THE POLITICAL IMPORTANCE OF THE 'WESTMINSTER COMMITTEE' OF THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY,
with Special Reference to the Years 1807-22
(Introduction)

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"Patronage" it has been observed, "was not merely consonant with the social structure of England. It was essential to it". (1). No less was it essential to its political structure. The nature of politics in the eighteenth century, following on the work of Professor Namier, is now substantially clear. (2). Patronage, influence and corruption were a reflection of prevailing social, economic and, indeed, physical conditions, intensified by the lack of major issues to divide the nation for the larger part of the century, and perpetuated by the necessities of government, following the Revolution Settlement of 1688-9. Not until social and economic advances altered the distribution of political power and brought a wider public into existence; not until issues arose to rouse, and the means were found to organise it, was any substantial change in the system of government practicable.

The complex development of popular consciousness, and the emergence of the people as an independent force in society and politics, is a study of fundamental importance to the present day, recently emphasized. (3). But for most of

(2). L.B. Namier, The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III.
(3). cf, e.g., H. Butterfield op. cit.; R. Pares, King George III and the Politicians; L.B. Namier, 'Monarchy and the Party System' (Romanes Lecture 1952 reprinted in L.B. Namier, Personalities and Powers pp 13-33)
the eighteenth century 'the people' scarcely counted. Society was predominantly oligarchical in structure, following a pattern in large measure prescribed by the rural character of England, the scattered small scale nature of her communities and the comparative backwardness of the bulk of her, as yet, small population. There were, excepting the metropolis of London, no great urban centres, and indeed few towns of any considerable size. Men lived in villages, or, in towns little bigger than villages, in relative isolation. England had still to be physically integrated by modern communications and the mass of the people, often ill-educated and illiterate, had yet to attain a consciousness extending much beyond their own home areas.

In these circumstances, the leaders of society were the men with local influence; men, whose birth, wealth and superior education, but whose ownership of property locally, above all, was considered to give them a legitimate title to its use. They were the politically conscious and active part of the nation, forming a small upper-class clannish world, drawn closer by common social interest, by inter-marriage and by ability to afford the costs, and to surmount the difficulties of travel, a world in which everyone knew, or knew of, everyone else. Living and meeting in country houses, their gravitational centre was London. London, containing the residence of the court, Parliament, the government offices and law courts, as well as the chief business and financial houses, was the centre of social and political, as well as the commercial life of the country.
Politics, in the eighteenth century, reflected the oligarchical tendencies and ethical values of a small localised society, of men concerned with maintaining or extending their social prestige and with furthering their ambitions. After 1714 and the substantial settlement of outstanding national issues, their interest in local, personal or business affairs came to dominate the political scene. Men, driven no longer by fierce religious passion, or constitutional rivalry, turned again to lesser, more personal, matters.

The role of central government, was, perhaps inevitably, conceived as limited. The mass of the people looked for leadership, not to a distant government in Westminster, but to those who possessed an influence locally; and it was upon their co-operation that government relied for the ordinary purposes of law enforcement and administration. Its chief direct functions were to safeguard the realm, to maintain order, and to conduct the nation's foreign policy. For these purposes it was necessary to secure a revenue and to raise money by taxation, but, it might well be that this would be almost the only way that it would directly touch isolated localities. But, even had its functions been conceived otherwise, it must have been physically impossible for government to enforce its edicts on a national scale, without the co-operation of influential men in the countryside: and those who possessed local power were exceedingly jealous of any effort to invade it. Government, in fact, meant very largely, local government, and it was normal for those who sought particular, personal or local ends, to approach matters first
through those who possessed influence locally.

In days, when professional and business opportunities were fewer, when the civil service was in its infancy and when openings in most fields depended, not on competition, but on a successful approach to the 'right' person, those, in whose power it was to recommend a man for employment, or, in whose gift a certain post was, inevitably enjoyed exceptional prestige in society. A great many such appointments might well be, directly or indirectly, in the hands of the local aristocracy. If, further, some local or business advantage were sought, which might only be secured through an act of parliament, the first approach had often to be made to the man, or men, of local influence. It was all to the good if the person, or persons, seeking advancement, or the advancement of business interests, had an influence which could be bargained in return. Indeed, in each local area, one may imagine the social structure as knit together in the form of a pyramid, the most influential at the apex, the less influential spreading outwards in greater numbers towards the base, each person dependent for the maintenance, or improvement, of his position in society, upon the prestige he enjoyed and the influence he could bring to bear. Ethically, there might be no objection to a system of patronage, providing the competition for favour did not become too intense. But it is clear that legitimate influence might easily, and, in fact, did, degenerate into corruption, and that the opportunities for the pursuance of selfish or factional interests
might encourage the buying and selling of loyalty.

It was an essential element in the social order, that those who possessed influence, should seek to maintain and, in many cases, to extend it. Their influence was bound up with their social prestige and their prestige depended, not only on their own elevation in the social hierarchy, but on their ability to attend to local requirements, and to secure the interests of their families, and personal or business friends. Central government, dependent on their assistance in securing the co-operation of the country as a whole, had every reason to uphold their influence and facilitate its extension, so long as it could win and retain their support. Fortunately, perhaps, the favour of central government was essential if the ambitions of the majority were to be realised, and there would, in fact, be considerable competition to secure it. Central government alone, could arrange for the grant of honours and titles, could provide openings in the government service, the professions and the church for friends and dependents, and could, for example, permit the local aristocracy to make their own nominations to official posts. Moreover, its co-operation was essential to the furthering of a great many local or business interests. If securing its favour meant active participation in politics (and it did not necessarily mean that, for, no matter who was in power, the granting of local favours to please and uphold the dignity of those whose local influence was important, was generally worth while) - still the rewards were not unattractive. The normal starting point of a
political career, would be securing of a seat in Parliament, and it was the leaders of society, or their would-be imitators, or dependents, who dominated the parliamentary scene.

It was in parliament that the various interests of the communities of Britain were represented and co-ordinated. Attention centred chiefly on the House of Commons. Over the centuries, in proportion as it had sought to tighten its control over taxation, the Crown's need to secure its co-operation had become the greater. The importance which it had attained in the scheme of government, meant that those who had, or who could obtain, influence within it, or upon its composition, were in a strong position to further their interests. If government needed the support of the Commons, much could be gained by bargaining such influence, in return for the favours of government.

Many of the reasons for which men sought entry to parliament will be apparent: some did so because it was traditional in their families to do so; some to secure personal, business or professional advancement; some to enhance their social prestige as an end in itself. Their reasons have been analysed in some detail by Professors Namier and Pares. (1). In the House of Commons, perhaps up to one third of the total membership, partly professional administrators or officials.

(1) L.B. Namier, The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III, Chap. I.

R. Pares, op. cit. Chap. I. As Professor Pares points out, p.30, it should be recognized many entered politics simply for the "due exercise of the talents God gave them, and for fun".
officials, partly minor placemen, would habitually support the crown to secure permanent employment. Another large body, perhaps a hundred or more strong, mainly country gentlemen, concerned principally with the prestige they enjoyed as representatives of the counties, would make a feature of their independence. Though prepared to make their collective influence felt on occasion, they were casual in parliamentary attendance. Both these bodies, representing little more than aggregates of individuals, had neither liking for, nor interest in, party politics. Between them, the remainder, men keen to cut important figures, out to secure the highest offices of state, or, men believing their ambitions stood a better chance of realisation if they assisted prominent politicians in the quest for office, would form themselves in groups. The group, or 'party', would be linked by family, property owning or friendship ties, or, perhaps by admiration for the personality of a particular leader, and might join with others to form a larger structure. Groups, or aggregations of groups, might differ from other such groups in little, or nothing, on principle, though, as the eighteenth century wore on, their differences were to become more marked. They were concerned greatly, however, with the dispositions of the offices of state, and with securing various private, local or sectional interests, by bargaining their support in return for the favours of the crown.

The parliamentary scene was, in fact, largely atomised. Even before 1714 the famous Whig and Tory parties appear
rather as aggregations of groups and individuals, than united bodies (1). The apparently clear cut constitutional and religious struggles of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, tend to mask the family, social and business rivalries which underlay and often embittered them. After 1714, when the outstanding major national issues had been settled, party loyalties relaxed or dissolved and personal, sectional or local ambitions appear in the foreground.

Government, indeed, had long had to take into account the nature of political loyalties. Even when party feelings had run high, the patronage of government had played an important part in politics. In view of their influence in parliament and in the localities, government had to take into account the desires of politicians and be prepared to reward them in the coin they sought.

Much has been written about the electoral system, chaotic to modern eyes, through which men entered the Commons. That it survived so long, only serves to emphasize the readiness, with which the mass of the people accepted aristocratic leadership, and preferred, if they happened to possess a vote, to turn it to personal advantage. The electoral system, in fact, helped to perpetuate, and was, in turn, perpetuated by the existing social and political order. On the one hand, it gave

(1) cf. in particular, R. Walcott from 'British Party Politics 1688-1714' in Essays in Modern English History presented to Wilbur Cortez Abbott; also. K. Feiling, History of the Tory Party, 1640-1714.
political power to those, whose possession of property gave them influence in society. On the other, their political importance was such as to impede interference with electoral power. So long as the country remained predominantly agricultural and the bulk of the population ignorant in, or indifferent to, political matters, there was comparatively little objection to a system, which did produce a House composed mainly of landlords, substantially representative of the nation's interests.

If the nature of society, and the need to secure the co-operation of its leaders in Parliament, meant that crown patronage and influence had long played an important part in tilting the political scale, the relative positions in which crown and parliament were placed by the Revolution Settlement, and the atomisation of the political scene, were to make them essential to the working of government. That Settlement left the crown still theoretically supreme in the initiation and execution of policy, face to face with a parliament, practically supreme over taxation, and hence, the means of implementing policy. The crown's need to secure the co-operation of parliament, hitherto increasingly desirable, was now imperative. The crown had to have a majority there in its favour. But, in the absence of any clear cut party divisions, there could be no clear or firm basis, on which the crown could rely for support. In the circumstances, it would have been impossible for matters to be left to chance in a totally undisciplined parliament. A cementing force had to be introduced.
be introduced which would hold men together; attendance, at least on important occasions, had to be enforced; a discipline had to be maintained. There was no other way, in which the innumerable separate groups and individuals in parliament could be bound together into a workaday 'party', save by careful and systematic bestowal of the patronage in the hands of the executive. The interests of crown and parliament had to be artificially harmonised by influence.

The whole system depended, so to speak, on there being a chain of patronage linking the crown with the governing classes and the governing classes with the nation at large. Professional administrators, or 'civil servants', and place-men, the former likely to be men of ability, but nonetheless dependent for their position on crown patronage, would almost certainly form the core of any ministry, filling many of the lesser governmental posts and lending their parliamentary support. The King, however, would need to provide them with leaders, capable of managing parliamentary business and defending the government in debate, and, for this purpose, would have to start negotiations with the heads of the parliamentary groups. This was a delicate business, generally done through an intermediary, who would begin by sounding a leading politician, who would, in turn, negotiate with the leaders of other groups or individuals whose influence or ability might be valuable for their support. Success or failure in the negotiations, which, at a later stage, would involve the King, would turn on the disposal of offices among party, or court,
court, politicians, upon the award of titles or favours among themselves or their dependants, and on the sanction given to the promotion of various sectional or local interests. If a bargain were struck, a ministry would be formed, composed of one, or more, party leaders, their chief supporters and members of the court following, supported by men, some personally following the ministers, their interests satisfied or, with the prospect of seeing them satisfied, some connected directly with the crown, prepared to carry on much as under a previous ministry. In the course of time their identities would merge into a kind of ministerial 'party', linked by common enjoyment of crown favour.

If a dissolution of parliament should follow the formation of a ministry - and a general election, if it came at all, would almost certainly come after such negotiations, - arrangements made in advance would ensure the exercise of electoral influence in the ministry's favour. These would have involved the striking of bargains with lesser men, who wielded local influence, until at the end of the chain the humblest elector might, if he were lucky, secure a favour for his vote, or, if he were unlucky, find himself subject to considerable pressure. The crown, too, would have entered the electoral field direct, seeking to purchase seats for its supporters from borough patrons, or to arrange the return of candidates, in the few constituencies where its influence was virtually supreme. The importance of crown influence exercised directly would, however, be slight in comparison with
that which would be exerted indirectly through ministers and in conjunction with their own influence. It was their possession of the confidence of the King and their ability to satisfy or promote the interests of those who possessed electoral influence, which tipped the electoral scales in their favour.

True the electoral system gave little or no chance for 'the people' to influence elections, but, even where, in a few rare constituencies, electors were numerous, the evidence shows that, where they were not ignorant or indifferent, they were little concerned with other than personal or local matters. In default of a wider public - and a public, whose interests in national affairs was reflected by clear-cut divisions in parliament - there was no way government could be carried on save by an elaborate system of influence.

It is well known how Whig historians were led into thinking the cabinet and party system established after the Revolution Settlement, especially since, during the period of the Whig ascendancy, George I and George II appeared to have taken a back seat, allowing the Crown's powers to be exercised, seemingly without personal interference, and ministries appeared to depend for their life on a parliamentary majority. It is now apparent that the system followed was the reverse of the modern practice. The King chose or approved his ministers, and they, in turn, proceeded to build up a 'party' in parliament, using their own, and Crown patronage, to secure the election of men to the Commons and to unite
and discipline them into a body, on whose support the ministry might rest. At the same time, a ministry could rely on the natural bias of a considerable element in parliament, who would normally think it right to support the King's government. A ministry did not fall because of an adverse parliamentary vote; rather the adverse parliamentary vote would follow the secession of one or more of the groups, hitherto supporting the ministry.

The King, as Professor Pares has shown, had, in fact, still an important role to play. Constituted as it was, parliament had, as yet, no clear means of taking the initiative in government. (1).

... ... ... ... ... ...

Much has been written revealing the true character of eighteenth century government. Much once thought to be viciously corrupt will now bear an interpretation considerably less harsh. Far from being strong enough to induce parliament to act contrary to the will of the nation, it is clear that the influence of the executive was then much less able to 'discipline' members than to-day. Members indeed were then far more unruly and independent than now.

The fact remains that there was a great deal of unpleasantness in eighteenth century politics, particularly in elections where legitimate influence might so easily give way to pressure. Even allowing the venality of many electors, political bullying is no less to be condemned, and corruption, though it can now be explained, need not therefore be explained away.

(1). op. cit. passim.
Political corruption, indeed, was never without its critics. Throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries men styling themselves Tories, True or Independent Whigs, Patriots and later Reformers, some within, some without the ranks of the governing classes, persistently attacked it. Because, however, they were not always disinterested; because they condemned parties and attacked the system of government itself; (1) and because their proposed remedy for corruption, often supported by unsound historical justifications, appeared impracticable, it was long the fashion to condemn their ideas as factious and/or absurd. Historians who believed the party system established in the eighteenth century found no difficulty in agreeing with contemporary Whig verdicts, that all who opposed the existing system of government were either villains or fools.

It has recently been re-emphasised however, how greatly the Whig legend has served to obscure the true state of affairs. (2). Not only was the party system very far from established in the eighteenth century but there were and remained strong currents of feeling against the very existence of parties, long after the reign of George III. The King not only had, but was felt rightly to have an important role to play in politics. Parties long remained strongly distrusted

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(1). Because, in particular, it appeared they wished either to establish an absolute Monarchy, or, to sweep away the Monarchy and House of Lords altogether. cf. infra pp. 28-7

(2). In particular, by R. Pares. op. cit.; N. Gash. Politics in the Age of Peel.
as bands of office seekers whose existence restricted the
King's free choice of ministers, or worse, as factions con-
cerned with seizing control of the executive and with seeking
to establish, by corruption, a parliamentary despotism. The
ideal of non-party government - of government, executed by a
King who would choose his ministers and govern through a
freely elected and uninfluenced parliament in the national
interest - long fascinated men of the eighteenth and early
nineteenth centuries.

Recognition that the party system was not established,
has, in itself, long made a re-examination and re-assessment
of the ideas of those who criticized and condemned the con-
temporary governmental system essential, and, indeed, in the
case of Bolinbrooke, such a reassessment has been made. (1).
But it has not yet been made clear that men long before and
long after thought on the same lines as he, precisely because
of the essential sameness of the situation which confronted
them. To-day, therefore, precisely because modern investigat-
ion, showing that many features of eighteenth century govern-
ment had not the sinister aspect such men gave them may once
more divert attention from their views, a re-examination of
those views would now seem even more necessary.

True few of the critics of corruption were disinterested.
The complete altruist is a rare phenomenon in politics and it
is clear political spite, professional ambition as well as
economic and social jealousy sharpened their protests. True
(1). H.N. Fieldhouse "Bolinbrooke and the Idea
of 'Non Party' Government". History. 23 (1938-9)
pp 41-56.
also, many were long misled into believing that the power of the executive was increasing. Yet to admit these things neither lessens the evils of corruption nor invalidates criticism of them.

For as Professor Fieldhouse has pointed out, though with reference to Bolingbroke only, their writings and speeches show more clearly than any historian until modern times, that the old party labels of 'Whig' and 'Tory' had long since lost their original meanings and that the nation was at one on fundamentals. Further in attacking not the party system, nor parliamentary government of the modern kind, but parties as they existed and government as it was actually carried on, their long continued criticism appears as a valuable commentary on the contemporary working of the political system. (1)

But it is not merely their criticism which merits re-examination. Their efforts, their aims and their proposals also and equally deserve a fresh and more sympathetic reappraisal. Their professed desire to 'restore the balance of the constitution' and their call for 'non-party' government has been ridiculed. Their remedy for corruption, in so far as it embraced proposals to 'separate' executive from legislature, has been condemned as certain to produce governmental deadlock. It has been usual to view their proposals as purely negative and destructive.

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But it is clear that insufficient attention has been given to the strong homage still paid by all men, even in the nineteenth century to the ideal of the balanced constitution and to the belief that the fundamental principles which should govern its working had been reasserted at the time of the Revolution. In the light of the limitation imposed upon them both by contemporary constitutional ideals and the realities which underlay them, their insistence upon the importance of implementing the Revolution Settlement and of restoring the balance of the constitution may well appear more understandable. At the same time it may well seem, too, not only that they could have offered no other remedy for corruption than that which they did put forward, but that their proposals were, in fact, by no means entirely devoid of positive and constructive value.

The so-called Revolution Settlement reflected, it would appear, a practical desire for a solution to immediate problems and a return to 'normal' as soon as possible. It reflected, too, not only intense dislike of arbitrary rule by King, parliament, or dictator, but equally a dislike of theoretical experiments. Consequently, though the powers of the crown were limited, and it was warned there were certain things it must not do — among them seek an undue influence in parliament — yet its position, as head of the executive, was substantially unimpaired. Though parliament came to assume a final control over governmental finance and military discipline, thus ensuring it was in a position to check any governmental
action of which it disapproved, the implication - of ultimate parliamentary supremacy - was never asserted.

Precisely how far these arrangements represented a conscious sense of purpose, and how far they also embraced recognition of parliament's inability to assume effective control of the executive, it would be difficult to say. But it is clear that an idealised version of the intention and purpose of the Settlement came to have wide currency. It was commonly held that the Revolution had been undertaken to restore an historic constitution, the balance of which had been destroyed by the Stuarts. On the one hand it appears as the triumph of the ideas of the seventeenth century parliamentarians, whose historical conception of Stuart rule as an innovation gave so powerful a thrust to the Whig interpretation of history. On the other it suggests the continuing fear of unchecked authority in any form, and the strengthening of the belief, growing at least since the Interregnum, that the excellence of any constitution consisted in the separation and balancing of its constituent elements.

There might be some vagueness as to what these elements were. Some might think of executive, legislature and judiciary. Others, and more commonly, of King, Lords and Commons, but there was widespread agreement that there must be no one supreme power in the state, and, if any one part or body in the constitution exceeded its due bounds, the others should be in a position to check it. The sphere of each part was conceived to be delimited by fundamental law, though opinions upon the exact nature and operation of that law might differ.
Thus it was conceived that the Settlement had intended to arrange, that King, Lords and Commons should be allotted independent spheres, within which each would be supreme over the functions it had to perform. Each, singly, or in combination with another, should be in a position to check the encroachment of a third. The full operation of this triangular balancing scheme is too complex for easy description, but, as things were normally expected to work, the explanation is simple. The King, who was to be head of the executive, free to choose ministers and to initiate policy, was, if necessary, with or without the aid of the Lords, to act as a brake on the Commons. The Commons, to be a freely elected and uninfluenced body, representative of the nation, was to provide money for government and, if necessary, again with or without the aid of the Lords, to act as a check on the King. The Lords, representing the interests of the aristocracy, would normally hold the balance between them. No one part must be in a position to influence or gain ascendancy over another, or the balance would be upset.

Attachment to the ideal of a balanced constitution may seem strange to minds accustomed to the strong central government of the modern state. It may even appear as extraordinary self-delusion, since no proper separation and balance of the parts can be shown to have existed, and, in practice, King and parliament acting together could do much as they chose.

But it was, in the first place, the expression of an
age when political influence was in the hands of men, whose local power made them jealous of, and keen to prevent, strong central interference; and, in the second, the very existence of the belief that there were certain things government could not do, that power was dispersed among separate agencies that must watch and check each other, served to reduce the effectiveness of governmental action and to increase the scope of individual liberty.

For some, the view of the Revolution Settlement as a kind of new Magna Carta, which had restored the balance of the constitution, embraced a genuine belief that the Constitution had once existed, in its ideal form, in primitive times; for others, no doubt, it was a convenient fiction. But in both cases it reflected an intense dislike of any system of arbitrary power, and it long remained a serious political charge to claim that a person or persons were trying to destroy the balance of the constitution.

Belief in the ideal of a balanced constitution was, however, not only a reflection of constitutional realities but a measure of the failure to understand, or unreadiness to accept, their implication. For neither the settlement itself, nor the elaborate theoretical explanations of the arrangements made, had provided more than constitutional framework. It was clear what King and parliament must not do. The King must neither govern above parliament nor without parliament, and parliament, in turn, must not seek to impose its wishes on the Crown. But it was not clear, nor was it ever made clear...
precisely how government was to be carried on. This much, however, is clear, that if the King could not govern without parliament, neither could parliament, without organised parties, representing an authentic division of opinion of the nation, assume the executive power, and either dispense with the King altogether, or turn him into a figurehead. King and parliament had to co-exist. But there was, so to speak, so delicate a balance between them, that unless some way had been found of tilting it and of reconciling their interests, so that they could move together harmoniously in one direction, government must have come to a standstill. A machine in a perfect state of balance, as Bentham was later to point out, cannot move, (1).

Thus it was from the need to find a way out of the difficulties created by the Settlement, that the whole of the subsequent constitutional practice had developed. If, as already pointed out, the Crown had been completely prevented from exercising an influence in parliament and parliament had stood composed of individuals, freely elected, undisciplined and without direction, government it would seem, save in the hands of a genius or a great national leader, must have come to be in a state of deadlock. The Revolution Settlement had, /in itself,

in itself, provided no final answer to constitutional problems, and the ideal of a perfect constitutional balance of power was as incapable of practical realisation then as now.

Obvious though they may now seem, the difficulties of maintaining a balance of power if the parts of the Constitution were separated, would have been far from readily admitted by large numbers of contemporaries. Apparent and easy to accept as it may be to-day, the inevitability of influence and corruption in the working of government in the eighteenth century and earlier nineteenth century, was far less apparent, and would certainly have been far less readily acknowledged, then. Fieldhouse has said, with reference to Bolingbroke's attitude, that it forms... "the best contemporary reflection of the bewilderment of a generation which saw its constitutional practice apparently undermining the purpose of its most cherished constitutional forms". (1).

But it is evident the attitude of many others in Bolingbroke's day, and later, was the same, and that it reflected precisely the same 'bewilderment'.

(1) H.N. Fieldhouse op. cit. p.56.
To many, the ministry or cabinet might well appear, not as to-day, a device through which the will of the nation can be made effective, but rather a 'cabal', or device concerned with securing control over parliament and the country by systematic 'corruption'. Parties might well appear not as to-day, bodies, through which national feeling is collected and expressed, but rather, the aggregate of groups and individuals, united by their common enjoyment of the spoils of office on the one hand, or the aggregate of groups and individuals united in the quest for office on the other - the former bent on retaining, the latter on securing, power.

To those who saw the country was at one on fundamentals, the concern of the Whigs to maintain the old party names, as if the parties themselves still existed, or as if the names retained their original meanings, might well, and did, seem simply to reflect the desire of unscrupulous politicians to divide the nation in order to justify their retention of power.

It would now appear, further, that the arguments put forward by those - principally Whigs - who defended the constitutional practices which had developed since 1688, made it even easier for contemporaries to misunderstand the part played by influence in the working of government. For it was commonly argued that not only was the balance of the constitution maintained, but that influence was necessary to maintain it. The balance, it would be said, depended on each of the three parts of the constitution being susceptible to the
influence of the other two. The Commons having come to play
the chief part in matters of government, then, in order to
preserve the balance of powers, it had become necessary for
the Crown and Lords as well as the people to secure an in-
fluence within it.

It is now understandable that those who distrusted con-
stitutional developments should immediately regard this as a
specious attempt at delusion by those who would destroy the
constitution. Recognising that the Commons must move in the
direction the majority willed, seeing that a majority came
and continued to support the actions of any set of ministers
in power - believing so long as ministers controlled an ex-
tensive patronage and placemen could sit in the Commons, a
majority would always do so - they might well regard the arg-
ument that the balance of the constitution was, and could
only be, maintained by keeping things as they were, as absurd.
Influence or corruption, it appeared to them, were being de-
fended as necessary to bring about precisely the state of
affairs which the Revolution Settlement had been designed to
prevent!

Thus it is hardly surprising that those who criticised
and opposed corruption in government should complain that it
was 'destroying the balance of the constitution', and should
regard the arguments of those who defended existing constit-
tutional practices as being necessary to preserve that 'balance'
with contempt, and themselves project measures to prevent
corruption as designed to 'restore the balance' of the consti-
tution.
For, while it is evident that the excellence of the balance of power established at the time of the Revolution was praised on all sides, yet it is equally evident that, to many, it was quite clear that such a balance no longer existed. It was easy for those who distrusted the nature of constitutional developments to believe that when the balance of the constitution had been restored in 1688-9, it had been left with safeguards inadequate to preserve it against the designs of corrupt politicians. Such a view must have encouraged and, in turn, must have been encouraged by, the belief that the purpose of the Revolution had been diverted by men who had turned James II from the throne, only to perpetuate the abuses of the Stuarts in their own interests.

To those who came to think on these lines then, it must have seemed natural to argue that the 'balance of the constitution' must again be restored, and that measures which would 'separate' its parts - measures which would check the power of those who would corrupt the nation - must be secured to restore it. Placemen, it was commonly suggested, for example, must be removed from the Commons, either completely, or in numbers sufficient to reduce the influence of the crown, and to eliminate or minimise that competition for office, which, in their view, encouraged the formation of parties. The Commons must be reformed so that it might express the true
sense of the nation. (1). But, whatever the precise nature of the measures necessary, the King must be free to perform his duties as head of the Executive, free to choose his own ministers, who in turn must provide government in the national interest, since the Commons must equally be in a position to watch and check them.

Criticism of, and comment upon, those who attacked the eighteenth century system of government has varied with the course of time and in the light of a greater understanding of contemporary circumstances.

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and at its most damning, there were the views of contemporary Whigs, who, finding it virtually impossible to credit they did not see the true state of affairs clearly, and believing they must also see that their constitutional proposals would bring governmental deadlock, were prepared to regard them primarily, as dangerous men out to create a revolutionary situation. If they were not villains, however, they must be mere visionaries / or fools.

(1). 'Separating' executive and legislature in the sense 'Patriots' or Reformers had in mind did not necessarily mean the removal of placemen. cf. infra p.38
or fools. (1).

At a later stage and somewhat more sympathetic, there were the views of historians who believed the party system established, who, finding it equally impossible to credit they did not see the 'true' state of affairs clearly, and believing they must see their proposals would destroy it, were disposed to regard them primarily as having been misguided idealists. If they were not, then, of course, they must be revolutionaries. (2).

In recent times, and at its most sympathetic, there are the views of Professor Fieldhouse on Bolingbroke, and, by inference, those who thought like him. (3). As he sees matters, / though in railing

(1). cf e.g. any of the large number of Edinburgh Review articles referring to the Reformers between 1807 - 20, a number of which are suggested infra. p.47, and in particular Edinburgh Review XIV, July 1809, Art. 1. p.303, referring to the 'Burdettite' Reformers. "It is obvious therefore, that they see clearly, that if this influence is to be destroyed in the House of Commons, it must either be renewed in the shape of prerogative, or the kingly and aristocratical elements must be altogether discharged from the constitution".


(3). op. cit.
though in railing against contemporary constitutional practices and against parties and in calling for a return to the Revolution Settlement, they failed to see that it was the Settlement itself which had made these practices virtually unavoidable and brought parties of the kind they detested into existence; though they failed to see the deeper source of corruption in the indifference and ignorance of the nation at large and, therefore, too readily ascribed it to the influence of corrupt politicians; though their remedy for corruption, involving as it did the separation of executive and legislature was, in itself, no remedy, and must further have produced constitutional deadlock - yet - their failures must be seen as the almost inevitable failures of contemporaries confronted with so much that was misleading, and their 'remedy' as an obvious and understandable remedy in the circumstances.

But though Professor Fieldhouse has made it possible to view their proposals with much greater sympathy and understanding, yet even in his attitude - as much as in the attitudes of earlier writers - there is an implicit belief that no men who saw things clearly, who were not stupid, and who had no ulterior motives could possibly have pursued things in the way they did, since they must also have seen their proposals would make executive government impossible. To earlier writers, in the most favourable light, their proposals appeared as the product of visionaries. To Professor Fieldhouse they have appeared as the product of men misled by appearances and
contemporary reverence for the balanced constitution established by the Revolution. But to all men at all times they have appeared as, at best, idealists - their proposals unrelated, or 'unrelatable' to political realities.

It is to be contended, however, that the fact that their constitutional proposals have not appeared practicable has been misleading; that readiness to dismiss them thereafter, as the product of idealists, has prevented adequate consideration being given them.

For it must be recognised that they did, indeed, see the real situation substantially as their opponents, the defenders of the existing system, saw it; that they did, indeed, envisage the consequences of putting their proposals into effect to be what their contemporary opponents claimed (viz: that it would make the existing system of government impossible); that though this is so, their readiness to persist with their advocacy did not, ipse facto, make them rogues, fools or idealists.

It is clear, though they would not have agreed with contemporary defenders of the existing order as to its causes, that they were aware that political apathy and self interest was widespread amongst the people and did recognise that corruption was symptomatic of a decline in the national spirit; that they not only took these factors into account when framing their remedy, but were convinced it was not only the right but, the only possible constitutional remedy in the circumstances. It is clear, too, that they would have been fully prepared
prepared to admit the difficulties the King and his ministers must face if they were unable to secure the co-operation of parliament.

At all times, whenever consideration has been given to their constitutional proposals, attention has centred on the fact that they must, if applied, have made the conduct of government - save by an exceptional and inspiring, national leader, impossible. As a consequence, it must seem one fundamental factor has tended to be forgotten and another equally fundamental factor has been so obvious as to have been ignored. In the first place, it has to be remembered that those, like Bolingbroke and Reformers later, who attacked the eighteenth century system of government, were primarily concerned to check the spread of corruption. In the second, they did, indeed, believe that a great national leader or leaders were necessary to check it.

Viewing the facts of the situation - 'corrupting' influence in the possession of the governors and corruption among the governed - they were, it is true, disposed to believe the nation had been and was being corrupted by the influence of 'corrupt' politicians. But it need not be supposed if they had accepted the converse proposition - that corruption in the nation at large had driven politicians to set their tone accordingly - that their remedy would have differed. Whatever or whoever had been responsible for bringing the country to its existing condition - it was for that condition itself that they were concerned to find a remedy. In their eyes the symptoms,
the morally unedifying example of politicians on the one hand, and the readiness of the people to seek their own interests on the other, made the disease obvious. National spirit was decaying. For this there was only one remedy—national regeneration.

The optimum state of affairs would be when government came to be in the hands of an able King and capable ministers, who would govern wisely through, and with the advice of, parliament, entirely for the national good. But, it seemed, this happy state could never be brought about until the means were found to prevent ministers corrupting the Commons and the Commons itself became a body fully representative of the nation, able and ready to express itself independently. It was for this reason that they proposed measures designed to 'separate' executive from legislature, and to make the Commons more independent and later more representative.

They scarcely supposed, however, that the constitutional reforms they advocated would be adopted until the effects of corruption were lessened (much as they might have believed they should be adopted immediately). Nor did they imagine, even when they should have been carried out, that they would immediately and of themselves eradicate corruption.

It was one thing, and important, that the means of preventing the exercise of 'corrupting' influences upon the nation should be found and made effective. It was another, and equally important, that the means of ensuring the people should be in a position to resist them and to express themselves freely...
should likewise be found and made effective. But it is clear they recognised the bringing about of national regeneration was not merely a matter of securing constitutional reform, but a matter of infusing a new spirit into the nation.

Thus there can be no doubt, that, important as they believed it was that constitutional reforms be secured, they believed too, that it was of equal importance, both immediately and for the future, that the people be roused and educated to resist 'corrupting' influences.

There can however, also be no doubt that they regarded it as equal if not greater importance still - again immediately and for the future - that the people be given proper and inspiring leadership. It was vital that men, who would set an example of selfless devotion to duty and who would compel the attention of the nation, should come forward to lead them. If the country were to be led to secure the reforms necessary to impede the exercise of corrupting influences - if the people's independence and self confidence were to be restored - if government were to be conducted in the national interest thereafter - it was essential that great national leaders be found.

As Professor Butterfield has shown, it was Bolingbroke's belief - expressed in a manner which reflected the influence upon him of Machiavelli's views on corruption and the decline of liberty in a state - that the English people were becoming totally corrupt and that the only hope for the future lay in the inspiring lead of a Patriot King who would ignore party factions and govern through able patriot ministers in the national interest.
interest. (1). It was no less the belief of large numbers of others.

Since it was admitted, however, that public spirited Patriot Kings were so rare as to be miraculous, (2) and it must, equally, have been recognised that inspiring Patriot leaders were exceptional, it may seem, even at this point, surprising that well into the nineteenth century, the opponents of corruption still insisted on the fundamental importance of leadership by a public spirited King and inspiring ministers, and still advocated constitutional reforms which, it seems likely, would have made the conduct of government impossible.

Providing the continuing sameness of the situation which confronted them is recognised, however, and granted their aim to dissuade and/or prevent ministers/exercising a 'corrupting influence' upon the Commons and the nation—was also the same, the reason is obvious enough. They simply had no alternative. If government were to be carried on without corruption, if government were to be conducted through a freely elected and independent Commons by men who would make no use of the customary means of securing and binding a majority within it (who, indeed, would no longer find these means available, if their reforms were carried) then, as it has been so frequently pointed out, they would indeed have to be men capable of winning the support of the Commons and the nation by the inspiration of their leadership alone.

But if their remedy still appears idealist, it must seem too, that government by a Patriot King and ministers who could command support through their talents and powers of leadership, was not only the only possible remedy which could have been put forward as an alternative to government by 'corruption', but a remedy directly springing from constitutional realities.

For it is to be supposed that they will scarcely be blamed for not having advocated a return to absolute monarchy—though it has been, in times past, tempting to think they did. Nor, it may also be supposed, will they any longer be blamed for not making proposals for direct parliamentary government via the modern party system, of which they had no conception—though it may be tempting to think they should have.

Their aim was to ensure there would be good government according to the interests and the will of the nation.

To-day it is possible to know that the interests and will of the nation were to find clear expression through the party and cabinet system. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, however, there was no certain way the interests of the nation as a whole could express themselves clearly as the 'national will' in parliament, no certain way in which the 'national will' could make itself effective, without the leadership and assistance of the King and his ministers. The initiative in government had to be taken by the King—after him his ministers—and inevitably much depended on the lead they gave. But, as it has been pointed out, if parliament were in no position...
were in no position to assume the executive power, neither were the King and his ministers in a position to govern other than through and with the approval of parliament. King and parliament had to co-operate.

Thus, in the last resort, whatever measures might have been framed to ensure that a King and his ministers had not the means of corruption at their disposal, to ensure that the Commons represented the interests of the nation and could express itself independently, there was no way of ensuring there would be good government in the national interest — nothing could be done, save to urge the necessity of a 'good' King, 'good' ministers and a 'good' parliament. At best, a 'good' King would recognise the national interests and would choose capable ministers who would naturally win support for themselves and their proposals on their merits. At worst, it was to be hoped that if no such 'good' King existed to choose capable ministers, or if no capable ministers appeared either, then a 'good' parliament would at least ensure that the best ministers available were secured by withholding support from others.

Idealists or not, it was as natural for contemporaries to argue that the King must ignore party distinctions, as it was natural for the King himself, as Professor Namier has pointed out, to believe that he should seek to form a
national government (1). Idealist or not, it was as natural for contemporaries to stress the importance of securing ministers with talents and powers of leadership able to stand free of party connection, as it was natural for the elder and the younger Pitt, as Professor Pares has indicated, to act on the assumption, and in large measure to find, that personality and talents alone, could indeed command support. (2). Government by men of inspiring personality and talent was the only alternative to government by influence.

Fieldhouse may still have thought it strange that Bolingbroke should fail to see that a king who should govern as well as reign according to the principles of 1688, would be in an incongruous, if not impossible, position. (3). But that, in fact, was substantially the position of the Hanoverian Kings.

/They did have


(3) H.N. Fieldhouse op. cit., p. 53.
They did have to govern: they were faced with parliaments composed of men large numbers of whom owed no permanent allegiance to any group or party, and who could and did act entirely independently. Indeed, as the century progressed, more and more members of parliament came to act even more independently. Exactly how they should govern, or precisely how their relationship with parliament should be regulated, probably few would have cared to say. But few save the Whigs cared to defend the existing methods of government openly. And when George III came to pursue these methods, himself it was the Whigs themselves who were foremost in leading the cry against 'corruption'.

One inference which may be drawn from the arguments of all historians who have commented upon the proposals of those who criticised eighteenth century government, and who came to assume they did not see the situation clearly, is that it has been felt that if they did see matters clearly and had no better remedy to offer, then they should either have kept quiet or preached quietly to the nation the error of its ways. But it would be an idealist indeed, who could expect men who detested corruption to accept it without comment, or to be content with preaching to the people the virtues of resisting selfish temptation without protest against those who so readily put temptation before them to secure their support. The fact that they, no more than other contemporaries, saw precisely how government could eventually be carried on without influence or corruption, must no longer obscure the importance of their protests against it.
For, in the last analysis, whilst it is clear their professed claim, to be seeking to restore the balance of the Constitution was no more than a commonplace of the age, their desire to secure a 'separation' of powers reflected neither their belief in abstract theory nor a misguided belief that the principles of the Revolution Settlement must be brought to actuality - but their practical desire to find a way of preventing King and ministers and politicians generally, exerting 'corrupting' influences on parliament and the nation. It was not that they did not see that Crown and parliament must co-operate closely, not that they did not see that the former must, therefore, be able to exercise an influence upon the latter, if harmony between them were to be maintained. Rather was it the nature of the influence which was actually exercised by the former that they detested, and the means by which it was actually secured which they wished to destroy. Again, it was not great popular parties of the modern kind they rejected, but parties of the kind which existed, parties linked by the principle of connection or by influence. (1).

(1) Professor Fieldhouse acknowledges, op. cit. p. 55, that "it is not too much to suggest that he (Bolingbroke) had already some dim perception of the difference between cabinet government as worked by Walpole, and cabinet government as it was ultimately to develop". He quotes Bolingbroke (Craftsman No. 258) "... The House of Commons ought not to be independent of the other parts which are the House of Lords and the King. In like manner, the House of Lords ought not to be independent of the King and Commons; nor the King independent of the Lords and Commons. In this sense then, the several Estates of the Legislature are dependent on each other; but this
but this dependency arises from the wisdom and the happiness of our Constitution which has provided that no one branch of the Legislature shall enact anything to the prejudice or without the consent of the others. It arises from the necessity of mutual agreement, founded on mutual interests; whereas, if the exercise of any corrupt influence should be allowed, one Branch of the Legislature would gain such an ascendent over the others, that the balance of our Constitution would be broken and the concurrent assent of the Legislature might not arise from the mutual interest of those who constitute it, but from a dependence which is created by corruption. 
In their eyes, the influence of ministers on parliament must depend on the merits of the men and on the merits of the course they proposed: the readiness of parliament to cooperate with them - on the common agreement on principle of a majority to pursue that course. The bond between executive and legislature, between ministers and their supporters in parliament, must be based on principle.

In the circumstances of the eighteenth century, especially when interest in national affairs was at its lowest ebb, there was, however, no hope of agreement between executive and legislature being reached and preserved on principle alone, unless the executive came into the hands of an exceptional and inspiring leader.

Yet - in working to rouse feeling against corruption and self interest, - in directing attention towards national affairs, and in emphasising the importance of agreement on principle as the basis of political cooperation and morality they too, like others, albeit unwittingly, were cooperating with Providence in the development of the modern party system which was to provide the answer to the problem all contemporaries found, and must have found, insoluble.

Coming largely though, it may be suggested, by no means entirely, from within the governing classes, and at a time of substantial prosperity, the volume of criticism of the system of government in the reigns of George I and II was comparatively slight, except at moments of crisis. It was otherwise in the later eighteenth century.
The reign of George III saw the early development and speeding up of processes, ultimately to transform the character of society and government.

On the one hand economic and social changes were accompanied by a steady increase in population. The growth of professional and business opportunities brought increasing numbers of people to the old towns and later to the newly rising towns of the North. The rise of new classes of men, enjoying new sources of wealth, came more and more to weaken the social and political power of the aristocracy. More people were to become better educated and informed, more self reliant and less dependent on patronage for their advancement. The development of communications, of canals, roads and the press, came to make for the closer social and physical integration of the country.

On the other and simultaneously, events of national and international importance, above all the American and French Revolutions, drew, and held, the attention of the nation, raising issues, which roused and divided it. Increased interest in national affairs focussed greater attention upon the character of government itself, and led to developments ultimately to transform it.

In the first place, George III's efforts to heal party divisions and to govern on a 'non-party' or 'national' basis, inspired, by reaction, a movement which was to lead to the reduction of the influence of the crown in politics.

Looking upon his intervention in government as an unwarranted intrusion upon their especial preserve, and
resenting his readiness to accept, even to seek, ministers from beyond their own circle, the Whig aristocracy saw in his attitude, the desire to build up a party of his own, which would support his own 'despotic' actions.

Feeling, therefore, they must fight to preserve their position, the main body of the Whigs came instinctively to draw closely together, and Burke was inspired to put forward his famous defence of parties, as "things inseparable from free government" - as things equally necessary to give expression and effect to the nation's interests, and to safeguard the nation from arbitrary rule.

Believing, further, that it was the patronage at the disposal of George III which enabled him to tilt the political scales against them, they were led to consider ways of reducing its extent. In the policy of economic reform, which embraced the abolition of many obsolete offices and sinecure posts, in the gift of the Crown, they saw not only a way of reducing the costs of government, which would be popular in the country, but, of more immediate importance to them, a way of reducing the means by which they believed the King secured and retained his political supporters.

In the second place, the policies of George III and his ministries towards matters which became highly controversial, inspired, by reaction, a movement which was to lead to the reduction of the political influence of the aristocracy.

Strongly disapproving the courses they elected to pursue, substantial numbers of men in the country were stimulated to protest against them.
protest against them. Among them were many who had hitherto stood outside the political nation, some of newly acquired wealth, from business and professional sources, others of the lower ranks of society, whose status had risen as a result of widening economic opportunities and better educational facilities. Their protests ignored, they became aware how slight was the store set upon their opinions by ministers or by parliament. Feeling their interests neglected, they turned their attention towards the institutions of government.

Prepared to believe with the Whigs that the influence of the Crown on parliament and the nation was excessive, and to support their schemes for its reduction, many came to look upon the influence of the aristocracy as equally excessive, and equally in need of reduction. Believing parliament, as then constituted, would never express nor safeguard their interests adequately, they were led to consider ways of making it more independent and more representative. The development of the means through which their opinions could be organized and expressed brought forth a new and more authentic demand for parliamentary reform.

The rousing of national interest in political and constitutional matters, and the direction of attention towards corruption in politics was to lead to the beginnings of a popular revulsion in feeling against the whole system of government by influence, whether that influence was in the hands of the Crown or the aristocracy. The appearance of the / demand for
demand for economic reform, first pressed by the Whigs but coming to reflect too, a growing popular desire for increased governmental efficiency, is to be seen as the beginning of a long-term movement, ultimately to transform the administration of the state, and greatly to reduce the political influence of the crown. The appearance of the demand for parliamentary reform also, first pressed by a comparatively small number of radicals, but coming to reflect as well a genuine and growing, though, at first, narrowly based, 'public opinion', is to be seen as the beginnings of a second long-term movement, ultimately to transform the character of parliament and greatly to reduce the political influence of the aristocracy as well. The appearance of 'public opinion' itself, is to be seen as reflecting the early emergence of an altogether new and independent force in politics - 'the people'.

The modern party system was in due course to develop as a response to these changes and as a response to the challenge of a growing 'public opinion' on national and governmental affairs - out of the needs of executive government on the one hand, and the need to guide and give effect to the wishes of the public on the other. It is clear, however, that its development was slow - uncertain, unplanned and, for a long time, unseen.

However Burke might describe them, however important in the scheme of government they were subsequently to become, parties long continued to be composed of small aristocratic groups and individuals, without any clearly defined relation-
ship to newly emerging popular opinion. Large numbers of parliamentary politicians - after the Irish Union still more - remained unattached to any political party. If strong feeling over the American War, and, later, allegiance to the persons of Pitt and Fox, made temporarily for clear division of sentiment in parliament and the country, yet, still later, the substantial agreement of the nation on the need to prosecute the war against France, and the deaths of Pitt and Fox, saw parties again disintegrating.

In the reign of George III, parties were, in fact, to become weaker rather than stronger. In the first place, as the field of business and professional opportunity widened, so men became less dependent on patronage for their advancement, and politicians less amenable to the influence of the Crown or the aristocracy. Again, economic and administrative reforms came to weaken not only the influence of the King, but of ministers too, still further, by reducing the number of official or sinecure posts available for their distribution. In so far as they reduced the number of rewards which could be promised to their supporters if they came to office, the influence of opposition leaders was also to be weakened.

But in any case, public men were to come to feel increasingly unable to allocate office other than on merit. (1).

(1) I.R. Christie, "Economical Reform and the 'Influence of the Crown', 1780" C.H.J. XII. No.2 (1956) pp. 144 et seq. convincingly shows how, far from increasing, the influence of the Crown had been decreasing since 1761. cf. infra p. 173 note 2.
In the second, as public opinion, though uncertainly expressed, grew stronger, so parties, inadequately reflecting this opinion, incapable of directing it behind them, and with inadequate means of disciplining their members, were apt to find themselves at the mercy of sudden gusts of popular feeling to which individuals would react differently (1).

In due course, as the political public became larger, better informed, more independent, more ready and able to express its opinion and wishes clearly, so politicians would be brought to pay heed to the wishes of the public, would be drawn together from a need to find the means of guiding its opinion, and giving effect to its wishes. In due course, a new basis for political cohesion would be found in common agreement to pursue a particular policy or programme, and politicians would come to be organized in two parties, one of which would control parliament, and the executive, as well.

In the meantime parties came to be, and for a long time remained, weak and unstable, and their individual members to act with far more independence than at the present day. The King remained to play an important 'initiatory' role in government. The patronage of the Crown and the influence of the aristocracy remained, though with decreasing effectiveness, important cementing and disciplinary forces in a world where personal and sectional interest still played a substantial, though diminishing, part in motivating political action - remained to become the subject of a growing volume of criticism.

cf. in particular, W.R. Brock, Lord Liverpool and Liberal Toryism, ch IV
Coming increasingly from men who stood outside the ranks of the governing classes, from men altogether outside the political nation of the eighteenth century, from men to whom aristocratic paternalism was itself a cause of grievance, criticism of the system of government, and of corruption, was to become more fundamental, more violent and more bitter.

Initially, such men directed their hostility against George III, joining with the Whigs in protesting against the treatment of Wilkes, in seeking to prevent, and thereafter to stop, the American War, and in pursuing economic reform. Their experience of the Whigs in these years, however—above all, their recognition of Whig unwillingness to press for parliamentary reform—did much to intensify their dislike of the aristocracy and to reduce their distrust for the King. The failure of Pitt to pursue parliamentary reform later, convinced numbers of men they must act independently and led them to redirect their hostility against all aristocratic parties and party men.

Like those who had attacked the system of government in the earlier eighteenth century, they too came to see in parties the self-interested efforts of politicians to secure or retain office. Nor did Whig justification for parties in any way increase their appreciation of them.

For neither Burke, nor those who defended parties in the early nineteenth century showed they had any real conception of parties, which would exist to express the will of, or
would depend directly on the support of the people at large. (1) True, they showed they recognised formed parties were necessary to parliamentary government - necessary as a check upon the Crown and necessary to provide a solid core in the Commons, on whom ministers could rely for support. But, though they emphasised that it was essential members of a party to agree on principle, they did not show they believed parties could be held together by agreement on principle alone. In their eyes the only real basis of party allegiance still remained aristocratic connection. Nor did they show that they envisaged parties, not even the Whig party, as large enough to control the Commons by themselves. They believed that it would continue to be necessary to make use of Crown patronage as a means of securing and disciplining a parliamentary majority. Believing government to be largely a matter of administration and that executive action should be decided according to circumstances, they showed they saw no sound reason for putting forth a programme. Their assumption for a long time was simply that it would be just and in the best interests of the country, if they controlled the executive.

Thus it may appear more clearly why radicals should have distrusted the Whigs and viewed their arguments as inspired solely by an instinct of self preservation. For the Whigs admitted too, that what was commonly called and certainly regarded by

Note (1) continued.

Also W. Roscoe 'Letter to H. Brougham', (1811), Brougham's anonymous *Edinburgh Review* reply (XX. Art. VIII) [for Brougham's authorship cf. Aspinall, Lord Brougham and the Whig party p. 259]; and Roscoe's indirect reply to Brougham in his 'Letter to J. Merritt'.
regarded by them, as corrupting influence, was necessary to hold parties together. They admitted too, that what was commonly called and equally certainly regarded by them, as corrupting influence, was necessary to secure for their party (or any party) a majority, if they came to office. They even admitted that their prime aim was to secure control of the executive.

Neither Whig members nor Whig behaviour, however, suggested they alone had the sole right to govern the country. Conservatives and radicals equally might have agreed with the Whigs that influence, (or corruption) was doubtless necessary to parties, that parties were doubtless necessary to parliamentary government. But they would not have agreed that influence (or corruption) or parties, were necessary to good government. To many - to radicals especially, the very idea of parliamentary government, under the control of an exclusive aristocratic clique or cliques, was anathema.

As others before them the radicals of the last decade of the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century - predominantly men of the middle and working classes - came to view corruption in government, and among the 'governed' in the nation at large, as having been brought about through the influence, and by the example, of the 'governors'. In their view, however, responsibility lay with the entire aristocratic caste.

Their interpretation of the contemporary situation profoundly influenced their historical ideas, and their historical ideas, in turn, confirmed their interpretation of the existing state of affairs.
They came to believe that the aristocracy had merely turned James II off the throne and perpetuated Stuart corruption for their own benefit. In the constitutional development of the eighteenth century they saw the persistent efforts of the aristocracy to retain their power; in parties the rivalry of factions of that aristocracy; in the maintenance of party names, simply aristocratic attempts to delude the nation that its interests were being safeguarded.

Unlike others in the earlier eighteenth century, however, they came to believe the power of corruption was now rapidly declining. To men who were conscious of the improvement in their own economic and social status, and of the independence they had acquired through education - who were conscious, too, of the similar improvements in the status of others, and the growing restiveness and independence among the lower ranks of society generally - it seemed quite clear that, despite all aristocratic attempts to 'corrupt' and delude the nation, they had been unable to prevent 'the people' from improving their condition; unable to prevent the spread of reason and independence among them.

Believing that the spirit of reason and independence must continue to spread among all men and must inevitably eradicate 'corruption' and destroy the power of 'corrupting' influences, they came to view the attitude of politicians towards them, and their efforts to hold parties together - and their efforts to defend 'corruption' as necessary to hold them together - as reflecting the last desperate efforts of a declining aristocracy to cling to power.
If their views appear as a perversion of the truth, yet they can no less appear as stemming directly from the truth as they saw it. There was, indeed, much in the political situation of the later eighteenth century and early nineteenth century which must have appeared to confirm and justify them.

For it must be remembered first, that from the moment large numbers of men from the lower ranks of society first came to political consciousness, they found the governing classes, alarmed at their growing independence, substantially united in determination to resist all reforms and to suppress all popular attempts to secure them; second, that in the early nineteenth century, after the deaths of Pitt and Fox, the parties held together by their personal magnetism, tended to break up, and both ministerial and opposition parties (i.e. the aggregation of groups and individuals who supported ministerial and opposition leaders respectively) equally appeared to be growing weaker and more unstable in parliament in proportion as 'public opinion' grew stronger, and the old disciplinary influences grew weaker.

If it is recognised that they saw parties as they existed — saw them apparently breaking up, because the power of what they regarded as corruption was diminishing in the face of increasing strength of public opinion — then it must be apparent why they should view those who defended influence or 'corruption' as necessary to maintain them, as fighting a rearguard action for the old order. It must be equally apparent why they persisted in urging constitutional reforms
similar to those proposed in the earlier eighteenth century.

When the spread of reason had eradicated corruption and checked the exercise of corrupting influences completely as they believed it must, then 'the people' must be led by men who could win their support according to their ability to lead and upon the merits of their proposals - since 'the people' would follow no others.

But meanwhile, the spread of reason could, and must be, hastened. It was no less necessary that 'the people' be educated and roused to resist corrupting influences; no less necessary that honest and able leaders should come forward - men capable of setting the people an example of public spirit; capable of winning their support by appealing to their reason; no less necessary that measures which would impede the exercise of corrupting influences upon the Commons and the nation, and would ensure 'the people' had the opportunity of expressing themselves freely, be put into effect.

Whether, like Paine, they would have preferred a republican constitution; or whether they were content to accept the Monarchy and the House of Lords, and believed it necessary to 'restore the balance' of the constitution, there was general agreement that good government demanded that executive be 'separated' from legislature, and the Commons reformed in such a way that it became properly representative of, and dependent on, the people.

Ultimately they believed, the power of reason would lead all men to see their interests as one. Until that time, however, it would be necessary to accept the decisions of the majority.
majority, and it would be vital that everything was done to encourage the people to reach their decisions upon the basis of reason alone. Therefore an honest King and inspiring national leader who would appeal to and awaken the reason of 'the people', were, and would continue to be, essential to good government.

That the radicals of the early nineteenth century should make constitutional proposals which posited that great leaders were necessary to good government, may be considered perhaps even less surprising than the fact that others, earlier in the eighteenth century, did so. For, once more, they may be related closely to contemporary realities. The old forces, which had drawn and held men together in parties, were breaking down. New means of drawing and holding them together had yet to be found and developed. Meanwhile the Commons tended to become increasingly 'individualised'. As things were - as the deaths of Pitt and Fox had shown - the leadership of men who could inspire devotion had already become of great importance as a means of drawing and holding men closely together. As things were, after 1807 particularly, it might well have seemed, not simply that the inspiring leadership of great men was the only possible alternative to government by 'corruption', but that it would soon become the only possible way
only possible way of carrying on government at all (1).

In point of fact, it is clear, such was their faith in the rapid spread and the power of reason, that they believed it would not be long before a majority in the country would come naturally to agree on, and to cooperate in pursuing, the best course of action, providing they were well informed. In these circumstances it would follow that, providing they were honest, capable and efficient, ministers of quite ordinary mortal size, would be adequate to put the nation's will into effect.

The radical solution of the problem of corruption may have been impracticable, and it cannot be surprising that Whig historians, who ante-dated the party system, and contemporary

Whigs, who saw

(1). On the importance which Reformers of the early nineteenth century attached to inspiring and 'honest' leadership cf. e.g. Place Papers, B.M. Add.MSS. 27, 349 ff. 52 et seq., and 35, 148 f.5. (Place to John Cam Hobhouse, 19. 12. 1827) where Place makes clear his views on the need for men with talents, ability to command support on the basis of an appeal to reason, and powers of perseverance, if the people's support were to be won, and political and social improvements effected. Such men, he said, "must produce the most salutary changes, and in time form such a public as no government would dare abuse."
Whigs, who saw the necessity of influence in government, should have regarded these views and proposals with disfavour.

But it is now clear that the radicals, or Reformers, had no clear conception of the modern party system, and were not really attacking it, whilst contemporary Whigs had a conception of it little better, and were not really defending it. The Whigs may have been 'right', with reference to contemporary circumstances, in emphasising the importance of the parts which traditional and family influences played in drawing men into political association, and which Crown patronage played in holding them together in support of the executive. And yet the radicals, too, were 'right', with reference to a future in which the people at large were to become more independent, more interested in, more able and ready to express opinions on national affairs - were right to emphasize the importance of the parts which reasoned agreement on policy and programme must come to play in drawing men together, and which talents and ability to convince by rational argument must play, if they were to be held together for governmental purposes thereafter.

Historians have been, and doubtless will be, right to criticise the actions and behaviour of those who attacked the eighteenth century system of government, according to their standpoint. But they have been, and would be, wrong to ignore their views, their constitutional aims and proposals. For the former appear as a valuable aid to the understanding of the working
of the working of the contemporary political system and the latter appear as making their own important contribution to the development of the modern party system and to the conceptions of government, which underlie it.

Their professed desire to 'restore the balance' of the constitution was a reflection of strong contemporary feeling that such a balance ought to exist, and Whig and Tory defences of the status quo attempted to show that it did. (1). And however wrong their historical justifications for their views may have been, they were really no worse than those of seventeenth century parliamentarians in their struggle against the Stuarts - who, happily for their fame, appeared on the side of Whig 'parliamentary' progress.

For a number of reasons, 'public opinion' appeared earliest, and long remained strongest, in the London area. In London there were more people less bound up with the eighteenth century social and political system than anywhere else in the Kingdom. Economic and social developments had improved the status and educational level of the people earlier than elsewhere. In an age when news travelled slowly, Londoners were better

(1). cf. e.g. Edinburgh Review, X, Art. Cobbett's Register Quarterly Magazine 1. Art II, which, states its agreement with the above Review article.
Londoners were better informed by close contact with political affairs and by newspapers. The very density of their numbers made it easier to rouse and mobilise them. Further, in view of the concentration of people in the home counties, it cannot be surprising that London should long be the centre of efforts to rouse opinion in the country as a whole.

'Public opinion', it has been pointed out, however, can only be understood with reference to its emergence in each constituency. (1). Its earliest appearance in Westminster, during the latter half of the eighteenth century, still requires to be studied, and it remains beyond the scope of this thesis to examine its origins closely. But it is clear that, by the early years of the nineteenth century, Westminster had become the centre of a movement to play a prime educative role in rousing and organising opinion in London and in the nation, during the period in which the eighteenth century system of government can most clearly be seen to be breaking down.

It is important, however, to know not only the reason for the appearance of 'public opinion' and to understand the machinery of its organisation — indeed any study of the Westminster Committee must necessarily seek to shed light on these matters — but to understand, as well, its character. 'Public opinion', in its earlier phases, meant very largely radical opinion, and in Westminster radical sentiment came to be particularly strong. The group of citizens, who, in the early nineteenth century

nineteenth century came to form the 'Westminster Committee' detested the conceptions which underlay the contemporary system of government, and one of the principal bonds of their association was a common desire to see them destroyed. As they became, for a time, the most important group of radical critics of that system, it is their ideas which perhaps most of all require to be re-examined.

If it can be shown that their views have a value hitherto neglected, yet it is still necessary to show how they came to hold them, and why they put them forward with such intensity of feeling. It is to be suggested that much depended on their social environment, and perhaps even more on their political experience to date.
WESTMINSTER IN THE 18th CENTURY.

Society and Administration.

Westminster forms part of the metropolis of London and is situated within the county of Middlesex. Much of it lies on the banks of the Thames, west of St. Paul's. By the eighteenth century, urbanization and the application of the name 'London' to the whole metropolitan area, had already tended to obscure the separate identities of the cities of London and Westminster. But, for centuries, their separation was physical and the area, known as Westminster, extremely small. Indeed it was once little more than an island surrounded by marshland, the Thames on one side and a branch of the river 'Long Ditch' on the other. Its only remarkable feature was the Abbey or Minster of Thorney, whose property the area was. The Strand, a road between fields and river, was the main connecting link with London.

Even today, the name Westminster is commonly associated with the small area surrounding the Abbey including the Houses of Parliament and the Government buildings of Whitehall. But, in fact, its boundaries, defined from time to time for local administrative or electoral purposes, have expanded greatly, so as to embrace a very important and sizeable part of the metropolis. By the eighteenth century they bordered the city of London to the east and the present Oxford Street to the north. Continuous building and a growing population over the centuries,
centuries, had led, by 1730, to its division into nine parishes (1). The number of its inhabitants in 1700 may have been around 130,000 or nearly 20% of the total London population. (2) Macaulay could rightly describe it as the greatest city in the island, next only to the city of London itself. (3).

As Westminster grew physically so it merged into one vast urban metropolis, indeed the only great urban community in the kingdom until the nineteenth century. In the process, however, its outline became less clear. In default of any strong central authority, its administration came to be diffused among a number of small local units. Economically and socially, the interests of its inhabitants had come to be interwoven with those of other areas in the metropolis, and Westminster appears, at times, less a distinct city than a district of London.

Westminster, however, was clearly distinguished, if not always precisely defined, in eighteenth century eyes. It was first, as today, the centre of government and, in a way still recognisable, the centre of upper class society. Its distinct-ion on that count, however, was, in the eighteenth century, much greater.

(2) M.D. George, op. cit. p.329. Mrs George's figures, based on the baptisms in Parish Registers, are:— Westminster, 130000; total for Metropolis, 674,350.
In an age when the crown still retained a prime importance in politics, the residence of the court in Westminster, was a tremendous attraction. Men, driven by the strong personal and social ambitions which underlay the politics of the period, found their natural gravitational centre round a court, which still possessed the power, directly or indirectly, to satisfy them. The presence of parliament was a similar attraction for those to whom a seat in the Commons was a stage in the rise to higher social and political eminence, or, for those, who sought the advancement of sectional or local interests. At a time when a great deal of governmental business was still judicial in character and litigious disputes still marked the social rivalries of the age, the presence of the Law Courts likewise centred considerable attention on Westminster.

Westminster was then, was the meeting place of upper class society. Ministers had their town residences there, and others, of the nobility, gentry and wealthy professional and merchant classes, sought to acquire or build houses too. The amenities and amusements which existed to satisfy their demands - the shops, newspapers, theatres and so on - had the attraction of being, at least in so concentrated a form, unique in the country, and they, in turn, increased the attraction of the city. Everyone of rank knew everyone else in Westminster, and anyone, who was, or hoped to be, of some consequence, found it worth his while to be in, or near, Westminster for at least part of the year, to keep in touch
with current social and political affairs. The comparative confinement of political discussion to a small oligarchical society, gave Westminster, as its apex, a distinction far greater than now. Westminster was viewed very much as the centre of polite society and gentlemanly politics, in strong contrast with the city of London, the stronghold of commercial wealth, vulgarity and factiousness.

But, second, Westminster in the eighteenth century had another and less enviable distinction, little to the taste of its upper class residents. In a way, little evident today, it was an area of the greatest contrasts, both in regard to its physical features, and its population. It was becoming an area of spacious squares and magnificent houses, set amidst the most appalling slums. The elegance of the upper classes met the squalor of a far larger lower class population. Poverty, overcrowding, disease and disorder were as much part of the Westminster scene as its wealth and luxury.

Face to face with noblemen, wealthy business and professional men, and apart from a body of middling well-to-do shopkeepers and civil servants, were the small scale craftsmen, tradesmen and journeymen, who formed the majority of Westminster's settled population and whose interests were bound up with supplying the needs of the court and the well-to-do. Beneath them, were the often rootless and drifting casual workers, rogues and vagabonds in search of labouring jobs or easy pickings from the rich. Collectively and, in eighteenth century eyes, scarcely differentiated, they formed a large lower class
lower class element in metropolitan society, extending beyond Westminster.

The people of this world and underworld were little hampered by a love of tradition and order. Their lives and living conditions were harsh and drab in the extreme. Long hours of work, the uncertainty of employment, hunger and the cheapness of life itself encouraged them in all manner of disorders. Political excitement or economic distress brought others flocking in from elsewhere in the metropolis or the country, and Westminster, the centre of government, became the stage for all manner of violent and frequently irrational demonstrations, often encouraged for factional purposes, for which the Westminster of the eighteenth century became notorious.

At no time was this unruliness and disorder more apparent than during parliamentary elections. Westminster was, in the unreformed system, the electoral area with, by far, the largest number of electors, mainly of the humbler kind. Its distinction in this third respect was unique. Elections in the centre of the political world were apt to encourage disorders on a scale without effective parallel in the country.

It is impossible to avoid an overwhelming sense of the contrasts provided by eighteenth century Westminster. Politically, the Court, the nobility and the Abbey had long dominated the area. The social prestige of the upper classes far outweighed the physical numbers of inarticulate and frequently illiterate artisans in the political scale. The influence
and pressure they could bring to bear, as owners of the bulk of the city's property and as the chief customers, on whom the working and trading population depended, made their position extremely strong. But, for centuries, they had fought a losing battle to check the influx of lower class elements and to maintain order. By the eighteenth century their failure meant that Westminster presented immense social and administrative problems. Living and working conditions for the majority were appalling to modern eyes. Social amenities such as street paving, lighting and sanitation were negligible. Disease was rife and the death rate extremely high in overcrowded slum dwellings. The machinery of public order was hopelessly defective, even when reinforced by acts of Parliament. Crime was widespread and unchecked. The administration of Westminster, the heart of the capital, was chaotic. In practice, divided among what, constitutionally speaking, were a series of village units - the parishes - there was no effective central authority capable of meeting the needs of an expanding urban society.

How had this state of affairs arisen? Effectively it was the product of a long period of disordered growth, beginning in the sixteenth century. The modern development of Westminster is inevitably bound up with the development of the metropolis as a whole, and anyone who seeks to understand
it must draw heavily upon the works of Mrs. M. D. George. (1).

In the Tudor period the growth of overseas trade and industry was part cause, part effect of a considerable acceleration in the pace of economic change. In particular, the favoured geographical position of the City and Port of London encouraged its rapid commercial and, to a lesser extent, industrial expansion. Men, perhaps uprooted from traditional occupations, perhaps lure by the prospect of new opportunities or the growing wealth of London, itself, flowed into the capital. The City of London, itself, became overcrowded, and a large lower class and vagrant population formed beyond the City limits to the East. The wealthier merchants, anxious to escape the evil consequences of disease and squalor and concerned to secure a better social background, tended to migrate to the less developed area of Westminster. This westward movement of the well-to-do, continual throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, was accelerated by the Plague and the Great Fire, and by the habit, growing in the eighteenth century, of living apart from one's place of business.

(1). cf. in particular M. D. George, *London Life in the XVIIIth Century*; also M. D. George, *England in Transition*. It will be apparent that this section owes a great deal to the former work, which I found invaluable. cf. also R. B. Powell, *Eighteenth Century London Life*. 
At the same time, however, Westminster, as the centre of government, was coming to attract men from all over the country, eager to increase their social prestige or to further particular interests. The revived strength of the Tudor monarchy, its ability, indeed its need, to satisfy the desire of a closely oligarchic and influential upper class, focused considerable attention upon the Court. The growing importance of parliament in the scheme of government meant that, more and more, men sought to secure an influence within, or upon, it. Residence in Westminster became highly sought after. It was, for those with professional, political, or social ambitions, an almost essential means of keeping in touch with affairs. Further, personal contact with the Court, ministers and other legal officials, facilitated the transaction of all manner of political and legal business.

Westminster, then, became the centre of cosmopolitan upper class society. The wealth of London and the concentration of the wealthy in Westminster made for a highly developed form of urban social life, the attraction of which, in turn, drew others to the capital. Over the years emerged the familiar upper class world of the eighteenth century, the world of elegance and fashion, of coffee houses, clubs and salons.

It is indicative of the importance Westminster was acquiring in the sixteenth century, that, under Henry VIII, it secured the right
secured the right to return two representatives to Parliament. The first writ was issued in 1544, probably, in part, to satisfy the desire of influential inhabitants into whose hands much of the valuable property in the area was passing, in part, to provide what must have seemed two safe seats for the Court. If the franchise then, as later, included all inhabitant householders, it is reasonable to suppose the government had no thought that it would come to embrace thousands of the least substantial elements in society.

For, at the same time as it attracted nobility and wealthy commercial, financial and professional elements, Westminster came to draw even larger numbers of the lower classes. It is probable many, from the outset, must have aimed at satisfying the needs of the court and the well to do, by the carrying on of small scale luxury and provisioning trades. To a large extent, however, the influx of lower class elements was part of a process whereby those flocking to the capital and overflowing the city of London, came to Westminster, seeking any kind of livelihood. Since there were no industries of any scale

any scale to absorb them, the poor of Westminster were even poorer than elsewhere. Some, undoubtedly, succeeded in joining the body of those whose living depended on the wealthy, as journeymen or craftsmen. But the periodic 'migrations' of the Court and high society to the country, made even their living uncertain. The rest formed a poor and unstable element, clustering round the Abbey. As their influx continued, so the well-to-do moved further west, leaving Covent Garden, Soho and areas off the Strand in their hands. The numbers were constantly swelled by men in search of casual work, by others in search of excitement, and by rogues, thieves and indeed every kind of criminal lured by the wealth of Westminster. (1).

From the Tudor period onwards, continuing, often futile, endeavours were made to check and control the growth of the metropolis. Partly they represented fear of national disaster, the fear of social and economic dislocation if London were to engross the trade and industry of the country. Partly, they sprang from the fear of the disease and disorder which would spread in a large unwieldy urban community.

/ Efforts were made

(1) For the movement of both well-to-do and poor elements into Westminster; the efforts to check and regulate the flow; and the consequences, cf. M.D. George, London Life in the XVIIIth Century, Ch.s II and III pp. 63, et seq.
Efforts were made to check the influx of men of all ranks. Every discouragement was shown to those who sought to leave traditional occupations and their home areas. Even the seasonal appearances of the upper classes was condemned, lest they neglect their social duties in the countryside. At the same time, it is clear successive governments sought to maintain and enhance the upper class character of Westminster and to check the inward drift of vagrants, whilst preventing them getting out of hand.

In the first place there were innumerable measures designed to check new building, or the subdivision of existing houses, in defined areas. They were aimed principally against the erection of dwellings suitable for the lower classes. Many of them, clearly, had Westminster in mind, and frequently, specific exemption was given to the building of houses in Westminster fit for 'noblemen and gentlemen'. The Stuarts combined the same policy with efforts to raise money by ensuring those seeking exemption from building regulations should pay heavily for the privilege. Efforts were made, then and later, to secure the erection of more substantial and costly brick structures, which only the comparatively well-to-do could afford.

Completely ineffective in checking the growth of the metropolis, whatever positive encouragement there may have been for the upper classes to build in Westminster, this policy had an effect the reverse of that intended. Men still flocked to the capital and, in default of adequate housing, overflowed existing
overflowed existing dwellings or stayed in the open. It led to efforts to circumvent the law or to conceal its infringement. Flimsy, dangerous, insanitary structures appeared in backyards, where they might not be noticed. Decaying or derelict houses were patched up; cellars were converted; houses, and even rooms, subdivided. The practice of taking in lodgers developed in defiance of the law. Areas, beyond the reach of government edicts, were built up rapidly and haphazardly so that appalling congestion resulted. The unscrupulous search after quick profits by men with land to lease, by middlemen and builders, led to all manner of cheap unstable dwellings. Wars raised building costs and reduced the standard of work. In the seventeenth century the introduction of the window tax limited the amount of light and air which could find its way into houses and hit shopkeepers, particularly. Certain areas became notoriously dangerous to anyone well dressed and others were hotbeds of disease. Streets were narrow, dirty, unlit and often untended. Great numbers of people lived cramped together and the vast army of lodgers far outnumbered the more stable household element. By the eighteenth century, the disorderly physical growth of London had produced what would seem today an appalling state of affairs. Westminster had come to have large slum areas which, if they were less extensive, were no different from elsewhere in the London area.

In the second place, direct attempts were made to solve or ease the problem, by social and economic legislation. The
The measures tried have a reference by no means confined to Westminster, or even to the London area. But it is apparent that the nature of the problem and the evidence of its scale were particularly clear under the eyes of government, and that the social and economic legislation of the Tudors and Stuarts, much of which was still in force, if not always enforced, in the eighteenth century, had the disorderly growth of the metropolis very much in mind. Sometimes, as in the case of the Poor Law, legislation followed practices first evolved by individuals and groups in Westminster itself.

The Statute of Apprentices, in part designed to prevent men drifting from customary occupations, and efforts by Londoners and others to attract cheap labour; the beginnings of provision for those unable to help themselves, backed by the harshest of Poor and Vagrancy Laws against those who did not try; the later Stuart Settlement Laws - all represent efforts to restore stability and order to the metropolis, and the country generally. There were many other schemes. Efforts extended beyond the checking of the drift to the capital, to the return of immigrants to their place of origin. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries positive steps were encouraged in addition to the Poor and Vagrancy Laws, to secure the removal of undesirable persons, e.g. the use of the Press Gang to feed the Navy; enforced enlistment in the Army; the encouragement of emigration to the Colonies, often with a blind eye turned to force or fraud. There is ample
evidence of the concern felt by the well-to-do in Westminster at the ever growing numbers of poor in the area, and of their efforts to keep them in check. (1).

It remains evident that the birthrate among inhabitants, together with immigration, more than kept pace with the high death rate and the outward flow. Social and economic legislation, concerned to maintain a fixed order in society in defiance of the facts of change, in no way got at the root of problems. The Poor, Vagrancy and Settlement Laws often encouraged, contrary to intent, the flow of people to the London area. Unable to find work or a settlement elsewhere, they hoped, with every prospect of success, to escape notice in the vastness of London, and perhaps to find work. The Vagrancy Laws tended to defeat their own ends, by their very severity, and were frequently not enforced. The problem in London and, perhaps more acutely, in Westminster, was not merely that of a resident, but that of a floating population.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the numbers of poor were swelled both on a permanent and seasonal basis by an influx of Irish immigrants, who came to form an element in metropolitan and Westminster society with living standards, often lower than their English counterpart. Communities of foreign exiles, often with radical political and religious leanings, added further to their numbers.

(1). cf. in particular M.D. George, op. cit. Chaps. II and III.
In the third place, a series of administrative expedients were tried in an effort to bring the disorders of the metropolis under control. Their extent and the violence of the mob in Westminster were particularly offensive to the court and the nobility, and the peculiar type of local administrative unit evolved there was intended, primarily, to reinforce law and order. (1).

Until 1541, Westminster had been subject to the rule of its Abbot, but, in that year, it was made the fee of a Bishop with a Dean and twelve prebendaries. Edward VI, however, dissolved the Bishopric, and, thenceforth, Westminster could no longer strictly be termed a 'city'. (2). Thereafter, its government developed on manorial lines until the reign of Elizabeth. A High Steward, a Deputy Steward, a High Bailiff acting as Sheriff, and a High Constable were its chief officers.

In 1585, however, a new court of Burgesses was established with the aim of reinforcing the machinery of order in the vicinity of the Palace and government buildings. At the same time, care was taken that the new court should not, like the corporation of London, become capable of focussing 'popular' opposition against the court.


(2). At least not until the grant of a Royal Charter, on Oct. 29th 1900, confirmed the title.
Twelve well-to-do Westminster tradesmen were appointed for life by the High Steward, to form the court. They, in turn, were to co-opt twelve assistants. Each Burgess was given charge of one of the twelve wards, into which the city was already divided, and was made responsible for the maintenance of order, and for the enforcement of the duties of local citizenry. Their powers, however, were strictly limited. They were not given the powers of J.P.s, and, indeed, the powers of the Middlesex magistrates were expressly preserved. (1).

How far this experiment succeeded initially, is uncertain, though, as a result of the great unrest during the civil wars and the temporary abeyance of the Court in the seventeenth century, special commissions of the peace were issued for Westminster, and were continued thereafter.

By the eighteenth century, however, it is clear that the Burgess Court in no way provided an answer to the problem it was meant to solve, and many of its functions were coming to be discharged by Justices of the Peace. In any case, it had never been conceived that it was the duty of a local authority to perform the functions of a modern local government unit. The Court existed, in the case of Westminster, primarily in a judicial capacity, to supervise and enforce the duties of citizens, and to maintain order in the manorial area of the Dean and Chapter. Any large scale undertaking to

improve amenities would, in any case, have been beyond its powers as well as outside contemporary conceptions. Even the most efficient enforcement of the citizens' duty, e.g. to pave or light their streets, would tend to produce a chaotic lack of uniformity, which might well be held to have worsened matters. Compelling amateurs to perform the unpaid services of 'watch and ward', provided no adequate means of preventing crime and disorder.

The Burgess Court, in fact, became increasingly like many a municipal corporation that had 'outlived' its original function - a profitable vested interest. Its continued existence bears testimony, not to its efficiency, but, to the fact that those called to serve upon it enjoyed a number of fees and revenues from fines for non-observance of obsolete laws and customs. Men could obtain exemption from jury or watch service by payment, and there is a suggestion of systematic 'blackmail' in threats to nominate men for burdensome duties unless they paid for exemption.

The magistrate who came to take over many of the functions of the court, at first brought scant improvement. At best, they were concerned with little beyond their own areas and had little interests in the wider aspects of administration. At worst, they were men of disreputable character, concerned principally with securing the fines, fees and other profits, which came from their administration of 'justice'. Far from checking crime and disorder, their example was such as to demoralise the people and encourage it.
Though the repression of large scale disorder was possible by the use of the London militia, the method was cumbersome and inefficient. Measures in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to strengthen the machinery of order were either largely a dead letter, e.g. the act against Tumultuous Petitioning, or, as in the case of the Riot Act, added to the confusion by leaving Magistrates uncertain whether to call troops or not. At elections, matters got completely out of hand, since convention and the law demanded troops be kept at a distance, and the special constables, hired by the High Constable, were totally inadequate in numbers to prevent trouble. Harsh criminal laws, particularly for crimes against property, reflected the desperation of a government and a governing class that could not prevent crime, and believed the threat of savagery, alone, could check an otherwise unbridled population.

The absence of any strong area-wide authority not only encouraged administrative disunity in Westminster, but must have made concerted action to improve matters for a long time impossible, even were it conceived. There emerged, in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, a number of new parish units, reducing the power of the Burgess court still further, and commanding a stronger, if more localised, allegiance. At first, however, their vestries - dominated by upper class interests, and often narrowly oligarchical in form - had powers to do little more than levy a Poor rate and certainly the frequent corruption or inefficiency of their officials brought
officials brought no immediate improvement to the character of administration. Even when, later, their powers came to be increased, and their efficiency improved, many problems remained too vast for a number of small and often conflicting authorities to tackle. Still later, the advent of improvement commissions served to add to the confusion of divided authority and obligation.

Further, if there was no single authority to focus the civic interests of Westminster's inhabitants, neither was there in Westminster any area-wide body, which might have served to draw together and focus their economic interests. The Burgess court had never, like a municipal corporation, been concerned with the regulation of the trades of the city. In fact, though there were exceptions, the trades of Westminster were often extensions of trades organized on a metropolitan basis, and Westminster tradesmen must have tended to look outside Westminster to the leadership of the London companies and the City of London corporation. Again, in an age when, as Mrs. George points out, social distinctions were often based on trade status, (1) the organisation of trades on a metropolitan basis, must have meant that many of Westminster's working and trading population had affinities strong with men practising the same trade elsewhere, than with others following different trades in Westminster itself. In any case, a high proportion of inhabitants among the well-to-do can have had little concern with the economic life of the city. Many were landowners, resident for only part of the year and

(1) M.D. George, op. cit., p. 157 et passim.
year and drawing rents from estates in the country. Others had commercial interests in the big trading and financial companies centred in London.

Indeed, almost every factor save one, the common possession of a unique parliamentary franchise, must have long served to heighten disunity among inhabitants. The diffusion of loyalty among small local administrative units was accentuated by the physical barriers erected by dirty and unsafe streets and the sheer difficulty of getting from one area to another. Economically, the interests of many were bound up with organisations of a metropolitan character or lay outside Westminster altogether. Consciousness of social distinctions likewise must have impeded co-operation. The horizontal cleavage between the upper and lower classes was for long too great to be bridged. The vertical social barriers based on trade status must long have hindered co-operation among Westminster's working population. Collectively, these factors in large measure account for the indistinct outlines of Westminster as a city and were effectively to hinder the rise of a corporate spirit.

In the early nineteenth century, the strongest impression of Westminster must perhaps inevitably still be one of violent contrast. The centre of government still appears against a background of administrative chaos and corruption. Social amenities, by modern standards continue to appear negligible, and disorder is still seen to be widespread and unchecked. / Society itself
Society itself appears still deeply divided, a conception heightened by the righteousness of upper class belief that theirs was the only world that mattered, and that they were the natural rulers of a people incapable of acting for themselves.

On the one hand the world of high society, with its wealth, its property interests, its love of luxury and elegance, still stands apart. On the other the world of the lower classes remains one in which misery and brutality are accepted as a norm. Administrative corruption and harsh criminal laws apparently continue to demoralise and brutalize a people accustomed to every hardship and to encourage the readiness to accept and to jeer at the suffering of others. Their world must still seem one of the coarsest manners and morals, in which men, who played little or no part in public affairs, worked for long hours under appalling conditions with little time or opportunity for relaxation. Masters and skilled tradesmen can be seen still living and working cramped together sharing their houses with lodgers, journeymen and apprentices. Unemployment and hunger never appear far away, and, for a majority, the patronage of the wealthy would seem indispensable. The uncertainties of life still encouraged the habit of 'letting off steam' whenever occasion offered. Drunkenness, rioting and general improvidence remained common and encouraged by the numbers of gaming and drinking houses. Little, at first sight, appears to differentiate the character of the mass of Westminster's settled trading population from
population from the still vast numbers of drifting people, the casual workers, the rogues and the poor and sick.

An overheightened sense of the contrasts in Westminster, however, has the effect of making a whole number of important features and developments less easy to see. As long ago recognised by Mrs. George, over concentration on the administrative confusion, the disorders, and the often appalling conditions still evident in the London area, tends to obscure, as it obscured to the great majority of contemporaries, the many improvements, which had taken place even before the mid-century and which continued thereafter. (1). These changes were part cause, part effect of wider changes in the character of English society as a whole, a society already much more complex than the single horizontal social division between rich and poor would suggest, and, after the mid-eighteenth century, growing rapidly in size. The scale of disorders in the metropolis became such, that what are commonly regarded as nineteenth century problems, came to be tackled in an eighteenth century world.

So common are the sweeping enactments of central government today, that it is difficult to recognise that many important developments in the eighteenth century can only be seen on a small scale local basis, as a response of individuals or groups to immense new problems, for the solution of which no adequate machinery existed. The withdrawal of

(1). M.D. George, op. cit. pp.13 et seq..
central government, aside from the fact that it had no satisfactory means of enforcing its decrees, meant that much had to be undertaken on a piecemeal basis of local initiative. Because the administrative problems, and the social evils arising from them, were frequently writ larger, and were the more obvious and offensive in the heart of the capital. Because conditions favoured the emergence of a strong and vocal middle and lower middle classes, whose interests lay in improving their conditions of life earlier than elsewhere, developments in Westminster were frequently in advance of the rest of the country.

On the one hand, there were advances in medical knowledge and knowledge of social conditions, which, together with physical improvements in the layout of the city, made possible a great improvement in the health of the people. These developments were accompanied by a growth of social compassion, increased administrative efficiency and the provision of amenities, which went far to improve their lives, conditions and social habits. On the other, there were increasing opportunities for social and economic advancement, increasing demand, and provision, for education and increasing inducement towards, and attention to, self-help.

The two sets of factors interacted. As life became more secure and more pleasant, as the prospect of improving one's conditions increased, so the demand for further improvements from those, whose status had risen, increased still further, and a growing social consciousness against the evils remaining.
evils remaining. It is impossible to separate them, or to decide what was the prime motivating force behind the improvements which were brought about.

Physical, administrative and social improvements, indeed, came about for a number of reasons. The government and the upper classes had the evidence of large scale evil under their eyes in concentrated form. Even if they did not believe it was their duty or within their power to cure it, a natural defensive mechanism led them to help themselves by seeking to improve the appearance of the city. A great opportunity came after the Great Fire, and the many magnificent buildings and squares, which began to appear, set an example of spacious living, which encouraged emulation, if on a lesser scale. The method, by which sanction for improvements was obtained - by securing Private Acts of Parliament - could itself be copied.

The building of Westminster Bridge, leading to the demolition of many wretched houses, was a further stimulus towards improvement. The developing habit of living apart from one's place of business in the outer districts of London helped to relieve congestion. The growth of the spirit of humanitarianism, commonly associated with Wesley, had long before began to stimulate a social consciousness, at least among individuals or groups of more enlightened men. A greater knowledge of social problems encouraged more efficient administration, and developments in science, technology and medicine made practical improvements possible. If developments were slow up to
were slow up to the mid-eighteenth century, there was considerable acceleration thereafter.

The improvements in administration were many, beginning, perhaps, in 1735, with the first of a series of local acts, through which the Westminster parishes came to take over many of the original functions of the Dean and Chapter in regard to regulating the watch and street cleaning and lighting. They were empowered to levy rates for these purposes as well as for the relief of the Poor, and, as their revenues increased, they were able to employ salaried officials and staff, who acted under all manner of committees and Boards. Attempts to enforce the citizen's obligation to attend to street paving, gave way, in 1762, to the first of a series of Paving Commissions, also employing salaried professional men and labourers. It was an example which parishes were quick to follow in seeking their own paving and lighting commissions. The Westminster parishes, in fact, came to possess many of the powers of later municipal corporations in miniature.

At the same time, there appeared, in the 1750s, a better, more humane and more efficient type of magistrate. The Fieldings, Bow Street, and the beginnings of a professional police force are well known. Such men were not at first in a majority, but the example of the few could, and did, do much to improve the character of administration, and to root out the sources of disorder.
Chaotic though the system might appear, great improvements were made. Westminster became safer, cleaner, and, physically, more ordered. The gradual substitution of the professional and the paid official for the amateur, who served against his will, or the man who bought his office and expected to recoup himself from the profits he could make from it, was a considerable step forward. If local areas acted in rivalry, their competition was both a stimulus towards, and opportunity for, experiment.

At the same time, partly as a result of physical and administrative improvements, partly as a result of increased medical knowledge and the better treatment of the poor, the health of the people improved. Magistrates, doctors, operating dispensaries, charitable organisations and Methodist preachers, all helped to disseminate more accurate knowledge of conditions and better social habits. The decline of gin and spirit drinking after a strong campaign and government legislation against the gin trade, must have saved many lives. Charity and private schools; though their scope was limited, testify to an increasing awareness of the value of education, if no deep understanding of its meaning, and an increased demand for it.

These, and other factors, helped to improve the conditions, and to raise the status of, the mass of the people. They may be, and were, obscured for many reasons. If one judges the past by modern standards, the administration of Westminster in the early nineteenth century must appear hopelessly deficient.
deficient. A great deal of inefficiency, brutality and corruption remained, indeed, long afterwards. Contemporaries sometimes did not, sometimes could not, see improvements, or had become oblivious to them, once accustomed to their existence. Those, with a newly awakened social conscience, concentrated on the evils remaining, forgetful of others, often worse, which were passing away. The upper classes, more aware than ever before of the scale of problems, were frightened by the growth of 'insubordination' in the later eighteenth century, into believing the state of affairs to be worsening. At the end of the century the hardships of war created a temper, which found existing conditions of life less and less supportable.

In the same way, the growing complexity of society may also be obscured. Knowledge of eighteenth century society, so long limited to the upper classes and coloured by their view of all beneath their charmed circle as the 'lower orders' or the 'mob', heightened the impression of a single horizontal cleavage. The compassion of nineteenth century middle class reformers and historians, seeking to redress the balance of our knowledge of the 'other' world, serves unintentionally to perpetuate this conception. When one looks closely, it is apparent there were many horizontal gradations from the highest to the lowest, and, as the century progressed, the development of a substantial middle and lower middle class element in Westminster became of increasing importance.

Their status is distorted by nineteenth century ideas
as to the standards expected of the middle and working classes, and, to a large extent, by living conditions, habits and manners, which seem far inferior to the former, and similar to the latter. It has been common to speak of the middle class, throughout the eighteenth century, as if it embraced only the higher professional, business and commercial sections of the community, particularly in London, whose wealth and comparative wealth, encouraged standards and living conditions similar to those of the upper classes. It is important, however, that the reference be widened, especially as the century progresses.

In particular, the middle classes in Westminster, though little is heard from them until after/mid-century, were a growing body consisting of many lesser elements including shopkeepers and lesser professional men. Because London then, as now, was a name applicable to the whole metropolitan area, and because trades were arranged on a metropolitan basis, it has been the fashion to speak of 'London tradesmen' in a way which disguises the numbers of well-to-do business men, whose residence and/or place of business was in Westminster. Again, it is clear that the term 'lower orders' conceals the existence of growing numbers of men of substance.

The craftsmen and journeymen of Westminster are in no sense to be confused with the modern 'working class', though many might still work with their hands, where today factory production would perhaps enable them to confine themselves to trading and/or employing functions. If their living conditions, education and social habits scarcely conformed to the standards
set for and by the Victorian middle class, yet there were many among them, who had not only come to enjoy independent status, but often a degree of wealth. Among the lesser men of eighteenth century society, it is often less easy to draw distinctions on a horizontal than on a vertical plane. The social difference between a master and those who worked for him for example, might well be negligible compared to that which separated all of them from men of apparently similar economic status, following a different trade elsewhere. It may well be that the rise of the 'middle class' in its modern form does not appear clearly until the advent of the 'factory system' in the nineteenth century, but it cannot be said to have depended on it.

It is evident, for example, there was a growing number of men, not only in the higher administrative jobs, but in lesser posts among the various local authorities and charity organisations, which employed salaried staff. Wars encouraged the expansion of government offices, increasing the demand for all grades of officials and clerical workers. Increasing opportunity was a stimulus to education, and education demanded teachers. The growth of professional opportunities in Westminster was an important factor in the development of middle and lower middle classes.

At the same time, the economic position of Westminster's tradesmen population steadily improved. The Westminster trades, often catering on a personal basis for a small wealthy clientele, or engaging in luxury or precision manufactures / for a specialized
for a specialized market, came to enjoy, apart from seasonal depressions, a comparative economic stability by mid-century, favourable to the rise of shopkeepers and tradesmen as men of substance. An increasing demand from the luxury-loving upper classes, brought prosperity to many specialized trades, and to the keepers of, for example, provision and wine shops, coffee houses and confectioners' businesses. The slow migration of larger scale industries away from London during the century, in search of cheaper methods of production, and the beginnings of the factory system, emphasised the independence of the small masters of Westminster, and their social position became more highly prized. In spite of competition from cheaper factory made goods, the quality of their products more than allowed them to hold their own, and profits and wages rose. Demand increased demand. Trades could profit from an increased consumption of articles earlier regarded as luxuries. Government contracts spread wealth in the London area, and much of it must have been spent in Westminster.

It is true one cannot say all masters and shopkeepers were men of substance. Many gambled away their earnings and drank away their lives. But one equally cannot say all journeymen and artisans belonged to the 'working class' or were men of no consequence, since many owned their own tools or were employers themselves. It is possible to discern a growing element of lower middle class tradesmen, possessing houses or premises of their own, with a status considerably above the wage earner.
wage earner or lodger. Their habits and standards were rising, partly because of the improvements about them, perhaps, still more, because of their own increasing efforts towards self-help through the many trade and friendly societies, to which they belonged. Persistent government efforts to suppress trade clubs, believing them to be centres for the encouragement of disorder, bear witness to their number and strength growing throughout the century.

Westminster, as the century progressed, in fact, provided increasing opportunity for the talented to rise in the social scale. If convention and the interests of stability demanded homage to be paid to the idea of a fixed order in society, it is clear that ability and talent were not, in practice, prevented from reaching their proper level. There were ample stimuli towards, and opportunities for, rising in the world, not only through patronage, but increasingly through competition. The upper classes were constantly being leavened by the entry of new men with talents or wealth into their ranks. If not all men could attain such heights, if not all of them even reached standards approaching those of the modern middle class, yet the growth of a middle and lower middle professional and tradesmen population was a factor of first importance in Westminster society. Their position came to be substantially different from the wealthy merchants on the one hand, and the mass of semi-skilled workers on the other, among whom many had spent their early lives. Their improved status is of greater significance than the fact that the position
that the position of many must have remained grim, and their rise accelerated the pressure for further administrative and social improvements. As improvements broke down the physical barrier dividing Westminster, so the rising status of its inhabitants helped to break down the social barriers, by creating among them, a community of interest.

The character of Westminster in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was rapidly changing. A substantial middle and an even larger lower middle class were appearing before their emergence becomes clear in the country as a whole - in part the result of increasing professional and business opportunities, in part because of an economic structure favourable to the independence of large numbers of small tradesmen. Men were becoming more self confident and assertive, less dependent on and more resentful of patronage. Further, they were becoming more ready to question the whole basis of a society of which the disordered growth of Westminster was the product, more ready to question the nature of authority responsible for it. Consciousness of social evils, the inadequacies of local administration and the often artificially stimulated disorders, particularly evident in elections, increasingly focussed their attention on the position and power of the upper classes.

Anti-aristocratic feeling, indeed, came to be particularly intense in Westminster. London, it is true, had always contained large numbers of men, who stood outside, and had little love for, the eighteenth century social and political
system. But, in no place outside Westminster were the attitude and behaviour of the aristocracy more easily observeable, nor the evidence of large scale disorders, social hardships and political bullying more apparent; in no place did the influence of the aristocracy in local and central government come to be more keenly felt, and in no place did there appear a greater concentration of men more conscious of, and perhaps, above all, more able to protest against, the evils about them.

The resistance of the upper classes to 'reform' encouraged a belief they were bent on retaining power for its own sake, by corruption or force, that they alone had been, and were, responsible for refusing to improve the lot of 'the people'.

The existence of an exceptional franchise came, in time, to offer a unique opportunity for 'independent' expression. Westminster had long been the centre for the operation of aristocratic politicians seeking to bring 'popular' pressure to bear on government, and their political techniques could be adapted and developed by leaders, who emerged from Westminster itself. Elections and their common interest as electors perhaps more than any other factor, developed among Westminster's inhabitants a sense of community, and a corporate spirit. As an electoral unit Westminster stood apart - distinct from the rest of the metropolis.

Radicalism in Westminster appears most obviously as a protest in the political sphere against the evils of the eighteenth century political system. But it is essential to see it as part of a much more widespread protest by classes, newly conscious of
conscious of the generality of evils, and largely shut out from sharing in their solution. Often their understanding of their cause was limited, and the evidence they took from their experience of the character and practices of the upper classes in Westminster, encouraged wrong conclusions.
91.

THE POLITICAL BACKGROUND.

Westminster, the centre of government, was also a political unit, in the sense of being an electoral area. As such, both its nature and location were unique.

In the first place, its low franchise embraced a larger number of people than anywhere else in the country. Under the reformed electoral system, large constituencies were extremely rare. Further, as we have seen, a majority of inhabitants belonged to the lesser ranks of society. Since there were few places where men of comparable standing could vote, the nature of the electorate was, in this respect, exceptional.

Westminster very largely escaped the processes going on elsewhere, through which the franchise had come, or was coming, to be more and more confined. In part, the explanation may be that there was no strong corporation to concentrate the power of influential inhabitants. But, in any case, the size of the electoral body, though in no way preventing the more blatant forms of corruption, must have made any form of severe restriction exceedingly difficult. (1).

(1). The City of London franchise was 'limited and confirmed' by an act passed during Walpole's regime (11. G1, C13, sect.1) to Liverymen only. If, as seems likely, the aim was to prevent vast numbers of the poorer inhabitants taking part in elections (according to Mrs. George, op.cit. p.329, inhabitants totalled 139,300) in the interests of order, it must at least seem likely too, that many would have welcomed a limitation of Westminster's franchise for the same reason.
The right of election for individual places, argued successively before Chancery, Assize Judges and latterly the Commons itself, became, in 1696, the virtual right of the Commons to fix. In that year, and more definitely in 1729, they asserted the right to determine all disputes over the franchises as they occurred. Thereafter they were settled according to the Commons 'last determination'. (1).

There was no general determination of the right of voting in Westminster until 1785, when the customary exercise of the scot and lot franchise was confirmed and the electoral boundaries of the city defined. All men who were inhabitant householders and who paid the local rates were deemed to be electors. An act of 1788, amending that of 1729 and allowing petitions against 'last determinations', enabled the city limits to be redefined for electoral purposes. Thereafter there was no major change until 1832. (2).

For the greater part of the century then, the franchise in Westminster depended mainly on custom. There were, it is true, a number of acts of general application limiting the franchise and, from time to time, determinations regarding its exercise would be made by the Commons - perhaps arising from circumstances in Westminster, and applicable only to Westminster, perhaps arising from circumstances elsewhere, and applicable either to scot and lot boroughs only, or to all electoral bodies. Thus minors and Peers, and, at a later stage, revenue officers

revenue officers were excluded from voting, and all electors had to be prepared to take the oaths of allegiance and supremacy. (1). In 1680 it was determined by the Commons that King's menial servants not having houses of their own in Westminster could not vote; and in 1698, in a petition against a return, 'that no alien not being a denizen' had the right to vote. (2). In 1760 a resolution of the Commons stated the franchise 'seemed to be vested in the inhabitant householders paying scot and lot', and in 1786 a residential qualification of six months was required of all inhabitants of scot and lot and potwalloper boroughs before they could vote. (3).

In the eighteenth century, attention was only beginning to be paid to the matter of giving the franchise in places all over the country a more precise definition and to the provision of laws governing the machinery and conduct of elections. Election law, however, was, in the main, case law. Though it was possible to make general rulings about types or groups of persons, who might not vote, about corruption and the conduct of returning officers, and so on, it was, in view of the complete absence of uniformity in the franchise and dislike of tampering with property rights, extremely difficult, if not impossible.

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(1). Minors debarred 7 and 8 Will. III, c25; Revenue officers debarred 22 G.111. C41; Peers debarred by resolution of the Commons 1699. Oaths of Allegiance and Supremacy 7 and 8 Will. III, c27. For these and other acts concerning elections cf M.A. Thomon, A Constitutional History of England, pp. 186, 321.

(2). T.H.B. Oldfield, An Entire and Complete History of the Boroughs etc. 11. 254 seq.

(3). Ibid.
if not impossible, to frame general laws regarding electoral rights and procedure. A very great deal was left for individual areas to work out in their own fashion, and much depended on the returning officer.

In general, however, and until 1832 it was possible for all inhabitant householders in Westminster, who paid their local rates to vote in elections, together with many who were neither inhabitants nor householders nor ratepayers. Not only was it impossible to enforce such statutory limitations on the franchise as did exist, but the franchise itself was far from precise. In the absence of a clear ruling as to what constituted a householder, as to whether paying rates meant liability to pay, or actual payment up to a certain period before the election; in the absence of wholly satisfactory means of checking a claim to vote - even granted the qualification was ruled upon by the returning officer in advance - there was, in every election, a high probability that many who voted would have no pretensions to any qualification whatever. Such men might act under influence or pressure from above, on the impulse of bribery, or desire to secure favours. No doubt there were many illegalities; but in a large number of cases, their appearance at the poll must be viewed as improper or unethical, rather than illegal, since laws defining the franchise precisely did not exist.

In the second place, Westminster, as an electoral area, had an unique location, and its inhabitants were in an exceptionally stimulating position.
In the conditions of the eighteenth century, when news travelled slowly and uncertainly to the small scattered communities of a predominantly rural England, the stimulating political life of the capital was altogether exceptional. The opportunities for keeping up to date with affairs of the day were unparalleled. Writing of 1698, Macaulay rightly emphasizes the advantages of the citizen of Westminster over his provincial counterpart,

"The citizen of Westminster passed his days in the vicinity of the Palace, of the Public Offices of the House of Parliament and the Courts of Law. He was familiar with the faces of ministers, senators and judges. In anxious times, he walked up to the Hall to pick up news. When there was an important trial he looked into the Court of King's Bench. When there was an interesting debate in the House of Commons, he could at least squeeze himself into the lobby or the Court of Requests, and hear who had spoken, and how, and what were the numbers on a division. He lived in a region of coffee houses, of bookseller's shops, of clubs, of pamphlets, of newspapers, of theatres, where poignant allusion to the most exciting questions of the day perpetually called forth applause and hisses." (1).

In the eighteenth century the concentration of political activity and interest in the area surrounding the government, was, indeed, far more intense than to-day. The metropolitan area was the one large urban community in the kingdom, embracing a far larger proportion of the population than now. Within it a great deal of the wealth and talent of the nation had assembled. The large numbers of influential men assembled in Westminster, and the finances of the city of London, attracted exceptional political attention. It was perhaps, inevitable that

inevitable that politicians should centre their activities in the comparatively confined area, where it was easy to discuss and arrange matters with other politicians, where opinion could be more easily mobilised, and where the pressure, often crudely physical, of a large population, could be more effectively concentrated on, or behind, government.

But London, and the vast population of the London area, had really come to demand a special attention in their own right. The financial and economic power of the city itself placed it in a position of independence, which gave it an exceptional weight in the political scale. Its attitude was a matter of considerable moment, the more especially since its powerful corporation was in a position to defy the government beside it and to generate the opposition of the metropolitan area in its support.

The inhabitants of Westminster then, formed part of a larger community to which strong political attention was devoted. Their position, however, was unique. If the political life in the London area was stimulated by close contact with government, the attitude of the London area, in turn, might exercise a disproportionate influence upon government. An opposition under its eyes, combined with the clamour of a large populace, could be singularly embarrassing, and Westminster became a stage for the operations of the politicians of the London area, as well as for the activities of politicians from all over the country. Its inhabitants were thus caught, so to speak, in the crossfire of controversy on national issues and of disputes between the government and the City of London itself.
City of London itself. They were themselves the object of particularly close attention, especially at elections, when the opportunity for rousing a popular clamour against a ministry were great.

In view of the considerable stimuli and the opportunity for popular expression offered by a wide franchise, it cannot be surprising that Westminster should early have demonstrated a strong public opinion. Indeed, the considerable evidence, from time to time, of what appear to be popular activities and expressions of independent opinion there in the first half of the eighteenth century, might suggest that Westminster had already become a centre of popular radicalism. In the view of the radicals of a later age, Westminster had, indeed, been the centre of a popular and independent movement for reform, growing since the Revolution. Its failure to develop indeed, heightened the belief among them, that theirs was part of one long struggle, waged throughout the century against an aristocracy determined to stifle 'the people'. (1).

Certainly, much of the machinery later used to mobilize public opinion is apparent, and there can have been few of the proposals for constitutional reform put forward by the radicals, which were not canvassed or discussed.

(1). The writings of Francis Place reveal the application of this view of the past to the history of Westminster most completely (cf. E.M. Add.MS. 27, 549, which comprises Place's historical account of Westminster elections since the Revolution). But the same view coloured the writings of all radicals of the early nineteenth century when they referred to the eighteenth century past.
It would, however, be very misleading to accept the evidence of strong popular feeling in Westminster, in the early eighteenth century, at its face value. The misunderstandings of those who did so illustrate the dangers of transposing the politics of a later to an earlier age. The political character of Westminster, in fact, requires closer examination. It altered considerably in the course of the century, and must be related more closely to the prevailing political circumstances.

Granted, in an age, when the politically active public was a limited body, that there must have been an exceptional concentration of influential and informed men in Westminster, yet the vast majority of inhabitants were, as has been seen, men whose social standing and educational level remained for much of the century extremely low. Comparatively few of them were, for a long time, in a position to exercise an independent judgement, or to derive much benefit from the stimulating world about them. No doubt, even fewer would have been persona grata in the bookseller's shops, coffee houses or the lobby of the Commons, even if they had thought of trying to enter them. The circulation of newspapers was limited even in London, partly by heavy stamp duties, partly by mechanical limitations on printing. But, in any case, few of Westminster's journeyman population could read until late in the century, nor indeed had had any worth while education at all.
Granted too, that Westminster was frequently the scene of public meetings, that petitions to parliament were organized in the name of the electors of Westminster, that it was necessary for politicians to cultivate the favour of thousands to secure election, it does not follow that strong or genuine popular feeling existed. It has long been recognized that a great deal of what may superficially be accounted 'public opinion' was artificially stimulated from above, and the demonstrations staged in Westminster are not, for a long time, to be seen as reflecting the independent feelings of the body of electors. (1). Even on rare occasions, strong passions were roused, it is difficult to distinguish genuine popular feeling from that whipped up for factional purposes. Indeed, for much of the century, it would be difficult to show that the majority of Westminster's inhabitants had any strong feelings on politics at all.

Apart from the condition of the majority of inhabitants, the physical disunity of the area and the social disunity of the people for a long time hindered the formation and expression of a united opinion. The lack of an effective central authority to serve as a focus for civic expression, meant that there was no obvious channel or outlet for it, and, as has been seen, loyalty was diffused. As Professor Pares has said, public opinion in the eighteenth century could be little more than municipal opinion, because there was no other form it could take,

form it could take, no other way through which it could be easily identified and organised. (1).

Opinion, in fact, was formed and demonstrated rather on a metropolitan basis, and, even then, reflected the views only of a comparatively limited body. Numbers of well-to-do merchants, and many of Westminster's more prosperous shopkeepers or tradesmen must have been freemen of the city of London, and their political views would be expressed through its corporation. Again, at times of exceptional excitement, though it was possible to summon a public meeting in Westminster, it was a more likely and acceptable practice to call a county meeting of the freeholders of Middlesex. Such meetings, however, though they might reflect the feelings of numbers of Westminster citizens - many of whom may well have been freeholders in the county - and though they might be attended by thousands, for a long time expressed, at most, only the opinions of the comparatively well to do.

There was no satisfactory way in which the opinion of the remainder could be collected or expressed, even granted any was formed, no way open to them of influencing matters except by occasional violent and irrational explosions of the kind that persisted in Westminster even in the nineteenth century. The lack of effective means of maintaining order, and the readiness shown by the common people to riot, often from sheer devilment,

(1) R. Pares, op. cit. p.198.
from sheer devilment, Long made the 'mob' a factor in metropolitan, and indeed, in national politics. But it can scarcely be held to demonstrate the existence of a 'public opinion', among them, especially since 'mobs' were notoriously stirred up artificially from above. Even those who spoke as if they had the sense of 'the people' behind them, commonly believed the majority of them to be ignorant and indifferent, and, in the mass, positively dangerous,

The habit of speaking of 'the people', and the practice of appealing to them and claiming to act on their behalf in pamphlets and the press, developing since the Restoration era, reflected advances both in political theory and technique. (1). The heightened importance of parliament in the scheme of government, particularly after the Revolution, led to greatly increased competition between crown and politicians for influence and seats within it. Their rivalry, and the rivalry of parliamentary groups, greatly extended the field of political operations, and further enhanced the value of the franchise. Corruption, both in and out of parliament and particularly in elections, became more systematic. In the oligarchical struggles of the period, it became common for politicians and groups, supporting or opposing the ministry, to charge each other with seeking a corrupt influence in parliament against

parliament against the interests of 'the people' or with tampering with 'the people's' electoral rights, and to claim that they alone represented 'the people'. Charges of electoral corruption were particularly easy to make in view of the uncertainties of the franchise and electoral law, and they were the more readily made and listened to after the experience of Stuart interference in elections.

Recognition in theory that 'the people' had power, however, in no sense implies that recognition in practice. In fact, 'the people' politicians had in mind were limited to those persons who had, or whom they thought ought to have, political weight in the country. True it would sometimes serve their interests if a wider popular feeling could be stirred up. But the real support they sought was from men of substance and intelligence, who could be expected to resent any threat to their political position, the neglect of their interests. The extent and nature of this body would vary in the view of different politicians, but, for the majority, it was very limited.

The demand for political reform, put forward in the 'national interest' - for a reduction of placemen, for short parliaments, for a lessening of electoral corruption and for an increase in the representation - though their source lay in a genuine undercurrent of distaste for corruption and dislike of the existing holders of political power, were, it is true, often put forward by disaffected politicians in an effort to whip up a clamour, which would help them secure office. The demand in the earlier eighteenth century was, in
any case, neither persistent in any widespread sense, nor the product of a popular upsurge. Moreover, it was the reverse of democratic. In the earlier eighteenth century, the most genuine support for those who claimed to represent the 'national interest' or the 'independent part of the nation', came principally from sections among the country gentry and the independent business community, comprising the lesser industrial and commercial men.

Government, in any case, was simply not geared to take heed of 'public opinion'. On the contrary, it was adjusted to conditions as it found them, to the need to secure the support of a small oligarchical upper class, whose influence depended primarily on its social prestige and the possession of landed property. It was their interests, not those of a numerical majority of the population, with which so much governmental and parliamentary business was concerned. Public meetings, petitions to parliament, and instructions to members, carried weight only if they represented the opinions of those, who had a standing in the local community whence they originated. Instructions to members frequently made no pretence of being 'popular', and were concerned with pushing various local interests. (1). But if, as on occasion, large numbers of people did appear to support these demonstrations of opinion, then their weight might well be lessened, since it would be believed they represented the work of faction. (2).

The only expression of opinion, which politicians would normally accept as representative of 'national opinion' would be that of the independent country gentry, whose opposition in a body would have been—and was—embarrassing to any ministry. (1).

In these circumstances, the political existence of even Old Sarum, was, perhaps, less anomalous than that of Westminster, with its large population, wide franchise, and great body of electors, a majority of whom carried virtually no weight in the eighteenth century political scale. Politicians, who sought election in Westminster, had no delusions as to the character of the majority of those whose support they sought and whose passions they roused. But they recognised the power of the 'mob' as a means of intensifying pressure against their rivals, and found it convenient, on occasion, to claim they had the sense of 'the people' behind them.

The actions of government from time to time/restrict the press by licensing acts and/or stamp duties, (2), may be seen not so much as attempts to hamper the formation of public opinion in the modern sense (though, no doubt, they did have that effect) but as efforts to prevent politicians inflaming an ill-educated and often violent people, particularly in the metropolis. The same is true of restrictions upon all manner of popular

all manner of popular assemblies. Trade clubs were likewise condemned, not merely as adverse to the interests of employers, but because they might easily become centres of political disaffection. The attitude of government, in fact, reflected recognition of the great amount of ignorance, venality and violence among the population, so evident in the eighteenth century. If it is true that there was selfishness and over righteousness in the belief that 'the people' were a very limited body, there was much to justify the attitude in Westminster itself.

Thus Westminster, important as the centre of government and the meeting ground of influential men, was, for most of the eighteenth century, chiefly the battleground of rival political factions, and had little of the importance it later assumed as a stronghold of popular radicalism. Not until social and educational improvements had raised the status of the mass of its inhabitants and had given them a weight in society did their opinion come to be of importance, though, even then, that importance was slow in obtaining recognition. Not until its lower class inhabitants had developed a community of interest did their leaders come to take independent action.

The political character of Westminster, in fact, closely reflected its social character. Moreover, the presence of government, at first sight and, indeed, ultimately a stimulus to popular independent action, was for a long time to impede it.
The many small tradesmen of Westminster, who depended on the custom of the wealthy, had often a great deal to lose if they acted contrary to dictation from above. Lower down the scale, men might have little to lose, but a good deal to gain, if they voted as directed. Indeed, there can have been few places, where so much influence and pressure could be brought to bear on so many people susceptible to it.

Though it must be unsafe to quote figures without a fuller investigation than has here been attempted, yet it would seem that between 1700 - 1769 - during which time there were fifteen general elections (two of which were re-staged after being declared void) and six bye-elections - there was only one occasion, in 1741, when the court candidates or candidate were not returned. On this occasion two court candidates were returned at first, but, after the election was declared void, the opposition candidates were 'accepted' without a contest.

Between 1770 and 1807, when there were seven general elections and eight bye-elections, it would seem the court and ministers became disposed to allow one of the two seats to the opposition. Excepting the general election of 1774, only one Court candidate was set up in general elections. Only on one occasion - in the bye-election of 1788 - was the court or ministerial candidate not returned. (1).

(1). These figures, tentatively put forward, are based on information contained in, Members of Parliament pt.1, 1213-1702, and pt.11, 1705-1832. Return ordered by the House of Commons. (1876-7). In compiling them, I have taken into account what has been discoverable about the characters and political affiliations of candidates, and (cont'd at foot of page 108).
But, however they viewed their chances of success, there were few occasions when candidates in opposition to the ministry did not appear, generally with the backing of opposition groups in parliament and/or the support of disaffected members of the upper classes with property and influence in Westminster. The election campaigns of these candidates and their supporters would differ little, or not at all, from the campaigns of those who enjoyed the favour of the ministry.

Those who opposed the ministry would be more likely to seek 'popular' or mob support, but they would show no greater scruples, and would be no less ready to make use of influence and/or pressure of various kinds to secure victory.

The 'independence' often ascribed to the counties and to the few large constituencies including Westminster, and the fact that they were commonly represented by men who were neither office-holders, nor prominent party men, in no way implies the independence of their electors. Professor Pares is almost certainly right in arguing that the expense of contesting them was so high that few ambitious politicians cared to bother with them unless there were special inducements for them to do so.\(^1\)

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\(^1\) R. Pares op. cit. p. 8.

Continuation of Note (1), from page 107.

The circumstances of the elections concerned, as far as they have been discoverable in well known printed sources. I have considered a more thoroughgoing analysis inadvisable without information to be derived only from special research.
on receipt of office had to resign and seek re-election, a process to be repeated each time he moved a stage higher or changed his office. The trouble and costs of seeking re-election in the large constituencies meant that their seats were frequently left for local interests to dispose as they pleased, to men with lesser political ambitions and larger fortunes. But though by no means all of Westminster's representatives were well known party politicians, it was seldom they were wholly unattached.

It is well known that, on occasion, and for tactical reasons, both the Ministers and opposition leaders would think it worth while to contest the counties and other large constituencies, not only so as to claim their candidates had the approval of 'the people', but because the rest of the country might be expected to notice the action of these places and would, supposedly, accept the fiction.

Westminster, in particular, almost always received close attention. Party leaders recognized that the staging of a demonstration in the stronghold of government itself, could be expected to attract considerable attention. Ministries were only too well aware of the opportunities of stirring up disaffection against them, and of the loss of prestige involved in defeat.

Thus, though many of those who stood for election in Westminster neither were, nor became, officeholders, and were not prominent party men, yet it was rare if they did not receive strong ministerial or party encouragement. Further, a good proportion of
good proportion of successful and unsuccessful candidates were prominent politicians, and were party men.

Candidates varied in kind. Sometimes, the importance of the occasion, and desire to claim they enjoyed popular support, encouraged a number of prominent politicians to come forward. Sometimes men of local standing, sometimes popular figureheads, whose prestige was of more immediate value than their political ability, would be persuaded to stand. Whether they enjoyed financial backing or not, however, it was important for most candidates to have a large purse. (1).

In the faction struggles between rival aristocratic candidates and their supporters, the humble Westminster elector was little more than a pawn; the body of electors little more than so many numbers to bolster the poll of rival candidates. If, as was the case, there was much that was disreputable and venal among them; if, faced with political ignorance and indifference, candidates had to rely on the determining factor of corruption, yet, it should not be forgotten that those who believed it was their divine right to govern, often abused their trust.

The electorate in Westminster was, in fact, similar to that in other constituencies in the eighteenth century, except

(1). These conclusions, again tentatively put forward, are again based on a consideration of the information given in the Return ordered by the Commons, (op. cit.) in conjunction with evidence drawn from secondary sources, and the Dictionary of National Biography (hereafter D.N.B.).
that the features characteristic of the period were apt to be 'writ larger' than elsewhere. There was, as elsewhere, much apathy, much interest in local affairs, much self-interest and much venality. Up to 1714 and for some years thereafter, whilst the establishment of the Hanoverian dynasty remained a serious issue in politics, there was, in the country at large and in Westminster particularly, keen interest in elections. (1). Had important issues continued to divide the nation, it is reasonable to suppose that a 'public opinion', reflecting at least the interest of the better educated in Westminster, would have developed much earlier. But, with the ending of the war with France, the accession of George I, and the lessening of religious friction, political tension everywhere relaxed.

True, Westminster remained a centre for the operations of politicians seeking, particularly at elections, to stir the discontented elements of the metropolitan area and to bring pressure upon government. On certain occasions, indeed, particularly in 1733-4, and 1741 their efforts, in this respect met with considerable success. (2). But the court interest kept a tight hold on Westminster and the Septennial Act lessened their opportunities. Again, prosperity under Walpole, spreading to most sections of the community, weakened the hostility of

(1). Between 1700-1714 there were 7 General elections and 2 bye elections. (Members, Return ordered by the House of Commons, op. cit.) The frequency of elections must have played its own part in stimulating excitement in the capital at this time.

(2) See next page
(2). Also in 1721 - when the first general election after the passing of the Septennial Act was held. For the 1721 election cf. J. Grego, *A History of Parliamentary Elections and Electioneering from the Stuarts to Queen Victoria*, pp. 81 et seq.; Place Papers B. M. Add. MS. 27,349 ff. 95-8. (Place's own 'History'); For the excitement of 1733, and the election of 1734, when the 'Patriots' were seeking to rouse opposition to Walpole's Excise scheme cf. A. Hassall, *Life of Viscount Bolingbroke* pp. 138 et seq.; J. E. and W. P. Smith, op. cit.; C. S. Emden op. cit. pp. 40 et seq. For the 1741 election cf. J. E. and W. P. Smith op. cit., A pamphlet, *A True account of the Election of Members of Parliament for the City and Liberty of Westminster etc.*., 1741. (Place's own bound copy is in the B. M.); J. Grego, op. cit. The 'Patriots' established a 'popular' 'Loyal and Patriotic Association' in Westminster after this election, to safeguard the interests of independent electors.
hostility of lesser merchants and tradesmen for the great merchant princes, whose influence on government was so strong, and, improving the lot of small masters and journeymen, hindered the rise of any permanently strong opposition. Foreign affairs, and the struggle for Empire thereafter, turned men's eyes largely away from domestic rivalries.

The absence of major political issues, and the disintegration of parties representing different principles or policies meant, it has been pointed out, that the business of government became increasingly administrative rather than legislative, and the interest of politicians centred more and more upon the composition of the executive. (1). Rival candidates for election, whatever their group affiliation, stood as honest individuals, all equally professing their zeal to uphold the crown and the constitution. It may have been clear one candidate or more would support the ministry and the others would not. But the absence of clear cut issues between them meant there was little to guide the elector, and it must have helped to diminish interest in the national aspect of elections still further. (2).

In the circumstances, political interest in Westminster had come to centre more and more on securing personal or local advantages, and it was the candidates who had most influence or the most influential backing, who were most ready to attend to the demands of inhabitants, or whose purses were the largest, who were most likely to be successful. The great number of

local and private acts of parliament applying to Westminster, testifying to the interest of well-to-do inhabitants in effecting physical and administrative improvements, in seeking, for example, to set up some local utility company, and, indeed, in dozens of other local matters. (1). Prospective representatives of Westminster must have been forced to devote a good deal of attention to them. But self interest and venality among the humbler electors were common. A vote given, or votes collected in favour of a candidate, could lead to a favour, a cash reward, or, perhaps, to a profitable office. At least it would lead to free food and beer, and might be the means of avoiding unpleasant consequences.

If the indifference and apathy towards national affairs, even among electors of some substance, largely account for the systemization of electoral corruption, the evolution of other familiar and often demoralizing practices, designed to bring men to the poll, is an indication not only of the character of the vast body of electors, but of the opinion commonly held of their character. Public treating was a regular feature leading to wholesale drunkenness. So, too, were processions, organized with music and banners, to make a show, and to encourage men to vote in a body. Cheer leaders to whip up enthusiasm for candidates, and 'chairmen' to carry them from each day's poll, and to give them the semblance of popularity, were frequently a direct

(1) A large collection of Acts relating to Westminster is in the possession of the Archives Department, Westminster Public Library.
were frequently a direct incentive to mob violence, for which a rival's supporters would be blamed. Gangs of roughs would be hired, ostensibly to protect electors in one interest from the mob, but often, in practice, to prevent others of a rival interest from reaching the poll. The prevalence of these and other similar practices, is a reflection not only of the indifference to them of the majority of electors - indeed one might say they were welcomed by many as part of the 'sport' of an election - but of the belief of aristocratic candidates and their supporters that they were necessary to the handling of so ignorant and brutal a people.

Thus the relationship between candidates and electors was, in fact, similar to that familiar elsewhere, save that the scale of electoral operations was larger and involved more work in the open, and political techniques were adapted to deal with an exceptionally large concentration of the lower classes. On the one side, there would be every effort to win over the support of men whose influence was invaluable, combined with every species of bribery and pressure to win or force the support of those who were considered to have neither interest nor opinion about politics. On the other, there would be bargaining for personal or local advantages, self-seeking, depravity and disorder, and often fear and hardship. The affectation and high flown, if vague, promises of candidates, to uphold the King's government, met the violence, stone and muck throwing of a riotous people.
Contested elections were the occasion of tumult and disorders, lasting for weeks, which virtually put an end to the normal life of the city. Even if ministerial and opposition groups had decided not to make a major effort, yet there would be politicians anxious to stir up excitement in order to embarrass government, and large crowds of people only too glad of the opportunity to let off steam.

Notification of an election in Westminster was made by the publication of a notice by the returning officer advertising the time and venue of the election. (1). The returning officer was the High Bailiff of Westminster. He became technically the Sheriff of the City for the time of an election, but had no original authority. The King's writ was issued to the Sheriffs of Middlesex, who, in turn, issued their precept to the High Bailiff. In due course he made his return through them.

Long before the opening of the poll, a great number of preliminary matters would receive attention. The election would be discussed and decisions would be taken by party leaders on whether or not a major effort was called for, which would either avoid a contest or lessen its expense. If a major stand appeared worth while, or unavoidable, suitable candidates would be

(1). In drawing the following character sketch of a typical eighteenth century Westminster election I have made use of varied and miscellaneous sources which are listed in the bibliography. A large volume, The History of the Westminster Election (of 1784), containing every material occurrence from its first commencement on 1st April to the final close of the poll on 17th May, by Lovers of Truth and Justice (hereafter the Westminster Election of 1784) is of value in providing both information, and a picture of the election scene as a whole.
candidates would be sought out and approved by the party leaders. Arrangements would be made by ministers to bring influence to bear directly through official channels, and indirectly through prominent ministerialists, who had property in Westminster, in support of nominees. Financial assistance might be arranged through the Patronage Secretary. (1).

At the same time, opposition leaders would be making arrangements to secure the support of influential sympathizers for their candidates, and a 'whip round' might be held among their friends to provide funds for the campaign. Aristocrats with property in Westminster, would direct their agents to inform tenants how to vote. (2).

A very great deal, however, would be left to individual candidates, whether they received the support of parliamentary groups or not. Even if they received financial aid, they would almost certainly have to spend a good deal of their own money. Further, the business of gathering friends and supporters, and forming them into committees to conduct the election would, it seems, be largely left to them. (3).

Election committees were long mainly of aristocratic composition. There was always a plentiful supply of noble or wealthy upper class politicians in Westminster, ready to make a show of presenting candidates to electors. Such men, however, though their support might be directly valuable, would, it seems, be encouraged

(1) M. Ostrogorski, Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties 1, 130.

(2) Place was prepared to provide plenty of evidence of cases where tenants were told how to vote cf. e.g. B.M. Add. Ms. 27, 841. 123.

(3) M. Ostrogorski, op. cit. p141, emphasises how much was left to private initiative. cf. infra Sect. 11, ch v. 11 and 11.
it seems, be encouraged to join a committee largely because their prestige would add lustre to a cause and attract wider support. The 'efficient' core of a committee would be a professional election manager, legal advisors and a number of clerks specially employed for the occasion (1).

It was from these committees that handbills, newspaper adverts, cartoons and squibs, were issued in favour of their own and against rival candidates. In the eighteenth century the art of directing electoral propaganda towards the 'free and independent electors of Westminster' became highly developed (2). Frequently of a scurrilous nature, and almost always libellous to modern eyes, it came to exhibit a striking sameness from one election to the next. Broadly, ministerial supporters were always depicted as relying upon secret and sinister influence, whilst opposition candidates were decried as inspired by faction. In all this, the aid of small printers and publishers was enlisted, glad of the increased business which came with an election, and perhaps ready to publish independently in support of one cause or another in the hope of patronage.

Very early, in Westminster, the extent and numbers of voters had made subdivision of a committee's responsibilities necessary. If electors were to be made to come to the poll they had to be contacted locally. Thus was developed the technique of canvassing

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(1). C.S. Eden, op. cit. p.178. et seq., emphasizes the growing spate of election 'literature' throughout the century.
technique of canvassing, which came to be the principal work of local sub-committees based on the Parish divisions. (1). There is very early evidence of Parish committees forming, and indeed of Parish vestries exercising a direct influence of their own. (2). Each parish would have its rival committees, its voluntary supporters and paid officials who went round to individuals seeking their support. They would transmit the results to the central committee, who would thus come to have a rough idea of their chances, and would act accordingly. Custom demanded rival committees should proclaim that their canvass promised success. Further, the canvass results were useful in guiding subsequent tactics, whilst the election was in progress.

At one time it may have been that the Dean and Chapter were responsible for arranging and bearing the costs of staging the elections. Certainly it was their servants, the High Bailiff and the High Constable, who handled preliminary official matters, such as engaging poll clerks and special constables, and arranging for the building of the Hustings. Elections in early days seem to have been conducted in Westminster Hall. (4). They were later held for a period in Palace Yard.

(1). M. Ostrogorski, op. cit. p.153; The operation of Parish Sub-Committees is quite clear in 1784, cf. Westminster Election of 1784,...etc.
(2). J.E. and W.P. Smith op. cit. p.163, show the Vestries of St. Martins-in-the-Fields and St. Margaret, discussing election matters in 1679. Bundles of election papers in the possession of the Westminster Archives Department show the concern of the Parishes of St. Margaret and St. John in the election of 1819.
(3). Francis Place devoted much time to research on this problem for reasons which appear below, cf. infra Sect. pp. 13 at seq. cf. also B.M. Add. MSS 27,845 f.6; 27,342 f.271.
Palace Yard, until the fighting of rival mobs, the tumult and the damage, led to their being shifted to Convent Garden. There, before the Portico of the Parish church of St. Paul's, the Hustings would be erected, a covered wooden platform, from which candidates and supporters would address the crowds, and to which electors would come to cast their votes. (1).

The Hustings were partitioned into seven to correspond with the Parish divisions. Certain parishes united for electoral purposes, though otherwise retaining a separate identity. Notice boards, with the names, St. James, St. Martin's in-the-field, St. Margaret and St. John, St. Paul and St. Martin le Grand, St. Clement's and St. Mary's, St. George's and St. Anne's, were placed to divide the groups of officials who attended each division upon behalf of each candidate. The candidates had inspectors and clerks to consider and register each vote. The High Bailiff, in a place apart, would also have his inspectors, to consider disputed votes and control procedure. At each division, electors would go to record their votes, and, so long as Westminster returned two men to parliament, they could either 'plump' for one candidate, or register a second choice, thus giving two votes. Any elector would be likely to have his qualification to vote questioned by the inspectors of one or more rival candidates.

The election began with the High Bailiff coming to the front of the Hustings, proclaiming silence, and reading the precept from the Sheriffs of Middlesex, calling for the return of two men to parliament.

(1) For a picture of hustings, cf. Westminster Election of 1784 etc.
of two men to parliament. He, or his deputy, would read the act (3611, c. 24) against bribery and corruption, and a magistrate then administered the oath to the High Bailiff, who promised to make a fair and just return. The business of nominating and seconding candidates then proceeded, the proposers each making speeches. After the High Bailiff had proclaimed the candidates' names and called for a fair and impartial hearing for them, they, also, would make speeches. Next, a show of hands in favour of each candidate would be called for.

This action had long become a formality, and whether or not it had ever been decisive, rival candidates rightly assumed many who held up their hands were not electors and formally demanded a poll. Poll clerks were, therefore, sworn, and the opening of the poll proclaimed immediately, or for the next morning. Candidates and their supporters then busied themselves with technical matters, such as, for example, arrangements for the presence of Commissioners to administer oaths to electors.

Until 1785, the poll continued until the High Bailiff considered no more electors would come to register their votes or until it was clear who must be the victors. Then, by arrangement with the candidates, the poll would be declared closed. The expenses of keeping the poll open, and, in consequence, the expenses of the election as a whole, mounted with each successive day, and, since they were in the last resort, the responsibility of candidates, few wanted it kept open a moment longer than necessary. Nonetheless, in 1749, it
continued seventeen days, and in the famous election of 1784, the memory of which long lingered in Westminster, for forty days. It was the ridiculously protracted length of this contest and the scenes of tumult, exceptional even for Westminster, which led to the passing of an act, in 1785, limiting the poll to fifteen days. (1).

Even so, though it was never undertaken after 1784, it was still possible for a candidate to demand a scrutiny of all the votes cast. If the High Bailiff had agreed, and it would have meant great trouble for him, it would lead to the return being delayed indefinitely, and involved candidates in further great expense. In 1784, a scrutiny lasted nearly a year. But, indeed, there were so many uncertainties about the franchise, that it might well have dragged on for further years if it had not been for the impatience and exhaustion—above all financial exhaustion—of candidates. In the end, it was, as might be expected, found there were almost as many bad votes for one side as for the other, (2).

The absence of electoral registers and, indeed, of any clear and fixed ruling on the franchise meant, as suggested already, that almost any person might be permitted to vote. But it meant too, and conversely, that large numbers of men with a good title to vote according to a reasonable interpretation of the franchise

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(1) Annual Register 1784-5 (2nd ed.) p.366.
(2) The Westminster Election of 1784, pp.539, et seq.
of the franchise, might be prevented from doing so. If, on one hand, it was all too easy for rival electoral committees to arrange for totally unqualified men to vote, it was, on the other, far from uncommon that men, with a clear conscience to their entitlement, might be excluded if they sought to vote for the 'wrong' interest.

It is true that in Westminster the Poor Rate books provided a rough and ready electoral roll and they were always present at elections. If they were not in original in the hands of the High Bailiff (and he could always demand to see them) they would be in the hands of rate collectors employed by one interest or another, to act as its inspectors. Committees would try to get hold of copies if they could not get the men with the originals on their side, but the originals were the sole documentary evidence of a man's qualification to vote, and apart from the excellent chance of their not being up to date might, it seems, have been manipulated for electoral purposes. The rate collectors were thus in a position of some influence and their support might be invaluable.

There were, in fact, innumerable ways in which the doubtfully qualified or totally unqualified might vote, and the clearly or morally qualified might be turned from the poll. On one hand, in the course of the canvass, it would, for example, come to light that certain houses listed in the rate books were temporarily without residents, perhaps because the tenant or owner was away, perhaps because it was for sale, or to let, perhaps because

(1). Westminster Election of 1784, p.332; infra Sect. IV App. 11. 2
(2). See next page.
perhaps because it was decayed. Men could be persuaded to claim them as their residence, or to claim the identity of a previous or absent tenant. Again, men, who were no longer resident, could vote if their names, carelessly or conveniently, had been left on the books. Lodgers might claim to be householders, if rate collectors would turn a blind eye. If it was clear that evidence of past payment of rates would be demanded, many would have had their rates paid for them, or would have them paid on the spot, when they came to vote.

On the other hand, it might be possible to claim a man had not paid his rates simply because there was no entry in the book - i.e. it had been deliberately or carelessly not recorded. Or it might be said, after 1786, that he had not paid them sufficiently far back to show he had been resident for six months. A man's name might not have been entered in the book even if he had been resident for much longer than the approved period. Efforts to have the defect made good, or to pay rates on the spot might be rejected. (1).

Until 1789, the uncertainty over electoral boundaries meant that bodies of men from districts, the electoral position of which was uncertain, might be permitted to vote even in clear cases of sharp practice. (2). A very great deal depended on the

(Cont.) cf. Letter in unsorted bundle of election papers of Parishes of St. Margaret and St. John in possession of Westminster Archives Department, High Bailiff (Arthur Morris) to Rate Collector for St. Margaret, 19.2.1819. "I desire and strictly enjoin you to attend on me at the Hustings ...with the Books containing the last Poors rates...for the purpose of giving me such evidence as may be necessary".

(1). The part played by the Poor Rate Collectors in elections is discussed more fully below, cf. infra Sect. V. App.11. to Ch. xiii

(2). Westminster Election of 1784. p.300
depended on the vigilance and authority of a candidate's inspectors. If victory for one interest were assured and they were removed altogether, a defeated candidate could poll whomever he liked, as often as he liked, to make a fair showing.

The High Bailiff did not interfere unless asked to arbitrate, but, when he did, he was at a disadvantage and had to look to his own interests. If the vote was bad, but allowed, the only remedy open to an aggrieved candidate was to call for a scrutiny or to petition parliament. The former, it has been suggested, was a fantastic remedy in the circumstances, and was mainly pursued for propaganda purposes. The latter was almost as expensive, equally protracted and probably equally fruitless. But, if the vote were good and not allowed, the remedy for an elector, backed by the candidate and interest he had sought to vote for, was an action against the returning officer - the High Bailiff himself. It is not, therefore, surprising that the most disinterested of Bailiffs, and they were not always disinterested, tended to accept most claims to vote. (1).

Apart from attempting to take advantage of anomalies and uncertainties in the franchise, rival parties made every effort, during, as well as before, elections to secure the support of electors. Public meetings would be called in the interests of the whole body of electors and manifestos would be issued, urging them to act independently by voting for one cause or another.

(1). Westminster Election of 1784, p.260, et seq. The High Bailiff's interpretation of the franchise in 1819 was to cause an outcry among the Westminster Reformers and to lead to their bringing a court action against him. cf. infra, Sect. V. App. II. to Ch. XIII.
another. Resolutions passed concerning election arrangements made every attempt to give candidates in one interest the semblance of acceptance by popular will, and their rivals, the appearance of wholehearted condemnation.

Open exhortation would be accompanied by less savoury transactions, and influence and pressure on electors might become intense. Some of the forms they took have been mentioned already. Direct bribery may well have been on a lesser scale than rival contestants claimed, but it seems to have been common enough. Public treating, or the quiet payment of a man's rates, differed only in kind. Where quieter methods of hindering a rival or gaining an advantage seemed inadequate, the hiring of, for example, a gang of dock workers or Irish labourers, to impede electors reaching the poll, would be tried. (1). Naval candidates always produced gangs of sailors. (2).

Few electors can have been entirely free to give their votes as they chose, and of those that were, many decent men must have preferred to keep away altogether. The total poll was often comparatively small. At best, the journey to the hustings through the vast and riotous crowds in Covent Garden was extremely offensive. At worst, there was a real risk of injury, possibly even death, in a brawl.

Election costs were apt to be enormous, though varying from contest to contest according to the importance placed on securing a seat.
securing a seat or seats. As elsewhere they mounted after the passing of the Septennial Act. The nature of these costs are examined later, but including official and unofficial expenses they might on occasion, it seems, amount to tens of thousands of pounds. (1).

The election was closed officially by an announcement from the High Bailiff, who would then announce the result, and, if there were no objections, make his return. Technically, the man who headed the poll was the senior member. Thereafter, by long standing tradition, the hustings were torn to pieces by the mob.

Whilst successful candidates and supporters sought to capitalize on their victory by holding celebration dinners and processions, unsuccessful candidates would seek to show their defeat had been solely due to corruption, or mob violence, which had prevented their supporters from voting for them.

As with the social scene, however, concentration upon the more obvious features of political life in Westminster in the eighteenth century—on the ignorance and indifference of electors, on 'corruption', on the violence of the mob, on the absence of genuine popular feeling—tends to mask many other features of importance. As it has long ago been recognized, the very fact that 'corruption' became so extensive in the eighteenth century is, in itself, testimony to the growing independence of 'the people'.

(1). cf. infra Sect. II, Ch. VII, 1.
If the appearance of a more genuine popular feeling in the later eighteenth century is to be explained; if the ability of electors to take, and their motive in taking, independent action, later in the century is to be understood, then one must remember not only the long term effects of social improvements and increased economic opportunity in raising the status of the mass of the electors, but also, the equally long term effects of their being in the centre of the political world. It is clear that the years during which rival aristocratic groups fought their electoral battles in Westminster - years in which the majority of electors acted under direction from above, have an importance not to be underestimated. For they were years which stimulated awareness, not only of the malpractices of those who conducted them, but of the practices and processes of government generally.

In the first place, though newspaper circulation and the reading public were for a long time both limited, yet it may be suggested that many newspapers and periodicals, as well as much pamphlet literature, would be read aloud and argued about in the drinking houses and trade clubs of the London area. Periodicals such as the 'Craftsman', of the earlier and mid-eighteenth century, specifically aimed at rousing and crystallizing discontent among, inter alia, the lesser merchants and shopkeepers and tradesmen of London, may not have been conspicuously successful in achieving the immediate aims of their sponsors. But, over a long period, the arguments of the 'opposition' press must have received very wide currency in Westminster.
Westminster. At the same time, though put forward less effec-
tively and persistently, the arguments of ministerial supp-
orters must have become equally familiar.

In the second place, there was the tremendous and concen-
trated effect of elections. Even when, as on occasion, the
seats were not contested, yet a great deal of canvassing would
probably have been undertaken, and large numbers of pamphlets,
handbills and squibs would appear. But if, as was more usual,
the election were contested, then there can have been few people
in Westminster who were not canvassed, and pressed to give
their vote(s) to one side or another, or who were not in some
other way affected, whilst the spate of election literature
would be enormous.

For most of the century, in fact, the professional and
tradesman elements of Westminster were courted and urged as
'worthy and independent electors' to act for themselves, to
overthrow those who would corrupt the nation, or to resist the
beguilements of faction. It cannot be surprising, therefore,
that, in the course of time, many ordinary electors began to re-
fect on matters for themselves. Nor can it be surprising –
in view of the physical and social improvements taking place
in Westminster and the disgust which disorderliness in the
city was coming to inspire – that the readiness of aristocratic
politicians to encourage mob violence and to debauch electors
came to be regarded by growing numbers of men with an increas-
ing contempt.
The middle and lower middle classes in Westminster may have been a latent force in Westminster politics for much of the century, but they were nonetheless, a potential force, ever growing numerically as the century progressed. The readiness of many of them to support the metropolitan radical agitation of the 1760s, 1770s and 1780s against the increasing cost of inefficient administration and wasteful expenditure, and the growing protest at electoral corruption, can only be explained on the assumption that strong feelings were aroused.

There appears, indeed, in the later eighteenth century, a more widespread and growing distaste for the prevailing standards of political morality, and dislike of the use of influence and pressure as a means of securing political support. Among the early radical leaders, many of whom stood within, or on the fringe of, the governing classes, there were, it is true, those whose opinion of 'the people' was scarcely higher than that of aristocratic politicians, and whose public behaviour set them an example no better. Yet there were, too, others who, whatever their attitude towards 'the people', did begin to seek to raise the standards of moral conduct in dealings with them and who did come to set a personal example of integrity as leaders of popular campaigns, or as managers of, or candidates in, elections.

If there was no revolutionary improvement in the character of the Westminster electorate as a whole, yet more and more men did come increasingly to resent the corruption, pressure and other malpractices of elections. Calls for reform and / purity of election
purity of election came gradually to have a new and more genuine feeling behind them. If, at first, genuine resentment was confined to the few - if still fewer were able to take or cared to risk the consequences of independent action - yet, in the last three decades of the eighteenth century, numbers of men of a new generation grew up to believe in the necessity of encouraging political self-help by working among 'the people' themselves, and still more became ready to support them.
By the middle years of the eighteenth century numbers of physical and administrative improvements in London and Westminster had begun to shape the metropolis in the fashion of a modern capital. Towns in the provinces, too, had begun to appear as real urban centres, and improving communications brought an increasing circulation of newspapers and news. At the same time, the status of many people was improving and their educational level rising. The non-conformist educational system in particular, it would seem, had begun to pay strong dividends in producing men of up to date learning, dissatisfied with traditional modes of thought. It may be suggested, too, that the dissemination of dissenting tracts and sermons throughout the century, and the discussions they occasioned, had also played their part in the awakening of a more critical frame of mind. It would be wrong to over-stress these developments. For a very long time to come, people in many parts of the country remained isolated and localised in their interests. The bulk of the population remained illiterate and politically backward. Yet, the appearance of a larger politically conscious public is a development not to be ignored. (1).

(1). H. Butterfield, George III Lord North and the People p.181 et seq., emphasizes the importance of the dissenting tradition in the development alongside the traditional eighteenth century 'world', of a new 'world' of men living in towns engaged in trade and industry, rationalist in outlook, who were prepared to disparage the tradition of the aristocracy.

For a significant view on the importance of the education provided by dissenting academies cf. T.S. Ashton, 'Industrial Revolution' pp.20-21.
Pitt's return to power in 1757 may have owed little directly to the municipal demonstrations in his favour. But there can be no doubt he enjoyed a considerable support outside parliament, particularly in London, among sections of the middle class merchant community, interested in the efficient and business-like conduct of government, and restive at the factional struggles of the Whig groups. Pitt's conduct of the war with France, and his attitude towards trade and empire, stimulated and appealed to men, whose interests were far different from those of the landed aristocracy. The accession of George III, Pitt's fall from power, the ending of the war and the political events which followed, all served to focus a greater attention upon the working of the governmental system itself.

It is clear that a good deal of the agitation of the sixties, seventies and early eighties, was encouraged by various of the Whig groups, who had their own good reasons for opposing George III. There was no heir apparent, no rival 'court', for some time, on which they could pin their hopes of regaining power. Extra-parliamentary support of a popular character was, therefore, not without value in strengthening their hands against a man apparently prepared to challenge them on their own ground. Again, there grew an increasingly strong element of dislike among them, for the numbers of nouveau riche - Indian 'nabobs' and contractors among others - who would buy their way into parliament, thereby challenging the landowning caste, and tend to support the ministries of George III. But the agitation of these years...
Agitation of these years was by no means solely inspired and led by the Whigs. Not only is a new political awareness apparent in the nation, but new popular leaders appear, drawn from ranks below the governing classes.

Doubtless much of the 'popular' interest in politics in this period, was still artificially inspired from above. Doubtless too, much of what appears as strong political feeling, still depended on temporary economic discontent, and on the readiness of the London 'mob' to break into violence upon any excuse. There is no clear evidence of any independent or widespread popular interest in political matters in the country, as a whole, nor even in the London area, on a persistent basis.

At the same time, the raising of important political issues and the efforts of agitators to rouse and sustain political interest, did, on occasions, win the widespread and genuine support of substantial elements. The extent of the support for Wilkes and other popular leaders among well-to-do merchant and professional classes in the metropolis, and from individuals and groups elsewhere, suggests that the numbers, who had come to feel their interests were neglected by government, and who were prepared to take a new and more independent line, had grown considerably. The real beginnings of popular radicalism are apparent.

1. There are a number of secondary works dealing with the early parliamentary reform movement which are listed in the bibliography. Among the most valuable are G.S. Veitch, The Genesis of Parliamentary Reform, and E. Butterfield, George III, Lord North and the People, 1879-80; S. Maccoby's English Radicalism 1762-85 contains many illuminating extracts from contemporary newspapers and pamphlets, and a good bibliography of the subject which lists the most important works produced by radical leaders, the biographical studies of them available, and the published collections of the papers they left behind.
It was, at the outset, a comparatively limited movement, strongest and most easily identifiable in the capital, amongst the comparatively wealthy. Within the next twenty years, however, the issues, on which its leaders helped to concentrate attention, had come to interest numbers of men—merchants and gentry—in the provincial centres. But it was not, and indeed, except on rare occasions, never gave the impression of being a united movement. Despite efforts to secure agreement on a given course of action, its leaders were themselves individualists, very far from universally trusted. Further, and in the early stages, it was very far from being democratic in any modern sense. There was, it is clear, little or no belief among those who supported the radical agitation in its earlier stages, that the bulk of the population were either fitted, or entitled to share in government. The protests heard reflect rather a desire to ensure the interests of those already privileged should not be overlooked. The savagery of the metropolitan 'mob' behind the radical agitators, which long served to alarm conservative or wavering elements and to encourage a belief that even limited constitutional reform might be the first step towards anarchy, frightened many of the early Reformers too. (1).

(1). The connection has yet to be properly worked out, but it is clear that many of the early Reformers, e.g. Beckford and Horne (later Horne Tooke) had been associated with the old 'Patriot' opposition, and were really carrying on the 'Patriot' tradition. The term 'Patriot' was still commonly used. For the contemporary connotation of the term 'Patriotism', as synonymous with 'public spirit', cf. H. Butterfield, 'The Statecraft of Macchiavelli' p.154.
Had the Wilkes episode been handled more tactfully, or had the American policies of George III and his ministries been more successful, the radical agitation, never as imposing as appearances sometimes suggest, would doubtless have had even less substantial support. Even as things were, strong, if less highly organised opinion, remained firm against the radicals.

Under the emotional stress of discontent with government actions, and inspired by the American Revolution, men of standing did, it is true, advance sweeping and democratic theories of government. But, for the most part, the real aims of even the radical leaders were moderate and intended to be practical. Extreme theories might be fervently believed in by the few, hold an academic interest for more, but were soundly distrusted by the majority. Some men might, at most, want no more than a change in government policy. Others, wanting to see the system of government purified, might believe the composition of the Commons should be altered, either to increase its efficiency as a check to the Crown, or to make it more representative of opinion in the country, or both. But support for more radical schemes often represented no more than a willingness to see pressure upon government intensified. Few spoke of the 'people' at this time, contemplated the 'propertyless'.

Nevertheless, the emergence of a 'popular' radical movement with its own staff of leaders, beyond the ranks of the aristocracy, was, in time, to have profound effects on the character of government. For a long time to come, its chief source of strength lay in the metropolis where there were large numbers of men.
numbers of men whose interests in trade and industry encouraged no reverence for a governmental system which took so close an account of the interests of the landed aristocracy, and where there were men living by their wits, and intellectuals, who had no reverence for any institutions at all. Standing apart from the eighteenth century political world, and lacking the kind of connections which might have drawn them to support one of the parliamentary groups, those of them who now came to associate politically, were brought together principally by their common agreement to pursue a particular course of action.

If their leaders were, for some time, prepared to accept, and even to seek, the assistance of the aristocratic Whig opposition groups in Parliament, there was, among them, little or no belief in the virtues of aristocratic government, and no intention of helping the Whig opposition to regain power, uncommitted to some programme of reform which would help to diminish aristocratic influence on government as well. Their interest in parliamentary reform, their cries against corruption, placemen and rotten boroughs represented something very different from that of the opposition groups in the earlier part of the century.

Tactical considerations, over the Wilkes affair, for example, and common hostility to George III's American policy thereafter, might dictate the cooperation, albeit often half-hearted, of Whig opposition groups and radical leaders, — might, for a long time,

for a long time, prevent open rupture between them: but it is clear, that there was, from the start, an inherent mutual distrust which grew stronger in the course of time. As the intentions of each developed and unfolded, it became clearer that the aim of the majority of the Whigs was, at most, to reduce the influence of the crown, whilst the aim of the radical leaders was to reduce excessive aristocratic influence on government as well, so their antipathy grew stronger. Much as they wanted to see crown influence reduced, the radical leaders, it is clear, had no thought of leaving the aristocracy, not merely substantially able to carry on government as before through their own borough influence, but apparently in an even stronger position, since they would have less reason to fear the competition of the King himself. Whether to make the Commons more independent, or, as it was later argued, more representative, the radicals envisaged parliamentary reform as an essential complement to the economic, or administrative, reform scheme of the Whig parliamentarians.

At the same time, it is also clear that schemes which, in any way, lessened or interfered with the value of the political property and influence of the governing classes, would find little favour among the Whigs. The demand for parliamentary reform was, as yet, by no means widespread in the country, and the main Whig body felt little inclination to martyr themselves in a cause, which, they well recognized, would weaken their own influence in government. The refusal of the majority of parliamentarians to entertain schemes of parliamentary reform, and the apparent half-heartedness or insincerity, with
which individuals among them took up the cause, more than anything drove the radicals increasingly to rely on their own resources.

It was in these years that Westminster became the centre, above all, of extra-parliamentary political activity. Between 1760-84, the number of occasions when large riotous crowds thronged its streets and when excitement reached fever pitch, must be difficult to compute. Though there were periods of comparative quiet, yet successive ministries and the body of conservative inhabitants of Westminster must have become heartily sick of 'popular' demonstrations of all kinds - demonstrations which, especially after the Gordon Riots, might appear to be producing a state of anarchy.

But this is only in a limited degree to be seen as a result of a truly popular upsurge in Westminster itself. Not until the demand for reform came from the growing numbers of the lower middle and lower classes in the metropolis, and those of them who lived in Westminster, could take advantage of a franchise denied their fellows elsewhere, was there any specifically 'Westminster' movement. The early radical movement, so far as it centred in and around the capital, was metropolitan in character. The centre of gravity of the majority of its supporters was the City of London itself. But they might well live in any one of the political units into which the metropolis was divided, and be electors in any one, or all three, of the major constituencies. The privileges of the City of London and the machinery of its corporation, if made to serve radical
purposes, perhaps provided the most considerable opportunities for staging demonstrations against the government. But there were other ways in which the metropolis might be roused as well. County or public meetings and petitions might be arranged in the name of the Freeholders of Middlesex or the Electors of Westminster, and the elections themselves, in all metropolitan constituencies provided further opportunities for those seeking to attract attention and to embarrass government. That Westminster was so frequently the scene of processions and disorders, reflects, principally, the desire of extra-parliamentary agitators to ensure that their demonstrations should, so far as possible, concentrate the attention of both the ministry and the country.

Thus, though after 1763, Wilkes and his supporters fought their legal battles in Westminster amid scenes of great popular clamour, (1), there was no protest organized against the government on a specifically Westminster basis until 1769. It would be wrong, however, to make much of this, or to infer from it that support for Wilkes in Westminster was less marked than elsewhere. When one speaks of the popular support for Wilkes in Middlesex it is easy to overlook the fact that inhabitants of Westminster were also inhabitants of the county as well. Wilkes himself and many of his friends and supporters were residents and electors of Westminster, and electors in London too. That he chose to stand for election in the county, after

(1) H. Bleackley, Life of John Wilkes, chs. VII-XIII.
his failure in the City of London, may reflect a belief that the influence of government would be too strong against him in Westminster, but it may well have been a matter of expediency or personal fancy. It was certainly suggested he stand for Westminster, where some of his friends were prepared to organise the election for him. (1).

It was, however, upon winning his seat in the County that the main effort of his coterie came to be concentrated, and as a result, though one of his friends was set up in Westminster, Hugh Percy, son of the most influential of local landowners, the Duke of Northumberland, and Edwin Sandys, were returned as ministerial candidates. (2). But, throughout the first and subsequent Middlesex elections, excitement in Westminster was intense, and the Duke of Northumberland and his son came in for much abuse. (3). After the 'St. George's Field's massacre', and the ministry's treatment of Wilkes, tension increased still further. The return of Sgt. Glyn, one of Wilkes's supporters and legal advisors, on the death of the member for Middlesex whose seat was not in dispute, was overwhelming. Wilkes' own repeated rejection by the Commons played into his and his supporters hands, and gave them a tremendous opportunity to capitalize the issues and to keep them alive.

In February 1769, the first of the so called 'popular' societies, the famous Bill of Rights Society, was launched, in the first instance to make the most of Wilkes' fame, by paying / his debts and election

(2). Members, Return ordered by the House of Commons op. cit. cf. also D.N.B. Hugh Percy (son of 1st Duke of Northumberland).
(3). ibid.
his debts and election expenses out of money publicly subscribed on his behalf. (1). It is, however, clear, that at least some of its members, perhaps at the outset, perhaps later, thought of it as something more - as a means of coordinating and concentrating popular effort (2). Though one cannot say the society as such, was responsible for all the radical meetings, petitions and other demonstrations of the next five years, yet the individual members did have a lot to do with them, and it must have served to keep radical leaders in touch with each other. At the same time it is clear, Whig leaders, themselves, were prepared to lend a hand in more stately fashion by encouraging county meetings.

The proceedings of 1769-71, in which demonstrations in Westminster itself achieved a considerable prominence, are illustrative of the character of the 'popular' movement at this time. On the one hand, the Whig leaders are seen to be prepared to countenance and even encourage the agitation, so long as it was confined to the redress of grievances already apparent, and did not aim at making people discontented with their situation in life by raising wider issues. On the other hand, the radicals are

(1). H. Bleackley. op. cit. pp. 240 et seq.
S. Maccoby. op. cit. p. 105 et seq.
A. Stephens, Memoirs of J. Horne Tooke 1. 164, et seq.
(2). In particular Horne (later Horne Tooke) cf. A. Stephens, ibid., Maccoby, op. cit. p. 107. Horne Tooke played a prominent part in managing Wilkes' Middlesex election campaigns, and apparently set himself against all practices likely to inflame the 'mob'. His subsequent breach with Wilkes - when he and others founded the rival Constitutional Society, is well known. cf. infra.
the radicals are seen to be ready to accept and even to seek the aid of the parliamentary opposition, and some of them, at least, anxious to press its leaders to go further than they wished. It is clear that the former were inclined to be apprehensive at the course the agitation was taking, and the latter, to be suspicious as to the former's intentions. Throughout, strong conservative opinion remained opposed to the objects, methods and character of the agitation in the streets. (1).

The background circumstances were those arising from the efforts of Wilkes' supporters to stage a campaign of petitions protesting against the government's treatment of Wilkes - a campaign, in which certain of the Whig leaders proved willing to assist. If it was relatively easy to secure a strong protest from Middlesex, yet it was with much greater difficulty that conservative obstruction was overcome, and wavering opinion won over elsewhere. Nonetheless, a Surrey county meeting was finally arranged and persuaded to approve a more moderate petition and, in due course, in spite of repeated attempts by conservative or official elements to frustrate it, a London Livery meeting, held at a time when the annual election of Sheriffs could no longer be avoided, was persuaded to approve a petition to the King, violently attacking the ministry. Recognizing that it by no means represented Livery opinion as a whole, the King received it in July, with distinct coldness. (2).

(1) S. Maccoby, op. cit. ch. VI.
(2) ibid. p. 120.
Partly, no doubt, as a result of genuine irritation, but, still more, because of a desire to capitalize this new evidence of 'indifference' to 'the people', the petitioning movement came to take a new and more radical character. For the moment, the struggles between court and radical elements in the London Common Council prevented the staging of a Livery protest meeting. (1). It was, perhaps, for this reason, therefore, that, in August 1769, the inhabitants of Westminster were encouraged to give a fresh lead by petitioning the Crown to dissolve parliament.

In the first instance, a previous meeting was held at the Standard Tavern, Leicester Square, consisting of respectable tradesmen. "There were no gentlemen of fashion or rank among them". (2) A petition produced by John Almon seems to have been approved, and it seems to have been arranged that a respectable committee, under the chairmanship of Robert Jones, should in due course, present it to the electors at a public meeting. Almon himself, now seems to have taken a back seat. (3)

On 29th August some 7,000 people attended the meeting, held in Westminster Hall, under the chairmanship of Sir Robert Barnard. It is said this was the first time the Hall was so used for a public meeting, and the location was doubtless chosen deliberately with an eye to its effect on the ministry and parliament. Westminster's current representatives were conspicuously absent.

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(1). ibid. pp.120-22.
(3). see next page
conspicuously absent. Again approved, the petition was signed by 5137 inhabitants and, in due course, presented to the King by Barnard and Jones in December. (1).

In the meantime a London Livery meeting and a number of other meetings had been staged in the country. In most cases, one sees associates of Wilkes or members of the Bill of Rights Society actively engaged in their promotion, Whig leaders lending their support where they had influence, and conservative elements opposing in vain. Numbers of them, like that of Westminster, called for the dissolution of Parliament. Excitement, which had remained great throughout the summer and autumn months during which Parliament had remained prorogued, mounted as the time for its meeting in January approached and it was recognised that discussion of the petitions, which had been presented, could no longer be avoided. (2).

At the same time, it is clear that conservative opinion in the country remained steady, and there were many who agreed with Dr. Johnson in viewing the petitions, not as in any sense the true feeling of the country, but the work of a knot of agitators. (3). After an attempt to ignore their existence was frustrated in parliament,

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(1). Annual Register (6th ed.) 1769, p.159. According to Place (27,849 f 99) it was the first time Westminster Hall had been used for a public meeting of electors.
(2). S. Maccoby op. cit. p.133.
(3). ibid. Dr. Johnson's opinion was expressed in a pamphlet, The False Alarm.
frustrated in parliament, ministerial spokesmen, one after the other, condemned them and those who produced them. Westminster's petition particularly was singled out for very scathing treatment by Thomas de Gray.

"Will any man say that the late petitions are promoted by men of wealth and probity.... The petition from Westminster is a demonstration to the contrary. Of 25,000 respectable inhabitants, twenty only of the rank of gentlemen could be found to countenance the petition. Every member of the house can tell by whom and by what means the Westminster petition was obtained. They know that a ferment was kept up by a few despicable mechanics headed by a base-born people, booksellers and broken tradesmen, the scum of the earth, unworthy to enter the gates of His Majesty's Palace." (1).

Such views, indeed, were representative enough, and ministerial spokesmen denied there was any genuine evidence of public grievances at all. But, withal there is truth in the denunciation of the petitions - that of Westminster included - as the work of a faction, and though it is more than likely that many who signed them, or joined in the meetings, were ignorant of, or little concerned with, the issues involved, yet it is clear that genuine feeling was expressed as well. Even in the metropolis it must have been difficult to have staged meetings unless reasonable numbers of men of intelligence and standing had been prepared to lend their support, and not even the combined efforts of parliamentary and extra-parliamentary opposition, could have sustained an agitation in the provinces and the metropolis for several years, on an entirely artificial basis.

Thus it was that, in addition to petitions, there came remonstrances. (1). Parliamentary and extra-parliamentary opposition groups are seen, at least publicly, to be in close co-operation. First, early in March, a Livery meeting voted a remonstrance, protesting at the total disregard of its earlier petition, and a few days later (7th March) a small meeting in Westminster was busy arranging a public meeting for a similar purpose. (2). On March 28th, a Westminster public meeting, again ignored by Westminster's M.P.s, also voted a remonstrance. Within half an hour it was presented by Barnard to the King, who received it with great frigidity. (3). Meetings in Middlesex and elsewhere produced further petitions, Further plans were made to produce yet another remonstrance in London. (4).

Meanwhile, an exceptional opportunity to make trouble for the ministry seemed to be unfolding in Westminster itself. One of her two representatives, Sandys, was called to the House of Lords on the death of his father, and a bye-election became imminent. Between the lines it may be read that the radical agitators had all along met with opposition from Westminster's representatives, who were both ministerialists, and their desire to secure a spokesman in Parliament had been increasing. The bye-election now played into their hands. (5).

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(1) S. Maccoby op. cit. p.139.
(2) Ibid. p.141.
(4) S.Maccoby op. cit. p.146.
Once again John Almon appears on the scene, addressing a meeting of electors held to consider the matter. He lamented that, whilst other petitions had been defended in parliament by the representatives of the places which had sent them, the Westminster petition had had to be defended by Sgt. Glyn of Middlesex. Westminster's representatives, "like true courtiers," had appeared to consider their constituents unworthy of their regard. He had, however, waited upon Lord Temple, suggesting the propriety of electing Sir Robert Barnard as a more worthy representative, and had received that nobleman's approval. He urged, as Place puts it, that Barnard be returned in the face of the Court, to show that they (i.e. the electors of Westminster) were not the "rabble and canaille" they had been described.

Almon's suggestion was accepted and the meeting duly agreed to ask Barnard to stand. Following the fashion set in regard to Wilkes, those present promised "they would pay all the expenses, he should not pay a guinea". When, on 24th April, conservative elements in Westminster held a meeting to set up Sir John Hussey Delavel, all appeared set for a fresh contest with the ministers which radical leaders must have hoped for. In the event, however, Delavel did not appear, and, no ministerial or other

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(1) Place Papers B.M. Add. Ms. 27,849. f.101.
(2) Place Papers B.M. Add. Ms. 27,849. f.102. The word's are Place's. Place added: "When in 1807, I interfered in the Westminster election, I had never heard of the proceedings respecting Sir Robert Barnard, yet, in the most important particulars, the proceedings are similar, the principal difference (being) that the electors were countenanced by some of the principal nobility, while we, in 1807, were countenanced by no person of any political importance."
no ministerial or other candidate coming forward, Barnard was returned unopposed on April 30th. (1).

The action of the electors in returning Barnard in the stronghold of government itself, was inevitably cried up as a great popular triumph. (2). It needs, however, more careful refinement. Doubtless the demonstration of feeling in the capital was far more genuinely 'popular' than many apparently similar demonstrations earlier in the century had been. Further 'the people' at this time were very far from acting solely under the direction of parliamentary opposition groups. Temple and other Whig leaders might take a close interest in affairs, might even lend their influence on the side of the radicals. But the extra-parliamentary agitation had come to have a distinct leadership and a momentum forever tending to take a course more extreme than parliamentarians could sincerely approve.

Granted all this, however, it is evident that the return of Barnard is to be seen as a 'popular' triumph only in a limited sense. There is no more evidence now than earlier in the century, that the ordinary electors did take, or could have taken, any significant part in the proceedings. Almost certainly, the fact that he was not opposed reflects, primarily, the desire of the recently

(1) Annual Register (6th ed.) 1770 p.101; Gentlemen's Magazine 1770, Chronicle, 24th April, for Delavel meeting.

desire of the recently reconstituted ministry to avoid yet another disorderly election in the centre of government, rather than a belief in the real strength of 'popular' feeling in Westminster, or, still less, in the necessity of bowing to it. Whig electoral influence must all along have figured largely in the calculations of both ministerial and radical leaders. That recognition that influence, exercised on behalf of Barnard, would be likely to make for a contest prolonged, expensive, and possibly damaging to their prestige, must in any case have weighed heavily with ministers. But all concerned must have seen, too, that a contest at that time would provide a further opportunity for agitation, which would rouse a clamour in Westminster for days, probably weeks, on end. In the circumstances, and the more especially since it remained evident that conservative opinion was not to be shaken, it cannot be surprising that the ministry, aware of the risks involved in a contest, should make a tactical withdrawal likely to weaken the effect of the radical campaign.

Though the agitation continued fiercely throughout 1770-71; though, indeed, combined opposition efforts succeeded in focusing considerable attention upon alleged 'secret influences' in government, yet it became clearer that the tide of sentiment was more and more turning in favour of the ministry. Further, though the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary opposition groups cooperated still and were to remain in loose contact throughout the seventies, yet it was at this stage that the fundamental difference in their aims became clearer. At the same time.
At the same time, division among the radical leaders themselves developed into an open breach. There were, doubtless, more positive reasons for the strengthening of the ministerial position by 1772, for, divided though the opposition might really be, the various groups composing it continued to attack the ministry, whenever opportunity offered. But dissension among the opposition is a factor not to be ignored. (1).

It was in May, 1770 that Burke's famous "Thoughts.... on the Present Discontents" first appeared as a 'Manifesto' of the Rockingham Whigs. It was almost immediately denounced by Catherine Macauley as presenting no remedy, nor programme, nor aim, save the restoration of a party, or faction, to power. (2). It is apparent she regarded it as not only a Whig effort to secure 'popular' backing for party purposes, but, as such, highly dangerous in its delusive effects on the public. She urged the only real remedy for present discontents was to provide a really effective check on the executive by reforming parliament. (3). Almost at the same time, it is clear, efforts were being made by at least a section of the radicals to manoeuvre Chatham and the Rockingham Whigs into committing themselves to push for Triennial Parliaments and a more full and equal representation - efforts which met then, and later, with little, or no, success. It is unnecessary to follow the divergence between Whigs and radicals at this point. For most of / the seventies the

(2). cf. Gentlemen's Magazine, May, 1770, pp.222-3, where Mrs. Macauley's 'Observations' on Burke's 'Thoughts' are printed.
the seventies the possibilities of joint action tended always to prevent that divergence becoming an open breach, and it is rather in the correspondence of the time that it is most apparent. In any case, many of the popular leaders would, in this period, have been content to secure agreement to a programme of reform, far more moderate than those, which, from time to time, they advocated publicly.

It was a few months later, that a fresh division appeared among the hitherto apparently united supporters of Wilkes. It would be tedious to recount the well known story of how city and parliamentary political rivalries, as well as personal animosities, led to the secession of the followers of Horne from the Bill of Rights Society, and the founding, after a violent public altercation in the press between Wilkes and Horne, of a new club - the Constitutional Society.(1).

Dissension first appeared openly at a public meeting in Westminster Hall, summoned in October, 1770 by Wilkes, who endeavoured to secure agreement to resolutions calling for Westminster's representatives to move for North's impeachment. (2). He was defeated by Sawbridge, an associate of Horne, who urged that not only was it certain to fail, but that its failure would hamper further opposition protests. Instead, he urged and secured the adoption of a new remonstrance, which called, inter alia, for triennial parliaments and the removal of ministers. In view of the dissension at the meeting itself, and

the widening of the breach thereafter, it cannot be surprising that, by the time it was presented to the King by Barnard, it was received without reply. Between 1770 and January 1771, (1), the mutual hostility of the rival radical factions came into the open as a result of recriminatory letters written to the press. Only the opportunities for further agitation offered by a new quarrel with the Commons over the matter of reporting debates - a quarrel which brought the radical cause new martyrs, and which, once again, brought vast crowds to Westminster, seem to have delayed the breach becoming final earlier. But, by April 1771, it was complete. (2).

It would be mistaken however, to imagine there was no co-operation between the rival groups thereafter, and, indeed, from time to time, new groupings appear. Again, there was no obvious sign of diminished readiness or ability to stage popular demonstrations. At the same time, however, lack of unity must necessarily have tended to weaken the movement, and by the summer of 1772, if not before, popular clamour had largely subsided.

The agitation of 1769-71 may not have been conspicuously successful in securing a redress of grievances, but it is evident that numbers of men began to think more seriously than ever before about the question of parliamentary reform, as a prerequisite to the solution of other grievances. Efforts to secure widespread agreement to any particular programme might fail.

But the various schemes and proposals put forward in these years, and which continuing to appear thereafter, particularly when government action seemed high handed or incompetent, reveal a continued interest in the matter, which was stimulated by the American Revolution. Further they must have served, in turn, to stimulate interest and discussion and to keep the matter before the public so that, by the end of the seventies, calls for shorter parliaments, and a more equal representation of the people, however imprecise or limited in their appeal, had become familiar in many parts.

The various schemes propounded show little inventiveness, and owe much to the past. Shorter parliaments was an old cry, but, whether the demand was for 'triennials' or 'annuals', it was one with little or no appeal for parliamentarians or, indeed, for a majority in the country. Politicians feared not only a colossal increase in expense to themselves, but a continual uproar in the country and the intensification of electoral corruption. Reducing the number of placemen, or excluding them altogether from the Commons, were likewise old schemes. Their reduction in numbers was one thing, and numbers of politicians were by no means ill-disposed to the idea. But their removal, it was argued, would make the conduct of government impossible, and found scant favour. Calls for bills to reduce corruption in elections were also old. Few politicians took the matter very seriously, except in so far as they considered the possibilities of reducing the direct influence of the crown, since they believed corruption arose from the ignorance and venality of the people.
154.

and venality of 'the people' themselves. At the same time, the persistence of the demands, reflecting a growing dislike of the demoralising practices of aristocratic candidates, tended to give them a greater significance.

When it came to schemes for altering the composition of the Commons, the plans which were tentatively put forward, came to assume an altogether new note. Proposals to give additional representatives to the counties, and sometimes to the London area, in order to make the Commons more independent, were in line with the cries of the opposition, in the early part of the century. They received a certain guarded support among parliamentary circles, perhaps most obviously from Chatham and some of the country gentry. But the city radicals' preparedness to discuss the disfranchisement of rotten boroughs and the redistribution of their seats in the metropolis and among the newly rising towns and the counties, an idea never seriously taken up before, was a very different matter. (1).

(1). cf. Almon's Political Register, Jan. 1768, and Political Register Extraordinary, issued between March and April, 1768 for Almon's examination of rotten boroughs, and his demand for the redistribution of their seats in the metropolis and among the new towns on the basis of wealth and population. cf. also, Gentlemen's Magazine, March 1770, p.109, for Beckford's caustic comments on rotten boroughs to a Livery audience; James Burgh, Political Disquisitions 3 Vol.s (1774-5); Wilkes' reform speech and proposals in parliament, 1776, Bleackley op. cit. pp.305-6. Complaints about rotten boroughs were old, but their source at this time was new. cf. S.Maccoby op. cit. p.169, and p.311 note 2, who shows how Beckford and Horne Tooke, inter alia, tried to get Chatham to commit himself to agree to reforms involving redistribution of seats at this time.
Theoretical demands for a full and equal representation of the people based on a complete redistribution of seats and annual suffrage, which began to appear in pamphlet or book form in the middle seventies, were even more novel. (1). But, in the minds of most, these and other extreme radical schemes, attracted little more than academic interest, and not until the 1780s did they begin to receive a widespread and persistent publicity.

It is, however, in the means considered for carrying out schemes of reform, by mobilising public opinion, and by bringing pressure to bear on parliament, or by securing representation within it, that the most striking novelties appear. In 1766 a suggestion appeared that the mere discussion and the drinking of party toasts was not enough—that the people must associate, petition and instruct. (2). The Bill of Rights Society may not have been strictly popular in membership, may not, originally, have been conceived at all as a means of encouraging and coordinating public opinion. Indeed, it may well, in origin, have appeared little different from other tavern and dining clubs, which met to discuss political matters. But it seems evident that its members did, in fact, make no small contribution to the rousing and co-ordinating of 'public opinion', both in, and beyond, the metropolis. Further, they not only promoted petitions, but encouraged the instruction of members of parliament.

(1) e.g. James Burgh, op. cit. John Cartwright, Legislative Rights of the Commonalty vindicated: or Take your Choice 1776.
(2) H. Butterfield op. cit. p. 259 note 2. quoting from James Burgh's Crito p. 18.
members of parliament, the pledging of candidates for election, and were even prepared to handle an election campaign in 1771.

It is clear, in fact, that ideas of concerted popular action at elections had been germinating even before the famous Middlesex election. In 1768, Almon's 'Political Register' had urged electors to vote only for candidates, who publicly pledged themselves to a particular programme. In 1771, a publication carried matters a stage further, urging the promotion of associations in every market town, with a head body in London prepared to correspond and concert action, to re-assert the power of the people in elections. (2). In effect, it previewed the modern kind of political party with its network of constituency organisations, composed of men agreed to pursue or to vote for a particular policy. In the same year, the recommendations of the Bill of Rights Society - that electors in every County, City and Borough should only vote for such candidates as would subscribe to their programme - may have been influenced by this. (3).

The idea of concerted action, however, was not to be confined only to the occasion of an election. At the county meeting in York in 1769, it was urged that it was no use petitioning Parliament, unless measures were concerted to continue the agitation, if the petition were rejected. (4). In 1774-5,

(1) H. Butterfield, op. cit., quoting from James Burgh's, Crito cf. infra p. 157.
(3) S. Maccoby, op. cit., pp. 170-1.
Burgh's 'Political Disquisitions' urged the formation of an Association composed of delegates of locally formed groups, pledged to a scheme of reform. And, in 1766, John Cartwright's 'Take Your Choice' differed from Burgh, only in its readiness to see the Association embracing all Englishmen, and not merely property owners. (1).

Only a narrow borderline separated those who saw in such an Association, an electoral organisation, from those, like Cartwright, who saw it as a kind of super extra-parliamentary pressure group, which would force its claims on Parliament, and those like John Jebb, who were prepared to argue that, since an Association would be more truly representative of the country than parliament, then it might, in the last resort, supersede parliament altogether. As Professor Butterfield has pointed out, a new kind of political party was being envisaged—a party bound, not by ties of `family connection or influence, but, by agreement in principle to pursue a particular programme. In view of the physical structure of eighteenth century society the Association - of local corresponding bodies - was perhaps the only way anything approaching national feeling could be aroused and focussed. (2).

It seems likely that not only had thoughts of coordinating popular effort been under consideration, at least since the elections of 1768.

(1). James Burgh, op. cit.; John Cartwright, op. cit.
elections of 1768, but that any rate one group, the Bill of Rights Society, was prepared to make a much stronger attempt to do so at the next general election, which had to come before the spring of 1775. In the years 1773-4, there had been a number of opportunities for opposition demonstrations, within and without parliament, and again Westminster had been the scene of processions to St. James' with petitions from the City of London. It was, perhaps, not without reason that radicals had greater hopes of regaining 'popular' support and securing the return of numbers of their leaders to parliament.

The surprise dissolution of 1774 in anticipation of disturbing news from America, however, seems to have caught both the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary opposition unawares. The 'Wilkites' immediately re-issued their programme of 1771, and urged electors to vote for anyone who would not support it. At the same time, arrangements were made to set up candidates in all metropolitan constituencies and possibly in certain places elsewhere. (1).

In Westminster, Lords Mahon and Mountmorres, both Bill of Rights Society members of rank, were expected to have an easy victory. The appearance of Humphrey Cotes, however, a friend of Wilkes, as a third popular candidate, reflected the continuing personal feuds amongst the radicals, and hampered their election campaign. Further, a dispute arose with the Rockingham hams over the candidature of Edmund Burke, though, in the event, he did not stand. (2).

(1). H. Bleackley op. cit. p.286.
(2). H. Bleackley op. cit. p.287.
As it was, three 'popular' candidates all stood against undue influence and corruption in elections, and, at least publicly, refused to encourage the usual scenes of debauchery by opening beer houses for their supporters. No doubt it told against them. But the determining factors in their subsequent defeat seem to have been the strength of the influence of the Dukes of Northumberland and Newcastle - the former, at least, encouraged by George III - in favour of their respective sons, Hugh Percy and Thomas Pelham Clinton; (1) the lack of any effective radical electoral organisation; and probably the lack of Whig support. The Duchess of Northumberland, herself - in a manner to be copied by other great ladies of rank in subsequent elections - helped to sway bourgeois and tradesmen feeling in favour of her son and his co-candidate. (2)

The defeated 'Wilkite' candidates launched a petition alleging all manners of corrupt acts by, or on behalf of, their opponents, in an effort to publicise the cause, but it came to nothing. (3). Wilkes himself, and Glyn were, however, easily elected in Middlesex, and their supporters enjoyed a partial success in London and more limited success elsewhere. In all, it seems, Wilkes came to enjoy the support of some twelve M.P.; scarcely the number

(1). J.E. and W.P. Smith, op. cit. pp.334-5, show George III asking Lord North to press the Duke of Northumberland to persuade his son to stand, arguing that Mahon could not be a very formidable opponent, since he would not open any (public) houses. cf. also : Hist. MSS Commission 10th Rept. 6p.7., George III to John Robinson, Oct. 7th, 1774.
(2). H. Bleackley op. cit. p.287.
(3). T.H.B. Oldfield, Representative History .......... etc. op. cit. IV [Westminster]. 197 et seq.
scarcely the number hoped for, but, in view of the suddenness of the election, perhaps a better total than might have been expected. (1). But, though Wilkes was finally allowed to take his seat by a House anxious to avoid any further agitation, he and his followers were to make little enough impact on the Commons thereafter.

In 1775, the worsening news from America, and restiveness amongst hard hit business men in London, provided the city radicals with considerable opportunities for organizing popular protests out of doors. Their contemptuous reception by the ministry encouraged further demonstrations, and may well have encouraged American opposition too. But skilful tactful handling of the parliamentary situation by North, and genuine resentment against American actions, strengthened the ministry's hand and left the opposition, particularly the Wilkite opposition, with scant support.

Thereafter, and up to 1779, radical efforts flagged and it seems to have been recognized there was scant hope of staging effective demonstrations against the ministry either in London or Westminster, and still less hope of rousing widespread popular feeling against the conduct of government in the country at large. From 1776 until the end of 1777, desire to teach the Americans a lesson, strengthened, if anything, by the Declaration of Independence; a belief that the rebels could not hold out; and the comparative success of British arms, - all served to rally loyal

(1). H. Bleackley, op. cit. p.287.
served to rally loyal support behind George III and his ministry. Even under the stress of military failure at the end of 1777, and ministerial recognition that the unconditional surrender of the Americans was no longer to be expected, hope remained strong that all might not be lost and the entry of the old enemy, France, into the war seems at first to have inspired only further patriotic loyalty. (1).

Though the nation became more restless, as the situation grew tenser in 1778-9, yet the vast majority remained unwilling to admit defeat in America and, still less, to see George III at the mercy of the main Whig opposition body, the Rockinghams. So long, indeed, as they opposed the justice of the American War, and greeted British reverses with acclaim, the parliamentary opposition was regarded as purely factitious, and the radical opposition as highly dangerous. The secession of members of the Whig opposition from parliament during 1776-7-8, indeed, only increased dislike for them, among conservatives and radicals. Though it is interesting to notice Wilkes making his long promised reform proposals in 1776, and to see the Wilkite Lord Mahon’s unopposed return to parliament in a Westminster bye-election of the same year, yet there is little of importance to remark on in these and other attempts by the opposition groups to attract attention, save their failure to win support, and apparent failure to rouse interest, other than of a condemnatory or contemptuous nature.

The opposition, indeed, was not only weak but divided, both in and out of parliament. The Rockingham Whigs still stood / apart from Chatham and

(1) S. Nazzohr, op. cit. p. 284.
apart from Chatham and Shelburne, and were even divided amongst themselves on the issue of secession. The split among the City radicals still persisted, and both groups remained at odds over City politics. Apart from them, the dissenting theorists, Price and Priestly, stood really in isolation as individualists, as, too, did John Cartwright. There is little evidence of close cooperation among them, or others, interested in reform, though what there is, does show they were in touch with each other, and ready to discuss each other's views. (1).

Nor was there any real cooperation between the parliamentary opposition and the radical leaders, though they were, it seems, in loose general contact. As a group, the Rockinghams had no liking whatsoever, for the extra-parliamentary agitators, on personal or political grounds, though individuals among them, like the Duke of Richmond, might show their schemes greater favour. To radicals it remained clear that the Rockingham's chief constitutional interest still centred upon the weakening power of George III, and that they were no more ready to commit themselves to any plan of reform which involved trusting 'the people'.

For Shelburne and the Chathamites, however, the radicals had greater favour. The group led by Horne, who had broken with Wilkes, had long been in contact with Shelburne and so, too, had the theorists

(1) The memoirs and biographies of the radical leaders of this time (cf. bibliography in S. Hackett's, *English Radicals, 1762-85*), contain many of the letters they exchanged.
too, had the theorists Price and Priestly. (1). Cartwright corresponded with him and other Whig leaders, and his replies were more favourable than most. (2). Even the Wilkite group, kept from a parliamentary alliance with him because of his association with the rival city group, and by his personal hostility for Wilkes, for the most part gave him their general support. (3).

The greater favour shown for Chatham and for Shelburne at various times, and for the younger Pitt later, has an explanation depending only in part upon their apparently greater willingness to consider schemes of parliamentary reform. Their appeal depended largely on their apparent dislike of the politics of the aristocratic parties, on their refusal to become deeply involved in the main party rivalries of the time and on the interest they displayed in the efficient conduct of government. In particular, Chatham's powers of leadership and his interest in Empire, Shelburne's administrative talents and his interest in administrative efficiency, and the younger Pitt's own interest in progressive administrative and financial reform, all attracted the favour of those who increasingly disapproved of the inefficiency of eighteenth century government. The Rockingham Whigs never had, and never appeared to have, the same sincere interest

(2) F.D. Cartwright. Life and Correspondence of Major Cartwright. 1. 107 et passim. (hereafter, Life of Cartwright).
(3) H. Bleackley, op. cit. p.298.
same sincere interest in increasing the efficiency of administration, and it must have heightened the impression that their pursuit of economic reform was largely selfish.

The importance of these years in the development of the 'popular' movement, however, lies rather in what was going on behind the scenes. Though none of the various opposition groups succeeded in rousing a popular clamour at this time, yet it is clear that their ideas were kept before the public, and that they were spreading outwards, attracting attention here and there among individuals and groups in the country at large. Further, it is clear that discussion on possible schemes of reform continued, and that there were men, whose efforts to unite the parliamentary and the 'popular' opposition groups never relaxed. John Cartwright, for example, must have written hundreds of letters to Whig parliamentary leaders and to popular politicians or theorists, sometimes submitting his own proposals for reform as a basis for discussion, but always seeking to secure agreement upon some common plan of action to rouse the nation. (1).

But the limitation of Whig aims, the lack of enthusiasm shown by them for any scheme of joint action which involved parliamentary reform, and their belief that any attempt to stir the people must surely fail, brought all such efforts to nought. Many men, it seems, came to centre their thoughts more and more upon rousing the people by action independent of the Whig leaders. Some at least came to believe that it was positively undesirable that the Whigs should be allowed to influence a popular movement (1). Life of Cartwright, 1. 83 et passim.
a popular movement at all, since they would be likely to misdirect it for their own party ends. To them, the only hope of securing the reform they deemed necessary lay in the creation of an independent popular movement, independently led, and sufficiently imposing to carry the Whigs, and the country as a whole, along with it.

As the war situation and danger in Ireland and India worsened during 1778, spreading an, at first, indefinable sense of dissatisfaction and discontent in the country, numbers of men with varying aims, it is clear, stood ready to seize upon any issue which would provide them with an opportunity of crystallizing and harnessing it. Towards the end of 1779, letters appeared with increasing frequency in the press, urging that the time had come for popular intervention, and proposing an association be formed to co-ordinate action. Though there seems to have been no previously arranged scheme between them, yet, in the metropolis and in the county of Yorkshire, it is apparent that groups of men with widely differing backgrounds and aims, had each determined upon independent action. Whether they viewed it as a means of bringing influence to bear on members of parliament; whether as a means of influencing the next and subsequent elections; whether as a means of securing a representative body capable of superseding parliament altogether - their efforts to form a centrally directed association composed of locally-formed committees, illustrate the importance, which had come to be attached to the devising of a machinery which would mobilise, express and focus opinion in the country at large.
The story of the agitation of 1779-80 has been recounted in detail elsewhere, most notably by Professor Butterfield. (1). During its course, the hostility of the popular or radical leaders for the main body of the Whig aristocracy was to be greatly intensified. The chief acts of the drama came to be played in Westminster, both inside and outside, parliament.

Though the opposition groups in parliament had, from 1778 onwards, enjoyed greater support when they had attacked excessive government expenditure and the conduct of the war, there was no obvious sign in the autumn of 1779, of that support becoming widespread or popular. At the same time, however, restlessness became increasingly apparent in the nation, and the attempt of the metropolitan radicals to engineer a Middlesex election grievance and to generalize it in the manner of 1769, by calling for petitions in favour of the freedom of election, represented a fresh effort to harness and focus discontent. Though it is clear they were planning to promote a nation-wide association to forward their campaign, nothing however in the developments of the next few months suggests their efforts would have aroused much enthusiasm. On the other hand, the first moves in Yorkshire to summon a meeting on the issue of public economy roused almost instantaneous interest. (2).

(1). cf. H. Butterfield. op. cit. Professor Butterfield's book is devoted to the political scene and political agitation of these years. It will be evident that I have here drawn heavily on his valuable work.


(3). H. Butterfield, op. cit. p. 196 et seq.
The object of saving public money by an overall reduction in wasteful expenditure, not only had an obviously popular appeal, but it was, further, an object on which the various opposition groups could unite wholeheartedly. The parliamentary opposition groups signified their intention of taking the matter up, and their willingness to cooperate in doing so. The metropolitan radicals closely followed suit, professing their willingness to await the lead of Yorkshire.

Such genuine popular support and impetus as the agitation of 1779-80 came to possess, derived, it is clear, mainly from a growing, if inadequately crystallized desire, among those elements feeling the pinch of high wartime taxation, and the effects of wartime economic dislocation, to stop the American war. Its strength, further, was derived principally from substantial elements, men of landed property, and merchants. There is no evidence that 'the people', in the sense of large numbers of men from among the lower ranks of society, were ever concerned in it, whatever may have been their feelings at the time. Further, though numbers of men were prepared to support the opposition groups in order to see the pressure on government increased, there is little to suggest that their confidence in them had grown, or that many had any favour for their projects of constitutional reform.

If, however, the opposition leaders could have agreed, and cooperated to ensure, that the aims of the movement were limited to the securing of public economy, they might well have carried the day. But it is clear there were men who believed / the situation called for
the situation called for remedies altogether beyond the mere saving of public money, and who were anxious to see them applied. In their view the economic ills of the day were the consequence of a despotic and corrupt political system.

At one end of the scale were the Rockingham Whigs, who believed that economical reform was not only desirable in itself, but essential as a means of reducing the power of the Crown. At the other end of the scale, were those among the metropolitan radicals, who also believed governmental economy desirable and the reduction of the influence of the Crown essential, but who believed, too, that economical reform must be accompanied by a sweeping reform of parliament. Between them stood the Yorkshire leaders themselves, chief among them Christopher Wyvill, representing men who had also come to believe some species of parliamentary reform was an essential complement to economic reform. But, if they believed that the Whig remedy would prove quite inadequate, they had still less liking for the extreme proposals for parliamentary reform which were put forward by the City radicals. Men of property themselves, they still believed that the possession of property alone gave men a legitimate right to interfere in politics. Born into a different tradition, were those who were prepared to assert the rights of 'the people'.

Thus, from the outset, the movement came not only to embrace aims likely to rouse the strongest opposition in the country, but to suffer from the divisions of opinion among those who were to lead it. So long as an alliance seemed likely to promote
likely to promote their respective aims, the various opposition groups cooperated. When it became clear none of them were to achieve their aims, they separated amid mutual recrimination.

If, initially, the Rockingham Whigs welcomed the Yorkshire movement and were enthusiastic about encouraging it, it was in the belief that they would be able to control it, and would draw strength from its support. Partly because they were anxious to display the genuineness of popular feeling, and partly because they distrusted Whig aims and were anxious to prevent the diversion of the movement to party ends, the Yorkshire leaders showed themselves anxious to prevent the Whig leaders playing any part in their proceedings at all. Keen to see economic reforms carried and the power of the crown reduced, - ready to support the Whig parliamentary campaign to secure that object - they wished to present the Whigs with a 'popular' demand for moderate parliamentary reform, they would find it difficult, if not impossible, to ignore.

But, in the event, believing sudden and decisive action alone could be successful, they went far, too fast. Their schemes; and the encouragement these gave indirectly to the even extremer schemes of the metropolitan radicals; and their plans for an association to carry them through, not only outraged conservative opinion but frightened the waverers and even their own supporters. Moreover, they greatly antagonised the Rockingham Whigs, who not only objected to parliamentary reform, but particularly objected to being stampeded into it.

(1) H. Butterfield, cit., pp. 196 et seq. & pp. 220 et seq. / Shelburne indeed and a few
Shelburne, indeed, and a few individuals less closely bound to
the main Whig body, broke away on this issue, and showed the
popular leaders greater favour. (1). But it was the opposi-
tion of the Rockingham Whigs, which more than anything dampened
the movement. Nothing did more to encourage the hostility
and distrust of the popular leaders for the Whigs, than their
attitude in 1780 and the years which followed. The extreme
radicals came to attack them openly, and though Wyvill public-
ly continued to seek to win their cooperation, privately, it
is clear, he distrusted them absolutely. (2).

It was in Westminster that action came to be centred.
In Westminster was formed the most famous of all Correspond-
ence Committees - later Associations - set up in response to
the call from Yorkshire for places elsewhere to imitate its
action and to band together. Further, Westminster became the
meeting place of the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary
opposition leaders, and public attention was focussed not on-
ly upon parliament itself, but upon the meetings and discussions held outside it. Nowhere were the divided and conflict-
ing aims of the opposition leaders to be more clearly revealed
than in Westminster, or, more precisely in the Westminster
Committee itself. On no community was the impact of the pop-
ular movement to be greater.

The first Westminster Committee, unlike the later and
loose association of

loose association of Westminster electors to which the name came to be applied after 1807, was a formed association with established rules of procedure, set up, originally, for a specific purpose, and holding regular meetings. (1). Like other committees elsewhere, it was, strictly speaking, no more than one local cell in a movement directed by the Yorkshire leaders, and, in one aspect, was clearly intended to be an electoral committee. But, from the outset, its position in the capital, and the importance of its members, gave it an exceptional influence. Owing little to the initiative or energies of the average Westminster elector - though it is likely to have enjoyed the support of numbers of tradesmen and professional elements, - it was comprised principally of men representing all the diverse elements of the opposition. In particular, it comprised a strong group of metropolitan radicals, a number of individual radical theorists, and, at first, a strong body of parliamentary Whigs. In addition, many of the leaders of other committees and associations formed elsewhere were made honorary members. Its position, in fact, was such that the group which dominated it, could bring considerable influence to bear upon the movement as a whole - could, for example, exercise great influence upon the deputies representing committees elsewhere,

committees elsewhere, who met both formally and informally under Wyvill in the capital, to decide upon a course of action. Precisely for this reason, and because of the divided interests of its members, friction within it became inevitable.

At first, dominated by Fox and a small group representing the views of the Rockingham Whigs, the Committee professed its zeal for economic reform, and it is apparent that, for some time, Fox and his group sought to limit the movement to the securing of this alone. Prepared, it seems, to wait in the hope that the Whigs might be pressed to go further, the more radical elements, who had originally expected to dominate the Committee, were content for the moment, to accept Fox's leadership. But their patience proved to be limited, and, as Wyvill's aims came to be opposed by the Rockingham group, so tension in the Committee grew stronger. If the Whig element in the Committee remained strong enough to secure its official opposition to the plan of Association adopted by the deputy meeting in London, yet the majority of its active members now showed themselves openly and strongly to be in favour of more radical measures.

Fox, partly infected by the radicals' enthusiasm, partly, perhaps, concerned to retain the popular influence he had attained, went a long way, though not the whole way, with them. Wyvill, indeed, now more fully aware of the strength of conservative opposition and of the need to secure the cooperation of the great Whig leaders, was prepared to moderate the Association's demands in deference to them. But the extremest radicals...
of the Westminster Committee would no longer be held back.

The campaign, it is well known, reached its climax in Dunning's famous motion, concerning the increase in the power of the Crown. Even before this, however, it is apparent that opinion, swayed partly by North's adroit tactics, and partly by dislike of the behaviour of the opposition, was swinging in the ministry's favour. Further, the Yorkshire movement had already lost momentum as a result of its own divisions. Dunning's success was, as Professor Pares has said, the result of the willingness of the country gentry to express their general disapproval of the policy of the ministry by voting for a popular formula, where they were unwilling to favour the specific measures proposed by the opposition. (1).

But nothing could have led to greater confusion than the success of a motion deploring the Crown's influence in the very place where that influence was held to be all powerful. Not only was there no planned campaign to follow it up, but the whole force of the arguments of the Association, indeed the very case for an Association at all, was immensely weakened, if the House of Commons, constituted as it was, could act as it had. (2). Already numbers of the movement's supporters had begun to fall away, alarmed by the extravagant behaviour of the radicals. Now, many more began to lose their enthusiasm.

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G.S. Veitch, *op. cit.* p. 68.

The agitation flagged. Associations everywhere became less ready to move. Only in Westminster, where the influence of the metropolitan radicals was concentrated, was the campaign carried on strongly. Fox remained chairman of the 'Westminster Committee', and there was still a group within it prepared, like Wyvill and the Yorkshiremen, to support the Rockingham Whigs campaign for economical reform in the hope they might yet be manoeuvred into going further. (1).

But the radical Reformers, wary of Fox's sincerity, were no more ready to be restrained by him. They believed they saw the movement betrayed by those who counselled moderation, and who believed in half measures. Not only the Whigs, but /Wyvill himself,

(cont'd from foot of p.173.).

has further illuminated Professor Namier's thesis by showing how greatly mistaken were those contemporaries who supported the economic reform campaign on the assumption the power of the Crown was increasing. As he shows, not only had the numbers of placemen been steadily decreasing from the exceptional level they reached in 1761, but the Crown had lost, or was losing, control of a number of constituencies it had once dominated. For nineteen years in fact, the power of George III had been decreasing. As Professor Pares has pointed out, op. cit., it was still the indirect expression of 'public opinion' by the 'country gentry' which worried ministers most - not the 'public opinion' of the Yorkshire Association.

(1). G.S. Veitch op. cit. p.69 et seq.;
H. Butterfield op. cit. p.337. et seq.
Wyvill himself, who also advised caution, came in for their condemnation. As they saw matters the movement had failed, less because of tactical mishandling, divided leadership and conservative opposition, than because it had never been based fairly and squarely upon 'the people'. It was they who must be roused, they who must be made to realise that anything short of a radical reform would prove a delusion.

It was in this mood that a number of them came together to support Cartwright's long cherished scheme to set up a society which would disseminate political pamphlets and other literature, which would 'educate' the people to understand the nature of the Constitution, and teach them their proper role in it.

The Society for Constitutional Information, founded in April, 1730, as it has often been pointed out, was not itself popular. Its membership, which included numbers of wealthy aristocrats, was by ballot, and the subscription was high. But, there is reason to believe that the membership of substantial men was encouraged, partly to add prestige to the society, and partly to provide funds for the society's publications and programme.

It was the same mood that seems to have inspired the famous report of the sub-committee of the Westminster Association, appointed in the same month to consider a plan for preventing bribery and corruption at the now closely approaching election. The scheme it produced in May, when the defeat of Burke's economic reform

(1). Life of Cartwright. op. cit. 1. 120, shows Cartwright to have been in correspondence with numerous Reformers on the matter since 1778.
Burke's economic reform proposals was complete, and independent members of the commons were again strong in support of the ministry, reflected the extreme radical ideas of Cartwright and Granville-Spencer. Those who had drawn it up, had interpreted their terms of reference as widely as possible, and it embraced proposals for manhood suffrage, equal electoral areas, single member constituencies, annual parliaments, single day elections, arrangements for an electoral register, the ballot, and payment of members. (1).

In June 1780, the Duke of Richmond himself, motivated principally, perhaps, by irritation at the Rockingham's ineffectiveness, and desire to see the pressure on the ministry maintained, made reform proposals in the Lords which closely followed Cartwright's scheme of 1776. (2). At the same time, the Westminster Committee made arrangements to circularise its own scheme of reform in support of Richmond. (3).

But these moves could not have been made at a time more unfortunate for the cause of reform. If conservative hostility towards the popular leaders was already marked, it was to be enormously increased by the Gordon Riots - the outbreaks of anti-Catholic mob violence which, in June 1780, turned the capital into a battlefield, and parliament into a blockaded fortress, for days.

(1). W. Harris, op. cit. pp. 30-31; H. Butterfield, op. cit. pp. 341, et seq.
(2). G.S. Veitch, op. cit. p. 70, note 3.
(3). W. Harris, op. cit. pp. 30-31
fortress for days. If they were totally unconnected with the Yorkshire movement, yet nothing did more than this orgy of destruction to convince a majority in the country that any scheme of reform which involved placing trust in 'the people' must be disastrous.

In the circumstances, even the extreme spirits in the Westminster Committee considered it wiser to follow a more moderate course, and, for the time being, they accepted the lead of those, who now believed in cooperating with the Rockingham Whigs. Fox, at this moment, must have seemed to them a convenient figurehead, and, at least, he professed a readiness to go further than the rest of his party. Whatever the case, his candidature for Westminster in the approaching general election, first put forward in February, was now confirmed, and it was promised to carry him free of expense. (1).

When the election came in the autumn of 1780, however, conservative feeling was so strong, that a good deal of the money spent by ministers and the Court in contesting the election, might well have been saved. A significant division was apparent among the Whigs themselves, as well as between Whigs and radicals, and their success was limited. In Westminster, however, where £800 was contributed by the Court in favour of the two ministerial candidates, Admiral Rodney and Lord Lincoln, the Westminster Committee and the Whigs succeeded in placing Fox second in the poll. (2).

(1). W. Harris, op. cit. p. 32; S. Maccoby, op. cit. p. 298, note 3, quoting Horace Walpole's Journal of the Reign of George III, for his account of the Westminster meeting of Feb. 2nd 1780, where Fox was first publicly proposed.

In the first few months of 1781, Wyvill, moving cautiously, succeeded in arranging another, if very much smaller, deputy meeting in London. Held to discuss the launching of a fresh popular campaign to support a renewed Rockingham Whig effort to secure economic reform, great care was taken to secure agreement upon a moderate programme, which was to be recommended to parliament and advertised before the nation in the form of a petition to the Commons. Eventually, it was agreed to call only for the Repeal of the Septennial Act and the addition of a hundred county members. But though a petition on these lines was presented to the Commons, the House could not be persuaded to consider it in committee, and the programme attracted little attention in the country. Despite the efforts of the Yorkshire leaders, despite the work of the Constitutional Information Society, popular interest in parliamentary reform languished. (t).

Even the ultimate disasters of the American war, though stimulating the opposition and encouraging a number of petitions from the metropolis calling for peace, failed to rouse any widespread demand for reform. When the making of peace became inevitable, and North's ministry was finally driven to resign, it was recognised by all that only the Rockinghams could form a ministry to take its place and the strength of their position (cont'd from foot of p.177).

show the interest of George III, Lord North and Robinson in the Westminster election, and their recognition of the trouble and expense it would cost to keep Fox out. (f). S. Maccoby, op. cit. p.348. et seq.
their position, combined with widespread desire for peace, prevented any real protest against their imposition of terms upon the King in a way few in the country would normally accepted. Economical reform was no longer to be resisted.

But, whilst many must have felt that the reforms carried by the Whigs went too far, and accepted them only as the price that must be paid if peace were to be made, whilst others, including the Whigs themselves, were satisfied they had taken things far enough - the popular leaders, both moderate and extreme, were quick to press upon them the additional measures they considered necessary. The refusal of the Whigs to go further may have been politically sound, and, indeed, those who urged them to do so, can, by this time, scarcely have expected they would do otherwise. But it did nothing to lessen the conviction of radicals that all along the main concern of the Whigs had been to secure office.

Such feelings tended to draw them even closer to Shelburne, Richmond and the former Chathamite following, who had all along shown them greater favour, especially when the younger Pitt entered upon the political scene and appeared ready to take up the question of parliamentary reform. It must have been with no small satisfaction that they noted the strength of the Shelburne element in the ministry, and the growing rift between it and the Rockinghams, which the King's favour for Shelburne encouraged. (1). An attack by Burke on all parliamentary reformers drove

(1) S. Maccoby, op. cit. pp. 370 et seq.
parliamentary reformers drove the popular leaders still further away from the Rockinghams.

In May, Pitt came forward in parliament with a motion for a committee to enquire into the representation, and shortly afterwards he and a number of the prominent popular leaders met and decided to urge yet another campaign of petitions, for parliamentary reform. (1). A plan, it was agreed, should be debated during the summer. In the same month the Westminster Committee sent a deputation asking Pitt to be a candidate at a bye-election in Westminster. Though he refused, it was a supporter of his, rather than of Fox, who was chosen and subsequently returned unopposed - Sir Cecil Wray, the first president of the Constitutional Information Society (2). Then, in July, Rockingham himself died, and the efforts of Fox to preserve the ascendancy of the Rockingham group as against Shelburne, tended to rouse even stronger support for the King's decision to call upon Shelburne to form a new Ministry, in which Pitt was included.

It was not without optimism that popular leaders could view a situation which brought those, who had favoured the cause of parliamentary reform most, to power, and sent numbers of its chief opponents into opposition. Though Cartwright, at least, was disposed to be cynical about the scant likelihood of pledges, made while out of office, being redeemed, yet both Shelburne and Pitt

(1). G.S. Veitch, op. cit. p.85; W. Harris, op. cit. p.37 et seq., referring to minutes of the Westminster Committee shows how Reformers cultivated him and tried to persuade him to agree to stand for Westminster at the next election.

(2). W. Harris, op. cit. p.38.
Shelburne and Pitt seem to have given reassurances that they would favour the cause of parliamentary reform, and throughout the summer the popular leaders both gave, and encouraged, support for the ministry. (1). The already planned petitioning campaign for reform, launched at a Westminster meeting in July, was thus aimed at strengthening Shelburne's hand. (2).

But whilst Wyvill's and the Yorkshire Committee's method of procedure, - which embraced careful efforts to sound out opinion all over the country in order to find an acceptable formula - showed moderation and tactical sense, the extremely radical tone of petitions produced in the metropolis, the Constitutional Information Society's distribution of extremist literature, and the attention which Cartwright was devoting to securing petitions from the 'unrepresented' among the lower orders in the provinces, all served to scare the moderates. (3).

By December, Wyvill had found it impossible to secure agreement on a plan of reform. Anxious to preserve the appearance of unanimity, he was also anxious to calm the fears of moderate men, by making it clear there was no intention of attempting to dictate to the Commons. Therefore he urged the adoption of a form of petition, moderate in tone and general in its recommendations,

(1). G.S. Veitch, op. cit. p.94; Life of Cartwright 1, 146-7.
In a letter to his wife Cartwright speaks of Shelburne having pledged himself to 'us' by 'word and interest'; cf. Rev. C. Wyvill, Political Papers IV, 195-6, for a letter of Lord Surrey to Wyvill referring to Pitt's promise to support parliamentary reform; and IV, 191, for a letter of Wyvill's announcing receipt of a note from Pitt, reassuring him of his intention to hold by his professions.

(3) ibid, and note 3.
in its recommendations, which would be ready for presentation by the spring of 1783. On December 19th, the Yorkshire freeholders voted a moderate petition which Wyvill and his supporters thereafter, published as a model. Lest the general terms in which it asked for reform be held to infer sweeping changes were sought, four points were put forward to make clear their extremely moderate aims. (1).

How far the popular leaders would have agreed on a definite programme, had there been a serious chance of pressing any programme successfully, cannot be known. Certainly, a large number of meetings in many places did adopt the Yorkshire petition as a model, and the campaign in the country certainly appears to have been developing. Long before the reaction of the country could be adequately gauged however, long before Wyvill's campaign was intended to reach its climax, a development occurred, which completely altered the parliamentary reformers' prospects. (2).

Shelburne, weak in the commons since he had no strong party of his own behind him, and concerned with pressing affairs of state, had little time to spare for the question of parliamentary reform. But, whether or not he was losing interest, whether or not he would, in due course, have taken the matter up had he had a chance, matters less than the fact that he was given no opportunity to make clear his attitude or intention either way.

or intention, either way. In February, 1783, the famous or infamous Fox-North coalition made his position untenable, and he resigned.

The coalition, and the furore which followed its accession to power, profoundly affected the subsequent course of the reform movement, and the political outlook of the radicals.

More immediately it was to lead to the wrecking of Wyville's campaign. It may well seem that that campaign had had little chance of success. At most, popular desire, at the end of the war, was for peace, order and economy, rather than for parliamentary reform. At the same time, the breach which now came between the popular leaders and the Whigs, and the alliance of the former with the Court, made quite certain it would fail. By the time the political crisis, occasioned by the coalition, was over, the country as a whole, anxious above all for a return to normalcy, was apathetic about reform.

Taking a longer term view, however, the effect it had on the attitude of Reformers, and upon sections of the population, hitherto politically inactive, not only influenced the character of the later reform movement, but helped to bring it into existence.

Much has been written about the coalition, and the story of the events of 1783-4 is familiar. George III's early failure to keep the coalition at bay and his subsequent and successful efforts to secure its dismissal; Pitt's assumption of power with a parliamentary majority against him; the subsequent parliamentary swing in his favour.
parliamentary swing in his favour and the general election which made him secure - all are well known features, recently and illuminatingly re-discussed. (1).

There can be no doubt that it caused widespread and strong disapproval among men of all classes and provoked intense anger among Reformers. Impossible though it is to think that 'public opinion', far less popular desire for parliamentary reform, either did or could have played any direct part either in securing the coalition's downfall, or in elevating Pitt to power, yet it is impossible to doubt that national feeling, and such 'public opinion' as did find expression, was strongly on the King's side in this decisive battle of his reign, and that a growing genuine 'popular' feeling against corruption did exist. (2).

It is of course apparent that other interests beside the Reformers came to have their own particular reason for seeking to whip up feeling against the coalition, and in favour of Pitt. Conservatives generally, for example, taking the diametrically opposite view to Reformers and believing Fox likely to throw power into the hands of 'the people' for his own purposes, were equally ready to denounce his self-interest, and to encourage suspicion of his corrupt intentions. Again, in the capital particularly, popular clamour owed part of its force to the efforts

(1). By R. Pares, op. cit. pp.122 et seq.

(2) cf. infra. Sect 1. pp.41-44.
of its force to the efforts of vested interests, outraged by Fox's India Bill, to create the belief he was seeking, by corruption, to establish himself as a despot. Again too, merchants and business men elsewhere, with little faith in the administrative talents of either North or Fox, and coming to believe Pitt alone able to restore discipline and order to the administrative machinery of the country, were equally ready to encourage popular suspicion of the coalition.

But it must be impossible to explain adequately the tremendous excitement aroused in the country or even the clamour in the capital, solely by reference to the attitudes and activities of sectional interests. Account must be taken too, of the attention which, for years, had been focussed upon the whole question of political patronage and corruption, and of the distrust which, over a considerable period, North, and for different reasons, Fox and the Whigs, had already inspired. The cry against corruption would scarcely have been taken up so rapidly, the agitation in the capital would not have been so strong, had not genuine anger and suspicion already been aroused. Neither Tory nor radical elements, nor the great body of moderate men between, were yet ready to see the King made a puppet. Still less, were they ready to see the coalition in power in his place.

Whatever the reaction of particular interests, and of the nation as a whole, whatever the effect that reaction had upon subsequent developments in the political sphere, it is more important here that consideration be given to the /reaction among Reformers
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reaction among Reformers and its effects on the character of the reform movement, subsequently. Bitter at the sudden turn of events, and believing North and Fox, equally, to have been moved solely by party advantage, it was, nonetheless, the Whigs for whom the Reformers felt the greater anger and contempt. Though they had long distrusted the Whigs, the shock of their coalition with North was no less bitter when it came. That North, whom they had long detested as a mere Tory office seeker, should have been willing to accept support from any quarter in order to regain power was only to have been expected. That Fox and his Whig followers should now have been willing to join with him, long their greatest enemy, at the very time when the people whom he and they had so long encouraged to demand reform, were still looking to them for leadership, appeared to them a far more barefaced demonstration of self-interest than they had expected. Nothing, even had it been calculated to do so, could have done more to complete their distrust of the Whigs. Nothing could have done more to influence their political thinking and to destroy utterly their faith in parties.

Until developments could be seen more clearly, the Reformers, though turning more and more to Pitt, who continued to show willingness to press their cause, did not break openly with the Whigs. Whilst George III desperately sought a way out of the trap in which the coalition held him, Wyvill and his supporters went ahead arranging for petitions to be presented to parliament. Not until after Fox and North had assumed office, not until May when,
office, not until May, when, despite Fox's support, Pitt's very moderate reform proposals were heavily defeated by North, did they denounce the Whigs and declare openly in favour of Pitt.

Thereafter, whilst George III made efforts to rid himself of the ministry and Pitt himself prepared to assume power, Reformers did everything possible to sway opinion in his favour, and continued to do so during the period when he and his followers stood heavily outnumbered in parliament. By the time Pitt was ready for a dissolution, they had made arrangements to cooperate with the Court in the subsequent general election.

The view they sought to impress is clear enough. The Whigs had betrayed 'the people' and were seeking to establish a parliamentary despotism. They had all along been seeking to force themselves on the king and to delude 'the people'. They were now - contrary to the will of both - trying to maintain their hold on parliament. Denying the right of the King to change his ministers, they were, by contending against a dissolution, denying the right of 'the people' to choose their representatives. Pitt, conversely, represented the choice of both king and country.

Impossible though it may be to assess, or even to estimate, with accuracy the amount of genuine support the Reformers won, it is, nonetheless, important to emphasise that it was again in Westminster, as much as outside as inside parliament, that the chief acts of the drama were played. Fox was not only one of the city's representatives, but chairman of the foremost reforming body.
foremost reforming body in the Kingdom - the Westminster Committee. It was in Westminster that the reaction of Reformers could most clearly be seen. It was on Westminster's inhabitants, it must seem, that the political controversy occasioned by the coalition had the greatest impact.

Thus, long before the Reformers broke openly with the Whigs, the growing strain on their relations became apparent in the meetings of the Westminster Committee. By far the larger number of the Reformers came to look to Sir Cecil Wray as leader and deserted Fox altogether. (1).

In May 1783, after the failure of the petitioning campaign, the Committee split completely. The Westminster Committee remained in existence until 1785, but those who attended, appear, and appeared, far more clearly in the character of 'Foxite' Whigs.

During the period when Fox and North in parliament were, as their majority gradually dwindled, fighting a strong rearguard action, it became more and more obvious that the 'independent' Reformers were gaining, and the 'Foxite' Reformers losing, strength. While addresses and meetings were held in the capital to demonstrate feeling in favour of Pitt, both in London and Westminster, Fox found it increasingly difficult to get a hearing from the very 'public' who had formerly acclaimed him.

When, in due course, the general election came in March 1784, it was again in Westminster, Fox's own constituency, that the developments and issues between the opponents and the supporters of the coalition could most obviously be seen. Reformers and the Court interest had come together to support Hood and Wray jointly.

For forty days the noisiest, longest, most violent, most bitterly contested and, in many ways, most fantastic of all eighteenth century elections between Fox and his opponents, was fought until both sides and their arguments were exhausted.

While Tories and Reformers stressed the importance of preserving the prerogatives of the Crown and the rights of 'the people' against a self-interested faction, the 'coalitionists' emphasized the importance of preserving the supremacy of parliament against the interference of the Crown as the 'defender' of 'the people'. Both sides repeatedly and incessantly claimed to be defending 'the people's' interests. For months thereafter, the issues were kept alive by the famous and protracted scrutiny, demanded by Reformers in an effort to prevent Fox, who, by the narrowest of margins and after intensest of efforts, had come second in the poll, from being returned. (1).

However strongly some of them may have detested the necessity of having had to campaign alongside 'courtiers', Reformers had perforce to take comfort from Pitt's assurances, given before the election, that he would bring forward a measure of parliamentary reform as soon as possible. Cartwright, at least, had long believed his aims too limited, and particularly disliked his apparent refusal to urge the repeal of the septennial act. But Pitt was now the only man who could help them. (2).

Thus a renewed effort had been made to launch yet another petitioning campaign for reform, partly, doubtless, to encourage him, partly, to strengthen his hand at his own request. Once again Wyvill had procured a Yorkshire meeting, and arranged for a petition to give the country a lead. (3). But it became rapidly clear that desire for parliamentary reform was again dwindling and the country becoming apathetic. No petition at all could be secured from the unrepresented rising industrial towns, which, Pitt was now prepared to agree, should have their own representatives. Apart from the probability that the influential manufacturers in them had all along been primarily concerned to secure the peace and economic stability which Pitt seemed able to offer, the incredible scenes at the Westminster election - the crowds, the riotous mobs, the disorders - must, in a fashion similar to the Gordon Riots, have done much to encourage a belief that the 'costs' of election were too high to make the direct return of representatives worthwhile. (4).

Thus, when Pitt made his promised parliamentary reform proposals in 1785, it was easy to argue against them that there was insufficient evidence of a demand for reform, to warrant their consideration. As is well known, Pitt was, thereafter, to drop the matter completely. (1).

Thereafter, too, Reformers, unable to agree in supporting Pitt's proposals, in so far as they involved compensation to dispossessed borough owners - a principle which the majority detested - and disheartened by public apathy, tended to cease agitating for parliamentary reform. Some disappear from the political scene altogether; others, interested themselves in special causes, such as the abolition of the Slave Trade, the repeal of the Test Acts, or the position of Catholics.

Though diminishing in numbers, as time went by - for his tax programme was far from popular - some Reformers still supported Pitt. Others may for a moment have come to have renewed hopes of, if not trust in, Fox, if only because he was, and for ever seemed likely to be kept, in opposition. Certainly, Fox might once again appear to be looking for popular support.

But, in 1788, the attitude of both Pitt and Fox towards the Regency question, and the corruption which followed the spending of fantastically large sums of money, by Pittites and Foxites in a Westminster bye-election, seems to have turned many of them

(1). S. Maccoby, op. cit, p. 441.
many of them finally against Pitt and Fox equally. For all their fine phrases about 'the people' it seemed clear to them both parties were interested solely in power, were equally ready to trample upon them. (1).

More and more, it seems, Reformers came to the view that, not only was it not worth cultivating the parties, but positively dangerous to do so, since it would hinder 'the people' from seeing what seemed clearly the fact – that no party men would ever take up their cause. It was necessary to take more positive action to warn 'the people', necessary to give them a more positive lead against all aristocratic 'factions'. (2).

The first Westminster Committee died with the Yorkshire association. For a short time, there was, after over a decade of restless popular agitation, comparative calm in Westminster. It is, however, of first importance to recognise what, between 1760 and 1785, must have been going on beneath the surface; what must still have been going on thereafter.

If, in the period up to 1760, the popular agitation of the 'Patriot' opposition played an important part in stimulating the interest of the substantial middle class elements, and had brought them to take active part in politics, so, in turn, after 1760, the popular agitation of the middle class radicals was to stimulate men of lower middle class station – craftsmen, journeymen and lesser professional – until they, too, became politically active.

(1) S. Maccoby, op. cit. cf infra, sect. 1, pp. 2 et seq. and 41 et seq.
(2) cf. infra, sect. 1, pp. 10 et seq., and pp. 90 et seq.
There is - as indicated already - little to suggest that the mass of Westminster's smaller shopkeepers played any but the part of onlookers in the events of this period. There is certainly no sign of them acting independently; nothing to show their feeling had any influence on politics; nothing to show that it was even mobilized. It must seem in elections they had remained so many pawns. Yet it is equally evident, that the political interest of individuals amongst them was being stimulated the whole time, particularly by the Yorkshire agitation for which Westminster provided the principal stage.

It seems, however, that it was the Fox-North coalition, which more than any other single factor quickened the political interest of large numbers of the more substantial of the 'lower orders' (1). To men, who listened to the Reformers and the Whigs denounce corruption and tyranny and thunder at North's ministry, who had had their imaginations fired by Fox's declarations of the rights of 'the people', it came both as a shock and a stimulus to their political thinking. Others who, perhaps, had hitherto paid little attention to the political agitation, are likely to have found their interest roused by the tremendous furore it caused. Disillusioned and bewildered, - their reaction is discussed more fully below, (2) - they began it seems, to discuss matters more amongst themselves.

(1). for John Thelwall's reaction and the reaction of many others cf. Life of Thelwall by his widow, p.64. and below p.148. It was the coalition of 1783-4 which first brought him to take active part in politics (Life p.43). cf. also, infra Sect.1, pp.11-13.

(2). cf. infra Sect.1, pp.41-44
Upon the minds of men whose political interest had so recently been sharpened, the Westminster election of 1784 must have had a tremendous effect. For forty days, they were virtually forced to be aware of politics. On the one hand, they could not help but be conscious of the bitter controversy on the hustings and in the press - of a controversy in which the fundamentals of government and the working of the constitution were laid bare. On the other, and even if they did not understand the arguments of politicians, they must have become bewildered at the way all of them throughout the election spoke of the rights and liberties of 'the people' - yet bribed them, used pressure upon them, hired gangs to bully them, debauched them and - after the election - ignored them. More than any other election in the eighteenth century, it was the violence of the 1784 election which awoke a genuine and really popular dislike amongst Westminster's 'lower orders' for the behaviour of aristocratic candidates and their supporters - a dislike to be greatly intensified by the similar scenes in a bye-election in 1738 - again between Pittites and Foxites. (1).

Though the great clamour in the capital died away, their interest it is clear did not die. On the contrary, the appearance of new popular debating societies after this time must suggest it was steadily increasing. (2).

(1) A. Stephen, Memoirs of Horne Tooke I.51.
(2) Thelwall's Coachmaker's Hall debating society was functioning in 1784. cf. Westminster Election of 1784, p.352.
By the time the French Revolution broke out, there were, it would seem, many men among the so-called 'lower orders' in Westminster, politically alert, discontented with aristocratic government, suspicious of both Pittites and Foxites - but so far without organisation or leadership to inspire them to voice their feelings in public, or to take political action themselves.

The coalition of 1784, by dividing Reformers from the Whigs, had destroyed the first Westminster Committee. The distrust of aristocratic parties it helped to inspire - distrust encouraged when Pitt and his followers too, seemed to have lost interest in 'the people', in the struggle to preserve their power - was to lead to the emergence of another and very different 'Westminster Committee', formed by men from among the 'lower orders' of Westminster itself.