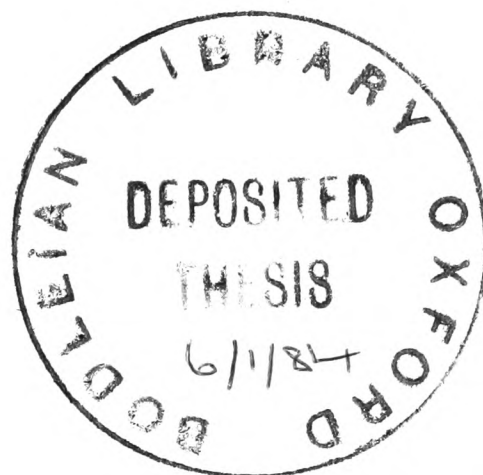


POLITICS, PROPERTY, and PROGRESS:

BRITISH RADICAL THOUGHT, 1760-1815



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This thesis attempts to provide an account of radical thought in Britain, 1760 to 1815, by way of a study of the tracts, pamphlets and articles of the major radical ideologues. It begins by examining the assumptions made by the radicals in respect of nature and human nature, material and moral progress, and liberty and equality. The differences revealed in relation to the basic assumptions are then analysed in the context of the major questions of politics, property and progress. On the issue of political liberty distinctions are made between mixed constitutionalist radicals and republicans, democratic or otherwise, and between those who adopted a "radical" as opposed to a "moderate" approach to voting rights. Special attention is given to Thomas Spence's and William Godwin's views on decentralization and democracy and to the radical case for an armed citizenry. Regarding property and progress a major distinction is drawn between agrarian and commercial radicals according to attitudes taken on the emergence and development of modern commercial society. The different versions of the agrarian alternative are considered and the reformist, communitarian and revolutionary approaches to agrarianism examined. In relation to commercial radicalism a distinction is drawn between Smithian and artisan approaches to the meaning of equality of opportunity and connected with a change in the social composition of the radical movement in the 1790s. A chapter is devoted to James Burgh who synthesized aspects of agrarianism and commercial radicalism. The final section of the thesis considers the alternatives proposed for the achievement of radical

ends. A distinction is drawn between reformers and revolutionaries and two chapters given over to consideration of the special contributions of William Godwin and the young Coleridge. It is concluded that radical ideology is best understood as a synthesis of civic humanism and Lockean liberalism and that the class perceptions of particular radicals are important in understanding the different ways they develop the radical case.

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ABBREVIATIONSState Trials

T.B. Howell and T.J. Howell, A Complete Collection of State Trials (London, 1813-1820).

O.E.D.

Oxford English Dictionary ed. J. Murray et al (1933; reissued Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1961).

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is written in the light of the resurgence of interest in the nature and role of ideology in eighteenth-century British politics. As Maurice Goldsmith observed in a recent review article:

To understand eighteenth-century British politics without ideology is impossible. Whether or not ideals motivated political actions, ideas cannot be regarded as mere rhetorical decoration; for the king, the politicians and the people, their roles, their interests and their rights -¹ their political world itself - were defined by those ideas.

The most recent overview of eighteenth-century political argument - H.T. Dickinson's Liberty and Property² - is written in this spirit. He has argued that whereas ideological debate in the early and middle years of the century could be slotted into the categories of Whig and Tory and Court and Country, the newer categories of radical and conservative become relevant after 1760. In this thesis I will be concerned with the ideas of the radicals who unsuccessfully mounted a challenge to the political system in the so-called "Age of George III".

To apply the label "radical" to someone in late eighteenth-century Britain, particularly in the years of the French Revolution and French Wars, was usually to abuse them. Radical, and its sister category imported from France, "Jacobin", became umbrella terms referring to all opposition tendencies within the nation.³ As a consequence important distinctions became blurred, all the oppositionists being seen

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1. M.M. Goldsmith, "The Principle of True Liberty: Political Ideology in Eighteenth-Century Britain", Political Studies, XXVII (1979), 141-46. See also H.T. Dickinson, "Party, Principle and Public Opinion in Eighteenth Century Politics", History, LXII (1976), 231-37.
 2. H.T. Dickinson, Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth-Century Britain (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977).
 3. R.J. White, Radicalism and its Results, 1770-1837 (London, Historical Association, 1965), p. 7.

as "democrats", "republicans", or "levellers" who, by intention or implication, would destroy not only the monarchy, aristocracy and established church but also the prevailing system of property - that is, if they were unchecked. Defenders of the status quo imposed a uniform standard on what was in fact a complex phenomenon with many dimensions, sociological and regional as well as ideological.¹

The first precise use of the term radical came from John Cartwright in 1777. Referring to the central tasks facing the nation he wrote:

We must go to the bottom of the stinking sore and cleanse it thoroughly: we must once more infuse into the constitution the vivifying spirit of liberty and expel the very last dregs of this poison. Annual Parliaments with an equal representation of the commons are the only specific in this case; and they would effect a radical cure.²

The "radical reformers", then, distinguished themselves by their commitment to universal manhood suffrage³ and annual parliaments. Radical was chosen as it implied a "return" or "restoration" to "the roots" and "the original fountain of power". This was interpreted in two ways: firstly as a restoration of the system of representation to the Commons on its proper, rational basis as was dictated by the laws of nature and, secondly, as a restoration of ancient liberties embodied in the Anglo Saxon Constiution and destroyed

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1. The need to treat radicalism as a complex phenomenon has been stressed in two review articles: Norbet J. Gossman, "Definitions and Recent Writings on Modern British Radicalism, 1790-1914", British Studies Monitor , IV (1974), 3-11 and John W. Osborne, "Recent Writings and Work to be done on British Radicalism, 1780-1835", British Studies Monitor , IV (1974), 23-29.
 2. John Cartwright, "Legislative Rights of the Commonality Vindicated" (1777) in S. Maccoby (ed.), The English Radical Tradition, 1763-1914 (London, Nicholas Kaye, 1952), p. 32.
 3. Very rarely did the radicals propose that voting rights be extended to women. Their position on the "woman question" is discussed on pp. 54-56 below.

in 1066.¹ The radical reformer, said Cartwright, offered the nation "the constitution itself"; and no contradiction was seen between what the laws of nature dictated and what the Anglo-Saxons had created.²

Cartwright³ contrasted the radical reformers with moderate reformers, such as Christopher Wyvill, who went beyond a programme of economical reform⁴ but who balked at the idea of universal suffrage and equal electoral districts whatever their purely "theoretical" merits. On the question of voting rights Wyvill was willing to accept an extension to copyholders in the Counties and "decent householders" in the Boroughs as suggested by the highly respectable Society of the Friends of the People. These proposals were, he said, "the nearest approximation to theoretical perfection which could consist with the stability of Property that is now enjoyed in this Country". Success of the radical programme, he maintained, could only be achieved through bloody revolution and would lead inevitably to the establishment of "an

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1. On the radicals and the Anglo-Saxon myth see Christopher Hill, "The Norman Yoke", in John Saville (ed.), Democracy and the Labour Movement: Essays in Honour of Dona Torr (London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1954), pp. 42-54. J.G.A. Pocock outlines the seventeenth-century sources of antiquarianism in his The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law: English Historical Thought in the Seventeenth Century (Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1956), esp. ch. 6.
 2. John Cartwright, Take Your Choice! Representation and Respect: Imposition and Contempt. Annual Parliaments and Liberty: Long Parliaments and Slavery (London, 1776), p. 18.
 3. "Cartwright to Wyvill, 15 April 1811", in F.D. Cartwright (ed.), The Life and Correspondence of Major Cartwright (2 vols; London, 1826), ii.9.
 4. The economical reform programme developed by the Rockingham Whigs aimed at reducing the influence of the Crown by checking corruption and extravagance within the existing system of representation. On the degree to which these aims were realized see the indispensable A.S. Foord, "The Waning of the Influence of the Crown", English Historical Review, LXII (1947), 484-507.

irritated Democracy".¹

Not only were the radical reformers distinguished from the moderates but also from the republicans, who wished to see the creation of a system of government free of King, Lords and Bishops. As early as 1767 Catharine Macaulay had proposed such a system for her "ideal" polity² but it only began to be taken seriously as a realistic alternative when the Americans provided a working model of a representative and republican, if not a perfectly democratic, system.³ As was the case in America, there were British republicans like Catharine Macaulay and Joseph Priestley who balked at the idea of universal manhood suffrage even though they accepted the case against any hereditary elements in the Constitution.⁴ More than anyone else it was Thomas Paine who articulated the philosophy of democratic republicanism, central to which was the right of the common people to govern themselves, directly in small states or by way of elected representatives in larger states.⁵ For principled or tactical reasons, to be discussed in chapter 5 of the

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1. Christopher Wyvill, A Letter to John Cartwright, Esq. (York, 1801), pp. 7, 5. On Wyvill's politics see N.C. Phillips, "Country against Court: Christopher Wyvill, A Yorkshire Champion, The Yorkshire Archaeological Journal, XXXX (1962), 588-603 and J.R. Dinwiddy, Christopher Wyvill and Reform, 1790-1820 (York, St. Anthony's Press, 1971).
 2. Catharine Macaulay, Loose Remarks on Certain Positions to be found in Mr. Hobbes's Philosophical Rudiments of Government and Society. With a short Sketch of a Democratical Form of Government, in a Letter to Signior Paoli (London, 1967).
 3. On the relationship between American developments and British radicalism see Colin Bonwick, English Radicals and the American Revolution (Chapel Hill, Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1977).
 4. On Macaulay's and Priestley's views on the perfect republic see pp. 100-102 below.
 5. See esp. Thomas Paine, Common Sense ed. Isaac Kramnick (1776; rep. Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1976) and The Rights of Man ed. Henry Collins (1791-92; rep. Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1969).

thesis, the radical reformers thought it important to work for the improvement of the established, mixed constitution which included an hereditary monarch and an hereditary upper house.

In contemporary literature it has become normal to include the moderates, radical reformers and republicans in any treatment of late eighteenth-century radicalism. The term radical therefore has been used "to designate the proponents of political reform in the direction of democracy".¹ Consequently the histories of radicalism in the period have tended to overlap with histories of parliamentary reform.² In this thesis I will depart from this usage in two respects. Firstly I will pay more attention to the social and economic attitudes of the radicals than is normally the case with studies which focus on political arguments and political movements. It will be necessary, therefore, to caste the net a little wider and include in the study Robert Wallace, William Ogilvie and Charles Hall, none of whom were political radicals but whose arguments on the questions of property and progress became part of the radical arsenal.³ Excluded, however, will be Jeremy Bentham and William Cobbett despite the fact that they came to a radical position in the first decade of the nineteenth-century and, in Bentham's case, flirted with

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1. H.V.S. Ogden, "The State of Nature and the Decline of Lockian Political Theory in England, 1760-1800", American Historical Review, XLVI (1940), p. 29. My emphasis added.
 2. See esp. G.S. Veitch, The Genesis of Parliamentary Reform (1913; rep. London, Constable, 1964), I.R. Christie, Wilkes, Wyvill and Reform: The Parliamentary Reform Movement in British Politics, 1760-1815 (London, Macmillan, 1962), and John Cannon, Parliamentary Reform, 1640-1832 (Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1973).
 3. Robert Wallace, Various Prospects of Mankind, Nature and Providence (London, 1761), William Ogilvie, "An Essay on the Right of Property in Land" (1781) in M. Beer (ed.), Pioneers of Land Reform (London, 1921), and Charles Hall, The Effects of Civilization on the People in European States (2nd ed., London, 1813).

radicalism in the 1790s.¹ As their contribution to later radical thought was distinctive the temptation to read them back into the late eighteenth-century should be avoided. Secondly the emphasis will be placed on the radical reformers and the republicans rather than the moderates. It is the case, however, that the moderates cannot be ignored as there were significant political and intellectual overlaps between the three political tendencies. In this respect the distinction between "theory" and "practice" or "utopia" and "reform" is crucial. Many of the radical reformers (and indeed some of the republicans) saw the need to accept some sort of moderate programme as the most appropriate basis for political agitation in the conditions which prevailed. In theory they may have believed in universal manhood suffrage and annual elections but in practice they were prepared to compromise with the moderates. Similarly there were republicans who were willing to work within the mixed constitution of King, Lords and Commons for a more limited programme centring on reform of the Commons and its relations with the executive. Compromises of this sort were justified on two not unconnected grounds. Firstly there was the purely pragmatic argument that moderation was necessary for political success. Secondly there was the principled objection to any strategy which created the conditions for revolutionary upheaval. Consequently moderation was thought necessary to maximize the possibility of legal and peaceful transition. Studies which focus on the fundamental, long-term aspirations of the radicals, and exclude any consideration of the time and tactical dimensions within radical thought, tend to create an unjustifiably "revolutionary" reading of

1. See J.R. Dinwiddy, "Bentham's Transition to Political Radicalism", Journal of the History of Ideas, XXXV (1975), 683-700 and John W. Osborne, William Cobbett: His Thought and Times (New Brunswick, Rutgers Univ. Press, 1966).

radical intentions.¹

Existing studies of the radicals have tended to be more interested in the nature and political significance of the movement itself rather than with its ideology. This is reflected in the two book-length studies of radicalism recently published - C.B. Cone's English Jacobins and Albert Goodwin's Friends of Liberty² - which pay very little attention to the question of ideology. On the other hand issues of social composition, organizational forms, regional differences and political practice (and its consequences) have all been given extensive coverage. In recent years the emphasis has shifted away from studies of the "high politics" of reform, and its relationships with parliamentary sympathizers and supporters, to studies of the relationship between radicalism, popular politics and the emerging working-class; particularly in the light of the claims made by E.P. Thompson in his magisterial study, The Making of the English Working Class.³ Isaac Kramnick has also been active in the area of the social history of radicalism, arguing that it was very much a reflection of the coming to political consciousness of the middle-class, dissenting interest within the nation.⁴ At the same

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1. See, for example, Leslie Stephen's portrayal of the radicals as "revolutionists"; History of English Thought in the Eighteenth-Century (2 vols; London, Smith, Elder and Co., 1876), ii.252-81.
 2. C.B. Cone, The English Jacobins: Reformers in Late Eighteenth-Century England (New York, Scribners, 1968) and Albert Goodwin, The Friends of Liberty: The English Democratic Societies in the Age of the French Revolution (London, Hutchinson, 1979).
 3. See esp. E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (1963; new ed. Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968) and Gwyn A. Williams, Artisans and Sans-Culottes: Popular Movements in France and Britain during the French Revolution (London, Edward Arnold, 1968).
 4. Kramnick has developed his argument in three lengthy essays: "Religion and Radicalism: English Political Theory in the Age of Revolution", Political Theory V (1977), 505-34, "English Middle-Class Radicalism in the Eighteenth-Century", Literature of Liberty, III (Summer 1980), 5-48, and "Republican Revisionism Revisited", American

time one can point to a rapidly expanding collection of studies of individual radicals which has added a great deal to our understanding of the personal, political, social and regional dimensions of radicalism.¹ Some of these studies have also had a good deal to say about the question of radical ideology and how it can be approached. What is missing, however, is any extensive and intensive analysis of radical ideology as expressed in the writings of the radicals themselves.

In respect of eighteenth-century ideas in general a great deal of work has been done attempting to define the nature of the paradigm or paradigms within which political discourse was conducted and in relation to which particular texts can be understood. Probably the most significant contribution has been made by J.G.A. Pocock with his argument that eighteenth-century political thought is best seen not as a beginning but as a continuation and development of the "classical republican" or "civic humanist" tradition.² In particular he has defined and analyzed the specifically English variant of this tradition from the time of its articulation by James Harrington and Algernon Sidney in the seventeenth-century. When applied to the eighteenth-century the Pocockian approach leads to a significant de-emphasis of the influence of Locke who

Historical Review, LXXXVII (1982), 629-64. See also John Brewer, "English Radicalism in the Age of George III", in J.G.A. Pocock (ed.), Three British Revolutions: 1641, 1688, 1776 (Princeton, Princeton Univ. Press, 1980), pp. 323-67.

1. See esp. Joseph O. Baylen and Norbet J. Gossman (eds.), Biographical Dictionary of Modern British Radicals Volume 1: 1770-1830 (Sussex, Harvester, 1979).
2. See J.G.A. Pocock, Politics, Language and Time: Essays in Political Thought and History (New York, Atheneum, 1971), esp. chs. 3-4, "Virtue and Commerce in the Eighteenth-Century", Journal of Interdisciplinary History, III (1972), 119-34, The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition (Princeton, Princeton Univ. Press, 1977) esp. Part Three, and "The Machiavellian Moment Revisited: A Study in History and Ideology", Journal of Modern History, LIII (1981), 49-77.

had been given a central place in earlier studies by Sir Leslie Stephen and Harold Laski.¹ Pocock is particularly interested in the development of an oppositional "Country" ideology in the Anglo-American world in the first half of the eighteenth-century. For him it is "the dialectic of virtue and commerce" which is the appropriate framework for understanding political argument in this period, Country ideology existing on one side and Court ideology on the other.

Pocock continues this theme into the last half of the century. For example, he claims that James Burgh, John Cartwright and John Thelwall are "key points in the long continuous history of a political language and its concepts".² In arguing this he relies upon Caroline Robbins' earlier study of the "real Whigs" or "Commonwealthmen". Robbins pictured the radicals as "honest Whigs" who kept alive a tradition of thought slowly but systematically being undermined by social and economic changes.³ In this interpretation of radical thought "corruption" (or "enfeeblement") is the key concept. Corruption refers to that state of affairs which afflicts a nation when its citizens, particularly those entrusted with the responsibilities of public office, place self-interest ahead of the public good. Degeneration and decay are bound to result, the only remedy being a return to first principles in the organization of political, social and economic life. For the radicals the idea of

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1. Stephen, English Thought in the Eighteenth Century and Harold Laski's two studies: The Rise of European Liberalism: An Interpretation (London, George Allen & Unwin, 1936) and Political Thought in England: Locke to Bentham (London, Thornton Butterworth, 1920).
 2. Pocock, Politics, Language and Time, p. 146. See also Iain Hampsher-Monk, "Civic Humanism and Parliamentary Reform: The Case of the Society of the Friends of the People", Journal of British Studies, XVIII (Spring 1979), 70-89.
 3. Caroline Robbins, The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman (1959; rep. New York, Atheneum, 1968).

renewal and return was commonly linked with a belief in ancient, Anglo-Saxon liberties overthrown in 1066. Such a framework allows for the existence of what Pocock has called a "Renaissance pessimism" about the direction of social and economic as well as political change in the eighteenth-century.

An alternative framework points to a general hegemony of "progressive" or "bourgeois" ideology in the century - roughly speaking a mixture of Lockean political philosophy and Smithian political economy. The radicals are presented as "outsiders" demanding equal political, civil and economic rights.¹ The special role played by the dissenters in formulating and spreading these arguments is noted. A distinction is often drawn between the "middle-class" and "plebeian" versions of radical ideology, the latter emerging with the popular, artisan-based societies in the 1790s and the former having its roots in the earlier period of Wilkite agitation when radicalism found its first institutional expression in the form of the Society for Constitutional Information. Whereas the middle-class radicals argued for the maintenance of some degree of "balance" within the constitution, to protect property and avoid "anarchy" and "levelling", the plebeian or artisan radicals saw the merits of Paineite republicanism with its emphasis on popular sovereignty, democracy and social reform.² This distinction between middle-class and plebeian radicalism is often put in terms of the distinction between "political" and "social radicalism"; the social radicals arguing not only for political reform and cheap government but also for a wide-ranging

1. See esp. Laski, European Liberalism, pp. 206-8, T. Tholfsen, Working Class Radicalism in Mid-Victorian England (London, Croom Helm, 1976), ch. 2 and the three articles by Isaac Kramnick cited above in footnote 4, p. 7.

2. See esp. Dickinson, Liberty and Property, chs. 6-7 and Thompson, Making of the English Working Class, ch. 5.

programme of social and economic reform. The second part of Tom Paine's Rights of Man is usually given pride of place in the history of social radicalism.¹ However, although the specific programmes differed, both middle-class and plebeian radicals are said to have accepted the general contours of a bourgeois economy, the exception to the general rule being the eccentric land nationalizer from the North-East, Thomas Spence. Spence is said to have crossed the threshold to "socialism" whereas the other radicals only approached it.²

The primary aim of the thesis is to provide a thorough account of late eighteenth-century radical ideology, in all its dimensions, by way of a study of the tracts, pamphlets and articles of the movement's major ideologues. Stress will be placed on the tendencies which existed within the movement on each of the major questions which confronted it.³ Only then can the various claims which have been made about the "meaning" of radical ideology be properly assessed.

The radicals are studied in relation to the wider eighteenth-century debates on the possibility of human equality, progress and perfectibility, the nature and origins of the English Constitution, the possibility of democracy, the nature and significance of modern social and economic developments, and the meaning and consequences of a transatlantic revolution in which they were themselves

1. See the above and Henry Collins, "Introduction", Paine, Rights of Man; George Lichtheim, The Origins of Socialism (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), ch. 6; and James Eayrs, "The Political Ideas of the English Agrarians, 1775-1815", Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science, XVIII (1952), 287-302.

2. Collins, "Introduction", p. 43.

3. The need to take account of the intellectual divisions within the radical camp was made in an early, underdeveloped paper by Carl Cone, "English Reform Ideas during the French Revolution", Southerwestern Social Science Quarterly, XXVI (1947), 368-84.

participants.¹ To make it possible to situate the radicals in this way the thesis is divided into four parts which roughly coincide with the wider eighteenth-century concerns:

- I Radical Theory: The Foundations
- II Political Liberty
- III Property and Progress
- IV Transition

The first part will deal with the assumptions made by the radicals about nature, mankind, society and history and will lay the foundations for the major distinctions to be used in the later chapters. The second part will deal with political arguments by focussing on the distinction between radical reform and republican accounts of political liberty. Chapters will also be devoted to the case for decentralization as developed by Thomas Spence and William Godwin and to the important question of the arming of the people and its relation to political liberty. The third part will deal with the social and economic values and proposals of the radicals by situating them in relation to the debate about modern commercial society. The distinction between agrarian and commercial radicalism will provide the framework for discussion. Special attention will also be paid to the social and economic ideas of James Burgh. The fourth part of the thesis will deal with rival accounts of the transition, reformist and revolutionary. Chapters will also be given over to a discussion of the reformist strategies proposed by William Godwin and the youthful Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

1. On the eighteenth-century context I found the following most useful: Lois Whitney, Primitivism and the Idea of Progress in English Popular Literature of the Eighteenth Century (Baltimore, John Hopkins Press, 1934), Basil Willey, The Eighteenth-Century Background: Studies in the Idea of Nature in the Thought of the Period (1940; rep. Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1962), Simeon Wade, "The Idea of Luxury in Eighteenth-Century England" (Harvard Univ. Ph.D. thesis. 1968), Peter Gay, The Enlightenment: An Interpretation (2 vols; London, Wildwood House, 1973), Donald Winch, Adam Smith's Politics: An Essay in Historiographic Revision (Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1978) and R.R. Palmer, The Age of the Democratic Revolution (2 vols; Princeton, N.J., Princeton Univ. Press, 1959 and 1964).

PART I: RADICAL THEORY: THE FOUNDATIONS

CHAPTER 1: MAN AND NATURE

Although the central focus for this study will be the political and social thought of the radicals it is necessary to deal with the philosophical framework within which their attitudes to politics, property and progress developed. About this two points need to be made. Firstly, few of the radicals could be described as systematic philosophers; still less as philosophical innovators. They were, as Morton White has said of the American revolutionaries, "philosophical borrowers".¹ Secondly, there was major disagreement amongst the radicals themselves on what counted as a secure philosophical foundation for a radical commitment. The existence (or otherwise) of God, the human soul and natural rights, for example, were all points of contention within the radical camp itself.

In general terms, however, the radicals did see themselves as spokesmen for the enlightenment tradition which sought to apply the highly successful methods of natural science to the study of man and society.² Human existence was thought to be multi-faceted but not so complex as to prevent understanding and explanation in terms of general principles. Such principles could act as guides to both the ends and means of political practice. Being unable to use the laboratory as in the natural sciences, the enlightenment radicals turned to

1. Morton White, The Philosophy of the American Revolution (New York, Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 4. Of the radicals only Richard Price, Joseph Priestley and William Godwin can be said to have made substantial and lasting philosophical contributions.

2. See Gay, The Enlightenment, ch. 7.

history for concrete, experimentally verified evidence. "Hypotheses built upon arguments a priori", wrote Joseph Priestley, "are least of all tolerable. Here observation and experience are the only safe guides".¹ According to James Mackintosh sufficient knowledge had been accumulated from history to make it possible to speak of a "science of politics".² Some of the radicals interpreted this in a peculiarly English way, it being believed that the Anglo-Saxon Constitution perfected in the reign of King Alfred, was a model for contemporary politics.³ The point of radicalism, then, was to restore the constitution to its original basis; thus, as we saw in the introduction, the use of "radical".

Society was conceived of as a great machine which, if placed on the right foundations, would forever be in equilibrium.⁴ That such foundations could be apprehended intellectually, either through the study of history or the use of reason, and introduced practically was never doubted. Indeed many radicals believed that they lived in an age in which mankind was approaching moral perfection, the highest of all human purposes. "The kingdom of the Messiah which our Saviour came to establish", claimed Richard Price, "was fast approaching." The subjects of it would be "fellow-citizens with angels, and heirs of a glorious immortality".⁵

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1. Joseph Priestley, Lectures on History and General Policy ... (Birmingham, 1788), p. 14.
 2. James Mackintosh, Vindicae Gallicae ... (3rd. ed., London, 1791), pp. 112-13.
 3. See ch. 2, sect. III of this thesis for an account of the tensions between a "scientific" and a "patriotic" view of English history.
 4. This is Thomas Spence's formulation. See "An Interesting Conversation between a Gentleman and the Author ...", Pig's Meat, 111 (1795), p. 234.
 5. Richard Price, Evidence for a Future Period of Improvement in the State of Mankind ... (London, 1787), pp. 1, 3. See Jack Fruchtman, jnr, "Politics and the Apocalypse: The Republic and the Millenium in Late-Eighteenth-Century English Political Thought", Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture, X (1981), 153-64.

I The World of Nature

The context of all human endeavour was the material universe. "Whether we sleep or wake," wrote Thomas Paine, "the vast machinery of the universe still goes on".¹ It was a law-governed and purposeful universe which was granted by the Creator (atheists would say which existed) for the mutual benefit of mankind. The order and simplicity which natural scientists had discovered in nature was assumed to exist in the human world as well. Thus certain of the laws of nature could even be used analogically by the student of human affairs. Consider, for example, one of Paine's arguments for American independence:

In no instance hath nature made the satellite larger than its primary planet, and as England and America, with respect to each other, reverses the common order of nature, it is evident they belong to different systems: England to Europe, America to itself.²

Similarly he argued that the natural distribution of talents and wisdom right throughout society meant that election rather than hereditary right was the best basis for government.

First and foremost, however, the world of nature was a great store-house for the satisfaction of material needs: "Do we not see a fair creation prepared to receive us the instant we are born - a world furnished to our hands that cost us nothing?"³ The radicals regarded the earth in its original state as the property of all. That all had an equal right to what nature offered was, said Thomas Spence, established

1. Thomas Paine, The Age of Reason, intro. by John M. Robertson (1795-6; London, Watts and Co., 1915), p. 6.
2. Paine, Common Sense, p. 91. The best analysis of the precise position of "Nature" in Paine's thought is to be found in P.J. Burnell, "The Political and Social Thought of Thomas Paine 1737-1809" (Univ. of Warwick. Ph.D. thesis. 1972), ch. 1.
3. Paine, Age of Reason, p. 6.

by the scriptures and the dictates of "natural reason".¹ The existence of such a world, which could be used and developed by mankind, was seen as proof of the reality of the principle of benevolence: "Do we want to contemplate [God's] munificence? We see it in the abundance with which he fills the earth. Do we want to contemplate his mercy? We see it in his not withholding that abundance even from the unthankful".² Merely to be present in such a wonderful creation was thought to be a spur to moral behaviour.

Some of the radicals pushed the idea of nature as a moral educator even further. In his novel, The Peripatetic, written in the form of a travel journal, John Thelwall began uncontroversially by pointing to nature studies as a stimulant to intellectual exercise. However, later on in the text he presents nature itself as a moral educator

... from the stork, that bears its aged parent on its back, and from the pelican, whose maternal care has produced the fable of her fostering her infant progeny from her own bleeding bosom, we learn the practical religion of the heart! the glorious maxims of relative and social duty.³

Being close to nature was thought to encourage the peaceful and meditative side of man and discourage greed and aggression. Inevitably such views raised the question as to whether or not the earliest stages of human existence were the best because it was in the earliest stages that there were the fewest mediations, such as were associated with civilized existence, between mankind and the natural world. It also raises the question of mankind's nature: was it basically peaceful and sociable or

1. Spence, "An Interesting Conversation", p. 232. It should be noted that there was more than one interpretation of what this meant and what it implied for policy.

2. Paine, Age of Reason, p. 14.

3. John Thelwall, The Peripatetic ... (2 vols; London, 1793), i.12, 17-18.

were the better parts of man the creations of civilization? The various answers that were given can only be clearly seen when placed alongside the various perceptions which existed of the history and meaning of economic development. It is to these that I now turn.

II Economic Man

The radicals considered human beings from the point of view of the various levels of their existence - the economic, the social and the political, and the intellectual and the religious. At his most basic man was a material being, a bundle of needs and capacities requiring sustenance. Human labour was the activity through which he was able to provide for himself by exercising his capacities upon nature. Four elements were involved:

- (i) human needs, the satisfaction of which was the object of labour
- (ii) the labour process itself
- (iii) the means of labour, naturally provided and man-made
- (iv) the products of labour.

Not only were the radicals concerned with these elements from the point of view of modes of property which related to the distribution of the means of labour and the final product, but also with modes of subsistence which related to the type and range of economic activity. It was believed that the modes of life, labour and property of a nation were crucial to its morals and manners, the latter being important in any treatment of politics and political liberty. Consequently discussions of politics, property and progress were inextricably linked.

Following the approach adopted by the Scottish Historical School the radicals usually referred to four stages in economic development:

hunting and gathering, pasturage, agriculture and commerce.¹ The emergence of private property in the land was associated with the agricultural stage of development. In earlier stages the land itself had, according to John Thelwall, remained common property even though "the savage appropriates the game transfixed with his dart, and the shepherd challenges the flock he has reclaimed and pastured".² Whenever the agricultural system preponderated, on the other hand, experience soon suggested "the general expediency of permanent possessions in the individual who was to cultivate".³ Only with a degree of security would the required efforts - ploughing and feeding, preparing the harvest and manuring the soil - be forthcoming from the individual. It was believed, however, that in the earliest stages of agricultural civilization an equality in the distribution of land was maintained by the community.⁴ In the course of time - or by way of direct conquest - the egalitarian system was broken up and replaced by feudalism. Governments, argued Thelwall, "instead of protecting the weak against the strong (as they pretend to do) and thus levelling" actually intensified the inequalities by creating different classes, orders and distinctions amongst the people, granting important privileges to the propertied and instituting the law

1. See esp. two articles by Andrew Skinner: "Economics and History: The Scottish Enlightenment", Scottish Journal of Political Economy, XII (1965), 1-22; and "Natural History in the Age of Smith", Political Studies, XV (1967), 32-48.
2. John Thelwall, The Rights of Nature against the Usurpations of Establishments ... (2 parts; London, 1796), ii.61.
3. Ibid., p. 66. Thelwall did note the existence of exceptions: agriculture being "the joint concern of the whole state" and the common territory being cultivated by "common labour"; ibid., p. 62.
4. Only one of the radicals, the Spencean Thomas Evans, associated a system of agrarian equality with Anglo-Saxon England; Christian Policy, the Salvation of Empire ... (2nd ed., London, 1816), pp. 11-12. For an account of his social and economic ideas see pp. 190-92 below.

of primogeniture.¹

The fact that material progress was possible was seen as testimony to the dynamic quality of human capacities. Because of their inventive powers and creativity, wrote Thomas Spence, men are truly the "Lords of the Creation".² Unlike animals (and young children) who were said to be "slaves" of the present, men were described by Joseph Priestley as beings who could contemplate past and future, draw lessons and construct alternatives.³ In the arts and sciences of economic activity these qualities made for vast improvements in human productivity.

In the case of the move from hunting and pasturage to settled agriculture there was complete agreement among the radicals about the general facts of improvement. Of the earliest forms of life and labour John Thelwall wrote:

While the earth remains uncultivated, the subsistence of man, even in the most genial climates, is scanty and precarious; the social passions are languid and joyless; the faculties are sluggish; the intellect slumbers, as it were; and all the nobler and finer feelings of our nature, lie benumbed in the oblivious bog of indolence: the endearing intercourses of friendship are scarcely known; the reciprocations of relationship are but a sad chain of domestic tyranny and servitude; and even the dearest and sweetest of those connections which give an interest, and a zest, to civilized life, exhibits, in the hut of the savage or the barbarian, a disgusting picture ...⁴

Warfare was also thought to be frequent, the enlargement of territory being the only means available for increasing subsistence. Thus despite the advantages which were associated with primitive life, such as a generally

1. Thelwall, Rights of Nature, ii.72-3.

2. Thomas Spence, "The Rights of Man, by Question and Answer", Pig's Meat, I (1793), p. 265.

3. Joseph Priestley, An Essay on the First Principles of Government ... (London, 1768).

4. Thelwall, Rights of Nature, ii.57. See also, esp., Priestley, Lectures on History and General Policy, pp.323-4.

free mode of life and corporeal strength and vigour,¹ there were forces at work which made the transition to an agricultural economy inevitable and desirable. In this sense none of the radicals could, properly speaking, be labelled "chronological primitivists", a title coined by Arthur Lovejoy to refer to those who believed that the earliest stages of man and society were the best.² At the same time Lovejoy pointed to what he called "cultural primitivism". This was the belief that what was wrong with the world was due to the abnormal complexity and sophistication of modern life, the multiplicity and over-abundance of material possessions and the want of human spontaneity. It wasn't held that the earliest stages of man's existence were perfect in all respects but that on the basis of what was known about the earliest times a model of the normal social order could be constructed.³ There were radicals who agreed with this assessment of modern life and who saw much of human history as a decline, but for them it was a decline dating from the emergence of inequality in the agrarian societies rather than from the introduction of settled forms of life and labour. This agrarian current in radical thought co-existed with a strong belief in the rationality and inevitability not only of the move to agriculture but also of the emergence of commercial civilization. Underlying this disagreement between agrarian and commercial radicals were differing perceptions of human needs

1. Ibid., pp. 324-25 and Catharine Macaulay, Letters on Education ... (London, 1790), p. 24.

2. Arthur Lovejoy, "Foreword", Whitney, Primitivism and the Idea of Progress, pp. xii-xiii. Whitney outlines the views held by the radicals on the question of primitivism: Thomas Day, pp. 133-36; Catharine Macaulay, pp. 154-57; Joseph Priestley, pp. 177-84; William Godwin, pp. 207-57; Thomas Paine, pp. 226-29; and Mary Wollstonecraft, pp. 231-35. Her argument that there is a strain of primitivism in Paine's thought has been corrected by V.E. Gibbens, "Tom Paine and the Idea of Progress", Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, LXVI (1942), 191-204.

3. Lovejoy, "Foreword", p. xiv.

and of the relationship between material and moral progress. I will discuss each in turn.

III Material and Moral Progress

It is possible to extract from the radical literature three conceptions of mankind's material needs. In the first place there was a clearly agrarian conception. This acknowledged the need for subsistence goods only, included in which were the so-called "coarse" manufactures - clothing, housing essentials and agricultural implements.¹ The important thing about these basics was that the family or small, village community would be an adequate basis of production; trade, commerce and manufacturing either being completely absent or reduced to a bare minimum. Also to be noted was the fact that only a small quantum of human labour would need to be exercised to produce these goods, leaving plenty of time for moral and intellectual development. Secondly there existed what can be called a modified agrarian conception which saw the need for some degree of material refinement over and above the bare necessities.² Consequently some degree of trade, commerce and manufacturing was deemed acceptable but not to the extent that an agrarian way of life and labour lost its pre-eminence. Basically the agrarians possessed a static view of human needs and saw nothing but superfluity and extravagance when others saw progress.

The commercial conception of mankind's material needs was dynamic and open-ended. "There is no situation man ever yet arrived at or ever will arrive at", claimed Joseph Priestley, "in which he can entirely

1. See, for example, Hall, Effects of Civilization, sect. xxxvii.

2. See, for example, William Godwin, Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, ed. Isaac Kramnick (3rd ed., 1798; rep. Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1976), pp. 703-4.

acquiesce, so as to look for no further improvements".¹ Today's basics, therefore, were yesterday's luxuries; commerce being an essential means for facilitating a world-wide division of labour in which all would gain. The point of politics was not to hold back the forces of modernity but to sweep away all the obstacles to material progress and its proper distribution.

The crucial question for the radicals concerned the relationship between material progress and moral and intellectual progress, as it was the latter rather than the former which they saw as the supreme end of human existence. The first end of human existence, explained John Cartwright, was to constantly approximate towards moral perfection in order that one attained the future happiness promised by the Creator. The second end was to render human life, individually and collectively, as happy as possible during the terms of mortality granted to mankind.² Herein lay the point of contention between agrarian and commercial radicals. The agrarians saw a conflict between moral and material progress except insofar as the latter opened up the possibility for greater leisure for contemplation and self-improvement. "The genuine wealth of man", wrote Godwin, "is leisure, when it meets with a disposition to improve it. All other riches are of petty and inconsiderable value".³ The production and exchange of luxuries associated with modern commercial society was thought not only to be unessential to human needs but impossible to attain without excessive labour - at least for the vast majority. "Simplicity of Manners" as well as leisure were said to be preconditions

1. Priestley, Lectures on History and General Policy, p. 386.

2. Cartwright, Take Your Choice, pp. 1-2.

3. William Godwin, The Enquirer, Reflections on Education, Manners, and Literature ... (London, 1797), p. 167.

for "soundness of understanding".¹ Luxury consumption encouraged greed and shunted men off the straight line of moral perfection which required the employment of all talents, understandings, strength and time to the production of the greatest quantity of good. Richard Price spoke of self-interest having to be "corrected", "purified" and transformed into "the only just and rational principle of action" - universal benevolence.² A life of hard labour and/or luxury consumption was a means to the opposite.³

Agrarian ideology exerted a powerful influence on a radical generation searching for solutions to the moral and political decay which they saw around them. The ideas of the self-sufficient village community and the independent freeholder, which had long played a role in British social and political thought, became intermixed with classical republican ideals of equality, simplicity and virtue to produce the agrarian radicalism of the late eighteenth-century.⁴ "Manly vigour", "plain good sense", and "humane virtues", wrote William Ogilvie, were exhibited chiefly by independent cultivators free to enjoy the fruits of their own labour.⁵ By dismantling the superstructure of modern civilizations and

1. Godwin, Political Justice, p. 78.

2. Richard Price, A Discourse on the Love of Our Country (4th ed.; London, 1789), pp. 6-8.

3. In arguing this the agrarian radicals could call on a long intellectual tradition which had seen "luxury" as the cause of mankind's problems. See John Sekora, Luxury: The Concept in Western Thought, Eden to Smollett (Baltimore and London, Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1977). On the eighteenth-century debate see Wade, "The Idea of Luxury".

4. See Paul H. Johnstone, "In Praise of Husbandry", Agricultural History, X-XI (1936-37), 80-85; A.J. Sambrook, "The English Lord and the Happy Husbandman", Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth-Century, and Judith H. Shklar, "Rousseau's Two Models: Sparta and the Age of Gold", Political Science Quarterly, LXXXI (1966), 25-51.

5. Ogilvie, "Right of Property in Land", p. 33.

returning human beings to more natural modes of life and labour, moral and political regeneration could begin.¹

The commercial radicals such as Joseph Priestley and Thomas Paine believed in material progress and connected it with private property, self-interest and commercial society. They argued that the society and economy said by the agrarians to be the basis and fulfilment of the ethic of universal benevolence - the agrarian utopia - was antithetical to real human needs and aspirations. They argued that the presentation of options by the agrarians - agrarianism or moral decay - was unsatisfactory as they believed that commerce expanded and humanised the mind by way of increased contact and the encouragement of mutual interdependence.² It was recognized, however, that modern commercial society could be destructive if the political, social and educational contexts were not organized properly. For such radicals, then, universal benevolence became a means by which individual, self-interested behaviour would be regulated, rather than an abstract end to which it would be totally subordinated. Of course there were differing understandings of what such "practical humanitarianism" would mean for state policy and individual action, but all the commercial radicals saw themselves as possessing a more realistic view of human nature and human potentialities than the backward-looking agrarians.³

1. For a fuller discussion of agrarian ideology see ch. 9, sect. III and ch. 10.

2. See Gibbens, "Tom Paine and the Idea of Progress" and Willey, The Eighteenth-Century Background, pp. 200-204.

3. On the background to these ideas see Albert O. Hirschman, The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before its Triumph (Princeton, Princeton Univ. Press, 1977) and Ralph Lerner, "Commerce and Character: The Anglo-American New Model Man", William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd series, XXXVI (1979), 3-26. Commercial radicalism will be discussed in more detail in ch. 9, sect. II and ch. 12.

CHAPTER 2: STATE AND SOCIETY

The radicals recognized that the development of human capacities and the satisfaction of human needs, both basic to human existence and human happiness, were social activities; so much so, wrote William Godwin, that "the interests of individuals are intertwined with each other, and cannot be separated".¹ According to John Thelwall history had confirmed the social nature of human existence by establishing that nowhere had there been or was there "man without society". History, he continued, also proved the political nature of human existence by failing to produce any societies "without government".² In this chapter I will look at the philosophical justifications which the radicals gave to these historical realities and the special attention which many of them gave to England's Anglo-Saxon past.

I Man as a Social Being

In eighteenth-century political and social thought the concept of "the state of nature" played a central part and was used in a number of ways.³ Firstly, it described the earliest condition of men regardless of its characteristics. As more information on "primitive man" and life in "rude states" became available this specifically historical usage became more frequent. Secondly, it often referred to the state of human existence before the development of the arts and sciences; in other words

1. Godwin, Enquirer, p. 1.

2. Thelwall, Rights of Nature, ii.51.

3. See A.O. Aldridge, "The State of Nature: an undiscovered country in the history of ideas", Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, XCVIII (1972), 7-26; Ogden, "The State of Nature"; and Ronald Meek, Social Science and the Ignoble Savage (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976).

human life before civilization. I have already referred to both of these usages in the first chapter. Thirdly, it was used as a hypothetical abstraction, describing the status of human beings not subject to any law or government. For the radicals it was this specifically Lockean sense which was of primary concern. Many of them took the concept further and postulated a "state of natural liberty"; a state not merely without government but without any form of association. By examining a state of human existence in which there were only occasional and fortuitous meetings between individuals and no stable and permanent social relations they hoped to be able to find the raison d'être of man's existence as a social being.

The radicals believed that a state of natural liberty would, of necessity, give way to a state of society. Two reasons were given. In the first place human beings were said to be naturally gregarious and, in the words of Thomas Paine, "unfitted for perpetual solitude".¹ John Cartwright, almost self-contradictorily it would seem, went further: "the natural liberty of a social being was in society".² In the second place it was argued that only through co-operation would material progress be possible. In a state of natural liberty, explained Joseph Priestley, the powers of men are dissipated by attention to a multiplicity of objects, the employments of all are similar and improvement is slow and uncertain. By means of general association and the division of labour human powers could have their full effect.³ It should be noted, however,

1. Paine, Common Sense, p. 66.

2. John Cartwright, An Appeal on the Subject of the English Constitution (London, 1797), p. 25.

3. Priestley, Essay on the First Principles of Government, pp. 6-8. On the development of this idea - and the part played by Priestley - see Milton Myers, "Division of Labour as a Principle of Social Cohesion", Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science, XXX (1967), 432-40.

that there was much disagreement in the radical camp on the limits to which the principle of the division of labour should be taken.

The starting point for political and social theory, then, was man-in-society. For some of the radicals, clearly influenced by Burke's Vindication of Natural Society, it was the patriarchal family structure which was the first form of social existence.¹ For some as well, the way of life centred on relatively isolated family groups was the most "natural" and productive of human happiness. In general, however, society was taken to mean a union of several families formed for common internal advantage and external defence. For many this implied, of necessity, the formation of a system of law and government.

II Politics and the State

For many of the radicals the move from society to government was more problematical. "Man, were he not corrupted by governments", wrote Thomas Paine, "is naturally the friend of man". Because co-operation between human beings was voluntary and mutually beneficial, and because the "inner light" of Reason informed human behaviour, there were powerful forces making for harmony within society.

The mutual dependence and reciprocal interests which man has upon man, and all the parts of a civilized community upon each other, create that great chain of connexion which holds it together. The landholder, the farmer, the manufacturer, the merchant, the tradesmen, and every occupation, prospers by the aid which each receives from the other, and from the whole. Common interest regulates their concerns, and forms their law;

1. See, for example, Maurice Margarot, Proposal for a Grand National Jubilee ... (Sheffield, n.d.), p. 24. In his Vindication of Natural Society (1756) Burke had posited the existence of three stages of social development: firstly a state of nature, secondly a natural society composed of individual family groups and thirdly a political society involving the union of families through law. It was intended as pure irony but was taken as a literal statement by many contemporaries. See Aldridge, "The State of Nature", pp. 18-19.

and the laws which common usage ordains have a greater influence than the laws of government.¹

The Lockean state of nature was a state of customary, law-governed harmony.

For Paine, the state was a "necessary evil", and like clothing "the badge of lost innocence". Unfortunately the impulses of conscience were not sufficiently clear, uniform and irresistibly obeyed enough to make a stateless form of social existence possible.² Putting it in its simplest terms it was believed that there was a residue of human weakness in all men which made for temptation and evil. Given the natural differences in physical strength these temptations were always powerful, the physically strong being tempted to avoid work and invade the property of the weaker members of the human species.³ This being the case individuals were willing, firstly, to surrender a small portion of their rightfully obtained property to finance a state and, secondly, to give up their right of personal redress in exchange for the legal protection of their other rights.⁴ In establishing a government which laid down the rules governing social existence it was seen to be essential to distribute political rights equally if all lives, liberties and properties were to be protected properly. Political rights were thus derived from natural rights and became central to the protection of the latter: "The right of voting for representatives, is the primary right by which other rights are protected. To take away this right, is to reduce man to a state of slavery, for slavery consists in being subject to

1. Paine, Rights of Man, pp. 230, 185.

2. Paine, Common Sense, p. 66.

3. Sampson Perry, The Origin of Government ... (London, 1797), p. 12.

4. Paine, Rights of Man, pp. 90-91.

the will of another, and he that has not a vote in the election of representatives is in this case."¹

Implicit in the radical conception of the state was the belief that the people were educated to freedom and morality through participation in the polis. According to Joel Barlow natural man was a being on whose heart the moral law is engraven, placed there by God, to be discovered through conscience and reason. However, within society "he is called to encounter problems which the elementary tables of his heart will not always enable him to solve". Simple moral rules could be deduced but not those which involved complexity:

Natural reason may teach me not to strike my neighbour without a case; but it will never forbid my sending a sack of wool from England, or printing the French constitution in Spain. These are positive prohibitions, which Nature has not written in her book.²

Consequently a public dialogue was seen to be essential if human beings were to discover and systematize the rules of justice which should govern their social and economic relationships. John Thelwall also stressed the positive role played by politics in human societies. Its role, he said, was to substitute "moral arbitration" for "physical force" in human affairs. The law ought to be the epitome of "aggregate reason" with the

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1. Thomas Paine, "Dissertation on the First Principles of Government ..." (1795), The Political and Miscellaneous Works of Thomas Paine (2 vols; London, 1819), ii.13. The commonly held view, that when one compares Common Sense (1776) with The Rights of Man (1791-92) a shift from a negative to a positive conception of government occurs, cannot be sustained. For Paine it was the system of law to guarantee social justice which was a "necessary evil"; the activity of politics was a positive good in that it guaranteed just laws and proper administration. In later life, however, Paine did begin to have second thoughts about the connection between democracy and justice. See ch. 6, sect. III below.
 2. Joel Barlow, Advice to the Privileged Orders in the Several States of Europe ... (2 parts; London, 1792, 1795), i.109, 110-111.

objective of not just protecting and preserving mankind's natural rights but also of improving the physical, moral and intellectual enjoyments of the whole population. Only by bringing all the people together on the basis of equality would politics be able to perform this task.¹

For the radicals the political model used was the small, face-to-face community within which all would participate equally in organizing their common concerns.² The community would enforce its will through social pressure or legal sanction. National parliaments were simply extensions of these local communities, members of parliament being their representatives and subject to annual re-election. It should be noted, however, that none of the radicals denied the existence of an objective moral order within which the political process operated. The purpose of legislators was not to create the law but to express it. Consequently the will which was to be found was not - as Rousseau put it - "a sum of particular wills" but "the general will" or "common interest".³ For the radicals politics was a positive good in that it was a way of collecting the common interest and ensuring its impartial application. Only William Godwin was bold enough to claim that government was only transitionally necessary and would wither away in the rational future.⁴ However, before moving on to radical accounts of government and political forms - and their destiny - it is necessary to situate the philosophical alongside the historical accounts in respect of the state and to fill in the detail of radical

1. Thelwall, Rights of Nature, ii.41-47.

2. This aspect of radical thought is discussed in Margaret Leslie, "The Social and Political Thought of Joseph Priestley" (Cambridge Univ. Ph.D. thesis. 1966), pp. 144-53.

3. Jean Jacques Rousseau, The Social Contract trans. G.D.H. Cole (London, J.M. Dent, 1913), pp. 22-26.

4. See pp. 51-52 below.

perceptions of liberty and equality. The former will be dealt with in the rest of this chapter and the latter in the next chapter.

III The Earliest States and the Anglo-Saxon Model

It was believed by many of the radicals that the earliest states emerged organically out of society and were democratic in character. In the first instance, wrote Thomas Paine, general assemblies of the people decided upon regulations for their common life, no other sanction than public opprobrium being necessary for their enforcement.¹ Eventually permanent systems of law making and enforcement became necessary. However, given the small and simple nature of the economies and societies which existed, direct democracy remained a suitable method of government; the sole required qualification to the model being the election (for short terms only) of administrators to execute the laws laid down by the people. Only in times of emergency were centralizations of legislative and executive power ever sanctioned.² The ancient republics of Greece and Rome, when due allowance was made for the restrictions on participation which existed, were held out as examples from which much could be learnt. They were, said Catharine Macaulay, "models of human glory" that had played their part in the process of "enlightenment" which characterized the modern world.³

However, to hold out the Greek city-states as ideal forms of government was seen by most of the radicals as a backward step in that they were only designed for small states with small populations. Unless radical decentralization was proposed - as it was by Thomas Spence and

1. Paine, Common Sense, p. 67.

2. See Thelwall, Rights of Nature, ii.53-4 and Perry, The Origin of Government, pp. 11-21.

3. Catharine Macaulay, The History of England, from the Accession of James I ... (8 vols; London 1763-1783), i.275.

William Godwin¹ - methods had to be found to integrate the many communities which made up a nation. It was further thought that the absence of an understanding of representative democracy had made the decay of ancient democracy an inevitability. As Thomas Paine put it:

As these democracies increased in population, and the territory extended, the simple democratical form became unwieldy and impracticable; and as the system of representation was not known, the consequence was, they either degenerated convulsively into monarchies or became absorbed into such as then existed.²

Others placed more stress on the emergence of economic inequality in the process which undermined the ancient republics. The Agrarian Law of the Roman Republic, argued Catharine Macaulay, was never fixed on a proper balance and the "extreme disproportion" in wealth which resulted shifted the balance of political power to "the aristocratical party" which subverted the fundamental principles of the government and introduced the innovations which ended in anarchy. Anarchy, as is naturally its consequence, ushered in absolute monarchy.³

It was believed by a significant segment of the radical movement that Anglo-Saxon England had managed to avoid this fate, at least until 1066 when the Normans successfully invaded, by designing a system of government which could keep alive the principles of democracy despite the larger areas and populations. The chief text for this point of view was Obadiah Hulme's anonymously published Historical Essay on the English Constitution (1771).⁴ In the earliest times, wrote Hulme, each community

1. Spence's and Godwin's views on decentralization are outlined and discussed in ch. 7.

2. Paine, Rights of Man, p. 199.

3. Macaulay, Loose Remarks, pp. 34-5.

4. [Obadiah Hulme], An Historical Essay on the English Constitution ... (London, 1771).

(or Tithing) within the country governed itself by way of the annual election of legislators and administrators. Only those who had become housekeepers were deemed to be freemen and therefore capable of voting. Each Tithing had an elected chief magistrate to supervise the administration of its laws. For reasons of defence a number of these Tithings united to form a Wapentake which was composed of the chief magistrates of the Tithings. It would elect officers of the militia and supervise all matters relating to the defence of the area, a court of law being established to enforce all regulations pertaining to defence. Eventually several Wapentakes combined to form a Shire which would have its own parliament (or Shire-gemot) consisting of the chief magistrate of every Tithing. The Shire-gemot would elect the officers of the Shire, from whose ranks would be elected a chief with executive authority and command of the militia. A Shire Court was also established to which citizens from the localities could appeal if they were unhappy with decisions of the Tithings or Wapentake Courts. Finally a Kingdom was formed by the union of a number of Shires, the chief magistrate of the Tithings meeting annually as a national Parliament and custom establishing one family as the source of the chief magistrate for the whole Kingdom. It was stressed, however, that each King had to be accepted by the Parliament.

The English Nation was formed when seven such kingdoms united under Alfred, "a prince of the most exalted merit that ever graced the English throne". At first a standing council with deputies appointed by the King and Parliament from every Kingdom ruled in concert with Alfred. Eventually the seven Parliaments were abolished and a National Parliament (or Wittenagemot) formed. It contained three elements, one hereditary and two elective:

1. Members of the standing council who had been appointed by each Kingdom to assist the King became Barons of the realm

and a distinct part of the Legislature.

2. Two members from each Shire elected annually by all housekeepers.
3. Two members from each town Tithing elected annually by all housekeepers.

As had been the case in each separate kingdom the King was chosen from one family, the ratification of Parliament completing the process. Hulme also insisted that the Clergy had no formal place in the Anglo-Saxon Constitution.¹

Many features of the Anglo-Saxon Constitution - as presented by Hulme - particularly impressed the radicals. In the first place it was constructed from the bottom up, each level being responsible to that below it. The administration of justice was local and trial by jury was an established institution. In the second place the King and Lords emerged from the people and as such were ultimately responsible to them. In the third place there was a union of the civil and military powers rather than their divorce. Finally, and this was the feature most important to Hulme, it enabled a number of communities over a large area to integrate and form a nation while still keeping alive the principle of accountability to the people by way of annual elections. Most of the radicals, however, altered Hulme's account to suit their own purposes. Consequently universal manhood suffrage rather than householder suffrage became a feature of the English Constitution² and the union of civil and military power was linked with the arming of the citizenry. A standing army, explained Granville Sharp, was "entirely repugnant to the constitution of England".³ According

1. Ibid., ch. 2.

2. See, for example, Baxter, A New and Impartial History of England ... (London, 1796), p. vii.

3. Granville Sharp, Tracts, Concerning the Ancient and Only True Legal Means of National Defence ... (3rd ed., London, 1782), p. 27.

to Sharp each level of government in the Anglo-Saxon system involved a "frankpledge" or mutual agreement for mutual defence and government, there being a gradation of authority from the Chief of a Tithing right up to the King. This made the preservation of internal tranquillity and defence of the nation against foreign aggressors the duty of every citizen in every locality if called upon by the appropriate authorities.¹

This conception of the Anglo-Saxon Constitution became a model for many of the radicals and British history from 1066 was seen as the story of the struggle between constitutional principle and arbitrary rule. "The plain and simple truth is," claimed Thelwall, "that since the overthrow of our Saxon institutions, the sun of Liberty had never shone with unclouded beams, upon this unhappy country". He argued, however, like the seventeenth-century Levellers before him, that "some of the maxims of common law ... survived the general wreck; and from these fragments men began to comprehend what the structure was when entire." Consequently by a series of grants, charters and statutes the "Gothic shrine of liberty" was kept alive, if only imperfectly. First the nobility, then the country gentlemen and finally the trading interest were said to have had victories in relation to the monarchy. The common people entered the picture in 1649 but as they were not prepared for democracy the inevitable and tragic result was the dictatorial rule of Oliver Cromwell.² John Cartwright's understanding of developments since 1066 was pitched in terms of losses and gains. He identified the latter as the Magna Carta and

1. Granville Sharp, An Account of the Constitution English Polity of Congregational Courts ... (2nd ed., London, 1786), pp. 278-79. For details of radical arguments on the question of national defence see ch. 8.

2. Thelwall, Tribune, iii, pp. 183-92. On the Levellers see R.B. Seaberg, "The Norman Conquest and the Common Law: The Levellers and the Argument from Continuity", Historical Journal, XXIV (1981), 791-806.

the Revolution of 1688 and the former as the law of 1429 which limited the right to vote in county elections to forty-shilling freeholders, the Triennial Act of 1694 and the Septennial Act of 1715. By these three measures, he wrote, "the true barriers of liberty" were broken down and abuses allowed to creep in. Without a restoration of the Constitution to its proper basis absolute tyranny threatened.¹

For radical reformers like John Cartwright, history, or rather English history, was characterized by three periods: an ancient and glorious past in which political and civil liberty flourished, a long period of tyranny in which the idea of Anglo-Saxon democracy and elements of its common law kept alive the spirit of liberty amongst the people, and a future period, just beginning, in which the nation would fully recover its ancient liberties by restoring the Anglo-Saxon Constitution. One variety of radicalism, then, was militantly patriotic. The central task for the radicals, claimed John Baxter, was to spread knowledge of the proper constitutional foundations of British politics. History writing, he said, should aim to show the "historical facts" and "patriotic virtues" in their "true colours".²

It was the case, however, that a vigorous attack on this conception of history - and history writing - was mounted by the historians of the Scottish School, in particular David Hume, William Robertson and John Millar. The Anglo-Saxon age, they said, was "barren and rude" with most of the population slaves or tenants at the will of their Master. At the

1. Cartwright, An Appeal on the Subject of the English Constitution, pp. 36-43.

2. Baxter, A New and Impartial History, p. x. On patriotism and the radicals see Hugh Cunningham, "The Language of Patriotism, 1750-1914", History Workshop, XII (1981), 9-18 and Thompson, Making of the English Working Class, ch. 4.

same time they emphasized the complete transformation that had been wrought by the Normans in 1066 and rejected any notion of continuity from the ancient past to the present.¹ With such ideas Thomas Paine was in complete agreement and he denied that Anglo-Saxon practice could be of any use to the radicals in their search for intellectual bearings.

"The English government", he said, "is one of those which arose out of conquest, and not out of society". He was referring, of course, to the Norman invasion. Beyond that there were no bearings, and attempts to construct a constitution on the basis of efforts "to abate that tyranny, and render it less intolerable" since 1066, for example the winning of the Magna Carta, had not produced adequate results.² David Williams agreed that the Anglo-Saxon Constitution could not be regarded as a model because of the propertied franchise, the role played by the established Church and the clear lack of civil liberty. He believed, however, that certain of the institutions which he claimed to have existed, in particular the Folkmote or yearly assembly of all landholders which reviewed the conduct of King and Parliament, could be adapted and usefully utilised in contemporary conditions.³

At work within the radical camp, then, was a completely different and more realistic account of historical development amongst those not gripped by the myth of Anglo-Saxon perfection. History was seen as a learning experience in which there were high points but no model of

1. For a summary of their views see Quentin Skinner, "History and Ideology in the English Revolution", Historical Journal, VIII (1965), 155-56. See also Duncan Forbes, "'Scientific' Whiggism: Adam Smith and John Millar", The Cambridge Journal, VII (1954), 643-70.

2. Paine, Rights of Man, pp. 94, 214-15.

3. David Williams, Lessons to a Young Prince ... (5th ed., Dublin, 1791), pp. 28, 47 and Letters on Political Liberty ... (London, 1782), p. 48.

perfection in the past. On its own, emphasized Mary Wollstonecraft, "ancient wisdom" was not enough; but if synthesized with the intellectual achievements of modernity it could be productive of genuine knowledge.¹ According to this account of history human knowledge was gradually accumulated, each stage of human development contributing its lessons. It was essentially a theory of progress, from crude beginnings to an enlightened present which was paving the way for a perfect future. In Joseph Priestley's terms each stage was playing its part in God's plan for mankind. Even that which appeared to be evil or tragedy became reasonable, necessary and a disguised good.² Or as Catharine Macaulay put it: "It is perhaps the nature of all finite things to know things only by comparison, and this knowledge is well purchased, even with the expence of pain."³

The co-existence of these two accounts of history within the radical movement is indicated by a comparison of John Thelwall's political lectures with his scholarly and critical tract, The Rights of Nature. In the former, as was shown earlier, he spoke of the English Constitution - said to be a democracy limited by a hereditary chief magistrate and an hereditary upper chamber - and the need to restore it to its ancient purity. However, in the latter he poured scorn on the whole idea of Anglo-Saxon Liberty, claiming that it was characterized by a sharp division between military freemen and agricultural slaves. Following the

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1. Mary Wollstonecraft, An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution (London, 1794), p. 3. According to Paine there was more to "admire and less to condemn" in the Athenian democracy "than in any thing which history affords", Rights of Man, p. 199.
 2. See esp. Priestley, Lectures on History and General Policy and James J. Hoecker, "Joseph Priestley as a Historian and the Idea of Progress", Price-Priestley Newsletter, 111 (1979), 29-40.
 3. Macaulay, Letters on Education, p. 8.

Scottish historians, to whom he referred, his account of historical development was based on an account of changes in the modes of subsistence and property. The cause of liberty in the modern world came to be linked with the developing commercial system.¹ It would seem, however, that the radical constituency preferred to hear a story involving King Alfred, the Norman Yoke and the long struggle for the restoration of lost, English liberties. It was, as E.P. Thompson notes, still "the rhetoric of the age".²

1. Thelwall, Rights of Nature, i.18-19, ii. 49-77, 114-15.

2. Thompson, Making of the English Working Class, p. 96.

CHAPTER 3: LIBERTY AND EQUALITY

Most of the radicals were perfectly happy to utilise utilitarian as well as natural rights arguments in their presentation of the case for reform. The "rational object of civil association", wrote John Thelwall, was "the general good" or "the happiness of the whole". This depended, he added, on the security and reciprocation of individual rights.¹ Indeed, as has been persuasively argued by Margaret Leslie, it was within the context of natural law theory that one version of eighteenth-century utilitarianism was articulated.² It was this natural law utilitarianism, primarily developed by Locke, Hutcheson and Priestley, which attracted the radicals. For such thinkers the laws of nature dictated modes of action which being consistent with God's will/man's nature were productive of human happiness. Benthamite utilitarianism, on the other hand, rejected the notion of an objectively given moral order and considered all pleasures "as having originally equal claims to recognition".³ Such views were repugnant to the radicals. Even for William Godwin, who thought it important to begin with duties rather than rights, human happiness was given a definite and permanent content.⁴ All the radicals agreed, in general terms at least, that liberty and equality were mankind's greatest endowments, the means and ends of human progress and human happiness.

1. Thelwall, Rights of Nature, ii.41.

2. See Leslie, "Social and Political Thought of Joseph Priestley", ch. IV.

3. Ibid., p. 112. On the Benthamite version of radicalism see Elie Halévy, The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism (London, Faber and Gwyer, 1928).

4. See esp. K. Codell-Carter, "Introduction", to Enquiry Concerning Political Justice (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1971), pp. xvi-xx.

This chapter will outline the senses in which individual radicals understood their commitments to these primary values.

I Types of Liberty

Two types of liberty were referred to - political and civil. Political liberty was defined in two ways depending on whether the community or the individual was the point of reference. Political liberty was, as John Cartwright observed, "not a mere personal but a social right and condition".¹ The struggle of the American colonies against the British Parliament had helped clarify this distinction for the radicals. Firstly, then, political liberty referred to the power of self-government which a community, considered parochially or nationally, preserved for itself against any extraneous powers. It was analagous to the rights individuals preserved for themselves when they collaborated with others to form a state.²

In the second place it referred to that power which members of a state reserved for themselves "of arriving at the public offices, or at least of having votes in the nomination of those who fill them".³ For political liberty to be perfect all would have an equal power in directing the community, or at least an equal power in voting for those who would be given the power to direct the community's affairs. "Every Government whatever the form of it", wrote Joseph Priestley, "is originally, and antecedent to its present form, an equal republic".⁴ Consequently any

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1. John Cartwright, The State of the Nation ... (London, 1805), p. 108.
 2. Richard Price, Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty (9th ed., London, 1776), p. 6. In this tract Price used "civil liberty" as the others used "political liberty".
 3. Priestley, Essay on the First Principles of Government, pp. 12-13.
 4. Ibid., p. 41.

transgressions from the model needed to be fully and properly justified if they were to be acceptable.

Political liberty also implied, David Williams argued, the power of a people to repel all encroachments from above and confine those in public office to the limits of the office.¹ The thinking behind such an argument was outlined by Granville Sharp:

In all societies of men governed by Laws some sort of general Covenant must be understood to subsist between the several Sovereigns and their Subjects respectively: and, though such Covenants are not always expressed, yet most certainly, they are always implied.²

The authority of parliament, argued John Cartwright, "is in no sense 'absolute and despotic' for even in its authority over persons, it is limited and controuled by the constitution".³ It was important, therefore, to have a written constitution containing a Bill of Rights.

Similarly Thomas Paine argued for a written constitution which should be the act of the whole people and which could lay down detailed restrictions on those in authority.⁴ Should the contract be broken the people had a right to revolution. However, the right to revolt in any particular case depended not simply on whether the governors had betrayed their trust but on whether the evils which revolution would bring would be less than those which the people presently experienced.⁵ It was an abstract right which needed to be placed in its historical context. For the radicals

1. Williams, Letters on Political Liberty, p. 10.

2. Granville Sharp, A Declaration of the People's Natural Right to a Share in the Legislature ... (3rd ed., Dublin, 1776), p. xviii.

3. Cartwright, An Appeal on the Subject of the English Constitution, p. 30.

4. Thomas Paine, "A Letter Addressed to the Addressers ..." (1792) in H.H. Clark (ed.), Thomas Paine: Representative Selections (New York, Hill and Wang, 1961), pp. 374, 378-80.

5. Priestley, Essay on the First Principles of Government, pp. 24-5.

political liberty entailed national, and some added parochial, independence, some form of democracy, and, in the last instance at least, popular sovereignty. What this meant for institutions, procedures and practices will be discussed in later sections of this study. The rest of this chapter will concentrate on civil liberty.

For some of the radicals the power which a state exercised over the individuals within its boundaries was of more importance than the form of state which existed. Civil liberty was defined as "that power over their own actions, which the members of the state reserve to themselves and which their officers must not infringe".¹ It was thus possible to enjoy political liberty but not civil liberty; although, as Joseph Priestley argued, some form of the former was needed to protect the latter.² All the radicals were agreed, to use the words of William Godwin, that every human being "has a claim upon his little sphere of empire and discretion; and he is entitled to his appropriate portion of independence".³ While the radicals were divided on how large this sphere should be, they agreed that it would cover freedom of thought, speech and opinion in all matters pertaining to religion, morals and politics. The proper office of the civil magistrate, Richard Price forcefully maintained, was "to maintain peace; not to support truth".⁴ Not surprisingly then, the radicals were in the forefront of the various civil liberties campaigns of the late eighteenth-century.

The fact that many of the radicals were themselves dissenters added a personal element to their intellectual convictions. It has

1. Ibid., p. 13.

2. Ibid., pp. 54-5.

3. Godwin, The Enquirer, pp. 88-9.

4. Price, Evidence for a Future Period of Improvement, p. 23.

been noted by Russel E. Richey that as the eighteenth-century progressed the dissenters moved from a "negative" to a "positive" understanding of their position. From defining themselves over against the established church they began to stress the universalisability of their demands for civil and religious liberty. This "gradually emerging Whiggish self-understanding", argues Richey, "was to displace both the sectarian and the anti-Anglican statements. It remained the central source of identity until the end of the century".¹ More than anyone else it was Joseph Priestley who articulated the case for complete religious toleration. He argued that religious liberty was a natural and inalienable right because it was a natural duty. No-one, said Priestley, should allow their conscience to pass into the hands of others. Despite the orthodox view and his own hostility to Catholicism he was prepared to defend the rights of Roman Catholics as well. It was the case, he assured his readers, that Catholicism was a dying creed in the current age of enlightenment.² Some of the radicals, most notably James Burgh, agreed that Catholics should be granted religious freedom but rejected the argument that they should be granted political rights. The "nature, genius, and tendency of their religion is such", noted Burgh, "that it sanctifies all manner of oppression and cruelty to protestants, and therefore must naturally

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1. Russel E. Richey, "The Origins of British Radicalism: The Changing Rationale for Dissent", Eighteenth-Century Studies, VII (1973-4), 186. See also Bonwick, English Radicals and the American Revolution, ch. 7.
 2. See Priestley, Essay on the First Principles of Government, sect. III. For Priestley's views on religious liberty see esp. Leslie, "The Social and Political Thought of Joseph Priestley", pp. 189-204.

prove destructive to every protestant state".¹

Freedom of the mind was defended in one of two ways. Firstly, it was argued that moral, intellectual and religious freedom was a natural, God-given right and the basis of human autonomy in the world. Without the grant of freedom, wrote John Cartwright, "neither virtue nor vice, right nor wrong" could be ascribed to human actions and "to talk of happiness would be to talk nonsense". Human beings were said, therefore, to possess a duty to preserve their freedom from all tyranny.² Secondly, a connection was drawn between civil liberty and human progress. Given that human beings were fallible, Joseph Priestley argued, progress was only possible through the clash of ideas:

The wisest, and in all respects the best method, is to indulge men in the freest expression of their natural sentiments, and even to encourage the fullest discussion of all topics, of a civil as well as of a religious nature, in order that one opinion and one reason may combat another, and that all truth, religious, philosophical, or political, may prevail, and establish itself without obstruction.³

Even if an individual happened to be infallible, added William Godwin, it would be a mischief for him to impose on others: "He may exercise a republican boldness in judging, but he must not be preemptory and imperious in prescribing".⁴

Once we widen the parameters to include the more explicitly public

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1. James Burgh, An Account of the First Settlement, Laws, Form of Government, and Police of the Cessares ... (London, 1764), p. 51.
 2. Cartwright, Take Your Choice, p. 2.
 3. Joseph Priestley, An Appeal to the Public on the Subject of the Riots in Birmingham ... (Birmingham, 1791), p. 92.
 4. Godwin, Political Justice, p. 198.

and behavioural dimensions of human existence disagreements within the radical camp begin to emerge. For most the distinction between "liberty" and "license" was equally as important as that between "liberty" and "tyranny". To be truly free required knowledge of the limits of freedom. Freedom did not mean willing things arbitrarily but submitting oneself to "higher and higher types of 'necessity'", the highest freedom consisting of "the most complete submission to moral law".¹ If the laws were to be effective, explained James Burgh, the people themselves needed to be virtuous; good laws without a good people were worthless.² As education, constitutions and modes of subsistence and property all had a bearing on the morals and manners of a people, discussions of liberty necessarily involved consideration of these influential factors.

According to Burgh education was a national, state responsibility which needed to be administered carefully so that the young were introduced to and educated into the new way of life and politics being proposed.³ Plans for national education, which constantly appeared in radical programmes, were justified in three ways. In the first place, wrote Thomas Cooper, public instruction would inform men of their rights and the duties of those who serve them. Secondly, it would give them the ability to use creatively the leisure time available to them. The radicals, like many of their contemporaries, feared the undisciplined and licentious "mob". Thirdly, educational provision for all would draw forth "latent Ability" and so give "energy" to Industry. A rigidly class-divided society was thought to be inefficient as well as unjust. Until

1. This is Basil Willey's description of Joseph Priestley's concept of freedom; Eighteenth-Century Background, p. 173.

2. James Burgh, Political Disquisitions ... (3 vols; London, 1774-75), iii.4.

3. Ibid., ch. VI.

such public provision was forthcoming "the middling and poor Classes of Society" should establish meetings and clubs of their own which could correspond and communicate with each other.¹

George Dyer, whilst insisting that public education should not supersede private, noted that public provision would certainly render private provision "less necessary". He also proposed that rich and poor be taught in the same schools:

Such policy would humanize the heart, and prevent the proneness to insolence, which too often accompanies the wealth, and that proneness to servility, which attends the poor.²

He qualified his commitment by adding that the individual children be taught that which their "station and situation" required, with special provision made for the talented poor.³

Joseph Priestley agreed that education influenced the morals and manners of a people but did not see, with one significant exception, a role for national government. Parental freedom in respect of education was necessary if there was to be experimentation and progress (as in the other arts and sciences) and if domestic, family-based happiness was to be preserved. He believed, however, that the state did have a role with respect to the poor. They were, he noted (following Adam Smith) caught up in a division of labour which left them ignorant and potentially disruptive. Public provision of an elementary education was necessary to

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1. Thomas Cooper, A Reply to Mr. Burke's Invective ... (Manchester, 1792), pp. 75, 76-9.
 2. George Dyer, The Complaints of the Poor People of England (2nd ed., London, 1793), p. 18.
 3. Even Mary Wollstonecraft in her plans for national, state-funded education proposed a separation of children at age nine; those of "superior abilities or fortune" going to one school and those "intended for domestic employments, or mechanical trades" to another; Vindication of the Rights of Woman ed. Miriam Kramnick (1792; rep. Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1978), p. 275.

remove any temptations to idleness, extravagance and vice. If they could be taught "contentment in their station, and a firm belief in the wisdom and goodness of Providence that has so disposed them", he asserted, "they may be almost as happy, even in this world, as the most virtuous of their superiors".¹ Priestley, himself the victim of an unruly mob, was particularly sensitive to the problem of social order in a modern, necessarily hierarchical, society.²

Many of the radicals were also educational radicals, arguing that education should not only teach but practise liberality and humility. "Violate not they own image in the person of thy offspring", warned William Godwin, since "that image is sacred".³ Only if the educators themselves possessed a consciousness of the fallibility of human understanding and respect for the autonomy of their pupils would education be liberal. Of such a system Godwin wrote:

Everything bespeaks independence and equality. The man, as well as the boy, would be glad in cases of difficulty to consult a person more informed than himself.⁴

Others such as Burgh and Priestley, took a sterner view. Priestley, for example, stressed that parents and educators needed to "early" and

1. Priestley, Essay on the First Principles of Government, pp. 62-104; An Appeal to the Public on the Subject of the Riots. Part II ... (London, 1792), pp. vii-viii; and Miscellaneous Observations Relating to Education ... (Bath, 1778), p. 129.
2. See R.B. Rose, "The Priestley Riots of 1791", Past and Present, XVIII (1960), 68-88. Priestley may have regretted an earlier reference he made to mob action: "Governors will never be awed by the voice of the people, so long as it is a mere voice, without overt-acts ... [I]s not even a mob a less evil than a rebellion, and ought the former to be so securely blamed by writers on the subject, when it may prevent the latter?"; Essay on the First Principles of Government, pp. 47-8.
3. Godwin, The Enquirer, p. 89.
4. Ibid., p. 80. See also his unrealized scheme for a school; An Account of The Seminary ... (London, 1783). On the intellectual and practical background of the scheme see Don Locke, A Fantasy of Reason: The Life and Thought of William Godwin (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), pp. 20-24.

"deeply" impress on the young the principles of integrity, honour and religion "in a severe and virtuous education". It was unlikely, said Priestley, that the bulk of mankind could be freed completely from vice. It was sufficient, however, that humans "learn the art of preserving the appearance of virtue" because "if that appearance be habitual, and uniform, it will have nearly the same effect in society."¹

Further tensions within the radical movement are to be observed on the question of whether the process of education would be ongoing into adulthood. Burgh saw the need for a wide-ranging regulatory system to reduce human imperfections and weaknesses. "Human nature is originally the same in all ages and nations. Only in some it is more, in others less, debauched from its original tendencies".² He spoke approvingly of the censors, sumptuary laws and public meals of ancient Greece and disapprovingly of modern forms of leisured activity and sexual liberty. Legal restrictions on alehouses, gaming and adultery were all proposed. In Thomas Spence's writings, on the other hand, scorn is thrown at puritan excess and state regulation of individual behaviour. He saw the preaching of "temperance, labour, patience and submission" as part of the apparatus of aristocratic social control.³ Spence also advocated easy divorce: "Under our unalterable establishment what a dreadful thing it is to make a wrong choice where there is no remedy nor redress for life."⁴

1. Priestley, Lectures on History and General Policy, pp. 423, 425.

2. Burgh, Political Disquisitions, iii. 176. Burgh's ideas are the subject of ch. 11.

3. Thomas Spence, "The Important Trial of Thomas Spence ..." (1803) in A.W. Waters, Spence and his Political Works (Leamington Spa, 1917), p. 42. The themes of rest and idleness, as well as equality and fellowship are part of the English utopian tradition. See A.L. Morton, The English Utopia (London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1978).

4. Spence, "Important Trial", p. 46.

In looking at the differing accounts of the limits and potentialities of civil liberty it is clear that both "classical republican" and "enlightenment" assumptions were at work. According to the former tradition political liberty and political participation are given the central place, since republics are seen as "inherently fragile and unstable works of art, saved from corruption and decay only by the heroic virtue and self-denying patriotism of their citizens."¹ Consequently it was thought to be essential to instil the right values in the citizenry and to organize the society and economy so that the private and public goods coincided. Corruption or enfeeblement constantly threatened and had to be guarded against. On the other hand there were those who saw history as inherently progressive and who emphasized civil liberty in all spheres as the key to enlightenment and progress. Political liberty was held to be important but more as a means to civil liberty than as an end-in-itself. As Margaret Canovan has put it:

In place of the old vision of free states almost as lighthouses continually battered by the waves of chaos and tyranny, there was a new sense of history as a broad stream down which men were floating towards better societies, which they could reach easily, without any need for Spartan efforts.²

On this view there was less need to closely watch the morals and manners of the people. Both traditions were at work but when, for example, we compare James Burgh and William Godwin it is clear that the emphases are different, though an important point of common ground

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1. Margaret Canovan, "Two Concepts of Liberty - Eighteenth-Century Style", Price-Priestley Newsletter, II (1978), 28.
 2. Ibid., p. 38. See also Duncan Forbes, "Sceptical Whiggism, Commerce and Liberty", in A.S. Skinner and T. Wilson (eds.), Essays on Adam Smith (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1976), pp. 179-201.

was provided by the existence of natural rights assumptions within the classical republican framework as it was developed in the eighteenth-century.

Related to this distinction between "classical republican" and "enlightenment" assumptions was that between Godwin and the other radicals. For most of the radicals a condition of perfect liberty and morality may have been approximated in the earliest stages of human existence but could not be recovered or realized without sacrificing society and progress. The state, then, and all it involved was unavoidable; or, as Thomas Paine put it, "a necessary evil".¹ Perfect liberty had a role to play as one value amongst others whose claims could not be denied and whose precepts could be used to judge contemporary social life and institutions. Any restrictions on the individual would need a clear justification. Differing views existed on precisely where the balance was to be found between granting enough freedom to guarantee progress and restricting it sufficiently to avoid licentiousness. In this respect there were, as has been shown, "liberals" and "conservatives" in the radical camp.

For William Godwin, on the other hand, there was a state of perfect liberty and morality to be realized in the future. He acknowledged that systems of law and coercion had been historically necessary, providing a framework of security in a world of human imperfection, but not that this provided a complete, philosophical justification for the existence of the state. Such a task, he claimed, was impossible. Godwin even rejected the argument, central to radical thought in general, that political authority was justified on the basis of a social contract or agreement between free and consenting

1. Paine, Common Sense, p. 66.

individuals. According to Godwin either the idea of consent or that of government had to be sacrificed: "So numerous are the varieties of human understanding, in all cases where its independence and integrity are sufficiently preserved, that there is little chance of any two men coming to a precise agreement about ten successive propositions that are in their own nature open to debate".¹ Government was indeed a necessary evil which "corresponds, in a certain degree, to what the Greeks denominated a tyranny"² because it acted as a destructive influence on decision-making, individuals deferring to an external standard rather than allowing their minds to think through an issue independently. Consequently Godwin saw the maximization of civil liberty as a central objective for the reform movement and believed its beneficial influence would be cumulative, the time arriving when human beings would no longer need to rely on law and punishment to maintain order and justice.

II Degrees of Equality

There are given to all men, claimed John Cartwright, "the same senses, feelings, and affections to inform and influence; the same passions to actuate; the same reason to guide; the same moral principles to restrain; and the same free will to determine all alike".³ In the full range of their needs and capacities men were born equal. Two corollaries followed. Firstly - to quote one of the chapter headings from William Godwin's Political Justice -

1. Godwin, Political Justice, p. 214.

2. Ibid., p. 550. The political, social and economic implications of Godwin's anarchist philosophy are further discussed in chs. 7, 10 and 15 of this thesis.

3. Cartwright, Take Your Choice, pp. 2-3.

"the characters of men originate in their external circumstances". "It is" he said, "impression that makes the man".¹ He defined education as "every incident that produces an idea in the mind, and can give birth to a train of reflections". It included "the education of accident, or those impressions we receive independently of any design on the part of the preceptor; education commonly so called, or the impressions which he intentionally communicates; and political education, or the modification our ideas receive from the form of government under which we live".² To change an individual therefore, required a change to the influences which operated on his mind. Change was thought to be possible, if only in the longer run.

In the second place the radicals argued that any existing inequalities needed special justification and would only be acceptable if based on mutual agreement within the community. A rational community, wrote Cartwright, would only elevate some "in order to promote the common good, or to express the public gratitude for good already received".³ They differed in their assessments of which inequalities could and could not be justified. Most insisted that it was prudent, given contemporary opinion, or necessary, given observed differences between the sexes, to assume that there were important inequalities between men, and certainly between men and women, with respect to needs and capacities. The radicals did accept some of the arguments which were part of the wider political culture.

1. Godwin, Political Justice, p. 107

2. Ibid., p. 111.

3. Cartwright, Take Your Choice, p. 4.

Although they attacked conservative ideas of "natural" superiority and inferiority with respect to differences between men, many radicals agreed that women were "naturally" subordinate and could not claim equal political rights. John Cartwright defended this restriction on the grounds that women were unable to serve as the military defenders of the country and perform the labours of magistracy and office in civil government.¹ However, the belief that women could (and should) be more equal to men in "mind" and "spirit", even if politically and economically subordinate, had been developing in the eighteenth-century.² The case for intellectual equality and improved education for women had become well established if not completely accepted; it being recognized by many that the assumptions of intellectual equality contained the basis for an argument for complete emancipation. In her Letters on Education Catharine Macaulay criticized the use of education as a means for inculcating social prejudices and attacked sexual segregation. She proposed physical exercise and academic studies for the education of women as well as men. "There is", she said, "but one rule for the conduct of all rational beings".³

Mary Wollstonecraft laid the intellectual foundations for a wider political, social and economic emancipation even though she

1. Cartwright, An Appeal on the Subject of the English Constitution, p. 21. In one tract Cartwright did propose a vote for women: A Letter from John Cartwright, Esq. to a friend at Boston (London, 1793), pp. 65-6.

2. See A.R. Humphreys, "The 'Rights of Woman' in the Age of Reason", Modern Language Notes, XLI (1946), 256-69 and Miriam Kramnick, "Introduction", Wollstonecraft's Vindication of the Rights of Woman, pp. 29-40.

3. Macaulay, Letters on Education, p. 201.

limited her specific policy recommendations mainly to the sphere of education.¹ According to Wollstonecraft all human beings - men and women - enjoyed the same nature and could attain reason and play a role in God's Plan. Certainly the demand for equal political and social rights for women surfaced in the 1790s.² It is important to note, however, that the most consistent advocate of women's political rights - Thomas Spence - conceded that women were ineligible for public employments on account of the delicacy of their sex.³ Even Mary Wollstonecraft saw "the care of children in their infancy" as "one of the grand duties annexed to the female character by nature".⁴ Indeed part of her argument for educational equality was that it would enable women to fulfill their child-rearing duties more effectively, training children being as important an occupation as any. In other words the area of reproduction was still associated with the female essence. Wollstonecraft did argue, however, that those women who chose not to have children could (and should) be able to play their part in the public world.

1. On Wollstonecraft's deference to context see J.N. Janes, "On the Reception of Mary Wollstonecraft's Vindication of the Rights of Woman", Journal of the History of Ideas, XXXIX (1978), 293-302 and Anca Vlasopolos, "Mary Wollstonecraft's Mask of Reason in Vindication of the Rights of Woman", Dalhousie Review, LX (1980), 462-71.
2. See, for example, The Cabinet (3 vols; Norwich, 1795), i.178-85; ii.36-49. In this essay Mary Wollstonecraft's Rights of Woman is recommended to readers of the Cabinet.
3. Thomas Spence, "The Constitution of Spensonia" (1803) in Waters, Political Works, p. 98.
4. Wollstonecraft, Vindication of the Rights of Woman, p. 265. On this point see Virginia Sapiro, "Feminist Studies and the Discipline: A Study of Mary Wollstonecraft", The University of Michigan: Papers in Women's Studies, I (1974), pp. 184-5, 193-4.

For most of the radicals, then, the patriarchal family unit was the basis upon which political society was constructed. This made the male head of household the agent to whom political rights were attached, women and children being his dependents.¹ An alternative, which could provide an institutional basis for Mary Wollstonecraft's hopes, was proposed by William Godwin. Although he concluded that marriage as it currently operated was unacceptable he believed that it could be "a salutary and respectable institution" if there was "room for repentance" and "liberty and hope" were maintained.² His ideal, as John P. Clark puts it, was of "long-lasting but not indissoluble unions based on mutual consent."³ It should be noted, however, that as Godwin grew older he came to accept the notion of male dominance. Indeed in his Thoughts on Man he rejected the idea that women should develop "audacious, masculine and military qualities" and argued that they recognize men as "their protectors" with abilities "something more than human".⁴

The radicals' qualifications with respect to women also existed in the general area of mankind's needs and capacities and the implications these had for social justice. It was safe to assume, said John Thelwall, that there were differences in "strength", "power", and

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1. On the background to such thinking see T. Brennan and C. Pateman, "'Mere auxiliaries to the Commonwealth': Women and the Origins of Liberalism", Political Studies, XXVII (1979), 183-200.
 2. Godwin, Political Justice, p. 764.
 3. John P. Clark, The Philosophical Anarchism of William Godwin (Princeton, Princeton Univ. Press, 1977), p. 118.
 4. William Godwin, Thoughts on Man, His Nature, Productions, and Discoveries (London, 1831), pp. 292, 296. On the development of his ideas on marriage, see Clark, William Godwin, pp. 118-21. Godwin's views on marriage, in the context of his anarchistic utopia, are outlined on pp. 181-2 below.

"desire" between individuals.¹ The equality given by the Creator (Creation) was an equality of situation, which each of us could utilise to our own ends. Differences of economic outcome were bound to result and should be accepted: "Superior Talents, superior Knowledge and superior Industry, ought, on the plainest principles of Justice and Equity to enjoy superior advantages. Who would work that a Stranger might enjoy the profit of his Labour?"² It was stressed, however, that the equality of opportunity which each of us possessed in the state of nature should be preserved, only those differences which resulted from personal industry or talent being justified. William Godwin agreed that we could assume some degree of difference in "industry" and "economy" between individuals and that in the free economy inequalities of outcome were bound to result. For Godwin, however, justice required that the final product be distributed according to needs rather than capacities. He separated the treatment of production from that of distribution: "Inequality therefore being to a certain extent unavoidable, it is the province of justice and virtue to counteract the practical evils which inequality has a tendency to produce".³

Social justice⁴ for some of the radicals, then, meant distribution according to desert; for others, distribution according to needs. Given the increasing complexity and interdependence of modern life and labour, those who adhered to the desert-based conception of social justice faced the particular problem of separating the "personal"

1. Thelwall, Rights of Nature, ii.41.

2. Cooper, A Reply to Mr Burke's Invective, p.75.

3. Godwin, Enquirer, p.169.

4. For the distinctions used in this paragraph I am indebted to David Miller, "The Ideological Background to Conceptions of Social Justice", Political Studies, XXII (1974), 387-99.

from the "social" in respect of productivity. Coupled with this was the problem of family inheritance, seen by many to be part and parcel of that security of property which made for freedom and progress. Inheritance sat uneasily, however, alongside another radical objective, that of ensuring that all start equal in "the race of life". Different radicals had different views as to the extent and form of property redistribution that would be desirable. Many also acknowledged the relevance of a third conception of social justice, that of protection of acknowledged rights to ensure that men's expectations of one another were fulfilled and social disruption avoided. Different "mixes" of these conceptions were developed at the level of abstract theory (what is the good society?), and at the point of political practice, (what objectives should be pursued in the current context?).¹

A major problem for the radicals emerged with respect to moral and intellectual equality. Most of them stressed that environmental considerations were all important in determining whether or not one's moral and intellectual capacities were able to work to the full. For example, Godwin linked soundness of understanding with leisure, simplicity, freedom of inquiry and lack of prejudice.² The recognition of this fact had a conservative effect on the politics of the radicals as some saw dangers in the immediate granting of political rights to the poor or the encouragement of their participation in the movement for reform, at least without middle-class leadership, as they had yet to be softened by plenty or educated to benevolence. There were more than echoes of the ancient fears which existed in respect of

1. See esp. chs. 10-12 below.

2. Godwin, Political Justice, p. 78.

democracy.¹ The "middling orders", on the other hand, were thought to be most able to exercise their moral and intellectual capacities as they were above poverty but below luxury, possessing independence but not arrogance. "They appear", concluded Mary Wollstonecraft, "to be in the most natural state".²

The emergence of a popularly-based movement in the 1790s helped to break down some of these assumptions. For some the arguments presented above were unbearably elitist. It was claimed that the common people were educating themselves through their clubs and societies and that reason only required freedom if it was to respond. There is always a sufficiency of wisdom in "the general mass of society" explained Thomas Paine.³ More than any other, however, it was Thomas Spence who based his politics on a belief in the potential of common people not just as the source for a new, highly participatory democracy but also as a revolutionary force. Spence needs to be placed in the context of the tradition of working class self-organization and action in the North-East, from where he shifted to London in the 1790s.⁴

As was the case with liberty we can point to the differing uses to which the term equality was being put. For some the idea of a state of perfect equality was at best a myth and only some version of equality

1. See J.A.O. Larsen, "Judgement of Antiquity on Democracy", Classical Philology, XXXIX (1954), 1-14.
2. Wollstonecraft, Vindication of the Rights of Woman, p. 81.
3. Paine, Rights of Man, p. 197. In later life even Paine began to have his doubts about the relevance of democracy. See pp. 110-11 below.
4. See esp. P.M. Kemp-Ashraf, "Thomas Spence", in P.M. Kemp-Ashraf and Jack Mitchell (eds.), Essays in Honour of William Gallacher (Berlin, Humboldt Universitaat, 1966), pp. 280-84 and John Stevenson, Popular Disturbances in England 1700-1870 (London, Longman, 1979), pp. 124-6.

of opportunity was a goal worth pursuing. For others the idea of equality of condition still had its appeal, at least as a utopia towards which mankind could progress. A society without property and within which everyone realized their "natural equality", wrote Richard Price, would remove all the causes of human contention and wickedness.¹ It was an ideal, unrealizable now, but useful as a means for assessing contemporary reality and acting as an ultimate goal.²

1. Richard Price, Four Dissertations (2nd ed., London, 1768), pp. 137-38.

2. For different versions of the egalitarian utopia see Chs. 10, 11 and 16.

PART II: POLITICAL LIBERTY

CHAPTER 4: CORRUPTION AND THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY CONSTITUTION

According to the defenders of the status quo the British Constitution was the perfect embodiment of the idea of balance in political science in that it successfully combined the doctrines of "mixed government" and "separation of powers".¹ The former, derived from classical sources, dictated that legislative power should be distributed among the three major estates of the nation - King, Lords and Commons. To become law any proposal required the concurrence of each estate. Such a mix was said to combine the virtues of monarchy, aristocracy and democracy - namely strength, wisdom and sensitivity to the public good - while avoiding the dangers of each - namely tyranny, a factious oligarchy and anarchy. The doctrine of the separation of powers, actually developed in the seventeenth-century as a rival to the ancient theory of mixed government, asserted that the three major functions of government - legislative, executive and judicial - should be distributed among different persons and institutions. In the eighteenth-century a weaker version operated which simply stated that all the powers of government should not be placed in the same hands or located in the same institution.² Thus the King would be the supreme head of the executive, and in possession of important powers and privileges, the Lords a supreme court

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1. See M.J.C. Vile, Constitutionalism and the Separation of Powers (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1967), chs. 1-5 and S. Pargellis, "The Theory of Balanced Government", in C. Read (ed.), The Constitution Reconsidered (New York, Columbia Univ. Press, 1938), pp. 37-49.
 2. According to the stronger versions of the doctrine each branch of government must be confined to the exercise of one function only and the persons who compose the agencies must be kept separate and distinct; Vile, Constitutionalism, p. 13.

of appeal, and the Commons a judge of national expense and the grand inquest of the nation. However, for the system to work smoothly it was deemed necessary that the Crown and Lords exercise some influence over the Commons. The use of patronage to win over a significant segment of the House of Commons became an accepted practice and a central convention of the eighteenth-century constitution.¹

The effective combination of "mix", "separation" and "influence" which many believed had been realized in eighteenth-century Britain was thought to safeguard the nation from the twin evils of tyranny and democracy and create the conditions for the achievement of a high degree of liberty and stability. Not so, claimed the radicals. John Thelwall wrote: "Whatever may be the form and exterior appearance of our Government we are in reality living under a virtual aristocracy".² This chapter will deal with what the radicals believed to be the real nature of the eighteenth-century constitution.

I A Virtual Aristocracy

Great Britain was, the radicals consistently and forcefully maintained, well along the road to absolute tyranny. They traced the source of contemporary decay to the failures of the revolutionary settlement of 1688.³ In the first place the monarch - despite the restrictions imposed on him by the Bill of Rights (1689), the Coronation Oath Act (1689) and

1. See W.S. Holdsworth, "Conventions of the Eighteenth Century Constitution", Iowa Law Review, XVII (1932), 161-180. On changing attitudes to influence see J.A.W. Gunn, "Influence, Parties and the Constitution: Changing Attitudes, 1783-1832", Historical Journal, XVII (1974), 301-28.

2. Thelwall, Tribune, i.206.

3. For the different attitudes taken towards 1688 in the eighteenth-century see H.T. Dickinson, "The Eighteenth-Century Debate on the 'Glorious Revolution'", History, LXI (1976), 28-45.

the Act of Settlement (1701) - was left with great powers, particularly with respect to influence over the House of Commons. According to Catharine Macaulay the "undermining and irresistible hydra, court influence" had replaced "the more terrifying, yet less formidable monster prerogative".¹ In the second place, while the system of parliamentary representation had remained intact, the Triennial Act (1694) and the Septennial Act (1716) had entrenched practices abhorrent to the radicals. Even where elections were reasonably free of corruption, wrote John Cartwright, the representatives gained too much independence as a result of the length of each parliament. They were taught, he said, "to assume the carriage and haughtiness of despotic masters; to think themselves unaccountable for their content".²

The fact that political liberty was not recovered in 1688 meant that both civil liberties and the remaining political liberties were under threat. For the radicals power was a dynamic and aggressive force forever threatening liberty and right. "The love of power", wrote James Burgh, "is natural; it is insatiable; it is whetted, not cloyed, by possession". Thus governments "do as naturally tend to despotism as heavy bodies to their respective centres".³ Given, then, that the constitution was not placed on its proper foundations the encroachments of the eighteenth-century were thought to be inevitable. The coincidence of the Wilkes affair with the American crisis convinced them "that a conspiracy was afoot which transcended the physical barrier of the Atlantic

1. Catharine Macaulay, Observations on a Pamphlet, Entitled, Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents (Dublin, 1770), p. 14.

2. Cartwright, Take Your Choice, p. x.

3. Burgh, Political Disquisitions, iii.206, 234.

Ocean".¹ Writing in the 1790s John Thelwall spoke of his fears of a "counter-revolution" which would destroy all the advantages of 1688, limited as they were. Pitt and Dundas, he wrote, had even "assumed the power and pomp of royalty".² Writing in 1812, on return from his transportation to Australia, Maurice Margarot spoke of his fears that the constant encroachments on liberty would melt away the free constitution, Britain becoming a "state of slavery" as in feudal times.³

Both the system of representation for the Commons and the functioning of Parliament were seen by the radicals to be sources of arbitrary power. Not a twentieth part of the Commons, claimed John Cartwright, were chosen by "the people".⁴ The vast majority were self-appointed, nominated by Ministers, Peers and borough-holders or the winners of a process of bribery and corruption at election time. Importantly both the Crown and the Lords played a role in elections to the Commons; so much so, wrote Thomas Paine, that most members of the Commons were "hewers of wood and drawers of water for the other parts of the constitution".⁵ Once elected the Septennial Act ensured that the use of influence by the Crown could work unhindered. Venality, concluded James Burgh, had "poisoned all ranks, from the bribed voter to the candidate for a place in the great assembly of the nation".⁶

1. Bonwick, English Radicals and the American Revolution, p. 52.

2. Tribune, iii.204. In all of this the King was described as "Pitt's puppet"; ibid.

3. Maurice Margarot, Thoughts on Revolutions (Harlow, 1812), p. 25.

4. John Cartwright, Internal Evidence; or an Inquiry, etc. (London, 1784), p. 54. Somewhat later Cartwright described "radical Westminster" as a "solitary gleam of light"; Reasons for Reformation (London, 1809), p. 12.

5. Paine, "Letter Addressed to the Addressers", p. 373.

6. James Burgh, The Dignity of Human Nature ... (2 vols; London, 1767), ii.199.

For some of the radicals George III was an independent force in politics who had used his powers to wedge a place for the Crown - in person - at the centre of the constitution. In 1688, said David Williams, the Crown was held in tutelage by the Aristocracy but by 1790 the monarch had secured for himself some influence over both Lords and Commons.¹ For most of the radicals, however, the King was the victim of "a deadly faction, ruling by the worst of all engines, an elective Dictatorship".² A "rotten-borough oligarchy" - as it was most frequently called - was said to be in control of the King, using his authority to conceal its own, unprincipled use of power. The Cabinet which had been slowly developing in the eighteenth-century was said to be the point at which the rotten-borough oligarchy was able to unite the executive power of the Crown and the legislative power of the Commons.³ To speak of an effective separation between legislature and executive was no longer thought possible. The radicals rejected any suggestion that the economical reforms actually achieved had had any significant impact on the system of corruption.⁴

Although control of the executive was acknowledged to be crucially important a rotation of "ins" and "outs" was still possible. The radicals treated the struggles between different factions within the establishment with a good degree of cynicism. The struggle between Whig and Tory since the Restoration, wrote John Thelwall, "has been nothing more than a struggle which of the combinations of aristocratic families

1. Williams, Lessons to a Young Prince, pp. 48-50.

2. Cartwright, The Commonwealth in Danger; with an Introduction Containing Remarks on Some Late Writings by Arthur Young, Esq. (London, 1795), p. 100.

3. Cartwright, An Appeal on the Subject of the English Constitution, p. 46.

4. See Foord, "The Waning of the Influence of the Crown" for a twentieth-century assessment.

should grasp the government of the country into their own hands".¹ The developing party system was explained in these terms:

Party is a compact and association of individuals: an agreement that whatever way you vote I will vote the same; my family interest shall combine with your family interest, my borough with your borough, when you are in place, I will be in place also, and we will divide the good things between us ...²

Only associations formed to oppose tyranny had a positive place in the radical theory of political conflict.³

II Political Power and Economic Interest

Whichever faction of the establishment managed to capture power the interests they served was always too narrow. It was, the radicals argued, a clear case of naked self-interest at the expense of the public good. In the first place there was said to be a systematic bias for those with property and against those without it. "The Laws" asserted Thomas Spence, "are made by Property; and for Property. Men are out of the question except as appendages to this same Property".⁴ With this estimation of the situation Mary Wollstonecraft agreed, citing the penal laws, the practice of pressing, the game laws, and the system of taxation as examples.⁵ The most frequently aired complaint, however, related to the enclosure movement which had gathered pace in the last half of the century. "The numerous Inclosure bills", said Thomas Cooper "are pregnant Instances, where, as in the fable of Nathan the prophet, the

1. Thelwall, Tribune, i.206.

2. Ibid., 212.

3. See T.M. Parssinen, "Association, Convention and Anti-Parliament in British Radical Politics, 1771-1848", English Historical Review, LXXXVIII (1973), 504-33.

4. Spence, "Important Trial", p. 69.

5. Wollstonecraft, Rights of Woman, pp. 25-43.

poor man's Lamb is seized, to encrease the numerous herds of his richer and more powerful neighbours".¹

Although all the radicals pointed to the many disadvantages experienced by the propertyless labouring class only a few, such as Charles Hall and Thomas Spence, reduced all politics to a propertied/propertyless division. Charles Hall spoke of a situation in which only one class of people - those who own the land, the cattle and corn raised upon it, raw materials, tools, machinery, and goods manufactured or stored for sale - controlled the political process at all levels. There were, he acknowledged, divisions of interest between sections of the ruling class but "in the grand and primary division of the whole people, namely, the rich and poor, they are but one order of the people, that is the rich".² A mere change in the system of political representation was said to be worthless unless it recognized the influence that automatically went to those who possessed property.³

Generally, however, politics was seen by the radicals in terms of an oligarchy/people division, the latter including the middling orders with various degrees of property as well as the labouring poor. In what was perhaps the clearest account of the constituent parts of the rotten-borough oligarchy John Thelwall identified "the great landed proprietors" and "the political intriguers and parasites" as the two classes of rotten-borough monger.⁴ The state was pictured both as an

1. Cooper, Reply to Mr. Burke's Invective, p. 72.

2. [Charles Hall], "Thoughts on Corruption and the Defects of the Representation of the People in Parliament", Monthly Magazine, XXXII (1811), 227.

3. See also Thomas Spence, The Meridian Sun of Liberty; or the Whole Rights of Man displayed and most accurately defined (London, 1796), pp. 2-4.

4. Thelwall, Tribune, ii.374.

instrument for the economic interests of the wealthy and as a parasite feeding off the productive sector of the economy.¹ In respect of the first the wealthiest merchants and manufacturers were usually included alongside the landlords as the system's major props and beneficiaries. The excise laws, the uneven distribution of poor rates, primogeniture, enclosure and the existence of chartered companies were cited as evidence of the existence of monopoly influence on political decisions. The special place of land in the system was indicated by the Corn Laws which prevented imports of wheat unless the price was very high and encouraged exports through bounties.

For the political intriguers and parasites the political pay off was places, pensions and patronage provided by the Ministry and paid for by taxation. Wealth and political position, said Thelwall, had been achieved through the "basest prostitution" to successive administrations. He spoke of the symbiotic relationship that had been developed between ministry and oligarchy as taxes were "levied to buy up the borough-mongers and the borough-monger's vote for fresh taxes, to reward the Minister and his dependents".² It was a good constitution, concluded Thomas Paine, for "courtiers, placemen, pensioners, borough-holders and the leaders of parties".³ According to John Cartwright the political governors themselves, in alliance with the stockholders, had managed to form themselves into the effective rulers of the nation by way of the tax system. This oligarchy, claimed Cartwright, was composed of "the faction

1. For a contemporary account which is very similar see E.P. Thompson, "The Peculiarities of the English", The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays (London, Merlin Press, 1978), pp. 39-56.

2. Thelwall, Tribune, ii.379.

3. Paine, "Letter Addressed to the Addressers", pp. 370-71.

behind the throne, the faction of the Boroughs and the faction of "Change Alley Jews".¹ Eventually even landholders would become slaves to this clique as the exhaustion of present tax sources forced the rulers to cut into landlord property to pay the interest on the national debt: "The direct tendency of this system is the annihilation of all landed property and all freedom".² For most of the other radicals Cartwright's image of political control based on money power was too extreme and the specific influence of the propertied, particularly the landlords, needed to be included in any account of the political system.

These understandings of the relationship between economic interest and political power led to the conclusion that the system was undermining itself from within. In the first place, and for reasons to be outlined in Chapter Nine of this thesis, the radicals believed that the labouring poor and increasing numbers of the middling orders were being forced into a desperate situation. "Brutalised by Ignorance and rendered desparate by want", explained S.T. Coleridge, "the people were being driven to insurrection".³ In the second place the taxes necessary to maintain King and Lords, finance bribery and corruption, and keep up a large military establishment, were eroding the productive base of the economy and paving the way for a bankruptcy crisis. Put simply it was thought that the government would find it increasingly difficult to meet

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1. John Cartwright, England's Aegis: or, The Military Energies of the Constitution (3rd ed.; 2 vols; 1806), ii.99.
 2. John Cartwright, An Appeal, Civil and Military, on the Subject of the English Constitution (London, 1799), p. 87.
 3. S.T. Coleridge, "Conciones ad Populum or Addresses to the People" (1795) in L. Patton and P. Mann (eds.), Collected Works Vol. 1: Lectures 1795 (London, Routledge, 1971), p. 69.

its interest commitments.¹ The radicals pointed to the possibility of an explosion of resentment from below led and manipulated by unprincipled demagogues and paving the way for some new and more terrifying form of tyranny. The spectre of military coups or foreign invasions was constantly being raised. A "radical cure" had become essential. What most of them hoped for was the construction of a movement of the vast majority, disciplined, orderly and co-ordinated, which could resolve the crisis in the direction of radical reform. The radicals were divided, however, on what should be the long and short term political objectives for such a movement. The next three chapters will deal with their proposals for political change.

1. Richard Price was the most important and voluble exponent of this point of view - and of the Sinking Fund as a possible remedy. See his Appeal to the Public on the Subject of the National Debt (London, 1772). See also C.B. Cone, "Richard Price and Pitt's Sinking Fund of 1786", Economic History Review, IV (1951), 243-51.

CHAPTER 5: THE RADICAL REFORM PROGRAMME AND THE MIXED CONSTITUTION

The case for radical reform emerged from within a larger, more moderate movement aiming to reduce the influence of the Crown and improve the representativeness of the Commons.¹ The earliest radicals were on the extreme wing of this movement, emphasizing as they did the need for suffrage reform and annual parliaments. These radical reformers shared many of the assumptions of their moderate colleagues about the Constitution, in that they wished to restore it to its original condition in which there was a perfect balance between King, Lords and Commons. The ancient theory of mixed government was accepted as the necessary basis for any political system. It had been "translated into an English setting and kept alive" by the so-called "Real Whigs" or "Commonwealth-men" in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.² Without doubt the first generation of radicals were the heirs to this tradition of political analysis and argument. However, as the movement developed and the case for a more undiluted form of democracy grew, a new tendency emerged within the radical movement - those who were in principle democratic republicans but in practice were mixed constitutionalists seeking radical reform within the system of Kings, Lords and Commons.³ This chapter will begin by distinguishing between these two types of radical reformer, agreed on a programme but not on the theoretical and political framework within which it was to be understood, and then move on to outline more clearly their specific arguments concerning the King,

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1. This is shown very clearly in Dickinson, Liberty and Property, ch. 6.
 2. Winch, Adam Smith's Politics, p. 30.
 3. The arguments for a democratic republic and against the mixed constitution will be taken up in the next chapter.

Lords and Commons.

I Types of Radical Reformer

The earliest radicals tended to accept in principle and practice the existence of King, Lords and Commons. The objective of the English Constitution, explained John Cartwright, was to protect the rights, independence and happiness of each "estate" in the nation.¹ To this end was created a legislature composed of all three estates - Kings, Lords and Commons - and a separation of powers conducive to the common good. The need for radicalism to preserve the idea of mix in the legislature was stressed by the Duke of Richmond.

... if the House of Commons was reduced to its natural dependence on the people alone, and the present system of making it the exclusive part of government was continued, we should approach to a pure democracy more than our constitution warrants, or than I wish to see. I am not for a democratic, any more than for an aristocratic, or monarchic government, solely; I am for that admirable mixture of the three.²

These radicals conceived of a hierarchical society within which the interests of the common people would be protected through their right to elect the Commons. It was clear that Cartwright expected the people to prefer men of higher birth and station to look after their interests in the Commons and to be their military leaders.³ In the first edition of Take Your Choice he even went so far as to insist upon a property

1. John Cartwright, Give us our Rights! Or a Letter to the Present Electors of Middlesex and the Metropolis (London, 1782), p. 53. See also "An Address to the Public, from the Society for Constitutional Information" (April 1780) in Tracts Published and Distributed Gratis by the Society for Constitutional Information. (2 vols; 1783, 85), i.1.
2. A Letter from His Grace the Duke of Richmond, to Lieutenant Colonel Sharman ... (London, 1783), p. 11. On Richmond as radical see A. Olson, The Radical Duke, the Career and Correspondence of Charles Lennox, Third Duke of Richmond (London, Oxford Univ. Press, 1961), ch. iv.
3. Cartwright, England's Aegis, i.26.

qualification for membership of the Commons.¹ The nation was conceived of as a pyramid with the King at the top and the people at the base:

The people, in whom resides the strength, the solidity and power of the state, will form the broad base and the substantial body of the constitutional pyramid: from them it will ascend and contract into the elective aristocracy their representatives; then again, still ascending and lessening into the hereditary aristocracy the peerage, in these two we shall behold the wisdom that is to balance between the people and the executive magistrate; and finally we find the crown forming the apex of the pyramid, and recognizing that goodness which is the attribute of him who executes what power and wisdom, combining for the public good, have prescribed.²

For many of the other radical reformers these assumptions about hierarchy and mix were unacceptable. In theory at least the case for some sort of democratic republic was thought to be unassailable. This was the position taken by both James Burgh and Catharine Macaulay in the early days of late eighteenth-century radicalism.³ In practice, however, they thought it best to pursue reform within the existing system of King, Lords and Commons. Republicanism, explained Burgh, was only fully acceptable in contemporary times "supposing a state to be settling its form of government". In Britain, on the other hand, a form of government already existed and was capable - if reformed - of providing a framework for government in the interests of the people.⁴

In the 1790s this theory/practice distinction was aired more frequently by the radical reformers. After declaring himself to be a democratic republican in principle John Thelwall went on to explain that he would only adopt such a position if he were drafting a constitution for a newly established state. In Britain there already existed a

1. Cartwright, Take Your Choice, p. 69.

2. Cartwright, Commonwealth in Danger, p. 103.

3. Macaulay, Loose Remarks and Burgh, Political Disquisitions, ii.18.

4. Ibid.

constitution and a tradition of constitutional thought and practice. He urged radicals to work within that tradition "not because Englishmen should prefer what is English ... but because in England there is a constitution established, which, if realised by a fair representation of the people, is capable of securing the happiness of the nation: and having a decided abhorrence of tumult and violence, I reprobate the man who would plunge into commotion for speculative opinions". To engage in politics purely on the basis of abstract theory, without reference to "tradition", "history" and "circumstance" was thought to be dangerous and in the English case unnecessary as sufficient political liberty could be won within a framework of King, Lord and Commons to protect the people from oppression. "The welfare of mankind", wrote Thelwall, justifying his acceptance of radical reformism rather than democratic republicanism, "is my object, not particular modes or shapes of constitutions".¹

However, the radical reformers who emerged in the 1790s had more faith in the common people than either the mixed constitutionalist radicals like Cartwright or the earliest radicals like Burgh and Macaulay who only saw the theoretical merits of republicanism. For radicals like Thelwall the radical reform programme was simply an objective for the current generation. Future generations of radicals would deal with the question of where to proceed from there. They wished to uplift the common people, at first politically, and then socially and economically. Their compromise with King and Lords was based on the belief that British politics worked within a framework which had been inherited from history but was capable of renovation. The mixed constitutionalists agreed with this but added their belief in the rationality of the hereditary

1. Thelwall, Tribune, iii.259. On this distinction between theory and practice see also David Williams, The Philosopher in Three Conversations (3 parts; London, 1771), i.20-22.

distinctions that had emerged. They insisted that the common people still had their "place" and "station" within society, duties as well as rights. Once they had been given a share in the choice of legislators and the burden of taxation was lifted from their shoulders they were expected to be contented with their lot. These radicals found it much easier to compromise on the questions of universal suffrage and annual parliaments with the moderates within the reform movement. Their confidence in the common people - as has been written of Catharine Macaulay - was "ultimate rather than immediate".¹

In the rest of this chapter dealing with the radical reform programme I will only highlight the distinction between these types of radical reformer when it is necessary. However, it is worth noting that in the last instance all the radicals were "republicans" or "commonwealthmen" in the sense that the common good of the whole people was seen to be the object of government. Consequently radical reformers like Cartwright warned the King and Aristocracy that their place within the constitution was only guaranteed if they could be seen to be performing a useful function. Should they refuse to concede reforms, republicanism of the Paineite variety would become a real possibility.² Increasingly, the American experiment was convincing the radicals that the case for government with hereditary elements lacked foundations.³ However, their

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1. Bridget and Christopher Hill, "Catharine Macaulay and the Seventeenth Century", Welsh History Review, III (1967), 398.
 2. John Cartwright, A Letter to Rev. Christopher Wyvill (London, 1801), p. 52 and Commonwealth in Danger, p. 98.
 3. For instance John Cartwright's views on King and Lords did change. By the late 1790s he was arguing that the Anglo-Saxon Constitution contained no hereditary elements, rather they came with William in 1066; An Appeal Civil and Military, on the Subject of the English Constitution (2nd ed.; London, 1799), pp. 209-26. However, it was not until later in his life that he positively advocated democratic republicanism; The English Constitution Produced and Illustrated

belief in the reality and importance of an English tradition of thought and practice, coupled with their fear of what a revolution might bring convinced them of the need for a radical reformist approach to politics.

II King, Lords and Commons

The maintenance of an hereditary kingship was the starting point in the mixed constitutionalist logic. It was agreed that the position of first magistrate needed to be an hereditary one as tumult and disorder, even civil war, tended to come with the death of any appointed or elected King.¹ It was stressed, however, that the King would exercise executive power only; the radicals agreeing with the Duke of Richmond that it had become a convention of the Constitution that the King no longer possessed a veto power in relation to legislation passed by Lords and Commons.² John Cartwright was an exception. However, he was only willing to grant the King a delaying power over legislation.³ For the radicals, then, the King was to be the head of an executive council, chosen by himself and consisting of, it was hoped, the most able and virtuous men in the nation. The Council was to act within the constitution and laws of the land. The radicals pressed their view that King and Ministry should have no personal prerogatives, all powers and privileges being a grant and therefore subject to abolition or amendment by the people or their representatives. Not only was it thought proper that Ministers could be impeached but also that the King himself could

(London, 1823). On the evolution of his ideas see John W. Osborne, John Cartwright (Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1972).

1. Thelwall, Tribune, ii.215-6.

2. Richmond, Letter, pp. 10-11.

3. Cartwright, Commonwealth in Danger, p. 119.

be removed from office if he broke his (implicit) agreement with the people to act only for the common good. However, most stress was placed on ministerial responsibility:

These gentlemen must know, there is not a prerogative of his Majesty, nor a branch of his government, which is, or can be exercised, without the advice, and concurrence, and responsibility, of his ministers; except only that of choosing the ministers themselves; for even in the prerogative of mercy, the King undoubtedly acts by advice; and a minister who should corruptly misadvise, would be amenable to parliament.¹

The radicals conceived of a "Patriot King" freed from the clutches of the rotten-borough oligarchy and without influence in the legislature, acting as the political, military and spiritual leader of the nation.² Given that the limits within which the King could work would be well-established and much narrower than those currently existing, the character of the monarch would change. "Kings", explained James Burgh, "are the protectors not the masters of their Kingdoms". "A Kingdom", he continued, "is a stewardship, not an estate".³ In fact in his early, utopian tract Burgh had argued that monarchies were ideal forms of government if monarchs were restricted in what they could do and if they were ultimately responsible to the people.⁴ To ensure that Kings were "servants of the people" rather than "arbitrary rulers" John Cartwright even thought it necessary to speak of "Royalty" rather

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1. Cartwright, An Appeal on the Subject of the English Constitution, p. 47. Of the powers of the King David Williams wrote: "His powers are the powers of the community; and are to be continued or withheld, according to its interest or pleasure", The Philosopher in Three Conversations, i.43-4.
 2. On the background see Isaac Kramnick, Bolingbroke and his Circle: The Politics of Nostalgia in the Age of Walpole (Cambridge Mass., Harvard Univ. Press, 1968), pp. 163-69.
 3. Burgh, Political Disquisitions, iii.376.
 4. Burgh, An Account of the Cessares, pp. 27-30.

than "Monarchy".¹

Nevertheless as first magistrate the King was expected to be an important part of a properly functioning constitution. In Burgh's Account of the Cessares the King was to put into execution the laws of the land, oblige all to conform, punish those who violated the law and, if appropriate, reprieve a convicted prisoner or reduce his punishment.² Cartwright believed that because the King alone could have the necessary intelligence about the designs and movements of foreigners it would be justified to give him certain powers with respect to the defence of the nation. The absence of a standing army and the existence of a democratic Commons would prevent any abuse of such discretionary powers which needed to be granted in relation to defence.³ Finally, it was also hoped that the King and Ministry, when themselves "freed" from the system of corruption and all that it entailed, could turn their attention to projects of public utility. "If Kings were republican in their measures of administration", wrote Burgh, "subjects would be royalist in their obedience".⁴

According to convention the Lords were an independent part of the legislature and the supreme court of appeal for the nation at large. It was agreed by most of the radicals that the Lords were not fulfilling these functions properly. Thomas Cooper spoke of the Lords as an "idle" part of the constitution except insofar as a small number of "active" Lords controlled a significant portion of the Commons and were prominent

1. Cartwright, Commonwealth in Danger, p. 117.

2. Burgh, An Account of the Cessares, p. 40.

3. Cartwright, England's Aegis, i.51. Radical ideas on defence are discussed in ch. 8.

4. Burgh, Political Disquisitions, i.123.

in national political life at executive level. The great number were said to accept without question, in their role as judges and legislators,

the decisions of other, constitutionally equal or lesser bodies.¹

Following on from this analysis the Duke of Richmond saw radical reform as a means of enhancing the role of the Lords. Once the Commons had been democratized and made independent the Lords could return to the rightful position, adding wisdom and authority to the legislative process.²

The nobility and the gentry, wrote Cartwright, could, with radical reform, "once more rise from that dangling court dependence and frivolous insignificance ... to situations of real dignity and importance in the state".³

The radical reformers who saw political reform of the existing constitution as a preliminary to wide-ranging social and economic reform would not have agreed with these hopes/expectations with respect to the House of Lords. According to John Thelwall it was the House of Commons which reflected the "sense of the nation" and was the real source of legislative authority. He noted that "our ancestors" merely "imagined" that their democracy would work better with an aristocratic appendage. Note, however, his use of "imagined" rather than "believed" or "argued". Indeed, when it came to describing the Lords Thelwall could not resist a lampoon:

It is ... very well known that, by Lords we mean a certain number of individuals, walking, like other men, upon two legs, but, unlike other men, decorated with stars and garters, and such other ornaments, as you might have seen represented in gingerbread, a few days ago, at Bartholemew

1. Cooper, A Reply to Mr. Burke's Invective, pp. 30-2.

2. Richmond, Letter, p. 12.

3. Cartwright, England's Aegis, i.26.

Fair.¹

At no time, however, did Thelwall advocate the abolition or the limitation of the powers of the Lords. The expectation appears to have been that the realization of a democratic Commons would over-awe the Lords into acceptance of the primacy of the latter. James Mackintosh predicted precisely this, arguing that radical reform would bring with it a reduction in the power of King and Lords.² In Joseph Priestley's anonymously published tract of 1791 can also be found the presentation of radical reform as the starting point for a more wide-ranging set of reforms, included in which was the ending of all hereditary distinctions in the constitution.³

The early years of George III's reign brought sporadic proposals for the reform of the system of representation to the Commons. Both the extension of the franchise and more equitable representation for the nation at large, as well as shorter parliaments, were urged. In relation to the franchise the earliest reformers defended the maintenance of some sort of property qualification. In particular, domestic servants or paupers were said to be too ignorant or too dependent to be capable of rational decision-making. Nor, some even argued, were the wage labouring class to be trusted with the vote as they lacked a sufficient interest in the nation. Universal suffrage, it was feared, would open the floodgates to "levelling" and, at worst, tumult and disorder.⁴

An important step in a radical direction was taken in James

1. Thelwall, Tribune, ii, 214, 212.

2. Mackintosh, Vindicae Gallicae, p. 343.

3. [Joseph Priestley], Political Dialogues. Number 1: On the General Principles of Government (London, 1791), p. 34.

4. See esp. Christie, Wilkes, Wyvill and Reform, ch. 1.

Burgh's Political Disquisitions. There it was argued that no theoretical or principled case existed against the extension of voting rights to all adult males. He stayed within the confines of traditional discourse on the subject but gave it a new twist by asserting that every man had what may be called "property" and therefore real "interests":

Every man has a life, a personal liberty, a character, a right to his earnings, a right to a religious profession and worship according to his conscience, etc. and many men, who are in a state of dependence upon others, and who receive charity, have wives and children, in whom they have a right.¹

Drawing on the debate about the American colonies around the principle 'No taxation without representation' Burgh noted that the poor in Britain were taxed heavily (by way of taxes on the necessities of life such as malt, beer, leather, soap and candles) but had no share in determining who should be in the Commons.² In this way Burgh was able to take to task those who assumed the right to vote should be based on property but were not willing to pursue the logic of the argument. Nevertheless Burgh himself was reluctant to move straight from theory to policy and thought it acceptable if the franchise was extended only to all who paid direct taxes. He also proposed that each County be represented in proportion to the taxes it contributed to the nation, voting rights for the individual to be weighted in respect of property held. Nor did he expect a radical alteration in the composition of the Commons: "Members of Parliament ought to be men of good natural parts, education, and character, sound reasoners, viz. the landed, the commercial, and the

1. Burgh, Political Disquisitions, i.37.

2. John Brewer has argued that the American debate about property, taxation and representation was central to the process by which country ideology was transformed into radicalism in the 1760s; Party Ideology and Popular Politics at the Accession of George III (Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1976), ch. 10.

monied ..."¹

The most decisive argument in favour of universal suffrage was made by John Cartwright. According to Cartwright God made all men free and equal; free to choose and equal in needs and capacities. Prior to mutual agreement no distinctions between people could legitimately be made. He acknowledged that in large states certain hereditary distinctions were relevant but not in respect of the right to vote for the Commons. In the first place, following the line taken by Burgh, he argued that everyone had a family and, no matter how poor, some property to defend. A vote was a means by which such property could be defended from unwarranted invasion. In the second place, voting had an expressive function; it was part of what it meant to be human:

All are by nature free; all are by nature equal: freedom implies choice; equality excludes degrees in freedom. All the commons, therefore, have an equal right to vote in the election of those who are to be the guardians of their lives and liberties.²

For Cartwright, then, political liberty for the individual was part of human liberty in general.

We should note, however, the way in which Cartwright understood his commitment to universal suffrage. He certainly did not expect or wish the common people to become their own legislators. Social peace, rather than conflict and agitation, were thought to be the likely consequences of radical reform as the poor man would be consoled by his

1. Burgh, Political Disquisitions, i.62. William Jones, Richard Price, and Granville Sharp had similar doubts about the wisdom of universal suffrage as a radical demand despite their agreement with it in principle. Consequently they all proposed that some sort of limitation be placed on the right to vote - at least in the short run. It was always advisable, explained Sharp, to play safe: "We know not what would be the effects of it; probably they would be good: but we ought to walk in a trodden path, and build on sure foundations"; Account of the Constitutional English Polity, p. 244.

2. Cartwright, Take Your Choice, pp. 21-2.

possession of a voting right into thinking that "by his nature, he is the equal of every other son of man".¹ It was always sound policy, Cartwright urged, "not altogether to overlook those gradations in society which are created by birth, station, knowledge, and property, which contribute to order and subordination".² Other radicals, while not willing to grant that wisdom was naturally found in the ranks of the gentry and nobility, hoped (and expected) that the common people would show deference towards an enlightened middle-class. James Mackintosh wrote:

The multitude have attained sufficient knowledge to value the superiority of enlightened men, and they retain a sufficient consciousness of ignorance to preclude rebellion against their dictates. This is the precise state in which the human mind is equally by discernment and deference prepared for legislation.³

Above poverty and below luxury the middle-class could guide the common people. The system of democratic accountability would guarantee that they would not stray too far away from the people's interests.⁴

To secure the right to vote was only the starting point in the radical understanding of a democratic Commons. It was also necessary to ensure equality in representation throughout the country as a whole by way of equal electoral districts.⁵ Most proposed that each one of these

1. Cartwright, Commonwealth in Danger, p. 89.

2. Cartwright, England's Aegis, i.48.

3. Mackintosh, Vindicae Gallicae, pp. 365-66.

4. Remembering, of course, that it was all adult males to whom most of the radicals referred when they spoke of universal suffrage.

5. The economic changes gathering pace in the late eighteenth-century contributed to the radical case "by accentuating the anomalous nature of the representation and emphasizing the need for a re-distribution of seats"; G. Whale, "The Influence of the Industrial Revolution (1760-1790) on the demand for Parliamentary Reform", Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, fourth series, V (1922), III. See, for example, John Cartwright, Address to the Unrepresented Manufacturing Towns (London, 1793).

districts would send a single member to the Commons. Cartwright, in endorsing this proposal, also argued, clearly in reply to Edmund Burke, that the members chosen should not be the representatives of any other, much less of all, other communities in the nation.¹ David Williams, on the other hand, proposed the preservation of the Anglo-Saxon system of electing legislators. Each Tithing (consisting of ten men and their families) would elect a representative who, with the representatives of the nine nearest Tithings, would elect a representative for a Hundred. This process would continue until each electoral district was represented by one man who would take his seat in the Commons. This, he hoped, would ensure that the "sense of the whole district" informed their actions in Parliament.² According to James Mackintosh the only alternatives to such a system of indirect election were "tumultuous electoral assemblies, or a tumultuous Legislature".³

Any corruption in elections would be avoided by the implementation of universal suffrage, annual parliaments and the secret ballot. Universal suffrage would make it almost impossible for electors to be

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1. Cartwright, Internal Evidence, p. 80. Burke had argued that MPs should not represent interests, localities or individuals but the nation as a whole. "Parliament", said Burke, "is a deliberative assembly of one nation, with one interest, that of the whole". See I. Kramnick (ed.), Edmund Burke (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall, 1974), pp. 20-21.
 2. Williams, Letters on Political Liberty, p. 80.
 3. Mackintosh, Vindicae Gallicae, p. 247. Mackintosh was expressing his approval for the provision of the French Constitution of 1791 which established indirect election. He disapproved, however, of the limitation of voting rights to those who paid direct taxes equivalent to three days labour; ibid., pp. 226-27. For an excellent analysis of the politics of Vindicae Gallicae see Lionel A. McKenzie, "The French Revolution and Parliamentary Reform: James Mackintosh and the Vindicae Gallicae", Eighteenth-Century Studies, XXIV (1980-81), 264-82.

bribed as the numbers involved would be too large.¹ Annual parliaments would guarantee that any influence exercised would be by the constituents and not the executive. Only when a court knows, claimed James Burgh, "that the same men are likely to be in parliament for seven, fourteen, or twenty-one years, [does it become] worth while to practise upon them".² Election by secret ballot was equally necessary to prevent "influence, caballing, animosity or resentment".³ In an unequal society such as Britain, explained Cartwright, it was especially necessary to free the commoners from the influence which nobles and wealthy commoners could exercise in open elections.⁴ Some radical reformers, stressing the public nature of voting, were less impressed with the arguments for a secret ballot. Capel Lofft wrote: "I dislike its liability to Evasion; its want of Publicity and of that scope for the expansion of free and generous Sentiment".⁵

There was also disagreement on the question of rotation for members of parliament. "The shortening of parliaments alone, without exclusion by rotation", argued Burgh, "would prove only a palliation, not a radical cure".⁶ It was Burgh's view that any government was

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1. John Cartwright, The People's Barrier against undue Influence and Corruption ... (London, 1780), p. 50: "To suppose that the whole nation can be bribed to give those powers, without controul, into such hands, is as unreasonable as to suppose that the minister could bribe the whole nation to throw themselves off Dover-cliff into the sea."
 2. Burgh, Political Disquisitions, i.128.
 3. Ibid., i.176.
 4. Cartwright, Commonwealth in Danger, pp. lxvii-lxviii.
 5. Capel Lofft, On the Revival of the Cause of Reform in the Representation of the Commons in Parliament (London, 1809), p.8.
 6. Burgh, Political Disquisitions, i.173.

"impossible without continual dangers to liberty".¹ To minimise the dangers he proposed that two-thirds of the Commons be excluded from re-election, with a time limit before they could stand again. John Cartwright thought this unnecessary given the secret ballot and annual elections. Cartwright also believed that Burgh's proposals contradicted "first principles" in that the people should always be able to choose the person they most desired to be their representative in the Commons.²

The radical reformers shared the views of the moderate reformers who focussed more directly on the influence of the Crown in the Commons. The Commons, explained John Cartwright, "is intended by our law to be the representative of the Commons ONLY, and for the more special purpose of watching, and resisting, the crown; and controlling its ministers!"³ All those from the first Lord of the Treasury to the turnspit in the royal kitchen should be excluded from membership of the Commons as should contractors, subscribers to loans and officers in the army and navy, but not militia men. Freed from the influence of the Crown and the rotten-borough oligarchy the Commons could once again become the organ of the popular will. Capel Lofft agreed with the general principle of an independent House of Commons, but saw problems if no Ministers or officers of the army and navy could sit in the Commons. This would mean, he argued, that undue weight would naturally pass to the House of Lords "by the public officers of the Crown having Seats and votes there, and not in the House of Commons".⁴ Persons holding the great deliberative

1. Ibid., i.107.

2. Cartwright, Take Your Choice, pp. 65-6.

3. Cartwright, Give us our Rights, p. 19.

4. Lofft, On the Revival of the Cause of Reform, p. 5.

offices of government should, he said, come from the ranks of the most honourable and respectable in the Commons as well as the Lords.

The presence of parties or factions within Parliament was thought to be totally inappropriate to rational decision making unless it was clearly based on the desire to thwart the undue exercise of executive power.¹ "Principle", asserted John Thelwall, "says we will investigate what is true, consider what are the elements of government, what the purposes for which it was instituted, and according to the convictions of our individual minds, each individual will vote". The common good would be best served, he continued, if there were a variety of opinions in the Commons, the majority of voices deciding.² As MPs were liable to be called to account for their decisions James Burgh insisted that their voting in the Commons be recorded.³ Indeed, many insisted that the people's representatives in the Commons were delegates who, if the electorate considered it appropriate, could be given instructions. The representative, explained George Philips, is in the same relation to the people as "an attorney, or agent is towards the persons, by whom, and for whom, he is empowered to act".⁴ The right of the people to recall their representatives was thought to follow.

The belief of the first generation of radical reformers like John

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1. Such thinking was part and parcel of the Commonwealthman tradition. See Caroline Robbins, "Introduction", Two English Republican Tracts (Cambridge Mass., Harvard Univ. Press, 1969), pp. 41-2. For the wider context see Caroline Robbins, "'Discordant parties': A Study of the acceptance of Party by Englishmen", Political Science Quarterly, LXXIII (1958), 505-29.
 2. Thelwall, Tribune, i.212-3.
 3. Burgh, Political Disquisitions, i.176.
 4. George Philips, The Necessity of a Speedy and Effectual Reform of Parliament (Manchester, 1792), p. 31.

Cartwright that politics was best left to the nobility and gentry was challenged by the newer, more aggressive brand of radicalism that emerged in the 1790s. To ensure that the choice facing electors was not limited to men of property George Philips proposed that all members of the Commons be paid an adequate wage for the performance of their legislative duties. To restrict the choice to those who had sufficient private income was said to be inconsistent with the freedom of elections. The present Commons was, he wrote, an institution which gave "undue respect for property" and diminished respect for "talents, diligence, fidelity, and virtue". To make the rich the people's representatives, he concluded, would be a serious mistake; the whole point of the Commons being that it counterbalanced the influence of the rich and powerful in the country.¹

Another issue, which surfaced in the writings of David Williams, was that of the number of representatives. Williams believed that the current figure of 558 was too high in that it allowed "tumultuous and ambitious leaders" to emerge in the chamber. To counter the emergence of factions and to ensure that rationality prevailed he proposed that all the deliberative business be performed by small Committees consisting of only ten or twelve members. They could publish their business so that the press could fully report it to the nation. In the last instance, however, all legislative proposals would go to the Commons as a whole where a majority would decide.²

It was the view of the radical reformers that only a democratically constituted and independent Commons could properly fulfil its

1. Ibid., p. 37.

2. Williams, Letters on Political Liberty, pp. 79, 83-4.

functions within the Constitution as part of the legislature, controller of supply and supervisor of the executive. All recognized that Parliament functioned within a framework of natural and God-given rights but most assumed that annual parliaments and universal suffrage would afford sufficient protection of those rights. David Williams and John Cartwright were the important exceptions. Williams advocated the setting up of a body separate from the legislature and executive "to prevent abuses, and to check all encroachments".

In every state ... where it is an object to improve and perfect the Constitution, there should be a set of men, would should add to a general knowledge of business the profoundest and coolest speculations, who should be the guardians of the state without having the slightest interest in its official departments.¹

He proposed that each Tithing elect a representative, ten of whom would further elect and so on until every million inhabitants were represented by one. Assuming the electing population to be two million "the business of universal representation would be done in London by two persons". As was the case for the legislature elections would be annual. He stressed that the deputies should not be given "the slightest latitude" by their constituencies. Unfortunately Williams tells us very little about how the Guardians would actually function in relation to the other parts of government except to say that they will "give the community a security against that breach of trust, and that collusion with the executive power by which parliaments have often reduced the whole nation to the utmost distress".² In a later tract he made it clear

1. Ibid., pp. 70-1, 75. Williams made it clear that this proposal was separate from those which dealt with the legislature and executive. His proposals for a more equal representation to the Commons are outlined and argued for in ibid., Letter vii.

2. Ibid., pp. 59, 60, 61.

that this organization of the general will, which was seen as an adaptation of the Anglo-Saxon Folkmote, would not only review the ordinary legislation but also the fundamental or constitutional laws which laid down the system of government for the country as a whole.¹ Williams was distrustful of all delegated powers, no matter what the form of government in which they were embodied. Consequently to properly guarantee political liberty radical reform of the legislature needed to be complemented by the establishment of a system of guardianship.

John Cartwright, on the other hand, saw the jury system as the last line of defence of liberty. He was critical of what he saw as the attempts by the government and judges of his day to influence jurors in the performance of their duties. He insisted that the task of selecting juries be the responsibility of democratically elected Sheriffs.² In important criminal cases involving the crown and the subject, such as trials for libel, sedition or treason, Cartwright argued that juries had a right to decide on the basis of the Constitution and the rights of man even if they contradicted the law of the land:

For, with all our reverence for the law, we must remember, that it flows from THE CONSTITUTION; and that that again flows from THE PEOPLE: for whose protection and happiness, law, legislature, and constitution, have all been created, and are alone to be upheld.³

The existence of a written constitution and a new bill of rights was crucial if such duties were to be performed properly. It could act, said Cartwright, as a "guide and limit" to legislation, a clear demarcation of the prerogative powers, and a collection of "beacons and landmarks for showing what rights and liberties are a gift of God and untouchable".⁴

1. Williams, Lessons to a Young Prince, pp. 98-9.

2. Cartwright, Letter to Rev. Christopher Wyvill, p. 22.

3. Cartwright, An Appeal, Civil and Military, p. 258.

4. Cartwright, An Appeal on the Subject of the English Constitution, p. 13. For Cartwright's Bill of Rights see Internal Evidence, pp. 78-83.

From amongst this array of proposals for the reform of the British Constitution the radical reformers hoped it would be possible to create one programme which would not only be the basis for internal unity and political effectiveness but would guarantee, if realized, a corruption-free polity. The radical reformers stressed the need for fundamental reform, universal manhood suffrage and annual parliaments, as they believed that compromise with the moderates was incompatible with the battle for true freedom. Anything but a truly democratic Commons would be subject to corruption. Others, some of whom were themselves unsure as to the wisdom of measures such as universal suffrage no matter how unassailable it was from an ethical-theoretical point of view, stressed the need for unity and political effectiveness and urged compromise with moderates like Christopher Wyvill.¹ On what issues and to what degree one needed to compromise there was disagreement. However, it was towards a radically reformed constitution at least, that they wished to push Britain, even if it could not be obtained in the short term. On whether or not this would pave the way for even more fundamental change in the republican direction was left up to the future to decide. William Frend's plea to his fellow radicals to reach agreement with each other is indicative of their approach to politics:

Let the republicans be moderate in their demands, the anti-republicans not pertinacious in opposing every reform, and government, strengthened by the accession of both parties to it as a centre of union, will present to the world a compact body, firmly united to preserve an improving constitution, and to promote the publick happiness.²

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1. On the history of these debates see Veitch, The Genesis of Parliamentary Reform, Christie, Wilkes, Wyvill and Reform, and Cannon, Parliamentary Reform.
 2. William Frend, Peace and Union recommended to the associated bodies of Republicans and Anti-Republicans (St. Ives, 1793), p. 44.

CHAPTER 6: REPUBLICANISM AND DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT

In the eighteenth century there were a number of senses in which the words "republic" and "democracy" were used. As mentioned in the last chapter republicanism often referred to the belief that the object of all government, no matter what its particular form, was the good of all the people: "What is called a republic", wrote Thomas Paine, "is not any particular form of government. It is wholly characteristical of the purport, matter, or object for which government ought to be instituted, and on which it is to be employed, RES-PUBLICA, the public affairs, or the public good ..."¹ Usually, however, the belief that a monarchical element was antithetical to the principles of good government was part and parcel of the republican creed. It is this sense of republican which had been a legacy from the seventeenth-century.² It also became increasingly common to associate republicanism with democracy, or government without Kings, Lords or Bishops; it being believed that the health of the republic depended on extensive and vigorous participation free of hereditary and clerical influence. The development of the theory and practice of representative democracy, as opposed to direct democracy for which the word democracy had traditionally been reserved, strengthened the connection between the two words by making democracy more respectable. In some cases, however, democracy was used in the more general sense to refer to popular sovereignty rather than to a particular form of government a people might choose.³ As it is with forms of government that I am

1. Paine, Rights of Man, p. 200.

2. This tradition allows the possibility of "aristocratic republicanism". See Christopher Hill, "Republicanism After the Restoration", New Left Review, 111 (1960), 46-51.

3. See R. R. Palmer, "Notes on the Use of the word 'Democracy', 1789-1799", Political Science Quarterly, LXVIII (1953), 203-26,

primarily (but not exclusively) concerned in the following chapters the more specific senses of "republic" (government without Kings, Lords and Bishops) and "democracy" (government by the people or their representatives) will be used.

This chapter will consider the radical case against the British Constitution of King, Lords and Commons and for an "unmixed" democracy without King and Lords.¹ This will involve a discussion of arguments about existing constitutional arrangements and about alternatives proposed. Two republicans - Thomas Spence and William Hodgson - drew up detailed constitutions for their ideal Britains.² It will also be necessary to show why certain democratic republicans saw the need to unite theory and practice in a way denied by radicals such as John Thelwall who accepted the republican case in theory but were radical reformers in practice.

I Arguments Against Kings and Lords

As was shown in the last chapter none of the radical reformers advocated a positive role for the monarch in the nation's legislature; at most he would possess a delaying power on legislation passed by Lords and Commons. However, it was assumed, if only reluctantly, that the Lords would continue to play a legislative role and thereby act as a

G. Salvemini, "The Concepts of Democracy and Liberty in the Eighteenth Century" in Read, The Constitution Reconsidered, pp. 105-19 and D.O. Thomas, "Neither Democrat nor Republican", The Price-Priestley Newsletter, I (1977), 49-60.

1. See Corinne Comstock Weston, English Constitution Theory and the House of Lords 1556-1832 (New York, AMS Press, 1970), pp. 179-216.
2. William Hodgson, The Commonwealth of Reason (2nd ed.; London, 1795) and Thomas Spence, The Constitution of a Perfect Commonwealth ... (2nd ed.; London, 1798). Spence's Constitution was re-issued in revised form as The Constitution of Spensonia, A Country in Fairyland ... (London, 1801).

check on the Commons. Obadiah Hulme had shown in his Historical Essay how the hereditary chamber had emerged organically and rationally within Anglo-Saxon England, being a reflection of the desire to give "wisdom" a role in the government of the country.¹ Mixed constitutionalists like John Cartwright simply assumed that the Lords, if liberated from the temptations of corruption, would remain the repositories of wisdom in the nation. In reply the republicans marshalled four arguments: firstly, that the hereditary principle contradicted the right of each generation to determine its own destiny, secondly, that representative government was in fact the best means to ensure that the talented and wise play the central role in politics, thirdly, that any mix in the legislature must lead to conflict, imbalance and eventually corruption and, fourthly, that any attempt to thwart the will of the people, if legitimately arrived at, was contrary to first principles and therefore unacceptable.

Thomas Paine was foremost amongst the radicals in his assertion of the right of each generation to self-determination and in his criticism of the practice of setting up particular families in perpetual preference to others: "Every age and generation must be as free to act for itself, in all cases, as the ages and generations which preceded it. The vanity and presumption of governing beyond the grave is the most ridiculous and insolent of all tyrannies".² Nor was it possible to offset this principled claim by reference to the superior wisdom of aristocracies. Paine invoked two "laws of nature" to support his argument that representative government was the best means to government by the wisest, which was the original sense in which "aristocracy" was understood. Firstly, wrote

1. See pp. 32-34 above.

2. Paine, Rights of Man, pp. 63-4.

Paine, "the human species has a tendency to degenerate" when a small number of persons separate from "the general stock of society" and engage in intermarriage.¹ Secondly, he claimed, it is impossible "to control Nature in her distribution of mental powers":

It would be as ridiculous to attempt to fix the hereditaryship of human beauty, as of wisdom. Whatever wisdom constitutently is, it is like a seedless plant; it may be reared when it appears, but it cannot be voluntarily produced. There is always a sufficiency somewhere in the general mass of society for all purposes; but with respect to the parts of society, it is continually changing its place. It rises in one today, in another tomorrow, and has most probably visited in rotation every family of the earth, and again withdrawn.²

Although not foolproof as a method of finding the best governors, representative government, by way of the institution of election, came closest. If the judgement of the people was ever mistaken, explained John Thelwall, it would always be possible to make a quick correction.³

At the heart of the republican case, however, was the belief that any "mix" in the legislature would be impossible - at least in the longer term - because it institutionalised conflict and made for instability. In the arena of political institutions the idea of mechanical balance was thought inoperative. For example, in the British Constitution the restlessness of power would ensure that one element (or combination of elements) always came out on top:

... as the greater weight will always carry up the less, and as all the wheels of a machine are put in motion by one, it only remains to know which power in the constitution has the most weight, for that will govern.⁴

1. Ibid., p. 105: "By the universal economy of nature it is known, and by the instance of the Jews it is proved ..." Like John Cartwright Paine possessed anti-Semitic prejudices.

2. Ibid., p. 197.

3. Thelwall, Tribune, ii.210.

4. Paine, Common Sense, p. 70.

"The moving power" in such a species of Government, argued Thomas Paine, "is, of necessity, Corruption".¹ No matter how imperfect the elected part of the constitution it would always give rise to a greater portion of reason than is convenient to the hereditary part, thus making it essential that the former be bought up. By implication, then, mixed governments were always expensive governments and, although it was generally believed that the Commons would come into much more prominence in a radically reformed constitution, the republicans argued that unless the process of change was completed and all hereditary elements removed from the constitution any gains made would be under threat - particularly from the Lords. History had shown, claimed Catharine Macaulay, that "a senate, or an assembly of men who have had some controul over the voice of the people, some power of mitigating, regulating or carrying into execution their laws" has always "been hostile to the principles of democracy, and often ended in the ruin of freedom".²

The assumption was clear: no set of men could be separated from the rest of society, given important powers and be expected to abide by the popular will. For the republicans the balance that counted was between the people and their governors, not between the various branches of government. Legislation which was to affect all equally should be the product of the uninfluenced judgements of all. No other procedure survived the test of principle or utility. In effect the House of Lords was a chamber soaked in the spirit and practice of oppression which needed to be removed root and branch from the constitution. Within British history the House of Lords did not emerge organically from society but was

1. Paine, Rights of Man, p. 162.

2. Catharine Macaulay, Observations on the Reflections of the Right Hon. Edmund Burke, on the Revolution in France (London, 1790), pp. 80-1. It was the Roman Senate which Macaulay had in mind.

imposed on it as a result of the Norman Conquest. In essence, explained William Godwin, the aristocracy was "neither less nor more than a scheme for rendering more permanent and visible, by the interference of political institution, the inequality of mankind".¹

Nor did the republicans think much of the radical reformers' defence of the idea of a "Patriot King". According to the radical reformers a hereditary first magistrate with clearly defined powers and no influence over the legislature would be a positive element within the Constitution. The utilitarian defence of the hereditary principle at the level of chief magistrate was that it avoided the dispute that could come with the death of a King. Joseph Priestley, in his anonymously published Political Dialogue, criticized those who held this belief. He argued that only when the "kingly power" is very great would there be intense competition for the office. Should the prize be less worth contending for "there will be fewer competitors and less inconvenience from the competition".² Thus the argument for a hereditary first magistrate no longer applied, as even the radical reformers were careful to point out that the powers of the King would be significantly less and increasingly circumscribed in a reformed constitution. Priestley thought it dangerous to give the choice of ministers to one man for life. Rather he proposed regular elections for the office, arguing that the business of state was not so difficult that dedicated persons could not adequately prepare themselves. John Oswald also pointed to the contradictory nature of the British system of ministerial responsibility. Why, he asked, should not the chief magistrate, whose errors may be as pernicious as those of his minister, also be accountable to the people for his

1. Godwin, Political Justice, p. 479.

2. Priestley, On the General Principles of Government, p. 10.

behaviour.¹

Put simply, then, the republicans could no longer see the merits of the utilitarian argument for maintaining an hereditary first magistrate and could see many arguments against it. Thomas Paine saw the behaviour of the French monarchy as a lesson to all radicals convinced of the need to compromise with King and Lords. Originally Paine had approved of the gradual nature of the French reforms and did not condemn proposals for a constitutional monarchy, although his personal view was that after free debate and constitutional amendment the French would terminate the monarchy. However, with the royal flight to Varennes in June 1791, the time had come for the republic: "Let France then, arrived at the age of reason, no longer be deluded by the sound of words, and let her deliberately examine, if a King, however insignificant and contemptible in himself, may not at the same time be extremely dangerous".² Here can be seen the same argument as was applied by republicans to the Lords: preserve King and/or Lords and the rule of the people could not be guaranteed. According to the republicans the radical reformist belief that monarchs could be re-educated to enlightened principles was without foundation.

In the end, however, the chief argument against King and Lords was the argument for a democratic republic. The "science of government", wrote Paine, had been enveloped in mystery for the purpose of "enslaving, plundering, and imposing upon mankind". In reality it was "the least mysterious and the most easy to understand".³ Government existed for the

1. John Oswald, Review of the Constitution of Great Britain (3rd ed.; London, 1793), pp. 37-8.

2. Thomas Paine, Address of the "Société Republicaine" (1791), quoted in M.D. Conway, The Life of Thomas Paine (London, Watts and Co., 1909), p. 126.

3. Paine, "Dissertation on the First Principles of Government", p. 3.

benefit of all and should therefore be subject to the control of all.

"In a free state" proclaimed John Oswald, "there can be but one class of men, which is that of the citizen; as there is but one will, which is that of the people". To create a privileged class of men separate from the people and with extraordinary powers would "never enter into the minds of free people".¹ The recent experience of the United States of America was seen as confirmation of the belief that government without King, Lords and Bishops was possible and preferable, even in an extensive territory.²

II Outlines of the Republic

In discussing constitutional proposals Thomas Paine made a distinction between matters of "principle" and matters of "opinion".³ Whether or not the rights of men should be equal under a constitution, he wrote, was not a matter for debate "for men do not hold their rights as grants from each other, but each one in right of himself". In an extensive territory the only system of government consistent with principle, then, would be some form of representative democracy. However, on the precise manner in which the several parts of government should be arranged and related there was room for variation; these were matters of opinion to be decided according to specific circumstances and experience. In general Paine concentrated on outlining the first principles on which government should be based rather than on the organizational forms which would embody these principles. Nevertheless scattered throughout his writings, and in the writings of his fellow republicans, can be found much discussion

1. Oswald, Review, p. 12.

2. See Bonwick, English Radicals and the American Revolution, esp. ch. 6.

3. Paine, "Dissertation on the First Principles of Government", p. 18.

of the questions associated with the form to be taken by the republican alternative to the British Constitution of King, Lords and Commons. A treatment of these discussions is essential as it indicates precisely what the republicans meant by rule of "the people".

At this point it is important to note that two leading republicans - Catharine Macaulay and Joseph Priestley - were not wholeheartedly democratic in their commitments. Their republican projections were characterised by the absence of what Paine would call an inalienable natural right - the right to vote. According to Catharine Macaulay those who were paupers living on the alms of society had no right to enjoy political privileges. She argued that paupers had forfeited their political rights because they lived off the labour of others. The right of maintenance afforded by civilized countries was said to result from compassion and benevolence and was not a matter of natural right. "It is on the basis of industry alone, the only principle which exactly squares with a native right ... that the legislature has formed the rights of representation."¹ For Macaulay economic independence was a precondition for the right to vote; wage earners but not paupers possessed the necessary qualifications. On becoming a republican in the 1790s Priestley maintained his support for restrictions on the right to vote. In his earlier writings he had merely noted that universal suffrage was unnecessary, the interests of the middle and lower orders being essentially the same.² However, in the final edition of his Lectures on History and General Policy he argued that the

1. Macaulay, Observations on the Reflections of Right Hon. Edmund Burke, p. 79. See also Hill and Hill, "Catharine Macaulay", 397-400.

2. Before 1790 Priestley believed that hereditary elements were necessary to guarantee good government in extensive states; Essay on the First Principles of Government, pp. 10-11, 22-25 and Lectures on History and General Policy, Lecture XLIII. For his views on the suffrage question see Essay on the First Principles of Government,

right to vote should be annexed to educational qualifications of some sort; for example a test of literacy. This would, he said, act as an inducement for the poor to uplift themselves and earn the right to vote. He also proposed low or zero salaries for all public offices so that they would only be effectively open to those with property, thus encouraging the acquisition of property. "It is a poor country indeed," he observed, "that cannot furnish persons enough of independent fortunes, both able and willing to serve their country in any capacity, civil or military".¹

Catharine Macaulay and Priestley were old-style republicans closely related to the Commonwealthmen of the early years of the eighteenth-century, all of whom thought economic and intellectual independence to be essential preconditions for citizenship. Both of them also defended bicameralism as a means of preserving "balance" in the republic. Macaulay proposed the election of an Assembly by "the people"² divided up into equal electoral districts and a Senate elected by the people from amongst those in the Assembly.³ The nation's generals, admirals, civil magistrates and other important office-holders would be chosen by the Assembly from amongst those who had held the rank of

pp. 20-22. For a thorough treatment of his views on these questions, see Leslie, "The Social and Political Thought of Joseph Priestley", ch. 5, sect. III and ch. 7.

1. Joseph Priestley, Lectures on History and General Policy ... (3rd ed.; Philadelphia, 1803), pp. 116-18.
2. It is not clear, as Barbara Schnorrenberg claims, that she intended universal manhood suffrage; "The Brood Hen of Faction: Mrs Macaulay and Radical Politics, 1765-1775", Albion, XI (1979), 35.
3. Macaulay, Loose Remarks, pp. 30-37. By 1790 she was opposed to bicameralism. See her Observations on the Reflections of Right Hon. Edmund Burke, p. 81. However, it is interesting to note that in this tract she applauded the French system of indirect election as the best method of ensuring that only the wisest and most able became the nation's legislators; ibid., pp. 76-77.

Senator, and would themselves be members of the Senate. Annual elections would replace a third of each chamber, no-one being capable of re-election within a space of three years. She wished the Senate to be a debating chamber only, with small enough numbers (fifty) to prevent the confusion which usually resulted from large assemblies. Legislative power would lie with the directly elected assembly but in some matters assembly members would be instructed by their constituents.¹ Priestley also saw the need for a second chamber with a delaying power on all legislation proposed by a House of Assembly. He hoped it would be composed of men of "superior wisdom" who could act as a check on "those who have little besides their property to recommend them".² He insisted that it should not be hereditary but remained silent on how its members would be elected. Of one thing Priestley was sure; that the aristocracy made bad legislators. They were, he said, sufficiently numerous to form a "society" and, unfortunately they felt no restraint on their measures respecting "the lower ranks". They might even make it "a point of honour to preserve and enlarge their privileges, at the expence of those beneath them".³

For the other republicans a democracy based on universal manhood suffrage, equal electoral districts and a secret ballot was thought to be necessary if first principles were to be protected. "Freedom", wrote Thomas Paine, "must have all or none, and she must have them equally".⁴

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1. Appeals from all courts would be sent first to the Senate and then to the Assembly; ibid., p. 32.
 2. Priestley, On the General Principles of Government, p. 18.
 3. Priestley, Lectures on History and General Policy, p. 305.
 4. Thomas Paine, "A Serious Address to the People of Pennsylvania" (1778) in P.S. Foner (ed.), The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine (2 vols; New York, Citadel Press, 1945), ii.284. Hereafter Complete Writings.

However, Paine was concerned that legislators had a tendency to act too quickly and on impulse rather than reason. His experience of politics in Pennsylvania in the 1780s had also led him to fear the influence of party, faction and prejudice in the legislature.¹ Nevertheless he remained implacably opposed to bicameralism and gave three reasons for his belief: it led to inconsistency in government, it made for the possibility of minority rule, and it could not be shown to allow for the wisdom it was supposed to encourage. His method of preventing hasty legislation from being passed was to divide the House of Assembly into two or three parts and have each proposal debated separately by each part before being returned to the whole Assembly where a majority would decide.² Paine was opposed to the idea of binding legislators to particular interests or regions as it would prevent them from considering the interests of the nation as a whole. He wished the democratically elected representatives to be independently-minded legislators: "They see over the whole, and in behalf of the whole".³ He saw little danger that representatives would become tyrants:

With representatives, frequently renewed, who neither administer, nor judge, whose functions are determined by laws; with national conventions, with primary assemblies, which can be convoked at any moment; with a people knowing how to read, and how to defend itself; with good journals, guns and pikes; a Legislature would have a good deal of trouble in enjoying many months of tyranny.⁴

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1. Eric Foner, Tom Paine and Revolutionary America (New York, Oxford Univ. Press, 1976), ch. 6.
 2. Paine, Rights of Man, pp. 222-23.
 3. Thomas Paine, "Six Letters to Rhode Island" (1782-3), Complete Writings, ii.355. See also Burnell, "The Political and Social Thought of Thomas Paine", pp. 125-34.
 4. Thomas Paine, "Anti-Monarchical Essay for Use of New Republicans", in M.D. Conway (ed.), The Writings of Thomas Paine (4 vols; New York, 1894-6), iii.108. Hereafter Writings.

As early as 1767 Catharine Macaulay had developed an alternative model of the legislative process. She made a distinction between the affairs of commerce, and all matters relative to state and executive government, and matters of taxation, peace and war, and general legislation. She proposed that the former would be determined by the Assembly after being debated in the Senate. The latter would also be determined by the Assembly after having been debated in the Senate, but only after the people in their respective electoral districts had time to deliberate on the issues and instruct their representatives.¹ John Oswald agreed with the principle but saw no need for the people to instruct their representatives; rather they themselves would accept or reject legislative proposals put to them by a democratically elected representative body. It was important, he said, that no representative assembly be given the power of legislation. Any assembly was said to be subject to the influences of fear, corruption and ignorance and therefore incapable of legislating properly. "The greater the mass of the people assembled the greater will be the portion of COMMON SENSE obtained, the nearer we shall approach the UNIVERSAL GOOD".² Similarly Thomas Spence wished to see all proposed legislation referred to the people in each locality to become law only if "in more than one half of the counties or departments of the parishes the tenth of the parishes have not objected".³ For these radicals, then, the people and not the people's representatives should be the legislators: "The law is the will of the people; whatever therefore is not the will of the people is not law".⁴

1. Macaulay, Loose Remarks, pp. 32-33.

2. Oswald, Review, p. 57. Unfortunately Oswald never says what would precisely count as the "will of all".

3. Spence, Constitution of a Perfect Commonwealth, p. 19.

4. Oswald, Review, p. 54. Oswald argued that any laws which did not coincide with the "will of all" would be difficult to execute; ibid., pp. 56-57.

Hostility to executive power was another feature of republican discourse. According to Thomas Paine the necessary existence of some kind of authority to superintend the execution of the laws contained dangers. In determining the methods of appointment and composition two rules ought to apply: firstly, that no one individual should be invested with extraordinary powers "for besides his being tempted to mis-use it, it will excite contention and commotion in the nation for the office" and, secondly, that power should never be given to any set of individuals for any length of time.¹ The republicans feared that the radical reformers would leave too much power in the hands of the King in their reformed constitution. It was partly to allay such fears that John Cartwright became a convert to the cause of a written constitution in the 1790s. For some of the republicans, however, the granting of executive power to an individual, and then checking it only indirectly through parliamentary supervision, was insufficient as a means of control.

In Catharine Macaulay's model of the perfect republic the Senate, a small body of about fifty selected by the people from amongst the nation's directly elected representatives, would effectively constitute the executive power. It could only act, however, with the support of the Assembly, and in the case of peace and war, taxation, and general legislation, with the support of the nation at large. Rotation of all positions was seen as a preventative against decay. She acknowledged that emergencies might justify the placing of executive power in the hands of one man (this would be done by the Assembly, the time period of office-holding to be limited to one month unless an extension was agreed to by the Assembly) but no one person should be able to hold

1. Paine, "Dissertation on the First Principles of Government", p. 21.

the position for more than one year.¹

William Hodgson in his utopia "The Commonwealth of Reason" proposed that the nation's directly elected representative body choose from its own ranks "Committees" of Government, Finance, Agriculture, Trade and Provisions. Rotation for these positions and for a place in the national representative body would ensure that the practice of legislating and governing was diffused right throughout the society and that no permanent caste of politicians, legislators or executors, was allowed to form. The sending of men to legislate without giving them the power to execute was said by Hodgson to be "an absurdity" which was intended "to deceive and defraud the people of their just rights".² William Godwin was of the same view: "There can be no just reason for excluding the national representative from the exercise of any function, the exercise of which, on the part of the society, is, in any case, necessary".³

For radicals such as Joseph Priestley and Thomas Spence, on the other hand, the separation of the legislative power from the executive power was an essential part of the republican constitution. Priestley proposed direct and regular elections for the office of first magistrate who would then choose his ministry.⁴ Spence proposed the selection of an executive council from a body especially elected by the people. The directly elected national assembly would perform the task of electing the

1. Macaulay, Loose Remarks, pp. 31-35.

2. Hodgson, Commonwealth of Reason, p. 54. Hodgson argued that legislative power was best delegated to the body of representatives elected by the people, rotation to prevent corruption, ibid., pp. 52-53.

3. Godwin, Political Justice, p. 538. For Godwin an elected president with important powers was just as dangerous to the people as an hereditary monarch; ibid., Book V: ch. IX.

4. Priestley, On the General Principles of Government, pp. 11-12.

executive from this body. This council would be charged "with the direction and superintendence of the general administration" and would have a right to speak in the nation's legislative assembly. Annual elections to all bodies - legislative and executive - would ensure democratic accountability within the system.¹

The republicans also saw the need to make the judicial arm of government publicly accountable. Indeed, according to Thomas Paine, the judiciary was, together with the general superintending body, part of the executive arm of government. Both Paine and Thomas Spence wished to see civil cases decided at the local level by a process of arbitration in which the principles of natural justice would be applied to the merits of each case.² Criminal cases, on the other hand, would go to trial by jury. William Hodgson stressed the importance of selecting the jury by lot and of not allowing the same jury to try successive cases: "This will prevent the possibility of bribing a jury, because it will be utterly impossible to know what jury will try any given cause". Justices of the peace and all civil and criminal magistrates would be directly elected by the people.³

Thomas Paine also proposed the setting up of a Court of Justice to deal with all disputes between the state and individual over the legitimacy of public acts. It was essential, said Paine, to keep the government out of all disputes between itself and members of the public. A written constitution outlining the rights of man and the forms, powers and limitations of government would be essential if a system of judicial review

1. Spence, Constitution of a Perfect Commonwealth, pp. 19-20.

2. See Paine, "On Constitutions, Government, and Charters" (1805), Complete Writings, ii.996-97 and Spence, Constitution of a Perfect Commonwealth, p. 21.

3. Hodgson, Commonwealth of Reason, p. 70.

was to work properly. Nevertheless, given his democratic commitments, Paine still thought it important that judges be accountable to the people, a fully independent judiciary being a limitation on the right of the people to self-government. The legislature ought, therefore, to have the power to remove judges without going through "the tedious and expensive formality of impeachment".¹

Central to the politics of republicanism was the idea of a continuous reaffirmation of the social compact. It was stressed that procedures should be available for each nation to absorb the lessons of its, and others, experience and make amendments to the constitutional laws of the nation when it was thought necessary. Paine proposed the setting up of specially elected constitutional conventions every seven years to suggest changes which the people could accept or reject.² However, this would not prevent revisions in the interim, the powers of "forming and reforming, generating and regenerating constitutions" being "always before a country as a matter of right".³ These procedures, together with the annual election of the nation's ordinary legislators, would ensure that politics was not frozen into unalterable patterns.

III Justice and the Will of All

As was noted in Part I of this thesis the radicals saw politics as the process by which the laws of nature, or God, were translated into a legal framework for judging human behaviour. Politics, in other words,

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1. See John J. Meng, "The Constitutional Theories of Thomas Paine", Review of Politics, VIII (1946), 283-306.
 2. Thomas Paine, "Letters to the Citizens of the United States" (1802), Writings, iii.431.
 3. Paine, Rights of Man, p. 178.

was simply applied ethics. To ensure that political outcomes properly reflected the moral universe within which human beings lived the radicals believed that certain political rules needed to be observed. The first and most important was that power, if left in too few hands for too long, was bound to corrupt. The radical republicans believed that only by establishing a system of democratic accountability, free of the influence of King and Lords, would unbiased legislation and administration be guaranteed. To divide authority between King, Lords and Commons was contrary to principle and a certain recipe for corruption. "In every state, as in every single person", wrote Joseph Priestley, "there ought to be but one will, and no important business should be prevented from proceeding by any opposite will".¹ However, as has been seen in the last section, the republicans disagreed on precisely how a political system free of King and Lords would ensure that this "one will" produced legislation which was ethically acceptable.

Joseph Priestley and Catharine Macaulay, on the one hand, and Thomas Spence and John Oswald on the other represent the two extremes on this question. Both Priestley and Macaulay believed that a democracy unmediated by respect for education and property would contain the potential for decay. Consequently they did not see the right to vote as inalienable and God-given but dependent on the attainment of intellectual and/or economic independence. Spence and Oswald, on the other hand, interpreted the doctrine of democratic self-government quite literally. At the same time they saw the right to vote, the right to education and the right of access to productive capital as part and parcel of the package which would establish a democratic republican society. Underneath the differences on the question of political liberty were different perceptions of how much

1. Priestley, On the General Principles of Government, p. 18.

social and economic equality was possible and desirable. These differences will be outlined in Part III of the thesis: "Property and Progress".

Thomas Paine saw a representative system in which proceedings in the legislature were slow, deliberate and subject to judicial review as the best method of guaranteeing truly republican government. He did think it was possible for democratically elected legislatures to act in an unjust way. Indeed in his earlier writings he went so far as to argue that certain kinds of economic contracts entered into by the government could not be revoked by a succeeding legislature. These were, he said, all deeds or contracts, signed, sealed and delivered where the state acts as an individual and, as such, was subject to the same laws of justice as other individuals. A republic, he explained, should establish a sovereignty of justice rather than a sovereignty of will. Nevertheless he still believed that contracts could not be granted forever and should be annulled after thirty years.¹ In a later essay he rejected this argument, stating that it would be contrary to the "very intention, essence, and principle of annual elections" to disallow legislatures the right to undo the work of those which preceded them. To ensure that justice was done all acts which required some permanency such as sales or grants of land and acts of incorporation should be proposed by one legislature and adopted by a second after the people had a chance to express their opinions through an intervening election.²

It is also important to note the qualifications Paine placed on his democratic republican commitments after his experience of the French

1. Thomas Paine, "Dissertations on Government; the Affairs of the Bank; and Paper Money" (1786), Complete Writings, ii.394-99.
2. Paine, "On Constitutions, Governments and Charters", pp. 989-9. See also Howard Penniman, "Thomas Paine - Democrat", American Political Science Review, XXXVII (1943), 247-49.

Revolution where he saw factionalism, religious fanaticism amongst the people and atheism amongst the leaders undermining its principles. In 1804 he wrote a paper on the memorial sent to the American Congress from the French inhabitants of Louisiana demanding immediate admission to equal statehood in the United States. In it he reminded the memorialists of the "mischief caused in France by the possession of power before they understood principles".¹ The existence of slavery in Louisiana, he said, proved that the people there had no understanding of human rights and could not be granted equal rights in the republic. Increasingly he turned to religious issues, believing deism to be an essential precondition for democracy as it led to respect for God's creation and inspired the practice of morality. Education and enlightenment, which had been treated as non-problematical by the younger Paine, were now seen as preliminary tasks.²

Within the radical camp, then, there were two models of political argument, mixed constitutionalist and republican. For many of the radicals, however, the pull of the former proved to be greater when it came to political practice as it provided what seemed to be a surer foundation for agitation. At the same time this chapter has revealed how some of the republicans were concerned to preserve "balance" in the republic by making concessions to "independence" and "wisdom" in their ideal polities. The strength of the hold of traditional conceptions cannot be underestimated. Nevertheless the importance of the emergence

1. Thomas Paine, "To the French Inhabitants of Louisiana" (1804) quoted in Conway, Life of Thomas Paine, p. 291.

2. Paine's increasing pessimism about the short term possibility of democratic republicanism is discussed in Burnell, "The Political and Social Thought of Thomas Paine", pp. 190-95 and W.E. Christian, "The Moral Economics of Tom Paine", Journal of the History of Ideas, XXXIV (1973), 367-80.

of clearly republican and democratic conceptions of politics needs to be recognized, especially when they are placed within the wider context of the American and French Revolutions. These experiments gave an immediacy and relevance to the alternatives by stripping away what had appeared to be their utopian qualities. At the very least this new way of looking at politics, shocking to the establishment but appealing to certain sections of the popular reform movement, added a new dimension to political argument by developing in a "straightforward" and "literal" way the concepts of natural rights, consent and revolution.¹ According to two of the radicals not even the orthodox republican interpretation of these ideas was literal enough; Thomas Spence wishing to strengthen the commitment to mutuality, immediacy and participation by way of decentralization and William Godwin wishing to widen the sphere of individual freedom to the point at which the state would become redundant. As decentralization was seen as a necessary step in the process Godwin's ideas will be discussed alongside Spence's in the next chapter.

1. H.T. Dickinson, "The Rights of Man: From John Locke to Tom Paine", New Edinburgh Review, ed. O.D. Edwards and G.A. Shepperson, XXXV-XXVI (1976), 43.

CHAPTER 7: DECENTRALIZATION AND THE STATELESS SOCIETY

The radical model of the political system had as its basic unit the local, self-governing community. It was argued that the locality, like the individual in a state of nature, lacked the power to protect its natural right to self-determination and therefore found it necessary to unite with other localities, firstly at the regional and finally at the national level. For many of the radicals the nation-state became not simply the guarantor of defence but the focal point for politics and legislation; the locality remaining as a unit within the electoral system with only a residual of power. David Williams spoke of his fears that the existence of separate states in America would "disunite and alienate" the American people. He wrote: "I think the whole wants that unity, harmony, capacity of common judgement and general will, which would have resulted from a general organization of the republic into one body".¹ However, it would seem unlikely that the radicals expected or desired the long tradition of localism or regionalism to wither away, particularly since they had themselves utilised the institutions of local government to mobilise opposition to the existing system.² Thomas Spence and William Godwin differed in that they did not merely see a role for local government in a reformed system, but placed it at the centre of their political commitments. Spence believed decentralization was essential if democracy was to be realized, whilst Godwin believed it would pave the way for the end of all political Government.

1. Williams, Lessons to a Young Prince, p. 74.

2. On the role of London see Dame Lucy Sutherland, "The City of London in Eighteenth-Century Politics", in R. Pares and A.J.P. Taylor (eds.), Essays Presented to Sir Lewis Namier (London, Macmillan, 1956), pp. 49-74.

I Spensonia

At the centre of Thomas Spence's vision of the new society and polity was the parish. In "Spensonia" - the name he gave to a country organized on Spencean principles - each parish would contain an equal number of citizens and would not be so large that all the inhabitants could not organise their common affairs collectively.¹ After a year's residence every adult man and woman would be a full citizen of the parish, voting by secret ballot on all matters of common concern. The parish would be "the sovereign lord of its own territory" as it would own "the land with all its appurtenances as structures, buildings, and fixtures, and mines, woods, waters, etc. contained within itself".² Individuals would pay a rent to the parish for the right to use the land, rents to vary according to the quantity and quality of the land.

Spence stressed that his objective was the unmediated rule of the common people, free of the influence of both aristocracy and middle class. He threw scorn at those who pictured government as a process which only a few could understand and participate in. The time would come, he envisaged, when "we are not mere spectators in the world, but as all men ought to be, actors".³ Because each parish would be very small in size and population, government could be by all the citizens; elections only being necessary in the case of local officials such as Justices of the Peace and the police. He introduced the idea, common to socialist thought in the nineteenth century, that politics would be transformed into a

1. Spence, Constitution of a Perfect Commonwealth, p. 16. On precisely how large the parishes would be Spence was silent.

2. Thomas Spence, "The Rights of Man" (1775) in Beer, Pioneers of Land Reform, p. 11 and "A Lesson for the Sheepish Multitude", Pig's Meat, II (1794), 34.

3. Thomas Spence, "A Further Account of Spensonia", Pig's Meat, II (1794), 214.

process of administration and co-ordination. Speaking as a citizen of "Spensonia" he wrote:

Instead of debating about mending the state, as with you, (for ours needs no mending) we employ our ingenuity nearer home, and the result of our debates are in every parish, how we shall work such a mine, make such a river navigable, drain such a fen, or improve such a waste. These things we are all immediately interested in, and each have a vote in executing.¹

What many eighteenth-century political theorists called "democracy" - direct government by the people suitable for small states only - was Spence's image of the decentralized future. He even compared each of his parishes with a "little polished Athens" and a "warlike Sparta".²

Through the leasing of agricultural land, workshops and housing the parish would receive revenue sufficient for its purposes, any surplus to be distributed in equal portions to all inhabitants; male and female, young and old, legitimate and illegitimate.³ The decision as to how revenues would be spent was to be a local one, Spence expecting a healthy and democratic competition between the parishes to be a major source of the nation's strength. His own conception of how parish life ought to be organized can be gleaned from his various writings if we list the numerous proposals he put forward with respect to the expenditure of rents:⁴

1. Ibid.

2. Thomas Spence, "A Supplement to the History of Robinson Crusoe" (1782) in Kemp-Ashraf and Mitchell, Essays in Honour of William Gallacher, p. 305. The sources of Spence's commitment to localism and participatory democracy are thoroughly examined in Thomas R. Knox, "Thomas Spence: The Trumpet of Jubilee", Past and Present, LXXVI (Aug. 1977), 75-98.

3. He liked to compare each of his parishes with fraternal or benefit societies caring for all their members; The Meridian Sun of Liberty, p. 11.

4. See "Rights of Man", pp. 11-12; "Supplement", pp. 305-6; Constitution of a Perfect Commonwealth, p. 16; and "The Important Trial", pp. 43-54, 61-2.

- (i) Maintaining local officers such as police and Justices of the Peace.
- (ii) Building, repairing and adorning houses, bridges and all other structures in the parish.
- (iii) Making and maintaining the passages, highways and canals.
- (iv) Planting and taking in waste lands.
- (v) Providing and storing ammunition and all sorts of arms.
- (vi) Making grants for agricultural and other improvements.
- (vii) Providing educational and cultural facilities such as a library, school and assembly rooms.
- (viii) Maintaining a church and minister of religion for the majority, there being freedom of religion for the rest.¹
- (ix) Providing a hospital and financing a public health campaign.
- (x) Constructing and maintaining a public granary and fuel store, the contents to be used in times of need.
- (xi) Constructing and maintaining safe and convenient bathing places.

Quite clearly, then, each parish would, as a collectivity, be active in promoting the health, welfare and happiness of its inhabitants.

Spence accepted that county and national government was necessary, but he took seriously Thomas Paine's principle that "the collective power in any of the parts is constituted for the sole purpose of doing THAT which the minor parts are not sufficiently competent to do".² Consequently he expected county and national government to deal mainly with the resolution of inter-parish disputes and national defence and foreign policy.³ To prevent these levels from having an independent revenue-raising

1. Spence only made this proposal in one of his earliest tracts, "Supplement", p. 306.

2. Paine, "A Serious Address to the People of Pennsylvania", p. 296.

3. Spence, Constitution of a Perfect Commonwealth, pp. 20-3.

power, he proposed that they be financed solely by the parishes, a small proportion of the rents being set aside for the task. As was shown in the last chapter he wished to see the nation have a common legislature to propose laws, the support of a significant number of parishes being necessary before such proposals became law. In "Spensonia" freedom of movement would be a basic and inalienable right. This would help ensure the spread of equality throughout the nation, as no one parish would be able to prevent newcomers from entering and enjoying any special advantages it might have. Spence also seems to have envisaged the development of some sort of national employment policy by which an unemployed labourer could be given assistance to move to parishes with extra riches or land.¹ However, the strength of Spence's commitment to the locality is clearly indicated when his plans are contrasted with those of William Hodgson. In Hodgson's "Commonwealth of Reason" the nationally elected assembly would deal with the major areas of public concern such as agriculture, trade and transport, a land tax being levied to finance all public expenditure. The primary task for democratically elected local authorities and juries chosen by ballot would be to administer the laws of the land established by the national legislature.²

II From Decentralization to Statelessness: William Godwin

William Godwin differed from Spence in two important respects. Firstly, change under the Godwinian plan would necessarily be gradual and evolutionary. For Spence, on the other hand, a revolution from below was thought to be essential if Spencean principles were to be realised.³

1. Thomas Spence, The Giant-Killer, or, Anti-Landlord, II (1814), 12, 14.

2. See Hodgson, Commonwealth of Reason, pp. 55-104.

3. Spence's and Godwin's views on the transition will be dealt with in chs. 14 and 15 below.

Secondly, the decentralized utopia of Godwin's which most closely resembles that of Spence was to be a phase in human development and not the end-point of human aspirations and action. The most basic source of human oppression was seen by Godwin to be the state and political institutions in general. Spence was less utopian, believing a system of law to be necessary if a community was to deal with those possessing vicious inclinations.¹

Godwin acknowledged that, given the current climate of opinion and intellect, national government was still necessary. A representative form of democracy was the preferred model as it avoided some of the defects associated with "large promiscuous assemblies" of the people, such as ignorance, demagoguery and inconstancy, and brought with it the possibility of rulership by men of superior wisdom and education. By giving the right to vote to all, representative democracy encouraged honesty, frankness and freedom: monarchies and aristocracies, on the other hand, were associated with faith, fear and submission.² Of necessity a national assembly would have no upper house, the institutions of two houses of assembly being described as "the direct method to divide a nation against itself". One of the two houses, argued Godwin, would always "in a greater or less degree, be the asylum of usurpation, monopoly and privilege".³ Slow and deliberate proceedings by the assembly would be the only check necessary against hasty and ill-advised legislation. Godwin was also suspicious of any significant division between executive and legislative powers. He argued that assemblies would only need to appoint

1. Thomas Spence, The Case of Thomas Spence, Bookseller (London, 1792), p. 11.

2. Godwin, Political Justice, Book V, ch. XIV.

3. Ibid., p. 536.

ministers to deal with two sets of tasks: firstly, those of "financial detail and minute superintendence" which only a small number could perform, never clearly defined, and secondly, any measures that would not admit of delay such as peace and war, taxation and the convocation of deliberative assemblies. He stressed that any executive decisions could be revised or annulled by the assembly.¹

It was Godwin's belief that over time the powers of national government could be reduced, the focus of political life shifting downwards to the parish. He proposed that national (or regional) assemblies be elected only when necessary to deal with inter-parish disputes or the threat of foreign invasion. Flexibility of this sort would help counter the conservatism that tended to go with permanently established institutions.² In the first instance commands backed up by force would be needed but as enlightenment spread the assemblies could invite the districts to co-operate, using argument alone to influence their behaviour. The whole nature of politics would be transformed: "Thus, that which was, at first, a great empire with legislative unity would speedily be transformed into a confederacy of lesser republics, with a general congress of Amphictyonic council, answering the purpose of a point of co-operation upon extraordinary occasions. The ideas of great empire, and legislative unity, are plainly the barbarous remains of the days of military heroism".³

According to Godwin even these temporary assemblies would be

1. Ibid., pp. 537-9.

2. On Godwin's notions of "stasis" and "flux" and how they related to his views on law and government see Michael H. Scrivener, "Godwin's Philosophy Revaluated", Journal of the History of Ideas, XXXIX (1978), 615-26.

3. Godwin, Political Justice, p. 610.

destined to desuetude as the simplicity and equality of a parish-based life ushered in an era of unending rationality. Godwin's definition of the parish was slightly different from Spence's:

... a certain small portion of territory, whether in population or extent, which custom has rendered familiar to us.¹

As one moved upwards through regions to the nation-state complexity, variety and disagreement made a system of law necessary and inevitable. Within each parish, on the other hand, there was a natural basis for co-operation and mutual agreement. Godwin proposed that the only political institutions necessary would be locally based juries "to decide upon the offences of individuals within the community, and upon the questions and controversies respecting property which may chance to arise".² As time passed the juries would need only to recommend ways to solve disagreements and invite offenders to forsake their errors. Eventually even these juries could pass away, neighbours in a small area such as the parish being well informed of each other's concerns and perfectly equal to their adjustment.³ Godwin also noted that sobriety and equity, so essential if self-regulation was to be possible, were "the obvious characteristics of a limited circle".⁴ It was possible, then, for political government -

1. Ibid., p. 545.

2. Ibid., pp. 544-5. Godwin does not indicate the method by which juries would be selected. However, his criticism of lots (ibid., pp. 627-8) the method favoured by Hodgson to select a jury, and his support for democracy would indicate that he favoured election. See Clark, The Philosophical Anarchism of William Godwin, pp. 192-3.

3. Godwin, Political Justice, pp. 542, 610. See also William Godwin, Considerations on Lord Grenville's and Mr Pitt's Bills ... (London, 1796), pp. 2-4.

4. Godwin, Political Justice, p. 543. See Isaac Kramnick, "On Anarchism and the Real World: William Godwin and Radical England", American Political Science Review, LXVI (1972), 118-121 for an account of "the politics of simplicity".

"that brute engine which has been the only perennial cause of the vices of mankind" - to be dissolved.¹

Godwin differed from the other radicals, as was shown in the last section of the thesis, in that he could see no rational grounds, other than historical, functional ones for the existence of political government, grounds that would become irrelevant as the human species developed. The purest kind of obedience, wrote Godwin, flowed from the independent conviction of our private judgement. Deference to all authority, even if it was democratically constituted,² was destructive of human individuality: "The pretence of collective wisdom is among the most palpable of all impostures. The acts of the society, can never rise above the suggestion of this or that individual, who is a member of it".³ In a democracy a "fictitious unanimity" is created by giving legislative power to a numerical majority of citizens, or their representatives in an elected assembly. Any debates are distorted by the necessity of their being terminated by a vote:

Debate and discussion are, in their own nature, highly conducive to intellectual improvement; but they lose their salutary character the moment they are subjected to this fortunate condition.⁴

In such a situation orators become prominent, ignoring the canons of reason and evidence, feeding on prejudice and irrationality in an attempt to forge together a majority of votes for proposals they happen to

1. Godwin, Political Justice, p. 554.

2. As Roland Garrett has convincingly argued Godwin's arguments against the institution of national assemblies (Political Justice, Book V, ch. XXIII) are at the same time arguments against more general democratic forms; "Anarchism or Political Democracy: The Case of William Godwin", Social Theory and Practice, I (July 1971), 111-120.

3. Godwin, Political Justice, p. 550.

4. Ibid., pp. 548-9.

favour. In all of these processes the individual loses his way, adjusting his sentiments to others rather than allowing the dictates of his own understanding to work unhindered. "The mind of one man is essentially distinct from the mind of another. If each do not preserve his individuality, the judgement of all will be feeble, and the progress of our common understanding inexpressibly retarded".¹ At best, then, representative democracy could only be a temporary expedient.

There is, however, a slight tension within Godwin's own account of the stateless society. Whilst he looked forward to the diminution and abolition of all formal and institutional restraint on individual behaviour, he does seem to have envisaged a continuing role for informal restraint via the "general inspection" which is exercised by members of a limited circle over the conduct of each other:

No individual would be hardy enough in the cause of vice to defy the general consent of sober judgement that would surround him. It would carry despair to his mind, or, which is better, it would carry conviction. He would be obliged, by a force not less irresistible than whips and chains, to reform his conduct.²

In an important sense, then, there would be a form of "politics" even if there were no formal political institutions. However, Godwin seems not to have thought that the necessary influence which frank and open dialogue would have on the individual would be destructive of individuality:

"He that, in the gentlest manner, undertakes to reason another out of his vices will probably occasion pain; but this species of punishment ought, upon no account, to be superseded".³

What Godwin envisaged was a complete change in the relationship

1. Ibid., p. 236.

2. Ibid., p. 545.

3. Ibid., p. 761.

between the individual and society. He attacked all forms of co-operation, cohabitation and marriage and argued for economically independent individuals capable of "standing alone".¹ All forms of social intercourse then, could become "a luxury, innocent and enviable, in which he joyfully indulges".² He could not see, for example, any replacement for conversation and dialogue. "But", he concluded, "he will resort with a scarcely inferior eagerness to solitude, and will find in it the highest complacency and the purest delight".³ This contrasts with Thomas Spence's vigorously democratic and communitarian conception of the truly human future. What we have in Godwin's writings is the projection of the hypothetical past "state of nature" of the political theorists, with "art" and "civilization" added, into the future.⁴

1. Godwin, The Enquirer, p. 142.

2. Godwin, Political Justice, p. 761.

3. Ibid. In an Appendix ("Of Health, and the Prolongation of Human Life") Godwin also outlined the extraordinary beliefs, firstly, that human intellect may develop to the point where life could be prolonged "beyond any limits which we are able to assign" and, secondly that as the earth was fully peopled propagation would cease, leaving the human race as "a people of men, and not of children"; ibid., p. 776. These beliefs were, however, described as only matters of "probable conjecture", which were not central to his argument.

4. Whitney, Primitivism, pp. 207-19 and Stephen, English Thought in the Eighteenth Century, ii.275.

CHAPTER 8: AN ARMED CITIZENRY

To fully guarantee political and civil liberty the radicals thought it necessary to have a fully armed and militarily prepared citizenry. The right to fight force with force in defence of one's life, liberty and property, claimed Granville Sharp, could never be annulled when one entered into a contract to form a civil society. The right to bear arms was said to follow. It was also a question of duty; the duty of every citizen to assist their neighbours or countrymen in preserving internal liberty and social order and defending the country from foreign invasion.¹ According to many of the radical reformers the arming and training of the citizenry was not just a question of natural right and social duty but an integral part of the Anglo-Saxon constitution which had been allowed to fall into decay.² Citizenship rights, then, implied and necessitated military rights.

The existence of a standing army was said to be totally repugnant to the principles of freedom and/or the constitution of England.³ In the first place a standing army was said to have very great power but little attachment to the country within which it was established. It was also true, noted John Cartwright, that the inducements of money and drink

1. Sharp, Tracts, p. 5.

2. Cartwright, England's Aegis, i.119-20.

3. On the development of this idea in neo-Harringtonian circles see esp. The Political Works of James Harrington (Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1977), pp. 128-151 and Lawrence D. Cress, "Radical Whiggery on the Role of the Military: Ideological Roots of the American Revolutionary Militia", Journal of the History of Ideas, XXXX (1979), 43-60. It should also be remembered that advocacy of citizen militias was not limited to oppositionists; both William Blackstone and David Hume associating freedom and security with militias. See ibid., 52-3 and David Miller, Philosophy and Ideology in Hume's Political Thought (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1981), pp. 178-79.

tended to ruin the habits and morals of the average soldier. Like a "scientific boxer", Cartwright wrote, he was "apt to be overbearing and insolent". At the same time the militarily unprepared citizenry tended to have too little by way of "manly fortitude and spirit".¹ This was said to be a very dangerous mixture of elements: either the army would act on behalf of the Ministry and give it more power than it should have or it would subvert the whole system of government and establish military rule. The radicals were particularly worried that the impending bankruptcy crisis would create the conditions within which military dictatorship or foreign invasion were the only alternatives to radical reform.

John Cartwright also disputed the view that standing armies and modern military science provided a more efficient system of defence. Only free men, he said, could be relied upon in case of foreign attack: "Seeing liberty in victory, and slavery in defeat, the battle has no terrors; for nothing he dreads but degradation and shame. Such men can be slain but cannot be conquered."² An armed citizenry under the control of its democratically elected officials³ would be permanently organized throughout the width and breadth of the country and easily mobilized in case of local or national emergencies.⁴ Added to the relative inefficiency

1. Cartwright, England's Aegis, ii.29.

2. Ibid., i.13.

3. It was a feature of the Anglo-Saxon Constitution, claimed Cartwright, that the same election gave military and civil command. This meant that the choice of military commanders lay with the people whose liberties were to be protected and that military officers were also civil magistrates who necessarily knew the laws of the land and its constitutional foundations; ibid., i.15.

4. Cartwright's plan for national defence can be found in An Appeal, Civil and Military, pp. 98-137.

of a standing army as a fighting force was the expense required to maintain it when compared to the system in which each soldier was a citizen and each citizen a soldier. A significant cause of the excessive levels of taxation in eighteenth-century Europe was, claimed Cartwright, the existence of standing armies.¹

It was also Cartwright's belief (and it is important to point this out given our desire to distinguish clearly between the different types of radical) that the standing armies introduced into Europe by Charles VII of France acted to reduce the nobility to insignificance by shifting military power to a professional body at the centre of the state. As a result the balance of political power passed from the nobility to the king, giving the latter the means for arbitrary rule.² Of the "new nobility" Cartwright wrote

A nobleman now, if an insurrection spring up under his nose, or if a privateer land to pillage his estate, has no power of the county to come at a call, to repel the insult, or to restore the public tranquillity.³

It was feared that the development of the standing army in late seventeenth-century England was similarly paving the way for arbitrary rule. Cartwright deplored such developments as he wished to see the nobility and gentry as the nation's civil magistrates and military officers. He even proposed that the cavalry consist of men of rank, family or fortune. "I

1. Ibid., pp. 204-5.

2. Ibid., p. 112. In the case of England, Cartwright noted, the civil policy of Henry VII aided in the reduction of the power and status of the nobles but to a different effect - the strengthening of the power of Commons in relation to King and Nobility. Clearly he was referring to Henry's granting the nobles the right to alienate their land; to sell, mortgage or dispose. Financially exhausted by the Wars of the Roses and an extravagant life style they were forced to sell to "industry and commerce". The Civil War of the seventeenth-century was seen by many to be the long-term result. See esp. Macaulay, History of England, V, ch. xi.

3. Cartwright, An Appeal, Civil and Military, p. 112.

cannot approve", he said, "of men being lifted out of their natural stations in society, and set on horseback by the strength of private subscriptions; for that breaks down the line of distinction which sound policy requires to be preserved".¹ For Thomas Spence, on the other hand, "nothing but conspicuous Merit can advance any to be Officers and they must go gradually through every Station to the highest, if their Merit carry them so far".²

An armed citizenry trained in the use of arms and well versed in the principles of political and civil liberty was also thought to be the last line of defence in the case of internal subversion. Indeed it was argued by William Jones that the right of resistance implied the right to bear arms and the duty to practise the use of them.³ John Cartwright put the case clearly and succinctly:

Valuable ... as are legal and legislative representation, without this arms-bearing of the People, they are no better than paper and parchment, which a Norman invader, a Cromwell, a Bonaparte, or a Pitt can with impunity give to the winds.⁴

It was in this light that Thomas Spence described the secret ballot and an armed people as the "guardian angels" of his system of democracy and equality.⁵ In a radically reformed polity, then, the teaching of military skills and the organization of martial exercises would be part of the education of the young and the ordinary life of the adult male population.

1. Cartwright, England's Aegis, i.32.

2. Spence, "Supplement", p. 301.

3. William Jones, The Principles of Government; in a Dialogue between a Scholar and a Peasant (London, 1783).

4. John Cartwright, A Letter to the Electors of Nottingham (London, 1804), p. 25.

5. Spence, "A Further Account of Spensonia", p. 215.

Spence eventually came around to the view that a standing army and navy within the context of a militarily prepared citizenry was acceptable and important for the nation's defence. However, he stated clearly that there would be no generalissimo and no difference of ranks except in relation to service and during its continuance. Use of the force to preserve internal peace and order or to defend the country against foreign invasion would require the written authority of the properly constituted authorities.¹ For the other radicals this concession with modernity would re-open the door to tyranny. Only in the case of an emergency such as a foreign invasion, said William Hodgson, would it be necessary to assemble a national force. It could be chosen by lot, equal numbers to come from each district, and would remain on foot "only so long as the public danger shall be declared to exist by the national representation".²

For support of the use of a standing army for national defence we need to turn to Priestley's Lectures on History and General Policy.³ In the first place Priestley made the obvious point that modern warfare required modern weapons and methods.⁴ Without these, he said, courage and martial heroism were of no use; and the fact of the matter was that they were most developed in "rich and flourishing" states which could allow for a specialized army and specialized body of military knowledge. It was true, he said, that common soldiers tended to be those too idle to look

1. Spence, Constitution of a Perfect Commonwealth, pp. 22-3.

2. Hodgson, Commonwealth of Reason, pp. 97-8.

3. See Priestley, Lectures on History and General Policy, Lectures LX-LXI.

4. It is worth noting that in England's Aegis (1806) John Cartwright had seriously suggested that spears would be suitable weapons for the English infantry. See Osborne, John Cartwright, p. 73.

after themselves and their pay was very low. Nevertheless, "the very possession of arms tends to inspire a sense of honour and attachment to their country, though they have little or no interest in it."¹ Priestley also disagreed with those who claimed that standing armies were more expensive than citizen militias. The latter, he said, were more expensive "for the same reasons that we have our shoes and cloaths made at less expence by employing shoe-makers, and taylors, whose sole business it is to make shoes and cloaths, than for every man to be taught and to make them himself".² The contrast was between armies taught for war only, being idle and useless for other purposes and the whole community occasionally practising the use of arms. The latter, claimed Priestley, would produce the greater sum of idleness.

Priestley's was a balanced argument. He admitted that defence based on every citizen being learned in the use of arms and ready to fight when called made for a generalised martial spirit and preserved the independence of the people. However, the simple fact was that "the fighting men, not making war their whole business, will not be very expert in it, and consequently will not have that confidence in themselves that a standing army has".³ His support for a standing army was subject to two conditions: firstly that the officers be of the body of the people and, secondly, that the civil privileges of officers be more valuable than anything they could get as soldiers. Clearly, then, he was fearful that standing armies could become instruments of tyranny. Indeed by 1791 he was arguing that the new era of liberty which was dawning in

1. Priestley, Lectures on History and General Policy, p. 489.

2. Ibid., pp. 479-80.

3. Ibid., p. 479.

Europe would bring with it an end to standing armies: "Standing armies, those instruments of tyranny, will be unknown, though the people may be trained to the use of arms, for the purpose of repelling the invasion of Barbarians".¹ It was also in the 1790s that Priestley reached the conclusion that the hereditary monarchy and aristocracy were not essential to the constitution.²

For the radicals the right to participate in politics was inextricably linked with the right to bear arms. Bearing arms was expressive of and instrumental to the protection of political and civil liberty. For those from whom such ideas were taken - James Harrington and his intellectual descendants - personal political autonomy and arms bearing were also linked with economic independence; in particular the possession of an inheritable landed freehold.³ The moderates within the reform movement in the late eighteenth-century stayed within this universe of thinking but extended the criteria for economic independence. It would seem, however, that when the right to vote was articulated as a human right the Harringtonian unity of political, economic and military power was broken. It follows that what becomes crucial in any analysis of their political thought is their understanding of property and its distribution. For example in the thought of Thomas Spence the unity between political, economic and military power was to be created by the revolutionary redistribution of land. The other question that has emerged from this chapter relates to the whole issue of economic

1. Joseph Priestley, Letters to the Right Honourable Edmund Burke, occasioned by his Reflections on the Revolution in France (Dublin, 1791, p. 120).

2. See footnote 2, pp. 100-101 of this thesis.

3. See Pocock, Politics, Language and Time, ch. 4 and Cress, "Radical Whiggery on the Role of the Military".

progress, seen by Joseph Priestley to be a precondition for military strength even if at the expense of a wide distribution of martial spirit. For the radicals the whole question of economic progress, and its relation to the division of labour, proved to be divisive.

PART III: PROPERTY AND PROGRESS

CHAPTER 9: INEQUALITY, POVERTY AND SOCIAL DECAY: IMAGES AND EXPLANATIONS

The central place occupied by parliamentary reform in the thought and practice of the radicals has led many commentators to conclude either that they were little concerned with the issues of property and progress or that there was an essential, unspoken unity on the question. Radical positions were seen as needing little explication because they derived from a wider culture in which liberal values and Smithian political economy had become dominant, though it was generally acknowledged that the emergence of artisan-based societies in the 1790s had led to a more militant and social-reformist interpretation of the liberal creed. Nevertheless the creed itself was not transcended. What such a view overlooks are the tensions that existed within the movement on the major questions relating to property and progress. Dealing with the earlier part of the century J.G.A. Pocock has pointed to a sharp division between the Court and Country interpretations of politics, property and progress. Within Country ideology, Pocock argues, it is possible to detect a "Renaissance pessimism" about the direction taken by social and economic change, particularly in relation to developments in the financial system.¹ Later in the century this Court-Country divide elucidates but does not fully capture in its full complexity the pattern of ideological disagreement. As the process of economic transformation gathered pace more radically opposed interpretations of the meaning of the commitment to liberty, equality and progress emerged. The major split

1. That Pocock over-estimated the degree to which the Country idealogues were hostile to commerce has been argued by Jesse R. Goodale, "J.G.A. Pocock's Neo-Harringtonians: A Reconsideration", History of Political Thought, 1 (1980), 237-59.

within radicalism was on the issue of modern commercial society and its implications for the welfare and happiness of the people. Thus whilst it would be possible to point to a whole set of proposals which many of the radicals would agree upon as part of a short-term programme, such as parliamentary reform, tax reform and cheap government, there were still differences on the ideological framework within which the proposals were situated and on the more fundamental, longer-run objectives of the movement.

I Eighteenth-Century Economy and Society

As was noted in the first section of this thesis the radicals utilised the four stage model of economic development formulated by the Scottish Historical School: hunting and gathering, pasturage, agriculture and commerce. In relation to this model it was believed that Britain was highly advanced, the development of the "arts" and "sciences" and their application to the productive process making possible the production of many conveniences alongside the necessities of life.¹ The trading and manufacturing sectors had come to play their role in the economy alongside an agricultural sector being transformed by enclosure and increasing farm size. There was a clear awareness of the changes taking place within the manufacturing sector; with "manufactories", where the division of labour was becoming increasingly refined, playing an ever more important role in the economy. The developments in manufacturing and commerce, explained Joseph Priestley were "in a great measure inseparable".² The links between these changes and the growing importance of certain towns and cities was also noted; urban ways of life still

1. Priestley, Lectures on History and General Policy, p. 380.

2. Ibid., p. 379.

representing an evil force for many of the radicals, even for those who saw great benefits from the emergence and development of commercial civilization. By bringing together wealthy people, Priestley argued, cities encouraged a spirit of emulation and extravagance.¹ Richard Price, on the other hand, pointed to the effects of towns and cities on the health of the common people.²

To properly characterize the social and economic formation it was thought necessary to understand the modes of production, distribution and exchange which were held to have been greatly influenced by the "Financial Revolution" of the late seventeenth-century.³ At the heart of this revolution was the new system of public borrowing and its associated national debt, the creation of the Bank of England, the spread of paper money and the rise of the joint stock company. Support for modern commercial society did not entail support for these changes in the financial system; in particular the size and influence of the moneyed interest associated with the national debt was the cause of much concern. John Cartwright's description of the stockholders was not uncommon: 'Money'd property in the funds ... converts whole herds of men into drones, who contribute nothing towards the public stock; but, on the contrary, are a dead weight on the industry of the nation.'⁴ The potential for speculation and the whole notion that "whim", "opinion" and "fashion"

1. Ibid., p. 422.

2. Richard Price, An Essay on the Population of England, From the Revolution to the Present Time ... (London, 1780), p. 63.

3. See P.G.M. Dickson, The Financial Revolution in England: A Study in the Development of Public Credit 1688-1756 (London, Macmillan, 1967). On the ideological repercussions see esp. J.G.A. Pocock, "Early Modern Capitalism: the Augustan Perception", in E. Kamenka and R.S. Neale (eds.), Feudalism, Capitalism and Beyond (Canberra, ANU Press, 1975), pp. 63-83.

4. Cartwright, Take Your Choice, p. xv.

could determine economic activity was deeply disturbing to the radicals as they were associated with the pattern of instability which destroyed the frugal as well as the prodigal traders. As John Brewer concluded in an important essay dealing with the attractiveness of radical ideology to tradesmen, middlemen, shopkeepers and small producers: "The stock-jobber and speculator were hated, therefore, because it was thought - often with good reason - that their machinations provoked the honest trader's downfall".¹

The most revealing feature of eighteenth-century Britain was thought to be the sharp contrast between affluence and poverty. "However our imagination may be impressed by painting and comparison", wrote Thomas Paine, "it is nevertheless true, that a great portion of mankind, in what are called civilized countries, are in a state of poverty and wretchedness."² Essentially there were two parts to the radical definition of poverty:

1. The want of proper or sufficient food and the other necessities of life such as housing, clothing and bedding.
2. The want of sufficient leisure time and educational facilities to allow for religious, moral and intellectual development.³

It was also widely believed that the nature of the work experience itself was of great importance in any discussion of poverty. For example, workers confined to narrowly defined tasks by the division of labour within the factory were thought by many to be rendered ignorant and barbarous, their work requiring neither invention nor intellect.⁴

1. Brewer, "English Radicalism in the Age of George III", p. 337.

2. Paine, Rights of Man, p. 233.

3. See esp. Hall, Effects of Civilization, chs. III-VII.

4. Ibid., pp. 24-25. Hall quoted the now famous "alienation passage" from Adam Smith's Wealth of Nations.

First and foremost it was the wage-labouring class, both urban and rural, who suffered, despite the fact that it was largely their toil which produced the wealth of the nation. John Thelwall was particularly critical of those town-based intellectuals (of whom, he admitted, he had been an example) who accepted the picture of rural felicity presented in novels and pastorals of the period. On visiting rural England he found life in the cottages somewhat different:

I beheld there poor women, doubled with age, toiling from morning to night, over their wheels, spinning their flax and hemp; and I found that their condition was so miserable, that many of them were positively obliged to take their work once or twice a day home to the persons who employed them, in order to get the scanty pittance that was to purchase the meal by which they were to sustain their emaciated frames.¹

Although he recognized the progressive potential of a reformed manufacturing system Thelwall was highly critical of its contemporary working. "What is a huge manufactory", he asked, "but a common prison-house, in which a hapless multitude are sentenced to profligacy and hard labour, that an individual may rise to unwieldy opulence".²

The prevailing system of poor relief was thought not only to be inadequate but totally inappropriate. "Why," asked Thelwall, "ought any man to be immured between high walls, resembling those of a prison merely because he is found guilty of poverty - the consequence of being doomed to inordinate toil without an adequate reward?"³ It would be far better, the radicals consistently argued, to put the people on such a footing that

1. Thelwall, Tribune, ii.33. Thelwall referred to the publication of the Rev. J. Davies, rector of Barkham in Berkshire, to back up his claims that there was severe rural impoverishment; The Case of Labourers in Husbandry stated and considered in three parts (London, 1795).
2. John Thelwall, "A Pedestrian Excursion through several parts of England and Wales during the summer of 1797", Monthly Magazine, VIII (Nov. 1799), 784.
3. Thelwall, Tribune, ii.353.

they could maintain themselves and their families by their own labours. If poor relief was to be provided, only those incapable of working, through ill-health, injury or old age were to be eligible. For most of the radicals independence, frugality and hard work were highly valued ends, to be pushed as far as possible.¹

To substantiate their claims about the present poverty of the labouring class the radicals drew contrasts with earlier times. John Thelwall claimed that despite the barbarity of feudalism and the oppressive system of vassalage the labourers were better off in feudal society than in modern times. In particular the conduct of the landowners with respect to tenants and cottagers had degenerated significantly under the influence of "rampant commercialism".² John Bone explained this difference between the two periods by reference to the changed political framework. In feudal times, he wrote, the King and Aristocracy were at loggerheads, both seeking alliances with the poor in their struggle for supremacy. It became necessary, therefore, to take care of the common people. In modern times, on the other hand, the Aristocracy had come into dominance and were able to oppress the people. "The language Adam Smith used, with regard to the state of things under the feudal system," wrote Bone, "may not improperly be applied to that which has since obtained."³ It was also commonly argued that life for the labouring poor in the civilized states was more burdensome and oppressive than that experienced by those

1. On the background to ideas about poverty in general and the Poor Law in particular see J.R. Poynter, Society and Pauperism: English Ideas on Poor Relief, 1795-1834 (London, Routledge, Kegan and Paul, 1969), esp. chs. II-III.

2. Thelwall, Tribune, ii.45-46.

3. John Bone, The Wants of the People, and the Means of the Government ... (London, 1807), pp. 8-19.

living under primitive conditions, such as the American Indians. Indeed, according to Thomas Paine, poverty was a condition unknown to man in his earliest state as nature was an easily accessible source of necessities. Poverty, he concluded, "is a thing created by what is called civilized life."¹

The radicals also argued that the logic of the system was driving increasing numbers of the middling orders into poverty. Contemporary experience was said to confirm John Thelwall's belief that it was in the interest of the oligarchy "to have but two classes, the very high and the very low, that those they may oppress may be kept at too great a distance - and in too much ignorance to be enabled to seek redress."² Feudalism had been threatened, they noted, not by the peasantry³ but by the emergence of an economically independent class in trade and industry. It was the radical hope that the common interests of the labouring poor and the middle orders would form the basis for a political alliance. It was recognized, however, that those enjoying some present material advantages might not turn to common political action, despite what the future held for them, but would compete ruthlessly and vigorously as individuals to keep themselves above the poverty line:

... a violent struggle is excited: every man strains every nerve: every man's interest becomes opposite to every man's. Hence eager competitions, sharp contentions, frauds, oppression. Hence the source of all matters that make life anxious and unhappy.⁴

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1. Thomas Paine, "Agrarian Justice" (1795-6) in Beer, Pioneers of Land Reform, p. 181.
 2. Thelwall, Tribune, ii.234.
 3. It should be noted, however, that the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 lived on in radical consciousness. See Thelwall, Peripatetic, ii.27-8 and Robert Southey, Wat Tyler: A Thrilling Poem of Republicanism (London, 1881). Although written in 1794 Southey's poem was not published until 1817.
 4. Hall, Effects of Civilization, p. 140.

According to Hall this "war of all against all" was part of the evil of contemporary civilization.

Where the radicals disagreed was in their explanation of poverty and inequality. According to the agrarians, whose insensitivity to the phenomenon of "economic progress" can be said to have sharpened their description and analysis of its working,¹ modern commercial society was inextricably linked with inequality and poverty. However, for the commercial radicals who embraced modernist beliefs about progress and luxury, poverty and inequality were said to be primarily the results of political corruption and monopoly privilege - left-overs from an earlier age. Late eighteenth-century Britain, then, was seen on this view to be an unstable mixture of "old" and "new", a progressive economic substructure thwarted and hindered by a reactionary political superstructure and, some added, an inflationary and de-stabilising financial system. "Agriculture, commerce, manufactures, and the tranquil arts by which the prosperity of nations is best promoted", explained Thomas Paine, "require a different system of government and a different species of knowledge".² For the agrarians on the other hand, the "old" had become the "new" and it was this which constituted the problem. The belief that it was aristocratic and pre-modern left-overs which explained inequality and poverty was said to conceal the real nature of the modern society and economy:

Adam Smith thinks Mr Hume has great merit in having been the first that observed that manufacturers had abolished the servile dependence of the people on the great feudal barons; but Dr Smith was not aware of this new species of dependence of the lower orders on the rich, which is established in its stead, in most civilized states.³

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1. See L. Colletti, From Rousseau to Lenin: Studies in Ideology and Society (New York, Monthly Review Press, 1972), pp. 162-63.
 2. Paine, Rights of Man, p. 168.
 3. Hall, Effects of Civilization, p. 52.

The next two sections of this chapter will deal with these differing accounts of inequality and poverty in eighteenth-century Britain.

II Explaining Inequality and Poverty (i)

The British problem, wrote Thomas Paine, was primarily the result of the "barbaric system of government" which had been grafted upon the "internal civilization" of the country. He estimated that one quarter of the labour of the productive citizens was consumed by the government and its many dependents ranging from the King and Church to "Placemen, Pensioners, Lords of the bed-chamber, Lords of the kitchen, Lords of the necessary-house, and the Lord knows what besides".¹ According to John Thelwall the figure was closer to one-half. But for the expenses of government, he wrote, "every labourer and mechanic might receive twice the wages that he now receives, without deducting, in the least, from the profit of his employers, or the convenience of the consumers."² It was this horde of parasites which, together with corruption, warfare and colonial aggrandisement, accounted for the enormous expense of government. The settlement of 1688 bore a great deal of responsibility for this burden, argued Thelwall, since it had dragged Britain into a "system of continental alliances" with "the waste of millions of British treasure, and torrents of British blood to support the air-drawn phantom - the balance of power".³ Recent research has confirmed the validity of radical claims that it was the cost of paying for past wars and preparing for future ones which dominated the cost of government in the late eighteenth-century.

1. Paine, Rights of Man, pp. 148, 233.

2. Thelwall, Tribune, i.36.

3. Ibid., iii.97.

Military expenditure, more than anything else, seemed to epitomise a social and political system which emphasised that which was unproductive and destructive of human life and labour.¹ Peter Mathias has given the following estimates of public expenditure:

<u>PUBLIC EXPENDITURE BY CENRAL GOVERNMENT²</u>			
	<u>Interest Charges</u>	<u>Military Expenditure</u>	<u>All Other Expenditure</u>
1750	44%	42%	14%
1783	34%	58%	8%
1801	32%	60%	8%

To pay for its expenditures the government resorted not only to taxation but also to a system of public borrowing. The frequency of warfare in the earlier part of the eighteenth-century meant constant additions to the national debt which, the radicals argued, future generations had to pay for with higher taxes and inflation:

The funding system is a system of anticipation. Those who established it a hundred years ago, anticipated the resources of those who were to live a hundred years after; for the people of the present day have to pay the interest on the debt contracted at that time, and of all the debts contracted since.³

It was argued that the rich landowners, merchants and manufacturers were able to use their political power to shift the burden of taxation onto the shoulders of the labouring poor and the middling orders. Again current estimates of the sources of revenue in the eighteenth-century are worth noting. Mathias and O'Brien have estimated that

1. The radical criticism of war is clearly outlined in Thomas Holcroft, A Letter to the Right Honourable William Windham, on the Intemperance and Dangerous Tendency of his Public Conduct (London, 1795), pp. 26-39. See also J.E. Cookson, The Friends of Peace: Anti-War Liberalism in England, 1793-1815 (Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1982), chs.2-3.

2. Peter Mathias, The First Industrial Nation: An Economic History of Britain 1700-1914 (London, Methuen and Co., 1969), p. 41.

3. Thomas Paine, "The Decline and Fall of the English System of Finance" (1796) in Political and Miscellaneous Works, ii.16.

direct taxation (within which the land tax was the most important element) accounted for a falling proportion of revenue, declining from 35 percent in the first decade of the century to 18 per cent in the final decade - the addition of Pitt's income tax pushing the figure to over 30 per cent in the first decade of the nineteenth-century.¹ Customs and excise duties - regressive, indirect taxes on commodities which hit all consumers - were the most important source of government income, providing over 70 per cent of revenue even in the Napoleonic war years when direct taxation peaked. Excise taxes were levied on beer, malt and hops, spirits, soap, candles, salt, bricks, glass, starch, paper, printed fabrics, leather and coal carried to London. The radicals were also critical of the locally collected poor rates (only necessary, they noted, because the system created poverty in the first place) and tithes which they saw as clogs upon improvement.² Even Pitt's ostensibly progressive income tax was the subject of severe criticism as it cut into the precariously based incomes of small traders, shopkeepers and producers.³ It was assumed that a reformed polity would simply not need such taxes.

It was believed that, more than anything else, it was this tax burden which caused poverty and hardship for the labourers and made it difficult for small traders, manufacturers and farmers to improve their holdings. As Thelwall noted this worked directly into the hands of the monopolists:

... every commodity is taxed and re-taxed and taxed again, in

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1. Peter Mathias and Patrick O'Brien, "Taxation in Britain and France, 1715-1810: A Comparison of the Social and Economic Incidence of Taxes collected for the Central Governments", Journal of European Economic History, V (1976), 601-50.
 2. Thelwall, Tribune, ii.69-72, 351-52.
 3. See Cookson, Friends of Peace, pp. 78-80.

fifty different ways ... Hence the enormous expense of all improvement - all production: so that great capitals are requisite, not for the actual cultivation of the earth, but for the fines,¹ that must be paid to government for permission to cultivate.

Radical opposition to taxation was not merely opposition to taxation per se but, as John Brewer has recently noted, opposition to "the powers, methods of collection, and means of law enforcement available to tax officials."² The use of "general" warrants to enter premises and the use of summary procedures which denied putative tax offenders trial by jury were particularly offensive to radicals reared on the myth of free-born Englishmen.

Working in the same way to create hardships was monopoly power in many areas of production and trade, but most importantly in the agricultural sector which supplied the bulk of those products most needed by the labouring power. While enclosure and the encouragement of larger farms were seen, up to a certain point, as a means to higher productivity, beyond that point they acted solely in the interests of the landowners and larger farmers.³ For landlords enclosure and concentration of holdings facilitated both the collection of rents and the imposition of higher rents.⁴ It was also widely believed that in this period much land had been converted from agriculture to pasturage, horse-breeding or amusement and that much land capable of improvement had been left unutilized.⁵ The concentration of farming into fewer units meant that large farmers were able "to

1. Thelwall, Rights of Nature, ii.95.

2. Brewer, "English Radicalism in the Age of George III", p. 339.

3. Priestley, Lectures on History and General Policy, pp. 461-63.

4. Thelwall, Tribune, ii.64-8.

5. Ibid., ii.67-9.

rule the market at their own will and pleasure".¹ Inevitably, then, the prices charged were artificially high. According to John Thelwall the monopoly control of output also obstructed the charging of fair prices in the country's fish markets.²

To John Thelwall it seemed as if the inhabitants of the globe were subject to the control of a "few engrossers and monopolists who still assume the name of merchants". The whole point of trade, he said, was for individual countries to exchange commodities which they possess in abundance for commodities which they lack but need. This he called "commission-commerce". In reality, however, monopoly control allowed individuals to produce or accumulate commodities in the hope of exciting artificial wants, provoking the demand and increasing the consumption. This he called "speculation-commerce". As a consequence all the advantages which trade could bring were lost.³ The Corn Laws were said to exacerbate the situation by encouraging the export of the necessities of life and restricting imports unless the prices were very high. Not only did "the poor peasant and artisan" have to pay the bounty but they also suffered from the higher prices which inevitably resulted.⁴ They also opposed "the various inclusive Franchises, Privileges and Charters of different Trades and Corporations" which restricted entry into various trades and prevented the competitive process from bringing its full benefits.⁵

1. Ibid., p. 64.

2. Ibid., pp. 73-5.

3. Ibid., iii.38-9.

4. Ibid., ii.58-64.

5. [James Parkinson], Revolutions without Bloodshed, or Reformation preferable to Revolt (London, 1794), p. 5.

Monopoly power in the product markets was backed up by monopoly power in the labour markets making it possible for wage earners to be "scotched" of their fair share of the final product. It was believed that the economic power of the wage labouring class had been significantly reduced as a result of enclosure, increasing farm sizes and the introduction of machinery which displaced labour. Of the latter John Thelwall wrote:

These arts and inventions, as they threw advantages into the hands of the capitalist, would, of course, accelerate the progress of accumulation, till the labourers became so many, and their wants so urgent, that mere competition must reduce them to absolute subjection, and destroy all chances of adequate compensation.¹

The legal restrictions placed on the right of the workers to combine and bargain for higher wages were said to encourage this process of "scotching".² Thelwall in particular waxed indignant at the system which allowed factors, merchants, wholesale dealers and opulent manufacturers to fix prices "while mechanics that enter into associations to appreciate their own labour are sentenced like felons to a goal."³ The fact that wages were too low meant that it was impossible for the workers to make allowance for sickness, unemployment and old age. Consequently such occurrences brought tremendous hardship to labourers and their families. They were deprived of that sense of dignity and independence which was thought so essential to individual self-esteem.⁴

1. Thelwall, Rights of Nature, ii.89.

2. The Combination Acts of 1799, which systematised the legal restrictions on workers' rights, were opposed by the radical ideologues. See esp. Thomas Lee, The Looking Glass of the Workmen of the United Kingdom ... (Bristol, 1807).

3. John Thelwall, The Natural and Constitutional Rights of Britons ... (London, 1795), p. 42.

4. Joseph Priestley, An Account of a Society, for encouraging the Industrious Poor ... (Birmingham, 1787), p. 15.

Quite self-consciously the major radical ideologues saw themselves as the spokesmen of the "productive" sector of the economy. They wished not only to see justice in the distribution of the final cake but efficiency in its production. It was argued, following Adam Smith, that corruption, monopoly and warfare kept production levels artificially low by increasing the "inactive part" of the population.¹ In particular the national debt was seen as a burden on the productive sector which could not be supported if current trends continued. Pessimism about the economy was also fuelled by the belief that the population was declining, and had been since 1688.² Famine and economic decay, loss of life in war and emigration to America were thought to be major causes of de-population. The fact of de-population was thought to be a cause as well as a consequence of economic decline. For example Joseph Priestley saw great dangers to the nation in the emigration of many dissenters. "It may not much exceed the truth", he said, "if we suppose that one half of the wealth of the nation has been the acquisition of Dissenters".³

According to the radicals the poor state of the real economy was concealed by the inflationary effects of paper currency not backed by gold and silver. The value of gold and silver, claimed Thomas Paine, was determined by the quantity which nature had provided and was not influenced by man. Paper money on the other hand was too easily available and possessed of an "uncertain and fluctuating value" which destroyed the

1. Cookson, Friends of Peace, pp. 55-57.

2. See esp. Price, Essay on the Population of England. Price's views were the subject of controversy. See James Bonar, Theories of Population from Raleigh to Arthur Young (London, George Allen and Unwin, 1931) and D.V. Glass, "The Population Controversy in Eighteenth-Century England", Population Studies, VI (1952), 69-91.

3. Priestley, An Appeal to the Public on the Subject of the Riots. Part I, p. 104.

morals of a country and turned its people into stock-jobbers.¹ Its importance in the economy was thought to explain the frequency of speculative booms and busts, which drove so many tradesmen to the wall. Writing in 1796 Paine argued that a crisis would soon develop if the nation's creditors were ever to demand cash. "Is there a man so mad, so stupid", he asked, "as to suppose this system can continue".² He expected the forthcoming crisis in the system of finance to bring with it a revolution in the system of government. Central to this argument was the assumption that the real economy itself was in crisis as resources were drained from the productive to unproductive sectors.³

On the precise line to be drawn between the productive and unproductive sectors there was little systematic analysis. Certainly most government expenditures, including interest payments on the national debt, were deemed unproductive, Thelwall making a distinction between "the expenses of corruption" and "the expenses necessary for regular government".⁴ It was argued that the experience of the United States had shown how low the necessary expenses of government were. The monopoly power which existed was also thought to allow large farmers, traders and manufacturers to earn for themselves income over and above that which their own contributions to production legitimated. In other words a certain portion of the nation's total profit bill was seen as unearned income. This was clearly acknowledged by Thomas Paine when he proposed to tax not just land but all property:

1. Paine, "Dissertations on Government", p. 407.

2. Paine, "English System of Finance", p. 7. Paine's economic ideas are outlined clearly in Henry Collin's "Paine's Economic Ideas", Bulletin of the Thomas Paine Society, IV (Aut. 1967), 5-9.

3. Cookson has shown how new evidence on the national income and population undermined the radical case for impending crisis in the early years of the nineteenth century; Friends of Peace, pp. 59-61.

4. Thelwall, Tribune, i.39.

... the accumulation of personal property is in many instances, the effects of paying too little for the labour that produced it; the consequence of which is that the working hand perishes in old age and the employer abounds in affluence.¹

Rent, on the other hand, was seen quite explicitly as unearned income, a payment received for ownership rather than labour. "The aristocracy", wrote Thomas Paine, "are not the farmers who work the land, and raise the produce, but are the mere consumers of the rent; and when compared with the active world are the drones, a seraglio of males, who neither collect the honey nor form the hive, but exist only for lazy enjoyment."² Together with tithes and parochial assessments in the rural areas they drained resources away from the industrious and inventive, thus reducing the base upon which economic growth was built. Nevertheless, despite various proposals for tax reform, none of the commercial radicals argued for the extinction of the landowning class. Indeed for conservatively inclined radicals like John Cartwright the landed gentry were still expected to provide the wisdom, intelligence, and time to govern the country - with, of course, the consent of the people. It never occurred to Cartwright that such a class could or should be extinguished.³ John Thelwall hoped that the landowners would justify their right to a share of the final product by managing their estates in a just and progressive manner.⁴ Even Paine, who had condemned rental payments conceded that part of the produce of the land was the rightful property of its owners. It was, he said, the emergence of monopoly in land ownership not the system of private property which was at fault.⁵

1. Paine, "Agrarian Justice", p. 199.

2. Paine, Rights of Man, p. 249.

3. See pages 72 and 126 of this thesis.

4. Thelwall, Rights of Nature, ii.82.

5. Paine, "Agrarian Justice", pp. 183-86.

"The only original source of wealth, and every advantage", wrote Joseph Priestley, "is labour".¹ That the labouring poor - "the peasants in the field" and "the manufacturers in the workshop"² - were the backbone of the nation was clear. Included also were the small producers and middling orders of society whose profits could be clearly related to personal contribution. Those who own the means of production and have the ingenuity to "suggest what we execute" wrote Thomas Lee, are entitled to adequate returns.³ The radical programmes of social and economic reform, which would lop off the unproductive superstructure and lift up the productive, were pictured as a means to achieve a closer connection between effort, ingenuity and outcome.⁴ Only Thomas Paine seemed aware that in an economy with an increasingly complex division of labour it was increasingly difficult to isolate the contribution of different individuals to the final product:

Separate an individual from society, and give him an island or a continent to possess and he cannot acquire personal property ... All accumulation, therefore, of personal property, beyond what a man's hands produce, is derived to him by living in society, and he owes, on every principle of justice, of gratitude, and of civilization, a part of that accumulation back again to society from whence the whole came.⁵

These radicals all believed that with peace, cheap government and genuine competition production would be vastly expanded and social justice encouraged. In other words political reform was a means to economic

1. Priestley, Lectures on History and General Policy, p. 369.

2. Thelwall, Tribune, i.44.

3. Lee, The Looking Glass, p. 15.

4. As will be shown in ch. 12 there were different conceptions of the policy mix that would guarantee such a connection.

5. Paine, "Agrarian Justice", pp. 199-200.

growth, financial stability, and social justice.¹ They rejected any suggestion that they were "levellers", a certain degree of inequality being accepted as an incentive to effort and a reflection of differential abilities. Within this set of beliefs "luxury" came to be seen not as a synonym for high standards of living but for unearned income which, like a sudden influx of gold and silver from overseas possessions, was bound to have a corrupting influence.² The existence of an idle and dissolute class living in splendour off the labour of others was seen as a constant threat to political liberty which social and economic reform would need to prevent.

III Explaining Inequality and Poverty (ii)

For the agrarian radicals small-scale, relatively self-sufficient, agriculturally-based communities were the only foundation upon which the human condition could be regenerated.³ They saw great costs and few benefits, if any, from modern commercial society with its agricultural improvement, manufactories and highly developed system of international trade. They associated manufacturing modes of life and labour with poverty and material deprivation. Indeed Charles Hall believed that the evils which Malthus said would come with over-population had already arrived. Quoting from Adam Smith's Wealth of Nations he pointed to the example of China where "trade, manufactures and civilization" had been much longer

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1. There is a classic statement to this effect in Cartwright, The People's Barrier, pp. 46-7.
 2. The conservative critics of the modern economy complained that it was the spreading of high standards of living throughout the country which was the cause of economic, social and political decay. Gradually, however, a new definition of luxury (as unearned income) developed in the eighteenth-century. See Wade, "The Idea of Luxury", chs. 3, 5-6, 9.
 3. As will be shown in chs. 10, 11 and 16 there were different conceptions of the utopia which would embody agrarian principles.

established and where the misery was even greater than in eighteenth-century Britain. Smith's mistake, he said, was not to see that this "increase of poverty was the consequence of the increase of wealth, which he has so laboured to effect."¹ More than anyone else it was Hall who articulated most clearly and most systematically the agrarian point of view. Therefore his ideas will form the basis upon which this section will be constructed.²

Central to the agrarian understanding of the plight of the common people was the belief that they were being "forced" off the land and into the workshops. The so-called agricultural improvement was seen as nothing more than a means to this end. As a result, wrote Hall, there was a real shortage of agricultural necessities in the country at large. He dismissed the view, held by many of the radicals, that material poverty was caused by an artificially created shortage of the necessities in the market-place. Given the natural fertility of any amount of soil, he believed that output depended on the seasons and the amount of labour employed. Only through labour-intensive cultivation with manuring, hoeing and weeding would the output from land be maximized. In modern civilized states, and eighteenth-century Britain in particular, it was claimed that there were too few agricultural labourers in relation to the total population.³ To explain poverty was to explain this shortage.

1. Hall, Effects of Civilization, p. 98.

2. The important role that Hall has played as a precursor and nineteenth-century socialist thought has long been recognized. See M. Beer, A History of British Socialism introd. by R.H. Tawney (2 Parts; London, George Allen and Unwin, 1929), ii.126-32, G.D.H. Cole, Socialist Thought: The Forerunners 1789-1850 (London, Macmillan, 1953), pp. 35-6, and J.R. Dinwiddy, "Charles Hall, Early English Socialist", International Review of Social History, XXI (1976), 256-76.

3. Hall, Effects of Civilization, ch. VIII.

To do this one needed to turn to history.

In the earliest stages of human existence, Hall believed, land was the common property of all the people, no person having a right to more than was necessary to provide for himself and family. Eventually, however, with the introduction of the principle of "exclusive and perpetual property" inequality developed and a division emerged between those who owned the land and those who were propertyless.¹ For the right to use the land men now had to pay a rent to the landowning class. What, asked Hall, following a line of enquiry that had been pursued by the Scottish Historical School, did they do with this rent only a small proportion of which was required for their own consumption needs?² In the first instance they used it to directly employ followers and retainers to serve and amuse them. Eventually "they induced ingenious men to employ their time in the production of works of art, of various kinds, in great number, variety and neatness of execution, than heretofore".³ As manufacturing became more complex and refined several workmen of different trades were required to produce one item, and to make this possible a class of master manufacturers arose. In effect these manufacturing capitalists were given a share of the produce of land so they could employ labour and produce what the rich landowners desired. A class of manufacturing capitalists employing a growing proportion of the labouring population emerged to become part of the ruling class of

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1. Ibid., pp. 57-9. The rise of inequality, Hall wrote later, had its cause in "two of the most natural and powerful passions to be found in man ... avarice and ambition"; ibid., p. 322.
 2. On Adam Smith's approach to the emergence of modern society which Hall found so useful see Nathan Rosenberg, "Adam Smith, Consumer Tastes, and Economic Growth", Journal of Political Economy, LXXVI (1968), 363-74.
 3. Hall, Effects of Civilization, p. 77.

Europe.¹

As the demand for manufactures grew it became necessary for the rich to use their power to shift labour from the agricultural sector to manufacturing, a large and pliable labour force being necessary to take advantage of the modern factory system with its complex division of labour. Thus arose the modern economic system. Even in feudal times, despite the exploitation which was acknowledged to exist, the condition of the people was said to be better as more were left to cultivate the soil and fewer compelled to engage in manufacturing.² The springboard for such a shift, claimed Hall, was not increasing agricultural output due to so-called "agricultural improvement" but persistent and crippling rent rises passed on to the consumers in the form of higher prices. Agricultural prices were also jacked up by shortages created by a declining labour force in the rural areas.³ In effect the demand for manufacturing items was sharply increased by increasing the share of agricultural output which went to the landlords and large farmers. As it was believed that supply tended to follow demand⁴ output in the manufacturing sector rose. Agricultural output, on the other hand, fell as the rural areas were stripped of labour. Prosperity was said to be an

1. Ibid., pp. 71-3. Note that for Hall "this capitalist, this manufacturer, is in reality a possessor of land, and, like him, has in his power and disposal a certain quantity of the necessaries of life, and can grant or withhold these in the same manner as his joint proprietors, as they may be called"; ibid., pp. 71-2.
2. Ibid., pp. 51-2.
3. Ibid., p. 324.
4. For Hall the nature of supply and the distribution of labour were determined by the nature of demand which, in turn, was determined by the distribution of property. The higher the degree of inequality, therefore, the higher the demand for products desired by the rich. As Dinwiddy has observed the Earl of Lauderdale's Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Public Wealth (Edinburgh, 1804) was clearly the source for this idea, "Charles Hall", 270-71.

illusion as very few of the increasing number of manufacturing items were consumed by the labouring poor. "If we see great quantities of honey, should we think the bees from whom it was taken, rich and well stored with that which they subsist on?"¹

It was Hall's belief that a large proportion of the products of manufacturing were "luxury" items, unnecessary to the satisfaction of essential human needs. Indeed he argued that the manufacturing items necessary for human existence could be produced within an agrarian and family-based economy.² Not only was the modern manufacturing sector unnecessary but so was the trading sector. In effect Britain's traders were facilitating the import of luxury items, only a few of which "came down to the use of the poor"; and, as trade had taken labour from the countryside to perform the tasks required, it only exacerbated the shortage of agricultural necessities which lay behind the material poverty of the labouring poor.³ Hall estimated that in contemporary times the price of agricultural necessities was four times what it had been. In the absence of wage increases the poor were forced to consume less.⁴

What concerned the agrarians as much as the purported decline in the agricultural sector, with its deleterious effects on agricultural output, was the nature of the newly found employment in the trading and manufacturing sectors. In the first place Hall pointed to the sedentary nature of the work which prevented the necessary exercise of the body,

1. Hall, Effects of Civilization p. 144.

2. Ibid., pp. 37, 264.

3. Ibid., p. 83.

4. Ibid., p. 32.

many of the operations requiring forced and unnatural postures. Secondly, the work was carried on in confined and unwholesome atmospheres rendered nauseous and putrid by the exhalations of bodies and the effluvia of substances worked on. Thirdly, and most importantly, the individual workers were "nearly reduced to machines" performing only a few simple operations requiring neither intellect or invention.¹ Technological innovation designed to abridge labour did not make life any easier for those left in employment. On the whole, concluded Hall, it rendered labour "more tedious, more dangerous, more injurious to them".²

All in all, then, the trading and manufacturing sectors were said by Hall to constitute an oppressive and poverty-creating superstructure. Central to his understanding of the economic process were his conceptions of class, wealth and power. The labouring poor were said to be dependent on the rich because of the latter's possession of the wealth of the nation, its land, the cattle and corn raised on the lands, the raw materials found therein, the tools and machines used for manufacturing and the goods manufactured and stored for sale. Possession of this wealth enabled the rich to control the labour of the propertyless. It was true, he acknowledged, that no individual was obliged to work for any particular employer "but for one or another of them he is obliged to work, under the penalty of their withholding from him the things without which he cannot live." To a poor man the employers offer the following terms: "If you labour for me in such and such a way I will give you that which you need."³

1. Ibid., chs. IV-V, p. 137.

2. Ibid., p. 154. Not only were the rich said to be demanding more refined products but a greater degree of refinement, and this "to an infinite degree"; ibid., p. 96.

3. Ibid., pp. 49, 44.

The payment of a wage to the labourer was said to conceal the fact that he was deprived of the full product of his toil:

Money covers and conceals the action, as the case of a watch does the motions within; by giving the money he seems to give corn. Money is therefore an instrument serving to deceive and delude the people and to induce the poor wretches to think the rich their benefactors, whether they are or not.¹

Wages were not so much payment for services rendered as "the price the master has agreed to give, and what the workman, in most instances, is compelled to take for or in lieu of the whole produce of his labour."² For Hall wage-labour as an institution and not just monopoly power in the labour market was the object of criticism. He did note, however, that the competition between buyers and sellers was so uneven in eighteenth-century Britain that wages would always be very low and the surplus accruing to employers very high. The unevenness in competition he attributed to the propertyless condition of the labourers, which meant they could not withhold their labour for very long in any struggle for higher wages, to the support given to the employers by the state, and to the lack of consciousness amongst the labourers:

... though more nearly concerned, yet being deprived of the means of resistance, as well as distressed and dispirited by the natural effects of their situation [the poor] are not equally active in asserting their rights.³

Hall estimated that although the labouring class amounted to eight-tenths of the population, they received only one-eighth of the total product. The situation of the rich and poor, then, was said to be "like the algebraic terms plus and minus ... in direct opposition to, and destructive of each other".⁴ As Asa Briggs observed: "[Hall] stated clearly for the

1. Ibid., p. 103.

2. Ibid., p. 121.

3. Ibid., p. 115.

4. Ibid., pp. 118-19.

first time the central proposition of a class theory of society."¹

Central to Hall's analysis was also the belief that the major tendencies associated with the modern economy would continue unabated. Eventually the middling orders would be threatened as the rich required increased supplies of labour to produce or obtain the luxuries they demanded. Fewer and fewer of the rich would expropriate more and more from an expanding labouring class,² an increasing proportion of the labour force would be devoted to manufacturing luxury products, and the living standards of the labourers would be reduced to appallingly low levels:

... there are no bounds to the quantity of labour that the rich have a power of claiming from the people; and by consequence, of the diminution of the necessaries of life that remain to the poor for their own use.³

Within the economic process itself Hall could see no forces to counter these developments, all of which had their ultimate source in the desire for luxury products. It was that which tempted "mankind to oppress; and is almost the only source from whence oppression comes".⁴

In this account of inequality and poverty the payments to the state and its growing band of dependents, including stockholders, was simply another burden on the backs of the poor additional to the payments they made to the rich by way of rent and profits. Interestingly Hall provided a directly economic rather than a political interpretation of

1. Asa Briggs, "The Language of 'Class' in Early Nineteenth-Century England" in A. Briggs and J. Saville, Essays in Labour History (London, Macmillan, 1960), p. 48.

2. Despite the high death rate Hall believed (quoting Adam Smith) that "the passions" would keep the birth rate high and so allow for minimal population growth in civilized countries.

3. Hall, Effects of Civilization, p. 96.

4. Ibid., p. 87.

warfare. Wars, he said, were the result of competition between the rich of the different civilized countries for control of trade or territory. On occasions, the rich also used their control of the state to instigate wars which would prevent the spread of egalitarian principles and divert the attention of the poor from their domestic suffering. Whatever the cause it was always the poor who suffered, either because they did the fighting or because their labour was taken from agriculture.¹

Rent, profit, interest and payments to placemen and pensioners were all seen as part of the surplus unjustifiably expropriated from the labouring class. "The rich", said Hall, "are employed in the consumption, not in the production of things".² He did acknowledge that farmers and manufacturing capitalists could improve the productivity of the labour they employed - in the former case through improvements in land utilisation and in the latter case through technical progress³ - but he persisted in claiming that only the labouring class was productive, since to justify returns to an employing class was to justify wage labour as an institution. The "happiest state" was said to be an economy of free, and equal producers in which each family had direct access to that amount of land and non-agricultural capital needed to provide for themselves. The distinction between "management" and "execution" which existed in the contemporary economy was thought to be destructive of the human capacity for all-round development - material, moral and intellectual. Ultimately, then, Hall's labour theory was ethical in inspiration; any individual being entitled only to those returns which his cultivation of an equal share

1. Hall, Effects of Civilization, ch. XXIII.

2. Ibid., p. 103.

3. Ibid., pp. 307-8, 154.

of the land's capital would bring.¹

It was Hall who provided the agrarian viewpoint with a degree of analytical sophistication - chiefly through his use of contemporary political economists such as Smith, Lauderdale and Malthus.² Of course, with his radical natural rights assumptions and classically republican and agrarian attitudes, the insights of the political economists were subject to a significant re-working. From being potentially or actually progressive, the modern economy with its revolutionized agricultural and manufacturing sectors and its increasing reliance on international exchange, became the root cause of the nation's problems. Other radicals who adopted a distinctly agrarian position agreed with this but differed in respect of the point of critical emphasis. For example Mary Wollstonecraft claimed that labourers employed in the trade and manufacturing sectors were particularly prone to bouts of unemployment as "whims" and "fashions" (or what twentieth-century economists would call "tastes") rapidly changed:

How many mechanics, by a flux of trade or fashion, lose their employment; whom misfortunes, not to be warded off, lead to the idleness that vitiates their character and renders them afterwards averse to honest labour!³

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1. In this respect Hall's labour theory is remarkably similar to that of the nineteenth-century radical Thomas Hodgskin. See E.K. Hunt, "Value Theory in the Writings of the Classical Economists, Thomas Hodgskin and Karl Marx", History of Political Economy, IX (1977), 322-45.
 2. In particular Malthus' case for the co-incidence of manufacturing growth, agricultural stagnation, a stable population and material, moral and intellectual poverty developed in Chapter XVI of the first edition of his Essay on the Principle of Population was clearly used by Hall. On Malthus and "immiserizing growth" see Geoffrey Gilbert, "Economic Growth and the Poor in Malthus' Essay on Population", History of Political Economy, XII (1980), 83-96.
 3. Mary Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Men in a Letter to the Right Honourable Edmund Burke ... (London, 1790), p. 149. Wollstonecraft believed that the development of modern commercial society with its large workshops and extreme division of labour

Tillage, on the other hand, was, explained Thomas Spence "a Trade that never fails, therefore the way to it ought to be easy to every man when all other trades fail".¹ Spence, unlike Charles Hall, also believed that there was a chronic tendency to unemployment due to the "most tardy" spending habits of the rich. They had a tendency, he wrote, not to return to the economy that which they expropriated. It took fires, shipwrecks or wars "to make them disgorge, and give back to the Life's Blood of Society [that] which their Tenacity retains from Circulation."² For Spence the labourers were not valuable because they provided the necessary toil but also because they provided the market for the produce. The rendering of the tenants bankrupt would deprive the landlords of their rents, the source of their wealth: "Behold their places, temples and towns, mouldering into dust, and affording shelter only to wild beasts and their boasted, cultivated fields and gardens degenerated into a howling wilderness".³ In Hall's account, on the other hand, the rich performed their tasks as consumers admirably; the problem was not underconsumption but overconsumption of luxury goods.

Underneath the differing radical accounts of inequality and poverty were differing images of the good society and economy which would properly underpin and complement the political reforms sought. The next three

impeded rather than encouraged the progress of reason; An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution, pp. 518-20.

1. [Thomas Spence], "A Dream", Spence's Songs (London, n.d.) Part III.
2. [Thomas Spence], A New and Infallible Way to Make Trade (London, n.d.). For the source of Spence's underconsumptionist views see the writings of his intellectual mentor the Rev. James Murray, esp. "New Sermons to Asses" (1773) in Sermons to Asses, to Doctors in Divinity to Lords Spiritual, and to Ministers of State, published by William Hone (London, 1819), pp. 18-21.
3. Thomas Spence, "The Rights of Infants ..." (1797) in Kemp-Ashraf and Mitchell, Essays in Honour of William Gallacher, p. 336.

chapters will deal more thoroughly with the "agrarian" and "commercial" conceptions of property and progress.

CHAPTER 10: AGRARIAN RADICALISM

The term "socialism" did not enter the political language until the late 1820's when it was coined and popularized by the Owenites in Britain and the Saint Simonians in France.¹ The "socialists", as opposed to the radicals who were proponents of mainstream political economy, argued that capital should be held in common and economic and social life organized on a co-operative basis. It would be wrong to conclude from this, as some commentators do, that no such ideas existed in the late eighteenth-century. There were no "socialists" but there were "Spenceans" and for a brief period "Pantisocrats" who threw scorn at the other radicals for their faint-hearted approach to the question of property.

Others too developed conceptions of the ideal society based on the principles of equality and community. The reference to "community" as that state of affairs in which property was held in common was well established by the eighteenth-century. A more general use was also made of the title "leveller" which had specifically referred to a political movement in the seventeenth-century. By the end of the eighteenth-century "levellers" were those who wished to bring all to the same social, moral, or intellectual level.² Indeed, many of the radicals went out of their way to distinguish their own beliefs from those of levellers, who advocated community or equality of property. By 1808 the general term "agrarianism" had emerged to refer to this tendency within radical thought. It possessed the great merit, as Arthur E. Bestor, Jr. has noted, "of

1. See Arthur E. Bestor, "The Evolution of the Socialist Vocabulary", Journal of the History of Ideas, IX (1948), 259-302.

2. See Samuel Johnson, A Dictionary of the English Language (1755; rep. London, 1979) and O.E.D., ii.702, vi.226-7.

separating out the economic from the political thread in the reform movements of the late eighteenth-century".¹ Advocacy of various sorts of "agrarian law" had made the word, traditionally used with reference to Roman history only, appropriate in the contemporary context.

The fact that terms such as "community", "levelling" and "agrarianism" became associated indicates that this was a tendency characterized not only by a strong commitment to human equality but also by hostility towards modern commercial society and its developing manufacturing sector. In an important sense the agrarians were merely articulating an idea which had more usually been aired by modernists so that it could be refuted. Human nature and human progress, so it was said, were antithetical to the ideals of democracy, community and equality. According to the agrarians, on the other hand, it was the modern idea of progress which needed to be questioned, not the ideals which had certainly been undermined by modern society.² A simpler form of life centred on the locality and based, primarily at least, on an agricultural way of life was thought essential if human beings were to achieve their highest purposes. Unfortunately, those societies from antiquity which came closest to agrarian perfection did not properly secure themselves from various types of subversion and their most desirable institutions were undermined and overthrown. The agrarians believed, however, that they had learnt the lessons of the past and that the requirements of perfection could be established, theoretically at least.

1. Bestor, "Socialist Vocabulary", 263.

2. See Neal S. Wadler, "The Beginnings of 'Economics as if People Mattered': Radical Theories of Social and Economic Reform in England, 1775-1805" (Georgetown Univ. Ph.D. thesis. 1978).

I Utopia and Reform in Agrarian Ideology

The utopian genre has had a long and distinguished history within British political thinking.¹ However, there has been an unfortunate tendency in the literature of eighteenth-century social and political thought to ignore British utopias and concentrate on the French. This leaves one with the impression that there was more ideological unity within the British political culture than in fact there was.² A closer look reveals that six ideal-type constructions of society as it ought to be, outlined with varying degrees of sophistication and complexity, can be identified and linked with radicalism in this period:

1. Robert Wallace's	"Model of a Perfect Government"
2. James Burgh's	"Cessares"
3. Thomas Spence's	"Spensonia"
4. William Godwin's	"System of Equality"
5. S.T. Coleridge's	"Pantisocracy"
6. Charles Hall's	"Happiest State"

The inclusion of Robert Wallace's "Model"³ in this study, despite his own belief that the realization of such a utopia, for all its benefits, would lead to over-population and violence, is justified on the grounds that it took on a life of its own and became, for Richard Price at least, a scheme that would remove most of the causes of "contention and wickedness" by "annihilating property and reducing mankind to their natural equality". It was towards such a society, claimed Price, that God was guiding

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1. See Morton, English Utopia and F.E. and F.P. Manuel, Utopian Thought in the Western World (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1979), chs. 4 and 9.
 2. See, for example, Laski, Rise of European Liberalism, pp. 206-7. For an account of the French utopians which is particularly useful see Emile Durkheim, Socialism and St. Simon ed. with an introd. by A.W. Gouldner (Yellow Springs, Antioch Press, 1958), ch. 3.
 3. Wallace, Various Prospects, chs. I-IV. On Wallace as an articulator and contributor to "Commonwealthman" ideology in general see Robbins, The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman, pp. 202-11.

humankind.¹

Because they embodied the fundamental assumptions held by the agrarians with respect to property and progress these utopias must play an important part in any assessment of radical thinking in this period. It becomes very clear that while agrarianism is an identifiable tendency of thought, there was no agreement on the degree to which the principles of equality and community could or should be taken, or on the degree to which commerce and manufacturing should be restricted, in the ideal society. There was a co-existence of unity and diversity within the tendency, the differences revealing themselves in arguments that closely resembled those that later surfaced within what we now speak of as "the socialist tradition". Moreover, and more importantly, there were differences on the status which "utopia" should possess within radical thinking at large. Was it merely an ideal-type construction, useful only for criticism, or was it a summons to action as well?

First and foremost within late eighteenth-century radical thought "utopia" served critical purposes. Not only were the agrarians able to present to their contemporaries a model of the good society but they possessed a point of reference from which contemporary society itself could be judged in a direct and easily comprehensible way. Traditionally this had been the purpose of utopian thinking. As Judith Shklar has written:

[The classical utopia was] a model, an ideal pattern that invited contemplation and judgement but did not entail any other activity. It is a perfection that the mind's eye recognizes as true and which is described as such, and so serves as a standard of moral judgement ... As such it is an expression of the craftsman's desire for perfection and permanence.²

1. Price, Four Dissertations, p. 138.

2. Judith Shklar, "The Political Theory of Utopia: From Melancholy to Nostalgia" in F.E. Manuel (ed.), Utopia and Utopian Thought (Boston, Souvenir Press, 1965), p. 105.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries these critical functions were taken over and expanded into what Shklar has called a "relentless future-directed activism."¹ From being "nowhere" historically utopia became a future society and a call to action. In the case of the late eighteenth century this change could be seen to be at work but it manifested itself in different ways.

For Thomas Spence and Samuel Taylor Coleridge utopia was thought to have immediate relevance. "Spensonia" provided the intellectual basis for Spence's political agitation. When the people understood what needed to be done he expected them to intervene directly in the course of human history and establish a Spencean republic, success in one country being a spur to success in others. In Spence's thought, then, the transition from "utopianism" to "revolutionism" was clear.² In Coleridge's case it was hoped that a select group of well-educated individuals could set up a small community organized along utopian lines to act as an example to the rest of the world. It is not surprising that utopianism should eventually have taken shape as "communitarianism" since many of the utopian tracts had been written in this way, a small group of disenchanted individuals leaving the "Old World" and travelling to the "New" where they could proceed to re-organize their lives along utopian lines.³

Generally speaking, however, the agrarians distinguished very clearly between "utopia" (the ideal state) and "reform" (those changes that were practicable given the intellectual, moral and political context).

1. Ibid., p. 108.

2. Spence's theory of revolution is dealt with in ch. 14 below.

3. Coleridge's conception of "Pantisocracy" and its place in contemporary history is dealt with in ch. 16 below.

Utopia became a model, perhaps unattainable, but towards which Britain should be gradually shunted by way of piecemeal reforms. William Ogilvie, whose detailed reform proposals made a significant contribution to agrarianism in this period, defended the policy of "gradual progressive innovation" by pointing to the dangers and hazards associated with great changes accomplished suddenly.¹ In the interests of liberty, stability and civilized life it was thought necessary to temper radicalism with respect for established relationships and interests. Ogilvie's Essay on the Right of Property in Land (1781) attracted a good deal of attention in the French Revolutionary years not only because it outlined clearly the natural rights and utilitarian basis for agrarian reform,² but because it was literally crammed with proposals for reform, some of which required government action and some of which could be introduced voluntarily. He mentioned means by which rents could be controlled, leases improved and farms converted into freeholds with appropriate compensation for the present owners.³ More importantly, he outlined a model agrarian law suitable, he claimed, for contemporary conditions and more likely to be effective than the agrarian laws from antiquity.⁴ By

1. Ogilvie, "Right of Property in Land", p. 32. Ogilvie still thought it important to keep before the public eye more fundamental plans of social and economic reform as revolutions did occur and if based on the right principles could be productive of much good. As a strategy for change, however, revolutionism was both foolhardy and dangerous.
2. See ibid. Section I: Of the Right of Property as derived from the Law of Nature and Section II: Of the Right of Property in Land as founded in Public Utility. See also Eayrs, "The Political Ideas of English Agrarians", 294-8.
3. See Ogilvie, "Right of Property in Land", chs. 30-2, 54-6, 63-4.
4. The Agrarian laws of antiquity, said Ogilvie, failed to produce durable and beneficial effects because their operation was "sudden, violent and occasional" and they were easily evaded as they opposed the whole body of the people who wanted land to those who held more than their legal allotment. He mentioned Solon's body of laws for Athens and the Roman laws of the twelve tables; ibid., p. 96.

this measure any citizen not in possession of land could claim from the public up to forty acres from any farm, freehold or uncultivated common, preferably in his parish but if necessary from anywhere in the country. Existing small farms and the lord of the manor's own park or farm would be exempted. Ogilvie also thought it important that the recipient of land pay the lord of the manor certain "aids and services expedient for preserving order and subordination in the country". Arbitrators would determine what reserved, perpetual rents would be paid to the landlords and temporary rents, if any, to the former tenant in compensation for their loss. Further moderation might be introduced into the scheme by restricting the class of men entitled to the land or the land available to them. By such a measure it was hoped that "day labourers and manufacturers" could be transferred in an orderly and peaceful way "to the more animating and manly occupation of cultivating a small farm for their own account."¹

By giving the poor the opportunity to enjoy a rural-based independence and security the agrarian reformers hoped that the logic of modernization could be reversed and the poor protected from occupations alien to their happiness. According to Charles Hall it was also essential to prohibit or at least heavily tax non-essential manufactures and abolish the practice of primogeniture if the population was to be returned to agricultural occupations. The latter would help reduce the degree of inequality and the former counteract or prevent its effects by reducing the demand for luxuries. Would the rich man, he asked, "be less warm in a second cloth than he was in a superfine? Will he sit easier in a carved than a plain chair? Will he sleep better in a silk

1. Ibid., p. 33. For Ogilvie's Agrarian Law see ibid., chs. 71-5.

than a linen bed?"¹

Being fearful of popularly-based agitation both Hall and Ogilvie hoped that the enlightenment of the rich and powerful would be sufficient to bring the desired reforms. For the other agrarians, however, reform of the corrupt and unrepresentative parliament was thought to be an essential precondition for agrarian reform. It was hoped that a properly elected parliament could closely supervise any enclosure that was deemed necessary and, at a minimum, institute a policy of waste land re-development with small plots being made available to the poor. "Why" asked Mary Wollstonecroft, "are huge forests still allowed to stretch out with idle pomp and all the indolence of Eastern grandeur? Why does the brown waste meet the traveller's view, when men want work?"² Wollstonecroft also wished to see the larger estates divided into small farms so that the people could be saved from the necessity of shifting to the cities. Maurice Margarot wished to see the abolition of the national debt and a more egalitarian distribution of the land achieved in one step through the public expropriation of land deemed unnecessary surplus for the owners. This land would be divided and distributed to fundholders. In defending his proposal Margarot argued that when money was lent to the government the security given was not the taxes which could be extracted from "the middling classes and the poor" but the land itself. Thus to return the debt the "overgrown and large landholders" had to give up a portion of their land.³

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1. Hall, Effects of Civilization, pp. 219-20. Like Ogilvie, Hall believed that "great disorder and even convulsions" would result from "a hasty and indiscreet use of powerful remedies"; ibid., pp. 215-6.
 2. Wollstonecroft, Rights of Man, p. 148.
 3. Margarot, Proposal for a Grand National Jubilee, pp. 43-48. Whilst in Australia Margarot suggested that the problems of the colony would be best solved by limiting commerce and settling the people on small farms. See Michael Roe, "Maurice Margarot: A Radical in Two Hemispheres, 1792-1815", Bulletin of the Institute of Historical

With many agrarian reformers it is not clear whether or not the reforms proposed were expected to start up a process that would end with utopia. They were, to quote a description of Ogilvie, "possibilists" rather than "revolutionists".¹ The important task, as they saw it, was to concentrate on the immediately relevant, to counter the system of corruption and begin to reverse the process of modernization through a series of "peaceable" and "constitutional" reforms. In William Godwin's thought, on the other hand, a long process of partial - and voluntarily given - reformation was expected to bring Britain closer and closer to the "System of Equality".² There is also evidence that Richard Price saw the connection between utopia and reform in the same light. In his Essay on the Population of England he called for a reversal of the processes that were leading to de-population and economic decay. Amongst these were the engrossing of farms, the enclosure of common fields and the forcing of labour into the unhealthy towns and cities.³ It was his belief that God's will would guide such a reversal and eventually usher in "a kingdom of light, and peace, and virtue".⁴ In the context of America he believed that the polity, society and economy were already so advanced that it would be possible to move very close to the egalitarian plans of Plato, Sir Thomas More and Robert Wallace. In any event Americans should ensure

Research, XXXI (1958), 74-6.

1. J. Morrison-Davidson, Four Precursors of Henry George (London and Glasgow, 1899), p. 22.
2. Godwin's mixture of gradualism and utopianism is the subject of ch. 15 below.
3. Price, Essay on the Population of England, pp. 39-40, 62-3, 76-7.
4. Price, Evidence for a future Period of Improvement, p. 3. In the contemporary period Price saw an improvement in the state of civil government, an extension of civil and religious liberty, the "down-fall of all slavish and anti-Christian hierarchies", and an improvement in the state of education as the key items of reform which would come to Britain, ibid., pp. 29-36.

that inequality be not allowed to develop and that foreign trade be kept to a minimum.¹

II Alternative Models of Perfection

In one of the first attempts to situate the newly emergent socialist movement in its historical and intellectual context Mary Hennell proposed a distinction between a "negative" as opposed to a "positive" community of goods. In the earliest stages of society only the land and the materials of labour were common to all, individuals claiming for themselves the products of their own time and industry. In societies "whose selfish desires have not been awakened to the refinements of luxury", she continued, there was a tendency for such a negative system to pass directly into one in which the means, processes and products of labour were the common property of all. Such a system was said to embody fully the socialist principle, as a "positive" and not just a "negative" community of goods was entailed. In fact, however, the transition that actually occurred in human history was from a negative community of goods to a system of "self-love" and "exclusive property". Modern socialism, argued Hennell, represented the desire to create a positive community of goods on the basis of the level of improvement and civilization that had been created by the system of exclusive property.² In this thesis it is the distinction between a "negative" and a "positive" community of goods that

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1. Richard Price, Observations on the Importance of the American Revolution, and the Means of Making it a Benefit to the World (London, 1784), pp. 58-9, 60-7. Isaac Kramnick's denial that Price's yeoman ideal was non-commercial, non-pecuniary and self-sufficient sits uneasily alongside the textual evidence; "Republican Revisionism Revisited", 644. Kramnick is too keen to present all the radicals as middle-class, bourgeois liberals.
 2. Mary Hennell, An Outline of the Various Social Systems and Communities Which have been founded on the Principle of Co-operation (London, 1844), pp. 242-46.

is most useful as it applies neatly to the utopias of the late eighteenth-century agrarians. It also closely parallels the distinction made by Judith Shklar between Rousseau's two models of the perfect society: Sparta and the Age of Gold. The former presents an image of the perfectly socialized man whose entire life is absorbed in his social role, the latter an image of the self-sufficient and self-contained family household living a simple, rural life.¹

a. Negative Community of Goods

Charles Hall was essentially an agrarian reformer. He proposed a series of reforms which could be introduced without a great deal of dislocation but which would improve the lot of the labouring poor. However, to permanently secure the happiness of the people he believed that it was necessary to establish an alternative mode of production and form of society in which the community owned and distributed equally the land and all those things necessary to sustain an agricultural way of life such as cattle, fowl and some agricultural machinery.² Although some manufactured items would need specialized labour, and certain medicines would have to be imported from overseas, economic life in this "Happiest State" would be family-based and localised:

If property was equally divided, and there was no rich, the inhabitants of a parish would seldom be led out of their parish for anything they wanted; every place would produce everything that there was real occasion for.³

As well as the very small degree of specialization in trade and manufacture the community would support a group of scholars with special knowledge of

1. Shklar, "Rousseau's Two Models".

2. See Hall, Effects of Civilization, chs. XXXVII-XXXIX.

3. Ibid., p. 170.

the arts, sciences and languages. The only other specialization would occur within each family on the basis of sex and age; the father working on the land and the mother and children in the home and on the simple manufactures needed by the household.

Given the simplicity of human needs and the equal access to an agricultural way of life, Hall believed that individual farmers would only need to labour for a few hours a day. This would ensure, he claimed, that correct measure of rest, action and pleasure from which happiness was thought to flow spontaneously.¹ The amount of leisure available would also allow for the spread of knowledge and learning right throughout the community and, to a large degree, divisions based on intellectual and moral excellence would be broken down. Virtue would come to reign and the war of all against all would wither away:

In this medium state, what a man had would be little liable to be taken from him by another, all strife about MEUM and TUUM would nearly be at an end. At present, as among brute animals, all war against all.²

Human beings, claimed Hall, were naturally benevolent; it was civilization which perverted their better natures.³

The central features of Hall's utopia was the equal access to the land and an agricultural way of life. Given this equality each family would have the right to retain the full products of their labour:

Whatever things a man makes with his own hands, out of such materials as his proportionate share of land yields, must be

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1. Ibid., pp. 259-61. For this idea Hall declared his indebtedness to David Hume. He criticized Hume, however, for not seeing that in the civilized world only a few enjoyed this condition. The rich, he said, have rest and ease to excess and the poor action or labour in excess; ibid., p. 260.
 2. Ibid., p. 268.
 3. Ibid., pp. 269-71. Such a view sits uneasily alongside Hall's other claim that avarice and ambition lay behind the emergence of inequality of property; ibid., p. 322. The tension in his account of human nature is discussed in Wadler, "Radical Theories of Social and Agrarian Reform", pp. 142-5.

allowed to be his own, and these may be accumulated if they are not consumed by the maker of them, or they may be exchanged for other things, made by and belonging to other peoples, of an equal value; to be strictly estimated by the quantity of the labour employed in making the things exchanged.¹

The right of family inheritance was said to be part and parcel of this basic right to the products of one's labour. Hall recognized that accumulation would result but, given the right of all to an equal share of the land, it would never be considerable. It was possible, therefore, to preserve equality, independence and security at the same time.

Such a utopia was attractive to a section of the radical movement for a number of reasons. In the first place it was based on an agrarian way of life and labour thought to be most conducive to health, strength and comeliness.² The conceptions of time, authority and work associated with the modern factory were thought to be totally inappropriate to human welfare.³ In the second place there would be an abundance of necessities, but the complete absence of those luxuries and refinements which corrupted the human heart and debilitated the body. In the third place the achievement of a substantial degree of equality would remove the material conditions for tyranny and make democracy a possibility. As James Harrington had written a century earlier: "And if the whole people be landlords, or hold the lands so divided among them that no one man or number of men within the compass of the few or aristocracy overbalance them, the empire (without the interposition of force) is a commonwealth".⁴

1. Hall, Effects of Civilization, p. 68.

2. See also Ogilvie, "Right of Property in Land", sect. II. Richard Price claimed that the state of Connecticut in America came close to such a state of perfection; Observations on the Importance of the American Revolution, pp. 57-8.

3. On the popular background to this idea see E.P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism", Past and Present, XXVIII (1967) 56-97.

4. James Harrington, "Commonwealth of Oceana" (1656) in Political Works ed. Pocock, p. 164.

Finally, the provision for independence and security would enable each farmer to be a true citizen and soldier in the republic. This "freehold" conception of virtue and citizenship was central to much agrarian thinking, though it was stressed by the radicals that each person had a right only to as much land as was consistent with the equal rights of others.

b. Positive Community of Goods

In Robert Wallace's "Model of Perfect Government" (1761),¹ written he said, in the tradition of Sir Thomas More, James Harrington and the philosophers and lawgivers of ancient times, the community would not only own but collectively control the uses to which its land was put. Progress was linked with co-operation:

Mankind cannot cultivate the earth to so great advantage separately as by their joint labours. Knowledge is most successfully acquired by united endeavours.²

Labour, therefore, should be distributed throughout the community so that no one person was overburdened. When the nature of the work was particularly severe and unpleasant the hours of work would be reduced, lots being used if no one would freely choose to do it. While women were bearing children, he added, they "should be obliged to no other work than nursing and taking care of them".³

Because agriculture was the most important economic activity all males would, without exception, be taught it so that they could assist in seed-time and harvest. Care would also be taken to ensure that there were

1. See Wallace, Various Prospects, ch. II.

2. Ibid., p. 50.

3. Ibid., p. 45. In relation to sex and marriage in general Wallace wished to see society take a more enlightened view. See Norah Smith, "Sexual Mores in the Eighteenth-Century: Robert Wallace's 'Of Venery'", Journal of the History of Ideas, XXXIX (1978), 419-33.

enough "masons, wrights, weavers, smiths, shoemakers, painters, musicians, statuaries, engravers, and all other persons proper for procuring not only the necessaries of life, but whatever was elegant and magnificent, if it was not fantastick, but agreeable to nature."¹ A division of labour based on traditional craft skills was believed to be consistent with the ethical principles behind the scheme; masters or teachers of all the arts and sciences being employed by the community to instruct the children while the adults were at work. Although all the able bodied men and women would be usefully employed the hours of work would be small enough to allow plenty of time for religious, moral and intellectual development. "Everyone" said Wallace, "might have the means of being a philosopher". However, all would not be work and study, time being available for "diversions and recreations of any kind, according to every man's honour".²

The products of labour, as well as labour itself, would be distributed equally. Consequently no one would be distinguished by their houses, clothes or food "but all of them should enjoy everything in the same manner".³ Rules would also be needed to take care of the infirm, and for discharging the aged from any obligation to labour. As opposed to Hall's "Happiest State", then, there would be no chance for individual accumulation. On the other hand the production and consumption of what Hall would have called non-essential items was considered appropriate. However,

1. Ibid., p. 42. Nature, said Wallace, had set a "proper boundary to our taste of beauty and grandeur" by rendering painful the labour required to produce them. However, in contemporary society the great bulk of mankind were forced to labour long and hard to allow a small minority to enjoy luxury and elegance; ibid., pp. 51-2.

2. Ibid., pp. 40-1, 105.

3. Ibid., p. 44.

there is no sense in which Wallace can be seen as advancing beyond an artisanal and pre-industrial conception of technology and manufacturing.

The emphasis on social co-operation in production, distribution and land is the central feature of Wallace's utopia. For collective control to be exercised properly it was thought essential that each community be sufficiently small. Wallace believed that "the equitable distribution of labour, and of the profits of it, would take away the occasion of hardships and dangerous cabals". And, Wallace continued, "by removing property, we destroy theft and robbery; so by maintaining an equality, we prevent hardship, banish discord, and restore the golden age".¹ All citizens would be fulfilling their roles within the community as a whole rather than at the behest of an individual employer. The community would not only have to ensure that there was a real equality of economic condition² but also that the "manners" of the people were correctly formed and their "appetites" curbed. In particular, the instruction of youth and the distribution of trades and employments were important community concerns.³

c. The Godwinian Synthesis

According to William Godwin there were only two ways of organizing a nation's economic life: either each man would have his portion of labour

1. Ibid., pp. 100-1.

2. Wallace did acknowledge that in his Utopia distinctions based on the strength and beauty of the body, the sagacity and quickness of understanding, the degree of virtue and grace possessed, and the diligence shown in employment would remain; ibid., p. 85.

3. Ibid., pp. 92-3.

assigned to him by the community at large, the produce being collected into a common stock, or, each man would be left to exert that position of industry and cultivate those habits of economy to which his own mind prompted him. The former, of which Wallace's "Model" was an example, was said to create "a state of slavery and imbecility" as it put an end to individuality and initiative and reduced all exertions to a piece of "mechanism without personal motive".¹ The ideal economy for Godwin, then, was the same as that of Charles Hall: small-scale, independent production based on access to the means of production necessary to maintain such independence. Godwin predicted that only half an hour a day would be needed to produce the necessities of life, the rest being left for leisure, intellectual endeavours and the production of those conveniences, not strictly speaking necessary but conducive to a better life. Like Wallace and unlike Hall, however, he thought that "a state of equality need not be a state of Stoical simplicity."²

Technology had, for Godwin, a particularly important role to play in the future state of man. In the first place he predicted that technological development would reach the point where the mechanical tasks such as the pulling down of a tree, the cutting of a canal or the navigating of a vessel, requiring the labour of many men, would be within the capacity of an individual. Given Godwin's belief that "everything that is usually understood by the term co-operation is, in some degree,

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1. Godwin, The Enquirer, pp. 168-9. The intellectual sources of Godwin's ideas on society and economy are discussed in Frederick Rosen, "Progress and Democracy: William Godwin's Contribution to Political Philosophy" (University of London. Ph.D. Thesis. 1965), ch. 5.
 2. Godwin, Political Justice, p. 753. He noted that in a state of equality and independence the production of those things not absolutely necessary to human existence would be purely voluntary; ibid.

an evil", technological progress of the sort outlined above would be progressive in that it would increase the sphere for individual endeavour. By making for more independence of judgement and action throughout society human rationality would be improved. In the second place Godwin pointed to the time when machinery would liberate mankind from "the deadliest foe to all that is great and admirable in the human mind" - mechanical and manual labour. Like the slaves in ancient Greece, modern technology would make possible an end to the necessity of manual labour, leaving men free to pursue their highest endeavours. He noted, however, that only in a state of equality would the utility of improved machinery "be liable to no dispute". In contemporary times new machinery brought hardship to "the labouring part of the community".¹

Godwin expected that as one approached the labour-less utopia a limited division of labour would still exist as some people were clearly better at producing certain things than others. It was important, however, that exchange relationships, defined as barter and sale on the basis of mutual advantage, did not co-exist with such a division. It was Godwin's belief that the source of contemporary evil could be traced to the emergence in the earliest times of both a division of labour and a system of barter and sale:

Barter and sale being once introduced, the invention of a circulating medium in the precious metals gave solidity to the evil, and afforded a field upon which for the rapacity and selfishness of man to develop all their refinements. It is from that point that the inequality of fortunes took their commencement.²

In the future utopia the individual would still be fully responsible for the products of his labour but would be obliged by the dictates of

1. Ibid., pp. 758-59.

2. Godwin, The Enquirer, pp. 215-6.

justice to distribute them according to the needs of his fellow human beings. The interference of the government in distribution was thought to be justifiable only "upon occasions of rare occurrence, and indispensable urgency".¹ Long-lasting changes in the distributional system to promote social justice would need to be based on "men's dispositions and sentiments". Without such changes any governmentally enforced redistribution would be short-lived: "The same evils would spring up with a rapid growth; and we should have gained nothing, by a project which, while it violated every man's habits, and many men's inclinations, would render thousands miserable".²

For Godwin an economy of small producers, within the context of a decentralized polity³, was desirable not because it guaranteed a distributional pattern consistent with contributions of time, effort and ingenuity, but because it encouraged independence of mind and paved the way for distribution according to human needs:

It is taught, in the Eighth Book of Political Justice, that in the best condition of human society, each man will have the sovereign empire over his own property, and the fruits of his labour, but that, in that state, the judgement of each coinciding with the judgement of all, each man will dispose of his time, his industry, his talents and his possessions in such a manner as shall be productive of the greatest quantity of general good: so that all the practical effects of a community of property will arise. This in time will come to the same thing as what is vulgarly conceived under the idea of a community of property.⁴

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1. Godwin, Political Justice, p. 711. Although Godwin expressed a clear preference for a society in which the deserted and helpless would be taken care of without state intervention he thought the Britain of his day was not "ripe" for such a state of affairs; see Clark, The Philosophical Anarchism of William Godwin, p. 147.
 2. Godwin, Political Justice, p. 714.
 3. See pp. 117-23 of this thesis.
 4. Godwin, Abinger Mss, Bodleian MSS 76 quoted in Rosen, "Progress and Democracy", pp. 317-8.

Herein lies the Godwinian synthesis, the working out of the principles of justice as established by human needs and human equality in the context of a free economy and free society. The belief of the communitarians that the community as a whole could rationally organize production and distribution was thought to ignore the destructive effects of co-operation. At the same time the Hall-type utopia which distributed the means of production only was thought not to satisfy fully the principles of justice. "We have in reality", he said, "nothing that is strictly speaking our own. We have nothing that has not a destination prescribed to it by the immutable voice of reason and justice".¹ Liberty, simplicity and equality were all part of the Godwinian package; a significant degree of the first and second being seen to pave the way for the third.

Another feature of Godwin's future state of equality which needs to be noted, because it sharply distinguished him from the other radicals, agrarian and commercial, was the absence of any family relationships or cohabitation. These were, he said, hostile to individuality and fortitude and the direct cause of much unhappiness as they forced individuals to mould together their essentially diverse characters.² This being the case some method needed to be found to deal with the questions of child-rearing and education. The helpless infant, wrote Godwin, would be the responsibility of the mother "unless, by frequent parturition, or by the nature of these cares" it was clear that she was bearing an unequal burden. In this case "others", whom and in what ways he does not say, will "amicably and willingly" help.³ Education would be radically transformed, the youthful individual being free to consult others when and where

1. Godwin, Political Justice, p. 194.

2. Ibid., pp. 756-67.

3. Ibid., p. 765.

he wished. Not only, therefore, would education be dis-established as other radicals had proposed but significantly de-institutionalised:

No creature in human form will be expected to learn anything but because he desires it, and has some conception of its value; and every man, in proportion to his capacity, will be ready to furnish such general hints and comprehensive views as will suffice for the guidance and encouragement of him who studies from the impulse of desire.¹

III Thomas Spence: At the Limits of Agrarianism

In outlining his views on property rights Thomas Spence made a sharp distinction between "land" and "moveable" property, with everyone having an equal and inalienable right to the former. In Spence's utopia - "Spensonia" - the land would be under common ownership, to be let by the local parish corporations; the rent to vary not only with the quantity but also with the quality of land held by any individual. His definition of land was a wide one: "the land with all its appurtenances, as structures, buildings, and fixtures, and mines, woods, waters etc. contained within itself."² Moveable property on the other hand - money, plate, jewellery, furniture, apparel, and cattle - would not be subject to common ownership. Therefore, once everyone's right to the land was established, a degree of accumulation of moveable property was thought to be acceptable, but unimportant, because "when wealth cannot be rooted and fixed in land, it is of a fluctuating and evaporating nature, and is apt, like the moisture of the earth to take wings and fly away, unless restored by the showers of industry."³

1. Ibid., p. 766.

2. Spence, "Lesson for the Sheepish Multitude", 214.

3. Thomas Spence, The Reign of Felicity (London, 1796), p. 10. According to Charles Hall Spence left too many items private property in his revolutionized system. Hall wished to see an equal distribution of the land and all that was necessary to sustain an

In the original presentation of his ideas Spence argued that a man's right to equal portions of the land and its products was founded upon his right to life because "the land or earth ... with everything in or on the same, or pertaining thereto, is the means of life itself."¹ In a state of nature, wrote Spence, all were free to sustain themselves and family with the animals, fruits and products of nature. However, as shall be shown in the case of Thomas Paine's Agrarian Justice,² this right to subsistence does not necessarily imply a right of access to a portion of the land itself, but only a right to welfare payments financed by a tax on the property-holders. Spence seems to have recognized this and in most of his later tracts he justified the right to an equal share of the land in terms of a right of access to productive capital. Independent labour, unmediated by relations between employer and employee, was seen as an end-in-itself. As far as possible, he wrote to Charles Hall in 1807, it was necessary to reduce the number of labourers and journeymen in any line of business. In "Spensonia" all would be "little farmers and little Mastermen".³ He made it clear that where employee-employer relations still existed, they would be radically transformed.

Every man may engage his services and his time, but he cannot sell himself; his person is not alienable property. The law does not acknowledge servitude; there can exist only an engagement of care and gratitude between the man who labours and the man who employs him.⁴

Spence saw an intimate connection between the right to a share in the

agricultural way of life such as cattle, fowl and some machinery.
See "Hall to Spence, 25 August 1807", B.L. Add. MSS 27808, f.280.

1. Spence, "The Rights of Man", pp. 5-6.
2. See pp. 229-30 below.
3. "Spence to Hall, 28 June 1807", B.L. Add. MSS 27808, f.284.
4. Spence, Constitution of a Perfect Commonwealth, p. 13.

land and a right to vote. Just "as none are suffered to meddle in the affairs of a benefit society or corporation, but those who are members, by having a property therein, none have a right to vote or interfere in the affairs of the government of a country who have no right to the soil, because such are and ought to be accounted strangers."¹ Common ownership, equal distribution and democracy Spence saw as intimately connected. He radicalised the idea that only those with property in a state could be good citizens by adding to it the proposition that all have an equal right to property.

However, he did not cast aside the commitment to welfare or the right of all to the means of subsistence. This was to be guaranteed in "Spensonia" by the surplus rent policy. He proposed that the surplus rent left over after the expenses of Government had been met, would be shared equally by all the inhabitants of each parish - men and women, young and old, rich and poor, legitimate and illegitimate. Spence assumed that such payments, to be made quarterly, would guarantee a reasonable standard of life for all. Spence liked to compare each parish with a fraternal or benefit society caring for all of its members.² Given that the rent would vary with the quality as well as the quantity of the land let, any improvements made would, in part, be passed on to the community at large. In justifying this redistribution Spence introduced the idea of the social nature of work:

Slaves and unfortunate Men have cultivated the Earth, adorned it with buildings and filled it with all kinds of Riches. And the Wealth which enabled you to set these People to work, was got by Hook or Crook from Society. Pray, was ever a solitary Savage found to be rich? No - all Riches come from Society, I mean the Labouring Part of it. And when these improvements return back to Society, they will only return to the Source from whence they came.³

1. Spence, Meridian Sun of Liberty, p. 2.

2. Ibid., p. 11.

3. Spence, "A Dream", n.p.

Unfortunately Spence did not mention or develop this conception of labour in any of his other writings.

Nevertheless it was the productive rather than the welfare side of his ethic which he tended to stress. "It is", he wrote, as a self-styled "Spensonian" citizen, "the security of property, exempt from wars, the freedom from taxes, from revenue officers, from oaths, informers and every irksome shackle, that constitutes our supreme happiness."¹ By removing the superstructure of landlordism and corruption the people could enjoy the full fruits of their labour, individually and collectively. The payment of rent on land would, he stressed, be the only source of government revenue:

a Government that draws great riches from sources which do not immediately affect the people, as from Loans, Mines, Foreign Tributes or Subsidies, is sure to creep by Degrees into absolute power and overturn everything.²

"Spensonia" was not, however, just a utopia of small producers and cheap government, it was also a federation of small, self-governing communities exercising ultimate control over the economic process and caring for each of its members. Government, he maintained, should be as close to the people as possible. Consequently he proposed that the parish be the basic organizing unit, the land to be parochial rather than national property.³

Within "Spensonia" agriculture would be the basic economic activity; each parish being like a Board of Agriculture having as its number one priority the provision of agricultural land for all its citizens.⁴ In "A Dream" he actually proposed the returning of everyone

1. Spence, Giant-Killer, II (1814), 14.

2. Spence, "Important Trial", p. 52.

3. The tasks Spence wished to see tackled at local level have been outlined on pp. 114-7 of this thesis.

4. Spence, "Important Trial", p. 59.

to "the natural occupation of Tillage until the whole Earth be as the Garden of Eden."¹ To this end he saw the need for the large estates to be broken up when leases expired and waste lands developed for cultivation. Country parishes would be obliged to invite town dwellers to come and settle on these lands, loans being offered if needed. A secondary, but still important, consequence of such a policy would be the break up of monopoly control in the marketplace:

... we may suppose that Farms would be so small, and the Farmers would hardly be rich enough to hoard much, neither would they be so few in number as easily to combine to raise the price of their produce.²

He envisaged "a fair, salutary, and democratic competition" pervading all aspects of Spensonian life.³

Two issues of detail bothered Spence: How would the distribution of the land be administered? What would be the terms of the lease? On both issues he underwent a change of mind. In 1782 he envisaged a ballot determining who would gain access to any land for which there was excess demand. The land user, provided he cared for his land, could pass it on to any of his children who did not have access to land. In the case of there being no heirs the land would return to the community.⁴ However, in his London writings he proposed that the land be "let by public auction, after due Advertisement in the Public Prints".⁵ This would prevent partiality or corruption and ensure that the rents found their proper value. At the same time he saw dangers in the whole idea of family

1. Spence, "A Dream", n.p.

2. Spence, "Important Trail", p. 44.

3. Thomas Spence, The Rights of Infants (London, 1797), Appendix, p. 14.

4. Spence, "Supplement to the History of Robinson Crusoe", p. 305.

5. Spence, "Constitution of Spensonia", p. 100.

tenancies. Thus in an updated version of his lecture he proposed seven-year leases¹ and in his Constitution of Spensonia twenty-one year leases.² This would ensure competition for the most desirable leases, the community as a whole gaining from the higher rents that would result.

Spence recognized that because of free access to the land the trading and manufacturing sectors would be thinned. This was a tendency he supported, believing that in the contemporary economy too many men were employed as artificers and tradesmen. However, he insisted, unlike the agrarian fundamentalist, Charles Hall, that "Spensonia" would supply that quantity and quality of goods necessary to satisfy both "natural" and "artificial" wants.³ "Would you", Spence asked Hall, "have us all to become again Goths and vandals and give up every elegant comfort of life?"⁴ Indeed he believed that the existence of universal education would spread the demand for refinements and luxuries. However, "none will be in Trade and Manufactures, but those who can live well by them because Tillage would be open to all in the Case of Difficulty". Therefore any trade would be "genuine, unforced and natural".⁵ In his Giant-Killer Spence also noted that although free trade would be established in "Spensonia" its citizens would be too satisfied with their abundant home trade to

1. Spence, Meridian Sun, p. 11.

2. Spence, "Constitution of Spensonia", p. 99. Two points can be added. Spence proposed the banning of sub-leasing except where an inn-keeper or private person gave accommodation to others. Nor was he opposed to one person holding more than one lease where health or business required it or where he may wish to rent a new estate before the lease of his current place expires. One person could not, however, be a citizen of more than one parish; ibid., pp. 100-101.

3. Spence, "Important Trial", p. 53.

4. "Spence to Hall, 28 June 1807", f.284.

5. Spence, "A Dream", n.p.

go "scrambling and fighting" for foreign trade.¹

On the precise nature of the trading and manufacturing sectors Spence had very little to say, though he did stress that trade within and between countries should be free and that no kind of labour, culture or commerce should be forbidden to the industrious citizen.² What seems to be revealed is a preference for a manufacturing and trading sector dominated by small-scale artisanal production and distribution: an economy without the institution of wage labour:

In so Prosperous a State as this there would be few labourers or Journeymen in any line of Business. All would be little farmers and little Mastermen. Wages as in America would of consequence be high and where prodigality or mischance did not prevent those hiring themselves might soon be above such necessity.³

The whole notion of an economy in which there are large-scale enterprises and a complex division of labour was alien to Spence's mode of thought. Rather, the community would lease workshops and premises to small traders and manufacturers in the same way as agricultural land was distributed.⁴

Spence also included mines and water in his definition of what would be subject to common ownership in "Spensonia". In the case of the waters he proposed that all maritime parishes became Boards of Fisheries in the same way as inland parishes were Boards of Agriculture.⁵ On mines, however, there was less clarity. In 1782 he quite clearly

1. Spence, Giant-Killer, II (1814), 12.

2. Spence, Constitution of a Perfect Commonwealth, p. 13.

3. "Spence to Hall, 28 June 1807", f.284.

4. See for example Thomas Spence, "The Marine Republic", Pig's Meat, II (1794), 71 where Spence makes it a community responsibility that workshops be built for artisans in the new society.

5. Spence, "Important Trial", p. 59.

proposed leasing them in the same way as houses and agricultural land, owned by the community but controlled by the lessee.¹ In a later tract, however, he indicated that decisions about how a mine would be worked should be made by the parish as a whole in the same way as decisions about public transport and waste land development.² This would indicate a stronger degree of public control for the activity of mining which was, in the eighteenth-century a large-scale enterprise with significant capital requirements. Given that it was the one major area in "Spensonia" where wage labour would still exist, he wished to ensure that the conditions of work were subject to community supervision and not just the prerogative of the employer.³

In a similar vein he insisted that all scientific and technical progress be supervised. To this end he attacked the institution of private patents and proposed instead that the national parliament purchase any invention or secret and publish it for common use so long as it was convinced that it would produce no harm: "Thus no quacks or imposters, under pretence of secrets, are suffered to impose on mankind to ruin their healths or pick their pockets".⁴ At the same time, especially enterprising men in the arts, sciences or medicine would be rewarded for their ingenuity.

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1. Spence, "Supplement to the History of Robinson Crusoe", p. 304.
 2. Spence, "A Further Account of Spensonia", p. 214. Note that these are all larger scale activities requiring united efforts.
 3. P.M. Kemp-Ashraf's has claimed that all large enterprises would become public property in "Spensonia" to be managed directly by the parish or leased to worker co-operatives. There is evidence that the community would need to supervise the conditions and processes of work but not that Spence conceived of the later socialist idea of worker co-operatives. See Kamp-Ashraf, "Thomas Spence", in Kemp-Ashraf and Mitchell, Essays in Honour of William Gallacher, pp. 272-73.
 4. Spence, "A Further Account of Spensonia", 218.

Within Spence's utopia, then, there is room for a market-place, individual accumulation, trade and artisanal manufacturing. He also saw the importance of satisfying the human demand for refinements as well as luxuries. However, he expressed a clear distaste for the authoritarianism of some earlier utopians (for example Sir Thomas More)¹ and stressed that material progress and economic freedom should never be purchased at the expense of the individual producer and his needs as a human being. What was necessary, therefore, was to give everyone right of access to the means of production, especially agricultural land. Once this objective was achieved and maintained by locally-based democracies the "extras" could be forthcoming without the abrogation of individual freedom which was a feature of modern commercial society with its institution of wage labour and its manufacturing division of labour. He never expected or desired the larger-scale activities to be anything more than necessary appendages to a basically agrarian and artisanal based economy.

That Spence's thought occupies the outer limits of agrarianism can be clearly illustrated if we contrast his ideas with those of Thomas Evans as expressed in Christian Policy, the Salvation of the Empire (1816). Evans, one-time secretary of the London Corresponding Society (L.C.S.), became associated with Spence some time after his release from prison in 1801. After Spence died in 1814 Evans founded the Society for Spencean Philanthropists, organized in divisions along the lines of the L.C.S. of the 1790's:² Like Spence, Evans thought it essential that the national

1. "Spence to Hall, 28 June 1807", f. 284.

2. On Thomas Evans see Terry Parssinen, "Thomas Spence and the Spenceans: A Study of Revolutionary Utopianism in the England of George III" (Brandeis Univ. Ph.D. thesis. 1968), esp. ch. 3.

debt be repudiated¹ and "all the land, the waters, the houses, and all permanent feudal property" be brought into public ownership.² Unlike Spence, however, he did not see this as a means to an equal division of the land and an agrarian way of life for the majority. Evans distinguished between the social and economic philosophy of Judaism, which sought to establish an agrarian republic through the equal distribution of the land, and that of Christianity, which divided the rent or produce of the land. It was Spence's surplus rent policy, not his commitment to an economy of small farmers and artisans, which attracted him to Spenceanism.³

Evans thought it best that the commonly owned land be administered at parochial level by committees especially appointed for the task. They would let the land on leases only, the leaseholders having the right to let to tenants at will but not to re-lease.⁴ It was important, he noted, firstly that the present occupiers of land be not disturbed and, secondly, that the landowners of the past receive a certain portion of the rental income which would go to the public under the new system. This portion would not simply be a payment for lost rights but, for the large landowners, a continuing payment for the overall management of the estates. "All the relative classes of society", stressed the more moderate Evans, "[would] continue undisturbed".⁵

1. Evans, Christian Policy, p. 16.

2. Ibid., p. 14.

3. Ibid., p. 21.

4. For details of his plan see ibid., pp. 25-7.

5. Ibid., p. 25. Parssinen has explained this divergence from Spencean egalitarianism and revolutionism by pointing to the centrality of Christianity to Evans' politics: "Evans ... equated the establishment of Spence's Plan with the return of true Christianity. For him the coming era was to bring a reconciliation of the oppressed and the oppressors. They were to be joined in a Christian fellowship"; "Thomas Spence and the Spenceans", p. 142. Evans also thought it would be possible to achieve public ownership without changing the

After the parish committee had met its local expenses and made its contribution to national government the surplus would be distributed to all the inhabitants as is the case in a joint-stock company. The repudiation of the national debt and the expropriation of all but a portion of the nation's total rental income would enable the country to abolish all other forms of taxation. Freed from an oppressive tax system "manufactures, commerce and agriculture" would flourish:

We have the best means of manufacturing, the most extensive, useful, and complete system of machinery, and industrious labourers in the world; remove the pressure of debt and taxation, and who can come into competition with us, either in lowness of price or quality of commodities?¹

Like Spence, Evans also believed that industry would be encouraged as the surplus rent was spread throughout the community and not appropriated by a small minority with the propensity to "lock up from public use" a significant portion of their earnings.²

For Evans, then, Spenceanism was a means of securing the social and economic foundations of modern commercial society. He pushed the belief that rent and interest were unearned forms of income through to its logical conclusion and criticised the other radicals for not seeing that property rather than the state was the chief obstacle to the relief of poverty and the future progress of the nation. He expressed no preference for an agrarian way of life and no hostility towards the institution of wage labour.

IV Utopias and the Population Problem

In her Outline of the Various Social Systems and Communities which

system of government; Christian Policy, p. 31.

1. Ibid., p. 28.

2. Ibid., p. 34.

have been founded on the Principle of Co-operation (1844) Mary Hennell outlined the objections which had been made to "systems of equal and united interests".¹ In the first place the institutions were so perfect that they could only be adapted to perfect beings but it was impossible to create perfect beings without perfect institutions. By making institutions both cause and effect of human perfectibility the utopians had pushed themselves into a corner. The radical agrarians who took their utopian projections seriously saw gradualism (Godwin), revolutionism (Spence) and communitarianism (Coleridge), as the means by which this problem could be transcended.² A second objection raised by all the defenders of commercial society, and discussed in the next chapter, is that there would be no stimulus to exertion in an egalitarian society. With this claim the agrarians were in complete disagreement, whatever the precise nature of the system of production and distribution they proposed, and whatever the precise nature of the human "needs" they assumed existed and required satisfaction. Indeed they claimed that by giving everyone a stake in the system work would be encouraged. Where they differed amongst themselves was on the amount of individual accumulation that was consistent with the principles of equality and community.

The most decisive objection, however, was that put forward by Malthus: overpopulation as a result of the removal of all vice and misery from human society.³ Consequently utopia was said to be inconsistent

1. Hennell, Outline, pp. 248-52.

2. See chs. 14-16.

3. See also Francis Place's criticism of Spence's plan for social revolution; B.L. Add. MSS 27808, ff.193-94. On Place's Malthusianism see W.E.S. Thomas, "Francis Place and the Working Class", Historical Journal, V (1962), 65-66. On the history of Malthusian argument and counter-argument see Kenneth Smith, The Malthusian Controversy (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951).

with the present frame of nature and with the limited extent of the earth. In fact, as has already been noted, it was Robert Wallace who first raised the alarm. He argued that the war and violence which would come with overpopulation was "more unnatural than all [the] present calamities".¹ He concluded:

From this view of the circumstances of the world, notwithstanding the high opinion we have of the merit of Sir Thomas More, and other admired projectors of perfect governments in ancient or modern times, we may discern how little can be expected from their most perfect systems.²

Of the agrarians William Godwin³ and Charles Hall⁴ paid special, and relatively detailed attention to the problem. Thomas Spence also recognized that in "Spensonia" overpopulation would soon result due to the encouragement of marriage and birth and the influx of foreigners eager to experience the joys of the new life available to them. The only solution he could see to this problem was the extreme one of colonisation - using force if necessary to procure colonies. He stressed, however, that no financial benefits should be derived from the colonies established which should become independent states as soon as possible. On the longer-term problem of global over-population he remained silent.⁵

Both Godwin and Hall criticised Malthus for the reactionary nature

1. Wallace, Various Prospects, p. 120.
2. Ibid., p. 123. Wallace did acknowledge, however, that legislators ought never to lose sight of the utopias "or any proper opportunity of transplanting the wisest of their maxims into their own governments, as far as they are adapted to their particular circumstances, and will give no occasion to dangerous convulsion"; ibid., p. 124.
3. Godwin, Political Justice, Book VIII, ch. ix and Thoughts Occasioned by the perusal of Dr. Parr's Spital Sermon ... (London, 1801), pp. 54-82.
4. See Hall, Effects of Civilization, Appendix: "Observations on the Principal Conclusion in Mr. Malthus's Essay on Population", pp. 325-49.
5. See Spence, Giant-Killer, II (1814), p. 13 and "Constitution of Spensonia", p. 112.

of his argument that the current calamities in Britain and Europe were necessary to prevent even greater calamities in the future. Hall acknowledged that the future of countries establishing a system of equality would be over-population but emphasized that it would be very distant - even if preventative methods were not used. Preventative methods were said to be of two types: those which prevented such a state altogether with respect to any one country and those which removed the time to a more distant period with respect to the whole world. An example of the former would be colonization and of the latter, the regulation of marriages. In a state of equality it would be possible to convince the people to regulate marriage to the extent that over-population itself was avoided, "for every man being in the same state, every man affected in the same manner by the existing circumstances, every man is equally interested, and equally inclined to submit to any ordinances, wisely calculated to remove the common evil".¹ Hall also argued that should the neglect of preventative methods lead to over-population then it would not be attended by the same degree of evil as was experienced in the civilized countries. There would, he said, be "no invidious distinctions, which add to the sufferings of the over-burdened; no degradation, no debasement, no contempt, no insults".²

According to Godwin, Malthus had ignored three factors in his calculations. In the first place history had shown that methods, such as the exposing of children, easy abortions and abstinence from sex, could be effective in keeping down population growth. In the second place he pointed to the possibility of improvements in the methods of food

1. Hall, Effects of Civilization, p. 334.

2. Ibid., p. 336.

cultivation:

The improvements to be made in cultivation, and the augmentations the earth is capable of receiving in the article of productiveness, cannot, as yet be reduced to any limits of calculation ... The rational anticipations of human improvement are unlimited.¹

In the third place he pointed to the growing rationality of the human species and the consequences this would have for sexual conduct:

The more men are raised above poverty and a life of expedients, the more decency will prevail in their conduct, and sobriety in their sentiments. Where everyone has a character, no one will be willing to distinguish himself by headstrong imprudence.²

For Godwin, then, there simply was not a population problem for which human beings would not be able to find a solution.

The existence of the agrarian utopia, in its various forms, within the radical intellectual universe is a clear indication that the so-called "middle-class" or "bourgeois" political economy had not established complete dominance in the culture; and amongst those who rejected its dictates there was debate, albeit limited, on the degree to which the principles of agrarian simplicity and equality could or should be taken. For such radicals political reform without changes in the modes of life and labour of the people would be worthless and short-lived. One such radical who agreed with this proposition, and on becoming a political reformer saw the intellectual merits of the agrarian case, was James Burgh. Gradually he saw that a case could be made for a modern commercial economy and society but he was never fully convinced that agrarianism needed to be discarded. Therefore, before proceeding to a full-scale account of commercial radicalism it will be useful to consider the social and economic thinking of Burgh.

1. Godwin, Political Justice, p. 769.

2. Godwin, Thoughts Occasioned by the perusal of Dr. Parr's Spital Sermon, p. 74.

CHAPTER 11: JAMES BURGH'S SPARTAN MODERNITY

James Burgh came to a radical political position in the 1760 s with a well developed fear of irreligion and luxury. In Britain's Remembrancer (originally published in 1746) he had written:

... no Degree of Wealth, of Trade, of Naval or Military Force have ever been sufficient to support any Nation where Luxury and Vice have prevailed.¹

God had brought distress to Britain in the form of a dearth of corn and the Jacobite Rebellion as a punishment for the vices which prevailed and were tolerated. He believed that every rank in the nation had come to enjoy corrupting levels of material convenience. Even "a tradesman of the meanest Rank", wrote Burgh, possessed gilt china-ware, silver plate and a choice of foreign wines.² Such improvements in living standards were feared because it was felt that they would lead the common people to question their relative position within the social hierarchy.³ The divergences and indulgences which modernists thought would relax and soften the mind were seen by Burgh as the agents of venality and licentiousness. As a solution to the problem Burgh appealed to all those in authority, from the landlords in the country to the senior citizens of London, to lead the way to national regeneration by setting an example in religion, frugality and sobriety.

At this stage there was no political dimension to Burgh's social

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1. James Burgh, Britain's Remembrancer ... (London, 1759), pp. 6-7. The importance of this tract in the eighteenth-century debate on luxury is noted in Wade, "Idea of Luxury", pp. 96-101.
 2. Burgh, Britain's Remembrancer, p. 13.
 3. In The Dignity of Human Nature (originally published in 1754) Burgh had noted that all monetary distinctions were ultimately superficial but still necessary in God's design for the world. It was thought improper, therefore, to feel insolence at one's allotted social and financial position; ibid., i.32.

criticism. Indeed he spoke deferentially of the nation's highest ranks. However, when he did turn to politics and take up a radical position some of the older assumptions and values stayed intact at the centre of his thought.¹ This is revealed in both his utopian tract of 1764, An Account of the Cessares, and in his later, practically oriented writings. The former is a clear example of agrarianism as defined and analysed in the last chapter. Burgh's later writings, on the other hand, are a strange mixture of pre-modern and modernist moral and political economy. There is no indication that the "Cessares" remained for Burgh as that state of affairs any "good man would wish a nation to be", a belief he certainly held in 1764.² It is the case, however, that some of the proposals he made in An Account of the Cessares remained at the centre of the reform programme he wished his fellow radicals to consider. It is instructive, then, to begin an account of his social and economic thought with his utopian projection.

I Burgh's Version of Agrarian Utopia

In Burgh's utopia the community would grant to each man sufficient land, with sheep, corn, hogs, fowl etc. , to maintain himself and family. Any mines of coal, iron or useful minerals and medicinal waters found on an estate would belong to the public and be used according to rules laid down by the nation's Senators.³ No gold or silver mines would be

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1. On the process by which Burgh became a radical see Carla Hay, "The Making of a Radical: The Case of James Burgh", Journal of British Studies, XVIII (1979), 90-117.
 2. Burgh, An Account of the Cessares, p. iii.
 3. The political system of the "Cessares" would consist of an hereditary chief executive and Senators elected for life. A Senator could be dismissed if a majority of the electors in any constituency could convince the Senate as a whole that he was incapable of performing

allowed to exist as they would be a temptation to foreign invasion. Each family would be basically self-sufficient, dividing its time between agricultural and non-agricultural pursuits. There would be a sexual division of labour and a place for child labour:

The women take care of the household affairs, and the dairy and poultry, and spin the cotton, flax and wool. And every child is ensured to labour, suitable to its age and strength, for none are permitted to be idle.¹

Like the other agrarians, Burgh believed that mankind's most basic needs could be satisfied with a minimum input of human labour. In his utopia he expected a great deal of time to be spent in moral, religious and intellectual improvement. Material welfare was simply a means to this end.

Small towns and a capital would exist, each house within them to have "the same appearance, form and dimensions" in its public face. However, in the back part of the house "every one may build as he pleases, provided he does not injure, overlook or darken his neighbours".² In the chief town, called "Salem" to remind men of the peace and union which ought to prevail, the government would provide a public library, museum and models for making all useful implements and machines. Thus the small amount of manufacturing which needed to be done would be performed in the countryside by the families themselves.

Burgh stressed the abolition of foreign trade and commerce. This

his duties properly. The perfect constitution, he argued, needed "to keep a happy medium between the tyranny of arbitrary monarchy, the factions of aristocracy, and the anarchy, licentiousness, and wild tumults of a democracy"; ibid., p. 26. Chapters III to V of the Cessares deal with the political system.

1. Ibid., p. 102.

2. Ibid., p. 88. The country would be neatly divided into parishes and counties, there being one town for every county ; ibid., p. 48.

would prevent the introduction of needless superfluities and expensive fashions which were thought to be the source of disregard for the public good and dissoluteness of manners. To this end he also proposed that the Senate should prohibit all trades and acts which ministered to idleness, pride and unnecessary refinement. Unless specifically sanctioned by the Senate the lending of goods or money for interest would also be prohibited. Dress would be regulated by the Senate according to age and sex with behaviour strictly controlled by "Inspectors" elected six to a parish and subject to rotation. "An effeminate sop or beau (being a disgrace to men)", he wrote, "is to be fined and employed in the bettering house in some dirty and laborious public works".¹

An annual tax paid by each occupant of the land would be sufficient to meet the expenses of government. The government would be obliged to support the sick, aged and those incapable of looking after themselves; provide a public library, museum and models for making useful implements and machinery; offer rewards to the authors of useful inventions; construct public granaries to be used in times of scarcity and, importantly, guarantee an equal and strict education for the nation's children.² All children, he stressed, belong to the community and education ought to be under the public eye.

Like Charles Hall, Burgh saw the enjoyment of a "calm country life" and the fruits of one's labour as the key to human happiness since it would establish "temperance and industry" and restrain "pride, ambition and luxury".³ The citizens of the "Cessares" would be active, strong

1. Ibid., pp. 85-6.

2. Equal, that is, except in respect of sex. The young women were to be educated to be "loving, frugal and industrious wives, and good mothers" and young men "to be diligent in their employment, kind husbands, and prudent fathers"; ibid., pp. 116-7.

3. Ibid., p. 106.

and healthy, "enur'd to labour", plain in their dress, housing and furniture, temperate in their diet and simple in their life and manners. For Burgh, however, pride, ambition and selfishness were not simply the by-products of a particular form of economic life but human potentialities which could only be curbed by the public supervision of behaviour and a strictly enforced system of education.

Burgh's utopia was clearly an intellectual construction which could be counterposed to contemporary reality. Besides a suggestion that colonies could be organized along utopian lines there is no indication that Burgh thought the modern world was or could be re-created in the image of utopia.¹ For the relief of poverty within Britain he proposed the equal division of the country's commons, heaths, forests and chases among the "sober and industrious poor".² Grants of five to seven acres, (rent to be paid to those who lost their common rights), would give the labouring poor a degree of independence and an "estate" they could call their own. Burgh acknowledged that they would still have to work in their respective trades and employments as well as tend their plots to fully provide for their families. It was within such a reformist spirit that all of Burgh's subsequent writings were cast. However, the hostility which he expressed towards modern commercial society, if only indirectly by way of his utopian alternative, was significantly qualified in his later writings. Here he made the case for trade, commerce and manufacturing - but only in the context of reforms which would appear contrary to elements of its "spirit".

1. For a useful discussion of "utopia" and "reform" in Burgh's writings see Oscar and Mary Handlin, "James Burgh and American Revolutionary Theory", Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society, LXXIII (1961), 38-57.

2. Burgh, An Account of the Cessares, pp. 7-8.

II A Spartan Modernity

In most of his writings Burgh spoke approvingly of Britain's commercial and manufacturing interests and the part they were playing in the progress of the nation. Manufacturers were singled out for special praise. They were, he wrote, a "more valuable fund of riches to a nation, than mines of gold and silver".¹ Unfortunately, however, the system was not being allowed to work properly because the landed interest was in control of parliament. He pointed to taxes on the articles of trade and bounties on the export of corn as examples of improper governmental interference.² The solution he proposed was simple: laissez-faire in respect of imports and exports. At the same time he saw the need, like the other agrarian and commercial radicals, to place governments on honest and cheap foundations through the abolition of all places and pensions. "The public", he said, "cannot be too curious concerning the characters of public men".³ He also placed a high priority on paying off the national debt. He proposed either that it be paid off once and for all by a ten percent tax on all capital holdings, or gradually by way of a sinking fund to be set up along the lines suggested by fellow radical Richard Price.⁴

Burgh believed, however, that modern society carried great dangers, whatever the benefits it could bring. "Every man and every woman", he wrote, "seems to have erected a temple to money in their hearts".⁵ It was thought highly possible that a period of economic

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1. James Burgh, Crito, or Essays on Various Subjects (2 vols; London, 1766-67), i.50.
 2. Burgh, Political Disquisitions, i.51-2.
 3. Ibid., iii.11.
 4. Burgh, Crito, i.33-5.
 5. Burgh, Political Disquisitions, iii.65.

progress would be followed by decay as wasteful expenditure and class conflict wore away at economic health and political freedom. Central to his politics was the belief that there was nothing inevitable about these trends:

The truth is, it is only occasionally, not necessarily, that commerce, arts, and taste do harm ... Riches do not necessarily enervate a people, unless there be a relaxation of discipline, and degeneracy of manners.¹

What the welfare of the people ultimately depended on was not its material strength but the morals and manners of its people: "Such, therefore, who have modelled governments for any duration, have endeavoured to propose methods by which the riotous appetites, the lusts, avarice, revenge, ambition, and other disorderly passions of the people might be bounded."²

In the first place he thought it essential that there be equality of competition in the market-place, particularly for the necessities of life. Only then would self-interest and the common good be mutually consistent. In 1766, a year in which there was a particularly sharp increase in the price of provisions, he anonymously published a pamphlet on the question of high prices of necessities and how to avoid them.³ He attributed the sharp increases in prices to the enclosure movement, the decrease in the amount of land available for wheat, sheep and cattle and the practice of slaughtering very young calves and sheep. In the

1. Ibid., p. 64.

2. Ibid., p. 30.

3. [James Burgh], Proposals (Humbly Offered to the Public) for an Association against the Iniquitous Practices of Engrossers, Forestallers, Jobbers etc ... (London, 1766). The background to the pamphlet and the empirical validity of the claims made in it are discussed in Carla Hay, "Crusading Schoolmaster: James Burgh, 1714-1775" (Univ. of Kentucky. Ph.D. thesis. 1972), pp. 97-107.

case of London he was convinced that the especially high prices were due to "the wicked arts of Engrossers, Forestallers, Jobbers, Salesmen, and Carcase Butchers".¹ To remedy the situation he urged his fellow citizens to form a Society whose objectives would be:

- (i) To bring Butcher's Meat to the London Markets, free from the unjust profits laid upon it by interlopers between the breeder and the consumer;
- (ii) To indemnify persons who would be willing to testify against Forestallers, Regrators, etc.;
- (iii) To check the premature destruction of young cattle and sheep by premiums and "other means".²

As soon as it had sufficient money the Society would purchase full-grown live cattle and sheep and transport them to London where they could be penned, slaughtered and prepared for sale. The meat would be sold directly to the consumer or to retail butchers at prices set by the Society itself.

It was hoped, then, that the idea of association³ could be put to work in the economic sphere to guarantee lower prices. To have any effect the Society would need to attract wealthy and generous subscribers. Burgh also stressed that it would need to be organized democratically, a general committee to be elected from the membership. Every six months half of the general committee would retire and new elections held. Subscription money could not be diverted from its original purpose without the agreement of at least two-thirds of all the subscribers called to a

1. Burgh, Proposals, pp. 6-7.

2. Ibid., pp. 17-18.

3. On the application of the idea of association to politics see Parssinen, "Association, Convention and Anti-Parliament".

general meeting with adequate notice.

In the second place it was crucially important that the wealth of the country be distributed more evenly and utilised more usefully than at present. His views on the accumulation of wealth were clear:

No subject in any country ought to be exorbitantly rich. It is a thing of ill example, and excites unbounded desires, which lay men open to corruption.¹

Thus what was seen by many to be a necessary incentive to activity, and as such a corollary of progress, was feared by Burgh. "Would it be any great hardship", he asked, "if there was a law, that no British subject should have above 10,000 L. a year."² Rather than have a few very rich subjects it was always better to have several thousands enjoying competency and independence. It was also a question of useful production and employment. "Many thousands of hands would be usefully employed in agriculture and the manufacture, which are now driving people in coaches, chariots, and whiskies to bankruptcy".³ He proposed that the government follow the ancient republics and regulate wealth consumption as closely as possible. Taxes on amusements and unnecessary conveniences as well as campaigns against intemperance, gambling, public balls, theatricals and masquerades would all be appropriate. In all of these matters the government had a right and a duty to take an interest.⁴ "Statesmen", he wrote, "ought to keep as constant an eye upon the manners of their people, as the most prudent parents upon those of their children."⁵

In the third place Burgh saw the need to overhaul the system of

1. Burgh, Political Disquisitions, iii.118.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p. 97.

4. Ibid., chs. III-VIII.

5. Ibid., p. 159.

poor relief in the country. The problem, as he saw it, was that "even in this rich country, the number of those who have it not in their power, without strict care, constant labour, and secure parsimony, to save anything for old age, is very great".¹ By way of hand-outs, however, the poor were led to look upon industry and frugality as unnecessary. The preferred alternative was to put the poor to work, for example on re-developing the nation's waste lands. Burgh did say, however, that the state should support those who can no longer work because of old age. It would be necessary that payments not be given in the "present promiscuous way" but according to "behaviour through life".² It was important that local magistrates should keep an eye on the idle and debauched within their communities and draw up a register to be consulted when an individual applied for assistance.

Burgh's reformed Britain, then, would be one in which there was hard work, a considerable measure of equality and steady but unglamorous improvements in material standards. Ideally there would be a standard of material comfort beyond which no-one could go. He was willing to grant that the degree of equality and simplicity proposed for his utopia was unrealistic and inapplicable in modern conditions, but not that lessons could not be drawn from it and applied in a society experiencing economic progress. It was a question of ensuring that the social and economic, as well as the political, foundations were recognized. He claimed that a narrowly political radicalism which did not concern itself with the morals and manners of the people would insufficiently combat the forces of internal decay. Consequently he proposed limits on accumulation and a strict, regulatory framework around consumption and

1. Ibid., p. 225.

2. Ibid., p. 226.

social behaviour. What Burgh did not do, however, was make a case for modern, commercial society. Hard-working, sober and frugal farmers, merchants and manufacturers were applauded but the riches they were capable of producing were feared. At best he was a reluctant modernist, many attitudes and assumptions from an essentially static and agrarian utopianism informing his approach to the problems of modern society. It is necessary, therefore, to deal comprehensively with those radicals who saw modern, commercial society as necessary and progressive in the long march of human history.

CHAPTER 12: COMMERCIAL RADICALISM

In this thesis it has been argued that the most fundamental distinction between the radicals in relation to the questions of property and progress is that between agrarian and commercial radicalism. At the outer limits of agrarianism were the commitments to an equal distribution of land and small farms, the belief that trade, particularly foreign trade, should at best be only an appendage to a system based on self-sufficient localities, and a strong preference for small-scale artisanal manufacture. Large-scale, capital-intensive agriculture, modern manufacturing and an extensive system of trade and commerce, as well as the institution of wage labour and pattern of class inequality which came with the modern economy, were deeply offensive to the agrarians. They saw political reform, or revolution, as the precondition for the reversal of the modernising tendencies at work in the eighteenth century. The commercial radicals on the other hand embraced the ideals and institutions of modern commercial society, believing it to be a newer and higher phase in the progress of human history. Indeed many of them saw it, as the Scottish Historical School had done, as a new and necessary stage in human history. Therefore the central purpose of political reform, or revolution, was to remove the remaining obstacles to the full development of commercial civilisation. It should be noted, however, that the radical commitment to such a society and economy was not without its qualifications. Consequently it was also thought necessary to ensure that the commercial economy was placed on proper political social foundations so that it functioned to the benefit of all. On precisely what this meant there was disagreement. Consequently this chapter will deal with the issues which divided as well as those which united the commercial radicals.

I The Benefits - and Costs - of Commercial Civilization

The commercial radicals believed that if the modern economy could be freed from the oppressive systems of corruption and war, and made subject to wise, virtuous and cheap administration, there would be "immense overflowings of wealth".¹ Improvement, however, would not occur without adequate incentives. Economic activity needed to be removed from the straitjacket of localism and related to the developing system of commerce. As Joseph Priestley explained:

The only way to encourage agriculture is to excite other kinds of industry, affording a ready market for the exchange of corn for commodities; that is, to make it subservient to commerce.²

The belief implicit in the agrarian world-view - that the desire to procure mere subsistence without any view to superfluity would prove a sufficient motive for improvement - was specifically rejected by Priestley. Progress in trade and manufacturing was said to be essential if there was to be progress in the agricultural sector. The choice as he saw it was not between modernism and agricultural plenty but between modernism and an economy permanently in danger of famine.

For the same reasons the commercial radicals rejected the agrarian case for "equality" and "community". The objective for any programme of social and economic reform, they argued, should not be equality of property but equality of rights. Two arguments were advanced against the former. In the first place it was generally believed that any attempt to achieve equality of property would, in the words of John Thelwall, lead to "massacres and assassinations, equally destructive to the security of every order of mankind; and, after a long struggle of afflictions and

1. Cartwright, The People's Barrier, p. 47.

2. Priestley, Lectures on History and General Policy, p. 365.

horrors, must terminate at last, not in equalisation, but in a most iniquitous transfer, by which cut-throats and assassins would be enabled to found a new order of nobility, more insufferable, because more ignorant and ferocious than those whom their daggers had supplanted".¹ In the second place it was believed that "all just and fairly acquired distinctions of property" increase industry by giving incentives to the hard-working.² Unless such property was protected improvement would not be possible. Indeed it was thought natural and inevitable for property in a free society to be distributed unequally. As Thomas Paine wrote:

That property will ever be unequal is certain. Industry of talents, dexterity of management, extreme frugality, fortunate opportunities, or the opposite, or the mean of these things, will even produce that effect without having recourse to the harsh, ill-sounding names of avarice and oppression.³

What the commercial radicals sought was equality of rights or, as it would be put today, equality of opportunity. "It is one thing" explained John Thelwall, "to place a barrier round property; another to put property in the scale against the welfare, and the independence of the people".⁴ Any man, said Thelwall, "has as just a title to improve his faculties for himself and family as another."⁵ It was said to be the duty of the government to ensure that in "the race of life" all men start equal.⁶

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1. John Thelwall, Sober Reflections on the Seditious and Imflammatory Letter of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke ... (London, 1796), pp. 33-4.
 2. Thelwall, Tribune, iii.257.
 3. Paine, "Dissertation on the first Principles of Government", p. 14.
 4. Thelwall, Tribune, iii.256.
 5. Ibid., i.61.
 6. See the anonymously published pamphlet An Explanation of the Word Equality (n.p., n.d.). Sections of this were published as a handbill in Manchester in 1792. See Thomas Walker, A Review of Some of the Political Events which have occurred in Manchester ... (London, 1794), pp. 46-7. It was, argues Isaac Kramnick, the radical dissenters who

To go further than this in the direction of equality would lead to injustice and economic stagnation. It needs to be recognised, however, that there was much disagreement amongst the commercial radicals on what equality of rights implied for policy. In the case of Joseph Priestley the emphasis was placed on the security of property needed to guarantee progress whereas in John Thelwall's writings the emphasis was on the re-distribution necessary to equalise opportunities. Each carried into their general ideology of equality of rights different perceptions of what was possible and justifiable with respect to governmental action. These differences will be outlined in the next section of this chapter.

The first and foremost benefit attributed to modern commercial civilisation, therefore, was that it freed mankind from the poverty and insecurity which it was believed were necessarily associated with agrarian localism and all "levelling" doctrines. However, this was only the beginning of the case in relation to material improvement. Through the application of the division of labour and of science to industry a vast expansion of human productivity, well above that necessary to satisfy mankind's "basic" needs, was believed to be possible. It was thought perfectly natural that human beings should desire to improve their standard of living in this way. "No sooner do men find that they can subsist", wrote Priestley, "than they discover a desire to improve their situations, and increase their accommodations".¹ The vast expansion of human productivity was not only beneficial because of the material benefits which came with it but also because of the possibilities for all-round

popularized the metaphor of the race of life; "English Middle-Class Radicalism in the Eighteenth-Century", 13.

1. Priestley, Lectures on History and General Policy, p. 386.

improvement which it created. Wealth would become available, John Cartwright said, for the care of the aged, the infirm and the sick, for the construction of better canals, roads and bridges, and for "embellishing" every town upon the island with such noble works of architecture, painting and sculpture as dignified the free state of antiquity".¹ The commercial radicals saw the enrichment that would come with economic progress in communal as well as personal terms. They were not believers in what contemporary critics have called "consumerism".² Nor were they happy with the system - believed to be in existence - by which a wealthy few were maintained by the excessively hard work and poverty of the vast majority. The whole point of the modern economy was that it could bring improving standards of living to everyone, whether they were wage labourers or employers.³

Unlike the agrarians the commercial radicals also saw the modern society and economy as perfectly consistent with the new polity which they hoped to make of Britain. In the first place it was believed that commerce itself had helped in the process of liberation from feudal despotism by dispelling ignorance and undermining hereditary notions of status.⁴ If continued this process would do a great deal to undermine national prejudice and remove the causes of war. Joel Barlow explained:

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1. Cartwright, The People's Barrier, p. 47.
 2. Note John Thelwall's inclusion of communal as well as personal consumption in his defence of luxury: "I think it is a very good thing that a country should be adorned with splendid edifices, magnificent buildings, books to inform the mind, and divergences and indulgences to relax and soften it"; Tribune, ii.8.
 3. On the development of this attitude in eighteenth-century political economy see A.W. Coats, "Changing Attitudes to Labour in the Mid-Eighteenth Century", Economic History Review, 2nd Ser., XI (1958-59), 35-51.
 4. See esp. Thelwall, Tribune, iii.38-46.

Chivalry and hierarchy taught us to believe that all men who did not pay homage to the same monarch, or use the same mode of worship with ourselves, were our natural enemies, and ought to be extirpated. The spirit of commerce has brought us acquainted with those people; we find them to be like other men, and that they are really useful to us in supplying our wants. As their existence and their prosperity are found to be advantageous to us in a commercial point of view, we cease to regard them as enemies; and we refuse to go and kill them, unless we are hired to do it.¹

John Thelwall also took the view that the development of the factory system was "favourable to the diffusion of knowledge, and ultimately promotive of human liberty" because it brought large numbers of people together where they could communicate with one another. "Every large workshop and manufactory", he wrote, "is a sort of political society which no act of parliament can silence, and no magistrate disperse".² As a result of this it became increasingly difficult for governments to dictate to their peoples. All in all, then, the cause of peaceful and proper government was significantly encouraged by the extension of commercial activity.

In the second place it was believed that higher standards of living had a tendency, as John Thelwall put it, to "relax and soften" the human mind.³ Compared to "uncivilised and barbarous states", claimed Joseph

1. Barlow, Advice to the Privileged Orders, ii.58. See also Thomas Paine's, "Letter to the Abbé Raynal ... (1782), Complete Writings, ii.211-63.

2. Thelwall, Rights of Nature, i.18-19. Thelwall's argument closely resembles that of the Scottish reformer and political economist John Millar who described the political consequences of the development of trade and manufactures in these terms: "... there arise large bands of labourers or artificers, who by following the same employment, and by constant intercourse, are enabled with great rapidity, to communicate all their sentiments and passions. Among these there spring up leaders, who give a tone and direction to their companions. The strong encourage the feeble; the bold animate the timid; the resolute confirm the wavering; and the movements of the whole mass proceed with the uniformity of a machine, and with a force that is often irresistible."; "The Advancement of Manufactures, Commerce and the Arts", in William C. Lehmann, John Millar of Glasgow 1735-1801 (Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1960), p. 338.

3. Thelwall, Tribune, ii.8.

Priestley, wealthy states displayed a much greater "humanity of temper" and a "higher and juster sense of honour".¹ It became possible, therefore, to imagine an open and more democratic society in which the "will of all" and "human reason" were in natural harmony. Underneath such thinking was the Smithian assumption that there was an underlying human impetus for improvement. Should that natural desire be restricted mankind would become melancholic (at best) or aggravated (at worst). The attempt to place human beings within a rigidly defined moral framework was thought to be impossible without an unacceptable degree of tyranny, and destructive of the civility which made for the proper working of an open society. Priestley was also contemptuous of the belief that luxury made men more cowardly and effeminate. In fact, he said, because the people are well nourished and have something to defend they display more spirit and courage than those living without superfluities. In no way, therefore, would there be a decline in the capacity of a wealthy country to defend itself should the necessity arise.² It was believed, of course, that as commercial civilisation spread the frequency of international conflict would be reduced. Eventually a world would be created in which warfare was completely absent.³

Even the strongest supporters of commercial society recognised that it contained tendencies which, if unchecked, would significantly undermine its benefits for mankind. In the first place, noted Joseph Priestley, there was the danger that the calculating mentality which went with

1. Priestley, Lectures on History and General Policy, p. 419.

2. Ibid. See also pp. 128-30 of this thesis.

3. See Joseph Priestley, A Sermon preached at the Gravel Pit Meeting in Hackney ... (London, 1793). According to Priestley wars had a role to play in "God's Design" so long as mankind was still in its "state of childhood and youth"; ibid., pp. 10-11.

commerce would overtake the personality and "estrangle the mind from the sentiments of generosity, and lead to a sordid avarice".¹ Capital cities were said to have a tendency to exacerbate this problem:

When persons who have wealth at their command live together, they are constantly and unavoidably actuated by a spirit of emulation to go beyond one another, in every article of extravagance and expence.²

There was always, then, the possibility that legitimate self-interest could be transformed into greed. They conceived of greed as a potentiality which could be curbed rather than as a fact of life which had to be accepted if a commercial economy came to prominence.

In the second place, Priestley saw great dangers inherent in the situation of the manufacturing labouring class. They were, he said, taught nothing besides "their particular art or trade" and, without any leisure, they had little means of acquiring general knowledge. What spare time they had was spent in the alehouse "wholly improvident with respect to futurity, in this life or another". The danger was that the workers would become a "mob"; ignorant, unprincipled, profane, improvident, licentious and "disposed to every species of violence short of murder".³ Given the existence of such a class, liberty and order would always be under threat, especially if there were "over-grown fortunes" which excited a spirit of envy, emulation and ambition.⁴ The commercial radicals believed that political reform (or revolution) was necessary not only to complete the process of modernisation that had begun but also to tackle the problems

1. Priestley, Lectures on History and General Policy, p. 387.

2. Ibid., p. 422.

3. Priestley, An Appeal to the Public on the Subject of the Riots, Part II, pp. vii-viii.

4. Priestley, Lectures on History and General Policy, p. 421.

associated with commercial society. No other political system could guarantee that it be done properly or fairly. The case for political reform (revolution), then, was not to hold up economic progress but to make it possible and acceptable.

II Proper Foundations for Commerce: The Meaning of "Equality of Rights"

a. Smithian Radicals

The best governments, argued Joseph Priestley, are those in which the people are left with valuable private rights and in which the laws are known to everyone and administered fairly. Political liberty was defensible only insofar as it was a means to civil liberty.¹ Governments, therefore, needed to limit their functions to three major areas:

- (i) defence from external aggression;
- (ii) the administration of justice; and
- (iii) the erection of public works useful to the whole, and to posterity, which would be neglected by private enterprise.²

Priestley saw political reform, if qualified in the right ways, as the necessary precondition for the sweeping away of the oppressive and expensive state structure which, he claimed, had developed in eighteenth-century Britain. Once this was achieved the market would be able to work in accord with principles outlined by Adam Smith.

"Individuals", said Priestley, "when left to themselves are, in general, sufficiently provident and will daily better their circumstances".³

1. Priestley, Essay on the First Principles of Government, pp. 54-5.

2. Priestley, Lectures on History and General Policy, pp. 272-73. Priestley acknowledged that Adam Smith was a primary source for his Lectures. His treatment of the role of the state is virtually identical to that of Smith. See Adam Smith, An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations ed. E. Cannan (1776; Chicago, Univ. of Chicago Press, 1967), Book V, ch. 1.

3. Priestley, Lectures on History and General Policy, p. 360.

Consequently he advocated the abolition of all bounties on the export of corn (which, he said, sacrificed the interests of the consumer to those of the producer) all apprenticeship laws which restricted freedom of entry into a trade,¹ the Poor Laws,² and all regulation of usury.³ He also looked forward to the day when the Navigation Acts, said to be necessary when they were introduced, could be repealed.⁴ For the free market to work properly and in the interests of the people Priestley also thought it necessary to free trade from the influence of the chartered companies⁵ and agriculture from the influence of primogeniture and entail.⁶ Like Adam Smith Priestley saw primogeniture both as a means of "power and protection" within feudal society and as an obstacle to agricultural improvement.⁷ He rejected the argument that, on the death of an individual, all property should go to the state to be distributed according to degrees of consanguinity. As an alternative Priestley proposed the following:

Let every person ... bequeath his property to those persons in whose wisdom he can most confide, but not pretend to direct them in circumstances which he will never know, and therefore cannot judge of.⁸

This would preserve the security of property and, hopefully, make for a more efficient allocation of land through the generations.

1. Ibid., p. 376.

2. Ibid., pp. 279-81.

3. Ibid., p. 412.

4. Ibid., p. 392.

5. Ibid., pp. 393-94. "Private or separate traders are universally known to take more pains, and to manage more frugally, than companies can, or ever will be able to"; ibid., p. 394.

6. Ibid., pp. 394-5.

7. See Smith, Wealth of Nations, pp. 407-11.

8. Priestley, Lectures on History and General Policy, p. 279.

John Cartwright held similar views about the necessity of a free market in a progressive society.¹ Property, he said (in a defence of opposition to primogeniture) should be "as free as WATER". He explained why this was so in the following way:

Water accumulates wherever receptacles detain the descending rains; it frequently overflows, and causes great but temporary inequalities; but by the operation of necessary causes, it constantly tends to its more regular divisions of seas, lakes and rivers; no less then to rivulets, brooks, rills and dews; and by its natural circulation, throughout the regions of the earth, sea and air, it refreshes and preserves all nature in health and beauty. Similar are the proper effects, in political society, when PROPERTY is left to take its uncontrouled circulation.²

The argument had been articulated clearly by Adam Smith. With a free market equality is encouraged because the rich tend to become inactive and indolent whilst the poorer members of society are permanently active and anxious to improve their situation. The existence of a free market guaranteed that the lazy are penalised and hard-working rewarded.³

Cartwright did note that "at the distance of many centuries" the globe would be "stocked with inhabitants equal to its means of support". At this point he expected God to intervene and prevent any calamities that would come with over-population. Indeed he expected a new era to dawn: "And this consideration may add some strength to the prophecy, which

1. With Osborne we can agree that Cartwright "looked at politics from the point of view of the landed gentry"; John Cartwright, p. 164. However, Osborne stresses too much the backward-looking qualities of Cartwright's thought. Cartwright was a typical, eighteenth-century progress-minded landowner who saw no contradiction between his "Anglo-Saxonism" and his belief in a modern economy. On the progressive landowners see esp. Harold Perkin, The Origins of Modern English Society 1780-1880 (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), chs. 1-3.
2. Cartwright, Commonwealth in Danger, pp. ci-cii.
3. See Smith, Wealth of Nations, pp. 360-71. With Smith, Priestley and Cartwright also saw public prodigality as more of a danger than private prodigality.

intimates that time shall have an end, meaning that portion of eternity which commenced, and shall end, with the arrangements made for the accommodation of man on earth, is to be succeeded by some great change in nature".¹

A reformed polity would have a great impact on the economy, not only by freeing it from government regulation, but also by removing the superstructure of corruption, waste and war which was diverting labour and capital from their most productive uses and placing a heavy burden of taxation on the shoulders of the middling orders and labouring poor. In the present system, estimated Priestley, two-thirds of the fruits of industry went to the government.² With the emergence of cheap and honest government - the possibility of which had been shown in the American case - this money could return to the people in the form of both lower taxes and socially beneficial expenditure. Low levels of taxation were thought to be essential to the proper working of a commercial economy. Priestley believed that the needs of government would be best met by moderate taxes on consumption rather than possessions, as the latter opened the door "to all kinds of oppression and cruelty". He also argued that "the fewer particulars are liable to be inspected in a free state the better". It was thought preferable to restrict taxation to luxuries as they did not raise the price of the necessities.³ With Priestley's assessment of taxes on property, Cartwright was in complete agreement. Taxation of capital and confiscation, he wrote, were exactly the same thing.⁴ The most

1. Cartwright, Commonwealth in Danger, p. xcix.

2. Priestley, On the General Principles of Government, p. 4.

3. Priestley, Lectures on History and General Policy, pp. 501, 502, 503, 506.

4. Cartwright, Life and Correspondence, ii.33.

important thing was to ensure a low tax regime. Of necessity this would also require an end to the national debt.¹

Both Priestley and Cartwright also believed that part of the surplus released could be put to socially beneficial uses. As noted earlier in the chapter, Cartwright supported expenditure on social welfare, for the sick, aged and infirm, on the country's transport system and on "noble works of architecture, painting and sculpture".² In respect to social welfare, the indications are that Cartwright wished to see an end to the state system and an expansion of the principles of private charity and self-help. For example, on Brothertoft Farm, where he built a textile mill in 1788, he provided housing for the workers and had them set up a friendly society to provide for their needs in times of stress and unemployment and medical care for themselves and their families.³ In a later tract, he wrote that in a reformed Britain "unmerited want would not be suffered to depress an English heart; nor disease be permitted to enter the cottage door, without medical skill treading on his heels".⁴

The case for self-help was developed most comprehensively by Joseph Priestley. Indeed, when he was setting up his textile mill, Cartwright specifically asked for a copy of Priestley's tract on pension funds.⁵ In

1. Of all the radicals Priestley gave the most balanced view of the National Debt, noting its advantages to a state in times of need and the danger that it would lead to high taxes and eventually the threat of national bankruptcy. The only long-lasting solution would be the creation of peaceful relations between countries; Lectures on History and General Policy, Lecture LXIV.
2. See above p. 212.
3. For details see Naomi H. Churgin, "Major John Cartwright: A Study in Radical Parliamentary Reform 1774-1824" (Columbia Univ. Ph.D. thesis. 1963), pp. 14-16.
4. Cartwright, Letter to the Electors of Nottingham, p. 58.
5. Priestley, An Account of a Society, for encouraging the Industrious Poor.

this tract, Priestley argued against the Poor Law which he saw as a temptation to idleness and profligacy and, as such, "a debasement of human nature". It was to be preferred, he said, to get back into "the plain path of nature and of Providence" and make it necessary for every man to look after himself and family, with the "humanity of individuals" stepping in to relieve those wants which could not have been foreseen. He recommended a law which would make it compulsory for persons with property of less than fifty pounds to pay a portion of their wages into a fund which they could draw upon in times of need.¹ For such a scheme to work, it was said to be essential that wages be high enough to allow for comfortable subsistence and savings. In a progressive economy without any restrictions on the labour market, this could be guaranteed.

Another radical who emphasized self-help and self-education amongst the labouring community was John Bone, a one-time members of the L.C.S.² He advocated the establishment of a national contributory fund to be augmented by the rich and charitable. The fund was to be managed by directors elected by the subscribers themselves, relief to be paid in proportion to contributions.³ He also proposed extending the scheme to include accommodation for the aged and retired, a school and a trade school, an inn, public bath and a bank - all to be situated in premises to be known as "Tranquillity".⁴ Bone believed that such schemes would make

1. Ibid., pp. 7, 11-15.

2. In 1795 Bone took a division of the L.C.S. with him to form the London Reform Society. This Society argued for political reform, self-help and self-education. See Report of the Committee of the London Reforming Society ... (London, 1795) and Address and Regulations of the London Reforming Society ... (London, n.d.).

3. See John Bone, Outline of a Plan for Reducing the Poor Rate ... (London, 1805), pp. 26-52.

4. John Bone, Principles and Regulations of Tranquillity ... (London, 1806).

state-provided relief, wage regulation and labourers' combinations unnecessary. "The doctrine of my motto is", he explained, "LET THE PEOPLE ALONE".¹ It was thought crucial, however, that the labour market be free so that the labourers received the full product of their efforts. Only this would allow them to finance schemes for self-help and self-education.

The creation of friendly societies was part of Priestley's plan for the removal of all temptations to idleness, extravagance and vice from the labouring poor. As well as the encouragement of self-help, the government could legitimately suppress all supernumerary alehouses and provide a basic education in reading and writing for the labourers. All of this could do much to counter the adverse effects of the division of labour on the individual and encourage a spirit of ambition and industry. Any costs involved would be small as there would be savings in the administration of the law as the behaviour of the poor improved.² Priestley also advocated public expenditure on waste land conversion so that small plots could be made available to the poor,³ and on the maintenance of granaries, to be opened when shortages forced the price of grain to unacceptably high levels.⁴ However, in spite of all these expected changes in the position and attitude of the poor, Priestley still deemed it necessary to ensure that "those who have the poorest prospects in life" are "taught contentment in their station, and a firm belief in the wisdom and goodness of Providence, that has so disposed of them".⁵ With such sentiments,

1. Bone, Wants of the People, p. 6.

2. Priestley, An Account of a Society for encouraging the Industrious Poor, p. 17.

3. Priestley, Letters to the Right Honourable Edmund Burke, p. 118.

4. Priestley, Lectures on History and General Policy, p. 367.

5. Priestley, Miscellaneous Observations Relating to Education, p. 129. In this tract, Priestley divided British society into three groups: the Rich (those with rank and fortune), the Middling Classes (those

Cartwright was clearly in agreement. He believed that the granting of voting rights to the poor consoled them in their poverty by making them "citizens" of the state.¹ Both wanted to remove the most basic obstacles to social equality and inter-class mobility in eighteenth century Britain, but neither expected nor desired a drastic re-structuring of social and economic relationships. It was essential, therefore, that each class "know its place" within the society. For the rich and powerful, this meant understanding that sobriety and virtue were essential. "Being freed from a necessity of attending to their own immediate wants", wrote Priestley, "they are under the greater obligation to attend to the wants of others".² He stressed that there are no absolute rights of property or power. For commercial society to work it was essential that the upper class was "early" and "deeply" educated to the principles of integrity, honour and religion.³

Priestley's and Cartwright's views may be summarized in the following way. They wished to see the gap between the upper and middle classes reduced by freeing the economic system from the corruption and artificial restraints which propped up the former at the expense of the labouring and middle classes. However, whilst they wished to see the condition of the labouring class significantly improved, they did not wish to alter its position in relation to the middle class. Within such a

with some degree of art and skill, those with enough money to train themselves into a profession and those with sufficient wealth not to need a trade or profession) and the Lowest Classes (the "mere labourers" without any skills).

1. Cartwright, Commonwealth in Danger, pp. 88-89.
2. Priestley, Miscellaneous Observations Relating to Education, p. 114.
3. Priestley, Lectures on History and General Policy, p. 423. There is an excellent account of Priestley's views on rank and equality in Leslie, "Social and Political Thought of Joseph Priestley", ch. VI.

system, individuals should be free to rise, but beyond the institution of a system of basic education and the provision of some land, the state needed to do little to make that rise possible. Indeed the whole point of such reforms was to secure the labouring poor within the context of inequality. This being the case it was important that each class be educated to its position in society - the richest to benevolence and integrity and the poorest to sobriety and hard work.¹ Without such a moral framework, it was feared that the tendencies mentioned in the last section - greed on the part of the rich and rebelliousness and licentiousness on the part of the poor - would have full play. Any talk of "levelling" was severely criticised.

Because of the beneficent effects of the new, commercial system, the standards of life of all would be subject to constant improvement and a new era of peace and prosperity would emerge. "Now only", wrote Priestley, "can we expect to see what men really are and what they can do ... how glorious then is the prospect, the reverse of all the past, that is now opening upon us and upon the world".² It would not, however, be a utopia without inequality or hard work. Nor would it work without proper attention to good government and the education of the people along Christian lines. With political reform added it would very much be an economy and society such as Adam Smith desired.³

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1. At this point it is worth remembering that Cartwright expected the common people to respect the special talents of their "betters" when it came to electing representatives and Priestley wished to restrict the vote to those with some degree of property and education so that each man would have an incentive to self-improvement.
 2. Priestley, Letters to the Right Honourable Edmund Burke, p. 237.
 3. See D.A. Reisman, Adam Smith's Sociological Economics (London, Croom Helm, 1976), ch. 7.

b. Artisan Radicals

Like Priestley and Cartwright, Thomas Paine and John Thelwall saw the first consequences of political reform to be the institution of cheap and honest government, the reduction of the overall level of taxation and the beginning of peaceful relations between nations. They, too, were advocates of the system of free trade and economic liberty, believing it to be productive of great material improvement and international harmony. "It is", said Paine, "a pacific system, operating to cordialize mankind, by rendering nations, as well as individuals, useful to each other."¹ However, to properly guarantee peace between nations, he also thought it necessary to take positive steps towards international co-operation and disarmament.² Paine's enthusiasm for contemporary developments in manufacturing, was also clear. In 1789, whilst in England, he wrote to Jefferson: "I have been to see the cotton mills - the potteries - the steel furnaces, tinsplate manufacture - white lead manufacture - all these things might easily be carried on in America."³ Without doubt he was an enthusiast for the modern economy and society.

In Thelwall's case, an early publication - The Peripatetic - indicated a leaning towards agrarian romanticism and hostility to commerce. Indeed, he specifically connected the latter with war, luxury and inequality:

Commerce! thou doubtful, and thou
partial good!
'Tis true by thee we swell to Wealth
and Power
.....

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1. Paine, Rights of Man, p. 234.
 2. See Clark's "Introduction" to Thomas Paine: Representative Selections, pp. xcvi-c.
 3. Paine, Writings, iv.101. There is no better account of the nature and development of Paine's social and economic philosophy than Foner, Tom Paine and Revolutionary America.

But then by thee - (with grief to
 muse records it)
 Oft by thee
 War, savage War; too, lifts his
 brazen voice

 'Tis thine, too, Commerce, throu' thy
 native land
 To pour, wide-wasting, like
 a deluge, round
 The poison'd stream of luxury,
 rank polluted!
 The monster breeding Nile of
 hideous vice
 Thou, Commerce, too, monopolizing
 fiend!
 Fatten'st a few upon the toils of
 all.¹

However, after 1795, it was not commercial society as such which he
 attacked, but the particular form it took in eighteenth-century Britain.
 Enclosures, so long as they were conducted on "fair and honest principles",
 were to be supported as they raised agricultural productivity.² On his
 "pedestrian tour" of 1797, Thelwall also noted that factories were not
 necessarily "common prison-houses". He pointed to the newest and largest
 factories with up-to-date machinery and good wages and housing for their
 workers.³ With an end to monopoly influence and arbitrary restriction
 foreign trade could be transformed into the fair exchange of items for
 which there was a mutual need.⁴

For both Paine and Thelwall, however, the aim of a radical govern-
 ment would not simply be to ensure that the path was cleared for the
 development of a commercial economy but to guarantee that the burdens and

1. Thelwall, Peripatetic, i.38-9.

2. Thelwall, Tribune, ii.45.

3. See Charles Cestre, John Thelwall: A Pioneer of Democracy and Social Reform during the French Revolution (London, Swan Sonnenschein, 1906), pp. 163-6.

4. Thelwall, Tribune, iii.38-46.

benefits were distributed according to the principles of social justice. According to them this required more active government intervention than was thought desirable by either Priestley or Cartwright. Paine and Thelwall articulated the more radical assumptions about rank and equality held by the popularly-based societies which had emerged in the 1790s.¹ To legitimize a modern society and economy measures had to be introduced to offset the pattern of monopoly that had emerged not only at the centre of political but also social and economic life. "A revolution in the state of civilization", wrote Paine, "is the necessary companion of revolutions in the system of government".²

Paine directed his attention to the system of taxation and expenditure. There had been a long history of argument about these matters within radical circles. As early as 1771 Obadiah Hulme had argued that all taxes ought to be paid by the property of a state; both fixed (all lands and houses) and moveable (all money and merchandise) to be included in the assessment. It was also important, he said, to ensure that a proper balance existed between taxes on fixed and moveable property. In eighteenth-century Britain landowner control of Parliament had allowed an unfair shift of the tax burden from the land.³ In his Rights of Man. Part II Paine claimed that a republican system of government

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1. See James Walvin, "English Democratic Societies and Popular Radicalism, 1791-1800" (Univ. of York, D.Phil. thesis 1969), esp. ch. 5. The policy implications of the L.C.S. social and economic philosophy can be clearly seen in Parkinson, Revolutions Without Bloodshed; The London Corresponding Society's Addresses and Regulations (London, 1792), pp. 12-16; and London Corresponding Society, "Address to the Nation" in A Narrative of the Proceedings at the General Meeting of the London Corresponding Society ... (London, 1797), pp. 12-26.
 2. Paine, "Agrarian Justice", p. 202.
 3. Hulme, Historical Essay on the English Constitution, ch. X.

would lead to a reduction of six million pounds in the expenses of government as honesty and peace replaced corruption and war.¹ It would be possible, therefore, to entirely abolish the poor rates (and the inhuman system of poor relief which went with them), the tax on houses and windows and the commutation tax. These taxes could be replaced by a new progressive tax on incomes from property. Not only would it help distribute the burden of taxation more fairly, but it would undermine "the unnatural law of primogeniture" by making it unprofitable to keep large estates. He also proposed a new progressive tax on the interest paid to stockholders and the lessening of public taxes in the same proportion as the interest was diminished.

Even with the reductions in taxation the existing system, plus the new tax, would produce a surplus of revenue which could be put to productive use. He proposed, as H.H. Clark has described it, "an elaborate system of state aids and pensions at all the critical periods in the lives of the masses".² Paine's own summary of the plan is as follows:

- (i) Provision for two hundred and fifty-two thousand poor families
- (ii) Education for one million and thirty thousand children³
- (iii) Comfortable provisions for one hundred and forty thousand aged persons
- (iv) Donations of twenty shillings each for fifty thousand births
- (v) Donation of twenty shillings each for twenty thousand marriages
- (vi) Allowance of twenty thousand pounds for the funeral expenses of persons dying at a distance from their family and friends
- (vii) Employment, at all times, for the casual poor in the cities of London and Westminster.

1. Paine, Rights of Man, p. 260.

2. Clark, "Introduction" to Thomas Paine: Representative Selections, p. xciii.

3. Money was to be given to the parents for this purpose but it was important, Paine added, to see that ministers of religion in each parish certify that the parents did not mis-spend their grants; Rights of Man, p. 263.

Paine calculated that the total cost of these expenditures would come to four million pounds, well within the reach of a reformed government.¹ By such expenditures Paine hoped to realize two objectives: firstly, the banishment of poverty without any loss of dignity or independence for the individual and, secondly, the banishment of ignorance from the rising generation. Education for the youth of the nation would not only lead to a reduction of poverty in the future, but would guarantee that those with "natural genius" could progress in a manner consistent with their talents.²

In Agrarian Justice different means were proposed to achieve the same objectives.³ Paine wrote of the need for the creation of a National Fund which would make a lump sum payment to every person when they reached twenty-one years of age and per annum payments to every person fifty years and over. This would be paid for by an inheritance tax on all property, personal as well as landed. Such a tax and such payments were a recognition of the fact that "the earth, in its natural uncultivated state, was and ever would have continued to be, the COMMON PROPERTY OF THE HUMAN RACE".⁴ Even though the shift to private property was necessary because it made economic progress possible, human beings never lost their right to an equal share of the land in its natural state. By taxing property, the community would be merely returning to itself the "natural inheritance" which had been absorbed by the private owners. By making payments to the young and old, it would ensure that the right of all to subsistence and

1. Ibid., pp. 262-69.

2. Ibid., p. 263.

3. In this tract Paine made it clear that he was attempting to steer a path between the agrarian communism of Gracchus Babeuf and the conservative defenders of the status quo. It was written in Paris in the winter of 1795-6.

4. Paine, "Agrarian Justice", p. 183.

equal opportunities was guaranteed.¹ He proposed a tax on all forms of property and not just land for two reasons: firstly, because he believed that a portion of any person's property was the result of "society" rather than individual exertion and, secondly, because "the accumulation of personal property is, in many instances, the effects of paying too little for the labour that produced it".² Once again he defended his reforms on the grounds that they would secure everyone against poverty and ensure that every "man or woman born in the Republic" inherited some means of "beginning the world".³

According to John Thelwall, the community had a duty to put the necessities of life, some comforts and a tolerable degree of leisure within the reach of all its citizens.⁴ Through cheap government and lower taxes, the middling orders and labouring poor would make immediate gains. Like the other radicals he was also opposed to the practice of primogeniture:

... if there is such a thing as a principle of descent, growing out of the nature and foundations of property, it is this - that the property acquired by the industry of the parents, should descend to those whom the passions of such parents have brought into an appropriated world.⁵

Like Paine and Priestley he also proposed the abolition of the poor laws.

1. A similar argument had been developed earlier by "Philander" (the radical dissenter John Aiken). He argued that those unemployed due to age or sickness had a right to relief because they acquiesced to a system of private property which took away from some the right of access to land - in the interests of greater productivity. He stressed that the unemployed had a right not just to subsistence but to that standard of comfort acceptable at the time; "Humane Thoughts on the Rights and Comforts of the Poor", Gentleman's Magazine, LVIII (1788), 40-41.
2. Paine, "Agrarian Justice", p. 200.
3. Ibid., p. 203.
4. Thelwall, Rights of Nature, i.16.
5. Ibid., ii.111. See also Hodgson, Commonwealth of Reason, pp. 21-2, 73-4 and Macaulay, Loose Remarks, pp. 36-7. According to Macaulay it was the failure of the Roman Republic to adequately tackle inequality which explained its subversion.

"Would it not be more just and more wise", he asked, "to put the great mass of the people upon such a footing as to enable them to maintain themselves and their families by their own labour?".¹ Consequently he argued for a massive programme of waste land development financed from part of the surplus released by cheap government. Such land could then be parcelled out in lots of eighty or one hundred acres and would be adequate compensation for any losses as a result of enclosure. He estimated that 50,000 families could benefit from such a policy. Thelwall also noted that in the interest of lower rents, increased competition and more social equality, the placing of an upper limit of two hundred acres on farm size would be worthy of consideration by a reformed parliament.²

Central to Thelwall's thinking was also the idea that the whole relationship between capital and labour needed to be changed. Labour should, he said, receive a share of the product not merely equal to that which is necessary to support him and his family but "proportionate to the profits of the employer". In other words, a portion of what had come to be regarded as the rightful property of employers should pass to the workers. Employers should remember, he wrote, that without labour capital "could never be productive".³ To this end, he advocated the abolition of all laws which forbade workers from combining to bargain for higher wages and better conditions of work.⁴ The economic status of the working people would improve not only through the right to bargain being guaranteed, but also because the encouragement of agriculture would make available

1. Thelwall, Tribune, ii.353.

2. Ibid., ii.67.

3. Thelwall, Rights of Nature, ii.80. See also Dyer, Complaints of the Poor People of England, p. 74.

4. See also Paine, Rights of Man, p. 279. Only William Hodgson argued positively for the need for minimum wage legislation; Commonwealth of Reason, pp. 74-75.

an independent way of life for many who currently lacked any choice. Consequently, it would no longer be possible for employers to disregard the interests of their labourers. The terms of the compact between employer and labourer would come to be determined, not by the power of the former and the wretchedness of the latter, "but by the reason of the thing, and the rules of moral justice."¹

Finally, Thelwall advocated the establishment by the state of schools for the education of all. The thinking behind this plan was not that it compensated for the ignorance which came with excessive specialization, (Priestley), but that it provided a framework for equal opportunities:

The labourer has a right ... to maintain himself and a family in decency and plenty, and to give his children such an education as, according to the state of society, may be requisite to enable them, if they should have the virtue and the talent, to improve their condition and mount to their intellectual level, though it should be² from the lowest to the very highest station of society.

Thelwall wished to see a society in which there were "imperceptible gradations of rank, where step rises above step by slow degrees, and link mingles with link in intimate and cordial union".³ Like Paine he thought it important that the inequalities which existed should be related to contributions of some sort and that all should have the chance to reach that level commensurate with their "virtue and talent".

Paine and Thelwall are to be distinguished from Priestley and Cartwright, then, in that they advocated a more fundamental uplifting of the rights and opportunities of the labouring class within commercial society. They did not wish, however, to infringe the principle of

1. Thelwall, Rights of Nature, ii.80.

2. Ibid., ii.81. For a detailed plan of national education see Hodgson, Commonwealth of Reason, pp. 86-95.

3. Thelwall, Tribune, ii.66.

private property and undermine the position of the independent middle class, recognised by both groups of men to be a crucial group within a progressive economy.¹ They believed that the re-structuring proposed for Britain would simply be at the expense of "monopoly power" in trade, commerce and manufacturing. Indeed, despite the proposals for tax reform and social welfare (Paine) and for land reform and a re-structuring of the capital-labour relationship (Thelwall), they still believed that plentiful incentives for progress existed. They also applauded the free market economy: Thelwall arguing, as part of his case against the poor laws, that "the love of freedom" was an instinct "implanted in every breast".² It was believed, however, that the only way to truly secure a modern economy was to ensure that the proper balance between equality, liberty and inequality was found.³ By implication they claimed that Adam Smith was too concerned to protect the accumulation process and that Thomas Spence went too far in the direction of equality.

In the case of Thelwall, one more point also needs to be made. He always qualified his opposition to equality of property, as opposed to equality of rights, by saying that it was only impossible or undesirable given the current state of opinion and intellect. In the present period, he wrote, the society in which there were imperceptible gradations of rank was a perfectly practicable substitute for the "golden age of equality".⁴ This always left open the possibility that even more fundamental changes might be on the agenda in the future. What he did not do, however, was make

1. For this very reason Thomas Spence was highly critical of their politics; The Meridian Sun of Liberty, pp. 2-4.

2. Thelwall, Tribune, ii.353.

3. See Paine, "Agrarian Justice", p. 201 and Thelwall, Tribune, iii. 256.

4. Ibid., ii.66.

any utopian projections. Thelwall was, as B.S. Allen has noted, a political activist whose procedure was "dictated by his interest in practical measures and a policy of wise caution".¹ Thus, on the question of whether or not commercial society would ultimately be replaced by a new and "higher" form of civilization, despite its progressive role in the current era, Thelwall remained silent. Interestingly, Joel Barlow, a committed commercial republican, noted that the time may come when "it shall be more congenial to the social nature of man to exclude the idea of separate property". On introducing this avenue of thought he immediately closed it off by noting that "it is not my intention in this work to enter upon that enquiry".² Indeed none of the radicals did and it was left to the nineteenth-century socialists to argue that while the commercial economy and society was necessary in the progress of humankind it would ultimately be transcended by a higher form of civilization based on common property. The agrarians, of course, would have asked why it was necessary to suffer all the evils of modernity when steps towards a better society could be taken immediately.

If we can speak of a "bourgeois" or "liberal" variety of radicalism this chapter has outlined the sense in which it was so. It involved a commitment to economic progress and a defence of the institutions thought necessary to procure it. The existing state was pictured as an unproductive and de-stabilising superstructure whose destruction would pave the way for economic progress and social justice. Some thought the preservation of a good measure of "mix" in the constitution would be necessary to

1. B.S. Allen, "William Godwin's Influence upon John Thelwall", Publications of the Modern Language Association of America, XXXVII (1922), 679. Thelwall, wrote E.P. Thompson, only took Jacobinism "to the borders of Socialism", Making of the English Working Class, p. 175.

2. Barlow, Advice to the Privileged Orders, ii.6-7.

ensure that equality did not overbalance liberty and undermine economic progress whilst others, most notably Thomas Paine, linked together in an uncompromising way the ideas (and ideals) of democratic republicanism and commercial liberty. An economy based on economically independent agents, be they wage labourers or capitalists, was thought to provide a suitable framework for the universalization of political rights. Indeed the replacement of corruption with honesty and accountability in politics and of aristocratic patronage with market forces in economics was thought to make possible the proper exercise of citizenship.¹

It has been emphasized, however, that the precise "class perceptions", that is to say perceptions of the legitimacy and continuing relevance of social and economic inequalities, held by the commercial radicals did differ and that these differences can be related to the changing composition of the movement in the 1790s. The popularly-based radical societies of the 1790s made a claim not only for the widening of the political nation but for the loosening of the boundaries between the classes. This made for tension within the wider movement which still contained many who saw hierarchy and deference, albeit modified, as necessary to stability and progress. Such tension has already been noted in relation to the political demands of the radicals. The fact is that the commitment of many of the radicals to the general and abstract ideals such as "liberty" and "equality" was significantly qualified when it came to concrete political practice. This can also be shown in relation to arguments about the means by which the new constitution and society were to be achieved.

1. See esp. Brewer, "English Radicalism in the Age of George III", pp. 345-9.

PART IV: TRANSITION

CHAPTER 13: THE ENGLISH WAY TO POLITICAL REFORMATION

For most of the radicals political reform was viewed as the basis of other reforms, social and economic. They believed, therefore, that the efforts of the movement should be concentrated on securing representation for the people in the Commons and independence for that democratically elected half of the legislature. Certainly, they supported campaigns, for example against the Test and Corporation Acts and the slave trade, which sought reform within the existing political system, but were critical of those who thought substantial results could be achieved without radical reform of that system. For example, George Dyer estimated that, at most, improvements in the civil and criminal code would be possible given the constitution as it was then structured.¹ The belief, held by the agrarian reformers William Ogilvie and Charles Hall, that the established rulers would see the need for reform and act accordingly was thought to be totally unrealistic.² Political reformation, then, was seen as the primary task as it alone could pave the way both for cheap and honest government and for social and economic reform.

Once a specific radical tendency had emerged in the 1770s, which took organizational form as the Society for Constitutional Information, a

1. Dyer, Complaints of the Poor People, pp. 90-1.

2. Both Ogilvie and Hall recognized that the rich and powerful had an interest in upholding the system but expected them to institute reforms when they were "informed of the evils they perhaps unknowingly occasion" (Hall, Effects of Civilization, p. 233). For them it was chiefly a question of "enlightenment". See also D.C. Macdonald, "Biographical Notes on William Ogilvie" in Birthright Land (London, Kegan, French and Trübner, 1891), pp. 143-9.

clearly defined position on the problems of transition began to crystallise. It was seen as the English way to political reform and its chief theorists were James Burgh, John Cartwright and John Jebb.¹ In the 1790s, when radicalism took on a plebeian as well as a middle-class appearance and when many radicals thought they were on the eve of a decisive breakthrough, adherence to the strategy worked out in the earlier years was maintained by the central figures in the movement such as John Cartwright, John Thelwall and Joseph Gerrald. It was believed that such a strategy would make it possible for the radicals to achieve reform without revolution. By "revolution" they meant two things: firstly, a complete re-structuring of the political system along democratic republican lines and, secondly, a direct and insurrectionary challenge to the existing system by the forces of reform that would lead almost inevitably to civil war. The two were placed together as it was believed that it would be impossible to achieve democratic republican, as opposed to radical reformist, objectives without a revolutionary struggle. This was also said to apply to those versions of social and economic radicalism which infringed the principle of private property. A central aim of the radical reformers was to see to it that the revolutionary option was kept in reserve only. They clearly distinguished between the politics of pressure and the politics of revolution.²

I The Dangers of Revolution

As has been shown the radicals believed that sovereignty ultimately

1. See E.C. Black, The Association: British Extraparliamentary Organization 1769-1793 (Cambridge Mass., Harvard Univ. Press, 1963), ch. 5.

2. For a particularly useful overview of the personnel, activities and ideas of the 1790s see M.I. Thomis and P. Holt, Threats of Revolution in Britain 1789-1848 (London, Macmillan, 1977), ch. 1.

resided in the body of the people. Political powers and privileges could be justified only by reference to "the common welfare" and what this entailed in concrete, institutional terms could only be found by reference to "the sense of the nation". The right of the people to associate and seek fundamental, constitutional reform was both a natural and historical right derived from Anglo-Saxon theory and practice. In the last instance this right extended to revolution. This was confirmed, claimed John Thelwall, by the events of 1688. The Glorious Revolution provided proof, he said, "by practice, as well as by theory, that the only legitimate source of government is the approbation of the people."¹ It was believed, however, that the legitimate exercise of the right of revolution was not a straightforward matter as revolutions contained great dangers which reformers needed to take into account.

In the first place it was believed that a revolutionary challenge would almost inevitably lead to civil war and violence. The heat and fury of insurrection, wrote Thelwall, were bound to reduce the candour, moderation and disposition to tolerate opposition so essential to the peaceful resolution of disputes. At the same time opportunities were created for demagogues or small factions to come to prominence, as the passions of the people came to hold sway over their reason.² According to James Mackintosh popularly-based revolutions contained special dangers as it took time for the progress of instruction, the force of persuasion and the mild authority of opinion to educate the people to democratic politics. It was to be expected, then, that some calamity and violence

1. Thelwall, Tribune, iii.96. For the radical view of 1688 see Dickinson, "Eighteenth-Century Debate on the 'Glorious Revolution'", 40-2.

2. John Thelwall, Peaceful Discussion, and not Tumultuary Violence the Means of Redressing National Grievances (London, 1795), p. 16.

would occur.¹

In the second place revolutions were seen as the breeding ground for tyranny. When revolutions became necessary, explained James Burgh, decisive, and usually precipitate, action was required, to be performed by a small minority, whom he called "the deliverers", acting on behalf of the majority. However, should the power be left in their hands for too long there was a danger that they would "erect themselves, like Cromwell and others, into tyrants, and ... rivet on the unhappy people the very fetters they had just before knocked off."² "The destruction of the tyranny is not, of necessity", John Thelwall consistently warned his fellow radicals, "the emancipation of the slave".³ He too warned of the spectre of Cromwell whose contemporary equivalent he saw to be Robespierre.⁴

The radical reformers possessed, then, what can be called a realistic understanding of revolutionary confrontation and the dangers it contained. They believed that through a mixture of external pressure and internal decay the existing authorities could be forced to concede to the demands of the radicals without the necessity of revolution. From all points of view this was seen as the preferable option by radical reformers keen to establish themselves as the true heirs of an Anglo-Saxon Constitution which was thought to have provided channels for the peaceful alteration of all political relationships.⁵ Unfortunately, the contrast

1. Mackintosh, Vindicae Gallicae, pp. 162-3.

2. Burgh, Political Disquisitions, iii.312.

3. Thelwall, Rights of Nature, i.88-9.

4. On Cromwell see Thelwall, Tribune, ii.186-95.

5. See esp. Joseph Gerrald, A Convention the only means of saving us from Ruin (London, 1793).

that is often drawn in accounts of radical intentions - between "moral force" and "physical force" - does not bring out clearly enough the sorts of pressures, certainly more than "moral" even if less than "physical", which they expected would come to operate in the build-up to political reformation.

II Reform without Revolution

To bring about change the radical reformers thought it essential to utilise what they believed to be their constitutional right to associate for reform of the political system. To give authority to their demands they proposed the construction of some sort of "Grand National Association of the People" which would reflect majority opinion in the nation. It was envisaged that such an association would be organized from the parish, through the counties and up to a centre in London.¹ The radicals insisted that petitioning parliament without mass backing was useless.² Such an association would be the central but not the only instrument applying pressure on those in parliament. It was also necessary, said John Cartwright, to use the press to spread opinion and to attempt to build up a "patriotic" presence in the Commons itself by participating in elections where the franchise made success a possibility. Last, but not least, he called on reformers to exert themselves in a dedicated and enthusiastic way.³

In one of the earliest sketches for the projected association James

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1. In the development of the idea (and its evolution in the nineteenth-century) see Parssinen, "Association, Convention and Anti-Parliament".
 2. Gerrald, Convention, p. 94.
 3. John Cartwright, A Letter to Rev. Christopher Wyvill (London, 1801), pp. 14-19. There is no better treatment of Cartwright's ideas on what was required to bring about reform than Churgin, "Major John Cartwright: A Study in Radical Parliamentary Reform."

Burgh concluded that only "persons whose names are in any tax-book" should be eligible to join. As has been seen Burgh accepted the theoretical case for universal (manhood) suffrage - not least because all were strictly speaking taxpayers in a system which relied heavily on indirect taxation - but shied away from it as a radical demand, proposing a taxpaying suffrage instead. His desire to limit membership of the association was necessary if there was to be unity between the ends and means of reform.¹ Before long, however, most radicals had come to view universality as a vital feature of any association for reform. All men who preferred liberty to slavery, wrote Cartwright, should be eligible to join.² Open membership came to be seen as a precondition for future success as it would make it possible for a successful radical movement to speak in the name of the mass of people and apply real pressure on those with power. David Williams explained the failure of the Yorkshire Association Movement precisely because of its "distrust of the people" and its "timidity and indecision". To be successful, he said, it was necessary to proceed "upwards from the people" rather than downwards, as the Yorkshire Associators had done, from "the sentiments and inclinations of individuals or of small assemblies".³

Democratic accountability from below was thought to be necessary to prevent usurpation from above; organization and responsible leadership necessary to avoid disorder and upheaval from below. John Jebb proposed that the number of delegates from each of the counties, cities and principle manufacturing towns to the national centre of the association should be proportional to the populations of these areas.

1. Burgh, Political Disquisitions, iii.429. See also pp. 80-2 of this thesis.

2. Cartwright, Take Your Choice, p. 92.

3. Williams, Letters on Political Liberty, pp. 37-8.

He stressed that all those elected would be delegates instructed to follow certain ends and subject to recall.¹ The radicals were particularly sensitive to the possibility of power diminishing the radical commitments of their leaders as it had seemed to have with many parliamentarians, the most obvious example being Pitt the younger.² Most of the radicals also thought it important to underpin the middle layer of committees with parish-based and democratically organized constitutional clubs.³ Such clubs would discuss political questions and communicate with each other and the public. Until a system of national education was established, wrote Thomas Cooper, the clubs would provide an institutional framework for popular education in the country.⁴

Organization and leadership were thought to be crucially important given the nature of the objectives being sought. The best way to harness the power of the people, argued James Burgh, was to have them "guided, limited, and directed by men of property, who are interested in the security of their country, and have no income, by place or pension, to indemnify them for bringing slavery and ruin upon their country". It was fortunate he said, that such patriots existed in "the rich, the great, the independent city of London".⁵ Even John Thelwall, the leading theorist of the London Corresponding Society, saw the need for leadership to come from "people of considerable property and influence". Speaking of the situation in Sheffield he wrote:

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1. John Jebb, An Address to the Freeholders of Middlesex ... (4th ed.; London, 1782), p. 13.
 2. For a radical assessment of Pitt (and Robespierre) see Thelwall, Tribune, i.246-60.
 3. See Gerrald, Convention, pp. 111-19 for such a plan.
 4. Cooper, A Reply to Mr. Burke's Invective, pp. 78-9.
 5. Burgh, Political Disquisitions, iii.426, 433.

... there is a great body of virtue, and well grounded principle among what may be called the Sans culotterie: but it is a body without a head. They have unfortunately no leaders. There are, indeed, several people of considerable property and influence who think with them; but who have not the courage, or the energy, to take that open and decided part which might promote the real peace ... of the neighbourhood.¹

It was thought necessary to organize the new voters and teach them their duties as well as their rights. Enthusiasm, said Thelwall, needed to be united with the "sacred love of peace and order".² To this end Thelwall consistently attacked all forms of direct action fuelled by traditional notions of what E.P. Thompson has called "the moral economy of the crowd". Such action was said to divert attention from the system to individuals and encourage vengeance at the expense of humanity.³ It was in the context of these views that Thelwall felt so aggrieved by William Godwin's attack on him as an "impatient and headlong reformer".⁴

The existence of an organized majority, led by men accountable to those below, but responsible in their political attitudes, needed to be complemented by simplicity and clarity of objectives.⁵ This was important, they said, because unanimity within the movement was a pre-condition for success. By narrowing down radical ideology to its most basic element - seen to be reform of the House of Commons - it was thought possible to focus the radical movement and achieve general agreement within its ranks. Only that plan of reformation could be insisted upon, wrote Jebb, which

1. Thelwall, Rights of Nature, i.18.

2. Thelwall, Tribune, ii.xvi.

3. Ibid., ii.305-6. See also John Cartwright's appeal to the machine-breakers to seek political solutions to their problems; Life and Correspondence, ii.17-21.

4. On Godwin's attack see his anonymously published Considerations on Lord Grenville's and Mr Pitt's Bills ... (London, 1796). Thelwall's reply is in the preface to volume II of Tribune.

5. Cartwright, Take Your Choice, pp. 92-3.

had the sanction of a majority of the people.¹ The radical reformers believed that any attempt to incorporate too much, in both breadth and depth, would hinder the chances of achieving unanimity and majority support.² A spirit of compromise between the different tendencies within the movement as a whole was thought to be crucial. What objectives would achieve the unity and support desired was perhaps the central strategic question asked by the reformers. The reformers envisaged a national consensus emerging by way of discussion and debate within their national association. Crucial to an understanding of their "politics" is an account of the process by which they expected the will of the majority to translate itself into political reform.

Whenever the radicals spoke of the prospects of reform they introduced their claim that the existing system was heading for bankruptcy. Reform without revolution was seen as a possibility because the accumulation of pressures from outside, organized as a national association and utilising the press, petitions and public meetings, would coincide with the threat and eventually the reality of national bankruptcy. Put simply, it was believed that the repayment of the national debt was becoming increasingly difficult while wasteful public expenditure and warfare were undermining the productive sector of the economy.³ In the writings of John Cartwright and John Thelwall there are different versions of the way such an economic and financial crisis would manifest itself politically.

1. Jebb, An Address, p. 22.

2. With this in mind it is instructive to contrast John Thelwall's public lectures with the speeches he gave on behalf of the L.C.S. In the former he ranged widely whilst in the latter he concentrated on universal suffrage and annual elections for the Commons.

3. See pp. 140-50 of this thesis for a fuller account of the argument.

According to Cartwright it was "money power" which was in effective control of the nation. He believed that segments of the propertied class would begin to see the need for reform as the government was forced to increase taxation to meet its commitments. After a time, he predicted, all landholders would also begin to feel the effects of high taxation. Rather than become the paymasters for the clique which dominated King and Commons he expected them to take up the cause of political reform just as they had taken up economical reform in the 1770s. Rather naively, we may think, Cartwright always saw an Act of Parliament containing a declaration of rights and a statute for securing them as the best way to realize reform objectives.¹ Ultimately, then, the crisis would be solved within the existing system as external pressures mounted and the political props of the rotten borough oligarchy collapsed. Cartwright always argued, however, that in the absence of pressure from without the strategy would never be able to succeed. He pointed to the process by which the Magna Carta was created as an example: "It was a great national effort, headed by the barons, that first subdued the mind of the despot, John, and extorted, from his fear, MAGNA CARTA".² In the 1790s and beyond he always warned the establishment of the dangers they faced should they reject the call for reform: "If you do not take care to make the poor friends, prepare yourself for their being turned into enemies."³

John Thelwall also expected splits to emerge in the ranks of the propertied class as the bankruptcy crisis threatened. "It is the nature

1. Cartwright, An Appeal, Civil and Military, p. 87 and The People's Barrier, p. 90.

2. Cartwright, Life and Correspondence, ii.8.

3. Cartwright, Commonwealth in Danger, p. lxxiv.

of corruption", he said "to eat itself up. Let the corruption eat away then; and the friends of liberty and of the human race shall receive the benefit." Unlike Cartwright he expected the stockholders, rather than the landholders, to see how they had been "cheated and deluded" by the rotten borough oligarchy. Consequently, from being "links in the chain" which has "bound and fettered us down" they will become "the peaceable and manly instruments of our emancipation".¹ From being opposing interests the stock-holder and the productive labourer would be united in their efforts to obtain reform.² Eventually he expected the rotten-borough oligarchy to cave in under the pressure:

I trust that in every part of the country the congregated voice of Englishmen will be uplifted to frustrate the artifices, and overawe the usurping insolence, of those who dare to invade our rights - till, like cowards, (for bullies mostly are cowards) they fly abashed from their lofty situations, and leave the reformation of abuses, and the regeneration of our Constitution, to more honest and more able hands.³

For Thelwall the existence of an association, well-led, organized and representing the majority was vital if the inevitable collapse of the old system was to lead to the introduction of a new and better order rather than to chaos and anarchy. He wrote: "Trust not your hopes to a blind fatality. Repose not in the indolent expectation, that the corruption of the system will work its own cure".⁴ Like Cartwright he warned the establishment of the dire consequences that would follow

1. Thelwall, Tribune, iii.84.

2. Thelwall, Rights of Nature, i.50-1.

3. The Speech of John Thelwall, at the second meeting of the London Corresponding Society ... (London, 1795), p. 19. Later in the speech Thelwall made it clear that it was Pitt and the Ministry which would "fly abashed". The hope was that the King and Parliament, under pressure and constrained by the threat/reality of bankruptcy, would be forced to accept the case for reform.

4. Thelwall, Rights of Nature, i.88.

should they reject radical reform of the system of representation to the Commons.

According to moderate reformers such as Christopher Wyvill the acceptance of universal suffrage - let alone radical social reform proposals - as an objective would deter a large portion of "the well-disposed Rich", from joining any movement for reform and increase the chances of "fruitless commotion" followed by much loss of blood and the establishment of tyranny. He called on the radicals to adopt a more cautious and moderate programme in which there was a fuller recognition of the rights of the propertied. Of necessity this meant restrictions on the right to vote.¹ Many radicals were willing, at different times, to compromise with the moderates in an effort to maximize the possibility of peaceful reform through parliament. John Cartwright took such a line in the late 1790s and again in the early nineteenth-century when interest in reform revived after 1805. In both cases he was willing to concede that a programme based on extending the suffrage to all taxpaying householders would have more chance of success.² However, he always insisted that electorates be as equal as possible and that elections be annual.³

It can be seen, then, that together with certain doubts about the viability, contemporary or otherwise, of universal manhood suffrage, there were practical reasons for rejecting it. The case for compromise along these lines had been outlined as early as 1783 by Richard Price.

1. Wyvill, Letter to John Cartwright, pp. 4-6. As Dinwiddie observed Wyvill never gave up hope of reviving "the old spirit of Yorkshire"; Christopher Wyvill and Reform, p. 10.
2. See Cartwright, An Appeal, Civil and Military, p. 62 and Reasons for Reformation, p. 13.
3. In Reasons for Reformation Cartwright argued that the most distant electorates should be smaller as "pure equality would give undue preponderance to the capital"; pp. 12-13.

With respect to voting rights he wrote:

In these cases, to avoid the danger of losing all by aiming at too much, the attempts of enlightened men should be governed by a regard to what is most practical, considering present circumstances, and the attachment which always prevails in a country of old establishments.¹

Ironically perhaps it was Cartwright who developed most clearly the case against a watered down reform programme. No despotism, he explained to Wyvill, voluntarily reforms itself: "Nothing can be done but by public opinion. When that shall be sufficiently powerful, the borough-portion, put in fear, will vote for radical reform with as much peaceable acquiescence as John signed Magna Carta".² Moderates, he said, did not put forward proposals which could call forth anything like the national unanimity or the animation and enthusiasm needed to overawe the establishment. Similarly Thelwall opposed the efforts to moderate the radical programme in the interests of "unity" and "realism". Moderation, he explained, did not mean the sacrifice of principle but "the determination to weigh and consider every sentiment before you adopt it, to be inflamed by no factious principles, to be misled by no party attachments, but to do that which is just, and never more; always taking care that we do not let violence and intemperance snatch from our hands the reins of reason".³ For Thelwall the danger that the common people would be lost to the cause of reform through disenchantment or frustration was a greater worry than the danger that existing parliamentarians would not budge as the crisis intensified. This was a tightrope the radical reformers

1. Richard Price, "Letter to Col. Sharman" (1783) quoted in D.O. Thomas, The Honest Mind: The Thought and Work of Richard Price (Oxford, Oxford Univ. Press, 1977), p. 152. However, as Thomas notes, universal (manhood) suffrage was, for Price, "the ideal to which human societies should progress"; ibid., p. 204.
2. Cartwright, Life and Correspondence, ii.9.
3. Thelwall, Tribune, i.336.

were quite willing to walk given their commitment to a non-revolutionary strategy. It should also be said that for many of the small traders, artisans and working people who became active in the radical movement in the 1790s it was a question of pride that they be accepted on an equal basis into "the political nation". To compromise on this would imply a loss of identity and autonomy.

III Revolution as Last Resort

For the radical reformers a revolutionary challenge to the existing system was seen as a last resort in their strategy of change-by-pressure. Two sorts of circumstance justified revolution. Firstly, if the established authorities, frightened by the power of the people, turned to illegality and even violence to keep themselves in power, the radical movement may have little choice but to take up the challenge and fight force with force. If the authorities turned to violence, wrote John Thelwall, the reformers faced the alternative of "perishing in thousands" or of "repelling force by force with death or victory on their banners, and on their hearts". He continued:

Such, was the case in many a nation - in Genoa - in Switzerland - in Holland twice - in America; and such was the case in France. Opinion had grown till it had burst its chains, circumstances concurred that gave opinion weight: the court seemed to yield; but coercion was prepared.¹

Revolution, even given all the dangers that went with it, was preferable to complete enslavement because it was always difficult to escape from the latter. There were times, proclaimed the London Corresponding Society, when the people had to choose "liberty or slavery".²

1. Thelwall, Rights of Nature, i.72.

2. London Corresponding Society, Address to the People of Great Britain and Ireland (London, 1794), p. 6. There is some evidence that

Secondly, they pointed to the situation which would develop if the established authorities failed to give way to the demands of the people, clearly articulated and organized. Should the system not budge, wrote John Jebb, a national assembly representing a majority of the people had every right to "dissolve" the House of Commons and institute equal annual and universal representation of the people. To such changes the King and Lords would be obliged to assent.¹ Whilst the reformers always saw the change-by-pressure strategy as preferable they never balked from the idea of revolution as the last resort: "An associated nation may do more than petition, or remonstrate ... There is nothing it cannot do but what is naturally impossible. It can level a throne with the earth, and trample authority in the dust. And it can do these things of right".² The reformers warned the establishment not only that they possessed this right but that, should it be exercised, it might lead to wider and more fundamental changes than those outlined in the radical reform programme. For example, the presence of the King and Lords in the constitution could become a matter for consideration.³ Such warnings would, they hoped, act to apply further pressure on the establishment.

In both circumstances revolution was seen as the last stage in a long process of agitation and association, and even then as a last resort. Any idea of a small elite acting independently of majority support on the basis of foreign intervention was regarded as anathema. Of the

leading reformers believed that the time for revolution had arrived in 1794. The government made sweeping arrests and brought Thomas Hardy, Horne Tooke and John Thelwall to trial for High Treason. The prosecution failed to produce any hard evidence of revolutionary intentions and preparation and the three were acquitted. See esp. Goodwin, Friends of Liberty, ch. 9.

1. Jebb, An Address, pp. 18-19.

2. Cartwright, Take Your Choice, pp. 96-7.

3. Cartwright, An Appeal, Civil and Military, p. 178.

latter Thelwall wrote:

... no country can have freedom, which cannot obtain it for itself, and that foreign interference can only, at best, produce a change of masters.¹

Thelwall distinguished between "self-defence" and "vengeance" to provide criteria for determining where force was and was not acceptable.²

It was believed that if the movement was well-led, organized and disciplined, the proper balance between revolutionary necessity, democratic accountability, and respect for differences could be maintained.

Not surprisingly the reformers had very little to say about the exercise of revolutionary leadership and the preparation of revolution. James Burgh had noted, that should complete tyranny threaten it would be foolish "to wait for formalities". To prevent the movement from being crushed completely, he said, "desperate" measures would be necessary.³

In a similar vein William Jones argued that should a revolutionary situation emerge compliance with "every punctile of form" may very well "endanger success as to the substance". For example, he wrote, it was probable that only "the wisest" would see the need for resistance when "the enemy is at the gates". They would need to be decisive in their leadership if complete tyranny was to be avoided.⁴ This was precisely the context within which revolutionary usurpation became a possibility. Most of the radicals simply assumed that when leadership and decisiveness were required they would be forthcoming from within the movement, democratically organized, widely based and crystal clear on its

1. Thelwall, Rights of Nature, i.145.

2. Thelwall, Tribune, i.241.

3. Burgh, Political Disquisitions, iii.444.

4. William Jones, A Dialogue on the Revolution between a Gentleman and a Farmer (Manchester, 1788), p. 12.

objectives.¹ By combining revolutionary leadership with democratic practice it would be possible to avoid the spectre of a Cromwell or a Robespierre.

The other problem concerned the arming of the people. As has been seen this was viewed as a right, an essential part of what it meant to be a citizen. In what was perhaps the boldest tract to come from a member of the Society for Constitutional Information, William Jones argued that the right of resistance carried with it the right not only to bear arms but to be practised in the use of them. "We ought always", he said, "to be ready; and keep each of us a strong firelock in the corner of his bedroom."² The reformers were clear on the state of affairs which would prevail after radical reform - an armed and militarily prepared nation. However, they did not see this as a necessity in the build up to radical reform. In the first place they always stressed their commitment to a legal, constitutional and peaceful approach to political reformation. In the treason trials of 1794 the government failed to prove that this was simply a cover for their revolutionary plans. In the second place, they believed, as they had with respect to revolutionary leadership, that should the occasion arise requisite force would be available. It was always assumed that the reformers would have the force of numbers on their side. Even the confirmed revolutionaries acknowledged that the weight of an established majority would reduce the need for physical force.

1. Thelwall noted that one of the problems with the English revolution of the seventeenth-century was that the people were enthusiastic but unclear on their objectives. This made it possible for unprincipled leaders to use them for their own ends; Tribune, iii.188-90.

2. Jones, Principles of Government, p. 8.

IV England versus France

A major intellectual problem for the radical reformers who thought revolution could be avoided was posed by the experience of the French Revolution, and of this fact they were constantly reminded by conservative defenders of the status quo. In the first place it was argued that what had begun as reform within the old system ended with the destruction of the monarchy and nobility. Secondly, what had begun as a revolution of reasonable order decayed into mob rule and terror. The reformers freely acknowledged these charges in relation to the French Revolution. How, then, did they deal with the argument that radicalism, republicanism, revolution and terror were necessarily bed partners? Were not they, by implication if not intention, leading Britain down the same road?

The answer given by Thelwall and Cartwright was that when one had, as in France, an intransigent and scheming monarch, encouraged by the nobility and priests, and a long oppressed and revengeful people a republican revolution was inevitable.¹ For his part Thelwall defended the destruction of the Bastille, the opposition of the people to the interference of foreign mercenaries and the defence of the Constituent Assembly as all "acts of salvation, to which France owes what she yet possesses of liberty".² The small degree of calamity and violence which came with the revolution in its earliest years was seen as a small price to pay for the liberties won. However, the emergence of "mob rule" as a feature of political life and the rise to power of Robespierre were seen in a completely different light, as unnecessary and deplorable signs of decay rather than maturation.

1. See esp. Thelwall, Sober Reflections, pp. 73ff. and Cartwright, An Appeal, Civil and Military, pp. 178-81.

2. Thelwall, Tribune, i.288.

In an important tract Mary Wollstonecraft provided a solution to the problems posed by this decay. The excesses, she explained, were not due to the "principles" underpinning the revolution but to the "character" of the French, long corrupted by despotic government. They lacked the "purity of heart" and "maturity of judgement" which only the experience of liberty itself could bring. The "fruit of liberty" would only ripen gradually as the changes in the system of education, property and politics had their effect. What had happened in France was that the spirit of revenge and the passions of the moment, fuelled by factions and demagogues, had been allowed to interfere with what was essentially a progressive development.¹ The essential problem in the French case, argued John Cartwright, developing the earlier insights of Mary Wollstonecraft, was that the nation was "tossed on the sea of opinion, without compass or rudder, and without a single pilot, who knew his way into a port of safety."² This had happened from within a system of despotism, all liberties having been destroyed centuries ago. Consequently the French lacked the habits of free men, the practice of past ages, and the knowledge that can only be gained from experience. It was to be expected, therefore, that their revolution would have its imperfections. Nevertheless, like Thelwall, he insisted that "Marat and Robespierre were no more to be regarded as integral parts of the new principles of France, than Pitt and Dundas as parts of the old principles of England."³

England was seen as a very different case: "As touching the consequences to be expected from reform in England, we shall look in vain

1. Wollstonecraft, Historical and woral View, p. 512.

2. Cartwright, Appeal, Civil and Military, p. 179.

3. Thelwall, Sober Reflections, p. 73.

on what has happened in France; the cases being extremely dissimilar".¹ Neither republicanism nor mob rule were inevitable. Firstly, it was claimed that the English people were sufficiently attached to the privileged orders to believe that they had a role to play in the country's politics. It was also believed that the privileged would be sufficiently flexible to defer to the voice of the people when it spoke clearly and decisively to them.² Secondly, the degree of oppression in England, real as it was, had not reached the point where the people would be driven to revolt in a violent and vengeful manner.³ The central argument, however, concerned the historical and political context within which the reformers saw themselves operating. In England, Cartwright claimed, liberty had never been completely destroyed, the decayed remains of representation still existing despite the inroads which had been made. England also possessed a constitution which, said Cartwright, was clearly defined and increasingly understood by the people. England's revolution had occurred in the seventeenth-century. What was needed in the eighteenth was the completion of the process then begun:

We have compass, and rudder, to keep us steadily in our course, there is no want of experienced pilots; and we have a strong current in our favour: in short, we have nothing in our way but a boom of obstruction, which the parties with whom I am now expostulating, have laid across its harbour's mouth, to oppose our entrance.⁴

A case study of an English Revolution was that of the Americans. That ~~revolution~~ itself was thought to be necessary and inevitable given

1. Cartwright, An Appeal, Civil and Military, p. 178.

2. Ibid.

3. Thelwall, Sober Reflections, p. 34.

4. Cartwright, An Appeal, Civil and Military, p. 179. On the radicals as reformers especially conscious of their "Englishness" see Melvin J. Lasky, "The English Ideology", Encounter, XXXIX (1972), 25-39 and XL (1973), 19-34.

the intransigence of the British Government. In the final balance, argued Cartwright, it was a successful revolution because it was based on the habits, experience and knowledge of a free people. Well versed in political principles, and unaffected by scheming factions and ambitious leaders, the Americans were able to stay on the right track. Importantly, as well, they proved that the problems which developed in France were not the result of the extension of the principle of representation, nor of the absence of kings, lords and bishops from the legislature. And, added Cartwright, "if the French have active imaginations and a proneness to theory, to mislead their judgement, the Americans are as phlegmatic and matter-of-fact a people as any on earth".¹ The radical reformers assumed that political change in Britain would be as soundly based as that in America. Interestingly, however, the all-powerful myth of the American Revolution as an English Revolution was so attractive to them that they said nothing about the actual degree and type of violence which in fact accompanied the transition to independence.² It was on the longer-term historical significance of the revolution that they focussed their attention. In this context any evils which occurred in the revolution itself were but dust in the balance.

To back up his case that radical reform of the existing constitution was possible in Britain, and republicanism and revolution inevitable in France, John Thelwall introduced an argument about the relationship between forms of government and size of territory. In any country, he claimed, there were two important laws of politics. The first was that the "centre" of any country government will be subject to "a certain

1. Cartwright, Commonwealth in Danger, p. cxxix.

2. See R.M. Brown, "Violence and the American Revolution" in S.G. Kurtz and J.H. Hutson (eds), Essays on the American Revolution (Chapel Hill, Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1973), pp. 81-120.

degree of check and controul" because "public opinion" tends to rally around the government. In the provinces, on the other hand, it was easier for governments to control the people and prevent opposition from emerging and developing. For example, he pointed to the regime of repression which existed in Scotland in the early 1790s:

... we find that the judges of Scotland could dare to pronounce, and the aristocracy of Scotland to give countenance and occasion to the pronouncing sentences so monstrously illegal that the very hearts even of aristocrats in England revolted at them.¹

The second was that "a monarchic government, whether limited or absolute, acts in its proper person only in the centre".² In the case of the out-lying provinces power would have to be delegated. If the provincial governors were given too little power they would find it difficult to enforce order, particularly in crisis times.³ If, on the other hand, they were given great powers two potential dangers would result:

Either he may make use of that power in such a manner as to oppress and destroy the province over which he domineers, and then you have a limited government in the centre only and a despotism in the extremities, or he may make use of it in so lenient and popular a way as to attach the province to himself; and then who shall answer for his loyalty.⁴

Consequently it was necessary for monarchs, if they were to maintain

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1. Thelwall, Tribune, iii.198. Clearly he was referring to the prosecution of the leading figures at the British Convention in Edinburgh. See Goodwin, Friends of Liberty, ch. 8.
 2. Thelwall, Tribune, iii.198. By despotism he meant a government "so energetic that it can strike even to death at any extent of the country, and produce obedience by terror". By a limited monarchy he meant "a country in which the governing or central power is restrained - that is to say, it is not so strong but what the other parts of the constitution, and particularly the great body of the people, can put a peaceable, but yet efficacious restraint upon it", ibid., 197.
 3. He does not weigh this up against his first law that the provinces were in fact easier to control than the centre.
 4. Ibid., 199.

order in the provinces, to give great powers to their deputies and to set up a system of spies and informers to see to it that their agents were not attaching the province to themselves. Therefore should a country be extensive a monarchical form of government would necessarily decay into absolutism. Such was the case in France where the only alternative to absolute despotism was absolute republicanism, each province being free to act with respect to its own circumstances and communicating its will to the centre on those questions which were the proper concern of the central government, for example defence and foreign policy. In the case of England, however, the choices were not so extreme. Unfortunately Thelwall did not explore the implications of his argument for Great Britain as a whole. Did it mean, for example, that independence should be granted to Scotland, Ireland and Wales if they were to enjoy political and civil liberty in the proper manner?

The reformers did not deny that republicanism and violent upheaval might occur. Ultimately, it depended on the response of the establishment to pressures for reform and the degree of leadership and organization exercised within the ranks of the people. Still they lived and practised their politics on the assumption that their image of the proper, English way to negotiate constitutional change was, in the last instance, an eighteenth-century reality. The maintenance of the freedom to associate and publicise became central to their strategy. By necessity, then, they had to criticise any extremists whose language and behaviour seemed to threaten the civil and political freedoms necessary to peaceful agitation and association. The encouragement of riot and disorder, as opposed to peaceful assembly and public meeting, republican and levelling doctrines, as opposed to radical reformism and revolutionary conspiracy, as opposed to open association were all seen as dangerous and counter-productive. Within the radical movement, wrote Thelwall, there are

"inflated enthusiasts, who, bawling for liberty, without understanding its principles would violate every sacred principle of peace and public happiness."¹ It was crucially important, he said, that the movement proper disassociate itself from these "enthusiasts".

The fact remains, however, that there were real tensions within the movement itself on what counted as a responsible policy for reformists to follow, particularly in relation to social and economic reform. The artisan radicals in the 1790s insisted that if the common people were to be incorporated into the radical movement their needs and interests would have to be acknowledged. More conservatively inclined political reformers such as John Cartwright agreed with this, but as was shown in the last chapter, they worked on different assumptions about the degree of social and economic equality which would be acceptable. In the short run the solution found was to search for agreement on political reform and remove the question of social and economic reform to the future, when parliament was reformed. But even in the short run political reform would be of immense assistance to the labouring poor since it would result in government that was both cheap and honest. In the longer-run the different perceptions of social and economic equality would also come up against different assumptions about the mixed constitution. George Dyer had noted that without a complete change in the form of government, as opposed to reform of the existing system, radical social and economic change would not be possible.²

It should be apparent, then, that the claim made by the British Government in the 1790s that all the radicals were really revolutionaries, using the language of moderation and constitutionalism to conceal their

1. Thelwall, Peaceful Discussion, p. 5.

2. Dyer, Complaints of the Poor People, pp. 93-7. See also pp. 79-80 of this thesis.

real aims, was false.¹ Too many of the radicals went out of their way to distinguish between French and English conditions, and to point out the dangers of revolutionary upheaval, for this to be the case. The truth on this matter, as well as on most of the other issues which interested them, was that the radicals were clearly divided. The authorities, either deliberately or because of intellectual confusion, did not adequately distinguish between the various elements within the radical movement. However, because of this very fact the reformers who thought revolution could be avoided faced an immense problem. Because the government saw them, or chose to see them, as revolutionaries, it thought it legitimate to ignore their demands, prosecute their leaders and disperse their associations. The constitutional radicals' hopes from the mid-1790s were that the liberal Whigs could convince their parliamentary colleagues that the government's attempts to stifle free speech, assembly and association were illegal and counterproductive, and that the citizen jurors would act according to the "spirit" of the constitution rather than to the letter of repressive legislation.²

It was not until after 1805 that the radical reformers re-emerged with some sort of organization and significance, the so-called Westminster radicals playing a key role.³ In the interim some of the reformers had emigrated to America, most notably Thomas Cooper and Joseph Priestley. Others, such as John Thelwall, "retired" from active politics when it

1. See Report of the Committee of Secrecy of the House of Commons (London, 1799). The same line is taken by W.P. Hall, "British Radicalism 1791-1797", Columbia Univ. Faculty of Political Science: Studies in History, Economics and Public Law, XLIX, no. 1 (1912).

2. For Cartwright's views on the proper role of juries see above pp. 90-91.

3. See D.P. Alstadt, "The Radical Movement in England 1806-1814" (Case Western Reserve Univ. Ph.D. thesis. 1968).

became clear that the government and popular opinion were turning decisively against the radicals.¹ James Mackintosh turned away from the radical movement altogether concluding, as W.E. Christian put it, that "the lower orders did not show the disposition he had expected to accept without question the lead of the enlightened middle classes".² There were those who soldiered on, most notably the indefatigable Major Cartwright and John Horne Tooke.³ By this time, however, it was clear that active revolutionaries were at work within the radical movement. Writing in the late 1790s from his new home in America, Joseph Priestley now spoke as if revolution, and violence, had become inevitable in Britain.⁴ For some of the radicals the very notion that political change could come without revolution was always thought to be absurdly idealistic. Their ideas are the subject of the next chapter.

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1. Thelwall took up residence in the countryside to concentrate on his literary endeavours. Besides a brief re-entry into radical politics in 1818 (as publisher of The Champion newspaper) his life until his death in 1834 was devoted to other causes, the most important of which was the development of a cure for speech defects.
 2. W.E. Christian, "James Mackintosh, Burke, and the Cause of Reform", Eighteenth-Century Studies, VII (1973-74), 200. In 1799 and 1800 Mackintosh delivered a series of lectures on "The Law of Nature and Nations" in which he refuted his earlier views. He remained, however, a liberal Whig reformer until the end of his life. See Baylen and Grossman, Modern British Radicals, p. 306.
 3. In her excellent thesis J. Anne Hone clearly shows that radicalism in its many forms was alive and active in London between 1796 and 1805; "The Ways and Means of London Radicalism, 1796-1821" (Oxford Univ. D. Phil. thesis. 1975), chs. 1-3.
 4. See Clarke Garrett, "Joseph Priestley, the Millenium, and the French Revolution", Journal of the History of Ideas, XXIV (1973), 64-6. In 1791 he had expressed the hope that partial change within the existing mixed constitution would be possible; Letters of Edmund Burke, p. 3 and On the General Principles of Government, pp. 34-5.

CHAPTER 14: REVOLUTIONISM

From the mid-1790's to at least 1803 and then again after 1812 it is clear that an active revolutionary tendency existed within the radical movement. Indeed the government successfully uncovered two revolutionary conspiracies: that of Watt and Downie in 1794¹ and the so-called "Despard Conspiracy" in 1802.² The debate that has occurred within the scholarly literature has been centred on the size, regional distribution, historical continuity and national significance of this political tendency. More specifically efforts have been made to discover whether there was any relationship between revolutionary politics, Luddism and the emerging working-class movement in the light of the claims made in E.P. Thompson's Making of the English Working Class.³ In this thesis it is not my concern to deal with the details of the revolutionary current but to outline as clearly as possible the nature of revolutionism as the primary ideological alternative to reformism. Dealing with individuals within the movement it is difficult to distinguish, as J. Ann Hone has shown in her meticulous study of London radicalism, between reformers and

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1. For the trials of Watt and Downie see State Trials, vols. XXIII-XXIV. The conspiracy is discussed in Henry Meikle, Scotland and the French Revolution (Glasgow, James Maclehose and Sons, 1912).
 2. For Despard's trial see J.H. Gurney, The Trial of Edward Marcus Despard (London, 1803). The most recent study of the conspiracy establishes the Irish and French dimensions of what had traditionally been seen as the work of Despard alone; Marianne Elliot, "The 'Despard Conspiracy' Reconsidered", Past and Present, LXXV (1977), 46-61.
 3. For recent overviews see Thomis and Holt, Threats of Revolution, chs.1-2 and A.D. Harvey, Britain in the early Nineteenth Century (London, Batsford, 1978), chs. 5-7. See also the articles by John Dinwiddy: "The 'Black Lamp' in Yorkshire 1801-1802", Past and Present, LXIV (1974), 113-23 and "Luddism and Politics in the northern Counties", Social History, IV (1979), 33-63; and J.L. Baxter and F.K. Donnelly, "The Revolutionary 'Underground' in the West Riding: Myth or Reality?" Past and Present, LXIV (1974), 124-32 and "Sheffield and the English Revolutionary Tradition", International Review of Social History, XX (1975), 398-423.

revolutionaries both because there were ambivalent stances and overlapping associations,¹ and because, as established in the last chapter, the reformers could see circumstances in which revolution was justified. For their part some revolutionaries, in theory at least, did see the dangers inherent in revolutionary upheaval and the need to distinguish between principled and unprincipled violence. Nevertheless there is enough evidence, textual and otherwise, to make the distinction even if the application to individual cases is not as clear as one might wish.

I Why Revolution?

Two assumptions underpinned revolutionary thinking on the transition: firstly, that the establishment could not be expected to defer to the will of the people even if it was clearly articulated and organized and, secondly, that it would resist the will of the people with all the force at its command, including violence. Change-by-pressure would need, therefore, to culminate in revolution if it was to succeed. For the reformers the two questions uppermost were: How could revolution be avoided? In what circumstances was revolution unavoidable? For the revolutionaries the relevant questions were: How should the revolution be prepared for? When was the time ripe for insurrection?

At the centre of their thought was the image of the present system as a "system of violence". "Let us not be deceived", wrote John Oswald, "for it is a force alone that can vindicate the rights of the people. Force is the basis of right, or rather right and force are one".² Thomas Spence was equally clear. What the current rulers obtained by the sword,

1. Hone, "The Ways and Means of London Radicalism", chs. 1-5.

2. Oswald, Review, pp. 40, 52.

he said, they would retain by the sword: "Are not they and their Minions now in Arms under the Yeomanry, Volunteers etc? And what means the inveterate war commenced by the Aristocracy of the world against France? They know that Mankind once enlightened will not brook their lordliness, nor be content with their Rights by piece-meal; therefore they exert every nerve to prevent light from spreading; and the union of the people".¹

The grounds upon which it was right to overthrow the establishment were outlined by Henry Redhead Yorke.

If our principles are just, and they are such as the majority of the People approve, neither hot-headed Bigots, nor interest Pensioners or Placemen, are authorised in opposing them.²

When the "mists of prejudice" had been dispersed and even "the meanest cottager" knew his rights, said Yorke in a fiery address to the people of Sheffield, "the commanding voice of the whole people shall recommend the 558 gentlemen in St Stephen's Chapel to go about their business".³ Each generation, asserted Thomas Paine, had the right to restructure government according to its own needs and preferences. To defer to the existing parliament was as unprincipled as it was futile.⁴ In defending the right to revolt it was made clear, by the few revolutionary theorists to whom we can refer, that majority support was essential. It was partly a

1. Thomas Spence, "The End of Oppression ..." (1795) in Political Works ed. Waters, p. 113.
2. Henry Redhead Yorke, Thoughts on Civil Government: Addressed to the Disfranchised Citizens of Sheffield (London, 1794), p. 7. Yorke had been one of a small colony of British radicals in Paris in the early 1790s. He returned to England, as Melvin Lasky notes, full of the French "style and politics", "The Recantation of Henry Redhead Yorke: A Forgotten English Ideologist", Encounter, XLI (1973), 73. On the radicals in Paris see J.G. Alger, "The British Colony in Paris, 1793-93", English Historical Review, XIII (1898), 672-94.
3. Henry Redhead Yorke, "An Address to the British Nation ..." (1794) in State Trials, XXV, col. 1037.
4. Paine, "Letter Addressed to the Addressers", pp. 337-8.

question of legitimacy, partly a question of practicalities. "Who would suppose that only a few Parishes would be so fool-hardy", asked Thomas Spence, "to set up a New System, so contrary to former Prejudices and Interests without well knowing that the Whole Nation were ripe and ready to join them?"¹ In similar vein John Oswald cautioned his colleagues to guard against not only "the timid race of men" who by "the indecision of their character" blunt the vigour of revolutionary resolve, but also "the sons of violence" who advise the movement to act with "precipitation and harshness". Still, Oswald thought it more likely that the so-called "moderates" would cause problems. By their indecision and lack of resolve, he said, the evils of the present system would be allowed to accumulate and intensify.²

What marks out the revolutionaries is the commitment to democratic republicanism and, in Spence's case, to social as well as political revolution. It had been recognised by the radicals, reformists and revolutionaries, that a complete transformation of the political system, let alone the political and social system, was impossible without a revolution of the people. A mixture of pressure, division within the establishment and the threat, or realization, of bankruptcy might bring in its wake some parliamentary reform; but without a revolutionary challenge democratic republicanism would have to be removed from the contemporary agenda, a compromise unpalatable to the republicans as it meant accepting monarchical and aristocratic elements in the constitution. Thomas Spence went further. For him the landlords and stockholders were a force which had to be expelled from the body politic

1. Spence, "Important Trial", p. 48.

2. Oswald, Review, pp. 46-7.

before any real change could come about.¹ Leave them intact, he said, and they will use their time, energy and wealth to plot against any reform measures which parliament may consider. Accepting James Harrington's understanding of the connection between economic and political power he wrote: "When you allow the justice of private property in land you justify everything the landed interest do, both in their own estates and the Government, for the country is theirs; and what you call oppression, is only their acting consistently with their interest".² For Spence all varieties of reformism, political and social, were naïve and incoherent. He even spoke of the democrats and republicans who rejected social revolution, in contrast to reform, as "drivellers" who secretly desired to become landlords themselves.³

II The Theory of Revolutionary Transition

Thomas Paine saw the convention strategy as the best means to mobilise opinion and ultimately find the sense of the nation on the question of constitutional changes. Only when opinion was universally on the side of reform would the moment for revolution have arrived.⁴ Paine believed that opportune moments for significant political changes arrived infrequently in the course of history and needed to be capitalised on immediately before "normality" returned. He stressed, however, that any discretionary powers used by the revolutionary party in the course of

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1. By this he did not imply their physical extinction. All citizens whatever their past, he said, had the right to enjoy the benefits of "Spensonia"; "Important Trial", pp. 54-5. Should they resist the revolution, however, the story would be different. See pp. 268-70 of this chapter.
 2. Spence, Meridian Sun of Liberty, p. 4.
 3. Spence, "Important Trial", p. 47 and "End of Oppression", p. 113.
 4. Paine, "Letter Addressed to the Addressers", pp. 380-81. Paine's views on revolution are given an exhaustive treatment in Burnell, "Political and Social Thought of Thomas Paine", ch. 4.

revolution should not be allowed to become permanently established, or a new form of tyranny would threaten. Nor, he said, would the revolutionary party have the right to persecute those with whom they were in disagreement: "The moral principle of revolutions is to instruct, not to destroy."¹ With respect to violence he was equally clear, and he insisted that revolutionaries distinguish clearly between "the system" and "the individual". Only violence absolutely necessary in the interests of self-defence and systemic change was justified. For these reasons he opposed the execution of the French monarch and became disillusioned with the French Revolution from the time the Jacobins came to power. To Paine it seemed as if the principles of the Revolution were being replaced by considerations of "faction" and "power". But, as Melvin Lasky perceptively observed: "[For Paine] a people, a nation had failed, not the idea".² The one modification he did make to his politics was to emphasize more directly the need to prepare and educate the people for a revolution.³

Despite some misgivings about the propensity of the human race to tolerate oppression,⁴ Thomas Spence believed that a combination of "Reason" and "Printing" would ultimately spread his ideas throughout the

1. Paine, "Dissertation on the First Principles of Government", p. 21.
2. Lasky, "Recantation of Henry Redhead Yorke", 82. Yorke, on the other hand, did turn decisively away from the revolutionary idea. See his A Letter to the Reformers (Dorchester, 1798). The last fifteen years of his life were spent "in energetic but unsuccessful attempts to renew his political career, this time as a Tory"; Edward Fearn, "Henry Redhead Yorke - Radical Traitor", Yorkshire Archaeological Journal, XLII (1968), 191.
3. See pp. 110-11 of this thesis.
4. In an essay in his penny weekly Spence actually criticized Burke, somewhat ironically, for his phrase "the swinish multitude". "On very slight observation", Spence wrote, "he would find real Swine to be more noble animals, and far from being so obsequious"; "The Rights of Man, by Question and Answer", 263.

nation. Only when a majority of the nation was convinced of the justice and viability of his plan did he believe revolution to be justifiable and, as has been seen, feasible. From this point he developed two conceptions of the revolutionary transition. Suppose, a young mechanic asked an Old Spencean in one of Spence's dialogues, the mass of the people had come to see the truth of Spencean principles, how then would the revolution occur? In reply the Old Spencean spoke of "a few Thousands of hearty determined Fellows well armed and appointed with Officers, and having a Committee of honest, firm, and intelligent Men to act as a provisional Government, and to direct their Actions to the proper Object". They would publish a manifesto and direct the people in the parishes to take possession of the landed property therein, appointing a committee to manage the process of change. Should "the aristocracy" arise to contend the matter, he said, "let the People be firm and desperate, destroying them Root and Branch, and strengthening their Hands by the rich Confiscations".¹

In a later tract the process is described somewhat differently. A few contingent parishes, he wrote, would declare the land to be theirs and form a "convention of Parochial Delegates". Other parishes would be invited to follow their example and send delegates to what was in effect an embryo national assembly. From this base the revolution could spread outwards. Should the landed interest stir, the people would be compelled to "exterminate them and sequester the Remainder of their illgotten Wealth".² By this he meant their moveable property which, in the absence

1. Spence, "End of Oppression", p. 115.

2. Spence, "Important Trial", pp. 47-8. This quote actually comes from The Restorer of Society, to its Natural State ... (1801) which Spence reprinted in The Important Trial (1803). It was for the publication of the Restorer that Spence was found guilty for seditious libel and sentenced to a year's imprisonment.

of resistance, would remain as private property. In this tract the revolution is given a more spontaneous character, with the starting, co-ordinating and organizing functions to be performed by the people themselves in the localities and by way of their elected convention. Spence referred both to the American and French Revolutions, and to the recent mutinies in the fleets,¹ as evidence of the "public spirit" and "extensive unanimity" present within the present generation. Once the "public mind is duly prepared", he argued, the people were capable of accomplishing "schemes of infinitely greater difficulty than a thing that may be done in a day".²

In each case Spence was explicit on the need to deal with the physical force factor. Partly, but not wholly, it would be a question of the weight of numbers on the side of the revolution. Consequently, if a revolutionary army was necessary, it would only need to be small as the revolutionaries would "have the bulk of the people on their side". Spence also proposed that soldiers supporting the establishment be offered double pay for life to desert to the cause of the revolution.³

In Spence's writings there can also be found an awareness of the economics of revolution. Popularly-based, direct action in the past, he said, had always been hampered by the fact that the material poverty and dependence of the labouring poor on their employers always placed them at a disadvantage in any confrontation. "The cries of their famished Families", he noted "break up their Campaigns before they are well begun, and they must again return to the yoke, like other starved animals, for

1. At Spithead and Nore in 1797.

2. Spence, "Important Trial", p. 48.

3. Spence, Giant-Killer, ii.13.

mere subsistence".¹ The first act of the revolution, then, would be to expropriate not only all landed property but also the last rental payments received by the landlords. In this way resources would be immediately provided for the revolutionary cause.²

Like Paine, however, Spence made the distinction between principled revolutionary action, which may imply violence, and unprincipled mob action. "Here is no Tocsin", he said, "sounded as signal for massacre, no war whoop for an ignorant Rabble to turn out to burn and destroy. No such thing: It is the irresistible force of Reason, addressed to the thinking part of Mankind, and showing by fair Interference that Men may attain their rights by unanimity".³ Like Paine, Spence believed that he was living in a revolutionary era, the burdens on the back of the people forcing them to seek solutions through direct action. At present, however, they were thinking in terms of "forms of government" rather than "systems of society". Because political revolutions would not solve the problems facing the people they could not bring the revolutionary process to a halt:

Mixture of Right and Wrong, and of Liberty and Slavery did never give long content, and at this enlightened period, will less do so than ever. So that Revolutions will now never cease, or rather the Nations will be in a continual state of Revolution, till perfect Truth and Right be established.⁴

Such thinking also provided Spence with another scenario for the transition.

In a small tract, A Fragment of Ancient Prophecy (1798), quite clearly intended as an allegory for current events, he predicted that the

1. Spence, "End of Oppression", p. 114.

2. See ibid., p. 115 and "Important Trial", p. 55.

3. Ibid., p. 48.

4. Ibid., p. 64.

French Revolution would be forever forced outwards as the old rulers of Europe, including Britain, combined together to fight it.¹ Because the old rulers would not give up their fight what had become the French Empire would continue to increase as would the costs of keeping up the fight. At this point the "Man of the Island, who publishes the real System of Liberty" (that is Spence) would offer them some advice:

Take possession of all the rents of the conquered countries, and they will be more sufficient to pay your armies, and to ye also abolish all the taxes which their governments had imposed on the people.²

In this way landlordism would be abolished. As the reactionary forces were beaten France could give each country back its national independence and they could enjoy life organized on Spencean lines. There is no proof that Spence was active in the circles which actually sought French invasion. He was simply too critical of the limited nature of their politics - they rejected common ownership of the land - to associate with the republicans. However, this did not prevent him from thinking that such men might pave the way for the greater good that was Spenceanism.

Of all the radicals, Spence's thinking came closest to that of the French revolutionary Gracchus Babeuf.³ In the first place Babeuf wished to integrate the political and the social revolution. In the second place there are similarities in the conception of the transition. In 1795 Babeuf wished to see the revolution begin in a centre where the conditions were particularly favourable. From such a base, which would establish

1. The reaction would come, explained Spence, because "the rich men of the earth" feared that "the genuine principles of liberty" (that is Spenceanism) would spread with "the fictitious" (that is democratic republicanism); A Fragment of Ancient Prophecy (London, 1798), p. 4.

2. Ibid.

3. The following details of Babeuf's ideas are from R.B. Rose, "Gracchus Babeuf: the first modern revolutionary", Encounter, XLVII (1976), 28-36.

the new society within its boundaries, the revolution would spread outwards, the functioning alternative acting as an example to the rest of the country. This closely resembles Spence's presentation in the Restorer (1801). There is no evidence, however, that Spence knew of Babeuf or his views on the revolutionary transition. Spence's earlier account of a few thousand armed and experienced Spenceans establishing a provisional government and managing the process of change also looks remarkably like Babeuf's ultimate plan for which he was arrested and tried in 1796. There was, however, one important difference. Babeuf and his colleagues argued for the necessity of a temporary dictatorship over the people; who could be purged of "Royalist" influence and prepared for democracy. Only when they were properly "enlightened" could democracy be established. In his account of the transition Spence assumed that the people had already been enlightened as to the evils of the present system and the need for a Spencean alternative. Like many revolutionaries, before and since, Spence exhibited some frustration at the tendency of the people to accept oppression like "he-asses",¹ but he did not develop a theory of revolutionary dictatorship along the lines of Babeuf.

Given his arguments in A Fragment of Ancient Prophecy, Spence cannot have been unaware that there were British radicals, many of whom finished up in Paris, who had come to see French intervention, and co-ordination with their Irish compatriots, as part and parcel of the revolution. It was these men, and not Spence and what was at most a handful of followers,² who were at the centre of revolutionary conspiracy

1. Spence, "Rights of Infants", pp. 331.

2. In fact, until 1807, there is no solid evidence that Spence had any followers at all. See Olive D. Rudkin, Thomas Spence and his Connections (London, George Allen and Unwin, 1927), ch. 6.

in the 1790s and in the first years of the nineteenth-century.¹

Shadowy organizations such as the United Englishmen and the United Scotsmen, modelled on the United Irishmen to prevent penetration by spies, came into existence.² In the thought and practice of these revolutionaries concern for the legitimacy of revolution evaporated and was replaced by concern for the practicalities of takeover.

Precisely what these plans were is not clear. What is clear is that they believed insurrection and physical force to be essential. Englishmen were increasingly coming to realize, said the "Secret Committee of England", that "in order to possess a Constitution, they must make one." To this end "the invincible Army of France" would be an invaluable ally returning to its home land, when it had finished its mission.³ The highly dubious assumption made by these truly physical force radicals was that the British establishment was propped up by military force alone. In other words it was believed that Britain had become the complete despotism for so long predicted by the radical pamphleteers. In defending his proposals for a French invasion of Britain, Thomas Paine explained that not only was the British government in power solely on the basis of force but that it was a continuing threat to Europe. Desperate times,

1. See Elliot, "The 'Despard Conspiracy' Reconsidered" and A.W. Smith, "Irish Rebels and English Radicals 1798-1820", Past and Present, VII (1955), 78-85.

2. For the publications of these societies see the appendices in the Report of the Committee of Secrecy of the House of Commons. For an assessment of their activities see Harvey, Britain in the early Nineteenth-Century, pp. 85-93 (United Englishmen) and Meikle, Scotland and the French Revolution, pp. 186-93 (United Scotsmen).

3. "An Address of the Secret Committee of England to the Executive Directory of France" in Report of the Committee of Secrecy of the House of Commons, pp. 61-62. This document had been found on the person of Father James O'Coigly, a United Irish leader, arrested in Kent in 1798. O'Coigly had been in contact with the London-based radicals and was on the way to France when he was arrested.

therefore, required desperate measures.¹

It was also clear that, for the first time, elements of the Scottish radical movement had reached the conclusion that political revolution should mean national independence as well. Thomas Muir, resident in Paris after escaping from New South Wales to where he had been transported in 1794, argued that the cause of revolution in England was a lost one, the people being a worthless mob sunk in ignorance. The Scots, on the other hand, were a moral people who only needed soldiers, arms and money from France to achieve democracy and independence. The Union between England and Scotland has been achieved, he claimed, by English bribes and since then English influence had been paramount in Scotland's parliamentary representation, its universities and even in its church.² That similar sentiments had been held by many Scottish radicals since the movement developed from 1792 is clear, but what is not so clear is how many believed that national independence, as opposed to equal representation in the British parliament, was the corollary.³

Not surprisingly some of the local radicals, disillusioned by developments in France and by French military policy in Europe, saw great dangers in the idea of French invasion. Speaking at the last meeting of the London Corresponding Society in 1798 Thomas Evans argued that the French government had betrayed the principles of the revolution and was now "more desirous of establishing an extensive military despotism,

1. See Alfred O. Aldridge, "Thomas Paine's Plan for a Descent on England", William and Mary Quarterly, XIV (1957), 74-84.
2. See Meikle, Scotland in the French Revolution, ch. 8 and Christina Bewley, Muir of Huntershill: A Scottish Patriot's Adventures around the World (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1981), ch. 12.
3. There is a study which uncritically associates the Scottish radical movement with nationalism and republicanism from its inception: P. Beresford Ellis and Seumas Mac A'Ghobhainn, The Scottish Insurrection of 1820 (London, Victor Gollancz, 1970), chs. 3-4.

than of propagating republican principles".¹ He proposed to the L.C.S. that, in the event of a French invasion, all its members should join the volunteers and fight for Britain. By 1803 complete disillusionment with France, now ruled by Napoleon, had come to dominate what was left of a revolutionary current in Britain after the crackdown that had led to the trial of Despard. Writing to Charles Hall in 1805 Spence described the French Revolution as a complete "miscarriage" and he was never again to raise the idea that French invasion might pave the way for Spenceanism.²

That hesitancy which characterized the attitude of the radical reformers towards "the people" was almost completely absent in the case of the revolutionaries. Thomas Spence argued that he had seen enough of attempts to "preach and pray the World into Justice and Tenderheartedness". It was, he said, "a delusion".³ The time had come for the people to reject the system and the temporizing politics of the middle-class radicals and intervene directly on the stage of history. The people were not just to be organized numbers to back up and give legitimacy to a process which would occur within the boundaries of the English Constitution, but were themselves to be the means and ends of political change. Revolution, then, was on this view the proper and necessary expression of the idea of popular sovereignty itself.

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1. Proceedings of the General Committee of the London Corresponding Society ... (London, 1798), p. 6. Evans is worth quoting because there is evidence that he was actually a revolutionary and member of the United Englishmen. As Goodwin observed: "Whether his attitude reflected his own disillusionment with the French, a desire to hedge his bets, or an attempt to cover up treasonable and secret designs is hard to determine. On the face of it Evans' behaviour on this issue seems impossible to reconcile with the encouragement he was giving to the United Englishmen" Friends of Liberty, p. 447. It is highly probable, that the locally-based revolutionaries were divided on the issue of French help as those resident in Paris had been in 1792. See Lasky, "Recantation of Henry Redhead Yorke", 72.
 2. "Spence to Hall, 28 June 1805", B.L. Add MSS 27808, f.284. See also Spence, Giant-Killer, i.6-7.
 3. Spence, "Important Trial", p. 59.

At the same time the people were to be a physical force or battering ram which could, if organized properly, destroy the military arm of the establishment and pave the way for the equalization of political and civil rights. What disinclined the reformers to the schemes and scheming of their revolutionary colleagues was not only that they gave the Government the excuse it needed to clamp down on all opposition, but that it laid the foundations for demagogues to establish their own "mob-based" tyranny in the country. The theorists of revolution such as Paine and Spence had recognized the problem, but the same cannot be said with any assurance of all of their more action-oriented colleagues. It would have been strange, however, if the movement for political change in Britain in these years did not contain within its parameters differing ideas on what needed to be done and differing interpretations as to how those ideas were to be applied in any particular case. In fact not only were there reformers and revolutionaries in the traditional political sense but two radicals who defy easy categorization even though they both lie on the reform side of the major division: William Godwin and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. It is with their ideas on the transition that the next two chapters are concerned.

CHAPTER 15: GODWINISM

The discovery by the radical movement that the author of the Considerations on Lord Grenville's and Mr Pitt's Bills ("A Lover of Order") was none other than William Godwin was deeply disturbing; for in this tract Godwin was critical not only of the government but also of the London Corresponding Society and of John Thelwall in particular. Only twelve months earlier Godwin had published a series of articles in the Morning Chronicle accusing the government of using a doctrine of "constructive treason" by which men could be charged for High Treason on the grounds that their actions might result in the death of a King. Such a doctrine was said to be unlawful and preposterous. Godwin also insisted that radical attempts "to procure a Reform in the Common's House of Parliament, through the medium of associations and Conventions, is not a conspiracy to subvert the Monarchy".¹ In a substantial way he had helped lay the foundations for the acquittal of Hardy, Tooke and Thelwall. In the Considerations, however, he wrote of the dangers of "anarchy and tumult" created not only, if mainly, by the repressive measures of the government but also by the leading radicals. His complaint was not simply with revolutionism and physical force radicalism but with those reformers who saw the dangers of revolution and who formulated a strategy of change-by-pressure.² Godwin's political position was an identifiable brand of reformism in which there was little or no

1. William Godwin, Cursory Strictures on the charge delivered by Lord Chief Justice Eyre to the Grand Jury ... (London, 1794), p. 28. On its importance at the time see Locke, A Fantasy of Reason, ch. 7.
2. See Godwin, Considerations, pp. 8-23. Mistakenly C.H. Driver has argued that Godwin's complaint was with "the physical force party"; "William Godwin", in F.J.C. Hearnshaw (ed.), The Social and Political Ideas of Some Representative Thinkers of the Revolutionary Era (New York, George Harrap, 1931), p. 143.

place for associations and revolutions. Underpinning it was the belief that gradual reformation would be inevitable so long as it was not interfered with by those wishing to speed things up or those wishing to slow things down. He accused the radicals of the former and the government of the latter. "The truth" asserted Godwin, "may be expected hourly to gain converts. The more it is discussed the more will it be understood, and its value cherished and felt".¹

I On Revolution, Association and Public Assembly

Like the reformers, Godwin was deeply fearful of the consequences of revolution. "Revolution, although engendered by an indignation against tyranny, yet is itself even more pregnant with tyranny."² As it was state power which was being challenged the stakes were high. Because of this participants in the struggle were often driven to question the most basic of freedoms, including the freedom of thought and opinion, in their desire to secure power. At the same time the insecurity and uncertainty created by a revolutionary situation worked against frankness, sincerity and objectivity. In revolutions, he wrote, "the passions of men are afloat, and we are hourly under the strongest impressions of fear and hope, apprehension and desire, dejection and triumph".³ In such a situation, Reason had very little chance to operate and loss of life, bitterness and indignation were bound to result and persist long after the issue of state power was settled. Consequently revolutions had a tendency to leave unresolved many of the problems to which they had been addressed. According to Godwin revolutions were bound to decay into disorder

1. Godwin, Political Justice, p. 261.

2. Ibid., p. 269.

3. Ibid., p. 271.

and culminate in some form of tyranny. Politicians, then, had a duty to at least postpone revolution even if they could not entirely prevent it.¹

Godwin was of the belief that reformers rarely needed to take such risks in their pursuit of reform. He claimed that all political and social institutions ultimately rested upon opinion: change that opinion and the institutions themselves would change. Once opinion had shifted it was only a question of time before the institutions themselves responded. In the light of this belief he maintained that revolutionaries were the victims of two sorts of fallacy. The first was that a minority could act on behalf of the majority and introduce changes for them. "No people", said Godwin, "are competent to enjoy a state of freedom who are not already imbued with a love of freedom".² To take such a road, then, was totally indefensible. The second was the belief that, given majority support, the process of change could be sped up by revolutionary action. It was delay rather than haste which worked to the advantage of the reformers: "Every hour diminishes their [the establishment's] number and their resources, while, on the other hand, every moment's delay gives new strength to the cause, and fortitude to the champions of liberty".³

With typical thoroughness Godwin did acknowledge that "crises" occurred when opinion had clearly shifted but the system had yet to respond. Still, he insisted that "not a sword will need to be drawn, not a finger lifted up in purposes of violence" because the adversaries of popular opinion would be "too few and too feeble to be able to

1. Ibid., p. 281. See also Scrivener, "Godwin's Philosophy", 622-3.

2. Godwin, Political Justice, p. 262.

3. Ibid., p. 259.

entertain a serious thought of resistance against the universal sense of mankind".¹ By holding off from precipitous action the weight of numbers on the side of reform would be allowed to grow to the point where establishment resistance would be pointless. Godwin argued, however, that exceptional circumstances were possible in which revolution and the use of force might be necessary. A "whole nation", he said, possessed the right to "resort to arms" if it was impossible for them to prevent the introduction of "slavery" in any other way.² This qualification came at the end of a discussion on the proper approach to be taken by the radicals when popular opinion was clearly on their side. Provided that complete tyranny would not be the result revolution and the use of force were to be avoided. A few pages later he also made it clear that the longer they waited the less deplorable would be the mischiefs attendant on any revolution rendered necessary.³ In the first edition of Political Justice (1793) this position was developed more explicitly and in relation to the American and French Revolutions. He spoke approvingly of both revolutions but noted that delay on the side of the reformers would have made for "better consequences". Godwin argued that it was the establishment which would "have principally to answer for all the consequences that shall ensue" because it was their resistance which caused the people to revolt. Should tyranny actually descend upon a nation he saw little hope of reform and advised speedy emigration.⁴

In a chapter of the first edition of Political Justice entitled

1. Ibid., p. 274.

2. Ibid., p. 259.

3. Ibid., p. 281.

4. See Clark, The Philosophical Anarchism of William Godwin, pp. 288-89.

"On the means of introducing the genuine system of property" which was omitted from the 1798 edition, Godwin also posed the question:

"Suppose that the inevitable consequence of communicating the truth were the temporary introduction of such a scheme as has just been described, [i.e. revolution] must we on that account refuse to communicate it?" Godwin argued that the truth should be told "at whatever expense" and called on his readers to contrast the "moment of horror and distress" with the "ages of felicity" which would follow.¹ Not surprisingly, given the progress of the French Revolution and the reaction in Britain, Godwin was more circumspect in his later writings. Nevertheless he was particularly critical of those former radicals who used the failings of the French Revolution as a justification for opposition to all reform. It was ironic, he noted, that many radicals who had attacked him for his lukewarmness had, by the end of the century, gone to the opposite extreme. He explained apostasy in the following terms:

The human intellect is a sort of barometer, directed in its variations by the atmosphere which surrounds it. Add to this, that the opinion which has its principle in passion ... includes in its essence the cause of its destruction ... Zeal, though it be as hot as Nebuchadnezzar's furnace, without a continual supply of fuel will speedily cool.²

It is also worth noting that Godwin consistently defended the reforms that were actually achieved by the French Revolution, for example the end to hereditary government, and feared they would be overturned by foreign intervention.³

For Godwin, then, there were three possibilities. Either the

1. See William Godwin, Enquiry Concerning Political Justice (1st ed., Dublin, 1793), ii, 406-9.

2. Godwin, Thoughts Occasioned by the perusal of Dr. Parr's Spital Sermon, p. 9.

3. See B.R. Pollin, "Godwin's Letters of Verax", Journal of the History of Ideas, XXV (1964), 353-73.

people were unenlightened and unprepared for freedom in which case the struggle for freedom would be useless and/or dangerous, or the progress of political knowledge was such that it would be "futile and short-lived" to attempt to prevent progress.¹ There remained one situation - and one alone - that justified revolution and the use of force: where public opinion was clearly in support and the only alternative to direct action was complete enslavement. He accused many of the radicals of a tendency to over-estimate the extent, and degree of illumination of their support. If opinion was really behind a change, he said, its realization would be inevitable. The "enemies of reform", then, were not only the "friends of antiquity" who held up necessary reform but also the "friends of innovation" who were impatient and inclined to precipitous action.²

In the radical reform image of the transition the pressure of organized opinion was at the centre of the picture. The creation of an association for reform, backed up by public assemblies and the radical press, were the means to this end. In reply to the radical reformers Godwin argued that public opinion did not need an extraordinary association to ascertain its strength or to give effect to its objectives. His view on this topic will be discussed later in this chapter. In the second place he pointed to the dangers of political association and public assembly. Whereas for the reformers they were instruments of order and education as well as pressure, for Godwin they were the source of much evil.

For truth and political information to spread Godwin believed that all would need to think for themselves and remain free of "compulsion", "passion" or "party". However, these were precisely the qualities

1. Godwin, Political Justice, p. 259.

2. Ibid., p. 261.

encouraged by associations in general and public assemblies in particular:

Truth can scarcely be acquired in crowded halls and amidst noisy debates. Where hope and fear, triumph and resentment, are perpetually afloat, the severer faculties of investigation are compelled to quit the field. Truth dwells with contemplation.¹

Within political associations harangue and declamation replaced reasoned discussion. As a result "the acrimonious", "the intemperate" and "the artful" always won over "the prudent", "the sober" and "the sceptical". Crowds, said Godwin, had a natural tendency to riot and associations a "restlessness of disposition" which meant that they always liked to be seen to be active. Given the atmosphere of mutual animosity created by rival tendencies, associations always begat counter-associations. Godwin could see only one consequence from this mixture of pressures: "We should probably be involved in all the mischief of resistance, and all the uproar of revolution".² It was for this reason that he urged the government to pay "very careful and uninterrupted attention" to the operations of the radicals.³ In all of this he was careful to distinguish between the motives of the reformers like Thelwall, said to be highly honourable, and the likely consequences of their actions. He also made it clear that he viewed the Two Acts of 1795 as a remedy worse than the disease in that they threatened all sorts of speculative and philosophic disquisition so essential to the health of the nation.

However Godwin did allow two exceptions to his general rule with respect to political associations. In the first place ad hoc groups formed in normal times to correct specific and pressing evils were

1. Ibid., p. 286.

2. Ibid., p. 283.

3. Godwin, Considerations, pp. 14-15.

justifiable. But it would be quite wrong for such groups to persist longer than "the single and momentary purpose" for which they were constructed as they were bound to degenerate into "a mass of abuses".¹ In the second place "crises" might render associations absolutely necessary. Godwin explained:

While opinion is advancing with silent step, impatience and zeal may be expected somewhat to outrun her progress. Associations, as a measure intrinsically wrong, the wise man will endeavour to check and postpone as much as he can. But, when the crisis arrives, he will not be induced by the irregularities of the friends of equality to remain neutral, but will endeavour to forward her reign, as far as the nature of the case shall appear to admit. It may even happen that, in the moment of convulsion, and the terror of general anarchy, something in the nature of association may be indispensably connected with the general safety. [my emphasis]²

Godwin thought it safe to assume that "men of character and vigour" could be expected to emerge in such a situation and that "the soil in which such men are to be matured is less that of action than of enquiry and instruction."³

It is important to record that Godwin did possess a notion of "crisis" in which state power and authority were questioned and possibly challenged and that he did have a place - albeit a limited and special one - for association, revolution and the use of force. Thus although there was "one mode according to which the benefit of mankind may best be promoted, and which ought always to be employed", exceptional circumstances might force reformers to consider alternatives. "Mankind", said Godwin, "are imperfect beings".⁴ With this estimation of the human

1. Godwin, Political Justice, p. 292.

2. Ibid., p. 291.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

condition radical reformers like John Thelwall were in complete agreement. However, it was their belief that associations were not only a means of clearly ascertaining the sense of the nation on consitutional questions but a way of organizing and civilizing popular pressure for change. By eschewing an association strategy, therefore, popularly-based, undisciplined upheavals from below were actually encouraged. Godwin's Considerations, concluded Thelwall, was proof of "how great and how dangerous a tendency the life of domestic solitude led by this singular man, and his scrupulous avoidance of all popular intercourse has to deaden the best sympathies of nature, and encourage a selfish and personal vanity."¹

II. The Case for Gradualism

J.P. Clark has noted the existence of two "Burkean themes" in Godwin's account of the transition: firstly, the belief that reform should be gradual and, secondly, the belief that order and security were essential.² Godwin, was particularly critical of hasty changes, be they implemented by an unenlightened people from below or an enlightened but unrepresentative elite from above. He cautioned reformers against believing that discontent was a sure sign that society was ready for wide-ranging changes and against the temptation to introduce changes about which there was very little understanding. Scattered efforts to renovate society, in the context of general ignorance, were thought to be worthless. It was always better, he wrote, when discussing the institution of marriage, to endeavour "by discussion and reasoning, to effect a grand and comprehensive improvement in the sentiments of its members."³ Godwin

1. Thelwall, Tribune, ii.xv.

2. Clark, The Philosophical Anarchism of William Godwin, p. 281.

3. William Godwin, Fleetwood: Or, the New Man of Feeling (3 vols; London, 1805), i.xii.

also saw dangers in the extension of political rights to those not sufficiently enlightened to practise them properly since it would pave the way for tyranny rather than liberty. Thus he thought it best to approach universal suffrage gradually. England, he explained to a young follower in 1820 is "not yet ripe" for universal suffrage.¹ Although in principle a democratic republican he was in practice a Whig, describing Charles Fox as "the most illustrious model of a Parliamentary leader on the side of liberty that this Country has produced."²

The case for gradualism was primarily a case for order and stability. "Dreadful convulsions", he wrote, "sentence whole classes of men to wretchedness" and endanger stability by creating resentment.³ In order to maintain the peace and tranquillity of society it became necessary to "temporize" and "accommodate ourselves to the empire of old prejudices".⁴ Thus, although he believed that the system of ranks, seignorial duties, fines, conveyances, entails, distinctions between freehold, copyhold and manor in landed property, vassalage and primogeniture associated with feudalism, could be rightfully abolished by parliament he proposed that it be done gradually.⁵ However, it was one thing to gradually abolish feudal

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1. See Charles Kegan Paul, William Godwin: His Friends and Contemporaries (2 vols; London, Henry S. King, 1876), ii.265. In this letter Godwin was opposing universal male suffrage for Spain in the light of the revolution there. He voiced his approval for the establishment of freedom of the press, the abolition of the Inquisition and the introduction of partial representation by the Spanish revolutionaries.
 2. William Godwin, Uncollected Writings 1785-1822 ed. J.W. Marken and B.R. Pollin (Gainesville, Florida, Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1968), p. 457. Fox consistently urged caution in the movement for parliamentary reform. Household suffrage was as far as he was willing to go. On Fox and radicalism see Baylen and Gossman, Modern British Radicals, pp. 177-82.
 3. Godwin, Political Justice, p. 721.
 4. Godwin, Considerations, p. 80.
 5. Godwin, Political Justice, pp. 720-21.

privileges, quite another to re-distribute private property by legislative decree. To interfere with private property was to interfere with independent judgement, it being "better than one man should suffer than that the whole community should be destroyed".¹ All parliament was justified in doing was to remove all of the feudal encumbrances on the production and distribution of wealth. What Godwin wished to see, however, was not that the distribution of wealth would follow the requirements of economic power but that the needs of the people would be the governing criterion for distribution. Only by freeing the system of distribution from parliamentary influence would this be possible. "The distribution of wealth in every community", he wrote, "must be left to depend upon the sentiments of the individuals of that community". The attempt to achieve social justice by means of regulation was said to be "ill-conceived and abortive".² Consequently he would have nothing of social and economic programmes designed to equalize opportunities for self advancement by way of government action - apart from, of course, those which would gradually dismantle feudalism.

It was Godwin's belief that political reform would pave the way for social and economic reform, not because parliament would become responsive to popular pressure for legislative action, but because it would lead to liberalization and decentralization, the primary conditions for the encouragement of Reason. It was one of the ironies of Godwin's thought that he saw laissez-faire as the precondition for equality as it would liberate the individual conscience from the pressures of established prejudices. For this reason he was totally opposed to schemes for national education advocated by many of the radicals in the interests of universal

1. Ibid., p. 717.

2. Ibid., p. 715. See also pp. 177-82 of this thesis.

enlightenment, citizenship, and equal opportunities.¹ In the first place, Godwin argued, all public establishments included in them "the idea of permanence". There was a bias, he said, in favour of what is already known as against what remains to be discovered:

... public education has always expended its energies in the support of prejudice; it teaches its pupils, not the fortitude that shall bring every proposition to the test of examination, but the art of vindicating such tenets as may chance to be established ... All this must be unlearned before we can begin to be wise.²

In the second place publicly provided education discouraged people from learning and acting on their own motivations. "Whatever each man does for himself", claimed Godwin, "is done well; whatever his neighbours or his country undertake for him is done ill".³ In the third place he maintained that there would always be an "alliance" between such a system of national education and the national government: "Government will not fail to employ it, to strengthen its hands, and perpetuate its institutions".⁴ Godwin was well aware that the bulk of privately funded and controlled schools were equally destructive of individual initiative and enlightenment in eighteenth-century Britain but he was highly critical of schemes for public provision which would, he claimed, only compound the evils attendant upon the existing system.⁵

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1. See pp. 46-7, 176, 200, 232 of this thesis for some details of radical proposals for state education. Clearly Godwin had been influenced by Priestley's attack on state education in his First Principles of Government, Part II, Sect. II, pp. 62-104. Unlike Priestley, however, Godwin did not go on to advocate state provision of a minimum education for the labouring poor. See pp. 47-8, 222 of this thesis.
 2. Godwin, Political Justice, pp. 614-5.
 3. Ibid., p. 616.
 4. Ibid., p. 617.
 5. On this issue see also Burton R. Pollin, Education and Enlightenment in the Works of William Godwin (New York, Las Americas Publishing Co., 1962), ch. III.

Freedom of opinion, Godwin also argued, could be trusted to produce results in respect of the many unjustifiable inequalities which existed: "If, in any society, wealth be estimated at its true value, and accumulation and monopoly be regarded as the seals of mischief, injustice and dishonour, instead of being treated as titles to attention and deference, in that society the accommodations of human life will tend to their level, and the inequality of conditions will be destroyed".¹ Only by securing the individual from all forms of oppression and creating a framework of law and order in which the individual would be secure, could such processes begin to work. However, as was the case with respect to revolution and association, Godwin did allow for exceptions. On the question of property, he said, there were occasions when the infringement of the sphere of personal discretion would be justified:

What shall prevent me from taking by force from my neighbour's store if the alternative be that I must otherwise perish with hunger? What shall prevent me from supplying the distress of my neighbour from property that, strictly speaking, is not my own, if the emergence be terrible, and will not admit of delay?²

It was, he concluded, no more fitting that I should bring upon myself death than that I should suffer it to fall upon another. At the same time the government may itself re-distribute property from one person to another "where the alternative is complete, and the employment of force will not produce a greater evil, or subvert the general tranquillity".³ Although he gave no examples it would seem that he had something like the Poor Laws in mind.

Godwin also admitted that the forceful dissolution of government

1. Godwin, Political Justice, pp. 715-6.

2. Ibid., p. 225.

3. Ibid., p. 226. See also f/n 1, p. 180 of this thesis.

may, in exceptional cases, be beneficial in that it "awakens thought, and diffuses energy and enterprise through the community". If investigation and reasoning had proceeded such a dissolution, and the community was fully prepared for it, such "anarchy" could be a "seed-plot for future justice". Given that the current age was one in which political truth had been more widely circulated and understood he concluded that revolutions offered "a more auspicious ultimate result than revolutions of any former period".¹ Nevertheless he still thought it best to hold anarchy at bay and wait patiently for opinion to bring its inevitable changes, free of violence and bloodshed. Eventually these changes could culminate in what would be a permanently secure state of anarchy and social justice.

III The Process of Change

The major problem faced by Godwin in explaining the process of change itself related to his own analysis of the relationship between "opinion" and the "environment" (included in which were all the major political, social and economic institutions). Because his account of political, social and economic change assumes that opinions must change first he must be able to establish an independence of opinion within society. However, in the chapters in Political Justice dealing with the epistemological assumptions behind his politics this is precisely the position he rejects. "The characters of men", he headed the fourth chapter, "originate in external circumstances".² Within Godwin's thought, therefore, there was a problem with respect to the origin of new ideas. As Clark writes:

1. Ibid., pp. 665, 666.

2. Ibid., Book I, ch. IV.

As has been seen he holds that opinions are shaped by the environment, and especially the social environment. Our values are conditioned, as Marx would also put it, by the social institutions of our society, and in Godwin's opinion, both economic and political ones exert an enormous influence. But these institutions are dependent, in turn, on opinion. Given this relationship of mutual dependence between ideas and institutions, Godwin must find a point at which change can begin.¹

Godwin solves this problem by distinguishing between the content of the mind and the faculty of reason.

The content of the mind, wrote Godwin, was created from our impressions of the external world which included ourselves, other people and nature. All minds at birth, he claimed, were a tabula rasa on to which the environment (via impressions) makes its mark. At the same time, however, each human being was born with the potentiality for rationality. Only the activation of this capacity to think and judge for oneself, make connections and discern cause and effect in phenomena could lead any individual to the truth. For Godwin ignorance and error lay in confused understanding. However, whilst every individual was born with the capacity to reason and discover the truth, his or her particular environment was crucial in determining its effectiveness. Thus the capacity to reason and find the truth was ultimate rather than immediate in those subject to the wrong influences, such as the very rich and the very poor. Nor, it should be said, was Godwin confident that those employed in trade, commerce and the professions could be relied upon to exercise their natural capacities as they were motivated primarily by the prospect of personal gain, even at the expense of others.²

1. Clark, The Philosophical Anarchism of William Godwin, p. 278.

2. Godwin, Enquirer, p. 219.

Godwin believed that there existed in late eighteenth-century Britain a small group of persons "already awakened to the pursuit of truth". These were "the men of study and reflection" for whom Political Justice was written, a literary and intellectual elite centred in London and within which the dissenting interest was so prominent.¹ In the Enquirer Godwin wrote:

The affairs of man in society are not of so simple a texture, that they require only common talents to guide them. Tyranny grows up by a kind of necessity of nature; oppression discovers itself; poverty, fraud, violence, murder, and a thousand evils follow in the rear. These cannot be extirpated without great discernment and great energies. Men of genius must rise up, to show their brethren that these evils, though familiar, are not therefore less dreadful, to analyse the machine of human society, to demonstrate how the parts are connected together, to explain the immense chain of events and consequences; to point out the defects and the remedy. It is thus only that important reforms can be produced. Without talents, despotism would be endless, and public misery incessant.²

The preservation of the liberty of these "saviours of the human race" was the key to Godwin's strategy of social and political change, and his disapproval of the popularly based radical movement of the 1790's stemmed largely from his fear that they would provoke the government into stemming the free flow of ideas so essential to the health of the nation's intellectual elite.³

His belief was that "small and friendly circles", engaged in dialogue and conversation characterised by frankness and honesty, would become the vehicles for the transmission of the truth. For true progress of intellect to occur discussion would need to be followed by periods of silent study and reflection. However, should the "unambitious and candid

1. Godwin, Political Justice, p. 288. See also Martin Fitzpatrick, "William Godwin and the Rational Dissenters", Price-Priestley Newsletter, III (1979), 4-28 and Pollin, Education and Enlightenment, ch. IV.

2. Godwin, Enquirer, pp. 10-11.

3. See M. Philp, "William Godwin's Political Justice" (Oxford Univ. M. Phil. thesis. 1980), pp. 80-3.

disquisitions of enquiring men be swallowed up in the insatiable gulf of noisy assemblies, the opportunity for improvement is annihilated".¹ Without the interruptions of revolution or reaction "the circle of instruction" could gradually increase and reason spread through the nation. In this the printing press would be of great benefit in that it had made possible the easy multiplication of copies and significantly cheapened publications thus diminishing "the extreme inequality of information among different members of the same community, which existed in ancient times".²

Godwin also made it clear that the intellectual elite had a special responsibility to ensure that their own number was reproduced through the correct education of their children. It is no surprise, given his analysis of the relationship between the reasoning process and the truth, that he saw the point of education as teaching children the ability to "think, discriminate, to remember and to enquire" rather than to imbibe and repeat particular thoughts. The Enquirer was largely a treatise on how children could be educated to excellence. It required, he said, "great care in the training, and the most favourable circumstances to bring it to perfection". Godwin left no doubts that those born into poverty were destined to ignorance. Poverty, he said, was "the great slaughter-house of genius and of mind. It is the unrelenting murderer of hope and gaiety, of the love of reflection and the love of life".³

As "the circle of instruction" grew so the political nation could be extended. In the first instance this would mean a moderate programme of political reform only, as before universal suffrage (and ultimately the democratic republic) could replace the existing system the labouring

1. Godwin, Political Justice, p. 290.

2. Ibid., p. 280.

3. Godwin, Enquirer, pp. 6, 17.

poor would need to be raised up materially and intellectually. This would occur, firstly, as a result of the gradual dismantling of privileges associated with feudalism and of the corruption associated with the existing political elite and, secondly, from the "rich and great" voluntarily re-distributing land to the advantage of the labouring poor. The rich, claimed Godwin, were susceptible to the appeals of justice.

From one dreadful disadvantage their minds are free. They have not been soured with unrelenting tyranny, or narrowed by the perpetual pressure of distress ... If you show them the attractions of gallantry and magnanimity in resigning then, they will often resign without reluctance.¹

He called on them to pay higher wages to their employees and to charge prices more in line with costs.² It was also hoped that the great landowners would begin to break up their estates and allow the people to satisfy their own needs on their own land.³

It is certainly true that Godwin expected the realization of democracy to speed up the process by which poverty was alleviated and wealth re-distributed, as it would remove those restraints which prevented the mind from attaining its genuine strength in the present system:

Implicit faith, blind submission to authority, timid fear, a distrust of our powers, an inattention to our own importance and the good purposes we are able to effect, these are the chief obstacles to human improvement. Democracy restores to man a consciousness of his value, teaches him, by the removal of authority and oppression, to listen only to the suggestions of reason, gives him confidence to treat all other men with frankness and simplicity and induces him to regard them no longer as enemies against whom to be upon his guard, but as brethren whom it becomes him to assist.⁴

At this point the pressure of opinion as well as the force of reason

1. Godwin, Political Justice, p. 786.

2. Ibid., pp. 793-94.

3. Godwin, Enquirer, p. 178.

4. Godwin, Political Justice, p. 490.

would begin to play a role as the admiration for wealth and position declined: "He [the rich man] would not be pointed at with the finger, or hooted as he passed along through the resorts of men, but he would be conscious that he was looked upon as the meanest of mankind."¹ It was partly, then, a case of individuals themselves absorbing the ideas of justice and acting accordingly. For Godwin knowledge of justice necessarily meant behaviour in accordance with its dictates.² Partly also, it would result from the community exerting pressure of opinion (but not backing it up with the force of legislation) on those with wealth and privilege. Eventually the distribution of the burdens and benefits of life would be in accordance with the principles of justice.

Godwin's was a case for the intellectual. If only those who were fortunate enough to have gained general enlightenment could see that the impulse to politics and action as practised by the radicals in the 1790s was self-defeating and unnecessary, the interruptions of revolution and reaction could be avoided. Silent study, serious philosophical disquisition, and candid conversation were, for Godwin, powerful forces which would eventually carry all before them.³ His own assessment of the state of opinion in the country led him to conclude that the Whigs constituted the party to whom the liberally-minded and enlightened should give their support since they were committed to a defence of civil liberty and to reforms in keeping with "the spirit of the age".⁴ At one and the

1. Ibid., p. 739.

2. Ibid., pp. 155-56.

3. See Fitzpatrick, "William Godwin and the Rational Dissenters", 15-18.

4. On Whiggery as ideology see Abraham D. Kriegel, "Liberty and Whiggery in early nineteenth-century England", Journal of Modern History, LII (1980), 253-78.

same time, then, Godwin was the most radical and the most conservative of the British radicals. He was the most radical with respect to the principles which underpinned his thinking, principles which led him to a commitment to anarchism and equality, and conservative with respect to the practice he proposed for his fellow reformers. He had no doubt that enlightenment would eventually spread, even if the establishment tried to hold it up and the reformers tried to push it too fast. The truth, he liked to say, was like a pebble in the lake whose circles, no matter how slowly, will eventually overspread the whole surface.¹

1. Godwin, Political Justice, pp. 461-62.

CHAPTER 16: PANTISOCRACY AND THE POLITICS OF CHRISTIANITY

The political position of the youthful Coleridge has attracted a good deal of scholarly attention, if only because of his later denials that he had ever been a Jacobin or a democrat. In 1803 he admitted to a general association with the English Jacobins but emphatically, and truthfully, denied that he had ever been a member of one of their societies. He was driven to their camp, he explained, not because of fundamental agreement with them, but because both his family and the establishment treated his opinions as the "drivel of a babe". Even then his support for radicalism was said to be solely rhetorical.¹ In Biographia Literaria (1817) he maintained that he had viewed the "revolutionary principles" of the 1790's with complete "abhorrence".² It would seem, however, that like many apostates before and since Coleridge was attempting to re-write his own past. Certainly this was the belief of John Thelwall who had been befriended by Coleridge in 1796. "Mr. C.", he wrote, "was indeed far from Democracy, because he was far beyond it". Without much doubt, noted Thelwall, the young Coleridge was a "leveller" believing as he did in a society which all are equal in rank, social position and political power."³ Recent editions of Coleridge's political lectures delivered in Bristol in 1795 and of the ten numbers of The Watchman published in 1796 confirm Thelwall's description.⁴ What is revealed is a vision of the good

1. S.T. Coleridge, Collected Letters ed. E.L. Griggs (6 vols; Oxford, Oxford Univ. Press, 1956 ii.998-1005.
2. S.T. Coleridge, Biographia Literaria (1817; London, J.M. Dent, 1906), p. 94.
3. See B.R. Pollin, "John Thelwall's Marginalia in a copy of Coleridge's Biographia Literaria", Bulletin of the New York Public Library, LXXIV (1970), 81.
4. See Collected Works, vols. I and II, published by Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971 and 1970.

society; Christian-inspired, small-scale, self-sufficient and self-governing and within which benevolence would be developed from the family outwards. Like Thomas Spence, Coleridge was critical of those radicals who wished to "drag down" those above them but who treated with "suspicious jealousy" schemes for uplifting the poor.¹ To distinguish his own position from that of his fellow radicals Coleridge invented the terms "Pantisocracy" and "aspheterism". The former referred to his ideal community; the latter to the doctrine of common property which underpinned it.

In any treatment of late eighteenth-century radical thought Coleridge's place is secured, not simply because of his commitment to community of property, but also because he helped introduce the idea - which was to become common to nineteenth-century socialism - that the construction of a small community based on the principles of equality and co-operation was not only a means to self-fulfillment but an example to the rest of the world of what was possible and most desirable.² As such communitarianism (or "utopianism" as it was frequently called) became an alternative form of political practice; communitarians being critical of both the reformists and revolutionaries who focussed on state power. Coleridge also contributed in his lectures and writings of 1795 and 1796 a highly individual understanding of what a radical commitment should entail in the Britain of the 1790s. Before disillusionment and finally conversion to the cause of the status quo Coleridge was developing what he

1. S.T. Coleridge, "A Moral and Political Lecture delivered at Bristol" (1795) in Collected Works, i.11.
2. For recent studies which have placed Pantisocracy in the communitarian tradition see C. Garrett, "Coleridge's Utopia Revisited", in S. Teselle (ed.), The Family, Communes and Utopian Societies (New York, Harper and Row, 1972), pp. 121-37 and D. Hardy, Alternative Communities in Nineteenth-Century England (London, Longman, 1979), pp. 8-9.

saw to be specifically Christian understanding of radical politics. The precise nature of his thinking and practice in these early years continues to attract a good deal of scholarly attention.¹

I Pantisocracy as Utopian Community

How would it be possible, Robert Wallace had asked in his Various Prospects, to establish the "Model of Perfect Government" which his principles dictated as the most beneficial for human happiness? There were, Wallace said, two possibilities: firstly, there were moments of "grand revolution" when the spirit of patriotism and the love of equality had been accidentally raised and, secondly, "new communities" based on the right principles could be set up in uninhabited parts of the globe. By their example others may be led to follow until the system had spread to all countries.² Therein lies the essence of communitarianism: political change by the force of example. Such ideas did not develop in a vacuum and it is particularly important to note the tradition of settlement in America by religious groups seeking to escape persecution and put their principles into practice.³ Indeed the image of America as an asylum of liberty and a source of moral regeneration (the "New World") was well established by the 1790s. In the years preceding the birth of

1. See John Colmer, Coleridge: Critic of Society (Oxford, Oxford Univ. Press, 1959), chs. 1-2; "Bliss was it in that dawn: the matter of Coleridge's revolutionary youth and how it became obscured", Times Literary Supplement, no. 3623 (Aug. 1971), 929-32; Lewis Patton and Peter Man, "Introduction", Collected Works i.xxvii-lx; Lewis Patton, "Introduction", Collected Works, ii.xxiii-lxxix; and Kelvin Everest, Coleridge's Secret Ministry: The Context of the Conversation Poems 1795-1798 (Sussex, Harvester Press, 1979).
2. Wallace, Various Prospects, 68-9. See also Burgh, An Account of the Cessares, pp. 3-7.
3. See Arthur Bestor, Backwoods Utopias: The Sectarian Origins and the Owenite Phase of Communitarian Socialism in America 1663-1829 (2nd ed.; Philadelphia, Univ. of Philadelphia Press, 1970).

the Pantisocratic scheme the virtues of America had been paraded by the French journalist and humanitarian J.P. Brissot and the English radical Thomas Cooper.¹ With Joseph Priestley, Cooper hoped to attract British and French settlers to a planned community in the region of the Susquehanna River. Both travelled to America but their scheme for a settlement failed as insufficient interest was shown.²

It is not surprising, then, that Southey and Coleridge should have looked to America in general and the Susquehanna region in particular as the home for their planned community.³ When they met in 1794 both were imbued with the general principles of the French Revolution but it was Southey who first thought of the idea of emigration with like-minded friends. On meeting Coleridge he told him of his ideas and "from what we know of Coleridge, and the fertilising power of his mind, the rest follows".⁴ Not only did Coleridge invent the terminology and give most thought to the philosophical framework within which the scheme was to be placed, but he concerned himself fully with the practical problems it posed. For Coleridge the Pantisocracy was, as Harold Beeley has noted, "an experiment in social organization, complementary to the French Revolution and destined to convert humanity by example". For Southey, on

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1. See Sister Eugenia, "Coleridge's Scheme of Pantisocracy and American Travel Accounts", Publications of the Modern Language Association, XL (1930), 1069-84.
 2. It is important to note that the Cooper/Priestley scheme was a commercial one and private property was to be a feature of the new settlement. Thus there is a clear distinction between it and Pantisocracy. This is missed by M.C. Park, "Joseph Priestley and the Problem of Pantisocracy", Proceedings of the Delaware County Institute of Science, XI, no. 1 (1947).
 3. On the connections see J.R. MacGillivray, "The Pantisocratic Scheme and its Immediate Background", in M.W. Wallace (ed.) Studies in English by Members of University College, Toronto (Toronto, 1931), pp. 131-69 and M.W. Kelley, "Thomas Cooper and Pantisocracy", Modern Language Notes, XLV (1930), 218-20.
 4. J. Simmons, Southey (London, Collins, 1945), p. 39.

the other hand, the prospect of "a pleasant way of life" was more to the point.¹ This contrast is borne out by a brief history of the rise and fall of the plan.

In the original plans for the Pantisocratic community only twelve men and twelve women "of good education and liberal principles were to be involved".² Before leaving it was recognized that they would need to agree upon a "code of contracts necessary for the internal regulation of the society" but it was recognized that these might have to be adjusted to accord with the laws of the United States.³ The freedom of religion and political opinion and the freedom to withdraw at pleasure were thought to be essential. The economic base of the community would be agricultural, each man only needing to labour for two or three hours a day.⁴

Coleridge's hostility to manufacturing was total and he claimed that it was the introduction of weapons for hunting and utensils for domestic accommodation which paved the way for the introduction of landed property in the earliest stages of human history. He explained this by noting that the occupation of manufacturing ill-accorded with the wandering life of the shepherd and led, therefore, to the creation of towns and cities. The existence of these centres of population gave greater value to the surrounding lands and as a result the notion and practice of exclusive rights developed. As manufactures improved and artificial wants developed

1. Harold Beeley, "The Political Thought of Coleridge", in E. Blunden and E.L. Griggs (eds), Coleridge: Studies by Several Hands on the Hundredth Anniversary of his Death (London, Constable, 1934), p. 153.
2. See H. Sandford, Thomas Poole and his friends (2 vols; London, 1888), i.96-99. On the intellectual sources for the Pantisocracy scheme see esp. L.W. Deen, "Coleridge and the Sources of Pantisocracy: Godwin, the Bible and Hartley", Boston University Studies in English, V (1961), 232-46.
3. Coleridge (29 Aug. 1794), Collected Letters, i.96.
4. The women, on the other hand, were to be employed caring for the children and in other occupations suited to their strength. Apparently this did not include housekeeping; that was to be a job for the men.

inequality became more marked and disputation and conflict emerged for the first time. It was because of this conflict, he claimed, that government became necessary:

... the jarring Interests of Individuals rendered governments necessary and governments have operated like quack Medicines; they have produced new diseases and only checked the old ones - and the evils which they check, they perpetuate.¹

In the Pantisocracy, then, life would be simple and unaffected by the evils of luxury and the means of obtaining it - trade, commerce and manufacturing. These features of the modern world, he said, made it "a contradistinction to the kingdom of God."²

Coleridge proposed a "positive" (as opposed to a "negative") community of goods; all the produce being laid up in common for the use of all equally.³ He specifically criticized the doctrine of equalization of property which he distinguished from community of property ("aspheterism"). Schemes which proposed an equal division of the land rather than the final product were said to be flawed, firstly, because it was always impossible to ensure that each individual possessed land of similar quality, secondly, because even if equality was initially established normal market processes would create inequality, and, thirdly, because it allowed the selfish passions to have free play:

While I possess anything exclusively mine, the selfish Passions will have full play, and our Hearts will never learn that great Truth that the good of the Whole etc.⁴

He believed one of the weaknesses of Mosaic Law to be that it only

1. S.T. Coleridge, "Lectures on Revealed Religion ..." (1795), in Collected Works, i.219.

2. Ibid., p. 225.

3. On the distinction between a negative and a positive community of goods see pp. 171-2 of this thesis.

4. Coleridge, "Lectures on Revealed Religion", p. 228. See Dean, "Coleridge and the Sources of Pantisocracy", 236-40.

equalized property rather than abolished all private property. Any accumulation was said to be incompatible with salvation and the Kingdom of God.

As was the case with most of the utopian literature discussed in chapter ten, a crucial feature of Pantisocratic life would be the emphasis placed on study, discussion and the education of children. A good library was said to be essential. However, benevolence was thought to be more than an idea which one defined and proved intellectually; it was also, and more importantly, a matter of feeling and experience. The family unit and all private attachments were said to have a crucial role in making benevolence a habit of the "soul", as it was within the immediate personal circle that it could be learnt and experience in a concrete manner:

The ardour of private Attachments makes Philanthropy a necessary habit of the Soul. I have my Friend - such as he is, all mankind are or might be! The deduction is evident - Philanthropy (and indeed every other Virtue) is a thing of Concretion - Some home-born Feeling is the centre of the Ball, that, rolling on thro' Life collects and assimilates every congenial Affection.¹

Accordingly Coleridge applauded William Godwin for proposing the correct ends of human existence but criticised him for cutting this end off from the essential means to its realization - the family. Godwin's notion of benevolence was thought, therefore, to be purely abstract and unattainable.² In Pantisocracy, on the other hand, there would be a network

1. Coleridge (13 July 1794), Collected Letters, i.86. See also Dæen, "Coleridge and the Sources of Pantisocracy", 240-45.
2. Godwin did modify his thinking on feeling in general and the private and domestic affections in particular. See his Thoughts Occasioned by the perusal of Dr. Parr's Spital Sermon, pp. 24-44. It was true, Godwin acknowledged, to encourage universal benevolence by practising it in the context of family and friends. He stressed, however, that it was not these private and domestic affections which were the test of virtue. In that test all human beings counted as one, including family and friends. See also Locke, Fantasy of Reason, chs. 12-13, 16.

of living relationships between specific individuals from which benevolence would emerge. Over a number of generations the existence of the proper conditions for human life would guarantee that the benefits accumulate and the evils of the past disappear. Eventually true happiness would be found.

Before long Southey wished to modify the original plan by including not only his mother, cousin, mother-in-law and brothers-in-law but also some servants. Concerning the latter, Coleridge was particularly indignant as it undermined the egalitarian aspirations of the scheme. "The leading Idea of Pantisocracy", he pleaded with Southey, "is to make men necessarily virtuous by removing all Motives to Evil - all possible Temptations".¹ The presence of servants was said to be such a temptation. There were also great dangers should the children be taken:

These children - the little Fricker for instance and your Brothers - Are they not already deeply tinged with the prejudices and errors of Society? Have they not learnt from their schoolfellows Fear and Selfishness - of which the necessary offspring are Deceit, and desultory Hatred? How are we to prevent them from infecting the minds of our Children?²

The whole point of the Pantisocracy was to prove that it was the environment which created evil. By starting afresh a new generation, imbued with new principles and new habits, could be created. At every step it seemed as if Southey was undermining this idea. By the end of 1794 the scheme had completely collapsed.

When Coleridge was in London making enquiries about transportation and land purchases, Southey and the others had decided to launch the experiment in Wales instead. Although he objected Coleridge reluctantly accepted the change, thinking that it would help pave the way for the

1. Coleridge (21 Oct. 1794), Collected Letters, i.114.

2. Coleridge (23 Oct. 1794), Collected Letters, i.119.

American experiment by allowing the Pantisocrats to accustom themselves to an agrarian lifestyle. However, Southey's plan to abandon the idea of community of property (except with respect to the initial purchase) was, for Coleridge, the last straw: "In short, we were to commence Partners in a petty Farming Trade. This was the Mouse of which the Mountain Pantisocracy was at last safely delivered".¹ By August 1795 the whole project had disintegrated amidst much bitterness and mutual recrimination.

For Coleridge Pantisocracy was not just a means of escaping from the Old World and finding peace and happiness in the New,² but an experiment which he expected God to universalise at some point in the future. Like Richard Price and Joseph Priestley he was convinced that the millenium was at hand.³ Like William Godwin he believed that it was possible for a select few to break out of the circle of determination which doomed most men to their allotted place within contemporary society. Unlike Godwin however, he added that it was possible for this select few to carve out for themselves an island of perfectibility in a sea of luxury and corruption. This "seminary", as he liked to call it, would be the embryo of the highest state of society at which mankind was destined to arrive.⁴ The plan was, as Kelvin Everest has observed, "not a

1. Coleridge (13 Nov. 1795), Collected Letters, i.165.

2. Coleridge did not demur from defending his plans in these terms as well. See "On the Prospect of Establishing a Pantisocracy in America", Coleridge: Poetical Works ed. E.H. Coleridge (Oxford, Oxford Univ. Press, 1969), p. 69.

3. See esp. Coleridge's "Religious Musings", ibid., pp. 108-25. In the "hour of solemn jubilee", he wrote, "the massy gates of Paradise are thrown wide open" and the human race would become "the vast family of love", ibid., p. 122.

4. Coleridge (early Aug. 1795), Collected Letters, i.158.

renunciation, a recoil from social man, but a positive start, releasing new potential."¹

II Politics and Christianity

When hopes of setting up a Pantisocratic community faded and eventually disintegrated in 1795, Coleridge was left with the problem of determining what he was obliged to do in the context of the Old World. His analysis of the situation was classically radical. The government, steeped in corruption and driven to war against revolutionary France, was taking Britain along the road to despotism.² Equally possible was a violent upheaval by the ignorant and desperate lower orders.³ The task facing the radicals was to avoid these twin evils. Consequently he was a supporter of the campaign against the Two Acts of 1795 which, if passed, would convert Britain into "a despotism". "Every man has a right", he argued in defence of the radical campaign against the Two Acts, "to save his Country from Slavery".⁴ He also supported - in general terms - the extension of the right to vote and frequent elections. Governments, he said, were good or bad according to their distance from democracy, be it direct or representative.⁵ The want and ignorance of the lower orders was said to be largely the result of the excessive taxation associated with the systems of corruption and war.⁶ Parliamentary reform, therefore, was

1. Everest, Coleridge's Secret Ministry, p. 61.

2. S.T. Coleridge, "The Plot Discovered ..." (1795) in Collected Works, i.313-5.

3. Coleridge, "A Moral and Political Lecture", p. 10.

4. S.T. Coleridge, "Lecture on the Two Bills" (1795) in Collected Works, i.271.

5. Coleridge, "The Plot Discovered", p. 307.

6. Coleridge, "Conciones ad Populum", pp. 65-70.

part of the process which would materially and intellectually uplift the poor. Coleridge also made it clear that political reform should be achieved gradually and in line with degrees of illumination: "Without previous illumination a change in the forms of Government will be of no avail ... we actually transfer the Sovereignty to the People, when we make them susceptible of it".¹

Like the radical reformers whom he warmly applauded for their patriotic efforts,² Coleridge saw a role for politics and public opinion in his conception of political change. The freedom of the press was described as an example of the people's constitutional right to influence the government: "This unrestricted right of over-awing the oligarchy of Parliament by constitutional expression of the general will forms our liberty". Eventually the will of the people as expressed through the press would need to be embodied in legal form by way of the petition; the whole nation becoming "one grand Senate, fervent yet untumultuous".³ Unlike Godwin, Coleridge did not attack the practice of political lecturing, indeed he was engaged in it himself in Bristol in 1795, or the formation of political associations. He described John Thelwall as an honest and principled activist whose influence on the lower orders was positive. "If the day of darkness and tempest should come", he wrote, "it is most probable, that the influence of T. [Thelwall] would be very great on the lower classes".⁴

1. S.T. Coleridge, "The Watchman: Prospectus" (1796) in Collected Works, ii.4-5.

2. Coleridge, "A Moral and Political Lecture", p. 13. He specifically mentioned the victims of the government crackdown in Edinburgh in 1793: Thomas Muir, Thomas Palmer, Maurice Margarot and Joseph Gerrald.

3. Coleridge, "The Plot Discovered", p. 313.

4. Coleridge (20 Aug. 1797), Collected Letters, i.342.

According to Coleridge, William Godwin believed that the enlightened few could exert an influence on all the people no matter what their background or situation.¹ There was, however, said Coleridge, too great a gulf between the classes for easy communication to occur: "Society as at present constituted does not resemble a chain that ascends in a continuity of Links".² The over-worked labourers were not, given their present situation, capable of absorbing and understanding the truth as articulated by Godwin. The dangerous position, however, was held by those radicals who appealed to the self-interest of the labouring poor. Experiencing no benevolence themselves, an appeal to the self-interest of the poor was not capable of engendering any. Such radicals were, he concluded, quite willing to "make the Altar of Freedom stream with blood." These were the men who provided the raw material out of which the Ministry manufactured conspiracies.³

In Coleridge's mind, however, there was a more basic problem faced by all the radicals who framed their appeals in purely secular and humanist terms. Godwin in particular was singled out for criticism. Godwin, said Coleridge, offered no motive to moral improvement except the distant prospect of perfection to be enjoyed not by ourselves but by posterity. This would "scarcely influence" he claimed, "the actions of any - still less of the ignorant, the prejudiced, and the selfish".⁴ Christianity, on the other hand, offered the promise of peace and happiness

1. Godwin did believe (i) that all men were ultimately susceptible to reason and argument and (ii) that the truth would gradually descend to the lower orders. However, as was shown in chapter fifteen, he did not believe that this process would occur for the poor independently of an improvement in their material condition.
2. Coleridge, "Conciones ad Populum", p. 43.
3. Coleridge, "A Moral and Political Lecture", p. 9. See also "Conciones ad Populum", pp. 43-5.
4. Ibid., p. 44.

in the Kingdom of Heaven and, via Jesus, proved its claims within history itself. Given the existence of an after-life in which each individual enjoys or suffers the consequences of his life, even the poorest of men would be influenced and so develop an interest in acting according to the dictates of justice. Coleridge's exhortation to the radicals, therefore, was: Go, preach the Gospel, especially to the poor who could be subject to the influence of unprincipled demagogues.¹

In this way Coleridge believed it was possible to teach the poor their duties in order that they become capable of exercising their rights. The true patriot, then, was the man who united "the zeal of the Methodist" with "the views of the Philosopher" and was "personally among the Poor."² Such patriots, "the elect of Heaven" as he called them in Religious Musings, would see the necessity of equality of condition as well as equality of rights and of proceeding with "calmness and energy". Progress along Christian lines would be gradual but consistent:

Accustomed to regard all the affairs of man as a process, they never hurry and they never pause; theirs is not that twilight of political knowledge which gives us just light enough to place one foot before the other; as they advance, the scene still opens upon them, and they press right onward with a vast and various landscape of existence around them.³

Religion, he pleaded with his fellow radicals, was only against freedom when it was in alliance with power and avarice, as was the case in eighteenth-century Europe.⁴

1. The religion of Christ, wrote Coleridge, contained two essential elements: firstly, a belief in the omnipresent Father of infinite power, wisdom and goodness and, secondly, the belief that in the after-life we do not perish but enjoy or suffer the consequences of our life; Coleridge (1797), Collected Letters, i.280-81.
2. Coleridge, "Conciones ad Populum", p. 43.
3. Coleridge, "A Moral and Political Lecture", p. 12.
4. Coleridge, "The Watchman: Number One", p. 12.

Coleridge expressed some optimism about the diffusion of knowledge in the 1790s, despite the existence of forces of reaction. Firstly, he pointed to the progress of the Methodists and other disciples of Calvinism. Whatever its errors Coleridge viewed Methodism as conducive to the spread of liberty because its attention to the New Testament could not fail to bring benefits to its congregations. Secondly, and like Thelwall, he pointed to the emergence of large manufactories in which it was the custom to read regularly. Thirdly, the number of book Societies was on the increase, and fourthly, the experience of the dreadful effects of war and corruption was leading people to seek solutions. "I shall be happy", he concluded, "if my exertions should ever form one link, however small, in this chain of causes".¹ He was referring to his efforts as the editor of The Watchman, designed to diffuse knowledge throughout the nation: "A PEOPLE ARE FREE IN PROPORTION AS THEY FORM THEIR OWN OPINIONS. In the strictest sense of the word KNOWLEDGE IS POWER."²

Like Godwin's Coleridge's politics were marked out by a distinctive emphasis on the personal. Politics, and public activity in general, may be able to clear the ground but it could not construct anew: "If we would have no Nero without, we must place a Caesar within us, and that Caesar must be Religion".³ The truly Christian radicals were compared with the first disciples converting through the force of their words and their example. He preserved his commitment to the Pantisocracy by proposing that the Christian patriots part with their possessions, distributing them to those most in need, and enjoy in common those necessities which would be left. He gave an illustration of the Christian

1. Ibid., p. 14.

2. Coleridge, "The Watchman: Prospectus", p. 4.

3. Coleridge, "Lectures on Revealed Religion", p. 229.

approach in respect of the slave trade. The application to the legislature to stop the trade was said to be superfluous as a more effective and morally consistent method was available: a voluntary boycott of its major products, sugar and rum. He addressed the consumers of such products in the following way:

As you hope to live with Christ hereafter, you are commanded to do unto others as ye would that others should do unto you. Would you choose, that a slave merchant should incite an intoxicated Chieftan to make war on your Country, and murder your Wife and Children before your face, or drag them within yourself to the Market?¹

Such use of argument leading to boycott, he said, was ultimately the only way to stop the trade. The true realization of the fraternal and egalitarian society would be the "final result of an unresisting yet deeply principled Minority, which gradually absorbing kindred minds shall at last become the whole".²

In retiring to Nether Stowey in 1796³ Coleridge did not immediately go on to argue that conventional politics was unnecessary and undesirable but that he was personally unsuited to its rigours. To Thelwall he wrote:

... impervious circumstances point out to each one his particular Road. Much good may be done in all. I am not fit for public Life; yet the Light shall stream to a far distance from the taper in my cottage window. Meantime, do you uplift the torch dreadlessly, and shew to mankind the face of that Idol, which they have worshipped in Darkness!⁴

Note that he does see a continuing role for himself in the general diffusion of opinion and that he urges Thelwall to keep alive his public, political activity. He also admits that "the time will come when our

1. Coleridge, "The Watchman: Number Four", p. 138.

2. Coleridge, "Lectures on Revealed Religion", p. 218.

3. Everest has convincingly argued that for Coleridge Nether Stowey was "a version of the pantisocratic ideal"; Coleridge's Secret Ministry, pp. 90-91. See also Garrett, "Coleridge's Utopia Revisited", p. 129.

4. Coleridge (17 Dec. 1796), Collected Letters, i.277.

Utilities will be directed in one single path".¹

The primary task of the Christian radical, then, was to win the individual over to the principles and practice of the Gospel. At points this implied political activity, if only because it impinged on the Christian minority by determining what degree of intellectual and religious freedom was to exist in society. Indeed, should despotism threaten it was the Christian's duty to engage in firm but peaceful resistance.² However, for political activity to be acceptable and effective Coleridge thought that it needed to be based more directly and clearly on the precepts of Christianity. Christianity, because it taught dread of an "invisible spectator" and offered hopes of future rewards, allowed the individual to be freed from "the tyranny of the present impulse". In other words it disciplined mankind to the proper exercise of their freedom. Atheism, on the other hand, taught immediacy and sensuality.³ The Godwinians were described as "a myriad of detached metaphysical systematizers" and the revolutionaries as "unilluminated by Philosophy and stimulated to a lust of Revenge by aggravated wrongs".⁴ Coleridge's sympathies were with the reformers like John Thelwall and Joseph Gerrald. There too critical remarks were in order as radical reformism tended to be too narrowly concerned with political rights and insufficiently egalitarian in its thinking. At the same time they were said to rely too heavily on legislative change and gave too little attention to the question of individual conversion. The truly Christian radical, on the

1. Ibid.

2. Only in his Religious Musings did Coleridge hint at violence in the process of political and social change.

3. Coleridge, "The Watchman: Number One", p. 12.

4. Ibid. and "A Moral and Political Lecture", p. 9.

other hand, would prove his politics by word and by example. The Pantisocratic ideal stayed alive not just as a distant ideal but as part of the means by which its own universalization would be possible.

CONCLUSION

Early in the thesis it was established that the radicals marked themselves out in the political culture of eighteenth-century Britain by their commitment to a significant extension and development of political rights. Earlier opponents of the political system wished to see more frequent elections, the removal of placemen from the Commons and the replacement of a standing army by a citizen militia but they still believed that Parliament needed to be based on the independent landed men in the counties. The late eighteenth-century radical movement saw as its primary objective the significant widening of "the political nation".¹ In the first instance the dissenters, middling orders and men of small property took up the battle; to be joined in the 1790s by artisans and other sections of the newly emerging working class. The task of the thesis has been to provide a detailed account of the varied dimensions of radical ideology and on this basis to assess the various interpretative claims that have been made about the nature of radicalism.

On the most basic question of political liberty it was found necessary to distinguish between the different perspectives which existed within the radical movement. Firstly, and most significantly, there was a distinction between those who saw the need to preserve a mixed constitution of King, Lords and Commons and those who wished to return to first principles and construct a new, republican constitution without hereditary mediations. For the mixed constitutionalists the people's house, the Commons, would have control over supply and the veto power over

1. The term has been borrowed from J.H. Plumb, "Political Man" in James L. Clifford (ed.), Man Versus Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1968), pp. 1-21.

any proposed legislation. They believed, therefore, that the common people's interests would be served. However, because of the mixed constitution this would not be at the expense of the legitimate interests of the propertied classes. In effect the mixed constitutionalist radicals added their case for a fully democratic Commons to the Country ideology which had provided the basis for political opposition in earlier days. In this respect there was a clear continuity of political language and political argument.¹

For the republicans, on the other hand, the fact that the people or their representatives could not legislate without the agreement of unelected and generally reactionary elements was more to the point. It was noted, however, that differing republican traditions were at work. Republicans such as Catharine Macaulay and Joseph Priestley saw the need to institutionalise, to a limited degree at least, the idea of "mix" in the constitution by showing some deference to property, education and experience. For many the idea of a fully-fledged democratic republic was still associated with "anarchy" and "levelling". There were radicals, such as Thomas Paine, Thomas Spence and John Oswald, who made the case for a democracy based clearly on popular sovereignty. Amongst these unashamed democrats there was still a significant debate on precisely how the institutions of democracy would need to be structured to ensure that the general good resulted from the political process. Different methods of election, accountability and models of law making were proposed to guarantee that the "will of all" issued forth as the "general will".

The fact that "democratic" and "aristocratic" republican ideas,

1. See esp. Dickinson, Liberty and Property, ch. 6, Brewer, "English Radicalism in the Age of George III" and Linda Colley, "Eighteenth-Century English Radicalism before Wilkes", Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, 5th Ser., XXXI (1981), 1-19.

most of which can be traced to the seventeenth-century, played an important part in late eighteenth-century radical argument is testimony to the degree of political and intellectual work performed by those whom Caroline Robbins labelled "eighteenth-century Commonwealthmen". In the context of radicalism itself, Catharine Macaulay's eight-volume History of England proved to be of immense value in that it provided an alternative, republican reading of the seventeenth-century to that of David Hume. In the days of the Commonwealth, she wrote, England "was arrived at the meridian of its glory", only to be re-subjected "to the yoke of an individual" by Oliver Cromwell.¹ She applauded the Levellers, noting that they were "honest to the principles of equal and general Freedom".² At the same time the democratic and popular republican tradition was kept alive throughout the eighteenth-century in the coffee-houses and chapels of the "Dissenting artisans and politically and economically dispossessed".³ Late eighteenth-century republicanism emerged out of and was built upon these earlier traditions kept alive in the eighteenth-century.

In the second place, and overlapping and complicating the distinctions made above, were differing perspectives on what was appropriate as an objective in the short run, as opposed to what may be appropriate sometime in the future. This related not only to the extension of voting rights but also the basic constitutional forms. In respect of the latter it was found to be useful to distinguish between principled

1. Macaulay, History of England, v.376, 379.

2. Ibid., iv.355. See also Hill and Hill, "Catharine Macaulay and the Seventeenth Century".

3. Foner, Tom Paine and Revolutionary America, p. 10. See also Plumb, "Political Man".

and tactical mixed constitutionalists. The latter's commitment to a politics based on the renovation of the existing system of King, Lords and Commons was underpinned by the belief either that only reform of this character was achievable in the context of the times and British traditions; or, more to the point for many, was all that was achievable without revolution. The same divisions emerged in relation to voting rights, many of those professing a belief in natural equality proposing an evolutionary strategy. Only in time, as the material and intellectual condition of the common people improved, would it be possible to fully extend voting rights.

Such doubts with respect to the contemporary relevance of the most radical objectives were based not only on tactical and strategic considerations but also on real fears as to the consequences of extending rights to many thought illiterate, impressionable and potentially dangerous. For many of the radicals politics and citizenship were still associated with property as it was thought to guarantee independence and a real interest in the affairs of the nation. There was, then, a great deal of intellectual and practical, political overlap between the moderate and radical reformers. The radicals were instrumental, however, in continuing the process by which the notion of property for citizenship was extended -from landed property to moveable property to labouring capacity. Eventually it was argued that all adult males have a natural and inalienable right to participate in the nation's political life; at least at a minimum level by way of the vote.

From the point of view of political argument, therefore, radicalism contained distinctly different currents of thought. At one end were those who possessed a positive conception of democracy and who believed the people had a right either to be their own governors or to elect those that would be. At the other end of the spectrum were those

who possessed a negative conception of the democratic part of the constitution, seeing it more as a check on government rather than a source of government. For some of the radicals it was also apparent that there was an expectation that men of property would still be the nation's leaders and legislators, even though they would be accountable to a broader constituency. For the mixed constitutionalists it was a question of integrating the common people into the existing system; for the democratic republicans it was a question of revolutionizing that system.

To ensure that political rights would be exercised properly a nationally organized system of education was thought by many to be necessary. It was hoped that by educating the people, and in the process informing them of their rights and duties, much progress would be made in breaking down the gap between economic position and political capacities. For the radicals the closing of such a gap would also necessitate an improvement in the economic rights and opportunities of the common people. At a minimum this required lifting from their backs the unproductive and oppressive superstructure of unequal laws and taxation. Thomas Spence went so far as to argue that democracy required an equal distribution of the land so that everyone would have a direct interest in the affairs of the nation. By integrating education and economic improvement with the case for political change the radicals were able, in a new and productive way, to utilise for their own purposes the traditional argument about the necessary connection between property, independence, and citizenship. Unlike their conservative critics they assumed that the common people were capable of moral and intellectual improvement.

It was seen, however, that patriarchal assumptions lay behind the thinking of many, if not most, of the radicals. The adult male was

thought to be head of a household and as such had a responsibility to work for his family and a right to see to it that their interests were protected by the state. Women were said to be in a naturally subordinate position, lacking the independence necessary for citizenship. By the turn of the century the whole notion that men and women enjoyed different spheres of activity and because of this were to be treated differently when it came to politics had been questioned, most notably by Mary Wollstonecraft. Wollstonecraft claimed for women the potentiality for full and equal rationality and moral responsibility. Following on from this a minority of radicals made the case for equality in respect of education and citizenship rights. None seemed to have thought, however, that women, or at least all women, could escape the child-rearing functions which "nature" had bestowed on them. Still the fact remains that it was within the context of late eighteenth-century radical thought that the case for women's rights was given an enormous fillip.

In line with the earlier, Real Whig oppositionists the radicals saw citizenship as being intimately connected with the right to bear arms and be militarily trained. It was partly this connection which led many to think that political rights could not be granted to women, it being assumed that they were incapable of military labour. The radicals argued that the granting of political rights to the individual resulted in an obligation to take part in the nation's defence. At the same time a militarily prepared people could thwart the ambitions of any individual bent on establishing himself as a dictator. Standing armies were thought to be potential instruments of tyranny and an inefficient and expensive means of national defence. Only Joseph Priestley in his Lectures on History and General Policy developed a case against citizen-based schemes for national defence in the modern world with its forever developing division of labour. For most of the radicals this was to question the

very basis of a properly organized polity in which the political and military functions would be united.

The claim that all adult males possessed a right to political liberty was defended in two ways. Firstly, it was argued that it was expressive of their humanity and inherent rationality; politics being viewed as a process of collective self-determination. To deny someone this right would be to deny them a place in society and prevent them from realizing their full humanity as social and political beings. Contained within this defence of political liberty were civic humanist assumptions about politics and human nature; a corrupt polity being one in which there was an absence of political liberty and civic virtue. Secondly, political liberty was seen in liberal terms, as an instrument to protect the other, naturally-given rights to life, liberty and property. Underpinning this argument was the Lockean image of the state as a deliberate creation, designed to protect human beings from the weaknesses of their fellows. Without political liberty, and the accountability it brought to government, there would be a danger that the state itself would be oppressive. The natural rights assumptions provided a moral framework within which it was believed politics ought to be conducted and on the basis of which politicians and political systems should be judged. The point of citizenship, then, was to see to it that the governors acted in the proper manner. Frequent and uninfluenced elections were insisted upon because they would guarantee that this was the case.

That the radicals wished to synthesize the two accounts of citizenship, as expressive and as instrumental, was revealed in discussions of representation. Should the people come to rely too heavily on their representatives civic lethargy may emerge as a problem and pave the way for corruption. Government by and in the interests of the few

would, given realistic assumptions about human nature, lead to the undermining of natural rights. A number of solutions were proposed, ranging from rotation to constituency control over political representatives. Because of their assumption of the corruptibility of power they saw the maintenance of civic virtue through its constant exercise as crucially important in a properly functioning polity. Interestingly they said very little about the role local government could play in this process by providing a means by which ordinary people could learn the true meaning of citizenship.¹ Thomas Spence was the significant exception. He did propose a national legislature for his utopia but expected the locality to be the centre of political, social and economic life.

William Godwin also proposed a significant decentralization of function but in his case it was to pave the way for an anarchical society. As human beings improved Godwin thought that the hypothetical state of nature of seventeenth and eighteenth-century political theory could become a reality. He was willing to preserve the civic humanist idea of a public dialogue between free and equal persons and part of the natural rights doctrine² but not the political and institutional contexts within which they were applied. No matter how a state was constituted Godwin always saw it as oppressive. Even the social contract theory was said to fail to legitimise government as obedience in any particular case may be against the dictates of the general welfare. It was the latter, he argued, which should always have precedence in human affairs.

1. This point has been made in relationship to Thomas Jefferson's political thought. See Jean Yarborough, "Republicanism Reconsidered: Some Thoughts on the Foundation and Preservation of the American Republic", Review of Politics, XLI (1979), 88-92.
2. See his defence of "passive" as opposed to "active" rights in Book II, ch. v of Political Justice: "Every man has a certain sphere of discretion which he has a right to expect shall not be infringed by his neighbour"; ibid., p. 198.

For Godwin the encouragement of genuine human autonomy was not only the chief end but also the primary means of human improvement.

The right to political liberty was thought by the radicals to extend to the right of revolution. The idea of revolution was linked to the idea of "renewal" or "renovation", held to be necessary when a country had fallen into a state of corruption. However, whereas in classical republican thinking such renewals were usually associated with a specially ordained "Lawgiver" who would lay the foundations for freedom and virtue, for the radicals it was for the properly organized voice of the people, incorporating the collective wisdom of the nation, to decide the basic, constitutional laws of the country. Ultimately, then, it was the people who were sovereign.

Most radicals, however, like the seventeenth-century Whigs from whom they gained many of their ideas, saw revolution as a right which could only be exercised in a direct and forceful way as a last resort. They pointed to the dangers attendant upon any revolutionary confrontation and sought political reform within the context of what they saw to be English legality and constitutionality. The political reform they sought was justified as a restoration of the political system to its proper, Anglo-Saxon basis. The use of historical argument allowed the radicals to establish their patriotic credentials and to ward off the conservative claim that they were "revolutionists" and "innovators". The radicals laid claim "to precisely those elements of belief which opponents of reform were accustomed to think of as their own - prescription, prejudice and patriotism".¹ This being said the radicals made it clear that their commitment to an ancient point of reference was based on the belief that

1. Janice Lee, "Political Antiquarianism unmasked: the Conservative Attack on the Myth of the Ancient Constitution", Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research, LV (1982), 169.

Anglo-Saxon institutions had emerged organically and from the point of view of political principles, properly. It was possible, therefore, to consistently use both the language of antiquarianism and of first principles in developing the case for change.

Building on eighteenth-century historical research which undermined the extravagant claims which had been made with respect to the Anglo-Saxon past, other radicals rejected the view that freedom was a value which had been lost and needed to be recovered. According to Thomas Paine while some lessons could be drawn from historical precedents, the task of political reformation rested with each generation. So long as the institutions designed were based on the universal, inalienable rights of man the precise form they took could vary according to time and place. For Paine the historical task of radicalism was not the recovery of long-lost rights and liberties but the slotting into the ongoing process of human progress and enlightenment.

By 1815 the antiquarian argument had been severely criticized and was decreasingly used. Interestingly, however, a degree of continuity between the late eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century radical reformers can be established. Although reference to Anglo-Saxon institutions and practice declined, a less precise form of "popular constitutionalism" persisted, based on "that corpus of laws secured during the struggles against absolutism, the sacred whig canon of Magna Carta, Habeas Corpus, Bill of Rights and Act of Settlement".¹ It was only to be later in the century that the connection between radicalism and "the language of patriotism" was severed.²

1. J.C. Belchem, "Republicanism, popular constitutionalism and the radical platform in early nineteenth-century England", Social History, VI (1981), 7.

2. Cunningham, "The Language of Patriotism, 1750-1914".

The idea of association became central to the radical strategy for change as it was seen as a means of properly articulating and organizing popular opinion. It was hoped that reform associations could transform the "mob" of eighteenth-century Britain into "citizens". The associations formed were seen as "ideal polities, models of a perfect social order".¹ William Godwin, always the odd man out, however, expressed doubts about all popularly-based political activity. Not only, he claimed, were revolutions dangerous and to be avoided if possible, but political associations and public meetings, the very core of the mainstream radical strategy for change, were not conducive to the spread of rationality and carried dangerous potentialities.

The revolutionaries differed from the reformers in that they saw the need to have a new system built on rational foundations and principles right from the outset if corruption was to be avoided. To preserve hereditary elements was to keep alive the threat of oppression. Only a deliberate foundation based on "reflection and choice" rather than "accident and force" would give solidity to the political changes sought.² At the same time it was thought naïve to believe that political change could be achieved without the vigorous and violent opposition of the existing rulers. In revolutionary thought, then, awareness was shown of the physical force factor. But whilst the revolutionaries could point to the problem facing the reformers of achieving reform with an intransigent establishment and of maintaining it with hereditary institutions still intact, the reformers pointed to the danger of revolution degenerating into revolutionary dictatorship.

1. Brewer, "English Radicalism in the Age of George III", 360.

2. On the classical and neoclassical sources for such thinking see Yarborough, "Republicanism Reconsidered", 75-82.

For all the radicals the corruption at the centre of British political life was seen as resulting in government by the few and in the interests of the few. Given the assumption that power corrupts it was thought impossible to protect the people from their governors without some institutionalization of political liberty. In the case of Britain it was thought that the political elite was in alliance with the powerful economic interests, in particular the landed and financial interests. This "virtual aristocracy" was thought to be a permanent threat to religious and civil freedoms and a drain on the productive classes of the nation. Political liberty was supported, therefore, because it would either restore freedoms lost or guarantee freedoms yet to be enjoyed, and because it would abolish the superstructure of taxation, warfare and waste that characterised the eighteenth-century state. Radicals also continued to air earlier criticisms voiced against "money power" and the financial system, which created unnecessary instability and uncertainty in the economy. All believed that cheap and honest government would replace the expense and corruption of the present system when political change was achieved.

Whilst a commitment to cheap and honest government was common to all the radicals it does not, in itself, indicate the nature of their social and economic ideology. To elucidate the nature of radical ideology it was necessary to deal explicitly not only with arguments about political liberty but also about civil liberty, property and progress. In the first place a clear difference emerged on the question of the degree of freedom which any state could grant to its people. For some, most notably James Burgh, the thorough socialization of the young and the continuing control of the adults was a matter of grave political concern, given the potentiality for licentiousness and evil which existed. Only in the context of such a framework of state intervention was it thought

possible to grant civil and political liberty without any fear of abuse and decay. At the other extreme were those who associated political reform with a process by which civil liberty would be progressively extended. Within this "liberal" point of view progress was associated with the freedom to explore and experiment with new ideas and practices. Excessive state interference was thought to stifle such a process. Nevertheless liberals such as Joseph Priestley still expected social institutions such as the family, churches and schools to instil in the people the values necessary for the proper exercise of liberty. He also saw a role for the state itself in respect of the education of the labouring poor who were, to a degree, victims of the developing division of labour. William Godwin took the liberal argument even further and expressed doubts not only about the state but also about social institutions such as the family which he believed stifled individuality and therefore the human potentiality for rationality. However, he stressed that before government and other institutions could wither away human beings would need to be fully prepared for the implications. Part of the process of achieving this would itself involve the liberalizing of social and political life. Classical republican, Puritan and Enlightenment assumptions all vied for position in radical discussion of the meaning and limits of human freedom.

Most importantly, a division was discerned on the major issue of property and progress. By the second half of the eighteenth-century it had become clear that developments in agriculture and manufacturing were joining those in finance to significantly change the nature of the British economy. The commercial radicals argued that most of the modernizing tendencies should be embraced, the significant exception being the so-called financial revolution. As Isaac Kramnick noted:

... by the end of the century criticisms of the debt, of

paper money, and of banks and, in turn, praise of independent farmers could not automatically be translated into a politics of nostalgia or a repudiation of capitalism or even of urbanism. Fear of national ruin from an ever-growing national debt was as widespread in the entrepreneurial and manufacturing circles as it was among the middle-class intellectuals in the dissenting chapels and academies.¹

Commercial Radicals argued that political change was a necessary precondition for the proper flowering of the modern, commercial economy with its national and international division of labour since only political change would free government from the clutches of the corrupt and wasteful. With talent and honesty at the helm of the state enterprise and initiative would be freed to work their wonders. In eighteenth-century Britain it was thought that taxation, waste and war had stifled those potentialities which modernizing tendencies revealed to be at work.

If it is possible to speak of "bourgeois radicalism" it was this ideology which gave it coherence. It was noted, however, that within the context of such beliefs there were important differences of emphasis between "Smithian" and "Artisan" radicals. Both accepted the contours of a modern, commercial society but disagreed on the degree to which the economic rights and opportunities needed to be equalized. This reflected itself in different perceptions of what the labouring class were entitled to, both in respect of the final product and in respect of the opportunities of their children for self-advancement. Putting it simply their class perceptions were different.

For the Smithians society was conceived of as an open hierarchy; there being little expectation of a great deal of inter-class, inter-generational mobility. For Joseph Priestley, in fact, the very existence of different classes rendered necessary different systems of education so that all could find happiness in their station. In the case of the

1. Kramnick, "Republican Revisionism Revisited", 643.

labouring poor responsibility for such education was said to lie in the hands of the state. With the establishment of cheap and honest government the lot of the labouring class was expected to improve. Thomas Paine and John Thelwall, on the other hand, wished to see a more significant increase in the share of production going to the labourers, either at the point of production or via transfer payments. They also made the case for genuinely equal educational opportunities so that all children no matter what their background could realize their naturally-given talents. It was argued that a broadening of the social basis of the radical movement in the 1790s can explain the more aggressive social and economic outlook that was developed. The artisan radicals wished to have their assumed equality of status fully recognized in the political, social and economic spheres. A reformed state, then, would need to act to ensure that social justice and equal opportunities were achieved. They stressed that their concern was to establish equality of rights and not equality of condition, which was said to be destructive of incentives and the seed-bed for tyranny. At most they took radicalism to the borderlines of socialism, they certainly did not cross into its territory. Indeed they saw the industrial revolution as creating opportunities for self-advancement rather than closing them off and freezing Britain into a two-class society.

All the commercial radicals, however, accepted the basic claim that commercial society would bring about economic progress and a new era of international harmony via peaceful exchange. Luxury, which had referred to generalised affluence, was preserved as a critical concept but came to refer to unearned income expropriated from the productive classes by the rich, idle and powerful. The commercial radicals plundered freely the economic writings of "sceptical Whigs" such as Adam Smith and David Hume. Where they differed from the sceptical Whigs, to

varying degrees, was on the question of political liberty. Smith and Hume saw personal and civil liberty as the key to progress, and controversially from the point of view of most of the radicals, claimed that such liberty was compatible with different forms of government, except pure despotisms. With their perception of the corruptibility of the powerful and their belief that commercial society would be inherently imbalanced and politically unstable if the interests of all the participants in it were not recognized and protected, the radicals made the case for a significant extension of political liberty. It was this belief that made their Whiggism "vulgar" as opposed to "sceptical".

Nevertheless the line between the radicals and sceptical Whigs on political questions was blurred. As was shown the radicals differed in their assessment of the degree of democracy that was necessary to realize political liberty and protect civil liberty. According to time and place a mixed constitution or a democratic republic would be appropriate. The reformers sought that degree of reform which would not only be attainable peacefully but which would also prevent corruption. The republicans pointed out that the two objectives were in conflict and that the only way to root out corruption and prevent its re-emergence was to place the system on completely new foundations. In the case of Joseph Priestley a development from a "sceptical" to a "vulgar" viewpoint can be discerned. In his earliest writings he placed the stress on civil liberty and proposed only the mildest reforms to the political system. By the 1790s he was convinced of the necessity for a wide-ranging programme of political reform which he hoped would pave the way for the abolition of the hereditary elements in the constitution. It was this taking seriously of the whole idea of political liberty by the radicals which marked them out and opened up the intellectual space for the consideration of the democratic republican idea. The existence of

a living experiment across the Atlantic gave a practical plausibility to this thinking.

From Smith and Hume the commercial radicals developed their case for a modern, progressive economy; from Locke the conception of the social contract and the rights of man; and from the neo-Harringtonians ideas on citizenship, the mixed constitution, corruption and renewal. Such a synthesis was thought to be necessary if political liberty, civil liberty, economic progress and social order were to be achieved. The republican tradition based on Machiavelli, which dealt with men as they are rather than as they ought to be,¹ kept its relevance for eighteenth-century radicals who in other respects are best seen as enlightenment liberals. Isaac Kramnick, on the other hand, has claimed that for the radicals "citizenship and the public quest for the common good were replaced by economic productivity and hard work as the criteria of virtue ... One's duty is still to contribute to the public good, but this is seen as best done through economic activity, which in fact aims at individual gain."² This is to underplay the important role the commercial radicals saw for political liberty and its proper exercise in the new society. Without virtuous citizens and virtuous statesmen, the radicals argued, there was always a danger that the polity would be swamped by partial interests. It was a question of finding the proper balance between the "private" and the "public" spheres of human existence. They believed that such a balance between economic pursuits and public participation, military and political, could be realized in the nation at large and in the life of any individual. In fact, given the freedom which was granted to self-interest in the commercial economy, it was

1. See Yarborough, "Republicanism Revisited", 64-76.

2. Kramnick, "English Middle Class Radicalism", 35.

particularly important to ensure that it be balanced by public-spirited participation so that at the level of the state concern for the common good was not lost. Jean Yarborough's description of the project of the Framers of the American Constitution is apposite:

... they did not choose liberal democracy over republicanism. Their plan was far more ambitious: they sought to combine the advantages of liberal freedom and republican virtue, without the disadvantages of either.¹

Precisely because commercial radicalism represents a mixture of elements tensions were bound to exist. For example the commercial radicals embraced the idea of the division of labour but were reluctant to apply it to the sphere of defence. Although willing to acknowledge that a degree of separation between citizen and legislator had become necessary in a large state they were not willing to break the assumed link between the possession of arms, military training and citizenship. And, as Caroline Robbins has said of the eighteenth-century Commonwealthmen in general, "they could not foresee the future nor the changed demands of an industrialized society".² They viewed economic progress, with a little help from a reformed Parliament, as creating opportunities for self-advancement and as breaking up class society. All would have sufficient property and independence to be citizens in the new commercial society. It was this assumption about future projections that the agrarians challenged.

The central point about the social and economic ideology of the radicals is that there was significant disagreement on the question of economic progress. The thesis has drawn attention to agrarian radicals who not only developed a more fundamental critique of the social and economic tendencies of the day but proposed alternatives based on the

1. Yarborough, "Republicanism Reconsidered", 63.

2. Robbins, Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman, p. 385.

values of simplicity, equality and community. Whilst the commercial radicals saw contemporary economic developments as basically progressive, modern commercial society being the fourth and necessary stage in the progress of mankind from his hunting and gathering beginnings, the agrarians complained of the disintegrating and corrupting effects which came with modernity. They pointed to the emergence of private property and inequality in the distribution of the land and the development of a taste for non-necessities as the chief factors which paved the way for modern civilization. The "Renaissance pessimism" which Pocock associated with earlier neo-Harringtonian thought was transformed by the agrarian radicals into substantive criticism of the financial, agricultural and manufacturing revolutions of the eighteenth-century.

Late eighteenth-century agrarian thought has found its way into the history of British socialism because of the critical concepts developed and because of the alternative ways of life and labour proposed. Whereas other radicals saw social division in terms of the middling orders and labouring poor versus the oligarchy the agrarians pointed to the struggle between the propertied and the propertyless. In this scheme the possession of wealth, rather than excessive wealth and political power, came to be seen as the source of power in all its forms. The institution of wage labour itself became the object of criticism, Charles Hall explicitly developing the conception of profit as a surplus, unearned and as such unjustified as a form of income.¹

However, as was the case with commercial radicalism different class perceptions were at work when it came to applying agrarian doctrines. Only in the thinking of Thomas Spence was agrarianism

1. It was, as John Dinwiddy has observed, "on the critical rather than the constructive side that Hall's most impressive contribution was made"; "Charles Hall, Early English Socialist", 275.

applied in a distinctly "socialist" and revolutionary way. Most of the agrarians preferred to see their goals approached gradually and with due respect for existing opinions and institutions. It was one thing to have a theory of exploitation, quite another to urge the labouring poor to take their destiny into their own hands. To gradualism and revolutionism as an approach to recovery and regeneration the young Coleridge added his scheme for an experiment based on community of property. Untainted by the "Old World" each generation of Pantisocrats could evolve in the direction of perfection and act as an example to the rest of the world as to what was possible and most conducive to human happiness.

The agrarians also developed a critique of contemporary modes of life and labour based as they were on the division of labour. They wished to see the various spheres of human endeavour fully integrated within each personality rather than separated by way of specialization. What later socialist theorists categorised as "alienated labour" was central to their criticism. For the agrarians work should integrate mankind's material and intellectual capacities. To do this it would need to be unmediated by wage labour and modern technologies which reduced work to a machine-like activity. At the same time it was stressed that only the amount of work was necessary which satisfied mankind's basic needs, though some agrarians made allowance for a degree of "refinement". True wealth was found in the moral and intellectual improvement which genuine leisure allowed. In this respect the agrarians were good Aristotelians.¹

1. See J. Whitebrook, "Pre-Market Economics: The Aristotelian Perspective", Dialectical Anthropology, III (1978), 197-220. Only because he sees all the late eighteenth-century radicals as bourgeois radicals can Isaac Kramnick conclude that Aristotle was meaningful to the radicals "less as a theorist of Republicanism than as a champion of the moderate and superior mean, the theorist of a middle class polity"; "English Middle Class Radicalism", 33.

Basically two models of the agrarian alternative were found to exist in radical thought. Firstly, a model based on common ownership and equal distribution of the land. This was the radical, egalitarian version of neo-Harringtonianism with its ideal polity of independent men of landed property. The emphasis was placed on independent, family-based production. Secondly, a model based on common ownership and control of land. Here the emphasis was on co-operation in production, with distribution on the basis of need. The point of reference was the village community organizing and controlling its economic destiny. The young Coleridge captured the distinction between the "negative" and "positive" utopia when he spoke of "equality of property" as opposed to "community of property". For the communistic Coleridge the former was too individualistic in its nature to be acceptable.

The finer points of the distinctions between the various agrarian utopias were noted to indicate the degree to which the agrarians differed on the precise meaning and application of values such as simplicity, equality and community. Thomas Spence's utopia was said to lie at the outer limits of agrarianism as he did allow for a degree of specialization, between farmers and small-scale manufacturers, and for a degree of trade and commerce, internal and foreign. All this was to occur, however, within the context of a community guarantee of equal access to the land and an agrarian way of life. Given such a concrete commitment to "freedom of choice", backed up by his belief in quarterly payments to all citizens, Spence believed the right balance between necessity and refinement and between freedom and equality would be found.

As was the case with commercial radicalism agrarianism has been found to contain differing elements: Aristotelian pre-market economic theory, Harringtonian assumptions about equality, citizenship and democracy, Lockean arguments about natural rights to life, liberty and

property, and long-lasting popular attitudes to village life and labour. At the same time the traditional utopian concern with men as they ought to be was kept alive and radicalised by the claim that such oughts could be realized on earth as well as in heaven. By focussing on the agrarian current within radical thought a clear picture emerges of the many and diverse sources of nineteenth-century British socialism. For too long, as Iorwerth Prothero has observed, "Owen" or "Owenism" has been "a near-total explanation of working-class movements in the late 'twenties and early 'thirties". He continues:

It is surely time that "Owenism", an amorphous term if not defined, is cut down to size, and it should not be necessary to insist that the different aspects of Owenism must be related to persistent strands in working-class activity - artisan self-employment, anti-Christian propaganda, Spenceanism and land reform. "Owen" has too long been a substitute for explanation.¹

However, whilst there was a degree of continuity between eighteenth-century agrarianism and nineteenth-century socialism the discontinuities should also be noted. The agrarian radicals were agrarian in their emphasis. They did not view bourgeois society as a progressive era that would pave the way for a new and higher form of civilization as Karl Marx did. Rather they rejected the whole conception of economic progress.² Given the belief of the commercial radicals that the ideals of "equality" and "community" (as understood by the agrarians) flatly contradicted the imperatives of economic progress the only choices offered were: commercial society (at best with a degree of social and economic reform) and agrarian society (at best with a degree of trade

1. Iorwerth Prothero, "William Benbow and the Concept of the 'General Strike'", Past and Present, LXIII (1974), 155.

2. For an effort to utilise eighteenth-century agrarian thought in the construction of a twentieth-century, post-industrial ethic see Wadler, "Radical Theories of Social and Agrarian Reform", chs. V-VI.

and refinement).

In general terms it can be said that radical ideology represented an attempt to give a wider meaning and a social purpose to the aspirations of those who sought parliamentary reform. The study has shown that radical ideology cannot be reduced to "bourgeois liberalism" or "civic humanism" but rather that a mixture of elements were involved. On the one hand, then, John Locke keeps his place as a pre-eminent influence on radical thinking.¹ On the other, the claim by John Pocock and his followers that the importance of civic humanism (or more specifically its English variant developed in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries) also played a role in radical thought stands the test of textual analysis. Ideas of natural rights, consent, representation and civil liberty mingled freely, if not always consistently, with those of mixed government, citizenship and political liberty. There was not a single, exclusive way in which these traditions were plundered and concepts used to build a case for political change.

The divisions within the radical movement occurred on the basic questions of political liberty, property and progress, and the transition: between mixed constitutionalists and republicans, commercial radicals and agrarians, and reformers and revolutionaries. To a degree these divisions cut across the bourgeois liberal/civic humanist divide but in certain respects they reflected it. This was particularly the case in relation to property and progress where a sharp division on the questions of wealth, equality and labour revealed the degree to which older utopian and republican values were at war with modern realistic and commercial values within the radical movement itself. However, the fact

1. See esp. Kramnick, "Republican Revisionism Revisited" for a detailed analysis of the influence of Locke on radical thinking.

that the commercial radicals were so insistent on the centrality of political liberty makes it impossible to divest them of what can only be described as civic humanist assumptions about politics and corruption. At points this mixing of elements resulted in tensions within commercial radicalism; the democratically inclined emphasizing citizenship and political liberty and the moderates emphasizing political balance and civil liberty. For the agrarians social and economic equality, political liberty and decentralization were thought to be inextricably linked in any strategy for national regeneration. They made few concessions to modernist ethics and political economy.

The failure of the civic humanist and bourgeois liberal paradigms individually to explain radical ideology is testimony to the dangers of taking a too unilinear and reductionist approach to the history of ideas. The need to respond as directly and open-mindedly as possible to the texts so one can see all the diverse and sometimes contradictory elements at work within radical thought was found to be essential. It was certainly the case, as was shown, that the civic humanist and bourgeois liberal traditions were used in particular ways by particular radicals to make sense of their commitments. To argue, however, that radical thought is best described by defining it as "civic humanist" or "bourgeois liberal" is to overlook the real ambivalences and contradictions that existed within it.

It was true that the language and concepts of the civic humanist tradition, as well as certain of its central ideas and beliefs, particularly in relation to political liberty, were used by particular radicals. However, to reduce radicalism to civic humanism by arguing that it was nothing more than a further development of that tradition would leave any account of radicalism deficient. In the first place newer ideas associated with the enlightenment had clearly arrived and were being used by the radicals. Based on a belief in natural equality and natural rights this tradition

stressed civil liberty or "freedom from" rather than political liberty, participation and "freedom to". One of the more interesting aspects of radical thought which was revealed was the way it grappled with the problem of fusing the newer and older concepts of freedom, "freedom from" and "freedom to" respectively. A clear recognition that such a tension existed at the centre of radical thought is easily lost by a reductionist reading of the texts.

In the second place the centrally important tendency of thought recognized to exist in relation to debates about property and progress, agrarianism, cannot simply be seen as civic humanist thought. An egalitarian version of the civic humanist polity composed of landed men, armed and independent, was developed by the radicals. It was found to be important, however, to add an even older tradition, that of Christian communitarianism, to the list of influences upon radical agrarianism. The ideas of sharing, co-operation and mutuality could be seen to be at work within Spence's, Godwin's and Coleridge's thought. The inclusion of Coleridge's pantisocratic phase was thought to be particularly important in this respect. Not only did he propose Pantisocracy as a model for the good life but also as a guide to personal practice. According to him the radical Christian had a responsibility to fuse the 'personal' and the 'political' levels of existence.

Kramnick's argument that radicalism was essentially a middle-class phenomenon also fell down when it came to dealing with the complexities of radical thought. Kramnick is right to point to the role class consciousness played in the formation of a radical community in the late eighteenth century political culture. Indeed it was shown how the radicals saw themselves as fighting for "the people" against "the rotten-borough obligarchy". The fact that many were dissenters added to this feeling of alienation from the established system. Kramnick then moved on,

however, to link this emerging class-consciousness with modern society, the middle-class and bourgeois ideology. This account of radicalism is neat and clear-cut but was revealed to be inadequate in two important respects.

In the first place it was found that, amongst those radicals who accepted the broad contours of a commercial society, there were clear differences on the political, social and economic pattern that would establish "equality of rights". By focussing on the specific proposals of the commercial radicals it was possible to distinguish between the Smithians and Artisans, the latter tendency emerging as the movement widened its basis of support in the 1790's. In the second place there was clear hostility in certain quarters, especially amongst the Spenceans, to the whole idea of middle-class politics and ideology, whatever the precise shape it took. Spence's attack was on all varieties of reformism, both in respect of ends and means. In developing his critique of the establishment Spence used the ideas and concepts of agrarian thought.

Differing class perceptions were found, therefore, to be useful in distinguishing between currents within radical ideology; a closer reading of the texts and the analysis of "practice" as well as "theory" revealing that different radicals put different context into general terms such as "the people", "political liberty", and "equality". At one end of the political spectrum were those who saw universal manhood suffrage as an efficient and legitimate means of determining which of the nation's men of property and influence would actually legislate for the nation and act as its political and military leaders. At the other end were those who wished to destroy the existing political, social and economic system by way of a people's revolution. These differences were revealed to be important in relation to each of the major themes tackled in the thesis; political and civil liberty, property and progress, and transition.

According to Kramnick the case for modern commercial society made sense of radical commitments in respect of political, social and economic reform. The evidence, however, indicates that the modern society and economy emerged as an intellectual and political puzzle for the radicals. The speeding up and intensifying of the process of social and economic change in the last half of the century provided a point of reference for such thinking. The fact that these changes represented a problem for the radicals is indicated by James Burgh, whose writings Kramnick confidently describes as "self-conscious apology for the assertive middle class".¹ In Burgh's thought older agrarian ideas mingled uneasily with modern notions of property and progress. It was found to be more appropriate to define Burgh in terms of the tension at the centre of his thinking rather than resolve the tension by describing him either as an agrarian or a bourgeois radical. The same case has been made for radical ideology as a whole.

Central to the thesis is the belief that radical ideology was best tackled by an analysis which centred on the major questions faced by radicals, both in respect of ends and means: What was meant by political liberty and civil liberty and how do the two relate? What was the best form of social and economic life? How best could the desired changes be introduced? By detailing the various answers that were given it was possible to see how the language and concepts of particular traditions were appropriated and developed. The useful distinctions, however, were those between mixed constitutionalists and republicans, agrarian and commercial radicals, and reformers and revolutionaries. These focus on radicalism as oppositionist ideology in its time and do not preclude further analysis. Such analysis revealed further distinctions, for example between tactical and principled mixed constitutionalists; moderate

¹ Kramnick, "Republican Revisionism Revisted", 640.

and democratic republicans; negative and positive community of goods; radical reformers, Godwinians and Pantisocrats; and Paineite and Spencean revolutionaries. Detailing radical arguments about means as well as ends, centrally important in any study dealing with the ideas associated with a movement for change, was particularly important in that it could show, for example, the co-existence within Godwin's thought of both extremism in respect of ends and moderation in respect of means.

Where necessary the influence of the so-called "greats" in the history of social, economic, and political thought, such as Locke, Harrington, Bolingbroke, Smith, Hume and Malthus, was noted. Generally speaking, however, the radicals were allowed to speak for themselves as radicals. This direct confrontation with their thinking on politics, property and progress revealed a degree of autonomy and internal unity as well as disagreement and debate. In particular there was a consistent interpretation of political events in their own country, particularly those of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. According to the radicals they revealed the failure of past reform to provide for a genuinely "radical cure" of the political system. Events of their own day were said to confirm the belief that the structural weaknesses left at the centre of the British polity had developed to the point where absolute tyranny threatened. It was possible, therefore, to leave events as general background rather than have them intrude into the exposition of ideas and arguments. In terms of ideology overseas events, in particular the American and French Revolutions, were more important. They provided a point of reference for the radicals on the basis of which they could compare and contrast their own ideas. Consequently the images the radicals held of these two eighteenth-century revolutions told us a great deal about radical ideology, particularly in respect of the transition.

Histories of the radical movement and its place within British political and social history in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries exist . It was not my intention to repeat that exercise; nor to allow the notions of historical "importance" and "relevance" to influence unduly my judgement as to which radicals and which radical ideas were to be emphasized. Consequently the youthful Coleridge and his ill-fated pantisocratic scheme is given a good degree of space. Similarly Thomas Spence, who Francis Place described as nothing more than a radical crank working on the fringes of the movement, emerges as a central figure because of the interesting ideas he developed on some of the important questions faced by the movement. Only by deliberately avoiding an approach which circumscribes the treatment of radical ideology can its richness and diversity be fully expressed.

In an important sense, then, the thesis has been a vehicle through which the radicals could put their point of view about the major questions confronting Britons at the beginning of the Age of Democratic and Industrial Revolution. The very fact that the richness of radical thought was revealed is testimony, firstly, to the differing traditions that were utilised and, secondly, to the differing social experiences that particular radicals brought to their thinking on politics, property and progress. To reduce radical thought to a particular intellectual paradigm or a particular social class would unjustifiably simplify our understanding of radicalism as ideology and destroy the real tensions and ambivalences that existed at the very centre of their case for change.

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