

RADICAL REFORM MOVEMENTS IN SCOTLAND

FROM 1815 TO 1822

with particular reference to
events in the West of Scotland.

by

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Submitted for the degree of
Ph.D in the University of
Glasgow, May 1970.

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Summary.

Demands for a moderate reform of the political system in Scotland were first made in the last quarter of the eighteenth century; only in the 1790s were demands made for a radical reform. From this time members of the lower orders of society began to organise themselves in political societies and to interest themselves in government and politics. This interest terminated as the century drew to a close but revived again at the conclusion of the war with France in 1815.

Radical reformers could influence people in three ways - by addressing public meetings, by forming political societies, or by publishing newspapers and pamphlets. In Scotland from 1815 onwards, at first under the influence of the English reformer Major Cartwright, meetings were held and petitions submitted to parliament. When these met with no success, secret societies were formed in the winter of 1816-17 and their object was the achievement of reform by physical force if necessary. The leaders of this conspiracy were arrested and tried and this action by the authorities contributed in some measure to the decline of the reform movement.

In 1819 demands for political reform revived. Again meetings were held and Union Societies formed under the influence of an English reformer, Joseph Brayshaw. These societies stressed the need for reform to be achieved as a result of moral force being exerted on the government. After a short period of great enthusiasm, these societies went out of existence towards the end of 1819 partly as a result of the impractical nature of the types of moral force that it was suggested should be used, partly as a result of the passage of Sidmouth's Six Acts. A secret organisation whose members believed in the use of physical force came into existence. There was regular contact between reformers in Scotland and England; but the Radical War which was planned was a fiasco. Within a week it was over and the leaders were forced to flee, or go into hiding, while some of those who had taken up arms in the radical cause were imprisoned to await trial. After Treason Trials conducted under English law by a Commission of Oyer and Terminer, three men were executed.

Of great importance in 1820 after the failure of the Radical War was the affair of Queen Caroline. This allowed Whigs and Radicals to make common cause in criticising the King and his ministers without seeming to criticise the institution of monarchy. The affair was important in Scotland in that it allowed a critical press to develop. Scottish radical reformers had been handicapped by the legal restrictions on the press and

had depended on the much more outspoken English press for the spread of radical opinions. The only radical paper published in Scotland in the years 1815-22 was The Spirit of the Union which lasted for only eleven weekly issues before its editor was imprisoned and later transported. During the Caroline affair the Scotsman became strongly critical of the government and of the Tories. The latter tried to counter this criticism by establishing their own virulent press but this attempt ended in failure and ignominy.

By 1822, radical reformers in Scotland had achieved no concrete success. There was always strong opposition to the kind of change that they demanded. Tories, Whigs, the established church, people of strong religious principles all expressed their abhorrence of radical reform. Many people were probably disinterested. Active support came for the most part only from weavers. These were people formerly distinguished by their high intelligence, who now believed that the supposed Golden Age was over, that their economic and social status was declining, and that this decline could be stopped only by some vigorous action on their part. Various remedies were suggested and tried. Some were convinced by William Cobbett and other radical writers that they could help themselves only by agitating for political change.

Because of its limited appeal, the demand for radical reform in Scotland had little chance of success in the years 1815-1822. Nevertheless the radical

reform movements of these years are important because they revived among the lower orders an interest in politics, and gave them experience in organising large scale meetings and political societies. In 1832, William Cobbett asserted that the Reform Bill would never have passed into law unless a complete revolution had taken place in the minds of the people, and in this revolution the events of 1815 to 1822 are significant.

INTRODUCTION

Source material for the study of radical reform movements in Scotland from 1815-1822

In Scotland the demand for a radical reform of the House of Commons reached a climax on two occasions in the years from 1815 to 1822. In 1816-17 and again in 1819-20 public meetings were held, grievances aired, and demands for reform made in a peaceful manner. On each occasion also a secret organisation developed with plans to use force to effect change. Inevitably, these movements were opposed by those who were already in positions of authority at national and local level.

The sources for the study of these popular movements in Scotland are by no means comprehensive. Few radical reformers wrote about their demands or their plans; this is inevitably the case with those who were involved in secret conspiracies. On the other hand, the sources from the side of the governors are much fuller, but frequently show ignorance of what was happening or what kind of reform was desired.

The main source of information is series 102 of the Home Office Papers, which are not published. These consist of (1) letters written to the Home Secretary, Lord Sidmouth, by all manner of people in Scotland on all manner of subjects; (2) letters written to the Lord Advocate who was the Government's Scottish minister as well as being an important legal official (3)

miscellaneous correspondence which came into the hands of the Home Secretary or the Lord Advocate (4) pre-cognitions taken from prisoners arrested in 1817 because of their connection with a plot to effect political reform. When the radical agitation was at its height there was almost daily contact between Scotland and London, or between the Lord Advocate (sometimes in Edinburgh) and his Scottish informants such as Reddie, Town Clerk of Glasgow. From these letters we learn (1) what those in authority had discovered about Radicals, or believed that Radicals were going to do (2) what the authorities intended to do to counter these plans. Unfortunately, the Lord Advocate and the Home Secretary were not always well informed about the Radicals' intention. They had to depend on informants who might be people of some social status - Lords lieutenant, Provosts, Town Clerks, Ministers of Religion - who were motivated by a desire to support the existing social order; or they might be casual informants motivated by a desire for financial gain. Complete reliance cannot be placed on information from either type of informant. Those in the first group were rarely in direct touch with Radicals, and were therefore purveying second hand information; while those in the second group were liable to manufacture or exaggerate information in order to make themselves appear of greater importance. Thus from the Home Office Papers the information we have about radical plans may not be

accurate. On the other hand, we can learn what the authorities knew and what they intended to do. For this reason, therefore, these papers must be regarded as of outstanding importance.

Some of the information about Radicals came from policemen in Glasgow and Edinburgh, though few men were engaged on the business of detection or 'spying'. The activities of the Glasgow Police can be studied to some extent in the unpublished Glasgow Police Minutes. Unfortunately these are usually cryptic and contain many references to the other types of work in which police in those days engaged. There are few references to the activities of the 'secret men' who were appointed in 1816.

Glasgow and Paisley were the two chief centres of radical activity and some information about the part played by the local councils in countering it can be found in the Burgh Records of Glasgow and the Council Records of Paisley. Selections from the former have been published, and the unpublished manuscript material has also been examined; the latter are unpublished. There is little evidence from either set of records that the local authorities had any precise knowledge of the activities of radical reformers.

Outside the burghs, authority in a number of administrative matters lay with the Heritors. Heritors Records (which are unpublished) reveal little of value in a study of radical reform. We are told, for example

that at Balfron in 1816, there was great poverty as a result of 'pressure of the times', but we are told little else.⁽¹⁾ The heritors of Bothwell met 'to take into consideration the case of those persons in the Parish who (were) out of employment and empowered a committee to distribute meals'; the reaction of the people to their distress was to face it with 'quietness and resignation'.⁽²⁾ Even in the Barony Parish of Glasgow where distress and unrest were possibly greatest there are only passing references to distress and none at all to political activity.⁽³⁾

Church Records (unpublished) provide us with virtually no information about the demand for radical reform. The only references to the political discontent of the period are in the Loyal Addresses preserved in Presbytery Records or Home Office Papers. The Minutes of individual Kirk Sessions, when they can be found, yield nothing. Many session records for the period do not exist; those that do are concerned for the most part with purely domestic or religious affairs.

Among official papers, therefore, the most important by far are the Home Office Papers. The correspondence of the Lord Advocate, the Home Secretary, and other officials is of considerable value even although the facts stated about radical reformers may

1. Heritors Minute Book, Balfron. Dec 1816
2. Heritors Minute Book, Bothwell. Aug; Sept 1816
3. Heritors Minute Book, Barony Parish e.g. 21 Oct 1816, 9 Nov 1819, 3 Dec 1819

not always be accurate. These papers also include precognitions taken in 1817 from radicals arrested for their part in the secret conspiracy of that year. These precognitions - statements made in private by a prisoner but not used in evidence at a trial - are of considerable value in that from them we can establish the facts of the secret conspiracy. It can be argued that statements made by prisoners may be untrue in that pressure may be used against them to make the statement; or that the statements once made can be altered by the authorities to suit their purpose. But in 1817 so many precognitions were taken which to a great extent confirm each other that one is left with the impression that they are genuine and contain details of what the prisoners knew of the conspiracy in which they were taking part. It is unfortunate that in 1820, when radical conspirators taking part in another secret conspiracy were arrested and brought to trial, no precognitions were taken. These treason trials in 1820 were conducted under English law, and English usages were observed under the terms of the Treason Act of 1709. We have therefore to depend for our knowledge of the 1820 conspiracy to a large extent on the evidence which was given at the trials. This evidence was taken down in shorthand, and presumably was sent to London directly after the conclusion of the series of trials. In February 1821 the notes were returned to the Crown agent in Edinburgh for the purpose of publication and in

March 1821 it was agreed that Messrs Ballantyne & Co. should undertake this.⁽⁴⁾ Eventually, this transcript appeared in 1825; whether it had been edited to any significant extent it is impossible to say, since the original notes do not seem to have survived.

Information from the governors' point of view can also be obtained from some private papers. The Lord Provost of Glasgow in 1820 was Henry Monteith, and copies of letters written to him in the period February to April 1820 have survived. These letters, mostly from the Borough-reeve of Manchester and the Provost of Paisley, give valuable information about events in these two places; and it is also possible to discover from these letters what Monteith had been saying about conditions in Glasgow. We now know, for example, that Monteith was not in possession of precise information about the Radical Rising in April 1820; like a number of other people in authority, he could merely guess that something would happen. Some information can be obtained from the Melville Papers held in the National Library of Scotland. These consist for the most part of letters written to Viscount Melville who throughout the period 1815 to 1822 was a politician of national importance. Nevertheless he was not the dominating figure in Scottish political life that his father had been and he seems to have played little part in countering the demands for radical reform.

Consequently the information contained in letters written to him is of much less significance than what was sent to the successive Lords Advocate and is generally merely corroborative material.

The centre of radical activity in the period 1815-20 was Glasgow and it would be helpful if we could obtain more information from the private papers of those who were most intimately involved in upholding the status quo there. Kirkman Finlay, for a time Member of Parliament for the Glasgow burghs, and James Reddie, Town Clerk, were in close touch with events. But the private papers of Finlay which are available tell us almost nothing of his part in his fight against the radicals or of the extent of his knowledge of the radicals' activities, while none of Reddie's papers for this period are available. (The Home Office Papers contain a number of important letters from both these men).

Finlay and Reddie employed as one of their agents or 'spies' Alexander Richmond, who in 1812 was one of the organisers of the Weavers' Strike. In 1816, he began to provide them with information about the activities of the secret radical conspirators and continued to do this for about three months. When these conspirators were arrested and tried in 1817, Richmond was widely blamed for having been the sole author of the whole plot and for having acted as an agent provocateur. To clear his name, he published in 1824 an account of the events

in the west of Scotland from 1812 until 1820. He admitted that in 1816-17 he had been a spy, but denied that he had done anything to encourage the plotters. Lord Cockburn, who knew him, pointed out that though his Narrative 'may not be vitiated by purposed falsehood...(and) there is a general foundation of truth in it, the details of no such statement can be relied on when they depend entirely on the authority of the narrator'.⁽⁵⁾ In fact, much of what Richmond wrote in 1824 can be supported from material in the Home Office Papers. But Richmond's Narrative has been regarded by many students as unreliable and merely a piece of special pleading, more reliance being placed on the writings of Richmond's severest critic, Peter Mackenzie.

Mackenzie was born in Dumbarton in 1799 and began work in the office of the sheriff clerk there at the age of ten. When he was fourteen he transferred to Glasgow and began to work for a man of strong Whig principles, Aeneas Morrison who may have exerted a strong influence on the young man. At the time of the radical agitation from 1815 until 1820 Mackenzie was a very young man at no time involved with radical reformers. His only first hand knowledge of the events of those years came from his service with the volunteer Glasgow Sharpshooters who fought against the militant radicals in 1820. Later in 1820 Mackenzie did become

actively involved in politics and organised the petition in Glasgow in favour of Queen Caroline but it must be emphasised that it was only late in 1820 that he began to take an active interest in reform politics. He never had first hand knowledge of the radical agitation before that date and in this respect is inferior to Alexander Richmond. Yet Mackenzie published in later years much that was strongly critical of Richmond. He became a journalist in the 1830s and his early publications included the Loyal Reformers Gazette, the Reformers Gazette (both weeklies), the Letters of Andrew Hardie, the Exposure of the Spy System and many other pamphlets which have exercised such a strong influence over students of Scottish radicalism. Mackenzie developed a vigorous style which depended for effect on hyperbole and constant repetition and the frequent use of block capital letters. In the Exposure of the Spy System published in 1832 he began a strong, systematic attack on Richmond, proving that Richmond was the sole author of what had taken place in the years 1816 to 1820 and that he acted as a government spy to provoke the people into taking action to reform parliament so that the authorities would then be able to arrest the leading reformers, punish them, and thus terminate popular reform movements. This book by Mackenzie was reviewed in Tait's Magazine and eventually Richmond raised an action against Tait's London booksellers, Simpkin and Marshall. The trial for libel took place in December

1834.

While Tait and Mackenzie were preparing their defence, the former was obviously perturbed.⁽⁶⁾ In February 1834, when it was first known that Richmond intended to sue for libel, Tait wrote to Mackenzie asking him to prove the allegations that he had made against Richmond. Presumably he heard nothing, for in April he wrote again, stressing that Mackenzie must prove (1) that Richmond was engaged by Kirkman Finlay to assist in suppressing a conspiracy and that he began by creating one, (2) that nocturnal meetings were held in the home of Mr. Reddie and that Richmond supplied a treasonable oath to the chairman of a reform meeting, (3) that Richmond furnished a treasonable Address in 1820 which was posted about Glasgow by himself and his companions, (4) that Richmond was driven with contempt from Glasgow. Basically, these are the charges which Mackenzie repeatedly made against Richmond on many occasions, but the evidence to support these charges was slight. After nine months of preparation, Mackenzie could find witnesses whose evidence appears to the modern student to be of a very insubstantial nature. William McKimmie, a weaver from Bridgeton, Glasgow stated that he had been approached by Richmond at the end of 1816 and encouraged to begin an organisation to resist the government. Stewart Buchanan, also a weaver in Glasgow in 1816-17, said that in January 1817

6. Much interesting information is contained in Mackenzie's private papers held by the Town Clerk, Kirkintilloch. An account of the trial is contained in Trial for libel in the Court of Exchequer

he met Richmond who held a paper which contained a copy of the oath binding the conspirators to secrecy. Robert Craig, a weaver who later became a prominent reformer, said that Richmond had tried to persuade him to join a secret association; and William Wotherspoon, a reformer in 1816, said that Richmond was intimate with Campbell and McLachlan, two prominent reformers. (This was a fact which could be ascertained from Richmond's own Narrative and did not require to be proved at the trial for libel). Lastly, Robert Macdougall, a former weaver asserted that Richmond concocted a treasonable oath and put it into the hands of the reformers.

A skilled lawyer could easily have disposed of such flimsy, hearsay evidence. Unfortunately, Richmond conducted his own case, called no witnesses, and was refused permission to read out a statement from Kirkman Finlay and James Reddie. The defence was conducted by the experienced Serjeant Talfourd, who made much of the fact that Richmond had brought the case before an English, rather than a Scottish jury, and this fact probably coupled to Richmond's failure to prosecute effectively led to the failure of his action for libel.

As a result, it must have seemed that Mackenzie's charges were justified. There was a grain of truth in the statements which Tait asked Mackenzie to prove. Richmond was engaged by Kirkman Finlay to assist in suppressing a conspiracy; nocturnal meetings were held at the home of Mr. Reddie; Richmond was

driven with contempt from Glasgow. But a study of Home Office Papers and other material shows that (1) Richmond did not create the conspiracy (2) the treasonable oath was not concocted by Richmond (3) Richmond had no connection whatsoever with the Radical Rising of 1820.

Mackenzie wrote about the activities of spies other than Richmond. Whether or not his information about the 'spy system' which existed in Glasgow in 1820 is any more reliable than his writings about Richmond it is impossible to say since we do not know where he obtained his information. But it is remarkable that neither Henry Monteith, Lord Provost of Glasgow nor Sir William Rae the Lord Advocate, nor Lord Sidmouth the Home Secretary had any knowledge of a spy system. On the whole it is probably wise to reject everything that Mackenzie wrote except when, as in the Queen Caroline campaign in Glasgow, he had first hand knowledge of events. (It must be admitted that a spy system might have been organised by Kirkman Finlay and James Reddie, but since we do not have their private papers we cannot be definite on this point). Rejection of Mackenzie's writings leaves the student with little material from the radical side.

Among private papers the only ones which have been found to present something of the reformers' point of view are those of George Kinloch. Kinloch, a member of a Perthshire landowning family, was born in 1776 and

in the early 1790s was living on the continent. He became interested in political reform and retained this interest until his death in 1833 (by which time he had been elected member of Parliament for Dundee in the first election to the reformed House of Commons). He spoke at radical reform meetings in Dundee in 1817 and in 1819 and was also involved in other demands for reform - for example he spoke in favour of reform at County Meetings, he wrote to the local newspapers, and he organised and attended Fox Dinners to commemorate the great Whig leader. In 1819 as a result of what he said at a reform meeting in Dundee and subsequent letters he wrote to the newspapers he was regarded by the authorities as the radical leader in Scotland and it was decided to prosecute him. Consequently, Kinloch fled to France to escape prosecution and remained there for four years. Hitherto, his private papers have not been available for study.⁽⁷⁾ Those that have now been seen prove conclusively that although Kinloch had strong views on the subject of political reform, he was not intimately connected with any reform movement. From his papers we learn something of Cartwright's tour of Scotland in 1815 and of the events surrounding Kinloch's

7. These are held by Sir John Kinloch, Bart. They have been used recently by Mr. Charles Tennant in an unpublished biography of Kinloch and both the biography and copies of some of the papers have been shown to me. It has not been possible to have access to the original documents.

arrest and flight in 1819. But there is no more; there is no evidence of an organised Scottish reform movement led by Kinloch nor is there any evidence of his contact with reformers in other parts of Scotland. No other private papers of anyone prominent in the movement for radical reform in the period 1815-20 have been traced and it is unlikely that any exist. Radical reformers were for the most part not the type of people to correspond to any great extent with other reformers, not to keep such letters as they did receive. Moreover those who were engaged in secret activity would commit as little as possible to writing.

A few radical accounts were published in later years. James Turner of Thrushgrove, a prominent reformer in Glasgow for many years, published his Recollections and these are particularly valuable for the study of the reform movement in 1816, even although they were not published until more than thirty years after the events of this time. Parkhill, a prominent Radical in Paisley, later wrote his History of Paisley and Autobiography of Arthur Sneddon, both of which contain interesting information. Another Paisley radical was Fraser of Johnstone, whose son later wrote his biography, and this contains some important information about the 1820 Radical War period. The Strathaven Rising in 1820 has been described by Stevenson who took part in it. Another work on the Strathaven Rising is The Pioneers; this may have been the work of Stevenson also, but it does differ in a few

minor respects from the other work and there seems to be no reason why the same man should publish virtually the same work under two different titles.⁽⁸⁾ These however are the only important works to be written by Radicals about the movement for radical reform, and the organisation among the reformers. One other radical reformer whose writings are of some value in describing what annoyed the people and what bitterness was felt about sycophantic Churchmen was Alexander Rodger. His poetry is at times vigorous and conveys clearly the contempt he felt for the Church, the Royal family, and the King's ministers.

Apart from the Home Office Papers, the most important source material comes from the newspapers. The press in Scotland was much more strictly controlled than was the case in England; only one Scottish radical newspaper, the Spirit of the Union was published during the whole period 1815-22, and its life was short. But the Scotsman in Edinburgh and the Glasgow Chronicle did pay some attention to the demands of the reformers and the meetings they held, and much information has been acquired from a study of these two newspapers. Other newspapers were for the most part of little value in the period 1815-20. Such papers as the Glasgow Herald had little or no editorial comment, had no leading articles,

8. A letter to the Glasgow Herald 10 Mar 1908 states that the two works are by the same man, and says that this fact was commonly accepted throughout the 19th century.

and presented only an unfavourable picture of the reform agitation; local newspapers, such as the Ayr Advertiser copied many of their items from other newspapers and like the Herald carried no leading article editorial comment. Little support for radical reform came from any newspaper in Glasgow or Edinburgh and it is for this reason that reformers seem to have relied on English journals such as Cobbett's Weekly Political Register or Black Dwarf. For the Scottish historian, however, it means that the press, which can be a fruitful source of information in England is much less valuable than may be expected.

In the years 1815-22 the Scottish publication with the greatest national reputation was probably the Edinburgh Review; but although it was anti-Tory it was also anti-radical and therefore provides only a limited amount of information about the radical reform movement. In 1824, James Mill described it as an organ of the Opposition section of the aristocracy, and this is an accurate assessment.⁽⁹⁾ There was always support for the continuing dominance of the landed aristocracy in Government and a rejection of the idea of popular political power; yet the Review did realise that Government must yield in some degree to popular pressure and thus it came to support the idea of a union between Whigs and the people; otherwise, it was feared, the balanced constitution established in 1688 would be over-

thrown by the Tories. From the Review, therefore, we learn of the unpopularity of the Tories and of the plans which Whigs had to reform the parliamentary system; but of the demand for radical reform and the activities of reformers there is little information other than can be obtained in newspapers such as the Scotsman. Many political pamphlets were produced in the years 1815-22 some in favour of the established system of government, some in favour of reform. From these we can learn of the ideas which reformers had and the complaints they made against Government, but there is little about radical organisation or activity. Two exceptions to this are the pamphlets by Joseph Brayshaw, an English reformer who spent several months in Scotland in 1819-20. His Appeal to the People of England and Letter to the Lord Advocate of Scotland are interesting in that they not only present the usual radical complaints but in addition suggest how radical reformers can exert influence on the Government without resort to physical force.

Among other published books are a number which may be regarded as primary sources. The Life and Correspondence of Major Cartwright by F.D. Cartwright contains an account not only of this leading radical's ideas of reform but some information about his Scottish tour in 1815. Henry Cockburn's several works - Memorials of his times, Examinations of the trials for Sedition in Scotland, Life of Jeffrey and Letters on the affairs of Scotland to T.F. Kennedy - are all important but one must remember that he was a Whig lawyer and

therefore on occasion liable to give misleading information or biased opinions. Miss Janet Hamilton, a Lanarkshire woman best known for her verse and advocacy of temperance published in 1870 her Poems, Essays and Sketches which included Sketch of a Scottish Roadside Village Sixty Years since (the village being Langloan which is now part of Coatbridge) and Reminiscences of the Radical Time 1819-20. Thomas Chalmers the well-known minister of St. John's Church in Glasgow has left a copy of the sermon which he preached on 30th April 1820 - The Importance of Civil Government to Society and this gives an admirable account of his views of militant radical reformers. The biography of Chalmers by his son-in-law Hanna also contains much of importance.

Although it cannot be too strongly stressed that political agitation is not necessarily the result of economic distress, nevertheless it must also be realised that widespread distress among the lower orders did provide radical reformers such as Cartwright and Cobbett with an audience ready to listen to their arguments. It has therefore been felt necessary to examine briefly economic conditions in the period after 1815. Contemporary statistics can be obtained from Sinclair's Analysis of the Statistical Account and from Cleland's works - Enumeration of the Inhabitants of the City of Glasgow, The Rise and Progress of the City of Glasgow, and Statistical tables relative to the city of Glasgow.

Other statistics relating to the hand-loom weavers are to be found in the Report of the Select Committee on Handloom Weavers (1834) and Report of the Assistant Handloom Weavers Commissioners (1839); and also in Tooke's History of Prices (6 vols. 1838-56). More recently, available material has been gathered together and analysed in Gayer, Rostow and Schwartz The Growth and Fluctuation of the British Economy 1790-1850.

The records of debates in parliament (Parliamentary Debates, First Series 1803-20, Second Series 1820-30) are also of importance. Much time was spent in discussing economic distress and the need to maintain law and order during the periods of unrest. Yet these records present us with only a partial picture of the demand or need for parliamentary reform; the majority of those who spoke or voted in Lords and Commons had little sympathy for radical demands and do not seem to have been well informed about radical plans or activities. As a source, the main value of the Parliamentary Debates is that they tell us something of the attitudes and knowledge of the people who had political power.

Modern studies of radical reform movements in England are numerous. The most valuable in the present study have been Thompson The Making of the English Working Class and Read Peterloo. Both of these have material that is connected with movements in Scotland. Of reliable Scottish studies of the subject there are few. Meikle Scotland and the French

Revolution is good for the 18th century but has little dealing with the years after 1802. Mathieson Church and Reform in Scotland is a good general history. Many local histories contain some reference to the events of the period, particularly to the Rising in 1820 but for the most part are based on hearsay or on the writings of Peter Mackenzie, and are thus of little value. The same criticism applies to Johnston History of the Working Classes in Scotland.

In the present study, the first chapter is partly a general account providing background to the study of radical reform movements in Scotland, partly an account of the revival of demands for radical reform in 1815. This second part of the chapter is based on original material in the Kinloch Papers (included in the Appendix). The remaining chapters are based largely on unpublished material - Home Office Papers, the Monteith Letters and the Glasgow Police Minutes - or on material from newspapers, particularly from the Scotsman, the Glasgow Chronicle and the Spirit of the Union. The only published works which have provided much source material are the account of the Trials for Treason and two accounts of the Strathaven rising.

Since most of the unpublished material is readily available in the locations mentioned in the bibliography, it was not thought necessary to include any in Appendices. An exception has been made of the Kinloch Papers which cannot be readily consulted, and extracts

from them are included.

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used throughout:

- H.O. - Home Office Papers
- Parl. Deb. - Hansard's Parliamentary Debates
- S.H.R. - Scottish Historical Review

The beginnings of radical reform
movements in Scotland

During the period from 1768 to 1832 frequent demands were made in both Scotland and England for some change in the political system. At first in Scotland criticism of the existing system was made by the small politically conscious class which existed at that time, by the landed gentry in the counties and by merchants and lawyers in the burghs. Not until the 1790s did organised criticism emanate from the lower orders of society. Moreover, complaints which were made about the system by landowners and merchants frequently arose from specific defects in the working of the electoral system rather than from dissatisfaction with the general system as such.⁽¹⁾

The political system in Scotland at that time was one which had been partly fashioned by legislation before 1707, partly by electoral practice after that date. The Scottish counties returned thirty members to the House of Commons at Westminster; the royal burghs were grouped to return fifteen members. The franchise in the counties was as settled in 1681. Those who held of the crown land valued at either forty shillings of old extent or £400 Scots of current valuation had the right to be admitted to the Roll of Freeholders. Prior

1. Ferguson Electoral Law and Procedure in 18th and early 19th century Scotland 83-90

to 1707 disputes about admission to the roll could be settled in the Court of Session, but this did not continue after the union of the parliaments. Since the vote in the counties in all cases lay in the land and not in the person it was possible to create nominal and fictitious votes by trust conveyances, and the control of such creations after 1707 became difficult. Soon after the union the Duke of Queensberry began to create such votes and this process was developed by lawyers throughout the eighteenth century. A qualification to vote could be created by the conveyance of the title or superiority of land to the stipulated value without giving actual possession of the land, and in this way 'parchment barons' were created to serve specific electoral purposes.⁽²⁾ In the election of 1768 numerous election scandals were exposed and subsequently there were demands for reform of the electoral system. Among suggestions made were that the valuation should not be split and that parliament should be filled only by gentlemen of property, to the exclusion of placemen.⁽³⁾ Eventually a vigorous campaign was organised from 1782 onwards. The counties of Inverness, Moray and Caithness appointed commissioners to consider the question of nominal and fictitious votes and later in 1782 a meeting of representatives from

2. Ferguson op. cit. 17, 40, 69

3. Scots Magazine xxx (1768) 176

twenty three counties was held in Edinburgh.⁽⁴⁾ A committee was appointed and an attempt made to get parliament to intervene, but without success. About 1790 a new campaign against nominal and fictitious votes was mounted and an attempt made to attach the right to vote to real possession of property.⁽⁵⁾ The rolls of a number of counties were indeed purged at this time and as a result of this and in face of increasing popular demands for a more radical reform of the political system, most freeholders ceased to agitate for further change and became pillars of the existing system.

More serious and sustained criticism came from those who wanted some alteration in the system as it affected the burghs. The system which existed encouraged bribery and corruption, allowed plundering of burgh funds and property, prevented expansion and thus affected the prosperity of every inhabitant. There was in the burghs the need to reform parliamentary representation as well as the need to reform internal administration. These needs were much greater than anything experienced by the counties at this time and

4. Caledonian Mercury 31 July 1782 7 Aug. 1782

5. Colonel Norman Macleod (M.P. for the county of Inverness) to Earl Grey, 4 July 1792, 13 Aug 1792, 30 Nov 1792 and Appendix, S.H.R. xxxv 1 (1956)

largely account for the greater importance of the campaign for burgh reform.

Only the sixty six royal burghs were grouped to return members to the Commons. Towns which were not royal burghs were merged for parliamentary purposes in their counties; thus growing towns such as Paisley and Greenock were without burgh representation. Other expanding burghs such as Glasgow might be under-represented in relation to their population and wealth. In the royal burghs members of self perpetuating councils determined the choice of burgh members of parliament and could do so with little regard to the wishes of those burgesses who were not members of the council. The number of people directly concerned in the election of burgh members of parliament was thus very small, averaging about twenty per burgh, and bribery became commonplace.⁽⁶⁾

A campaign for reform of burgh representation began in December 1782 when the Caledonian Mercury published the Letters of Zeno (later identified as Thomas McGrugar a wealthy Edinburgh burghess). He criticised the representative system with particular reference to Edinburgh; but he was no democrat, as he considered that the dregs of the population were disqualified by ignorance from taking part in political affairs and that their interests should be protected by the knowledgeable, virtuous and propertied middle classes. The Merchant Company of

6. Ferguson 'Dingwall Burgh Politics and the Parliamentary Franchise in the Eighteenth Century' S.H.R. xxxviii (1959)

Edinburgh decided to petition for reform but withdrew when it was realised that Pitt, who at this time advocated some measure of parliamentary reform, might come into office. Although in 1784 Pitt showed himself unwilling to press for reform in the face of strong opposition, the burgh reform movement in Scotland prospered. In March 1784 a convention of delegates was held in Edinburgh and at this convention thirty three of the royal burghs were represented; local committees also came into being. Gradually however the burgh reformers lost interest in reforming the parliamentary representation of the burghs and concentrated instead on reform of the internal administration, suggesting that the franchise be given to all resident burgesses, that local elections should take place annually on a given day, and that the elected council be answerable to the burgesses for their administration of burgh funds and property.

Until 1793 the campaign for burgh reform continued and bills for reform of administration were presented in 1787, 1790, 1792 and 1793. But opposition to change was strong - it was in the interests of the existing burgh councils and the members of parliament they had elected to maintain the status quo - and no Scottish member of parliament was prepared to introduce legislation initiating reform. By 1793 many burgh reformers had probably been frightened by the extremism of the popular reform movement and the movement came to

an end for the time. There is no case in which a leading Burgh reformer went on to become an extremist.⁽⁷⁾

Those who supported county and burgh reform movements tended to be those on the fringes of the then existing 'political nation' - landowners in the counties, merchants and lawyers in the burghs. They were people of some social consequence enjoying the benefits of some education or affluence who were nevertheless denied a share in the political management of their country, or of their burgh. There was nothing in the county reform campaign and little in the burgh campaign to appeal to the mass of the people. The changes proposed in the counties would have strengthened the grip of local landowners on political affairs at the expense of 'parchment barons' but it is doubtful if the electorate in the counties which before 1832 never reached three thousand in number would have been expanded. Reform of the burghs would have brought political power to resident burgesses, not necessarily to a very large number of householders in a burgh; but the burgh reform movement, had it been successful would have brought some indirect benefits to the inhabitants of burghs since presumably burghal administration would have been improved. Nevertheless, such a campaign was unlikely

7. Primrose 'Scottish Burgh Reform' Aberdeen University Review xxxvii (1957-8)

to receive much enthusiastic support from the majority of urban dwellers.

The interest of the mass of the people in political reform was aroused only when a much more radical reform of the political system was proposed. The term 'radical reform' came in the nineteenth century to mean among other things the holding of annual elections to the house of Commons and the extension of the franchise to, at least, all male householders. Although it was only after 1815 that the word 'radical' was used as a substantive and that the term 'radical reform' came into common use, the need for such a reform had been publicised during the last quarter of the eighteenth century. (8)

The campaign for radical reform owed much to Major John Cartwright, a member of an old Nottinghamshire family who served in the Royal Navy for eighteen years until he objected to the government's treatment of the American colonists. (His title 'Major' he owed to his service in the militia). From 1776 until his death in 1824 he worked as a pamphleteer and orator to spread his ideas of the need for political reform, and successive reform movements owed much to his tenacity

8. Cartwright Life and Correspondence of Major Cartwright ii 14; Martineau History of the Thirty Years Peace i 226.

and enthusiasm. His ideas changed little during this long period. In 1776 in a pamphlet entitled Take Your Choice he suggested that the right to vote should not depend on ownership of property, (although there should be a property qualification for members of parliament), that there should be annual parliaments, equal electoral districts, payment of members of parliament and vote by ballot.⁽⁹⁾ It was this pamphlet which introduced the idea of 'radical' as opposed to 'moderate' reform. Cartwright showed himself interested in the origins or roots of our system of government and insisted that any worthwhile change must take heed of these. He believed that an ancient English constitution had come into existence in some spontaneous way in Anglo Saxon times, that it was democratic but that its democratic character had been perverted by the Norman robber barons. It was now necessary, he imagined to get back to these democratic roots and to cut away the growth of centuries which prevented the people from exercising their traditional political rights.⁽¹⁰⁾

The appeal of such arguments in favour of a return to a mythical constitution was probably limited. In 1790 for example it was reported that the Society

9. Cartwright Take Your Choice 69, 84

10. Hill 'The Norman Yoke' in Savile (ed) Democracy and the Labour Movement gives other examples of this point of view.

for Constitutional Information in which Cartwright took a particular interest was supported only by 'philosophers, the great body of second rate literary men, some clergymen, many lawyers, many dissenting ministers and nine-tenths of the profession of physic - all therefore belonging to the educated classes.',⁽¹¹⁾ Yet these arguments did have some influence over reform movements in Scotland. In 1783 a Committee of Citizens in Edinburgh wrote to the Society for Constitutional Information congratulating the Society on its exertions and expressing its own determination to follow their example by circulating in Scotland small tracts and pamphlets on the subject of constitutional liberty.⁽¹²⁾ When in 1792 the first Convention of delegates from reform societies was held in Edinburgh, the delegates showed themselves to be under the influence of ideas similar to those of Cartwright when they pledged themselves 'to petition parliament to restore the freedom of election and an equal representation of the people in parliament and to secure to the people a frequent exercise of their right of electing their representatives.' Thomas Muir of Huntershill, the advocate who played a leading part in the reform movement of the 1790s emphasised at the Convention the need

11. Maccoby English Radicalism 1786-1832 51

12. Seaman British Democratic Societies in the period of the French Revolution 11

to restore the constitution to its original purity.⁽¹³⁾

Probably of greater importance in enlisting widespread popular support for a radical reform of the political system were the example of events in France and the writings of Tom Paine. In France a new system of government was established by the efforts of those who had hitherto been denied a share in government and events there were followed with great interest in Scotland. In 1790 for example the Whigs in Dundee regarded what was happening in Paris as 'the triumph of liberty and reason over despotism, ignorance and superstition,' and during the 1790s the lower orders of society frequently showed their approval of events in France by planting trees of liberty, having church bells ring and adopting a universal spirit of reform and opposition to the established government.⁽¹⁴⁾

This spirit of criticism was also encouraged by the publication of Paine's Rights of Man in 1791 and 1792 and by the attack on existing religious institutions contained in his Age of Reason, also published in 1792. Unlike Cartwright, Paine showed no veneration for the past, for governments which all, with the exception of those in America and France derived their authority from conquest and the maintenance of arbitrary power. He rejected the hereditary system and the idea of government by a small privileged group. He attacked

13. Meikle Scotland and the French Revolution

Appendix A

14. Meikle op.cit. 44-6, 82-96

the taxation of the underprivileged and the unnecessary wars which led to an increase in taxes.

He suggested not only political but social change - the establishment of a system of social benefits to assist the poor - and it was possibly this suggestion that radical reform of the political system would produce benefits of a practical economic and social nature and freedom from oppressive taxation that won him popular support.⁽¹⁵⁾

The influence of his writing was probably increased by the government's action in banning The Rights of Man in May 1792. For example, in one small town in the north of Scotland, seven hundred and fifty copies of the book were sold within three weeks of the ban being proclaimed.⁽¹⁶⁾

The London Corresponding Society, the first popular political organisation in England was strongly influenced by him, a fact which was deplored by some more traditional reformers.⁽¹⁷⁾ A similar society drawing its membership from shopkeepers and tradesmen, the Friends of the People, was established in Edinburgh in July 1792.⁽¹⁸⁾ Other reform societies were soon

15. Seaman op.cit 124

16. Meikle op.cit 80; H.O. 102.61 Report on Conditions in Scotland

17. Collins 'The London Corresponding Society' in Savile op.cit. Thompson The Making of the English Working Class 24

18. Meikle op.cit 86 H.O. 102.61 Report of Conditions in Scotland

established in Scotland and so strong and widespread had the movement become by the end of 1792 that it was possible to organise a national Convention in Edinburgh. In 1793, two further conventions were held, the last one attracting delegates from England as well as Scotland. By then, however, the reform movement had lost much of its support. Middle class supporters were frightened off by the increasing republicanism that was manifest at succeeding conventions and all but the most enthusiastic had their enthusiasm for reform dampened by the strong action taken against leading reformers by the authorities. Muir was sentenced to fourteen years transportation and other leading reformers were treated in a similar fashion. The Act against Wrongous Imprisonment was suspended in 1794 and the laws against treasonable practices and seditious meetings were strengthened in 1795. As a result, the societies of Friends of the People became almost extinct although as late as 1797 a society of this name composed mainly of weavers was formed in Glasgow by a missionary from the London Corresponding Society named Jameson.⁽¹⁹⁾ It was in the same year that societies of United Scotsmen were formed. This seems to have been a small organisation advocating annual parliaments and universal suffrage and maintaining contact with the revolutionary

19. H.O. 102.14 William Scott to Henry Dundas
7 May 1797. Dundas to Lord Advocate 26 June
1797. Scott to Dundas 16 Aug 1797

United Irishmen. The leader, George Mealmaker, a Dundee weaver was sentenced to fourteen years transportation in 1797 but the movement seems to have continued in existence until at least 1802 although its failure seriously to embarrass the government during these years would suggest that there was little support for it and that the government's vigorous action against reformers and reform movements had been successful.⁽²⁰⁾ According to Henry Cockburn, the Whig lawyer, an anti-reform reaction had set in by the end of the century. In Edinburgh, tradesmen of Jacobin sympathies had credit stopped; workmen were dismissed; philanthropic work was regarded with mistrust and even Whig lawyers had difficulty in obtaining employment.⁽²¹⁾ Not until 1815, by which time the war against France was finished and reformers could not be stigmatised as traitors, did vigorous radical reform movements arise again in Scotland.

The revival of such movements is closely linked to the economic situation and to the activities of Major Cartwright. During the years from 1810 onwards there was much unrest in industrial areas in both England and Scotland. The causes of this unrest are complex, involving economic, social and political factors.

20. Meikle op.cit gives a full account of reform movements in the 1790s. Accounts of the trials of reform leaders are to be found in Howell State Trials xxiii and xxvi

21. Cockburn Memorials of his time 80

Economic difficulties became of outstanding importance in 1810 when Napoleon began the more vigorous prosecution of his European blockade. Until then, Britain had been able to trade with the Continent; but the closure of continental ports at the same time that the new trade with Central and South America ran into difficulties caused a great depression in those industries which were largely dependent on overseas supplies or markets.⁽²²⁾ In 1810 also there was a poor harvest and a decline in the import of grain from Europe.⁽²³⁾ In the west of Scotland was much hardship and unemployment, weavers, spinners, carpenters, cabinet makers and tailors being unemployed in large numbers while there was partial unemployment among those connected with the building trades.⁽²⁴⁾ By the summer of 1811 about 15,000 of the 30,000 looms in Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire and Dunbartonshire were idle and even those weavers who were employed could earn barely 5s per week.

For the hand-loom weavers this was in fact the beginning of a serious decline in their trade. For some time this group of workers, one of the most numerous in Scotland, had been attempting to prevent a decline in their wages. An Arbitration Act of 1803 (43 Geo III c 151) laid down that all disputes regarding wage rates were to be settled by justices, although there is no record of the system becoming effective. About 1809

22. Deane and Cole British Economic Growth 1688-1959 187

23. Gayer, Rostow and Schwartz The Growth and fluctuation of the British Economy 85

24. Parl. Deb. xix 1018 8 May 1811

weavers began to combine all over Scotland and soon there were some seventy associations from Airdrie to Saltcoats sending delegates to weekly meetings in Glasgow.⁽²⁵⁾ A pamphlet entitled Articles and Regulations for the General Association of Weavers in Scotland was printed, cash and minute books were maintained, and contact was established with associations in England and Ireland. Negotiations were undertaken in Glasgow to regulate entry to the trade and to fix reasonable rates of wages. When these proved unsuccessful, the weavers' leaders then drew up a table of prices for weavers' work and took it to the Court of Session in Edinburgh. The judges there found it reasonable but the employers refused to implement it. The weavers then came out on strike all over Scotland and in Glasgow they held out for nine weeks. The strike was finally broken by the arrest of the strike leaders in February 1813. These men were tried, found guilty of having formed a combination in restraint of trade, and sentenced to terms of imprisonment ranging from four to eighteen months.⁽²⁶⁾

Although the weavers were not motivated by any political purpose, the failure of the strike of 1812 and

25. Glasgow Herald 15 Mar 1813

26. Glasgow Herald ibid. Richmond Narrative of the Condition of the Manufacturing Population

the subsequent punishment of the strikers' leaders has some bearing on the later development of radical reform movements in Scotland. Hand-loom weavers, who formed a large part of the working population in Scotland had been made to realise the difficulty of maintaining or improving their economic status by industrial action. The economic difficulties which forced them to take this action in 1812 did not disappear and weavers must have been perplexed to know how to overcome them. The discontent and feeling of powerlessness which they must have experienced made them a suitable audience for political agitators who tried to convince them that social and economic reforms could come only after a change in the political system.

In fact economic conditions did improve slightly after 1812. Napoleon's blockade collapsed; there was increasing investment in commerce and industry consequent upon Napoleon's defeat at Leipzig in 1813; and a good harvest in 1813 brought food prices down. But by the end of 1814 it was widely recognised that the improvement in economic prosperity had been temporary and we can now see that the period from 1810 to 1815 was one of depression lightened only by a year of prosperity in 1813.⁽²⁷⁾

Probably what affected the lower orders most adversely in these years and caused most unrest was the fluctuation to which the national economy was subject. The causes of fluctuation were

27. Gayer, Rostow and Schwartz op. cit 110-137

not known and the reactions of those most affected were often violent and misdirected. (For example, Luddism in England).

In this situation of widespread hardship and discontent Major Cartwright began again to campaign vigorously for a radical reform of the house of Commons. In 1812 he was instrumental in founding in London the Hampden Club - open only to owners of or heirs to property giving rent of £300 per annum - which had as its object the use of every exertion in county meetings to induce the Commons to take parliamentary reform into early consideration.⁽²⁸⁾ This club never had a vigorous existence and its meetings were badly attended but this was not known to people outside London. The club was presented to them as 'a standard beneath which all friends of reform might rally' and as a means of encouraging other reformers to establish popular political clubs.⁽²⁹⁾ In doing this, Cartwright tried to divert the prevailing discontent in manufacturing districts into constitutional forms. He decided to visit the areas where unrest was greatest. In January 1812 he went to Derby and Leicester and during the ensuing twelve months toured widely seeing at first hand 'the actual conditions of a starving people'.⁽³⁰⁾ Early in 1813 he established

28. Cartwright Life ii 24-32

29. Ibid 31-2

30. Ibid 45

written contact with reformers in Glasgow and was hopeful of receiving a petition with twenty thousand signatures from the city.⁽³¹⁾ For the last three years of the war Cartwright was busy trying to convince people in manufacturing areas that their economic distress could be relieved by radical political reform.

Soon after the end of the war, on 21st July 1815, he landed at Leith to begin a thirteen week tour of Scotland. He travelled widely, visiting Greenock, the coast of Ayr and Paisley; Stirling and Alloa; Dunfermline, Newburgh and Perth; Coupar in Angus, Forfar and Brechin; Crail, St. Andrews and Aberdeen. He went twice to Stonehaven, Inverbervie and Montrose; twice to Dundee, Cupar in Fife and Kirkcaldy; twice to Lanark and Hamilton; three times to Glasgow and Edinburgh; and finally he returned to England by the road of Kelso.⁽³²⁾

He later looked back on his tour with particular pleasure at the hospitality and kindness he received.⁽³³⁾ He was also initially impressed by the good spirit in respect of constitutional freedom among 'this well informed and reflecting people' and in Glasgow he was delighted with 'the spirit and intelligence beyond (his) most sanguine expectations!⁽³⁴⁾ Unfortunately

31. Cartwright Life ii 50

32. Meikle op.cit. 221

33. Cartwright op.cit. 114-7

34. Ibid 111-2

we know little of what happened on his tour for it was reported in none of the Scottish newspapers apart from some hostile comment in the Edinburgh Correspondent.

We do know that his object was to persuade people to sign petitions praying for a reform of the house of Commons. Petitioning was the means which many reformers were forced to adopt to bring their desires to the attention of the King in Parliament. In England, the right to petition had been guaranteed in 1689 in the Bill of Rights but it was qualified by a Restoration statute which disqualified most people from petitioning for political change, for the only legitimate form of meeting at which any change in church or state could be considered was a County meeting convened by the landowners.⁽³⁵⁾ Only such meetings could legally petition the King or either house of Parliament with more than twenty signatures in favour of political change. But during the early years of the reign of George III there was a growth in public meetings and petitions and this growth was accelerated after 1775 by the strong reaction to the war with the American colonies. Henceforth petitioning assumed a more important place in demands for political change. This development occurred in Scotland also. Petitions and addresses had been submitted at the time of the union negotiations in 1706-7 but the practice of

35. Fraser 'Public Petitioning and Parliament before 1832' History xlvii (1961)

petitioning seems to have declined thereafter. In 1766 merchants in Glasgow joined a national campaign for the repeal of the Stamp Act which had been passed in the previous year to raise taxation from the American colonies⁽³⁶⁾ and in 1775 petitioned against the unnecessary and oppressive acts which had by then been passed against the American colonies.⁽³⁷⁾ In 1778 there was a petitioning campaign against proposed legislation to grant a measure of relief to Roman Catholics and in the face of the strong opposition that was made manifest the Government withdrew its proposals.⁽³⁸⁾ There is thus evidence that well before the end of the eighteenth century petitioning had established its place in Scottish political life.

Cartwright brought to Scotland a form of petition which had been prepared for and approved by the Hampden Club.⁽³⁹⁾ In this, it was stated that the Commons did not represent the nation, that taxation without representation should be resisted, that excessive taxation resulted from the wars which had just finished and that the people had been 'put out of a condition to consent to taxes.' It was argued that rights of election should be restored and that there should be representation co-extensive with taxation, an equal distribution throughout the country of

36. Scots Magazine xxviii (1766) 527, 531

37. Ibid xxxvii (1775) 691

38. Black 'The Tumultuous Petitioners' Review of Politics xxv 2 (1963)

39. Appendix

representation, and annual election to the Commons.

These were all points that had been made by Cartwright from 1776 onwards and however inaccurate some of his arguments may have been, they were approved by large numbers of people if the number of those who signed the petition is assumed to have any significance.

Cartwright found 'everywhere from Lanark and Greenock to Edinburgh and Aberdeen ... an unequivocal desire on the part of the mass of the people below the rank of Magistrates and exclusive of placemen and others directly interested in the present corruptions to promote reform by signing petitions.'⁽⁴⁰⁾ In September 1815 he was hopeful that Scotland would submit '500 Petitions of the form now in use containing 300 names each.' In fact, Perth alone submitted about one hundred petitions each with three hundred names, and from the whole of Scotland there came at this time about six hundred petitions.⁽⁴¹⁾ So successful was Cartwright in obtaining signatures to petitions that the provost of Dunfermline later thought that the movement he had initiated would end in revolution or rebellion.⁽⁴²⁾

In this activity Cartwright was assisted by a number of Scotsmen. In Perth for example he left forms with 'Mr. David Johnstone, a considerable manufacturer' who seemed to have 'all the talent, know-

40. Cartwright to Kinloch 10 Sept 1815. Appendix

41. Cartwright to Kinloch 10 Sept 1815. MacLachlan
The Story of a Nonconformist Library 125

42. H.O. 102.26 Provost of Dunfermline to Sidmouth
6 Dec 1816

ledge, resolution and energy for moving that town and its vicinity.' In Glasgow he was assisted by Lang, a printer who kept his press in readiness for executing orders and who was also to become a member of the Glasgow reform committee in 1816.⁽⁴³⁾ In Edinburgh his assistants were Dr Gilchrist,⁽⁴⁴⁾ Captain Johnston (possibly the former editor of the Edinburgh Gazette who in 1793 was imprisoned for contempt); and Mr. W. Moffatt a Solicitor.⁽⁴⁵⁾ Those who met Cartwright in Dundee included Doctor Ramsay, James Duncan, Messrs Ogilvy and Saunders, writers, Mr. Jobson a bank cashier and Mr. Rintoul the printer.⁽⁴⁶⁾ After this meeting Cartwright thought that petitioning would be organised but he was to be disappointed for 'obstacles were imagined which three grains of reason and spirit! would have dissipated.'⁽⁴⁷⁾ At some time before 22nd November 1815 George Kinloch who although a Perthshire landowner had many contacts with Dundee, took a store of petitions

43. Cartwright to Kinloch 15 Sept 1815. Appendix

44. John Gilchrist 1759-1859. Born Edinburgh. Appointed surgeon in East India Company 1783. Became fluent in oriental languages. Returned to Britain in 1809. After 1816 a language teacher in London. Noted for his fiery temperament and the violence of his politics.

45. Cartwright to Kinloch 22 Nov 1815. Appendix

46. Robert Rintoul 1787-1858. Apprentice printer in Edinburgh. 1809 - moved to Dundee to print the Advertiser, a weekly established in 1801. Editor 1811-25. 1826 - moved to London to become in 1828 editor of The Spectator. Of the others whom Cartwright met nothing seems to be known.

47. Cartwright to Kinloch 15 Sept 1815. Appendix

from Edinburgh but was unable to commence 'petitioning operations' presumably because there was insufficient support. (48)

It would seem that Cartwright when he first came to Scotland intended to rely on the circulation of forms of petition and their signature by as many people as possible. Presumably he believed that people would be prepared to do this because radical reform of the house of Commons was a subject on which people had strong opinions and were well informed. But despite the favourable impression he received on his arrival Cartwright was soon in despair at his seeming lack of success and was on the point of leaving Edinburgh when the thought came into his mind 'of a lecture in the way of experiment.' (49) In September 1815 he suggested to John Love, a reformer in Perth, that Mr. John Fulton of 14 Princes Street, Glasgow, be invited to Perth to give a lecture on the constitution. Cartwright thought that Fulton's lecture which he had read was so good that if financial support could be given Fulton would turn out to be 'a profitable speculation'. A tour of the Perth-Dundee area was arranged and Fulton reported that his first lecture was a success but thereafter in Dundee, Montrose and other places little effect was produced. This Cartwright attributed to the fact that speaking in public on politics was still 'peculiarly

48. Cartwright to Kinloch 22 Nov 1815 and Dec 1815 Appendix.

49. Cartwright to Kinloch 8 Jan 1816. Appendix

the office of a gentleman.' Hence it was vital that those who took the lead in the reform movement should be people of social consequence and should make an appeal to those of similar status. 'Where Fulton failed, a man whose rank and character could command respect and attract attention should try the ground over again.' (50)

Cartwright also tried to strengthen the cause of reform in Scotland by encouraging George Kinloch to form a national reform club having for its object radical reform; but there is no evidence that at this time such clubs, similar to the Hampden Club in England, were formed. (51) It is doubtful if indeed there was much serious support for Cartwright's ideas of reform. On his arrival he would presumably meet only a limited number of enthusiasts and from his contact with such people would form a favourable impression of support in Scotland for radical reform. Certainly many petitions were returned, possibly signed by well over 100,000 people (assuming that 600 forms of petition, each with space for 300 signatures, were fairly fully completed). But it is questionable if such a fact, even if it is accurate, is a reliable guide to the feelings of the people of Scotland about radical reform.

50. Cartwright to Kinloch 15 Sept 1815, 22 Nov 1815, 8 Jan 1816. Appendix

51. Cartwright to Kinloch 1 Dec 1815

Petitions may contain forged signatures or be signed several times by the same person. Moreover the appendage of a signature to a petition implies no commitment to action or to continuing support for a movement. One should therefore consider the failure of Fulton's lecture tour and the almost complete absence of support for radical reform in Scotland by the beginning of 1816 and conclude that Cartwright's tour did little more than stimulate a transient interest in radical reform. When later in 1816 there did develop a widespread petitioning movement supported by large numbers of the lower orders of society, it may well have been the result not so much of the activities and influence of Major Cartwright as of the deteriorating economic situation which caused widespread distress and the interest that was then aroused in the remedies for this situation publicised by the great radical propagandist, William Cobbett. As in the 1790s, it was not a belief in the ancient origins of representative democracy nor a profound conviction on the question of natural rights which convinced the lower orders of the need for radical political change; it was the conviction that such a change would bring improvements of a practical economic nature that persuaded large numbers of people to give their support to radical reform.

The Petitioning Movement 1816-17

For much of the time from 1816 to 1822 there was great distress among the lower classes although its extent is difficult to determine. Tooke⁽¹⁾ said that 'there was from 1814 to 1816 a very general depression in the prices of nearly all productions and in the value of all fixed property, entailing a convergence of losses and failures among the agricultural and commercial and manufacturing and mining and shipping and building interests which marked that period as one of the most extensive suffering and distress.' He showed⁽²⁾ that there was a great advance in prices in 1817 and 1818, an 'exaggeration of demand' and a state of excitement and speculation' and 'very extensive engagements for importations of grain as well as other descriptions of produce.' So much was imported that by the end of 1818 there was stagnation and in 1819 another fall in prices. Importers, speculators, and manufacturers were ruined and prices of most commodities continued to decline with few exceptions until 1822.

It has been suggested recently that although 1816 and 1819 were years of depression while 1818 saw a brief recovery, in terms of real wage calculations the position of labour in industry and commerce shows a decided improvement between 1813 and 1821.⁽³⁾ An

1. Tooke History of Prices ii 12

2. Ibid 58

3. Gayer, Rostow and Schwartz The Growth and Fluctuation of the British Economy i 110

inconclusive debate has been conducted among historians on the subject of the standard of living.

Although some, for example T.S. Ashton, consider that between 1790 and 1830 there was an improvement, there is general agreement that in the years immediately after 1815 there was a decline in real wages and in the standard of living.⁽⁴⁾

This controversy about the extent of distress is unlikely to be settled since it is impossible to construct indices for prices, wages and earnings which can apply to the whole country. The average tends to be given, and the fact that many would be below the average is forgotten. We have little idea of the conditions of employment imposed by the attempt to earn this wage; nor do we know how many were unemployed. In a time of depression inevitably many workers would be dismissed or would be unable to find a market for goods they had produced. While the wages of those still in employment might be maintained at something approaching their level in more prosperous times, those who were unemployed would receive nothing.

It is much easier to determine the causes of distress than it is to measure its extent. While continental and American markets had been closed to

4. Ashton 'The standard of life of the workers in England 1790-1830' in Hayek (ed) Capitalism and the Historians 127 ff; Hobsbawm 'The British standard of living 1790-1850' in Economic History Review x (Aug 1957)

British merchants, native industries had in some cases been established. The boom which British merchants hoped for at the conclusion of the war did not materialise, because even when there was still a market for British goods, often people were too poor to pay the prices demanded. Although for example cotton exports to America increased in volume in 1815 the increase in value was negligible.⁽⁵⁾ Britain found also that she had lost her monopoly of the carrying trade. At home, the demobilisation of 400,000 men from the Army and Navy caused labour problems, and in the west of Scotland, this problem was accentuated by Irish immigration which increased in the post war period.⁽⁶⁾ Home industries, having lost some of their overseas markets, no longer had the recompense of government orders which had stimulated the iron and textile industries in particular.⁽⁷⁾

Difficulties in overseas trade and the surplus of labour after 1815 affected the cotton industry especially. From 1815 onwards there was a fall in cotton prices which was halted only briefly in 1818. Not until 1821 was an improvement noted, when the 'working classes found regular employment and received

5. Gayer, Rostow & Schwartz op.cit. 145-7, 123.

6. Handley - The Irish in Scotland - passim
Gayer, Rostow & Schwartz op.cit. 136

7. Gayer, Rostow & Schwartz op.cit. 126-7

a liberal remuneration for their services' in both the cotton and woollen industries in Yorkshire and Lancashire.⁽⁸⁾ Any improvement, however, was temporary, and a slow decline in wages and profits continued.⁽⁹⁾

What was happening after 1815 was that a decline in wages and prices in the cotton industry which had been apparent while the war was still in progress, continued. In the Manchester area, for example, prices of all types of goods declined from 1810 until 1819 apart from an increase in 1814.⁽¹⁰⁾ Wages for those weaving fancy articles had been 21s. per week in 1810; by 1819 they were only 10s.3d. In 1810 the rate for velveteens had been 12s; by 1819 it was 8s.9d. And in the Manchester area, at any rate, there was no corresponding decline in the prices of food.⁽¹¹⁾

The distress which was nationwide affected the west of Scotland very badly but was present in other areas of Scotland too. A report from Glasgow in 1816 said that 'the general misery ... was said never to have been equalled',⁽¹²⁾ and this would seem to be confirmed by the fact that in June 1816 the Lord Provost of Glasgow called for instant relief for the unemployed among the industrious poor and for those who were being paid such low rates and wages as were inadequate

8. Gayer, Rostow & Schwartz op.cit. 154

9. Ibid 155

10. Read Peterloo - 16

11. Ibid 17

12. Gayer, Rostow & Schwartz op.cit. 125

to the support of themselves and their families.⁽¹³⁾

Money was collected and distributed on a very restricted scale - a man earning 2s. per week did not qualify for assistance.⁽¹⁴⁾

In Paisley, the town council gave official support to a plan to assist those in distress.⁽¹⁵⁾

Such concern for the poor was not usual in the burghs.

In other parts of Scotland we know that distress was worse than usual from references to it in Heritor's Records; and it was so bad that the Lord Advocate felt the need to advise Lord Sidmouth about the bad conditions prevailing among 'mechanics and operatives.'⁽¹⁶⁾

Distress among the lower classes of society was undoubtedly made worse by a change in the government's fiscal policy. During the war, income tax had been a most successful source of revenue⁽¹⁷⁾ but its abolition in 1816, as a result of strong pressure from both Whigs and Tories, meant that taxes were now raised in a large measure from consumer goods. In 1816, for example, William Cobbett estimated that the 'poor' man was paying taxes of 16s. per year on salt, he paid 4d.

13. Glasgow Burgh Records 27 June 1816

14. Glasgow Chronicle 4 Jan 1817

15. Paisley Council Minutes 7 Jan 1817

16. H.O. 102.26 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 27 July 1816

17. Gayer, Rostow & Schwartz - 139 shows that in 1815, £15.6 million was raised from the Income or Property Tax, between 20-25% of total revenue.

on every pot of beer, and more than half of what he paid for sugar, tea, coffee, tobacco, shoes, soap and candles went to taxation.⁽¹⁸⁾ Whether or not these facts were accurate, there is no doubt that there was widespread feeling that the lower classes were paying in taxation a much greater proportion of their income than did those who were wealthier.

Distress and unemployment at this time could be a personal disaster, for the facilities for the relief of poverty in Scotland were totally inadequate for an urban society. Able bodied paupers were not entitled to poor relief and had to depend on charity if they could not find employment. This charity was of course entirely inadequate when unemployment was widespread; in Glasgow in 1816, for example, only £9079 was raised for those in need.⁽¹⁹⁾ For the majority of those out of work there was therefore little prospect of assistance, and as a result meetings were held from August 1816 onwards to protest at the lack of provision of relief for those in distress.⁽²⁰⁾ For the most part the authorities and wealthier members of the community seem to have done little to help. A writer in the Ayr Advertiser for example, advised the industrious part of the community to adopt the patriotic spirit of the higher classes and this

18. Glasgow Chronicle 14 Nov 1816

19. Cleland The Rise and Progress of the City of Glasgow 104

20. H.O. 102.26 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 31 Aug 1816

would enable them 'to struggle against their present difficulties and to wait with patience till commerce find a new channel, manufacturers revive, trade assume its wonted aspect of activity, and affluence revisit the land.' (21) When weavers in Kirkcaldy appealed to the Government for assistance they were told by Sidmouth that although he was sorry for their distress, it was 'not of a nature to admit of the special interference of Government for the purpose of affording relief.' (22) The Government on a number of occasions refused to aid the distressed; town councils rarely took action, and even then the measure of assistance given would not be great; public charity was normally insufficient; and the Scottish system of poor relief, based on parishes and burghs, and dependent on the decisions of heritors and magistrates was not appropriate for towns whose population was increasing rapidly. Even in rural areas the system could not cope with widespread distress. In Balfron, for example, the heritors found themselves in difficulties for the demands of the poor were 'more than ordinary from the pressure of the times'; in 1818 it was reported that the Kirk's annual income for poor relief was (on a ten-year average) £22 while there were on the roll twenty-five paupers who were paid annually £45; in

21. Ayr Advertiser 25 July 1816

22. Glasgow Chronicle 10 Dec 1816

1819 the poor's fund was again in difficulties, and a voluntary subscription had to be raised. (23)

It is not surprising that in times of economic distress those who were badly affected should seek some solution. In 1812 the weavers had organised a strike and other trades were to adopt the same solution in the future. But in the years immediately after 1815 the labour market was flooded and this made strike action difficult. Moreover the memory of what happened in 1813 to the weavers' leaders must have acted as a deterrent. Nor could those in distress turn to the authorities for much financial assistance. Even if there had been a widespread desire to create a more effective system of poor relief, this could not have been made effective for some time. Thus it was easier in this period of great distress for political reformers to win converts to their views that distress, which it was claimed resulted from excessive taxation, could be assisted only by a reform of the political system. Such a view was propagated by William Cobbett. see p. 3

Cobbett, born in 1765, was for a time in the army. In 1791 he was granted an honourable discharge and despite his lack of formal education eventually took up a career as a writer. In 1802 he first published his Political Register, a journal which continued with only one short break until 1838, three

23. Heritors Minute Book Balfour 13 Dec 1816,
28 Oct 1818, 22 Nov 1819

years after his death. The articles which it contained were written in a manner which was vivid and designed, with allusions to everyday life, to appeal to a wide public. Cobbett was essentially a countryman extolling the virtues of a mythical past when countrymen predominated in English society and all could depend on having plentiful supplies of white bread, red meat and good beer. He ignored the rural slums, the wretchedness of long hours of work for little return and the domination of the countryside in many cases by absentee landlords. More than anyone else of his generation, he created the myth of a Golden Age in a rural past; he never came to terms with industrial society. Yet his writings became popular among the lower classes in the industrial towns; possibly they, in their urban wretchedness, were attracted by the romantic idea of the Golden Age which had existed, and which could return if only 'they' - ministers, factory owners, government pensioners, philosophers - could be compelled to reform the system of government and finance which had developed.

When he began his career in political journalism in 1802 he was anti-Jacobin and a Tory. Probably the strongest influence on his opinions was dislike of foreigners, and while France was a revolutionary-inspired country it was easy for him to link this dislike of foreigners with dislike of what they believed. But after 1802, France was no longer a revolutionary

state; rather was it a despotic Empire threatening liberty and gradually Cobbett came to dislike not only foreigners but also despotic government. He studied the British system of government and finance, and became aware of the despotism in Britain. By 1806-7 he had changed his support from Tories to Whigs and then to Radicals. After 1806 the Political Register was an important radical publication, though with a price of 1s - $\frac{1}{2}$ d. its circulation was limited. Nevertheless, it was read by some of the lower classes in their clubs in the north of England, but in November 1816, Cobbett made a change which revolutionised political life. He discovered that stamp duty could be avoided if he published his leading article separately, and this greatly reduced the cost of his publication. The twopenny Register sold widely, and in the Midlands and north of England 'the writings of William Cobbett suddenly became of great authority.'⁽²⁴⁾ His first pamphlet - the Address to the Journeymen and Labourers - sold 44,000 copies within a month and 200,000 by the end of 1817, when there was still no sign of sales diminishing.⁽²⁵⁾ In his address, and in other articles that were published large numbers of people were able to read Cobbett's account of the distress throughout the country, his analysis of its

24. Bamford. Passages in the life of a Radical 11-12

25. Cole. The Life of William Cobbett - 225

causes, and the remedies which he suggested. In fact, it is possible that Cobbett's vigorous style exaggerated the extent of distress; he certainly had only a limited idea of the causes; and the remedies which he proposed would therefore be quite inadequate. But his prose expressed in clear language and with considerable emotional impact the feeling of protest that many people seem to have been experiencing. Fundamentally his message to his readers was clear - the true cause of distress was misgovernment and the only way to improve government was by parliamentary reform.

In the Address to the Journeymen and Labourers issued on 2nd November 1816 Cobbett began by stating clearly what his article would be about - 'on the cause of the present miseries, on the measures which have produced the cause, on the remedies which some foolish and some cruel and insolent men have proposed, and on the line of conduct which Journeymen and Labourers ought to pursue in order to obtain effectual relief and to assist in promoting the tranquillity and restoring the happiness of the country.' 'As to the cause of our present miseries it is the enormous amount of taxes which the government compels us to pay for the support of its army, its placemen, its pensioners... and for the payment of the interest of its debt.' This intolerable weight of taxation had all proceeded, he thought, from want of parliamentary reform. He

pointed out that of the £70 million being raised in taxation, £45 million was for the payment of interest on the National Debt, - 'this is the price we have paid for having checked ... the progress of liberty in France, for having forced upon that people the family of Bourbon and for having another branch of the same family restore the bloody legislation which Napoleon had put down.' He emphasised that the only remedy for distress consisted 'wholly and solely of such a reform of the Commons or People's House of Parliament as would give to every payer of direct taxes a vote at elections and as would cause the members to be elected annually' and that the great principles of the past should not be forsaken. 'I know of no enemy of reform and of the happiness of the country so great as that man who would persuade you that we possess nothing good and that all must be torn to pieces. We want great alteration, but we want nothing new.'

Distress resulting from excessive taxation, unpopular Government policy at home and abroad, the need for parliamentary reform - these were the points made again and again at public meetings in 1816-17. All this was of much greater practical interest to the mass of the people than Cartwright's theorising about ancient Anglo-Saxon constitutions might be. Cartwright justified reform on the basis of his curious interpretation of English constitutional history;

Cobbett appealed directly to the lower classes.

'Whatever the pride of rank, of riches or of scholarship may have induced some men to believe ... the real strength and all the resources of a country ever have sprung, and ever must spring, from the labour of its people.'⁽²⁶⁾ Such statements gave to the lower classes a self-confidence that Cartwright's theorising could never have given, and Cobbett's opinions were so forcefully and repetitively expressed that they penetrated the minds of all interested in reform. He also gave advice as to how reform was to be obtained - the people were to attend every public meeting within reach and to submit petitions. 'Petitions should be in decorous language' he wrote, and only petitioning 'should be the channel of (reformer's) sentiments.'⁽²⁷⁾ This advice was followed widely in Scotland, where his Political Register was of considerable influence, and at the meetings which were held to prepare petitions, his ideas obviously exerted great influence on those who spoke.⁽²⁸⁾

Prior to the publication of Cobbett's Address in November 1816 two important meetings were held in Paisley and Glasgow. The first of these was in the West Relief Church, Paisley where Archibald Hastie, a reformer in the 1790s, presided over a meeting which included a large number of 'respectable persons.'

26. Cobbett Address to the Journeymen and Labourers

27. Political Register 15 Feb 1817

28. Bamford op.cit. 11

There is no record of the speeches that were made, but we have a note of the resolutions passed.⁽²⁹⁾ From these it is obvious that there was great concern at the extent of economic distress and the view was expressed that this situation had been brought about not by the transition from war to peace as members of government tended to argue, but by excessive taxation. This in turn had been caused by the increase in the national debt which resulted from the ruinous wars against France, from sinecures, from the continued existence of a standing army and from the government's failure to economise. All this stemmed from 'that unequal and insulting representation of the people in Parliament'; and this 'mockery of representation' had produced a Corn Bill which had been passed, so it was claimed, with 'the unanimous disapprobation of the people.' The final resolution concluded by asking for the restoration of the people's undoubted right of choosing annually their own representatives in the Commons.

These resolutions were mainly concerned with criticism of the government and only briefly was a remedy proposed. Government policy in a number of matters was criticised but the mention of affairs abroad is of particular interest, showing that these reformers were interested in more than their immediate surroundings and circumstances. The Pope was criticised not because of his religion but because his

29. Glasgow Chronicle 10 Oct 1816

government was oppressive and criticism was levelled against Louis XVIII and Ferdinand of Spain for the same reason.

This Paisley meeting brought forth enthusiastic comment from Cobbett - the speeches and principles were admirable, 'a model for the imitation of every town and county in the kingdom' and reflected great credit on the tradesmen and manufacturers who made them.⁽³⁰⁾ But this Paisley meeting has been overshadowed by one which took place a few weeks later on the outskirts of Glasgow. On 15th October 1816 the Glasgow Chronicle published a notice calling a public meeting on the 18th of the month in the yard of the Eagle Inn to draw up a petition for submission to the Prince Regent. But on 17th October, it was announced that the meeting had been postponed because the use of the Eagle Inn Yard had been prohibited. Two days later the Chronicle gave a full account of what had happened. Originally, a request signed by fifty burgesses to hold the meeting in the Trades Hall had been rejected by the Town Council because this hall had been damaged during a public meeting in April 1815 (The hall keeper denied that this was the case). Another application was rejected, and then permission to hold the meeting on Glasgow Green was also refused. Then after the rejection of a request to use a dissenting Meeting House, permission was given to use the yard of the

Eagle Inn. Then the factor for the landlord called on the Innkeeper and permission was withdrawn. Thus the people of Glasgow were unable to hold a meeting to petition the Prince Regent because 'some of those in public authority seemed to feel as if their power was to be shaken forever.' On 26th October, however, the Chronicle once again advertised a public meeting, this time to be held on 29 October at Thrushgrove, the estate of James Turner, a well known Glasgow reformer who owned a tobacconist's shop. Since Thrushgrove was a private estate outside the city boundary the magistrates could not prevent the meeting taking place there. (31)

This Thrushgrove meeting is significant for three reasons. Firstly, it was the largest open air meeting that had been held in Scotland for political purposes. It is impossible to determine how many were present. Turner, quoting the Glasgow Courier (30 Oct 1816) which was a newspaper opposed to reform and therefore likely to minimise the attendance, puts

31. J. Smith (ed) Recollections of James Turner of Thrushgrove contains a full account of the Thrushgrove meeting. There are also notices and accounts in contemporary newspapers. James Turner, born 1768 in Glasgow, did not attend school. Put to work as a tobacco boy; taught himself to read and write. A journeyman 1789-98; then in business on his own account, having saved £100. Retired from business in 1831 and became a member of Glasgow Town Council.

the figure at forty thousand. The figure was arrived at as follows : the meeting was held in a field which contained 11,750 square yards; about one third of this was closely filled and if we suppose nine men to occupy a square yard, we shall have upwards of thirty five thousand; since however there was constant movement on the fringes of the crowd, the number attending was be even greater. This computation may be inaccurate. Perhaps less than one third of the field was occupied, and it is most unlikely there were nine men to every square yard. Yet it is without doubt true that many people did attend the meeting, many arriving before mid-day although it was not due to begin until 1p.m, and it is also true that despite the large numbers who spent several hours at Thrushgrove 'not the slightest injury was done to any article upon the ground.' The whole meeting was conducted 'with an order and decorum which strikingly proved how groundless had been the prejudice against popular meetings in this part of the country.'

The size of the meeting, therefore, was of significance. So also was the fact that it was held in the open air. Open air meetings were not new in Scottish life but Thrushgrove was reputedly the first occasion on which an open air meeting was held for political purposes. Radical reformers could spread their views mainly in three ways - by speaking at meetings, by forming societies, or by distributing

literature. Normally one would expect large official buildings to be denied to the reformers as had been the case in Glasgow. Dissenting meeting houses which were used regularly for meetings in 1816-17 would normally be fairly small, holding only a few hundred. So if reformers wished to address large audiences they had to organise open air meetings. These larger meetings presented problems not only for the organisers - erecting hustings, ensuring that people could be organised in an orderly way - but also for the local authorities who viewed with alarm the assembly of so many reformers in an open place.

The third significant fact about Thrushgrove was that the speeches that were made and the resolutions that were carried must have had a strong influence on other meetings in Scotland. The size of the meeting attracted publicity and the 13th resolution called on every town and village to express their feelings. The example of Thrushgrove having been given in Glasgow, it was much more likely that other places would follow suit.

At the meeting, James Turner of Thrushgrove was chairman; the speakers were Glasgow merchants and shopkeepers. Their speeches (if one can assume they were correctly reported in the contemporary press and in later years by Turner) were long and repetitive, and the resolutions extremely verbose.

The first speaker after Turner took the chair

was Mr. Gray - presumably Benjamin Gray, a shoemaker who was a well known reformer. . . . He began by mentioning the distress - 'In every corner of this once flourishing country one hideous picture of misery presents itself; commerce, manufacturers and agriculture all groan beneath impending ruin. Bankruptcy crowds on bankruptcy... thousands of the industrious and labouring poor are famishing for want of employment...'. Then came an examination of the causes of distress and the conclusion that 'the only adequate cause that can be assigned for the present distresses of the nation is the oppressive weight of the enormous burdens which have been entailed upon the country by a vile and corrupt faction.' The solutions to the problems facing the nation would be found in retrenchment and reform, and reduction in the whole system of expenditure. 'The people must have their legal share in the government of the country - they must have the representatives of their own choosing ... nothing short of radical reform can save them ... Norman and Stuart tyrants have successively beat down the whole fabric of British freedom; but not extirpating the people, that freedom each time rose again with fresh accession of strength. Why then should not the people do now as their fathers have repeatedly done before them? In one word, why should they not Petition, Petition till crowned with complete victory?' (32)

After this speech, which was obviously influenced by the opinion of Cartwright and Cobbett concerning the causes of distress and by the tradition of the 'Norman Yoke', resolutions prepared by a reform Committee were submitted by Mr. Lang, the printer who was one of Cartwright's supporters and also Turner's brother-in-law. These resolutions were seconded by an ironmonger, Mr. McArthur who appealed to the patriotism of his audience, reminding them of the struggles and sacrifices of Wallace, Bruce, George Buchanan and others. Then a very long speech was made by Mr. Russell a grocer, who began by insisting that the right to petition had been guaranteed in 1689 and that it was 'one of the fundamental and unalterable laws of the land.' Then, after condemning the burgh faction who had tried to deny the people of Glasgow this right, he analysed the causes of distress. The main cause was excessive taxation which resulted from the wars with the American Colonies and France. The remedy was a reduction in government expenditure and 'free and equal representation in Parliament' for the people. 'Let the house be filled with representatives freely and fairly chosen by the people' - the people being defined as 'taxable householders'. They must 'Petition and Petition and Petition in an orderly manner' until this reform was achieved. (33)

Mr. Lang then returned to give his view of the situation. 'All the grievances we complain of, all the sufferings we endure are to be traced to ... misrepresentation of the People in the House of Commons.' As a remedy, he advocated annual elections and elections by ballot, the local schoolmaster acting as the returning officer. (34)

The resolutions which were then adopted were much longer than at Paisley. There were similarities in that the prevalence of distress was mentioned and this was attributed not to a transition from war to peace but to the expense of the recent wars, to the extravagance of Government, to the foreign policy that had been adopted, to the maintenance of a standing army and to the apathy and indifference of the ruling classes. But the Thrushgrove reformers gave more attention to the whole matter of parliamentary reform. They believed that the people had been deprived of their legal share in the government of their country and that for this reason they no longer had any security of their legal rights, liberties and privileges (6th resolution). They maintained that the only way of affording relief to the country was by 'returning to the first principles of the constitution and restoring to the people their undoubted right, that of freely, equally and annually electing their own representatives to Parliament.' (8th resolution)

The meeting at Thrushgrove and the resolutions accepted there set a pattern for future meetings in Scotland. Certainly nowhere else did so many people assemble and a number of meetings were held in churches which must have limited the attendance to a few hundred.⁽³⁵⁾ But the petitions that were prepared followed the Thrushgrove pattern - a statement about the prevailing distress and its causes and the consequent need for a radical reform of the Commons. There was in all the resolutions a great similarity to those at Thrushgrove and a uniform tendency to link the need for political reform with the distress which prevailed among the lower orders. The one exception to this of which we have record was a meeting at Kilbarchan on Saturday 21st December 1816 in the Relief Church.⁽³⁶⁾ It was resolved that the prevailing distress could be traced to radical errors in the principles of Government, that these errors did not result 'from any defect in the British Constitution but from a shameless and undisguised deviation from its original spirit and purity', and that the only solution was to 'petition Parliament for a radical and thorough reform of itself

35. Meetings were held for example in churches at Fenwick (27 Jan 1817) Tarbolton (30 Dec 1816) Kirkintilloch (16 Jan 1817) Saltcoats (14 Dec 1816) Stewarton (18 Dec 1816) Paisley (20 Jan 1817) Girvan (25 Jan 1817) Kilmaurs (28 Jan 1817) Arbroath (3 Feb 1817) Beith (8 Feb 1817) Elderslie (8 Feb 1817) and Greenock (no date) - references in the Glasgow Chronicle

36. A full account of this is contained in H.O.

by the extension of the elective right and the annihilation of every part of the system at which our forefathers would have blushed.' This was the type of statement made at many other meetings; but the speakers at Kilbarchan introduced a more philosophical element than seems to have been normal in 1816-17.

It was suggested that 'a flagrant and unjustifiable attack on the rights of man' was being made and that 'Mankind (had) now begun to form just conceptions of their own dignity and importance..... There (was) a mental revolution which (would) ultimately effect the deliverance of mankind' and then the voice of reason would be heard. Attacks were made on 'the despots of the earth exulting in their pride of heart, causing Te Deums to be chanted over the fallen liberties of mankind' and on Church and State 'conspiring to plunge mankind into all the horrors, superstition, bigotry and nonsense of the dark ages.'

Such sentiments would seem to owe much to Paine and his writings of the 1790s. Elsewhere, reformers seem to have been influenced more by Cartwright and Cobbett. The idea that a perfect constitution in the past had been perverted in more recent times is to be found repeatedly in speeches and resolutions. English influence on Scottish reformers is perhaps shown most clearly in a pamphlet entitled Thaumaturgus published in four parts in 1816 and 1817. In this it is stated that 'From the origin of Parliament to the

reign of the eighth Henry the parliaments of England were annual ... and an election was held previous to the meeting of each parliament. The House of Commons was then elected by the people every year, the members were paid by the people for their attendance and they watched over the rights, privileges and interests of their constituents....' Repeatedly the Scots linked themselves to this inaccurate and foreign parliamentary tradition basing their arguments in favour of reform on this rather than on the rights of man as the speakers at Kilbarchan did.

Presumably the Scots had learned much of this inaccurate tradition from Cartwright and Cobbett. From Cobbett's Political Register they learned about the widespread distress, its causes and the need for political reform. Specific criticisms which were made at meetings about government policy, the civil list, sinecures, the standing army, and excessive taxation were to be found frequently in the Political Register. Cobbett wrote about taxation as the cause of distress - this was repeated at reform meetings; he wrote about members of the government who were to blame for the failure to initiate reform and at meetings these attacks on Sidmouth and his colleagues were repeated. He employed hyperbole frequently, and one could criticise radical reformers for the way in which they copied this in their speeches. Cartwright, Cobbett and reform orators and writers had little

regard for accuracy in what they wrote and said and can be criticised for this.

It is not unusual for political writers and orators to exaggerate and it may be thought that radical hyperbole should not be strongly condemned. But those who complain about existing institutions should ensure that they have proposals for alternative arrangements. Radical reformers can be condemned for their divergent ideas about the reforms they desired. It was reported in the Glasgow Chronicle that 'On the necessity of parliamentary reform all classes of those who are friends of the people, Whigs and Jacobins, are agreed, though they may differ as to the plan and extent.'⁽³⁷⁾ It was these differences which could lead to trouble among Radicals. Generally the political reform demanded at public meetings was the institution of annual parliaments (i.e. annual elections) and the extension of the suffrage. Few mentioned at this time the need for a secret ballot, probably because it was seldom mentioned by Cobbett who thought it 'sneaking, cowardly and hypocritical' though he later came to support it.⁽³⁸⁾ The extension of the franchise that was desired was never made clear. Normally the demand was for universal suffrage, but it is most unlikely that the reformers

37. Glasgow Chronicle 31 Dec 1816

38. Cartwright op.cit. ii 142, Political Register
23 Nov 1816

contemplated the extension of the franchise to all men and women. Occasionally, speakers clearly indicated what they wanted; one man at Campsie demanded votes for all men over 21 not debarred by crime or insanity and a resolution passed at Carmunnock was that 'every man not disqualified by crime or insanity at the age of 21 years should possess a vote for his representative in Parliament; for every man being liable to be taxed to support the state and to be called upon to arm in its defence are proofs that he has a right to choose the representative who is to vote away his money and demand his services....' (39) But there was never any suggestion that the lower classes should enter parliament, and there was little mention of the size or location of constituencies, merely the often expressed stipulation that there be 'fair representation.'

At all times the demands were made peacefully and petitions were prepared and presented in what was believed to be a constitutional manner. The people of Tarbolton deprecated 'all tumultuous and riotous proceedings as unworthy of the character of Scotchmen and directly leading to aggravate those evils which they are meant to remedy.' (40) The people of Kirkin-tilloch said they were 'not a factious but a peaceable

39. Glasgow Chronicle 9 Dec 1816 and 7 Jan 1817

40. Ibid 14 Jan 1817

people' and that their principles were not revolutionary.⁽⁴¹⁾

The meeting at Kilbarchan was an exception; there, the speeches were violent and it was stated that force would be used if petitions failed.⁽⁴²⁾

The fact that the meetings caused the authorities little concern is borne out by the paucity of references to them in official papers. After the Kilbarchan meeting the Sheriff Substitute of Renfrewshire reported that it was clear 'that the contagion is spreading among the working classes but they are taught coolly to contemplate the application of violence';⁽⁴³⁾ the clergymen in Langholm protested to his member of Parliament Mr. W.R.K. Douglas that an evening school had been entered and signatures for petition demanding reform obtained from every child who could write.⁽⁴⁴⁾ But these are negligible complaints when one considers the many meetings which were held in Scotland at this time.

It is also significant that only one prosecution in a court of law took place as a result of what happened at a public meeting. Alexander McLaren a weaver who made a speech at a meeting in Kilmarnock on 7th December 1816 and Thomas Baird, a merchant who published McLaren's speech were charged with sedition

41. Glasgow Chronicle 21 Jan 1817

42. H.O. 102.26 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 24 Dec 1816

43. Ibid

44. Parl. Deb. xxxv 924 10 Mar 1817

on the grounds that the speech and publication were spoken and published wickedly and feloniously and were calculated to degrade and bring into contempt the Government and Legislature, and to withdraw therefrom the confidence and affections of the people, filling the realm with trouble and dissension.⁽⁴⁵⁾ The statements which it was alleged McLaren had made were probably no worse than remarks in similar speeches elsewhere in Scotland. He had stated that the people were ruled by men 'only solicitous for their own aggrandizement' and that 'a base oligarchy was feeding their filthy vermin on the people's vitals'; that the remedy for such a state of affairs was petitioning, but that should the Prince Regent turn a deaf ear to these petitions, he should forfeit their allegiance. He also claimed that the House of Commons was corrupted, decayed and worn out and that since it was composed of noblemen, clergymen, naval and military officers, placemen and pensioners, it had departed from its original purity when it consisted only of commoners chosen annually by the universal suffrage of the people.⁽⁴⁶⁾

45. Cockburn - Examination of Trials for Sedition 177 ff, State Trials xxxiii 1 ff

46. McKay History of Kilmarnock 205 ff in describing this incident mentions that McLaren was not one of the main speakers. He merely opened the business of the meeting with a 'brief and energetic address.'

When the Lord Advocate, Alexander Maconochie, addressed the Jury he claimed that every speech or writing which tended 'to produce public trouble or commotion, anything which moved his majesty's subjects to the dislike, subversion or disturbance' of the government was sedition. Any speech or writing he thought, which vilified or traduced the sovereign or criticised the House of Commons fell under the crime of sedition. If this classification of sedition were accepted it was obvious that McLaren's reputed speech, as well as many other speeches made in both Scotland and England, could be called seditious. Lord Justice Clerk Boyle in his summing-up impressed upon the jury that the subject had a right to complain and petition, that in law a conviction could not be warranted unless they were satisfied both of the dangerous tendency of the language and of its having been employed with the wickedness of intention imputed to it by the prosecution, and that McLaren and Baird were both men of high character. Although the Lord Advocate had failed to show beyond doubt that the language complained of had been used with any wickedness of intention, the jury passed a verdict of guilty though recommending both to the clemency of the court. Both were then sentenced to six months' imprisonment, and after that period to find surety for their good behaviour for a further three years, McLaren for £40, Baird for £200.

Although at first sight the punishment may seem harsh, and although as defence counsel pointed out in

his concluding speech, what happened at Kilmarnock could not bear comparison with what was happening unchecked in England, yet Cockburn was so impressed as to call it 'the first perfectly fair trial for sedition that Scotland had ever seen', and it should be remembered that those found guilty of sedition in the 1790s had been sentenced to transportation. Why McLaren and Baird were prosecuted is difficult to determine. Possibly the authorities wished to punish someone for the criticisms that were being made of the Prince Regent and the Government of the country in 1816-17. But if the intention was to impress the general public and show the strength of established institutions, a more obvious victim could have been found at an earlier date in Glasgow (for example at Thrushgrove). McLaren was a weaver, a man of no social consequence, who had taken no previous part in reform agitation; he lived in Kilmarnock and made his speech there to a crowd of only 4,000 people. On the other hand, Russell, Gray, Lang and others who spoke at Thrushgrove were fairly wealthy people of some social standing in the shopkeeper class, and their speeches were made before a crowd of 40,000. The only possible explanation of their immunity from prosecution and the prosecution of McLaren and Baird is that McLaren's speech was printed at the time whereas it was many years afterwards before the Thrushgrove

speeches were published other than in contemporary newspapers.⁽⁴⁷⁾ But McLaren's punishment came too late in any case to affect the petitioning movement. By March 1817 the whole idea had lost its appeal to the general public and few political meetings were by then taking place.

The only other person charged with sedition at this time was the Rev. Neil Douglas a Universalist preacher in Glasgow. Douglas, born in 1750 had formerly been a minister of the Relief Church in Cupar, Fife, and in Dundee. There in 1793 he had come under the influence of the movement for political reform. Afterwards, he moved on to minister in Edinburgh, Greenock and Glasgow and it was there in 1809 that he set up his own Universalist Church.⁽⁴⁸⁾ On 26th May 1817 he was charged with sedition on the grounds that in the course of various prayers, sermons and declamations from his pulpit he had spoken criminally of the

47. This conclusion would seem to be confirmed by the fact that on Friday, 28 Feb 1817 a printer at Ayr was brought before the Sheriff depute and charged with printing and publishing the speeches and resolutions of a meeting at Tarbolton. He was bailed for £60 on condition that he brought forward the person who brought him the manuscript he had printed. There is no further reference to this case. Scotsman 8 Mar 1817

48. Struthers, History of the Relief Church ch. xxii

King, the Prince Regent, parliament and the judiciary 'asserting and drawing a parallel between his Majesty and Nebuchudnezzar ... driven from the society of man for infidelity and corruption' and saying that the Prince Regent was 'a poor infatuated wretch or a poor infatuated devotee of Bacchus, ... that the House of Commons was corrupt and that the members thereof were thieves and robbers ... that the laws were not justly administered ... and that subjects were condemned without trial and without evidence.' (49) There were seven witnesses for the prosecution but none could give the preacher's exact words since his speech was so rapid that it was difficult to follow him. James Waddell, a surgeon, could give only his impressions and not the substance of what was said, (50) and this seems to have been generally the case. Moreover, two of the witnesses were common town officers who had been sent to the place of worship to detect sedition. (51) On behalf of the prisoner, six witnesses appeared. They stated that although Douglas was a reformer, he was loyal, always prayed for the king and the royal family, and had previously commended our system of justice. They maintained that he had been sermonising on the book of Daniel for the previous two years and came inevitably to Nebuchudnezzar.

49. State Trials, xxxiii 633 ff. Cockburn Trials for Sedition ii 192 ff

50. State Trials xxxiii 647

51. Ibid 649, 651

Wedderburn, the Solicitor General, who was prosecuting had to admit that the crown's evidence was poorer than he had expected, yet he maintained that Douglas was a political preacher whose conduct was highly criminal. 'To all who have paid attention to the progress of this trial it must be clear that he has been in the habit of arraigning in his discourses the measures of Government and of infusing among his hearers political dissatisfaction.' (52) But Wedderburn contented himself by asking for a verdict of Not Proven. Even this was denied him. The jury returned a verdict of Not Guilty, for, as Cockburn remarks, the prosecution was so ludicrous and the prisoner so honest, respectable, dull and obstinate that no good natured person could avoid taking his side. The case made the authorities appear ridiculous; even if it had been successful for the Crown it is difficult to see what benefit would have accrued either to the Government or to society in general. It allowed the character and habits of the Prince Regent to be discussed and inevitably it cast doubts on the ability of those lawyers in Scotland - the Lord Advocate and probably the Solicitor General - who decided that the case should proceed.

Long before Douglas appeared in court charged with sedition, the movement for political reform which he

had reputedly encouraged had declined. The petitions which had been sent to London from many parts of Scotland met with no success. Petitions from Glasgow and other neighbouring places were delivered by Cartwright to Sidmouth on 18th December 1816 and these were passed to the Lords of the Treasury.⁽⁵³⁾ On 4th January 1817, Turner, acting on behalf of the Glasgow Committee protested that the petition had not been given direct to the Prince Regent - 'it is certainly a novel circumstance for any inferior authority or branch of administration to interpose between the Sovereign and the petitions of the subjects. Were this principle to be admitted ... the hope of relief at any time or on any occasion from this quarter would be for ever at an end.'⁽⁵⁴⁾ But Sidmouth's secretary assured Turner on 8th January that the petition had been referred to the Prince Regent before being given to the Lords of the Treasury. In fact, the petitions from Glasgow met the same fate as the many other petitions presented; they were all either rejected out of hand by the Commons or ordered to be laid on the table, to be ignored and forgotten.

The failure of this petitioning movement, in contrast to the similar type of movement which led to the abolition of Income Tax in 1816, was caused by

53. Glasgow Chronicle 2 Jan 1817

54. Ibid 14 Jan 1817

the failure to convince a number of members of the House of Commons to support the type of reform demanded. As the winter passed, members of parliament who might have favoured some measure of reform, and members of the middle classes were frightened by a movement which, in England at any rate, seemed to lead to violence. As the Glasgow Chronicle noted on 1st February 1817, the stoning of the Prince Regent's coach 'like every other act of the mob will only tend to strengthen the administration and enable them to withhold concessions.' On 13th February, 600 merchants, bankers, manufacturers, and others in Glasgow stated that they were deeply conscious of the benefits of the constitutional and mild government of the House of Brunswick, and that improvement in the condition of the people would be retarded by universal suffrage and annual parliaments, though they did not explain how they came to this conclusion.⁽⁵⁵⁾ The freeholders of the county of Lanark deprecated 'the dangerous and unconstitutional projects of annual parliaments and universal suffrage, evils ever regarded by the wise and judicious of all parties as only names for anarchy and revolution.'⁽⁵⁶⁾ Although it was perhaps true, as was suggested in the Commons in March 1817, that nine-tenths of the people of Scotland were anxious for reform, this did not mean that all people

55. Glasgow Chronicle 13 Feb 1817

56. Ibid 20 Feb 1817

wanted annual parliaments and universal suffrage. (57)

Moreover as the Lord Advocate pointed out, of the people of Scotland 'capable of forming a correct judgment on the subject, nine-tenths did not wish for any change in the representation in parliament' and he emphasised that no petitions in favour of such reform had been received from the landed interest, from any corporate body, from commissioners of supply or from any meeting of freeholders. (58)

This was a good point, for not until a number of those who had political influence could be persuaded to support demands for a radical reform of the Commons did the movement have any chance of achieving success by constitutional means and the extent of popular support was therefore of little consequence.

Generally the petitions were presented by Burdett or Cochrane, the only two genuine Radicals in

57. Parl. Deb. xxxv 921, Sir R. Ferguson 10 Mar 1817

58. Ibid 923

the Commons. (59) Occasionally, others presented the Scottish petitions - General Sir Ronald Ferguson, Mr. Bennet and Lord Archibald Hamilton all presented petitions demanding retrenchment and

59. Burdett, Sir Francis, 1770-1844. Resident in Paris in 1790s until 1793. Entered parliament 1796 and from 1797 onwards attacked the government for encroachment on popular rights, on taxation, and on the restriction on free speech. From 1807 he sat for Westminster, being elected as a result of the campaign organised by Francis Place. Burdett did not meet with the full approval of Place's radicals since he refused to pledge himself to them, but he did remain an outspoken critic of successive governments until in 1837 he became a Conservative.

Cochrane, Thomas, 10th Earl of Dundonald, 1775-1860. Elected M.P. for Westminster 1807. Later accused of Stock Exchange fraud, imprisoned and fined. Became an outspoken critic of the government. Left England in 1818 to command the Chilean navy. During the years 1816-18 he did present a genuine radical point of view in the Commons. For example, in answer to those who maintained that universal suffrage was an impracticable proposition, he reminded the House that militia lists could be used. 'Parliaments ought to be annual and all householders ought to have the elective franchise.' Parl. Deb. xxxv 361 14 Feb 1817

reform.⁽⁶⁰⁾ But these three men were never radical reformers and while they and other Whigs might feel that 'the great advance which Scotland (had) made in wealth and improvement during the last fifty years (demanded) some amendment in the representation', and would agree that Scottish representation at Westminster was open to criticism, they probably desired to extend the franchise only to owners of property and land.⁽⁶¹⁾

It would be untrue to say that the petitions roused much enthusiasm or opposition in either Commons or Lords. When for example in March 1817 after several months of petitioning, a vote was taken on

60. Ferguson, Sir Ronald (1773-1841) born Edinburgh, entered army 1790. Went to Cape of Good Hope as Brigadier General in 1804. Major General 1808. M.P. for Kirkcaldy Burghs from 1806-1830. A firm friend of parliamentary reform but opposed to the 'wild doctrine of universal suffrage'. Parl. Deb. xxxv 310 10 Feb 1817

Bennet, Henry Grey (1777-1836) 2nd son of 4th Earl of Tankerville. M.P. for Shrewsbury and a prominent Whig who frequently voted against the government.

Hamilton, Lord Archibald (1770-1827) younger son of 9th Duke of Hamilton. Educated Eton and Oxford, called to English Bar 1799. M.P. for county of Lanark 1802-27. A consistent critic of the Tories and advocate of moderate reform.

61. Parl. Deb. xxxv 177 ff 10 Feb 1817 and 921 ff 10 Mar 1817

receiving printed petitions for reform, only 64 members in the Commons voted and of these only 6 supported the main Radical speakers, Cochrane and Burdett. The government was thus able to ignore the petitions and demands for parliamentary reform knowing that it was a subject which was of little interest to many members of parliament and that many unfranchised people in the country were opposed to what were regarded as the excessive and dangerous demands of the petitioners.

There was thus no positive, easily categorised result of the petitioning movement. No concessions were wrung from the Prince Regent and his ministers; no Whigs in parliament were won over to the radical programme; and it is probable that the violence which became an intrinsic part of the movement in England retarded the movement for parliamentary reform. But there are in Scotland two factors of importance about the movement. Firstly, it revived interest in politics among the lower classes and made political meetings commonplace.⁽⁶²⁾ Secondly, it provided a

62. Thompson The Making of the English Working Class 678-9 stresses the great importance of the revival of the habit of holding public meetings and open air demonstrations. 'In the provinces the very notion of working men attending meetings under the auspices of men of their own rank was, in the minds of the loyalist gentry, synonymous with riot and insubordination.' The great lesson to be learned in both England and Scotland was that the 'mob' could act in as peaceful a manner as those of the middle and upper classes.

peaceful outlet for the feelings of the people. Had they not been able to attend political meetings and record their discontent through petitions, there might have been widespread outbreaks of rioting and machine breaking as there had been in parts of England during the latter part of the war. Although the authorities in Scotland, particularly in Glasgow, were always afraid of rioting, the people were almost always well behaved. By the spring of 1817 when it must surely have become obvious that petitioning unsupported by the middle classes or by the use of force would not succeed, the end of distress was in sight. With the end of widespread unemployment and starvation, few people were prepared to take the trouble to attend public meetings or to waste time petitioning a ruler who paid no attention to the requests made. Thus the whole agitation passed quietly away in Scotland in the spring and early summer of 1817. Cobbett lost much of his influence when he fled to America to escape prosecution, and his place was taken by others such as Sherwin and Wooler, more extreme in outlook, who ridiculed him for his flight.⁽⁶³⁾ As he lost influence, the petitioning movement died out.

Also by this time it was becoming obvious that the Hampden Club, which had provided Cartwright with a base from which to launch his tours of the manufacturing areas, was not sufficiently powerful to provide

63. Black Dwarf 2 Apr 1817

the leadership that reform needed. By 1818, Cartwright had to admit that it had been lamentably defective, cold and inefficient 'although it had been instrumental in generating the petitions for reform of over a million men.'⁽⁶⁴⁾ In 1819 the Club died when only Cartwright attended a meeting which had been called.⁽⁶⁵⁾ Its exclusiveness made it quite unsuitable to lead a popular movement. Yet, for three reasons it is important in the story of post-war radicalism. Firstly, as we have noted, it provided Cartwright for a base from which to set out to convert the machine breakers into political reformers. Secondly, it acted as a model for political clubs throughout the north of England. From September 1816 onwards, clubs were formed all over the north and attempts were made through them to interest the people in politics. An address to the inhabitants of Oldham in September 1816, for example, told them it was a duty incumbent upon them 'to exert themselves in a constitutional way to recover their lost rights.'⁽⁶⁶⁾ Before the end of 1816 there were so many clubs in Lancashire that conferences of delegates could be called. There was a small subscription - usually 1d per week - which could soon amount to a reasonable sum, (after only a few months the Leeds club had a

64. Cartwright - Life ii 143

65. Ibid 163

66. Kinsey Some aspects of Lancashire Radicalism
35-8

balance of £17). There was an organisation in Manchester for sending out speakers to clubs who wanted them.⁽⁶⁷⁾ And the picture that emerges is most definitely one of lower class leadership in lower class clubs; there is no suggestion of middle class domination. Although these clubs died out for a time in 1817-18, they revived again a year later, sometimes under other names; thus a tradition of political clubs among the lower classes had been established where the emphasis was strongly on political not economic, discussion.⁽⁶⁸⁾

The Hampden Club organisation does not seem to have been so strong in Scotland. Certainly, some contact with Cartwright was maintained. A central committee which had been formed in Glasgow received a letter from him in January 1817 suggesting the appointment of the Unitarian minister George Harris as a delegate to a conference in London; and Lang the publisher received both pamphlets and letters.⁽⁶⁹⁾

But there is no evidence that a strong network of clubs existed in Scotland; it is possible that the Scots at this time were prepared to do no more than append their names to a petition after attending a meeting. It is also possible that clubs did exist, but that their records were disposed of just as in

67. Kinsey Some aspects of Lancashire Radicalism
48-56

68. Ibid 64

69. H.O. 102.27 Richmond to Sidmouth 27 Jan 1817
and 9 Feb 1817

Manchester, for example, 'all books and papers belonging to the society were safely destroyed' to prevent any of the three thousand members suffering afterwards. (70)

The absence of a Hampden Club organisation of any consequence in Scotland is also suggested by the fact that the Scots were so poorly represented at the 'Crown and Anchor' Meeting in January 1817. This meeting, the third reason for attributing importance to the Hampden Club, was an assembly of reformers from all parts of England where clubs existed, their object being to discuss a plan for radical reform. It was the nearest that radicals ever came to having an accepted common policy argued out at a national level. There was one great difficulty in the way of such a meeting; under the Seditious Societies Act of 1799 no national political organisation was legal, and it was illegal to form local societies which were branches of a national society or which communicated with a national centre by means of correspondence or by the exchange of delegates. The meeting at the Crown and Anchor Tavern therefore tried to legalise itself by meeting in public session and claiming that it merely represented persons from petitioning towns who had gathered to consider the best means of effecting a constitutional reform. At three meetings on 22nd,

23rd, 24th January they debated the qualifications to be demanded of voters and parliamentary candidates, the need for annual parliaments, and for the ballot. Then after petitions had been presented to Parliament the delegates mostly dispersed.⁽⁷¹⁾ The importance of this meeting was considerable. It had met in London just as Parliament was assembling and attention was bound to be paid to it. An attempt was made to introduce uniformity into the demands for radical reform. Delegates from the North were able to see leaders of whom they had only heard, men such as Henry Hunt; and those same delegates discovered that at times their wishes could over-ride those of more illustrious reformers.⁽⁷²⁾ But at this important meeting Scotland was hardly represented. Glasgow's delegate was Major Cartwright himself, while a Unitarian minister George Harris represented both Edinburgh and Paisley.⁽⁷³⁾ This poor representation would seem to confirm that Hampden Club organisation in Scotland was not comparable to that in Lancashire, that there were few well organised clubs in Scotland, and that such clubs as did exist had insufficient funds to send members to London.

Every movement desiring some radical reform of government must face up to the dilemma of whether or

71. Ibid 82 ff. White Waterloo to Peterloo 140 ff

72. Cf. for example Bamford's account of how universal suffrage could be practical if Militia lists were used as Voters' Rolls.

73. Glasgow Chronicle 28 Jan 1817 and 30 Jan 1817

not to rely entirely on moral force. Cobbett wrote about this problem - 'the right to resist oppression always exists but those who compose the nation at any given time must be left to judge for themselves when oppression has arrived at a pitch to justify the exercise of such right.'⁽⁷⁴⁾ Shortly after the Crown and Anchor meeting it became obvious not only that the Government would not grant the reform that the petitions demanded but that a vigorous attack would be made on the reformers. There had always been those who favoured physical force to obtain reform, and the failure of petitions coupled to the Government's antagonistic attitude forced reformers to decide whether they would forsake the idea of obtaining reform or press for it with greater vigour. An inevitable result of the failure of petitioning was that attention was turned by some extremists to the use of physical force.

74. Pol. Register 4 Apr 1815

Secret Associations in Scotland 1816-17

It was always difficult for the landowning and other wealthy groups to appreciate that Cartwright and Cobbett were trying to bring about reform by peaceful means. All reformers tended to be classed as dangerous, whether they were the wealthy landowners of the Hampden Club or Spencean Philanthropists. These latter were followers of Thomas Spence, a publisher and vendor of political tracts in London who believed that 'we must destroy not only personal and hereditary Lordship but the cause of them, which is Private Property in Land.' Such views made Spence who died in 1814 and his followers who continued to publicise his views after his death the most extreme reformers of the time and a much greater danger to society than men like Cartwright. Yet successive governments from 1793 to 1820 were always ready to think that all reformers were trying to 'seduce the lower classes of the people,'⁽¹⁾ and to act decisively against reformers. The government on three occasions in the nineteenth century before 1820 persuaded parliament that strong action against reformers was necessary. What happened in 1812, 1817 and 1819 was that the government, having announced that it was in possession of information about actual or threatened disturbances had secret

1. Parl. Deb. xxxvi 741 Sir John Nicholl
20 May 1817

committees appointed from both Houses. The reports of these committees were then used as an excuse for the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act (in Scotland, the act against Wrongous Imprisonment) and the passage of restrictive legislation.

When in 1816 and 1817 there were riots at Spa Fields in London and stones were reputedly thrown at the Prince Regent's coach, secret committees were appointed and their reports were presented in February 1817. The Committee of the House of Lords condemned the whole reform movement, considering that the Hampden Clubs throughout the country were used as a cloak to further plans dangerous to public security; Glasgow was named as one of the areas in which these clubs, and societies of Spencean Philanthropists were to be found.⁽²⁾ The Committee noted that oaths of secrecy had been frequently administered, some of them 'of the most atrocious and dreadful import', and that publications of a most seditious and inflammatory nature were being circulated. If an attack had been made on the Prince Regent's coach, and this was not proved, it was seen as 'an additional and melancholy proof of the efficacy of this system to destroy all reverence for authority' and an indication that further provisions were necessary for the preservation of

public peace.

The committee of the House of Commons gave an even more alarming picture. 'Attempts have been made to induce the working classes to look for relief not only in a reform of parliament on the plan of universal suffrage and annual parliaments but in a total overthrow of all existing establishments and in a division of the landed and extinction of the funded property of the country.' (That is, what the Spenceans believed in)⁽³⁾ It was believed that a system of secret associations had been extended from England into Glasgow and some other populous towns of Scotland, and that the members of these associations whose object was the overthrow by force of the existing form of government, were armed.⁽⁴⁾

During the debate which followed, the government moved the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act, Sidmouth commenting that a very large proportion of the club members had parliamentary reform in their mouths but rebellion and revolution in their hearts.⁽⁵⁾

But Mr. Bennet pointed out that concerning the situation in Scotland only one witness had been examined, namely the Lord Advocate 'who had produced a paper which he begged might not be made public.'⁽⁶⁾

This compelled the Lord Advocate Maconochie, who had just taken his seat in parliament to rise and give an account of what information he had given to the secret

3. Parl. Deb. xxxv 438 19 Feb. 1817

4. Ibid 446

5. Ibid 554 24 Feb 1817

6. Ibid 710 26 Feb 1817

committee.⁽⁷⁾ He told the members that he had learned in the previous November of efforts to disseminate publications which contained 'the most reprehensible matter ... to familiarise the people with a contempt for the heads of government.' In January came information that secret meetings were taking place in Glasgow, organised by people who had been prominent in the troubles in the 1790s. He then read the oath which the conspirators had sworn, an oath administered to many hundreds - 'In the awful presence of God, I, A.B., do voluntarily swear that I will persevere in my endeavours to form a brotherhood of affection amongst Britons of every description who are considered worthy of confidence; and that I will persevere in my endeavours to obtain for all the people of Great Britain and Ireland not disqualified by crimes or insanity, the elective franchise at the age of 21 with free and equal representation and annual parliaments; and that I will support the same to the utmost of my power, either by moral or physical strength as the case may require; and I do further swear that neither hopes nor fears, rewards or punishments shall induce me to inform or give evidence against any member or

7. Parl. Deb. xxxv 728. Alexander Maconochie (1777-1861) son of a Scottish judge, was called to the bar in 1799; advocate-depute 1807, Sheriff of Haddingtonshire 1810, Solicitor General 1813, Lord Advocate 1816, M.P. for Yarmouth 1817. Raised to the bench as Lord Meadowbank 1819.

members collectively or individually for any act or expression done or made in or out of this or similar societies under the punishment of death, to be inflicted on me by any member or members of such society. So help me God and keep me steadfast.'

This melodramatic oath, containing incitement to sedition or treason, had a strong effect on the House and as a result, Habeas Corpus and its Scottish equivalent were suspended until 1st July 1817.

(Eventually this was renewed until January 1818). Also passed was a Seditious Meetings Act which was designed to ensure that all reforming clubs and societies would be utterly suppressed. No meeting might be held of more than fifty persons without prior notice to the magistrates, who had power to disperse such meetings.

Public liberty had been seriously curtailed. Was there really a serious danger to established government? How had ministers and members of the committee learned of the dangers, what information did they have, how accurate was it? In part, the answer to these questions can be found in the Home Office Papers.

The authorities were handicapped by the absence of well trained, efficient police forces. There was considerable opposition to the establishment of such

forces; at the local level, objections came from local councils which did not want to establish forces that would require large sums of money to maintain; while at national level there was opposition on more philosophical grounds. The Parliamentary Committee of 1818 saw in Bentham's plan for a Ministry of Police 'a plan which would make ... all classes of society spies on each other.'⁽⁸⁾ Even where police forces were established, numbers were kept to a minimum and powers of investigation were limited by shortage of numbers and the allocation to the force of a wide variety of duties. In this situation it was inevitable that spies and informers, who were not members of a regular force, would be used.

Glasgow had a Police Force from the beginning of the 19th century. In 1799 a petition was presented from a great number of respectable inhabitants praying that the magistrates would obtain an Act of Parliament to regulate the police of the city and to light, pave and watch the streets; in 1800 a bill for this purpose passed both houses of Parliament.⁽⁹⁾ But the police force that was established spent most of its time in attending to street lamps, finding who broke them, clearing snow, ice and rubbish from the

8. Thompson op.cit. 82

9. Glasgow Burgh Records 7 Nov 1799 and 3 Aug 1800

streets, and fighting fires. All this had to be done by a force which even by 1819 numbered only 123 men of whom 82 were night watchmen.⁽¹⁰⁾ Yet by 1816, the members of the Glasgow Police Committee were beginning to realise the need for the detection and prevention of disorder and crime. A 'Secret Service' is mentioned in April 1816, and in August it was decided that 'three persons of intelligence and activity who can write a fair hand should be advertised for ... for secret service.'⁽¹¹⁾ Generally, the new secret service does not seem to have been a success, although one officer, McGregor, was commended by Mr. Reddie, the Town Clerk and by the Lord Provost.⁽¹²⁾ In 1816 also, the Secret Service Committee received the sum of £100 to spend on establishing a group of special constables who would 'support the peace of the Town upon any occasional emergency' and early in 1817 the establishment of such constables was increased to seven hundred.⁽¹³⁾

Such a small force in a large city could hardly be expected to maintain order in times of difficulty and it was normal for the army to be called in to suppress disorder; nor could the small detective force be expected, no matter how proficient it might be, to provide much information about any secret

10. Glasgow Police Minutes - passim e.g. 13 June 1816 and 27 Aug 1819

11. Ibid 25 Apr 1816 and 22 Aug 1816

12. Ibid 25 July 1816 and K. Finlay to R. Haddow 7 Mar 1818 (in M.S. Bailie's Library)

13. Ibid 16 May 1816 and 9 Jan 1817

organisations that were being formed. The jurisdiction of the Glasgow Police was limited to the city itself and the suburbs of Gorbals, Calton and Govan did not come under their jurisdiction. It was thus possible for plots to be hatched in these areas and for the Glasgow Police to have no opportunity to find out what was happening. Throughout the periods of unrest the Glasgow Police establishment was shown to be quite inadequate either for the task of maintaining order in the face of violence on a large scale or for the task of providing accurate information about the activity of secret reformers. Therefore it was necessary to employ spies and informers, but it was always difficult to find reliable people. There was always the strong possibility that those employed would provide inaccurate information and that sometimes it would be the aim of the spies to enhance the value or importance of what they had discovered, thus making their own value to the authorities greater.

The first evidence of any secret activity in Glasgow at this time was contained in a letter from the Lord Advocate to Lord Sidmouth in November 1816. He reported the formation of an association of about twenty people whose chief business was the circulation of cheap and mischievous publications calculated to excite discontent among the people, but more than this he could not discover because he lacked 'a

private channel of communication.'⁽¹⁴⁾ It is possible that this group was associated with Lang the publisher, who received reform literature from Cartwright, but we cannot be certain. It is a measure of the inefficiency of the Glasgow Police and other informers that it was seemingly not possible to obtain more information about such a large group engaged in an activity which must inevitably have brought them into contact with the general public; nor did it seem that the Lord Advocate received any copies of the mischievous literature.

More definite information about sedition and conspiracy in the Glasgow area came from Andrew McKay, head constable of Linlithgow⁽¹⁵⁾ while he was patrolling his area in disguise looking for vagrants he met a person whose appearance aroused his suspicions. He eventually learned from him that pikes were being manufactured in Glasgow and Paisley. The Lord Advocate, when he was informed, decided to send McKay to Glasgow 'to cultivate the acquaintance of his informant.'⁽¹⁶⁾ McKay arrived in Glasgow on 9th December 1816, and two days later he reported to Mr.

- 14. H.O. 102.26 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 24 Nov 1816 and Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 14 Dec 1816
- 15. Ibid Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 7 Dec 1816
- 16. Ibid Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 9 Dec 1816

Reddie, the Town Clerk, that arms were being manufactured in the suburbs, and that he had been introduced into a secret committee whose President was named Bogie. There he learned that depots of swords, halberds and pikes existed, and a member of the association, Tait drew a pattern of the pikes that were being made.⁽¹⁷⁾ This convinced the authorities that a plot existed and that it was necessary to obtain more precise information. But this presented a difficulty; McKay could no longer be used for it was thought that the reformers suspected him, and the Glasgow Police were considered incapable of assisting. Consequently, the head of the Edinburgh Police Force, Captain Brown was sent to Glasgow, 'disguised as a reformer.'⁽¹⁸⁾

He had the other spies or 'scouts' being employed by Reddie the Town Clerk and Hamilton, the Sheriff-depute of Lanarkshire, obtained little positive information. Immediately on his arrival Brown ascertained that no smiths or wrights were manufacturing weapons at nights in any of the suburbs, and after a week he could only state that while McKay had reported nothing of which he had not received information from the persons whose names he had mentioned (i.e. Bogie and Tait), nevertheless these

17. H.O. 102.26 Reddie to Lord Advocate 11 Dec 1816 and Folio 645 (drawing of pike)

18. Ibid. Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 13 Dec 1816

persons had exaggerated the extent of the preparations they and their associates had made. As a result of his investigations in Glasgow, Brown concluded that the Glasgow Police deserved the low reputation they had, and that the cause of the trouble and the threat to public peace arose from 'want of that due proportion of conciliation and firmness on the part of the magistrates.' (19)

Later reports in 1817 obtained from those who were associated with the secret movement show that Captain Brown was substantially correct in what he reported. There was no serious plan in the first part of December for an armed rising although there was obviously a lot of wild, boastful talk by a few careless men. But other reports reaching Mr. Reddie and the Lord Advocate did indicate quite positively that arms were being manufactured, and the Glasgow Magistrates seem to have lived in a state of constant alarm. The Lord Provost on 12th December complained that there were only 300 soldiers in the city to assist the 300 police and Special Constables, and two days later the local militia was called out, sworn in, and given arms. (20) What was really wanted, however,

19. H.O. 102.26 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 22
Dec 1816

20. Ibid Lord Provost Black to Major General Hope
12 Dec 1816. Robert Hamilton, Sheriff of
Lanarkshire to Lord Advocate 14 Dec 1816

was more positive information and on 16th December, the Lord Advocate asked Sidmouth to send up agents who might 'ingratiate themselves with the Traitors.'⁽²¹⁾ In fact, by this time Mr. Reddie had started to employ a spy whom he described as his best informant, and who later was identified as Alexander Richmond.⁽²²⁾

Richmond, by trade a weaver, had been one of the leaders in the strike of 1812 and in 1813 had been indicted before the High Court of Justiciary. Cockburn his counsel, advised him to leave Scotland and he was consequently outlawed.⁽²³⁾ In March 1815 he surrendered to the Sheriff of Renfrewshire, pleaded guilty, and after proving that he was in very bad health, and being given a very good character, he was imprisoned for about a month. When he was released, Cockburn, Jeffrey and Vans, three lawyers, gave him some money to set up in business but he found trade difficult. Jeffrey thought that a meeting between Richmond and Kirkman Finlay might be beneficial to the former, and this meeting took place a day or two after 8th December (i.e. at about the

21. H.O. 102.26 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 16 Dec 1816

22. Ibid Reddie to Lord Advocate 15 Dec 1816

23. Cockburn Memorials 311, Richmond Narrative 1-19. Henry Cockburn (1779-1854) born and educated in Edinburgh. Advocate 1800-1806 advocate-depute but dismissed 1810. Built up a reputation as a criminal lawyer. A writer and Whig politician.

same time that McKay came to Glasgow.⁽²⁴⁾ Finlay received him in a very flattering manner and gave his opinion that Richmond should be able to obtain some respectable situation such as his abilities enabled him to fill. He also asked Richmond if he was not aware of an extensive and widely spread secret conspiracy for the avowed purpose of overturning the Government, a conspiracy in which many thousands in Glasgow and its neighbourhood were engaged.⁽²⁵⁾ Richmond was sceptical of the existence of such a conspiracy in Scotland and thought that it might be a creation of the Government to discredit reform, but he undertook to provide Finlay with whatever information he could obtain, although he stressed that he would do no more than provide information to prevent mischief - i.e. he would not

24. Richmond op.cit. 42

Francis Jeffrey 1773-1850. Called to the bar 1794. Eventually established himself as one of the most effective advocates in Scotland. A prominent contributor to the Edinburgh Review. Rector of Glasgow University 1820. Lord Advocate 1830.

Kirkman Finlay 1773-1842. Member of a prominent commercial family in Glasgow. A strong opponent of monopoly of the cotton trade enjoyed by East India Company in 1793. Magistrate in Glasgow 1804. 1812 Lord Provost. 1812-18 M.P. for Glasgow burghs. 1818-20 M.P. for Malmesbury. A staunch supporter of Tory government and of free trade throughout his life.

25. Richmond op.cit. 50

act as an 'agent provocateur'.⁽²⁶⁾ Within a week he reported that the scheme of which Finlay had spoken was very much deeper than had been thought, and that the people were in communication with England, especially with Lancashire.⁽²⁷⁾

At first sight it is difficult to reconcile Richmond's discoveries with those of Captain Brown. Richmond had discovered a well organised scheme, Brown considered that no dangerous conspiracy existed. But Brown was making enquiries about Bogie and his associates with whom Richmond seems to have made no contact. Richmond contacted a completely different set of reformers. When he started his enquiries, he knew that reform committees associated with the public meetings and the preparation of petitions for Parliament were in correspondence with one another, but he believed that nothing of a secret nature was mixed up with their proceedings. In Glasgow, respectable business men were the organisers (although Russell, one of the Thrushgrove speakers were regarded with suspicion by Sidmouth and the authorities),⁽²⁸⁾ and in the suburbs, committees were composed of the more intelligent workmen. Richmond associated the secret societies with the meetings which had been held

26. Richmond op.cit. 60 and H.O. 102.26 Reddie to Lord Advocate 15 Dec 1816

27. H.O. 102.26 15 Dec 1816 Ibid

28. Ibid Sidmouth to Lord Advocate 20 Dec 1816
Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 24 Dec 1816

to discuss poor relief, or the lack of it. Such meetings seem to have been common; just when Richmond was starting to work for Kirkman Finlay there was a meeting of 700 in Calton and Bridgeton, and following this about 200 people went to Dr. Burns of the Barony Church to demand assurance that they and their families should be adequately sustained.⁽²⁹⁾ One of the leaders of the agitation among the poor was John McLachlan, and it was to him that Richmond went for information, although he had not previously known the man.⁽³⁰⁾

McLachlan was in a state of extreme poverty and was easily persuaded to give information, though Richmond soon began to doubt its accuracy. From McLachlan he learned that an organisation was in progress, and this information Richmond passed on to Finlay with the advice that every exertion should be made to relieve the distress as the best means of lessening the influence of those who were attempting to lead the lower classes.⁽³¹⁾ Then, on 18th December, Richmond went to New Lanark to meet his prospective employer, Robert Owen. On his return on 22nd December he went to see Finlay who, presumably influenced by his earlier activity, offered him a respectable situation under the Government if he would help to suppress the

29. H.O. 102.26 Reddie to Lord Advocate 11 Dec 1816
Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 12 Dec 1816

30. Richmond op.cit. 60-1

31. Ibid. 62

conspiracy. Richmond accepted on condition that he was not brought forward to give evidence at any time in a Court of Justice. (32) Such a stipulation could be interpreted in two ways; Richmond maintained that he wished all those who might be influenced by him in their conduct to be free from punishment and this was more likely to be the case if he were not called as a witness. On the other hand, he may very well have realised what the attitude of people would be if it were known that he had acted as a spy.

No informant other than Richmond could be found at the time and this was a matter of regret for the Lord Advocate. He was suspicious of Richmond mainly because there was no way of checking the information which he gave and because he (Richmond) claimed that he had had to pay the sum of £5 for some of his information. Yet he had to be employed for no one else was available and Sidmouth had ignored requests for assistance. Moreover, he soon supplied the authorities with information which, if it were true, was of the utmost importance and could not possibly be ignored.

By 25th December, Richmond claimed to have discovered the existence of Secret Committees in Glasgow, Ayrshire, Dunbartonshire and Stirlingshire led by such members of the societies of 1793 as were still alive. These secret committees were strongly influenced by

the Masonic movement - masonic signs had been made instrumental in their projects - and were bound by oaths to each other. There was some contact with reformers in England; about two weeks previously two delegates had come to Glasgow from Manchester and Carlisle and the Glasgow committee had decided to send delegates to Edinburgh, Perth and to England, but funds were short and the English journey was meanwhile impossible. The aims of the societies were in general peaceful. Far from contemplating revolt, they were hopeful of peaceful reform when Parliament would meet early in 1817, but should that not be forthcoming, they would wait for a lead from England before taking any action. The pacific nature of the societies was confirmed, it seemed to Richmond, by the absence of the arms' depots which McKay had reported, but sedition was being encouraged by publications sold by Lang the printer who was in contact with Cartwright. (33)

What Richmond had unearthed seems to have been a group of Hampden Clubs, similar to those in the North of England, though probably lacking their efficient organisation. Further details, which on the whole support this view, were reported a few days later by Richmond. The Central Committee, with which Richmond had established contact, represented an Association which had nothing to do with Bogie,

who was thought untrustworthy. This Association had started in Calton and had spread to other places even outside Glasgow - e.g. Kirkintilloch and Langloan. Contact had been established with the Hampden Club, and no action of any kind would be taken until after the numerous petitions already prepared had been presented to Parliament and the fate of the expected Reform Bill became known. The Association was averse to any popular tumult because it would tend to put the authorities on guard, and had done nothing to provide depots of arms, though some weapons had in fact been collected by individuals. Moreover, since money was required, it was hoped to persuade members of the middle classes to give financial support, and this was unlikely if the movement were to depart from constitutional action. In only one way was the law being broken, the Lord Advocate reported; an oath of secrecy was administered before any progress in initiation into the Association was permitted, and this, it was realised by those who administered and took it, rendered the members liable to capital punishment. (34)

Immediately afterwards, Richmond provided evidence of an entirely different Association, which he obtained from his friend on the Central Committee (presumably McLachlan), and different masonic

friends. (35) There were fifty different associations in the West of Scotland from Paisley to Kilsyth, Campsie and Airdrie. They acted in concert and their object was the 'complete overthrow of existing arrangements and seizure of the property of the higher classes of society' - obviously corresponding to the Spencean rather than to the Cartwright/Cobbett form of radicalism. To attain their object they had 60-100 stand of arms and supplies of powder and ball, as well as a number of cutlasses. The plan was to seize the barracks and thus obtain more arms and ammunition, partly overpowering and partly bringing over the soldiers. There had previously been information that could be construed as confirmation of this; on 12th December Mr. Reddie had complained that attempts were being made 'to seduce the 42nd from their duty.' (36) 'The more numerous party' said Richmond, 'ignorant and more violent, worthless and desperate, seem bent on a more immediate rising to try what will be the effect of striking a blow here.' But there was some relief for the authorities in the information that no link with Spencean groups in England had been established; nor was there any association with the

35. H.O. 102.26 and 102.27 Minutes of conversation with Richmond 28 Dec 1816

36. Ibid Reddie to Lord Advocate 12 Dec 1816

more peaceful reformers in Scotland. (37) Richmond concluded his report by saying that Andrew McKinlay, an Irish weaver now living in Calton, had a copy of the scheme for insurrection drawn up by the Irish Association; that the spinners in Clark's mill in Bridgeton were allowed by their manager, Keith, to attend meetings during working hours, and that Roman Catholics were not admitted to the associations 'because priests had preached against all interference in political matters and auricular confession made the associated afraid that Roman Catholics might be the means of betraying them.'

On 1st January, the Lord Advocate told Sidmouth that Richmond's reports had been confirmed from other sources. (38) In fact, all that had been confirmed was that secret meetings were taking place; two beaming house keepers had reported this to Reddie and Finlay, and there was no indication which of the two groups of reformers they might belong to. So far, although there was some evidence that reformers were meeting in secret, there was only Richmond's evidence

37. 'All the towns petitioning for reform had appointed standing committees and were keeping up an active correspondence with one another; but they had no connection with the confederacy' - Richmond Narrative 80. This, in conjunction with the reports Richmond made to Reddie and Finlay, would seem to confirm that there were at least two quite distinct groups of reformers in the west of Scotland.

38. H.O. 102.26 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 1 Jan 1817

about the aims of the more militant group. It was obviously necessary for the authorities to obtain more information, but by now Richmond was alarmed for his personal safety and wanted nothing more to do with the business. Sidmouth had by now decided that Richmond's information was of the utmost importance and that he should be encouraged to find out more, even being assisted with money. The Lord Advocate therefore advised Robert Hamilton, the Sheriff-depute of Lanarkshire, to promise Richmond ample reward should this information prove to be correct. (39)

Consequently Richmond continued to pass on the information he was now receiving from three informers - McLachlan, his original informant whom he now considered untrustworthy, John Campbell, 'the soul of the business in Calton', and McDowall Peat, a weaver who was precentor in the church where Rev. Neil Douglas preached. (40) At the beginning of January, the Lord Advocate knew that a central committee of eighteen had been established, and during the following month considerable secret activity was reported in Glasgow and its suburbs - Govan, Partick, Camlachie, Parkhead, Tollcross, Westmuir and the east of the large Barony parish. Initiation of reformers

39. H.O. 102.27 Sidmouth to Lord Advocate 1 Jan 1817, Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 1 Jan 1817

40. Richmond op.cit. 70 ff. and H.O. 102.27 Richmond (?) to Sidmouth 9 Feb 1817

was also reported from further afield, for example from Perth and Dundee. On the other hand, some areas in and around Glasgow in which activity could have been expected were very quiet - Anderston, Tradeston, Gorbals, Rutherglen, Paisley.⁽⁴¹⁾

But although the areas of activity were known, there was no reliable indication of the numbers involved. On 8th January 1817, Richmond estimated that five thousand belonged to the associations and had had the oath of secrecy administered; this information was supported by other reports received by Mr. Reddie.⁽⁴²⁾ Yet a month later it was said in one report that the strength of the associated conspirators in Scotland did not exceed fifteen hundred, while Kirkman Finlay gave the number of those who had taken the oath as no more than five hundred, and these 'the lowest and the most ignorant of the people.'⁽⁴³⁾ Perhaps there is here some confusion between the two groups of reformers that Richmond's reports suggest existed. The larger figure would presumably be of those who were peaceful reformers, while the smaller and later figure would be

41. H.O. 102.27 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 2 Jan 1817 and 8 Jan 17

Richmond(?) to Sidmouth 9 Feb 1817

42. H.O. 102.27 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 8 Jan 1817

43. H.O. 102.27 Richmond (?) to Sidmouth 9 Feb 1817 and Finlay to 'My Lord' (Sidmouth?) 28 Jan 1817

those who joined the more extreme organisation. It could also be argued that no one, not even the reformers themselves, would know how many secret conspirators there were and that any attempt to estimate membership is bound to be unsuccessful.

On one other matter however, Richmond was able to be more precise; he gave the names of a number of those who were taking an active part in the reform movement, though once again there was no indication of whether they favoured the public petitioning movement or were implicated only in secret activity. Turner of Thrushgrove he considered violent and of little ability, William Lang the printer shrewd and deep; McArthur more passionate and more intelligent than Russell, of whom it was said '(he) is a stupid man not much in favour with any party, either the general ostensible reformers or the more secret associations.'⁽⁴⁴⁾ Others whom Richmond named belonged to the secret associations; McKinlay and Campbell, both weavers, were men of whom he had high opinion and they seemed to be leaders of the more violent groups. Associated with them were McTyer (McTear) a teacher in Calton, who was also one of the Glasgow Reform Committee; Keith of Clark's Mill in Bridgeton who was responsible for the initiation into the secret societies of most of the

44. H.O. 102.26 and H.O. 102.27 Minute of a conversation with Richmond 28 Dec 1816

spinners who worked there; and Gibson, one of Keith's spinners who was a member of the Central Committee. Richmond was also able to describe in detail the secret sign used by reformers who had been initiated - 'to extend the right hand back to the right ear, and drawing it down that side of the face as far as the mouth to extend the fingers over to the left side and draw them and the thumb into a point below the chin.' (45)

The authorities realised that much of Richmond's information was unsatisfactory. Not only was it imprecise; it was also unconfirmed in many respects and would not stand in a court of law were prosecutions to take place. Probably one or two other spies were being used for the whole winter of 1816-17; Mr. Reddie mentions McGregor and 'his two secret men, Paterson and Lothian' and occasionally information about reformers would probably come from other sources. (46)

But the Lord Advocate realised how unsatisfactory all this was from the legal point of view and impressed on both Reddie and Sheriff-substitute Robert Hamilton the need to have full and legal evidence of the extent and objects of the conspirators. Consequently, Captain Brown was once again brought through from Edinburgh and for seven

45. H.O. 102.27 Richmond(?) to Sidmouth 9 Feb 1817

46. H.O. 102.26 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 1 Jan 1817

102.27 Reddie to Lord Advocate 12 and 13

Jan 1817, Finlay to Sidmouth 28 Jan 1817

nights in succession he investigated in different parts of the city. While he found that treasonable language was being used, he could find no evidence of an organised conspiracy or even of oath taking. (47)

Probably during the second week in January 1817 Sheriff Robert Hamilton began to employ a spy who proved to be much more successful. This was George Biggar who, like Richmond, had been involved in the strike of 1812. (48) By 15th January he had so ingratiated himself with the reformers that he was able to confirm all that Richmond had said - 'a system of private organisation cemented by oaths has actually been formed and a delegate is to be sent by the Central Committee to Lancashire where a similar system is stated to be actually commenced.' (49) (This presumably referred to the people in Glasgow who had contact with Cartwright and the Hampden Clubs). Before the end of the month Biggar had been admitted a member of the secret association and was able to give from personal experience that Richmond never had information about the oath of secrecy, the bond of union or obligation to remain loyal to the association, the signs and handgrip by which members

47. H.O. 102.27 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 8 Jan 1817

48. Richmond claimed that he had been instrumental in having Biggar employed - Narrative 78

49. H.O. 102.27 15 Jan 1817 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth

recognised one another and the passwords for entry to meetings. It was he who provided a copy of the oath which was sent to Sidmouth on 31st January.⁽⁵⁰⁾

When the secret sign and oath were altered in February, Biggar was able to inform the authorities.⁽⁵¹⁾

On 12th February, Finlay informed Sidmouth that the state of manufacturers had improved and that 'this circumstance joined to the firm confidence of all classes of the people in the Government and the general detestation expressed on the occasion of the attack on His Royal Highness have thrown great impediments in the way of the Central Committee ... and I now indulge my sanguine hopes of its speedy and entire dissolution.'⁽⁵²⁾

But this improvement in trade could very easily lead to the outbreak of trouble. McLachlan had only a few days earlier reported that there was a split among the reformers between those, the general body who knew nothing of the plans or of the poor state of the funds and those who took everything upon themselves in the organisation of the reform

50. H.O. 102.26 Note with information from Biggar
26 Jan 1817

H.O. 102.27 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 31 Jan 1817

Ibid Finlay to 'My Lord' 28 Jan 1817

51. H.O. 102.27 Copy of oath 10 Feb 1817

Ibid Robert Hamilton to Lord Advocate 11 Feb 1817

52. H.O. 102.27 Finlay to Sidmouth 12 Feb 1817

movement. The former were tired of waiting and 'a trifle would blow the whole up, especially if trade continued to get favourable.'⁽⁵³⁾ Thus the improvement in trade which would threaten to lose the more violent reformers some of their support could lead to revolt. Before this could happen, the Glasgow magistrates acting on the orders of Sidmouth arrested the members of the Central Committee as they met in Hunter's Public House on Saturday 22nd February. Other arrests followed, and by 27th February, 26 people were in custody.⁽⁵⁴⁾

These arrests and the debates in Parliament on the reports of the secret committees roused considerable comment in Scotland. The editor of the Glasgow Chronicle expressed surprise on learning that Spenceans were aided and abetted in the city and the Glasgow Committee for conducting the petition for Parliamentary Reform while expressing disapproval at the attack on the Prince Regent saw with grief and indignation the insinuation that they were connected with secret associations; they had never even heard of Spenceans.⁽⁵⁵⁾ The editor of the Scotsman did not think that the evidence warranted any strong measures and commented 'The outrage against the Prince Regent is disclaimed as an inducement for resorting to such measures (i.e.

53. H.O. 102.27 Richmond(?) to Sidmouth 9 Feb 1817

54. Glasgow Chronicle 27 Feb 1817

55. Ibid 22 Feb 1817 and 27 Feb 1817

laws to limit personal freedom and suspension of Habeas Corpus); and all that remains is an allegation that there is a spirit of discontent afloat in the country.... Is there not a possibility of plots being formed against the people?' (56)

The authorities had received information which showed that many people had joined societies whose object was a reform of government. Finlay stated that he was 'deeply convinced of the necessity and propriety of the measures proposed by ministers ... for there existed plots (in Glasgow)', (57) and probably all those in possession of the facts agreed with him. It was difficult, however, to know how much information should be released to the general public and how it should be released. Ministers were in a difficult position in the early months of 1817. They had received reports which they considered justified restrictive legislation and the arrest of a number of reformers. But this information had not been verified and could be verified only by questioning radical prisoners and trusting that their confessions would confirm the accuracy of the reports they had received. The information which ministers had in the early months of 1817 could not be released to the public because of the lack of verification and because

56. Scotsman 22 Feb 1817

57. Parl. Deb. xxxv 1096 14 Mar 1817

the authorities would not wish prisoners to know the extent of their information before any prosecution took place. It would seem not unreasonable therefore that the authorities should not disclose the information they had but should first of all verify it and then put the public in possession of the facts when the prosecution of reformers took place.

In order that a successful prosecution might take place it was necessary for the prisoners in Glasgow to be examined, for confirmation of the spies' reports to be obtained, and for some of those who gave information to be prepared to give evidence at a subsequent trial. The prisoners included William Edgar, a teacher in Calton, John Keith, manager of Clark's mill, James Finlayson, writer's clerk, William Simpson, spirit dealer, John McLauchlan, John Buchanan, Hugh Cochran, Hugh Dickson, James Hood, James Robertson, Andrew Somerville, John Campbell, Andrew McKinlay, Peter Gibson, all 'weavers or other workmen'.⁽⁵⁸⁾ They were committed for trial on the charge of conspiring against the Government and taking an unlawful oath. Before a trial could take place they had to be examined and statements had to be obtained, the usual custom in Scottish criminal practice. They were examined by Salmond, the procurator fiscal in Glasgow, and on occasion by Home Drummond, one of the Advocates depute. Most of the

prisoners made more than one statement and admitted that their earlier statements had been inaccurate or incomplete. The final statements they made can be compared with one another and it will be found that they provide corroboration of details about the secret associations, although it must be emphasised that no two statements are identical on all points.

John McLachlan, it would seem, was the first to be examined on 23rd February. He admitted that since July 1816 he had been one of a committee in Calton formed to obtain parochial aid for weavers, but he denied that he had been a member of any other type of society. He did say, however, that he understood that Andrew McKinlay and John Campbell had attended secret meetings and that meetings had been held at Munn's Public house and at Bogie's.⁽⁵⁹⁾ James Hood, a weaver from Govan admitted that he was a member of a reform committee and had signed a petition, but he said nothing to incriminate himself or anyone else who had been arrested.⁽⁶⁰⁾ Andrew McKinlay, first examined on 28th February, admitted that he was an Irishman who had come to Scotland in 1799 and that he had signed the Calton reform petition; but he denied all knowledge of a secret association. Hugh Dickson, another Irishman examined on 28th February, claimed

59. H.O. 102.27 McLachlan's Statement 23 Feb 1817

60. H.O. 102.27 Hood's Statement 26 Feb 1817

that he was in ill health and that his memory was impaired; and he was 'entirely ignorant of any secret associations bound together by an oath to obtain by physical strength if necessary any changes in the existing constitution.' . Dickson said he had no reason to be disaffected; he received 4s6d per week from the charitable subscription fund, and he had gone to the meeting at Hunter's public house on 22nd February, where the arrests took place, because he thought it was about the process against the Barony Kirk Session (i.e. the attempt to obtain more poor relief from the Barony Kirk). Peter Gibson, a wright at Clerk's mill, who was examined at some unknown date, gave the same reason for his attendance at Hunter's - McLachlan had invited him to a meeting about poor relief. He also admitted having subscribed to petitions for reform of Parliament which had been left in the Laigh Kirk Session House so that as many as possible might sign them; but like the others he denied any connection with a secret organisation. (61)

The only prisoner who at first admitted any connection with a secret association was William Simpson who on 24th February, stated that about seven weeks previously McDowall Peat had called upon him and explained that he planned to form an association to compel Parliament to grant the petitions for reform. Peat administered an oath of secrecy verbally after which there was read over a written oath or obligation

61. H.O. 102.27 Gibson's Statement

to persevere in endeavouring to form an association for the purpose of obtaining for all the people of Great Britain and Ireland not disqualified by crime or insanity the elective franchise at the age of 21 and annual parliaments, and that by physical strength if necessary. On 25th February he admitted that there had been plans to raise funds to send delegates to Carlisle 'so as to learn what the people there meant to do in case their petition for reform was not attended to or answered to their minds.' He also understood that delegates from different quarters in and around Glasgow had meetings and he described the sign which the reformers had adopted so that they would recognise one another.

This statement must have convinced the authorities that some of what the spies had reported was true. Simpson had mentioned the oath and the secret signs as the authorities had heard of them, and this would presumably have the effect of encouraging the procurator-fiscal to persist in his cross-examination so that the other prisoners would admit their complicity. Eventually, on March 3rd, Dickson and Gibson began to provide really important information on the lines that the authorities expected. Thereafter, confession followed confession until on 21st March the Lord Advocate could inform Sidmouth that the evidence seemed to be complete. Unfortunately the evidence was all contained in

statements made by the prisoners under examination, and such statements or precognitions could not be produced as evidence in a Court of Law to prove the Crown's case.

From statements made by Dickson, Gibson, McLachlan, Finlayson, McKinlay and Campbell⁽⁶²⁾ a general picture can be established of the secret organisation which existed in the Glasgow area. It is probable that in November and December 1816 there were several secret societies in Glasgow and the suburbs in addition to Bogie's conspiracy which had first attracted the attention of the authorities. Initiation into these societies seems to have taken place first of all in Camlachie where David Smith, a weaver, and James McEwan a spinner were initiated in a Druggist's by 'the Session Clerk'. (It is possibly significant that both Smith and McEwan were members of Rev. Neil Douglas's Universalist Church and that McDowall Peat, later prominent in the movement, was precentor there). By the end of November there was in Tradeston a society 'for the purpose of bringing about a reform in the Commons House of Parliament by forcible means in the event of the petitions of the people not being granted.' The existence of this Society in Tradeston was mentioned by Smith to John Campbell who was already

a member of a group meeting in Calton. This Calton group had been meeting openly to try to obtain parochial relief for those who required it (mainly weavers) and it was then proposed that application be made to the Glasgow Reform Committee (i.e. the group headed by Turner of Thrushgrove for preparing and presenting a petition to Parliament) to see what relief if any might be expected and what should be done if their petitions were rejected and the poor of Calton left to the weather and the winter in a state of starvation. The first time that this Calton group mentioned a secret oath was at a meeting at a house in Sister Street, about the end of November. Thirteen people were present including Campbell, McLachlan, McKinlay and Dickson. They discussed the need to take an oath of fidelity but came to no decision. At another meeting in the same house they all agreed (with the exception of the householder John Stark) that an oath was necessary and at a meeting at Dickson's house the oath was taken. McKinlay the Irishman, had a copy of an oath from the Irish Treason Trials. This he read out and the others repeated it after him. Either at this meeting or at another one in Dickson's house, David Smith and Peter Gibson explained about the Tradeston Society. Smith stated that before he could tell them anything, all present must take an obligation of secrecy and to this they agreed,

binding themselves by a secret promise not to reveal what they could afterwards learn. Before the end of December 1816 other meetings were held at McKinlay's house and at a schoolroom in Tureen Street and other members were admitted.

It would thus seem that from Camlachie a secret association had spread to Tradeston by means of Smith and McEwan and then through Smith and Gibson had linked up with the members of McLachlan's group in Calton, a group originally interested in obtaining parochial relief. It was this Calton group which attracted Richmond's attention, but in the middle of December when he was making his first reports, he obviously exaggerated its importance. It was at that time only in process of forming and could not have established any contact with England, though other groups of reformers - e.g. that group to which Lang belonged - did have contact with English reformers. Nor could depots of arms have been organised, as Richmond had reported (see above 89). The meeting of the Central Committee on 25th December which Richmond heard of from McLachlan was probably one of the meetings at Dickson's house and there is no mention in any of the statements of an organisation comprising 50 different associations scattered over the west of Scotland. It is possible that Richmond intentionally exaggerated the dangers of revolution

in order that he might become indispensable to the authorities; on the other hand, his informant during December was McLachlan who emerges from the precognition and from the evidence he later gave at the trials as a most untrustworthy man. Later, when the trials were over, McLachlan stated that at some time in December 1816 Richmond called on him and asked if he and his friends were still so ignorant as to expect any relief from parochial aid; they should rather turn their attention to reform of Parliament; the poor must form societies with small weekly or monthly contributions, for men such as Cockburn and Jeffrey, leading Whigs, would approve of such societies.⁽⁶³⁾ Yet of all this there is no mention in any statement made before the trial. It is much more likely that the secret association in Calton began in a fortuitous way during the second half of 1816 when unemployment was becoming serious, and that it became linked with the Tradeston society, in the way described in the precognitions. After 1st January 1817 this Calton association obviously increased in importance, spreading its influence throughout the whole Glasgow area.

On 1st January, a significant date in Scottish life, about ten people including Gibson, Campbell, McKinlay, Dickson, McEwan, McLachlan, Edgar and Peat

63. Glasgow Chronicle 14 Aug 1817

assembled in Leggate's Public House. As some people present (those who did not come from Calton) had not taken the oath, this question was again brought up. McKinlay produced his written oath again, but Edgar, a teacher in Bridgeton who was a member of the Glasgow Reform Committee, did not approve of its extremism. Another form of oath was worked out after discussion and written by Edgar. This oath was then taken by all present, about four at a time. All stood up, holding up their right hands, Edgar reading the words of the oath. At this meeting, it was fully understood by the reformers that force was to be used if the petitions did not obtain what was wanted in the way of reform, but at the same time it was understood that if they did not see a probability of success in using force, it was not to be resorted to. Secret signs were agreed so that initiates might recognise one another, the next meeting was fixed for 4th January at Neil Munn's Public House, and a password - James Black (the name of the Lord Provost) - arranged. McEwan took away a copy of the new oath for Tradeston and McKinlay one for Calton.

The next meeting was held as arranged, 15-20 being present. Most of the people who attended the previous meeting were present, though Edgar was missing, and in fact does not seem to have attended again. John Keith, manager of Clark's mill attended

having first of all been initiated by Campbell in a school-room in Tureen Street. At the meeting three or four men from Govan including James Hood were initiated, Peat, who was preses for the evening, reading the oath. Then Smith made a report of progress in Camlachie, Peat and McEwan were appointed to go to Carmunnock to initiate Dryburgh the Parish schoolmaster there, and Campbell, McLachlan and Buchanan were appointed to go to Paisley to see what could be done there to start, or link up with associations.⁽⁶⁴⁾ Lastly, Burdett's bill for reform

64. Details of Dryburgh's subsequent career are interesting. He had been parish schoolmaster in Carmunnock for some years and had always been reported on favourably. But on 6th Aug 1817, the Moderator of Glasgow Presbytery received a letter from Lady Stewart of Castlemilk, one of the heritors, complaining that Dryburgh was guilty of repeated acts of drunkenness and profane swearing. Dryburgh was summoned before the Presbytery, but did not appear, and 'therefore they did, and hereby do in terms of the Act of Parliament of the 43 George III C.54 anent parochial Schoolmasters depose the said Mr. David Dryburgh from the office of Schoolmaster in the parish of Carmunnock and deprive him of all right to the emoluments and accommodation belonging thereto....' Presb. of Glasgow Minutes. iii 1808-1819. 6 Aug 1817, 1 Oct 1817, 8 Oct 1817, 5 Nov 1817. Dryburgh later claimed that he had been arrested on 10 Mar 1817, kept in prison until 24 July 1817 on a charge of High Treason, and for this reason dismissed from his post in Carmunnock. Loyal Reformers Gazette 16 July 1831

of Parliament was discussed. Before the meeting broke up it was agreed to meet on the following Saturday, 11th January, at Robertson's Public House (though later Robertson maintained that no meeting took place there on that date). Thereafter, meetings were held regularly - at Robertson's on 11th and 18th January, and on 15th and 18th February, at Fyfe's on 22nd and 25th January and at the Pidgeon Tavern on 1st and 8th February. The final meeting took place at Hunter's on 22nd February. In addition, there were other meetings of reformers, for a Select Committee and a Secret Committee were formed. The former was a group of seven, appointed probably on 1st February, whose business was to alter the words of the oaths, the signs, and the secret grips or handshakes. The other committee was selected by ballot on 15th February, its functions being to send such information to the General Committee as it was thought prudent for it to have but to keep to itself everything that would be hurtful to the cause. This secret committee had also the duty of procuring arms and the responsibility of sending delegates to any place. For this reason, the secret committee had authority to draw money from the Central Committee without giving a reason for its requirements.

The main concern of the secret association in the first two months of 1817 was to increase membership. How many were initiated it is impossible to

say. Initiation took place in Govan, Anderston, Calton (especially in Clark's mill) and Bridgeton, but little was done in Tradeston, Gorbals, Hutchesontown and Pollokshaws. Even in Carmunnock where 'all the men were friendly' (according to McKinlay) only two were initiated. Three members of the 42nd Regiment - one Sergeant, one Officer's servant and one Piper - joined the reformers after being 'treated' by Buchanan. These soldiers promised not to obey the Colonel but to obey the General Committee 'which is now sitting in Scotland, England and Ireland' and to assist to the utmost of their power with arms or otherwise. This reference to the widespread authority of the Committee was most probably gross exaggeration; there is certainly no proof that such unity or authority prevailed.

When initiated, a man had to be confirmed by at least one person as a 'confidential, respectable and sober person'. Campbell tells us that he was busy initiating almost every night, except Sundays. The candidates would gather in a private house or a tavern and the initiator would make a speech, lasting 10-20 minutes, showing the danger attending the attempt to bring about a reform, the caution that would have to be used, the need for reform and the benefits that it would bring to the individual and to the nation. Then an oath of secrecy would be taken - 'In the awful presence of God I do voluntarily

swear that neither hopes nor fears, rewards nor punishments shall induce me to inform or to give evidence against any member or members of this or any similar society for any act or expression done or made in or out in this or similar societies under the punishment of death to be inflicted on me by any member or members of such society. So help me God and keep me steadfast.' Then the other longer oath (see above, 74) quoted in Parliament by the Lord Advocate was taken. After this, the new members received the signs, words and grip. When the membership of a particular society reached 12-16 it was broken into two and thus the number of societies was constantly increasing. This must have made it difficult to know the exact number of societies, far less the number of initiates, for not all the societies would be in regular contact with the Central Committee. (Campbell, for example, estimated that he initiated 100-150 who were never reported to the Central Committee).

Members of the Central Committee also arranged for expansion outside Glasgow - Peat and McEwan in January, McKinlay and Finlayson in February went to Carmunnock. Gibson, Buchanan and Robertson went to Rutherglen and Cambuslang; Campbell, McLachlan and Buchanan went to Paisley. There was correspondence from Arbroath; three men from Dundee were

initiated.⁽⁶⁵⁾ There was great discussion about contact with England so that the Scots might know 'what state of forwardness they (i.e. the English reformers) were in and to acquaint them the length the people around Glasgow had gone.' On 18th January it was agreed to send delegates if money could be found, but it was not until 18th February that two delegates - Finlayson and Hood - were appointed. The delay was caused by the lack of funds. William Simpson, who was collector of subscriptions for a district in Anderston, altogether obtain only 1s8d. On 6th February, Finlayson records that the delegates to the Central Committee were asked if they had any money, to which the reply was 'not much'. Finlayson understood that a weekly payment of 1d from each member was expected and gave 2s. McKinlay who on the same evening demitted office as Treasurer handed over to his successor a balance of 5s. By 15th February, another 25s-30s had been collected. With such small sums available it was necessary to look elsewhere for funds. At the end of December an unsuccessful attempt was made to get the money subscribed for the poor taken out of the hands of the Committee set up to administer it and placed in the hands of the reformers (presumably the Calton group).⁽⁶⁶⁾ In January it was decided to appeal & .

65. H.O. 102.27 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth
16 Jan 1817.

66. H.O. 102.26 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 30 Dec 1816

direct to some wealthier people for assistance.

It was thought at first that some members of the Glasgow Reform Committee might help. Russell and McArthur had both expressed themselves very forcibly to McLachlan and some others who had called on them, both seemingly in favour of the use of physical force.⁽⁶⁷⁾ But no further assistance was forthcoming from them. At a meeting on 22nd January, Johnston, a man who was attending for the first time, stated that there was a society of gentlemen in Glasgow in communication with England. These men also had a written constitution nearly finished and counted on having 10,000 adherents shortly. Eventually a meeting was arranged for Saturday 15th February; about 14 gentlemen were to assemble in the house of John Smith, a spirit dealer in Calton. These men wished to be initiated and asked that Campbell should attend to do this. But although Campbell went to Smith's none of the gentlemen came. Johnston who had arranged the meeting then went out and brought back Mr. Robert Kerr a merchant.⁽⁶⁸⁾ William Edgar, the teacher, who had been present all the time, read over the oath and Kerr stood up, held up his right hand and repeated it. Then after the signs and grip had been given him a discussion took

67. H.O. 102.27 Richmond (?) to Sidmouth 9 Feb 1817

68. Richmond comments of him - '... unobtrusive and inoffensive in his manners, his deficiency of general knowledge of the world and of society had inadvertently led him into this imprudent connection.' Narrative 93

place about sending delegates to England and about the need for a fairly large sum of money - £15 was the sum suggested. Kerr thought that he might possibly be able to find this sum and he therefore asked Campbell to call on him in the course of the next week. Campbell, after reporting to the Committee, agreed to call at Kerr's warehouse at 6.30p.m. on Saturday 22nd February.

The secret committee, meeting at 6p.m. on 22nd February decided to send McKinlay and Finlayson along with Campbell. When they arrived at Kerr's Warehouse, Campbell went up, and then a quarter of an hour later invited the other two to join them. Kerr then promised to provide at least £5 for delegates' expenses and suggested that the delegates should go to Manchester, dressed like workmen. He showed them a letter from a man in Bolton on the subject of meetings, and also produced a constitution which Finlayson understood to be similar to the Constitution of 1792 when Kerr had been a member of a reform society. Then the three men returned to the committee meetings to report what had taken place, and it was agreed that Campbell would bring to the next secret committee meeting on the following Wednesday a copy of the Constitution he had seen at Kerr's. Later the same evening the members of the Central Committee whose meeting began at 8p.m, were

arrested and Kerr himself was taken into custody on 24th February. Not all the chief conspirators were caught. Somehow, Peat and McEwan escaped and were never traced despite a reward of £50 for their capture.⁽⁶⁹⁾ George Biggar had for some time been a member of the Committee and was taken prisoner at first, but when he disclosed his identity, he was released.⁽⁷⁰⁾

It was now possible to consider the accuracy of the information that the authorities had when the members of the Central Committee were arrested. It is impossible to comment on the facts disclosed first of all in November by McKay from Linlithgow. Bogle and his friends, the conspirators whom he discovered, were never arrested and the Calton organisation had no contact with them. Captain Brown on his first visit from Edinburgh may have discovered the truth about that organisation, but he and his assistants failed in their duty on their second visit when they spent a week in Glasgow in January and failed to find any evidence of oath taking. Had it not been for Richmond and Biggar, and possibly the other spies, the Government would have had no knowledge of any treasonable activity in Glasgow. It is true that Richmond did not give an accurate picture of events in December. The Secret Committees all over

69. H.O. 102.27 Copy of advertisement 16 Mar 1817

70. Glasgow Chronicle 13 Sept 1817

the west of Scotland and the contact with England which he reported on 25th December did not exist, nor did contact with the Hampden Club except through Lang the bookseller. The information which he obtained on 27th December about the extent of the organisation around Glasgow and the provision of arms was most misleading. But from the beginning of January, much more accurate information was obtained. This may have been due to Richmond's change of informant - Campbell and Peat in addition to McLachlan - but it may also have been the work of George Biggar. The oath, the progress of initiation, the signs were all reported by him. On the whole, the government exaggerated the importance of an association which seems to have been inefficiently organised, badly financed, and unarmed. There is throughout the story the impression that the reformers were playing at being conspirators, that they had no idea of what was involved in compelling an established government to alter the laws. And since it was an organisation seemingly confined almost entirely to the poorer members of the lower classes, it would never have the finance necessary to establish contact with England or to establish depots of arms. But of this the government seemed unaware and the Lord Advocate was hardly justified in stating that others moving in a different sphere of life - i.e. the middle classes -

were involved in the conspiracy. Apart from Robert Kerr no member of the middle classes joined these extreme reformers and this is confirmed by Finlay's statement that 'there were no persons of rank concerned in the plots' and that 'disaffection had been produced by the low miserable state of the wages given for labour.'⁽⁷¹⁾ The government's inability to realise that some reformers might be reasonable and respectable presumably led them to confuse those who had taken part in the petitioning movement or who had joined Hampden Clubs with the violent men who formed seditious secret societies. It could also be argued that the authorities had been driven into a state of fear by Richmond's reports in December 1816, but whether he or McLachlan was responsible for the distortions at that time, we cannot say.

It is also difficult to determine whether Richmond and Biggar were merely spies or were agents provocateurs persuading the reformers to make violent plans which otherwise they would not have adopted. On 28th January Kirkman Finlay who along with Reddie was more closely associated with the situation in Glasgow than was anyone else in authority wrote to either the Lord Advocate or to Sidmouth.⁽⁷²⁾ By this time the organisations of reformers had been in

71. Parl. Deb. xxxv 1096 14 Mar 1817

72. H.O. 102.27 Finlay to 'My Lord' 28 Jan 1817

existence for at least a month and oaths had been used for this time. Yet Finlay states '...we have now succeeded in getting precise information on the subject of the Association from the testimony of two persons who at our desire have been introduced and sworn. The secret oaths and Bond of Union now remain no longer in doubt.' Later critics of Richmond and those in authority maintained that the oaths and Bond of Union had been prepared by someone in the service of Government and that the reformers were persuaded by Richmond to accept these. Since Finlay was in constant touch with Richmond, Reddie and the Lord Advocate he would surely have known if the oaths had been prepared and introduced in this way. It would appear that before the end of January Finlay had no precise knowledge of the oaths. It may still be argued that Richmond prepared the oaths but if he did so, it was of his own accord and not at the instigation of his employers. It is also interesting to note that Finlay states that two people had been introduced and sworn. We know that Biggar was one of these but we do not know who the other was. It was not Richmond, for he never joined the associations; it may possibly have been one of the police spies or 'secret men'. In 1833, it was stated that Finlay had admitted paying three spies to stir up the people and this he never denied. (73) These three might therefore be

Richmond, Biggar and this third man. But Finlay's ignorance of the nature of the secret oaths and Bond of Union until the end of January would suggest that he did not encourage these spies to stir up the people and that if they did act as 'agents provocateurs' it was without Finlay's knowledge.

Nor in the procognitions is the name of either Richmond or Biggar mentioned, though this may be the result of careful editing by the authorities. But one has the impression that McLachlan, Campbell, McKinlay and Hood in particular needed no encouragement to contemplate rebellion, though their ability to put their ideas into effective practice must remain doubtful. It is possible that McEwan and Peat who escaped were spies, but if they were, the Lord Advocate knew nothing of it - he described them in a letter to Sidmouth as ringleaders of the conspiracy.⁽⁷⁴⁾ After the trials were over, McLachlan did try to blame Richmond for driving them to excess and later writers, notably Peter Mackenzie, have adopted this point of view, with no evidence to support the charge. It is certainly true that Richmond was paid after some years for his services but this does nothing to prove him an agent provocateur.⁽⁷⁵⁾ With regard to Biggar, however, the charge may be justified. Once

74. H.O. 102.27 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 16 Mar 1817

75. H.O. 102.30 Finlay to Sidmouth 12 Aug 1819

Sidmouth to Finlay 17 Aug 1819

again after the trials were over, a Pollockshaws weaver, Robert McDougall, said that during January he had been frequently visited by Biggar, 'treated with whisky and assailed with arguments.' Biggar argued the need for secret association, 'the last resource of an oppressed and suffering people.' (76)

McLachlan also stated that Richmond had advised them to send a delegation to England or through the different towns in Ayrshire, though this was not done; then he continued 'Your friend Biggar was more manly for he came forward on 22nd February and after he had sat in our company till we were all apprehended, he boldly declared when collared by the officers that he was the man who gave the information.' (77) But we now know from the information we have that Biggar's information was much more accurate and important than Richmond's. Although the Lord Advocate might consider that 'a more dangerous man' than Richmond did not exist and that he seemed 'to have consummate ability and perfectly to understand how to gain the confidence and inflame the minds of the lower ranks', yet the damage that he did was small, much of his information was inaccurate and he was obviously deluded by at least one of his informants, McLachlan. (78)

The evidence for the prosecution of the

76. Glasgow Chronicle 23 Aug 1817

77. Ibid 13 Sept 1817

78. H.O. 102.28 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 11 Apr 1817

prisoners was assembled slowly from their own statements. On 3rd March, Dickson made the first important confession after Mr. Drummond had stated that he would take him as a Crown witness provided he made a full disclosure of his part in the secret transactions. On the following day, Drummond offered to take Gibson as a Crown witness 'completely absolving him from all punishments for the offences charged against him,' on condition that he made a full disclosure about the secret associations. This Gibson did to the best of his knowledge and ability. McKinlay began to provide important information on March 4th although his statements were not completed until a fortnight later. On 12th March McLachlan admitted that he was now 'sensible of his error in not having said all that he did or know about the secret organisations and the secret association or meetings with which he had for some time been associated.' Thomas Sinclair gave some information on 19th March and James Finlayson made a most important statement on 2nd April. With three of the prisoners, Drummond and Salmond the Procurator-Fiscal had no success. James Hood was continually evasive; William Edgar declined to answer as to his whereabouts on 1st January when he had reputedly administered the oath, and stressed his connection with the Glasgow Reform Committee and with Messrs Turner, Lang, Ogilvie and Gray rather than with those who had been imprisoned; and John

Keith, the mill manager, denied all knowledge of secret meetings.

When the Lord Advocate arrived in Scotland from London on 15th March he began to employ himself 'in taking steps that were necessary in bringing on the trials of at least some' of the prisoners.⁽⁷⁹⁾ The necessary steps were presumably in obtaining more evidence from the prisoners, for he ordered the re-examination of McKinlay on 19th March. Before 21st March he had evidence against several of having actually administered the treasonable oath, but he must have felt that what he had was inadequate for Drummond was then sent back to Glasgow to persuade Campbell to confess the details of his part in the whole affair,⁽⁸⁰⁾ though Sidmouth had warned the Lord Advocate not to purchase Campbell's testimony by any other promise than that of protection.⁽⁸¹⁾ Before the end of the month, Campbell, by now in Edinburgh Castle, said he would make a full confession, in return for which he was promised protection if it were necessary for his personal safety, and his wife was given help to remove to

79. H.O. 102.27 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 17 Mar 1817

80. H.O. 102.27 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 21 Mar 1817

81. H.O. 102.27 Sidmouth to Lord Advocate 26 Mar 1817

Ayrshire.⁽⁸²⁾ The Lord Advocate was very pleased to have this confession for he considered Campbell the ablest of the whole gang and counted on him being a most important and trustworthy witness in the approaching trials.⁽⁸³⁾

Now that he had some evidence, although it had a basic weakness in that it was entirely verbal testimony from the prisoners themselves, the Lord Advocate had

82. H.O. 102.27 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 28 Mar 1817. Melville Papers. Ms 10.f41. Copy of a letter written by direction of the Lord Advocate by Mr. Drummond to Mr. Salmond, procurator Fiscal at Glasgow, dated 1st April 1817 ... which shows the understanding of the Crown as to the nature of the arrangement with Campbell. 'We are certainly bound to insure the woman's personal security and in order to effect that you may cause her to be sent off to Ayrshire.... Campbell has been procured such means as are necessary to secure his personal safety and that of his wife without which it is impossible to expect that he should give an unbiased evidence.... Further he must be left in the situation of every other witness.' This letter would seem to prove that there was indeed no inducement offered by the Crown other than the promise of protection to Campbell and his wife, and assistance to Mrs. Campbell to move from Glasgow to Ayrshire. Since Campbell came from Ayrshire it is reasonable to assume that Mrs. Campbell wished to return to her relations or to the area in which she had formerly lived.
83. H.O. 102.27 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 30 May 1817

to decide who was to be tried and on what charge. It must have seemed to him that the strongest evidence of having administered an oath was against McKinlay, Edgar and Keith (although the two latter were certainly/^{not}prominent members of the secret association) for these were the three men who were eventually brought to trial. But the Lord Advocate had considerable difficulty in framing a charge against his prisoners. Originally, he planned to charge them under an act of 1812 - 'An act to render more effectual an act passed in the 37th year of his present majesty for preventing the administering or taking unlawful oaths' which inter alia enacted that every person who administered or caused to be administered an oath binding a person to commit treason or murder should be guilty of felony and suffer death as a felon. But although he had evidence against several of having actually administered the oath in Glasgow, the Lord Advocate was not sure if those who were present were aiders and abettors or if they were 'to be considered as administering, the punishment for which is death', and he therefore asked Sidmouth about the proceedings against the Luddites in Nottingham in 1812.⁽⁸⁴⁾ Sidmouth replied that there had been no prosecution under the act of 1812, though there had been several at Chester, Lancaster, and

84. H.O. 102.27 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth
21 Mar 1817

York under the act of 1797. The Solicitor General gave it as his opinion that the mere personal presence of a third person did not make him an abettor in the offence of administering, but that any fact which showed that he gave countenance to the administration of the oath brought him within the law. Under the law as it stood there was no such offence as abetting the taking of an oath.⁽⁸⁵⁾ This opinion obviously made it unlikely that the Lord Advocate would be able to bring a capital charge against the majority of his prisoners, few of whom could be proved to have administered the oaths. But there was a case against some of the prisoners, and the first two, Edgar and Keith, were brought before the court on 9th April.

The charge against them was that on 1st and 4th January 1817 they had administered an oath binding the taker to commit treason.⁽⁸⁶⁾ Counsel for the prisoners argued that the use of physical strength to bring about annual parliaments and universal suffrage was not necessarily to levy war, and did not therefore amount to treason. The judges, as they had been wont to do in all cases where a charge was for the first time laid on a new statute, directed the argument to be laid before them in

85. H.O. 102.27 Sidmouth to Lord Advocate 26 Mar 1817

86. H.O. 102.27 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 11 Apr 1817

writing. The delay which this involved was much regretted by the Lord Advocate as was the fact that apart from Edgar and McKinlay, it now seemed to him that the prisoners could be brought to trial only on a charge of having taken the oath which was punishable not with death but with transportation. (87)

This was most unfortunate, he felt because 'for the sake of example a greater number of capital punishments ought, if possible, to be inflicted in Glasgow.' He had also considered bringing his prisoners to trial on a charge of 'conspiring to constrain the King and to intimidate and overawe the Parliament into an adoption of their plan of universal suffrage and annual parliaments by the use of physical force', which would of course have been treason, but reflection persuaded him that it would not be expedient to proceed to trial on such a charge.

It is probable that many of those in Parliament felt as the Lord Advocate did that a few executions would have a salutary effect on the country. (88)

Wooler, the editor of the Black Dwarf who now claimed the attention that Cobbett had previously commanded, pointed out that 'the motive for laying the first

87. H.O. 102.28 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 13 Apr 1817

88. See for example - A. Aspinall (ed) The Letters of George IV

H.G. Litchfield (Treasury Solicitor) to Addington (Under Home Secretary) 25 Oct 1817 'The effect (of Brandreth's trial) will I trust be most salutary not to the people of this country only but to the people of England at large.'

charge at such a distance from the metropolis, to be tried before judges whom no man could suspect of partiality for the rights of the people and by juries celebrated for taking the ministerial authority into due account was obvious enough.⁽⁸⁹⁾ He argued that if treason could have been proved in Scotland, it could have been more easily proved to have existed in England although the validity of this argument seems doubtful when one remembers the differences in the judicial systems and in the treatment of reformers in the 1790s.

McKinlay was eventually brought to court on June 2nd, but as in the case of Edgar, the judges asked for the arguments to be stated in writing, thus postponing the trial for several weeks.⁽⁹⁰⁾ The Scottish law officers were perplexed by the situation in which they found themselves, and asked the Attorney-General how the law stood in England. While the Crown in Scotland maintained that the oath had bound the taker to commit High Treason, counsel for the prisoners denied this. They contended that suppose it did so bind them, then having been administered to a variety of persons the legal result must be that all the parties concerned were guilty of High Treason. If this were so, the prisoners could not be tried for felony under the statute of 1812, the felony having

89. Black Dwarf 30 July 1817

90. H.O. 102.28 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 4 June 1817

merged in the higher offence of Treason and thus the prisoners could only be tried for Treason. This might also have meant that the Scottish court would not have been competent to hold the trial, and either that the prisoners would go to England or that a special commission be appointed (as in 1820). The Lord Advocate argued that the doctrine of one crime merging in another was utterly unknown in Scotland where a person might be charged with Manslaughter although the facts alleged on the face of them appeared to amount to murder. 'In the year 1795 it was stated by the Court that the prisoners might be grateful to the public prosecutor for trying them for sedition because the acts charged amounted to treason, and yet it never was supposed that this formed a bar to the trial or conviction.'⁽⁹¹⁾ The legal arguments became more and more complicated; altogether McKinlay was before the Court on four occasions, on June 2nd, 19th, 23rd and July 19th. Public sympathy grew with each appearance and it was pointed out that he, a man unskilled in the law was unlikely to know if the oath he had administered were treasonable when the judges themselves could not agree.⁽⁹²⁾ Irritation with the Lord Advocate was expressed; in parliament he was criticised by

91. H.O. 102.28 Lord Advocate to Solicitor
General 4 June 1817

92. Glasgow Chronicle 1 July 1817

among others, Kirkman Finlay who expressed his disgust at an individual being confined to a solitary prison and tried over and over again 'merely because the Lord advocate was unable to draw an indictment....'(93)

On 18th July, the Lord Advocate reported to Sidmouth that the Court of Justiciary had been discussing the relevancy of the latest indictment and that there had been a majority in favour of the Crown. He hoped that if the prisoner were convicted he would be sent to Botany Bay; capital punishment, bearing in mind the tranquility which by then prevailed, would be revolting to the people of Scotland, and on similar occasions in the past (though not under the statute of 1812) it had been usual to depart from the capital charge.⁽⁹⁴⁾ But the Lord Advocate failed to obtain a conviction. When Campbell, the main crown witness was called and was asked the usual preliminary question 'Has anyone given you a reward or promise of reward for being a witness', he answered in the affirmative. 'By whom?' he was asked. 'By that gentleman', he answered, pointing to Home Drummond, and went on to assert that he had been promised a place in the Excise as a reward for being a witness. If Drummond had indeed done this he was disobeying orders given to him by the Lord

93. Parl. Deb. xxxvi 1078 ff. 20 June 1817

94. H.O. 102.28 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 18 July 1817

Advocate (see ref. 82) but it is possible that Campbell was merely trying to invalidate his testimony. If his statement were true then his evidence was inadmissible; if it were not true, then he was guilty of perjury and the rest of his evidence could not be believed.⁽⁹⁵⁾ At any rate, his evidence about the secret conspiracy could not be received, and while other witnesses for the Crown were called - McLachlan, Gibson, Finlayson and Dickson - their evidence did not compensate for Campbell's missing testimony and for the way in which it had been invalidated. The jury returned a verdict of Not Proven, and McKinnlay was dismissed from the court after being informed by the Lord Justice Clerk that this verdict left a mark upon his character which nothing but a life of rectitude would wipe off. Charges against the other prisoners were dropped and they all returned to Glasgow.

The Lord Advocate wrote to Sidmouth on 20th July giving his account of what had taken place.⁽⁹⁶⁾ He claimed that on two occasions he had been unable to exercise full control over events - when the premature seizure of the reformers took place in Glasgow in February and when Sheriff Sir William Rae destroyed a paper on which was set down the terms agreed between Campbell and the Crown. He concluded -

95. Cockburn Memorials 331-6

96. H.O. 102.28 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 20
July 1817

'It is impossible for me to describe to your Lordship how much I am mortified by the results of the trials; but I am satisfied that I have done my duty to the best of my ability, that the failure has not been owing to any want of exertion on my part....' Although Sidmouth agreed that no blame could justly be attached to those who had conducted the trials, this was by no means the end of the matter. On 10th February 1818 Lord Archibald Hamilton raised the matter of McKinlay's trial in the Commons.⁽⁹⁷⁾ He claimed that McKinlay's counsel had had no access to Campbell, that Campbell had been intimidated by Salmond and that he had been promised a reward in the excise by Drummond. The Lord Advocate replied that Drummond had no authority to do this, but his defence of the conduct of the prosecution was unconvincing and at the conclusion of the debate 71 voted against the Government whose majority was only 65.

Throughout the whole period 1816-18 there seems to have been a general feeling that the Government had greatly exaggerated the danger to the country. Press reaction to the reports of the secret committees in February 1817 have been noted (p. 97). On 5th June 1817 another secret committee was appointed to enquire

into seditious meetings.⁽⁹⁸⁾ When it reported 'the continued existence of a traitorous conspiracy for the overthrow of our established government and constitution ... in the midland and northern counties of England' this was used as a reason to continue the suspension of Habeas Corpus and its Scottish equivalent. In the debate on this, Earl Grey claimed that the oaths in Glasgow 'had been administered by hired spies and informers',⁽⁹⁹⁾ and Burdett raised the question of spies and informers in the Commons.⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ The claims in both Lords and Commons that spies had been used was never effectively countered by the Tories, although the suspension of Habeas Corpus was continued. After McKinlay's trial in July 1817, the Lord Justice Clerk's statement at the conclusion of the trial and the methods reputedly employed by Drummond and Rae which it was felt 'must carry alarm home to every independent mind' were severely criticised in the press.⁽¹⁰¹⁾

The feeling that personal freedom was endangered by the Government without adequate cause was strengthened by the large number of petitions which were presented by those who considered they

98. Parl. Deb. xxxvi 897

99. Ibid 1000 16 June 1817

100. Ibid 1016 16 June 1817

101. Glasgow Chronicle 29 July 1817

had been wrongly imprisoned. On March 4th, 1817, for example, Lord Cochrane mentioned the case of 'a schoolmaster and another individual at Glasgow who were taken up and confined... two nights and two days and there was no foundation in the charge against them.'⁽¹⁰²⁾ This was probably McTear, mentioned by Richmond as one of those who had been among the first to be initiated. (When he was arrested his colleagues in the Campbell Street Theological Society wrote to the Glasgow Chronicle saying how shocked they were at his arrest).⁽¹⁰³⁾ On March 21st the Commons heard a petition from John Weir, a muslin manufacturer arrested on 23rd February on authority of a warrant which contained only a surname and an address which was not his, and detained until 27th February. Although Finlay stated that 'it was customary in Scotland to issue a warrant . . . without mentioning Christian names or specifying their situation in life', J.P. Grant emphasised the need to have names distinctly stated.⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ Other petitions were presented in 1817 and 1818; among the last of the petitioners were James Robertson who was certainly involved in the conspiracy but had been released after 11 weeks imprisonment, and Keith and Edgar who had been the first to appear

102. Parl. Deb. xxxv 871 4-Mar 1817

103. Glasgow Chronicle 27 Feb 1817

104. Parl. Deb. xxxv 1218 21 Mar 1817

in the High Court. (105)

Nor did the government salvage its reputation and convince the general public of the gravity of the situation by a series of successful prosecutions, for the prosecutions in both Scotland and England nearly all failed. Many of those who were arrested were never brought to trial at all. Thus it was felt that the whole business had been elevated beyond what the circumstances could support. (106) Moreover, at the trials in England that part played by spies was strongly emphasised and in Scotland the feeling developed that the Government had hatched a plot in Glasgow, and that their work to this end had been carried out by Richmond.

On 14th August 1817 the Glasgow Chronicle published a series of letters between Richmond and John Wilson, a well-known Glasgow reformer. Wilson maintained that Richmond and Biggar 'were the original and sole cause of all incarcerations that (had) taken place.' At the same time, McLachlan published a long statement blaming Richmond for trying to persuade the reformers to take measures which they would otherwise not have considered. Despite Richmond's denials, and his statement that the Government knew of the Glasgow plot before he did,

105. Parl. Deb. xxxvii 946 10 Mar 1818

106. Scotsman 24 July 1817

it was soon generally accepted that McKinlay and his companions were the victims of Government and the two spies. It was unfortunate for Richmond and for the Government that the statements taken from the prisoners in 1817 could not be published or used in a court of law for these would have shown that the Government did have some justification for believing in a plot and in the administration of oaths, but because of the inefficiency of the police system of the time, the lack of written evidence and possibly the ineptitude of the Lord Advocate and his subordinates, this was never established beyond doubt in the eyes of the general public. The concentration on the part supposedly played by Richmond has concealed the fact that secret societies did exist in Scotland in 1816-17.

Relapse and Revival

Following the failure of the petitioning movement in 1817, a few public meetings took place where government policy was criticised and reform of parliament demanded. At one such meeting in the Relief Meeting House, John Street, Glasgow on 11th May 1818 eight resolutions were passed. These condemned the use of spies, the Government's suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act in the previous year, and the Government's attitude towards reform; and demands were made for 'a representation commensurate with taxation and Parliaments of duration not exceeding one year.⁽¹⁾ But there was no reference at the meeting to any prevailing distress, and it is possible that with the buoyancy of this time, far fewer people were out of employment and that distress was thus limited. Certainly there was no mention in the newspapers of any distress anywhere and this presumably accounts, to some extent, for the lack of support for the movement for parliamentary reform.

During 1818 the topics which attracted attention in the west of Scotland were the typhus epidemic, attempts to reform the poor law - which was by now plainly inadequate in urban areas, - and burgh reform. The typhus epidemic which affected Glasgow in

1. Black Dwarf 27 May 1818

particular, had possibly something to do with the cessation of popular meetings because of the dangers of infection when large numbers of people congregated. Burgh reform, a revival of the campaign which had been conducted in the 1780s, attracted interest in many Scottish towns and diverted attention from national to local issues. This movement revived in 1817 when the election of the town council of Montrose was declared void and by permission of the Lord Advocate, all the burgesses were initially to elect all the nineteen councillors and the ten annual vacancies were to be submitted permanently to their vote. Inspired by this break with tradition, some reformers in Edinburgh raised the question of reform in the Merchant Company of Edinburgh. Despite opposition there from the city authorities and the clergy (who 'opposed it as but another form of that unhappy tendency to revolt against time honoured institutions and exerted their flocks to meddle not with them that were given to change') resolutions in favour of reform to give burgesses control over the administration of their own affairs were carried.⁽²⁾ Within six months it was estimated that thirty out of the sixty six royal burghs had voted resolutions in favour of burgh reform and that the population of these burghs outnumbered the remainder by four to

one.⁽³⁾ For the next four years a campaign for reform of the burghs was conducted in the country and in parliament. In April 1819, for example, it was stated that petitions praying for a reform of the royal burghs were being presented to parliament and that nothing would satisfy the people of Scotland 'short of such a reform as would strike at the root of the odious principle of self election' and, as it was expressed in the Dumfries petition 'protect from future embezzlement and spoliation the little that now remains of the ample patrimonies with which the royal burghs were originally endowed.' And when Sir John Mackintosh presented this petition he stated that out of the 480,000 burghesses in Scotland, 410,000 had already signed petitions in favour of reform.⁽⁴⁾ In parliament, the demand for reform was led by Lord Archibald Hamilton. When in May 1819 he moved for a committee to consider the petitions for burgh reform, he pointed out that Scottish administration was at variance with usages in England or of any other country. He showed the absurdity of persons spending at pleasure the funds of the community and binding fellow citizens to pay debts contracted without their knowledge.⁽⁵⁾ The motion was carried and an investigation into the government of the burghs, the manner of election, the amount of taxes imposed,

3. Scots Magazine N.S.1 (1817) and N.S.2 (1818)
H.O. 102.29 passim for petitions from burghs to Parliament

4. Glasgow Chronicle 3 Apr 1819

5. Parl Deb xl 179 6 May 1819

annual expenditure and revenue, the alienation of property since 1707 and the present amount of debt was set in motion.⁽⁶⁾

It was Hamilton also who in April 1819 pressed for the appointment of a committee to investigate the affairs of Aberdeen which had recently been declared bankrupt for the sum of £250,000. In this he was unsuccessful, but the committee which was appointed in May investigated in particular four burghs - Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Dundee and Dunfermline - and showed that charges of inefficient administration were well founded. But the committee which was re-appointed in 1820 and 1821 was able to achieve very little. Eventually the Lord Advocate agreed to give the burgesses some financial control, but repudiated any change of the 'set' of the burghs.⁽⁷⁾

For some, this campaign was regarded as a useful means of maintaining interest in parliamentary reform and as a preliminary to it. The editor of Black Dwarf received a letter from Dundee saying 'We are now attacking the Cubs; we shall soon be able to attack ... the mammoth of Corruption.'⁽⁸⁾ The Whig Edinburgh Review stated that the councils of Scottish burghs had become a byword for 'a mean, corrupt, and interested government', and that change would have to

6. Parl. Deb. xl 179

7. Ibid xxxvii, xxxix, xl

8. Black Dwarf 11 Nov 1818

come. 'Such a change would no doubt ultimately affect the parliamentary representation of the burgh; but the most scrupulous and discriminating stickler for establishments cannot, we imagine, pretend that the experiment is accompanied with any hazard or that the slightest danger could possibly arise to the constitution of the country.'⁽⁹⁾ Lord Archibald Hamilton stated that his object was 'a reform in the internal management of the affairs of the burghs, radical and comprehensive indeed, but not more than commensurate with the occasion.'⁽¹⁰⁾ But there was strong opposition from the Tories. Castlereagh thought that burgh reform would lead to parliamentary reform; the Lord Advocate made the same point; and Canning was 'averse to any attempt to meddle with the Scots system of representation, entertaining as he did the utmost apprehension of the consequences of any measure tending towards what was denominated parliamentary reform.' Mr. William Dundas argued that the Scots were a sedate and religious people, but that if once roused they would endanger the House of Commons and that a most effective way of doing this would be by granting them the burgh reform they desired, while Mr. Boswell looked upon the question 'not as confined to the local circumstances of the Scotch burghs but as one of parliamentary

9. Edinburgh Review 1x (1818)

10. Parl. Deb. x1 179 ff 6 May 1819

reform affecting the general interests of the Empire. (11)

The campaign in the burghs, the speeches in Parliament, the appointment of the Parliamentary Committee and its report were all given great publicity in the Scottish press, particularly in the Scotsman. But whether this was a movement for radical reform was uncertain at the time. Generally, the Whigs supported it and saw in improvements in the burghs no threat to parliament. The Tories on the other hand argued that burgh reform would inevitably lead to some change in the election of members of parliament, and that by effecting a change in the status quo it was providing a bad example to reformers. If we now examine the question, it is difficult to regard it as an aspect of radical reform. Radical reform was associated with the reform of parliament, with the demand for annual parliaments and universal suffrage. The demand for burgh reform was associated on the other hand with an attempt to improve the government of royal burghs in Scotland by extending the right to elect councillors to the burgesses - a minority group. Only indirectly would this affect parlia-

11. Parl. Deb. '186, 190. William Dundas 1762-1845. Nephew of Henry Dundas. MP 1796-1831. Secretary for War 1804-6. Alexander Boswell 1775-1822, eldest son of James Boswell. 1815 - set up private printing press at Auchinleck which produced billes-lettres, pamphlets and books. MP 1818-21. Killed in duel 1822.

mentary elections and it would in no way help the immediate advance of radical aims. The burgh reform movement in the years 1815 to 1822 can claim a place in the story of radical reform only because it provided a large number of people, especially those who had some social status in the burghs, with an alternative focus for agitation and diverted their attention from the question of a radical reform of parliament.

In England in 1818 interest in parliamentary reform was maintained. The repression of 1817, the execution of the Pentridge rebels, the prosecution of journalists, were followed by an accession of strength to the cause of radical reform. Many reformers who had been imprisoned were released without being brought to trial and they once again addressed political meetings. When the Gagging Acts of 1817 expired in 1818 there was a flowering of political clubs, in complete contrast to Scotland.⁽¹²⁾ These political clubs were to play a part in the story of reform in Scotland since some missionary work was later carried out here by English reformers.

In July 1818, the first Political Protestants Union was formed at Hull, the members agreeing to meet once per week in small classes not exceeding twenty per class and to subscribe one penny each for

the purpose of purchasing such means of information as might be required to educate the members politically.⁽¹³⁾ The material for study consisted of Cobbett's Political Register, Sherwin's Register and Wooler's Black Dwarf. The leaders of each class met on the first Monday of each month to report the progress of their class to the chairman of the society. The Hull Union did not dictate any creed, did not insist on annual parliaments, universal suffrage or voting by householders; it required only that the members should be interested in some reform of the government of the country.⁽¹⁴⁾

In Stockport in October 1818 a Political Union for the promotion of Human Happiness was formed. This union divided itself into classes of twelve members, the classes meeting once a week to read books, converse, and discuss the best practical way of obtaining a free and good government. Every person joining the Union pledged himself to 'a radical reform of Parliament by means of suffrage in all male persons of mature age and sane minds.... Parliament having a duration not exceeding one year, and election by ballot.'⁽¹⁵⁾ From Hull and

Stockport, societies (including groups of females) took their model. At a meeting in Oldham in June

13. Black Dwarf 19 Aug 1818, 9 Sep 1818

14. Ibid 14 Apr 1819

15. Ibid 28 Apr 1819

1819, twenty eight towns were represented and the Stockport Union had plans to form a national union, 'for it is by this alone that we can become strong and mighty.'⁽¹⁶⁾ About such unions in Scotland we have no information; there were certainly unions in Glasgow in June 1819 though the city was not represented at the Oldham conference, and by the end of 1819 they had spread throughout the west of Scotland.

In England, the several associations had all political objects in view and economic factors were seldom mentioned in speeches and resolutions.⁽¹⁷⁾ In Scotland, however, it would seem that there was less interest in politics when economic conditions were not bad. Economic conditions which in general improved in 1817-18, soon deteriorated again. As early as February 1819 it became apparent that there was increasing unemployment and distress among the hand-loom weavers, and this distress continued for the rest of the year into 1820. Of the 18,537 looms in Glasgow and its suburbs, 5256 were unoccupied in 1819 and the situation in some of the neighbouring towns seems to have been even worse; in Hamilton 591 of the 1230 looms were

16. Kinsey Lancashire Radicalism 57

17. Ibid 64

unoccupied.⁽¹⁸⁾ Even in Paisley, where there was a higher proportion of skilled workers than elsewhere, 1100 looms were idle at one point in 1819.⁽¹⁹⁾ Moreover, even those weavers who were employed had to suffer once again a fall in wages which took them below even those of 1817 to less than one shilling per day on average, and yet the cost of essential foods in the Glasgow area had declined only slightly.⁽²⁰⁾ By 1820, it was estimated by Sinclair, the average earnings of the hand-loom cotton weaver were £20 per annum (i.e. less than eight shillings per week), a figure which agrees fairly well with that given by Cleland for the Glasgow area.⁽²¹⁾

The economic distress in the west of Scotland was mentioned in Parliament. Mr. Maxwell, presenting a memorial from Renfrewshire, stated that workers in manufacture were 'wholly unable to support them-

18. Cleland Rise and Progress of the City of Glasgow 239. Robert Brown, the Duke of Hamilton's factor, makes the interesting point that in the Hamilton area, the former high wages in weaving had attracted into that trade from farm work many of the native Scottish workers; their places in farm work were then taken by Irish immigrants. In the distress of 1819 it was the Scots who thus found themselves unemployed. Glasgow Chronicle 10 Aug 1819
19. Craig Historical Notes on Paisley 82
20. Cleland Enumeration of the inhabitants of the City of Glasgow 32-3
21. Sinclair op.cit. 47

themselves by their exertions; '(22) the Presbytery of Hamilton reported that the wages of labourers were not sufficient to maintain a family, and this was leading to non-attendance at church and school for want of decent clothes; (23) Mr. Bennet said that the people were in a state of famine and that their distress was being augmented by the influx of Irish immigrants; Wilberforce admitted that the people of the west of Scotland were suffering privations, but he then moralised that 'it was one of the dispensations of an all-wise Providence that men should keenly suffer the calamitous consequences of war in order to restrain them from a pursuit so revolting to a benign nature.' (24)

Mr. Bennet also mentioned that the former prosperity of the weavers added to their present sufferings. 'From the natural feeling of self preservation these people were impelled to look for a change and thought that their miseries would be remedied by a radical reform' of the House of Commons;

22. Parl. Deb. xli 1217 ff 6 Dec 1819.

John Maxwell (1791-1865), 8th Baronet. M P for county of Renfrew 1818-30 and for county of Lanark 1832-7. Noted for his interest in the lower classes and attempts to help them. He was 'decidedly against the radicals...though a sincere reformer.' Parl. Deb. xli 848 7 Dec 1819.

23. Ibid. 1393 21 Dec 1819

24. Ibid. x1 890 and 913 3 June 1819

and although he thought this idea might be erroneous, the House ought to sympathise with these people 'of very great intelligence'. But few members of Parliament were prepared to pay any attention to such pleas and as Lord Archibald Hamilton was later to point out, the ministers seemed to under-rate distress in Scotland. They blamed disaffection rather than distress for the disturbance which took place in 1819-20.⁽²⁵⁾ The Lord Advocate emphasised that it was not only weavers who attended meetings to demand political reform; cotton spinners who were earning anything from twelve to thirty five shillings per week were now among the agitators and coal miners, despite the fact that they had higher wages than they had enjoyed for many years were among the disaffected.⁽²⁶⁾ Yet as later events were to show, the people who gave most support to radical reform in 1819 were hand-loom weavers in the area around Glasgow. There was only a small measure of effective support in that area from spinners, miners and others, and there is little evidence of much radical activity outside the west of Scotland. One is therefore forced to conclude that the demand for radical reform was to some extent motivated by economic distress and that those who supported such demands did so because they felt there was no other way in which they could compel the authorities to act

25. Parl. Deb. N.S. 1 40. 28 Apr 1820

26. Ibid xl 921 7 June 1819

to ameliorate this distress. Moreover, before the end of 1819 when unemployment and distress had passed its worst, support for political reform was declining,⁽²⁷⁾ and probably only a very small proportion of the population gave support to radical agitation in 1820. We may assume that they would include a good proportion of idealists who were interested not so much in economic as in political improvement.

Inevitably the great distress among operative weavers led to the calling of public meetings to consider what should be done, and before August 1819 many meetings had been held.⁽²⁸⁾ One such meeting was held on Glasgow Green in 16th June to consider the distresses the weavers were labouring under and the propriety ^{of} petitioning the Prince Regent for the means of transporting all those of the trade who wished to emigrate to North America.⁽²⁹⁾ The magistrates fearing that there might be trouble stationed the 40th Regiment, some cavalry and the police force at the Green, but there were no disturbances although 35,000 attended. The chairman proposed that emigration was the answer to the problem of unemployment and low wages but one of the crowd who, it was later reported, was not a weaver,

27. Glasgow Chronicle 30 Dec 1819

28. H.O. 102.30 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 3 Aug 1819

29. Glasgow Chronicle 17 June 1819

opposed this solution. He claimed that low wages were the result of excessive taxation and misrepresentation in parliament, and he therefore moved that there should be annual parliaments, universal suffrage and a reduction in taxation. This amendment was carried and delegates were appointed to meet at the Green a few days later to discuss the matter. Another member of the crowd stated that the only people who should emigrate were borough mongers, sinecurists and 150,000 clergymen. Thus very much against the wishes of the Committee which had organised the meetings, the idea of organised emigration for weavers was, for the time rejected and a political bias introduced.⁽³⁰⁾ Another important meeting was held at Paisley on 17th July. About 30,000 people were told that 'the faction' (whether local or national was not specified) and taxation were to blame for the distresses of the poor. This meeting considered the propriety of petitioning the Prince Regent, but decided not to do so because previous petitions had been ignored, and instead they determined to issue an address to the nation.⁽³¹⁾

These meetings show the difficulties that faced the people. They were agreed that there was distress, but what was the cause of it? Different causes were suggested and inevitably, so were different remedies. But if the remedy were political reform, how was this

30. Glasgow Chronicle 17 June 1819, 24 June 1819

31. Brown History of Paisley ii 168

to be achieved by peaceful means?

At the end of July 1819 it was reported in the Glasgow Chronicle that meetings of unemployed workmen were being held in the manufacturing parts of the North of England. 'Their resolutions continue wholly political and propose no aid but what is to flow from a grand reform.' Such an attitude was criticised and there was the implication that people in Scotland were too sensible to follow this course of action.⁽³²⁾ On 24th August, the editor of the Chronicle was more explicit. 'There is reason to believe that since the failure of the petitions of 1817 the great bulk of the people are convinced that no benefit is likely to flow from their exertions unless they are backed by the enlightened and disinterested friends of liberty in a higher station. They are too sagacious not to perceive where the truth lies and they have too much good sense to take their notions from the ignorant writers who mislead the populace of England.'⁽³³⁾ Certainly, there was in England a much more widely based tradition of political radicalism than there was in Scotland and this tradition was being strongly reinforced by the proliferation of journals advocating reform. Such encouragement was lacking in Scotland, but another reason for the Scots'

32. Glasgow Chronicle 29 July 1819

33. Ibid 24 Aug 1819

general reluctance to support ideas of political reform to the extent that this was happening in England may have been the numerous examples that we find at this time of public and private benevolence to those in distress.

In 1816 the whole problem of distress had generally, in Scotland, either had been disregarded or dismissed. By 1819, however, the connection between distress and unrest had possibly become apparent to some people and much was done, though never on a large scale. Several people wrote to the newspapers advocating planned emigration of weavers; a similar solution was proposed in the Commons by Lord Archibald Hamilton and Kirkman Finlay.⁽³⁴⁾ On the other hand there are numerous examples of positive action being taken by local councils or by people of consequence. On 29th July, the Lord Provost of Glasgow met a delegation of five weavers and agreed that every man able and willing to work would be employed in digging a tunnel in Glasgow Green. Over three hundred were thus employed and the wages paid after the first week were one shilling per day. Another three hundred and thirty were employed at Wester Craigs Quarry knapping stones for the roads, and they also were paid one shilling per day. For those who were not employed,

34. Glasgow Chronicle 3 July 1819, 3 Aug 1819
Parl. Deb. N.S. 1 40-43 28 Apr 1820

soup kitchens were opened.⁽³⁵⁾ In October 1819, the Town Council sent a memorial to the Lords of the Treasury asking for £20-30,000 to build a wet and dry dock at the Broomielaw, using unemployed weavers to carry out the work. Two months later the government granted a loan of £30,000.⁽³⁶⁾ At Hamilton some of the unemployed were given labouring work on the south side of Bothwell Bridge and further south in Lanarkshire some were employed building the Carlisle road;⁽³⁷⁾ while the Heritors Records show that in the same area, some men were being employed on farm work and that a temporary fund was raised for the old and helpless. When eventually frost made outdoor work impossible, an assessment was raised to assist those still in distress.⁽³⁸⁾ In Paisley, the Town Council empowered the Kirk Session to advance £100 for relief of the distressed and unemployed operatives and it was agreed to employ forty operatives at improving the moss-lands of the burgh at a rate of one shilling per day, 'an allowance which, considering the inefficiency of those employed and the limited hours of labour, would far exceed the cost of amelioration if executed by persons accustomed to such work.'⁽³⁹⁾

35. Cleland Rise and Progress of the City of Glasgow 106, Glasgow Chronicle 31 July 1819, 19 Aug 1819, Glasgow Burgh Records 10 Aug 1819
36. Glasgow Burgh Records 27 Oct 1819, 27 Dec 1819
37. Ayr Advertiser 12 Aug 1819
38. Heritors Minute Book, Hamilton 10 Aug 1819, 11 Dec 1819

Some assistance was given by Heritors in a number of areas, for example in Balfron and in New Monkland.⁽⁴⁰⁾ The gentlemen of the county of Renfrew met in July under the chairmanship of Sir John Maxwell to consider the best means of relieving distress. It was decided to purchase webs to fill the idle looms, then to sell the produce and distribute profits among the weavers; if there were a loss it would be covered by the gentlemen. Quite correctly, this idea was criticised in the Glasgow Chronicle. There were already too many weavers and too much had been produced for the market available. The effect of this plan would have been to depress still further the wages of the hand-loom weavers.⁽⁴¹⁾ At a County Meeting in the same county, presided over by the Earl of Glasgow, a large sum was raised for public relief.⁽⁴²⁾

Sometimes relief was afforded by private individuals. Each of one hundred and fifty distressed families⁵ in Hamilton was given one quarter pound of mutton; the unemployed in Strathaven were

40. Heritors Minute Book, Balfron, 22 Nov 1819, 27 Dec 1819. New Monkland 19 Aug 1819

41. Glasgow Chronicle 20 July 1819

42. Brown ii 169. The Renfrewshire gentlemen also asked the Government for a grant of £80,000 to finish the Ardrossan Canal or for £30,000 to deepen the Clyde and fertilise waste land, but there is no record of this being granted. Glasgow Chronicle 16 Oct 1819

promised work on the ducal estates, and this it was said would last for five months.⁽⁴³⁾ The Earl of Glasgow in November 1819 gave a donation of £350 to help the industrious poor.⁽⁴⁴⁾

A number of Airdrie weavers were employed by William Mack of Fruitfield trenching his park at a wage of 8s to 10s per week. In Irvine, £100 was subscribed for poor relief; food and clothing were distributed in Kilwinning by a committee which included the Earl of Eglinton and Lady Montgomerie; the unemployed in Falkirk were employed at delving at a wage of 1s3d per day; Sir Hew Dalrymple of Bargany gave 200 creels of coal to the poor of the parish of Girvan.⁽⁴⁵⁾

The reason for all this benevolence was partly that it was believed that if the poor were helped 'the cry for Radical reform ... would be succeeded by the cheering sounds of gratitude.'⁽⁴⁶⁾ and in many cases those who had been assisted were grateful. One outstanding example of this comes from Dalry where on 17th February 1820 1500 inhabitants of the town presented Colonel Blair with a snuff box as a token of their gratitude for his kindness in finding employment for them during the recent distress.⁽⁴⁷⁾

43. Scotsman 20 Nov 1819 Glasgow Chronicle 11 Nov 1819

44. Scotsman 20 Nov 1819

45. Ibid 26 Nov 1819, 25 Dec 1819

46. Ayr Advertiser 12 Aug 1819

47. Glasgow Chronicle 22 Feb 1820

But not all the unemployed were so well cared for. In Balfour many of the 300 weavers were out of employment, and even those who had work could earn no more than 5s per week. One family had been known to live for a whole day on cabbages, another for two days on unripe potatoes. But when the weavers petitioned the local minister to call a meeting of the heritors, he replied that he had no power to do this and that in any case they had once had good wages and if they were now in want it was as a result of their own improvidence.⁽⁴⁸⁾ The government too was largely unhelpful. Huskisson did not think the Government could provide direct relief; all that could be done was to restore confidence and security to the capitalist; Lord Castlereagh thought that to grant relief to Lanarkshire would be unjust to the whole Empire; the Chancellor of the Exchequer felt that it was impossible to introduce legislation that would apply only to Scotland.⁽⁴⁹⁾ Scotland certainly was at a disadvantage compared to England in the matter of poor relief. It must be admitted that in 1819, many genuine attempts were made to assist the poor in Scotland, although this had generally to be done by private individuals working singly or in groups. But such attempts, made without government assistance, were obviously inadequate especially in

48. Glasgow Chronicle 17 Aug 1819

49. Parl. Deb. xli 1217 6 Dec 1819

weaving communities where unemployment was widespread. So distress continued and some of the lower classes were won over by those who believed in a political solution to the problem of economic distress.

Towards the end of July 1819, Major General Hope noted that a revolutionary spirit was once again evident in the west of Scotland.⁽⁵⁰⁾ As in 1816, the authorities could not determine the extent of the unrest because of the defective state of the Glasgow Police, and they merely knew that sundry meetings had been held. As we have already noted, most of the meetings in Scotland before the middle of August had tended to be non-political and the solutions proposed for the relief of distress had been economic. But the tendency to look to political reform as a solution, which had manifested itself at the meeting on Glasgow Green on 16th June, became much more prominent after the events in Manchester in August 1819.

During 1819 all over the north of England reformers were organising open air meetings which were notable for the discipline among those who attended and the display which accompanied each meeting. The most notable, though by no means the first or last of these meetings took place at Manchester on 16th

50. H.O. 102.30 Major General Hope to Sidmouth 31 July 1819. Alexander Hope (1769-1837). Joined army 1786; Major General 1808. Governor of Sandhurst 1812-19, Governor of Edinburgh Castle 1819-26. M P for Linlithgow 1802-34.

August 1819. This was a lawful meeting whose purpose was to consider 'the propriety of adopting the most legal and effectual means of obtaining reform of the Commons House of Parliament' and was to be addressed by the most famous radical orator of the day, Henry Hunt. The Manchester Magistrates decided to arrest Hunt and foolishly ordered the Manchester and Salford Yeomanry - a volunteer body - to effect this while Hunt was on the hustings surrounded by a crowd estimated at over 50,000. The Yeomanry reached Hunt with difficulty but as they returned through the crowd some of them were stuck. The 15th Hussars were then summoned to rescue the Yeomanry; panic seized the crowd and as the people fled many were injured.

Later investigations have shown that few people were killed or injured by the military.⁽⁵¹⁾ What was much more important was that radicals could now refer to the inhumanity of the Manchester magistrates and Yeomanry, could condemn the support later given to the magistrates by the Prince Regent and his ministers and could add to the radical martyrology. The Whigs too could seize upon it as an example of the dangers of military rule and emphasise their role as the protectors of the

51. Read Peterloo passim; White From Waterloo to Peterloo ch.xv. Thompson op.cit. 681-91 and Walmsley Peterloo: The Case Reopened, all give accounts of the affair

people. (52) There was immediate sympathy for those who had suffered and considerable publicity for Henry Hunt. When a month later Hunt returned to London, it was reported in the press that 300,000 people were in the streets to welcome him. Whether this figure is too high or not is unimportant. What is important is that a very large number of people thronged the streets to show their appreciation of a radical orator, and presumably, their dislike of the actions of the Manchester authorities. (53)

During the latter part of 1819 the number of public meetings in Scotland increased. Those which during August drew most attention were in Glasgow. On Saturday 21st August a meeting of between two and five thousand people was held in the Yard of the Relief Church in Tollcross. The magistrates took every precaution by having about 400 Special constables as well as police and other civil officers assembled and soldiers drawn up in their barrack yard. But the meeting was carried through without disturbance, and at the end it was agreed to demand universal suffrage, annual parliaments and vote by ballot. More important was a suggestion that a subscription be opened to establish a radical journal in the west of Scotland similar to Wooler's Black

52. Aspinall Lord Brougham and the Whig Party 276-7

53. Thompson op.cit. 682 ff

Dwarf, but although such a journal was badly needed to spread radicalism, there is no evidence that the suggestion was acted upon. (54) Another meeting in Glasgow was held in Graham Square, near the centre of the city on Thursday 26th August, but this was badly attended, and the authorities believed that the strong action taken by the magistrates was having a beneficial effect on reformers elsewhere and discouraging radical meetings. (55) That this was far from being a correct interpretation of the general attitude towards the Manchester Massacre was seen however at the numerous meetings which were held from September until the end of the year.

On 4th September, a meeting was arranged in Paisley, but the weather was so bad that the few who did come adjourned to the Unitarian Chapel. A week later another meeting was held, and groups came from Glasgow, Kilmarnock, Kilbarchan, Johnstone and Dalry (all areas with large numbers of weavers). Estimates of the numbers attending vary from twelve to twenty-five thousand, but it was agreed that 'never was there a greater observance of good order, not even in a religious Conventicle.' The people marched to the ground carrying banners and flags. In front of the hustings were drapes of black cloth and the Neilston band played 'Scots wha ha'e' and other

54. Glasgow Chronicle 26 Aug 1819, 30 Nov 1819

55. Ibid 28 Aug 1819.

H.O. 102.30 Hope to Sidmouth 27 Aug 1819

Scottish airs. A local schoolmaster acted as chairman and for about four hours the speeches continued. References to Manchester were frequent. 'Will it be believed by posterity that a peaceable assembly of freeborn Englishmen were wantonly murdered in open day?'. 'The British sword has been drawn on starving men and fainting women ... will you allow your brethren to be murdered without raising your voice against the infernal deed?'. The Government was condemned - 'We wish no such things as a revolution', said one, 'but we want a change of men and measures, a reduction of taxes, an end to all useless places and pensions and a voice in enacting laws by which we are governed.' Another who spoke at length on the Peterloo massacre, called upon the clergy to prove their humanity by giving something towards the relief of the Manchester victims. Following this a number of resolutions were passed condemning the actions of the Manchester magistrates and the support given them by the Government. But whereas meetings in 1816-17 had normally concluded with a decision to petition the Prince Regent, this meeting in 1819 had to find some other means of making the government aware of its sentiments. It was agreed that the only way to do this, 'to limit the power of the borough-mongers' was to deprive the government of its wealth and that the best way to do this was to abstain from the consumption of tea,

tobacco, and spirits. (56)

After the meeting a group from Glasgow encountered trouble. They were stopped by some Paisley constables and their flag taken from them. A scuffle ensued, windows were broken, the Riot Act read and cavalry summoned. Although there was a respite during Sunday, trouble flared up again the following night in both Paisley and Glasgow. Street lamps were broken throughout the city, troops called out and the Riot Act read. Altogether it was regarded as 'a very disagreeable night.' Lord Advocate Rae to some extent welcomed the trouble that had taken place. He thought that such riots would show what the real objects of the reformers were and would lead 'to all good men of whatever side in politics uniting in their endeavours to restore tranquillity.' (57)

In fact, the genuine reformers highly disapproved of what had happened, since such trouble, which had been caused by 'a gang of dissolute characters' would prove extremely prejudicial to the cause of reform. (58) As we have previously noticed

56. Glasgow Chronicle 14 Sept 1819, Brown History of Paisley ii 171, Renfrewshire Magazine 8 Oct 1819

57. Glasgow Chronicle 14 Sep 1819. H.O. 102.30
Colonel Hastings to General Hope 14 Sep 1819
Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 15 Sep 1819
Paisley Council Minutes 20 Sep 1819

58. H.O. 102.30 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth giving report of a spy (probably Captain Brown) 19 Sep. 1819

with regard to meetings in England, including that at St. Peter's Fields in Manchester, the people showed remarkable discipline and normally moved with military precision. This had made members of the middle and upper classes in England suspicious; they feared some sinister purpose in all the good order which prevailed. Exactly the same suspicions were to arise in Scotland. (59)

Yet such precision and good order were necessary if the meetings were going to take place at all. In 1816-17, many meetings were held, but they were, with very few exceptions, local in character. In 1819, on the other hand, meetings attracted large audiences from a wide area. At a reform meeting in Rutherglen on 23rd October, for example there were groups from Townhead, Calton, and other districts in Glasgow, from Cambuslang and from East Kilbride. (60) A meeting near Ayr attracted people from Tarbolton, Mauchline, Kilmarnock, Galston, Newmilns and Stewarton, (61) and a meeting in Kilmarnock also attracted crowds from all the neighbouring towns and villages. (62) In general, it seems that at most meetings some of the audience travelled many miles to be present. In order that such far-travelled groups should arrive at the meeting in some semblance of order, discipline was obviously

59. H.O. 102.31 Folio 98 Report from the Earl of Glasgow

60. Spirit of Union 30 Oct 1819

61. Ayr Advertiser 4 Nov 1819

62. McKay A History of Kilmarnock, 210

necessary, and there must therefore have been an acceptance of authority and the elevation from among the ranks of the marchers of some person to assume command.

Cohesion would also be helped by carrying banners, which would provide a focus for the group and at the same time make it identifiable to others. Such banners were extremely varied, and what they depicted or the mottoes they bore tell us something of the issues on which reformers criticised Government. At the Rutherglen meeting, for example, one banner depicted a woman with a child in her arms under the murderous sabre of a Manchester Yeoman, and it had the motto 'Law: Blood for Blood'. Other mottoes showed the strong influence of Peterloo - for example 'Remember Manchester' or 'Hunt and Liberty' - but there were also other influences of longer standing. 'Arise Britons and Assert your Rights', 'Annual Parliaments and Universal Suffrage' obviously were influenced by Cartwright's brand of reformism, 'Taxation without Representation an Injustice' could be traced back to the 1770s, while complaints about the Corn Laws were also of long standing among the urban population. It is interesting also that at Rutherglen, a pole bearing the French Revolutionary Cap of liberty was carried,

and at a number of meetings the chairman wore such a cap. (63)

Bands were formed by the reformers to help maintain good order as they marched. The Neilston Band played at Paisley in September, its function being to play at the meeting itself; at the Rutherglen meeting, the reformers marched to their places in the assembly behind bands playing the 'Dead March' from 'Saul' and before the meeting began, the combined bands played 'God Save the King', 'Rule Britannia', and 'Scots Wha ha'e'. At a meeting in Airdrie, the reformers marched through the streets behind the newly formed Union Band. (64) In Kilmarnock they had a band of pipers, drummers, fifers, clarioneteers and a bass drummer. (65) One of the secondary aims of having bands was probably to impress onlookers. That this did not always happen is vouched for by Janet Hamilton who lived in the parish of Old Monkland. She mentions radicals coming 'trampling along to the sound of a couple of fifes ... and many a banner

63. Spirit of the Union 30 Oct 1819

At a meeting at Kilmarnock on 20th November, an old banner which had reputedly been carried at Drunclog waved among the others. This would suggest some connection with a religious body, but in view of the general anti-clericalism in 1819-20 displayed at radical meetings, it is difficult to see what connection there could have been. McKay op;cit. 210

64. Ms. (uncatalogued) in Airdrie Public Library

65. Paterson Autobiographical Remmiscencies, 70

with a strange device was borne after them in their disorderly marches through our village.' (66)

As in England, drill was reputedly practised so that the appearance of the marchers would be improved, and that the marchers were well disciplined seems to be proved by the very few occasions on which any trouble was associated with the meetings and by the way in which even those who were not on parade were inspired to act in an orderly way. At the Rutherglen meeting, for example, a number of people assembled before the parties from a distance arrived. When shortly before 1p.m. it was announced that groups were waiting on the outskirts of the meeting, the crowd stepped aside in an orderly way to let them through to the front around the black-draped hustings. One hostile observer noted that 'men and women marched four and four, arm and arm', that the meetings were conducted with regularity and concluded without commotion. (67)

At all the meetings of which we have record, a large number of people attended, banners strongly critical of the government were carried, vigorous speeches strongly condemning the Government's domestic and foreign policies and the massacre at Manchester were made, revolutionary caps of liberty were worn, and all this was being reported in the

66. Janet Hamilton Sketch of a Scottish roadside village, 361

67. Notebook of Charles Hutcheson 9-10

press, yet the authorities took little action. After the Paisley meeting, the members of the Neilston band were arrested because they had played without receiving permission;⁽⁶⁸⁾ there was certainly a great deal of trouble after this meeting but no other arrests directly resulting from the meeting were made. Two weavers were arrested for using seditious expressions at a meeting in Mauchline;⁽⁶⁹⁾ in Airdrie, two of the leading Radicals, Rodger and Millar were arrested on six charges, but were able to refute them and return to Airdrie in triumph.⁽⁷⁰⁾ The only important case which resulted directly from one of the public meetings held in 1819 was the attempt to punish George Kinloch of Kinloch, the Dundee reformer and the only member of the gentry, or it would appear, of any social consequence at all who actively supported the reform movement in Scotland in 1819. It was presumably because of his social status, and not merely for what he had said that he was arrested in November 1819, and avoided punishment only by flight to France.

Kinloch took the chair at a reform meeting in the Magdalen Yard Green in Dundee in November 1819. He had been invited to take this post by a committee which had organised the meeting and seems to have been in no way responsible for the fact that

68. Spirit of the Union 6 Nov 1819

69. Glasgow Chronicle 1 Feb 1820

70. Spirit of the Union 25 Dec 1819

the meeting was taking place. In a letter to the Lord Advocate on 18th December 1819 Kinloch stated 'The meeting was proposed and arranged without my knowledge and I was not informed of it nor was I asked to attend it till several other gentlemen had refused to do so. I was asked to propose the resolutions which I did' To judge from an account in a local newspaper⁽⁷¹⁾ the meeting was attended by organised groups, possibly Union Societies, including about one hundred sailors bearing a Union flag. Kinloch's speech was typical of what was to be heard at radical meetings. He analysed the causes of distress - the expenses incurred by successive governments in the wars against America and France, the additions to the National Debt which resulted and the consequent need for more taxation. He argued that if the people had been represented in the Commons these wars would not have taken place. The remedy for the problem of distress was a radical reform of the Commons - annual elections, universal suffrage and voting by ballot - and this reform he saw as 'a reform to prevent revolution.' Then Kinloch went on to discuss the events at Manchester. 'There, our defenceless countrymen while peaceably and lawfully assembled ... were without warning attacked by a band of ruffians, sword in

71. Dundee, Perth and Cupar Advertiser 12 Nov 1819

hand ... and hacked and hewn down without mercy.... But cruel and infamous as their conduct has been, it is nothing compared to the cool, deliberate villainy of those who set them on. If these reverend and worshipful monsters are not dragged from their hiding places, if they are not put upon their trials for the murder of their fellow citizens, then there is neither law nor justice in England; and the time is near when we must either bow our necks to a military despotism or be prepared to rise like men in defence of our liberties.'

In this last part of his speech dealing with Peterloo Kinloch allowed himself to be carried away by his emotions. His description of the people being hewn down by ruffians is not accurate; but of greater consequence were his remarks about the need to try those responsible for the massacre (presumably he had Sidmouth in mind here) and the need to 'rise like men'. Such a statement could be construed as seditious.

Some of the speeches being made at meetings in the west of Scotland were almost as outspoken in their criticism of government (cf. Spirit of the Union passim) but what was exceptional about this speech at Dundee was that it was made by a landowner, a person of some social consequence. It is possible that the Lord Advocate realised that if radical reformers had such a leader, even although

his leadership might be nominal, they would greatly strengthen their position in Scotland. On 22nd — November, Kinloch was taken from his home to the Tolbooth in Dundee and taken before the Sheriff for examination. He did not deny that he presided at the meeting, or that the account of his speech as reported in the local newspaper was in any way inaccurate. What he did try to emphasise was that the meeting had been conducted in an orderly manner, that no revolutionary group was involved in it and that the meeting had been organised not by him but by a small committee. On 24th November he was released and went home. On 6th December, a copy of an indictment was handed to him at Kinloch House, demanding his attendance at the Court of Justiciary in Edinburgh on 22nd December. He was charged with having delivered 'a speech containing a number of seditious and inflammatory remarks and assertions calculated to degrade and bring into contempt the government of the realm and fill the realm with trouble and dissention.' He went down to Edinburgh to arrange for his defence, and soon learned that the Crown Agent in Edinburgh was 'very easy upon the subject' and would have let the whole matter drop, but unfortunately 'the orders came from London.' (72)

72. Kinloch to Mrs. Kinloch 10 Dec 1819
(Appendix)

Soon, however it became obvious that charges against Kinloch would be vigorously pursued. On 13th December 1819 he received an anonymous letter, signed Ignotus which said that if he conducted his own defence he would certainly suffer; '...if he (Kinloch) pleads ill he must lose it and if well the Judges will say This is a most dangerous person and we will do our country a service and strike terror into the Radicals by showing them that no talent or ability will avail them if we make him an example of severity.'

Kinloch's lawyer had already been in consultation with two Whig lawyers, Cranstoun and Jeffrey, who considered his case hopeless. Cranstoun felt that 'the Gentleman (Kinloch) had destroyed himself... by giving up the notes of his speech'. What he had said about the Manchester business was discussed, and they construed that it was tantamount to an invocation to civil war. They both agreed that to escape conviction was out of the question and Jeffrey thought the punishment could be anything from imprisonment to transportation for life. The possibility of finding out in an indirect way what punishment had been decided on by the Crown was then mentioned, and Pearson, Kinloch's lawyer, thought that he might get this information from Cockburn who was married to the niece of Home Drummond, the Solicitor General. Cockburn was not prepared to make use of his family connections for such a purpose

but he did say that Lord Pitmilley's opinion when Baird had been tried on a similar charge in 1817 (Pitmilley being one of the Judges) was that Transportation was the appropriate punishment. After these discussions Pearson felt that he must advise his client that 'In all periods of political effervescence to retire seems to have been the favourite practice of the best informed of the time.' (73) On 15th December Kinloch wrote to tell his wife that he intended to go to the west of England and from there to France, and for at least the ensuing three years he did not return to Scotland. (74) When his case did come up in court and he was missing, a sentence of fugitation was pronounced.

From November 1819 onwards, frequent references were made to Kinloch as the leader of a reform movement. Yet the truth seems to be that he was caught up in events over which he had no control and he was never at any time in close contact with reformers in any part of Scotland outside the immediate neighbourhood of his home. Kinloch's mistake had been that he had written several letters to the Dundee newspaper defending what he had said at Magdalen Yard Green, and this, along with the fact that he was a landowner, attracted the attention of the authorities. Attacks on the Government and the Manchester officials could be ignored if they were made verbally

73. Patrick Pearson to George Kinloch, dated (incorrectly) 12 Dec 1819 (should probably be 14 Dec 1819) Appendix.

at public meetings by people of no social consequence. When they were made verbally and then repeated in writing by a landowner and Justice of the Peace, this was a much more serious matter.

But the attack on Kinloch was not the cause of the termination of the public reform movement in 1819. Towards the end of the year, it would appear, distress was not so great as it had been in the preceding nine months and possibly for this reason there was a decline in public interest in the question of parliamentary reform. Another reason was that there seemed to be no way in which the reformers could enforce their wishes, petitioning having failed in 1816-17 and there must therefore have seemed little point in holding protest meetings. A third reason was that Parliament acted against the reform movement by passing at the end of 1819 the famous 'Six Acts', which by putting an end to large public gatherings drove the reform agitation underground. One of these six acts re-enacted with some additions the act of 1795 to prevent seditious meetings and assemblies. No meeting of more than fifty people, except County meetings called by the Lord Lieutenant or Sheriff, was to be held to discuss public grievances or anything relating to any trade, manufacture, business or profession, or any matter in church or state, except in the parish which the persons calling the meetings usually inhabited.

Breaking this law would be punishable by transportation for up to seven years. In both Scotland and England large scale meetings of the type held in the second part of 1819 were legally impossible, and this is probably the main reason for the absence of such meetings in 1820 (75)

In several ways this movement of 1819 differed from the earlier movement of 1816-17. In the first place, it drew its support from a more limited social group. In the earlier period, Turner of Thrushgrove and his friends had been the original organisers and meetings were held in all parts of the country. In 1819 however, almost all leadership and support seems

75. Of the Six Acts, four - the Training prevention Act, 60 Geo, 111 c1, the Seditious Meetings Prevention Bill 60 Geo. 111 C6, the Blasphemous and Seditious Libels Bill 60 Geo. 111 C8 and the Newspaper Stamp Duties Bill 60 Geo. 111 C9 - applied to Scotland. A fifth act - the Seizure of Arms act 60 Geo. 111 C2 - applied in Scotland only to the Counties of Renfrew and Lanark, while the sixth, the Misdemeanours Bill, did not apply in Scotland at all. Actions resulting from a breach of these laws were to be brought, according to an instruction contained in the acts, in the Court of Session.

to have come from the lower classes; in July the Glasgow Courier named those who had organised some of the meetings - seventeen weavers and one collier; and meetings seem to have been held almost entirely in the west of Scotland. And at these meetings there is evidence of a more venomous attitude towards Government than was ever displayed in 1816. This is probably to be explained entirely by the horror which was felt after the events at Manchester. Those who opposed the government, whether radical reformers or Whigs, found in this event and the support given to the local magistrates by ministers a convenient focus for their criticism.

Secondly we should note that in 1816 the strongest external influences at work on reformers had been Cartwright and Cobbett whose attitudes influenced the speeches, resolutions taken, and the practice of petitioning. These resolutions were normally ordered to be printed in the sympathetic, but Whiggish, Glasgow Chronicle. By 1819, the more extreme Hunt and Wooler (editor of Black Dwarf) were the strongest influences, and the Glasgow Chronicle, no longer sympathetic, was condemned at meetings ⁱⁿ for sheltering/ 'an air of political equilibrium... between the Whiggish wall of expediency and the frail superstructure of Toryism.' (76) There was no

petitioning; instead there was to be something termed an 'appeal to the people.' (77) What this might be was not explained. Did it mean that all lower classes should unite to exert moral pressure on the Government? Or did it mean an appeal to the governing classes who had rejected the demands of the earlier period; or did it mean the use of physical force? At Broxbrae in December it was agreed to use every legal and constitutional means for accomplishing radical reform, but no attempt was made to explain what these means might be. (78) The leading reformers in 1819, in contrast to those of 1816, were rousing the people, urging them to unite and making demands for a radical reform of government knowing that the only recognised legal, constitutional and workable method of bringing about such reforms had already failed. It was inevitable that such appeals would lead those who considered themselves

77. The 10th resolution at the Clayknowes meeting stated 'Most gladly would this meeting have presented their humble petitions at the feet of His Royal Highness soliciting his interference on their behalf...but from the neglect and even contempt with which their former petitions...have been treated...they prefer the only alternative that remains, an appeal to the people. Let us turn our attention wholly towards the attainment of universal suffrage, annual parliaments and election by ballot for only these can be ours and our Country's salvation.'

78. Spirit of the Union 11 Dec 1819

underprivileged to seek a violent way of obtaining their demands when their requests met with no success.⁽⁷⁹⁾ Thus while the movement encouraged by Cartwright and Cobbett had remained peaceful, with the exception of the relatively small number who joined the secret associations, the movement of 1819, although the organisers tried to maintain peace, led inevitably to violence among those who felt keenly the frustration of achieving nothing and making no impression on an unyielding government.

A third major difference between the movements of 1816 and 1819 was in the degree of organisation exhibited at the public meetings. This was the result of the work of union societies which spread rapidly in Scotland in 1819. As we have seen, they originated in the north of England, in Lancashire and Yorkshire and their expansion in Scotland owed much to a few missionaries who appeared after Peterloo. At the beginning of September, a well-dressed man who claimed to be a delegate from Hull tried to establish contact with Radical Reformers in Glasgow, though he met with no success for it was feared that he might be a spy.⁽⁸⁰⁾ Later in the same month two genuine reformers came from England to Edinburgh where they had little success.⁽⁸¹⁾ Probably

79. Paterson op.cit. 70 and H.O. 102.32 Folio 235 statement by an unnamed radical prisoner sent by Sheriff Robert Hamilton.

80. Glasgow Chronicle 11 Sept 1819

81. H.O. 102.30 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 27 Sep 1819

influenced by the fact that reform societies did exist in the west of Scotland⁽⁸²⁾ they then came through to Glasgow and stayed for several months. They travelled from one meeting to another in the west of Scotland encouraging the people to form Union Societies and suggesting how reform might be brought about.

One of the orators, whose name became well known in Scotland for a time was Joseph Brayshaw from Yeadon. Little is known of him, but he is the author of two pamphlets - An Appeal to the People of England and a Letter to the Lord Advocate of Scotland - both published in 1819. From the former we can learn something of his ideas of parliamentary reform. These ideas in fact are very similar to those expressed by many other reformers. 'Give us the Constitution in its purity and we have what we desire', echoes Cartwright, as does the inaccurate history which follows.⁽⁸³⁾ He then writes about the system of taxation which so greatly oppresses the people and concludes his comments on taxation by saying '...if we are determined to set a firm resolution to regain our liberty, we may render great part of the taxes unproductive.... The taxes upon Tea, Malt, Beer and British spirits during last year amounted to the enormous sum of £12,500,000...and the tax upon Tobacco £2,000,000...which by a determined

82. Glasgow Chronicle 11 Sep 1819

83. Brayshaw Appeal 2

perseverance in denying ourselves of these articles, we may deprive the tyrants of at once.' (84) This idea of self denial did become common among reformers; whether Brayshaw's influence helped to spread such ideas in Scotland is uncertain but we certainly do know that this concept was accepted in Scotland, and we find many reformers suggesting that those who attended meetings should be particularly careful to abstain from drinking liquor, their idea in advocating this being not only to deprive the government of revenue but also to ensure that opponents of reform would have no excuse to accuse reformers of drunkenness.

Brayshaw then stated that his ideas of reform were based on Cartwright's Bill of Rights and Liberties - equal electoral districts, maintenance of voter's roll, voting to take place on the same day in each constituency, vote by ballot, franchise for all men who pay taxes or who are liable to be called on for military service. (85) Brayshaw is therefore strongly in the Cartwright tradition; but whereas Cartwright had advocated petitioning, Brayshaw seeing that this had failed, advocated self-denial.

84. Brayshaw Appeal 6.

Cobbett had calculated that three quarters of the whole revenue came from wine, spirits, tea, coffee and tobacco; if even one third of this were withheld, the consequences would be 'the most beneficial that can be imagined.' Hunt frequently supported Cobbett in this matter.

Read Peterloo 158

85. Brayshaw op.cit. 7-8

In the Letter to the Lord Advocate we find more information about his political ideas but the bulk of the pamphlet is devoted to consideration of how to make these ideas effective since 'petitions were treated with contempt and insult.' (86) He points out that it is in the interest of the enemies of reform to urge acts of outrage because it affords them an excuse for punishing those who are engaged in such proceedings. The means whereby the principles of truth and justice may be established and every man who pays taxes or is liable for military service be given the right to vote is by 'Union and the spread of Political Knowledge.' (87) Although the Union movement seems to have been widespread in the west of Scotland in the last few months of 1819, we have little knowledge of it apart from what is contained in the pages of the Spirit of the Union, a newspaper which survived for only eleven issues. This means that what Brayshaw tells us about Union Societies is of the utmost importance since we can probably assume that the advice he gave and the organisation he described were followed by the Scottish societies which he played an important part in founding and encouraging.

Union Societies were never secret associations; they were assemblies where knowledge might be

86. Brayshaw Letter 35

87. Ibid 36

obtained; their proceedings were open their books and rules open for the inspection of the local authorities.⁽⁸⁸⁾ The acquisition of knowledge was the primary object of any Union Society since ignorance was 'the parent of crime and misery.' Knowledge was to be acquired by reading the works of Reformers or pieces written by the members of the Union and in making remarks upon them, all members of the Union being allowed to read or speak. The expenses of the Union were to be met by the payment of 1d per week by those who were able to afford it, but in fact the expenses would not be great since meetings took place in private houses and for this reason classes were limited to 20 members. (This is very much in the Hull 'Political Protestant' tradition).

Such societies were obviously not planning any revolution; their aim was to enlighten the people at such a low price as to be within the power of any individual. Then having outlined the function of Union Societies, Brayshaw developed a point made in the 'Appeal' - the need to reform one's own character. '...If we reform our own characters and attend strictly to the principles of moral virtue, we shall put those who slander us to silence.'

'The vice of drunkenness is, of all others the most disgraceful...it is absolutely, impossible to place any reliance on a drunkard....' 'In your societies

I would particularly advise you, in a friendly manner, freely to point out anything you may see wrong in each other's character....' (89) Such emphasis on moral reform and on self criticism was new in reform societies; but Brayshaw was particularly anxious about it because by 1819 reformers all over Britain were being branded as irreligious and immoral. The Lord Advocate had informed the House of Commons on December 19th that one of the great evils in Scotland at that time was the diminution of religious feeling among certain classes, and Brayshaw was at pains in his letter to the Lord Advocate to prove that this was not the case. (90) Certainly the picture he presents of Union Societies is not of blood-thirsty plotting to overthrow the government. Rather are they groups of men meeting regularly to improve themselves who hope through time by moral force to bring about a reform of Parliament. A negative approach was recommended to express disapproval of ministers of religion or shopkeepers who were opposed to the reform movement. 'If a parson abuse you and irritate your feelings by falsehoods, instead of breaking his chapel windows, leave him to talk to the benches and get his wages where he can.' 'If a tradesman or shopkeeper endeavour to injure you by taking part with your oppressors, instead of going to

89. Brayshaw Letter 37-8

90. Ibid 31 and 40

make a disturbance, enter his name and his crime in a book so that it may be publicly known and withdraw all your custom from him....' (91)

Brayshaw's plans for bringing about reform could therefore be divided into two categories - those which described the organisation and objects of Union Societies and those which advocated some form of self control or moral force such as abstinence from Liquor, tobacco and unnecessary foods or the shunning of some unsympathetic minister of religion or shopkeeper. Obviously his ideas about Union Societies were practical and sensible; they had been tried with success in England. But the other ideas were much more difficult to put into effect. Brayshaw, like so many other reformers who did not wish to resort to physical force, must have been dismayed by the complete failure of petitioning in 1817; the only alternative he could offer was this idealistic one which did not take into account man's natural weaknesses.

One of the few Union Societies of which we have any record met in Kilmarnock three times weekly - on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays - in the home of a cobbler, William Semple. The ten members of this Society read the Black Dwarf and the Glasgow Chronicle and discussed the more important topics; all were agreed that they wanted no king, Lords, gentry or

taxes, but there is no record of any constructive outcome of their discussions.⁽⁹²⁾ In Strathaven a Society was formed which met in the house of James Wilson and papers such as the Spirit of the Union were read.⁽⁹³⁾

In Paisley, unions seem to have been numerous. Each union of between ten and twenty people met in their workshop at the end of the working day and talked over 'plans of aggressive reformation.' A central council of leaders met once per week, and delegates were sent to Glasgow.⁽⁹⁴⁾ It was also believed that in Renfrewshire, union societies were meeting in hired apartments to read newspapers and pamphlets.⁽⁹⁵⁾ We must remember also that the orderly and large attendance at public meetings is a proof of the extent of Brayshaw's success. At Clayknowes on 1st November, over 3000 of those present were members of his societies.⁽⁹⁶⁾ But it is doubtful if the other things he advocated could succeed. Although it was reported that because of the Radical embargo, some small public houses were threatened with ruin⁽⁹⁷⁾ it is more likely, and would certainly be more human than the reaction of the societies would be similar to that of the Strathaven

92. Paterson op.cit. 63

93. Clydesdale Journal 1 Sep 1820

94. Parkhill The History of Paisley 45

95. H.O. 102.31 Folio 98

96. Glasgow Chronicle 2 Nov 1819

97. Ibid 28 Oct 1819

weavers who thought Brayshaw's ideas of self denial 'impracticable and absurd.' (98) Moreover, even if these economic sanctions had worked they would have been slow to affect the Government and would not have brought the immediate relief the people desired.

The effect of political discussions at Union Society meetings was to evoke a spirit of criticism which was worked up 'by stimulants within and without until nothing short of actual rebellion began to be entertained by the more reckless.' (99) For a time as in 1816-17 the public meetings and discussions that took place there possibly acted as a safety valve; the people perhaps felt that by attending such meetings and voicing their displeasure they were compelling the Government to give some consideration to their distress. By the end of 1819, the more fervent reformers must have realised that nothing positive was being achieved, and, since overt activity had been made impossible by legislation, have come to the conclusion that some more vigorous, secret action must be taken. In London, it had become apparent by September 1819 that the reformers were dividing into revolutionary and constitutionalist wings. Brayshaw's policy of passive resistance in Scotland had its English counterpart in the campaigns conducted by Hunt and Wooler. In both countries,

98. Glasgow Chronicle 28 Oct 1819

99. Paterson op.cit. 73

the constitutionalist wing could not function after the passage of the six acts, and only those who were prepared to meet and plot in secret could continue to function in 1820. At the same time, the attitude of those in authority towards the reform movement was hardening. This can be seen in the speeches made in parliament during the debates on Sidmouth's six Acts; it can also be seen in a letter written by Major General Sir Thomas Bradford to Sidmouth in November 1819. It was his opinion that the country could not be restored to tranquillity 'without serious and energetic action of the military against the mob' and that a conciliatory attitude on the part of the authorities had failed. Firm action would be necessary to calm the fears which were by then spreading among the 'better classes'.⁽¹⁰⁰⁾

Thus by the end of 1819 feelings were such among both governors and governed that serious conflict was almost inevitable.

100. H.O. 102.30 Bradford to Sidmouth 9 Nov 1819. Bradford, Sir Thomas 1777-1853. Entered army 1793. Peninsula 1808; in charge of a brigade in Portuguese army, 1813 - Major General. In France with army of occupation 1815-17. Commander in Scotland 1819-25.

The Radical War

The policy put forward by the revolutionary wing of the radical movement was that on the same day meetings should be held throughout the kingdom and it was possible that these might lead to insurrection. One of the advocates of this policy was Arthur Thistlewood who by the end of October had superceded Hunt in the idolatry of the London populace. It is probable that by November 1819 he had built up an underground chain of communication throughout the country and it was planned that when parliament met on 23rd November, delegates from this underground from London, the west of Scotland, Lancashire, Yorkshire, Birmingham and the Potteries would meet in Nottingham. Throughout the winter of 1819-20 some sort of national underground organisation existed and not until April 1820 did it disintegrate in failure.⁽¹⁾

In the west of Scotland, this underground movement possibly existed as early as July 1819. By then, some communication between the malcontents in Glasgow and those in Lancashire had been established, although the authorities felt that there was little danger and that the Lord Advocate could easily deal with the situation.⁽²⁾ By 10 August 1819 Reddie

1. Thompson op.cit. 694-707

2. H.O. 102.30 Maj. General Hope to Sidmouth 27 July 1819, Sidmouth to Melville 31 July 1819, Melville to Sidmouth 1 Aug 1819

knew that 'the dispositions and views of violence (were) much the same as in 1816-17 including formation of pikes, a nocturnal surprise and seizure of the barracks', but as in 1816 there was a lack of reliable information for as the Lord Advocate wrote, '...the truth is that in Glasgow there is a most defective system of Police and the magistrates have in consequence no certain information of what the disorderly persons have at any time in view.'⁽³⁾ As in 1816, Captain Brown and some of his men were brought from Edinburgh to Glasgow and other places in the west to discover what was happening. Two of Brown's men became members of the reformers' committee sometime after August 14th and remained on it until the end of January 1820.⁽⁴⁾ No mischief could be planned without the authorities having 'the most timely information' but the spies were perhaps unjustifiably proud of their own abilities. During September they found no evidence of military training, but they reckoned it was not needed for most of the reformers had been in the militia or in the line. They also reported that the riots in Paisley and Glasgow in September had been instigated not by the organised reformers but by a gang of dissolute characters from Glasgow; the genuine reformers 'highly disapproved of the proceedings and used every means in their power to dissuade these blackguards

3. H.O.102.30 Reddie to Sidmouth 10 Aug 1819 and Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 13 Aug 1819

4. H.O.102.33 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 8 Sep 1820

from repeating their annoyance, assigning as their reason that such must prove extremely prejudicial to the reform cause.....'(5)

The first hint of real danger came, however, not from these spies on the reform committees but from the Reverend Andrew Scott, the Roman Catholic priest in Glasgow. In his first report at the end of August he stated that he would try to keep Roman Catholics from joining the disaffected, although this would be difficult since his people were mainly Irish of the lower orders and were easily inflamed. 'They are very numerous, very poor, have nothing to lose in a revolution and are flattered by the reformists, with the hopes of ameliorating their circumstances by a revolution.' Nightly meetings were taking place at Eastwood and Neilston, but he did not specify the purpose of these.⁽⁶⁾ His second report, submitted on 22nd September, was much more important. He averred that in November an attempt was to be made to revolutionise the country first in Glasgow and then in Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire, and Ayrshire. The pipes from the gasometers were to be cut, thus plunging the city into darkness and causing confusion; ropes were to be placed across the streets to impede the cavalry and infantry, and when the soldiers were in a state of confusion, the Jail and Barracks would

5. H.O. 102.30 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 19 Sep 1819

6. H.O. 102.30 Report from Reverend Andrew Scott

be attacked and arms obtained to supplement the few weapons - pistols and pikes - which the reformers had. (7)

Another report of reformers being armed came from Renfrewshire in November. Many of those who attended a meeting at Johnstone were armed with pistols while others carried bludgeons. (8) In Paisley the casting of gun bullets was a common occupation and the manufacture of clegs became popular (clegs were made of lead in the shape of a top with an iron spike inserted in the small end. They were for use against Cavalry). (9) In Lanarkshire, it was reported, there was unrest and threats of violence in the parts of the county nearest Glasgow. On November 6th the Duke of Hamilton complained to Sidmouth that the state of men's minds in his area was such that 'the most trifling irritation would lead to disturbances', (10) and on the following day the deputy Lieutenant of the county, David Buchanan, writing from the parish of Old Monkland to the Duke complained of the apprehension that the loyal and well disposed part of His Majesty's subjects suffered because of the ill-disposed and turbulent people by

7. H.O. 102.30 Scott to Sidmouth 22 Sep 1819

8. Glasgow Chronicle 2 Nov 1819, 2 Dec 1819 and H.O. 102.31 Earl of Glasgow to Sidmouth 9 Nov 1819

9. Parkhill op.cit. 49

10. Glasgow Chronicle 9 Dec 1819

whom they were surrounded.⁽¹¹⁾ In the same area, Janet Hamilton commented on the insurgents who 'with their lean, pale, faces, unwashed, unshaved and uncombed, thinly clad, and out at knees and elbows, with reckless and defiant looks' paraded through her village of Langloan to the great terror and annoyance of the peaceable inhabitants, avowing openly that 'when the rising took place every man should help himself as he best could to the possessions of the rich.' And all the time they were busy 'collecting arms, ammunition and all kinds of offensive and defensive weapons such as pikes, pitch-forks and scyth-blades' and were reputedly busy every night casting bullets.⁽¹²⁾ Lord President Charles Hope reported that 'all disguise is now thrown off, even the flimsy pretence of Radical reform is now laid aside. A complete revolution of plunder is avowed to be their object.'⁽¹³⁾

Despite this activity no rising took place in November, but towards the end of the month information came from Paisley that on a certain Sabbath, probably after the meeting of parliament, the radicals would attack the military who were left in the barracks and

11. Glasgow Chronicle 9 Dec 1819

12. Janet Hamilton Reminiscences 362-3

13. Melville Papers Ms.10 f 97. Hope to Melville 9 Nov 1819. Charles Hope (1763-1851) Advocate 1784. 1801 - Lord Advocate. Raised to the bench in 1804. Lord President of the Court of Session 1811.

having overpowered them seize what arms they could.

If parliament did not remedy grievances a general rising would then take place in both Scotland and England.⁽¹⁴⁾

Shortly afterwards Captain Brown provided more specific information. The rising would take place on Monday

13th December and nine counties would be under arms.

From 6am - 10pm the crowds in Glasgow would parade to keep the attention of the soldiers and when the actual rising started, every man would know where to find firearms. Yet Captain Brown stated that he felt no serious apprehension, for trouble could not last long on an extensive scale.⁽¹⁵⁾

As a result of this information, precautions were taken in the Glasgow area. The Lord Provost and Magistrates of the city issued a proclamation warning the inhabitants that a large number of disaffected and ill-disposed people intended to assemble with arms; the 13th Regiment went to Paisley, and the 10th Hussars, the Stirlingshire Cavalry and the Midlothian Yeomanry arrived in Glasgow, the last named of these troops bringing two pieces of

14. H.O.102.31 Lieutenant-Colonel Norcott to Major General Bradford 22 Nov 1819

15. H.O.102.31 General Bradford to Sidmouth 8 Dec 1819, Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 12 Dec 1819

It is interesting to note that in Manchester a new extremist union was established and the leader W.C. Walker attended a delegate meeting at Nottingham called to organise simultaneous meetings for December 13th. The Huntite Radicals opposed these Ultra-Radicals at every stage. Read Peterloo 157

artillery.⁽¹⁶⁾ But on Monday 13th no riotous disturbance took place and not the slightest trouble was caused by great crowds 'whose countenances showed a considerable degree of gloom and disappointment.'⁽¹⁷⁾ No rising took place, it was later discovered, because the delegates from four counties who had assembled in Glasgow were waiting for news from England that rebellion had broken out there, and no such news came.⁽¹⁸⁾ In the west of Scotland only in Kilsyth was there some minor skirmishing when the crowds threw stones and snowballs at the Yeomanry who fired a few shots in return.⁽¹⁹⁾ Otherwise all was quiet; the first Radical attempt at organised rebellion had been a complete failure.

Later in December the Lord Advocate gave it as his opinion that this failure of the Radicals and the flight of their 'great leader' Kinloch had broken their spirit.⁽²⁰⁾ But the spirit of the Radicals was in fact far from broken according to a statement made by one radical prisoner. He said that a number of them who had at first been influenced by

16. Glasgow Chronicle 11 Dec 1819 and 14 Dec 1819

17. H.O. 102.31 13 Dec 1819 General Bradford to Hobhouse (Sidmouth's Secretary)

18 Dec 1819 Anon. letter to Sidmouth

18. H.O. 102.32 Folio 235 Statement by a radical prisoner (not named) sent by Sheriff Robert Hamilton

19. Glasgow Chronicle 16 Dec 1819

20. H.O. 102.31 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 22 Dec 1819

Brayshaw's ideas had now come to believe that reform could come only by force and that their numbers were great and well armed. The failure of 13th December, the result of the failure of reformers in England to start a rebellion, did not deter militant radicals. By this time there were Union Societies (presumably won over to the use of physical force) meeting in Ayrshire, Renfrewshire, Stirlingshire, Dunbartonshire and Lanarkshire and sending delegates to weekly meetings in Glasgow. On 16th December, only three days after the failure of the first intended rising, a committee of seven was established by delegates from Ayr, Kilmarnock, Mauchline, Paisley, Airdrie, Kilsyth and Campsie to supervise measures of reform, this committee or Directory being quite distinct from the older Central Committee. (21)

During the first three months of 1820, preparations for popular action continued. On 15th January, 30 delegates from five counties meeting at Paisley and then at Elderslie agreed to send a delegate to Manchester and other parts of England to seek co-operation for a general strike on March 1st; it would seem that this was to be accompanied by some form of military action, and it was believed that when the 10,000 people firmly united in the

21. H.O. 102.32 Folio 235. Statement by a radical prisoner. H.O. 102.31 Finlay to Sidmouth
22 Dec 1819

radical cause took action they would be joined by many others.⁽²²⁾ At this time also, the Paisley radicals sent one of their prominent leaders, John Neil, to Nottingham to a meeting of delegates there. The news that he brought back was that the Scots were not to take action first. They were on no account to move until they heard of 150,000 people being congregated with arms in their hands.⁽²³⁾ During January, Union Societies were meeting twice per week, and regular meetings seem to have continued during the following two months.⁽²⁴⁾ Committees were also meeting constantly, and at one such meeting the 27 delegates from Lanarkshire Paisley and Dumfriesshire were arrested in a Glasgow tavern. They were thought to be planning a rising at the beginning of March, but unfortunately for the authorities the radicals were able to destroy most of the papers they had with them and no decisive legal action seems to have been taken against them or the other radicals who were arrested shortly afterwards (altogether 33 were arrested within a few days).⁽²⁵⁾ These arrests had no effect on the reformers. On 22nd February

22. H.O. 102.32 Folio 235 Statement by a radical prisoner

23. Parkhill op.cit. 51 (On the other hand the delegate named in the radical prisoner's statement - ref. 21 - is John McIntyre of Paisley)

24. H.O. 102.32 General Bradford to Hobhouse 1 Feb 1820.

25. H.O. 102.32 Report by Sheriff Robert Hamilton 23 Feb 1820

when the delegates were arrested in the tavern, other meetings were going on in Glasgow of which the magistrates had no knowledge.⁽²⁶⁾ After this date they continued to meet and maintained contact with Manchester, Carlisle and Nottingham, though not directly with London. In March 1820 there was constant movement of delegates between England, Scotland and Ireland - 'highly respectable and genteel people' according to one informant.⁽²⁷⁾

The situation in Glasgow was regarded as more serious than anywhere else and it appears that by the month of March the reformers in the north of England were being guided by the Scots. In mid-March a Scottish delegate went to Manchester to warn the various radical sections 'to hold themselves in readiness for the shortest notice ... for an explosion at no very distant period was contemplated.'⁽²⁸⁾ Nor was the danger confined to the urban areas; the area on both sides of the Anglo-Scottish border was 'disaffected to a considerable degree' and radical delegates had even gone as far north as Ross-shire to 'pervert to political mischief' some local trouble there.⁽²⁹⁾

It is apparent that the degree of organisation

- 26. H.O. 102.32 Report from Minister of Houston
(Renfrewshire) 2 Mar 1820
- 27. H.O. 102.32 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 25
Feb 1820, Report by Sheriff Hamilton 1 Mar 1820
- 28. Monteith Letters G.1.2.25 Letter from Thomas
Sharpe, Borough reeve of Manchester 12 Mar 1820
- 29. H.O. 102.32 O.Owens to Lord Anglesey 3 Apr 1820
Monteith Letters G.1.2.28 Letter from Hobhouse

among radicals in the west of Scotland in 1820 was much greater than in 1817. In the earlier period the Glasgow reformers had never succeeded in sending delegates to England and had only the slightest contact (e.g. through Robert Kerr, and Lang the printer) with reformers there. But in 1820 there was constant and often open movement of delegates. Some of these were the advocates of moral force like Brayshaw himself who was certainly in Scotland in September 1819 and thereafter travelled throughout the Glasgow area addressing meetings and helping to form Union Societies; ⁽³⁰⁾ another 'organiser of Sedition' - although it is not clear whether he believed in moral or in physical force - was George Washington, alias Vance, who spent two years in Scotland. ⁽³¹⁾ In connection with the underground organisation that was established in 1819-20 we know that a delegate named Hutton was sent to Nottingham from Glasgow in November or December and that thereafter there was fairly close contact between the west of Scotland and the north of England. ⁽³²⁾

30. Glasgow Chronicle 5 Oct 1819, 29 Feb 1820-
H.O. 102.30 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 27
Sep 1819

31. Letter to the Duke of Hamilton by a British
subject. 66

32. H.O. 102.31 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 22
Dec 1819. Monteith Letters G.1.2.25 Sharp,
Borough reeve in Manchester names the delegate
from Manchester to the North as 'Sellers - about
5ft. 4 or 5 ins, slightly bowed - a light dirty
complexion....'

Although it is probable that no direct contact with London was ever established, nevertheless it is likely that there was contact with Thistlewood's underground organisation directed from the capital. The rumours of trouble in November and December were not confined to the Glasgow area but had counterparts in England; in February, on the day following that intended for the 'diabolical assassination' of the Cabinet (i.e. the Cato Street Conspiracy) large groups of radicals gathered expectantly in Paisley waiting for news; and it was presumably rumours of what was to happen in London that led to the arrest of the Glasgow delegates on 22nd February. One of Sidmouth's informants who believed that there was direct contact with London was the minister of Houston in Renfrewshire. It was this connection, he believed, that had poisoned the minds of the people in the west of Scotland, for the Scots were well educated and had too much good sense 'to rebel against the government had they not been incessantly tampered with by emissaries from England for many years past promising them astonishing melioration of their circumstances, high political power, an agrarian law, exemption from all direct and most indirect taxes.' (33) This English influence did not necessarily come direct from London, and the minister might thus very well be

wrong in assuming that such a link had been established. Yet it would seem that during the first three months of 1820 an organisation whose aim was the overthrow by the use of physical force of the existing system of government was functioning among the lower classes in manufacturing areas in both England and Scotland and that this organisation was much more effective than anything that had existed in 1816-17.

Another weakness in 1816-17 had been the lack of money in the hands of the secret reformers. In 1819, the Union Societies had been well enough organised to take a weekly subscription from members and possibly this idea was taken over or continued by the more violent reformers who were at work in 1820. At any rate, delegates were paid 4s per day when they were sent off on business and their families were cared for in their absence.⁽³⁴⁾ Possibly any money not used for this purpose was used for the provision of arms; during the latter part of 1819 and the first three months of 1820, there was much talk of the manufacture of pikes and the radical 'cleg'.⁽³⁵⁾ For the most part, the authorities found little evidence of the manufacture of arms; Captain Brown was unsuccessful in a search he made in Paisley in December, and the Glasgow Police in another search in February found only 1 complete pike and screw,

34. H.O. 102.32 Folio 235

35. H.O. 102.32 Minister of Houston to Sidmouth 31 Mar 1820; Parkhill op.cit. 49

4 pike screws and 3 pike heads when they raided a smithy.⁽³⁶⁾ In Paisley, the unions were preparing 'with tact and discretion'; but they had no powder, small arms or cannon, and no arrangements for food supplies or care of the wounded should hostilities break out. The weapons the radicals had seemed to be mainly what they could manufacture.⁽³⁷⁾

By March it was thought that there were 500 pikes in the village of Kilbarchan; by 3rd April there were 3-400 pikes in the village of Duntocher; and after the rising in April had failed, pikes and firearms were found in ditches and fields all over the west of Scotland.⁽³⁸⁾ Certainly one may question the value of pikes and old firearms against well armed soldiers, and at Bonnymuir in April 1820 the rebels were almost helpless when attacked by Cavalry. Nevertheless the preparations for rebellion were much more thorough than they had been three years previously and there is much justification for the anxiety which the Government in London and the local authorities showed. Moreover, the reformers were not going to be content with pikes

36. Glasgow Chronicle 16 Dec 1819, 29 Feb 1820

37. Parkhill op.cit. 53

38. H.O. 102.32 Report from minister of Houston
2 Mar 1820

Glasgow Chronicle 6 Apr 1820, 8 Apr 1820

Clydesdale Journal 10 June 1820

and firearms; by 15th January contact had been made with the Carron Iron Works and it was hoped to obtain artillery from there when fighting broke out. (39)

One officer who was on duty in Glasgow at the time wrote that the 'weavers, who had many old soldiers amongst them, had organised themselves into sixteen battalions.... The regiments were formed by streets so that in case of a turn out, they could parade.' Such a degree of organisation, if it in fact existed, was in marked contrast to the lack of organisation in 1816-17. (40)

While the reformers were preparing for armed rebellion the authorities were incessantly on the alert and constantly making preparations to quell any disturbance. The 7th Hussars were billeted in the barracks at Hamilton and in July 1819 one of their officers, Lieutenant Colonel Norcott travelled into Glasgow to discuss with the magistrates the way in which order could best be maintained. The magistrates felt that since 'meetings were secret and sudden and that (there was) seldom any intimation of intended mischief' a great deal of damage might be done before

39. H.O. 102.32 Folio 235. The radical prisoner who made this statement also claimed that the reformers had been studying military tactics and plans of manoeuvre based on a plan by Sir David Dundas - at that time the plan adopted by many regular army units.

40. Smith Autobiography i 325

the army could be informed. Norcott pointed out that there was a regiment of Infantry in the barracks in Glasgow but the magistrates considered infantry of little use in quelling a mob unless the soldiers opened fire; what was needed was cavalry.⁽⁴¹⁾ The magistrates were about to apply for a troop of Dragoons to be stationed in the city during the winter but the problem - which was not solved during the ensuing period of disorder - was where they could be billeted. There were no cavalry barracks in Glasgow and this meant either that cavalry had to be billeted privately or had to be brought in when needed from Hamilton.

Shortly after this, Major General Hope reported to Sidmouth that frequent calls were being made for troops by the magistrates of different towns, including Glasgow.⁽⁴²⁾ It was difficult, he pointed out, to meet these demands since 'the only disposable force (he had) was six or seven companies of infantry in the Barracks of Glasgow and three troops of cavalry at Hamilton Barracks.' He then continued 'Since the peace, all the Artillery horses have been withdrawn from Scotland so that we have not one gun in a state to be transported.' Lord Advocate Rae, who seems to have accepted the trouble very calmly, never-

41. H.O. 102.30 Norcott to Major General Hope 18 July 1819

42. H.O. 102.30 Hope to Sidmouth 26 July 1819

theless was also convinced that more artillery and cavalry were required,⁽⁴³⁾ and it was probably as a result of their complaints that on 5th August a detachment of Horse Artillery left Woolwich for Scotland.⁽⁴⁴⁾ Shortly afterwards, two troops of the 7th Hussars were moved from Hamilton into Glasgow, despite the lack of suitable accommodation.⁽⁴⁵⁾ Some (if not all) had to be quartered in the Eagle Inn, where the proprietor had large stables, and seem to have remained there throughout the winter.⁽⁴⁶⁾ They were immediately joined in the city by three troops of the 10th Hussars, two six pounders and sixteen artillery men.⁽⁴⁷⁾

When in September 1819 there was rioting in Paisley the Sheriff-depute of Renfrewshire and the Provost and magistrates of Paisley asked the Lord-lieutenant to obtain a permanent military force in their district so that trouble could be more easily suppressed although there also the barracks were

- 43. H.O. 102.30 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 3
Aug 1819
- 44. H.O. 102.30 Hope to Sidmouth 9 Aug 1819
- 45. H.O. 102.30 Sheriff R. Hamilton to Sidmouth
10 Aug 1819
- 46. Glasgow Town Council Minutes (unpublished) C.1.1.53.
27 Oct 1819 and 29 May 1820 in which payments to
the proprietor of the Inn were approved.
- 47. H.O. 102.30 Hope to Sidmouth 12 Aug 1819

unsuitable for cavalry.⁽⁴⁸⁾ By December 1819

the force at Glasgow consisted of 4 pieces of artillery, 8 troops of Hussars and 16 companies of infantry in addition to units of volunteers.⁽⁴⁹⁾

By January 1820 the disposition of troops in the west of Scotland was as follows:⁽⁵⁰⁾

	Cavalry	Infantry	Artillery
Glasgow	173	938	55
Paisley	80	255	
Dumbarton	-	51	
Kilmarnock	38	56	
Hamilton	228	-	
Airdrie	30	30	

Only at Dumbarton and at Hamilton were all the troops quartered in permanent barracks and in Glasgow, if not elsewhere, they came into constant conflict with the local populace among whom they were billeted. When the troops were insulted and pelted with stones they could not retaliate and consequently became much exasperated.⁽⁵¹⁾ Certainly the presence of so many troops, almost 2000, in the west of Scotland

48. H.O. 102.30 Sheriff depute of Renfrewshire to Lord Blantyre 18 Sep 1819 and H.O. 102.31

Major General Bradford to Sidmouth 10 Oct 1819

49. H.O. 102.31 Bradford to Hobhouse 13 Dec 1819

50. H.O. 102.32 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 4 Jan 1820

51. Monteith Letters G.1.2.11. Letter from Lt. Col. Norcott 23 Feb 1820 and H.O. 41.4 Sidmouth to Monteith 9 Aug 1819

led inevitably to increased tension in the towns /
where they were billeted.

These regular troops were not the most numerous of those helping to maintain law and order. At the reform meeting at Tollcross in Glasgow on 21st August there were 400 Special Constables to assist the regular police and soldiers in controlling the crowds. But such men would have been of little use in dealing with organised bodies of men who might be armed, and early in August the Town Clerk asked Sidmouth for advice about forming an armed association or corps of volunteer infantry.⁽⁵²⁾ By mid September the formation of a voluntary association was progressing slowly, but the Lord Advocate felt that the rioting after the meeting at Paisley would encourage more people to come forward to restore tranquillity.⁽⁵³⁾ From then onwards frequent mention was made of the recruitment of civilians into temporary volunteer groups. In the counties, units of Yeomanry cavalry were formed, a course recommended by Lord Sidmouth who wished to avoid the employment of regular troops 'unless urgent necessity existed for so doing.'⁽⁵⁴⁾ On September 24th a meeting was held to consider the expediency of raising such a unit for the County of

52. H.O. 102.30 Reddie to Sidmouth 10 Aug 1819

53. H.O. 102.30 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 15 Sep
1819

54. H.O. 41.4 Sidmouth to Monteith 9 Aug 1819

Lanark and the city of Glasgow, and approval was given to proceed, Charles Stirling a well-known Glasgow merchant being appointed Captain and James Oswald, later to be a Member of Parliament, second in command.⁽⁵⁵⁾ Not everyone even among the middle classes, approved of the formation of such units; when in November it was decided in Renfrewshire to raise a troop of Yeomanry cavalry Mr. Maxwell the M P for the county thought that the time of all could be better spent in finding work for the unemployed.⁽⁵⁶⁾ Although Charles Hope complained of apathy in the east of Scotland where radicalism was not such a great threat, volunteer units were soon to be found in many parts of Scotland.⁽⁵⁷⁾ One of the areas where enthusiasm was inadequate was in North Lanarkshire; here the farmers and others who wished to volunteer did not dare to come forward because of the menaces of their neighbours. 'This part of the county' the Duke of Hamilton explained 'is unfortunately surrounded by idle Irishmen, weavers and colliers who create a general uneasiness.'⁽⁵⁸⁾

Infantry units were also raised. In October it was decided by the JPs of Lanarkshire that a

55. Glasgow Chronicle 28 Sep 1819

56. Ibid 6 Nov 1819

57. Melville Papers Ms. 10 f 97. Hope to Melville
9 Nov 1819

58. Glasgow Chronicle 9 Dec 1819

voluntary force should be formed and some time afterwards ten of the leading men in Glasgow undertook to raise each a company of 100 individuals.⁽⁵⁹⁾ Possibly this decision was made after a proclamation issued on 15th November by the Lord Provost in which he called for 'the active aid of the loyal and well disposed part of the community to suppress the attempts of the turbulent and disaffected;' this same request was made earlier by the Lord Provost to the Commissioners of Police for help in raising and establishing an armed association 'for protection of peace and tranquillity.'⁽⁶⁰⁾ What eventually emerged were two distinct bodies the Sharpshooters and the Armed Association. The former was composed of youths 'of education, of sober habits, of unblemished character, able and willing to pay for the cost of the requisite military accoutrements and dress....' The 1000 volunteers who were required soon appeared - among them Peter Mackenzie the great radical of later years and tormentor of Richmond - and from 6 to 9 am and from 7 to 10 pm they trained each day. That they trained to some purpose can be gauged from the opinion of Sir Harry Smith - 'This corps more nearly deserved the comprehensive

59. Melville Papers Ms. 10 f 97. Hope to Melville 30 Oct 1819; Mackenzie - Reminiscences i. 219 ff

60. Glasgow Police Minutes 27 Aug 1819

appellation 'soldiers' than any corps ever did except those of the line' and their duties were 'executed with cheerfulness and prompt obedience.'⁽⁶¹⁾ By

mid December this body had begun to do duty but the formation of the other group had been much slower.

On 7th December the Lord Provost stated that the magistrates were disappointed in the response to their request of 15th November and the Commissioners of Police were asked to go round their respective wards to encourage people to join.⁽⁶²⁾ Their visits must have produced some results, for on 14th December, the Armed Association met in the Trades Hall to choose its officers, Major Mackie being appointed commandant on the motion of the Lord Provost; but the membership of the Armed Association never reached 500, i.e. less than half the membership of the Sharpshooters.⁽⁶³⁾ The Government supported both associations by sending 1500 stand of arms and in Mackenzie's opinion, they were now more than a match for radicals armed only with pikes. The difficulties which the Volunteers faced in carrying out their training are described by Charles Hutcheson. 'The walk in the Green was a continued sheet of ice and many of us fell upon it, regularity was out of the

61. Smith Autobiography i, 329

62. Glasgow Police Minutes 7 Dec 1819; H.O. 102.31
Finlay to Sidmouth 15 Dec 1819

63. Glasgow Chronicle 9 Dec 1819, 16 Dec 1819

question, our guns we durst not load nor fix our bayonets as it might have been dangerous to ourselves.' In view of this, it must surely be questionable if high standards of preparation would be reached.⁽⁶⁴⁾

In addition to these military preparations which provided Glasgow and the surrounding area with volunteer cavalry and infantry in addition to the regular troops, efforts were made to improve the Glasgow Police and make them better able to cope with the situation. In August, blame for the defective state of the police was laid on Mitchell, their captain, and he was ordered by the committee to be more active in his duties;⁽⁶⁵⁾ probably to assist him to cope with the alarming situation, the police establishment was increased in October to a total of 157, but no attempt was ever made to relieve Mitchell and his men of their many other duties.⁽⁶⁶⁾ On 9th December it was agreed to arm the police (presumably the officers) and on 12th January it was decided to issue cutlasses to patrolmen.⁽⁶⁷⁾ The final attempt to improve 'at as moderate a rate of remuneration as possible' 150 men to form small parties to patrol the streets along with the patrolmen.⁽⁶⁸⁾ But even with these changes, the Police Force in Glasgow

64. Notebook of Charles Hutcheson, 30

65. Glasgow Police Minutes 27 Aug 1819

66. Ibid 14 Oct 1819

67. Ibid 16 Dec 1819, 12 Jan 1820

68. Ibid 30 Mar 1820

remained totally inadequate in a city of over 100,000 people. The magistrates in Glasgow would certainly never have agreed that a larger, unarmed police force might be more effective than the armed soldiers they so frequently asked for, or that they themselves by recruiting and arming so many volunteers might be ensuring the probability of armed conflict.

The two sides now waited for something to happen. Throughout February and March there were reports of the continuing preparations of the radicals, but still there was an absence of accurate information.⁽⁶⁹⁾ On 20th March the borough reeve of Manchester told Lord Provost Monteith that he thought the radicals were planning 'an explosion at no very distant date,' and on the same day in Glasgow, a plan to set fire to the city that night was reported.⁽⁷⁰⁾ On 26th March the Lord Provost informed Sidmouth that it was possible a rising might take place towards the end of the week, but the information he had was vague, and Sidmouth felt it was not enough to act on. Before the end of the week the Minister of Houston reported that he also had heard rumours of a rising on the following day.⁽⁷¹⁾ What must have seemed conclusive proof that a rising in Scotland was

69. Notebook of Charles Hutcheson 31

70. Monteith Letters G.1.2.25 Letter from Borough reeve of Manchester 20 Mar 1820; G.1.2.27 Letter from Norcott 20 Mar 1820

71. Ibid G.1.2.30 Letter from Hobhouse 29 Mar 1820
H.O. 102.32 Report from Minister of Houston 31 Mar 1820

imminent was the rumour that Kinloch of Kinloch had returned and had been at Paisley, Glasgow and Hamilton accompanied by some French officers.⁽⁷²⁾

By the end of March the Manchester radicals were ready to rise, once someone else had begun hostilities.⁽⁷³⁾ Near Huddersfield there was an irresolute rising on 31st March; two hundred men assembled but dispersed when other support did not materialise.⁽⁷⁴⁾ It was left to the Scots to take the lead.

On the morning of Sunday, 2nd April, people in many parts of south-west Scotland awoke to find an Address to the Inhabitants of Great Britain and Ireland displayed in many public places. This Address was obviously written by people who had been influenced by Cartwright; the authors claimed that their principles were 'founded on the basis of our constitution which was purchased with the dearest blood of our ancestors', that they were trying to give back to Britons 'those rights consecrated to them by Magna Charta and the Bill of Rights' and 'to restore them to their native dignity.' It was also

- 72. Monteith Letters G.1.2.31 Letter from Lockhart of Carnwath 1 Apr 1820
- 73. Monteith Letters. G.1.2.32 Letter from Borough reeve of Manchester 1 Apr 1820
- 74. Thompson op.cit. 706-7

a document which rejected completely Spencean doctrine of land ownership. 'Equality of rights (not of property) is the object for which we contend; we think it indispensably necessary to declare inviolable all public and private property.' Such statements were presumably meant to allay the fears of the property owning classes and encourage them to join a movement which was claimed to be in the interests of all classes of society. Respectability was emphasised - 'we are not that lawless, sanguinary rabble which our oppressors would persuade the higher circles we are, but a brave and generous people, determined to be free.' 'And we hereby call upon all Justices of the Peace and all others to suppress pillage and plunder of every description.'

But the Address was essentially a document inciting the people to commit treason, or, at the very least, to cause tumult and disorder. A call for 'Liberty or death' implies that there will be fighting, presumably involving the forces of established government. Assistance to free the country and the King 'from the power of those who have held them too long in thralldom' was sought from the army. Soldiers were reminded that they might be called upon to support a cruel faction against their fathers and brothers. Could they not therefore follow the example of Spain, where a union of soldiery and people

had put an end to 'the yoke of hated despotism'? This, of course, was incitement to mutiny. The people in general were also encouraged to come forward 'and assist those who have begun in the completion of so arduous a task' - to 'sweep from our shores that corruption which has degraded us below the dignity of man.' Finally, there was a call to strike - 'we earnestly request of all to desist from their labour from and after this day, the 1st of April.... We therefore recommend to the proprietors of public works and all others, to stop the one and shut up the other until order is restored, as we will be accountable for no damages which may be sustained....'

Like so much radical propaganda of the period, the Address displayed defects which can easily be criticised. It was too long - like many of the speeches at radical meetings - and imprecise. What were the rights which were being claimed? How could soldiers refuse to obey orders without being mutinous? On what authority could they request Justices of the Peace to help them? Obviously, little thought had been given to these points. The only thing in the Address that really was clear was the call to strike. It was in their widespread ^{no} ~~abstention~~ ^{striking} abstention from employment on 3rd April that the lower classes in the towns showed their support for rebellion; on the other hand, few took arms or gave

active support to the Committee of Organisation for forming a Provisional Government.

The Address was displayed not only in prominent radical centres such as Glasgow, Paisley and Kilsyth, but throughout south-west Scotland even in the byways of South Ayrshire.⁽⁷⁵⁾ The speed and secrecy which surrounded the distribution of this document surprised the general public, and later radical writers denounced it as a Government manoeuvre to ensnare the people. Peter Mackenzie the chief of these writers stated that it had been drawn up in a house in the Gallowgate in Glasgow by a group of 28 people who were encouraged to contemplate rebellion by John King 'who must have been a spy'.⁽⁷⁶⁾ Parkhill states that one of the radical leaders in Paisley was John King, and there is no suggestion that he was a spy. In fact 'the business of reform in Renfrewshire was conducted with great regularity and secrecy and from the commencement till the time it was broken up it is perfectly evident that never was a spy amongst them.'⁽⁷⁷⁾ But this meeting (see p. 194) had no connection with the address and there is no evidence that Government spies had any part in its preparation. The truth would seem to be that several meetings of reformers were held to prepare this document. The main speakers at these meetings were

75. Ayr Advertiser 13 Apr 1820

76. Mackenzie Exposure of the Spy System 74

77. Parkhill op.cit. 45

Robert Craig, James Armstrong and James Brash, all weavers in Parkhead. Of these three, there is no doubt about the bona fides of Craig and Armstrong. Craig was a well-known reformer who was eventually honoured in 1835 by his fellow weavers for his devotion to the cause of reform and trade unionism;⁽⁷⁸⁾ James Armstrong had been prominent in the earlier agitation in 1816, had acted as host to the orator Brayshaw during part of his stay in Glasgow, and was arrested in April 1820, though released without being brought to trial. Of the third man, Brash, nothing is known beyond the fact that he also was arrested in 1820 and like Armstrong and many others, released without trial.⁽⁷⁹⁾

After the Address was finally prepared at a meeting at a house in Calton, and written by Robert Craig, these three men went to the house of John Wilson, another prominent reformer. Then they sent for Robert Fulton and John Hutchison, two young printers employed by Duncan McKenzie. Fulton, whose father was a well-known itinerant lecturer and correspondent of Cartwright and who was himself a member of a Union Society, immediately agreed to print

78. H.O. 102.33 Statement by Prisoner and Weavers Magazine, 1835. McKenzie suggests (Exposure of the Spy System 79, 92 ff) that John Craig was a spy and the author of the Address.

79. Glasgow Chronicle 1 Oct 1816, 24 Aug 1819, 28 Feb 1820 H.O.102.33 Statement by Prisoner. Another reputed author of the Address was John Anderson who was arrested in April 1820 and not released until August. Glasgow Chronicle 8 Apr 1820, 4 Aug 1820

the document, but it took some time to persuade Hutchison to do so. Working from 4 am until McKenzie arrived the two men produced 2005 copies of the Address which was then stored in Wilson's house. Then they were distributed to members of the Committees which were meeting regularly in Glasgow and were ready for display on Sunday 2nd April.⁽⁸⁰⁾

In Glasgow, many copies were posted in prominent places especially in Bridgeton. James Hardie, a JP for Lanarkshire who lived in Duke Street in the east end of the City, was attracted about 8.30 am by a crowd looking at a placard that had been pasted on a watchman's box. One of the many erroneous statements made by Peter Mackenzie was that Hardie lived elsewhere in Glasgow; and he deduced that his presence in the east end of the city was part of a plot to ensnare Andrew Hardie.⁽⁸¹⁾ When he tried to remove the placard he was restrained by one of the onlookers, Andrew Hardie, an incident that was to be of importance in Hardie's trial at Stirling on a charge of High Treason. The effect of the Address was apparent on the following day when 'the streets were crowded in a very tumultuous manner' and there was a constant bustle in Glasgow.⁽⁸²⁾ Men were to be

80. Stevenson A true narrative of the Radical Rising in Strathaven, 4

Fraser Memoirs of John Fraser, 21

81. Mackenzie, Exposure 91

82. Notebook of Charles Hutcheson 39

seen walking about the streets in military array in companies of about 60. Many weavers, cotton-spinners, machine makers, founders and colliers ceased work though very few took up arms; and despite large numbers in the streets and the pseudo-militarism of some, there was no disturbance. (83)

In the suburbs there was more activity. Two thousand met at Sandyhills to the south east of the city and agreed to assemble and drill there on the following day; in Cambuslang the panic among law-abiding people was so great that many left their homes at night and remained in the fields and glens until daylight. Parties were drilling at Dalmarnock in south east Glasgow, at Tollcross in the east end, and at many other places and all this without interruption from the authorities. (84)

But despite their seeming inaction, the authorities did not view what was taking place with equanimity. Colonel Norcott commanding the garrison in Glasgow thought that by Tuesday 4th April the use of armed force had become necessary because the 'system of terror and intimidation' had been carried to such a pitch. (85) On Wednesday, between four and six hundred people paraded in Bridgeton and Calton, summoned by the sound of the bugle, carrying colours, muskets, pistols and pikes

83. Glasgow Chronicle 6 Apr 1820

84. Letter to Duke of Hamilton from a British Subject

85. Monteith Letters G.1.2.37 Letter from Norcott

and firing the muskets as they searched for more arms. On the same day a report reached Glasgow that a large body of radicals was marching on the city and therefore the shops were closed, the Hussars, the Rifle Brigade and 13th Regiment of foot proceeded to guard the different entrances to the city and the magistrates had eleven well known radicals arrested. (86)

Although there was thus the greatest panic on Wednesday and the authorities were probably viewing events with increasing trepidation, in fact no radicals did march on Glasgow on that day and many of the strikers were beginning to return to work. Nevertheless, the danger of armed rebellion persisted until the end of the week; on Friday 7th April about 40 armed men from Bridgeton entered Kirkintilloch to assist the people there whom they understood to be in revolt. But by the following day, the radicals were reported to be throwing away their weapons

86. Glasgow Chronicle 6 Apr 1820, 18 Apr 1820
and Notebook of Charles Hutcheson 45

Sir Harry Smith, at this time a young officer described how he was sent out one day to make some arrests. 'I saw a violent storm of mob assembling.... On my word they were violent and the Hussars with the flat of the swords, as I particularly directed did make the heads of some ache while brickbars, stones, etc., were flying among us half as bad as grapeshot. The magistrates were horribly timid and frightened lest I should order the troops to fire. I said 'You command' which in those days they did, nor could the officer fire according to law without their order'... Smith Autobiography 1

and the editor of the Glasgow Chronicle could describe the events of the preceding five days as 'the wildest and most ridiculous in the records of the world.'⁽⁸⁷⁾ This is certainly an exaggeration but, on the whole, the attempt at armed rebellion had been a very damp squib. Few people had appeared bearing arms - fewer than 250 according to the Chronicle - and the only real attempts to begin a rebellion had been made on Wednesday 5th April by a small group marching from Glasgow to Falkirk and on Thursday 6th by a small group of weavers from Strathaven who marched to Cathkin and the southern outskirts of the city. Even non-militant action was ineffective since by the following week the strike had ended.

Throughout the week the Lord Provost and Town Council in Glasgow had been constantly on the alert, acting to prevent a rebellion taking place and trying to discover something of the origins of the Address. On Monday 3rd April they issued a proclamation ordering all shops to shut at 6 pm each night and imposing a curfew at 7 pm. Parties or groups of people standing together or walking in the streets after this hour were to be deemed disturbers of the peace; if lamps in the street were out, householders were asked to illuminate their windows with as much

87. H.O. 102.32 Anonymous Letter 7 Apr 1820
Glasgow Chronicle 8 Apr 1820

light as they could conveniently command. On the following day, the Lord Provost and Magistrates promised a reward of £300 to any person who gave information about the author, printer or publisher of the Address. They stated that the Address directly and openly proclaimed rebellion against the King (which it could be argued was not true since in the last paragraph the Address proclaimed support for the King) inciting and stimulating people to take up arms for the overthrow of the government and constitution as by law established. A third proclamation which appeared on the same day mentioned the 'audacious address' which involved the authors in the guilt of High Treason. All those who had been induced to strike work were warned that they would be considered as participators in the guilt and would be exposing themselves to the certain punishment of High Treason. The magistrates had obviously given little thought to the difficulties that they would encounter in implementing such a policy.⁽⁸⁸⁾ On the other hand it is possible that they realised that the publication of the Address could be used as an excuse to punish and intimidate reformers whom they had disliked and feared for several years. Turner of Thrushgrove, for example, was arrested and kept in prison until

88. H.O. 102.32 Folios 320, 321
Mackenzie, Exposure 76 ff

18th April. Later he claimed that he had been the 'victim of tyrannical power and malignant persecution, for which there was little chance of redress and that merely because (he) had not concealed (his) being friendly to the cause of Parliamentary Reform.' (89)

Another prisoner was Alexander Rodger, the radical poet, who commemorated his imprisonment in 'Letters written in a certain Bridewell.'

'But what's the reason I'm confined'
 Nae reason, troth, can be assigned
 Unless it be I chance to differ
 Frae them wha' will that I should suffer
 And that my views o' politics
 Accord not wi' some statesman's tricks.'

He later commented that those who sere 'seized by dizzens' were those who 'raised their voices loud and strang against what they conceived was wrang.' (90)

The efforts of the magistrates to find the authors of the Address were supported by the Government. On 8th April a royal proclamation was issued offering a reward of £500 for information leading to the conviction of those who had affixed or published the declaration. (91) Armstrong and Brash were, as we have seen, arrested but not prosecuted. Fulton escaped to Kilsyth, where presumably

89. Turner Recollections 47 ff

90. A. Rodger Poems

91. Monteith Letters G.1.2.42 Copy of royal proclamation

no one knew him, and Hutcheson went to Greenock from whence he fled to America. Craig and Wilson, who had also been concerned in preparation and distribution of the Address absconded and were never detained.⁽⁹²⁾ Thus the efforts made by the magistrates and the Government to fix on someone or some people responsibility for the printing, publishing and posting of the Address failed completely and gave later writers, such as Mackenzie, the chance to charge the authorities with having been themselves responsible for it.

The authorities also decided to overawe the reformers by a show of military strength. The second proclamation of 4th April had referred to the great military strength in the city and during the following few days there was movement of regular soldiers and groups of volunteers to places such as Glasgow, Paisley and Kilmarnock where trouble was expected.⁽⁹³⁾ In Glasgow on 3rd April the following troops were on duty - from half past four on the morning of Monday 3rd April⁽⁹⁴⁾ the garrison at the Barracks, 700 Sharpshooters in George Square, the Armed Association (presumably all 500 of them) in St. Enoch Square and the Glasgow Light Horse in St. Vincent Street. Regular troops in the area consisted of detachments of the Rifle Brigade, 13th, 80th and

92. H.O. 102.33 Folio 357

93. Glasgow Chronicle 4 Apr 1820

94. Hanna op.cit. ii 261

83rd regiments of foot, 7th and 10th Hussars and the Royal Artillery. In addition there was the Yeomanry Cavalry from the Middle and Upper wards of Lanarkshire at Hamilton and Airdrie, the Stirling and Kilsyth Yeomanry Cavalry at Kilmarnock, Volunteers from Port Glasgow at Paisley along with the Ayr Veteran Battalion, and in Glasgow a troop of the Dunbartonshire Yeomanry Cavalry, the Ayrshire Yeomanry Cavalry and the Midlothian Cavalry along with smaller groups such as Cambuslang Yeomanry Cavalry and the Kilbride Yeomanry Cavalry, whose total membership was about 200.⁽⁹⁵⁾ We do not know the total number of those involved, but there must have been some thousands of armed men in south west Scotland. The movement of these men would of itself have created tension and would deter all but the most fervent radicals from taking up arms. Yet despite the overwhelming supremacy which the armed supporters of the authorities must have enjoyed over their radical opponents, many people went in fear of their lives, convinced, as Sir Walter Scott was, that large numbers of blackguards were ready to rise. Chalmers stated that many of the citizens of Glasgow 'were in a sad state of terror and disturbance and would willingly have purchased the privilege of walking securely in our streets and sleeping securely

95. Glasgow Burgh Records 2 May 1820

Glasgow Chronicle 4 Apr 1820, 15 Apr 1820

in their houses at the expense of half their fortune.'⁽⁹⁶⁾ Lord Cockburn thought that seven-eighths of the Tories were 'stuffed with similar nonsense.'⁽⁹⁷⁾

When the radicals did resort to arms their efforts were futile and pathetic. The risings which took place in Glasgow and Strathaven had never any chance of achieving anything, so haphazard was their whole organisation. Of the origins of the rising in Glasgow which ended at Bonnymuir we have little evidence. According to Mackenzie, a meeting took place at Glasgow Green on the morning of Tuesday 4th April. There the delegates from the various local societies were informed that Manchester and other centres in England were afraid to act but would rise if Glasgow were to strike the first blow. (Cf. p.210) The Unions when informed of this were divided in their opinion of what should be done. Another meeting of delegates was held in the afternoon and it was reported that about half of the Unions were willing to act. A third meeting was held at 8 pm at Port Eglinton when it was stated by Duncan Turner, one of the leaders of the rebellion, that 100 men from the Unions there represented should go with 100 men from Anderston to Carron Iron Works to secure a large quantity of arms and ammunition and two pieces of cannon. Those who were prepared to go were to

96. Hanna op.cit. ii 525

97. Cockburn Memorials 345

assemble near the High Kirk between 10 and 11 pm. Eventually about 60 men gathered there, but the Anderston party did not appear. For this reason, Dougald Smith who had been nominated commander refused to take part and many others felt the same. At last a much smaller group led by Andrew Hardie set off. (98)

Marching throughout the night they reached the village of Condorrat about 5 am. By then the party numbered about 24 much to the disappointment of John Baird of Condorrat a Peninsular veteran to whom the Glasgow party had been directed and who was supposed to be the leader of a large party waiting to join the Glasgow contingent. Hardie for his part was most disappointed that instead of the 50 or 60 waiting to join him there were no more than a dozen. So far there had been nothing but disappointment for the rebels; the party from Glasgow which should have

98. Mackenzie Exposure 93-112. It is unfortunate that we have at this point no other source of information. At the later trials for treason much was learned about the events on the march but it is difficult to discover why Hardie and his friends were persuaded or were prepared to go to Carron. Andrew Hardie born 1793 in the village of Auchinairn to the north of Glasgow. His father was a weaver and this was the trade he followed. He served for five years in the Berwickshire militia until 1815 and then seems to have been unemployed. Otherwise little is known of him.

numbered 200 was little more than a tenth of that figure while the Condorrat party was only about one fifth of the strength expected. In all, therefore, fewer than 40 men set off from Condorrat to make their way to Carron. (99)

By 6.30 am the rebels were at Castlecary Bridge and in a tavern there they had porter and bread. About 7 am they set off once again, but immediately split into two groups. One small group under Hardie went by road towards Falkirk, the other under Baird going along the banks of the canal. Inevitably, the group on the road encountered some travellers - a man on horseback going towards Glasgow who took their advice not to continue; a trooper on his way from Stirling to join his unit at Kilsyth who was allowed to continue because he claimed that he was a former weaver and as such was sympathetic to their cause. (100) Hardie's group also entered a house near the road and took possession of a fowling-piece. Eventually when they were about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles beyond Bonnybridge the party on the road went down to join the others and wait for news. This, when it came, was disappointing; the people of Camelon were unwilling to join them. Accordingly the rebels decided to go up on the moor, pass the day there and

99. Green Trials for Treason i 213 ff

100. Ibid 184

return under cover of darkness to Glasgow. For about half an hour they remained near the top of the hill until about 9.30 am a troop of cavalry arrived from Kilsyth.⁽¹⁰¹⁾

This troop consisted of some members of the 10th Regiment of Hussars under Lieutenant Ellis Hodgson and a detachment of the Stirlingshire Yeomanry Cavalry, a force numbering about 32 all told.⁽¹⁰²⁾

The 10th Hussars had travelled through the night from Stirling and had reached Kilsyth only at 5.30 am. At some indeterminable time, probably after 8 am, news of the presence of rebels in the vicinity was received. The soldiers retraced their steps towards Falkirk and on the way were told by some local inhabitants where the rebels were to be found. When the cavalry approached, the men on the moor gave a cheer and ran down the hill towards them to take up position behind a dyke, and when the opposing groups were about 60 yards apart, opened fire. The Hussars and Yeomanry continued to advance and when they were almost at the dyke Lieutenant Hodgson called on the rebels to lay down their arms. This they refused to do, so he jumped through a space in the dyke followed by his men. Almost immediately the radicals took to flight, but they were chased and just over half of them captured.⁽¹⁰³⁾ Eighteen prisoners were taken

101. Green Trials for Treason i 213 ff

102. Ibid 194

103. H.O. 102.32 Folio 392

to Stirling and one left on the field very badly wounded. The weapons captured comprised 16 pikes, and one pike handle, a pitchfork, 5 muskets or guns and 2 pistols. Thus ended the Battle of Bonnymuir with the complete defeat of the rebels. The only injury suffered by the soldiers had been one sergeant severely wounded by shot and a pike, and Hodgson's hand grazed; one horse was killed and three horses wounded. (104)

At first there were rumours in Glasgow that the rebels had triumphed and there was great rejoicing; in Tollcross, for example men, women and children

104. This account of Bonnymuir is taken from official reports. The accounts of Bonnymuir contained in local histories are quite different. For example, Robert Gillespie in 'Round about Falkirk' gives an account which emphasises the treachery of John King and the bravery of the Radicals 'The Radical party - who in the field numbered some twenty- (held) both Yeomanry and Hussars at bay.... Repeatedly is the attempt made by the Hussars to get through upon the Radicals but these - hear it O Shade of Richmond - are successfully repulsed by a thick mustering of pikes. Eventually however the horsemen get round to the 'rebel' ranks when the majority of the civilians ... throw down their arms and run.' Mention is made later of several Radicals being badly wounded which was not true. The aim of this, and many other accounts was, of course, to stress the valour of the Radicals; in fact, from the official reports, and even from Andrew

Hardie's own letters, the 'battle' was a very short affair with few injuries on either side.

came on to the streets bearing arms and marched forth only to disperse when the real result was known; it was possibly for the same reason that radicals paraded in Bridgeton and Calton (see page 216).⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ When the real situation became known, however, the threat to public order in Glasgow diminished considerably. It was probably the fiasco at Bonnymuir that convinced the majority of the lower classes that they could achieve little on their own and that they would be well advised to return to work for after Wednesday 5th April there was little revolutionary activity in Glasgow and 'the ridiculous, desparate, insane rebellion' there came to an end.⁽¹⁰⁶⁾

During the few days that the Radical War lasted there was activity in several other places - in Paisley, in Duntocher and in parts of Ayrshire - but the only other armed rising which took place was in Strathaven, about 16 miles south of Glasgow. This town, composed to a large extent of weavers, had been noted for its radicalism for many years. In 1792 and 1793 a Society of Friends of the People had sent delegates to the conventions in Edinburgh, and even although support for radicalism declined somewhat after this, Strathaven continued to be a radical stronghold.⁽¹⁰⁷⁾ An invitation was received

105. Letter to Duke of Hamilton 16

106. Scotsman 22 Apr 1820

107. Meikle op.cit. 147 and Appendices A and B

in 1794 to take part in another convention; in 1797 delegates assembled there to consider taking joint action at the time of the Tranent riot.⁽¹⁰⁸⁾ A petition against the Corn Laws was presented in 1815; one of Cartwright's followers delivered lectures there on universal suffrage and annual parliaments; a Union Society was formed in 1819 and was addressed by Brayshaw.⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ It is not surprising therefore that some Strathaven radicals became actively involved in the Radical War in 1820.

After the Radical War, three men were to be executed for their part in the rebellion; Andrew Hardie and John Baird were captured at Bonnymuir and about them we know comparatively little, but James Wilson of Strathaven had been a much more prominent reformer and we therefore have more information about him. He was born in Strathaven in 1760 and spent his entire life there, working as a stocking weaver.⁽¹¹⁰⁾ He was also noted as a watch and clock repairer and frequently acted as a gunsmith, repairing weapons of all types. Throughout the town he was highly regarded as an honest, capable workman. His interest in politics can be traced back to 1793 when he joined the Friends of the People. He later corresponded with Skirving (who was transported) and

108. Meikle op.cit 152, 182

109. Glasgow Chronicle 4 Mar 1815. Clydesdale Journal 1 Sep 1820

110. Green Trials for Treason ii 33. Clydesdale Journal 1 Sep 1820

in 1805 and 1815 with Lord Archibald Hamilton who was MP for the area. In 1815 he was chairman of the meeting held to petition against the Corn Laws.

When Brayshaw visited Strathaven he stayed at Wilson's house and when a Union Society was formed, Wilson was the class leader and meetings took place in his house.⁽¹¹¹⁾

During the 1790's he had obtained a copy of Paine's 'Age of Reason' and he encouraged its study in the town; in 1819 the Society of which he was leader studied Cobbett's Register, the Black Dwarf and other inflammatory material. Thus by 1820 Wilson was 'revered as the father of reform and looked up to with respect and esteem by all those who were warmed with zeal for the liberty of their country.'⁽¹¹²⁾

But although he had been active in the cause of reform for over 20 years and was obviously the leading radical in Strathaven, there is nothing in his biography to suggest that he, at the age of 60, would willingly and enthusiastically take part in an armed rebellion and encourage others to do likewise. Yet he did take part in such an escapade and although it emerges from the evidence at his trial that he was by no means the leader he was the only one who suffered punishment. One is left with the impression that Wilson was executed not because he took a small

111. Green op.cit. ii 143

112. Stevenson op.cit. 11

part in the Strathaven rising in 1820 but because he had been a prominent though peaceful reformer for so many years.

In 1820 the Strathaven reformers, presumably the members of the Union Society founded in 1819, had established contact with the Secret Committee in Glasgow, their delegate being Robert Hamilton.⁽¹¹³⁾ On 1st April he returned from the city with about 200 copies of the Address and by the following morning these were displayed throughout the town.⁽¹¹⁴⁾ By Monday its contents must have been known to many of the inhabitants and as a result most of the workers were idle, though we do not know how long the strike continued. On the Monday evening a meeting was held at a farm called Three Stanes about half a mile outside the town. There, 40-50 people were addressed by William Robertson and John Stevenson. The former informed his audience that it was now time to draw the sword in defence of liberty and to refrain from compromise. 'If we succeed it will not be a rebellion, it will be a revolution and we shall receive the gratitude and thanks of a free and happy nation.' The latter also urged support for armed rebellion. 'We must and shall have justice; our petitions must no longer be insulted; our demands must and shall be conceded;... we must unfurl the red flag of defiance and trust to God and our own

113. Stevenson op.cit. 11

114. Green op.cit. ii Evidence of Brownlee and Shearer

right arms for the salvation of ourselves, our families and our fatherland.' (115) By acclamation it was agreed that the moment word arrived from the Secret Committee in Glasgow they would muster, march to the city and take part in the struggle. (116) It was also proposed that arms be borrowed and for the next two days some of the radicals were busy casting bullets and making cartridges under the direction of an old artillery man. By Wednesday, 2-300 bullets and cartridges had been manufactured, some weapons had been obtained arms cleaned and powder received from Glasgow and elsewhere. (117)

Strathaven was comparatively isolated from the revolutionary areas and the secret conspirators in Glasgow were unknown to the Strathaven Radicals. The situation was made difficult by the absence of a stage coach between Glasgow and Strathaven and for two days there was great confusion, considerable anxiety and a profusion of rumours. Not until Wednesday evening did definite word come from the committee when a messenger, James Shields, arrived. He was examined by Robert Hamilton and pronounced 'a genuine man'. The news he brought was that on the following day an attack would be made on the military forces in Glasgow. There would be 5-7000

115. The Pioneers 26

116. Green op.cit. ii Evidence of Shearer

117. The Pioneers 27-8

well-armed Radicals on Cathkin who would attack the city from the south, while a strong division on the Campsie Hills would attack from the north. (118)

(This corresponds to the rumours prevalent in Glasgow on that day, and it must be remembered that Shields would leave Glasgow before the results of the skirmish at Bonnymuir were known).

The reformers then went to Wilson's house, where they elected a Peninsular veteran, John Morrison as their leader. Wilson had taken no part in the events since the arrival of the Address, and the reason for the reformers' action in going to him at that time are not clear. Most probably it was because Wilson was in the habit of working with firearms and other weapons and it was essential that all weapons should be checked before they departed for Cathkin. (119) Wilson began to shaft a number of pikes that were brought to him while others went in search of arms. Even at midnight, his house was like a great smithy, with great knocking and hammering. Throughout the evening reformers were coming and going, many of them staying a short time, (120) to dry their clothes at the great fire before continuing their search for weapons. One man who visited Wilson's

118. The Pioneers 27-8

119. Ibid 32, Green ii Brownlee's evidence

120. Stevenson op.cit. 6, Green op.cit. ii
Evidence of Thompson

house between 10 pm and 11 pm found about 20 or 30 people there; another remarked on the great noise and the continual coming and going until after midnight. (121)

It was imperative that sufficient weapons be obtained and this must have seemed a formidable undertaking to the rebels who thought they would muster in all about 100 when they marched off. That more than three-quarters of this number deserted before sunrise was accounted for by 'the wetness of the night, the sagacious advice of friends and the report that all was quiet in Glasgow.' (122) Probably also of great importance was the influence of wives and mothers who persuaded their husbands and sons to return home; and many reformers, like Shearer would be deterred by the extremist attitude of men like Stevenson. Yet whatever the size of the group, sufficient arms had to be obtained. Many houses were visited though with little success. From the evidence presented at Wilson's trial it would appear that only three guns were obtained, and when the party set off on Thursday morning a number of the rebels had to be content with pikes. (123)

From midnight until 4 am there was comparative quiet. Then Morrison set off to the neighbouring

121. Green op.cit. ii Evidence of Shearer and Alston

122. Stevenson op.cit. 7

123. Green op.cit. ii Evidence of Alexander, Cochrane, Semple, Hamilton, Alston

village of Glassford in what proved to be an unsuccessful attempt to get more support. (124)

Shortly after 6.15 am, William Watson went into Wilson's house with a long pole and soon afterwards emerged with a flag on which was inscribed on one side 'Strathaven Union Society 1819' and on the other 'Scotland Free or a Desart.' (125) By 9 am the reformers' arrangements were complete and a party of probably a dozen (estimates of the number vary) gathered outside Wilson's house. Some had muskets, some pikes and Wilson had a broken sword. Many had gathered to witness their departure but only the children raised a cheer as the party walked off, weapons sloped over their shoulders. (126)

About one mile before East Kilbride they met two gentlemen in a carriage and from them learned that the military had possession of Glasgow and that no Radicals were encamped on Cathkin. The men from Strathaven immediately suspected Shields the delegate from Glasgow of deceiving them but he protested his innocence and the march continued; However one man was ordered to watch Shields very carefully and to shoot him if he

124. Pioneers 46

125. Green op.cit. ii Evidence of Alston, Boyd

126. Ibid

showed signs of trying to escape. Shortly afterwards, one of their scouts brought information that a troop of Yeomanry was waiting for them at East Kilbride but no encounter took place as the Yeomanry went off to Hamilton.⁽¹²⁷⁾

At this juncture, Wilson decided to leave the party. He went into the house of a friend and after a short time there returned to Strathaven.⁽¹²⁸⁾ The others carried on to Cathkin which they reached about two hours later only to find the hills deserted. But it was decided to unfurl their flag and await word from the Secret Committee. Three or four hours later a messenger arrived with the information that because of the extraordinary vigilance of the civil and military authorities all suspected people were being dragged to prison and that it was imperative the Strathaven men vacate their prominent position immediately. So the rebels dispersed, eight of them going to a public house in Rutherglen where they ate a hearty meal. A few were later captured, but the majority escaped, some to return to Strathaven, others to go elsewhere.⁽¹²⁹⁾ (The flag was taken off by Stevenson who settled in the village of Campsie. Later he emigrated to Australia taking the flag with him, and it was used as a winding sheet when

127. The Pioneers 54 ff

128. Green op.cit. ii Evidence of J. Thompson,
Richmond

129. The Pioneers 56 ff, Stevenson op.cit. 8 ff

he died)(130)

In other parts of Lanarkshire there was surprisingly little trouble. The weavers of Old Monkland parish who had been so strongly in favour of the reform/^{were} waiting for a lead from Glasgow and when this did not come, threw away their weapons into an old coal pit and returned to their rightful owners the pitchforks they had taken.(131) In Airdrie, two weavers were appointed delegates to Kilsyth and the neighbouring towns to report progress on the Bonnymuir campaign, and Rodgers the Secretary of the Airdrie Union Society met John Baird in a Camelon tavern on the evening of Monday 3rd April to arrange with him the purchase of pikes. But the two delegates spent most of their time in a tavern at Glenmavis (just outside Airdrie) drinking at radical expense and the Airdrie Radicals, probably the most militant in the country, took no part in the war.(132) At another strong radical centre, Kirkfieldbank, there was not even a strike on 3rd April and on Wednesday when a messenger arrived to say that there were 72,000 radicals under arms, still no move was made.(133)

In Paisley there was some trouble for a few days. The Address brought from Glasgow by James

130. Cameron Parish of Campsie 118

131. Janet Hamilton Reminiscences of the Radical Tune 366

132. Ms. (uncatalogued) in Airdrie Public Library,
Green op.cit. i 409

133. Glasgow Chronicle 13 Apr 1820

Spiers was widely publicised in the town and the surrounding villages; ⁽¹³⁴⁾ as a result the workers were idle on Monday and crowds gathered in the streets. ⁽¹³⁵⁾ Several of the cotton mills in Johnstone had in fact commenced work on the Monday morning but closed down later after visits from a group of Radicals led by Spiers and James Walker. Radical leaders in Paisley met on Monday and decided that they could not rise against the authorities as they had insufficient arms and no powder, and it was decided to make an effort to obtain more weapons. ⁽¹³⁶⁾ On the following day, about a dozen Radicals from Paisley, well furnished with firearms and other weapons, visited several houses to compel the inhabitants to give up any weapons they had. They met with little success and at one house in Foxbar, one of them was shot. ⁽¹³⁷⁾ It had been agreed earlier that a blacksmith's forge be set up near Kilbarchan. An anvil and tools were manhandled out from Paisley, but the Kilbarchan radicals would not come out to direct their comrades to the quiet spot that had been chosen for the forge, so the

134. Fraser op.cit. 21

135. Monteith Letters G.1.2.33 Letter from Oliver Jamieson, Provost of Paisley 3 Apr 1820

136. Parkhill op.cit. 59

137. Glasgow Chronicle 6 Apr 1820. Monteith Letters G.1.2.35 Letter from Oliver Jamieson, Provost of Paisley 4 Apr 1820

equipment was abandoned.⁽¹³⁸⁾ By the end of the week the town was fairly quiet and the magistrates decided to undertake a search for weapons. A good many pikes were discovered.⁽¹³⁹⁾ On the following day, with tranquillity seemingly assured, the Port Glasgow Armed Association - about 80 men - returned home from Paisley, escorting five Radical prisoners from Paisley to Greenock. They left Paisley about 11 am and had an uneventful march until they entered Greenock about 5 pm. There a large crowd had gathered, stones were thrown and several members of the crowd injured. Eventually it was established that six died, two were seriously injured and five slightly injured. But although this affray involved more casualties than Bonnymuir, and the fighting lasted for a longer time, it could not be classed as anything more than a riot. This seems to have marked the end of disorder in Renfrewshire during the Radical war.⁽¹⁴⁰⁾

In the village of Duntocher in Dunbartonshire there was some Radical activity. Arms were manufactured; all the cotton works were on strike; there were many strangers in the village and great alarm among the people. But nothing riotous took place; the people mainly cotton spinners, waited

138. Parkhill op.cit. 62

139. Glasgow Chronicle 6 Apr 1820

140. Glasgow Chronicle 11 Apr 1820. H.O. 102.32
Folio 433. Broadsheet in Mitchell Library

to see what would happen elsewhere and showed no signs of acting on their own initiative.⁽¹⁴¹⁾

In some parts of Ayrshire the situation looked more dangerous. In Stewarton, Orr the shoemaker, a well-known agitator, proclaimed a new constitution with a drawn sword in his hand. There were armed groups in Galston and Newmilns, but their activities came to nothing.⁽¹⁴²⁾ In the southern part of the country there was little danger. Many people in Ayr and Girvan were on strike on April 3rd, but most resumed their work on the following day.⁽¹⁴³⁾ Even in Kilmarnock, where more trouble might have been expected after the many public meetings in 1819, the people showed no inclination to rebel.⁽¹⁴⁴⁾ 'No banner was hoisted; no sword was drawn; everyone seemed to expect that his neighbour would take the lead in the enterprise, and none having the hardihood to venture forth in that capacity, the whole affair proved abortive.'⁽¹⁴⁵⁾

It is difficult to see on what evidence Kirkman Finlay could state that 'almost the whole mass of the population was concerned in these dreadful designs' to overthrow the Government.⁽¹⁴⁶⁾ Such a

141. Green op.cit. ii Munroe's Trial. passim

142. Letter to Duke of Hamilton 22

143. Ayr Advertiser 6 Apr 1820

144. Paterson Autobiographical Reminiscences, 73

145. McKay History of Kilmarnock 212

146. Glasgow Chronicle 13 Apr 1820

statement might have been applied with justice to specific areas of Glasgow or Paisley, but elsewhere there is no evidence to support such an opinion. The Radical War of 1820 showed indeed that the vast majority of the people, even although some might attend political meetings and join Union Societies were not prepared to take up arms to effect political change. Even in Strathaven there was remarkably little support for the use of physical force. Throughout the week that the threat of rebellion lasted, lack of planning was apparent. The Address which began the war was vague, giving no definite, clear, instructions to the people as to what they should do or why they should take action. It gave only one clear instruction - to strike from work - and even this was obeyed for only a short time. This lack of planning and vagueness of aim can be attributed in part to anonymity in leadership. There was no national leader in either England or Scotland. Thistlewood who might have filled this position was by April unable to exercise any control over events. The Scots invented for themselves a leader. During March it was reported that Marshal Macdonald of France, a Stuart descendant was in the country with French soldiers and that other Frenchmen would be landing on the Ayrshire coast.⁽¹⁴⁷⁾ Presumably Scots who believed this imagined themselves back in the 18th

Century preparing to substitute a Stuart for a Hanoverian. Had there been a national leader, presumably specific guidance would have been given and clear aims would have been established. As it was, although the Address had indicated support for the King against his ministers, there were people in Scotland whose aims were republican and it was believed that the aim of the radicals was to murder the King and his Ministers and place government in the hands of a provisional committee.⁽¹⁴⁸⁾ In the Monklands it was openly stated by the radicals that 'when the rising took place every man should help himself as best he could to the possessions of the rich' and that 'property of every kind was no longer to be monopolised by the few but divided among the many.'⁽¹⁴⁹⁾ The contradictions which were always a part of radicalism at this time are apparent in the contrasting attitude to property in the Address and in these Spencean opinions and in the previous example of the contrast between those who believed in the continuation of monarchy and those who wanted a Republic.

Such leaders as there were, were members of the lower classes. Unfortunately for the radical movement, they had to observe great secrecy and thus never established themselves as leaders in the eyes

148. H.O.102.32 Anon. Letter from Forfar

149. J. Hamilton op.cit. 363 and 370

of the general public. Andrew Hardie, for example, knew practically none of the men who went with him to Bonnymuir, nor did he know the man who gave him his instructions.⁽¹⁵⁰⁾ There was a Secret Committee in Glasgow which was responsible for calling on the people to take action. But no-one then or since, apart from those who were members of the Committee, could say who formed the Committee. The anonymity of leadership was a handicap in any appeal to the people; it also gave the authorities the opportunity to use spies and issue false instructions though whether they used this opportunity is doubtful.

If the aim of radicals in 1820 was to overthrow the national government it would seem necessary for revolutionary action to take place on a national scale. But this did not happen. The people of Scotland waited for a lead from England; in Paisley, for example the signal for the commencement of hostilities was to be the non-arrival of the English mail, while the same event was awaited in Glasgow as a sign that not only had hostilities in England begun but that they had been successful.⁽¹⁵¹⁾ Yet at the same time, people in England were waiting for a lead from Scotland. Rumours swept through the manufacturing districts of the north. 'It is reported that the Scots will shortly invade England' noted a Burnley

150. Mackenzie Exposure 101

151. Monteith Letters G.1.2.33 Letter from Provost of Paisley 3 Apr 1820. Mackenzie Exposure 94

weaver on 7th April, 'and join the English Radicals.' (152) In Manchester, information was received from various sources that the disaffected had arranged for a rising in Yorkshire near Huddersfield and in Lancashire near Burnley to be followed by a rising in Manchester, where reformers had in their possession an Address similar to the Scottish one. Nothing came of this movement in England and this was attributed to 'the pacification of Glasgow and the repulses of the population at Greenock.' (153) Any remote chance of success the Radicals might have had was lost by the failure of English and Scots to act in concert.

Some years later, Peter Mackenzie, converted to Radical principles after the war of 1820 in which he was a member of the Volunteers, wrote 'we are thoroughly convinced that Andrew Hardie and his unfortunate companions were the victims of blood-thirsty scoundrels better known by the name of spies who at that time infested the country.' (154) If by spies, Mackenzie meant 'agents provocateurs', then there is no evidence for his statement. There were

152. Thompson op.cit. 707

153. Monteith Letters G.1.2.47 Letter from Borough-reeve of Manchester 12 Apr 1820
Thompson op.cit. 707

154. Mackenzie Exposure 3

certainly people who tried to keep the authorities informed of what was happening. There were professionals such as the Edinburgh policemen working in Glasgow and the Glasgow 'secret men'.⁽¹⁵⁵⁾ There were those who like the provosts of towns or lords-lieutenant of counties thought it part of their duty to find out what was happening; there were casual informants such as Father Scott in Glasgow and the minister of Houston Church in Renfrewshire; and there were members of the general public. This however was an unsatisfactory system. In August 1819 Rae noted that magistrates were obliged 'to trust in a great measure for information to individuals employed and paid for as spies (who were) often ill-informed themselves ... and exaggerated the danger.'⁽¹⁵⁶⁾ In an effort to obtain more reliable information it would seem that some individuals gave money for the

155. Glasgow Town Council Minutes (unpublished) C 1.1.53. 28 Nov 1820. £100 was voted to Matthew Legat, senior criminal officer 'as a remuneration for his extraordinary and highly important services in the course of the last and present year.' What Legat had been doing is not mentioned. It could be that he was active against ordinary criminals but it could be recompense for the work involved in finding out about plans of radical reformers.

156. H.O. 102.30 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth
13 Aug 1819

employment of 'spies' or employed them themselves. In March 1820 Lord Provost Monteith complained to Sidmouth that they were handicapped in their efforts to obtain reliable information because there were no Corporation funds for such a purpose and 'what has been already expended is more than can be reasonably expected from individuals'.⁽¹⁵⁷⁾ Sidmouth then stated that he would be 'answerable to the extent of £200 for the expenses which (were) necessarily incurred', presumably in obtaining information.⁽¹⁵⁸⁾ That the Glasgow 'spy' system was inadequate is suggested by the fact that on 26th March 1820 Lord Provost Monteith had only an impression that a commotion would take place, information which was no more precise than that which Sidmouth already had.⁽¹⁵⁹⁾ Had Sidmouth or Monteith been employing 'agents-provocateurs' they would certainly have been much better informed of what was happening; from existing evidence it is apparent they were very badly informed and that an inadequate detective system existed.

Mackenzie also makes the point that the Government had moved troops from Stirling to Kilsyth to ambush Hardie and Baird, decoyed from Glasgow by

157. H.O. 102.32 Monteith-Sidmouth 17 Mar 1820

158. Monteith Letters G.1.2.28 Letter from
Hobhouse 22 Mar 1820

159. Ibid G.1.2.39 Letter from Hobhouse
29 Mar 1820

spies. (160) But if this was why the troops were moved they would not have gone so far on their journey. They would have stopped at Bonnybridge, by which time the two roads from Glasgow had converged, rather than continue to Kilsyth, which meant that one of the roads from Glasgow was open. By continuing to Kilsyth they made it necessary for themselves to retrace their steps only a few hours after they had reached their sleeping quarters, and their horses were so exhausted by the long, quick forced march that other horses had to be borrowed for the return to Bonnymuir. No soldier would have done this if he had known that rebels were on the march.

Mackenzie claimed that the Strathaven rebels had been duped by spies. (161) If this had been the case, surely troops would have been ready to capture them either on the long march to Cathkin, or immediately on their return to Strathaven? As it was, the Yeomanry in East Kilbride who could have captured the rebels moved off to Hamilton and it was not until the day after the Strathaven march, i.e. on Friday, that eleven of the marchers were taken prisoner in their own village, and presumably there was no evidence against most of these since they were

160. Mackenzie Exposure 102

161. Mackenzie Trial of James Wilson 38

not even charged.⁽¹⁶²⁾ The movement of troops from East Kilbride and the delay in making arrests would not have taken place if the Strathaven rebellion had been engineered by spies.

What is remarkable about the Radical war is that so few people were imprisoned for their part in it. The people of Bridgeton who on April 5th paraded for an hour, with a drummer at their head, just vanished when they found themselves without support from the rest of the populace;⁽¹⁶³⁾ two of the Strathaven leaders who might have been caught - Howat who returned to Strathaven and Stevenson who settled in Campsie - were left at liberty; over a year was to pass before Watson, who carried the Strathaven flag was arrested, and although a true bill was found against him at the treason trials, no action was taken against him.⁽¹⁶⁴⁾ Had the country been infested with spies, had the people been persuaded by government agents to commit treason, many more leaders would have been captured and more successful prosecutions would have resulted. But as the Lord Advocate complained, the principal leaders had been allowed to escape owing to the inefficiency of the police, and presumably, the absence of efficient spies.⁽¹⁶⁵⁾

162. Clydesdale Journal 26 May 1820 and The Pioneers 54 ff

163 Notebook of Charles Hutcheson 45

164. Clydesdale Journal 27 Apr 1821

165. H.O.102.33 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 25 July 1820

Hardie, Baird and Wilson were the victims not of a spy system but of inefficiency and folly. Parkhill suggests that 'the leaders although not spies not absolute liars were nevertheless crazy fools.' (166) There is no evidence that any thought had been given to the constitutional issues involved in the war, or to the execution of a plan to free the King from his ministers. There was no realisation that the overthrow of an established government requires careful planning backed by adequate resources. Writing of Thistlewood in England, Thompson states - '(he) was certainly guilty of folly in exposing the lives of his followers.... His plans were little more than fantasies...even if some variant of the Cato Street Conspiracy had succeeded in its immediate objective, it is difficult to see what would have followed.' (167) Exactly the same comment could be made with regard to the Radical War in Scotland.

Inefficiency is also to be found among those whom the radicals opposed. When the Lord Advocate went to Glasgow immediately after the rebellion he found that 'there was no person of any intelligence as a civil officer from whom assistance could be obtained in forwarding the decided measures, which it was then necessary to adopt in the way of search and

166. Parkhill op.cit. 60

167. Thompson op.cit. 705

otherways.' (168) Although the Lord Advocate was justified in condemning the Glasgow Police system, in particular for allowing radical ringleaders to escape, nevertheless the events of 1820 demonstrated a fundamental weakness that was not confined to the city. John Lang, chairman of the Justices of the Peace for the Lower Ward of Lanarkshire pointed out to Sidmouth that merchants and others in Glasgow had raised a voluntary subscription among themselves to provide additional safeguards in the form of better police services and companies of volunteers; Gorbals with a population of 22,000 and Calton with 16,000 had police forces outwith the control of Glasgow and these were just as much to blame for the escape of the radicals. The trouble with the whole police system was that there was no county assessment for the upkeep of a county police force, and Glasgow police, the most highly developed in the west, could exercise no control outside the city boundaries. (169)

An acrimonious dispute between the Lord Advocate and the Glasgow magistrates developed over the inefficiency of Glasgow Police. Obviously the Lord Advocate was not satisfied with police arrange-

168. H.O. 102.33 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 8
Sep 1820

169. Glasgow Police Minutes 4 May 1820. H.O.102.33
Statement by Glasgow Magistrates 31 July 1820
Lang to Sidmouth 21 Aug 1820

ments and activity in 1819-20. The Lord Advocate and the Glasgow magistrates realised that they had been inefficient, and this is more than can be said of the radicals and their later apologists.

The Aftermath of the Radical War

Immediately after the end of the 'war' and the capture of some of the rebels, consideration had to be given to the punishment of those in custody. As early as 10th April Lord Advocate Rae had decided that they should be charged with treason and that the trials should be conducted by a Commission as soon as possible in the places where the crimes had been committed. A week later he appointed the Solicitor-General for Scotland to take charge of the investigations.⁽¹⁾ However it was not until 29th May that a Commission of Dyer and Terminer was issued from London appointing the Lord Justice Clerk and two senior Lords of Justiciary to conduct enquiries and trials in the counties of Stirling, Lanark, Dumbarton Renfrew and Ayr.⁽²⁾ These treason trials were to be almost unique in Scottish legal history. By an act passed in 1709 the law of England in regard both to the crime of treason and the form of trial adopted were in future to apply also to Scotland. There-

1. H.O. 102.32 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 10 Apr 1820, 17 Apr 1820.

2. Green op.cit. i 4-6, 10.

The Lord Advocate was not anxious to have these trials conducted by a Special Commission of Dyer and Terminer from England, since this would cause delay and might be 'prejudicial'.

On the other hand, he was anxious to have some help from England. Melville Papers MS 11. Rae to Melville 14 Apr 1820

after, few treason trials took place in Scotland; the Jacobites were tried in England and only the case of Watt and Downie in 1794 established a precedent before 1820. Since by the law of England no man could be indicted for the crime of treason except on a bill found against him by a Grand Jury, this type of preliminary investigation had to take place. Normally under Scottish law precognitions would have been taken (probably by the Solicitor-General) and these would have been laid before the Lord Advocate so that he might determine whether there were sufficient grounds to put the accused on trial;⁽³⁾ but with the adoption of English procedure no precognitions were taken though statements by two of the prisoners, Hardie and Baird, were later used as evidence at the trials. Other points of interest about the trials were that the jury consisted of only twelve men and their verdict had to be unanimous. A full account of the trial has been preserved; in June 1820 Rae advised Sidmouth that there was no shorthand writer in Scotland to take down the trials and that in 1794 such a writer had been sent from London. Presumably Sidmouth did respond to Rae's request, for an account was preserved to be published some years later.⁽⁴⁾

3. Green op.cit. i 26

4. H.O. 102.32 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth
23 June 1820

During the 'war scare' a number of arrests had been made, but no charges were preferred against many of those in custody. On the other hand, not all those charged were in custody. Eventually those charged who were in custody numbered forty-one in Stirling, seven in Glasgow, six in Dumbarton, two in Paisley and four in Ayr.⁽⁵⁾ Special sessions of Oyer and Terminer were held at Stirling on 23rd and 24th June, at Dumbarton on 29th June at Paisley on 1st July and at Ayr on 4th July. True Bills were found at each place against the prisoners and dates for trial fixed.

The first trial to take place was that of Andrew Hardie. The indictment against him as against all the other prisoners at each trial consisted of four counts - compassing and imagining the death of the King, levying war against the King, compassing and intending to depose the King from the style, honour and Kingly name of the Imperial crown of the realm, and compassing to levy war against the king in order to compel him to change his measures.⁽⁶⁾

(The two latter counts were extensions of the first two and were based on acts passed in the reign of George III - 36 Geo.III c.vii and 57 Geo.III c. vi). Before the trial began the Lord President explained clearly to the jury the law of treason and the

5. H.O. 102.33 1 July 1820, 4 July 1820

6. Green op.cit. i 40 ff

difference between treason and riot - 'wherever the rising or insurrection has for its object a general purpose not confined to the peculiar views and interests of the persons concerned in it but common to the whole community and striking directly against the King's authority or that of Parliament, then it assumes the character of treason.'⁽⁷⁾ The Crown's case therefore rested to a great extent on the treasonable nature of the Address which had inspired the war and the influence that this Address had on those who were brought to trial. In each case the Crown had to prove that the prisoners were guilty of striking directly against the King's authority. It was not enough to show merely that men had marched under arms or had seized arms or had even fought against soldiers. Intention had to be considered, and the prosecution therefore tried to show that men who had read the Address would take up arms and march with treasonable intent.

It was stated by the Lord Advocate at the beginning of the trial that the Address contained matters of the most treasonable nature, and in his summing up at the conclusion of the case the Lord President insisted that 'if ever there was Treason launched from the pen or press of this country, that paper is a Treasonable composition.'⁽⁸⁾ The

7. Green op.cit i 23

8. Ibid 128, 284

treasonable nature of the Address was in fact never challenged, for although it had been stated that the principles of those framing the Address were founded on the basis of the constitution and that one of the objects of rebellion was to free the King 'from the power of those that have held (him) too long in thralldom', nevertheless it was pointed out that an attack on the government is an indirect attack on the King. The recent example of Thistlewood was referred to; he was convicted of levying war against the King for an attempt to put to death his ministers.⁽⁹⁾

The nature of the Address having been established to the satisfaction of the lawyers, it was necessary then to connect it with Hardie. It could not be shown that he was the author or publisher of it, but what was proved was that on the morning of Sunday 2nd April he read it and prevented a Justice of the Peace from removing it.⁽¹⁰⁾ It was then proved that people in Glasgow had been influenced by the Address to strike work and that among those who had done so was Hardie.⁽¹¹⁾ He was proved to have been one of those who marched to Bonnymuir, took part in the battle and ^{was} taken prisoner to Stirling.⁽¹²⁾ But Hardie was singled out for prosecution because he was the reputed leader of the

9. Green op.cit. i 127, 242

10. Ibid 142, 143, 156

11. Ibid 155

12. Ibid 186, 206, 208

group going out from Glasgow.⁽¹³⁾ His position as leader seemed to be proved by a statement that on the road, when Thomas Cook of the 10th Hussars was stopped by the rebels, Hardie was 'dressing them by the left.'⁽¹⁴⁾ While Cook was speaking to the rebels he was given a copy of the Address by one of them.⁽¹⁵⁾ Although it was not Hardie who did this, nevertheless as the assumed leader of the party in arms he was held answerable for what was done by those under his command. 'Here you have (Hardie) seing a large roll of hand-bills taken out by one of his party and one of them handed to the Sergeant of Hussars therefore, Gentlemen, the prisoner at the bar is implicated in the strongest manner with this paper....'⁽¹⁶⁾ Such a statement from the Lord President as he summed up must surely have convinced everyone that Hardie was most certainly connected with the Address and was therefore acting with treasonable intent.

Hardie denied that he was the leader of the party; he did not consider himself as having any charge of the party with which he went by road; but he took charge when the Hussar came up to prevent

13. Green op.cit.i 132

14. Ibid 186

15. Ibid 188

16. Ibid 295-6

his being hurt.⁽¹⁷⁾ His counsel argued that he was not a prominent reformer nor 'a meddler in politics at all', that he was not a 'hearer or maker of speeches at radical meetings or a zealot for annual parliaments and suffrage by ballot or any other reform.'⁽¹⁸⁾ It was claimed that he went out from Glasgow 'having no purpose of hurting anybody, to bring in other people who were friendly to the cause to Glasgow and that he took arms for this and no other purpose.'⁽¹⁹⁾ Counsel then went on to argue that this did not amount to Treason, although it was admittedly a serious offence. His arguments, however, were in vain mainly because Hardie had earlier made declarations at Stirling and Edinburgh and these were admitted as evidence at his trial.⁽²⁰⁾

17. Green op.cit. i 218

18. Ibid 243.

On the other hand it is interesting to learn that a few days before the first of April Hardie visited reformers in Paisley -

(Parkhill, Autobiography of Arthur Sneddon 106) and Hardie had previously been a member of a Union Society in Castle Street. (Glasgow Chronicle 9 Sep 1820). These two facts would seem to disprove that he had previously had no interest in politics.

19. Green op.cit. i 253

20. Ibid 299 ff

As the Lord President remarked, it was unfortunate for Hardie that he had made these statements since they alone provided corroboration for some of the evidence against him, and he continued 'why he made that confession I cannot tell.' But since he had made it 'without compulsion in his sober senses and in his sound mind' it was acceptable in a court of law.⁽²¹⁾ In this statement Hardie admitted that he left Glasgow on the evening of Tuesday 4th April with about twenty others, that he was armed, that he joined Baird at Condorrat and then marched off. He then told how they split into two groups, later rejoined on the moor, decided to return to Glasgow at night, and took part in the battle. His motives for leaving were obscure - 'he had no view to commit plunder or shed blood ... it was their purpose in going out to effect a change in public affairs... (he) did not mean the subversion of government but what he wanted was the restoration of the people's rights... Annual Parliaments and Elections by Ballot.' But this confession taken in conjunction with the evidence against him presented by the prosecution at the trial was enough to convince the jury of his guilt on the second and fourth counts. (The Lord President had indicated that the other two counts should not be considered) and this decision was arrived at after only twenty minutes' consideration.

If we can believe the letters of Andrew Hardie published by Peter Mackenzie some years later, his reason for confessing was that he realised from the questions he was being asked during interrogation that one of his companions had provided the authorities with all the evidence they needed.⁽²²⁾ If such a person did exist, and there is no evidence to support such an idea, he was presumably not called by the prosecution at the trials because of what happened in McKinlay's case in 1817. Lord Advocate Rae was able to boast later that 'not a single person appeared as a witness who was either a spy, a socius criminis, or liable to the most remote suspicion in any point of view.'⁽²³⁾

Hardie was probably justifiably convicted. He admitted that he and those whom he accompanied were trying to effect a change in government and although within twelve years of his trial the changes he desired were in some measure made, nevertheless his method of trying to bring about these changes was illegal. It was inevitable in the state of affairs which existed in 1820, the bitterness which prevailed between the governors and the governed, the lack of sympathy which was frequently shown, that he would be convicted. Yet there are weaknesses in the

22. Mackenzie Letters of Andrew Hardie 213

23. H.O. 102.30 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth

15 July 1820

Crown's case. Hardie's position as leader, his connection with the treasonable address, and the treasonable intent of his actions were not proved beyond all doubt. Only Sergeant Cook gave evidence which classed him as the leader, and it was only when he was accepted as the leader that he could be connected with the Address (despite the fact that he had admittedly read part of it in Glasgow). Cook's evidence was vital in all the cases at Stirling, for only the fact that he had received a copy of the Address from some person in Hardie's party on the road connected the insurgents with treason. It would have been possible for him to obtain a copy of the Address elsewhere, but this point was not stressed by the defence in either trial. Had there been no connection with the address, those charged might have been found guilty only of sedition and of resisting arrest. Cook's evidence, supported by Hardie's statement that a man called Henderson gave the Hussar a folded paper the contents of which were unknown to him, allowed the charge of Treason to be successfully prosecuted. (24)

Jeffrey who defended Hardie made a number of significant points. Firstly he stressed that evidence of an actual skirmish between any set of armed individuals and a body of the King's forces acting in the discharge of their duty is not of

itself evidence of a treasonable purpose.⁽²⁵⁾ He pointed to 'the utter want of evidence on the point of all participation in these plots and conspiracies and these committees and meetings and associations from which these pernicious and detestable handbills originally emanated' which would link these with Hardie.⁽²⁶⁾ With regard to the prisoners' declarations he said, 'they are far indeed from being conclusive evidence and...unless they connect facts that are proved by extrinsic evidence...it is hardly advisable to rely much on them.'⁽²⁷⁾ He spoke at length on the interpretation of Hardie's actions, trying to show that he might be guilty of the lesser charges of sedition or rioting or that he might have been defending himself against the attacks of the military.⁽²⁸⁾

Lord President Charles Hope in summing up said that Hardie's declaration in almost every particular did corroborate the evidence of other witnesses. He also pointed out that not one witness had been called by the defence. All that had been offered, he felt, was an eloquent appeal to passions and an attempt to lead the jury away from the evidence. Hope's summing up was fair in the light of what had been said by prosecution and defence but he might be

25. Green op.cit. i 237

26. Ibid 244

27. Ibid 251

28. Ibid 253-6

criticised for paying insufficient attention to Hardie's intentions and to the other lesser crimes of which he might have been guilty.⁽²⁹⁾

On the following day the trial of John Baird took place. The evidence against him was slighter than against Hardie. Even the statement which he volunteered, and which was used in evidence against him, was hardly sufficient to have him condemned on a charge of High Treason although he admitted that he had taken command of one section of a group which he believed was demanding some change in the parliamentary system.⁽³⁰⁾ Hardie had had some connection, however, tenuous, with the treasonable Address - he had been seen reading it in Glasgow and had reputedly been in charge of a party which had reputedly given a copy to a hussar whom they met. But Baird had no such connection with the Address. He admitted that he had seen a copy of it at Condorrat on Sunday 2nd April, but this fact was not proved at his trial. Much of the evidence against Baird, therefore, consisted of a repetition of the evidence against Hardie showing his connection with the Address. Then the prosecution tried to show that because Hardie had been thus influenced, Baird also was acting in a treasonable manner.⁽³¹⁾ What could

29. Green op.cit. i 276-300

30. Ibid 220

31. Ibid 319 ff 490 ff

be proved was that during the fighting at Bonnymuir, Baird had seemingly acted as leader, had aimed his 'piece' at Lieutenant Hodgson and had wounded Sergeant Saxelby with his pike, but this was not in itself treasonable; he might have been taking part in a riot.⁽³²⁾ Only the evidence of Cook, apart from Baird's own statement that the purpose of the party was reform,⁽³³⁾ could be used to convict Baird of treason yet this evidence was not about Baird's group but the other separate group under Hardie which for a time was on the road while Baird was some distance away on the banks of the canal. (See page 225).

The most interesting evidence came from Thomas Wright, a nailer in Camelon.⁽³⁴⁾ He was in a change house in Camelon on the evening of Monday 3rd April (not 2nd April as stated) when he saw Baird buying pike heads and making arrangements to meet the vendor, Andrew Burt, the following evening on the canal bank. Thus it was shown that Baird had arranged to take part in some plan on the following evening, Tuesday, and it can be seen that his involvement in the Bonnymuir affair was not unpremeditated. He had obtained weapons and he had made plans to meet a group from Camelon. Even more important evidence came from William Wright who was also present when the

32. Green op.cit. i 341 ff 501 ff

33. Ibid 423

34. Ibid 409

pike-heads changed hands.⁽³⁵⁾ He saw Baird in conversation with Rogers, the leading Radical in Airdrie, and from this we may deduce that Baird was a Radical of some standing and was planning something of more than local significance otherwise Rogers would surely not have taken the trouble to come over to see him. Unfortunately for future generations the prosecution made no attempt to find out more about this meeting. Had they done so they might have unearthed a widespread conspiracy and proved that Baird was very clearly involved in it. Jeffrey in his speech for the defence pointed out that although Baird had illegally armed himself this had nothing to do with treason.⁽³⁶⁾ The Lord Justice Clerk however did not agree. He saw treason in a number of Baird's actions - reading the Address at Condorrat, acquiring arms at Camelon, commanding troops at Bonnymuir - and in his expressed aim to bring about a radical reform of the House of Commons. 'The assembling with force and arms of persons whether in a greater or less number with that object in view - the bringing about of a radical reform in the commons House of Parliament - is a direct levying of war against the King.'⁽³⁷⁾ Despite the unsatisfactory nature of much of the evidence Baird was found guilty

35. Green op.cit. i 412

36. Ibid 463

37. Ibid 519-20

of Treason on the second count after the jury had deliberated for one and three quarter hours. Thereafter the trials were brought to a speedy conclusion. Sixteen others who had been taken at Bonnymuir changed their pleas from 'Not Guilty' to 'Guilty'. At other trials one man from St. Ninian's (near Stirling), one from Balfroun, and two from Camelon pleaded Guilty; six others from Camelon were acquitted without trial.⁽³⁸⁾ The sentence imposed on the twenty-two convicted was that they be hanged, drawn and quartered, execution to take place on 8th September. In fact, only Hardie and Baird suffered death, the others being sentenced to transportation.

The commission then moved on to Glasgow where the first case on 20th July was that against James Wilson of Strathaven, the charges being the same as those against Hardie and Baird. Once again it was necessary for the prosecution to prove the treasonable nature of the Address, its influence on the Strathaven reformers and to show that Wilson was one of those who took part in the rebellion. Where Wilson's trial differed from those at Stirling was that a statement he had made was not admitted as evidence and witnesses were brought forward for the defence.

With regard to the Address itself, Sergeant Hullock prosecuting stated that it was 'one of the

most flagrant pieces of treason ever uttered' and showed that its effect in Glasgow was to transform a tranquil quiet city into a place where men struck work and paraded the streets in small and large parties in military step.⁽³⁹⁾ It was proved that this address had been put up at some time on Sunday 2nd April in Strathaven and that its effect there was to persuade many of the weavers to strike work,⁽⁴⁰⁾ and it was also shown that on Wednesday 5th April a message was sent from Glasgow to Strathaven saying that the reformers in the city were 'up' and expected the Strathaven reformers to join them.⁽⁴¹⁾ It was also shown that on Monday 3rd April a meeting had taken place just outside Strathaven at which revolutionary speeches were made, that intensive preparations for action began on Wednesday 5th April (after the arrival of the messenger from Glasgow), that arms were collected on the Wednesday evening, and that a group departed from Strathaven on the Thursday bearing arms and carrying a flag.⁽⁴²⁾ Hullock summed it up thus; 'Does the seizing of guns, does the marching out from this place with a banner under these circumstances - do all these circumstances show an insurrection or do they not? If they do ... for what purpose did these unfortunate deluded men march from Strathaven? ... I say in point of law ... it was

39. Green op.cit. ii 308 ff

40. Ibid 143 ff 159 ff

41. Ibid 143 ff

42. Ibid 143 ff, 111 ff, 67 ff, 132 ff, 159 ff

a levying of war.' And although defence counsel might insist that 'You cannot say that the party were marching to carry any alleged conspiracy into effect', it was generally agreed that the men who marched from Strathaven on Thursday 6th April did so with a treasonable purpose. (43)

What was more difficult for the prosecution was to prove that Wilson had willingly taken part in the march. There was much evidence against him. He was seen sharpening an old broken sword on the Tuesday or Wednesday; his house was used as a rendezvous by the reformers on the Wednesday evening and it was from his house that they paraded on the Thursday morning. When the reformers did march off, Wilson was at the rear, hardly the position for a man who was going unwillingly. Moreover if he had previously wished to sever his connection with the militant reformers he could have done so on the Wednesday when he visited a neighbour's house or on the Thursday morning when he was seen at 6.15 am standing alone at his front door. (44) The prosecution concluded with a reminder to the jury that if there had been an insurrection and the prisoner had taken part in it, their verdict 'must be bitter to this unfortunate gentleman.' If he did 'in an evil hour lend himself to a conspiracy of the sort and nature imputed to him by the charge' they must bring

43. Green op.cit. ii 258

44. Ibid 164 ff, 62 ff, 143 ff, 135 ff, 53 ff, 319 ff

in a verdict of guilty. (45)

The main purpose of the defence was to show that while Wilson had marched off with the others on Thursday morning he had done so unwillingly. He was placed in a most difficult situation, threatened by individuals who 'in some angry moment ... might have taken away his life', and who subjected him to terror. He was never, so it was claimed, 'actuated by that traitorous and malignant intention which constitutes the crime of High Treason.' (46) There was certainly evidence to show that Wilson had played no part in events before the Wednesday evening and that he had been an unwilling marcher on the Thursday. He was certainly not at the meeting at Three Stanes on Monday evening (though the prosecution maintained that this was unimportant. By marching out with Stevenson and Robertson who had been there he had made himself equally answerable for what had taken place.) When the messenger arrived from Glasgow he did not go to Wilson's house (the prosecution erroneously stated that he was the person to whom the message was sent) and there was no evidence to connect him with any one or any organisation in Glasgow. Although large numbers of people went to his house on the Wednesday evening, there was no evidence on the part of the crown except that large numbers of people went in and out and there was a great noise.

45. Green op.cit. ii 329

46. Ibid 246-57

He took no part in the search for weapons throughout Wednesday evening.⁽⁴⁷⁾ There were several descriptions of his appearance as he marched off - very downcast, looking ashamed, carrying his sword but not flourishing it like the others, awkward and bashful looking.⁽⁴⁸⁾ Some claimed that he had been forced to go against his will and one witness said that Wilson expressed his intentions to escape as soon as he could.⁽⁴⁹⁾ Defence counsel also tried to show that the whole rising was of little significance, 'Is this a conspiracy against the life of the sovereign? Is it an attempt to seize his garrisons? ... (Wilson) and some others in a small village in the country seem to have gone a few miles on the road and then turned back and on this you are to convict a person of High Treason?'⁽⁵⁰⁾

But the Lord President's summing up demolished much of the defence argument. The look of shame on Wilson's face as he left Strathaven could be explained by his disappointment at the small number who had come to join him; moreover, 'though a man goes with considerable reluctance into a treasonable enterprise, it will not relieve him of the treason.' Had Wilson really wished to escape he could have done

47. Green op.cit. ii 143 ff, 255-6, 283

48. Ibid 49 ff, 53 ff, 116 ff

49. Ibid 359

50. Ibid 207

so on several occasions, for example at 6.15 am on Thursday when he appeared alone at the door of his house to smoke his pipe. 'God forbid I should press against this man anything more than the evidence warrants, but I think you have the decisive evidence that at that moment this man might have made his escape.'⁽⁵¹⁾ Throughout, the Lord President made it obvious that he did take the rising seriously as an act of treason.

The jury withdrew at 7 pm and returned two hours later to declare the prisoner guilty on the fourth count of the indictment, but they also recommended him to the mercy of the Crown. The Lord Advocate later reported to Sidmouth that the proof against Wilson had been complete except in the eyes of one jurymen 'whose political principles may be easily guessed at.' He had intimated his fixed resolution to wear out the rest of the jury until they agreed to an acquittal; after two hours a compromise was reached whereby Wilson was found guilty but the recommendation for mercy made.⁽⁵²⁾ Many people at the time and since have felt uneasy about the verdict and the resulting execution of Wilson. While he was in prison Wilson dictated to Turner of Thrushgrove a statement which was used by later writers to prove

51. Green op.cit. ii 330-76

52. H.O. 102.33 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth
25 July 1820

that he had been an unwilling rebel. In this statement he insisted that 'they threatened to blow my brains out if I did not accompany them. I said I had no arms; when the person noticed the blade of a sword which had no hilt and was broken at the point and which I used as a bow for my stocking frame, and they observed that I might take this. At length, carrying this useless blade with me we left my house for Glasgow ... I most solemnly deny that I took up arms to levy war against the King. I indignantly reject the imputation that I committed or intended to commit high treason.' (53)

But in 1835, Stevenson, one of the leaders of the rebellion published his account of what happened and in this he denied that Wilson had been compelled to march to East Kilbride. (54) The anonymous author of 'The Pioneers' (written in 1843) is equally vehement. 'Mackenzie brings my old friend James Wilson before the public as a weak, silly-minded, old dotard whereas Wilson took the lead of every reform movement at Strathaven for more than 40 years.' (55)

But whatever the truth about Wilson's part in the rebellion, only one sentence on him could be pronounced by the court. 'It is true James', said the

53. Gebbie Sketches of Strathaven 184

54. Stevenson op.cit. 10

55. The Pioneers 68

judge, 'that you have been recommended to mercy by the jury and most sincerely do I hope that mercy may be extended to you; but it is not the province of this court to give it ... the prerogative by law is vested in the hands of the Crown.' He was then sentenced to be hanged, beheaded and quartered on 30th August 1820. (56)

Appeals for clemency were then submitted. The Lord President sent a letter to Sidmouth along with one from the foreman of the Jury. The Lord Provost sent a letter regarding the disturbed state of the prisoner's mind and urging clemency. Wilson's solicitors submitted a petition. (57) Lord President Charles Hope wrote that 'although Wilson was undoubtedly the leader of the Union Society in Strathaven and hearty in the cause, yet when it came to the other points, either from compunction or fear, he had shown some reluctance to go out. However, the recommendation (to mercy) is of no importance.' (58) On 1st August Sidmouth wrote to the Lord President - '... considering the nature of the crime, the circumstances under which it was committed and the clear and unquestionable evidence by which it appears to have been proved, I should not think myself justified in giving such weight to the recommendations

56. Green op.cit. ii 390-1

57. H.O. 104.5 Folios 334, 336 and 23 Aug 1820

58. Melville Papers Ms. 11 Hope to Melville
23 July 1820

of the jury as to advise that the sentence of law should not be carried into effect.⁽⁵⁹⁾ So Wilson was executed (but not quartered) on 30th August before a crowd of many thousands, regarded by most as a martyr.

Wilson was the only prisoner indicted at Glasgow to be prosecuted. The opinions expressed by the one 'difficult' juror in Wilson's case and the possibility that other cases might fail persuaded Rae to give up the cases against William McIntyre of Strathaven, against whom there was virtually no evidence, and a number of men from Anderston and Parkhead.⁽⁶⁰⁾ One interesting point is the absence of any mention of James Walters, Wilson's son-in-law. On Tuesday 27th June the Grand Jury returned a true bill against him and he was indicted,⁽⁶¹⁾ but he never appeared in court again, even to be acquitted. There was as much if not more evidence against him as against his father-in-law. On Wednesday evening he had been one of those who had gone in search of arms; he was seen on Thursday morning 'frequently going in and out' of Wilson's house; several people noted his departure with the other rebels on Thursday, one stating that he was the hindmost man in the party (though others remarked that Wilson was last.)⁽⁶²⁾ There would have been sufficient here to give the

59. H.O. 104.5 Sidmouth to Hope 1 Aug 1820

60. Green op.cit. ii 377 ff

61. Ibid 3

62. Ibid 49 ff, 53 ff, 67 ff, 88 ff

Crown a better chance of success than they had against Wilson, who had never gone to search for arms, who had gone with the rebels only as far as East Kilbride, and who was virtually unarmed. When the Lord Advocate announced on 24th July that he was dropping the case against McIntyre he said '... it has been a rule ... to bring forward to trial such persons only as appeared to (us) to be the leaders....' Yet Wilson was far from being a leader. One is left with the impression that he was executed because he had been a critic of established government since 1793; and there is also the suspicion that perhaps his own son-in-law was persuaded to ensure that he did march with the rebels in 1820. If Walters were the last man in the party he would have been in an excellent position to control the movements of his father-in-law directly in front of him, and if he were in the pay of either the local or central authorities, this would explain why no action was ever taken against him, even although he was in custody. (63)

The trials at Dumbarton, Paisley and Ayr contained little of any interest. At Dumbarton, six men (five of them cotton-spinners) were indicted on 29th June, and the trial of one of them, Robert Munroe, took place on 26th July. But all that the Crown could show was that men had struck work in the

63. There is no further mention of Walters in the transcript of the trials.

village of Duntocher in April 1820. The Lord President, when he summed up advised the jury that the evidence linking the prisoner with the charge of High Treason was very doubtful. All that he had done, according to the evidence was to stop work because he was afraid of what might happen to him if he continued. The jury returned a verdict of Not Guilty, and subsequently the Crown offered no evidence against the other five who had been charged.⁽⁶⁴⁾ In Paisley, two men were charged, and the trial of one of them, James Spiers, took place on 1st August. There was much evidence to show that Spiers had been instrumental in bringing out on strike workers in Johnstone near Paisley and the man with whom he had been associated had read a proclamation to an audience of cotton spinners, and this proclamation began with the words 'An Address to Great Britain and Ireland.' It was also stated (by Fraser the Johnstone Schoolmaster) that Spiers had a copy of the Address on the evening of Saturday 1st April. The judge in his summary emphasised that if the jury were satisfied that Spiers had brought workers out on strike to implement the Address, they should find him guilty of High Treason. The jury however would find the prisoner guilty of only one act of one count of the indictment, of striking and giving up his work in a malicious and

illegal manner. It was pointed out that they had to find him guilty or not guilty on the whole count, not on one part of it. The jury therefore withdrew and eventually returned a verdict of Not Guilty; consequently no evidence was offered against John Lang, the other man charged.⁽⁶⁵⁾

Spiers was, in fact, very lucky to escape, for he was one of the leading radicals in the area and was probably deeply implicated in the rising. On Saturday 1st April he had visited Fraser to ask him to write to the local ministers so that they might warn their congregation on the Sunday to submit to the rebels on the Monday and that if they did so, no harm would come to them. Spiers was probably responsible for posting up copies of the Address, and on the Monday was certainly the leader of a group which called on mills to compel the workers to strike. When he was arrested he was able, from Paisley jail, to maintain constant contact with the outside world by means of the assistant jailer, and was able to have gathered as much information as possible on the character of the jurors. Thus when he was tried, he was able to challenge 35 of the jurors and it may well be that he owed his acquittal to the fact that he had obtained as sympathetic a jury as it was possible to have.⁽⁶⁶⁾ The Crown, however,

65. Green op.cit. iii 1-474

66. Fraser op.cit. 21, 24, 26

had no inkling of his connection with the Address, except the information from Fraser at the trial which stated that Spiers had not approved of it, and had little evidence to bring which would ensure a favourable verdict to them on a charge of Treason.

The Commission finally went to Ayr where Thomas McKay of Stewarton pleaded guilty to a charge of High Treason and was sentenced to be executed on 15th September, a sentence that was later remitted. The Lord Advocate then intimated that he would offer no evidence against another prisoner from Stewarton and two men from Mauchline since he felt that their offences were much less heinous than those of others - fourteen in Ayrshire from Stewarton and Galston - who had not been captured.⁽⁶⁷⁾ With this the commission ended its work in Scotland. In a concluding speech, Lord Advocate Rae pointed out that true bills had been found against 98 people, of whom 52 had failed to appear. Twenty four people were sentenced to death, two found Not Guilty, and the remainder acquitted by consent of the Crown. Rae expressed the hope that the 'wickedness and folly' of the schemes of 'deluded persons' would now be apparent and that all men would now bring themselves to be loyal subjects to their King.⁽⁶⁸⁾

67. Green op.cit. iii 477-489

68. Ibid 489-92

The Lord Justice Clerk had the last word. He thought that it was now apparent that there existed in April 1820 a dangerous conspiracy, extending over five counties, 'an extent of Treason ... unparalleled in the history of this country.' Such a situation, he felt, would not arise again if the police did their duty, the laws were rigorously enforced, if the circulation of seditious and irreligious publications were curtailed and if the lower orders were brought back to religious and sober habits.⁽⁶⁹⁾ In fact, the trials had not disclosed the extent of the preparations for rebellion in April 1820 and as the Crown authorities admitted, the ringleaders had not been caught. If the people did remain quiet after 1820, if future demands for reform did follow a more legitimate, constitutional pattern, it was not because of the government's action in bringing so many people to trial. During the trials, little interest in what was happening was shown in Glasgow, a sure sign thought Charles Hope that secret orders had been issued to the people, thus proving that a secret organisation still existed.⁽⁷⁰⁾ Baird, Hardie and Wilson were in later years regarded as martyrs in the cause of freedom, the martyrology being largely the work of Peter Mackenzie. Even at the time of their execution there is evidence in the

69. Green op.cit. iii 494

70. Melville Papers Ms 11 Hope to Melville
23 July 1820

newspapers that they were looked on with considerable sympathy by the mobs. The Tory 'Clydesdale Journal for example, records that at Wilson's execution 'the sentiments of the mob showed that they regarded him in quite a different light from that of traitor, cries of 'he's died for his country' and 'he's murdered' were quite general.' (71) Yet no attempt was made by the very large crowd - estimated at 70,000 - to rescue him, a situation similar to the execution of Thistlewood in London. (72)

It is probable that many people had come to recognise that militant radicalism could not succeed, and from April 1820 onwards there was little threat to peace. In April, the Scots Magazine after commenting on the disturbances in the west of Scotland perpetrated by 'infatuated madmen called Radicals', remarked that 'the result of (Bonnymuir) seems to have awakened the reformers to a sense of the hopelessness of their cause. At present all is quiet....' (73) In the following month it was confirmed that public tranquillity was completely restored. In September 1820 Sidmouth wrote 'The latest accounts from the country and particularly from most of the manufacturing districts are, upon the whole, favourable.' (74) This lack of revolut-

71. Clydesdale Journal 1 Sep 1820

72. Thompson op.cit. 705

73. Scots Magazine N.S.6 Apr 1820 376

74. A. Aspinall (ed) Letters of George IV Lord Sidmouth to the King 21 Sep 1820 and 25 Sep 1820

ionary activity was commented on by Dr. Chalmers in January 1821 - 'The putting down of Radicalism last year has gone far to set the popular feelings at rest' (75) - and noted by the editor of the Glasgow Chronicle in July 1821 even in such places as Paisley, Glasgow, Stewarton, and Airdrie which had all been prominent centres of radical activity. (76)

At the same time as militant radicals experienced failure there seemed to be an amelioration in the economic distress which had assisted the radical cause. 'Although at the beginning of 1820 Cobbett had been writing as usual on the causes of the present poverty and misery - the weight of taxes', yet by the end of the year economic recovery had taken place, and 1821 began a series of fairly prosperous years. In September 1820, Sidmouth noted that 'the price of labour (was) gradually rising in consequence of an increasing demand for it while the price of subsistence (was) very moderate and still declining.' (77) Chalmers in January 1821 wrote that 'the vis medicatrix of trade ... is steadily bringing matters round to a fairer rate of subsistence and employment for our population.' (78) In the summer of 1821, the Glasgow Chronicle noted that trade was improving rapidly, especially in small country

75. Hanna Life of Chalmers ii 522

76. Glasgow Chronicle 21 July 1821

77. Aspinall (ed) Letters of George IV Sidmouth to the King 25 Sep 1820

78. Hanna op.cit. ii 522

towns, and that the country seemed more prosperous than at any time since 1812.⁽⁷⁹⁾ These impressions are backed up by such statistical data as is available. Unemployment and food prices were both falling; the value of our cotton manufactures exported increased in 1821 to £23.5 million; the highest figure since the end of the war. And although the wages of handloom weavers showed little, if any improvement, the weavers presumably benefited from the fall in prices, and fewer of them would be unemployed.⁽⁸⁰⁾

But improvement in economic conditions was by no means the only reason for the end of militant radicalism. Probably much more important was the development of the dispute over the position of Queen Caroline in relation to George IV and the monarchy, a dispute which allowed Radicals to criticise the King and his ministers and yet still support royalty. Since Whigs were also prepared to support the Queen in her fight against the King, his ministers and

79. Glasgow Chronicle 31 July 1821

80. Gayer, Rostow, Schwartz i, 153, 170, 123
To some extent the economic situation of weavers would also be helped by the organised emigration which took place in the second half of 1820. In June and July 1820, 1,200 emigrants left the west of Scotland; in October, 2,000 were selected to go to North America from the counties of Renfrew and Lanark. Helen I. Cowan 'British Emigration to British North America 1783-1837' University of Toronto Studies (1928)

authoritarian government, this meant that there was a union between Whigs and Radicals in and out of Parliament.

Queen Caroline the wife of George IV had been separated from her husband for over 20 years. The King's Ministers believed, probably with justice, that she had formed a liaison with a low-born Italian, but in view of the King's own conduct felt that it would be unwise to introduce a Divorce Bill. The Ministers finally decided to offer Caroline a sum of money to remain abroad and to refrain from claiming the title or prerogatives of Queen. Caroline, however, with the assistance of Alderman Wood, a prominent London Radical, came to London to be met with enthusiastic support from the people. The Government eventually decided to introduce a Bill of Pains and Penalties to deprive her of her claims to the title of Queen Consort and for over three months - from August to October 1820 - the Ministers' case, supported by Italian witnesses, was argued. The mass of the people had decided that the King's Ministers were engaged in yet another plot and a considerable popular literature supporting Caroline appeared. Eventually, the Bill in the Lords had to be withdrawn, much to the delight of the public. The Queen's case continued however for much of the following year and did not finally end until her

failure to be admitted to the Coronation in July 1821.⁽⁸¹⁾

Throughout, the case of Queen Caroline was used as a party question. Radicals, such as Alderman Wood and Cobbett could join with Whigs such as Brougham in attacking the Monarch and his ministers. The mobs could ridicule the King without attacking the institution of Monarchy. Radical addresses and petitions could be drawn up in favour of justice and sincere attachment to the throne. Co-operation between Radicals and Whigs, and the determination of Radicals to present themselves as loyalists was to be the pattern of Radicalism in the years following 1820.

It might be thought that the Caroline case, which could rouse so much enthusiasm in London, where the King and his Ministers were known and where Parliament was meeting, would have little effect in Scotland, where these factors were absent. Yet the interest in Scotland seems to have been phenomenal. Newspapers carried long reports of the case and the general public developed a real interest in the whole affair. As early as 17th June 1820, the Scotsman devoted the entire front page to an editorial on the question and inside, the account of a debate about the Queen filled eight

81. Cole Life of Cobbett gives one of the best accounts

columns. For the next few months this newspaper gave considerable space to the events in London (on 26th August, for example, almost the entire newspaper was devoted to the Caroline affair). The Scotsman was of course a leading Whig newspaper and made much use of the controversy to attack the Tories. On August 19th, for example, it was stated on the front page that 'Toryism is blind in its confidence in power - arbitrary in its exercise of it. Its labours are all directed to two objects - to increase the power of the executive - to curtail the rights and privileges of the people ... there is not one opinion in the head nor one feeling in the heart of a genuine Tory that is not hostile nor dangerous to the Constitution.'

It was this feeling that the Constitution was being attacked and that the powers of the executive were being increased at the expense of the people that gave Whigs and Radicals common ground. While Cartwright continued to urge the adoption of his radical views⁽⁸²⁾ - the restoration of the mythical constitution involving the people in annual elections to Parliament - Whigs throughout Scotland and England demanded the curtailment of ministerial power and the recognition of the rights of the individual as

82. British Museum Add. Ms. 30109. Cartwright to Sir Robert Wilson 12 Sep 1820

represented by Queen Caroline. By the end of September, Addresses to the Queen had been submitted from Montrose, Haddington, Dalkeith and Edinburgh, and during the remainder of the year others followed.⁽⁸³⁾ The Address of which we have most detail is that from Glasgow.⁽⁸⁴⁾ This was the occasion on which the young Peter Mackenzie seems to have made his entry into politics. In mid-September, along with several other respectable young men - mostly connected with the law - he had with difficulty an Address printed and posted up. He had previously made arrangements with the Beadle of the Town Kirk to have the Address left there for a week so that signatures might be appended, but Mackenzie was taken before the magistrates to answer for his authorship and the 33rd Regiment was ordered to clear the Tron Kirk Session House. No charge could of course be preferred against Mackenzie and on his release he was able to place his Address in the Session House of the Relief Church in Campbell Street. Eventually it was signed by 35,718 people and forwarded by Lord Archibald Hamilton to the Queen. In this affair, Mackenzie was supported not only by

83. Scotsman 23 Sep 1820, 16 Dec 1820.

The Address from Edinburgh was particularly interesting in that it was signed by 8321 ladies.

84. Mackenzie Reminiscences i 261-304

those who presumably had been attending radical meetings and signing radical petitions during the previous four years (the signatures of this Address must have included well over half of the adult population of Glasgow at that time), but also many 'old' Whigs who would, like Mackenzie himself have been strongly opposed to Radicalism.

Mackenzie was strenuously opposed by Glasgow Town Council just as the radical reformers had been. As soon as his Address was displayed, orders were given for it to be taken down; troops were used to prevent people from signing it; Mackenzie himself was bullied by the Provost and Magistrates; representations were made to his employer to have him dismissed. As the editor of the Scotsman commented (23 Sep 1820) - 'Their (i.e. the magistrates) petty efforts will expose their own littleness.' The Tory Council also sent loyal Addresses to the King, and asked for a royal portrait to hang in the town hall⁽⁸⁵⁾ but their one attempt to hold a public meeting was a fiasco, ending with the Provost 'deeming no doubt discretion the better part of valour (fleeing) with precipitation from the meeting.'⁽⁸⁶⁾

When news arrived of the failure of the Bill against the Queen there was great rejoicing throughout

85. Glasgow Burgh Records 3 Oct 1820, 10 Nov 1820, 13 Dec 1820

86. Scotsman 23 Dec 1820

Scotland. In Glasgow, 'tar barrels were readily procured and lighted up in many parts of the principal streets; countless windows in the most prominent places in the city were spontaneously lighted up, while all along the crowded way was jubilee and loud huzzah.' (87)

The magistrates called out the Dragoons and the artillery and almost brought about a repeat of Peterloo. According to Mackenzie, this action 'sounded the doom of the Boroughmongers.'

In Edinburgh, the council also tried to prevent rejoicing and illumination, but without success. (88)

Of the illuminations in Hamilton one reader of the Clydesdale Journal noted '... the number of candles in any window was regulated by the blackness of the owner's neb and the more he was disaffected and disloyal the greater was the brilliancy displayed.' (89)

There was a suggestion that Radicals throughout Scotland had forced the rejoicings, but this suggestion can have no basis in fact, for illuminations and rejoicing took place in towns where demands for a radical reform of parliament had never attracted support, for example at Peebles. (90)

A letter published in the Scotsman from 'Banks o' the Tweed'

87. Mackenzie Reminiscences i, 294

88. Scotsman 25 Nov 1820

89. Clydesdale Journal 24 Nov 1820

90. Scotsman 9 Dec 1820

said that 'rejoicings in Jedburgh, Hawick and even Kelso ... afford convincing proof that the great majority of the country viewed with abhorrence and execration the measures pursued by the Ministers of the King against the Queen.' (91)

What happened was that the Caroline Affair had provided a stimulus to political activity and opposition to the Tories. On 22nd December 1820, a meeting was held in the Relief Church, John Street, Glasgow, the object being to prepare a petition to the King to dismiss his ministers. The resolutions which were agreed by an audience of merchants and artisans criticised the system of taxation which crippled the agricultural, manufacturing and commercial interests, wasteful expenditure by Ministers, an illiberal foreign policy, the attack on the constitutional privileges and liberties of the people, the distrust created by the use of spies, the opposition to all proposals of reform of the system of representation - 'defects which have been the grand source and origin of our present calamities and distress' - and the affair of Queen Caroline. Two thousand people attended the meeting and hundreds had to be turned away. (92) In some respects, the resolutions bear a strong resemblance to resolutions taken at public meetings in 1816; the main difference

91. Scotsman 16 Dec 1820

92. Ibid 30 Dec 1820

is that there is no mention of annual parliaments and universal suffrage as the reforms desired in the system of representation. By the end of January, 18,065 had signed the petition with the resolutions. (93)

More important than this Glasgow meeting was the famous Pantheon meeting in Edinburgh, from which one reformer at least dated 'the complete emancipation of Edinburgh from political thralldom.' (94) Its importance lies in the facts that it was held in Edinburgh which had played little part in the parliamentary reform movement since 1793, that it was attended by a very large number of people from the merchant, commercial and artisan classes, that the speakers were for the most part prominent Whigs, and that a petition prepared was signed by 17,363 people. (95) The main speaker was Francis Jeffrey who, according to the Scotsman had a great effect on the audience. 'On two or three occasions and especially at the allusions to the Manchester outrage and the spy system, nearly the whole audience rose from their seats, waved their hats, and gave

93. Scotsman 27 Jan 1821

94. A. Nicolson (ed) Memoirs of Adam Black 66

95. Scotsman 23 Dec 1820, 30 Dec 1820, 6 Jan 1821, 27 Jan 1821. The Glasgow Petition prepared at the same time was signed by more people, but the Edinburgh figure is noteworthy not only because it represents a bigger proportion of the population, but because Edinburgh people had not been in the habit of signing such petitions.

vent to their feelings in a tumult of applause.' (96)

But that this was no meeting of radical reformers was emphasised by Jeffrey. 'The increasing intelligence of all ranks has recently given a weight to public opinion which it never was entitled to before ... there is now a feeling of distress and of impatience ... that can no longer be neglected.' Ministers can see nothing but themselves and revolutionists. 'It is to fill up this chasm, to occupy a middle ground and to show how large a proportion of the people are attached to the constitution while they lament its abuses that such meetings as this should be assembled.' Thus Jeffrey made it clear that he at any rate stood somewhere between the Tories and their radical critics. Although he criticised in his speech the King's Ministers, their extravagance, indifference to petitions, their illiberal notions in commerce, their reactionary foreign policy, their use of spies and informers, their conduct of the Caroline affair, he did not specify reform of the House of Commons as a necessary course of action. The resolutions which the meeting adopted were on the same lines, the final one stating that there should be 'an Address to His Majesty expressing our sincere and unalterable attachment to His Majesty's person and government and to the principles of that happy constitution which placed

His Majesty's family on the throne, and humbly entreating His Majesty to remove from His Majesty's presence and councils those individuals by whose suggestion His Majesty and his subjects have been involved in so many calamities.' Another speaker, Andrew Scott - 'one of the people' - who had been a prominent Burgh Reformer, told the meeting that the Whigs were 'the only body that could fill up that fearful chasm between the governors and the governed.... They occupied a middle ground between those who wished to rule by intimidation and those who would involve us in anarchy and insurrection.' The only mention of anything other than moderate, Whiggish reform came surprisingly from Cockburn. 'Popular representation is a right', he said, but he did not make explicit what he understood by the term. (97)

Thus there was set in motion yet another movement for reform but one which could not be called radical. What the reform asked for was merely that the King should change his ministers and that domestic and foreign policies should follow a different course. Outside Glasgow, there was no suggestion that there should be a reform in parliamentary

97. Cockburn's ideas of reform can be seen from a letter to T.F. Kennedy 'I should think £20 sufficiently low, or at least £10....' - certainly not universal suffrage. Letters to T.F. Kennedy 20 Apr 1820

representation in any way radical. At a meeting in Dundee, for example, it was suggested that the changes in representation should be 'such changes and modifications as the increased intelligence and importance of the people as well as the corruptions introduced by time and the changes in the relative population of the several parts of His Majesty's dominions may require.' Generally, the demand was merely for a change of ministers and policy.⁽⁹⁸⁾

The public meetings in 1820-21 were not the only ones to criticise the King's ministers. County meetings were being held and at each the question of a loyal address to the throne was raised. Normally there was no difficulty in having this approved, but in 1821 in a number of counties there was a significant vote against it - fifteen against sixty-six in Ayrshire, thirty-five against eighty five in Fife, fifteen against fifty-two in Kirkcudbright, forty-four against sixty-three in Renfrewshire, twenty-seven against one hundred and eleven in Edinburgh. Most astounding was that in Lanarkshire the dissidents had a majority of four - ninety-four against ninety. All the other counties were unanimous in favour of the loyal address. The address which was submitted from Lanarkshire said 'That while we humbly offer to your Majesty these assurances of our determined

98. Scotsman 13 Jan 1821 and 27 Jan 1821

loyalty to your sacred Majesty and to the constitution as established in 1688 it would be want of duty not to express our conviction that a strict regard to economy in the public expenditure and the adoption of conciliatory measures are essentially necessary to remove the financial embarrassments of the country, to alloy the prevailing discontents to restore confidence to the people in your Majesty's government and to secure the tranquillity and prosperity of the nation.'⁽⁹⁹⁾ Another sign of a greater interest in criticism of the Government was in the notice given to Fox dinners. In January 1821, the Scotsman issued a special supplement giving an account of what had taken place at such a dinner in Edinburgh. Four hundred and seventy-five gentlemen assembled to honour Fox. Amongst the speakers were not only Francis Jeffrey and his like, but people of lower social status, such as booksellers and haberdashers. They became common in Scotland for a few years, and as Cockburn noted, 'these meetings in Scotland where we have no other regular convocations do immense good and have prodigiously awakened public spirit within the last few years.'⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ At the Glasgow Dinner in 1822, for example, the toasts (preceded of course by

99. Scots Magazine N.S.8 Feb 1821 and Scotsman 13 Jan 1821

100. Cockburn Letters to T.F. Kennedy 21 Dec 1822

appropriate speeches) included Queen Caroline, a speedy and substantial Reform in the representation of the People, Free Government in Spain and Portugal, the Independence of South America, Franklin and Washington, the Dissolution of the Holy Alliance, Lord Archibald Hamilton, Sir Samuel Romilly, Sir James Mackintosh,⁽¹⁰¹⁾ and these may be regarded as typical. Through these dinners and through public meetings, links were forged between merchants, artisans and the Whigs.⁽¹⁰²⁾

It would be impossible to show that ideas of a radical reform of the House of Commons had any effect on Whigs in Scotland. It is true that Whig activity increased considerably after 1820 but this was mainly the result of the Queen Caroline affair. In 1819 Francis Jeffrey let it be known that in his opinion parliamentary reform would have no effect on

101. Scotsman 2 Feb 1822

102. Cockburn Memorials 398, says that the Fox dinner in 1825 'was the last of these festivals.... Public meetings of all kinds soon became so common that, as substantive events, they are not worth recording. These Fox dinners did incalculable good. They animated and instructed and consolidated the Whig party with less trouble and more effect than anything else that could have been devised.'

relieving distress although possible some reform might be necessary to conciliate the people⁽¹⁰³⁾ and in April 1820 Cockburn was writing that the representation of Scotland could not possibly be worse, but that he did not think the time suitable for change.⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ Three years later, both he and Jeffrey had decided that change might be possible now that those in 'the central rank' of society had become aware of their privileges and duties.⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ By this time there was no longer any talk in Scotland of Unions and Associations and it was now safe for Whigs to advocate some measure of parliamentary reform. Yet they never adopted ideas of radical reform; as late as 1826 Jeffrey wrote 'We are for authority as well as for freedom. We are for the natural and wholesome influence of wealth and rank, and veneration which belongs to old institutions.'⁽¹⁰⁶⁾ This could hardly be termed a radical point of view.

Yet it is undeniable that by 1822 the Whigs had attracted a measure of popular support. The case of Queen Caroline had united Whigs, who saw in her a convenient person around whom to organise opposition to what they considered the dangerous

103. Cockburn Life of Jeffrey 189

104. Cockburn Letters to Kennedy 9

105. Glasgow Free Press 22 Jan 1823

106. Quoted in Aspinall Lord Brougham and the Whig Party 300

expansion of executive power, and people who 'had no particular kindness for George IV', pitied her in her adversity, and applauded her fight against the government.⁽¹⁰⁷⁾ The middling classes, the shopkeepers and their families, were as much devoted to her cause as the rabble and the views they held about Caroline were voiced in Parliament by the Whigs.⁽¹⁰⁸⁾ When the campaign for parliamentary reform revived at the end of the 1820s, the cry for reform was not confined as in 1816-20 'principally to the working classes; it was echoed far and wide by the great majority of the middle class.'⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ What happened, according to the Whig 'Glasgow Free Press' was that many people were converted 'from servile to liberal principles' and the great mass of the lower orders from the 'violent and visionary doctrines of radicalism to more moderate and consequently much sounder views respecting reform in Parliament.'⁽¹¹⁰⁾ It does seem true that immediately after 1820 'the operative portion of the manufacturing classes who formerly lent an ear to the absurd and impracticable system of Annual

107. Parkhill op.cit. 71

108. Aspinall op.cit. 279. Edward Ellice
to Lambton 14 Sep 1820

109. Fraser op.cit. 33

110. Glasgow Free Press 8 Oct 1823

Parliaments and Universal Suffrage (sank) if not into oblivion at least into silence.'⁽¹¹¹⁾ A union of quite diverse groups came to stand in opposition to the Tories. Sir Walter Scott thought that this opposition consisted of four elements.⁽¹¹²⁾ Firstly there was 'the old and proper Whig party ... whose general views were ... to turn out Ministers and get in themselves.' Secondly there were the Reviewing Whigs whose leaders were 'unquestionably men of great talents for both business and literature.' They had formed a 'convivial' union with the third group, the democratical party, which consisted of 'the lowest shopkeepers and mechanics.' Finally, there were the 'actual Radicals' in the large manufacturing towns. As Scott correctly pointed out, 'none of these different classes can with much truth or justice be mingled with the others, yet they all ... act together in opposition to the Tories.'

Thus the failure of militant radicalism in 1820 was followed by the development of a more coherent opposition to the Tories. The Radical War had shown that there was little support for violent means of reform and those who advocated it were discredited. People who desired a change in the parliamentary system therefore seem to have accepted that it should be

111. Glasgow Free Press 5 Feb 1823

112. Aspinall (ed) Letters of George IV ii 539-44
Scott to Sir William Knighton 12 May 1822

accomplished by more peaceful methods. This inevitably led to a union among those who desired some change even although critics such as Scott might regard it as un-natural.

The Press in Scotland 1815-22

Another sphere in which the case of Queen Caroline had unexpected influence was in the establishment of greater freedom for the press in Scotland. Unfortunately for the radicals of the period 1815-22 this freedom arrived too late although it was to be of considerable importance in the later political life of Scotland. The press in England played a most important part in the spread of radicalism; radicals could reach the general public in any of three ways - by holding large public meetings, by forming clubs or societies, or by publishing and distributing newspapers, pamphlets and books. Of these three methods, the last was most likely to affect or influence the greatest number, and the importance of the press was fully realised by both the reformers and their opponents. Restrictions on the press and the attempts by radical writers to overcome them played a large part in the story of radicalism at this time.

In England newspapers and periodicals had been gaining influence during the 18th century. Since 1695 there had been no formal censorship although there were restrictions on the freedom of the press. The publication or circulation of anything with a malicious intention of causing a breach of the peace was a misdemeanour at Common Law;

thus any expression of dissatisfaction with the established Government or Church could be classed as seditious libel and, as such, a misdemeanour at Common Law.⁽¹⁾ In 1795 the Common Law was enforced by an act (36 Geo. III C7) which allowed the penalties of High Treason to be attached to any design of intimidating either House of Parliament or of forcing the King to change his measures or his counsels; and the incitement of the people to hatred or contempt of the dynasty or the Constitution was declared a misdemeanour punishable with 7 years transportation for the second offence. Obviously this could be applied to those who criticised the government or who demanded changes in the constitution either in speech or in writing, and thus the freedom of the press could be seriously affected. Stamp duties also hampered the circulation of newspapers and periodicals; by 1815 the duty on newspapers was 4d per copy and there was a duty of 3s 6d on each advertisement, while pamphlets were subject to a duty of 3s per edition. These duties inevitably affected circulation and only half a million newspapers were sold each week in 1815. Thus it may be surmised that few members of the lower classes would be able to purchase newspapers regularly, and this meant that only in clubs and reading rooms could the news be

1. Wickwar The struggle for the freedom of the Press 19

regularly studied.⁽²⁾ A final restriction on the freedom of the press in England was the stipulation (by 38 Geo III C78 and 79) that the names and addresses of printer, publisher and two proprietors were to be registered at the Stamp Office and that printing presses were to be registered.

Despite these restrictions, a number of reformer publications appeared during the war, among them Cobbett's Weekly Political Register, selling at 1s $\frac{1}{2}$ d. The appeal to a mass readership did not come however until Cobbett had discovered how to evade Stamp Duty and thereby reduce the cost of his journal. After this had been done in 1816 many others in England followed his example and there was a proliferation of radical journals which inevitably must have exerted strong pressure on the radical movement.

Cobbett's Register in 1816 also began a change in Scotland. Although the first Scottish newspapers had appeared in the mid-17th century no political ideas were expressed until near the end of the 18th century. With the franchise limited to a very small proportion of the people, there was little interest in elections, and newspapers, which have to cater for their readers' interests, would consequently publish little about elections or political events.

A politically aware public did not exist in Scotland before the latter years of the 18th century. Even then the new-found vigour of the Scottish press did not last long. One of the newspapers which had reported the events of the British Convention in 1793, and which generally adopted a strongly radical point of view was the Gazeteer. The editor, Captain Johnson was in March 1793 imprisoned for three months for contempt of Lord Braxfield; thereafter the paper declined and ceased to exist in 1794 and this example probably had a strong effect on Scottish journalism. It was obvious that the laws restricting freedom of the press, the Scottish judicial system which allowed the jury to be picked by the presiding judge without power of challenge existing in the accused, the possibility of a majority verdict, and the distance of Edinburgh from London where legal cases could attract considerable attention, would prevent any newspaper which proposed radical changes in government from having a very long life.⁽³⁾ By 1815 there were in Scotland no newspapers that were radical in outlook and the Scottish press was in 'as fettered a condition as any Press that is legally free could be.... If the most respectable and unprosecuted London opposition newspaper had been published in Edinburgh, the editor would have been better acquainted with the

High Court of Justiciary than he would have found comfortable.'⁽⁴⁾ It will thus be seen why Scotsmen interested in political reform had been forced to read the London Morning Chronicle or the Political Register and why, during the years 1815-22, no long-lived radical newspaper appeared in Scotland. Consequently radicalism in Scotland was always, at this time, influenced by the ideas of English reformers, and Scottish radicals therefore tended to look south for leadership.

In Scottish newspapers at this time considerable publicity was given to events in Parliament when it was in session, to elections in England, and to reports of legal cases in London. Scottish affairs received much less publicity. Elections here could rouse little public interest since there were so few voters, virtually nothing that could be called a campaign and quite often, very few elections; papers were unwilling to publish accounts of legal cases which had anything remotely to do with sedition or libel as the editors might themselves face prosecution; town councils were close corporations whose proceedings were not reported; the General Assemblies met only once per year and their discussions were of little interest to those interested in political reform. Such Scottish news as did appear consisted of reports

of criminal and civil cases which would not endanger the editor, notices of County Meetings, accounts of the meetings of the Convention of Royal Burghs, Agricultural reports and a multitude of excessively trivial matters - ghosts, phenomena, etc. The leading article which had been found in the ill-fated Gazeteer, and which might have influenced public opinion, hardly existed. Events of real local significance were often omitted or referred to only briefly - presumably it was felt that everyone reading the newspaper would know about them, so reporting them would be unnecessary. Little attention was given to the activities of the lower orders of society, and even when such people were mentioned, it was usually in a cursory and unsympathetic manner. Nor during the period 1815-22 did any change in this attitude occur. Apart from the Spirit of the Union in 1819 no radical newspaper was published in Scotland and no established newspaper tried to give the radical point of view, with the possible exception of the Scotsman on a few occasions. There were no Scottish publications to rival those of Cobbett, Wooler, Hone, Carlisle, Sherwin and others in England; all that was produced here were some pamphlets, and the verse of Alexander Rodger.

In the west of Scotland the Glasgow Chronicle showed the greatest sympathy for the reformers' demands.

For much of the period 1815-22 it was critical of the Government, and was always prepared to publish letters on controversial topics - e.g. poor relief, work for the unemployed, Owen's scheme at New Lanark, relations between Catholic and Protestants, abolition of slavery, property and income taxes etc. A number of articles by Cobbett were copied from his Register; there were numerous quotations from Whig papers in London; notices of Radical meetings in the years 1816-17 were frequent and often at these meetings resolutions were passed expressing thanks to the editor of the Glasgow Chronicle for his support and ordering the resolutions to be printed there. But the Chronicle also published reports of County meetings; and the editor never announced the remedies which he favoured to alleviate the widespread distress. The policy of the Chronicle was to give publicity to both the Government and its critics, to criticise abuses but never suggest remedies. This policy of trying to hold the balance between both sides did not help the Chronicle in the long run. In 1819, the reformers criticised it severely at their public meetings and Macleod attacked it strongly in the Spirit of the Union. Even in face of these attacks the Chronicle tried to maintain dignity and show an absence of passion. The editor commended the reformers for their behaviour at public meetings and criticised the authorities for their part in the events at Manchester

in August 1819, yet at the same time deplored attempts to stir up the people.⁽⁵⁾

In October 1819 the Chronicle published an article on the Whigs and the points made then are indicative of the policy of the newspaper - Whigs ought to stand aloof from radical reformers who are not seeking an improvement in the House of Commons by a wisely adjusted balance of representation but are counteracting every prospect of it by claiming rights in defiance of the laws. 'They render the calm and dignified cause of reform an object of terror to many who would otherwise support it.'⁽⁶⁾ By 1820 the Chronicle was strongly opposed to the militant radicals; when the rebellion and strike took place in April 1820 the whole affair was played down - not more than one in eighty of the people had joined Union Societies, it was said - and blame was put on 'itinerant apostles of anarchy from England.'⁽⁷⁾

A question on which the Chronicle showed more enthusiasm was that of burgh reform. Meetings on this topic and discussions in Parliament were reported at length and editorial policy was clearly expressed - 'there is no reason why the management of funds and inferior law proceedings should be placed in the hands of a set of men altogether

5. Glasgow Chronicle 7 Sep 1819, 16 Dec 1819

6. Ibid 12 Oct 1819

7. Ibid 4 Apr 1820

uncontrolled and irresponsible.... Ministers ought at least to give us the management of our property.' Burgesses should all have the right to vote at town council elections, but this was as far as the Chronicle's Radicalism went.⁽⁸⁾ It was strongly middle class, Whig paper, convinced that only constitutional attempts to reform Parliament and improve the lot of the lower classes would succeed. By 1819 the most liberal newspaper in the west of Scotland was condemning demands for political reform to solve economic problems, for such reform it was with justification suggested 'would not obviate the overstock of hands and manufactures to which the calamity is owing;⁽⁹⁾ and in 1820 it had swung so far over to the right as to refrain from taking much part in the Queen Caroline affair except to advise the Queen to go and reside abroad. At no time in the period 1815-22 could the Chronicle be classed as a radical paper; the most that it had done was to give publicity to radical demands in 1816-17.

A newspaper which was much more positive in its approach to reform was the Scotsman, founded in Edinburgh in 1817. Its prospectus issued on 30th November 1816 complained that 'nothing of a very spirited or liberal nature' could find its way into the 'cold, unvaried and spiritless' Edinburgh newspapers at this time. The Scotsman soon obtained

8. Glasgow Chronicle 6 Apr 1819, 29 May 1819.

9. Ibid 29 July 1819

a large circulation and became the best newspaper in Scotland, combining independence with intelligence, moderation with zeal, with editors of the highest calibre.⁽¹⁰⁾ Generally, the Scotsman tried to appeal to the 'honest, liberal and well-meaning' members of society.⁽¹¹⁾ The front page was occupied by an article on some topic of interest (usually political) and there was elsewhere in the paper substantial comment on the news. Much space was given to parliamentary affairs and political events, but of Scottish affairs there was relatively little. It was never a radical publication, although on occasion it showed sympathy for the radicals as people if not for their political aims. It was always a Whig paper, upholding the Whigs as the champions of law and justice and advising all reformers to unite with them. Yet as compared to the Opposition papers in England, even the Scotsman had 'a chastened tone and didactic style' and is in no way to be compared to the radical publications in England. This was to be explained, thought the Editor, by the fact that since unanimity was not required of jurors in Scotland it was quite possible for an innocent person to be found guilty of a seditious libel, 'and that conscientiously by a majority of the jury.'⁽¹²⁾

10. Cockburn Memorials 297

11. Scotsman Prospectus

12. Ibid 25 Dec 1819

The Scotsman's outlook on Parliamentary Reform was similar to that of many Whigs. In 1817 the need for reform was stressed and the weakened influence of electors deplored; in 1819 the need for moderate reform was still being advocated - shorter Parliaments and an extended franchise without going the length of annual parliaments and universal suffrage.⁽¹³⁾ There seemed to be little basically wrong with the constitution; it was merely that successive Governments had, by ignoring the mass of the people, split the nation into two 'furious and irreconcilable factions ... while the small neutral corps of Whigs and the more considerate friends of reform 'feared the violence of both sides. The despiseable faction' who had ruled despotically for 60 years should now be replaced by others who would 'act in union with the sentiments and feelings of the public.'⁽¹⁴⁾ Its allegiance was made quite explicit when it referred to Fox as 'the greatest statesman the country ever produced.... To the exertions and eloquence of Mr. Fox it is chiefly owing that the principles of well regulated constitutional freedom are still dear to the majority of the people in England'.⁽¹⁵⁾ Yet the Scotsman later declared that it would support Whig ideals and Whig politicians 'only so far as Whig

13. Scotsman 22 Mar 1817, 10 Mar 1817, 29 Mar 1817, 10 Oct 1819

14. Ibid 27 Nov 1819

15. Ibid 8 Jan 1820

practice is consistent with the great principles of English liberty' ⁽¹⁶⁾ and when Lord Archibald Hamilton in 1819 supported the Seditious Libels Bill he was strongly attacked, although on previous occasions he had received nothing but praise.

The desire to treat every case on its merits can also be seen in the Scotsman's writings on radicalism. Generally, radicalism was condemned as 'a bugbear' and there was rejoicing when in 1820 it was on the wane. ⁽¹⁷⁾ Orator Hunt, who by 1819 was probably the leading Radical in England, was stigmatised as 'a shameless imposter who has been taking advantage of the distresses of the people to inflame their minds' and the reforms he proposed were condemned as 'tending to render all reform hopeless by raising an alarm in the minds of the powerful classes.' ⁽¹⁸⁾ When the first accounts of Peterloo reached Scotland, the Scotsman's sympathies were with the magistrates who had been forced to deal with demagogues and agitators. ⁽¹⁹⁾ But a week later, it was considered that there was no excuse for the treatment Hunt and his audience had been subjected to. 'Meetings like that held at Manchester...are the least of two evils; they are outlets for discontent

16. Scotsman 3 Oct 1820

17. Ibid 8 Jan 1820

18. Ibid 28 Aug 1819

19. Ibid 21 Aug 1819

and ill-humour ... the magistrates seem to have acted with the violence and ferocity of a mob.' If such proceedings meet with such countenance (from the Government) it is almost tantamount to telling the lower class that they are out of the protection of the law', and the upper classes who displayed such indifference to the sufferings of the poor were condemned. (Later, on 18th December 1819, the editor suggested that the State should actually help those in distress.) The Scotsman never advocated the doctrines of the radical reformers and was 'always forward to stigmatize or to blame what was intolerant or imprudent in their conduct; but while they committed no breach of the law (the Scotsman) deprecated with equal zeal everything like intolerance against them' and even praised some Radicals as honest, sincere, and well-meaning.⁽²⁰⁾ But later in 1820 the Radical War was considered as of little importance and the excessive fears of the Government ridiculed; no sympathy was shown for the rebels who were caught and imprisoned; the Treason trials were reported but no comment made. Instead, from the middle of the year onwards, the Scotsman took up with vigour the case of the Queen. On only one occasion from 1817-22 did the Scotsman forsake Whiggery to support radicalism and that was over Sidmouth's

20. Scotsman 12 Feb 1820

Six Acts, of which it strongly disapproved.⁽²¹⁾

The Scotsman showed that it could campaign vigorously when it wished to do so. Considerable support was given to the campaign for Burgh Reform; the Scottish system of selecting juries was criticised - 'the boasted trial by jury is worse than a hoax if the jurymen be not impartially nominated' - but in no sense could the Scotsman be classed as a radical paper.

The only genuinely radical Scottish newspaper was the short-lived Spirit of the Union published by Gilbert Macleod, assisted by Alexander Rodger. It not only reported news, mainly of public meetings; it also published addresses to its readers in the style that Cobbett had used in his Register. It was quite patently written to appeal to the lower classes and to incite them to take action against the Government and to protest against its policies. It first appeared on 30th October 1819 and the opening Address set the tone for the next ten weekly issues. 'It is easy my fellow citizens for those who are amply supplied both with necessaries and luxuries of life to become your admonitors and cram you with good words instead of food.' Such people did not feel the oppression of the tax gatherer, for they could put money out to usury. The solution to the problems of the oppressed was the extension of the franchise to all taxpayers except madmen and

women.

On occasion the Spirit of the Union could discuss broad issues or take note of national events - for example the sale of parliamentary seats, the Six Acts, Lambton's scheme for parliamentary reform⁽²²⁾ but usually greater interest was shown in local events. Public meetings such as those at Rutherglen and Clayknowes were described in detail and their resolutions noted; so also was a County meeting at Hamilton held to discuss Sidmouth's proposal for raising a corps of Yeomanry Cavalry, and the action of 34 farmers who there offered their services for every and any occasion against the radical reformers was condemned.

As Cobbett had done in the Register, frequent attacks were made on individuals. Those who attracted attention included the Parish Minister at Bothwell who told his congregation that 'the only criterion of their not having an evil heart of unbelief' lay in their signing an Address to Sidmouth.⁽²³⁾ Major Mackie, the Commandant of the Glasgow Armed Association who promised the Radicals 'a taste of steel'; and John Maxwell Jnr., who was unjustly condemned as a pretended reformer wanting the operative to work harder for lower wages.⁽²⁴⁾

22. Spirit of the Union 4 Dec 1819, 11 Dec 1819

23. Ibid 13 Nov 1819

24. Ibid

In this way, Macleod hoped to unite all radicals and demonstrate who their enemies were. But the strongest attacks were made on other newspaper editors. The Glasgow Newspapers were condemned for doctoring the facts of the riot in Paisley; the Chronicle was attacked for its pusillanimity; the Courier for employing 'a contemptible, low-bred, scribbler' who had sneered at the humanity shown by the Duke of Hamilton towards the Peterloo victims; the editor of the Herald, Samuel Hunter, was accused of snobbery and ridiculed for obesity. In all this, Macleod was making it clear that he was opposed to everyone who was not a fervent radical - Ministers and Members of Parliament, the Provost and magistrates of Glasgow, local dignatories, members of the middle and upper classes, and fellow journalists; and these attacks were made with an intensity that was hitherto unique in Scottish journalism, comparing in style with much of what appeared in similar English publications. Such journalism made a strong appeal, for over 1000 copies of the paper were printed each week, a very high figure for a Scottish newspaper at that time, and along with the Manchester Observer and the Black Dwarf, the Spirit of the Union became the Bible of radicalism in Scotland. (25)

Yet it was not the scurrilous attacks on all and sundry which led to the editors downfall. In the

9th issue on 25th December mention was made of Kinloch of Kinloch the Dundee Radical who had failed to appear for his trial. Macleod commented on the proceedings as recounted in another newspaper, the 'Glasgow Chronicle, (23 Dec 1819). But in doing this Macleod was, in the eyes of the Lord Advocate, guilty of a gross contempt of the High Court and of a most illiberal attack on the character of the Judges.⁽²⁶⁾ At his trial, Macleod admitted that he was the Editor, Publisher and Printer of the 'Spirit of the Union, that he had sold 200 copies of the 9th issue (although many hundreds were held back when he learned legal action was to be taken against him), that he had written the passage on Kinloch's trial, but asserted that he venerated the institutions of his country and never had at any time any intention to bring odium and contempt upon them. On 15th January he was found guilty of contempt and sentenced to four months imprisonment. In addition, he had to find £40 security for his good behaviour for three years afterwards.⁽²⁷⁾

On Monday 14th February he again appeared in Court, this time on a charge of sedition.⁽²⁸⁾ Seven seditious acts consisting of seven issues of the 'Spirit of the Union were specified by Lord Advocate

26. Scotsman 8 Jan 1820

27. Ibid 15 Jan 1820

28. Ibid 11 Mar 1820, 18 Mar 1820.

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Rae. There was nothing original in any of these issues; they merely advocated the normal radical measures such as Parliamentary reform, reduction of taxation, pruning the Civil List and punishment of those guilty for the Manchester atrocities. The only item which could not have been found in an English Radical publication was the criticism of the 34 farmers who had expressed a desire to join the Lanarkshire Yeomanry.

Although Macleod was only the publisher and not the proved author of the articles in the indictment, and although some of the worst articles had been reprinted from other, unprosecuted papers, Rae had little difficulty in winning his case. His evidence was aimed solely at proving publication; he merely recited and commented. Rae praised the constitution, ascribed the people's discontent not to their sufferings but to demagogues like the prisoner and asked what would become of our Society if he were not convicted. Several witnesses swore to the excellence and mildness of Macleod's character, and possibly for this reason the jury found him guilty but recommended leniency. On 6th March the judge pronounced sentence; Macleod was to be transported for five year.

Previously Moncrieff who was MacLeod's counsel had argued that the offence proved was not sedition or actual commotion but 'leasing-making' the punishment for which under a Scots statute of 1703

was fine or imprisonment or banishment but not transportation. He challenged even the legality of the one such sentence previously passed for 'leasing-making' or 'verbal sedition'. (R.V. Palmer) On the other hand, the Solicitor-General argued that transportation was necessarily included in banishment and the judges agreed with him. Lord Gillies alone was prepared to sentence Macleod to imprisonment. He stated that precedents for verbal sedition in Scotland were few but that in England where they were numerous there was no instance of more than fine or imprisonment; the act of 1819, which was almost a renewal of that of 1795, had stipulated banishment, not transportation, and that as the punishment for the second offence. Nevertheless, he admitted that the power to transport those found guilty of verbal sedition must be held to exist in Scotland but that in this case he felt it should not be exercised. The other five judges did not take such a lenient view. Lord Hernand considered that publication made the sedition real instead of verbal and with this Pitmilley, Succoth, Meadowbank and the Lord Justice Clerk agreed. Palmer had been sentenced to transportation, so Macleod had to suffer likewise.

Thus in the case of Macleod it was settled that in Scotland publishing a seditious libel was real sedition and that banishment included and authorised transportation. The savage punishment

of Macleod helped to ensure that no other radical journal appeared in Scotland for many years.

Such punishment was possible in Scotland because of the precedent of Palmer, because of the severe outlook of most members of the Scottish bench, because juries were picked by judges from a list of freeholders and because newspaper comment was stifled.

In London, however, the position was quite different.

In 1817 when the Habeas Corpus Act was suspended Cobbett fled to America, but his place was taken by other writers such as Wooler and Hone. When the Government tried to prosecute these men it gave itself unwelcome publicity. Wooler, who ridiculed politicians in his weekly Black Dwarf, was tried on a charge of publishing a defamatory libel on the King's ministers. He was found Guilty but three of the jurymen stated that they considered him only guilty of telling the truth. When William Hone, a writer of parodies was brought to trial on a charge of having mocked the Anglican Catechism, Litany and Creed he was able to quote in his defence similar unpublished parodies by George Canning, church dignatories and others in authority and after a trial lasting three days was found Not Guilty. He was then honoured with a public dinner, presented with £3,000 raised by public subscription and given immense publicity, which led to the sale of 100,000 copies of his parodies. After Peterloo in 1819, Wooler and Hone were replaced as leaders of radical

agitation by Carlile and Sherwin who continually attacked the Government in Sherwin's Political Register (Later Republican). Neither man was ever prosecuted for anything he wrote in either paper; Carlile believed that the Attorney-General did not want to attack authors for 'he knows that the authors remain authors after committed to prison.' When Carlile was eventually prosecuted it was on a charge of blasphemous libel (for publishing Paine's Age of Reason). Yet although he was found guilty and sentenced to imprisonment, the Republican continued to appear and Carlile's punishment seemed to have little effect on other writers.⁽²⁹⁾ The contrast between England and Scotland in the whole matter of the freedom of the press is very obvious from the examples that have been quoted.

In England the authorities realised that they would have much more success if they prosecuted the newsvendors and many prosecutions took place.⁽³⁰⁾ In Scotland there are few records of such cases, possibly because there were fewer vendors to prosecute in view of the greater restrictions on publishing that existed. It is recorded that in December 1819, Matthew Shiels was apprehended in Glasgow for selling cheap publications, and likewise James McDonald in Port Glasgow.⁽³¹⁾ Also in December,

29. Wickwar op.cit. 57-97

30. Ibid 97-102, 108-114

31. Glasgow Chronicle 9 Dec 1819, 21 Dec 1819

Andrew Marshall who had been selling political publications for three years was arrested along with his wife, and all his private papers seized. After a few days, bail was accepted and the two were released. They were indicted for circulating seditious and blasphemous pamphlets - Carlile's Republican, Nos. 12 and 13, Wooler's Black Dwarf, Nos. 41, 44 and Paine's Age of Reason but before their trial could take place on 6th January they fled and in their absence were outlawed.⁽³²⁾ On 24th January 1820 the High Court of Justiciary met in Edinburgh to try Walker Bailie and Janet Simpson his wife on a charge of sedition in that they had sold Wooler's Black Dwarf and other publications. Like Marshall, Bailie did not appear and was outlawed in his absence and the case against his wife was dropped.⁽³³⁾ The Lord Advocate, speaking of the case of Andrew Marshall, said that people charged with sedition who did not appear 'evinced by flight their own sense of the delinquency committed by them' and went on to state that if the trial had gone on there would have been produced in evidence an account current between Marshall and Carlile, 14 folio pages, which showed that in a few months in the summer of 1819 the number of blasphemous and seditious publications sent by Carlile to Marshall for

32. Republican 31 Dec 1819, 14 Jan 1820
Scotsman 22 Jan 1820
 33. Glasgow Chronicle 25 Jan 1820

circulation in Glasgow was 16,930. These included copies of the Republican, Black Dwarf, Medusa, Gorgon and a multitude of others and their price amounted to £147.⁽³⁴⁾ It would seem from this that Marshall alone had been distributing about 1,000 publications per week and he was presumably not the only vendor. Since each of these publications would be read by several people in the west of Scotland the influence of English Radical literature in 1819 must have been considerable.⁽³⁵⁾

The only Scotsman who established a reputation as a Radical writer at this time was Alexander Rodger, a weaver who became a journalist. He was an occasional contributor to Black Dwarf and joined Gilbert Macleod in 1819 in producing Spirit of the Union. In 1820 he was arrested and spent 11 days in jail but otherwise was unmolested and seems to have had no difficulty in producing quantities of radical verse.⁽³⁶⁾ He commented in a most satirical way on events of the time, on government policy, the royal family and the church. The meeting at Thrushgrove in 1816 was commemorated in James Block's

34. Scotsman 22 Jan 1820

35. Ibid 12 Feb 1820, also notes that two book-sellers in Glasgow had been arrested for selling seditious publications.

36. Rodger's poems were not published under his name until 1838 and 1842 in Stray Leaves and Poems and Songs. Yet although his work was published for the most part anonymously, it seems to have been well known that he was a radical poet from 1816 onwards.

Lament (James Black was the Lord Provost at the time).

'Yes, forty thousand men and mair
Have dared to meet
While my command was to forbear
On Green or Street.'

Black was also ridiculed (along with Dr. Chalmers) in Hints to the disaffected Sooty Rabble ('Sooty Rabble' being a term used by Chalmers in talking of the industrious classes). In this poem there is also criticism of government policy, Kirkman Finlay and his support for the Corn Law, and the Church, which was the subject of much criticism from Rodger. In 1819 government policy and the church were again criticised in The Twa Weavers and there is a strong appeal to working class sentiment -

'And see how the working man's substance is shar'd
Among the Monopolist, Taxer and Laird.'

The Government alone was the subject of criticism in The Wailings of Corruption (1817) in which Beldam Corruption laments the fate of her spies and informers.

'When crushed 'neath a burden of galling
taxation
Brought on by a profligate blood-thirsty set,
The peaceable suff'ers throughout the whole
nation
To pray for redress in their villages met.
'Twas then that corruption half frantic with
terror
Bethought her of aid from her blood-hunting
spies...'

The royal family was subject to considerable satire in such poems as A Loyal Lamentation written when there were discussions between the Duke of Clarence and Ministers to increase his income by £22,000 per year so that he might marry and possibly produce an heir to the throne;⁽³⁷⁾ The Mucking of Geordie's Byre which satirised George III; A Most Loyal Ode satirising arrangements made by Parliament in 1819 to pay £10,000 per annum to the Duke of York if he would look after his royal father; and The Fattest of the Fat written during the trial of Queen Caroline. But the most severe criticism was reserved for the Church and its Ministers, seen for example in Black Coats and Cravats Sae White (1817).

'For their plan is the puir human mind to
mislead
Whilst four or five hundred a year is their
creed'

Various ministers including Chalmers and Lapslie of Campsie were referred to in most uncomplimentary terms, and although Rodger admitted that there were some exceptional ministers

'But oh! these exceptions, how trifling!
how few!

Compared wi' the mass who self-interest pursue.'

Similar criticisms are to be found, for example, in Shonny Cammel a minister who, after an interview with

37. Parl. Deb. xxxviii 13 Apr 1818

the Lord Advocate, denounced the infidel and wicked nature of Radicalism.

'...the blessed Lord Sidmouth's the Lord
Whom I piously serve, by retailing his word.'

Such outspoken satire must have annoyed the Lord Advocate and others in authority in Scotland and it is surprising that no steps were taken to punish the author. The satire was aimed at the King, his family, his Ministers and at the Church of Scotland and it would seem to have been a simple matter for the Lord Advocate to institute charges of seditious or blasphemous libel. It is possible that the circulation of this satire was so restricted that it was deemed of little importance or perhaps the example of Hone's prosecution in London had convinced the authorities that more harm than good might result from such a writer as Rodger. //

All during the period 1815-22 the authorities were worried by the thought of the evil effects that Radical literature might have on the people. In 1816, Reddie, the Town Clerk of Glasgow was deploring the wide circulation of Cobbett's Address, the Lord Advocate was complaining about the 'cheap and mischievous publications' which were encouraging sedition in Scotland and Sidmouth thought that there had never been a time 'when greater industry was used... to pervert and inflame the minds of the

people.' (38) The Lord Advocate in January 1817 wrote to Sidmouth 'I am taking measures ... to obviate if possible the evil tendency of those (cheap publications) now distributing by the disaffected', but in March 1817 one of Sidmouth's informants told him that Cobbett's Register was circulating in the Highlands and causing disaffection there. (39)

In 1819, Lord Advocate Rae, probably with more justification than his predecessor wrote 'Your Lordship cannot be ignorant of the mischief which the licentious state of the Press is now doing. A very great number of the Black Dwarf and similar publications are now circulated in the west of Scotland. Something must be done here to counteract the evil....' (40)

The problem was not, of course, confined to Scotland; Sidmouth was at the same time referring to 'the root of all evil, "audax Licentia" of the press.' (41) It was to combat the growing influence of cheap newspapers and publications that two of the Six Acts were passed at the end of 1819. One (60 Geo.III C8) was for preventing and punishing seditious libels, while the other (60 Geo.III C9) was

38. H.O. 102.26 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 8 Nov. 1816, 24 Nov 1816 and H.O. 41.2 Sidmouth to Lord Advocate 13 Dec 1816

39. H.O. 102.27 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 10 Jan 1817 and H.O. 41.2 Sidmouth to Lord Advocate 20 Mar 1817.

40. H.O.102.30 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 28 Sep 1819

41. Pellew Life of Sidmouth 297

for increasing the price of the cheap weeklies and for regulating the production of all periodicals. As a result, the price of Wooler's Black Dwarf was raised to 6d as was Carlile's Republican. Cobbett eventually fixed the price of his Register at the same amount, which was high enough to prevent all but the most enthusiastic radicals among the lower classes from purchasing them regularly.

These two acts did little to stifle the press in England, but in conjunction with the prosecution of Macleod the result in Scotland could have been the complete elimination of the degree of liberalism that did exist. What allowed a critical and vital press to survive in Scotland was the Queen Caroline Affair followed by the complete ineptitude shown by the Scottish Tories in their efforts to establish their own ultra-Tory journals.

Since Queen Caroline was defended by a Member of the Commons, Brougham, and supported by the Whigs, the opposition press in England in 1820 became most outspoken, attacking the King and his Ministers incessantly. The Attorney-General in England was too busy with the Queen's case to attend to this outbreak of criticism, and probably realised that any attack on the opposition press in London would lead to increased publicity for the whole affair, a situation which would not be welcome either to the King or his Ministers. The English press therefore acquired a degree of

immunity and this had its effect on Scotland. In 1822, the Lord Advocate commented that 'the press in Scotland promulgated the most licentious opinions, and every effort was made for the purpose of stirring up and inflaming the minds of the people. There was not a county in Scotland from which complaints did not come describing the ill effects that were produced by the manner in which the press was conducted.'⁽⁴²⁾ Yet officially nothing could be done about it. The Scotsman which became the most outspoken newspaper in Scotland published nothing that was not being said by Whigs in and out of Parliament, and the news it expressed received widespread support from all classes of society. No prosecution could have succeeded even in Scotland, so the Scottish Tories had to act in some unofficial way to counteract the spread of what seemed to them sedition.

As early as 1817, the Lord Advocate had engaged some individuals 'of the very first talent' to prepare literature for circulation among the disaffected to counteract the effect of the literature encouraging radicalism.⁽⁴³⁾ In 1819, Lord Advocate Rae was writing of the need for 'a counter publication' to mitigate the influence of the evil encouraged by Black Dwarf.⁽⁴⁴⁾ It was possibly as a result of

42. Parl. Deb. NS. vii 1351 25 June 1822

43. H.O. 102.27 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 10 Jan 1817.

44. H.O. 102.30 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 28 Sep 1819

official efforts that such a pamphlet as Better thole than be rash was produced in 1819. After abolishing many of the usual radical arguments - free trade would injure the farmer, taxes are needed to pay for a war which threatened our whole system of government and way of life, ministers of religion are not unsympathetic people but have a duty to prevent sedition - the writer goes on to say 'From the conduct of many radicals, enemies of social order is too good a name for them. Enemies of the human race befits them better.' In this sentence, the air of reasonable argument which existed in most of the pamphlet is dispelled and it becomes obviously an unthinking diatribe against any criticism of Tory government. Another pamphlet produced in 1819 - Five Minutes Reflection on Radical Reform - consisted of a dialogue between John, a farmer, and Will, a weaver. The farmer criticised the weaver for his non-attendance at church; asked if it were true he had joined a Radical Club, and commented 'I should expect nothing but the worst evils from Reformers who begin their work by despising and setting at defiance the Religion of the land.' The link between Radicalism and non-attendance at Church was mentioned also in A Half-hour's Crack, which then went on to stress the advantages of the existing system of government - the House of Commons was not corrupt, universal suffrage would mean domination by the poor who would be incapable of sound judgements, taxation

bore more heavily on the rich than on the poor. A more ambitious Tory pamphlet at this time was 'An Inquiry into the Causes of the Present Distresses' by Robert Aiton, a prominent Edinburgh Tory. This booklet examined the causes of distress and showed how Tories, Whigs, Radicals and the Working classes differed. The Tories believed distress was the result of the transition from war to peace; the Whigs attributed it to their exclusion from office; the Radicals blamed the distress on the absence of annual parliaments and universal suffrage; while the working classes blamed everything on the Corn Bill. Aiton came out strongly in favour of the existing system of representation with a few minor modifications - he suggested for example a graduated scale of votes according to property and wealth - and maintained that under the existing system, government was efficient, and interest were adequately represented. Another Tory publication was A Letter to his Grace the Duke of Hamilton by a British Subject, possibly William Aiton of Hamilton. This gave an account of the Radical War as seen through Tory eyes, and is presumably an attempt to convince the Whiggish Hamiltons of the dangers of reform. It mentioned 'political poison' in the Scotsman as being responsible for the disaffection prevailing.

These pamphlets and others, however, could have had only a limited influence, and in 1819 a scheme

had been set on foot to provide the Tories in Scotland with a newspaper which would put forward their views with vigour and by such presentation defeat the spread of Radicalism through papers such as the Scotsman and periodicals such as Black Dwarf. From 1820-23 there existed in Scotland at least one extreme Tory paper whose main object was to vilify all who opposed the Tories. The three papers which were published at some time during this period, the Clydesdale Journal, the Glasgow Sentinel, and the Beacon, each claimed that it existed because of the licentious state of the press, each attacked Radicals, Whigs, and other newspapers, and each was supported by a group of Tories.

In November 1819 when the Spirit of the Union was being published a Lanark printer, William Murray Borthwick wrote to Sidmouth that 'the Country ... is inundated at the present time by the most abominable blasphemous and truly immoral publications which ever teemed from a mischievous press ... the mechanic and the labourer seldom have the pleasure of looking upon a periodical paper but what leads them aside from their allegiance....' He asked for his support in founding a Tory counterblast to the radical press, but although Sidmouth approved of what he wished to do, he was not able to furnish the support that was

required.⁽⁴⁵⁾ Borthwick wrote to Sidmouth again asking for assistance and presumably rejected again made appeals elsewhere.⁽⁴⁶⁾ By 7th Mar 1820, eleven Tories prominent in the west of Scotland, including Henry Monteith, Lord Provost of Glasgow, had each subscribed £25 so that a newspaper might be published.⁽⁴⁷⁾

This newspaper, published in Hamilton by Borthwick (who was later joined by a partner Robert Alexander) was the Clydesdale Journal. In its prospectus, published on April 28th 1820 it was stated that 'loyalty, liberality and patriotism' were to be the sentiments by which it would be guided and

45. H.O.⁴².198 William Borthwick to Sidmouth 8 Nov 1819 and H.O. 43.29 Henry Clive to Borthwick 13 Nov 1819

46. H.O. 102.31 Borthwick to Sidmouth 16 Nov 1819

47. Monteith Letters G.1.2.18 Letters from William Borthwick 7 Mar 1820

In Robert Alexander's Letter to Sir J. Mackintosh Appendix D, there is a 'Certificate or Manifesto in favour of the Clydesdale Journal originally drawn up by and in the handwriting of Henry Monteith Esq. of Carstairs & the Clydesdale Journal was begun under the auspices of some noblemen and gentlemen of the county.

Considering the present state of the country and of this county in particular, in consequence of the great industry used in disseminating publications which have a tendency to unhinge the principles of all classes and to render the middling and lower classes discontented and unhappy, we are desirous of encouraging a periodical publication which may counteract their baneful effect....'

inspired. 'Above all things the mania of Universal Suffrage, Annual Parliaments, Election by Ballot; the dangerous and alarming spirit of insubordination and principles of disloyalty and infidelity inbibed by some especially in the manufacturing districts, will be exposed with freedom and every effort will be made to restrain those who have adopted such opinions, and to prevent them who are of sound principles from being contaminated.' It was customary at the time for Tories to stress how widespread had been disaffection in 1819-20, while the Whigs (such as Cockburn) tended to minimise it. The Clydesdale Journal showed itself to be in the true Tory tradition. After a resume of the spread of radicalism in Scotland under the influence of Cartwright, Hunt, Brayshaw, etc. and justification of Sidmouth's Six Acts, mention was made of the treasonable Address which 'was obeyed by thousands and tens of thousands of weavers, colliers and other infected by Radical principles. '... Of the number infected with these principles it is impossible for any person ... to speak with certainty.... That all the unprincipled part of the community, all who would plunder if they were not restrained by law are Radicals need not be doubted.... A very large proportion of the operatives in the cotton trade and of the colliers are either thorough paced Radicals or deeply tintured with their principles of coercive reform.... Though the Radicals are not so formidable

as in the least to endanger the state, yet they are far more numerous, powerful and devilish than the minority papers represent them to be.' It was also stressed that 'many of these people have shaken off all fear of God, allegiance to their sovereign, respect for lawful authority and gratitude towards their employers and benefactors.' Later, radicals were referred to as 'infatuated men' who had 'insulted the laws of the country' and even when they were rejoicing at the victory of Queen Caroline they were branded as 'disaffected and disloyal',⁽⁴⁸⁾ an attitude which shows that the writer had failed to see that opposition to the King and his ministers was not necessarily a sign of disloyalty.

This uncompromising attitude towards radicalism was accompanied by a similar attitude towards the Whigs in general and towards Lord Archibald Hamilton in particular. The Whigs who had previously written against the principles and practices of the radicals were criticised for encouraging the workers to attend meetings and express their sentiments to His Majesty on the conduct of his Government.⁽⁴⁹⁾ Lord Archibald Hamilton was frequently criticised for his crusade for burgh reform when he and his family had done so little for their own burgh, and it was he who was blamed for the fact that when loyal Addresses were

48. Clydesdale Journal 24 Nov 1820

49. Ibid 26 Jan 1821

being prepared for George IV, Lanarkshire was the only Scottish county to accept an amendment. (50)

Then attacks were made on the press in general. The editor thought it licentious and the revolutionary principles, sedition and blasphemy that were encouraged were bound to have a bad effect on the people. (51) Much of the blame for disturbances during the previous years was attached to the press and in particular to Cobbett, Wooler, Hone and Carlile; and it was considered that whereas 'the libels of former times were only read by the higher class ... those of the present times are exclusively read by the lower orders. (52) The Journal supported the Constitutional Association which was formed in London towards the end of 1820 when 'the fury and insolence of the seditious press were at their height to promote the composition and dissemination of moral, loyal, constitutional tracts and secondly to restrain by legal means the circulation of seditious and treasonable libels.' (53)

The Journal was published weekly on Fridays from April 28th, 1820 until September 28th, 1821. From September 1820 until April 1821 the leading articles were written by George Douglas Aiton, a writer in Hamilton. (54) Prior to this, some of the leading

50. Clydesdale Journal 19 Jan 1821, 7 Sep 1821, 31 Aug 1821

51. Ibid 19 Jan 1821

52. Ibid 26 Jan 1821

53. Ibid 15 June 1821

54. Letter to Sir J. Mackintosh 17.

articles had been written by William Aiton, Sheriff-substitute of Lanarkshire, (although this was later denied by Alexander.)⁽⁵⁵⁾ Later, when Robert Alexander became Borthwick's partner, he presumably wrote the leading articles, Borthwick being, in the words of William Aiton, 'an illiterate man'. Whoever was responsible, the Clydesdale Journal certainly produced vigorous, readable material, and when national affairs were being considered, presented some well-reasoned articles. But in discussions of local affairs, bitterness was most apparent. Hamilton was said to be 'the very focus of radicalism for the middle ward of Lanarkshire and for this Lord Archibald was blamed; but it was in the letters which were published from 'Nuda Veritas' and 'A Lanarkshire Freeholder' that real asperity in the Journal was to be found. The Hamilton family was strongly criticised in these letters, probably the work of William Aiton.

Despite the vigour with which its articles were written, the Clydesdale Journal had eventually to close. Perhaps its situation in Hamilton was a disadvantage, but Robert Alexander decided to remove the paper to Glasgow and on 10th October 1821 it began a second career as the Glasgow Sentinel.

Meantime there had been published in Edinburgh the Beacon, from January until September 1821. Its opening editorial was on 'The present state of the Press' in which it was said that 'The abominable

55. Glasgow Courier 11 July 1822 and Letter to Sir James Mackintosh 23

publications which have been the very textbooks of popular knowledge have taught our fellow subjects to regard their rules as their natural enemies.' This opinion of the licentious nature of the press led to support for the Constitutional Association which would maintain order and support the due execution of the laws, oppose the dissemination of seditious principles, encourage persons of literary talent to exert their abilities in confuting the sophistries, dissipating the illusions and exposing the falsehoods which were misleading the people, and restrain the publication of seditious libels.⁽⁵⁶⁾ In April 1821, the Beacon felt 'It is quite disgusting to read these (Whig) journals and to reflect upon the base and pitiable artifices by which they endeavour to mislead the public mind.'⁽⁵⁷⁾

But although the press in general was thus condemned, the most virulent attacks were on the Scotsman. 'We know no publication (not even excepting the Spirit of the Union) which has so uniformly and with so much vulgar calumny and blind fury endeavoured to disunite from (landowners) the middling and lower ranks.'⁽⁵⁸⁾ This attitude, established in the first issue, lasted throughout the Beacon's career - in August 1821, for example the Scotsman was accused of having 'profaned the august ceremony of the Coronation with its shiny touch' and its readers were referred to

56. Beacon 13 Jan 1821

57. Ibid 14 Apr 1821

58. Ibid 6 Jan 1821

as 'a dunghill tribe..'(59) The Scotsman contained 'falsehood and malignity, vulgarity and betise, mawkish truisms and sheer nonsense' and its editor was described as 'this most factious scribbler, this personification of vulgarity, this inexorable enemy of grammar, this dunce in political science.'(60)

Attacks were also made on Whigs and Radicals. 'The mediocrity of (the Whig) leaders, the unparalleled baseness of their retainers, the ruffian violence of the press which they design to countenance, all is in keeping with the deep descent of the cause itself.... The deadly tinge of Radicalism is in fact apparent already upon the emaciated body of Whiggism.'(61)

A letter to the Editor referring to reformers in Crail, described them as persons who were 'fit for nothing else; every blockhead who is too stupid or lazy to thrive as a tailor or shoemaker forthwith imagines that the fault lies with the magistrates or the government.'(62)

One can imagine that these would be the opinions of the Beacon also. The Beacon, however, did not devote much time to criticism of Whig or Radical aims. It descended to attacks on individual Whigs. In January 1821 it stated that 'the Scotsman is supported principally for the private purposes of a few gentlemen who occupy private stations at the Scots bar...Cockburn, Stuart, Gibson,

59. Beacon 4 Aug 1821

60. Ibid 28 July 1821 and 4 Aug 1821

61. Ibid 6 Jan 1821

62. Ibid 21 Apr 1821

Murray, Jeffrey.'⁽⁶³⁾ In April 1821 began a series of attacks on Lord Archibald Hamilton - 'the noble correspondent of the Crail radicals and Strathaven traitors' - that ended in 1822 in a libel action.⁽⁶⁴⁾ Other Whigs who had been libelled - Stuart of Dunearn and James Gibson - took action against the Beacon; Stuart caned Stevenson the printer in public and Gibson received £500 damages. Eventually, the Beacon collapsed in face of what it considered 'a conspiracy', although the repercussions of its libels and career did not subside for at least two years.

The most important result of the whole Beacon affair was the disclosure that it had been supported financially by a number of distinguished legal figures in Edinburgh - Lord Advocate Rae, Wedderburn the Solicitor-General, J.H. Forbes, Sheriff-depute of the County of Perth, John Hope, Deputy under the Lord Advocate, Walter Scott, Sheriff-depute of the County of Selkirk, William Arbuthnott, Lord Provost of Edinburgh, and Henry Home Drummond, a deputy of the Lord Advocate.⁽⁶⁵⁾ In June 1822, when the Whig Abercrombie brought to the attention of the Commons the conduct of the law officers in Scotland, he maintained that this was incompatible with their legal

63. Beacon 13 Jan 1821

64. See e.g. Ibid 21 Apr 1821, 5 May 1821, 2 June 1821, 16 June 1821, 23 June 1821

65. Scotsman 29 June 1822

duties.⁽⁶⁶⁾ The bondsmen seem to have had some sense of shame, although such a feeling was not universal. Lord Melville was indignant at those who had abandoned the Beacon. It was 'a false move', which had had 'very injurious consequences' among his friends in Scotland. He was sure that the supporters of the Beacon would take the field again under better auspices and with increased vigour. 'The zeal of those who were the active agents has only received a temporary check and it very far from being extinguished - as their bullying opponents will soon... experience to their cost.'⁽⁶⁷⁾

In fact, the campaign against reform was to be carried on by the Glasgow Sentinel. Lord Advocate Rae and a number of other Tories had signed a document pledging themselves to support it, and it commenced publication on October 10th 1821. In some respects, the Sentinel was an improvement on both the Clydesdale Journal and the Beacon. Its article on the Corn Laws (7 Nov 1821), its attitude towards religious controversy (5 Dec 1821) and its criticism of Dr. Chalmers' scheme of poor relief (29 May 1822) all show signs of careful thought and some power of argument. But on other matters, the Sentinel was

66. Parl. Deb. N.S. vii 1324 ff 25 June 1822

67. Sidmouth Mss. Melville to Sidmouth 13 Oct 1821 quoted in Aspinall 'Politics and the Press' 268

obviously the heir of the Beacon. The Scotsman had indulged 'in the most scurrilous attacks upon private character 'and its exertions 'pandered to the passions of the multitude.' (68) A Radical was 'a political madman who feels, converses, dreams of one subject, politics ... is suspicious and apprehensive ... (has) a strong dislike of kindred and friends and a preference of enemies and strangers.' (69) Education is condemned, since it has encouraged mechanics to read 'each his paper, and these papers are of that class which none ever read without being led away.' (70) At various times, support was expressed for what the Constitutional Association was doing in England; accounts of Fox and Pitt dinners were given a strong Tory slant; the visit of George IV was greeted with great enthusiasm. This visit came 'when political rancour and party violence were at their zenith,' but everyone 'even the working classes' had derived much benefit, and many were converted to loyalty.' (71) There was opposition to Lord Archibald Hamilton - 'The democratic principles of the House of Hamilton have alienated the minds of a large portion of the men of business, merchants, manufacturers and farmers in the County of Lanark', and there is even the

68. Glasgow Sentinel 10 Oct 1821

69. Ibid 24 Apr 1822

70. Ibid 15 May 1822

71. Ibid 4 Sep 1822. Cf Scotsman and Glasgow Chronicle which give a very different impression.

suggestion that the radicalism of Glasgow and Paisley has been the result of encouragement from Hamilton⁽⁷²⁾ - but the main object of attack was Stuart of Dunearn. Repeatedly, offensive articles libelling Stuart were published and eventually Borthwick the publisher staved off an action for damages by giving up the manuscripts of the articles complained of. Stuart then discovered that the author was Sir Alexander Boswell of Auchinleck, a prominent Tory. He challenged Boswell to a duel in which Boswell was killed. While Stuart was awaiting trial, Borthwick was arrested on a charge of stealing the manuscripts from his partner Alexander; but when Stuart was acquitted Borthwick also was released. Cockburn claimed that Borthwick had been 'imprisoned as a thief and Stuart tried as a murderer merely because the former gave up papers in which the Advocate had an interest as a libeller to conceal, and the latter shot the author of the articles by which his Lordship and Co., were accustomed to defame.'⁽⁷³⁾

When in the House of Commons Abercrombie moved for a Committee of Inquiry into the conduct of the Scottish law officers, in relation to the public press two of the depute advocates sent such provocative

72. Glasgow Sentinel 30 Oct 1822

73. Cockburn, Letters to T.F. Kennedy 5 June 1822

Cockburn, Memorials 376 ff

Omond Lord Advocates ii 273 ff

letters that they had to be bound over to keep the peace and summoned to the Bar of the House for a breach of privilege.⁽⁷⁴⁾ A year later, Abercrombie again raised the matter, and although the Government gained a small majority in the ensuing division, the Lord Advocate and his officers came in for considerable criticism.⁽⁷⁵⁾ The knowledge that the Law Officers of Scotland and some of the leading Tories had supported libelous attacks on the personal honour of their political opponents did nothing but harm to the Tory administration in Scotland and the most important result of the Tories' excursion into political journalism was that the Scotsman, the object of so many attacks, seemed to gain in prestige and gave a stronger lead to anti-Tory feeling in Scotland. When, for example, the King visited Scotland in 1822 the Scotsman played down its importance. George IV was 'entitled to politeness and hospitality as a King and a stranger', and should be welcomed with the deference and high regard which a free people may evince towards the Head of Government.⁽⁷⁶⁾

While the visit was in progress, there was 'nothing deserving the name of enthusiasm among the people,' and this was the attitude adopted by most of the Scottish press. The speech which the Duke of

74. Parl. Deb. N.S. vii 1324 ff

75. Ibid ix 664 ff

76. Scotsman 3 Aug 1822, 17 Aug 1822

Hamilton made at a royal banquet on 24th August was given substantial coverage and what he said obviously reflects the Scotman's own attitude. Respect and honour were due to the person who wore the Crown but each person 'must not forget the respect due to himself'; the rights of the people were interwoven with the rights and securities of the Crown and these formed the true power and constitutional glory of the sovereign. (77)

By 1822, the press in Scotland had not won the freedom that was possessed in England. During the period 1815-22 no radical press in Scotland could develop because of the state of the law and the means of enforcement. Nevertheless, the Caroline Affair in 1820 and the failure of the Tory journals in 1820-22 created a situation that was new in Scotland. Henceforth, strong criticism of the King and his Government was possible and the ability and moral right of Tories to curb such criticism either by means of their own press or by process of law were very much in doubt. Slowly, a critical press in Scotland followed the lead of the Scotsman - papers such as the Glasgow Free Press and the Scots Times, - and in the 1830s came the truly radical press of Peter Mackenzie and the Chartists. Such a growth

77. Scotsman 31 Aug 1822

was possible because in 1825 the English Seditious and Blasphemous Libels Act of 1819 was extended to Scotland and henceforward there could be no transportation for a first offence and even for the second offence a sentence of banishment did not necessarily mean transportation.⁽⁷⁸⁾ Only then was it possible for radicalism in Scotland to develop without the inspiration of English writers.

78. 6 Geo IV c45

Responses to the demands for radical
reform

In the years from 1815 to 1822 there were no statutory changes of benefit to radical reformers; in fact the laws against them were strengthened by the Six Acts of 1819. The reasons for this apparent lack of success are to be found to some extent in an examination of the responses made to demands for a radical reform in the system of electing members to the house of Commons. From some people there came strong opposition while many displayed apathy. Support for radical demands was for the most part limited to particular social and occupational groups.

Strong opposition to radical demands came at all times from the King's ministers, from Tory members of parliament, and from members of the general public with Tory sympathies. Sidmouth's view that those who demanded radical reform were suffering from perverted and inflamed minds⁽¹⁾ was one that allowed no compromise and seems to have been typical of what many people felt. In 1816-17 and again in 1819-20 the anti-radical policy of ministers was well supported in parliament, even at times by members of the opposition. It is important to remember, for example, that Lord Archibald Hamilton the most outspoken Scottish Whig

1. H.O. 41.2 Sidmouth to Lord Advocate 13 Dec 1816

supported the Seditious Meetings Bill in 1819 as he felt that the subject's right to meet and discuss public grievances was being abused and should be suspended as 'the best guarantee for further security.'⁽²⁾ While there were many occasions in the period 1815-22 that ministers were criticised for their conduct of government, yet there was never any considerable body of support for the suggestion that a radical reform of the house of Commons was required. In 1816, Earl Grey, later to become Whig Prime Minister, wrote that he was opposed to the sweeping and radical reforms which were then contemplated; by 1819 he considered that 'a reform of parliament is from all information I receive, becoming more and more a subject of popular interest' and by April 1820 he was convinced that half measures on the question of reform would not satisfy the general public.⁽³⁾ Nevertheless, although he and possibly many Whigs had been won over to a campaign for a measure of parliamentary reform, there remained distrust of radical leaders. 'Is there one among them' wrote Grey 'with whom you would trust yourself in the dark? Can you have any doubt about the wickedness of their intentions?'⁽⁴⁾

The failure of radical reformers to win over any large number of members of parliament to their

2. Parl. Deb. xli 1028 13 Dec 1819

3. Trevelyan Lord Grey of the Reform Bill App. A.

4. Ibid 188

cause was of undoubted significance, since it meant that constitutional means of effecting reform were denied to them. The result was that some other method of effecting change had to be sought and in the circumstances this meant the adoption of physical force. By 1819, radical reformers were convinced of the futility of trying to proceed in a constitutional manner. The eighth resolution at Dundee in November 1819 was 'That from the contempt with which the late servile house of Commons treated the petitions of the people and from the disinclination which the present one has shown to attend to their wishes we deem it quite useless to offer any petitions to the honourable house praying for reform.' Nor did the Dundee reformers see any point in seeking support from the Whigs. Kinloch in his speech commented 'As to the Whigs they are for reform; but then, softly, it must be a temperate, a moderate reform.... They are quite shocked that it should be supposed that they have any ideas on the subject in common with us radicals; and I believe that of the two factions which have alternately had the worrying of this poor country the Whigs are most to be dreaded in so far as a pretended friend is worse than an avowed enemy.'⁽⁵⁾

If Kinloch and the Dundee reformers were here expressing the views of other radical reformers

5. Kinloch's speech at Dundee, Dundee, Perth and Cupar Advertiser 12 Nov 1819

in Scotland it is easy to understand how, faced by two unsympathetic and uncompromising groups in parliament, radicals in some cases turned to consider the use of physical force.

The uncompromising attitude which most parliamentarians adopted towards radical reform is echoed throughout the country. The attitude of the press has already been examined and it has been shown that in Scotland almost every newspaper opposed radicalism. Strong criticism of radicals was also expressed by members of the public; for example, the sheriff depute of Stirlingshire thought of them as people who wished to destroy the aristocracy and to subvert the constitution while the minister of New Monkland Church saw the radical agitation as 'an attempt on the part of the scum to become rulers of the nation.'⁽⁶⁾ The strength of opposition to radicalism can also be inferred from the support that was given to volunteer movements in 1819-20. Those who supported such movements came, it would seem, from among the more prosperous members of rural and urban communities. In Strathaven, for example, local landowners and farmers took the lead in forming bodies of volunteers and acting as officers.⁽⁷⁾ In Glasgow, Samuel Hunter, editor of

6. Clydesdale Journal 12 Jan 1821, Knox Airdrie 58

7. Ibid 18 May 1820

the Glasgow Herald was Colonel of the Sharpshooters which Peter Mackenzie and many other young men from good homes joined; the Major was R.D. Alston a prominent merchant and lawyers and merchants were captains.⁽⁸⁾ In Airdrie, the captain of one volunteer company was a local landowner, the captain of the other a local lawyer.⁽⁹⁾ In Paisley, officers of the local corps included writers, bankers, accountants and merchants.⁽¹⁰⁾ It would appear that in Scotland the demand for radical reform was opposed by those who had attained some position of social consequence while there is no evidence that people from similar social groups supported radicalism.

There was also a hostile response from churches in Scotland. Dr. Chalmers condemned Radicalism as 'an aspect of infidelity and irreligion' and this feeling seemed to be shared by the Churches as a whole. Religion and radicalism were 'utterly at antipodes with each other.'⁽¹¹⁾ For their part, radical reformers became increasingly critical of the Church. The cleavage between radicalism and religion was not at first apparent in 1816-17 when many of the meetings to prepare petitions were held in dissenting churches. But in the period 1819-20 there was frequently violent hostility. The Scots

8. Mackenzie, Reminiscences i 219

9. Knox Airdrie 57

10. Brown History of Paisley ii 213

11. Hanna Life of Chalmers ii 263

Magazine, for example noted that one public meeting in August 1819 was remarkable for 'the undisguised contempt for religion which pervaded all the speeches. It was asserted that the clergy gulled every government and that it was their infamous combination with the landed proprietors which had cheated the poor of their rights. All those who attended church were denounced as hypocrites ... Bible societies came in for their share of abuse.'⁽¹²⁾ Brayshaw wrote at some length on the relationship between Radicals and the Church.⁽¹³⁾ He stated that ministers of religion in the west of Scotland had no sympathy for the distresses of the people; 'they so far forgot every principle of religion as to take part with the oppressors and to calumniate and villify the oppressed.' One minister was quoted as saying that three shillings a week was amply sufficient for the maintenance of a weaver and his wife and children. Ministers were criticised for always preaching submission to authority, and any diminution in religious observance and feeling Brayshaw maintained was due to 'the baseness of those who call themselves ministers of religion.' 'Is it the least surprising that men should cease to go to places where their distresses are continually insulted

12. Scots Magazine N.S. v, (1819) Sept

13. Brayshaw Letter to the Lord Advocate passim

and their conduct misrepresented?' The Lord Advocate's spy in the Central Committee in 1819 reported 'they have resolved that all who join the good cause ... shall abstain from every description of religious duty.... They hold the clergy as the most active tools of the Government in oppressing the people.' (14) The resentment which weavers felt towards the church was mentioned by an anonymous Glasgow weaver. At one time, he suggests, there was such a demand from prosperous weavers for seats in church that seat rents had to be raised. Later, when the weavers were poor, they could not afford these rents. 'Is it not then to be wondered at that the generality of weavers should be soured and discontented with things as they stand; they hear so much said of the clergymen's high stipends being the cause of high seat rents that the clergy are viewed in no other light than as state sinecurists.' (15) In his biography of Chalmers, Hanna admits that in Chalmers' parish of St. John's in Glasgow, the high rate charged for the seats rendered the church of comparatively little effect as far as the humblest classes were concerned. (16)

There is the impression that radical reformers,

14. H.O. 102.30 Lord Advocate to Sidmouth 19 Sep 1819

15. Anonymous Short Account of the Life and hardship's of a Glasgow weaver 9

16. Hanna op.cit. ii 211

being mainly weavers and poorer members of the community, received little sympathy or assistance from the churches and stopped attending them because of this and because their poverty prevented them either from paying high seat rents or from buying good clothes which were demanded by convention. For the hostility that existed blame can be attached to both sides. Tom Paine was a strong influence over many extreme reformers; James Wilson of Strathaven was reputedly one who had been influenced by him and by other deistical writers, and then tried to convert other people to his irreligious views. (17) When a number of radical delegates were arrested in February 1820 several atheistical works were reported to be lying on the table of the room in which they were meeting. (18) Criticism of ministers and their support for established government can be seen most easily in the poems of Alexander Rodger.

In 'The Twa Weavers' he writes:

'How glibly ilk Sunday they lay off their crack
And tell their 'gull'd' hearers that these
trying times
Are solely brought on by the poor people's crimes.
And then, wi' their sanctified cant, how they whine
About passive obedience, like hirelings lang syne.'

Such sentiments can also be found in 'Black Coats and Cravats sae-white' and 'Shonny Cammel', and were

17. Clydesdale Journal 1 Sep 1820

18. Glasgow Chronicle 29 Feb 1820

unusually in Scotland where the Church had for so many years enjoyed a privileged position in society.

But churchmen had seemingly done nothing to win the support of the reformers. The author of an Address to the Gentlemen and Freeholders of the County of Ayr commented, 'The inconsistent conduct of many ministers of religion has done more to promote the cause of infidelity than all the exertions of infidels combined.'⁽¹⁹⁾ Strong support was given by the churches to established government. In 1817 the Presbytery of Glasgow sent a Loyal Address to the Prince Regent following the reputed attack on his life in London. 'Deeply lamenting the deep profligacy of these desperate and abandoned persons who, deluded by artful and unprincipled men have been hurried on to commit this daring outrage ... we join in prayer to the Almighty that he may continue to shield you in the hour of danger and to preserve the valuable life of your Royal Highness as a public blessing to these lands. Conscious of our sacred obligations as the Guardians of Religion, of virtue and of reverence for Law and Government to warn the people under our charge of their danger from the artifices of designing and turbulent men who by their fair but delusive speeches are now working on the passions of the people in order to produce insubordination and violence. We would not cease to caution our

hearers against being seduced into their destructive measures and will through the Divine Assistance exert ourselves to cultivate in their minds Piety towards Almighty God, Loyalty to our King and a steady attachment to that excellent constitution in Church and State.'⁽²⁰⁾ There could be no clearer indication of what the Church thought of reformers and of established government. In the same year, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland which annually expressed its high regard for the monarchy, recorded its 'devoted attachment to that constitution of Government under which the goodness of divine Providence' had placed the people;⁽²¹⁾ and in 1820 the same body commented that 'the scenes of tumult and outrage by which the commencement of (George IV's) reign had been disturbed affected (them) with deep mortification and regret.... The spirit which (they) deplored was confined to a small portion of the people of Scotland and the great body of people ... have continued steadfast in their faith and loyalty.'⁽²²⁾ The General Synod of Burgher seceders also expressed its loyalty to the throne and its abhorrence of troublemakers.⁽²³⁾ An Address from the Presbytery of Hamilton combines sympathy for the distressed with effusive loyalty - 'We view with unfeigned commiseration the severe distress in which many of our

20. Presbytery of Glasgow Records Ch.2 171.3 5 Feb 1817

21. H.O. 102.28 24 May 1817

22. H.O. 102.33 20 May 1820

23. H.O. 102.28 6 May 1817

countrymen have been long involved.... As friends of loyalty we deplore the daring attempts of disaffected and seditious men to exasperate the feelings of the necessitous at this period of commercial embarrassment, to lead them to outrage and insurrection and so excite them to forego the numerous blessings of our unrivalled constitution for chimerical plans for reform equally unattainable and ruinous.... As friends of Christianity we regard with indignation and horror those impious and blasphemous sentiments which have been circulated among the lower orders with a malicious industry and in conclusion the members of the Presbytery promised to counteract the influence of these demoralising sentiments. (24) In 1820, Dr. Chalmers commended the dissenting ministers who had 'acquitted themselves nobly' in 1820. 'I know' he said 'of an instance in which a member of the Methodist Church was excommunicated for his attendance on the Union Societies. Mr. Ewing our Independent minister has both preached and published in the strongest terms against the political spirit of the times.' (25) Some ministers actually became government informers. Lapslie of Campsie had been granted a pension for his activities in the 1790s and was suspected of being a government agent; the

24. H.O. 102.31 24 Nov 1819

25. Hanna op.cit. ii 263

minister of Houston in Renfrewshire sent reports to Sidmouth as did Father Scott, the Roman Catholic priest in Glasgow. When Kinloch of Kinloch was arrested in 1819 it was believed that trouble had been stirred up by Mr. Thomson, a Dundee clergyman. (26)

Religious laymen also opposed radicalism. One of the government's informants in Paisley, for example, mentioned irreligion as a cause of unrest in that part of Scotland and attributed this irreligion firstly to the return of soldiers from abroad where they had been influenced by the different religion there, and secondly to the increase in Sunday reading of newspapers. (27) An anonymous writer produced a newspaper called the Reformer which lasted (not surprisingly in view of its bad style) for only five issues. According to this writer, reform could begin only 'at the fireside' with a radical reformation of the heart. A sign of this would be improved attendance at church, but Radicals made a habit of absenting themselves from church and were too often influenced by drink. Radicals were advised to improve themselves by buying, borrowing or begging Bibles and reading them rather than the irreligious works which circulated amongst them. (28)

26. Norrie Some Dundee Celebrities of the 19th century, 29 and Appendix

27. H.O. 102.31 18 Dec 1819

28. The Reformer 3 Nov 1819, 10 Nov 1819, 17 Nov 1819

Another clear association of radicals with irreligion came at the conclusion of the trials for treason in 1820. At the end of each trial the judge made some mention of the need for adherence to religion and at the end of the series of trials the connection between the established church and good government was emphasised. The Lord Justice Clerk implored the magistracy and citizens of every rank and description to unite their efforts with ministers of religion in endeavouring to bring back the people to attachment to the word of God. 'It is painful indeed to think that ... in this quarter of the United Kingdom blasphemous and irreligious doctrines should have prevailed to the extent they have done.... If the lower orders are brought back to those religious and sober habits which were formerly the characteristics of the people ... there is no reason to apprehend that any of those traitors who have hitherto endeavoured to mislead them will be able to do so again with success.' In the eyes of the Justiciary the church had an important role to play in keeping the people law-abiding and submissive to authority.⁽²⁹⁾ When Baird, Hardie and Wilson were in prison awaiting execution they were visited frequently by ministers of religion. At least eight different ministers visited Andrew Hardie, and if we accept the letters he wrote as genuine, they

had some effect on him. He wrote to his relations - 'I enjoy a calm and composed mind ... altho' I am to be taken away in the bloom of life and to suffer an unnatural death, this gives me little concern knowing that he who gave me life can take it when it seemeth good for him to do so.'⁽³⁰⁾ Baird and Hardie seem to have been convinced that their efforts to bring about reform were an affront to society and to the church and on the day of execution Baird reputedly advised the crowd to venerate religion, advice that was repeated by Hardie who also asked the people not to go to public houses to drink to their memories but to go home, thank God, and mend their lives.⁽³¹⁾

The incompatibility between the Churches and radical reformers in Scotland is interesting. In England the position was different. There, dissenters were excluded from political life and from holding positions in certain professions by the statutes enacted after 1660. Constitutional reform was for them essential if they were to enjoy the social and political status of those who were members of the established church. There was thus a dissenting influence over the political reform movement which strongly affected its character. White⁽³²⁾ has suggested that 'the strength, particularly the moral

30. Melville Papers MS 909, f.29 and 41. Letter of Andrew Hardie to Relations 19 Aug 1820

31. Glasgow Chronicle 9 Sep 1820

32. White Radicalism and its results 1760-1837 7

and intellectual strength, of a radical political attitude in England owed nearly everything to middle class Dissent.' In Scotland, those who belonged to the non-established protestant churches suffered no additional political disabilities which would make them agitate for constitutional change. In the early 1790s there had been some measure of support among Scottish protestant dissenters for political reform⁽³³⁾ but this waned as the reform movement seemed to come under the stronger influence of deists such as Paine. For example, Robert Haldane the great evangelical who in 1794 expressed strong disapproval of the war with France had by the end of the century decided that Christians, being 'mere passengers in this world' ought to submit to any government however bad it might be.⁽³⁴⁾ Another preacher, Alexander Pirie, the minister of an Associate congregation, said in a sermon preached before the Glasgow Missionary Society in 1797 that obedience to 'the peaceful maxims of the saviour is necessary to the good order and happiness of his disciples as members of civil society.... As a Society, we have publicly disclaimed political interferences.'⁽³⁵⁾ It would appear from these and other examples that those

33. Struthers History of the Relief Church 378-92

34. R. Haldane Address to the Public concerning Political Opinion

35. A. Pirie A Sermon preached before the Glasgow Missionary Society 7 Nov 1797 21

interested in religious matters withdrew from the civil controversy, and it is probable that Struthers is correct when he suggests⁽³⁶⁾ that the dissenting churches in the post 1815 period did not involve themselves in the military mania. Instead, the strong desire for civil liberty which led to the demand for radical reform also pervaded the community on religious liberty and congregations began to insist on their ability and right to judge the qualifications of their ministers. The radicalism of churchmen in Scotland, in other words, manifested itself in a changed attitude in church rather than in parliamentary affairs.

There is some evidence which might suggest links between the dissenting Scottish churches and radical reform. In 1816-17 many political meetings were held in dissenting churches, and at the end of 1820 the Relief Church in Glasgow housed a political meeting in connection with the Caroline affair. Moreover, Peter Mackenzie placed the petition in favour of Caroline in the Relief Church after he had been forced out of the Tron Kirk Session House. But these facts could merely indicate toleration rather than support for political reformers. Evidence which may show a stronger link between Scottish dissenters and radicalism is contained in Rodger's poem Shonny Cammel about the minister who preached

support for the Lord Advocate and the established government in 1817 only to see two thirds of his congregation rise and walk out. Chalmers mentioned a dissenting congregation where some of the members gained a taste for public management but it was possibly to the numerically unimportant Unitarians or Universalists under Reverend Neil Douglas that he referred and Chalmers was probably correct in suggesting that 'the irreligion of the Radicals did much at length to neutralise their political influence amongst our people.' (37)

Among churchmen in the west of Scotland in the period 1815-22 the most influential was probably Dr. Thomas Chalmers. He was strongly opposed to political change and his opposition was significant not only because he was a churchman but because he did make suggestions of reforms that could be carried out and which would benefit the distressed. 'It is our belief that through the medium not of political change in the state but of a moral and personal change upon themselves there is not one desirable amelioration which (the lower classes) might not mount their way.' Throughout his life he distrusted political reform; he was not in favour of the Reform Bill in 1832 and believed it would do nothing to help the working classes. (38) In 1820 he strongly attacked radical

37. Hanna op.cit. ii 263, 257

38. Mechie 'The Church and Scottish Social development' - 49 and Hanna op.cit. ii 158

reformers. (39) The radical war he regarded as 'an exemplification of (wickedness) so plainly and obviously detestable as to vie with all that is recorded of the villainy of our species;' he referred to 'those wary and unseen counsellors who have so coolly conducted others to the brunt of a full exposure and then retired so cautiously within the shelter of their own cowardice ... those men who spoke a patriotism which they never felt and shed their serpent tears over sufferings which never drew from their bosoms one sigh of honest tenderness.' Then he asked if it was not evident 'that upon the slightest relaxation of (the government's) authority and the faintest prospect of its dissolution and overthrow there is lying in reserve as much of untamed and ruthless ferocity in our land as, if permitted to come forth, would lift an arm of bloody violence and scatter all the cruelties of the reign of terror among its habitations?' The rising at the beginning of April was condemned because it had taken place 'at the time of our sacrament, and to all who love its services it must have been a matter of grateful rejoicing that, by the favour of Him who sways the elements of nature and the uncontrollable elements of human society, we were permitted to finish these services in peace.' Other phrases which strike the

39. 'The Importance of Civil Government to Society'

A sermon preached by Dr. Chalmers on 30 Apr 1820

reader - and presumably had an effect on his hearers were - 'Honour the King and meddle not with those who are given to change,' and 'Where godliness exists, loyalty exists.' In 1822, when George IV visited Scotland, Chalmers went through to Edinburgh to see him, and was so affected that he exclaimed, 'Is not monarchy congenial to our nature?' (40)

There is throughout Chalmer's memoirs the impression that he was pompous and self-seeking. He enjoyed the company of the upper classes and was anxious that they should remain in political power. He venerated those in authority. At the same time, he had a low opinion of the lower classes; according to Alexander Rodger he referred to them as the 'sooty rabble' and his aim was to impose 'burden an' tax upon tax, to learn the base rabble the use o' their backs.' (41)

Yet despite his dislike of the lower classes, Chalmers did try to improve their conditions. In 1820 he suggested economic reforms - the repeal of the Corn Bill and the enforcement of Income Tax - and the multiplication of Established Churches. (42) He hoped that by increasing the number of churches and redefining parishes that the church would be able to administer poor relief efficiently, and he did much to make the system effective in his own

40. Hanna op.cit. ii 326

41. Rodger Black Coats and Cravats see White

42. Hanna op.cit. ii 264

impoverished parish. He had a strong influence over the middle classes and encouraged philanthropy. Sunday schools were established so that the poor could be educated. All this was important in that it suggested to many people who realised that some reform of society was necessary that it was not political reform that was needed but the institution and expansion of other reforms, supervised by the middle classes.

Chalmers is typical of a number of Scotsmen at this time - he saw the need for change and improvement in social conditions but opposed strongly the idea of political reform. Members of Chalmers' own congregations who assisted him in his projects, men such as Collins the publisher, presumably felt the same way. Another who adopted a paternalistic approach was Robert Owen at New Lanark. In 1816 he wrote⁽⁴³⁾ 'It is absolutely necessary to support the old systems and institutions under which we now live... Continue to obey the laws ... until the government of the country shall find it practicable to withdraw these laws which are productive of evil and introduce others of an opposite tendency.' As Thompson has rightly commented 'The notion of working class advance by its own self activity towards its own goals, was alien to Owen.'⁽⁴⁴⁾ Another possible

43. Owen An Address to the Inhabitants of New Lanark

44. Thompson op.cit. 781

solution to economic distress was put forward by Mr. Maxwell, Lord Archibald Hamilton and Kirkman Finlay when they supported the idea of assisted emigration of weavers and it was possibly as a result of their encouragement that many emigration societies were formed. (45)

Those who like Chalmers, Owen and Maxwell opposed political reform but encouraged change or improvement in other ways were diminishing the appeal of radical reform. Many who supported radical reform did so because they were suffering economic hardship; as Wooler admitted in the final number of Black Dwarf in 1824 there was 'no public devotedly attached to the cause of parliamentary reform' for all that was ever wanted was 'bread'. When this was provided more liberally, political enthusiasm suffered. (46)

It would also seem that there were many even among the lower orders of society who never supported the demand for radical reform. Chalmers, for example, believed that five sixths of the labouring population had no interest in reform of the political

45. A list contained in the Department of Public Records and Archives, Ontario, gives the number of such societies in the west of Scotland as eighteen in Glasgow in addition to others outside the city.

46. Thompson op.cit. 810

system. 'I have considerable intercourse' he wrote 'with the families of my own parish consisting of upwards of 10,000 people and though chiefly among the poor, I am quite sure there was as honest a terror and as sincere an aversion to public disturbance among them as among families of the rich. But this terror laid them open to the influence of the agitators who compelled almost the whole of them to strike work. On that occasion (that is in April 1820) I am convinced that the intimidators did not form more than a tenth part of the intimidated.'⁽⁴⁷⁾

Mr. Ewing, another Glasgow resident, thought that a great proportion of the people there were 'sound at heart.'⁽⁴⁸⁾ Janet Hamilton implied that in the Monklands the militant radicals were in a minority even in her traditionally radical community.⁽⁴⁹⁾

Sir John Maxwell explained his support for the Seditious Meetings Bill on the grounds that nine-tenths of the people of Renfrewshire wanted it since the public meetings being held in the county in the latter part of 1819 were 'little calculated to support the right of petitioning.'⁽⁵⁰⁾

Moreover the volunteer movements formed in 1819-20 depended for recruits on some of the lower orders of society. In Strathaven it would appear that

47. Hanna op.cit. ii 265

48. Glasgow Chronicle 13 Apr 1820

49. Janet Hamilton Sketch of a Scottish roadside Village 362

50. Scots Magazine N.S.5 (1819) December

there was a 'conservative' party among the people who feared the excesses of the violent reformers. It was this group which took possession of the town after the rising and was responsible for the capture of some of the rebels.⁽⁵¹⁾ In Paisley, the volunteer Rifle Corps included a number of clerks and warehousemen who went to work in uniform and carried their arms with them to protect themselves from the violence they feared might engulf them.⁽⁵²⁾ In Airdrie the threat of violence brought volunteers from among the ranks of the lower orders - shoemakers, wrights, a watchmaker, a labourer, a blacksmith and a weaver were among those who were given some promoted rank.⁽⁵³⁾ On the other hand, few people actually took up arms on behalf of the campaign for radical reform. In Glasgow in 1820, for example, the number was probably no more than seven hundred, though it may have been as low as two hundred and fifty (see p.218).

What support in fact did the movement for radical reform have? During the campaign conducted by Cartwright in Scotland in 1815, some measure of support came from people of some social consequence. Cartwright was a guest of the Duke of Roxburgh; Mr. Maule of Brechin Castle, Mr. Ferguson of Raith, and

51. Clydesdale Journal 19 May 1820 The Pioneers
55, 60
52. Brown History of Paisley ii 213
53. Knox Airdrie 57

Mr. Oswald of Auchincruive were Scottish members of the Hampden Club; in Dundee, as we have noted (p. 22) he contacted writers, bankers, lawyers and journalists. But after 1815 only George Kinloch of the landowning class retained his interest in radical reform; what happened to the lawyers and others in the next few years is not known. Support from 1816 onwards came from people further down the social scale.

There were in Glasgow in 1816-17 men such as Turner and his shopkeeper friends. In Renfrewshire at the same time those taking a prominent part in reform politics included Archibald Hastie, baker, John Lang, grocer, John Wotherspoon, baker, James Campbell, manufacturer, Alexander Taylor, teacher, Robert Davidson, surgeon, Peter MacFarlane, wright, and a number of weavers.⁽⁵⁴⁾ These groups were associated with the petitioning movement and seem to have taken no part whatsoever in the secret conspiracy of that period.

The secret conspiracy was mainly a conspiracy of weavers. It is certainly true that in February 1817 Lord Advocate Maconochie when telling the Commons about the arrests that had been made said that there were still at large 'others moving in a very different sphere of life' who were connected with the conspiracy. But the only person who on our

evidence fits this category is the merchant Robert Kerr. (55) Those arrested were mainly weavers, with the exception of Edgar (teacher), Dryburgh (teacher), Finlayson (writer's clerk), McTear (teacher). When Campbell and others initiated new members it seems to have been mainly among weavers that they worked.

In 1819-20 the connection between weavers and the demand for radical reform remained close. Turner and his associates in Glasgow, Hastie and his friends in Paisley were not involved either in the meetings which took place or in the organisations that were formed. The public meetings held prior to August 1819 in Glasgow seem to have had as their object consideration of the plight of the weavers. For example, the meeting held on Glasgow Green on 16th June was organised by the operative weavers in Glasgow and was called to consider the distresses they were labouring under; at the end of June a meeting of weavers' delegates was held in Argyll Street, Glasgow, to petition for immediate relief; in July a meeting of gentlemen was held under the chairmanship of Sir John Maxwell 'to consider the best plan of relieving the present distress of the operative

55. Parl. Deb. xxxv 729 26 Feb 1817

H.O. 102.27 McKinlay's Precognition

weavers. (56) Such meetings continued throughout 1819, but became political in outlook as political agitators played on the poor economic condition of the weavers. Union Societies, when they were formed by Brayshaw, seem to have been confined to the areas where there were many weavers. Brayshaw when in Glasgow lived with James Armstrong, a weaver; and one of those whom he visited was the Strathaven weaver James Wilson, whose associates in the reform movement seem to have been all weavers. (57)

When in February 1820, twenty seven radicals were arrested in Glasgow as they attended a delegates' meeting, it was discovered that they were mainly weavers and cotton spinners. (58)

Those who drew up the famous Address were Armstrong, Craig and Brash, all weavers.

In Paisley, the leaders in the secret conspiracy at this time were John Neil, John King and about twenty others who seem to have been, for the most part, weavers. (59)

In Airdrie, which had 'a strong and aggressive Union', four of the leaders were weavers; (60)

in Kilmarnock, James Paterson attended a Union Society which was composed almost entirely of

weavers. (61) When eventually rebellion did break

56. Glasgow Chronicle 10 June 1819, 29 June 1819, 20 July 1819

57. Clydesdale Journal 1 Sep 1820, The Pioneers 42, 45. H.O.102.33 2 Nov 1820

58. H.O. 102.32 23 Feb 1820

59. Parkhill, Autobiography of Arthur Sneddon 106

60. Knox, Airdrie 56-7. Ms (uncatalogued) in Airdrie Public Library

61. Paterson, Autobiographical Reminiscences 63

out, it was mainly weavers who were captured and punished. Wilson, Baird and Hardie were all weavers; many who went with them seem to have belonged to the same trade. Those who marched from Strathaven were probably all weavers; those who were captured at Bonnymuir were mainly weavers with the addition of a labourer, a blacksmith, a bookbinder, a tailor, a shoemaker, and a cabinet maker.⁽⁶²⁾ Spiers who was tried at Paisley was a weaver; Munroe and the others charged at Dumbarton were cotton spinners.

The connection between weaving and the demand for radical reform is also shown by an examination of places where such demands were frequently made and places which reputedly had large numbers of weavers. Glasgow was the centre of these demands in Scotland and in Glasgow there were about 20,000 looms.⁽⁶³⁾ Other prominent textile towns were Paisley, Airdrie, Hamilton, Strathaven, Kilsyth, Johnstone, Neilston, Kilmarnock, Kilbarchan and Galston - all places in which radicals were active and this would seem to confirm that as in Lancashire, Radicalism was in great degree a movement of weavers.⁽⁶⁴⁾

62. Green op.cit. i 43

63. Cleland Rise and Progress of the City of Glasgow 239

64. When evidence was being collected for the Handloom Weavers report (1839) courts of enquiry were held in the west of Scotland at Glasgow, Paisley, Hamilton, Airdrie, Strathaven, Kilsyth, Kirkintilloch, Eaglesham, Pollockshaws, Lanark, Rutherglen, Bothwell, Kilbarchan, Kilmarnock, Ayr, Maybole - presumably an indication that these were the chief areas of handloom weaving. Hand-loom Weavers Reports (1839) 2

Why the demand for radical reform should have been so strong among weavers is difficult to explain. Undoubtedly there was great economic distress among handloom weavers after the first few years of the nineteenth century. It is generally accepted that the number of hand-loom weavers increased at least until the 1820s while wages, on average, declined. Wood has estimated the numbers employed in hand-loom weaving at 108,000 in 1788, 220,000 in 1815, and 240,000 in 1820 while average wages were 18s 9d per week in 1797, 23s in 1805, 13s 6d in 1815, and 8s 3d in 1820. (65)

Although there can be strong criticism of average wages in such a complex industry, and although it is impossible to estimate accurately the numbers employed in hand-loom weaving, nevertheless the picture that can be drawn from these statistics is probably the correct one - increased labour force and declining wage rates. Alexander Richmond claimed that wages for plain work which had ranged from 8s to 20s 6d per week in 1812 were by 1816 only 70% of that figure while in contrast ten other trades and professions - tailors, shoemakers, blacksmiths, masons and others - had an average wage of 18s 4½d in 1812 and this did not decline. (66)

In December 1816 some weavers in Kirkintilloch were earning an average of only 6s 0½d per week and from this was deducted 1s 6d for loom

65. Wood The History of Wages in the Cotton Trade
112

66. Richmond op.cit. 23, 57

rent, candles, coal, brushes and other items leaving the journeyman weaver with only 4s 6½d. (67) That this was not an isolated or exaggerated case would seem to be confirmed by other reports in the press and by speeches in parliament. (68) What happened was that the distress among weavers which existed prior to 1815 was made worse at the end of the war by the return to the trade of soldiers who, sometimes with the aid of a pension could work at lower wages. (69) There was an increase in the quantity of cotton goods produced and a consequent fall in prices. To compensate for this, weavers had to produce more, working longer hours to do so. The market became overstocked; unemployment among weavers spread and other trades which depended on weavers for consumption of their produce or for employment also suffered.

The hardship which hand-loom weavers suffered was contrasted with the prosperity of former times. 'From 1785 until 1806' said one of the witnesses before the Assistant Commissioners preparing the reports on the Hand-loom Weavers, 'hand-loom weaving was the best trade going and in no other were wages so high. Any of the more skilled weavers could easily earn from 30s to 40s weekly' and the hardship which weavers later suffered consisted 'less in the actual scantiness of their means than in the bitter-

67. Glasgow Chronicle 26 Dec 1816

68. For example, Glasgow Chronicle 4 Jan 1817. Parl. Deb. xxxv 176 252 224

69. Sinclair Analysis of the Statistical Account of Scotland i App. 46

ness of the contrast between past and present times.'⁽⁷⁰⁾ It has recently been suggested⁽⁷¹⁾ that the 'Golden Age' can be shown by the economic historian to be largely a myth. But as far as the handloom weavers of the 19th century were concerned it was real. Admittedly, wage rates would vary widely even in the same town or village, but what was important was that some weavers could earn high wages and dress themselves in clothes of a quality equal to that of more prosperous manufacturers.⁽⁷²⁾ Handloom weavers fought against economic decline in a variety of ways - pleas for assistance from the government, machine breaking, political agitation, efforts to form unions.

The weavers also fought against threats to their independence. Blair, a Paisley writer, said that 'the weaver generally owned the loom at which he worked or hired it for a lengthy period. He was then his own master.... Thus the weaver was self contained and independent' and at his work could exercise 'taste, invention, harmony, art and genius'

70. H.L. Weavers Report (1839) 49, 18

71. Bythell 'The Hand-loom Weaver in the English Cotton Industry during the Industrial Revolution' in Econ. Hist. Rev. 2nd series xvii 339-353

72. Anonymous. A short account of the life and hardships of a Glasgow weaver 1

in a way that the worker who tended a machine in a factory could never do. Moreover since he was his own master, and until the end of the first decade of the 19th century was well paid in comparison with other workers, he could give himself more leisure and devote more time and money to his enjoyment. (73)

One witness quoted in the Report on the Irish Poor in Great Britain maintained that most natives of Paisley would sooner earn 12s per week at weaving with their own looms, having the command of their own time and their ingenuity exercised in their profession than work in a factory for a wage of 20s or 25s per week. (74)

Weavers were also noted for their intelligence. Janet Hamilton described them as 'the most intelligent, enlightened and by far the most independent body of working men in the Kingdom' and in support of this mentioned the books to be found in the local library which weavers had founded - 'The full half (of the books) were works of divinity, then biography, travel, voyages, and several sets of the British Essayist, a fair proportion of history and geography....' Weavers were thus well prepared by education and habit to read 'the infamous and seditious publications' which later circulated, and

73. Blair The Paisley Shawl 46, 48

74. Report on the Irish Poor in Great Britain
1835 133

they were intelligent enough to appreciate the deterioration in their situation and the need for some kind of reform or effort to halt the decline in their status.⁽⁷⁵⁾ Chalmers referred to weavers as 'a highly intelligent order of men.'⁽⁷⁶⁾ John Duncan, a weaver, considered that weavers formed 'as a whole a remarkable class of men - intelligent and observant of the progress of events at home and abroad, devoted to politics, strongly or wildly radical if not tainted with revolutionary sentiments after the intoxication of the French Revolution.'⁽⁷⁷⁾ The Hand-loom Weavers report mentions their remarkable desire for intellectual improvement; in the east of Scotland, at any rate, lectures delivered on any subject of any interest to them (for example on political economy) were generally fully attended.⁽⁷⁸⁾

But there were also indications that their intelligence was declining, that their time for reading was very much abridged, that they could not afford to send their children to school, and that the children had now to work so hard that in the evenings they were too tired to attend classes.⁽⁷⁹⁾ The weavers' tradition of intelligence and education which formerly enhanced their prosperity remained to embitter

75. J. Hamilton Sketch of a Scottish Roadside Village 236-245 and Reminiscences 361-2

76. Hanna op.cit. ii 262

77. Jolly John Duncan, Weaver and Botanist, 23

78. H.L. Weavers Report (1839) 190

79. Ibid 45, 46, 49

their poverty. (80)

The bitterness felt among weavers which led to demands for radical reform can therefore be partly explained as a protest against a decline in economic and social status by a body of men accustomed to political discussion of high intellectual quality. Their reaction is a natural human reaction. An attempt to provide a more elaborate sociological explanation has been made by Smelser. (81) He suggests that there is a typical sequence of events when a social system increases in complexity. The sequence begins when members of the system express dissatisfaction with some aspect of the system's functioning. The immediate responses to the dissatisfactions are undirected or misdirected symptoms of disturbance, which are gradually brought under control and their energy is turned to the generation of specific solutions for the original problems. The cause of unrest among hand-loom weavers was that they were being differentiated out of the industry by the more productive hand loom and power loom factories, and until the hand loom weavers were absorbed into other trades, their history was one of disturbance after disturbance.

Such an explanation of disturbance, apart from being highly impersonal, overlooks the fact that there was unrest among weavers before factories became

80. H.L. Weavers Report (1839) 18,

81. Smelser Social Change in the Industrial Revolution passim

common or a threat to the hand loom weaving industry. Factories were slow to be set up because there were so many weavers that it was cheaper to use them in large numbers than to spend money on factories and machinery. Nor does this sociological explanation show why weavers formed such a predominant group among political reformers.

It is certainly true that weavers, because of the nature of their work found it difficult to form trade unions. Hand loom weavers worked in isolation, in their own time, at different quality work and there could be little agreement about average or basic wages or about working conditions. Moreover, the failure of the strike of 1812 was a severe blow to their plans for union. In the aftermath of this failure and in the depressed days of 1815 onwards they were presented with a possible solution to their problems by William Cobbett. His philosophy was a regressive one. He planned to restore a society (which in fact had never existed) in which the outmoded artisan could flourish and in which individuality would triumph at the expense of centralised government. He promised a reduction in the taxation which must have appeared to many weavers as one of the main causes of the increased price of food and luxuries relative to their wages. The society he envisaged was one in which there would be a division of family labour - which had been common among weavers in the 18th century - independence for the craftsman and provision of most

essential needs, such as bread, ale, and meat, by the members of the family themselves. Such a society would be one in which the weaver would regain status and independence, and heavy taxation of foodstuffs would cease. Cobbett insisted that such a society could be restored if reform of parliament took place.⁽⁸²⁾

It is tempting to associate the support given by weavers to radicalism only with their economic distress. It is certainly true that there was great economic distress until 1820 and that thereafter, economic conditions generally improved. But economic distress alone is not the explanation of support given to radicalism by weavers. There are also to be considered the high moral and intellectual qualities which weavers had formerly possessed and the independence they had enjoyed. These, Cobbett convinced them, could be regained by supporting radicalism. Cobbett never came to terms with an urban, industrialised society; he was sadly deficient of remedies for the ills he so loudly and repetitively lamented.⁽⁸³⁾ But hand loom weavers likewise were largely anachronisms in 19th century industrialised Britain. Alone among urban dwellers they could look back on times of prosperity in the days before machinery, factories,

82. Cf. Smelser *op.cit.* 250-1

83. Thompson *op.cit.* 645, points out that Huntite radicalism valued economic independence and thus was not suitable for an urbanised society consisting to a large extent of factory workers.

and large towns became commonplace. There was always a close spiritual link between Cobbett and the hand loom weavers and this must be accounted one of the main reasons for the support that was given by weavers to radical reform. In the 1820s, Cobbett became more interested in fiscal reform than he had formerly been. He did not lament the past so loudly or frequently. His ideas of reform through petitioning had proved unsuccessful. It is perhaps for these reasons that there is so little mention of radical reform, even in times of distress among weavers. (84)

The movement for radical reform failed to achieve anything of substance by 1822 mainly because opposition to it was strong and support for it was limited to particular social and occupational groups. 'Until the 1840s at least, no insurrectionary movement of the English lower orders whether of town or countryside, stood any chance of success without the support of some combination of other social groups,' (85) and in Scotland, even more than in England support for radicalism was limited. Nevertheless it can be argued that something had been gained from the agitation

84. Rostow British Economy of the Nineteenth Century 125, has compiled a chart showing degrees of 'social tension'. According to this, the greatest tension in the early 19th century existed in 1812, 1819, 1826, and 1829, yet only in 1819 did this tension lead directly to demands for a radical reform of parliament.

85. G. Rude The Crowd in History 267

of these years. Lower class reformers had shown themselves to be capable of organising large scale meetings and a widespread organisation of political unions. A considerable, if transitory, interest had been taken in reform of the laws which governed election to the House of Commons, and the right of the lower orders to demonstrate their interest in such reform had been assumed. The growth of political consciousness is most significant and justifies Cobbett's assertion that 'the Reform Bill (of 1832) would never have passed into law unless a complete revolution had taken place in the minds of the people.'⁽⁸⁶⁾ In this revolution, the events of 1815 to 1822 played a most significant part.

86. Political Register 7 July 1832

Appendix

Extracts from papers in the possession of the Kinloch family relating to the part played by George Kinloch in radical reform movements from 1815 to 1820.

Hampden Club
Saturday March 4th, 1815

Extract from the Proceedings

That the following Form of a Petition, which has been read, is approved of, as the one which shall be printed and circulated by means of our Subscription; to be proposed in Meetings of Counties, Parishes, or Districts; or otherwise tendered for the Signatures of such as may approve the same.

TO THE HONOURABLE THE COMMONS OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND
IRELAND, IN PARLIAMENT ASSEMBLED,

The Petition of the Undersigned, Inhabitants of
Sheweth,

That your Petitioners have a full and immovable conviction, a conviction which they believe to be universal throughout the Kingdom, that your Honourable House doth not, in any constitutional or rational sense, represent the nation.

That when the People have ceased to be represented, the Constitution is subverted:

That Taxation without Representation is a state of Slavery:

That war, as a cause of excessive taxes, being the Harvest of those who live by Corruption, the cause and character of the war which commenced in 1793, your Petitioners now conceive to be, by the enlightened part of the community, well understood.

That as the tremendous tempest of war is not to be stayed at the bidding of those in whose mad and wicked counsels it had its origin, so it is probable, that the Contrivers of the late war did not intend the magnitude and duration it attained; which magnitude and duration, by the portentous calamities now found in their train, are fast opening the eyes of a deluded nation to the evil deeds of its authors:

That now these wicked rulers, themselves, if not infatuated, must know, that either that usurpation which has divested the People of their Representation must be for ever put down; or the liberty of England must perish, and the security of property be annihilated.

That there is no property in that which any person or persons, any power or authority, can take from the people without their consent.

That the scourging of a Taxation without Representation is arrived at a severity too harrassing and vexatious, too intolerable and degrading, to be longer endured without being unceasingly protested against, and as unceasingly resisted by all possible means warranted by the Constitution, until redress be obtained.

That in such a condition of their Country, your Petitioners are shocked to behold contending factions, alike guilty of their Country's wrongs, alike forgetful of her Rights, mocking the public patience with repeated, protracted, and disgusting debates, on questions of refinement in the complicated and abstruse science of Taxation; as if in such refinements, and not in a Reformed Representation as if in a consolidated corruption, and not in a renovated Constitution, relief were to be found.

That in the discussions which they have witnessed, your Petitioners see nought but what hath a direct tendency to place the English People in a situation, in which the unrelenting lash of unconstitutional taxation may, in all time to come, be lead on to the utmost extent of human endurance:

That instead of such a course, your Petitioners hold it to be self-evident, that there are not any human means of redressing the People's wrongs, or composing their distracted minds; or of preventing the subversion of Liberty and the Establishment of Despotism; unless by calling the collective wisdom and virtue of the Community into Council, by the election of a free Parliament:

Wherefore, considering, that through the usurpation of a Borough Faction and other causes, the People have been put even out of a condition to consent to Taxes; and considering also, that until their sacred Rights of Election shall be restored, no free Parliament can have existence; your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House will, without delay, pass a law for putting the aggrieved and much-wronged People inpossession of their undoubted rights: - to Representation co-extensive, at the least, with direct Taxation - to an equal distribution, throughout the Community, of such Representation; - and to Parliaments

of a continuance according to the Constitution,
namely, not exceeding one year.

- - - - -

FORM OF THE HAND BILL

Taxes at the Will of the Borough Faction,

or,

TAXES according to the CONSTITUTION

"Choose you this Day which you prefer: As for me and
my House, we prefer the Constitution."

HAMPDEN

A REFORM in the REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE in the
COMMONS HOUSE of Parliament, is the only measure
which affords any hope of seeing UNNECESSARY WAR,
with its ruinous Expense, avoided: USELESS OFFICES,
SINECURE PLACES, and UNMERITED PENSIONS abolished:
the POOR RATES considerably reduced: and such ECONOMY
in every department of the State introduced; as to
enable a virtuous Parliament materially to lessen
those TAXES which bear the most heavily on the GROWERS
OF CORN, or on the LABOURING CLASSES OF THE COMMUNITY:
namely the TAXES ON CANDLES, SOAP, SALT, SUGAR, and
LEATHER.

A PETITION FOR SUCH REFORM lies for Signature,
At At And at

- - - - -
Letters to George Kinloch.

Glasgow
10th Sept. 1815

... It was matter of much regret that I had not the
pleasure of seeing you when I called at Kinloch, as
I understand that you take a strong interest in a
truly constitutional reform.

So instructed, I have great satisfaction in
reporting to you, that I have every where, from
Lanark and Greenock to Edinburgh and Aberdeen,
experienced an unequivocal desire on the part of the
mass of the People, below the ranks of Magistrates and
exclusive of placemen and others directly interested
in the present corruptions, to promote reform by
signing petitions.

From the view I have had, as well as in the
opinion of judicious men, I am inclined to hope that
Scotland will afford not fewer than 500 Petitions of

the form now in use, containing 300 names each. This will be a weighty addition to upwards of 500 now collected in my house.

signed J. Cartwright

- - - - -

Edinburgh
15th Sept. 1815

. . . Too faint an impression seemed to have been made by my first visit to Dundee, that I contrived to make a second. On this last occasion, I had a second conversation with Mr. Robt. Millar, who, though assenting to the principles of reform, seemed disinclined to take part in practically promoting it. The gentlemen undermentioned, namely, Doctor Ramsay, James Duncan Junr. Esq; Messrs. James Ogilvy and Saunders, Writers; Mr. Jobson, Cashier of a Bank, and Mr. Rintoul, Printer, joined me in the evening, where we supped together, and I had reason to conclude that Petitions from Dundee would be a certain consequence of the convention that passed. But Sir, I am not yet in possession of any certainty that it really was. There, as in almost every other place, I perceived that obstacles were imagined, which three grains of reason and spirit would dissipate, and which, have been dissipated wherever that spirit was found. Should the matter there hang fire, doubtless your presence and animation would remove all hesitation.

At Cupar Angus, I conversed with no one but Mr. Robert Sime, whose house is a little out of the town, on the road to Kinloch. He seemed sufficiently decided in character and determined to proceed. I therefore left with him one of our Forms ready for signature. At Perth I left more Forms with Mr. David Johnstone a considerable manufacturer. I had with me the names of a few other persons, but Johnstone appearing to have all the talent, knowledge, resolution and energy for moving that town and its vicinity; and treating it as a matter easily effected, I left it wholly in his hands. I have since written to him, reporting the good prospects in our cause, and informing him that Lang of Glasgow keeps his Press standing for executing orders for Circulars, which he supplies as follows:- 100 at 2½d a copy, 200 or upwards at 2 pence per copy; having permission to multiply them without limit.

I recommended to Johnstone to get a Committee formed for Perth and its vicinity, to promote the work

of petitioning, to collect the petitions where signed to transmit them to Mr. Wm. Moffatt, Solicitor, Argyle Square, Edinburgh, (who will forward them with all other parcels that come to hand from the North and West to London in a compact package) as well as to watch over the attention paid to these petitions by the House of Commons.

By keeping such a Committee in existence will the conduct of the House is sure, the means will be in hand, for rallying, if necessary, the insulted Petitioners. From the mode of petitioning now recommended, namely, on single sheets, each containing full 300 names, an advantage will result. It will greatly increase the number of Petitions. The public imagination will be more influenced by learning that Perth and its vicinity have sent up four or five score Petitions, with 300 signatures each, such that they have furnished one petition how numerous by whoever it may have been signed....

I have suggested to John Love, that it may be a wise measure to invite Mr. John Fulton, of No. 19 Princes Street, Glasgow, to visit Perth for delivering his Lecture on Constitution. Dr. Joseph Borthwicke, at whose house I am now a guest, on looking into that lecture exclaimed - "This man is raised up by Providence at to give success to your efforts in the cause of Radical Reform." As Fulton is too poor to venture on going far from home as a Lecturer, I am endeavouring to obtain for him such a patronage, as shall secure him against loss or distress in dispensating the doctrines which flow from a knowledge of the English Constitution. My present efforts are confined to a few members of the Hampden Club, as that Association will not have a meeting till March. His lecture is so good that if he can but be protected in making the attempt, I have no doubt but it will turn out to himself a profitable speculation. Perhaps Sir, you may be able to back this suggestion at Perth, and promote the same at Dundee. Fulton even lectures in populous villages where there is a disposition to attend him.

signed J. Cartwright

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London
22nd Nov. 1815

Dear Sir,

I was greatly rejoiced to hear of you from my friend Gilchrist, and that you left Edinburgh with a store of Petitions. I hope you will soon need a further supply, since, in consequence of the light caste

on our system by the effect of a lecture at Edinburgh, it seems highly probable our general success, wherever lecturing can be introduced, will exceed anything before in contemplation. Personal interviews with a very few persons, the limited distribution of circulars, considering the difficulties to be removed by argument, having a very confined effect to my own exertions, until at Edinburgh and at Newcastle I delivered a Lecture. Even in the political Gomorrah of our country this wrought a miracle. It raised the dead, who are still flocking by hundreds to sign petitions. A lecture at once collects more in hundreds, the facts and the reasoning immediately spreads light through the mind and a flame through the hearts. The work is thus intravenously accomplished, and the spirit flies in all directions like fire.

I have informed Fulton in a letter of this day to consult you as to the direction we shall take. I had generally recommended the most populous towns of Fife, Perth and Forfar, but you will be able to dictate the best route.

... I have communicated to our Trio, in Edinburgh, (the Doctor, Capt. Johnston and Mr. W. Moffat) the hopes they may entertain of each, which would enable them to provide for the east of Scotland south of the Forth, the south and the south-west, round to Dumfriess.

signed J. Cartwright

- - - - -

1st Decembet 1815

. . . It will be well if, in Scotland, you can raise a national Club, having for its object radical reform without the qualification adopted in forming the Hampden. We have one Society requiring no pecuniary qualifications; but it was perceived that if we hoped to bring together a considerable number of persons of rank, residing in various parts of the Kingdom into one political society for reform, it must be by means unconnected with a promiscuous body residing for the most part in the Metropolis; and in a mode more corresponding with their stations in the community, and, provided such men can be brought to act the part of real Reformists, the expedient was a good one.

To put the Hampden in motion to a good purpose has required vigilance and some labour, but the best consequences having been the effects, and the

association being in a certain degree looked up to, there is reason to hope that it will improve in energy. To that end, I am now labouring, and should I succeed, consequences the most extrusive and most satisfactory may be expected. You will shortly, I trust, know more of this, and find the good effect in your parts.

Although you took with you from Edinburgh a considerable parcel of petitions, I am not sorry that you have not yet commenced your petitioning operations, because in a little time you may do it with more advantage. Earnest as in general I am for immediate action, yet where I know that the business is in right hands, and will not be neglected, I am at ease, knowing that the fittest moment will be chosen.

As yet I have heard but once from Fulton, who had made, as he reported, a good beginning. His lectures may have the happiest effects, and therefore it is to be hoped he will be everywhere encouraged.

I entirely agree in your suggestion to Mr. Doctor, to call things by their right names. Our Club took its name from Hampden, because he stood foremost in resisting unconstitutional Taxation, which is our own immediate object. The title of Club, in my judgment is very objectionable. I wish ours had been the Hampden Association for resisting Taxation without Representation. This would have expressed our meaning. By abbreviation among those to whom our object was familiar, we should be called "The Hampden".

With the great respect I have for the name of Fletcher, I conceive that radical reformists must have a difficulty in converting him into a guardian spirit, and I much doubt whether the history of Wallace will show him in a right point of view for that purpose. If a name be now strictly appropriate, it tends to mislead, and even to a title that has in it anything ambiguous or indefinite there must even be, more or less, some ground of objection. This seems to be well guarded against in our Union for Parliamentary Reform according to the Constitution? Two imitatory words, namely "The Scottish" would furnish you with a title perfectly unexceptionable, and completely explanatory, besides having a direct tendency to keep out false pretenders, and keep the members steady in a right line of conduct.

signed J. Cartwright

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8th January 1816

. . .Until I received your letter, I was not fully sensible of the value of my own expedient of delivering a lecture at Edinburgh. So true it is, that necessity is the mother of invention, and that the most beneficial inventions have generally been the fruit of incident. Being on the point of leaving Edinburgh in despair, the thought came into my mind of a lecture in the way of experiment.

The very first person in the capital to whom I sent my printed letter, says in his answer - "Public lectures are of a kind and times more importance than were your estimate of them. If only ten men can in the first instance be found to follow your example - ten more of property and character - ten men not wholly unknown to the country - these are essentials, if ten such men are found, the thing is done". "Why should not Sir Francis Burdett give two or three lectures in the metropolis, as a commencement? Why should not Mr. Northmore follow him, this would be a good and a sufficient beginning?" One of our members asked me - "I shall not get gentlemen to lecture anywhere". In reply, I have to ask if he do me the honour, to consider me as that thing called a gentleman, and to quote Sir Francis, who observed that speaking in public is delivering lectures, and in politics it seems to me peculiarly the office of a gentleman." Much light is there thrown on this point by the little effect produced at Dundee, Montrose, and other places in your parts by the lectures of Fulton, as well as similar success in some Western towns of the Secretary of our Committee. No lecturer could appear on a more unfavourable stage than he did at Edinburgh, where the effect has been all that could be desired.

It is not therefore of infinite importance, that, where Fulton failed, a man whose rank and character would command respect and attract attention, should try the ground over again? By a great effort of the printer, Dr. Gilchrist was furnished with two copies of the lecture, in a finished state, one of which, will, I am sure be at your command if you desire to have it. As the substance of it is taken from an Essay which a learned and experienced Lawyer has said contained the best history of the Constitution, "which our language can supply", it is hoped it be found at least most exceptionable, and furnishing the strongest incentives to Parliamentary Reform.

signed J. Cartwright

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5 Wych Street
Strand London
27th Nov. 1819

Dear Sir,

On my return to London I received your favour conveying to me the Vote of Thanks passed at a public Meeting held at Dundee on the 10th inst. As the greatest reward I ever anticipated for a life spent in the endeavour to restore, maintain, and secure the rights and liberties of the people, is the approbation of my fellow countrymen, I receive with pleasure the reward bestowed upon my exertions by the Reformers at Dundee, and the handsome way in which that vote has been conveyed by their respectable, enlightened and patriotic Chairman has greatly enhanced its value in my estimation. I was particularly gratified with the perusal of your excellent Speech and the proceedings at the Dundee Meeting. It is true my life was miraculously spared at Manchester when the bloody hands of a drunken and infuriated Yeomanry had premeditated its destruction, but from what is passing around me in this Metropolis, I fear that life is only prolonged to witness the total overthrow of all that which we ought to hold sacred in the Constitution, and that the fresh sacrifices and accumulated privations of the people will at length end in a hateful Military despotism.

signed H. Hunt

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Dundee
23rd Nov. 1819

Kinloch to Mrs Kinloch

My dear Helen,

You would be surprised yesterday to find me flown and in company with the Procurator Fiscal too.

Sheriff L'Amy is upon his high horse and appearing to make things appear very terrible. I was examined first as to the meeting Resolutions, etc. and dismissed at 4 o'clock when I went and dined at Blair's....

Sedition is the crime of which I am accused by the Bigwigs, so I suppose I shall be held to bail till their reverences take time to consider what they are to do with me and I have no doubt I shall be made to swell the Doctor's Green Bag....

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Edinburgh
10th Dec. 1819

My dear Helen,

I received yours today . . . I have nothing yet as to the business. Cranstoun and Jeffrey have been spoken to and have accepted the charge. Jeffrey coquetted a good deal and Pearson says evidently felt nettled at the hit I gave the Whigs. They are to meet for a consultation tomorrow night or Sunday forenoon, when we shall see how the land lies. I would not be surprised if the thing were dropped though I don't flatter myself with getting off so easily. Warrender the Crown Agent, Pearson says, is very easy upon the subject and would have no objections to their being no more of it but, he says, the orders come from London. Maule arrived here with Radical Rinty on Wednesday last. I am to see him tomorrow and expect to get him for one of my supporters....

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Edinburgh
12th Dec. 1819

My dear Helen,

. . . I am sorry to say that from all I can learn, a favourable result is hardly to be anticipated. Men's minds here are heated to a degree of which in our part of the country you can have no conception. Of course, I can hardly expect an impartial trial.

Circumstances too have occurred which make it still more unfavourable for me. There was yesterday a report that a general rising is intended

tomorrow in Glasgow. In consequence, Hussars, Flying Artillery and a Regiment of foot were sent off at a moment's warning. Today the Midlothian Yeomanry are also gone and the Castle duty is done by volunteers. I don't believe the people are so mad as to throw themselves on certain destruction but in the meantime these alarms operate most unfavourably for me.

Whatever shall happen, I have the satisfaction of an approving conscience. My error, if it amounts to a crime, was unintentional. I shall feel no disgrace from anything they can do to me and I shall have the satisfaction of knowing that the persecution of which I am the object will, in the end, forward the glorious cause for which I contend.

I shall probably be imprisoned - Thank God I can employ and amuse myself as well in a jail as in a palace. They will probably inflict a heavy fine on me...

2 o'clock Robert and Mr. Pearson are returned. My counsel anticipate a conviction, just as I had guessed. However there are many alleviating features of which they are to avail themselves. Jeffrey is to conduct my defence, assisted by Cockburn and advised by Cranstoun who does not practise in the Criminal Court. . . .

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15th December 1819

My dearest Helen,

... The tide of the times sets so strongly towards despotism at present that I am advised to go out of the way for a short time to avoid the pelting of the pitiless storm.

I mean to go to the west of England and from there to Havre and to remain in that neighbourhood till I see how the land lies....

I have done nothing of which I am ashamed and better men than I have been persecuted for the same error....

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Patrick Pearson, W.S., the solicitor who was acting for George Kinloch in Edinburgh reported to him in a letter dated 12th December 1819 (internal evidence would suggest that it should have been dated 14th December) the opinions of Cransteun and Jeffrey, his counsel. Parts of this report are as follows:-

'I thought it necessary in Correction of the Gossip of the Parlt. House to notice to them that it was not Mr Kinloch's purpose to interfere with his defence but to leave everything to his Counsel. Jeffrey's retort was - I am afraid Mr Pearson he has interfered too far already. These declarations, Cransteun joined in, I am afraid the Gentleman has destroyed himself by these declarations and giving up the notes of his speech...!

Two days later Pearson went to see Jeffrey and Cransteun again; when they 'discussed what is said about the Manchester business, which they as well the whole legal persons I have heard speak on the subject construed into what was tantamount into an invocation of Civil War. No part of the hypothesis has been justified by the event. The prince has approved. The Parliament has shaken off the Enquiry and there are no prosecutions, no attempts to bring the Yeomanry to Justice- of consequence the alternative of Civil War remains. All these matters were discussed not with heat, but with that silent and deep tone of feeling as if everyone present had been the intimate friend of the accused. Cransteun paced the floor in great perturbation and it broke involuntarily by bursts and starts that the case appeared worse to him by studying it, worse than Muir's, he muttered. They both agreed that to escape conviction was out of the question. Mr Jeffrey then made something like a set speech upon the subject of punishment, which he made to range from imprisonment for a short period to Transportation- aye Transportation for life. ... Jeffrey then mentioned Lord Hernand's opinion which was for Transportation. This opinion it struck me he might learn from Cockburn who is married on a niece of his Lordship's and there is daily communication betwixt the families.... I spoke of getting the prosecution quashed... upon the footing of your withdrawing yourself and (Cransteun) repeated that the party, not the Counsel, could determine upon such points.... I went to Cockburn twice yesterday.... He spoke generally on the subject of the case of Baird in which he was counsel and quoted the opinion of his neighbour Pitmilley who on that occasion had made

use of this phrase that Transportation was the appropriate punishment for sedition.... He never saw a more hopeless case. He referred to his conversations with Jeffrey, from which I said to him he would know we were already prepared for Conviction, all our doubts were as to the quantum sufficient of punishment. To be shut up a year or so would surely content them. He was very incredulous and did not anent to the ultimatum this indicated. I then recollecting Jeffrey's limit, tried him upon Lord Mernand. He seemed surprised that I should have such information and the effect was increased by the intentionally firm manner in which I shaped it. He got out of Countenance, scribbled on the wall and made play to disguise his being caught.... He then made the subject run upon your personal character- age, family, connections and so on, and mentioned the Distress of the Family at your being arraigned. I said they were no doubt much annoyed at what had happened but I did not conceive their prospects were near so gloomy as his. That's a pity he returned, a sentence of Transportation would come with a damnable thump upon them. All this passed not in levity but in frankness accompanied with obvious and just sympathy....

In all periods of political effervescence to retire seems to have been the favourite practice of the best informed of the time....'

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A letter from George Kinloch to the Lord Advocate written from London on 18th December, 1819.

My Lord,

This letter will be delivered to you... after I shall have left this country. On my arrival in Edinburgh lately with a view to make preparation for my trial I found men's minds in such a state of excitement and alarm that I once became convinced of the impossibility of obtaining an impartial hearing under the existing circumstance. It occurred to me that by withdrawing myself for a time, the object of Government would be obtained without exciting any feeling of animosity, such as might probably follow a conviction and sentence against me....

The meeting which took place in Dundee was proposed and arranged without my knowledge, and I was not informed of it, not was I asked to attend it till after several other gentlemen had refused to do

so. I was asked to propose the resolutions, which I did, and after having attended the meeting I immediately returned to my usual quiet mode of life, little imagining that I had been guilty of any crime....

Dundee and all that part of Scotland is in a state of perfect tranquillity, although the poor are suffering great distress. There have been no training nor preparing of arms, nothing in short which indicates the smallest intention of resisting the laws in any way whatever. Many and several intelligent people have assured me that the meeting has, in their opinion, had the best effects by allowing the spirit of dissatisfaction in a great measure to evaporate. I need not occupy more of your Lordship's time by dwelling on these circumstances, but shall proceed to state that though perfectly conscious of the innocence of my intentions yet in the present agitated state of the public mind, I have deemed it prudent to withdraw from the impending storm. My case is in fact, prejudiced. Not only several of the Jury have delivered their sentiments as to a conviction, but I have been informed I had little to expect from the Judges in the way of leniency. To fine or imprisonment or both I would have submitted without a murmur but when I heard that Botany Bay was likely to be my lot, among the outcasts of Society, I shrunk from the horrid idea to which, I confess, death itself would have been preferable. I am sure, my Lord, from all I have heard of your character you yourself would have been the first to disapprove of so horrid a punishment to a person of my station and feelings. It was rumoured there was a probability of a riot taking place on the day of my trial. To prevent, as far in my power, anything of the kind, I have left directions to announce in the newspapers the step which I have taken....

Signed George Kinloch.

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Mr Pearson prepared some notes to assist him in Mr Kinloch's defence. In these, he mentioned the peaceable nature of Dundee and district, the fact that Kinloch was not a disorderly or seditious person, and his performance of all the duties expected of a country gentleman.

'He holds certain opinions as to the necessity and the extent of a reform of the House of Commons... but nothing like disaffection to the whole frame of the existing Government can with truth be urged

against him!

Pearson then goes on to mention that the meeting in Dundee did not originate with Kinloch; the first notice he had of it was from the Dundee newspapers of 8th October, 1819. A fortnight later, the newspapers noted that Mr Maule had been invited to address the meeting but had declined. Only then was Kinloch approached.

'As to what happened at the meeting, (Mr Kinloch) begs leave to refer to the copy of the Dundee Advertiser which contains a corrected copy of the speech made and of the resolutions passed.... A report of the meeting and of the speech and resolutions was given in the Ministerial paper the Dundee Courier of the 12th November 1819 of a nature exaggerated, malicious and untrue, which account was copied into the Courier and other London Journals and he has some reason to believe that from the impression conveyed by it to the official people, particularly as to what is said about Civil War, the present trial originated, and the case has been prejudicated against him. Now it is a grave truth that the origin of that newspaper is connected with the spy system. The real editor is Mr Thomson, Clergyman, the ostensible editor is Mr Reid, designed Writer and who was brought from Edinburgh to Dundee after the paper was set on foot.'

Pearson concludes by referring to the 'spy like information' given to the Ministry from Thomson, the gross misrepresentation that has been made by him of Kinloch's case, the evil influence of this misrepresentation on official people and the public mind, and its possible effect on a jury.

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