3200	2722	2323
6	2564	2186	1710	14	3557	2805	2791
7	2671	2286	1817	15	3848	2936	3207
8	2841	2384	1895				

<sup>3</sup>(G. Huddesford), *The Scum Uppermost when the Middlesex Porridge-Pot Boils Over! An heroic Election Ballad with Explanatory notes*, (London 1802).

<sup>4</sup>A Report .... of .... the late contested election .... for Middlesex, p.31.

<sup>5</sup>*ibid.* pp. 43, 45.

<sup>6</sup>*ibid.* pp. 43, 46.

independent freeholders could yield results in such a large constituency and it was a theme that was central to both 'country' tradition and Burdett's subsequent career. After 1807 the independent freeholders at Westminster were to form the backbone of the Westminster Election Committee and for years to come would comprise the hard core of Burdettite support in the constituency.

Burdett chose to illustrate the advantages of voting independently and shaking off the yoke of a 'pensioned magistracy' by choosing an example that would inevitably conjure up for his hustings audience the horrors of rule by an arbitrary government and its hirelings. He cited the case of a twelve year old girl who had been sent to the 'mercy of Governor Aris' for pelting mud at the government candidate on the previous day.<sup>1</sup> References to the Cold Bath Fields issue could be relied upon to keep the popular pot boiling. Indeed on the last day of the contest, which saw Byng and Burdett returned at the head of the poll, a triumphant, flag-waving cavalcade processed from Brentford to Burdett's home in Piccadilly. Thousands lined the route and many crammed into the celebration dinner at the Crown and Anchor tavern. Burdett's speech, recorded an observer, touched every heart.<sup>2</sup>

But not everyone welcomed Burdett's triumph. The Foxites in particular had increasingly ambiguous feelings about his success. From the start they had been happy to promote a Byng and Burdett ticket against the government candidate. Many prominent Foxites had openly given their support to Burdett including Erskine, the Dukes of Devonshire and Bedford, Lord Thanet, Dr. Parr and Fox himself.<sup>3</sup> The Russells had helped to transport Burdett's supporters from the Strand out to Brentford, and campaign celebrations toasted those Whig hostesses zealously campaigning for 'liberty'.<sup>4</sup> The Foxites were still concerned with their battle against the Pittite 'system', and Burdett's stand against that 'system' during the Cold Bath Fields Prison issue and on the Middlesex hustings

<sup>1</sup>*ibid.* p.48-9.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.* p.73.

<sup>3</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Autog. d.20, f.57. Erskine to Burdett; Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Hist. b.200, f.4, Devonshire to Thomas Coutts; *Copy of the Poll for the Election of two Knights of the Shire to serve in Parliament for the County of Middlesex (1803)*.

<sup>4</sup>*A Report ... of the late contested election ... for Middlesex*, pp. 39, 57-8.

fitted very well into their political battle. Burdett himself was also acceptable in Foxite circles as an impeccable aristocrat who evinced a warm admiration for Fox himself. Indeed Fox and Burdett were still on friendly terms with each other at this time.<sup>1</sup> But there were signs that an association with Burdett had practical disadvantages in Foxite minds. They wished to stand forward as guardians of the rights of the people but did not relish too active a participation in politics from the people. The enthusiastic, unenfranchised mobs that cheered Burdett and pelted his government opponent, Mainwaring, were representative of a type of turbulent, popular politics that Foxites, such as Grey, wished to avoid. Burdett's connections with the imprisoned plotter, Colonel Despard,<sup>2</sup> and the members of Horne Tooke's Wimbledon circle who had undoubtedly had Jacobinical sympathies in the 1790s were far from welcome allies to Grey. The Foxite political battle focussed on the question of who was to hold political power from within the small political élite; it did not wish for too definite associations with men clearly outside the established political world. Burdett's 'country' ideas were also in this vein, but he was already attracting allies whose participation obscured his own more limited aims. The crucial difference at this early stage of Burdett's career between himself and the Foxites was that he was prepared to accept popular, more radical assistance and they were not.

There was also ambiguity towards the Foxites from Burdett's own circle. Tooke in particular was worried that Burdett might fall into Foxite guiding hands. When he heard that the Duke of Bedford had gone down to Brentford in support of Burdett, he 'immediately set off for the hustings in express opposition to his original intentions'.<sup>3</sup> The reason for tension between Tooke and the Foxites was at bottom a fundamental difference in their approach to politics, especially their differences over the idea of party. The Foxites were a small, tightly-knit group who believed in the responsibilities and obligations that adherence to a party imposed in the political arena.<sup>4</sup> By contrast, Tooke and

<sup>1</sup>B.L. Add. MSS. 47564, f.51. Fox to Lauderdale, 28 July 1802, reporting a conversation between himself and Burdett.

<sup>2</sup>More details on pp. 47-8.

<sup>3</sup>A. Stephens, *Memoirs of Horne Tooke*, ii. 306.

<sup>4</sup>L.G. Mitchell, *Charles James Fox and the Disintegration of the Whig Party, 1782-1794*. (Oxford 1971) pp. 246-249, 265-69.

Burdett's 'country' ideas were profoundly anti-party. Their stance was intimately connected with independence; not only independence from the ties of government office but from all party obligations, which inevitably tended to restrict a man's political behaviour. For them, party was more truly equated with early eighteenth century ideas about self-interested faction. Tooke's own earlier challenges at Westminster had symbolised the independent challenge to the representatives of party. His statement that, 'every man's honour ought to be in his own keeping'<sup>1</sup>, left no room for party loyalties, which imply the accommodation of political views to a party line. Burdett's own political career was to illustrate that he had fully absorbed this belief in the virtue of political independence. Thus although Burdettites and Foxites were in a loose partnership of protest against the Pittite 'system' at Middlesex, the underlying motives for their protests, and their ideas on the methods for promoting that protest, were poles apart and would be a source of tension in the following years.

Outside the Foxite group, the reactions of the remainder of the established political world to Burdett's triumph had no trace of ambiguity. There was disapproval of both the methods used and the result of the election. This disapproval manifested itself in two ways: in adverse effects upon Burdett's father-in-law, Thomas Coutts; and in a continued, vigilant observation of the activities of the Wimbledon group by government spies.

Coutts found himself in a difficult position. As illustrated in Chapter One of this thesis, there were considerable tensions within the Coutts and Burdett family group, and Coutts had seized on the chance to push Burdett into politics in order to distract him from discontent at his own hearth. In 1802, his fear was still that Burdett would remove his family abroad.<sup>2</sup> Although he was therefore pleased at Burdett's increasing involvement in the political world, the latter's announced intention to stand for Middlesex was an unwelcome surprise. Coutts obviously did not wish to prejudice his own interests and position as royal banker. His ties to established figures like the Prince of Wales and his

<sup>1</sup>A. Stephens, *Memoirs of Horne Tooke*, ii. 170-2.

<sup>2</sup>A. Aspinall, *The Later Correspondence of George III*, iv. 43-4, quoted from Sidmouth MSS., Coutts to Addington, 22 July 1802.

interest in political stability in general, inevitably made him disapprove of some of Burdett's radical political associates. His hope was that 'time would give moderation to his<sup>1</sup> opinions and conduct'.<sup>2</sup>

Coutts's fears about the inadvisability of Burdett's candidature had been confirmed when the government withdrew the secret service money lodged at his bank. Coutts could only protest his well-known disapproval of the conduct and principles of Burdett and his followers at Middlesex. The proximity of Burdett's election committee to Coutts's own doorstep was nothing to do with him; he denied all knowledge and acquaintance with those involved in such business.<sup>3</sup> Coutts did have to admit that he had procured a mere dozen votes for Burdett out of affection for the family and from a desire not to see his daughter miserable, but otherwise, he maintained, he had steered clear of all the electioneering. Indeed, he had warned Burdett of the likely expenses of such a campaign and had consequently advised him to give it up. Coutts vociferously denied newspaper rumours that he had paid Burdett's election expenses.<sup>4</sup> All the evidence certainly points to Burdett financing the Middlesex campaign himself, for the financial difficulties that became clear to him in 1807 and forced him to consider sales of parts of his estates were a result, he admitted, of his earlier ruinous election expenses.<sup>5</sup>

Coutts's claims that he had only assisted Burdett in minor ways did not go unnoticed. Thomas Grenville acknowledged to Lord Grenville the realities of electioneering:

'neither of us are likely to attribute bad principles to him because he got ten or twelve votes for his daughter's husband. I told him that though I should not have voted for Sir Francis Burdett, I thought it very natural that he should .... I think it is childish in Lord Hawkesbury to have taken this step; Coutts is no Jacobin.'<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Burdett's

<sup>2</sup>E.H. Coleridge, *Life of Thomas Coutts, Banker*, ii. 133, Thomas Coutts to William Pitt, 25 July 1802; B.L. Add. MSS. 41856, (Grenville Papers), ff. 79-82, Coutts to Grenville, 25 and 28 July 1802.

<sup>3</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>4</sup>E.H. Coleridge, *Life of Thomas Coutts*, ii 139-40; Coutts to Patrick Home, 19 Aug. 1802.

<sup>5</sup>Bodl. lib. MSS. Eng. Hist. A9, f.60, Burdett to Gawler, 28 Nov. 1807. To be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, p.65.

<sup>6</sup>Historical MSS. Commission, *Fortescue MSS.* (London 1910), vii 100, Thomas Grenville to Lord Grenville, 12 July 1802.

But the government secret service money was not returned to Coutts Bank until the Talents Ministry came to power in 1806.<sup>1</sup> It is clear from this incident that a political stand protesting against government policy was still one that was equated directly by many in government circles with Jacobinism. In such an atmosphere, the net of suspicion around a suspected Jacobin could take in even such pillars of the Establishment as Coutts. It is clear that to the majority of the propertied, political world, Burdett could be labelled a Jacobin; ample proof lay in his apparent desire to promote turbulent popular politics in the Capital. Such a course went against everything that Burdett's aristocratic birth, social position and wealth stood for. It was this fact, that it was a man of Burdett's social standing who had placed himself at the head of such a popular cause, that was profoundly inexplicable to contemporaries. Lord Minto spoke for many of them: Burdett's rank, fortune and talent had given to a 'catastrophic cause, ... a countenance which should not naturally belong to it'.<sup>2</sup>

Burdett's championing of the popular cause at Middlesex certainly had resulted in something like a renaissance of popular, metropolitan political activity. The Cold Bath Fields Prison issue that had identified individual cases of suffering, at the hands of the representatives of what was portrayed by radicals as an increasingly irresponsible legal system, had been ideally calculated to revive the turbulent spirit of metropolitan politics of the 1760s and 1770s. During the Middlesex election, songs were circulating that portrayed Burdett as the champion to protect liberty in Middlesex and for the people at large.

'Then exert yourselves nobly and give your support  
To the man who will never be slave to a Court.'<sup>3</sup>

ran a popular refrain exhorting metropolitan freeholders to assert their muzzled independence. The future Lord Lyndhurst wrote of Burdett: it was 'impossible to describe the enthusiasm of the multitude ... the people were, to a man, on his side'.<sup>4</sup> Burdett was the traditional, independent man of property with the

<sup>1</sup>*ibid.* viii. 369, Viscount Howick to Lord Grenville, 2 Oct. 1806, enclosing a letter from Coutts to Howick, 18 Sept. 1806.

<sup>2</sup>M.W. Patterson, i. 143; Lord Minto to Thomas Coutts, 15 Aug. 1802.

<sup>3</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Hist. b.200, f.11. Election song by Thomas Linton Rogers.

<sup>4</sup>Sir T. Martin, *Life of Lord Lyndhurst*, (London 1883), pp. 83-4.

resources, time and immediate access to a political platform and was therefore the ideal figure to launch criticisms against the government. Indeed, he was the only type of figure who could hope to keep a high profile and generate noticeable protest, as the government's largely successful imprisonment of radicals in the 1790s had proved. The aristocratic spokesman was essential to radicals in 1802, and Burdett's emotive, colourful speeches and his striking appearance made him the idol of the populace. It was precisely Burdett's 'patrician gusto'<sup>1</sup> that was vitally necessary to an opposition spokesman in these years. As the Manchester journalist, William Cowdroy, wrote,

'A man of his character, rank and fortune who devotes himself to the service of the public can be actuated only by the purest zeal for the good of his country.'<sup>2</sup>

But the dangerous times and legacy of the French Revolution had completely altered the rules of play and all opposition spokesmen inevitably incurred the label 'Jacobin'. *The Times* spoke for the propertied political world; Burdett was a man,

'who had been nurtured in the school of democracy ... the willing pupil of those whose principles are in opposition to the principles of the English Government'.

Principles 'directed to overturn both Church and State', whose supporters were 'Jacobinical emissaries' and

'the bare idea of his<sup>3</sup> succeeding in the present contest is sufficient to alarm every man who has not imbibed the principles of Marat or Robespierre.'<sup>4</sup>

Such words are clear proof that the example of the French Revolution totally obscured the 'country' content of Burdett's ideas. Proof of the jacobinical label being given to Burdett's views is the monitoring by government spies of Burdett's election committee during the contest. The spy Moody, who was known as 'Notary' in Burdett circles, was a member of the election committee

<sup>1</sup>E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p.671. Thompson suggests that 'Byronic gusto' was the shortcoming of patrician radicals; rather it should be argued that it was an essential ingredient to promotion of the radical cause on a national political stage.

<sup>2</sup>*Manchester Gazette*, 7 Aug. 1802, quoted in J. Dinwiddy, *Sir Francis Burdett and Burdettite Radicalism, History*, 65, (1980) 30.

<sup>3</sup>Burdett

<sup>4</sup>*The Times*, 28 July 1802.

and remained unsuspected for several years.<sup>1</sup> He sent back his reports to Sir Richard Ford at the Home Office, reports which clearly convinced the government that the 'circle of Wimbledon' were sympathetic to seditious designs. Tooke's house was described as the 'Head Quarters' and Tooke himself as the 'High Priest'.<sup>2</sup> A few days after the close of the poll for Middlesex, Moody reported that there was, 'scarce a notorious leader of Jacobinism absent'.<sup>3</sup> Government suspicions apparently acquired more content when Burdett and the Foxites visited Paris in the summer.<sup>4</sup> Burdett recorded his favourable impression of the Capital, pronouncing himself 'exceedingly gratified by my journey'.<sup>5</sup>

On his return, Burdett's involvement with the case of Colonel Despard meant that government attention was focussed upon him and his associates even more closely. Burdett first came across Despard <sup>6</sup> when the latter was imprisoned under the suspension of Habeas Corpus from 1798 until 1800 in Cold Bath Fields Prison. He was one of those championed by Burdett.<sup>7</sup> Despard appeared to have become involved with the United Irishmen, was arrested again in London in November 1802 and charged with High Treason for the supposed creation of a revolutionary army, whose network extended through London, the West Riding and Ireland, and whose design was to kill the King and overturn the government. E.P. Thompson provides a full discussion of the often shadowy and contradictory evidence in the case.<sup>8</sup> Despard protested his innocence. Financial backing for the committee working for his acquittal came from Burdett, Tooke

<sup>1</sup>J.A. Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, 53. Moody was a Carnaby St. shoe warehouseman and member of the L.C.S. He was secretary to Horne Tooke's 1796 election committee and remained in the Wimbledon circle until his death in 1808. The identity of Moody was completely unknown to Patterson; see M.W. Patterson, i. 143.

<sup>2</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Hist. B 200 f.18, J. Notary to Mr. Bruce (Sir Richard Ford), 7 Feb. 1803.

<sup>3</sup>P.R.O., H.O. 42/65, 'Civic Affection' to 'Dear Citizen', 31 July 1802.

<sup>4</sup>England and France had signed the Peace of Amiens on 25 March 1802. War resumed on 16 May 1803.

<sup>5</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. lett. d.94, ff. 1-2, Burdett to Lady Burdett. A.W. Stirling, *Coke of Norfolk and his Friends*, (London 1908) ii. 20.

<sup>6</sup>Colonel Edward Marcus Despard (1751-1803). He had a distinguished naval career under Nelson in the 1780s but with no obvious court connections or avenues to promotion he was left, by the 1790s, with many grievances against the corruption, nepotism and unfair system of rewards which existed.

<sup>7</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Hist. c.295 ff. 134, 145. Memos. about Despard and his petition to the House of Commons.

<sup>8</sup>E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 521-8.

and the Wimbledon set. To government eyes, the committee certainly comprised some suspicious men. It included Thomas Hardy, tried along with Tooke for treason in 1794, Le Maître, arrested several times in the 1790s; Gunter Browne, indicted with Lord Thanet for the attempted rescue of Arthur O'Connor in 1798; Clifford, a Roman Catholic lawyer; Pearson, one of the freeholders who had proposed Burdett for Middlesex, Horne Tooke and Burdett. Moody reported their deliberations to the Home Office. Subscriptions were collected for Despard's dependents, and Tooke launched into an attack upon the Royal Family and Whig place-hunters. 'They looked to every opportunity of the chance to distress TYRANNY', he concluded.<sup>1</sup> But in the same breath, Moody helped to clear Burdett and his friends from any real seditious designs for he admitted, 'after what had happened to the Colonel, they will be careful of associating too intimately with the lower classes as their friends in future'.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, one of the Committee's main worries was that Burdett's name would be brought up in Despard's trial and thus spoil his chances at Middlesex. Once again, all the evidence points to Burdett and his promoter, Tooke, seeking constitutional methods of agitation. This legitimate, constitutional approach to opposition politics was demonstrated by Burdett's second candidature for Middlesex in 1804 after a House of Commons committee had nullified the result of the 1802 poll, by overturning the Sheriff's decision to allow three hundred holders of shares in an Isleworth Mill to poll for Burdett as forty shilling freeholders.<sup>3</sup> In the Middlesex by-election in July 1804, Burdett fought the son of the government's previous candidate, Mainwaring.

The campaign opened with already deeply polarised sides. Burdett himself had contributed to the bitter mood by urging men at a Crown and Anchor dinner in the previous August not to volunteer for the defence of their country until

<sup>1</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Hist. b.200, ff. 18-19; Notary to Mr. Bruce, 7 Feb. 1803. P.R.O., P.C. 1/3117, Ford to Notary, 9 Nov. 1804.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.* Despard was executed in 1803.

<sup>3</sup>*Hansard*, 1804, ii. 958-9; on 9 July 1804, a Select Committee of the House of Commons declared the three hundred Isleworth Mill votes invalid. It also, however, declared Mainwaring's election invalid on the grounds that his agents had been guilty of bribing and treating voters. A by-election was therefore necessary.

grievances had been remedied. This uniting of a demand for reform with the possibility of volunteering for the defence of the nation outraged government pamphleteers and cartoonists.<sup>1</sup>

In response to government opposition to Burdett's candidature, his own supporters began to organise themselves in equal measure. The campaign in 1802 had clearly demonstrated that the independent freeholders had to have some sort of organisation capable of combatting the ranks of government office-holders and magistracy, marshalling behind Mainwaring. Organisation was the supreme talent of the veteran reformer, Major Cartwright, and bringing to the fore his experience in the County and Metropolitan reform associations of the 1770s and 1780s, he founded the Middlesex Freeholder's Club to promote Burdett's candidacy in 1804.<sup>2</sup> Inside the committee promoting Burdett, Notary was still busy at work reporting all the preparations for decorations, pamphlets and organisers. The promotion of Burdett was being approached with thoroughness and determination, features of organisation that were subsequently to be the hallmark of the metropolitan reformers in the decades up to 1832. Moody's version to Sir Richard Ford was that some were 'to bribe and treat' while 'our hero', Burdett, was to remain 'pure and unspotted'.<sup>3</sup> Although bribing and treating were practices standard to virtually every election contest, their detection was always likely to be a thorn in the flesh of such 'independent' candidates as Burdett. Detection was exploited to the full by opponents as the result of the 1804 contest was to illustrate.

The themes of Burdett's hustings speeches were once again very strongly 'country', independent ones. Those electors favouring the squandering of public

<sup>1</sup>A *Letter to the Freeholders of Middlesex, by an Attentive Observer*, (London 1804). The pamphlet's author was John Bowles, an anti-Jacobin pamphleteer. A *Calm & Dispassionate Address to Sir Francis Burdett, Bart., pointing out to him the Causes of his Defeat at the late Election of a Member to represent the County of Middlesex by an Independent Freeholder* (London 1804). D. George, *English Political Caricature*, p.71, 'The Crown and Anchor Desperado, or, the Cracked Member belonging to the Bedlam Rangers', B.L. No. 10054.

<sup>2</sup>J.W. Osborne, *John Cartwright* (Cambridge 1972) p.74; N. Miller, 'John Cartwright and radical parliamentary reform, 1808-19'. *English Historical Review*, 83 (1968) 709.

<sup>3</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Hist. b.200, f.22, J. Notary to Mr. Bruce (Moody to Ford), 18 July 1804.

money and the continuation of prisons as dens of torture should support his opponent, he maintained. The Cold Bath Fields Prison issue was too popular a cause to be dropped so, as in 1802, it was juxtaposed with favourite 'country' issues. The issue at stake, maintained Burdett, was whether a combination of corrupt magistrates and contractors should return a member for Middlesex, or whether the freeholders sufficiently valued their independence to overturn the 'baneful influence of corruption'.<sup>1</sup>

From 23 July to 6 August, as the evenly matched contest swung first in favour of one candidate and then his opponent, Burdett harangued his supporters from the hustings with a mixture of fiery, demagogic speeches containing essentially moderate, archaic, 'country' themes. He recalled the shout of, 'Wilkes and Liberty' on the day that his majority over Mainwaring was a significant forty-five, and he attempted to damage his opponent by continually fostering the connection with the miscreant Aris, the favourite of the government 'system'. At three 'Crown and Anchor' dinners,<sup>2</sup> he struck a fundamentally 'country', independent note that was to be a feature of his political career. Burdett denied any desire for political power but stated that his wish was merely to regulate the exercise of executive power. Perhaps more than anything else this was the hallmark of the independent, 'country' position. The early eighteenth century country gentleman had no desire for political office; his social and financial standing meant that he also had no pressing need to seek it. Far from having any inclination to fill the role of a government servant, the country gentleman preferred to leave for his estates at the end of the session and frequently could not be coaxed from them at the start of the next. A country gentleman was proud to vote on parliamentary issues as his conscience dictated and was difficult to convince of the merits of a party line.<sup>3</sup> Burdett's anti-party, independent stand was very much in this mould. His denial of any desire for political power did not prove groundless; even when he became an increasingly

<sup>1</sup>A *Full Report of the Speeches of Sir Francis Burdett at the late election, including those at the Crown and Anchor Tavern*, (London 1804) pp. 3, 8.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.* pp. 2-3, 7, 29, 38; 26,30 July, 3 Aug.

<sup>3</sup>J. Brewer, *Party Ideology and Popular Politics at the Accession of George III*, p.255

respectable member of the political world in the 1820s, he refused to tie himself by office to any ministry. In 1832, he even refused a peerage from Grey and the Reform Ministry. Complete political independence was the hallmark of Burdett's political career.

Continuing the 'country' theme in 1804, Burdett opposed the corruption that fed and nourished his election opponents. He placed his faith instead, he declared, in the favourite eighteenth century equation, the interdependence of liberty and property. Preservation of the liberties of the people was the best security for the preservation of property; the two stood or fell together. He therefore opposed the present crushing burden of taxation upon property; what was necessary was a favourite 'country' remedy, economy. This entailed the control of profligate and unprincipled ministers, the chief of whom was, of course, Pitt.<sup>1</sup>

The sentiments Burdett expressed on the final day of the poll are worthy of note for they were almost prophetic about the course of his singular, political career:

'I have ever been a steady supporter of what is called the Whig interest of this country. Without being a party man ... I have on all occasions to the utmost of my abilities, given that interest my unbiased and active support. I have done this because I believe the Whig principles are those which must save the country ... but if I should find that the Whig interest deserted its principles, or if the Tory interest abandoned their errors and set about reforming the constitution of the country you would find me as ardent in the ranks of their forces as I have hitherto been in those of the Whigs.'<sup>2</sup>

A political creed that paid such scant regard to party and group loyalties was always likely to be labelled erratic and unprincipled, but it is the aim of this thesis to prove that the very reverse was true. Burdett constantly promoted the independent 'country' ideas and aims that are already evident in his early political encounters. In the period of these Middlesex elections those ideas were in an alliance with the Foxite Whigs as the only other group who stood in parliamentary opposition to Pittite government. Soon the same set of 'country'

<sup>1</sup>*A Full Report of the Speeches of Sir Francis Burdett at the late election* .... pp. 68-9.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.* p.45

ideas was to be hijacked to spearhead a rejuvenated metropolitan radicalism. After 1815 this alliance too collapsed, and Burdett worked profitably with Whigs increasingly interested in parliamentary reform and Canningites promoting Catholic Emancipation. After 1832, his 'country' ideas found a more sympathetic response in the Peelite camp. It was a very singular political career and to many contemporaries it was inexplicable. But although Burdett showed no regard for party loyalties, his behaviour was far from unprincipled. His principles were those of complete political independence. In 1804 this meant independence from government corruption and influence; in 1807 it meant independence from the Foxite Whigs, and ultimately in 1815, Burdett proved that he also wished to be independent from any brand of doctrinaire radicalism.

At five o'clock on 6 August 1804, on the final day's poll at Middlesex, there was a majority of one for Burdett over Mainwaring and the government interest.<sup>1</sup> But the triumph for the Burdettites was short-lived for on the following day, the Sheriffs reversed the decision on the grounds that no votes should be allowed after the usual polling time of 3 p.m.<sup>2</sup> The result provoked a parliamentary wrangle with accusations of electoral malpractices on both sides. It was not until 10 February 1806, that a Select Committee of the House of Commons finally reported in favour of Mainwaring, despite the efforts of Cartwright and the Middlesex freeholders to petition Parliament in favour of Burdett.<sup>3</sup> Burdett himself disdained to become involved in the disputes between the two sides and maintained his independent stand: 'I have done my duty and the Public acknowledge it, surely this is sufficient to satisfy the ambition of an honest man.'<sup>4</sup>

By 1806, Burdett's 'country' protest was attracting a diverse range of associates. He still stood in an uneasy partnership with the Foxites. Before the contest Fox had toasted success to Burdett at the Whig Club.<sup>5</sup> As in 1802,

<sup>1</sup>*ibid.* p.43, Final numbers were Burdett, 2833; Mainwaring, 2832.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.* pp. 47-57

<sup>3</sup>*Hansard*, 1806, vi. 157-8.

<sup>4</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. lett. c.64, f.38. Burdett to Creevey, 18 Aug. 1804.

<sup>5</sup>A. Aspinall, *The Later Correspondence of George III*, iv. 158 No. 2839, Portland to George III, 9 May 1804.

Foxite support took a high profile during the contest with Norfolk, Bedford, Devonshire, Lansdowne, Lauderdale, Stanhope, Bessborough, Thanet, Holland, Ossulston, Sheridan and Whitbread all coming out in favour of Burdett. Lord William Russell chaired the first dinner at the Crown and Anchor for Burdett and Lord Duncannon the second.<sup>1</sup> During the parliamentary arguments over the contest result, Fox tried to block Mainwaring's petition to the House and continually voiced his support for Burdett.<sup>2</sup> In the Foxite battle against the Pittite system, Burdett, in 1804, was a politician who might help the cause. It was the subsequent failure of the Talents Ministry that illustrated that the alliance was a tenuous one. After 1806-7, Burdett's 'country' fears and aims were revealed to be substantially at variance with those of the Foxite camp.

After 1804, Burdett's 'country' ideas were thus increasingly the preserve of a rejuvenated metropolitan radicalism and by far the most important convert in this camp was the journalist, William Cobbett. In 1802, he had denounced Burdett's conduct as 'seditious bording upon treason'<sup>3</sup>, but the 1804 contest altered his opinion. He then witnessed ministerial support for Mainwaring through the votes of government dependents and the continual parliamentary reviews of the result. Burdett's 'country' stand against corruption and the increasing cost of the Civil List impressed Cobbett for it pointed the accusing finger at those Cobbett most disliked, the paper money-men, government contractors and stock-jobbers.<sup>4</sup> Burdett's opponent at Middlesex, Mainwaring and several of his committee members were all government bankers.<sup>5</sup> By contrast, Burdett came from a landed family which could trace its ancestry back to the Conquest<sup>6</sup>, and he had no business or professional ties. He had all the qualities necessary for the independent in politics and, as Cobbett's most recent

<sup>1</sup>A *Full Report of the Speeches of Sir Francis Burdett at the late election*, pp. 61, 63, 67.

<sup>2</sup>Lord Granville Leveson Gower, *Private Correspondence, 1781-1821*, ed. Countess Granville, (London 1916), ii. 35.

<sup>3</sup>B.L. Add. MSS. 37853 (Windham MSS.) xii f.140, Cobbett to the Rt. Hon. William Windham, 5 Oct. 1804.

<sup>4</sup>Cobbett's *Political Register*, 2 pp. 1772-3; 6 pp. 343-8

<sup>5</sup>J.A. Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, p.142.

<sup>6</sup>Patterson, i. 2-4.

biographer points out, it was these qualities that gained him Cobbett's support.<sup>1</sup> After 1804, the support Cobbett gave to Burdett in his *Political Register* was to be the chief contributory factor to Burdett's high profile in national political life. It was with this important journalistic ally and metropolitan radical supporters that Burdett's 'country' platform was to achieve a solid political triumph at Westminster in 1807.

<sup>1</sup>G. Spater, *William Cobbett, The Poor Man's Friend*, (Cambridge 1982), i. 150-3.

### CHAPTER 3: THE TRIUMPH OF A RADICAL

In the period 1806 to 1809, Burdett emerged as the leading radical spokesman, both inside and outside the House of Commons. His election to the Westminster seat in 1807 was a real triumph for the radicals and promised a possible rejuvenation of the radical cause nationwide. The central development behind the Westminster triumph is clear. It was the emergence of Burdett as the champion of 'independence'. In this role, he went on to elaborate, and present, a reform programme that was, in its aims and content, entirely an eighteenth century 'country' one. Nevertheless, after 1807, it was this programme that was to be the guiding star for a new phase of radical activity.

The decisive factor behind the enthusiasm of Burdett and his supporters, in 1807, for 'independence' was undoubtedly the disillusion engendered by the failure of the Talents Ministry to tackle reform. The political significance, and practical results, of the Talents' failure for Burdett was immense, and demands careful attention.

The coalition headed by Grenville and Fox that took office after Pitt's death on 23 January 1806, had an enthusiastic welcome in many quarters critical of the Pitt 'system'.<sup>1</sup> Burdett's response to the new administration had, however, a double edge. He was still warm in his praise for Fox, but he was profoundly pessimistic about his new allies, the Grenvilles. As early as March 1804, he had voiced a wish to distance himself from public men 'whose views appear to extend no further than the walls of St. Stephen's, or efforts beyond a seat on the Treasury bench'.<sup>2</sup> Those 'hateful villains'<sup>3</sup>, the Grenvilles, were, he feared, just such men. An alliance with them would only result in a scramble for place that would, in turn, diminish the popularity of Fox. Burdett's feelings were that this, 'mere change of administration .... would tend to very little'. All public men were falling far short of what was necessary for the country and he could only hope to declare his own sentiments honestly, 'against this insane war

<sup>1</sup>J.A. Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, pp. 149-50 for sympathetic radical and press reactions to the new administration.

<sup>2</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. c.61, f.62; Burdett to Thomas Coutts, 6 Mar. 1804.

<sup>3</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. d.97, f.123; Burdett to French, 10 Mar. 1804.

and corrupt system'.<sup>1</sup> When the Talents coalition was formed therefore in 1806, it was indeed the alliance between Fox and the Grenvilles that was to be the decisive factor behind Burdett's response to the administration.

It is quite clear why Burdett disliked the Grenvilles as a political group. Their political methods were worthy of the early eighteenth century charge of Venetian oligarchy. Critics estimated their receipts from sinecures, in 1806, at a huge £55,000<sup>2</sup>, and the decision to allow Grenville to become First Lord of the Treasury and yet still retain his Auditorship of the Exchequer<sup>3</sup>, thus overseeing his own accounts, was one which aroused profound misgivings about the desire of the administration to tackle corruption. A dislike of corruption<sup>4</sup> had been the chief impulse behind eighteenth century 'country' desires for reform; the same response from Burdett was now to cause him to cut his links with the Foxites and press more urgently for parliamentary reform.

At a Middlesex Freeholders' meeting in July, Burdett was severe in his criticism of those who had amassed fortunes at the country's expense.<sup>5</sup> In August, he professed himself disillusioned with the party politics of Westminster.<sup>6</sup> Whig country gentlemen such as the Bedfords and Coke were merely 'luxurious Gentlemen Sheep-breeders', who preferred submission to the present system rather than any attempt to change it. According to Burdett's 'country' ideas, such country-gentlemen were guilty of neglecting their political duty. They should take a disinterested lead in the political battle against an overmighty executive, rather than indulge in agricultural experiments. By contrast, he increasingly applauded Cobbett's systematic attacks in the *Political Register* upon the political system.<sup>7</sup> This development was a clear indication of Burdett's mounting disenchantment with politicians of all parties at Westminster. Indeed

<sup>1</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>2</sup>Leigh Hunt, *Examiner*, 10 May 1812, quoted in M. Roberts, *The Whig Party, 1807-12*, (London 1939) p.175.

<sup>3</sup>P. Jupp, *Lord Grenville*, (Oxford 1985) pp. 346-7.

<sup>4</sup>W.D. Rubenstein, 'The End of Old Corruption in Britain, 1780-1860', *Past and Present*, 101 (1983) 55-86, gives a detailed description of the places and pensions considered by contemporaries to comprise 'old corruption'.

<sup>5</sup>*The Times*, 30 July 1806.

<sup>6</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. d.97, f.125; Burdett to French, 18 Aug. 1806.

<sup>7</sup>*ibid.*

there are hints that he may have contemplated encouraging some form of political activity outside the forum of Parliament. To his chaplain, French, he confided:

'I have a political scheme in my head which I think likely to do good. I dare not commit it to paper. Don't imagine I mean any treason, but I must not commit my thought to paper especially until matured by consultation with the Wizard of Wimbledon. I think however it will be useful to the public by supporting and avenging the oppressed and exposing the mean and selfish. I go to Wimbledon tonight with a head full of mischief.'<sup>1</sup>

But there is no further evidence of any detailed ideas for organised political action outside the House. External circumstances instead enabled Burdett, Cobbett and their Wimbledon friends, to focus their efforts at the very centre of legitimate political activity. After Fox's death, and the subsequent collapse of the Talents Ministry, there was a succession of election campaigns in London between October 1806 and May 1807.

At the By-election in Westminster following the death of Fox on 13 September 1806, Lord Percy was returned unopposed with the support of Whigs such as Sheridan and Whitbread, and the support too of Burdett. His support for Percy was given on the grounds that he had never held Crown office. Burdett denied that the Westminster seat had been offered to him by radicals there headed by James Paull, and claimed that he would only cease to campaign at Middlesex should such a move benefit the public. He had only ever accepted the candidature as a means of rescuing the country from 'its present calamitous and disgraceful thralldom'.<sup>2</sup> But there was no real unity behind the joint support for Percy, and Burdett's criticism of the ministry mounted steadily. The country needed men of integrity rather than 'talents', so that the plain truth about corruption, and the distress it caused, could be revealed to those in power.<sup>3</sup> Burdett's dissatisfaction with political parties at Westminster was revealed quite

<sup>1</sup>Bodl. lib. Eng. Misc. d.40, f.1; Burdett to French, 2 Sept. 1806.

<sup>2</sup>B.L. Add. MSS. 27850 (Place Papers) ff.18-20; Patterson, i. 151 gives details of the Commons' committee decisions on the Middlesex election of 1804. The decision had finally been given in favour of Mainwaring on 10 Feb. 1806; a decision which resulted in Burdett re-contesting the Middlesex seat in the General Election of Nov. 1806.

<sup>3</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Hist. b.200, f.143; Burdett to James Paull, Sept./Oct. 1806.

plainly at the General Election in November and resulted in the, by now inevitable, breach between the radicals and their former Foxite allies. There were two main theatres of action for radicals in the capital. At Westminster, the radical James Paull<sup>1</sup> contested the seat as an independent against the Foxite political heir, Sheridan, and the Grenvillite, Admiral Hood. It was Burdett who announced Paull's candidacy at a Crown and Anchor Tavern dinner on 30 October and subsequently supplied him with one thousand pounds with which to fight his campaign.<sup>2</sup> During the election, the Wimbledon group headed by Burdett and Horne Tooke, joined radicals in Westminster, such as Francis Place, William Sturch and Samuel Brooks, in attempting to rouse an independent spirit amongst the electors.<sup>3</sup> Their efforts met with a considerable reward, for Paull at first headed the poll and was only narrowly defeated when the Hustings closed.<sup>4</sup> The narrow margin between Sheridan and Paull must have reflected the widespread disillusion about the Talents Ministry; a disillusion that enabled the independent radical cause to make important strides forward. Gillray's print, the *Triumphal Procession of Little Paul, the Taylor, upon his new Goose*, depicted a procession led by the rich Colonel Bosville; Horne Tooke followed, leading a goose with the head of Burdett; Paull, dressed as a tailor, was upon the goose's back, and Cobbett blowing a trumpet, brought up the rear.<sup>5</sup> Such a print gave a clear indication that many contemporaries saw men, such as Paull and Burdett, as mere puppets in the hands of the arch-schemers, Horne Tooke and Cobbett.<sup>6</sup>

The significance of the Westminster result for this study lies in two areas.

<sup>1</sup>James Paull (1770-1808). Paull had returned from India in 1804 with charges against the government there headed by the Marquis of Wellesley. At Westminster he was backed most strongly by Cobbett, who hoped to make political capital out of Paull's charges against Wellesley.

<sup>2</sup>Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 10, p.675; 41, p.415.

<sup>3</sup>B.L. Add. MSS. 27850, ff.16-33 gives Place's account of the election. William Sturch (1753-1838): an ironmonger and unitarian; member of the Society for Constitutional Information 1792-3; prominent in Westminster radical politics and a member of the Westminster Election Committee formed in 1807. Samuel Brooks: a diamond setter and glass cutter in the Strand; member of the Middlesex Freeholders' Club and subsequently Chairman of the Westminster Election Committee.

<sup>4</sup>*History of the Westminster and Middlesex elections in the month of November 1806* (London 1807). The final figures were: Hood, 5478; Sheridan, 4758; Paull, 4481.

<sup>5</sup>D. George, *English Political Caricature*, p.95.

<sup>6</sup>To be discussed later, see below pp. 75-6.

Men, who were to form the backbone of the Westminster Election Committee, can be seen making their first essay into political organisation, a vital ingredient if the radicals were to sustain any challenge against established political groups. Secondly, the solid radical backing for Paull at Westminster<sup>1</sup> reflected the progress of the Middlesex election where Burdett was championing an independent, radical programme, equally critical of government and Whig politicians.

It was Burdett's address to the Middlesex freeholders at the end of October that broke the radical and Whig association of 1802 and 1804. In it, he denounced both parties. The watchword of one was, the 'best of Kings'; of the other, the 'best of Patriots'. Yet neither did anything for the people, and when the two joined together, as in the Talents, it was inevitably at the people's expense. Burdett declared himself willing to stake his life and fortune for the rescue of the country; all that was necessary to effect that rescue was the integrity of an uncorrupt vote. He declined the support of any party and declared that he would not distribute a single cockade, nor furnish a single carriage in the campaign, in order to prove himself a zealous, disinterested and uncorrupt representative.<sup>2</sup>

Such a stand brought Whigs such as Whitbread, Peter Moore, Lord William Russell and Lord Holland all out into the field against Burdett, and prompted Byng publicly to repudiate any notion of a joint radical and Whig campaign.<sup>3</sup> Burdett responded with a further denunciation of, 'such shabby politics' when he addressed the Middlesex Freeholders' Club.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>J.A. Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, p.154, gives poll book details of plumpers cast for Paull that in 1802, had been divided between Fox and the independent candidate.

<sup>2</sup>*The Times*, 28 Oct. 1806; *History of the Westminster and Middlesex Elections in the month of November 1806*, pp. 292-3.

<sup>3</sup>Lord Holland, *Memoirs of the Whig Party during my time*, ed. his son, Henry Edward, Lord Holland, (London 1852-4) i. 180.

<sup>4</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Hist. b.200, f.27, Burdett to the Freeholders of Middlesex, November 1806; *The Times*, 8 Nov. 1806.

'The politics of George Grenville, the father, lost us America; the politics of George Grenville, the son, have lost us all Europe. To these politics, and to assist in carrying them on, the professing Whigs have lately joined themselves to their own great emolument and to the just dismay of the public.'

After the shabby spectacle of the 'Talents' Ministry, Burdett now claimed that a real concern for the public good lay exclusively with radicals, who stood independently from the other political groups. In response, Whig fury knew no bounds. Lady Bessborough recorded:

'I never heard louder cries against Sir Francis Burdett .... in former times than by ours now. Lord Lauderdale and Lord Holland say that if there is a man in England to be found to stand for Middlesex not excepting Mainwaring himself, they will support him to the very utmost to throw out Sir Francis.'<sup>1</sup>

Lady Bessborough herself, charitably credited Burdett with the sincerity of adhering to his principles, even though she believed them to be false ones. If his principles could be rectified,

'he would make a .... more useful Member of Parliament than those who adopt their political creed to their convenience, which is the most usual manner of proceeding; but if I said half this at Holland House, I should be murdered.'<sup>2</sup>

Remembering Burdett's early friendship with Fox<sup>3</sup>, it was indeed those at the centre of the Foxite shrine, Holland House, who were loudest in their protests against Burdett. Holland himself thought such conduct 'infamous' and declared he would use his influence to give plumpers to Byng.<sup>4</sup> Voting trends at

<sup>1</sup>*Lord Granville Leveson Gower, Private Correspondence, 1781-1821*, ed. Countess Granville, (London 1916) ii. 223; Lady Bessborough to Granville Leveson Gower, 29 Oct. 1806.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.* 224-5; Lady Bessborough to Granville Leveson Gower, 31 Oct. 1806.

<sup>3</sup>On the Hustings on 20 Nov., Burdett still professed great admiration for Fox personally. Patterson i. 185.

<sup>4</sup>B.L. Add. MSS. 51544, ff.44-6; Holland to Grey, 2 Nov. 1806. Holland saw Horne Tooke's dislike of the Whigs as the root cause of the split: 'It is not inconsistent in Horne Tooke and his party to show ingratitude and distrust towards the Whigs, but it is inconsistent in the highest degree in Sir Francis Burdett to throw out insinuations against my uncle's memory, of whom, within these four months I have heard him speak with the greatest admiration, regard and confidence - he feels it so himself, but has sold himself, understanding and heart to Horne Tooke.' B.L. Add. MSS. 51738, f.22; Holland to Caroline Fox, 3 Nov. 1806. Lady Bessborough too, blamed the influence of Horne Tooke: 'Horne Tooke has kept him fast with him these three days that he might not be seduced from the right principles.' *Lord Granville Leveson Gower, Private Correspondence*, ed. Countess Granville, ii. 223; Lady Bessborough to Granville Leveson Gower, 29 Oct. 1806.

Middlesex in 1806 were quite clearly polarising into total support either for, or against, the radicals, in contrast to the 1802 and 1804 contests when, with a joint Burdett and Byng ticket, many plumpers had been split between the two.

Cobbett, too, had considerably altered his opinion since June 1802. Now, he was eulogistic in support of Burdett, and was careful to explain his change of opinion to readers of the *Political Register*. The perilous state of the country in 1802, and the fact that Cobbett did not know that his sources were all on the government's pay roll, had led him to believe that Burdett's principles and aims were tantamount to revolution. Gradually, he had discovered how grossly Burdett had been misrepresented by the press, had witnessed his unselfish public conduct over the Cold Bath Fields Prison affair, and now on personal acquaintance with him, could state that their opinions were virtually identical. 'Our common end is to preserve the kingly government and constitution of our country.' How could Burdett possibly wish to dismantle the structure of society when he had so much personal stake in it himself?<sup>1</sup> Quite clearly, it was Burdett's position as the politically and financially independent country gentleman that was most valuable to the radicals. Only such an independent could credibly launch an all-out attack on the 'system' and those who hoped to profit from it.

Cobbett's claim that both he and Burdett wished to preserve 'kingly government' and the constitution, in equal measure, is worthy of note. Unlike Painite radicalism, the Burdettite radicalism of the early nineteenth century, was very strongly in favour of the monarchy. In Burdett's own speeches, the desire to preserve the monarchy and its legitimate prerogatives was a theme that occurred as regularly as the desire to see a reform of the legislature. In true eighteenth century 'country' tradition, the two were, in fact, inseparable. A union between a patriot king and his people, freely represented in Parliament, was the very remedy that would rid the political system of self-interested, corrupt boroughmonger control. This theme was central to Burdett's hustings speeches in 1806.

<sup>1</sup>Cobbett's, *Pol. Reg.* 10, pp. 683, 716, 748.

'The Constitution is not that a set of ministers should rule over you, but that the King should rule over you; and the only shield that the Constitution gives to the people of England against the abuse of the regal power is in the free and fair Representation of the people in Parliament .... to rule this country is the office of the King .... and I will never allow that any party, or coalition of parties have a right to get possession of the King.'<sup>1</sup>

'I am not for a king of shreds and patches, for a mere man of straw, whose powers are to be exercised or rather usurped by Ministers. I wish for a Constitutional King who shall rule this country by the powers which its Constitution has given him.'<sup>2</sup>

Such sentiments had none of the Painite mistrust of the caprices of a hereditary monarch, nor did they share the Foxite fear of the power of the Crown over the legislature. Burdett's political radicalism sprang from a very different tradition. Burdett's 'country' beliefs declared a fondness for the just powers of the monarch; an attachment to the 'ancient constitution'; a distrust of placemen and moneyed interests; a reliance upon the landed gentlemen to stand forward as the disinterested representatives of the people and a hatred of self-interested party motives as the basis for political behaviour.

During the Middlesex campaign, these constitutional differences were highlighted by a series of acrimonious exchanges between Burdett and Whitbread, who took up the cudgels on the Whigs' behalf. Whitbread disagreed that the Talents ministry had aimed merely to plunder office. Their peace with France was for 'public utility' and he defended Fox's reputation as the best of Patriots; a man who for forty years had been the country's 'most assiduous and disinterested servant'. Whitbread countered Burdett's adherence to the clause in the Act of Settlement, that no placeman should sit in the Commons, by the reply that if all these men were eliminated from the House then the government would, of necessity, comprise the worst people.<sup>3</sup> This was perhaps the crucial constitutional difference between the Whigs and Burdett. The Whigs had no fundamental objection to the rotten borough system 'per se', as long as it was not used by one party to perpetuate, indefinitely, their stay in office. One of

<sup>1</sup>*The Times*, 15 Nov. 1806.

<sup>2</sup>*The Times*, 20 Nov. 1806.

<sup>3</sup>Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 10, p.760. *History of the Westminster and Middlesex Elections in .... Nov. 1806*, pp. 321-6, Whitbread to Burdett, 5 Nov. 1806.

the benefits of the borough system was that it allowed men of talent into the House of Commons. In contrast, Burdett wished to destroy the rotten borough system, 'root and branch'. For him, the borough system was the foundation of the nation's political and constitutional ills. Replying to Whitbread's published letter, it was this constitutional difference that Burdett now took up. A justification of placemen was obviously the Whig creed, and he cited as evidence, Windham's position as Secretary of State, Tierney at the Board of Control and Sheridan as the Treasurer of the Navy. Paraphrasing a speech of Fox's in May 1806, he declared that the burdens of the Talents' new taxes forced men from their lodgings into a garret and thence onto the street,

'so that the best provided amongst us cannot tell where himself and his family may be found at last. This is a hard lesson for Englishmen to hear .... harder still to hear it enforced from the mouths of those who themselves are, all the while, creeping onward from their original garrets into palaces.'<sup>1</sup>

Adding personal insult to general injury, Burdett hinted that Whitbread was hoping for a peerage in return for his defence of the Administration. Whitbread immediately demanded a duel or a public apology from his antagonist.<sup>2</sup> Much to Whig surprise, Burdett made an apology.<sup>3</sup> This shortcoming in the aristocratic code of honour was once again laid at the door of the sinister Horne Tooke.<sup>4</sup> Grey rather smugly remarked that Burdett's conduct was no surprise for it merely proved that, 'every generous instinct in his heart is dead.'<sup>5</sup>

Amidst this round of bitter personal exchanges, the Middlesex election results were almost incidental. Mellish and Byng were returned comfortably ahead of Burdett.<sup>6</sup> The result appeared to justify those who felt that there was

<sup>1</sup>*The Times*, 13 Nov. 1806; Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 10, p.745.

<sup>2</sup>*History of the Westminster and Middlesex Elections in.... Nov. 1806*, pp. 459-61, Whitbread to Burdett, 2 Dec. 1806; Beds. C.R.O. Whitbread MSS. 1123 nos. 1961-2, Whitbread to Brand, 2 Dec. 1806; 1964, Whitbread to Burdett, 2 Dec. 1806.

<sup>3</sup>*History of the Westminster and Middlesex Elections in .... Nov. 1806*, pp. 461-2, Burdett to Whitbread, 3 Dec. 1806; Beds. C.R.O. Whitbread MSS. 1123, no. 1966, Whitbread to Burdett, 3 Dec. 1806.

<sup>4</sup>*Lord Granville Leveson Gower, Private Correspondence*, ii. 232, Lady Bessborough to Lord Granville Leveson Gower, 6 Dec. 1806.

<sup>5</sup>Whitbread MSS. 1. 1966/1.2; Grey to Whitbread, 5,6 Dec. 1806.

<sup>6</sup>*The Times*, 12 Nov. 1806: Final figures were: Mellish, 3213; Byng, 2394; Burdett, 1197.

no potential for the independent radical stand, which openly denounced the 'system' and, more importantly, scorned to use its methods. But some good had come out of the acrimonious exchanges. The uneasy alliance between Burdett and the Foxites had been broken and this now left Burdett free to make an all-out attack on the corrupt 'system'. Foxites were left to solve their own internal dilemma: if the Foxite claim to be the guardians of the people's interests was still to be valid, did that mean a complete sacrifice of the borough system and a united call for Parliamentary Reform? The result of Burdett's disillusion with the 'Talents' and his subsequent wrangles with former parliamentary allies, demonstrated that he had made his choice and, as an independent radical, was convinced of the need to destroy the borough system.

The fact that Burdett's defeat at Middlesex was interpreted as a triumph by metropolitan radicals was evident at the Crown and Anchor dinner on 5 February 1807. Cobbett gave the occasion much publicity in the *Register*. Fifteen hundred sat down to dinner, he alleged, and there was no other man in the kingdom who, 'could find so many to give half a guinea for the pleasure of dining with him.'<sup>1</sup> In reply to Burdett's critics who called him 'the Grand Lama' or 'Goose', exhibited, once in a while, by his masters, to keep radical hopes alive, Cobbett confidently asserted that Burdett would soon triumph over the real enemies of the country.<sup>2</sup> Cobbett was most keen to defend Burdett against Party accusations. It was easy to see why all Parties were hostile to Burdett's criticisms for the simplest possible reason: all Parties were bent on fattening themselves out of public money, an aim for which Burdett had no sympathy and an aim he was determined to expose.<sup>3</sup> It was this insistence on Burdett as an independent politician, free from all obligations to the government, or any other party faction, that was to be the core of the radical message in 1807. It was an idea which Burdett too, found most congenial at this point in time. One of his principal preoccupations was the burden of debt upon his vast estates. Burdett

<sup>1</sup>Cobbett's, *Pol. Reg.* 11, p.235.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.* Gillray and other cartoonists consistently depicted Burdett as such a creature exhibited at the whim of Horne Tooke or Cobbett. See, D. George, *English Political Caricature*, p.95.

<sup>3</sup>Cobbett's, *Pol. Reg.* 11, p.235.

was aware in 1806 that politics were causing him to spend far beyond his means for he had already hinted that the ancestral estate at Foremark might have to be sacrificed.<sup>1</sup> Although there is no precise information on how much Burdett had spent on the Middlesex election campaigns, in the light of repeated statements by Coutts that he had contributed no large sums, it seems reasonable to conclude that Burdett himself must have spent heavily. Several factors back up this assumption. He refused to spend any money in the Middlesex campaign of November 1806<sup>2</sup> and then in February 1807, he refused an offer from two electors to stand for Grampound. In his reply, Burdett recommended another gentleman of fortune and talent.<sup>3</sup> When he was approached by Westminster electors with the same offer, Burdett made the same refusal and only agreed to take the seat if the independent electors should choose to return him without any interference on his part.<sup>4</sup> Burdett's reluctance to engage in any more expensive election contests indicates, clearly enough, that he had already spent far too much in that sphere of activity. His financial statement drawn up in the autumn of 1807<sup>5</sup>, and covering the expenses of earlier years, confirmed his own fears. The average net receipt from his estates for the last five years had been £11,000 per annum. Expenditure on his estates and family ate into all that sum, leaving no surplus to pay off debts of £86,470. Of that enormous debt, £35,670 had been left by his ancestors and £50,800 had been added by himself. Here is proof of his generosity to Horne Tooke at Wimbledon, to Arthur O'Connor, to James Paull and, probably, to hundreds of Middlesex electors. The financial statement records that in 1806 Burdett had been 'hard pressed and made uneasy for the payment of £35,720'; probably the total of his Middlesex campaign expenses. Burdett's solicitor, Gawler<sup>6</sup>, had seen no means of extricating him other than a sale of part of his estates. 'The proposal', recorded Burdett, 'made

<sup>1</sup>Bodl. lib. Eng. Misc. d.40, f.1; Burdett to French, 2 Sept. 1806.

<sup>2</sup>*The Times*, 12 Nov. 1806, stated that this was indeed why Burdett had lost so convincingly.

<sup>3</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Hist. b.197, f.63; Walter Pomery and Jonah Isabell to Burdett, 14 Feb. 1807; f.64, Burdett to Pomery and Isabell, 23 Feb. 1807.

<sup>4</sup>See below p.67.

<sup>5</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Hist. A.9.f.60, Burdett to Gawler, 28 Nov. 1807.

<sup>6</sup>Henry Gawler, Burdett's solicitor and a member of the Wimbledon circle.

a deep impression upon me; it alarmed me, it awakened me to a serious consideration of my situation.'<sup>1</sup> He calculated that he had spent above his income by about £27,000 and had diminished the value of his property by £78,000. His remedy was drastic. He resolved not to part with an inch more of his land; to restrain himself and his family to the strictest economy until his debts were cleared; 'to contradict my own inveterate habits, and not again to give before I have and to anticipate nothing.'<sup>2</sup> With a prudent eye to the future, Burdett considered that he already had four daughters to provide for, and thus vowed that he would hold fast to 'unaimable principles of asperity' until he was unencumbered with debt.<sup>3</sup> In the light of this stringent financial examination, is it any surprise to find Burdett vowing not to spend a single penny at another election in 1807? But it would be too cynical to explain the radical 'independent' message solely in terms of Burdett's financial worries. The ideal of the financially and politically independent politician was central to the political creed of Burdett, Horne Tooke and Cobbett. Burdett was the ideal 'independent' and he remained true to this 'country' aim throughout his political career.

At the dissolution of Parliament after the resignation of the Talents, Burdett made the following declaration to the Middlesex Freeholders. He would retire from contesting for a place in the parliamentary arena because,

'with the omnipotent means of corruption in the power of our spoilers, all struggle is vain. We must wait for our redress and regeneration until corruption shall have exhausted the means of corruption, and I do not believe that period very distant, the present ministers being most likely to be our best friends by hastening it.'<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Hist. A.9.f.60, Burdett to Gawler, 28 Nov. 1807.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.* Burdett's attachment to his land is no surprise for such a country gentleman. 'I should never think of parting with land; for, if once converted into money, it would fall away like friends in adversity from a person of my habits and disposition .... land is best for a man who places his supreme good in leisure, liberty and command of his own time.' Burdett to Coutts, 6 Mar. 1804, Patterson, i. 154. This letter confirms not only Burdett's willingness to spend money on his friends and their causes, but also his 'country' distrust of estate that was not landed estate for the letter was a reply to Coutts' suggestion that he sell his Wiltshire estate to raise capital. Burdett would only agree to let it.

<sup>3</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Hist. A.9, f.60, Burdett to Gawler, 28 Nov. 1807.

<sup>4</sup>Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 11, p.955; Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Hist. b.200f.33; Burdett to the Middlesex Electors

Financial worries were certainly partly behind this declaration but it is difficult to believe that Burdett's promoters, Horne Tooke and Cobbett, wished him to retire from the limelight after Burdett's leadership of the radicals had so recently been acknowledged. Perhaps the declaration was a calculated risk taken in order to spur radicals into action? This was certainly the result for the day after the dissolution<sup>1</sup>, Francis Place called a meeting at his house and proposed a scheme to his fellow electors: to return Burdett and Paull for Westminster at no expense to themselves.<sup>2</sup> The following morning came the message from Paull that he had dined with Burdett at Horne Tooke's, and the former had agreed to serve at Westminster if a requisition from a substantial number of electors, requesting him to do so, could be obtained. Paull also maintained that Burdett had consented to preside at a Crown and Anchor dinner to promote the candidates.<sup>3</sup> Plans were made for a committee to raise money by public subscription although Place claimed to feel doubts about Burdett's eagerness to stand, having so recently declared his intended retirement.<sup>4</sup> These doubts were well-founded. On Tuesday 28 April, came Paull's news that Burdett had indeed refused to become a candidate and that they had almost quarrelled on the subject. Place advised Paull not to stand, but he refused. On 29 April, there was an announcement in the papers confirming Burdett's decision not to stand and Place resolved to go to Burdett to learn the truth. This was the first time that Place met Burdett. The latter eventually consented to stand if he were to be elected without any interference on his part. According to Place, Burdett agreed that it was right that electors should seek representatives and not the reverse.<sup>5</sup> Burdett protested his ignorance of all Paull's plans. He had known nothing of the announcement or planned dinner until he had seen the papers, and he protested strongly against the use of his name in such a way. Over the next few days, Place and a committee of electors drew up plans to promote the election of Burdett, but decided to drop Paull, doubting the latter's political

<sup>1</sup>28 April, 1807.

<sup>2</sup>B.L. Add. MSS. (Place Papers) 27850, f.41; Place's version of events.

<sup>3</sup>*ibid.* f.42.

<sup>4</sup>*ibid.* f.44.

<sup>5</sup>*ibid.* ff. 46-7.

integrity and also the extent of his political reputation.<sup>1</sup> On Saturday 2 May, came the unwelcome news that Burdett and Paull had fought a duel. Paull had been wounded in the leg, Burdett in the thigh. Burdett had resented the free use Paull had made of his name to such an extent that he had accepted the challenge<sup>2</sup>, apparently to Paull's surprise.

The radical cause appeared to be a fiasco even before the real campaign had begun. In a letter to *The Times* on 6 May, Horne Tooke publicly cleared himself from accusations that he was the arch-schemer behind the campaign for Burdett.

'If my advice had been as omnipotent as the dirty scribblers of the day have chosen to represent it over the mind of Sir Francis Burdett, he never would have been a candidate at all .... I rejoice that he is not returned to parliament for that place<sup>3</sup> or for any other.'

He was revealing on the subject of Paull. He had most cautiously avoided any intimate connection with him for 'there was something about him with which it was impossible for me to connect myself.'<sup>4</sup> Horne Tooke and Burdett both demonstrated an extreme reluctance to be involved with those at the grass roots of radicalism. Such an attitude was entirely in keeping with the low public profile Tooke had maintained since the late 1790s, and entirely in keeping with Burdett's aristocratic social status and, as was to be demonstrated repeatedly, his notions of the independent 'country' politician. Place confirmed this aloof attitude. It was well-known to the Committee that Horne Tooke had advised Burdett to have as little to do with them as possible.<sup>5</sup>

Whigs and government supporters were delighted to see the radicals washing their dirty linen in public. Gillray commented on the radical wrangles in his print, 'Patriots deciding a Point of Honour!', depicting the duel between 'Little Paul the Taylor' and 'Sir Francis Goose'.<sup>6</sup> The dispute between Burdett and

<sup>1</sup>*ibid.* ff. 48-54; *Morning Chronicle*, 2 May 1807; Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Hist. b.200, f.154, Printed Committee Resolutions announcing the withdrawal of support from Paull, and the opening of a subscription to promote the election of Burdett.

<sup>2</sup>B.L. Add. MSS. 27850, ff.56-9. Place's narrative. Burdett repeatedly demonstrated that he would not be at the beck and call of his radical backers.

<sup>3</sup>Middlesex.

<sup>4</sup>*The Times*, 6 May 1807.

<sup>5</sup>Add. MSS. 27850, f.86, Place's narrative of the election.

<sup>6</sup>D. George, *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires*, viii. 10725.

Paull certainly presented difficulties for the chief radical publicist, Cobbett. In 1806, he had promoted Paull as a candidate for Westminster, yet he had also recently eulogised Burdett as the new radical champion. He was unsure about Burdett's first refusal to stand and seems to have been in broad agreement with Place that 'the contest would be useless if Sir Francis Burdett would not come forward in person'.<sup>1</sup> After the duel, he threw his weight in behind Burdett as the man most likely to enable the radical cause to prosper, and was totally dismissive of Paull's chances. 'What a mortifying thing,' he confided to Wright, 'it must be to Mr. Paull to see the votes he will get! If his friends .... have any regard for him, they will instantly desist.'<sup>2</sup> In the next *Political Register* he announced, 'Mr. Paull is no longer in a state to be thought of as your representative.' He had always believed Burdett to be the best man to represent Westminster and Paull had known that to be his opinion.<sup>3</sup> The electors were promised that, 'if you succeed in causing Sir Francis Burdett to be returned to parliament, you will have done more for the country in the space of fourteen days, than has been done for it during the last hundred years', only a slight exaggeration of the conclusions which modern historians of radicalism have also tended to reach.<sup>4</sup>

Five candidates eventually contested the Westminster seat from 7 to 25 May.<sup>5</sup> The progress of the election and the work of the Westminster Committee has been told elsewhere and does not belong to this thesis.<sup>6</sup> Burdett's return

<sup>1</sup>B.L. Add. MSS. 22906 (Cobbett, Letters to J. Wright), i. ff.278-9; Cobbett to J. Wright, 28 & 29 April 1807.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.* f.280; Cobbett to Wright, 9 May 1807.

<sup>3</sup>Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 11, p.838. In 1817, after his break with Burdett, Cobbett claimed that the duel had taken place because Burdett had refused to run as a candidate with Paull. *Pol. Reg.* 33, pp. 73-4; 41, pp.416-17, 420.

<sup>4</sup>*ibid.* 11, p.871; A. Prochaska, 'Westminster Radicalism, 1807-32' (Oxford Univ. D. Phil. thesis, 1975); E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p.507.

<sup>5</sup>The five candidates comprised: Burdett and Lord Cochrane (1775-1860) later 10th Earl Dundonald, a successful naval commander against the French and promoted as an 'independent' candidate by the Westminster Committee along with Burdett; Elliot, the government candidate; Sheridan, the Whig candidate; and Paull, a radical candidate, yet not backed by the Westminster Committee.

<sup>6</sup>Francis Place and John Richter, *An Exposition of the circumstances which gave rise to the election of Sir Francis Burdett for the City of Westminster and of the Principles which governed the Committee who conducted that election* (London 1807). B.L. Add. MSS. 27850. ff.65-85, for Place's account; A Prochaska, 'Westminster Radicalism' pp. 38-43; J.A. Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, pp. 158-61

was secured by the hard work of the Committee who chaired meetings, rounded up subscriptions and organised canvassers. He made no appearance on the hustings, and in this way, the Committee adhered rigidly to the idea of the independent candidate, who was returned solely by the free choice of the electors.

At the start of the poll, there seemed little chance that the radical bid could break party hold over the seat. Place recorded that the Whigs laughed at the radicals' 'childish imbecility' whilst the Press depicted their efforts as deliberately designed to disturb the peace.<sup>1</sup> Signs that the Committee's exertions were beginning to bear fruit, however, came on the eleventh day when the government candidate, Elliot, withdrew, with the intention, it was presumed, of aiding the Whig, Sheridan. Whig objectives were made quite clear by Sheridan: 'I have done right in maintaining the contest ... I have supported the honour of the last administration ... and I have vindicated the principles and memory of Fox.'<sup>2</sup> The final result<sup>3</sup>, the return of both the Westminster Committee's independent candidates, Burdett and Cochrane, was therefore a terrible disappointment for the Whigs. It was a victory for radical independence at the heart of Foxite Whiggery, Fox's own constituency, and reflected the extreme disillusion of the electors with the Talents Ministry. Cobbett hailed the dramatic, double radical triumph over the workings of the corrupt political and electioneering system as 'the beginning of a new era in the History of Parliamentary Representation.'<sup>4</sup> At the close of the poll, Burdett addressed the electors. Denouncing the system of corruption, he claimed that no endeavours of his would be omitted to return to his countrymen the undisturbed enjoyment of the fair fruits of their industry, or 'to bring back to men's minds, the almost forgotten notion of the sacredness of private property, which ought no longer to be transferred from the legitimate possessors by the corrupt votes of venal and

<sup>1</sup>Add. MSS. 27850, ff.72, 75.

<sup>2</sup>*The Letters of Richard Brinsley Sheridan*, ed. C. Price, iii. 102. Sheridan to Earl of Moira, 19 May 1807.

<sup>3</sup>Final figures were: Burdett, 5134; Cochrane, 3708; Sheridan, 2645 and, before they had both withdrawn during the poll, Elliot, 2137 and Paull, 269.

<sup>4</sup>Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 11, p.972.

mercenary combinations'.<sup>1</sup> Burdett thus proclaimed the 'country' protest against an expensive executive perpetuated in power by a corrupt, self-interested boroughmonger system. This was just the message Cobbett wanted to hear. Burdett was,

'in EARNEST when he complains of abuses and calls for reform. This is his sin. It is this for which the factions hate him and for which the people love him .... the people of England feel that Sir Francis Burdett is our best friend .... we rely on his talents and integrity.'<sup>2</sup>

On 26 June, Burdett was chaired<sup>3</sup> through the heart of Westminster to a celebration dinner at the Crown and Anchor Tavern. Thousands of people lined the streets to see him carried in classical style, 'like Apollo in the ancient pictures and sculpture .... very pale, very handsome, very grave and bowing to nobody.'<sup>4</sup> The orderly procession lasted for two and a half hours. At the celebration dinner, Burdett's brief speech acknowledged the central point of the victory, the resurgence of the people's independent voice in politics:

'It is the common cant of both parties to deny that there is any such thing as 'the people' and they insultingly ask us where such a thing as the people is to be found in England? I can now answer their question; in Westminster, in the metropolis of England.'<sup>5</sup>

Burdett's election indeed represented the renaissance of the participation of 'the people' in politics in the capital on a scale unseen since the days of Wilkes. But the term, 'the people' must be explained. Despite the authorities' fears that the election campaign of a popular candidate would be likely to disturb the peace of the capital, the drafting of huge numbers of troops into Westminster, to control the rabble's excesses, was not necessary.<sup>6</sup> Lady Bessborough made a specific

<sup>1</sup>Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 11, p.961; *Morning Chronicle*, 30 May 1807.

<sup>2</sup>Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 11, p.989.

<sup>3</sup>He was unable to walk or ride with any comfort because of the thigh wound he had received in the duel with Paull.

<sup>4</sup>*Lord Granville Leveson Gower, Private Correspondence*, ii. 256, 259; Lady Bessborough to Lord Granville Leveson Gower, 26 & 29 June 1807. Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 12, p.1.

<sup>5</sup>*Morning Chronicle*, 30 June 1807. The paper alleged that 2000 people sat down to the dinner in various rooms of the Crown and Anchor.

<sup>6</sup>Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 12, p.1; J. Stevenson, 'Disturbances and Public Order in London, 1790-1821' (Oxford Univ. D. Phil. thesis, 1973) p.94 for details on the precautionary measures taken by the authorities.

point of noting that 'the crowd was immense, but quite quiet'.<sup>1</sup> The people who voted for Burdett, and those who ran his Committee, were tradesmen, craftsmen and artisans who paid taxes and had respectable business connections in the metropolis. They were not the mud-slinging rabble, but men who, for various reasons, wished to exercise some sort of political voice against the aristocratic factions of the day that controlled the political arena. But they did not contemplate setting up one of themselves as a candidate. That point is crucial. They knew enough about political reality to drop James Paull precisely because he was not a member of the established political world. They supported Burdett because he was. The glamour, reputation and rank of Burdett was crucial to their campaign. Radicals promoting his cause needed him far more than he needed them. Recognition of this fact, on both sides, enabled Burdett to treat the Westminster Committee in the subsequent years of their association, very much on his own terms. The achievement of the Westminster Committee men was to demonstrate that responsible, independent electors could work within a constitutional and legal framework and control all the potentially disruptive elements that usually went hand in hand with a popular election. Prochaska sums this up neatly with the conclusion that the committee members had learned how 'to organise into peaceful exuberance, crowds of people whose parents had almost certainly helped to swell the ranks of the Gordon rioters'.<sup>2</sup> It was a crucial lesson to learn in the years following the terrible example of the French Revolution.

Metropolitan electors hoped they had secured in Burdett a champion for the people's interest within the charmed circle of the political world. Certainly his reputation as such a champion was enhanced in 1807. The prints acknowledged it and depicted John Bull marching delightedly with the two new Westminster M.P.'s. Gillray too, acknowledged the 'Republican Goose at the top of the Pole'.<sup>3</sup> After the deaths of Pitt and Fox, Burdett was virtually the only

<sup>1</sup>Lord Granville Leveson Gower, *Private Correspondence*, ii. 259, Lady Bessborough to Lord Granville Leveson Gower, 29 June 1809.

<sup>2</sup>A. Prochaska, 'Westminster Radicalism, 1807-32', p.242.

<sup>3</sup>D. George, *English Political Caricature*, pp. 100-2.

politician to whom any glamour could be attached and his frequent appearances in the prints testify to this. Other evidence of Burdett's growing reputation was Henry Hunt's celebratory dinner at Bristol in honour of the Westminster victory.<sup>1</sup> Many provincial newspapers also spoke strongly in support of Burdett.<sup>2</sup> Thomas Hardy, the radical prosecuted along with Horne Tooke in 1794, wrote to Paine in New York: 'Sir Francis Burdett .... is become the popular man'.<sup>3</sup> It now remained to be seen in what way Burdett would champion the interest of the people within parliament.

One of the issues that received considerable attention from Burdett in the spring of 1808, and intermittently for the next five years, was the question of the abolition of the notorious practice of flogging in the army. The subject was of the utmost topicality at a time when the military might of France was at its height. Awareness of the threat from this direction therefore produced widely differing reactions to the subject. These reactions were highlighted in June 1808, when Burdett introduced a motion calling for all the regimental corporal punishment returns of the last ten years to be laid before Parliament.<sup>4</sup> Burdett's argument was that it was precisely at the time when a larger proportion of the population were involved in military life that military procedures ought to be reviewed and regulated. He did not deny that the army needed discipline, but not discipline that was dependent on the caprices of individual commanders. In support of his argument, he cited the example of the Duke of Cumberland's regiment. Its reputation had plummeted since the introduction of corporal punishments, eighty of which had been carried out in the last three years. The government line was diametrically opposed to Burdett's. The enormity of the enemy threat to Britain made discipline the all-important factor in military life and made the present time the least suitable one to be tampering with the subject. Any relaxation of discipline would open the door to subversive,

<sup>1</sup>J. Belchem, *Orator Hunt: Henry Hunt and English Working Class Radicalism*, (Oxford 1985), pp. 26-7.

<sup>2</sup>B.L. Add. MSS. 27838, f.205; papers in Bristol, Nottingham, Liverpool and Norwich; J. Dinwiddy, 'Sir Francis Burdett and Burdettite Radicalism', *History* 65 (1980) 20.

<sup>3</sup>B.L. Add. MSS. 27818, f.73, Thomas Hardy to Tom Paine, 15 Oct. 1807.

<sup>4</sup>*Hansard*, 1808, xi. 1115-6, 1117-9.

revolutionary doctrines and thus weaken the military resolve against France. Opinion in Parliament was overwhelmingly in support of this argument and only four could be found to support Burdett's motion.<sup>1</sup>

The flogging campaign is of interest for this study of Burdett because of the reasons for his attachment to this radical objective.<sup>2</sup> Partly, they were genuine, humanitarian ones in response to the many letters sent to him appealing for help and giving details of horrendous injuries inflicted for the most trivial offences. But his opposition to flogging also sprang from the same 'country' principles that led him to oppose corruption in government. In the same way that the introduction of a standing army subverted constitutional freedoms<sup>3</sup>, so the 'lash' was seen to be inconsistent with the spirit and principles of the Constitution, and the liberties of Britons as 'free men'. Burdett revealed his 'country' colours in this department when, in Bolingbrokean style, he championed the idea of a free, citizen militia rather than a standing army: 'Should we never learn that an armed people, proud of, and devoted to liberty, was the only method of making a country unconquerable, a government secure?'<sup>4</sup> As in Burdett's political ideas, the fond attachment to a mythical, golden past, that contrasted starkly with present harsh, arbitrary innovations, was in high profile. The theme was present in his many strenuous efforts to bring the practice of flogging before Parliament in these years.<sup>5</sup>

Not only corruption in the Army, but also corruption in government,

<sup>1</sup>*ibid.* 1122; The motion was defeated by 77 to 4.

<sup>2</sup>For the efforts of other radicals see, J. Dinwiddy, 'The Early 19th century Campaign against flogging in the Army', *Eng. Hist. Rev.* xcvi. (1982), 308-31.

<sup>3</sup>See above, Chapter 2, p.28.

<sup>4</sup>*Hansard*, 1808, xi. 26.

<sup>5</sup>Burdett spoke against flogging on many occasions in the period 1811-15. See: Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 19, p.534; *Hansard*, 1811, xx. 320-1; Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 19, p.1537; *Hansard*, 1812, xxi. 1263-75; xxi. 1313-4; xxii. 376-82, 1146, 1147-8; 1813, xxv. 126-8; 1815, xxxi. 940-2. Burdett was backed strongly by Cobbett who similarly sought a free army to oppose Bonaparte, and not a 'flogged nation'. Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 19 p.716. See Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Hist. b.197, ff.2-3, for Cobbett's memo. to Burdett on how the army promotion system should work in favour of deserving individuals and not merely placemen. The campaign also witnessed co-operation between Burdett and sympathetic Whig reformers such as Folkestone, Whitbread, Maddocks, Creevey, Bennet, Milton and Romilly. M. Roberts, *The Whig Party, 1807-12* (London 1939) pp. 201-13. Lord Holland praised Burdett's 'zealous and disinterested exertions' in this field. Lord Holland, *Further Memoirs of the Whig Party*, p. 102.

continued to be the major theme of Burdett's initiatives in Parliament. On every possible occasion, he opposed what he conceived to be the misapplication of public funds by the government, and raised a protest against the increase of tax and excise burdens upon the country.<sup>1</sup>

The next profitable subject for Burdett and other radicals arose in the spring of 1809. On 27 January, the radical M.P. Colonel Wardle, presented a motion against the Duke of York that accused him of the sale of Army Commissions through his then mistress, Mrs. Clarke. Her evidence was the main source for Wardle's charges against the Duke.<sup>2</sup> Both radical and Whig critics of the government united in support of the charges, all of them eager to seize the opportunity for revealing gross government corruption.<sup>3</sup> On 3 February, Burdett cross-examined the Duke of York's servant in the House, and on the 13 March, he made a long, fiery speech on the whole affair. It was, he claimed, the most painful set of circumstances ever to come before the House in his time. He charged all the legal hierarchy with a partial defence of the Duke, and with a deliberate attempt to portray Mrs. Clarke as a fabricator of evil doings, beyond all known genius, in order to destroy her story. He demanded that the people of England expected justice at the hands of their representatives.<sup>4</sup> It was an opinion that won support from many members. Burdett's growing reputation, inside<sup>5</sup> and outside the House, was an important source of support to Wardle and to the publicity of the radical cause in general. Wardle's charges appeared to

<sup>1</sup>*Hansard*, 1808, x. 409-10, 412, 793-5; 1808, xi. 119,853; xii. 235-7; 1809, xiv. 397-8, 506-8.

<sup>2</sup>*Hansard*, 1809, xii. 179-87.

<sup>3</sup>A. Aspinall, *The Later Correspondence of George III*, v. 179-80; Perceval to George III, 27 Jan. 1809.

<sup>4</sup>*Hansard*, 1809, xii. 335, 362-3; 1809, xiii. 391; *A Correct Report of the Speech delivered by Sir Francis Burdett in the House of Commons on 13 March 1809 on the conduct of the Duke of York. Printed by order of the Committee who conducted the late Westminster Election*, (London 2nd edition, 1809). Burdett was careful to keep clear of any personal acquaintance with Mrs. Clarke, whose motives he suspected, if not the substance of her revelations of corruption. Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Hist. A.9. Burdett to Wardle, 29 Nov. 1809; MSS. Eng. Lett. d.96, ff.171 & 173, Wardle to Burdett and the latter's reply.

<sup>5</sup>*The Life and Times of Henry, Lord Brougham, by Himself*, (London 1871) p.399.

substantiate<sup>1</sup> the radicals' criticisms of the 'system', and in a case where the leading personalities involved, afforded immediate colourful publicity. The prints were absorbed in the affair and gave their sympathies to Mrs. Clarke. Cobbett too, endorsed this view in the *Register*.<sup>2</sup> The printed version of Burdett's parliamentary speech ran quickly through two editions, selling thousands of copies.<sup>3</sup> The affair provided the most colourful material for charges of corruption since the Cold Bath Fields Prison debate. It injected the 'system's' critics with renewed vigour for the attack. In this vein, Cobbett urged Burdett and Folkestone to further action, for 'there can be nothing come out half so bad as I believe it'.<sup>4</sup> Such advice was not however, without its detriment to the radicals, and it only encouraged government supporters to see Burdett and Folkestone as Cobbett's puppets.<sup>5</sup> But radicals, such as Burdett, could at least count on the support of parliamentary Whigs in this campaign. This was ideal ground for political point-scoring against the ministry. It was an attack upon abuses that did not actually seem to necessitate a total change in the system. Hot on the heels of the Wardle campaign therefore, came a series of Whig motions against corruption including Madocks' charges of electoral corruption against Castlereagh, Curwen's Bill against the sale of seats in Parliament and Whitbread's motion against Pensioners and Placemen in Parliament.<sup>6</sup> But a close examination of Burdett's sentiments expressed in these debates reveals just how wide the gap between himself and the Whigs really was on their views of the 'system'. Burdett gave his support to all but one of these Whig motions, but at the same time, he urged that all such measures were shadowy substitutes for the

<sup>1</sup>The Prince of Wales believed Burdett to be the originator of Wardle's charges. A. Aspinall, *The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales*, (London 1969-72), vi. 359-60, The Prince of Wales to the Duke of York, 27 Jan. 1809; but this was only one of many rumours that speculated on the sources. J.A. Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, p.180.

<sup>2</sup>D. George, *English Political Caricature*, pp. 118-20; in 1809, Mrs. Clarke appeared 130 times in the prints; the Duke of York, 107; Wardle, 51, and Burdett, 23. Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 15, pp. 502, 535.

<sup>3</sup>See n.4, p.75

<sup>4</sup>B.L. Add. MSS. 22907, Cobbett, Letters to Wright, ii. 123; 14 Feb. 1809.

<sup>5</sup>G. Spater, *William Cobbett, The Poor Man's Friend*, i. 193.

<sup>6</sup>*Hansard*, 1809, xiv. 203-24, 486-96, 717-20, 934-45.

reform of parliament that alone would destroy corruption.<sup>1</sup> The net result was that the tensions amongst the government's opponents in Parliament were merely heightened and exposed. Castlereagh confidently remarked that, 'the opposition were firing into each other's ranks in every direction; Tierney at Burdett, Whitbread at Tierney .... nothing could indicate more division on their part'.<sup>2</sup> He was quite correct in his analysis. Many of the parliamentary Whigs disliked even a temporary association with Burdett and severely deprecated what they considered to be his unguarded, extreme language. Tierney reported to Grey that Burdett 'got badgered to your heart's content last night by everybody', and even a potentially sympathetic Whig such as Althorp, who had supported the campaign against the Duke of York, could remark that 'if Burdett and Whitbread had been told what to say by the Ministers, they could not have made speeches better calculated to tie up every one's hands who wished to make war on corruption'.<sup>3</sup> In 1809, as in 1806, conflicting opinions about the remedies to get rid of corruption were at the source of the differences between Burdett and other leading opponents of the government. Lord Folkestone, for example, gave his support to radical issues such as the reform of abuses and better regulation of the army. At several moments in 1809, it also seemed that he might give his support to a declaration for parliamentary reform, but in the event, he refrained. When an invitation to the dinner of Independent Liverymen also seemed to necessitate a pledge to reform, Folkestone wrote to Waithman: 'You know my opinion on that subject .... I cannot become a party to such a pledge'. His objection to a reform of the representation was total though he, by no means, objected to more limited measures, such as the shortening of Parliaments.<sup>4</sup> But

<sup>1</sup>*ibid.* 244-9, 506-9, 726-33, 951-3, 1000-4. Burdett did not support Curwen's motion, arguing that its precise terms would actually prevent any real progress on reform. *ibid.* 726-33.

<sup>2</sup>Castlereagh to Londonderry, 12 May 1809, quoted A. Aspinall, *The Later Correspondence of George III*, v. 278.

<sup>3</sup>Tierney to Grey, 27 May 1809, Howick MSS.; quoted A. Aspinall, *The Later Correspondence of George III*, v. 287-8. R.K. Huch, *The Radical Lord Radnor; The Public Life of Viscount Folkestone, 3rd Earl of Radnor*, (Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1977), p.49.

<sup>4</sup>*ibid.* pp. 54-5.

a pledge to reform the representation was shortly to be the basis of Burdett's reform plan to be laid before Parliament in June.

The differences between Burdett and Whitbread, so clear to all observers in 1806, also soon manifested themselves yet again. On 29 March, the electors of Westminster met to discuss the enquiry into the Duke of York scandal and also to hear speeches on Reform from the two members. There was unity on the subject of thanks to Wardle for his endeavours to detect corruption, but there the harmony ended. Burdett spoke of the still deeply engrained corruption in Parliament; of the House of Commons' contempt for the people; and of the fact that the safeguards of the people's liberty, Magna Carta and the Bill of Rights, were, in the present system of representation, merely dead letters. Radical reform was the necessary remedy. As in 1806, Burdett then launched into a furious attack on those Whig magnates who devoted the greatest part of their time to the improved farming of their estates. Burdett's finger was clearly pointing at, in his opinion, half-hearted reformers such as Bedford and Coke. 'The consideration of the political interests of the country', he declared, 'is abandoned, or at least neglected by those, who from their rank and station in life, ought to be its most watchful guardians and natural defenders.'<sup>1</sup> It was thus with gross dereliction of their political duty that Burdett charged the Whig aristocrats. His theme was essentially an independent 'country' one with its sharp, anti-party criticism. It was too much for Whitbread who, although no landed aristocrat himself, was far too closely allied to them by political and social ties, not to rise to their defence. He agreed with Burdett on the necessity of some measure of reform, but he then politely reminded the meeting that it was the Duke of Bedford's ancestors who, according to Whig tradition,

<sup>1</sup>*A Full Report of the Proceedings of the Electors of Westminster on Wednesday 29th March at a meeting held at Westminster Hall to express their sentiments on the enquiry into the conduct of H.R.H. the Duke of York, containing the speeches of Sir Francis Burdett and Mr. Whitbread on the necessity of an immediate reform of the House of Commons'* p. 16 (London 1809), Bone and Hone; Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 15, p.535.

had cemented the liberties of the people with their blood.<sup>1</sup> On the following day, he wrote to Creevey in a more indignant tone.

'I cannot say how much I was surprised by Burdett's unprovoked attack upon the great agriculturists, who are, almost without exception, real friends of liberty and Reform, none more so than the head of them, the Duke of Bedford, who thinks parliamentary reform indispensably necessary to our existence.<sup>2</sup>

But many Whigs were still too hopeful of place and a possible accession to power in 1809, and too tied up in the rotten borough system themselves, to be committed to reform of the representation. Inevitably, they were lukewarm on the subject.

The differences between opponents of the government within the House, in the years immediately after 1807, stood in stark contrast to the apparently growing solidity between radicals outside it. With this end in view, the radical triumph at Westminster was celebrated in grand style at the first anniversary dinner at the Crown and Anchor Tavern on 23 May 1808. The dinner, the first of many, kept the radical message before the metropolitan electors and, with the help of Cobbett's *Political Register*, before the political public nationwide. It also perpetuated the lines of communication between Burdett, his Committee and the electors, especially in the years there was no election excitement. In this way, the radical message in the Capital moved from the limited, dry atmosphere of political debate into a wider, more convivial, popular arena.

On 23 May 1808, five hundred electors, it was alleged, sat down to dinner, with Burdett in the Chair.<sup>3</sup> He began his speech on a flattering note. Any weight he possessed in public life, came from their public-spirited support. Despite the anniversary of their joint triumph, however, the country was still in a miserable state. It was plagued by internal corruptions and fobbed off, by a self-interested government, with trifling reforms, in order to distract attention

<sup>1</sup>*A Full Report of the Proceedings of the Electors of Westminster on Wednesday 29 March .....* p. 28

<sup>2</sup>*Thomas Creevey's Papers*, ed. John Gore (London 1948) p.58; Whitbread to Creevey, 31 Mar. 1809.

<sup>3</sup>*Proceedings at the First Anniversary Meeting of the Triumph of Westminster in the election of Sir Francis Burdett, celebrated on the 23 May 1808, at the Crown and Anchor Tavern, Strand.* (London 1808). Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 13, pp. 863, 869.

from the 'overriding question' of parliamentary reform.

'It does appear to me, quite childish, to suppose that that representation is fair, the majority of which, is returned by one hundred and fifty peers or powerful individuals .... A reform of that House has become as necessary to the defence of the country as are arms and men.'<sup>1</sup>

Linking patriotic sentiment with reform appeared to be a revolutionary message when fear of social upheaval and foreign invasion was uppermost in the minds of the political world. But it was, in truth, only the external circumstances of these years that distorted the appearance of Burdett's essentially 'country' message. His radicalism had the distinctive stamp of eighteenth century, patriot politics and he desired reform merely in order to rid the political system of borough corruption. In his message, there was no call for any changes approximating to anything like revolutionary innovation. His aim was for a purification of the political system as it was already constituted. A self-interested government was the target; to purify politics of its influence by means of Reform, was the aim.

It was the celebration of uncorrupt 'independence' that was stressed by all the Committee speakers at the dinner. As a practical way of convincing the diners of the merits of 'independence', the election accounts were presented. The balance due to the Treasurer was £117.3.3. The Committee gave a deliberately high profile to the financial aspect of Burdett's election. It was solid proof that the notion of the independent candidate was backed up in fact, and it stood in stark contrast to the huge sums spent at other contests. In such an atmosphere of mutual satisfaction and harmony, the dinner closed with songs, toasts and speeches supporting 'independence' and Reform.

The new feeling of unity and purpose between radicals bore fruit in the spring and summer of 1809, when a huge meeting to support Parliamentary Reform was followed by the presentation of Burdett's Reform motion to the Commons on 15 June. The great Crown and Anchor Tavern Reform dinner took place thanks, largely, to the untiring efforts of Major Cartwright. Rousing the

<sup>1</sup>*Proceedings at the First Anniversary Meeting of the Triumph of Westminster*, pp. 2-9.

public from apathy or fear on the subject of reform was one of the main obstacles faced by radical leaders, and Cartwright brought his years of experience in publicising political meetings to the fore, in order to make the dinner a success. Several hundred people sat down to dinner and the radical press gave the occasion a sympathetic hearing. Burdett took the Chair.<sup>1</sup> The dinner was a show of strength for dedicated reformers only. Whitbread declined the invitation and the few Whigs who were present made gloomy predictions, presaging further acrimonious divisions. William Smith warned the diners that only a very small proportion of the population actively favoured reform. J.C. Curwen, whose act to prevent the sale of seats in Parliament had lately passed, denounced the meeting in private, as 'the inflammatory proceedings of a drunken meeting in a tavern'.<sup>2</sup> The radicals were clearly out on their own. But they were united behind Burdett, and he used the occasion to outline their objectives against government corruption.

He opened his speech by claiming that he need only refer to Grey's petition of 1792 to prove that around one hundred and fifty individuals returned a majority of the House of Commons. Fresh evidence of abuses was uncovered every day. In such a context, it was clear that Magna Carta, the Bill of Rights and the Act of Settlement afforded the subject no protection. Abuses that had led to the downfall of the Stuarts, namely the institution of a standing army and tampering with election returns, were now tolerated. The Act of Settlement, in particular, was contravened on two points. Placemen holding Crown emolument continued to sit in the Commons and it was being made a 'sine qua non' of the peace negotiations that Britons should fight for the Crown's German dominions. Evidently, the borough faction in power was indulging in all the evils from which Britons had previously fought to be protected. Ireland was a blood-stained country, where a Bill of Indemnity deprived the victims of repressive policies of all redress. The measures Reformers desired were therefore essential for the

<sup>1</sup>N.C. Miller, 'John Cartwright and radical parliamentary reform, 1809-19', *Eng. Hist. Rev.* 1 xxxiii. (1968) 713; J. Osborne, *John Cartwright*, (Cambridge 1972) p.84.

<sup>2</sup>M. Roberts, *The Whig Party*, pp. 247-9.

dignity of the King, and the freedom and happiness of the people. 'This borough-mongering faction, under the pretence of the King's prerogative, oppresses the people; while under the pretence of being the Representative of the people, it controls the King.' The profligate waste of public money arose from the same evil. Burdett's only consolation was that the Prince of Wales was above suspicion in the late detection of abuses. In conclusion, Burdett asked for no novelties. He fought against corruption, from which there could be no relief whilst the borough faction was in power. Reformers demanded their birth-right and inheritance rather than any new-fangled doctrines. To prove this, Burdett's final toast of the evening was 'that decrepit, bed-ridden old gentleman ... called Magna Carta, whom we yet hope to see again walking abroad'.<sup>1</sup>

Burdett's speech denoted a distinctively insular, English radicalism. His expressed dislike of 'new-fangled doctrines' distanced his own aims from any suspicion of contamination by Painite, revolutionary theories. The constitutional battle of the seventeenth century against the Stuarts' arbitrary interpretation of the prerogative loomed far larger than the impact of recent events in France for Burdett. An historical perspective characterised the entire speech. His solution to the problem of a corrupt Government that dominated the monarch, public purse and the legislature was the early eighteenth century, country one of a union between a Patriot King and his people.<sup>2</sup> Burdett's trust in a judicious exercise of the Royal Prerogative placed him far apart from Whig political theory. His speech revealed these two important aspects of the early nineteenth century radical programme. Firstly, the extent to which it was saturated by English historical perspectives and analogies, and secondly, the extent to which solutions to the whole range of the country's problems were seen in simplistic constitutional terms. Cobbett praised the speech for precisely its 'sound, constitutional principles'.<sup>3</sup> In the same vein, *The Times* too focussed on the

<sup>1</sup>*Parliamentary Reform: A Full and Accurate Report of the Proceedings at the meeting held at the Crown and Anchor Tavern on Monday 1 May 1809*, (London 1809), p.28; Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Hist. b.196, f.16. Printed Resolutions of the Crown and Anchor meeting.

<sup>2</sup>See below p.113 footnote 1 for the similarity of Burdett's views to 'country', 'patriot' views of the 1730s and 1740s.

<sup>3</sup>Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 15, p.685.

constitutional aspect. Burdett's proposal would make parliament,

'a mere organ of the Crown .... the King who can now only summon, prorogue and dissolve Parliament, might under this new system, if ever he should meet with an intractable House of Commons say, "Gentlemen, new model yourselves, I am not content with the principle upon which you are at present constituted."'<sup>1</sup>

With this criticism, *The Times* highlighted an issue Burdett never really addressed. The self-interested executive he loathed, was the instrument of Pitt and his successors and yet as chief minister, Pitt was the result of George III's unfettered interference in the political arena. But Burdett still advocated the free use of the monarch's prerogative in order to dismantle the borough system. Introducing his plan of reform on 15 June<sup>2</sup>, he gave what perhaps can be regarded as his answer to this unresolved dilemma. Burdett projected the problem even farther back into history.

Abuses had penetrated the constitution at 1688<sup>3</sup>, when the borough system had become entrenched, and had bypassed the intended statutory safeguards in the Revolution Settlement. With this line of reasoning, Burdett might argue that the boroughmongers already dictated the political process, in the executive and legislature, long before George III and Pitt appeared on the scene. Certainly Burdett's interpretation of politics immediately after 1688, was a crucial factor in his constitutional theories. After 1688, the boroughmongers had diminished the constitutional powers of the Crown, and had begun to increase the burdens of the nation by initiating the alarming increases in the size of the National Debt, Burdett's other major preoccupation. Such an interpretation set him very firmly in the early eighteenth century 'country' mould.

Burdett's reform plan was very similar to Grey's of 1797.<sup>4</sup> He proposed a direct tax franchise; the division of counties into districts that each returned one Representative; the holding of elections on one day only, with votes to be counted by parish officers; and the return of Parliaments to a 'constitutional

<sup>1</sup>*The Times*, 16 May 1809.

<sup>2</sup>*The Plan of Reform proposed by Sir Francis Burdett in the House of Commons on 15 June 1809, printed by Order of the Westminster Committee*, (London 1809); *Hansard*, 1809, xiv. 1041-56.

<sup>3</sup>*ibid.* 1048.

<sup>4</sup>*Hansard*, 1797, xxxiii. 644-70.

duration'.<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that there was no pledge to the idea of annual parliaments or universal male suffrage. Burdett claimed that the plan's merit was its simplicity. According to his 'country' ideas, it was cheap and would eliminate the expense of election bribery. It would preserve social stability by the elimination of prolonged election riots. Most importantly, it would strike at the borough system by giving social weight and political influence to those with legitimate property. Such a reformed House of Commons would introduce economies that would give instant relief to the subject from the nation's enormous Debt and tax burdens. The whole plan was thus merely a return to the ideas of the 'true constitution'.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, the plan was substantially more radical than Burdett's stress upon such 'country' aims as the reduction of the National Debt implied. Proposals to divide counties into equal districts returning one representative came not from a 'country' creed, but from the more advanced metropolitan radicalism of the 1770s and 1780s. The plan was thus a blend of 'country' obsessions and more radical objectives; a blend which probably reflected the different aims of temporarily united radical leaders such as Burdett, Cobbett and Cartwright.

Reactions to the proposals were wide-ranging. The Commons defeated the plan by 74 to 15.<sup>3</sup> The thin House testified quite clearly to members' opinions that parliamentary reform was not only unnecessary, but more importantly, irresponsible in the country's present situation. Perceval stressed that he had played down his reply 'perceiving that nothing could more tend to give consequence to the motion than answering it at much length'.<sup>4</sup>

Although a handful of Whigs had voted for Burdett's motion, the *Edinburgh Review*, becoming the organ of Whig opinion, condemned the plan as impractical, and no cure for the nation's representative or financial ills. Naturally, the

<sup>1</sup>*Hansard*, 1809. xiv. 1053.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.* 1053.

<sup>3</sup>*ibid.* 1070-1. The fifteen voting for the motion were: Adams, Lieut. Gen. Campbell, Harvey Combe, Cuthbert, Hutchinson, Knapp, Shaw Le Fevre, Madocks, Maxwell, Moore, Thornton, Hanbury Tracey, Turton, Wardle, Western. Wharton, and Lord Cochrane paired off.

<sup>4</sup>A. Aspinall, *The Later Correspondence of George III*, v. 297-8, Perceval to George III, 15 June 1809.

*Review* disliked Burdett's interpretation of 1688 and the 'Whig Revolution'. It rather chose to explain the nation's ills by focussing on the present, not the past. It pointed to the effect of the French Revolution, the unusual duration of Pitt's administration, the sudden disappearance of great statesmen like Pitt and Fox and the extraordinary peril of the times as the root causes of the problems. Englishmen's liberties would be secure, it argued, as long as there was freedom of the press, and a public interest in events.<sup>1</sup> These Whig ideas, propounded by Horner, Jeffrey and Brougham in the *Review*, were a complete contrast to Burdett's. In the place of his determination to return to an 'ancient constitution', they asked for faith in the progress of public opinion and the spread of education as the security for Englishmen's liberties. Their more accurate perception of the extent to which the French Revolution had altered the nature of political debate contrasted too with Burdett's political insularity.

But it should be noted that although these Whigs may have been sceptical of the intellectual credibility of Burdett's proposals, they did not underestimate the extent of their appeal. Jeffrey wrote to Horner at the end of 1809:

'Do, for Heaven's sake, let your Whigs do something popular and effective this session .... You must lay aside a great part of your aristocratical feelings and side with the most respectable of the democrats, by so doing you will enlighten and restrain them .... Join the popular party, which is every day growing stronger and more formidable.'<sup>2</sup>

It was a revealing insight into the extent to which the Whigs felt that radical spokesmen threatened the traditional Whig position as the champions of the people.

In 1809, it indeed seemed as if the radicals were a united and growing band. Burdett's proposals were the closest to a consensus that the reform leaders were ever to reach. Cobbett pronounced Burdett's plan to be 'precisely that which I wish for'.<sup>3</sup> Major Cartwright acknowledged Burdett to be the leader of the Reform cause, and praised to Thomas Northmore, his 'moderation

<sup>1</sup>*The Edinburgh Review*, xxviii, 301-3; July 1809.

<sup>2</sup>*The Memoirs and Correspondence of Francis Horner, M.P.*, ed. by his brother, L. Horner (London 1853), i. 512-13; Jeffrey to Horner, 21 December 1809; on the same theme, see Vaughan MSS. c.9/3; fragment, 1809?, J. Allen to Sir Charles Vaughan.

<sup>3</sup>Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 15, p.962; 17, p.601.

and constitutional knowledge .... as the sketch of reform he proposed is in itself so excellent, I trust the prejudice against him will now vanish'.<sup>1</sup> There was not a hint of the later divisions that were to arise between Burdett, Cartwright and Cobbett over the desirable extent of reform and of the methods to be employed to achieve it.

Some attempt must now be made to explain the popularity of Burdett's ideas in public opinion outside Parliament. The first reason for their appeal lies in the extraordinary influence of Cobbett's *Political Register*, where they were most loudly trumpeted. The *Register* spoke in plain language that was easily read, or at least understood, by illiterate enthusiasts.<sup>2</sup> It extended political discussion far beyond the parameters of the established political world.

Burdett claimed to stand by the 'ancient constitution' and its ideas, as enshrined in statutes such as Magna Carta. Ideas about these statutes were deeply engrained in the minds of ordinary Englishmen. The protection afforded by them, and by the process of Common Law, was a dominant theme in popular interpretations of constitutional struggles from the 1640s to Burdett's own day. The notion of the ordinary Englishmen's rights in Common and Statute Law was thus an important factor in the appeal of Burdett's radicalism that constantly cited historical example and precedent. The English response to 1789 for example, had not been a welcome for an innovatory political blueprint that Englishmen might follow, but an almost ironic congratulation that the French had, at last, secured for themselves a constitutional government. Englishmen had won their liberties, many, many years earlier. Some of those liberties might be abused by an overmighty government by the end of the eighteenth century, but not to the extent that Westminster voters wanted to do away with the system of King, Lords and Commons altogether. They preferred to agree with Burdett that a process of restoration and purification was required; a return to principles that were already enshrined in Common and Statute Law, and were quite sufficient to

<sup>1</sup>*The Life and Correspondence of Major Cartwright*, ed. F.D. Cartwright (London 1826) i. 390; Cartwright to Thomas Northmore, 27 June 1809.

<sup>2</sup>O. Smith, *The Politics of Language, 1791-1819*, pp. 242-8, for Cobbett's contribution to the construction of a working man's grammar.

guarantee an Englishman's liberty. This was the character of a rejuvenated Westminster radicalism in the first decade of the nineteenth century. By the end of 1809, Burdett was its undisputed, independent champion. Events in the spring of 1810, were to strengthen him in that position, and to give him an undoubted popularity and reputation nationwide.

## CHAPTER 4: THE RADICAL IN ACTION

On 22 January 1810, Spencer Perceval was appointed to head a new administration. There was a potentially stormy Parliamentary session before the Ministry, with interest focussing on Britain's involvement in the Peninsular War and, more particularly, the military fiasco of the Walcheren expedition. Members and supporters of the Government could only hope to draw comfort from the fact that their Whig and radical opponents were themselves far from united. The popular triumphal processions, large public meetings and demagogic style of politics encouraged by Burdett and the Westminster radicals in 1809, had continued with the stage-management, by the Westminster Committee, of the Covent Garden 'Old Price' riots in December.<sup>1</sup> All these tactics were beyond the aristocratic pale of many Whigs. In their view, when the radicals took such initiatives, they only served to encourage disorder and strengthen Crown influence.<sup>2</sup> This was Grey's theme to Holland:

'Burdettites and Jacobins are in truth the best friends of the court ... diverting the public attention from all useful and practical objects ... they aim at nothing but degradation of all public character, their watchword being that all Ministers are alike, and that no advantage is to be derived from any change, thus co-operating most effectually with the Court in withdrawing all public confidence from its opponents.'

Grey had been in opposition to such men in 1792 and vowed not to co-operate with them now.<sup>3</sup> Whig fears about popular, radical politics were to be realised by the events of March and April 1810.

At the opening of the session, Burdett emphasised again the necessity for a reform of Parliament. In his answer to the King's speech, he criticised the imposition of harsh taxes upon the people, the government's establishment of military barracks, and the stationing of foreign troops on British soil. In at least a show of unity, he joined with other opposition members and laid the blame for the military failures in Spain and at Walcheren at the ministry's door.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>J.A. Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, pp. 183-4.

<sup>2</sup>W. Thomas, *The Philosophic Radicals*, (Oxford 1979), p.54.

<sup>3</sup>G.M. Trevelyan, *Lord Grey of the Reform Bill*, (London 1920), p.169.

<sup>4</sup>*Hansard*, 1810, xv. 114-22.

This strength of feeling on the subject of the war in the House was mirrored by a similarly intense debate outside it. When Sheridan's motion to allow strangers in to the public gallery during debates was defeated by 166 to 80 on 6 February, the criticisms from both opposition members and the public mounted still further. Burdett himself was called to order during the debate. To the ministers, his sentiments must have seemed to echo those of enthusiasts for a National Convention in the 1790s.<sup>1</sup> The House, he argued, stood before the country under circumstances of great suspicion. Some even thought that, in point of character, the House was on its last legs; 'As for his part, he greatly feared that, in reputation, that House had not a leg to stand upon'.<sup>2</sup> Burdett testified to his opinion on Parliament's present corrupt composition by chairing the Westminster Reform meeting in Palace Yard, and then presenting its Reform petition on 9 February.<sup>3</sup> In belligerent mood, he warned against such innovations as the introduction of military barracks, 'bastilles' and German troops; against attacks on the freedom of the press, and he called for a restoration of traditional liberties.<sup>4</sup> Press and debating freedoms were precisely the channels of opinion that most worried the Ministry. A considerable renaissance of anti-war feeling in the Councils and business communities of the City resulted in increasingly vociferous opposition to government policy. This was coupled with a series of bread crises and strikes amongst the lower ranks of the population. It was a potentially explosive situation.<sup>5</sup> Anxiety in the House about the mood of public opinion was revealed when Yorke<sup>6</sup> condemned placards advertising a radical debate run by John Gale Jones<sup>7</sup> entitled, 'Which was a greater outrage upon public feeling, Mr. Yorke's enforcement of the Standing Order or Mr. Windhams's recent attack upon the liberty of the press?' Despite Gale Jones's apology at

<sup>1</sup>E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 137-8.

<sup>2</sup>*Hansard*, 1810, xv. 338; B.L. Add. MSS. 27850, f.154, for Place's narrative.

<sup>3</sup>*ibid.* ff. 152-5 for Place's account; *The Times*, 10 Feb. 1810.

<sup>4</sup>*Hansard*, 1810, xv. 363-6.

<sup>5</sup>For details on social and economic conditions in London during the spring of 1810, see J. Stevenson, 'Disturbances and Public Order in London, 1790-1821', pp. 94-5.

<sup>6</sup>Charles Yorke (1764-1834) M.P. for Cambridgeshire.

<sup>7</sup>John Gale Jones (1769-1838), surgeon, radical pamphleteer and former L.C.S. leader.

the Bar of the House, he was committed to Newgate, without charge or trial.<sup>1</sup> Burdett immediately challenged the arrest. On 12 March, during his own motion against the imprisonment of Gale Jones, Burdett claimed that the behaviour of the Commons was an infringement of the law of the land and a subversion of the Constitution. Acknowledging the authority of legal precedent, he cited several cases which, in his opinion, defined the legal limits of the House's prerogative, and proved that its action was contradictory to Magna Carta and the Petition of Right. No freeman should be imprisoned other than by due process of law, but Gale Jones had been imprisoned for an act, the illegality of which had not been determined. The House could not exercise such arbitrary judicial functions against a member of the public.<sup>2</sup> The motion was defeated by 153 to 14.<sup>3</sup> Burdett might not have parliamentary support, but he did have the backing of the *Political Register*. On 24 March, its readers found a letter in direct opposition to the government's actions, entitled, 'Sir Francis Burdett to his Constituents; denying the power of the House of Commons to imprison the people of England', followed by a lengthy historical and legal justification of Burdett's position.<sup>4</sup>

The letter was signed by Burdett and the government proceeded against him as the author. Modern scholarship, however, with which this study agrees, sees the letter itself as Cobbett's work.<sup>5</sup> After his break with Burdett in 1819, Cobbett did indeed claim that he was the author during a vitriolic smear campaign designed to portray Burdett as a man who had abandoned reform. Burdett was then described as 'created by our generosity, by full exertion of our Talent, by our words put into his mouth'.<sup>6</sup> This claim is re-enforced by the jottings of Cobbett's daughter, who records that her mother 'used to be angry with him for writing speeches for other people and letting them have the credit

<sup>1</sup>B.L. Add. MSS. 27850, ff. 154-61 for Place's account.

<sup>2</sup>*Hansard*, 1810, xvi. 14\*\*\*\*-11\*\*\*\*\* (sic).

<sup>3</sup>Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 17, p.389; *The Diary and Correspondence of Charles Abbott, Lord Colchester*, ii. 238. No division list exists for the motion.

<sup>4</sup>Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 17, pp. 421-59.

<sup>5</sup>G. Spater, *William Cobbett, the Poor Man's Friend*, i. 237-8.

<sup>6</sup>Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 34, pp. 414, 741.

for them'. Anne Cobbett states specifically that her father

'wrote the paper which caused Sir Francis Burdett to be sent to the Tower, but nobody knew it ... he<sup>1</sup> asked me if I had read it, because I should. "Why Papa" said I, "didn't I write it?" ... He had forgotten that he dictated it to me.'<sup>2</sup>

The letter bears all the hallmarks of Cobbett's style. It was forceful, direct and emotive; a style designed to strike a chord with, hitherto inarticulate, political groups.<sup>3</sup> But although Cobbett was the letter's author, the argument was central to Burdett's reform platform. The core of the letter's argument was a familiar one:

'Either the House of Commons is authorised to dispense with the laws of the land, or it is not ... We need no better security, no more powerful protection for our Rights and Liberties than the Laws and the Constitution. We seek for, and we need seek for, nothing new; we ask for no more than what our forefathers insisted upon as their own, we ask for no more than what they ... were ready to seal with their blood, expressly declared to be 'the BIRTH-RIGHT of the people of England'; namely 'THE LAWS OF ENGLAND'.'

An Englishman's liberties, it continued, were enshrined in Magna Carta. They had been defended against Charles I and his demand for Ship Money, and subsequently against all the arbitrary tyrannies of James II. Now Englishmen must challenge not prerogative, but 'undefined Privilege, assuming the powers of Prerogative'.<sup>4</sup>

The historical and legal justification that accompanied the letter bore the stamp of Burdett's own style and brand of radicalism.<sup>5</sup> As in his Reform speech

<sup>1</sup>Cobbett.

<sup>2</sup>Nuffield College, Oxford, Cobbett MSS. Box xv.i. Account of the Family by Anne Cobbett, n.d. pp. 12-13.

<sup>3</sup>For example: 'Should the principle upon which the House of Commons have thought proper to act in this instance, be once admitted, it is impossible for any one to conjecture how soon he himself may be summoned from his dwelling, and be hurried, without trial, and without oath made against him, from the bosom of his family into the clutches of a jailor.' Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 17, pp. 421-5; *The Times*, 26 Mar. 1810; Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Hist. b.196, f.18. For information on Cobbett's style and grammar see O. Smith, *The Politics of Language*, p.242.

<sup>4</sup>Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 17, pp. 421-5.

<sup>5</sup>Cobbett's recent biographer, G. Spater, acknowledges it to be the work of Burdett, John Wright and Thomas Howell. G. Spater, *William Cobbett, The Poor Man's Friend*, i. 238. It compares favourably with a collection of Burdett's own historical jottings, see Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Hist. c.294. The concluding quotation from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* was also particularly characteristic of Burdett, who was extremely fond of quoting Shakespeare, in order to illustrate his political views, in his own letters.

in 1809, Burdett stressed that he left 'metaphysical imaginations' to others. He relied solely upon the laws of the land, where the Constitution was to be found. Burdett did not deny that members of the House possessed certain privileges whilst attending, and he cited cases from the reign of Edward II, and from the 1620s, in order to prove that members had been content to defend those privileges by appealing to the Common and Statute Law. The difficulties of defining the extent of the House's privileges had occurred during the sitting of the Long Parliament when, in order to resist the rule of a despotic Prince, the Commons had found it necessary to extend its privileges and assume greater powers. The end result was the dissolution of the whole frame of established, legal government. Burdett's interpretation centred on politics after the Restoration when the House, he argued, had been unwilling to give up its extended powers. As a result, contradictory rulings could be found after 1688, when both Houses had alternately appealed to, or by-passed the law, in order to define their powers. Burdett had no affection for the composition, or behaviour, of the House after the Revolution of 1688, an attitude which set him very far apart from Whig theorists. Instead, he took his stand upon the clauses of Magna Carta. According to that statute, the House could not by-pass Common Law and proceed to try, pass judgement or deliver sentence upon a freeman for it was not a Court of Record. For Burdett, Magna Carta was a tablet of stone that enshrined fundamental constitutional liberties in England. Those liberties had been laid down by statute in 1215 and ought to be binding upon all future generations. There was no room in this political theory for a doctrine of natural rights or for a gradual evolvement of the ideas of freedom and liberty. Burdett argued instead, in favour of a rigid veneration of the constitution as laid down, for time immemorial, in statute and the precedents established at Common Law.<sup>1</sup> It was an attitude that was curiously closer to Burke than Paine or the other protagonists of natural rights. Burdett continued to be labelled a potential Jacobin revolutionary by his government opponents but nothing, in reality, could be farther from the truth. Burdett used his historical argument to counter what

<sup>1</sup>Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 17, pp. 425-59.

he saw as arbitrary government, in the same way as early eighteenth century Tories, such as Swift and Bolingbroke, had similarly claimed to uphold Magna Carta as a fundamental Truth in order to discredit the tactics of their own political opponents.<sup>1</sup> According to Burdett, the Commons' action against Gale Jones was in opposition to all the principles of the Constitution as laid down in Magna Carta, the Petition of Rights, the Act of Habeas Corpus, the Bill of Rights and the Act of Settlement. The huge support Burdett was to receive for this argument, in subsequent weeks, would prove that his historical and insular radicalism was a potent and suitable vehicle for the articulation of many different grievances in the spring of 1810.

As Cobbett and Burdett had presumably intended, the letter immediately became an object of concern to the ministry. Perceval and the Speaker, Abbot, searched for precedents for the commitment of members. In the House, Sir Thomas Lethbridge tabled a motion declaring Burdett's letter to be a breach of the House's privilege, having gained a public admission from Burdett that the letter was his work and that he was prepared to stand by it.<sup>2</sup> The ensuing debate provoked a series of reactions. A clear majority of the House supported the government and declared the letter to be a libel. Refraining from a direct verdict on the letter, Folkestone and Whitbread advised caution and claimed that Burdett had been unfairly treated.<sup>3</sup> A clear point was scored in favour of the radical case when the widely-respected Whig lawyer, Romilly, doubted the letter to be a libel. Any member, he argued, should be allowed to speak upon such a subject.<sup>4</sup>

Outside the House, reactions to Burdett's letter also gathered apace. Committed radicals, like Place, denied the existence of a legal definition of libel. Not surprisingly, Cobbett preached the same doctrine and continued to eulogise all Burdett's statements.<sup>5</sup> Several newspapers deplored the eagerness of

<sup>1</sup>A. Pallister, *Magna Carta, the heritage of Liberty*, pp. 51-2.

<sup>2</sup>*The Diary and Correspondence of Charles Abbot, Lord Colchester*, ii. 240-2; *Hansard*, 1810, xvi. 136, 185-6; B.L. Add. MSS. 27850, ff. 164-8 for Place's narrative.

<sup>3</sup>*Hansard*, 1810, xvi. 269-75, 292-5; Aspinall, *The Later Correspondence of George III*, v. 548-9, Perceval to George III, 28 Mar. 1810; *Colchester*, ii. 242-3.

<sup>4</sup>*Hansard*, 1810, xvi. 280-5.

<sup>5</sup>B.L. Add. MSS. 27850, f.170 for Place's opinion; Add. MSS. 22907, f.258, Cobbett to J. Wright, 30 Mar. 1810.

ministers to focus on the debate between Burdett and Lethbridge in order to distract public attention from the Walcheren disaster. It was a policy of 'wretched expedients', and *The Times* doubted the government's ability to extricate itself from the Burdett affair without any embarrassment, given the highly charged atmosphere in the metropolis.<sup>1</sup> It was to be an extremely accurate prediction.

The debate in the Commons resumed on 5 April. Again, only Romilly, Folkestone and Whitbread voiced any semblance of support for Burdett. The situation changed dramatically, however, when the government backed Sir Robert Salisbury's extreme proposal to commit Burdett to the Tower. The result of the division was 190 to 152; a majority of a mere 38, with almost all the Whigs voting against the measure.<sup>2</sup> The House adjourned at 7.30 a.m. and the warrants for Burdett's arrest were signed by Abbot before 9.00 a.m. It was an action which plunged the capital into its most tense, and potentially explosive, situation since 1780.

Burdett's response to the Speaker's warrant was a defiant letter declaring the warrant to be illegal.<sup>3</sup> He refused to betray the trust of his constituents, or acknowledge any 'set of men who shall assume illegally the whole power of the realm'.<sup>4</sup> The ministry could merely bemoan the failure of the Serjeant to arrest Burdett with this first warrant, and watch, whilst he barricaded himself in his Piccadilly home, and called upon the Middlesex sheriffs to defend him against an illegal warrant and besieging military force.<sup>5</sup> Whilst the crowds and soldiers gathered in and around Piccadilly, the government embarked on a fraught two

<sup>1</sup>*The Times*, 28 and 30 Mar. 1810; *Morning Chronicle*, 28 Mar. 1810.

<sup>2</sup>*Hansard*, 1810, xvi. 547-8; *Colchester*, ii. 245. *The Farington Diary*, ed. J. Grieg, (London 1922) vi. 51-2 reports that Perceval had said to Salisbury: 'You would be a proper person to move it, being a country gentleman and not always voting with us, it could not seem from ministerial influence'. Ministers clearly desired to remove Burdett quietly from the scene. It was a considerable misreading of the mood of public opinion to imagine that they could accomplish this easily.

<sup>3</sup>*The Times* and Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* for 6 April 1810; Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Hist. b.199, f.8, Burdett to Charles Abbot, the Speaker, 6 April 1810.

<sup>4</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>5</sup>*Colchester*, ii. 249-50; MSS. Eng. Hist. b.199, f.11, Burdett to the Middlesex Sheriffs, Matthew Wood and John Atkins, 7 April 1810; Aspinall, *The Later Correspondence of George III*, v.556-60, Perceval to George III.

days of legal investigations. Had the Speaker's warrant the authority to break into Burdett's house? Should the Sheriffs call up the assistance of the military? Should a Declaratory Act be contemplated to give efficiency to the warrants?<sup>1</sup> At the same time as trying to solve the complex legal problems, the ministry also found itself managing a huge security operation. Inside Burdett's house was assembled a curious mixture of friends: his fellow Westminster M.P., Lord Cochrane; the Irishman, Roger O'Connor; and from time to time, Francis Place. It was the latter, who claimed that he had dissuaded Cochrane and O'Connor from turning to violent methods of resistance.<sup>2</sup> Coke and Whitbread also visited Burdett and reasoned against a course of resistance.<sup>3</sup> But the ministry's main fears about the threat to public order came not from those inside the house, but from the huge numbers who had gathered outside. The mob element was pelting those who refused to doff their caps to Burdett with mud and stones; some barricades had been erected near to St. James' Church; petty crime, such as pickpocketing was rife; several shots were heard; inflammatory posters circulated, and there were wild rumours of sailors gathering at Portsmouth to help their 'protector' from the Cold Bath Fields Prison affair. Another worrying factor was the numbers of well-dressed citizens who also appeared to be in support of Burdett. If there was a real revulsion, amongst all ranks in the capital, against the ministry's chosen course, then the threat to stability was indeed serious.<sup>4</sup> In order to meet all eventualities, Regular and Volunteer troops were called up from all over London and the South East of England. Guns were stationed in many of the West End Squares so that the houses of government members could be protected. But even these precautions were not without a measure of risk, for there were tensions between the Horse Guards and Life Guards, between

<sup>1</sup>*Colchester*, ii. 250-2; *The Times*, 7 April 1810; *Morning Chronicle*, 9 April 1810.

<sup>2</sup>B.L. Add. MSS. 27850, ff. 199-201 for Place's narrative.

<sup>3</sup>A.W. Stirling, *Coke of Norfolk and his Friends*, ii. 88-93.

<sup>4</sup>For excellent details on the crowds in the Burdett riots see, J. Stevenson, 'Disturbances and Public Order in London, 1790-1821', pp. 98-100. Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Hist. B.199, f.18, Mrs. Spencer Stanhope to her son, John, 10 April 1810; Aspinall, *The Later Correspondence of George III*, v. 560-1, Perceval to George III; *The Times*, 9 April 1810; *The Diary of the Rt. Hon. William Windham*, ed. Mrs. H. Baring (London 1886) p.503.

Regular and Volunteer troops, and between sheriffs sympathetic to both the government and radical causes.<sup>1</sup>

The stalemate was broken early in the morning of 9 April when the Serjeant-at-Arms, with his Deputy and about twenty constables, forced the doors of Burdett's house and arrested him. The move was undertaken upon the Serjeant's own authority but with a promise of indemnity from the government. Its members clearly desired to have a success to report to the House when it met on the Monday afternoon. Burdett was found in the drawing room, with his family and friends about him, and was in the process of lecturing his son upon Magna Carta! After protesting against the forcible intrusion into his home, he was taken, escorted by a huge, military procession, along a very circuitous route to the Tower so that the main body of the crowd would be avoided. On his arrival there he was greeted by Lord Moira, in the manner of a royal guest, rather than a prisoner.<sup>2</sup>

During the period of Burdett's imprisonment, the huge extent to which the government had underestimated support for him was amply demonstrated. Cobbett repeatedly pointed to the huge crowds that had gathered in Piccadilly, and the fact that a sizeable portion of the army was required to escort Burdett to the Tower, as evidence of public sympathy for the radical cause.<sup>3</sup> Burdett was certainly glamourised in many of the prints. According to the historian of political cartoons, apart from Nelson, no one, not even Chatham or Wilkes, was subject to such concentrated political eulogy. Burdett was given the role of St. George 'attacking the Monster of Despotism'. To quote M.D. George:

'To his merits as a disinterested Reformer, he now added those of champion of Magna Carta and the Bill of Rights, defender of the Englishman's home against a brutal soldiery, with the further achievement of martyrdom by his very comfortable sojourn in the Tower.'<sup>4</sup>

Outside the capital, there was evidence of widespread support for Burdett and

<sup>1</sup>J. Stevenson, 'Disturbances and Public Order in London, 1790-1821', pp. 99-106.

<sup>2</sup>*Colchester*, ii. 244-5; J. Stevenson, 'Disturbances and Public Order in London', p.103; E.H. Coleridge, *Life of Thomas Coutts*, ii. 261, Lady Burdett to her daughter, Sophia, 9 April 1810.

<sup>3</sup>Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 15, p.545.

<sup>4</sup>M.D. George, *English Political Caricature*, pp. 125-8.

his protest against an alarmingly arbitrary House of Commons. Burdett slogans appeared in places as far apart as Carlisle, Canterbury, Exeter, Newcastle and Birmingham.<sup>1</sup> A Fenland farmer could not conclude his letter to a friend of Burdett,

'without adverting to the great question which at this present time so much interests the public mind. There is nothing now talked of in the country but the imprisonment of our great and beloved patriot, Sir Francis Burdett. I hear my labourers discussing the subject every day; and what surprises me is, that they all seem perfectly to understand it, and regard the cause in which he is engaged as their own ... the imprisonment of Mr. Wilkes settled the question of general warrants, and that of Sir Francis will, by the blessing of God, be the means of renovating the constitution and re-establishing our liberties.'<sup>2</sup>

On 17 April, Westminster electors crammed into a meeting in Palace Yard to approve the conduct and principles of their representative, and to condemn the government's illegal proceedings. The speakers were Colonel Wardle and Lord Cochrane, the latter presenting a petition to parliament for Burdett's release. In the *Register*, Cobbett eulogised Burdett as the 'truest friend that England possesses'.<sup>3</sup> The results of the sustained publicity by Cobbett and other sections of the press, were to be seen in the numbers of dinners and petitions that celebrated Burdett's cause in subsequent weeks. The Livery of London's dinner, chaired by the increasingly radical Waithman, numbered amongst its guests, Whitbread, Wardle, Byng, Lord Ossulston, Wood, Maddocks and Creevey. It toasted Burdett, called for radical reform and sent a petition to Parliament in the same vein.<sup>4</sup> Similar meetings took place all over the country; in areas near to the capital, such as Middlesex and Southwark, and from farther afield, in

<sup>1</sup>P.R.O.,H.O. 42/106 for reports from postmasters to F. Freeling, quoted in J. Dinwiddy, 'Sir Francis Burdett and Burdettite Radicalism', p.20, n. 17-18.

<sup>2</sup>*Letters to William Frend from the Reynolds Family of Little Paxton, and John Hammond of Fenstanton, 1793-1814*, ed. Frida Knight, (Cambridge 1974) pp. 87-88, John Hammond to William Frend, 24 April 1810.

<sup>3</sup>Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 17, pp. 577, 632-40; 641-3; *Account of the Proceedings of the Electors of Westminster, on the Commitment of their Representative, Sir Francis Burdett, to the Tower, Published by order of the Committee who conducted his Election*, (London 1810); *Colchester*, ii. 263; *The Times*, 18 April 1810; *The Auto-biography of a Seaman, by Thomas, 10th Earl of Dundonald*, (London 1810) ii. 140; *Hansard*, 1810, xvi. 727-32; Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Hist. b.199, f.19, Burdett's reply to the Electors of Westminster, 20 April 1810.

<sup>4</sup>J. 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*, xvi. (1973) 81-2; *The Times*, 20 April 1810.

Liverpool, Berkshire, Nottingham, Rochester, Hull, Sheffield and Coventry. All sent petitions requesting the release of Burdett and some measure of parliamentary reform.<sup>1</sup> It is beyond all doubt that in April and May 1810 many could temporarily unite under Burdett's banner. It was unity in response to the threat posed by an arbitrary and reactionary administration that attempted to use parliamentary privilege in order to by-pass an Englishman's liberties and to stifle the call for reform. But it should be noted precisely amongst which ranks of the population lay most of the support for Burdett. He himself had information that government sympathisers, hardly a surprise, but also many Whigs, were trying to prevent meetings in favour of parliamentary reform. 'The object, no doubt, will be to prevent a real one and evaporate the present spirit upon a sham.'<sup>2</sup> The research of J.R. Dinwiddy confirms Burdett's opinion that support for him was centred largely amongst the lower ranks. At Nottingham, for example, there were two reform meetings. The Corporation Foxites petitioned for a change of administration and moderate reform, whilst several prominent Unitarians and many working men signed a petition for radical reform. As Burdett had heard, Wyvill and his friends blocked a reform meeting proposed by Sir Walter Fawkes at York because they feared the growth of Burdettite radicalism amongst West Riding industrial workers. William Lamb, the future Lord Melbourne, recorded that there was certainly a ferment in the public mind, but that it 'did not creep so far into the sounder parts of society'.<sup>3</sup> Burdett himself acknowledged that he would be prepared to accept any reform proposals. To Lady Burdett, he stressed that he had deliberately tried to accommodate the 'most timid' in Middlesex by sending a 'gentle' answer to their letter in support of his protest.<sup>4</sup> This attitude was very much in tune with his own essentially

<sup>1</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Hist. b.199, ff. 26-30 for the Middx. meeting; f.53 for the Liverpool petition; Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 17, pp. 675, 819; *Hansard*, 1810, xvi. 780-1, 791-818; Dinwiddy's article, 'Sir Francis Burdett and Burdettite radicalism' pp. 21-2 has yet more examples of expressions of provincial support for Burdett.

<sup>2</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Hist. b.197, f.5; Burdett to Lady Burdett, n.d. but addressed from the Tower, Sun. May.

<sup>3</sup>J.R. Dinwiddy, 'Sir Francis Burdett and Burdettite Radicalism', pp. 22 & n.31, quoting MS. autobiography of William Lamb; Panshanger MSS, box 16, Herts. R.O.

<sup>4</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Hist. b.197, f.5, Burdett to Lady Burdett, Sun. May.

moderate reform ideas centring on the idea of purification rather than radical innovation. The support from the more radical lower ranks in 1810, and the fearful reaction displayed by most propertied men, illustrates however, quite conclusively, the extent to which Burdett's moderate 'country' programme had become the standard-bearer for radicals of many different shades.

Whilst Parliament continued in session, Burdett remained in his 'comfortable martyrdom' in the Tower. Lady Burdett received a summons from him for clean linen, but this seems to be the greatest hardship he was called upon to endure!<sup>1</sup> He received a constant stream of visitors, ranging from Lady Oxford to Major Cartwright; a deputation from the Livery of London came to demonstrate their approval of his conduct, and he entertained friends, such as Creevey, to dinner.<sup>2</sup>

But whilst Burdett lived like royalty in the Tower, the members of the ministry felt far from comfortable. The threats to the capital's tranquillity had been survived; now they were faced with a number of delicate legal and political problems. The interest generated among members by the Burdett affair resulted in a very full House to hear Romilly's motion for the immediate release of John Gale Jones. The legal niceties surrounding the question of Jones's imprisonment were still far from clear, and there were plenty of members who wished to seize this opportunity to criticise the ministry.<sup>3</sup> Even those sympathetic to the government, who utterly condemned Burdett's tactics of pushing his resistance 'to the very verge of rebellion', had yet to admit that the government had, nevertheless, not been raised in public estimation, for 'there exists a general conviction of their incapacity'.<sup>4</sup> *The Times* ironically congratulated the ministers on a successful military expedition, albeit to Piccadilly; but in a more serious tone, it called the whole affair an 'ill-judged quarrel - a Speaker's warrant,

<sup>1</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.* f.7, for the Livery's visit; P.R.O.,H.O. 42/106-7, 109 includes lists of Burdett's visitors; *The Times*, 10 May 1810; *Thomas Creevey's Papers*, ed. J. Gore, p.80, Burdett to Creevey, 10 May, 1810; Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Hist. c.294, f.10, Henry Clifford to Samuel Lysons, 10 May 1810, recording Burdett's activities in the Tower.

<sup>3</sup>*Hansard*, 1810, xvi. 691-5; Aspinall, *The Later Correspondence of George III*, v. 562-3, Perceval to George III, 9 April 1810.

<sup>4</sup>Fortescue MSS. *Hist. MSS. Commission*, x. 26, Lord Auckland to Lord Grenville, 12 April 1810.

executed by a body of soldiers is an anomaly in British history, that has not occurred since the middle of the century last'.<sup>1</sup>

The doubt surrounding the authority of the Speaker's warrant was intensified when the government received news of Burdett's legal suits against both the Speaker and Lord Moira as Lieutenant of the Tower. If the government allowed Burdett to prosecute his suit in an external court of law before a jury, the privileges and authority of the House of Commons would be over-ruled. On the other hand, it was quite clear to the law officers, that the House could not be judge in its own case. Perceval spent days searching for any legal precedents in such an action. On 10 May, a committee of the House of Commons decided that the Speaker and Serjeant should have leave to appear and plead before the House, and that the Attorney General should defend them.<sup>2</sup>

At the end of May, the government's attention was diverted from legal affairs, when Burdett's Westminster Election Committee announced that a huge, triumphal procession would celebrate Burdett's release at the end of the parliamentary session.<sup>3</sup> Place recorded that he was not disposed to favour a large public demonstration, and that, when consulted, Burdett was of the same opinion. The latter was apparently eventually persuaded to agree to the plan by the enthusiasm of Major Cartwright.<sup>4</sup> The format of the procession was planned down to the smallest detail. The carriages of the participating celebrities were to be in specific positions. They would be accompanied by horsemen, footmen, flags, musicians, bands and banners. Advertisements for the procession were placed in all the newspapers and it was soon apparent that many would flock into the capital in order to take part or witness the spectacle.<sup>5</sup> The ministry made its plans accordingly on the same scale. Regular and Volunteer regiments

<sup>1</sup>*The Times*, 10 April 1810.

<sup>2</sup>For information on all the legal aspects of the Burdett affair see: *Hansard*, 1810, xvi. 156-7,969; *The Times*, 10 and 12 April, 5 May 1810; *The Morning Chronicle*, 12 and 16 April; *Colchester* ii. 258-78; Add. MSS. 27850 ff.209-213 for Place's narrative; Fortescue MSS. *Hist. MSS. Commission*, x. 34, Thomas Grenville to Lord Grenville, 4 May 1810; *The Memoirs and Correspondence of Francis Horner M.P.*, ed. by his brother, L. Horner, ii. 10.

<sup>3</sup>Add. MSS. 27850, f.229, Place's narrative.

<sup>4</sup>*ibid.* f.230.

<sup>5</sup>*ibid.* ff. 232-5.

were again called up from all over the South East; a semaphore system to relay news from Parliament to the Tower was devised, and special constables were enrolled.<sup>1</sup> It would appear that the precise details of the Westminster Committee's plans were relayed to the government by their informer, Powell, who was still in the thick of Westminster political activity. Place recorded that Powell lost all the Committee minutes to a pickpocket the night before the procession.<sup>2</sup> A more probable interpretation would be that they had been sent straight to Home Office hands.

Parliament was prorogued on 21 June. Contemporary reports testified to the good behaviour of the huge crowds that thronged the route from the Tower to Piccadilly.<sup>3</sup> They were to be disappointed however, for at 3.30 p.m., it was announced that Burdett had left the Tower by water, and had quietly slipped away to his Wimbledon home. The procession took place, but the central attraction was now only John Gale Jones, preaching from an open carriage. He was a poor substitute for Burdett, who was the real darling of the assembled multitudes.

Explanations for Burdett's conduct were many and varied. He himself protested that his conduct had been the result of the deepest reflection. He shrank, he claimed, from his critics' accusations that he revelled in the personal adulation such an occasion would naturally produce. More importantly, he dreaded being responsible for any loss of life should the crowd's enthusiasm have turned into riot. Burdett was supported in this discreet course by his brother, William Jones Burdett, and Horne Tooke. The *Morning Chronicle* similarly praised Burdett's desire to promote stability and moderate conduct.<sup>4</sup> His behaviour on 21 June was not particularly surprising. He had done nothing to discourage the display of popular indignation against the ministry in March and April, but the issue of Gale Jones' imprisonment was one of constitutional

<sup>1</sup>P.R.O.,H.O. 42/109 Government memoranda, 12-21 June 1810.

<sup>2</sup>Add. MSS. 27850, f.232, Place's narrative.

<sup>3</sup>*ibid.* ff.236-238; *Colchester*, ii. 278; *The Farington Diary*, ed. J. Grieg, vi. 73; *The Times*, 22 June 1810; *The Morning Chronicle*, 23 June 1810.

<sup>4</sup>Bodl. Lib. Eng. Lett. d.97, f.216, William Jones Burdett to James Langham, 17 July 1810; A. Stephens, *Memoirs of John Horne Tooke*, ii. 391; Add. MSS. 27850, f.238 for Place's record of these reactions.

importance. In such circumstances, the reform leaders could approve of popular protest. But it was another thing altogether for Burdett to bow to the plans and dictates of the lower ranks of radicals in Westminster and appear, at their command, in the June celebrations. Since 1807, he and Horne Tooke had consistently kept their distance from radicalism at the grass roots and Burdett clearly determined to do so on this occasion.<sup>1</sup>

Supporters of the government were naturally delighted at Burdett's behaviour. Anti-radical propagandists speculated, probably quite validly, that Burdett had found himself in too close a proximity to the mob. *The Times'* verdict was that the whole affair had been a useful lesson to potential radical sympathisers in politics; the reform cause would not be advanced by the participation of the public at large.<sup>2</sup>

The reaction of many radicals was inevitably one of bitter disappointment. The prints suggest that, amongst the London mob, Burdett's popularity was badly shaken.<sup>3</sup> Francis Place, one of the architects of the Westminster celebrations, was especially severe in his verdict. Burdett 'fell on this day from his height of popularity ... he never recovered the goodwill of many thousands ... and never has been relied upon to any considerable extent since that day'.<sup>4</sup> Apart from such personal reactions, the implications for the reform cause in general were clear. From April to June, many disparate elements had temporarily united and focussed on the person of Burdett; the movement had thus gained a semblance of unity and a cohesion of purpose. Once Burdett had refused to take a demagogic lead in popular agitation, the movement he had headed began to disintegrate. He

<sup>1</sup>Manchester College, Oxford, Shepherd Papers x. f.21; Shepherd records that Tooke's advice to Burdett was 'never ... interfere with the proceedings of a mob in your own favour. This interference gives indication of your possessing influence over them, and thus renders you in the general estimation answerable for their conduct'. Rev. William Shepherd (1768-1847).

<sup>2</sup>*The Times*, 25 June 1810; *Historical MSS. Commission*, Fortescue MSS. x.45, Thomas Grenville to Lord Grenville, 23 June 1810.

<sup>3</sup>M.D. George, *English Political Caricature*, p.127. See especially the print, 'The Burdettites Hoaxed, or One Fool makes Many' by Williams. <sup>4</sup>Ad MSS. 27850, ff. 239-40. Place's opinion was not without a shade of malice. Many Westminster radicals, including Burdett, had become suspicious of him because of his role on a jury that acquitted the Duke of Cumberland of the murder of his valet and Place subsequently took a back seat in Westminster politics for several years. A. Prochaska, 'Westminster Radicalism, 1807-32', pp. 48-50.

had been at his strongest whilst he made a personal stand against a specific case of infringed rights and liberties; once this was removed, it was far harder to unite different groups around positive reform remedies. Something of a salvage operation was attempted when Burdett dined with his constituents on 31 July, in order to celebrate his liberation, but although he was just as vociferous as ever against corruption, and claimed that the reform cause was gaining in strength and support, it was hard to disguise the fact that the reform leaders faced some difficult decisions in the summer of 1810.<sup>1</sup> They needed to clarify their position. Burdett's respectable departure from the Tower had perhaps brought him closer to Whig reform tactics; he appeared to have discarded demagogic methods for their more moderate paths. Many Whigs acknowledged this. Francis Horner commented that 'his powers of doing mischief are diminished .... [yet] .... he has qualities that would enable him .... to assist other public men in doing good'.<sup>2</sup> Yet many reformers were still striving to distance themselves from the Whigs. Quite apart from their different political traditions and ideas about the power of the Crown and rotten borough system, reformers such as Cartwright and Cobbett were correct in suspecting that in 1810, the Whigs were not really attached to reform as a major political objective.<sup>3</sup> The subsequent Regency crisis proved indeed that the Whigs were still more interested in a possible accession to power within the present system. It was imperative therefore that reform leaders established their own position and ideas within the political spectrum. This was difficult to achieve for on 9 July, Cobbett was sentenced to two years in Newgate and a fine of two thousand pounds for an article in the *Political Register* against the flogging of local militiamen by German mercenaries.<sup>4</sup> The sentence plunged Cobbett into a financial crisis and a personal quarrel with Wright, his co-editor, that threatened to curtail the influence of the reformers'

<sup>1</sup>*The Speech of Sir Francis Burdett at the Crown and Anchor Tavern, 31 July 1810, on the occasion of dining with his constituents after his liberation from the Tower, Published by order of the Stewards.* (London 1810); *The Times*, 1 Aug. 1810.

<sup>2</sup>*The Memoirs and Correspondence of Francis Horner, ed. by his brother, L. Horner*, ii. 22-3, Horner to J.A. Murray, 26 June 1810.

<sup>3</sup>The divisions in the Whigs over the subject of reform are discussed in detail in M. Roberts, *The Whig Party 1807-12*, pp. 265-302.

<sup>4</sup>G. Spater, *William Cobbett, the Poor Man's Friend*, i. 252-4; ii. 326-7.

most powerful literary weapon. Burdett too, faced possible personal setbacks when, in 1811, the details of his legal suit against William Scott, the brother of Lady Oxford, for the recovery of five thousand pounds, came to light. Scott maintained that Burdett had put the sum in trust for the young Lord Harley, whose paternity Burdett was supposed to have acknowledged. Although his intimacy with the Oxfords had been well publicised since 1798<sup>1</sup>, the revelations were potentially damaging, particularly as Burdett had railed against the behaviour of the Duke of York and Mrs. Clarke in 1809. Part of the glamour attached to Burdett sprang from the portrayal of him as a man of integrity and domestic virtue; a man worthy to be entrusted with the reform cause in contrast to hypocritical place-men. The pamphlet, *Adultery and Patriotism, a short letter to Sir Francis Burdett*<sup>2</sup>, that now circulated in Westminster, accused Burdett of hypocrisy and deceit, and forecast that he would probably abandon reformers with the same ease with which he had apparently discarded Lady Burdett. Although too much importance should not be attached to such gossip, it would be unwise to ignore completely the damage that might be caused to Burdett's standing by a personal scandal. Wisely, he dropped the case against Scott and devoted his energies to the promotion of several favourite radical campaigns that could be counted on to gather wide public sympathy. These were the campaigns against the practice of flogging in the army,<sup>3</sup> the securing of redress for prisoners detained without proper trial, and the highlighting of distress caused by heavy wartime taxation.

Such subjects loomed large in public opinion at a time when, after so many years of conflict with France, the nation was being asked to make yet more efforts. As a result, there was public support to be won for the political group that would consistently highlight a wide variety of grievances. As in 1809, there were signs that several prominent Whigs realised just how much political capital would fall to the radicals if they established themselves as spokesmen for the

<sup>1</sup>M.D. George, *English Political Caricature*, p. 132.

<sup>2</sup>*Adultery and Patriotism: A Short Letter to Sir Francis Burdett, Bart. M.P. ... by an Elector of Westminster and one of his Constituents.* (London 1811). Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. d.94, f.8, Burdett to Lady Burdett, 12 July 1811.

<sup>3</sup>See above Chapter 3, p.74

people. Brougham recommended to John Allen that the Whigs take up issues such as flogging in order to 'regain the estimation of the country', instead of allowing Burdett to take all the credit for raising them.<sup>1</sup> This subject was brought home to him when he went to contest Liverpool at the election of September 1812, for he reported that there were 'swarms of Burdettites there'.<sup>2</sup> Even the disgruntled Place was forced to admit that 'it would have been absurd in any man to oppose' Burdett at the 1812 election, such was his high standing amongst his Westminster constituents.<sup>3</sup>

During 1811-12, Burdett spoke many times in Parliament on behalf of those who had been imprisoned without trial in gaols in Lincoln, Lancaster, Ilchester and elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> Whilst seconding Lord Folkestone's motion on ex-officio informations for libel, Burdett attacked the Attorney General's 'most tyrannical illegal power .... of sending men to distant gaols and to solitary confinement'.<sup>5</sup> It was a system exercised with 'gross partiality' and 'vindictive rigour'<sup>6</sup>; supported by innovations such as special juries, it was a system contrary to Magna Carta<sup>7</sup> and to every principle of the constitution.<sup>8</sup> Burdett's spokesmanship for the hardships endured by the lower ranks of the population was stimulated by his political ideas of the rights due to the nation under his vision of the ancient constitution, rather than any detailed knowledge of the social and economic conditions of the people petitioning him for relief. It was his political worries about corruption, and its effect on the constitution, that made him call for an impartial committee of inquiry into the Luddite disturbances of June 1812; that made him highlight the distress in Northern and Midland

<sup>1</sup>Add. MSS. 52178, ff. 138-9, Brougham to John Allen, 21 June 1811.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.* f.162, Brougham to J. Allen, 25 Sept. 1812.

<sup>3</sup>Add. MSS. 27850, f.255 for Place's observations.

<sup>4</sup>*Hansard*, 1811, xx. 730, 754-5; 1812, xxiii. 759-62, 895-900; 1812, xxiv. 338-40, 340-1. The Burdett MSS. contain many examples of letters to Burdett requesting pecuniary relief or his help in enabling the petitioners to gain a political hearing. He was clearly regarded as a politician who could be relied upon to highlight the sufferings of those outside political ranks.

<sup>5</sup>*Hansard*, 1811, xix. 590.

<sup>6</sup>*ibid.* 583, 584.

<sup>7</sup>*ibid.* 593.

<sup>8</sup>*Hansard*, 1811, xix. 603; *The Speech of Sir Francis Burdett, Bt. delivered in the House of Commons on 28 Mar. 1811, upon a motion of Lord Folkestone's to examine into the practice of ex-officio informations filed by the Attorney General in cases of libel*, Published by J. Morton, 272, Strand, (London 1811).

counties in December 1812, and made him call for definite information on the real state of the country in the spring of 1815.<sup>1</sup> This political and constitutional impulse to Burdett's social campaigns was to separate him from reform leaders such as Hunt after 1815. More accurately informed about the social and economic conditions in the country, Hunt was to press for more radical parliamentary reform remedies than Burdett's purely political, 'country' horizons envisaged.

In all these debates upon various forms of distress, Burdett found himself in effective co-operation with Whigs such as Folkestone and Whitbread. But if the cause for parliamentary reform was to make further progress, it needed to gather support from many more voices within the political arena. In 1811, there was an attempt by Major Cartwright, to create the nucleus of a parliamentary group, who would act according to public principle, rather than the dictates of party faction, and who would sponsor the call for reform. There was no special personal understanding between Cartwright and Burdett<sup>2</sup>, but the former recognised that Burdett was the clear parliamentary leader of the reform cause in public opinion and therefore the man with whom to co-operate if his own nationwide tours and petitioning campaigns were to bear any fruit. The group of M.P.'s which he hoped to encourage to promote reform met on 30 March 1811. Burdett was accompanied by his brother, Cartwright himself, Walter Fawkes, Thomas Northmore and Strickland for the reformers; the Whig, Brand by George Byng, Sir Gilbert Heathcote, Hanbury Tracey and several more from his party. But the result was far from promising. The two groups could agree that the House of Commons did not speak for the nation and that some measure of reform was desirable, but nothing more.<sup>3</sup> On the radical side, Cobbett was sceptical about any definite reform pledge from the Whigs. 'I see very little to rejoice at in the co-operation of Sir Francis Burdett and Mr. Brand. They

<sup>1</sup>Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 22 p.11; *Hansard*, 1812, xxiv. 334-5; 1815, xxx. 681-2.

<sup>2</sup>Cartwright had acknowledged this as far back as 1808 when he admitted that each must work in his own way. *The Life and Correspondence of Major Cartwright*, ed. F.D. Cartwright, i. 356.

<sup>3</sup>N.C. Miller, 'John Cartwright and radical parliamentary reform, 1808-19', *Eng. Hist. Rev.* lxxxiii. (1968) 715-16; J.A. Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, pp. 205-6; Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 19, p.1518.

cannot go on together unless one or the other completely changes his object, and I am quite sure that Sir Francis will not do this'<sup>1</sup>, he declared in the *Register*. His assessment proved correct. None of the Whig leaders were at all interested in a rapprochement with leading radicals and they actively discouraged the fringe elements of the party, who showed an inclination to treat with the increasingly respectable Burdett.<sup>2</sup> Only Cartwright continued to be optimistic.<sup>3</sup> He denied that Burdett was disposed to 'counsels of violence'. In an attempt to persuade Christopher Wyvill to rejoin the reform movement and attend a grand reform dinner, Cartwright stressed that Burdett showed the 'greatest anxiety for a union of all reformers' and would attempt any rational reform scheme as long as reform of the Commons remained a *sine qua non*.<sup>4</sup> Wyvill agreed to be a steward and the dinner took place on 10 June 1811. The *Morning Chronicle* called it 'the most respectable meeting for Parliamentary Reform that ever took place'<sup>5</sup>, but despite the attendance of prominent radical sympathisers and a handful of independent country gentlemen it was clear that the main body of the parliamentary Whig party failed to appear.<sup>6</sup> Many had refused invitations to the event. Burdett had to leave the dinner early in order to present his Commons' motion against flogging in the army, and amongst those who remained, deep divisions were revealed on the approach to, and content of, measures of reform.<sup>7</sup> The greatest distance that the Whigs were able to move in favour of reform was revealed by Brand's motion, a year later, to entitle copyholders to vote for knights of the shire.<sup>8</sup> Burdett agreed that this small amelioration in the system

<sup>1</sup>Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 19, p.897.

<sup>2</sup>M. Roberts, *The Whig Party*, pp. 288-90.

<sup>3</sup>His *Six Letters to the Marquis of Tavistock on a Reform of the Commons House of Parliament; discussing the best mode of uniting Policy with Principle*, (London 1812) were an attempt to convert Whig moderates to Burdett's reform ideas.

<sup>4</sup>*The Life and Correspondence of Major Cartwright*, ii. 9, Cartwright to Wyvill, 15 April 1811.

<sup>5</sup>*Morning Chronicle*, 11 June 1811.

<sup>6</sup>Radicals present were Burdett, Robert Waithman, Henry Hunt, Samuel Brooks, Matthew Wood, Sir Charles Wolseley; the county respectables included Sir John Throckmorton of Berkshire, Francis Canning of Foxcote, Warwicks, Edward Blount of Staffs., Montague Burgoyne of Essex and Coke of Norfolk.

<sup>7</sup>For details on the dinner see: *The Statesman*, 11 June 1811; M. Roberts, *The Whig Party*, pp. 288-90; N.C. Miller, 'John Cartwright and radical parliamentary reform' pp. 715-16; Osborne, *John Cartwright*, pp. 92-3; J.A. Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, p. 207.

<sup>8</sup>*Hansard*, 1812, xxiii. 99-106.

of representation was something gained<sup>1</sup>, but even this limited proposal was defeated by 215 to 88.<sup>2</sup> There was quite clearly no inclination in the House for any measure of reform.

With the failure to generate support for reform inside Parliament, attention was once again focussed upon opinion out of doors. Over the next few years, Burdett's association with the Hampden Club reflected the reform ideas that were closest to his 'country' aspirations. The Hampden Club for political reform sprang out of the initial meetings between Whigs and radicals in 1811, but contrary to earlier supposition, N.C. Miller's article in 1974 revealed that the club was not the brainchild of Major Cartwright, but of Thomas Northmore of Cleve, Devon.<sup>3</sup> Cartwright obstructed its organisation initially, refused his name as a member until February 1812, and did not join the club until May 1813. These facts are significant because they reveal the differences of opinion between radical leaders such as Cartwright and Burdett, that did not come fully into the open until the end of 1816. Burdett, Thomas Holt White, Walter Fawkes and other country gentlemen eagerly accepted Northmore's suggestion for a political reform club, based in the counties, which stressed the importance of property. Each club member should possess the £300 property qualification for M.P.'s. In true 'country' tradition, those who had a permanent stake in the country should thus be encouraged to take the lead in the reform movement. The property qualification would guarantee moderation in the club's ideas, and effectiveness in the implementation of its aims. In contrast to enthusiasts for the Hampden Club, Cartwright remained true to his far more radical aims of 1776 and '*Take your Choice*'. In the 1770s, these differences had led to the split between the metropolitan radicals and Wyvill's County Association movement; in 1812, they resulted in Cartwright establishing the 'Union for Parliamentary Reform' to run alongside the property-based, gentry-run Hampden Club. Cartwright's 'Union' favoured direct tax-paying suffrage, a membership fee of

<sup>1</sup>*ibid.* 143-8.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.* 161.

<sup>3</sup>N.C. Miller, 'Major John Cartwright and the founding of the Hampden Club', *Historical Journal*, 17 (1974), 615-19.

merely a few pence, and a general national meeting to discuss reform 'without limitation'.<sup>1</sup>

Cobbett, Wardle and Hunt joined the 'Union' and five members of the Westminster Committee were prominent in its organisation. Burdett and Cochrane were likewise on the original founding body but did not subsequently play a prominent role in the Union's activities.<sup>2</sup> Burdett preferred an association with the Hampden Club, and it was in his name that its Circulars were issued.<sup>3</sup> He also continued to chair the Westminster reform dinners and meetings such as the celebration of the six hundredth anniversary of Magna Carta on 15 June 1815.<sup>4</sup> But there were signs of increasingly open divisions between Burdett and the other reform leaders in the period 1812-15. It was Cartwright and Hunt who encouraged the provincial reform clubs to petition parliament and press for a political voice for working men.<sup>5</sup> The result was that the Club's delegates favoured Cobbett's new manhood suffrage programme, which was to be implemented by Hunt's favourite method of unenfranchised, mass pressure upon the political ranks.<sup>6</sup> In stark contrast, Burdett's Hampden Circulars still called upon the 'Gentlemen of landed property to stand forward at the head of the reform movement'<sup>7</sup>, and pointed to the example of Wyvill's County Association Movement. Burdett's reform views were, in truth, quite different from those espoused by Hunt, Cobbett and Cartwright. His parliamentary speeches and private correspondence in this period reveal his consistent adherence to his own limited, 'country' programme, and it is these

<sup>1</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>2</sup>*The Life and Correspondence of Major Cartwright*, ii. 375-9; *Early Proceedings of the Union for Parliamentary Reform according to the Constitution*, printed by McCreery (Secretary), (London 1812).

<sup>3</sup>Bodl. Lib. Hampden Club Circular with instructions on how to petition for reform; Major Cartwright, *A Letter to Sir Francis Burdett as Chairman of the Hampden Committee*, 12 Dec. 1815; *Hampden Club Resolutions*, 23 Mar. 1816. The Club's bank account was also in Burdett's name.

<sup>4</sup>*The Life and Correspondence of Major Cartwright*, ii. 107; J.A. Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, p.261.

<sup>5</sup>Cartwright travelled 900 miles in 29 days, visiting 34 communities to establish Hampden and Union Reform Clubs in 1813.

<sup>6</sup>J. Belchem, *Orator Hunt*, pp. 52-4.

<sup>7</sup>*Hampden Club Resolutions*, 23 Mar. 1816.

views that should be examined if the split in the reform movement, in 1816-17, is to be understood.

During the recurring Regency debates in the period 1810-13, Burdett constantly championed the proper operation of monarchical powers. He objected to Ministers' adjournment of the House during the King's illness and claimed it was tantamount to an arbitrary suspension of the Constitution.<sup>1</sup> In Burdett's opinion, the King ought to be a 'great and efficient magistrate'<sup>2</sup>, and he protested against 'the intention to keep the crown always in a state of pupillage to the oligarchy in this House'.<sup>3</sup> Burdett wished to see Regency powers given to the Prince of Wales and subsequently to Princess Charlotte, in order to ensure that the monarchical office was not merely a rubber stamp for Parliament. He desired a Bill

'that Parliament shall never pass any measure ... for the purpose of giving it an authority and sanctity which does not, and never can, belong to it ... My only object is to preserve the Constitution ... and to put it beyond the power of the two Houses of Parliament to render the royal authority subservient to their will.'<sup>4</sup>

The efficient operation of constitutional, monarchical powers was a cornerstone of Burdett's political programme. As such, his sentiments echoed, very clearly, the language of the early eighteenth century 'country' opposition.

At the opening of the session in January 1812, Burdett pre-empted the official reply to the Lord's Commissioner's Speech and delivered a grand oration to the Regent, detailing the people's grievances after eighteen years of war. His catalogue of grievances was identical to his list of 1802.<sup>5</sup> He objected to the imposition of barracks and deployment of foreign soldiers in the country, rather than a reliance for defence upon volunteer Englishmen. He objected to the continued use of flogging as an army punishment; to the Attorney General's power of filing ex-officio informations; to the suspension of Habeas Corpus; to

<sup>1</sup>*Hansard*, 1810, xviii. 28-9.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.* 226.

<sup>3</sup>*Hansard*, 1813, xxiv. 716. For Burdett's other contributions to the Regency debates, *ibid.* 1810. xviii. 331-7, 922-6.

<sup>4</sup>*Hansard*, 1813, xxiv. 716. For Burdett's motion, 73; against, 238.

<sup>5</sup>See above Chapter 2, p.27, footnote 4.

the unprecedented tax burdens, and most of all, to the millions of debt that was a result of the protracted and unnecessary war.<sup>1</sup> The speech was loaded with 'country' sentiment and appears to have struck a chord with the war-weary public for the printed edition ran through about thirty thousand copies.<sup>2</sup>

The issues of the National Debt, excessive taxation and corruption in government were clearly still the major preoccupations for Burdett. This is demonstrated by his memoranda on the 1810 Finance Report and the speech he subsequently made on the 'state of the nation' on 28 July 1812. His private notes detailed the huge amounts of public money brought to the government by taxation, and the equally huge sums that left the Treasury as pensions and sinecures in the Army, for foreign loans and subsidies, as Secret Service money, as loans to the East India Company and to the Excise Commissioners. Burdett calculated that huge savings could be made by the abolition of sinecures, in order to relieve the starving manufacturers. At present, he concluded, 'the nation is robbed until people have no means of existence left, and they are shot by soldiers paid for by themselves for their own defence. All this arises by robberies on the people committed by the House of Commons'. Here was the crux of the problem for Burdett; 'those who vote the money are, in some way or other, interested in the expenditure of it. The small number of independent men have no weight at all'. If self-interested families such as the Whig Graftons and Grenvilles gave up their sinecures, thousands of families could be fed.<sup>3</sup> Here again was the classical 'country' remedy of a group of independent members who should expose the oligarchical interests in the Commons. Burdett's speech on the subject deplored the 'borough-mongering faction' that operated as an 'odious

<sup>1</sup>*Hansard*, 1812, xxi. 18-31; *Address to the Prince Regent, as proposed in the House of Commons at the opening of the Session on 7 Jan. 1812. To which is added also Lord Cochrane's Speech, who seconded the motion.* (London 1812).

<sup>2</sup>Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 21, p.282; B.L. Add. MSS. 27839, f.210 for Place's record of the sales. Burdett's fellow members in the Commons unreservedly condemned his tactics and sentiments by defeating the motion by 238 to 1.

<sup>3</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Hist. c.294, ff.54-7; MSS. Eng. Hist. b.196, f.19 for Burdett's conclusions on the 1810 Finance Report.

oligarchy'.<sup>1</sup> Their dominance in the legislature had provoked useless wars, wasted the national treasure and lives, neglected opportunities for peace, increased taxes by an alarming rate and, significantly, unhinged the property basis of the nation.<sup>2</sup> In a letter to his constituents from Oxford on the dissolution of Parliament in October 1812, Burdett stressed his own 'unsupported and unavailing efforts to stem a torrent of corruption'.<sup>3</sup>

Burdett's speech on the Army Estimates in February 1816<sup>4</sup> gave an even more faithful rendition of his 'country' opposition views. He strenuously denied that a standing army was either necessary or lawful during peacetime. It was inimical to the country's liberties, and the patronage of such a force encouraged the exercise of arbitrary power, as had happened under Charles I and James II. In a direct reference to Bolingbroke, the chief of eighteenth century 'country' opposition theorists, Burdett agreed that there was 'more to be apprehended for the Constitution from one hundred mercenaries within those walls than from one hundred thousand armed men without them'.<sup>5</sup> In a second Bolingbrokean echo to the monarch who had best united both Crown and people, Burdett alluded to the example of Elizabeth I, who had relied solely upon the people to be the support of the Crown. Likewise, he claimed, the nation should now look to its own militia and volunteers to preserve order in the country. The threat to stability came not from external military pressure; 'the real danger of this country was in her financial situation. The National Debt was the enemy, to the reduction of which we ought to apply our utmost efforts.'<sup>6</sup> This final flourish on the theme of the National Debt gave Burdett's speech a distinctly eighteenth century

<sup>1</sup>*Hansard*, 1812, xxiii. 1265.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.* 1262-72; Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 22. p.176.

<sup>3</sup>*Address of Sir Francis Burdett, Bart. to the Electors of Westminster, on the Dissolution of Parliament in 1812*; a printed silk sheet in Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Hist. B200. f.163A.

<sup>4</sup>*Hansard*, 1816, xxxii. 1001-5.

<sup>5</sup>*ibid.* 1002.

<sup>6</sup>*ibid.* 1003.

'country' flavour.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps unlike Bolingbroke, Burdett was totally sincere in his fear that the size of the National Debt, and the extent of corruption in government, presented a serious threat to the established order and prosperity of the country. These fears, and not a desire to accommodate the needs of a developing social and industrial nation, made him press for reform. In these years, he clearly wished to demonstrate that his reform ideas were disinterested, moderate and public-spirited ones. He stressed the importance of constitutional channels for reform, even to the extent, as in his speech on the Army Estimates, of enlisting the help of those bodies, the Militia and Volunteer forces, which the government paradoxically intended to be the first line of defence against agents of change in society.

To whom did Burdett look to promote his moderate, patriotic, reform ideas? His correspondence at this time reveals that he had no sympathy for the views

<sup>1</sup>All the central themes of Burdett's political creed had been articulated first by Bolingbroke in the first half of the eighteenth century. The latter had urged the aristocratic 'patriot' opposition politicians of his own day 'to reform the state ... to repair the breach that is made and is increasing daily in the constitution and to shut up ... the principal entries through which these torrents of corruption have been let in upon us.' Bolingbroke, *Works*, (1969, reprint of the London 1841 edition) ii. 364, from a 'Letter on the Spirit of Patriotism'. 'The government of Britain has ... the appearance of an oligarchy; and monarchy is ... rather imposed upon than obeyed.' *ibid.* 362. In 'The Idea of a Patriot King' (1738), the task was to 'reinfuse the spirit of liberty, to reform the morals, and to raise the sentiments of a people' *ibid.* 374. 'Party is a political evil, and faction is the worst of all parties. The true image of a free people, governed by a Patriot King, is that of a patriarchal family, where the head and all the members are united by one common interest, and animated by one common spirit ... instead of abetting the divisions of his people, he [a Patriot King] will endeavour to unite them ... he will put himself at the head of his people in order to govern, or more properly to subdue all parties'. *ibid.* 401-2. Bolingbroke eulogised Elizabeth as a 'patriot' ruler: 'she found her kingdom full of factions' yet 'she united the great body of the people in her and their common interest'. *ibid.* 412-13. 'A Patriot King will neither neglect, nor sacrifice his country's interest ... He will not multiply taxes wantonly nor keep up those unnecessarily which necessity has laid, that he may keep up legions of tax-gatherers. He will not continue national debts, by all sorts of political and other profusion; nor, more wickedly still by a settled purpose of oppressing and impoverishing the people, that he may, with greater ease corrupt some, and govern the whole.' *ibid.* 416. A Patriot King should reform the abuse of a standing army in a time of 'profoundest peace', and thus 'save a great part of this expense'. *ibid.* 418. In 'A Dissertation upon Parties', Letter IV, Bolingbroke depicted a 'country' party as one 'formed on principles of common interest. It cannot be united and maintained on the particular prejudices any more than it can, or ought to be, directed to the particular interest of any set of men whatsoever. A party thus constituted, is improperly called party. It is the nation speaking, and acting in the discourse and conduct of particular men.' *ibid.* 48. The sentiments Burdett held throughout his political career reveal a striking affinity to all of these Bolingbrokean patriot 'country' themes.

of the rising radical star, Henry Hunt, who encouraged the participation of the unenfranchised working man in politics. Burdett's letter to Coke of Norfolk on 24 October 1812 is revealing on this subject. After praising Coke's recent address to the Norfolk freeholders, he continued:

'Could our Country gentlemen be brought to think and act in like manner, there would be an end of the upstart system. ... There certainly is a spirit rising which only wants cherishing and methodising to be more than a match for corruption .... and who so fit to direct it .... as country gentlemen of unsophisticated understandings, disinterested views and independent fortunes. In truth, they are the persons principally concerned, infinitely more than the common people .... it is high time they should look about them. When they see a Purser of a Man of War, in a few years, amass an enormous fortune, obtain a great parliamentary interest, and build a palace fit to receive the King in, whilst they are obliged to pay court to this fungus and ask favours for their children, where do they imagine all this comes from, if not out of their own estates?'<sup>1</sup>

Two years later, Burdett was writing in the same vein, to the Whig, Bennet. 'In short, unless the country gentlemen and noblemen can be induced to stir, no good can, I fear, be done.'<sup>2</sup> In the stir created by Burdett's lukewarm opposition to the Corn Law in 1815<sup>3</sup>, he explained his views to the House in terms of his sympathy for the country gentlemen.<sup>4</sup> He could not identify with the public's intense interest in the Bill, which, in his opinion, was of little importance compared to the real problem, 'the corrupt state of the representation'. 'I think', he continued, 'the landed proprietors have, in this case, been very unfairly dealt with ... if we wish to have the country wealthy and prosperous, every man must be left to enjoy his property unmolested.'<sup>5</sup> He was 'sorry that the country gentlemen should allow themselves to be made the cat's-paw of any ministry, as they have done on this occasion'.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps more

<sup>1</sup>A.W. Stirling, *Coke of Norfolk and his friends*, ii. 91-2, Burdett to Coke, 24 Oct. 1812.

<sup>2</sup>University College, London, Brougham MSS. 35,902; Burdett to Bennet, 23 July 1814.

<sup>3</sup>His constituents were violently opposed to the Bill and petitioned against it.

<sup>4</sup>*Hansard*, 1815, xxx. 97-102.

<sup>5</sup>*ibid.* 202.

<sup>6</sup>*ibid.* 102. Bodl. Lib. Hampden Club Circular, April 1815, makes the allowance that 'votes for the Bill may have been given conscientiously'. This must have been an attempt to reconcile the Club's official objection to the Bill with its Chairman's different opinion.

than any other specific issue in these years, the lack of importance Burdett attached to the social and economic effects of the Corn Bill upon ordinary people, and his sympathy for his own kind, the country gentlemen, served to put a tremendous distance between himself and radical leaders such as Cobbett and Hunt. Burdett continued to voice his support for country gentlemen during the opposition's campaign against the income tax in March 1816.<sup>1</sup> He cited various examples of gentlemen who had been called upon to pay the tax from profits which they were not, in truth, realising, and he concluded by calling them 'to assume their natural situation in the state and exert themselves in defence of their property, and what was infinitely dearer, in support of the liberties of their country'.<sup>2</sup>

In the period 1811 to 1816, Burdett consistently voiced his opinion, and it was one that he had held as far back as his early political campaigns in 1802<sup>3</sup>, that it was the country's independent, landed gentlemen who should sponsor the call to purify the Commons from corruption and dismantle new, and suspect, financial powers. To complement these views, he began to move more in the social and political circles of men of his own rank, and less among the radicals who had first helped to launch his political career. It was a step that was, in some measure, forced upon him, for 1812-13 saw the break-up of the Wimbledon circle, with the deaths of its leading lights, Horne Tooke, J.A. Bonney, Colonel Bosville and Henry Clifford. This group was increasingly replaced by Burdett's friendship with men such as John Cam Hobhouse, the young lawyer Henry Bickersteth, Lord Byron, Douglas Kinnaird, Coke of Norfolk, the Marquis of Tavistock, H.G. Bennet and, more intermittently, leading Whigs such as Holland and Brougham.<sup>4</sup> Such associations inevitably led to rumours of discontent in the radical citadel, Westminster. These were first voiced in July 1814, when Lord Cochrane was expelled from the House for his supposed part in the Stock

<sup>1</sup>This was the only real opposition success in these years when they defeated the Ministry's income tax proposal by 238 to 201 on 18 Mar. 1816.

<sup>2</sup>*Hansard*, 1816, xxxii. 892.

<sup>3</sup>See above p.27.

<sup>4</sup>Lord Broughton, *Recollections of a Long Life*, ed. Lady Dorchester, (London 1909) i. 38; A. Mitchell, *The Whigs in Opposition*, 1815-30, (Oxford 1967) pp. 21, 42.

Exchange Hoax earlier the same year.<sup>1</sup> He was eventually returned unopposed for Westminster but not before it was clear that there were growing differences of opinion over the question of another candidate to represent the radical cause with Burdett. The issue was also bound to arise again for Cochrane announced that he would not thereafter seek re-election. The Whig, Henry Brougham, was favoured by Place, Samuel Brooks and James Mill, for he had already professed himself willing to stand by Burdett's reform plan of 1809.<sup>2</sup> Others however, favoured Major Cartwright. Burdett explained his own position to Bennet:

'I am grieved at the good old Major's standing for Westminster, and said all I could to prevent it, first because I really fear it will be the death of him, if he attends Parliament; secondly, because it divides the popular interest; and thirdly, because it is uncalled for, as Brougham, of whom I think as you do, is willing to avow the same principles of constitutional, radical reform, which I hold to be a *sine qua non* in Westminster.'<sup>3</sup>

Burdett's letter clearly acknowledged that he and Major Cartwright did not hold identical views on reform, and that he would prefer to see new faces from within the established political world coming forward to espouse the reform cause. In the spring of 1816, with the death of Lord Cochrane's father imminently expected, and consequently, Cochrane's own removal to the Lords, the subject was once more up for discussion. In February at a Palace Yard meeting, Brougham prepared to show his radical credentials, until Hunt's accusations against the Whigs as sinecurists forced his group to leave the platform in protest.<sup>4</sup> At the Westminster Anniversary dinner in May, Cobbett threatened to create a scene if Brougham's name came with Burdett's, above Cartwright's, in the list of toasts. Brougham himself stayed away from the dinner because of Hunt's presence.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>For information on Lord Cochrane and the Stock Exchange trial see: Add. MSS. 27850, ff. 275-80 for Place's narrative; Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Hist. b.197, ff. 106-8, 116-19 in Burdett papers; *Hansard*, 1814, xxviii. 542-606; 1816, xxxiv. 106. Burdett was one of a tiny minority who consistently maintained Cochrane's innocence.

<sup>2</sup>A. Aspinall, *Lord Brougham and the Whig Party*, (Manchester 1927) pp. 30-4; *Life and Times of Henry, Lord Brougham*, ii. 106, Brougham to Grey, 12 July 1814.

<sup>3</sup>U.C.L., Brougham MSS. 35902; Burdett to Bennet, 23 July 1814.

<sup>4</sup>A. Aspinall, *Lord Brougham and the Whig Party*, pp. 54-5.

<sup>5</sup>*ibid.* p.69; Add.MSS. 27809. f.31. Place to Bennet, blaming Brougham's cowardly conduct that 'has prevented his being returned, free from all expense, with Burdett'.

Divergent interests, aims and associations were thus clearly emerging in radical Westminster. Burdett still remained 'Westminster's Pride and England's Glory', but there were signs of trouble to come between the leaders of radical politics that after 1816, provided a series of unprecedentedly stormy election campaigns. The battleground of 1810, Burdett, the unquestioned radical leader opposing an arbitrary government, had now shifted to a Westminster battleground, where Burdett found himself pitted against his own former allies. Burdett's ideas on reform had not changed; but Cobbett and Hunt had progressed to embrace a radicalism that provided a remedy for the social and economic needs of a post-war Britain. It was against this new radicalism that Burdett had to defend both his 'country' creed, and his position in Westminster.

## CHAPTER 5: FROM RADICAL TO INDEPENDENCE

On 16 September 1816, Burdett's son, Robert, had an accident in a driving gig in Brighton.<sup>1</sup> Burdett went and stayed with him until he had completely recovered, and whilst there, found plenty of time to indulge in his favourite recreation of hunting. He hunted with the Regent's hounds and then went on to his own hunting lodge near to Melton Mowbray.<sup>2</sup> In the time-honoured tradition of country-gentlemen, Burdett withdrew from the metropolitan scene out of the Session, and he did not reappear until 2 November, when he chaired a meeting of the Hampden Club. At the meeting, it was decided to prepare a Bill for reform of Parliament, and a circular to that effect went out in Burdett's name. It stressed that after a suitable conference and discussion, reformers must prove themselves united in pursuit of their objective.<sup>3</sup> It proved an ironic statement for in the winter months of 1816-17, all the simmering tensions between the reform leaders, from the previous year, rose to the surface and resulted in bitter disagreements on the content and direction of the reform movement.

On 15 November 1816, there was ample proof of Hunt's belief in a politics that included mass participation and pressure on the political ranks, when the huge Spa Fields Meeting assembled to address and petition the Regent for reform. Hunt wrote to Burdett at Brighton and asked him to join in presenting the people's address. Burdett's reply was revealing. He had not, he said, received 'any authentic account of the petition'; he could therefore come to no determination upon it, and he was determined 'not to be made a cat's paw of, and not to insult the Prince Regent'.<sup>4</sup> Burdett was as anxious to distance himself from Hunt's style of politics, as he was to distance himself from the dictates of a corrupt borough oligarchy. Both methods by-passed those with a permanent stake in the country, the landed interest.

<sup>1</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. d.93, f.111, William Jones Burdett to Burdett, 16 Sept. 1816; MSS. Eng. Lett. c.65, f.29 for copy of the same.

<sup>2</sup>M.W. Patterson, ii. 419-15.

<sup>3</sup>J.A. Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, p.268.

<sup>4</sup>M.W. Patterson, ii. 415, Burdett to Hunt, 16 Nov. 1819; *The Green Bag Plot, addressed to the Real Reformers of England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland, by Henry Hunt*, (London 1819) pp. 4-5.

Hunt was furious at Burdett's reply, and it was with difficulty that Cobbett persuaded him to remain quiet for the sake of unity.<sup>1</sup> But Hunt's assertive radicalism made the Hampden Club's provincial delegates increasingly unwilling, in their turn, to accept, without question, the dictates of the club's aristocratic leadership. A conflict could not be evaded, and the opportunity came at the meeting of the Hampden Club provincial delegates, the week before the opening of the parliamentary session. Burdett refused to come up from the country, and so Major Cartwright took the Chair. Bamford, the Middleton delegate, recorded:

'the absence of the Baronet was the subject of much observation .... and yet, in deference to his wishes .... a resolution was introduced, and supported by Cobbett, limiting the suffrage to householders<sup>2</sup> .... This was opposed by many, especially by the delegates from the manufacturing district; some of whom were surprised that so important a concession should be made to the opinion of any individual. Hunt treated the idea with little respect and .... he felt no discomfort at obtaining a sarcastic fling or two at the Baronet. Cobbett advocated the restricted measure, scarcely in earnest, and weakly.'<sup>3</sup>

The differences between the reformers were amply demonstrated by the meeting's conclusion. Resolutions were passed in favour of universal suffrage and annual parliaments, although Burdett was allowed to frame the new Reform Bill in his own fashion.<sup>4</sup> At the opening of the Session, Hunt assembled thousands of petitioners at Charing Cross, directed them to Lord Cochrane's house opposite Westminster Hall, and then, almost forcibly, chaired Cochrane to the House with the reform petitions in his hands. Inside the House, Cochrane found Burdett, who had driven straight up from Leicestershire, and had thus successfully avoided a confrontation with Hunt and the delegates.<sup>5</sup> These events

<sup>1</sup>*ibid.* pp. 4-5; J. Belchem, *Orator Hunt*, p.63.

<sup>2</sup>Major Cartwright had travelled to Brighton long before the meeting in order to try and persuade Burdett to agree to universal male suffrage but with no success. As a result, Cartwright had appointed Cobbett to voice Burdett's more limited franchise beliefs. J. Osborne, *John Cartwright*, p.116.

<sup>3</sup>Samuel Bamford, *Passages in the Life of a Radical* (Oxford 1984) p.21.

<sup>4</sup>J. Osborne, *John Cartwright*, p.115; J. Belchem, *Orator Hunt*, pp. 66-9; Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 32, pp. 556-7.

<sup>5</sup>M.W. Patterson, ii.415-25; G. Spater, *William Cobbett, the Poor Man's Friend*, ii. 351-7; J. Belchem, *Orator Hunt*, pp. 69-70; S. Bamford, *Passages in the Life of a Radical*, p.22.

confirmed the disunion amongst the reform leaders. Burdett's birth, social status and political traditions all combined to set him apart from any desire either to transform the political scene radically, so that it might encompass universal male suffrage, or to use the petitioning power of the unenfranchised ranks to pressurise both the legislature and the executive. Bamford immediately recognised Burdett's inherently aristocratic nature and approach. 'His manner', he recorded, 'was dignified and civilly familiar; submitting to, rather than seeking conversation with men of our class.'<sup>1</sup> Yet it should also be noted that the delegates' verdict upon Burdett was approval of 'much that we found in and about him, and excusing much of what we could not approve. He was one of our idols, and we were loath to give him up'.<sup>2</sup> Burdett's tried and tested reform career, and his high, public profile, still made him an attractive figurehead for the reform movement. At the beginning of 1817, reformers had to decide to what extent they still needed Burdett's aristocratic leadership in order to penetrate the ranks of the political world. Major Cartwright was loath to break completely from Burdett for this reason, and, for the moment, this was Cobbett's stance too. In the autumn of 1816, both attempted to bring Burdett into their fold, rather than abandon him altogether.<sup>3</sup> Early in 1817, Henry Hunt had no such qualms. He refused to contemplate reconciliation with Burdett even in the face of the government's new, repressive 'Gagging Acts'. Denouncing Burdett in strong terms, Hunt claimed that he had proved himself insincere in 'protestations for the universal freedom of mankind' and, by his limited reform proposals, had succeeded in 'blasting the hopes and driving out of the pale of the constitution at least two-thirds of the population'.<sup>4</sup> Burdett, of course, never intended that almost all the male population should be given an active participation in the political process. Whilst he continued to be a vociferous

<sup>1</sup>S. Bamford, *ibid.* p.23.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.* p.24.

<sup>3</sup>Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 32, p.737.

<sup>4</sup>M.W. Patterson, ii. 424-5.

spokesman on behalf of popular grievances in Parliament<sup>1</sup>, he defined, at the same time, quite distinctly, his 'country' inspired reform objectives.

On the desirable extent of franchise reform, Burdett distanced himself from Hunt's call for universal suffrage. It could not, he claimed, 'be considered as tenable, and he was persuaded that such a reform as would protect property, and protect the bulk of the community from oppression, would satisfy all who had rational views on the subject and that then nothing more would be heard about universal suffrage'.<sup>2</sup> Burdett emphasised the claims of property in the political balance; a patriarchal propertied interest should act as guardians for the people's liberties. He looked to the 'gentlemen of England'<sup>3</sup> to restore the tranquillity of the country. Reports of disturbances were, he maintained, exaggerated in order to delude the propertied ranks and to encourage them to pass repressive legislation. It was a ridiculous ministerial claim that radical Spencean theories were attracting a mass following. Genuine sedition should be combatted by arming property for its own defence. The 'real spirit of the constitution' was that arms should be in 'the hands of the people best interested in the preservation of the public peace'.<sup>4</sup> By such methods, the nation would avoid the excesses of both the Spenceans and, more importantly, the 'Expenceans'<sup>5</sup>, who were still Burdett's major preoccupation. Burdett denied that reform clubs were traitorous bodies, or that there was a universal hatred of the privileged orders. Castlereagh and other 'notorious alarmists', had, he claimed, 'done more to bring into hatred and contempt the constitution, than all the clubs, whether Hampden

<sup>1</sup>*Hansard*, 1817, xxxv. 147-8, 607-14, opposition to Seditious Meetings Bill; 643-4, 746-52, opposition to Suspension of Habeas Corpus; 859-63, 991-3, Burdett presents 600 reform petitions; 1817, xxxvi. 941-2, support for Lord Folkestone for details on those confined under Suspension of Habeas Corpus; 1016-20, 1069-70, opposition to activities of government informers and spies, especially the notorious, 'Oliver'; 1180-2, opposition to Sidmouth's view that publishers of seditious pamphlets be imprisoned; 1239-48, opposition to 3rd reading of Habeas Corpus Suspension Bill; 1408-14, support for Brougham's enquiry into the new repressive legislation.

<sup>2</sup>*Hansard*, 1817, xxxv. 376.

<sup>3</sup>*ibid.* 608.

<sup>4</sup>*ibid.* 609.

<sup>5</sup>Burdett's name for those in the government responsible for the waste of public money. *ibid.* 608.

or Spencean, and all the trash which the committee<sup>1</sup> had raked together'.<sup>2</sup> The theme that an executive, propped up by a borough oligarchy, was a divisive method of governing the country, was resumed by Burdett on 25 February. 'He was astonished that those gentlemen, who from their rank and possessions were most deeply interested in the prosperity and well-being of the country .... should have estranged themselves from the people as they had lately done'.<sup>3</sup> Burdett said that he wished to see the gentry coming forward with the people, and for there not to be such a distinction of classes as at present. There was only one degraded class, the sinecurists. 'The effect of this classification of the people was mischievous.'<sup>4</sup> Such sentiments echoed those of the Patriot politicians of the 1730s and 40s.<sup>5</sup> They too had envisaged a regeneration of the country, and a reunification of the natural rulers and people, under the auspices of a Patriot King, who would cast off the toils of a self-interested faction. In May<sup>6</sup>, Burdett likewise conjured up the vision of a 'public Prince', whose rule was best strengthened by the happiness of his people. 'If there must be undue power', he declared, 'let it rather be placed in the hands of the Crown than within the reach of those individuals who awe the executive government, while they deprive the people of their rights.'<sup>7</sup> Burdett recognised, to a limited degree, the political, social and economic divisions in Britain after Waterloo, but his constitutional remedy came from the first half of the eighteenth century. It had no real point of contact with the radicalism that hoped to cure economic and social distress by admitting substantial numbers of the disenfranchised, distressed ranks into the political world. Burdett's constitutional ideas did not acknowledge the possibility of permanent, antagonistic divisions between different ranks. For

<sup>1</sup>A parliamentary committee of secrecy to which the Home Secretary's evidence on radical activity was submitted. J.A. Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, p.271.

<sup>2</sup>*Hansard*, 1817, xxxv. 611.

<sup>3</sup>*ibid.* 646.

<sup>4</sup>*ibid.* 650.

<sup>5</sup>See above p. 113, footnote 1. H.T. Dickinson, *Bolingbroke*, (London 1970) pp. 247-76 discusses the aims of the 'patriot' politicians of this time.

<sup>6</sup>*Hansard*, 1817, xxxvi. 704-29: Burdett's motion for a Select Committee to take into consideration the state of the representation. 77 members voted in support of Burdett; 265 against. For the list of the minority, *ibid.* 811-12.

<sup>7</sup>*ibid.* 716.

him, reunion was always possible by means of the purifying measures rooted in the constitution. The obstacles to that goal lay not in a changing society, but in the mistakes of the past. For Burdett, it was Charles II who had effected the corruption of the House of Commons, and the statutes of 1688 had failed to cure the problem. The mistakes of these previous generations had resulted in distinct interests prevailing over the common interest, and were bringing 'this country to ruin'.<sup>1</sup> Burdett now appealed to the country gentlemen to redress the nation's suffering by restoring a proper constitutional balance. He concluded his speech on the representation with a quotation from Burke. The 'virtue, spirit and essence' of the Commons lay in it being the express image of the nation's feelings. A House of Commons that was not such a reflection was an 'unnatural, monstrous state of things'.<sup>2</sup> This excursion into Whig orthodoxy did not detract from the 'country' theme as a whole. It rather served to stress the oppressive weight of the examples of history upon the constitutional theories of men such as Burdett and Burke. Burdett's political world was a static one that applied the constitutional truths of the past to his own generation, and indeed with equal facility, to future generations. He failed to perceive the full extent of the economic and social forces at work that might suggest to others the necessity for a progressive re-shaping of the political spectrum.

In the light of such sentiments, it was no surprise to see a restrained Burdett finding favour with several leading Whigs. Brougham acknowledged that,

'even Burdett has become moderate and reasonable, has met Lord Grey and gone to Lord Holland's in the evening. Lord Thanet brought this to bear ultimately, but I have had full explanations with Burdett and find him disposed to all fair and moderate conduct.'<sup>3</sup>

Such a lead would be 'very useful in weaning the people, or rather part of them, from those pernicious persons who have been misguiding them .... and in putting down the cry of alarm sounded by the Government for Party purposes'. By means of an alliance with Burdett, the Whigs might hope to recapture a share of

<sup>1</sup>*ibid.* 723.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.* 727.

<sup>3</sup>A. Aspinall, *Lord Brougham and the Whig Party*, p.74; Brougham to Lansdowne, 8 Feb. 1817.

the opinion 'out of doors' that had fallen to the radical camp, and possibly also present a more cohesive opposition attack upon Liverpool's government. But there was one overwhelming stumbling block to such a path forward. In 1817, there was still no Whig consensus on the subject of parliamentary reform. Only Thomas Brand accepted an invitation from Robert Waithman to attend a dinner given by the reforming Freemasons' Tavern group in the City, when the latter attempted to bring Burdett and the Whigs together.<sup>1</sup> Leaving aside the specific difficulties over reform, however, various Whigs and Burdett voted together on several occasions during 1817. Fourteen voted with Burdett against the Seditious Meetings Bill in February<sup>2</sup> and the substantial number of seventy-seven voted for Burdett's committee on the state of the representation in May.<sup>3</sup> Lord Holland noticed that Burdett was resuming a measure of friendship and political co-operation with many Whigs<sup>4</sup>, a development which culminated in the united campaign against the use of government spies and against the suspension of Habeas Corpus in June. At the Middlesex County Meeting arranged to protest against these measures, Bedford, Holland and Burdett all shared the same platform.<sup>5</sup>

By opening up avenues of co-operation with the Whigs, Burdett inevitably found himself on the receiving end of a bitter stream of criticism from his former chief supporter, Cobbett. Government legislation of January and February 1817 promised further fines and possibly imprisonment for Cobbett. This

<sup>1</sup>J. 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*, xlvii. (1973) 89-90; Morning Chronicle, 24 Feb. 1817.

<sup>2</sup>*Hansard*, 1817, xxxv. 639. The 14 were: Sir John Aubrey, T. Brand, Rt. Hon. T. Fitzgerald, Sir R. Fergusson, Lord Folkestone, R. Gordon, Col. Hughes, Lord Ossulston, Lord Rancliffe, Lord W. Russell, W. Smith, Lord Tavistock, Hon. W. Waldegrave, E. Webb and H. Bennet.

<sup>3</sup>*Hansard*, 1817, xxxvi. 811-2; A. Mitchell, *The Whigs in Opposition, 1815-30*, p.107.

<sup>4</sup>Lord Holland, *Further Memoirs of the Whig Party, 1807-21*, pp. 253-4.

<sup>5</sup>*The Independent Whig*, 22 June 1817; A. Mitchell, *The Whigs in Opposition, 1815-30*, p.108. Burdett was also to be found voting with many Whigs in the session of 1818, e.g. against the suspension of Habeas Corpus, the Indemnity Bill and the Alien Bill. *Hansard*, 1818, xxxvii. 484-91, 958-60, 287-92, 1151-2; 1818, xxxviii. 908-9, 1237-40.

situation, together with the likelihood of a personal financial crisis<sup>1</sup>, persuaded Cobbett of the prudence of withdrawing to America, a move which he accomplished on 22 March. From that haven, he began his series of articles under the title, 'A History of the last Hundred Days of English Freedom', which were published in the *Political Register* in the following autumn. In these, Cobbett was relentless in his criticism of Burdett personally, and of the Westminster election machine in general.

His initial attack in August centred upon Burdett's conduct the previous January; the latter's absence from the Hampden Club delegates' meeting, and his failure to present their reform petitions in Parliament.<sup>2</sup> Letter IV continued with this theme, and also branched out in to several other directions.<sup>3</sup> Cobbett principally charged Burdett with inconsistency. In previous years, claimed Cobbett, Burdett had criticised the apathy of the people in the cause of reform. Now, as

'he perceived the people to wax warm, he appeared to wax cold; and to see nothing but obstacles in the pursuit of that, to the full accomplishment of which, he had always declared that nothing but the hearty and unanimous good will of the people was wanting.'<sup>4</sup>

Whilst the reform cause gathered momentum, Burdett spent the time in Brighton and Leicestershire, hunting with army officers, and acquiescing in the fact that his son held a commission in the Prince's own Regiment in a peacetime standing army, an occupation Burdett had professed to abhor.

Certainly upon this last charge, Cobbett was doing Burdett an injustice. Coutts had obtained the commission for Robert, unknown to Burdett. On

<sup>1</sup>Cobbett had borrowed almost £3000 from Burdett. Whether this sum was a gift or a loan, was the subject of a bitter quarrel, in the period 1818 to 1820, between the two which soured the elections at this time. The money was not the subject of dispute at the time of Cobbett's departure for America. M.W. Patterson, ii. 475; G. Spater, *William Cobbett, the Poor Man's Friend*, ii. 358-9.

<sup>2</sup>Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 32, pp. 557, 619.

<sup>3</sup>*ibid.* 32, pp. 737-68.

<sup>4</sup>*ibid.* p.741.

discovering the facts of the matter, the latter had made his displeasure quite clear.<sup>1</sup>

Cobbett's charge that Burdett spent too much time hunting, and his claim that vanity was the reason why Burdett now held back from the reform cause<sup>2</sup>, seem, on the surface, rather superficial accusations. But they did touch upon more serious differences that centred on the question, what exactly was the role of a member of the Commons, and more specifically, the role of the Westminster M.P., as the standard-bearer for the reform cause? Cobbett constantly stressed the duty that Burdett owed to his electors, and to the people in general, for all the support they had given him.<sup>3</sup> Burdett's refusal to defend the Spa Fields reformers at the Bar of the House was a neglect of his duty. If time had changed Burdett's principles, claimed Cobbett, it was his duty to tell his electors that fact.<sup>4</sup> Cobbett, quite clearly, viewed the Westminster member as a delegate; a man who owed specific duties to his constituents, was answerable to them, and to whom he often had to make pledges.<sup>5</sup> In contrast to Cobbett, Burdett adhered to a totally different, and older tradition, centring on the idea of the independent member. For Burdett, it was a question of independence, not merely from a borough patron, or the ties of government place, but also independence from the electors whose member he was. According to 'country' political values, if an independent member had landed property and his own financial means, and thus had a real interest in the stability and welfare of society, then he would automatically protect the best interests of the society from which he came, and to which, he was intimately tied. The giving of 'pledges', and the idea of being

<sup>1</sup>M.W. Patterson, ii. 386; Burdett to T. Coutts, 27 Aug. 1815: '... I am very sorry and much hurt at the whole proceeding. I never can consent to Robert's receiving favours of that sort, nor to his going into the Army at all. It is a profession which I abhor, and particularly under the present circumstances of the country and of the Army'; Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. d.93, f.209, Burdett to Robert, 24 Sept. 1815, contains the same protest.

<sup>2</sup>Cobbett's explanation was that Burdett preferred to be the leader of an unsuccessful cause rather than merely a member of an increasingly strong campaign. Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 32, pp. 763-4, in Letter IV.

<sup>3</sup>*ibid.* pp. 753-4, 755.

<sup>4</sup>Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 32, pp. 840-3, in Letter V.

<sup>5</sup>'Pledges' were a favourite radical theme in the 1820s and 1830s, and they became a hotly contended issue in Westminster after the 1832 Reform Bill. See Chapter 7, p. 190.

a delegate, was thus totally superfluous. Burdett made this clear to the House in May 1817. Constituents, he maintained, would not wish to give specific instructions, if the House was fairly elected.<sup>1</sup> The commitment to the idea of independence can be traced consistently throughout Burdett's career. When he had first entered politics, he had vowed to be 'callous to every feeling but that of self-approbation'.<sup>2</sup> After the 1807 Westminster election, Place admitted it to be well known that Horne Tooke had advised Burdett to have as little as possible to do with the Westminster Election Committee.<sup>3</sup> Burdett's departure from the Tower in 1810 indicated a refusal to be bound by the dictates of his Westminster supporters.<sup>4</sup> To Hunt, he had recently stressed his determination not to be at the beck and call of reform club delegates.<sup>5</sup> He was to pass the same piece of advice on to his new Westminster running mate, J.C. Hobhouse in 1819<sup>6</sup>, and in 1820, Burdett again claimed that 'no man listened less to popular delusions, or even to what is called popular opinions'.<sup>7</sup> On this issue of 'independence', Burdett and Cobbett were thus moving increasingly apart.

In the light of Burdett's views upon the social rank of the ideal independent member, Cobbett's accusations that Burdett was now stressing the importance of property, were also misdirected.<sup>8</sup> As has been demonstrated in this thesis, Burdett had consistently called for country gentlemen to become the promoters of reform. Cobbett's views about the composition of Burdettite support in Westminster must also be questioned. His claim<sup>9</sup> that in 1806 and 1807, only himself and James Paull had spoken for the lower ranks may have been true, but this was not an accurate comment upon the identity of Burdett's supporters. As William Thomas has pointed out, the men on the Westminster

<sup>1</sup>Hansard, 1817, xxxvi. 722.

<sup>2</sup>*The Journal of the Rev. William Bagshaw Stevens*, ed. G. Galbraith, p.377.

<sup>3</sup>See Chapter 3, p.69.

<sup>4</sup>See Chapter 4, p.101-2.

<sup>5</sup>See above p.118.

<sup>6</sup>B.L. Add. MSS. 56540, (Broughton Papers) Diary entry for 23 Oct. 1819; Hobhouse reports Burdett's advice that, 'these men (the Committee) must not make a puppet of you, and the sooner they know that, the better'.

<sup>7</sup>*The Trial of Sir Francis Burdett Bt. at Leicester on Thurs. 23 Mar. 1820, before Mr. Justice Best and a special jury*. Printed by William Hone (London 1820) p.39.

<sup>8</sup>Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 32, p.853, in Letter V.

<sup>9</sup>*ibid.* pp. 850, 855.

Committee were respectable traders who were deeply interested in the stability of society, and were closely tied to the aristocratic society they supplied.<sup>1</sup> As a consequence of this, they constantly sought to promote the respectability of their campaign and candidate, and to distance themselves from the mob elements encouraged by other radicals.

The running of Westminster politics obsessed Cobbett more and more. On 17 October 1817, the *Political Register* contained a letter to Hunt on the intrigues of the Westminster 'Junto'<sup>2</sup>, and it claimed that Burdett intended to install his Irish friend, Roger O'Connor, into the second Westminster seat, thereby turning Westminster into little more than a rotten borough.<sup>3</sup> Cobbett described how the Committee had 'snug little dinners' on public funds, and how since 1814, they had been conniving, with Burdett, to bring Westminster back to the Whig political fold by proposing candidates like Brougham rather than reformers in favour of universal suffrage and annual parliaments. There was certainly more substance in this charge, for Burdett had believed Brougham's commitment to reform, and had favoured his candidacy against that of Major Cartwright.<sup>4</sup>

By the winter of 1817, Cobbett had launched fully in to his campaign to discredit Burdett. Increasingly impressed by Hunt, Cobbett was encouraging him to start campaigning in Westminster against Burdett who had 'abandoned the reformers'.<sup>5</sup> Burdett's reform image was further tarnished by his trip to Ireland from August to December, 1817. He went ostensibly as a character witness for Roger O'Connor, who was charged with robbery of the Galway Mail coach, but he stayed for an extensive social tour until the winter.<sup>6</sup> These very months witnessed the trial of Jeremiah Brandreth and his followers for a rebellion

<sup>1</sup>W. Thomas, *The Philosophic Radicals*, pp. 86-7.

<sup>2</sup>Cobbett's name for the Westminster Election Committee, also often referred to as the 'Rump'.

<sup>3</sup>Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 33, pp. 2-32.

<sup>4</sup>See Chapter 4, p.116.

<sup>5</sup>Nuffield College, Oxford, Cobbett Papers; Cobbett to Hunt, 17 Oct. 1817, and 8 Jan. 1818.

<sup>6</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. c.66, ff.7-41, 60-78 for Burdett to Lady Burdett describing his Irish tour; *The Personal Recollections of the Life and Times of Valentine Browne Lawless, Lord Cloncurry*, pp. 293-4.

provoked, in reality, by government spies.

The result of the trial was that Brandreth and one other were executed, and forty-three transported.<sup>1</sup> For Cobbett, the crucial fact was that the trial took place at Derby, only five miles from Foremark, Burdett's home. There is no evidence in Burdett's Irish correspondence that he knew anything about the proceedings, but Cobbett once again berated him for not intervening on behalf of Brandreth and his fellow prisoners.<sup>2</sup> The result of Burdett's neglect of his reform 'duties' was that Cobbett urged the Westminster electors to seek a new representative.<sup>3</sup> Burdett's response was to strengthen social and political ties with a new circle.

On 21 February 1818, J.C. Hobhouse recorded the first meeting of a dining club<sup>4</sup>, whose members were himself, Burdett, Sir Robert Wilson, Scrope Berdmore Davies, Douglas Kinnaird, Henry Bickersteth and Lord Byron.<sup>5</sup> The club members planned to dine together on every Saturday during the Parliamentary session, and each donated a literary work to the society. Burdett presented the works of Milton. The group was a strange mixture of men, ambitious in politics, law and society<sup>6</sup> but Hobhouse, as secretary, did record a common interest in how the reform cause should best be presented to the public.

<sup>1</sup>For details of the Brandreth rising see, E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 720-31.

<sup>2</sup>Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 33, pp. 248, 428. Letter III to Henry Hunt.

<sup>3</sup>Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 33, Nos. 3, 4, 11 and 14 for the spring of 1818 contain repeated references of this advice to the Westminster electors.

<sup>4</sup>Afterwards named 'the Rota' after a similar club founded by the seventeenth century political theorist, James Harrington.

<sup>5</sup>Sir Robert Wilson (1777-1849), shortly to be radical Whig M.P. for Southwark; probably came into Burdett's circle via his sister who married the brother of Burdett's old friend, Colonel Bosville. M. Glover, *A very slippery fellow, the Life of Sir Robert Wilson*, (Oxford 1978 ) p.6 Scrope Berdmore Davies (1782-1852) see, T.A.J. Burnett, *The Rise and Fall of a Regency Dandy, the Life and Times of Scrope Berdmore Davies*, (Oxford 1981); Douglas Kinnaird (1788-1830) a banker and a manager of the Drury Lane Theatre. Henry Bickersteth (1783-1851) later Lord Langdale and Master of the Rolls; he was a friend of Place and Bentham.

<sup>6</sup>With the exception of Byron. He was a member, but was absent in Italy for the whole of this period.

'We .... read essays, concocted plans of reform, framed resolutions to be read in Parliament, and drew up addresses for Parliamentary candidates. We were all Parliamentary reformers, but were by no means agreed as to the extent or general character of the change which ought to be made in the representative system.'<sup>1</sup>

Interestingly, Hobhouse recorded that Sir Robert Wilson was the one member 'determined to be satisfied with nothing short of radical reform'. "The Rota" drew up several of his election addresses and ~~edited~~ the reform resolutions moved by Burdett in the Commons in 1818. Out of Burdett's new associates, Bickersteth was regarded as the man who had replaced Cobbett as Burdett's political adviser.<sup>2</sup> It was he and Francis Place who were the intermediaries engineering the pact between Burdett and Jeremy Bentham in the summer of 1818.<sup>3</sup> It would seem that Bentham had accurately assessed Burdett's role in the reform cause:

'Being the hero of the mob, and having it in his power to do a great deal of harm, as well as a great deal of good, and being rather disposed to do good, and indeed having done a good deal of good already, [he] must not be neglected.'<sup>4</sup>

This temporary alliance between the utilitarian philosopher, who rejected the authority of the past over the present generation, and Burdett, the country gentleman, who esteemed the dictates of the ancient constitution as a remedy for present political ills, was a strange one indeed. But the pact must have been attractive to both sides. For Burdett, it might help to re-establish his reform credentials in the face of Cobbett and Hunt's criticisms, and he was clearly flattered by the new association.<sup>5</sup> For Bentham, who acknowledged his reluctance to be actively involved in politics<sup>6</sup>, Burdett must have been a suitable

<sup>1</sup>Add. MSS. 36457 (Broughton MSS.) ff. 2-3 for a list of members and rules; Lord Broughton, *Recollections of a Long Life*, ed. Lady Dorchester, ii. 94.

<sup>2</sup>*The Diary of Frances, Lady Shelley*, ed. R. Edgcumbe, (London 1912-13), ii. 35-6.

<sup>3</sup>Add. MSS. 27817, f.114; Burdett to Jeremy Bentham, 25 Feb. 1818, records Burdett's enthusiasm for the plan and the role of the intermediaries; T.D. Hardy, *Memoir of Henry, Lord Langdale*, (London 1852), i. 321-4; *The Works of Jeremy Bentham*, ed. J. Bowring (London 1843), x. 492-3; W. Thomas, *The Philosophic Radicals*, pp. 41-2.

<sup>4</sup>T.D. Hardy, *Memoir of Henry, Lord Langdale*, i. 329.

<sup>5</sup>Add. MSS. 27817, 114-5, Burdett to Bentham, 25 Feb. 1818.

<sup>6</sup>Add MSS. 27841, f.48. Bentham to Henry Brooks, 7 May 1818, declining the invitation to the annual Purity of Election dinner.

mouthpiece through which to convey his ideas on to the floor of the Commons. The reform resolutions were therefore drawn up and presented by Burdett on 2 June.<sup>1</sup> All too obviously, however, they reflected the vastly different, and often contradictory, political beliefs of the two men. The commitment to universal male suffrage<sup>2</sup>, the ballot, frequent references to 'principles of freedom' and a 'community of interests' were Benthamite ideals; interspersed references to the value of precedent and historical statute, the threat posed by the size of the National Debt, and the influence of the boroughmongers were the established obsessions of Burdett. Brougham was critical of Burdett's 'conversion' to universal suffrage and of the resolutions themselves.<sup>3</sup> The House rejected Burdett's proposals by 106 votes to none.<sup>4</sup> It only remained to be seen whether the pact with Bentham would indeed help to parry the noisy criticisms of Hunt and Cobbett during the General Election later in the month.

In the first General Election after the war, the indications were for a bitter contest in Westminster. The annual 'Purity of Election' dinner hinted as much, for it witnessed noisy demonstrations from the Hunt, Cobbett and Burdett camps of supporters.<sup>5</sup>

When at the beginning of June, Lord Cochrane announced that he would not stand again, the Westminster Committee looked about for another candidate pledged to reform who could run alongside Burdett. Working through the discreet channels and organisation of which Cobbett was so suspicious, the Committee chose Douglas Kinnaird, the young banker friend of Burdett, and he

<sup>1</sup>*Hansard*, 1818, xxxviii. 1118-1149; *The Substance of the Speech delivered by Sir Francis Burdett in the House of Commons on Tues. 2 June 1818, on moving a series of resolutions on the subject of Parliamentary Reform.* (London 1818) pub. R. Stodart, Strand; Bentham MSS. U.L.C. f.128, Folder No. 5.

<sup>2</sup>*Hansard*, 1818, xxxviii. 1135.

<sup>3</sup>*ibid.* 1151-69.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.* 1185.

<sup>5</sup>*The Times*, 25 May 1818.

declared himself committed to reform principles.<sup>1</sup> This choice was the signal for bitter radical divisions to emerge, and at the official proposal meeting, both Hunt and Cartwright were put forward by their own supporters. Hoping to profit from radical confusion, Whig and government parties also put up candidates and thus, by the first day of the poll, the number of candidates had increased to six: Burdett, Kinnaird, Major Cartwright, Hunt, Sir Samuel Romilly and Sir Murray Maxwell.<sup>2</sup>

The main worry for the Westminster Committee was that, by their nomination of Kinnaird, they had jeopardised the return of Burdett. To avoid this disaster, they resolved solely to support Burdett, and Kinnaird magnanimously agreed to withdraw.<sup>3</sup> The dangers diminished still more when Cartwright agreed to stand down on the grounds that he 'should consider the loss of Sir Francis Burdett's election as a serious misfortune to the public'.<sup>4</sup> Cobbett and Hunt still presented a threat however, and J.A. Hone has described in detail how support for them had fragmented opinion amongst reformers.<sup>5</sup> The result was that it was several days into the contest before Burdett passed the government candidate, Sir Murray Maxwell<sup>6</sup>, and at the close of the poll on 6 July, he was returned in second place to the Whig, Sir Samuel Romilly.<sup>7</sup> It was a real triumph for the Whigs<sup>8</sup>, and a set-back for Burdett. In the light of this, some

<sup>1</sup>B.L. Add. MSS. 27841, ff. 15, 16, 82; 27845, ff. 4-8, for Place's information on the selection. Burdett himself seems initially to have contemplated the idea of Hobhouse running with him. Add. MSS. 36457, f.31. Burdett to Hobhouse, 22 May 1818: 'let Bickersteth know whether you have made up your mind to annual Parliaments and universal suffrage and would be returned for Westminster.' Nothing further was heard of this idea.

<sup>2</sup>For reports of radical divisions at the proposal meeting: Add. MSS. 27845, f.13, for Place's observations; *The Times*, 5 June 1818; *The Morning Chronicle*, 6 June 1818; for Romilly's proposal, *The Morning Chronicle*, 15 June 1818; for Cartwright's support, see J. Osborne, *John Cartwright*, p.122.

<sup>3</sup>Add. MSS. 27845, ff. 31, 36 for the Committee's decision.

<sup>4</sup>*The Life and Correspondence of Major Cartwright*, ii. 145, Cartwright to Peter Walker, 19 June 1818; Cartwright voted for Burdett on 29 June. *ibid.* 147; Cartwright and Burdett's committees amalgamated and campaigned for 'Burdett alone'. Add. MSS. 27841, Place Papers, ff. 21, 23-4, 270.

<sup>5</sup>J.A. Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, pp. 283-6.

<sup>6</sup>T.A.J. Burnett, *The Rise and Fall of a Regency Dandy*, p.160, Hobhouse to Byron, 25 June 1818.

<sup>7</sup>Final numbers were: Romilly, 5339; Burdett, 5238; Sir Murray Maxwell, 4808; Hunt, 84.

<sup>8</sup>*Memoirs of the Life of Sir Samuel Romilly, written by himself*, ed. his sons, (London 1840) iii. 366, Creevey to Romilly, 13 July 1818.

analysis must be attempted of Burdett's own attitude throughout the contest.

On the first day of the poll, Burdett announced that, as in 1807, he would take no part in the contest.<sup>1</sup> Normally the proud boast of the Westminster Committee, their candidate's declaration of independence now became a real worry. In response to several letters from electors, the committee begged Burdett to appear on the hustings and to prove to his critics that he was still a friend to reform.<sup>2</sup> Burdett refused to comply with their wishes on the grounds that his self-respect was of more value to him than his duty to the electors, that he had never sought a seat in the House of Corruption, and that the electors must choose whomsoever they wished.<sup>3</sup> The Committee 'approved' the letter but were forced to double their election efforts. Far from believing such professions of independence, Burdett's opponents eagerly reported rumours that he had contributed thousands of pounds for the hiring of mobs and music, and they condemned it as the worst hypocrisy to affect 'purity' whilst employing such corrupt practices.<sup>4</sup> The precise degree of Burdett's involvement in such a heated contest lies somewhere between these two extremes. He did not appear on the hustings, but he was undoubtedly informed about the contest to a greater degree than his disinterested public statements indicated. His friends, Hobhouse, Davies and Kinnaird were active canvassers for his return. They had been admitted to the Westminster Committee and were heavily involved in the day to day work of the election.<sup>5</sup> From them, Burdett must have been aware of the worry produced by the polling in favour of Romilly, but he himself seems to have taken no active steps to secure his own return, a circumstance partly to be

<sup>1</sup>*The Times*, 19 June 1818.

<sup>2</sup>Add. MSS. 27845, f.43 for Place's observations.

<sup>3</sup>*The Times*, 22 June 1818.

<sup>4</sup>Hist. MSS. Commission (Fortescue MSS.) x. 439, 441, Thomas Grenville to Lord Grenville, 25 June and 3 July; *A Journal of the Reigns of King George IV, ... by the late C.F. Greville*, ed. H. Reeve (London 1882), i. 3-4; *The Times*, 27 June 1818.

<sup>5</sup>T.A.J. Burnett, *The Rise and Fall of a Regency Dandy*, pp. 158-63. Their inclusion was not a complete success for it inevitably fuelled charges of oligarchy from their opponents and also drew criticism from pockets of Burdettite support that the Committee made no effective answer to their critics' charges. Add. MSS. 27841 (Place), ff. 382, 452, editor of the *Gorgon* to 'the Gentlemen of Sir Francis Burdett's Committee', Sat. 27 June; Hardy to the Committee, 3 July 1818.

explained by the fact that he was confined to his room by gout for most of the proceedings.<sup>1</sup> The Committee was equally intent on stressing that Burdett had nothing to do with the financing of the election, and sent letters to the press deliberately refuting the rumours to the contrary.<sup>2</sup> During the whole of this bitterly contested election, whilst Hunt continually harangued the crowd around the hustings<sup>3</sup>; whilst Cobbett vowed to put Burdett 'down from an eminence which he will never dare look up to again', in the columns of the *Register*<sup>4</sup>; and whilst Thomas Cleary of the Westminster Committee worked to produce friction between Cobbett and Hunt<sup>5</sup>, Burdett himself declared his opinion upon the election and its personalities only twice. During the contest itself, he admitted that as 'an honest man' he could not support Cobbett<sup>6</sup>, and at the dinner held to celebrate his own return, he declared himself happy to have Romilly as his partner for Westminster, and referred to his radical critics, 'who showed more animosity against those who differed with them on trifles, than zeal for the general object'.<sup>7</sup> Even from these scraps of evidence however, it is easy to discern the practical aims behind Burdett's statements at this period. He was determined to pursue an independent course in politics, and refused to be attached to any specific political grouping. His behaviour in the months after the election warrants just such a conclusion.

He spent the autumn on his Ramsbury estate with his new circle of friends, Hobhouse, Bickersteth, Kinnaird and Davies.<sup>8</sup> He corresponded on the one hand with Lord Holland, whilst at the same time, he made a trip to London to a

<sup>1</sup>T.A.J. Burnett, *op. cit.* p.158, Hobhouse to Davies, 10 June 1818; Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. c.64, f.16, Burdett to Mr. Bryant, 12 June 1818.

<sup>2</sup>Add. MSS. 27845, f.47, for Place's report.

<sup>3</sup>*A Correct Report of the proceedings of the meeting .... to take into consideration and adopt the best means to secure the election of H. Hunt*, (London 1818) pp. 18-21; J. Belchem, *Orator Hunt*, p.79; *Memoirs of Henry Hunt esq. Written by himself*, (London 1820) ii. 75.

<sup>4</sup>Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 34, pp. 298, 364, 414.

<sup>5</sup>Cleary produced Cobbett's letter of 1808 at the poll which warned men to beware of getting involved with Hunt, a man who rode about the country with another man's wife. Add. MSS. 22907, f.372 for original of this letter; G. Spater, *William Cobbett, the Poor Man's Friend*, ii. 364-5.

<sup>6</sup>*Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. c.64, f.16*, Burdett to Mr. Bryant, 12 June 1818.

<sup>7</sup>*The Times*, 14 July 1818.

<sup>8</sup>Lord Broughton, *Recollections*, ii. 100. Add. MSS. 47222 (Broughton Papers) f.1. Burdett to Hobhouse, 24 Sept. 1818.

dinner to celebrate Major Cartwright's contribution to the cause of reform.<sup>1</sup> On 4 December, he formally described his aim to work with all those who sought practical steps forward towards achieving a measure of parliamentary reform. To the Liverpool Concentric Society, he declared that he would be content if the Whigs took up triennial parliaments and household suffrage for, 'you would be immediately sensible of the benefits of such a check upon the corruptions of the state', and he concluded, 'I am ready to join all Reformers of every description, to go as far as we can go, to obtain all we can obtain'.<sup>2</sup> In private, he also confirmed to Hobhouse his desire for independent political conduct, and stressed his distaste for doctrinaire party attitudes such as he had witnessed in previous months.<sup>3</sup> Burdett's intention was therefore clear. But the aim of a broad, non-party alliance in favour of reform was a difficult doctrine to preach to those he now sought as allies, the Whigs, and also to members of the Westminster Committee whose political careers had been forged upon the notion of implacable hostility to established political parties.

Tavistock expressed the dilemma for Whigs broadly in sympathy with many of Burdett's views. He agreed that 'it requires the combined forces of all the friends of freedom to resist the influence of a corrupt Representation', but he was disappointed at the hostility of the Westminster reformers to the Whigs, especially, 'after the reconciliation which took place at Burdett's desire two years ago'. Nothing but continued mischief and thereby the strengthening of the present ministers at the Treasury, would be the result of such animosity. Tavistock professed himself ready to believe that Burdett was anxious for co-operation, but his Committee, he informed Hobhouse, 'are doing themselves no credit by these attacks on the Whigs and I trust you will endeavour to put a stop to them'.<sup>4</sup> It was with difficulty that Hobhouse attempted to explain how

<sup>1</sup>Add. MSS. 51569, ff. 3, 5, 7, Burdett to Lord Holland, 22 and 29 Oct., 1 Nov.; Add. MSS. 36457, f.87, Burdett to Hobhouse, n.d.; report of the dinner, *Morning Chronicle*, 18 Aug. 1818.

<sup>2</sup>Add. MSS. 27842, ff. 195-196, Speech of Sir Francis Burdett to the Liverpool Concentric Society, 4 Dec. 1818. Printed handbill.

<sup>3</sup>Add. MSS. 47222, f.5. Burdett to Hobhouse, Dec. 1818.

<sup>4</sup>Add. MSS. 36457, f.73; Tavistock to Hobhouse, 4 Aug. 1818.

Burdett's ideas of independence worked in practice<sup>1</sup>, and although Tavistock expressed himself personally satisfied with his answer, he suspected that 'you will find very few who will believe that the leader of a Party does not either avowedly or tacitly, approve the language of his followers'.<sup>2</sup> Tavistock was not optimistic that party loyalties could be set aside as easily as Burdett seemed to desire, and admitted that members of his own Party did much damage in this sphere.<sup>3</sup> His fears were more than amply demonstrated in the Westminster By-election that followed the suicide of Sir Samuel Romilly in November 1818.

The intricate twists and turns of this bitter election have been expertly described elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> It is the task of this chapter to trace Burdett's views and aims throughout the contest, and to evaluate how they fitted into his long-term scheme for a broad, non-party alliance in favour of reform.

In the expectation that the ministerial candidate, Sir Murray Maxwell, would contest the seat once more, the Westminster Committee began a series of complex negotiations designed to facilitate the nomination of Hobhouse as their candidate. It is clear from Hobhouse's Diary that Burdett was not informed of these aims until he appeared in town to chair the Westminster meeting that debated a choice of candidate on 17 November.<sup>5</sup> From the Chair, Burdett supported the proposal for Hobhouse on the grounds that he would be the man most likely to perpetuate Westminster's political independence. Hobhouse was preferable to Hunt's choice of Major Cartwright, for reasons which Burdett refused to divulge, and also preferable to the suggestion of Lord John Russell, since he already had a seat in the House. Under Burdett's firm chairmanship,

<sup>1</sup>*ibid.* f.80; Hobhouse to Tavistock, 12 Aug. 1818.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.* f.88; Tavistock to Hobhouse, Aug. 1818 (in answer to the above).

<sup>3</sup>*ibid.* 'I do not defend Mr. Perry; he and Lord Grey do great harm in the Whig cause.' In the following Westminster By-election, Brougham said he could not support Hobhouse, on the grounds that he must prefer a party man of whose views he could be sure, rather than another like Burdett. Add. MSS. 56540 (Hobhouse diary) entry for 11 Dec. 1818.

<sup>4</sup>W. Thomas, *The Philosophic Radicals*, pp. 66-89; J.A. Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, pp. 288-91.

<sup>5</sup>Add. MSS. 56540 (Hobhouse Diary). There is no mention of Burdett until the 17 Nov. when Hobhouse records that Kinnaird informed Burdett of all the proceedings, and the latter expressed himself delighted with the proposal. Entry for 17 Nov. 1818. Until the 17, Burdett had merely answered the electors' request to chair the Westminster meeting. Add. MSS. 27842 (Place Papers), f.55, Burdett to Samuel Brooks, 8 Nov. 1818.

Hobhouse's nomination was carried by a large majority.<sup>1</sup> Privately, Burdett's reason for wishing to secure Hobhouse's nomination must have been that he would hope to be a candidate acceptable not only to Westminster reformers, but also to many Whigs in view of his good standing with many of that party, particularly the Bedfords.<sup>2</sup> Hobhouse confirmed that Burdett 'is the only man almost that sees the necessity of forbearance with respect to the Whigs', and to aid a good understanding with that group, had agreed that there should be 'no decided declaration of opinion as to Reform'.<sup>3</sup> Burdett's hope was that 'we shall have no battle' between potential Whig and Reform allies.<sup>4</sup>

With Hobhouse's nomination secure after the meeting on the 17 November, Burdett openly expressed his full support for his campaign by contributing one thousand pounds to the expenses of the election.<sup>5</sup> It was a contribution which inevitably fuelled the criticisms from his opponents, but one which Burdett presumably must have felt was necessary for the 'independent' candidate to make an effective challenge to Maxwell with his government backing. Certainly neither the Westminster Committee nor Burdett made any attempt to conceal the contribution but rather regarded it as a laudable contribution to the cause.<sup>6</sup>

Burdett very publicly supported Hobhouse throughout the contest in February, appearing daily on the hustings with him, making speeches in his support, and attending parochial meetings called to woo the electors.<sup>7</sup> This involvement in election politics, from which Burdett was normally anxious to distance himself, was surprising. In order to explain his participation, the

<sup>1</sup>(Place and Hobhouse) *An Authentic Narrative of the Events of the Westminster Election .... 13 Feb. - 3 Mar. 1819 .... compiled by order of the Committee appointed to manage the election of Mr. Hobhouse.* (London 1819), pp. 18-23.

<sup>2</sup>Hobhouse's Diary for these months reveals the intricate negotiations he undertook in order to try and enlist Whig support, or at least restraint from active opposition to his campaign.

<sup>3</sup>Add. MSS. 56540 (Hobhouse Diary) Sun. 16 Jan. 1819.

<sup>4</sup>Add. MSS. 47222, f.3; Burdett to Hobhouse, 26 Nov. 1818.

<sup>5</sup>*An Authentic Narrative*, pp. 29-30; Add. MSS. 56540 (Hobhouse's Diary) 27 Nov. 1818.

<sup>6</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>7</sup>*An Authentic Narrative*, pp. 74-5, 109-14, 132, 149-53, 156, 163-6, 167, 171, 177-9, 186-8, 196-8, 214, 226-8, 265-7, 292, 296-8.

barrage of criticisms which was levelled at him, by all sides, must first be examined.

In contrast to his withdrawal from the 1818 contest in order to facilitate Burdett's return, Major Cartwright now came out in a decidedly hostile stance, and doggedly pursued his own candidature throughout. In the week before the contest, he openly accused Burdett of ruining his chances of becoming an M.P., and of abandoning radical, for Whiggish, 'mock' reform.<sup>1</sup> Hunt was vociferous in support of the Major, demanding to know why Burdett had refused to support his nomination, accusing Burdett of abandoning radical reform, and dredging up old issues such as Burdett's Irish tour in 1817. At meetings, and on the hustings, Hunt was tireless in his verbal assault upon Burdett.<sup>2</sup> Cobbett, too, entered the fray by revealing, firstly, the fact that he had written the letter for which Burdett was prosecuted in 1810, and secondly, the extent of the financial business between the two. Burdett, he claimed, had deliberately misinterpreted a letter from himself and had subsequently implied that Cobbett had renounced all his obligations to pay his debts of almost three thousand pounds, to Burdett. Burdett had then publicly displayed his reply at Brooks' Club when it ought to have remained confidential.<sup>3</sup> Cobbett also pursued his usual themes that Westminster politics was controlled by Burdett's rotten borough 'Rump' and that Burdett had abandoned radical reform. His criticisms clearly angered Burdett, for the latter revealed that his sole objection to Cartwright's candidature was that the Major had countenanced statements from Cobbett, about himself, which the Major knew to be lies.<sup>4</sup>

Sir Charles Wolseley and Thomas Northmore<sup>5</sup> also appeared on the hustings to fuel the charges against Burdett, but although the radical squabbles were

<sup>1</sup>Major Cartwright, *Address to the Electors of Westminster*, 4 Feb. 1819.

<sup>2</sup>*An Authentic Narrative*, pp. 18, 44, 106, 126-7, 163, 214; C.F. Grenville, *Journal*, i. 18, 18 Feb. 1819; *The Times*, 18 Feb. 1819.

<sup>3</sup>Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 39, p.482; G. Spater, *William Cobbett, the Poor Man's Friend*, ii. 362-3; the series of letters between Burdett and Cobbett appeared in *The Examiner*, 3 Jan. 1819; *The Times*, 4 Jan. 1819.

<sup>4</sup>*An Authentic Narrative*, p.112.

<sup>5</sup>Sir Charles Wolseley (1769-1846) of Wolseley Park, Staffs; a radical and close friend of Major Cartwright's; T. Northmore (1766-1851), Founder of the Hampden Club; contested Exeter at the 1818 General Election.

noisy and occupied vast quantities of printed material<sup>1</sup>, they were not the most important feature of this contest, either for Burdett or for his political and social peers. Pride of place, amongst the many quarrels which marked the By-election, was the friction between the Whigs and the Burdett and Hobhouse camp.

After the unexpected withdrawal of Sir Murray Maxwell on 11 January, and before the start of the contest on 15 February, a bitter quarrel developed between the Whigs and those in favour of Hobhouse. It was a quarrel in which Burdett himself was uninvolved, and it developed firstly as a result of the publication of the Westminster Committee's previous election accounts, to which Place had added a severe indictment of the Whigs and their abandonment of the reform cause.<sup>2</sup> The second reason for division lay in Hobhouse's straying from the straight and narrow path of Whig party sentiment in his electioneering speeches.<sup>3</sup> The result of these blunders was the nomination of George Lamb as the Whig candidate, two days before the election began. For the duration of the contest, Burdett and Hobhouse were on the receiving end of a barrage of Whig party criticism about the principles, aims and methods of Westminster reform politics.

The Whig accusations that Westminster was no better than a rotten borough echoed those of hostile radicals and ministerialists. The *Morning Chronicle*, in particular, was unrelenting in its exposure of Burdett's supposed 'influence' over Westminster politics.<sup>4</sup> Burdett, in turn, responded to these attacks with a series of speeches from the hustings that denounced the Whig press, especially the

<sup>1</sup>For examples of radical propaganda against Burdett, see Add. MSS. 27842 which is Place's collection of newspaper cuttings and printed material on the contest. e.g. ff. 472, 642, Hunt and Gale Jones 'to the Public Spirited Inhabitants of the English Metropolis'; *Rump Chronicle*, 26 Feb., 3 Mar. 1819.

<sup>2</sup>*An Authentic Narrative*, pp. 54-8; W. Thomas, *The Philosophic Radicals*, p.77 describes it as 'written with the unremitting grimness which was Place's idea of eloquence'; Add. MSS. 56540 (Hobhouse Diary) 18 Jan. 1819 records that the various parochial committees were very divided over the Report.

<sup>3</sup>Add. MSS. 56540 (Hobhouse Diary) 9 Feb. 1819; Hobhouse feared that his speech and Place's report would create uproar amongst the Whigs; *An Authentic Narrative*, p.71; W. Thomas, *The Philosophic Radicals*, pp. 75-8.

<sup>4</sup>*Morning Chronicle*, 15, 16, 20, 22 Feb. and 5 Mar. 1819.

'Lying Chronicle'.<sup>1</sup> His interpretation was almost identical to that of 1806, when he had viewed the Talents Coalition as a sell-out for place, inspired by party manoeuvrings.<sup>2</sup> Now, Burdett again denounced the party politics that had produced the 'knavery' of the Talents. Lamb was just such a 'coalition' candidate, supported by both the 'ins' and the 'outs'.<sup>3</sup> Burdett's objections to the Whigs historically centred solely upon the occasions when party sentiment had prevailed over principle; at these times, he stated, Whig party politics had resulted in a neglect of the principles professed at the Revolution, and in the subsequent establishment of a standing Army, the public Debt, and the system of Bank paper. Party politics had been responsible for measures ruinous to the public, and had obscured Whig principles until it was impossible to tell whether the Whig creed was that professed by Fox or by Lord Grenville.<sup>4</sup> The theme was hardly a new one from Burdett's lips. It was the same, independent attack upon party politics that he had always voiced. But perhaps the most important feature of Burdett's attitude at this election, although it is difficult to decipher initially amongst the expressions of ill-feeling from all sides, was his desire still for a broad-based, non-party commitment to work for measures of practical, effective reform. He even went so far as to blame the partisan attitudes of the Westminster Committee for ruining Hobhouse's cause<sup>5</sup>, and for the Whigs themselves he still held out an olive branch. Burdett declared his loyalty to the memory of Fox's person and principles, and stated that 'amongst the Whigs are some of the best men in England'.<sup>6</sup> His message to them was that 'after all that has passed here', he was 'ready still to support the Whigs provided they pledge themselves to support any substantial or effectual Reform'.<sup>7</sup> At the Westminster

<sup>1</sup>*An Authentic Narrative*, pp. 149-53, 177-9; Add. MSS. 56540 (Hobhouse Diary) 22 Feb. 1819.

<sup>2</sup>See above chapter 3, pp. 55-9.

<sup>3</sup>Add. MSS. 56540 (Hobhouse Diary) entry for 17 Feb. lends credibility to this accusation, for it records that Lord Liverpool had given permission for his Select Vestry men to vote for Lamb.

<sup>4</sup>*An Authentic Narrative*, pp. 109-14, 149-53, 163-6, 177-9, 186-8, 226-8, 265-7 for Burdett's speeches against Whig party politics.

<sup>5</sup>Add. MSS. 27842, f.471; Burdett to Adams at the Committee Room: 'The Reports are so bad that it is impossible to correct them.'

<sup>6</sup>*An Authentic Narrative*, pp. 113, 265-7.

<sup>7</sup>*ibid.* p.269.

dinner after Hobhouse's defeat<sup>1</sup>, he delivered the same message. Party distinctions, stated Burdett, were 'ridiculous', and should be dropped in favour of a broad consensus agreement to 'root out the corruption of the House of Commons .... He was so little hostile to the Whigs that he only wished them to present some claim for public confidence; he was only anxious to fight under the Whig banners, provided the liberties of the country were inscribed upon them'.<sup>2</sup> In the light of these statements, Burdett must have regarded the by-election squabble as a monstrously unnecessary event that generated angry feelings where there should have been none. When it became clear that Hobhouse was not to be a candidate suitable to both Whig and Westminster reformers, the sense of frustration with those, such as the *Morning Chronicle*, who apparently wished for nothing more than to fan the flames of party hostility, prompted Burdett to descend in to the thick of the contest. Such a descent undoubtedly did increase the hostility and profound distrust of Burdett amongst many who were sensitive about the Whig party's history, traditions and creed. Foremost amongst these was Grey, whose reaction was hardly surprising. 'I beg you to understand', he wrote to Sir Robert Wilson, 'that nothing can ever make me forget or forgive the conduct of Burdett and his associates.'<sup>3</sup> Tavistock, too, reported that the Whigs were angry chiefly with Burdett, and not with Hobhouse.<sup>4</sup> But these reactions were not representative of the party, and those on its fringes, as a whole. Indeed, Grey's sentiments had been in response to Wilson's hope that 'the victory we have gained will be followed by such a course as may make these friends, who were opponents'.<sup>5</sup> And it was clear that there were still grounds for hope about political co-operation when in July, fifty-eight members of the Commons supported Burdett's motion that the House would

<sup>1</sup>Final poll numbers were Lamb, 4465; Hobhouse, 3861; Cartwright, 38.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.* 332-7.

<sup>3</sup>Add. MSS. 30109 (Sir Robert Wilson MSS.) ff. 9-10; Grey to Wilson, 17 Mar. 1819.

<sup>4</sup>Add. MSS. 56540 (Hobhouse Diary) 6 Mar. 1819.

<sup>5</sup>Add. MSS. 30109, ff. 9-10, Grey to Wilson, 17 Mar. 1819; Grey was quoting the words from Wilson's own letter to him before he delivered his own answer.

consider the state of the representation early in the next Session.<sup>1</sup> Burdett's speech was decidedly conciliatory, for he stressed that he had not raised the issue earlier in order to avoid the accusation that he aimed to spoil the Whig campaign for retrenchment and economy. All he asked now was that those who supported such a campaign should take the next logical step and support his own motion. He specifically did not propose to get enmeshed in arguments about the details of reform.<sup>2</sup> Such moderation produced results, and ironically, it was George Lamb who seconded the motion, and praised 'the manner in which it had been introduced .... so as to embrace all the supporters of reform, and not to embarrass the question by harassing details'.<sup>3</sup>

When the political world received the news of the massacre at St. Peter's Field in Manchester on 16 August, Burdett must have hoped that the indications for mutual co-operation in July, would be fulfilled by a united attack upon the ministry. How far that was achieved, and to what extent 'Peterloo' affected Burdett's own political standing, forms the concluding part of this chapter.

From his Leicestershire estate, Burdett immediately sent a strong, emotional letter to the London press, in which he totally condemned the action of the Manchester authorities in turning the soldiers upon the crowd. 'What, kill men unarmed, unresisting, and, gracious God, women too? .... Is this England .... A land of freedom?' Such an action, claimed Burdett, was 'an unparalleled and barbarous outrage'. The 'Gentlemen of England' had a duty to protect the nation's laws and liberties, and he called on his Westminster constituents to hold a meeting of protest. If the Attorney General, he concluded, chose to call his

<sup>1</sup>*Hansard*, 1819, xl. 1503-4: The minority comprised: G. Anson, D. Browne, W.W. Becher, R. Bernal, J. Barnett, B. Benyon, T. Brand, G. Byng, J. Calcraft, J. Carter, Lord Clifton, Sir W. de Crespigny, T. Denman, T. Dundas, C. Dundas, Visct. Ebrington, T. Foley, N. Fellowes, Lord C. Fitzroy, Sir R.C. Fergusson, S. Graham, R.H. Gurney, D.W. Harvey, T. Hutchinson, J. Hume, T.F. Kennedy, G. Lamb, Sir W. Lemon, Sir E. Lloyd, G. Longman, Sir T.B. Martin, W.A. Madocks, J. Maxwell, J. Martin, P. Moore, Dudley North, Lord Nugent, Lord F. Osborne, J. Pringle, C.F. Palmer, T. Pares, R. Price, C.F. Ponsonby, C.M. Phillips, W.T. Robarts, D. Ricardo, Lord W. Russell, G. Sinclair, Lord R. Spencer, J. Smith, W. Smith, W. Stewart, Marquis Tavistock, Alderman Thorp, Alderman Waithman, W. Williams, Alderman Wood, J. Wharton; Tellers were Burdett and Sir Robert Wilson; H.G. Bennet, E. Ellice and M. Fitzgerald paired off. The motion was defeated by 153-58.

<sup>2</sup>*Hansard*, 1819, xl. 1442.

<sup>3</sup>*ibid.* 1467.

letter a libel, so be it. He could not regret, or withdraw, his sentiments.<sup>1</sup> To prevent the publishing newspapers from suffering prosecution, and also surely in an overtly theatrical gesture designed to attract public notice, Burdett sent his original letter to Lord Sidmouth, and vowed to stand by his sentiments. 'Although penned in a hurry, and under the influence of strongly excited feelings, I can discover nothing in it, on a re-perusal, unbecoming the character of an honest man and an Englishman.'<sup>2</sup>

Not surprisingly, Burdett's public stand against 'Peterloo' gained him praise from all reformers. Major Cartwright abandoned his hostility from the Spring and adjudged the letter 'above all praise'.<sup>3</sup> Even Hunt called the letter 'excellent'.<sup>4</sup> Burdett's Westminster constituents echoed his call for a change of ministers after they had so clearly revealed their scant regard for English liberty.<sup>5</sup> Burdett's very public reaction to Peterloo certainly possessed the same note of deliberate theatricality as his reaction to the imprisonment of Gale Jones in 1810. But although he was prepared to face, and perhaps even to court, government prosecution<sup>6</sup>, his behaviour was, in other respects, far more cautious. He wrote to Bickersteth, and revealed: 'I do not wish to be in Town before the meeting<sup>7</sup>, or at least, to have it known .... I do not wish my lodgings to become too popular.'<sup>8</sup>

It would seem that he specifically did not desire a repeat of the popular demonstrations that had previously taken place. This letter to Bickersteth was perhaps proof that Burdett's highly publicised reaction to Peterloo was not an attempt to restore his popularity with the unenfranchised 'mob' element whose

<sup>1</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Hist. b.199, f.101 and Eng. Misc. B.101, ff. 11-12 for Burdett's letter. It was published in *The Times* and *Morning Chronicle* on 25 Aug. 1819.

<sup>2</sup>*The Times*, 31 Aug. 1819 also printed Burdett's letter to Lord Sidmouth.

<sup>3</sup>*The Life and Correspondence of Major Cartwright*, ii. 169-70; Cartwright to Jeremy Bentham, 27 Aug. 1819.

<sup>4</sup>Hunt, *Memoirs*, iii. 633.

<sup>5</sup>*The Times*, 3 Sept. 1819, report of a Westminster meeting held to protest against the government's actions in Manchester. Resolutions were also passed in favour of reform at the meeting.

<sup>6</sup>The Ministry was already filing an ex-officio information for seditious libel against Burdett.

<sup>7</sup>The Westminster meeting.

<sup>8</sup>T.D. Hardy, *Memoir of Henry, Lord Langdale*, i. 337; Burdett to Bickersteth, 28 Aug. 1819.

idol he had been in 1810. This thesis has argued that this was precisely the kind of support from which Burdett was now attempting to distance himself. But it is difficult to escape the conclusion that his protest letter must have been, in part at least, promoted by a desire to regain popularity with the possessors of a vote, who might be persuaded, in the light of Peterloo, to sympathise with a call for some measure of constitutional reform. Lastly, apart from any ulterior motive, his letter was also a genuinely horrified reaction against an example of arbitrary cruelty and injustice, such as characterised his attitude to such practices as flogging.

The opinions of Burdett's fellow Members in the House of Commons fell into several camps. Some Whigs agreed with Tierney, and saw Peterloo as an opportunity for the Whigs to regain some measure of popular sympathy. 'We ought', Tierney wrote to Grey, 'to avail ourselves of the first opportunity to mark our opinions on the recent conduct of government, and to contribute our share towards stirring up the country.'<sup>1</sup> With this in mind, Fitzwilliam led a successful county meeting of protest in Yorkshire, and Lord Holland praised Burdett's conduct at a similar Middlesex meeting where the radicals 'most judiciously hang back and give us time to act for ourselves if we like it'.<sup>2</sup> Certainly Burdett demonstrated the same desire for a reconciliation with the Whigs, as had characterised his motion in the Commons in July. He wished to avoid the contentious issue of reform at the Westminster meeting on 2 September<sup>3</sup>, and when the House met in emergency session on 24 November, he seconded Tierney's address of protest to the Prince Regent. He took a clearly conciliatory line, designed to reassure Whigs in the House about the radical reaction to events in Manchester. Burdett totally condemned the authorities' action at Peterloo and also subsequent government attempts to block both compensation for the victims and a legal enquiry into the whole affair. It was

<sup>1</sup>A. Mitchell, *The Whigs in Opposition, 1815-30*, pp. 126-7, quoting Tierney to Grey, 6 Sept. 1819.

<sup>2</sup>U.C.L. Brougham MSS. no. 48093; Holland to Brougham, 5 Oct. 1819.

<sup>3</sup>Add. MSS. 56540 (Hobhouse Diary) Tuesday 31 August. Burdett wished to avoid the subject of reform; Hobhouse and Kinnaird wished to link it to the protest against Peterloo.

bound, he claimed, to 'create suspicion in the public mind'.<sup>1</sup> He aimed to reassure potential parliamentary allies on the subject of reform. The mass of the people, he was convinced, were 'strictly loyal and firmly attached to the constitution'. With regard to the demand for universal suffrage, he would only state that although such doctrines were professed, he personally did not think such measures were advisable, and, more importantly, 'he had little doubt that the bulk of the people, with their good sense, would be satisfied with any reform that should establish an effectual control over the government in the Commons'.<sup>2</sup> Burdett went on to praise Fitzwilliam's conduct and independence, and hoped that the nation would always respect such attitudes. One hundred and fifty members supported Burdett and Tierney's sentiments. But three hundred and eighty-one did not, and amongst those members was the most common reaction to Peterloo. Supporters of the government, and also many opposition Whigs, were horrified at the prospect of mass demonstrations such as had occurred in Manchester. For the Whigs, the usual dilemma reappeared. They disliked a ministry that often appeared to be corrupt, self-interested and impossible to dislodge from power. On these grounds, they could happily campaign for retrenchment and economy, and be vociferous in opposition. But Whigs disliked radicals such as Hunt, who called for reform, and encouraged the unenfranchised ranks in support of that call, even more. Thus although Holland praised Burdett's conduct at Middlesex, his reaction to the radicals over all, was that Whigs must 'separate ourselves and the Radicals wide as the Poles asunder'. Protest against Peterloo, he commented, must not be interpreted as synonymous with support for reform.<sup>3</sup> Many Whigs still did not admit the necessity of reform, and feared the excesses to which they supposed such a concession would inevitably lead. Grey regarded Burdett and Sir Robert Wilson as the dupes of extreme radicals, whose intentions were wicked. 'You place yourself in their trammels' he warned Wilson, 'but .... if a convulsion follows, I shall not precede

<sup>1</sup>*Hansard*, 1819, xli. 184.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.* 187.

<sup>3</sup>U.C.L. Brougham MSS. no 48093; Holland to Brougham, 5 Oct. 1819. Burdett had correctly anticipated this reaction on the part of many Whigs. See above, p.144, footnote 3.

you many months on the scaffold, which you will have assisted in preparing for us both.'<sup>1</sup> Many Whigs sympathised with Grey's pessimistic forebodings and could not agree with Burdett's reassurances about the people's moderate reform demands, in the months after Peterloo.

If Burdett had only limited success in attracting Whig support for reform, there was even less chance, despite initially sympathetic responses to his letter<sup>2</sup>, of reuniting old radical allies. On this issue, Grey was quite correct. Reformers such as Hunt and Burdett were pursuing distinct and different aims. Cobbett's return to England, on 4 December, did nothing to ease the tensions. Hunt chaired the dinner to welcome him back to Westminster, but Burdett refused to attend after Cobbett's demand that Burdett furnish the means of facilitating the entrance of Hunt and himself into the House of Commons.<sup>3</sup> Although radicals of all shades therefore faced government prosecution<sup>4</sup> in the winter months of 1819, they faced them as members of a deeply divided cause.<sup>5</sup> Hobhouse's three months in Newgate for his pamphlet, *A Trifling Mistake*, were months well spent, for they resulted in him gaining the radical credentials and 'martyr's crown' that he had so obviously lacked when he stood for Westminster the previous year.<sup>6</sup> In the months before the General Election in March 1820, there were also rumours of the government's tactics for Burdett's trial in Leicestershire. The Attorney General had filed an ex-officio information against him for seditious libel, and the trial was to be in Leicestershire, on the grounds that the letter was published there. It was a move that was probably intended to avoid a

<sup>1</sup>G.M. Trevelyan, *Lord Grey of the Reform Bill*, p.188; Grey to Sir Robert Wilson, Oct. 1819.

<sup>2</sup>See above p.143.

<sup>3</sup>Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 35, pp. 481-502.

<sup>4</sup>After the government's introduction of the Six Acts on 29 Nov. 1819.

<sup>5</sup>Radical spokesmen prosecuted after Peterloo included: Cartwright, Wooler and Sir Charles Wolseley, all indicted for their part in a Birmingham meeting in July 1819; Hunt, for his role at St. Peter's Field; and also T.J. Evans, Carlile, Waddington, Davison and Wedderburn.

<sup>6</sup>*Hansard*, 1819, xli. 989-1004; Add. MSS. 36457, f.398, Burdett to Hobhouse, 30 Dec. 1819, records how well Hobhouse's pamphlet was selling after his imprisonment; f.488; Westminster electors to Hobhouse, protesting against his imprisonment; Add. MSS. 36458, f.182, Francis Place to Hobhouse, n.d. Feb./Mar. 1820, plans for a Westminster procession and dinner for Hobhouse on his release; *Morning Chronicle*, 5 Mar. 1820, report of the dinner.

'show' trial in the Capital, and thus also avoid any possible demonstrations of popular support for Burdett such as had occurred in 1810.<sup>1</sup> The bad news from Hobhouse was that Burdett would have 'the dirtiest scoundrel that ever sat on the bench' against him; the good news, that Burdett's Peterloo letter, was everywhere sold out.<sup>2</sup> Burdett heard from various local sources, of the preparations for a packed Jury, but succeeded in not letting his own legal affairs to counter such a move come in the way of his country gentleman pleasures. His instructions to Bickersteth via Hobhouse were that he remained in Leicestershire to attend to his legal business, 'but for God's sake and my sake don't drop a hint about the Hounds meeting at Ashby Pasture tomorrow morning'<sup>3</sup> On a more serious note, he stressed, 'it is pleasant to see our troops united, and the best part of the Whigs it seems too' and 'nothing should be published against the Whigs who seem to be trying to do good'.<sup>4</sup> Despite the fact that George Lamb once again contested Westminster, at the General Election following the death of George III, Burdett continued to call for unity between different political groups. In pursuit of his own independent, non-party ideals, he stressed once again that the names Whig and Tory perpetuated a spirit of 'needless animosity', for there were honest and honourable men in both camps.<sup>5</sup>

These sentiments were almost the sum total of Burdett's contribution to the election because of his absence at his trial in Leicestershire.<sup>6</sup> There, before Justice Best and a special jury, he was charged and judged to be guilty of publication of libel in Leicestershire, a tenuous claim indeed, for the letter had only been posted in the county. Burdett's speech in his own defence was a clear résumé of the reform views he had stressed in the recent past. He repeated his objection to the Attorney General's power of ex-officio information which deprived a victim of his statutory right of defence before a Grand Jury. By

<sup>1</sup>P.R.O.,T.S. 11/42/152, King v. Burdett.

<sup>2</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. d.96, f.5, Hobhouse to Burdett, n.d. Sat. Mar. 1820.

<sup>3</sup>Add. MSS. 47222, f.21; Burdett to Hobhouse, 14 Feb. 1820.

<sup>4</sup>*ibid.* Add. MSS. 36458, f.111; Burdett to Hobhouse, 6 Feb. 1820.

<sup>5</sup>*Morning Chronicle*, 15 Mar. 1820.

<sup>6</sup>Burdett left for Leicestershire on 17 Mar. Add. MSS. 56541 (Hobhouse Diary) 17 Mar. 1820.

such a route, argued Burdett, the Attorney General had secured complete control over the press. He denied that his own Peterloo address was aimed at irresponsible people; instead he had called upon his constituents and the 'Gentlemen of England' to defend the country's liberties and to petition solely for legal redress.<sup>1</sup>

The trial and its progress were widely reported, and must surely, have contributed to the Westminster results on 25 March.<sup>2</sup> The return of Burdett and Hobhouse resulted in Westminster regaining its committed reform appearance and the two members were treated, by their sympathetic constituents, to the customary triumphal procession and dinner.<sup>3</sup> At the May, Purity of Election dinner, Burdett received a magnificent silver vase as a tribute to his 'untoiling service to the liberties of the country and disinterested Patriotism'.<sup>4</sup> The following year, the electors expressed their support for Burdett in hard cash terms by paying his fine of two thousand pounds, half of the sentence, combined with a spell of three months in King's Bench, in the government's prosecution.<sup>5</sup> Not even Hunt's well-publicised criticisms of Burdett's supposed delaying of his Peterloo sentence<sup>6</sup> could sully his restored reputation with all his Westminster constituents.<sup>7</sup>

The severing of political connections is seldom conducted in an amicable

<sup>1</sup>*The trial of Sir Francis Burdett Bart., at Leicester, on 23 March 1820, before Mr. Justice Best and a special Jury.* Printed by William Hone, (London 1820)

<sup>2</sup>Final poll numbers were: Burdett, 5327; Hobhouse, 4882; Lamb, 4436.

<sup>3</sup>*The Private Letters of Princess Lieven to Prince Metternich, 1820-26*, ed. P. Quennell, (London 1937) p.27, 5 April 1820; Add. MSS. 36458, f.245, Thomas Hardy to Hobhouse, 18 April 1820.

<sup>4</sup>*Morning Chronicle*, 24 May 1820.

<sup>5</sup>*The Times*, 9 Feb. 1821; *The Affidavit of Sir Francis Burdett Bt. M.P., Read in the Court of King's Bench at Westminster on Thurs. 8 Feb. 1821*, (London 1821); Add. MSS. 36459, f.3, S. Brooks to Hobhouse 12 Feb. 1821; resolutions passed at a meeting of electors in support of Burdett and the opening of a subscription to pay his fine; Add. MSS. 36458, f.18, Handbill announcing the opening of the public subscription for Burdett.

<sup>6</sup>Patterson, ii. 499, Burdett appealed against his Leicestershire sentence on three counts: i. there was no proof of publication of libel in Leicestershire; ii. there were no charges against individuals in the letter as alleged, and iii. the judge had misdirected the jury by stating that the letter was a libel. On 3 Feb. 1821 however, the Attorney General moved for judgement against Burdett. Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. d.98, f.14, Burdett to Dr. Routh, 1 April 1820.

<sup>7</sup>Henry Hunt's *Letter to the Radical Reformers*; 10 Dec., 23 Dec. 1820 and 10 Feb. 1821. All written from Ilchester Jail.

spirit, and the profound differences amongst the radical leaders in the period 1817 to 1820 had inevitably witnessed a series of bitter recriminations and accusations. Hunt, Cartwright and Cobbett all berated Burdett for abandoning the reformers, but as this chapter has demonstrated, Burdett had not cast aside his reform views. He had simply always belonged to an older, 'country' tradition that was far more limited in its aims than Hunt's desire for universal suffrage and his encouragement of mass demonstrations by the unenfranchised ranks. It was more of a surprise that the radical and 'country' alliance, forged in the Middlesex campaign of 1802 against the background of the war, had held together for so long, than that it broke up during the search for the best solution to cure the political, social and economic problems of post-Waterloo Britain.

By 1820, Burdett had deliberately and successfully distanced himself from his former radical allies; he was not perturbed personally by their rantings<sup>1</sup>, nor did they pose any real threat to him at the polls.<sup>2</sup> He had achieved a position of political independence that was entirely in keeping with his 'country' creed. His position in Westminster was secure, and his aim now was to seek broad, cross-party co-operation in favour of effectual reform that would root out both corruption, and the Liverpool ministry, from the seat of power. His task was to convince the Whigs of the necessity of this type of reform. His friendships with men like Hobhouse, Sir Robert Wilson, Tavistock and Thanet proved that this aim had been successful in part. But there was no automatic path forward, and as the by-election of 1819 demonstrated, there was still a profound distrust of Burdett. Many Whigs could not disassociate him from the memory of his demagogic past and his undesirable radical allies; but even more important, was the Whig party distrust of his independent politics. Burdett desired to co-operate with Whigs, and yet freely admitted that 'the principles of those who were called Tories in the reign of Queen Anne form the substance of my

<sup>1</sup>Add. MSS. 56540 (Hobhouse Diary), 1 May 1819; Hobhouse recorded Burdett's observation that 'when a man has nothing to do or takes the whim, he attacks me' and subsequently commented, 'this is not affectation, Burdett really does not care about abuse'.

<sup>2</sup>Hunt polled only 84 in 1818.

political creed'.<sup>1</sup> This profound lack of respect for party loyalties, traditions, and sentiment was almost impossible for some Whigs to come to terms with. It therefore remained to be seen whether Burdett's independent political position and views had a role to play in the political scene of the 1820s, or whether, by his actions in the years 1817 to 1820, he had doomed himself to political isolation and ineffectiveness.

<sup>1</sup>*Hansard*, 1819, xl. 1455.

## CHAPTER 6: THE INDEPENDENT IN ACTION

Previous chapters have revealed how the independent, 'country' creed survived, in the person of Burdett, in to the nineteenth century, and how it could be harnessed at different times, in various circumstances, to causes that had little intrinsic sympathy with its fundamental values.

The constant theme underlying Burdett's relationship with first the radicals, and then the Whigs, was his refusal to bow to party discipline across all issues. This independent political behaviour had a long and respectable history, but did it have a bright political future? Burdett could not be comfortably slotted in to any of the political groups operating in the 1820s, be they the political heirs of Fox, the younger, more ambitious generation of Whigs, the Canningites, or the supporters of Liverpool's ministry, and yet he found himself far from isolated. Paradoxically, as Burdett's political theories became increasingly anachronistic and inadequate for the social and economic problems of the day, his practical value, as an independent politician in the House of Commons, rose.

In the 1820s, Burdett's independent stand made him peculiarly suited to take a leading role in issues that cut across strict party boundaries and loyalties. The campaign for Catholic Emancipation, and the negotiations to form the Canning Ministry, saw Burdett busier than he had ever been before in the House<sup>1</sup>, and represented his most productive contributions to the political arena.

Although he was still expecting the delayed judgement on his letter against Peterloo in the summer and autumn of 1820<sup>2</sup>, Burdett was optimistic about the political scene in general, and welcomed the Queen Caroline affair as a golden opportunity for all political opposition forces, in and outside the House, to harry the Liverpool ministry. Speaking at a dinner in Leicestershire, he remarked upon the 'most ardent display of public feeling', and his general conclusion to Hobhouse was that 'the body of the opposition is so good and the spirit of

<sup>1</sup>Lord Broughton, *Recollections*, iii. 110.

<sup>2</sup>Patterson, ii. 499; Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. d.98, f.18, Burdett to Dr. Routh, 19 Oct. 1820; Add. MSS. 40878 (Ripon MSS) f.91, Burdett to R.N. Bennet, 22 Nov. 1820; T.D. Hardy, *Memoirs of Lord Langdale*, i. 342-3; Burdett expected imprisonment on the grounds that there were 'too many scores to pay off .... deadly sins to be expiated for them to quit a hold now they have got it'. Burdett to Bickersteth, 21 Oct. 1820.

hatred in the country so strong that I think they [ministers] must go and possibly be called to account for all their unutterable villainy'.<sup>1</sup> With something of his old demagogic style, Burdett took his place by the side of men like Matthew Wood<sup>2</sup> and Brougham, and championed the Queen's cause to the plaudits of opposition members in the House, and many radicals outside it.<sup>3</sup> But this co-operation with former radical allies should not be given too much weight; Burdett looked to those within Parliament as the best hope for making progress against the Liverpool ministry. During the campaign in support of Queen Caroline, Burdett was warm in his praise of many of his parliamentary Whig colleagues. To Hobhouse he wrote:

'What a good fellow Creevey is .... Sir R.<sup>4</sup> must have a finger in the pie .... I am glad to see Folkestone out again .... How well Erskine has behaved. Lord Lansdowne, I think, has earn'd great credit, as well as Lord Holland, Grey and Carnarvon.'<sup>5</sup>

The members of the Horne Tooke circle of Burdett's early years in politics had included men drawn from diverse social backgrounds, but by contrast, Burdett now moved increasingly with men of his own social rank. In the autumn of 1820, he joined a house-party at Battle Abbey, the residence of the Duke of Sussex; he hunted regularly with the Duke of Bedford and Marquis of Tavistock; he dined with Lord Nugent, the Duke of Grafton, and Lord Fitzwilliam; he visited Edward Ellice, Lord Lansdowne, Whitbread, Lambton, and Lord John Russell; in July 1827, he was one of a splendid party of Whig grandees and ambassadors who dined at Devonshire House; he and Hobhouse were regular users

<sup>1</sup>Add. MSS. 47222, ff. 44, 46, 50; Burdett to Hobhouse, 20, 22 Oct. and 24 Nov. 1820.

<sup>2</sup>Matthew Wood (1768-1843), hop-merchant and M.P. for City of London, 1818-43.

<sup>3</sup>*The Horrible, Filthy Green Bag! The powerful and eloquent speech of Sir Francis Burdett in the House of Commons, on the motion of Mr. Wilberforce for an Address to his Majesty, Thurs. 22 June 1820*, (London 1820). Pub. by J. Fairburn; *Morning Chronicle*, 7 Dec. 1820, for Burdett's speech at the Westminster Meeting in support of the Queen. Burdett's reasons for supporting Queen Caroline were in line with those of her other radical and opposition supporters, i.e. that she was probably innocent of the charges laid against her; that it would detract from the dignity of all the royal family to investigate such charges; and that the government's proposed course of action towards the Queen was a denial of her constitutional rights.

<sup>4</sup>Sir Robert Wilson

<sup>5</sup>Add. MSS. 47222, f.44; Burdett to Hobhouse, 20 Oct. 1820.

of Brooks's and during the Emancipation crisis, there was what amounted to a Whig party meeting at Burdett's house when forty party M.P.'s gathered there to discuss the Disfranchisement Bill. In the summer of 1821, Burdett attended what was to be the last of the famous Holkham Sheep Shearings, where he joined a house party of prominent Whig magnates, presided over by the veteran Whig M.P., Coke of Norfolk.<sup>1</sup> All these engagements reflect the welcome Burdett now received in Whig circles. He even made his way to the shrine of Foxite Whiggery. For most of the 1820s, he was financing Fox's widow, Elizabeth, and he was a frequent guest at Holland House, anxious to do anything he could to 'promote Lady Holland's interests'.<sup>2</sup>

Burdett and the Whigs shared many political aims in the 1820s, but it must be noted that the differences in their constitutional theories remained still quite distinct. In a letter to his friend at Magdalen College Oxford, Dr. Routh, Burdett acknowledged himself one of those, who thought 'little happiness was obtained for the country by the result of the Civil Wars and subsequent Revolution in 1688'.<sup>3</sup> Likewise to Hobhouse, he stressed that, 'to break the chain that has been fastened link by link from the year 1688 up to the present time by the hands of corrupt parliaments and Judges on England's liberty is no easy task'. The Whigs, he suggested sarcastically, had exhausted their whole stock of virtue at the Revolution.<sup>4</sup> One serious difference between Burdett and the Whigs is therefore clear. They regarded 1688 as the event that safeguarded English liberties, and claimed it as exclusively their own offspring; in contrast, Burdett, with his independent 'country' views, looked upon it as an important

<sup>1</sup>For details of Burdett's social activities in Whig circles; Add. MSS. 30109, f.266, Burdett to Sir Robert Wilson, 11 Oct. 1821; Add. MSS. 36458, f.226, Burdett to Hobhouse, 9 April 1820; 36459, f.112, Kinnaird to Hobhouse, 12 Sept. 1821; 36460, f.316, Burdett to Hobhouse, 27 Aug. 1824; Add. MSS. 47222, ff. 54, 111, 146, 180, 218, 223, Burdett to Hobhouse, 27 Nov. 1820, 13 Oct. 1823, 7 Oct. 1824, 17 Mar. 1826, 10 Dec. 1827; Lord Broughton, *Recollections*, iii. 207; A.W. Stirling, *Coke of Norfolk and his friends*, ii. 246, 261; *The Times*, 10 July 1821 reports Burdett's speech at the Shearings; Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 41, pp. 626-7, for criticism of Burdett's socialising with these magnates.

<sup>2</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. c.65, ff.97, 93, 99, 101, 104 for correspondence between Burdett and Elizabeth Fox, 1821-8; Add. MSS. 47222, f.136, Burdett to Hobhouse, 23 Mar. 1824; Burdett appears regularly in the Holland House dinner books; Add. MSS. 51950-7.

<sup>3</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. d.98, f.25, Burdett to Dr. Routh, 24 May 1823.

<sup>4</sup>Add. MSS. 47222, f.81, Burdett to Hobhouse, 24 Aug. 1821.

step on the road towards achieving a corrupt legislature and a self-interested executive.

Another fundamental difference between the two was still conflicting attitudes towards the power of the Crown. Here the views of Burdett and Coke can be usefully contrasted. In many ways, their views were strikingly similar. Both men had opposed the French war, and had thus exposed themselves to the taunt of Jacobinism. Both disliked the excessive weight of taxation upon the country, and feared the possible consequences of the huge size of the National Debt. Both men called for retrenchment and moderate parliamentary reform as the remedies for all these evils. But central to Coke's view of the political world was his fear of Crown power. This was the emphasis of his speech in Norwich on the anniversary of Fox's birthday in 1820. 'It has been my wish', he declared, 'to keep down the influence of the Crown and ... I trust we shall all rise to a man and defy the "divine right" of kings to govern wrong[ly].'<sup>1</sup> Appropriate to the occasion, Coke remained true to this central Foxite obsession. Burdett came from a different political tradition, and was not suspicious of the constitutional powers of the Crown. He preferred to trust a 'public prince' rather than corrupt parliamentarians.<sup>2</sup> Thus despite the large measure of practical co-operation between Burdett and the Whigs on many of the prominent issues of the 1820s, these constitutional differences always remained.

The issues upon which there was nevertheless the greatest potential for joint activity were the subjects of reform and Catholic Emancipation, and it is on these subjects that this chapter will focus.<sup>3</sup> Burdett's attitude towards the

<sup>1</sup>A.W. Stirling, *Coke of Norfolk and his Friends*, ii. 227.

<sup>2</sup>Lord Broughton, *Recollections*, ii. 170-1. As this thesis has demonstrated, such a theme often held a prominent place in many of Burdett's public speeches. See above pp. 62, 82, 110.

<sup>3</sup>Burdett can also be found supporting many Whig motions for retrenchment and economy in these years. Although his views upon the subjects of economic distress and the currency were confused, and do not stand up to close scrutiny, his 'country' concerns were still the basis for his contributions in these spheres. His main theme was that debts which had been contracted before the changes in the value of the currency, should be paid according to their original value. For Burdett, according to this theory, 'the remedy was obvious. You must reduce taxation, your expenses and the interest of the National Debt'. *The Times*, 10 July 1821, Burdett's speech at Coke's Holkham Sheep shearings. 'The great causes

Whigs and reform in the 1820s established the necessary foundations for a fruitful co-operation in the years 1830 to 1832.

Although there was still much internal disagreement amongst Whigs about the degree of reform that could safely be proposed or whether indeed, such a measure was desirable at all, by 1820, there were at least ninety members of the

3 (cont.) of our present sufferings were the change in the currency and the pressure of taxation .... All our taxes ought to be lowered in proportion to the rise in the value of money; all our establishments ought to be reduced in that proportion - our civil list and all the salaries of public officers .... The cause of our embarrassments were our immense military and colonial establishments, our civil list and our great load of taxation. The corn trade as well as other trade, should be free, and its freedom would occasion no inconvenience if we were relieved from a portion of our burthens.' *Hansard*, 2nd Series, 1822, vii. 407, 410, 412-3, Burdett on the Agricultural Distress Report. 'The Distresses of the country appeared to him, to arise from two causes, enormous taxation was one, and the alteration of the currency was the other .... if persons were called on to fulfil engagements entered into before the currency was altered according to the rate of the currency when the alteration was effected, it was evident that the greatest distress, confusion and misery must be the consequence.' *The Times*, 24 May 1822, Burdett during the Westminster 'Purity Election' Dinner. Ministers should present the reduced estimates the country was not only constitutionally entitled to, but expected in its distress, especially 'in this the eleventh year of peace'. *Hansard*, 2nd Series, 1826, xiv. 926, 'The great remedy for relief was that all the country's burthens should be reduced in proportion to the increased value of the currency.' *Hansard*, 2nd Series, 1827, xvi. 1112. His attachment to the idea of the economic value of the English country gentleman can be seen quite clearly in his contrasting comparison of French rural life during his visit to France in 1829. Burdett deplored the 'perpetual division of property and subdivision upon every new succession, it cramps all exertions, agriculture is miserable, manufactures compared to ours also, politically it destroys all independence, since there are no class of persons to whom the emoluments of office are not of the first importance so that every creature of education is looking and hoping [for] a government situation' Add. MSS. 35148, f.34, Burdett to Place, 20 Jan. 1829. In the sphere of foreign policy, Burdett was enthusiastic, like many Whigs, for the progress of what he perceived to be, constitutional reform in other European countries. Add. MSS. 47222, f.64, Burdett to Hobhouse, 5 Jan. 1821: 'it is a critical moment for liberty all over the world, and could the Neapolitans be supported and finally made triumphant, legitimacy would receive its death wound and the banner of liberty wave over the civilised world.' He was also enthusiastic about the Spanish revolt and corresponded with Lord Holland on the subject. Add. MSS. 51569, ff. 17, 26, Burdett to Lord Holland, 15 Mar. 1821 and 29 Nov. 1827. His friendships with Hobhouse, Lord Byron and Lord Cochrane also led him to support the Greek's bid for independence, and involved him with the activities of the Greek deputies in London. For information on this subject: Brougham MSS. no. 20031, Burdett to Brougham, 12 Aug. 1825; Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. d.96, f.15, Hobhouse to Burdett, 10 Oct. 1825; and frequent references in the Broughton MSS.: Add. MSS. 36461, ff. 160, 226, 242, 274, 282, 296, 299, 311, 378; 36462, ff. 190, 216; 47222, ff. 157 and 159.

party who had voted for it in some shape or form.<sup>1</sup> Progress on the question of reform was by no means as automatic as the historian, with the 1832 Bill in his sights, might sometimes imply, but there were various factors that combined to make reform a more serious subject for Whig political discussion? The factor directly relevant to this study was that Burdett, still a leading reform spokesman and now distanced from his former radical and mob allies, presented a far less demagogic appearance to the political world, and promised the hope of constructing a moderate reform package that would protect the best interests of property. Hobhouse received several indications in these years that the Whigs would be prepared to recognise, and take advantage of, Burdett's help on the question of reform.<sup>3</sup> In 1822, Tavistock even hinted that Burdett might be asked to join any future Whig administration; Hobhouse conveyed Burdett's response, which was one of agreement 'understanding always that reform was to be the basis of their whole plan'.<sup>4</sup> Burdett felt that the Whigs must come round to reform if they were to attain office and popular support, although during the outcry against the Liverpool ministry in 1820, he had even gone so far as to 'wish them in anyhow. To get rid of these fellows would be something.'<sup>5</sup> Commenting upon the Whig association with popular sentiment in that year, he 'trusted that the connection would continue, as he believed it to be the only practicable means by which redress could be obtained for those grievous wrongs resulting from so many years of maladministration'.<sup>6</sup> Whilst serving the sentence

<sup>1</sup>For a detailed analysis of the increasing Whig commitment to reform, and for the details of Russell's reform measures of 1821, 1822 and 1826, see: A. Mitchell, *The Whigs in Opposition*, 1815-30, pp. 15-17; 133; 166-7; *Hansard*, 2nd Series, 1821, v. 604-22; 626 for the division. xv. 651-63, 714. Burdett was present for the 1821 and 1826 divisions and voted for Russell's motions. R. Brent, *Liberal Anglican Politics*, (Oxford 1987), pp. 19-64 traces the background to the Whig commitment to reform in the 1830s.

<sup>2</sup>A. Mitchell lists the factors as county opinion turning to reform in order to increase the control of agricultural opinion on parliament, and lack of success in parliament confirming Whig dispositions to reform as a route to office; to which may also be added the presence of new members in Parliament who identified political change less with the horrors of the French Revolution and more with a positive belief in the progress of society. For A. Mitchell, see *Whigs in Opposition*, p.167.

<sup>3</sup>Lord Broughton, *Recollections*, ii. 139-40.

<sup>4</sup>Add. MSS. 51545 (Hobhouse Diary), 17 May 1822.

<sup>5</sup>Add. MSS. 47222, f.60, Burdett to Hobhouse, 27 Dec. 1820.

<sup>6</sup>*Hansard*, 2nd Series, 1821, iv. 459.

for his 'Peterloo' letter, Burdett sent a clear message of support to the City reform dinner on 4 April 1821, at which many Whigs were present. The reformers' cause, he declared, could not be in better hands.<sup>1</sup> Hobhouse certainly noted 'the change since last year when scarcely a Whig would speak to Burdett or me, and yet no compromise has, I am sure been made on our part'.<sup>2</sup> The momentary, personal bitterness of the 1819 by-election had indeed dispersed to reveal a common purpose between the Westminster M.P.s and many Whigs. Burdett's attitude was certainly in line with his stand at the by-election, for over and above persuading his Whig friends to sponsor reform, he was primarily anxious to promote the subject amongst the propertied ranks in a broad, non-party context. His letter to his country-gentleman friend, Sir George Sinclair, deserves quotation at length for it reveals precisely these views:

'All reformers should lay aside all differences of opinion and enlist under the banner of Yorkshire<sup>3</sup> .... as to the Whigs, would that foolish appellation was dropped, playing their cards well, nay rather honestly, let them stick to Reform, and the nation will stick to them, and with the nation at their back, possessing amongst them splendid talents, they will become irresistible and put an end to the present miserable, mawkish, feeble and corrupt, and blind and foolish system - as to parties, they are all intolerable .... to man there is no such crime as not being of his party .... I doubt whether your Tory predilections are greater than my own. You know in the House of Commons I have always professed myself a Tory, however I am neither that nor Whig.'<sup>4</sup>

Although he was prepared to work with the Whigs towards reform, this statement emphasised quite categorically that Burdett was, first and foremost, an independent who disliked party labels and politics above all else. It was this feature that was so reminiscent of 'country' politics in the early eighteenth century. Wedded to the hope that independent gentlemen like himself should call

<sup>1</sup>*The Times*, 5 April 1821, reports the dinner and Burdett's letter of support. Whigs and reformers present at the dinner included Lambton, Whitbread, Lord Nugent, Heron, Coke, Curwen, Lushington, Moore, Ellice, Wilson, Wood, William Smith, Bennet, Torrens and Waithman.

<sup>2</sup>Lord Broughton, *Recollections*, ii. 145.

<sup>3</sup>Lord Milton chaired a huge county meeting in Yorkshire to petition for reform. Between 5,000 and 7,000 people attended; 17,083 signed the reform petition. For further details, see A. Mitchell, *The Whigs in Opposition*, p.180.

<sup>4</sup>Sinclair MSS: Political and Personal Correspondence between Sir Francis Burdett and Sir George Sinclair, 1813-44, vol.x. ff. 5-7; Burdett to Sir George Sinclair, 28 Jan. 1823.

for a purification of the representative system, it was hardly surprising that Burdett fluctuated between optimism and despair at the attitude of his social peers in the 1820s. After over a dozen county meetings in favour of reform in January 1823, he was praising 'the ability and patriotism "my country gentlemen" have displayed', and

'as to the particular resolutions adopted I care very little about them. The feelings evinced and sentiments expressed, by the persons present are chiefly worthy of regard, and if we can once unite under any one banner, an effect must be produced.'<sup>1</sup>

Shortly afterwards, however, he was complaining of 'the System, the System, there's the rub, and my Gentlemen of England don't seem sufficiently resolute to have it altered'. Perhaps they were all taking a leaf out of his own book, for several lines later he pointed to a possible explanation for their neglect of reform, by his observation on his own conduct: 'I suppose I am abused for my idleness and neglect of the public cause', but 'The Hounds are more musical and speak to quite as much purpose as the House'.<sup>2</sup>

Sporadic attempts to encourage those with landed property to support reform was certainly not regarded as a positive contribution to the reform cause by Burdett's radical critics. Cobbett and Hunt continued to make their dissatisfaction with both Burdett's own behaviour, and with his Whig friends, quite clear. The 'Purity of Election' dinners, in particular, became a regular battleground. In 1827, a drunken Cobbett almost came to blows with Hobhouse, across the dinner table.<sup>3</sup> Cobbett's criticism was unrelenting. Referring to Burdett as 'Glory'<sup>4</sup>, he devoted column upon column of the *Political Register* to bitter attacks: in 1820, Burdett was all 'talk and not DO'; in 1821, he revealed how 'Glory' and the 'Rump' controlled the Westminster dinners; in 1822, he concluded that no member had ever behaved with more flagrant inconsistency,

<sup>1</sup>Add. MSS. 47222, f.91; Burdett to Hobhouse, Feb. 1823.

<sup>2</sup>Add. MSS. 47222, f.93; Burdett to Hobhouse, 25 Feb. 1823.

<sup>3</sup>*The Times*, 24 May 1824; *The Times*, 24 May 1827; Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 62, pp. 537-64 gave Cobbett's version of the acrimonious exchanges; Lord Broughton, *Recollections*, iii. 197-8 gave Hobhouse's version; Add. MSS. 47222, f.102, Burdett to Hobhouse, cautions the latter to play down the affair; J. Belchem, *Orator Hunt*, p.188.

<sup>4</sup>A sarcastic reference to Burdett's heroic 1810 title, 'Westminster's Pride and England's Glory'.

and so the charges continued throughout the 1820s.<sup>1</sup> How valid were these claims? Cobbett's charges that Burdett did not fulfill his duties of a reform M.P. have been discussed in the previous chapter.<sup>2</sup> It should also be remembered that the question of parliamentary reform was not such a pressing matter on the political agenda as a whole, as Cobbett liked to suggest. Lansdowne's verdict in 1825 was that the country's reviving economic prosperity had banished reform even from the thoughts of many radicals.<sup>3</sup> Other issues took centre stage, and Burdett devoted his parliamentary energies, like many other members, to the campaign for Catholic Emancipation. The conclusion must be drawn that too close a perusal of the *Political Register's* criticisms make it all too easy to magnify the damage done to Burdett's public position. All Cobbett's columns and Hunt's rantings did nothing to dent the size of his majority in Westminster.<sup>4</sup> Burdett himself took very little notice of Cobbett's activities, and only occasionally referred to him as a meddler, whose 'paltry lies ... are not worth a thought'.<sup>5</sup> In general, his attitude continued to be one of aristocratic aloofness, and he refused to indulge in a public quarrel with his former radical allies over the details of reform. Burdett did not sever all his connections in radical circles outside the House,<sup>6</sup> but he was nevertheless determined to act independently; to

<sup>1</sup>Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 39, pp. 888, 914-5; 42, pp. 641-73; 56, p.85.

<sup>2</sup>See above pp. 125-7.

<sup>3</sup>A. Mitchell, *The Whigs in Opposition*, p.182, quoting Lansdowne to Holland, 17 Jan. 1825.

<sup>4</sup>Burdett polled 5327 votes in 1820, and was returned, without a contest, in 1830.

<sup>5</sup>Add. MSS. 47222, f.48; Burdett to Hobhouse, 22 Nov. 1820; and also Add. MSS. 36461, f.473, Burdett to Hobhouse, 11 Feb. 1826.

<sup>6</sup>Burdett was particularly generous towards Hunt. He twice attempted to shorten Hunt's Peterloo sentence which he regarded as not an act of justice, but of revenge. Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. d.98, f.16, Burdett to Dr. Routh, 16 April 182?; Add. MSS. 36458, f.299, Burdett to Hobhouse, 20 May 1820; Add. MSS. 47222, f.56, Burdett to Hobhouse, 21 Dec. 1820, all complain of the partiality and severity of Hunt's sentence. *Hansard*, 2nd Series, 1822, vi. 152-5; vii. 2-23 for Burdett's two speeches on the subject. Burdett's efforts produced an unconvincing and temporary transformation of Hunt's opinion of the baronet. J. Belchem, *Orator Hunt*, pp. 141-2. Burdett also made very generous contributions to radicals and radical causes in these years. He supported Thomas Hardy and others in Westminster whose financial hardship was brought to his notice by Place, and he contributed a significant sum to the Society for Diffusion of Useful Knowledge. Add. MSS. 37959, f.91, Burdett to Place on the subject of how to help Hardy, 20 Dec. 1820; *Memoirs of Thomas Hardy .... written by Himself*, (London 1832) pp. 89-94 for correspondence between Burdett and Hardy. Burdett supported Hardy with an annuity of £100 from 1823 until his death; Add. MSS. 37949, f.94, Burdett to Place, 2 June 1821; Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. d.96, f.161 Burdett to Place, 19 Feb. 1827; J.A. Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, p.245.

co-operate with the Whigs if he chose to do so, regardless of how such actions might be interpreted by his critics. He rationed out his political appearances, and showed little sympathy for Hobhouse's dutiful attendance at radical functions in London.<sup>1</sup> Cobbett would have been staggered to read Burdett's sarcastic reference to the May 'Purity of Election' anniversary: 'When is our West[minster] dinner? I always forget that memorable day.'<sup>2</sup> Burdett's was thus almost an amateur approach to politics. His determination to give his hunting equal priority with any political activities<sup>3</sup> not only smacked of the attitude of an eighteenth century country gentleman, but also indicated that he would prefer to co-operate politically with his hunting companions, often Whig grandees, rather than with dedicated radicals. Ample proof of just how far Burdett was removed from radicalism in the 1820s can be found in his reaction to the works of Tom Paine. Burdett was reading Paine for the first time in 1823. This in itself was an astonishing fact for a man who had entered politics in the 1790s, and it emphasises again the overwhelming extent to which Burdett's reform goals came from an insular 'country' tradition and had no affinity with the Painite iconoclasm of the French Revolution. Burdett admired Paine's clear prose style, but his verdict upon his ideas would have been a reassuring proof of his moderate reform aims for any of his new parliamentary allies. He confessed to Hobhouse that,

'I am by no means a convert to his principles .... the reading his works has much confirmed me in an opinion expressed by Harrington<sup>4</sup>, the Prince of Writers on Politics, "that there is something in the leading of Armies, legislating

<sup>1</sup>Add. MSS. 36458, f.391-2, Burdett to Hobhouse, 16 July 1820; Add. MSS. 47222, f.114, Burdett to Hobhouse, 20 Sept. 1823; f.127, Burdett to Hobhouse, 24 Feb. 1824.

<sup>2</sup>Add. MSS. 47222, f.234, Burdett to Hobhouse, 20 April 1829.

<sup>3</sup>Add. MSS. 47222, f.123, Burdett to Hobhouse, 22 Jan. 1824; f.133, 20 Mar. 1824; f.134, 22 Mar. 1824; 'I cannot help thinking foxhunting .... a preferable pursuit to sitting up in the den irritated'; f.148, 21 Oct. 1824, 'Foxhunting .... is less degrading than politics'; f.185, 2 Feb. 1827.

<sup>4</sup>James Harrington (1611-77), political theorist. His main work, 'Oceana' (1656) depicted a model commonwealth, the main principle of which was that stability depended upon the correct balance of landed property. His republic was thus a moderate aristocracy. Machiavelli was his great authority. His political club, 'the Rota', discussed his political schemes.

for and management of States, peculiarly fitted to the character of Gentlemen." <sup>1</sup>

Significant also was Burdett's remark that 'authors are very apt to flatter themselves' about their influence. Paine's 'Common Sense', he considered rather 'as a symptom, than a cause, of that which followed', and he believed, in general, that 'consequences are attributed from want of reflection to writings which they never produced'.<sup>2</sup> This scant regard for the role of pure intellectual theory as the foundation for political action sprang from Burdett's 'country' respect for existing political and constitutional institutions, and made him anxious to support projects which had a hope of being realised, rather than to hold out for the fulfilment of principles which could not easily, perhaps never, be attained. Such an attitude induced him to support not only the moderate reform aims of the Whigs in the 1820s, but also to give his full support to the campaign for Catholic Emancipation, even to the extent of supporting Canning in the hope of obtaining it.

Burdett's long connection with Irish affairs, through his friendships with leading Irishmen and several visits to the country<sup>3</sup>, had led him to take a keen interest in its troubled state.<sup>4</sup> In the 1820s, his refusal to be identified with any specific party in politics now made him a key personality in an issue that had long been open in English politics, and whose supporters came from all sides of the party divide.

All of Burdett's contributions in debate on the subject of Ireland<sup>5</sup> illustrated his practical, rather than ideological or intellectual, reasons for

<sup>1</sup>Add. MSS. 47222, f.102, Burdett to Hobhouse, 28 July 1823; Burdett concluded that 'Paine however was a great man ... and I am quite vexed that Cobbett should have cast dirt upon his Tomb and added another link to the chain of unseemly connection'.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.* f.108, Burdett to Hobhouse, 3 Aug. 1823.

<sup>3</sup>See above Chapter 1, pp. 7-10, and Chapter 5, pp. 128-9; *Personal Recollections of the Life and Times of Valentine, Lord Cloncurry*, pp. 273-4; 293-4.

<sup>4</sup>Burdett had already made appeals on behalf of the Catholics in Ireland, and had called for a solution to her problems. *Hansard*, 1797-8, xxxiii. 155-7; 1799, xxxiv. 954-6; 1801, xxxv. 1041-2; 1802, xxxvi. 515-23; 1812, xxiii. 257; 1819, xl. 515-22.

<sup>5</sup>*Hansard*, 2nd Series, 1822, vi. 131-4; 1823, viii. 1149-53; 1824, xi. 574-81; 705-12; 1438-40; 1825, xii. 757-64; 1826, xv. 566-7; 1827, xvi. 407-11. Also Burdett's introduction of three Emancipation motions which are discussed in succeeding pages.

supporting emancipation. He himself presented the rather anomalous picture of a country gentleman who had no religion<sup>1</sup>, and he was therefore at pains to discount the idea of the papacy presenting any political or religious threat. The Pope, he claimed, was 'as harmless as any old woman in Christendom'.<sup>2</sup> Burdett contended that real danger lay rather in the despair and disappointments of nine tenths of the Irish population.<sup>3</sup> On 15 February 1825, during debate on the Bill to suppress the Catholic Association, he was of the opinion that 'it was a contracted view of this question to call it an Irish question, he called it an English question'<sup>4</sup> and for this reason, he condemned the undecided policy of the Liverpool ministry towards Ireland. Like Milton's Chaos, claimed Burdett, conflicting influences vied to undo each other's work and 'Chance governs all'.<sup>5</sup> Of importance to him was the fact that the Catholic Association had constitutional aims and behaved in a peaceful manner. A guarantee of its moderation lay in the fact that it was led by such respectable aristocrats as Earl Fitzwilliam<sup>6</sup> and it was 'nonsense' to ban it because of its 'illegal tendency'.<sup>7</sup> In a tone reminiscent of the independents of the 1770s, Burdett recalled the 'appalling' loss to the empire of the American colonies, but predicted that 'evil as that was, and evil as also the last war was, still they would be as dust in the balance when compared with the evil which would arise from producing a war of rebellion in Ireland'.<sup>8</sup>

These themes were repeated on 28 February 1825, when Burdett introduced his motion for the House to resolve itself into Committee to consider the Catholic claims. His concerns were once again focussed on the practical

<sup>1</sup>Lord Broughton, *Recollections*, vi. 102; 'Lord Sudeley told me that .... George Sinclair tried to 'convert' Burdett. A strange enterprise, said Sudeley, in respect to a man whom I have heard say that "No one out of Bedlam could believe that story". Burdett however, was no scoffer, although certainly no believer when I knew him intimately. He was at the same time a well-wisher to the Church of England as a political institution, and thought, confined to its legitimate purposes and rights, it ought to be supported.'

<sup>2</sup>*Hansard*, 2nd Series, 1823, viii. 1074.

<sup>3</sup>*ibid.* 1075.

<sup>4</sup>*Hansard*, 2nd Series, 1825, xii. 453.

<sup>5</sup>*ibid.* 455-6.

<sup>6</sup>*ibid.* 451

<sup>7</sup>*ibid.* 458.

<sup>8</sup>*ibid.* 710. The Bill to suppress the Association passed its third reading by 226 to 96.

implications of the Irish situation, rather than on a discussion of the religious and political principles at stake. Burdett warned of the consequences of an external power, such as France, interfering in a discontented Ireland: in order to avoid this, and as a way of consolidating the empire, Ireland should be given her full rights.<sup>1</sup> Detached from religious fervour himself, he condemned those 'Saints', such as Wilberforce, who campaigned against negro slavery, and yet acquiesced in English Protestant tyranny in Ireland. Burdett stressed that such an oppressive system of government was fantastically expensive, and promised that retrenchment and prosperity would be the fruits of a more liberal and enlightened policy.<sup>2</sup> An appeal to the pockets of members, especially those of the landed interest both in England and Ireland, was perhaps the most efficacious method of overcoming their traditional attachment to the Established Church. But the real extent of Burdett's support for a practical solution to the Irish Catholic problem was revealed when the question of disfranchisement became a matter for fierce debate.

The Canningite, E.J. Littleton introduced the measure to disfranchise the Irish forty shilling freeholder on 22 April 1825, and it passed the Commons by a majority of 48.<sup>3</sup> The Bill was intended to counter overwhelming Catholic influence at the polls by making the electoral system less vulnerable to agitators. By raising the electoral qualification in the counties to ten pounds, it was hoped to placate, in some measure, the Irish landlords, who would lose influence by the ceding of Emancipation.<sup>4</sup> Burdett supported the proposal for disfranchisement on the grounds that its success

'was necessary to the success of the great measure of Catholic relief. He should think he acted very reprehensibly if he were to permit any abstract principles, however pure and admirable and beautiful, to stand in the way of his concurrence in so great and practical a benefit.'<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Burdett merely referred to Emancipation in this context.

<sup>2</sup>*Hansard*, 2nd Series, 1825, xii. 764-84, Burdett's motion for the House to go into Committee to consider the Catholic claims. The motion passed by 247 to 234.

<sup>3</sup>*Hansard*, 2nd Series, 1825, xiii. 126-7; G.I.T. Machin, *The Catholic Question in English Politics, 1820-30*, (Oxford 1964) pp. 55-6.

<sup>4</sup>M. Brock, *The Great Reform Act*, p.54 and footnote.

<sup>5</sup>*Hansard*, 2nd Series, 1825, xiii. 240.

He derided Brougham's scruples over disfranchisement and said it was impossible to work with such impracticable men.<sup>1</sup> Burdett's opinion on disfranchisement was not, in truth, surprising. He had broken with Cobbett and Hunt because he refused to hold out solely for the fulfilment of radical reform principles, and he had never become a Whig because he was always unable to identify with their feeling of loyalty to specific party principles. Despite however, the consistency of his own practical realism, Burdett was criticised, by both these groups, for his position on disfranchisement. Cobbett's tone was one of sarcastic astonishment that, 'Sir Francis Burdett, the great Reformer .... should ever be the organ of this measure'<sup>2</sup>, whilst Brougham, Grey and other Emancipationist Whigs were alarmed at such talk.<sup>3</sup> The split between these men and Burdett on the subject was expected to 'throw a considerable degree of coldness and bad blood amongst the party'.<sup>4</sup> But although the disfranchisement measure continued to be hotly debated up to the passing of Emancipation in 1829<sup>5</sup>, contrary to expectation, it did not destroy Burdett's good understanding with either his Whig allies, or with Irish and ministerial supporters of the general measure.

Lord Holland had already praised Burdett's 'plain, direct, firm and honest course' on behalf of the Catholics<sup>6</sup>, and thought that he and Tierney were 'the only publick men whose conduct and temper throughout the whole business has been entirely unrepachable'.<sup>7</sup> After their disagreement in the spring of 1825, by November Brougham and Burdett had resumed close contact. Burdett was anxious to conciliate, and to foster his good working relationship with the Whigs.

<sup>1</sup>Lord Broughton, *Recollections*, iii. 97.

<sup>2</sup>Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 53, p.681.

<sup>3</sup>Lord Broughton, *Recollections*, iii. 98; Buckingham, *Memoirs of the Court of George IV*, i. 241, Charles W. Wynn to Buckingham, 22 April 1825.

<sup>4</sup>*ibid.* 243. Fremantle to Buckingham, 27 April 1825.

<sup>5</sup>Daniel O'Connell was constant in his opposition to the disfranchisement measure in these years. *The Correspondence of Daniel O'Connell*, ed. M.R. O'Connell, Historical MSS. Commission, (Irish U.P. 1972), iii. no. 1182, O'Connell to his wife, 7 Mar. 1825; iv. no. 1532, O'Connell to Edward Dwyer, 6 Mar. 1829.

<sup>6</sup>Add. MSS. 51749 (Holland House MSS.) ff. 79-82, Holland to 4<sup>th</sup> Lord Holland, 25 Mar. 1825. Holland contrasted Burdett's behaviour to Canning's 'manoeuvring and serpentine line of politics'.

<sup>7</sup>*ibid.* f.85, 12 April 1825.

'What', he asked Brougham,

'think you about the Catholic Question? Ought it to be avoided or agitated this year? .... Shall we injure the question more by omitting to stir it, and thereby giving its enemies the triumph of saying we are afraid, or by stirring it run the risk at least, I fear, incur the certainty of losing our majority.'<sup>1</sup>

He consented that,

'as you think so, it shall be so, that is, I will be guided by yours and our other friends' judgement in all conduct relating to it. I send this to relieve you from any possible apprehension of my doing anything without previous consultation.'<sup>2</sup>

Burdett dined at Holland House, and at the homes of the Dukes of Devonshire and Norfolk; he spent much time with Tierney planning the next stage of the campaign, and in 1829, forty Whig M.P.s attended his house to discuss the disfranchisement issue.<sup>3</sup> Burdett also worked very profitably with Irish promoters of Emancipation. He was in constant communication with O'Connell and Plunket; the former, in particular, forming a high opinion of Burdett and of the talents he brought to the campaign. 'Sir Francis', commented O'Connell, 'is the same manly, delightful, honest man on this as on every other occasion'<sup>4</sup>, and he thought that Burdett 'was very powerful in his speech' at the Crown and Anchor dinner on 24 May 1825.<sup>5</sup>

Burdett was perhaps most at his ease in the political arena with this issue that tended to cut across party divisions. His independent personal position and political sentiments allowed him to work with equal facility with Whigs, Irish and ministerialists alike. February 1827, for example, found him in closer touch with Canning and Huskisson about the timings of the Catholic and Corn Bills.<sup>6</sup> Such

<sup>1</sup>Brougham MSS. U.C.L. no. 14512, Burdett to Brougham, 30 Nov. 1825.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.* no. 14513; Burdett to Brougham, 13 Dec. 1825.

<sup>3</sup>Lord Broughton, *Recollections*, iii. 161; A. Mitchell, *The Whigs in Opposition*, p.215.

<sup>4</sup>*The Correspondence of Daniel O'Connell*, iii. No. 1217, O'Connell to his wife, 4 May 1825.

<sup>5</sup>*ibid.* no. 1236, O'Connell to his wife, 24 May 1825. The progress of negotiations between O'Connell, Burdett and leading Whigs is recorded in O'Connell's Correspondence ii. Letter nos. 905, 977, and iii. nos. 1161, 1165, 1169, 1172, 1174, 1178, 1180, 1182-3, 1204, 1230, 1235.

<sup>6</sup>Add. MSS. 38748, f.245, Burdett to Huskisson, 8 Feb. 1827; ff. 246-8, Huskisson to Stapleton, 9 Feb. 1827; 38749, f.7, Burdett to Huskisson, 11 Feb. 1827; f.9, Huskisson to Burdett, 12 Feb. 1827.

friendly contacts, however, caused rumblings of discontent amongst Whig friends like Tavistock, who wished to pursue a more consistent party policy<sup>1</sup>, but these were nothing to the political storm that broke following Liverpool's stroke on 19 February 1827.<sup>2</sup>

On 12 April 1827, Canning was appointed Prime Minister. It was an appointment that heralded a huge number of resignations from the government and plunged all party politicians into immense confusion. Many 'old guard' Whigs such as Bedford, Rosslyn, Jersey and Grey distrusted Canning and his style of politics. Tavistock voiced the worries of such men when he observed to Hobhouse: 'I did not mean to say that Canning is not sincere in wishing to carry the Catholic Question. Undoubtedly he would be glad to carry it and to keep his office. But if he cannot have both, he had rather keep his place than lose both'. Many Whigs found it 'very difficult to reconcile his professions with his actions'.<sup>3</sup> But some of a more pragmatic or ambitious turn found grounds for supporting Canning. After anxious hours of meetings at Brooks Club and at Lansdowne House, it became clear that a significant number would be prepared to fill government places and to support his administration.<sup>4</sup>

Burdett immediately decided to support Canning. He believed that Canning had 'behaved very honourably during the whole negotiations'<sup>5</sup>, and he therefore 'took Canning as a choice of evils. If the Whigs did not support Canning, the bigots would come in.'<sup>6</sup> With no party ties or affections, Burdett moved across

<sup>1</sup>Add. MSS. 36463, f.247, Tavistock to Hobhouse, 1 Feb. 1827.

<sup>2</sup>In the months of confusion before the appointment of Canning as Prime Minister, the Catholic campaigners pressed on. Burdett presented a new Emancipation motion on 5 Mar. *Hansard*, 2nd Series, 1827, xvi. 825-49; it was defeated by 276 to 272. For discussion of whether to present the motion in the political confusion see: Add. MSS. 36463, f.296, Burdett to Hobhouse, 29 Feb. 1827; 36464, f.137, Burdett to Hobhouse, 3 Mar. 1827; Add. MSS. 51569, f.22, Burdett to Lord Holland, 2 Mar. 1827?; f.24, 4 Mar. 1827? Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. d.94, f.44, Burdett to Lady Burdett, 22 Feb. 1827.

<sup>3</sup>Add. MSS. 36463, f.307, Tavistock to Hobhouse, n.d.; A. Mitchell, *The Whigs in Opposition*, pp. 190-2.

<sup>4</sup>Whigs to enter office were Devonshire, Carlisle, Scarlett, Lansdowne, Spring Rice, Abercromby, Tierney and Macdonald. Others who supported from outside were Holland, Wilson, Brougham and Calcraft. A. Mitchell, *The Whigs in Opposition*, pp. 197-99; A. Aspinall, *Lord Brougham and the Whig Party*, pp. 149-50.

<sup>5</sup>for Emancipation of the catholics.

<sup>6</sup>Lord Broughton, *Recollections*, iii. 186-7.

the House to support Canning in the hopes of gaining the Catholic measure.<sup>1</sup> He justified his move to an intensely curious House by stressing the practical benefits he expected from the administration:

'I give my support to the administration as at present constituted, not entirely, perhaps, upon the foundations of a complete concurrence upon abstract principles, but as the best opportunity that I ever enjoyed in my life of doing something practically to promote the most important interests of the nation .... I will say, as a practical man, that I do not think it common sense to omit the opportunity of advancing a particular object because there are principles of an abstract nature on which you are at issue; or that because certain measures cannot be acted upon to their full extent you will refuse all support to every practical adoption of those measures.'<sup>2</sup>

Such a statement was perhaps the culmination of Burdett's steps, ever since 1817, towards a determined independence, and it set him firmly apart from all party doctrinaires. Burdett went on to stress that he was neither a Whig nor a Tory, and he hoped that,

'the terms now have no meaning. They are no longer applicable to the circumstances of the country .... it would be well if, for the sake of clearness and precision, the use of them were discontinued.'<sup>3</sup>

His first duty was,

'to support the Crown in the just exercise of its prerogative, against any factious band, who may, by any concerted design, think to put it in a dilemma, and compel it again to accept their services .... when I look at all the circumstances of these resignations I cannot avoid suspecting that they originated in an attempt unjustly to fetter the exercise of the prerogative of the Crown.'<sup>4</sup>

There could be no more orthodox statement of the eighteenth century, independent country-gentleman attitude than this, for it boldly proclaimed all parties to be no better than self-interested factions, and stated that it was a member's first priority to support the prerogative of the Crown to choose its own ministers. Burdett must, presumably, have then hoped that the Crown would

<sup>1</sup>At first, Burdett contemplated supporting Canning from his old opposition seat, but he then decided to cross the floor. Hobhouse refused to abandon his old opposition seat and was disappointed to find that Burdett had changed his own mind. Add. MSS. 36464, f.135, Burdett to Hobhouse, n.d. Sat. 1827; Add. MSS. 47222, f.189, Burdett to Hobhouse, 1 May 1827; Lord Broughton, *Recollections*, iii. 187-8.

<sup>2</sup>*Hansard*, 2nd Series, 1827, xvii. 413-14, 415.

<sup>3</sup>*Hansard*, 2nd Series, 1827, xvii. 529.

<sup>4</sup>*ibid.* 530.

make it its own first priority to agree to the Emancipation measure that a Canning administration would naturally sponsor. In view of George IV's past hostility to the measure, was such a hope realistic, or merely naïve? Burdett clearly believed it to be realistic, and quoted from Sidmouth's official letter at the time of George's visit to Ireland in 1821, in order to explain his opinion. The letter expressed George's desire to remove every cause of irritation in Ireland, and Burdett hoped that

'such language must be considered as the statement of His Majesty's sentiments upon the subject<sup>1</sup>; and it would be in the highest degree unbecoming to suppose that His Majesty had elevated with the one hand the hopes of the people of Ireland, in order to enjoy the miserable pleasure of dashing them to the earth with the other.'<sup>2</sup>

On the subject of reform, Burdett claimed that 'by supporting the present government, I do not abandon, or sacrifice, one iota of my principles as a friend of parliamentary reform.' His answer to his critics<sup>3</sup> was that he

'must wish to achieve some practical good in my time. If I cannot do all I would, I am bound, without waiting until more extensive views may be adopted, to promote all the good which the opportunity of the passing moment offers me ... it is no small good to have removed from the King's councils that narrow-minded, bigoted part of the late administration.'<sup>4</sup>

Theoretical principles again took second place to practical objectives for Burdett.

At a time of such party confusion, Burdett's political independence was valuable to the new administration. Canning looked to him as a mediator, and pressed upon him the necessity of influencing prominent Whigs to support the ministry and to fill Household posts.<sup>5</sup> He even voiced his desire to make Burdett a peer in order to counter Lord Grey's obstructive presence in the Lords.<sup>6</sup> When this offer was made, Burdett's reaction was that of the independent who was totally uninterested in political favour. He explained to Hobhouse that he

<sup>1</sup>of Emancipation.

<sup>2</sup>*Hansard*, 2nd Series, 1827, xvi. 847.

<sup>3</sup>Cobbett and Hunt both accused Burdett of abandoning reform by supporting Canning. Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 62, pp. 340-1, 344, 420, 427, 429, 468, 473-4; J. Belchem, *Orator Hunt*, p.188.

<sup>4</sup>*Hansard*, 2nd Series, 1827, xvii. 531, 533; Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. d.94, f.4. Burdett to Lady Burdett, 5 May 1827.

<sup>5</sup>Lord Broughton, *Recollections*, iii. 197-8.

<sup>6</sup>*ibid.* iii. 208.

merely wished to serve the public, and that 'to become a peer would render him powerless in comparison with his present means of utility'. Only in his comment that 'he should like to have the offer made to him in order that he might give the people a proof of his constancy', was there a hint that he wished to retain his position, from earlier years, as a popular political hero.<sup>1</sup>

Burdett remained very much at the centre of government discussions whilst Canning's ministry lasted. In July, for example, he was hosting a dinner at which Lansdowne, Bickersteth, Calcraft and Fergusson planned certain legal reforms.<sup>2</sup> But on 8 August, all such plans came to an abrupt end with Canning's death. At that moment, and for several months afterwards, the political confusion was just as great as at the start of the ministry. Hobhouse's brother observed that, 'Burdett is completely at a loss where to sit in the House [and] .... it is also uncertain what Brougham means to do, or what is to be done by anybody'.<sup>3</sup> As a Whig party loyalist, Tavistock could only conclude that, 'the King and Canning have divided us and defeated us'. The only good, he continued, would be for Burdett, as 'it will release him from the net in which he had entangled himself'.<sup>4</sup> Burdett's support had been a personal gesture towards Canning, and he admitted to Hobhouse that he now found himself in a difficult position:

'I have no doubt in my own mind .... that this pitiful cabinet<sup>5</sup>, the King's own handywork, could not and ought not to stand; at the same time, having got myself into, in Wellington phraseology, a false position, some address is required in withdrawing from it, or rather in preparing the minds of others for the movement .... I have written to Huskisson to acquaint him with my sentiments and to say I would call on him if he wished for further explanation, so that I have prepared my way for whatever line of conduct it may be advisable to adopt, always however keeping in view, kindness, as far as it is possible, towards those I can no longer support.'

<sup>1</sup>*ibid.* 209-10.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.* 207.

<sup>3</sup>Add. MS. 36464, f.123, Hugh Hobhouse to Hobhouse, 29 Dec. 1827.

<sup>4</sup>Add. MSS. 36464, f.166, Tavistock to Hobhouse, 5 Jan. 1828.

<sup>5</sup>The Cabinet was basically that of Canning's government but with Goderich at its head. He was unable to avoid a Whig split over the appointment of J.C. Herries, an anti-Catholic Tory, to the Exchequer. Only George's direct request to Lansdowne to carry on in office prevented his resignation. In January, Herries threatened his own resignation if Althorp was appointed to the Chair of the parliamentary finance committee. A. Mitchell, *The Whigs in Opposition*, pp. 204-8.

On the subject of making a speech in favour of reform, he continued:

'I am principally deterred by the fear of playing the game of the old faction more effectually, for I cannot conceal from myself that it is playing it in some degree to knock up the present administration, if such it can be called. A display of strong reform views would, I fear, aid them<sup>1</sup> greatly, perhaps reconsolidate them and reunite them with the king. I rather think Reform must come, if at all .... like a thief in the night, and that the country must be led blindfold to the point when the step must be taken and from which there will be no power of retracting. A great splash just now would run the risk of drowning it .... My present impression is .... to be vigilant, but quiet, 'laissez-faire' seems to me at this moment the dictate of wisdom .... one ought to be very clear before taking a very decided step and we are far too little informed at present to be able to determine anything very satisfactorily.'<sup>2</sup>

Without Canning, Burdett feared, and as events proved, correctly so, that the embryonic administration under Goderich was feeble and unable to sustain a government. His main fear was clearly that the king would be forced back into the arms of the remnants of the Liverpool ministry, from whom no Catholic, or any other, reforms, could be expected. To avoid this calamity, he advised abstaining from hostile criticism of the Goderich ministry. In this confusing situation, the naïvety and unsoundness of Burdett's views about the power of the Crown had been revealed. He must have hoped that the King would have formed, as he tried to do, an administration that inclined to the liberal concessions expected from Canning. The reality of the situation however, was that by 9 January, George had been forced to turn to Wellington and to those whom Burdett denoted, 'the bigots', apparently opposed to any concessions.<sup>3</sup> Burdett's belief that the Crown should have a free hand meant that no steps could be taken to interfere with its own choice of ministers. The party confusion created by Canning's original appointment had, in the final analysis, therefore, resulted in the supporters of Wellington being the only group who remained to form an administration to George's liking. Such was the highly unsatisfactory result of the dissolution of party ties so welcomed by Burdett in April 1827.

<sup>1</sup>'the old faction'.

<sup>2</sup>Add. MSS. 47222, f.227, Burdett to Hobhouse, 31 Dec. 1827.

<sup>3</sup>The initial presence of the Huskissonites in government was the only factor that gave grounds for hope of a more liberal policy.

The events which convinced Wellington of the necessity of granting Catholic Emancipation do not form part of this thesis. It is merely sufficient here to trace Burdett's role in the process. After the promising passage of Lord John Russell's Bill to abolish the Test and Corporation Acts for Dissenters, Burdett introduced another Emancipation Bill on 8 May 1828, which passed the Commons by 272 to 266.<sup>1</sup> Burdett was then one of the team that took the Bill up to the Lords and he continued to be very much involved in the measure when the government introduced their own Bill in February 1829.<sup>2</sup> The subject of the disfranchisement of the Irish 40s freeholder was once again divisive, and a Whig party meeting was held at Burdett's London home to discuss whether the opposition should agree to this government-proposed 'wing' to the general measure. To the despair of Daniel O'Connell, the majority agreed to support it.<sup>3</sup>

As in 1825, Burdett confessed that he was prepared to 'gulp the measure for the sake of carrying the great question<sup>4</sup>, and in the House, he explained that he 'gave his support .... on the clear understanding that this was to form a part of the great principle of compromise, intended to satisfy, not only our Roman Catholic fellow subjects, but to allay the apprehensions of the Protestant inhabitants of Ireland'. The price, he agreed, was dear, but 'he was prepared to pay it for the purchase of so valuable a measure'.<sup>5</sup> Burdett's commitment was again to tangible, practical results, rather than to the fulfilment of perfect, abstract principles. Indeed, in these months of the Wellington government when party principles were again under such strain, when the Whigs were attempting to regroup after the splits of 1827, and when the Ultras were turning angrily against Wellington following his ceding of Emancipation, Burdett, with no party loyalties, was optimistic that tangible good might be the result of such turmoil.

<sup>1</sup>*Hansard*, 2nd Series, 1828, xix. 375-419. Russell's Bill had been passed on 26 Feb. 1828. *Hansard*, 2nd Series, 1828, xviii. 781.

<sup>2</sup>The other members were Williams Wynn, Huskisson, Brougham, Littleton, Mackintosh and Spring Rice. *The Diary and Correspondence of Lord Colchester*, iii. 565. Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. d.94, f.51, Burdett to Lady Burdett, 2 Aug. 1828: 'I never was so occupied as this session.'

<sup>3</sup>*The Correspondence of Daniel O'Connell*, iv. no. 1532, O'Connell to Edward Dwyer, 6 Mar. 1829.

<sup>4</sup>Lord Broughton, *Recollections*, iii. 303; *Hansard*, 2nd Series, 1829, xx. 100-1.

<sup>5</sup>*Hansard*, 2nd Series, 1829, xx. 1375-6.

'There is every prospect' he observed to Hobhouse, 'of a blessed confusion; out of which chaos may arise Reform. This, I expect, as religiously as the Jews the Messiah.'<sup>1</sup> There was nothing, he continued, defensible about Wellington save his carrying the Catholic Question, and he publicly accused the ministry of 'total apathy and insensibility .... a complete unacquaintance with the interest of the country'.<sup>2</sup> As a result, Burdett gave his full support to Whig reform and retrenchment motions, and presented many petitions that all complained of general distress.<sup>3</sup>

But although he gave Whig motions his support in the Commons, he still refrained from enlisting under the party banner. His conspicuous absence from a Whig party reunion meeting at Althorp's rooms indicated that his aim was still that of independence.<sup>4</sup> Whilst supporting Blandford's reform motion in the House, Burdett again called for unity behind the banner of reform, rather than a continuation of the old party divisions. The only distinction, he advocated, should be between reformers and non-reformers; he himself, was prepared to enlist under the banner of reform, whoever might raise it.<sup>5</sup> As for the specific reforms that might be proposed, let 'any .... mode be adopted for infusing fresh spirit into the House, and he should be content'.<sup>6</sup>

As dissatisfaction with the Wellington government increased, Burdett, as the independent 'eminence grise' of the reform cause, once again became desirable as a figurehead for diverse groups who wished to promote reform. On 15 June 1830, Hobhouse dined with Thomas Attwood of Birmingham and Lord John Russell at Burdett's house.<sup>7</sup> The following month, Burdett was invited to speak at the inaugural meeting of Attwood's Birmingham Political Union, and the arrangement of the meeting for Burdett's convenience testified to his importance still as a reform leader.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Add. MSS. 47222, f.241; Burdett to Hobhouse, 30 June 1829.

<sup>2</sup>*Hansard*, 2nd Series, 1830, xxii. 173.

<sup>3</sup>*ibid.* xxiii. 176, 388, 807-17, 989-90.

<sup>4</sup>A. Mitchell, *The Whigs in Opposition*, p.227.

<sup>5</sup>*Hansard*, 2nd Series, 1830, xxii. 706.

<sup>6</sup>*ibid.* 710.

<sup>7</sup>Lord Broughton, *Recollections*, iv. 28-9.

<sup>8</sup>Add. MSS. 36466, f.203, Attwood to Hobhouse, 17 July 1830; f.211, Burdett to Hobhouse, 25 July 1830.

Burdett was equally enthusiastic for the cause of reform on French soil, and followed events there with great interest. The moderation of France's revolution in 1830 earned great praise from him<sup>1</sup>, and through his wife, he was in touch with the circles of Louis Philippe.<sup>2</sup> He chaired a Westminster dinner to celebrate recent events in France, and despite Hobhouse's initial fears for the possible adverse effects it might have on City friends, the dinner passed off with a notable lack of revolutionary enthusiasm!<sup>3</sup>

At the General Election on the accession of William IV, Burdett and Hobhouse were returned, unopposed, for Westminster<sup>4</sup>, and both welcomed the numbers of new Whig and reformer faces in the Commons. But at the very moment when the prospects for reform were so bright, Burdett was unluckily struck down by his old enemy, the gout, and was forced to be content with hearing of the increasing discomfiture of the Wellington ministry at second hand from Hobhouse and Brougham.<sup>5</sup> Burdett could only curse his own helplessness, and express his opinions on paper. His gout was

'very unlucky, and what a moment! .... What figures ministers make - it can't go on ... The Duke ... must go, it is not to be borne, ignorance and presumption personified .... Lord Grey seems to have made a good speech notwithstanding his sophistry about abstract right. He declares for efficient reform, that's enough.'<sup>6</sup>

He did struggle up to Town, on the grounds that, 'where can a man finish better than at his post'<sup>7</sup>, but was unable to attend the Civil List division which brought Wellington's government to an end on 16 November. Burdett pledged his support for Grey's new ministry<sup>8</sup>, and wrote enthusiastically to Place, that 'the Cause looks well and now only wants discretion to make it triumph'.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Patterson, ii. 580-1; Burdett to Le Chevalier, 14 May 1830.

<sup>2</sup>Patterson, ii. 577. Lady Burdett pursued a correspondence with Adelaide d'Orléans, sister of Louis Philippe. Burdett even contemplated a trip to Paris in the autumn. Add. MSS. 47222, f.256, Burdett to Hobhouse, 10 Sept. 1830.

<sup>3</sup>Lord Broughton, *Recollections*, iv. 46.

<sup>4</sup>*Morning Chronicle*, 2 Aug. 1830.

<sup>5</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. d.96, f.23, Tuesday 9 n.d. 1830, Hobhouse to Burdett; f.25, 3 Nov. 1830; MSS. Eng. Lett d.97, ff. 54-5, Brougham to Burdett, 7 Nov. 1830.

<sup>6</sup>Add. MSS. 47222, f.264, Burdett to Hobhouse, 5 Nov. 1830.

<sup>7</sup>*ibid.* f.266, Burdett to Hobhouse, 7 Nov. 1830.

<sup>8</sup>*Hansard*, 3rd Series, i. 944.

<sup>9</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. c.64, f.73, Burdett to Place, 20 Dec. 1830.

Amidst a whole range of opinions on reform in the winter of 1830, Burdett's views were still quite clear. He remained wedded to his 'country' inspired views of purification rather than radical innovation. In Committee on the East Retford Bill, he had shown no real liking for O'Connell's secret ballot proposals. They 'might be an excellent palliative for the present defective system' and he was not averse to experimenting with them in this one instance, but ideally he stressed, if 'all boroughs had a numerous body of electors, there would be no need of introducing the vote by ballot. Make the electors but numerous, and the Parliament short, and he wanted no other support than the unbiassed expression of public opinion'.<sup>1</sup> In a subsequent debate upon distress, Burdett demanded that the sufferings of the manufacturing districts be relieved, but still his main priority was that the landed interest should not relinquish their leading position, for those gentlemen were 'the natural defenders of the people of England'.<sup>2</sup> Was it therefore any surprise that Burdett felt out of place at the dinner with the representatives of Attwood's manufacturing community and confessed to Hobhouse, 'I shall .... be very, very glad when tomorrow is over'?<sup>3</sup> In his speech at the dinner, Burdett asked the Union to be true to the interests of the constitution and to rescue William IV from the boroughmongers<sup>4</sup>, whilst Attwood addressed the more complex, and arguably more relevant, issues of the currency and distress.

Burdett was a countryman who, during his rides across the countryside in the autumn of 1830, lamented the increasing demise of 'Old England, now half-destroyed by railroads and inclosures, steam engines and canals'.<sup>5</sup> Were the expectations of such a country gentleman to be fulfilled or shattered by the work of Grey's reform ministry and the years that followed?

<sup>1</sup>*Hansard*, 2nd Series, 1830, xxii. 1338-9.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.* xxiii. 814.

<sup>3</sup>Add. MSS. 36466, f.211, Burdett to Hobhouse, 25 July 1830.

<sup>4</sup>*Morning Chronicle*, 30 July 1830.

<sup>5</sup>Add. MSS. 47222, ff. 135-6, Burdett to Hobhouse, 21 Sept. 1830.

## CHAPTER 7: FROM INDEPENDENCE TO ISOLATION

The period from the formation of Grey's ministry at the end of November 1830 to June 1832, when Royal Assent was given to the Reform Bill was, quite naturally, one of great significance in Burdett's career. It represented the culmination of almost forty years in politics campaigning for reform. Looking forward to the future, the terms of the Bill and the personalities that rose to prominence during the struggle for it both set the tone for Burdett's attitudes until his death in 1844. The significance of the Bill for Burdett, and his reaction to the political groupings that arose to ensure its success, must be fully understood in order to evaluate his notorious declaration of conservatism in 1837. To many contemporaries, his action was a 'volte-face' from all his political views and associations up to that point. This chapter will seek to prove that far from being a political 'volte-face', Burdett's crossing of the House to the Conservative benches, in 1837, was the logical step in view of Burdett's interpretation of the Reform Bill. His crossing of the House merely demonstrated where 'country' attitudes lay in the late 1830s.

In the months before Russell revealed the Reform Bill to the House on the 1 March 1831, the country was in a state of tension and expectation. Burdett was for strong measures in order to preserve peace in the country at large.<sup>1</sup> The problems of agricultural and manufacturing distress loomed large, and served only to heighten the expectations of protagonists for reform, or alternatively, to increase the fears of those to whom reform was deeply abhorrent. The ministry had to aim to satisfy the former groups, whilst gradually conciliating and winning over the latter; a hugely difficult, perhaps impossible, task. In a letter to Lady Burdett in February 1831, Burdett revealed a shrewd grasp both of the state of the country and of the Ministry's problems. It is worth quoting at length. The Ministry,

'cannot be approved by anybody who receives pensions and expect to quarter their families on the Public, nor by the Party impatient who expect impossibilities and will not, at the same time make any allowances for obstacles or difficulties, but expect every theory to be done at once as

<sup>1</sup>Lord Broughton, *Recollections*, iv. 74.

if they were not ministers but conjurors .... Nor can they satisfy 'poor discontents' who rub the elbow and look for a time of hurly burly innovation, nor the conceited, shallow newspaper writers, the statesmen of Reviews and Magazines who think they ought to govern the world and look for a change à la Parisien and à la Belgique. Their difficulties are immense and they have nothing to rely upon .... but their integrity: that they possess, I believe, and therefore think that every honest man should support them and every wise one who wishes for reform and not Revolution. For what is to come next? The old Tory system, the enormous corruption of Mr. Pitt, never can return. The principles of the first are worn out, and the state of the money, as well as of the public mind, render impossible the second. I don't mean by this, to say that I think all that they [the Grey Ministry] might or ought, [sic] on the contrary, I blame their want of energy, disapprove many of their acts, but if they fall, what are we to look for? Nothing presents itself to my mind in any direction but what is far the worse.<sup>1</sup>

The letter is distinguished by its caution and realistic expectations. Burdett's attitude stemmed from years of personal experience of campaigning for reform and yet achieving nothing on the statute book. On the one hand experience had revealed how entrenched opposition attitudes were to reform, and on the other, had shown how fragmented and deeply divided the reform movement itself was. Burdett's own experience therefore enabled him fully to appreciate and to estimate the extent of the Ministry's difficulties. At a time when partisan spirits in both camps were increasing and opposing battle lines being drawn up, Burdett's letter had a detached assessment of all the warring factions. Such a tone sprang again from his own commitment to independence: independence as a political creed, and as a code for political behaviour. The letter clearly stated the support Burdett was prepared to give to Grey's ministry as the best and only possible option in the circumstances; it was an independent, pragmatic approach reminiscent of his support for Canning in 1827.

Burdett's letter made no mention of the popular accusations against Grey's ministry; that they, for example, planned to retain their own rotten boroughs, or that a significant number of Grey's family had quickly received government

<sup>1</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. d.94, f.56: Burdett to Lady Burdett, 10 Feb. 1831. Similar sentiments in Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. c.64, f.125; Burdett to his daughter, Susan, 6 Jan. 1831.

places.<sup>1</sup> It hardly seems possible that Burdett can have been in ignorance of these rumours, and the conclusion must be drawn that he was more likely deliberately to have passed over them in his uncritical, eulogistic enthusiasm for the imminent fulfilment of the reform cause he had championed for so long. The fact remains that his attitude in 1830 stood in contrast to his opinion in 1806-1807 when he had been extremely critical of the Whig scramble for place during the Talents Ministry.<sup>2</sup>

During these tense months before the presentation of the Bill, Burdett was in close touch with Whig government circles. As early as November 1830, his role as mediator between the ministry and radicals was becoming clear. To Grey, he reported conversations he had had with many reformers, and communicated their expectation of 'an efficient reform .... doing away all private and rotten boroughs'. He also voiced fears communicated to him about personalities: Lansdowne and Goderich in high office would be unpopular, Lord Anglesey was well-respected in and out of the House and Brougham had to be dealt with firmly. Burdett also personally urged Grey to be firm.<sup>3</sup>

According to Brougham, Burdett was made the Cabinet's 'confidant under seal of secrecy, and the outline of the (Reform) plan was .... communicated to him'. Brougham recorded that Burdett's reaction to the plan was that it was 'far too good news to be true .... He was overjoyed, but greatly doubted if we did not go too far. He made one or two suggestions both as to the measure itself and our mode of proceeding, some of which we took advantage of'. Hobhouse too confirmed Burdett's and his own, astonished reaction, and their fears that 'our Westminster friends would oppose the £10 qualification clause, but we were wrong for we found all our supporters delighted with the Bill'.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*The Poor Man's Guardian* noted that Lord Grey and nineteen of his relatives had received £171,892 p.a. from government offices and posts. Quoted in W.D. Rubenstein, 'The End of Old Corruption in Britain, 1780-1860', *Past and Present*, 101 (1983) p.73.

<sup>2</sup>See above, Chapter 3, pp. 59, 62.

<sup>3</sup>MSS. of 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Grey, Durham, ff. 16 & 16a, Burdett to Grey, 18 Nov. 1830.

<sup>4</sup>*The Life and Times of Henry, Lord Brougham*, iii. 49, 102-3; Lord Broughton, *Recollections*, iv. 93.

Reactions from both camps to the Bill are not of concern here.<sup>1</sup> Burdett's reactions and arguments in favour of the Bill are, however, to be studied in detail for their continuation of the 'country' independent ideas on reform that he had always advocated.<sup>2</sup> Burdett voted for the Bill in all its readings but his speech, in answer to Peel, on the second reading, was particularly characteristic.

Burdett denied that the excitement for reform was a novel one by tracing the campaign back through the years of post-war distress and Peterloo to Grey's reform motion in 1797. In all these years, he claimed, the people had asserted the right of 'free elections' according to the 'ancient and original principles of the constitution', and had asserted that boroughmongers were 'contrary to common and statute law of the land'. Political unions such as that at Birmingham were formed only because the people were denied a legitimate channel for the expression of their grievances and because they had totally lost confidence in the House. Reformers merely wanted to 'restore and preserve the Constitution in all its genuine purity', and Burdett strongly denied that this would mean that the Crown would sit less firmly on the monarch's head, or that the constitutional privileges of peers would thereby be threatened. It was merely the system of boroughmongers that was no longer to be borne: 'it had cost us America, it had produced the war with France, with a legacy of oppression on the industry of the country in the shape of our immense debt .... The Bill gave the People all which they required', and would be a 'source of inestimable benefit not only to them but their remotest descendants'.<sup>3</sup>

Burdett's speech was the classical 'country' argument for reform and restated all the themes traced in this study. His main object of hatred was the corrupt, factional influence of the boroughmongers, who cut out the natural rights of landed property from the representative system and, at the same time, curtailed

<sup>1</sup>For a detailed study of all reactions to the Bill, see, M. Brock, *The Great Reform Act*, Chapter 5, pp. 161-93.

<sup>2</sup>Once again, Burdett's reactions contrast with Hobhouse's specifically Whig ones. The latter praised the Bill as the 'greatest event ... that has occurred since the Revolution of 1688.' Lord Broughton, *Recollections*, iv. 92.

<sup>3</sup>*Hansard*, 3rd Series, 1831, iv. 901, 902. Other occasions when Burdett spoke in favour of ministers and the Bill: *ibid.* iv. 421-3; viii. 860-1; 913-19; ix. 116-21; 1832, xii. 893-4; 959-67.

the use of the Crown's legitimate prerogatives. Burdett stressed the central 'country' obsessions as they developed through that century, especially the Debt problem created by the wars against America and France. This had always been the greatest worry to the 'country' landowner who feared that the National Debt's size would ultimately threaten the stability of society. Burdett's main argument for the need for reform was therefore the standard 'country' case. His remedy was likewise: he recommended the restoration of the ancient constitution. As remarked upon many times in this study, this was the exclusively English 'country' reform tradition. It looked back to ancient statutes and principles, whether mythical or not, and it looked back to procedures and rights enshrined in Common Law rather than forward to a theoretical, innovatory blueprint for reform. Most notably, and this indicated a distinctively 'country' rather than Whiggish line, Burdett asserted the just rights of the monarch and equally those of the House of Lords. This, and his insistence on the finality of the Bill, was a clear indicator of how far he was to diverge from extreme radicals who subsequently desired further change and real innovation. As with Catholic Emancipation in the 1820s, Burdett also urged the imperative, practical argument for reform: the people had lost all confidence in the House and therefore reform must be immediate in order to preserve the old institutions by a restoration of respect for them. On the theoretical level, Burdett's argument was a totally 'country' one. By the dominant yardstick of purification rather than innovation, the Reform Bill was totally satisfying for in Burdett's opinion, it promised to eliminate boroughmonger influence and to restore the just influence of property in its traditional and some new forms. The speech therefore hinted very clearly that for Burdett the Bill fulfilled the 'country' case and would most likely complete his personal campaign.

Hunt accused Burdett of abandoning the radical programme of short parliaments and universal male suffrage by supporting the Bill<sup>1</sup>, but as has been proved many times in this study, apart from the 1818 flirtation with Benthamite

<sup>1</sup>*Hansard*, 3rd Series, 1831, v. 777-80, for Burdett's speech; 780-1, for Hunt's accusations. Hunt consistently voted against the Bill because it contained neither annual parliaments nor universal male suffrage.

radicalism, annual parliaments and universal suffrage had never been a feature of Burdett's personal reform platform.

The dominant assertion by Burdett in all the tense months of the Reform Bill debates was loyalty to this Bill and to the ministers: other parliamentary business must wait until the Bill was ensured; those radicals who criticised the Bill injured the Reform cause as a whole; it was every honest man's duty to support this Bill and these ministers as the best practical and only possible option; if this Bill failed, no man could answer for the consequences of the people's disappointed reaction.<sup>1</sup> In the days of May 1832 following Grey's resignation after defeat in the House of Lords, Burdett, in the House and at meetings, counselled this moderation and total loyalty to the Whig ministers.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly in private correspondence, Burdett struck the same note and revealed a particularly uncritical admiration for Grey:

'Lord Grey has honestly and boldly grappled with them<sup>3</sup> .... he alone can know all the difficulties .... therefore whilst we believe him honest, we cannot do better than support him in the way he thinks most advantageous. Any shew of suspicion can tend to no good .... Lord Grey is our General upon this occasion, we must trust him and above all we must not weaken him by any appearance of wavering in our line .... if we fall off finding fault because he does not do just as we think he ought, and [if we] show discontent and dissatisfaction and approaching disunion, we shall render that which is, of itself sufficiently difficult, impossible; we shall split and quarrel among ourselves and be beaten.'<sup>4</sup>

Written to Place, this letter was obviously both a private one and indirectly a public declaration to his constituents. From personal experience Burdett was well aware of the many conflicting personalities and aims in the metropolitan radical movement alone, and he was therefore anxious to convey his opinion at such critical times.<sup>5</sup> Unity, so that the Bill reached the statute book, was the priority for every realistic reformer. In fact, Burdett found little to fear from his own constituency. In Westminster there was a solid phalanx of support for

<sup>1</sup>*Hansard*, 3rd Series, 1831, iv. 421-3; viii. 860-1, 913-9; ix. 116-21.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.* 1832, xii. 893-4; *Morning Chronicle*, 12 May 1832 reporting a Westminster meeting with Burdett in the Chair.

<sup>3</sup>the boroughmongers.

<sup>4</sup>B.L. Add. MSS. (Place Papers) 35149, f.103: Burdett to Place, 24 Oct. 1831.

<sup>5</sup>Oct./Nov. 1831 riots and the formation of armed associations from the political unions in order to try and pass the Bill.

the Bill which was reflected in the unopposed re-election of Burdett and Hobhouse in May 1831.<sup>1</sup> On 23 May, in the last of the long series of triumphant 'Purity of Election' dinners that had started in 1807, Burdett praised Westminster's efforts for reform in dangerous times. These efforts would now be rewarded by the cleansing of the House, 'from the foul contagion of the boroughmongering influence'.<sup>2</sup>

Radical opposition to the Bill came not from the ranks of the respectable Westminster householders, nor from veteran radical campaigners like Thomas Hardy<sup>3</sup>, but from the more recent radical groupings in the emerging Political Unions. Following the defeat of the Bill's second reading in the House of Lords on 8 October 1831, confirmation of the Lords' implacable opposition to any change, the situation in the country began to take ominous turns for the worse. Moderate associations from the spring, such as the Parliamentary Candidates Society inspired by Place and supported by Burdett<sup>4</sup> seemed likely to be overtaken and swamped by national Political Unions designed to bring direct pressure to bear on those entrenched interests opposed to reform. These were the clear signs of the fragmentation of society and of the threats to the established order that Burdett, Grey and all moderate reformers had specifically hoped to avert by the initial launching of the Bill. To his friends' surprise and alarm, Burdett accepted the Presidency of the London, working-men-based National Political Union and chaired its first meeting on 1 November 1831.<sup>5</sup> His argument for doing so was that, 'if he did not put himself at the head of this

<sup>1</sup>*Morning Chronicle*, 3 May 1831. It was extraordinary that Burdett's 'country' line was bought by the Westminster electorate for so long, especially in the light of changes that the Reform Bill made to the electorate there. The £10 level did give something very near household suffrage in Westminster, though the conditions about residence were to deprive a good many of votes. In the final analysis Westminster's electorate of about 16,000 was reduced by about a quarter. M. Brock, *The Great Reform Act*, p.165.

<sup>2</sup>*Morning Chronicle*, 24 May 1831; Lord Broughton, *Recollections*, iv. 109, 113.

<sup>3</sup>Hardy wrote enthusiastically in support of the Bill to Burdett. Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. c.65, f.174; Hardy to Burdett, 7 Mar. 1831.

<sup>4</sup>Add. MSS. 35149, (Place Papers), f.41; Burdett to Place, 15 Mar. 1831; f.46, Printed handbill showing the aims of the Parliamentary Candidates Society, instituted to promote the return of fit and proper members for the House.

<sup>5</sup>Sir. D. Le Marchant, *Memoirs of John Charles, Viscount Althorp, 3rd Earl Spencer*, (London 1876), p.366; A. Aspinall, *Three Early Nineteenth Century Diaries*, (London 1952) p.153.

Union some designing men would'.<sup>1</sup> In the context of the county Associations of the 1780s, this would have been a tenable position, but this mediating role for a country-gentleman between government and extreme radicals that Burdett must have been envisaging by such a step, was by no means automatic in the 1830s and was to lead to the revelation of very differing views on reform. In his speeches to the Union, Burdett continued to stress moderation and co-operation; confidence in Grey and other ministers, and the aim of purging the system of boroughmonger influence.<sup>2</sup> But such moderate aims had no common ground with other speakers such as Lovett<sup>3</sup>, who called for universal suffrage for all males over twenty-one, or with the secretary, Mr. Detrouisier, who viewed the Bill as a mere 'stepping-stone' to more extreme radical objectives.<sup>4</sup> Burdett quickly began to realise that these men's aims were not only widely divergent from his own, but were asserted in a new spirit of potential class division and bitterness that he probably did not fully understand, but instinctively abhorred. These views struck at generations of belief in a spirit of deference from the unrepresented ranks, and they protested against the leadership of the property-owning ranks of society, of which Burdett formed a part. On 28 November 1831, Burdett wrote to Mr. Detrouisier stating that he would, 'never concur in establishing permanent political clubs to watch, i.e. govern the government. It is a wild and fatal notion'. Instead, he stressed, the people ought to be grateful that ministers had undertaken the Herculean task of Reform on behalf of the people. It was the people's job to stand by them.<sup>5</sup> In private, Burdett was inevitably seeking to extricate himself from the association. His inherent aristocratic aloofness was again revealed when he confided to Hobhouse that it was all 'very allowable to play at Backgammon with Messrs. Place etc.' but in reality one should only have dealings in important things with gentlemen and men of education.<sup>6</sup> Burdett's

<sup>1</sup>Lord Broughton, *Recollections*, iv.146.

<sup>2</sup>*Morning Chronicle*, 1 Nov. 1831 and 11 Nov. 1831.

<sup>3</sup>the future Chartist leader.

<sup>4</sup>*Morning Chronicle*, 1 and 11 Nov. 1831.

<sup>5</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. c.64, f.42, Burdett to Mr. Detrouisier, 28 Nov. 1831. Burdett's fears of 'permanent political clubs' must surely be the memory of someone who had grown up in the 1790s when the Jacobins sent observers to watch and monitor the proceedings of the Convention?

<sup>6</sup>Lord Broughton, *Recollections*, iv. 151.

exchange of letters with the Union clearly revealed the gap between the two viewpoints. He acknowledged to friends: 'depend upon it, they understand me as well as I understand them .... neither side is duped'. and the inevitable conclusion to the affair came in February 1832 when Burdett resigned the Presidency on the grounds of objecting to the meeting's petition against fiscal restraints on the Press.<sup>1</sup>

But despite these obvious differences of opinion between Burdett and radicals, his role as mediator between reformers in general, both in and out of the House, and the Ministry should not be ignored or underestimated. In a correspondence with Grey, Burdett passed on extremely valuable information about reformers' hopes, fears and demands at critical junctures. In April 1831, he passed on a note from Place, and revealed Westminster's desire for a dissolution: 'There is .... a feeling in Westminster not to be controll'd, the same I hear in Southwark, the City and Middlesex', he observed.<sup>2</sup> In October 1831, he was passing on information from the Birmingham Union since, 'it is good you should know what comes from different quarters', and he therefore also showed to Grey a letter from, 'a man of a good deal of influence amongst the middle-class'. These men feared that Grey and Althorp would not be able to carry out their intentions. Burdett acknowledged his own role as mediator: 'all I can do is to let you hear what others say'.<sup>3</sup> He always advised confidence in the Ministry, he later reported and, 'my logic generally prevails, both with bodies and individuals'.<sup>4</sup> In the critical days of May 1832, Burdett reported reformers' anxiety that Grey would resign<sup>5</sup>, and he conveyed to Grey, in no uncertain terms, the feelings of the Political Union delegates with whom he had been dining:

'the account they give of the feelings and determination and union of the hundreds of thousands of their districts is really enough to make the most reckless and thoughtless

<sup>1</sup>Add. MSS. 47222, ff. 143-4; Burdett to Hobhouse, 1 Dec. 1831; Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. d.94, f.64, Burdett to Lady Burdett, 8 Dec. 1831; *Morning Chronicle*, 3 Feb. 1832.

<sup>2</sup>Grey MSS. ff. 6, 7, 7a; Burdett to Grey, 21 April 1831.

<sup>3</sup>*ibid.* f.12, Burdett to Grey; 24 Oct. 1831.

<sup>4</sup>*ibid.* f.13; Burdett to Grey, 21 ? 1831.

<sup>5</sup>*ibid.* f.23; Burdett to Grey, 4 May 1832.

pause to think .... I suppose you will not now hesitate making such changes as you think necessary for your own power .... as to his Grace of Wellington, I think it impossible he should ever again be Minister of England, the people would not endure it.<sup>1</sup>

These letters clearly indicated that, despite differences of opinion on the extent of reform measures, Burdett was still regarded as a leader of the reform cause by many radicals. From Grey's point of view, this eminence also made Burdett absolutely vital to him as a channel for information from bodies with whom, without such a mediator, Grey would have had dangerously little, perhaps no, contact. Letters from Grey in reply to Burdett, conveyed his opinions on measures of great concern to radicals<sup>2</sup>, and it was clearly through the person of Burdett that Grey hoped to exert some influence on the potentially restive and alarming radicalism that lay outside the walls of the House. Burdett's role was indeed vital here.

Burdett also played a link-role between the Government and another important group, the Irish O'Connellites. In the light of Burdett's past association and interest in Ireland, and particularly the good working relationship he had established with Daniel O'Connell over Emancipation<sup>3</sup>, it was perhaps natural that Burdett sought to act as a mediator between O'Connell and the government. O'Connell and Grey both distrusted each other and their respective aims, and yet both needed each other's support. To O'Connell the Bill, though disappointing, was better than none at all, and to Grey, the O'Connellites in the early days of the Bill's passage in the House of Commons, represented valuable voting support, and promised reasonable tranquillity in Ireland during such difficult times. Burdett was not uncritical of O'Connell's attitude and measures: he criticised his tirade against the Whigs in February 1831 and agreed with Ministers that the Union question, the repeal of which O'Connell aimed to

<sup>1</sup>*ibid.* f.25; Burdett to Grey, 22 May 1832.

<sup>2</sup>Grey MSS. f.8, Grey to Burdett, 31 April, 1831; Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. c.65, f.153, Grey to Burdett, 22 May 1832; f.157, Grey to Burdett, 9 June 1832. Grey asked Burdett to use all his influence to get the Unions to disperse themselves.

<sup>3</sup>Burdett stressed this in a letter to Grey: Grey MSS. f.1, Burdett to Grey, April 1831.

discuss, could never be considered during times of such universal agitation.<sup>1</sup> Burdett attempted nevertheless, to secure O'Connell's release following the government's prosecution of him<sup>2</sup>, initiated in January 1831, and believed that only O'Connell could restore some peace and order to Ireland.<sup>3</sup> Grey's reply bemoaned O'Connell's ruinous public course and behaviour in Ireland, even though he admitted his good service on the Reform Bill. O'Connell's incitement of hostility to the government in Ireland, he continued, had made communication between the two impossible, and the government would therefore continue the prosecution even though it would make political life easier to drop it.<sup>4</sup> Burdett refused to take no for an answer, believing that the, 'peace of Ireland depends greatly on him'. He pressed Grey again to hint to the Irish Attorney General to postpone the judgement; Lord Anglesey, he believed, was also in favour of such a course.<sup>5</sup> Burdett's repeated urgings on this matter probably had a not inconsiderable amount of influence upon the ministry in the event, for the prosecution against O'Connell did lapse.<sup>6</sup>

The end of this prosecution, however, did not see an end to tense relations between O'Connell and the ministry, and its members still worried over the strength and potential, for agitation, of O'Connell's repeal movement. A further step towards some working understanding was achieved through the offices of Burdett and Arthur Paget<sup>7</sup> in October 1831, when O'Connell was promoted to King's Counsel, a step even Grey hoped would be a preliminary to a more useful

<sup>1</sup>*Hansard*, 3rd Series, 1831, ii. 336, 337-40.

<sup>2</sup>A prosecution initiated because of O'Connell's agitation in Ireland.

<sup>3</sup>Grey MSS. f.1, Burdett to Grey, April 1831. He hoped that O'Connell would not be brought up for judgement, 'great difficulty, I admit, but is it impossible?'

<sup>4</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. c.65, f.111, Grey to Burdett, 3 April 1831; Grey MSS. f.4, Grey to Burdett, 13 April 1831.

<sup>5</sup>*ibid.* f.5, Burdett to Grey, 20 April 1831.

<sup>6</sup>In May 1831, law officers decided that O'Connell's offences were punishable only under a statute that had expired. A. Macintyre, *The Liberator*, (London 1965), p.24

<sup>7</sup>Arthur Paget (1771-1840), diplomat and brother of Burdett's friend, Lord Anglesey.

connection with him.<sup>1</sup> For the moment, thanks to the offices of Burdett, some of the Irish tension eased, though the problem was to reassert itself as the ministry's main difficulty after the passage of the Reform Bill.

The reasons behind the communication between Grey and Burdett are worthy of examination for intimate as Burdett was with many Whigs up to 1830, he had never been so with Grey. Grey's aristocratic sentiments had totally disapproved of Burdett's early associations with the popular reform movement, and one suspects that he marked Burdett down as a disruptive demagogue rather than a responsible member of the landowning classes to which he so clearly ought to belong.<sup>2</sup> But Burdett's increasingly respectable associations with Whigs like the Hollands in the 1820s, his clear distancing of himself from Hunt and the extreme radicals, and his strenuous support for the Grey ministry from November 1830 had, however, resulted in this opening of communication between the two. From Grey's point of view, Burdett was clearly the man through which he hoped the Cabinet could exert an influence over the Political Unions. It was also coupled, however, with a genuine desire to recognise Burdett's reform services<sup>3</sup>, and came in the form of the offer of a peerage in 1831. Presumably Grey now hoped that Burdett would be a valuable supporter of the Bill and ministry in the House of Lords, where support was sorely needed. As Canning had been in 1827, however, Grey too was to be disappointed. Burdett was effuse in his thanks for the offer, but, adhering again to his independent code, still preferred to think he might be of more use in the Commons.<sup>4</sup> Even with a ministry he greatly admired, and whose aims he fully endorsed, Burdett refused to have any formal connection that might tie him to party obligations in the future. He still

<sup>1</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. c.65, f.127, Grey to Burdett, 22 Oct. 1831; A. Macintyre, *The Liberator*, p.26; Grey MSS. f.11, Burdett to Grey, 19 Oct. 1831: 'Pray lose no time in doing something to fix O'Connell.' Burdett enclosed a line from Paget who dined with O'Connell at Burdett's house. Presumably the meeting at Burdett's house established that O'Connell would be appointed King's Counsel.

<sup>2</sup>Whitbread MSS. Beds. C.R.O. no. 1966/1, Grey to Whitbread, 5 Dec. 1806. Burdett's conduct showed that 'every generous instinct in his heart is dead'.

<sup>3</sup>Grey MSS. f.4, Grey to Burdett, 13 April 1831, acknowledges the ministry's reliance upon Burdett as a leading reformer in the House of Commons.

<sup>4</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. c.65, f.121, Grey to Burdett, 5 Sept. 1831; f.123, Burdett to Grey, 6 Sept. 1831; f.125, Grey to Burdett, 7 Sept. 1831. A.D. Kriegel, *Holland House Diaries*, (London 1977), p.49.

remained profoundly against any party ties, and extraordinarily uninterested in political rewards.

The only favour Burdett strove to obtain, and thereby take advantage of his communication with Grey, was the reinstatement of Lord Cochrane to the navy, and an acknowledgement of his inheritance as Lord Dundonald, a favour which he obtained from the naval King William through the offices of Grey in May 1832.<sup>1</sup>

Communications between Grey and Burdett over Cochrane in the period September 1831 to May 1832, also inevitably covered much discussion of the question of a creation of peers to pass the Bill. As a continuation of Burdett's mediating role between the government and Unions, so now Grey wished to confide to Burdett the government's strenuous efforts to secure the Bill in the Lords. Grey must have hoped that Burdett would pass on such information to the radicals, and thus lessen the criticism that the ministry was doing nothing to secure the Bill, and that the radicals should therefore take the matter into their own hands. Grey did not wish to present a picture of insurmountable ministerial difficulties to the outside political world, and must have desired it to be known that the ministry was actively engaged in examining possible ways of securing the Bill in the Lords. In view of their efforts, he confided to Burdett, 'I do not think the public impatience on this subject fair to the government'.<sup>2</sup> This was a response to information, again channelled through Burdett, of the desire for a creation of peers amongst reformers in Westminster, a desire so strong as, 'to make it difficult to keep down clamour'. Ministers, Burdett confided, had lost ground with both reformers and supporters in the House of Commons, 'from a notion of their not showing sufficient vigour and decision'.<sup>3</sup> In response to this

<sup>1</sup>For communication between Grey and Burdett on the subject of Cochrane see: Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. c.65, f.118, 12 Aug. 1831; f.134, 8 Dec. 1831; f.136, 28 Jan. 1832; f.143, 2 Mar. 1832; MSS. Eng. Lett. d.94, f.77; 27 Feb. 1832; Grey MSS. f.9, 10 Aug. 1831; f.15, 8 Dec. 1831; f.18, 24 Jan. 1832.

<sup>2</sup>Grey MSS. Papers on Parliamentary Reform II, f.35, Grey to Burdett, 15 Feb. 1832.

<sup>3</sup>*ibid.* f.34, Burdett to Grey, 15 Feb. 1832. Burdett hinted that he too held this opinion.

valuable information, Grey explicitly stated the delicate line that the government had to tread:

'Nothing would have been easier than to cut with more energy than appearance but it would have been at the risk of breaking up the administration and of all the consequences that might have followed.'<sup>1</sup>

The details in the letters between Grey and Burdett suggest that Burdett was more than a mere channel for information between the ministry and radicals, but that he also developed into something of a personal friend. Grey confided to him his unwillingness to ask the King to sanction a mass creation of peers to pass the Bill since 'it is a question which goes to the absolute destruction of the House of Lords, an event which I certainly did not contemplate in endeavouring to reform the House of Commons'. By February, he was confessing himself to be an, 'old man overpowered by his work', and by May, was hoping that someone could be found to 'steer the ship into a safe port in case of his own failure'.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps by 1832 Grey recognised Burdett for the essentially moderate, aristocratic reformer that indeed he was; as such he was a sympathetic ear, and welcome ally, during times when all sorts of alarming radicals from outside the traditional political élite were appearing on the political stage, and demanding to be given a voice in the political process.<sup>3</sup>

Burdett's view of the peerage question was indeed essentially the same as Grey's. As he confided to Holland, he certainly did not wish to alter the inherent composition of the House of Lords, and he thought that, 'by selecting from the Scotch and Irish Peerage and calling up eldest sons of Peers and making a few old Whig supporters who .... deserve it, the Bill may be secured'.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. c.65, f.130, Grey to Burdett, 25 Oct. 1831. The consequences were of course, the return of a Wellington government, and rejection of reform, and thereupon, a general revolt in the country threatening disorder on a scale no property-owning man would wish to see.

<sup>2</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. c.65, f.127, Grey to Burdett, 22 Oct. 1831; f.138, Grey to Burdett, 19 Feb. 1832; f.147, Grey to Burdett, 5 May 1832; Grey MSS. f.14, Grey to Burdett, 24 Nov. 1831.

<sup>3</sup>Correspondence between Grey and Burdett does seem to indicate a mutual friendship. Burdett in his turn, asked Grey's advice on how to proceed with the Unions in the months after the Bill. Grey MSS. f.30, Burdett to Grey, 8 July 1832; f.32, 21 Aug. 1832; f.34, Grey to Burdett, 21 Aug. 1832.

<sup>4</sup>Add. MSS. 51569, (Holland House Papers), f.32, Burdett to Lord Holland, 20 Dec. 1831.

Like Grey, Burdett did not want to alter the composition of the Lords, but unlike him, he was more in touch with feelings outside the Cabinet and realised that the most essential thing was that the Bill should be secured. This forced him reluctantly to conclude to Grey: 'I suppose Peers will be created for I don't see how you are to succeed without. The King will surely not allow himself to be beat by a handful of Borough Proprietors.'<sup>1</sup> Knowing Grey's reluctance to create, he tried to impress upon him the gravity of the situation, and the overwhelming fact that the people must not be robbed of the Bill. Grey had to act, for, 'upon you rests the whole responsibility'.<sup>2</sup> From his long-standing connection with the Reform movement in Westminster, Burdett appreciated, far more than Grey, that the Bill had to be passed in order to satisfy opinion. 'Nothing but making Peers', he concluded, 'will make them easy and contented.'<sup>3</sup>

The Peers themselves, after the failure of Wellington to form a ministry between 10 and 15 May 1832, also realised that if any tranquillity was to be had for the country, Grey's ministry had to return and the Bill be accepted, if only by their abstention from the vote on it. Burdett's assessment, that the House of Lords' vote was 'the source of so much agitation and uneasiness' was thus quite correct.<sup>4</sup>

The hope that the country would be satisfied with the Bill depended of course, very much upon how it was regarded by public opinion outside Parliament. Burdett, as has been stressed, regarded the Bill as a final measure, but in the very first election after the new Bill, he faced opposition from those who wished to see further changes in the relationship between the constituency and its representatives. The issue in question was that of pledges, and especially those demanded from representatives, such as Hobhouse, who were in

<sup>1</sup>Grey MSS. f.23, Burdett to Grey, 4 May 1832.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.* f.25, Burdett to Grey, 22 May 1832. Burdett had confided to Hobhouse much earlier that Grey, 'does not seem sensible that he is the sole responsible Minister and if Reform fails, to him will the failure be imputed'. Broughton, *Recollections*, iv. 150. This feeling had been so much strengthened by May 1832 that he was forced to impress upon Grey personally the measure of his responsibility in order to persuade him to secure the Bill at last.

<sup>3</sup>Bodl. Lib. Eng. Lett. d.94, f.69, Burdett to Lady Burdett, 11 Feb. 1832.

<sup>4</sup>*Hansard*, 3rd Series, 1832, xii. 963.

office. In November 1832, the latter refused to give 'pledges' on his future political behaviour and therefore a plan was formed to oppose him by another reformer, Colonel Evans.<sup>1</sup> The radicals had long been attached to the notion of pledges from representatives<sup>2</sup> but Burdett had made his views quite clear on the subject. In August 1831 answering Hunt, Burdett admitted that popular members were, 'liable to be called to account by their constituents', but in the post-Reform Bill era when, by implication, 'honest' men, not corrupt borough nominees would be returned, the public, 'would acquiesce in the good sense and intelligence of Parliament'.<sup>3</sup> Pledges, in other words, would therefore be redundant. He repeated these sentiments in December 1832 on the hustings. Pledges were, 'good for knaves and attractive to fools', and men ought to trust each other when their interests were the same.

'They would not lend a knave 5 shillings upon a promise that he would return it next week, but they would lend it to an honest man, without any promise at all. The fact was that pledges were sham securities ... no honest, sensible or upright man, whose mind was open to truth would pledge himself to anything.'<sup>4</sup>,

concluded Burdett. Lord Anglesey wrote to congratulate him on his public stand against pledges<sup>5</sup>, but there were bitter criticisms from certain members of the Westminster Committee, and inevitably from Cobbett in the *Political Register*.<sup>6</sup> The latter was particularly virulent, and juxtaposed speeches from Burdett in 1806 and the present time. In 1806, announced Cobbett, Burdett had said that he would never agree that those holding Crown office should be representatives

<sup>1</sup>Lord Broughton, *Recollections*, iv. 153; Col. George de Lacy Evans, (1787-1870) after a distinguished Army career, came out of retirement, and contested Rye as a radical in 1830. He lost the seat after a petition against the result. He was successful against Hobhouse in the Westminster by-election of 1833. See below p.192.

<sup>2</sup>See. Betty Kemp, 'Patriotism, Pledges and the People' in, *A Century of Conflict 1850-1950*, ed. M. Gilbert, (1966), pp. 35-46.

<sup>3</sup>*Hansard*, 3rd Series, 1831, v. 780.

<sup>4</sup>*Morning Chronicle*, 10 Dec. 1831.

<sup>5</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. c.65, f.16, Lord Anglesey to Burdett, 22 Nov. 1832.

<sup>6</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Hist. b.200, f.183, Charles Sturgeon to Thomas Devear, Chairman of the Westminster Committee, 23 Nov. 1832; Cobbett's *Pol. Reg.* 78, pp. 562-3.

of the people; in 1832, by contrast, Burdett now saw no objection to Hobhouse being Westminster's M.P. whilst in office.<sup>1</sup> The disagreement is important, because it centred upon differing interpretations of the Reform Bill. Burdett saw the Bill as a final measure that, according to his 'country' aspirations had purified the House of Commons from corrupt influences. For him, the purged boroughs and new constituencies, whose franchise system was now based upon those who held legitimate property, would automatically return honest men to Parliament. These men would have the real interests of the country at heart and would not accept office merely as lucrative post. For Burdett, the terms of the Bill meant that constituencies could now trust their M.P.s and that there would be no need for checks upon them in the form of pledges. The Reform Bill had re-established this trust so that people could leave the business of governing to their representatives. Most emphatically, the Bill had not opened the door, as his radical critics hoped, to giving constituents a more definite voice in government, at the expense of their representatives, by means of pledges or future innovations in the constitution. In December 1832, Hobhouse and Burdett were triumphantly re-elected, but the affair indicated that differing interpretations of the Reform Bill would be a source of tension in Westminster in the future.<sup>2</sup>

In the light of Burdett's views about the Reform Bill, it is not surprising to find him at odds with radical causes in the 1830s. At the opening of the new 1833 reformed Parliament, Burdett supported the House of Commons' majority in favour of the experienced Speaker, Manners Sutton, while the radical 'triumvirs' of Hume, O'Connell and Cobbett backed Littleton. Burdett viewed their behaviour as empty 'caballing'.<sup>3</sup> In the same session, he opposed Hume's plans

<sup>1</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>2</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. d.94, f.87, Burdett to Lady Burdett, 11 Dec. 1832. *Morning Chronicle*, 13 Dec. 1832, gives the election returns: Burdett: 3248; Hobhouse: 3214; Evans: 1096. The fact that Burdett's conclusions on the men he hoped to see returned to Parliament by the Bill were entirely misplaced is discussed later in the chapter, pp. 199-200.

<sup>3</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. d.94, f.96, Burdett to Lady Burdett, 30 Jan. 1833.

to reduce still further the numbers of naval and military sinecures<sup>1</sup>; opposed his anti-ministerial stand on the revised Bank of England Charter; denied that Attwood's motion would contribute to alleviating distress, and voted against the radical motion to shorten Parliaments.<sup>2</sup> In the April 1833 Budget debates, when radical petitions requested the repeal of the House and Window Taxes, and included a petition from Westminster which occasioned Hobhouse's resignation, both Burdett and Hobhouse took the ministerial line that for the moment, the taxes should remain since the revenue they provided could not be supplied by a Property Tax. Burdett adhered to his opinion of 1831-2, and maintained that Ministers were, 'the honestest Administration that we ever had', and 'that every honest man was called upon to give them his support'.<sup>3</sup> The radicals however did not share this view, and scored a notable success when Evans beat Hobhouse at Westminster in the May by-election. The first chink had been made in the united Westminster reform front.<sup>4</sup>

In June 1835, during Grote's motion on the secret ballot, Burdett, as in 1830, denied that he anticipated the dangers that were supposed to arise from it, but felt that, 'he who concealed his feelings and his vote would be considered to have acted disreputably'. This was a time-honoured 'Country' objection to the ballot, and was based on the idea that a secret ballot would actually tend to increase corruption.<sup>5</sup> In the same month, Burdett sealed his separation from the

<sup>1</sup>A. Aspinall, *Three Early Nineteenth Century Diaries*, p.302. Burdett stated that he did not object to a Duke holding a Colonelcy as a reward for military service. He was in favour of officers being gentlemen because he thought only gentlemen could perform such duties well. *Hansard*, 3rd Series, xv. 706-8. Hume called this stance a 'turnabout' and Croker welcomed it as a Tory conversion but Burdett had in fact always held this line. See his letter to Hobhouse, 28 July 1823, when he agreed with Harrington that, 'there is something in the leading of armies, legislating for and management of states peculiarly fitted to the character of Gentlemen'. Add. MSS. 47222, f.102; Croker's *Correspondence and Diary*, (London 1884), ii. 202.

<sup>2</sup>*Hansard*, 3rd Series, 1833, xviii. 1352; xix. 1150-4.

<sup>3</sup>*Hansard*, 3rd Series, 1833, xvii, 823.

<sup>4</sup>A. Aspinall, *Three Early Nineteenth Century Diaries*, pp. 322, 328. O'Connell was jubilant: 'this is the strongest proof of the utter impossibility of the Whigs continuing in office. Burdett must now resign.' O'Connell to P.V. Fitzpatrick, 10 May 1833, O'Connell, *Correspondence*, v. no. 1974.

<sup>5</sup>*Hansard*, 3rd Series, 1835, xxviii. 461. In rather contrary fashion, however, Burdett, while disliking the ballot on 'country' theoretical grounds, declared he would vote for it because, 'if the measure should turn out to be effectual, it would serve to take away the delusions under which the people laboured respecting it'.

radical associates of his former years by refusing to contribute to a monument to Cobbett following his death. Instead Burdett sent the bonds for Cobbett's debt to him, which totalled, he calculated, £8000. These were ample proof, Burdett felt, of Cobbett's 'honesty'!<sup>1</sup>

In all these shifts away from the radicalism of the 1830s, Burdett was still the independent 'country' gentleman. His views remained completely static; far more appropriate to the early eighteenth century, than to the issues and political parties of the middle of the nineteenth. This is best illustrated by examining Burdett's reaction to one of the major issues of the 1830s, that of reform of the Poor Laws. Essentially, the fundamentals of the debate<sup>2</sup> centred around the proposal for a new, centralised control of the Poor Law machinery, or for a retention of the old method of supervision from the localities. Burdett did not deny that there were defects in the operation of the old system in some places but, 'he felt great repugnance to so extensive a change in a system which had existed so long'.<sup>3</sup> The new Bill proposed 'cumbersome machinery', when a proper administration of the old would equally produce beneficial effects. In 1838, when the same system was proposed for Ireland, Burdett again objected to the enormous outlay on workhouses when it could be profitably spent on relief, and 'as to preventing the poor of Ireland from going about to their friends and asking relief, it was the wildest and most mischievous notion'.<sup>4</sup> Privately, he confided to Hobhouse that he thought, 'slave apprentices were not worse off than the poor in some of the workhouses ... and said it was the only thing that made him apprehensive of a rising of the poor against the rich'.<sup>5</sup> Burdett's stand was a typical 'country' one. He was firmly in favour of small scale, local control of a system that thereby preserved time-honoured traditions of co-operation between different ranks in the community. The landlord fulfilled his

<sup>1</sup>M.W. Patterson, ii. 476. Burdett's Whig friends agreed that Cobbett's ingratitude to Burdett was intolerable. *Holland House Diaries*, ed. Kriegel, p.309.

<sup>2</sup>*The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. D. Fraser (London 1976); A. Brundage, *The Making of the New Poor Law*, (Rutgers U.P. 1978); N.C. Edsall, *The Anti-Poor Law Movement, 1834-44*, (Manchester U.P. 1971).

<sup>3</sup>*Hansard*, 3rd Series, 1834, xxiii. 822. Burdett voted for the second reading in the hope of decimating the Bill in Committee.

<sup>4</sup>*ibid.* 1838, xl. 1018.

<sup>5</sup>Lord Broughton, *Recollections*, v. 128-9.

responsibilities towards the parish poor, who in turn were grateful, deferential, and fulfilled their obligations to him. In theory, the mutual responsibilities were carried out by each party because they ensured the peace and prosperity of the whole of the small community. 'Country' views had always been suspicious of centralised interference at a local level, an interference that threatened the landowners' social and political influence, and now, in the case of the Poor Law, Burdett claimed that such interference threatened to dissolve the mutual responsibilities in the community, and instead, to divide men into mutually antagonistic classes. The maintenance of this 'country' argument as late as 1838 by Burdett, shows how far he was removed from the needs of a rapidly industrialising Britain, and how far he was embedded in the old 'country' political and social traditions of an essentially rural, eighteenth century society.

As Burdett remained wedded to a set of static 'country' values in the face of progressive Whig and radical opinions, so his social ties extended in a different direction. He still dined and corresponded with Whigs such as Ellice, the Hollands, Russell, Hobhouse and new members such as Henry Bulwer<sup>1</sup>, but several comments indicated a different direction where he might find the company and politics more congenial. On 25 Dec 1833, Burdett wrote to Hobhouse that a country life had been the object of his worship and,

'yet such has been the influence of my unlucky stars that I have had little opportunity of gratifying my task or acting that part in life which birth, parentage, and education and nature too seemed to have prepared me for and destined me too, and which I have increasingly yearned for.'<sup>2</sup>

The part was, of course, the one of 'country' gentleman, 'a Foxhunter and that sort of thing'.<sup>3</sup> Burdett began to gratify his yearnings for the country life and 'country' political attitudes, by forming friendships with men to whom these ideas were of primary importance, men such as the Tory, Croker. The two dined together with another country gentleman, and long-time friend of Burdett's, Sir

<sup>1</sup>A. Aspinall, *Three Early Nineteenth Century Diaries*, p.307; *Holland House Diaries*, ed. Kriegel, pp. 210 & 233; Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. d.96, f.44, Hobhouse to Burdett, 28 Nov. 1833; Add. MSS. 47229, f.273, Burdett to Hobhouse, 11 Dec. 1833; Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. c.65, f.27, H. Bulwer to Burdett, 5 Aug. 1835.

<sup>2</sup>Add. MSS. 47222, f.275, Burdett to Hobhouse, 26 Dec. 1833.

<sup>3</sup>*Holland House Diaries*, ed. Kriegel, p.307.

George Sinclair<sup>1</sup>, and according to Croker's jubilant report, 'rail against Radicals and revolutionaries and cry up to the Tories and the Irish Protestants'. Wellington confirmed that Burdett's 'opinion upon the state of affairs does not much differ from my own', and expressed no surprise at Burdett's dislike of the radical call for further innovation since, 'he is one of the largest and most prosperous landed proprietors in England'.<sup>2</sup>

The political issue over which Burdett was finally to part company with his old Whig and radical allies was the extremely complex one of Ireland: how to pacify her lawlessness, and how to reform the vastly over-endowed Church of Ireland. The subject was indeed an immense one that dissolved many political ties in the 1830s, and shattered Grey's ministry. Very few politicians were able to see their way through to a consistent line on all the issues; all certainly would have agreed with Burdett that it, 'was a subject which was calculated to drive a wise man mad'.<sup>3</sup> In the 1833-4 sessions, Burdett's votes were broadly ministerial, although he did criticise aspects of Stanley's earlier Tithe Composition Act. He voted for the Coercion Bill and for Althorp's outlined plans to amend the Irish Church Establishment.<sup>4</sup> But the problem of lay appropriation of surplus Irish Church revenues broke up the Grey ministry when Stanley, Graham, Ripon and Richmond resigned over Russell's declaration in favour of the principle of lay appropriation. Burdett's attitude, whilst these principles were being contested, was again to seek a non-doctrinaire, practical solution that could transcend strictly party and religious boundaries. His most strenuous efforts were directed towards attempting a reconciliation between Grey and O'Connell. As in 1831-2, he assumed the role of mediator, although this time events were to prove, with much less success. O'Connell, Burdett believed, was conciliatory, and he pressed Grey to have a personal meeting with him. 'This

<sup>1</sup>For correspondence between Burdett and Sinclair: Vol. x. 'Political and Personal correspondence between Sir Francis Burdett and Sir George Sinclair, 1813-44', in the Sinclair MSS. belonging to Viscount Thurso, and on loan to the Scottish R.O., Edinburgh.

<sup>2</sup>Croker, *Correspondence and Diaries*, ii. 202-3, 205, 208, 211; Croker Papers, Clements Library, f.6, Burdett to Croker, 12 Nov. 1834.

<sup>3</sup>*Hansard*, 3rd Series, 1834, xxiii. 667.

<sup>4</sup>*ibid.* 1833, xv. 458; 585-88; 1834, xxiii. 666-7.

could easily be managed', he urged, 'and if you thought fit, I might be present.'<sup>1</sup> O'Connell was the clue to peace in Ireland: if the government came to an understanding with him, the Repeal question could be set at rest. Burdett reported to Grey that only the Tithe Question and a Corporation Reform were the points O'Connell insisted upon, and Burdett did not see that O'Connell's 'propositions respecting the first are materially different from those of Government'. His suggestion was that,

'a promise may be made that .... O'Connell shall receive some appointment to be agreed upon. If he was made Master of the Rolls, he must necessarily retire from agitation .... but I wish you would see him, it might easily be managed, you would see better what to do in a quarter of an hour than anyone else could make appear in a twelve month.'<sup>2</sup>

On 17 May, Burdett again pressed Grey with the same urgency: the opportunity to negotiate with a conciliatory O'Connell was not to be missed, and the Tithe question had to be settled before disaffection spread, not only throughout Ireland, but possibly also to England.<sup>3</sup> Burdett busied himself with practical attempts to achieve reconciliation by dining with prominent Protestant and Catholic Irish members in London, and hoped 'to see what can be mutually conceded for the sake of peace'.<sup>4</sup>

Burdett himself thought that O'Connell's tithe plan was 'not free from objection', but he confided to Hobhouse that it was 'scarcely possible to pay too high a price for the pacification of Ireland'.<sup>5</sup> This was exactly the practical course of action he had urged when sacrificing the Irish 40s freeholders in order to gain Emancipation.

But Burdett was not dealing with men who were prepared to give on

<sup>1</sup>Grey MSS. f.36, Burdett to Grey, 7 May 1834.

<sup>2</sup>Grey MSS. f.37, Burdett to Grey, 12 May 1834.

<sup>3</sup>*ibid.* f.39, Burdett to Grey, 17 May 1834; Burdett spoke with considerably more immediate knowledge of the real situation in Ireland than other English politicians. One of his daughters, married to Otway Cave, was there, and he enclosed her letter to Grey, a letter revealing how the political and religious issues were infecting all levels of the population and rousing the whole country to an unstable state of excitement.

<sup>4</sup>*ibid.* f.39, Burdett to Grey, 14 May 1834; ff. 41, 41A, Burdett to Grey, 21 May 1834.

<sup>5</sup>Add. MSS. 47222, f.283, Burdett to Hobhouse, 19 May 1834; Lord Broughton, *Recollections*, iv. 340.

principle in order to achieve practical results, and whilst Grey acknowledged Burdett's 'sincere and earnest desire to promote a settlement', he had to refuse negotiations with O'Connell.<sup>1</sup> Burdett's attempts at mediation thus came to nothing, but they are nevertheless worthy of note, for they were yet another step in his life-long commitment to seeking a solution to Ireland's difficulties. His commitment originated with his friendship with Arthur O'Connor in the 1790s; it had included several visits to the country, and had resulted in a good understanding with many leading Irishmen. In stark contrast to many other politicians in England at the time, Burdett was well-informed about feelings in Ireland, and had made many more attempts to seek a practical solution to this intractable political problem. His efforts represented a genuinely disinterested desire<sup>2</sup> to seek a solution to Irish problems.

Grey's ministry collapsed early in July 1834, when O'Connell revealed the differences of approach between Grey and Althorp over the question of whether to renew in full the 1833 Coercion Bill.<sup>3</sup> Burdett chiefly blamed Althorp and Cabinet indiscipline for the collapse although he did acknowledge in 1836, that Grey's fault, 'was not governing those he was entitled to govern. Whoever would not have submitted he ought to have turned out .... and not to have resigned himself. Had he been steady and firm, Ireland would have been tranquil and O'Connell .... and his Priests tame as mice.'<sup>4</sup>

But it was easy to take a firm line in retrospect; in the summer of 1834, Burdett was as perplexed about the future as the vast majority of the political world. Although he concluded that there was no way to extricate the ministry, how was it possible to go on without it? 'They have no successors.' His one decided opinion was his 'country' sympathy for the King. 'They have brought the King to a fine pass'<sup>5</sup>, he noted to Hobhouse.

The ministry was reconstructed under Melbourne, but then dismissed by the

<sup>1</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. c.65, f.167, Grey to Burdett, 18 May 1834; Grey MSS. f.38, Grey to Burdett, 13 May 1834.

<sup>2</sup>He had no land there.

<sup>3</sup>For details on the collapse of the ministry see, A. Macintyre, *The Liberator*, pp. 133-4.

<sup>4</sup>Add. MSS. 47222, f.310, Burdett to Hobhouse, 10 Jan. 1836.

<sup>5</sup>*ibid.* f.287, Burdett to Hobhouse, 12 July 1834.

King on 15 November 1834.<sup>1</sup> Wellington took over as care-taker minister until Peel could be fetched from Italy. Amidst all the political instability, Burdett clung to his independent views, and placed the blame firmly on self-interested, party divisions. He was no Whig, he declared, and therefore declined to have anything to do with their manoeuvres to crush the Peel ministry before it was launched. He did admit that the King had rashly dismissed the Melbourne ministry for,

'as by the Reform Bill he cannot in reality appoint his Ministers, as whoever he appointed must go to large bodies of constituents to be approved, and as in the present unsettled state of the public mind they may very likely be rejected, the king and the country will be placed in a very dangerous position, which will have been produced by the unsteadiness of all parties, Whig, Tory and Court.'<sup>2</sup>

But this eighteenth century, independent attitude that Burdett so devotedly adhered to, was becoming rapidly inadequate and anachronistic in the atmosphere of 1834-5, when politicians were taking up their political stance behind a Whig and Radical alliance, or a more broad-based Tory platform. Burdett's refusal to commit himself to a party line was also beginning to cause profound dissatisfaction in Westminster. His election Committee requested a forthright statement against the Wellington government, and found Burdett's answer totally unsatisfactory. He would only observe that he did not fear that Wellington would repeal the Reform Bill; that they must wait until matters became clearer, and again he repeated his dislike of party, 'its rancour, injustice and virulence'.<sup>3</sup> The overwhelming feeling amongst the Westminster Committee members, many of whom still wished to remain loyal to Burdett personally, was that they could in no way trust Wellington and an administration whose members had tried to strangle the Reform Bill at birth, and who were likely to take a reactionary line on all issues.

<sup>1</sup>William IV refused to have Russell as Leader of the House of Commons. William's dismissal was the last occasion upon which a monarch turned out a ministry. The action confirmed Whig fears about the extent still of Crown power, but Burdett had no intrinsic objection to the action, rather to the timing of it, a view which emphasised strikingly his 'country' and not Whiggish, views.

<sup>2</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. d.94, ff. 125-6, Burdett to Lady Burdett, 21 Nov. 1834.

<sup>3</sup>MSS. Eng. Hist. b.200, ff. 198-9, 201: Burdett Address to Westminster Electors; Burdett to T. De Vear, n.d.

Amidst rumours that Burdett should be asked to resign, petitions were sent to the King requesting a non-Tory administration.<sup>1</sup> Burdett held fast to his opinions and restated his position, in no uncertain terms, in an election manifesto preparatory to the January 1835 election. He placed all his faith in the working of the Reform Bill; it alone would ensure that the right representatives were returned, and make corrupt government impossible. He professed himself ready to believe that Melbourne's ministry had had the public welfare at heart, but he did not now fear the new Peel government, for they could not ignore the House of Commons, and the people's wishes represented there. Burdett concluded on his own independent note. He hoped that the general interest should prevail, and the old factious flags and watchwords of Whig and Tory disappear.<sup>2</sup> In private correspondence Burdett restated this theme. To Hobhouse he wrote, 'It is surely time for party spirit to cease', and to Dr. Routh;

'I do sincerely hope something like stability will encourage all good and deter bad men, and give some chance of things again settling in a constitutional and rational manner, and that party spirit, however bitter at this moment, is approaching its dissolution.'<sup>3</sup>

These public and private statements reveal that Burdett's 'country' ideals resulted in a totally uncritical and simplistic view of the Reform Bill and its subsequent impact on the political world. In the years after the Bill, Burdett never asked himself the question, was the Bill working in the way he had hoped? If his

<sup>1</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Hist. b.200, f.205, T. De Vear to Burdett, 11 Dec. 1834; f.207, H. Pouncy to Burdett, 18 Dec. 1834; f.209, Petition from Westminster Electors to George IV; f.210, Minutes of a Westminster Meeting; f.211, Pouncy to De Vear, Tues.; f.213, Col. Evans to Burdett, 26 Dec. 1834; f.215, De Vear to Editor of Morning Chronicle; f.216, Prout to De Vear, 30 Dec. 1834; f.218, J. Thurston, Elector, to De Vear, 31 Dec. 1834; f.220, De Vear's reply, 31 Dec. 1834.

<sup>2</sup>Bodl. Lib. Eng. Hist. b.200, f.224, Burdett's Printed Election Manifesto, 3 Jan. 1835; Election figures: Burdett, 2850; Evans, 2709; Cochrane, 1614; The figure for Burdett does represent a drop of several hundred votes, but no substantial loss despite, to many minds, his startling stand. In Jan. 1835, Burdett polled 39.8% of the votes cast. This was compared to 43% in 1832, 36.4% in 1820 and 44.7% in 1807. Ever since Westminster first elected Burdett as an independent candidate in 1807, there was great attachment to the idea of independence - i.e. the independent M.P. - and by 1835 there was a strong loyalty to Burdett himself. Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. d.94, f.132, Burdett to Lady Burdett, 9 Jan. 1835.

<sup>3</sup>Add. MSS. 47222, f.298, Burdett to Hobhouse, 19 Jan. 1835; Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. d.98, f.42, Burdett to Dr. Routh, 26 Jan. 1835.

attachment to his 'country' ideals was to be continued, of course, he simply could not afford to ask that question for the answer would so obviously be against him. The Bill had not returned huge numbers of country gentlemen to Parliament, but had returned more radicals, and had produced an increasingly bitter party fight. Such results clearly invalidated Burdett's hopes for the Bill. In such a situation, and unwilling to abandon his 'country' tenets, Burdett inevitably found himself increasingly isolated. His own situation was, 'more and more difficult, I mean the situation of .... having no object but the public good and hating both parties.'<sup>1</sup>

Dislike of the ominous looking Whig, Radical and Irish alliance, whose first formal meeting agreed upon the nomination of Abercromby for the Speakership<sup>2</sup>, made Burdett decide to give his support to the government candidate Manners Sutton, at the opening of the 1835 session. He stuck to this decision despite repeated attempts to persuade him to change his mind from Hobhouse, Lady Holland and Lord Wellesley, for he felt it, 'unwise in the Whigs to make battle upon this ground'.<sup>3</sup> In the event, Burdett abstained from voting for the Speaker after a request from his electors. His explanation was that, 'as this was a mere party question, and .... that as I was not a party man, I might keep myself aloof from it'.<sup>4</sup>

Burdett had survived as M.P. for Westminster in January 1835, but how long could this independent line be maintained? These months seem to mark a crisis in Burdett's own assessment of his independent position. Party spirit seemed to dominate all political issues: it marked the arguments over the Speakership at the beginning of Peel's government; it blocked every single measure Peel proposed, and it brought about the second Melbourne ministry that was propped up by radical and Irish support. But whilst party spirit thus gave all other

<sup>1</sup>Sinclair MSS. x. f.22, Burdett to Sinclair, n.d. but around the time of the Jan. 1835 election.

<sup>2</sup>A. Macintyre, *The Liberator*, p.142.

<sup>3</sup>Add. MSS. 51569 (Holland House Papers), f.38; Burdett to Lady Holland, 1 Feb. 1835; Add MSS. 37311 (Wellesley Papers), f.238, Burdett to Wellesley, 10 Feb. 1835; f.240, Hobhouse to Wellesley, 11 Feb. 1835; Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. d.96, f.58, Hobhouse to Burdett, 7 Feb. 1835.

<sup>4</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. d.94, f.133, Burdett to Lady Burdett, 19 Feb. 1835.

politicians renewed energy and vigour<sup>1</sup>, it brought Burdett to a state of complete isolation. To Lady Burdett, he confessed, 'I long to get away from this vortex of faction which seems to me to be more bitter and worse than ever so that I feel myself quite alone in this world of strife.'<sup>2</sup> The moves by many politicians into firmer, and more organised, party associations, were still regarded by Burdett as 'this vortex of faction'. It was a phraseology and spirit that proclaimed itself firmly of the eighteenth century, and of a much older political world than the one Burdett now acknowledged that he found himself in.<sup>3</sup>

The letter to Lady Burdett deplored the spirit of the political atmosphere, but Burdett did pick out Peel as the only, 'single, presentable name to the public'.<sup>4</sup> Why did Peel now seem attractive to Burdett? Although there is no mention of Peel's famous 'Tamworth Manifesto' in his letters, there were several fundamental ideas within it, that formed part of Burdett's independent 'country' tradition. Peel attempted to approach those 'less interested in the contentions of party, than in the maintenance of order and the cause of good government'. He considered the Reform Bill, 'a final and irrevocable settlement of a great Constitutional question', but he still promised, 'the correction of proved abuses and the redress of real grievances'.<sup>5</sup> These aims all found a place in Burdett's 'country' programme and it was because the Whig, radical and Irish alliance seemed likely to follow, 'every popular whim ... abandoning respect for ancient rights and prescriptive authority'<sup>6</sup> that Burdett was becoming more and more

<sup>1</sup>The Lichfield House Compact of Feb. 1835 declared the common interests of the Whigs and Irish. Russell saw it as 'an alliance on honourable terms of mutual co-operation'. Russell, *Recollections and Suggestions*, (1875) p.135. Opponents saw it as an unprincipled league between ambitious Whigs, destructive radicals and Irish separatists. Peel's response was to try and broaden the base of the Tory party. A. Macintyre, *The Liberator*, p.144.

<sup>2</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. d.94, f.138, Burdett to Lady Burdett, 24 Mar. 1835.

<sup>3</sup>See above p.113, footnote 1. Especially Bolingbroke's references to party as 'faction'.

<sup>4</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. d.94, f.138, Burdett to Lady Burdett, 24 Mar. 1835.

<sup>5</sup>N. Gash, *Sir Robert Peel*, (London 1972) p.96. Quoting Peel's 'Tamworth Manifesto'.

<sup>6</sup>*ibid.* p.96. Respect for ancient rights and prescriptive authority has overtones of Burke's stand in opposition to the French Revolution and Painite radicalism. Burdett's dislike of Painite theory has been discussed above pp.160-1.

removed from them. This political parting of the ways was quite consistent. It had never been part of Burdett's 'country' aims to make radical, innovatory changes in the constitution; he had always desired merely to root out corruption so that the established constitution as he perceived it, could function properly.

In order to revitalise the Tory party, men like Croker were trying to portray the issues of the day, particularly the Irish Church debate, as great constitutional battlegrounds<sup>1</sup>. In this vein Croker wrote to Burdett and claimed that,

'the question of the Irish Church, serious enough in itself, becomes a thousand times more so ... by its being made the field of battle in which we are to fight for all property and all our institutions ... if the Irish Church is overthrown ... what will one's title and estate be worth.'

He lived, he confessed, in terror of a 'democratic despotism'.<sup>2</sup> Croker's letter was Tory scare-mongering at its most hysterical, and it produced no commitment from Burdett during the only session of Peel's government, for he was reduced to almost complete lameness by gout. Croker was however touching a sensitive nerve, and it was O'Connell's behaviour in Ireland<sup>3</sup> that pushed Burdett into an open breach with his former Whig and radical associates. Burdett demanded O'Connell's expulsion from Brooks's Club and sent his letter to *The Times*.<sup>4</sup> Burdett acknowledged to Holland that his public protest was perhaps a mistake, for it fanned the flames of the issue. O'Connell published a retort on 3 December, whereupon Burdett, Stanley, Graham and about one hundred others themselves withdrew from Brooks's.<sup>5</sup> Burdett however had at last made public his disapproval of the measures proposed by the Whig, radical and Irish alliance. Lord Holland could only conclude that,

<sup>1</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. d.94, f.62, Burdett to Lady Burdett, 7 April 1831.

<sup>2</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. d.97, f.77, Croker to Burdett, 29 Mar. 1835; f.79, Croker to Burdett, 3 April 1835.

<sup>3</sup>Deliberate intimidation by his supporters at the County Carlow by-election in June 1835 and inflammatory speeches against the composition of the House of Lords in the summer recess. Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. c.66, f.81, (Kerry Election report); A Macintyre, *The Liberator*, p.156.

<sup>4</sup>*The Times*, 21 Nov. 1835.

<sup>5</sup>The Club Managers (included Duncannon and Ellice, protagonists of the Irish alliance) refused to adopt the doctrine that a club be responsible for the private and political behaviour of its members. *Holland House Diaries*, ed. Kriegel, pp. 330-1; M.W. Patterson, ii. 636-44; A. Macintyre, *The Liberator*, p.156.

'some shrewdly suspect that the 'Otium' cum 'dignitate' to which this 'quondam' Agitator, but well-mannered and kind-hearted man looks, is to be the Tory Knight of the Shire for Derbyshire. He has always been swayed by those he lives with and the gossip of London says that Mr. Sinclair and Mr. Croker are now his chief advisers.'<sup>1</sup>

Burdett certainly was on close terms with Croker and Sinclair, but for all that, he did not abandon his independent ground. In February 1837, he was writing to Sinclair that he would like, 'his devotion to the country and constitution to be known', by declaring 'my abhorrence of the Coalition with Daniel O'Connell'.<sup>2</sup> He was to make that declaration in an election 'cause célèbre' in May 1837; an election that was almost as dramatic as the one for Middlesex that had signalled the start of his public career in 1802.<sup>3</sup>

Early in March 1837, a meeting of Westminster electors requested a statement of Burdett's views on ministers' policy. Sinclair made public at Burdett's request, his 'entire disapprobation of them and of their whole system of ministerial policy, foreign and domestic .... the measures now before Parliament are ill-concocted, unjust in principle, feebly sustained and mischievous to the public.'<sup>4</sup> As soon as Burdett had sufficiently recovered in health<sup>5</sup> to fight an election, he then resigned and addressed the electors. His was not a personal cause, he claimed, but no less than, 'the preservation of the Laws, the Church and the Constitution of England'.<sup>6</sup> His challenge was taken up, and the radical, Leader, was put up to run against him.

Contemporaries from all sides viewed the election as a party battle. Greville noted that the 'Tories worked hard for Burdett', and the result was 'a great triumph to the Conservative Cause and a great disappointment to the violent Whigs and still more to the Radicals'.<sup>7</sup> Lord Holland stated Burdett had

<sup>1</sup>*Holland House Diaries*, ed. Kriegel, pp. 330-1.

<sup>2</sup>Sinclair MSS. x. f.41, Burdett to Sinclair, 3 Feb. 1837.

<sup>3</sup>See Chapter 2, pp. 38-41.

<sup>4</sup>Sinclair MSS. x. f.69, Burdett to Sinclair, 20 Mar. 1837, containing Burdett to Mr. Pouncey (a Committee member), 12 Mar. 1837. The government measures in question were the Irish Poor Law and the Church Rates Bill.

<sup>5</sup>He suffered constantly from gout in these years. He was 67 in 1837.

<sup>6</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Hist. b.200, f.256, Burdett to the Westminster Electors, 4 May 1837.

<sup>7</sup>C.F. Greville, *Journal*, ed. H. Reeve, iii. 406.

'declared himself a Tory'<sup>1</sup>, and O'Connell admitted that Burdett's return was a 'severe blow' to the Irish cause.<sup>2</sup> The press also took up the party cry. *The Times* continually eulogised Burdett as the defender of the constitution, and declared that the electors should aim to 'crush the last remnants of life out of Radicalism' by electing him.<sup>3</sup> The ministerial *Morning Chronicle* declared that Toryism's fate 'was at stake in the Contest' and the radical '*Constitutional*' predicted that Burdett's re-election would sadly damage radicalism and ruin the Whigs.<sup>4</sup> But although friends and opponents were taking up party sides around Burdett, his own comments throughout the election were consistently those of the independent, who deplored the rallying-cry of 'Party'. To Sinclair, on the eve of the contest he wrote: 'I have not a single individual to look to and rely solely on the sense and spirit of the public.'<sup>5</sup> Thanking an elector for a letter of support, Burdett steadfastly maintained that, 'my political sentiments have experienced no change but many objects which I used to contend for have been attained and such questions should now be set at rest'.<sup>6</sup> It was a declaration that revealed conclusively the finality of the Reform Bill for Burdett. In speeches at his home, and at the hustings, Burdett expounded upon the independent 'country' beliefs he had always held. Experimental schemes, he claimed, threatened the constitution, and therefore men must support the King's prerogative and the rights of the privileged orders. There was no safety in the 'movement faction', and 'no just sense of what they owe to their ancestors'. Burdett was not ashamed to have discarded the contents of the Benthamite 1818 reform plan, for there had not been the consensus of support for it as there had been for the Reform Bill. He denied that he had ever proposed reform of the House of Lords, and repeated his objection to the new Poor Law. Defying 'any man living to say that any act of mine .... has been tinged with any interested feeling of any description', Burdett's conclusion was that 'I will not consent to

<sup>1</sup>*Holland House Diaries*, Kriegel, p.361.

<sup>2</sup>O'Connell, *Correspondence*, vi. no. 2401, O'Connell to Archbishop Murray, 18 May 1837.

<sup>3</sup>*The Times*, 1,4,6,9,12 & 13 May 1837.

<sup>4</sup>All quoted in *The Times*, 13 May 1837.

<sup>5</sup>Sinclair MSS. no folio number; Burdett to Sinclair, 30 April 1837.

<sup>6</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. c.64, f.40, Burdett to Mr. S. Dawn, 8 May 1837.

embark on an ocean of change to which I can see no limit.'<sup>1</sup> All these sentiments belonged to the mainstream of the 'country' tradition, but they also found a home in the new Conservative party gradually taking shape under Peel. This was hardly surprising, for there had always been similarities between the constitutional ideas of 'country' and Tory. What still distinguishes Burdett, however, is that despite all the groups and parties that claimed him as one of their number, he himself always took care to act in an independent manner, continually refused the formal ties of party, and was totally uninterested in the labels others gave him, or the rewards they offered to him. In the opening decade of the nineteenth century, the pressure of war, and of a system of government repression at home, had resulted in his 'country' views being labelled, 'radical'; in May 1837, against a background of Whig, radical and Irish coalition innovations, these same views were labelled, 'Tory'. But Burdett himself consistently clung to his independence, and it was with these independent 'country' sentiments that he concluded his hustings speech: 'I do not care whether I am called Whig or Tory; I am for the constitution of England, and I think the most stupid of all expedients is to revive now the old watchwords of Whig and Tory.' He now found himself in a strange, new, party-political world, and confessed that he had had 'the simplicity to think that when the bill<sup>2</sup> passed, honest and able men, whether nominally distinguished as Whigs or Tories, would have stood upon that as a broad foundation .... I had no idea that narrow bigotry would have been enlisted against me.'<sup>3</sup> It was as near as Burdett ever came to an admission that the Reform Bill had not produced the 'country' results he had expected.

Burdett beat the radical, Leader, by around 580 votes; a result that was a remarkable tribute of loyalty to the Westminster member of now exactly thirty years standing.<sup>4</sup> But it was certainly a personal victory, rather than any devotion on the part of the Westminster electors to an eighteenth century

<sup>1</sup>*The Times*, 10,11 May 1837.

<sup>2</sup>The Reform Bill

<sup>3</sup>*The Times*, 11 May 1837.

<sup>4</sup>*The Times*, 12 May 1837 gives the figures as Burdett, 3460; Leader, 2874.

independent cause.<sup>1</sup> One elector even requested from Burdett, the crutches on which he had walked to the Hustings!<sup>2</sup> With his political independence vindicated, Burdett applied for the Chiltern Hundreds, for his poor state of health and frequent, severe attacks of gout had made it almost impossible for him to attend Parliament. He intended to retire from public life, but was pressed to take up the Wiltshire County nomination and was elected for the county in the General Election following the death of William IV in July.<sup>3</sup>

From 1837 until his death in January 1844, Burdett's poor health inevitably curtailed his political and social activities. He continued his friendship with many old Whig associates, dining often with Hobhouse and making financial contributions to Brougham's 'useful' schemes.<sup>4</sup> But he now also socialised in circles where his 'country' sentiments were well-received, and spent time at dinners and house-parties of leading Conservatives such as Wellington, Sinclair, Croker, Hardinge and Peel.<sup>5</sup>

In the early 1800s, the background of the war against France had made Burdett's views appear radical; in the 1820s, his 'country' views had found a place in the Whig programme; now in the late 1830s, the measures of the Melbourne ministry, that pushed for further reform, both at home and in Ireland, made Burdett appear to hold a conservative stance.<sup>6</sup>

But he still made it clear that he could not be regarded as an automatic

<sup>1</sup>Leader was elected at the forthcoming General Election.

<sup>2</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. c.65, f.47, J. Conyers to Burdett, 12 May 1837.

<sup>3</sup>Burdett's letters to his family on his poor state of health, his resignation from Westminster and his subsequent delight at his return for Wiltshire: Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Hist. b.196, f.119; MSS. Eng. Lett. c.64, ff. 51, 55, 58.; d.94, ff. 167, 169, 171, 177; d.96, f.90; d.98, ff. 48, 120.

<sup>4</sup>Add MSS. 47222, f.322, Burdett to Hobhouse, 1939; Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. d.96, f.68, Hobhouse to Burdett, 12 Dec. 1840; Add. MSS. 37313, f.143, Burdett to Wellesley, 16 Feb. 1842; Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. d.97, f.74, Brougham to Burdett, Nov. 1842.

<sup>5</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. c.65, f.297, Wellington to Burdett, 13 Oct. 1837; for Burdett's correspondence with Conservatives in the late 1830s, Sinclair MSS. vol. x.; Burdett/Croker correspondence: Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. d.97, ff. 84, 89,91,93; for Burdett/Peel correspondence: Add. MSS. 40424, f.323; 40427, f.352; 40494, f.242; 40504, f.42; 40507, ff. 39,44,49; 40551, f.337; 40512, f.65; 40414, ff. 195,197,200,202,203; 40522, ff. 201,203; 40526. f/425; 40531, ff. 59,61; Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett, d.96, ff. 128,131,135,140,142,144,146,148-155.

<sup>6</sup>*Hansard*, 3rd Series, 1839, xlvii. 449; 1842, lx. 828-36. Burdett voted against the Whig ministry's measures for Ireland and against a repeal of the Corn Laws.

party voter, and indicated that when necessary, he would take an independent course of action. In February 1843, he was writing to Peel:

I need not make use of any profession of attachment to your administration .... but it is fair to mention that if there should be in the speech tomorrow anything to countenance the transactions which have taken place in Afghanistan .... any congratulations or sanction to them, it would be impossible for me not to protest against or move an amendment respecting them.<sup>1</sup>

Burdett remained the eighteenth century, independent 'country' gentleman to the last; a role he had consistently adhered to, and recognised as his. As he stressed to Lady Burdett in 1831, nature certainly 'intended me for an old Country Squire'.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Add. MSS. 40524, (Peel Papers), f.104, Burdett to Peel, 1 Feb. 1843

<sup>2</sup>Bodl. Lib. MSS. Eng. Lett. d.94, f.62, Burdett to Lady Burdett, 7 April 1831.

### CONCLUSION:

It has been the principal aim of this thesis to demonstrate that Burdett was first and foremost an independent country gentleman in the early eighteenth century mould. The similarity of his political programme to that put forward by opposition politicians of the 1720s and 1730s is, at times, astounding. The consistency of his attachment to such a programme will be a surprise to many for it contrasts with previous pictures of him as a wildly inconsistent politician who moved from extreme radicalism to reactionary Toryism.

This portrayal of Burdett also has important implications for the historian's picture of English radicalism, for it serves to emphasise some of its profoundly retrospective, insular and moderate characteristics. The sustained popularity of Burdett in Westminster up to 1832 indicates that there was always a strong element of his eighteenth century 'country' creed in the reform politics of this period.

Perhaps the most important result of this study of Burdett is the demonstration of the necessity of the aristocratic politician to grassroots radicalism in these years. Burdett's automatic right to a political voice, his status, and the glamour attached to his rank and person were ingredients that radicals could not do without if reform ideas were to be heard in the national political debate. Burdett's importance to the radical movement before 1832 should be recognised and acknowledged.

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