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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Anthonette Lynne McDaniel entitled "Thus Has the People Gloriously Triumphed": Petitioning, Political Mobilization and the Campaign to Repeal the Orders-in-Council, 1808-1812. I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in history.

John Bohstedt

Dr. John Bohstedt, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
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Accepted for the Council:

Associate Vice Chancellor
and Dean of the Graduate School

"THUS HAS THE PEOPLE GLORIOUSLY TRIUMPHED:"
PETITIONING, POLITICAL MOBILIZATION
AND THE ORDERS-IN-COUNCIL REPEAL CAMPAIGN 1808-1812

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

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Anthonette Lynne McDaniel

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents

Bettie and Walter McDaniel

and

my husband, Brian Crowson

Their Support Made This Dissertation a Reality.

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ABSTRACT

In 1812 citizens throughout Britain petitioned Parliament for a repeal of the Orders-in-Council, trade restrictions aimed against Napoleon's continental empire. A deepening trade depression led the petitioners to argue that the Orders must be abandoned, despite the government's support for them. The clamor for change forced the government to relent and on 23 June 1812 the measures were repealed.

This work examines the petitioning campaign undertaken in the provinces in 1812. Specifically, it explores the process of petitioning and political mobilization, the mechanisms used in gathering support and the networks and relationships which were an intricate part of the capacity of communities to respond. The work focuses on Birmingham, Liverpool, and Manchester. While these cities displayed a high degree of political awareness and popular political participation, each responded to the repeal campaign differently. Their varying responses stemmed from the sources of political mobilization and longstanding local conflicts. The repeal campaign involved complex local rituals and resulted in the mobilization of intricate community-wide social, political, religious, and economic networks. This campaign demonstrates

the importance of petitioning in popular politics and also emphasizes the role of political mobilization in community political life.

This study also examines politics at Westminster and the role of the repeal campaign in the political transformation already underway by 1812. The adoption of the successful repeal campaign by the Whigs shows a shift was underway from inchoate political factions to national political parties. Not only did the Whigs demonstrate the power of popular politics in undermining governmental policy, but by adopting a campaign favored by many merchants and manufacturers, the Whigs were developing a middle class constituency crucial to their victories in later decades.

Finally, the study examines the role of the provincial press in the process of political mobilization. This study strongly challenges the long-held assumption that the provincial press lacked the power to influence community opinion. Editors disseminated knowledge and also took a very active part in mobilizing the local populace. The provincial press along with community networks helped to create the awareness and politicization transforming Britain in the decades before the Reform Bill of 1832.

PREFACE

The history of Britain's response to events in Revolutionary France has long been the subject of great controversy among historians. A review of works written about this key period from 1792-1815 reveals, however, that most historians focus on three areas, Britain's response at home and abroad to the French Revolution from 1792-1795, the conduct of the long war itself from 1792-1815, and the economic consequences during the war particularly the attempt by Britain and France to use trade restrictions as a major component in their strategy for victory.

British domestic development after 1795, therefore, has traditionally received scant attention. The reasons for this are clear. First, many historians view the suppression of reforms movements by the Pitt government by 1795 as so successful that few domestic issues of merit bear discussing in the subsequent twenty year period. Thus many turn to post-war Britain and the renewal of reform for an understanding of events leading to the Reform Bill of 1832. Political historians meanwhile have often viewed the Tory administrations of Addington, Portland, and Perceval as uninspiring and largely unimportant. The Whig opposition in

the period also offered little because of their ineffectual leadership and their failed attempts to gain power. Finally, the war itself so overshadowed all other events during this period that much research has centered on it.

Unfortunately, the lack of attention paid to British domestic development in the first decade of the nineteenth century has left crucial gaps in understanding how important that period really was to the subsequent development of British political life. This study, then, will try to shed some light on this period by concentrating on an important but largely ignored petitioning campaign against the Tory government's trade restrictions, the Orders-in-Council.

The Orders-in-Council were an essential part of wartime policy after 1807. Initially a response to Napoleon's Berlin and Milan decrees, the Tory government at Westminster came to see the restriction of trade to the continent as a major war weapon. The government did not seem to consider adequately, however, the effect of this policy. Neutral nations, like the United States, became embroiled in the policies of these belligerent even though they only sought peaceful trade. At the same time, the Tories did not consider the effects of the Orders on middle class merchants and manufacturers in the provinces who depended on trade with the continent but more importantly with the United States.

The growing concern of these provincial economic leaders and the widening trade war led to a petitioning campaigns in

1808 and 1812. These petitions not only show the issues which concern these provincial petitioners but also provide the means for examining the political mobilization that gave communities the capacity to petition. This work examines the petitioning efforts in three provincial cities, Liverpool, Birmingham, and Manchester. Chapter One provides a narrative of events surrounding the petitioning campaigns of 1808 and 1812 and also examines those events in the late eighteenth century which helped to give these petitioners and their opponents a specific world view. Political reform efforts in the 1780s and 1790s are examined as well as attempts to create merchant and manufacturer political unity and agitation against Anglican political domination. Since the Orders-in-Council repeal campaign also provoked a strong response by supporters of the measures, issues such as the development of "Church and King" movements and other expressions of loyalty are also examined. Altogether it is argued that an understanding of the world views of the petitioners comes by first understanding their collective experiences before 1812.

Since petitioning was largely a community-centered event and involved issues of community popular politics, however, the majority of this work will focus on the petitioning campaign in three cities that were actively engaged in the issue of the Orders-in-Council.

Liverpool, Birmingham, and Manchester present striking examples of how communities perceived politics and how they

reacted to specific events. All three of these cities sent petitions opposing the Orders-in-Council and all three groups had a substantial number of governmental supporters. Yet each mobilized its populace in very different ways, ways which reflected the communities identities, their organizational networks, and their previous conflicts. It was not just enough for community leaders to support or oppose the trade restrictions. They needed a network and a local leadership to turn opinion into action. Thus this study examines those crucial networks and conflicts which provide the basis for political mobilization and concludes that popular political participation through activities such as petitioning was widespread, the populace was politically aware and that they did have the capacity to make their opinions heard even in an age of limited franchise.

In addition to contributions in understanding petitioning, political mobilization, and popular political participation, this study also examines the Orders-in-Council repeal campaign and political development at Westminster. Until recently, historians have largely ignored the transition underway in the House of Commons by the early nineteenth century. The repeal campaign, which becomes a major triumph for the Whigs and for one of its young leaders, Henry Brougham, demonstrates above all the shift from political factions to political parties. Factions, which centered around powerful political leaders like William Pitt and

Charles James Fox, dominated political life at Westminster throughout much of the reign of George III. Yet by 1806 both of these great leaders were dead and thus politics was in somewhat of a flux. No new leaders emerged to take the place of these giants. In fact, the successors to Pitt, Portland and Perceval were decidedly colorless men while the Whig leadership was under the control of ambivalent leaders like Charles Grey and William Wyndham Grenville. Thus opportunity arose for the creation of political parties, that is groups linked by ideology and not personality. The Orders-in-Council repeal campaign was an important movement in the development of these political parties. For by joining provincial merchants and manufacturers in opposition to this Tory policy, the Whigs were developing a new leadership of men involved with issues that reflected the concerns of a rising and powerful constituency, the middle class. The lesson of the victory of the petitioners against government policy will not be forgotten and Whigs will turn once again to middle class leaders for support during the crucial decades before the passage of the Reform Bill in 1832.

Finally, this study also examines the role of the provincial press and the Orders-in-Council repeal campaign. Most historians have denied that provincial editors shaped public opinion or developed ideas independent from London. The provincial editor, threatened by laws against libel, hampered by the demands of advertisers and limited by the

amount of profit generated by his small enterprise, has often been viewed as merely the disseminator of shipping and trade news and local gossip. This study reveals that this view is completely erroneous. Political mobilization centered on the press in all three of the cities. Editors were actively engaged in trying to gain supporters for and against the repeal efforts and used advertising, letters to the editors, and crossover reporting from neighboring cities in the struggle to sway opinion. The press in Liverpool, Birmingham, and Manchester was enormously important in making these campaigns a success or conversely, a failure. Thus, an examination of the role of the provincial press during this specific campaign reveals much about the working of these newspapers which has been previously ignored.

Altogether then this study concludes that petitioning was a crucial form of popular political expression in unreformed Britain but that an understanding of its role comes from an understanding of political mobilization, that is the capacity of communities to act and the webs, relationships and organizations that were utilized. Without this capacity for mobilization, petitioning efforts floundered even when there was strong feelings about the issue being debated. The repeal campaign also shows the important transformation occurring in national political life as well with the emergence of new leaders and budding political parties. Finally, the study seeks to resurrect the long-neglected provincial press whose

ability to help shape opinion was at the heart of the petitioning campaigns throughout the provinces.

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CHAPTER I

LOCAL IDENTITY AND NATIONAL PETITIONING: THE ORDERS-IN-COUNCIL REPEAL CAMPAIGN 1808-1812

On 23 June 1812 Viscount Castlereagh, Foreign Secretary in the Liverpool government, informed the House of Commons that the Orders-in-Council had been revoked. Although he claimed that this was a result of concessions made by the French, no one really took this explanation seriously. A national campaign of petitioning and an overwhelming body of evidence presented to Parliament by Henry Brougham had, in fact, succeeded in achieving the impossible: the abandonment of an important governmental wartime policy. In private, Castlereagh admitted that the government bowed to pressure but that "one does not like to own that we are forced to give way to our manufacturers."[1]

In the countryside, news of the revocation sparked an outburst of celebration. In Sheffield there was "ringing of bells and firing of cannon." In Coventry they roasted a sheep

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[1]For Castlereagh's speech see Hansard's Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 1st ser., vol. 23 (1812): 537-542, 545. Castlereagh quoted from Reginald Horsman, The Causes of the War of 1812 (New York: A.S. Barnes & Company, Inc. 1962), 258.

and in Hanley thousands gathered around a bonfire to celebrate the announcement. In Liverpool, Birmingham, and other cities that sent representatives to London to give evidence before the House of Commons' debate on the Orders, the returning representatives were welcomed home as heroes. Supporters of the repeal quickly organized banquets to thank political allies, particularly Henry Brougham, seen now as a supporter of all merchants and manufacturing interests. Finally, the Leeds Mercury announced to its readers that the repeal boosted wages in Lancashire and caused "more purchases in the Leeds Cloth-Hall . . . than there has been on any marketing day since the enactment of the celebrated Orders-in-Council."[2]

Contemporaries also understood, however, that more had occurred than the mere lifting of an onerous trade policy. Provincial petitioning, which produced a groundswell of public agitation against the governmental policy, demonstrated more than just fear for the economic futures of northern provincial cities. "Thus, at length, has the voice of the people gloriously triumphed over the strange infatuation of the men who preside at the head of affairs," announced the Midland Chronicle. It is an understanding of the variety of issues that accompanied the petitioning on these trade restrictions

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[2]Liverpool Mercury, 26 June 1812; Shrewsbury Chronicle, 3, 9 July 1812; Leeds Mercury, 27 June 1812, 4 July 1812.

that demonstrates both political mobilization and the formation of political ideology in these provincial cities.[3]

1. The Napoleonic Wars and Trade Restrictions, 1807-1812

Historians have generally viewed the debate over the Orders-in-Council in economic terms. Indeed, the system of punitive blockade begun in 1806-1807 with Napoleon's Berlin and Milan Decrees which placed restrictions on trade carried on between Great Britain and the continent has often been cited as the birth of modern warfare where whole populations suffered with the soldiers on the field of battle. Yet these decrees, along with Britain's retaliatory Orders-in-Council of 1807 and 1809, proved the embryonic state of these modern warfare tactics. Napoleon did not have the naval resources to blockade the Continent so the decrees had to be enforced from land. Thus, he had to depend in large part on co-operation from a host of conquered and client nations under his loose empire. In the British House of Lords, Lord Erskine scoffed that Napoleon might as well claim to blockade the moon as to claim a blockade of the continent in the Berlin and Milan decrees. Britain's trade figures seemed to justify such derision. From 1808 to 1810 merchants traded abroad without any serious consequences from the punitive measures.[4]

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[3]Midland Chronicle, 20 June 1812.

[4]The economic consequences of the blockades have been explored exhaustively especially by Eli Heckscher, The Continental System: An Economic Interpretation (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1922). For another general economic history of the blockade system see Francois Crouzet, L'Economie

Nevertheless, British retaliation to the French decrees produced much uneasiness in the provinces from the moment of its inception. In January of 1807 the Whig government known as the "Ministry of all the Talents" passed the first in a series of Orders-in-Council that defined Britain's foreign trade for the next six years. The first Order, which prevented trade between ports in the hands of the enemy, was a mild response to Napoleon's measures but future governments modified it with successive measures (more than two dozen in all) which created a complex system of blockade and licensing. In November of 1807 an Order-in-Council drafted by the Tory Portland government (1807-1809), maintained the right to blockade any port on the continent which was closed to British commerce although the government did not immediate seek to enforce this measure. In April of 1809 the government of Prime Minister Spencer Perceval (1809-1812) further tightened the restrictions by placing a tight naval blockade over a more restricted areas of the continent (from the Ems in Germany to Pesaro on the Adriatic to Orbitello in Italy).

It was obvious from the onset of these trade restrictions that neutral nations would be drawn inexorably into the conflict as Britain sought to enforce its blockade with its

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blockades on one provincial city see B.H. Tolley, "The Liverpool Campaign Against the Order in Council and the War of 1812," in Liverpool and Merseyside, ed. J.R. Harris (London: Frank Cass & Co., Ltd., 1969); and D.J. Moss "Birmingham and the Campaigns Against the Orders-in-Council and East India Company Charter, 1812-1813," Canadian Journal of History (1976): 173-188.

powerful navy and to take away the lucrative trade of neutrals that had been strengthened by the international commercial chaos produced by the war. To further complicate the situation and anger neutral merchants, the British government, particularly Perceval, determined to allow trade with Napoleonic Europe but only through a system of licensing which forced all ships bound for enemy countries to proceed first to a British port and transfer their goods onto British ships, leaving neutrals to become in effect British clients. Thus, after 1810 when the full system of restrictions was in place, not only was trade seriously interrupted by this confused system of blockade and counter-blockade, but the government was also rightly accused of using the war as a means of destroying neutral trade for British benefit.

The United States, the largest neutral carrier affected by these regulations, did respond. The Napoleonic Wars provided a significant boost to American trade. Both Britain and France allowed American merchants to exploit the European disruptions almost unhampered in the first decade of the war and this relationship seemed to satisfy all the nations involved. America was a major market especially for British goods. British exports to the U.S. peaked in 1808 at £8,613,124. The blockade system, however, ended this exporting boom. America's close trading ties with Great Britain coupled with a long-standing animosity toward the former mother country meant that the system of trade restrictions most

resented was Britain's. In December of 1807 President Thomas Jefferson responded to the Orders-in-Council by asking Congress to legislate a total embargo on all products exported from and imported into the United States. The relationship between the two countries degenerated from that point until the outbreak of war in June of 1812. Thus, Britain's war with France produced a totally unexpected enemy, the United States.[5]

2. The Petitioning Campaigns

It was the threat posed to foreign trade that was the catalyst to action taken against the Orders-in-Council throughout Britain. In the spring of 1808, Liverpool, Manchester, Hull, and London organized responses to the Orders-in-Council and the worsening relations with the United States. Their decision was to create a nationwide campaign of opposition to the Orders through petitioning. The petitioners realized, however, that they must have someone to represent their interests in London and they chose Henry Brougham, a

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[5]Tolley, "The Liverpool Campaign," 99. For Anglo-American relations in the decade before the War of 1812 see Reginald Horsman, The Causes of the War of 1812 (New York: A.S. Barnes and Co., 1962). One of the best accounts of the relationship between the United States and Great Britain between 1805-1812 still is Bradford Perkins, Prologue to War (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961). See also Herbert Heaton, "Non-Importation, 1806-1812," Journal of Economic History 1 (1941): 178-198; and Roger H. Brown, The Republic in Peril: 1812 (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1971).

More recently Donald R. Hickey has produced a scholarly volume mostly on the military aspects of the war in the United States. See Donald R. Hickey, The War of 1812 (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

young Scottish barrister and a well-known contributor to the Edinburgh Review who took special interest in economic issues.

For reasons we shall see, the campaign of 1808 was, in many ways, only a rehearsal for the much larger petitioning effort in 1812. First, economic conditions clearly had not declined enough by 1808 to create panic or to convince many cities that support of this effort was necessary. William Rathbone IV, one of Liverpool's leading merchants and organizer of the Liverpool campaign, lamented to William Roscoe, a fellow Liverpudlian and reformer, that in "Leeds, Birmingham, and Bristol, not a petition from either of these is to be procured though in the two former the suffering of all classes are (sic) deeply felt, widespread and rapidly increasing . . . In Liverpool, as bad as it is, I hope we are not quite so ignorant."[6] The petitioners also lacked a strong base of support in Parliament in 1808 to generate interest in their cause and to give them some grounds for hope of influence. Brougham, though an important spokesman, was not yet a member of Parliament. Thus, while the petitioners could be proud that they organized their protest without the guidance of London or Westminster, this independence sometimes led to unfortunate incidents. In Liverpool, for example, the lack of direction resulted in the rejection of their first petition by the House of Commons because it was too informal.

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[6]William Rathbone to William Roscoe, 23 March 1808, Roscoe Papers, Liverpool Records Office, Liverpool.

The petitions themselves also lacked sophistication in enunciating the complaints against the government. All five of the petitions (from Liverpool, Manchester, Hull, Cork, and London) were terse statements of opposition to the Orders. None expressed the particular distress in its city; in fact, their tone and similarity suggest that a model petition might have been circulated and copied.[7]

The 1808 campaign that yielded only five petitions also failed to change the Portland government's policy of retaliation. Yet, it was a crucial first step for organizers determined to pressure the government to end its retaliatory policy. The petitioners and their limited campaign forced the government in the spring of 1808 to hold hearings in the House of Commons on the issue of the impact of the Orders-in-Council. There, Henry Brougham, counsel for the manufacturers, demonstrated his prowess as a debater. Witness after witness came forth to give evidence of the destructive effect of the Orders, a weapon that Brougham turned to again in 1812. Though he didn't gain enough supporters to overturn the retaliatory measures, Brougham kept Parliament focused exclusively on this issue for several weeks during the spring

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[7]There is no concrete evidence to prove that model petitions were circulated in 1808. However, the similarity in wording and the close proximity of the time all five were introduced into the House of Commons does suggest the possibility. For Perceval's explanation of the rejection of the first Liverpool petition see his correspondence with King George III in Arthur Aspinall, ed. The Later Correspondence of George III, 5 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962-1970), 5: 36.

of 1808 and thereby earned for himself the admiration of government and opposition alike. Besides the obvious need for greater Westminster support, the 1808 campaign also proved that wider provincial support was crucial for ultimate success in repealing the measures.[8]

The economic condition of the country was very different in 1812. By 1811-1812 inflation and trade depression had devastated many provincial cities. Luddite violence broke out in Yorkshire, Lancashire, and Nottinghamshire. In addition, Anglo-American relations had deteriorated markedly; in February of 1811 President James Madison invoked the provisions of Macon's Bill No. 2 closing all trade between the United States and Great Britain.[9] Moreover, many Britons watched anxiously as a strong faction emerged in the United States Congress that seemed willing to risk war with Great Britain. While few Britons took seriously the military challenge of their former colonies, such a war would mean a steep escalation in Britain's international commitments and

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[8]Parliament, Journal of the House of Commons, vol. 67 (1812): 163.

[9]Macon's Bill No. 2 provided that the United States would trade with the warring powers but provided that if Britain or France revoked its restrictions trade would be closed with the other. Madison became erroneously convinced that France was prepared to lift her restrictions and thus closed trade with Britain in February of 1811 under the provisions of Macon's Bill No. 2. France continued to harass American ships on the high seas and the closing of trade with Britain only had the effect of leading to a further deterioration of Anglo-American relations.

even Prime Minister Perceval, who was decidedly ambivalent toward the United States, wished to avoid such an escalation.

The organizers of the 1812 campaign took advantage of the discontent, the pressures from America, and the lessons learned in the previous failure. Led again by Liverpool, the organizers of the petitions again sought the aid of Henry Brougham, by now House of Commons member from Camelford. Next, they sought to include more provincial cities in the petitioning process. The campaign found most of its support from the politically active Midlands and Northern England. In all, twenty-nine petitions against the Orders-in-Council were sent to Parliament from November 1811 to June of 1812. Liverpool, Birmingham, Leeds, the Stafforshire Potteries, Sheffield, Nottingham, Preston, Blackburn and a host of other manufacturing towns participated.[10] The leaders who organized the petitioning and signed their names most prominently in the advertisements in their local provincial press included William Roscoe, William Rathbone V, Thomas Thornely, and James Cropper from Liverpool; Josiah Wedgwood II from the Potteries; Edward Baines from Leeds; and Thomas Attwood and Richard Spooner from Birmingham. Many, in fact, gained their first experience in public petitioning and organization through this campaign. Attwood, for example, was

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[10]The petitions can be found in the Journal of the House of Commons, vol. 67 (1812). Here a brief summary of the contents of the petitions are given. Unfortunately, the original petitions perished in the parliamentary fire of 1834.

only twenty-eight years old when he led the fight in his native Birmingham against the Orders-in-Council.

The organizers of the repeal campaign also drafted petitions that reflected the specific concerns of their own populace. First, they addressed themselves to Parliament as representing the "merchants and manufacturers" of their town, setting themselves apart from the governing body or corporation and identifying themselves exclusively as the middle class.[11] In addition to the economic distress which all the petitions addressed, the petitions also became a forum for the expression of other concerns. In fact, four other issues are identifiable in the petitions. Six (20.6%) sought relief through parliamentary reform, believing that corruption in government led to the Orders-in-Council. Seven (24.1%) expressed a strong desire for free trade and thus opposed all trade restrictions. Three (10.3%) of the petitions addressed the issue of the war itself, blaming the continuation of the conflict for the Orders-in-Council and thus the distress. Three (10.3%) also expressed in their addresses the importance of manufacturing interests to the wealth of the entire nation and their right and responsibility to influence governmental decision-making. The remainder simply and poignantly reminded

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[11]24 of the 29 petitions identified themselves in this way. One petition came from a group of framework knitters from Leicester, two petitions were sent by weavers (Chorley and Chow Bent), one was addressed from the mayor and burgesses (Nottingham), and one from Journeymen Potters (from the Staffordshire Potteries).

Parliament of the distress in their districts and the vast numbers who needed public relief for support.

The 1812 repeal campaign also differed from the campaign of 1808 in that it aroused an opposition which supported the government's Orders-in-Council. Ten petitions were received in the spring of 1812 which opposed the repeal efforts underway in their provincial cities. While many complained that their opponents exaggerated the distress of the town, the most important issue and reason for their petitioning effort was the ardent belief that it was disloyal to challenge a governmental wartime policy. These petitions, organized either by shipowning interests who supported anything aimed at increasing British control of overseas commerce or by the clergy and municipal corporations, often expressed the impropriety of interfering with the government so engaged in winning a war against the nefarious Napoleon Bonaparte. The "gentlemen, clergy, and merchant traders" of Liverpool, for example, maintained that there was "danger to the public peace and order (exposed) by the promulgation of opinions tending to weaken, in the minds of the people of these realms, that reverence for the British Constitution" and that the petitioners tended to "bring into contempt the dignity of Parliament" and "paved the way for the subversion of all true allegiance."[12]

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[12]Journal of the House of Commons, vol. 67 (1812): 375.

Despite significant pressure from supporters of the Orders-in-Council and the full weight of governmental support for the measures, the petitioners seeking repeal did have effective networks which they mobilized. The most potent force for mobilization was the local press, which was often operated by editors sympathetic to the cause of repeal. Repeal supporters could also count on support from the most influential provincial merchants and manufacturers, who were suffering from the loss of trade by the spring of 1812. Finally, repeal supporters had behind them the thousands of people who signed the repeal petitions and pressured the Perceval government in April of 1812 to convene Parliament into a Committee of the Whole House to examine the effect of the Orders. Again, Brougham brought forth witness after witness, overwhelming the government with evidence of the failure of its policy. In fact, he summoned 150 witnesses to the bar of the House of Commons and was so relentless that he refused to suspend the hearings even after the assassination of Prime Minister Spencer Perceval on 12 May 1812. Brougham's persistence and the mass agitation were rewarded with the revocation of the six year long trade restriction on 23 June 1812, five days after the United States declared war on Great Britain.[13]

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[13]By convening Parliament into a Committee of the Whole House, Parliament, in effect, became solely preoccupied with this one issue. Witnesses were summoned by the leader of support of repeal (Henry Brougham) and the leader of the government's policy (George Rose, head of the Board of Trade).

3. Political Mobilization and Community Politicization

While this summary describes the overall tactics and issues that became enmeshed in the Orders-in-Council petitioning campaign, it is necessary to look much more closely at the petitioners themselves to understand why and how they organized this campaign against such powerful governmental and provincial interests. They brought into the campaigns of 1808 and 1812 a specific world view gained from provincial and national experiences. The petitioners, while clearly expressing the particular interests of their communities, expressed a clear ideology in these petitions, an ideology that united their collective efforts and pointed to future campaigns and struggles in which many became engaged. What previous petitioning and reform campaigns influenced their actions in 1812? How did they use this campaign as a springboard to enunciate other important concerns such as parliamentary reform, loyalism, middle class consciousness, and free trade? How did the Orders-in-Council petitions solidify these specific world views for both opponents and supporters of the government's policy?

Each witness was asked to testify as to the conditions in his own town and his personal opinion and experience with the Orders-in-Council. Brougham overwhelmed the government's case by bringing in influential British merchants and manufacturers like Richard Spooner and Thomas Attwood, Thomas Thornely, Ebenezer Rhodes, and Josiah Wedgwood II. For its part, the government tried to prove that the witnesses were ignorant about the Orders-in-Council and were unduly influenced into signing petitions. Their witnesses seemed to come mostly from provincial corporation members and West Indian merchants.

This study will also test many of the assumptions that recent historians like John Phillips, John Derry, Frank O'Gorman and Nicholas Rogers[14] have made regarding widespread popular political participation and political awareness. These historians have devoted much attention to revising the previous notion of a static, uninformed, disinterested eighteenth century polity long held by historians such as Lewis Namier, John Cannon and more recently, J.C.D. Clark.[15] This study of petitioning and political mobilization will test whether these recent revisionist assumptions of participation and awareness are correct in the petitioning campaign to repeal the Orders-in-Council. An emphasis on political mobilization will also allow much more than just the surface

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[14]John Phillips, Electoral Behavior in Unreformed Britain: Plumpers, Splitters and Straights (Princeton:Princeton University Press, 1982); John Derry, Politics in the Age of Fox, Pitt and Liverpool (London: Macmillan Education, Ltd., 1990); Frank O'Gorman, The Emergence of the British Two-Party System (London: Edward Arnold, Ltd., 1982); Frank O'Gorman, Voters, Patrons and Parties: The Unreformed Electorate of Hanoverian England, 1734-1832 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1989); Nicholas Rogers, Whigs and Cities: Popular Politics in the Age of Walpole and Pitt (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1989). For a full exploration of their theses see the conclusion.

[15]Sir Lewis Namier, The Structure of Politics at the Ascension of George III, 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1961); Sir Lewis Namier, England in the Age of the American Revolution 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1957); John Cannon, Aristocratic Century (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); J.C.D. Clark, Revolution and Rebellion: State and Society in England in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries (Cambridge University Press, 1986); J.C.D. Clark, English Society: Ideology, Social Structure and Political Practice During the Ancien Regime (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). For a full examination of their theses see the conclusion.

issues presented in the petitions to be examined. While they are important in understanding why petitioners gathered to oppose this governmental policy, they do not explain how petitioners gained support. The limitation in previous historians' examinations of petitioning and its role in the emerging political process has often been caused by the lack of questioning how a political movement was organized. All of the revisionists would certainly agree that ideas alone did not motivate the populace to action. For effective movements the ideas had to be embodied in effective collective action, or mobilization. The difficulty is understanding who people voted or petitioned or rioted with not just why they voted, petitioned, or rioted. Understanding political mobilization, that is the web of issues and relationships which cluster around each political action, also helps prevent the "ultra-rationalization" of the crowd, voter, or petitioner. Often people give their allegiance to a cause they themselves may little understand but which represents something particularly significant in their community. The examination of the campaign to repeal the Orders-in-Council will look at the issues and relationships which surrounded this successful extra-parliamentary movement to expand the understanding of political awareness and political participation in the early nineteenth century.

In petitioning Parliament, supporters and opponents of the Orders-in-Council were participating in a form of

provincial politics that was both traditional and yet also a highly structured and effective means of popular politics by the early nineteenth century. With the evolution of Parliament as a legislative body in the seventeenth century, petitioning was recognized as a constitutional right no one dared challenge. In fact, petitioning found frequent use by the eighteenth century as a means of obtaining legal redress and addressing local grievances.[16]

Great change occurred in the nature of petitioning, however, in the mid-eighteenth century. The Wilkite agitation, while not bringing sustained political reform, did end the long-standing prohibition against parliamentary reporting. As a result, interest in governmental affairs grew and petitioning increased with it. In 1789 there were 880 petitions sent to the House of Commons. By 1815 that number jumped to 4,498. The issues addressed also changed dramatically. Not only did they now seek to express opinion on national issues but they also sought to influence and change the opinions of members of Parliament.[17]

Furthermore, the leaders of these petitioning campaigns were often from the middle classes and most were non-franchised merchants and manufacturers in non-parliamentary

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[16]David Judge, "Public Petitioning and the House of Commons," Parliamentary Affairs 31 (1978): 392; Robert L. Nicholls, "Surrogate for Democracy: Nineteenth Century British Petitioning," The Maryland Historian 5 (1974): 44.

[17]Colin Leys, "Petitioning in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," Political Studies 3 (1955): 47.

towns such as Birmingham or Manchester. Despite their lack of representation, these propertied, educated local elites sought to express their political opinion and to influence the political direction of the nation. Thus, says John Phillips, "the English electorate comprised only the core of this 'political nation,' not its whole. Though often overlooked or denigrated, then and now, a substantial segment of the population beyond the core was politically involved and apparently eager to make its wishes known."[18]

A petitioning campaign was also an opportunity to mobilize supporters. Largely overlooked but of great importance was the ritual nature of the petitioning process. It began with a call for a public meeting by local elites concerned with a specific issue. The local corporation became immediately involved since the mayor, boroughreeve, or high bailiff was required by law to call or to deny the request for a public meeting. Thus, town partisanship played an immediate role in the petitioning process.

The public meeting was also advertised in the local newspapers. Not only did this involve the local press in the petitioning effort and the partisanship, but the printed announcement laid out for the local population the intent of the meeting and quite possibly a petition already prepared for discussion in advance. Thus, the forum was already announced

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[18]John A. Phillips, "Popular Politics in Unreformed England," Journal of Modern History 52 (December 1980): 599.

to be partisan, the corporation put on notice of the intent of the petitioners, and the press was enlisted to print the petitions and if possible to offer editorials favorable to the cause. The stage was set for supporters and opponents of the proposed measure to meet and debate the merits of petitioning.

Finally, the meeting was held at the specified date in a public house, hotel, or a public building such as the town Exchange building. Here, the merits of the proposed petition were debated, the most prominent members of the elite spoke, a vote was taken, a person chosen to present the petition and the copies themselves delegated to certain public areas for signing. If there was significant opposition to the petition, the opponents would follow the same process, gather signatures and present to Parliament a petition countering the claims made in the original address.[19]

Historians have rightly asked, however, if a signature on a petition was a meaningful expression of political opinion. While it can be easily demonstrated that non-electors from non-franchised boroughs participated widely in the petitioning campaigns of the late eighteenth century and in the Orders-in-Council repeal campaign, this does not prove any true political awareness. Indeed, this has been a widely debated issue. Samuel Johnson lamented the entire process in the eighteenth century by noting that " every man goes home and

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[19]James Bradley, Popular Politics and the American Revolution in England (Macon, Ga: Mercer University Press, 1986), 61-64.

tells of the glories of the day; how he was consulted and what he advised . . . Of the petition nothing is remembered by the narrator, but that it spoke much of fears and apprehensions, and something very alarming, and that he is sure it is against the government."[20]

During the Orders-in-Council campaign there is strong evidence to suggest that many petition signers really did not understand the issue surrounding the debate over the government's economic policy. For example, witness after witness to the Committee of the Whole House investigating the effects of the Orders-in-Council in the spring of 1812 proclaimed their ignorance of what they had signed. George Room from Birmingham admitted he had not even read the petition though he signed it. He claimed that he "took it upon the faith of those gentlemen that were employed in drawing it (the petition) up; they are of the most respectable kind that Birmingham has amongst us." Thomas Messenger, also from Birmingham, confessed ignorance of what the Orders-in-Council really were. "I do not understand which of the Orders-in-Council the embarrassments in the trade arises from; I understand they do arise from the Orders-in-Council, at least I understand it is generally believed so."[21]

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[20]Eugene C. Black, The Association: British Political Organization 1769-1793 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 19.

[21]Parliament, "Minutes of Evidence Taken Before the Committee of the Whole House to Whom it was Referred, to Consider of the several Petitions which have been Presented to

Such vague understanding of the issues and the constant accusation that signatures were coerced or obtained from people largely disinterested in the substantial questions has led some historians to dismiss the importance of petitions. Dora Mae Clark in her 1930 work on British opinion and the American Revolution maintained that petitions generally were poor indications of public opinion since signatures were often obtained fraudulently. Other, more recent studies conducted by James Bradley and John Phillips, however, dismiss the role of influence on petitioners and conclude that petitioning was a viable and persuasive form of political behavior which demonstrated the growing political consciousness of the nation. Here it will be shown that not only were petitions an effective means of expressing political opinion and awareness of national issues but that the petitioners viewed them as an important weapon in forcing a change of policy from the government at Westminster.[22]

Thus, in the spring of 1812 the organizers of the petitioning campaign both for and against the Orders-in-Council had an established ritual to guide them in seeking support. The petitioners could also draw upon the enormous

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the House, in this Session of Parliament, Relating to the Orders in Council," Sessional Papers (Commons), vol. 3 (1812): 65, 75.

[22]Dora Mae Clark, British Opinion and the American Revolution (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930); James Bradley, Popular Politics and the American Revolution in England; John Phillips, "Popular Politics in Unreformed England."

changes that had occurred in the country since the mid-eighteenth century. Clearly when they organized and when some of them signed, they looked back both to previous organized reform movements and to the increasing role of the middle class in these agitations.

4. Creating a World View: Eighteenth Century Reform Movements

Many of the Reformers who began to organize in 1812 after more than two decades of war and repression could find guidance for some of their emerging movements in the great decade of reform agitation, the 1780s. In particular, they could look to the campaigns of Christopher Wyvill and Major Cartwright. Wyvill, leader of the Yorkshire Association, sought moderate governmental reform and religious toleration. He drew supporters from county gentlemen, freeholders, and opponents of the government. Though his reforming interests were quite moderate and county-based, Wyvill was nevertheless important, for his association organized petitioning drives, set up committees of correspondence, sponsored pamphlets and other written material, successfully elected candidates to seats in Parliament, and united, at least for a brief period, more than fifteen counties seeking moderate economic, religious, and political reform. Yet Wyvill's organization failed in the end to cause the significant change he sought. Historian Eugene Black attributes this failure to the lack of sophisticated organization, the split by radicals away from the movement, and the lack of charismatic personalities within

the association. Yet, in saying this, it is important to remember that Wyvill and his Yorkshire Association did more than any contemporary to establish organization and ideals for future agitation and to establish the legitimacy of extra-parliamentary organizations.[23]

Major Cartwright, a contemporary of Wyvill's, however, drew support for his Society for Constitutional Information from radicals seeking parliamentary reform, that is a reform in the apportionment of the seats in the House of Commons. Cartwright sought a wider franchise and representation for unfranchised cities and thus naturally sought supporters in unfranchised manufacturing boroughs like Birmingham and Manchester. Cartwright and this radical society swept into its membership the most radical thinkers of the times from John Horne Tooke to Thomas Paine. Yet this society like the Yorkshire Association, floundered on ideology and leadership. Although it set a precedent later utilized by groups like the London Corresponding Society (1790), the Society for Constitutional Information with its radical demand for the disestablishment of the Church of England fell to the reaction of the French Revolution in the early 1790s. Yet Cartwright, unlike Wyvill, had a direct influence on the petitioners of

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[23]Black, The Association, 121. Wyvill was never comfortable with broadening his base of support to include mass agitation and was deemed "out of touch" with reforming interests when they re-emerged in the early 19th century. See J.R. Dinwiddy, Christopher Wyvill and Reform (New York: St Anthony's Press, 1971).

1812, for Cartwright rode out the storm of reaction and reappeared as a voice for reform in the last years of the Napoleonic War. With connections in the provinces and at Westminster, Cartwright followed Brougham on the northern circuit in the summer of 1812 (after the revocation of the Orders-in-Council) and sought support among influential organizers of the Orders-in-Council campaign like William Roscoe of Liverpool. Indeed, it is clear that Cartwright used the Orders-in-Council repeal campaign as a springboard in organizing his own pressure group, the Hampden Club, in April of 1812.[24]

While both Wyvill and Cartwright established important precedents for organizing extraparliamentary agitation, most provincial cities and middle class merchants and manufacturers were tied more to local issues than to national concerns like parliamentary reform. Thus, in addition to the tradition established by these early associations for national goals, provincial middle-class elites could look to campaigns conducted in their cities over issues that affected directly

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[24]F.D. Cartwright, ed. The Life and Correspondence of Major Cartwright 2 vols. (London: Henry Colburn, 1826), 2: 41. See also Major Cartwright to William Roscoe, n.d., Roscoe Papers. Cartwright wrote to Roscoe several times during and after the repeal campaign, even sending him a copy of the resolutions which guided the creation of the Hampden Club. Roscoe, however, declined to join or to let his name be used in Cartwright's campaign for membership explaining that his support would prove "useless " to Cartwright's efforts. It is more likely that Roscoe, like Brougham, did not wish to alienate the more moderate reformers who aided him in the campaign against the Orders-in-Council and thus sought to distance himself from Cartwright's radicalism.

their livelihoods and their perception of the power that the middle class should have in directing national affairs.

The campaigns in which wide numbers of the middle class became involved were essential in establishing their political identity in the late eighteenth century. Indeed, from the 1780s onward, local politics focused on political movements which polarized communities and established issues which would be debated for decades in a myriad of separate partisan struggles. These issues, both commercial and political, were in many ways at the heart of the debate on the Orders-in-Council in 1812.

The role of an increasingly self-conscious middle class in this community politicization was demonstrated most clearly in the commercial struggles of the 1780s. For the first time, middle class commercial elites united in a political movement to achieve commercial and political goals. The most important of these late eighteenth century movements was the creation in 1785 of the General Chamber of Manufacturers. In 1784-85 Prime Minister William Pitt levied an excise tax on fustian, a cloth produced from a mixture of cotton and linen, and attempted to liberalize trade with Ireland. These two measures, deemed a threat by the commercial communities all across the provinces, led to a massive petitioning campaign

and to the creation of a united organization--the General Chamber of Manufacturers.[25]

The Chamber was led by and received much of its inspiration from Josiah Wedgwood, the Staffordshire potter. Under his untiring guidance, committees of correspondence were established between the provincial cities, lobbyists sent to Westminster, and, most importantly, petition drives against the fustian tax and Irish free trade organized. In fact, the House of Commons received sixty petitions, the largest number ever sent in concert by manufacturers. Organizations of merchants and manufacturers sprang up throughout the provinces in most emerging industrial cities including Liverpool, Birmingham and Manchester. Faced with such strong expressions of public opinion, Pitt relented and revised both measures. For Britain's middle class elite this was a significant victory for it demonstrated that manufacturing interests could influence decisions at Westminster.

Wedgwood, however, sought more than just the eradication of the Pittite measures. The General Chamber was an expression of a united middle class manufacturing opinion

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[25]See Donald Read, The English Provinces, 1760-1960 (London: Edward Arnold, 1964), 24-30; G. Henry Wright, Chronicle of the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce (Birmingham: n.p., 1913), 12-38; Eric Hopkins, Birmingham: The First Manufacturing Town in the World, 1760-1840 (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989), 60-65; Leon S. Marshall, The Development of Public Opinion in Manchester, 1780-1820 (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1946), 184-185; John Money, Experience and Identity: Birmingham and the West Midlands, 1760-1800 (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1977), passim.

which he wished to strengthen. This unity was expressed in its motto "The General Chamber of Manufacturers of Great Britain--Union and Security--We Know Not Men But Measures--Success Follows Unanimity." Wedgwood and many of his contemporaries and supporters felt sincerely that Parliament did not appreciate the contributions of its manufacturers and that such an organization would inevitably force upon Westminster a recognition of their value to the nation. "Britain has still her cork jackets," wrote Wedgwood, "her manufacturers. 'Tis on them that she has hitherto floated, and they, with proper care, will I trust be sufficient to keep her afloat still. Take them away or diminish them to a certain degree, and she sinks inevitably."[26]

The General Chamber was also important for the community political organization it produced. In cities like Birmingham and Manchester, the most prominent reformers participated in the local campaign to unite manufacturers. In Manchester, Thomas Walker, an important local reformer, led the Manchester branch of the Chamber and went to London as a Mancunian delegate. When Pitt relented on his measures, Walker returned to Manchester a hero, not only to the merchants and manufacturers but even to the corporation who greeted him with a grand procession of "javelin throwers, trumpeters, the lord

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[26]Eliza Meteyard, The Life of Josiah Wedgwood, 2 vols. (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1865) 1: 406; George Sevage and Ann Finer, ed. The Selected Letters of Josiah Wedgwood (London: Adams and MacKay, 1965), 286.

of the manor and the deputy constable in their chariots, mounted dragoons and gentlemen, and groups of fustian cutters, master fustian shearers, packers, dyers, velvet dressers and calenderers . . . whitsters . . . and pattern-card makers carrying the flags and emblems of their trades." In Birmingham, a Commercial Committee existed as early as 1783 and drew support from 100 of the leading manufacturers. It sought specifically to unite the Midlands and established committees of correspondence aimed at achieving this unity even before the General Chamber was formed.[27]

The General Chamber of Manufacturers was thus an important first step in establishing a merchants' and manufacturers' organization aimed at influencing the actions of Parliament. At the same time, it helped to solidify a developing ideology among the middle classes stressing a new self-conscious importance that emphasized their unique contributions as the primary producers of manufactured goods in the nation. Conversely, these merchants and manufacturers also wished to show that politicians lacked awareness of the value of their productivity to the prosperity of the nation. The General Chamber and the myriad commercial organizations that sprang from it also united merchant and manufacturing

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[27]John Bohstedt, Riots and Community Politics in England and Wales, 1790-1820 (New York: Harvard University Press, 1983), 103; An Account of the Manner and Wherein a Standing General Commercial Committee was Established at Birmingham for the Purpose of Watching Over and Conducting the Public Interest of the Town and Neighborhood (Birmingham: n.p., 1784), 23.

interests in individual towns and cities, demonstrating the power of a joint effort in achieving commercial goals.

While the General Chamber demonstrated the power of merchant and manufacturing interests, it also demonstrated the embryonic level of their ideology and organization. While members like Josiah Wedgwood dreamed of the influence the organization could have at Westminster, the membership as a whole was deeply divided over issues such as free trade. Clearly much still needed to be accomplished in manufacturers' ability to organize pressure and establish long-term goals. The chamber itself disbanded in 1786. The issue over which merchants and manufacturers finally split was free trade. In 1786 Prime Minister Pitt sought passage of the Eden Treaty aimed at liberalizing trade with France. While the Chamber previously agreed to oppose the liberalization of Irish trade, the measure to open up freer trade with France doomed the solidarity of its membership. Representatives of the older trades, often chartered and protected by government regulations, opposed freer trade with any country. Others, like Josiah Wedgwood, would benefit from an open market and thus sought freer trade agreements. The debate that followed over the issue irreparably damaged the solidarity of the General Chamber and in some localities such as Birmingham even caused the local organization to split. By 1787 the Chamber and most local organizations had disbanded. Manufacturers

withdrew to their provinces and acted separately in obtaining their commercial goals.

Yet, the idea of united merchant and manufacturing interests was too powerful to die completely. For in 1812 merchants and manufacturers again united in a campaign even more successful than that of 1785.[28] Indeed, after victory was achieved in June of 1812 some communities like Birmingham renewed their efforts to create a strong unified Chamber of Commerce to replace those societies moribund since the failed General Chamber of Manufacturers. The merchant and manufacturing attitude, reinvigorated by the successful campaign, was best summed up in Aris' Birmingham Gazette in 1813 when it announced the creation of the new Chamber of Commerce:

> The vast importance of the commerce and manufacturers of this country to its welfare--the necessary dependence of its public revenue upon the resources of its merchants and manufacturers--and the reliance of a large proportion of its people for subsistence upon a foreign demand for the produce of its well-directed industry--all demonstrates the propriety of adopting some place by which these very general interests may be fairly appreciated and efficiently supported . . . These considerations, especially when viewed with reference to the unparalleled efforts which have been made to exclude our manufactures from the Continent of Europe, and the increasing competition consequent on the suspension of intercourse with America, forcibly indicates the necessity of establishing a Commercial Society in Birmingham,

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[28]Read, The English Provinces, 33.

> composed of its most respectable and intelligent merchants and manufactures for the purpose of collecting and comparing their opinions--of acting as a medium of communication with ministers and the legislature on the subject of trade, and of co-operating with other parts of the kingdom on all questions affecting the general prosperity of manufacturers and commerce of the British Empire.[29]

Middle class attitudes about their role in society and politics also led to a reshaping of attitudes about commerce and governmental policy. Clearly, economic changes in the country and the myriad of writings that appeared on economic issues led many to reevaluate their economic ideologies. The existence of organizations like the General Chamber certainly gave impetus to such evaluation but the Napoleonic War and the government's attitude toward trade that emerged during the war had a greater and much more sustained effect on economic ideology.[30]

The war and the trade restrictions practiced by France and England opened wide two important economic issues: the value of foreign versus domestic trade and the issue of free trade. These issues were laid out for public debate in a host of pamphlets, editorials and letters to provincial newspaper editors and doubtless in many local, informal debates. First,

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[29]Aris' Birmingham Gazette, 19 July 1813; Wright, Chronicle of the Birmingham Chamber, 49-51.

[30]For a complete summary of the development of commerce and middle class ideology see the excellent study by Paul Langford, A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1989).

as British and French blockades began to assail international trade, many argued that England should seek to create a "Fortress Britannica" by encouraging the development of her internal resources. Wealth, it was argued, was a product of domestic not foreign trade. The most potent spokesman for this idea was William Spence, who in 1807 published the controversial pamphlet Britain Independent of Commerce. In it, he denounced the value of foreign commerce for the wealth of the nation. "Britain does not derive any accession of wealth whatever from commerce of export, and consequently . . . her riches, her greatness, and her power are wholly derived from resources within herself, and are entirely and altogether independent of trade." Foreign trade, he said, threatened Britons by making them slaves to luxuries like tea, wine, coffee, silks, linens and that "vile weed" tobacco. Spence and his followers, like Tory politician James Stephens, merely restated a belief long-held by physiocrats that agriculture and domestic production were the most important for the economic survival and prosperity of any nation.[31]

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[31]William Spence, Britain Independent of Commerce or Proofs Deduced from an Investigation into the True Causes of the Wealth of Nations (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1807), 47. For more of Spence's theory on domestic production see "The Radical Causes of the Present Distresses of the West Indian Planters," Quarterly Review 2 (August-November 1809): 1-23. Note that according to Drew McCoy, Thomas Jefferson shared a similar fear of the effects of foreign trade in America as well. His arguments against foreign trade are quite reminiscent of Spence's. See The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980). James Stephens, a close political ally of Spencer Perceval, wrote his own

Merchants, manufacturers and others eagerly lined up to refute Spence. Spence and other physiocrats with their disregard for foreign trade were seen as quite threatening by provincial middle class elites even before the effects of the Orders-in-Council were fully known. They regarded an attack on foreign commerce as an attack on all merchant and manufacturers by those entrenched agrarian and monopolistic interests which did not recognize the wealth produced by Northern manufacturers. Provincial newspapers and monthly publications like the Edinburgh Review took great pains to refute the physiocratic argument and in doing so pointed again to the value of merchants and manufacturers to the nation.

The second economic argument that evolved from the war and most particularly from the debate over the Orders-in-Council was that of free trade. While the post-Napoleonic war period witnessed the first large-scale demand for free trade among British merchants and manufacturers, the most important first stage in the campaign for freer trade came in the period from 1805-1812. In fact, these years saw a burgeoning literature by many who were devoted to this goal. The Orders-in-Council repeal campaign became a springboard for an active debate on the issue of free versus restricted trade. At the same time, it provided further proof that Britain was now a

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influential pamphlet in 1805 entitled War in Disguise in which he denounced the expansion of neutral trade during the war.

great commercial empire and not a simple agrarian country where wealth was to be garnered solely from the land.[32]

For many merchants and manufacturers, the Orders-in-Council blockading Napoleonic Europe and other restrictions placed on neutral trade by an enforcement of acts like the "Rule of 1756"[33] exemplified a long-standing grievance: that governmental trade policy existed only to advance agrarian and monopolistic interests at the expense of merchants and manufacturers. It is natural that they should have had such an attitude. The existence of the license system created during the Napoleonic War proved that blockading the continent was only secondary to protecting British shipping interests. For by purchasing a special license a British shipper was free to trade with countries within the blockaded areas. Neutral nations like the United States, however, were still expected to follow the strict guidelines of the Orders-in-Council. That caused ill feelings between the governments in London and Washington and threatened the trade upon which many merchants and manufacturers throughout Britain relied. Many, including manufacturer Alexander Baring, maintained that the Orders were

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[32]Biancamaria Fontana, "Henry Brougham and the Political Economy of the Edinburgh Review," Annali della Fondazione Luigi Einaudi 16 (1982): 249-278.

[33]The "Rule of 1756," adopted during the Seven Years War, stated that a neutral could not trade with any nation in times of war that was closed to her in times of peace. An enforcement of that rule after 1805 in effect meant that the United States would be forced to give up the lucrative French colonial trade she gained from the war.

nothing more than an attempt to foster the monopolistic interests of West Indian traders who had much to gain by British naval restrictions on international shipping. In his pamphlet An Inquiry into the Causes and the Consequences of the Orders in Council, Baring denounced Stephens and other advocates of trade restrictions and warned that such restrictive policies threatened to bring Britons to the "brink of the precipice" by destroying their livelihoods. The liberal Edinburgh Review, which maintained a ceaseless campaign against trade restrictions and the war in general, included many articles that denounced the Orders-in-Council as unjust and against international law. Henry Brougham was a frequent contributor to the Review and, though the articles were never signed, probably wrote the following diatribe against the Orders-in-Council published in 1806: "We cannot annihilate the foreign trade of the rest of the world, in order to diminish the comforts, or cut off the resources of the nation with which we happen to be at war . . . If we can justify the rule of 1756 upon these general principles of equity and universal expediency, what forms the basis of international law?" Writer Joseph Phillimore was even more direct. To him the Orders-in-Council were "illegal, immoral and unjust."[34]

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[34]Alexander Baring, An Inquiry into the Causes and Consequences of the Orders in Council and an Examination of the Conduct of Great Britain towards the Neutral Commerce of America (London: J.M Richardson, 1808), 179; "War in Disguise or the Frauds of the Neutral Flags," Edinburgh Review 8

Provincial opposition to the Orders-in-Council combined with an even fiercer debate over one of the most vested of British trading interests, the East India Company. In 1812, the East India Company applied for a renewal of its charter and, alongside the petitioning for an end to the trade restrictions maintained by the Orders-in-Council, communities sent petitions and delegations to London to protest the continuation of the East India Company's monopoly of trade to China. Henry Brougham, who encouraged this petitioning effort, noted sarcastically that the East India Company sought an early renewal of her charter because it feared a loss of support in the government and because "they are aware, that bad as their circumstances this year, they will be worse next, a belief, I am persuaded, quite well formed." In fact, opposition to the rechartering effort led sixteen of the twenty-nine towns that sent petitions against the Orders-in-Council to send separate demands for the revocation of the East India Company monopoly. Their reason for this demand was quite simple: free trade was the inherent right of every

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(January-June 1806), 13; Joseph Phillimore, A Letter Addressed to a Member of the House of Commons on the Subject of the Notice Given by Mr. Brougham for a Motion Respecting the Orders in Council License Trade (London: E. Budd, 1812), 6. The list of rebuttals to the restrictionist argument are many. In the Edinburgh Review see "Examination of the Orders in Council," 11 (January-June 1808), 484-499; "Baring and Others on the Orders-in-Council," Edinburgh Review 12 (January-June 1808), 226-247; A Key to the Orders in Council (London: John Murray, 1812); For the support of the government's policy in pamphlets see Lord Sheffield, Strictures on the Necessity of Inviolably Maintaining the Navigation and Colonial System of Great Britain (London: W. Bulmer, 1806).

Englishman and to allow any vested interest to have a trade monopoly was to tread upon that constitutional right. This attitude was perhaps best expressed by Thomas Attwood in his speech on 4 March 1812 given to fellow Birminghamites at the East India Company petition organizational meeting.

> If the East India Company are to have a monopoly of the China trade, why not give them a Monopoly of the Corn trade? Why not give them a Monopoly upon Bread? and thus expose the whole of their countrymen to perish under their remorseless cupidity . . . Standing as we do, Sir, on the eternal grounds of justice and of reason, and supported as we are by the whole population of the country, I say, Sir, that if we fail, we OUGHT to fail, we OUGHT to be trod into the dust. But, Sir, we shall not fail, seeing our road as we see it, and feeling our strength as we feel it, what shall resist us?[35]

In Liverpool much enthusiastic was generated for a petition which was signed on 17 March 1812. At the petition organizational meeting William Roscoe, who for once did not meet the approbation of the Tory corporation, stated that "every British subject has, by his birth right, the privilege of carrying on trade to foreign parts . . . It is, indeed, an acknowledged part of the British constitution, which is considered as more favorable to commerce, than that of any other country." Finally, Manchester, which faced too many difficulties in 1812 to risk controversy over the Orders-in-

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[35]C.W. Wakefield, The Life of Thomas Attwood (London: Harrison and Sons, 1885), 47; Henry Brougham to William Roscoe, 20 February 1810, Roscoe Papers. Attwood's speech was carried in full by many provincial newspapers including the Liverpool Mercury and the Midland Chronicle.

Council, did unite to present its petition against the East India Company monopoly. As in Liverpool, the corporation and inhabitants who attended the meeting pointed to their right to participate in trade with all countries, even those prohibited by the existence of monopolies.[36]

Thus a new economic ideology based on the belief in the importance of foreign commerce and free trade was a notable legacy of the controversies created by the Napoleonic War. Instead of seeing the post-war period as the first stage in middle class adherence to free trade, it is clear that by 1812 this belief, and a firm commitment to pressuring the government to make this belief a reality were part of middle class experience and identity.

While the development of new economic ideology in this formative period is important, it would be a mistake to assume that the only issues that galvanized middle class opinion were economic. In many communities the issue that polarized opinion the most and created the strongest political alignments was religion: specifically, the unsuccessful campaign to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts in 1789. These acts, passed during the reign of Charles II, nominally prevented Dissenters from holding parliamentary and municipal offices. Although enforcement of the acts did vary throughout the country, nevertheless, Dissenters were officially

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[36]Liverpool Mercury, 20 March 1812; Manchester Mercury, 7 April 1812.

discriminated against in regard to office-holding. Repeal most certainly would have a great impact on the local level for there it would force open the doors of the provincial Anglican oligarchies. Furthermore, it would finally end the insult that Dissenters felt by the legally instituted prejudice.[37]

The repeal campaign of 1789 became a part of the experiences of the 1812 petitioners because of the extraordinary polarization that the issue created. Many merchants and manufacturers, particularly in Lancashire, were Dissenters. Furthermore, many prominent merchants and manufacturers already engaged in seeking a separate identity and influence for middle class interests were also Dissenters. For example, Josiah Wedgwood II, William Rathbone (Liverpool merchant), William Roscoe (Liverpool banker) and Thomas Walker were all Dissenters. They associated through their Unitarian or Quaker chapels; they established free schools for their children and provided higher education through institutions like the Warrington Academy near Birmingham. There the sons of merchants and manufacturers received their political and economic ideals from thinkers like Joseph Priestley, a prominent Unitarian scientist and philosopher. In short, the

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[37]It should be noted that in his recent work James E. Bradley argues that Dissenters in fact did not experience the amount of real political disfranchisement that is usually assumed by most historians. See James E. Bradley, Religion, Revolution and English Radicalism: Nonconformity in Eighteenth Century Politics and Society (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

Dissenters in the provinces created a separate ideology based largely on Enlightenment principles of toleration and individual enterprise which often stressed economic, political, and humanitarian reform. They also sought to influence both local government and Westminster with this ideology.[38]

The activism the Dissenters demonstrated in the repeal campaign of 1789 alarmed entrenched Anglican and Tory interests in the provinces. The threat was seen as much larger than religious practices. The polarization and bitter debate over ending the century-long prohibition against Dissenters in public office also helped to concentrate forces against these entrenched provincial interests. In Liverpool, for example, where a very active group led by Roscoe and Rathbone sought to muster support for repeal petitions, the issue clearly materialized as the Tory corporation versus a rising, frustrated Dissenter middle-class. The corporation aligned itself with the Church of England. The close connection between the Liverpool corporation and Anglicanism led to bitter debates both in the campaign to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts and in other ordinary local meetings. For example, although the Liverpool vestry was composed exclusively of Anglicans, all rate-payers could attend the meetings. The bitterness created by campaigns like the repeal

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[38]S.G. Checkland, "Economic Attitudes in Liverpool 1794-1807," Economic History Review, ser. 2, 5 (1952- 1953): 64.

movement of 1789 spilled over into these monthly meetings as Dissenters sought to frustrate the vestry by attending their sessions and "whenever a favorable opportunity presented itself, they would champion any cause which they thought would place the Established church at a disadvantage."[39]

In addition to opening up the bitter wounds between corporation and anti-corporation interests, the repeal campaign of 1789 also turned into a propaganda campaign in the local press aimed at winning over public opinion. With broadsides, pamphlets, circulars, and letters, supporters laid before the public the issue of the right to hold public office without religious prejudice. In Manchester, supporters of repeal established committees of correspondence and more radical Dissenters even challenged tithe collection and the Anglican liturgy itself. The propaganda war raged in the local newspapers and in public meetings. Clearly the religious component of the issue became diluted with the establishment of the "Church and King" Club (Tory and Anglican) and in the "Constitutional Society" (Whig and Dissenter) both of which sprang from the repeal campaign. Thus, in Manchester as in so many other provincial cities, the

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[39]Henry Peet, ed. Liverpool Vestry Books, 1681-1834, 2 vols. (Liverpool: The University Press, 1915), 1: xxxvii.

opinion became polarized between the Anglican, Tory, status quo and the Dissenter, Whig, reform.[40]

Finally, Birmingham, a town often noted by contemporaries as industrious and politically placid, had the most notorious sectarian confrontation of all because of the repeal campaign. Yet, this violence cannot be attributed either to a repressive Tory oligarchy or a massive town propaganda campaign. Birmingham's local Tory oligarchy clearly was not as rigid as in other communities like Liverpool. In fact, a Dissenter was always selected for the largely ceremonial post of low bailiff and many Dissenters were members of the local Street Commission created in 1769 to instigate municipal improvements and increasingly regarded as the town's governing body. The primary Dissenting chapel, the New Meeting House, contained many families with a high economic status and the congregation took a very assertive stance toward civic involvement. This involvement was accepted in the town and, as a result, historian Eric Hopkins denies that sectarianism played a significant role in the development of economic or political convictions in Birmingham. Indeed, contemporaries seem to corroborate Hopkins' view. William Hutton, a well-known Dissenter, claimed that the "principles of toleration are well understood" and that "Birmingham . . . does not seem to have

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[40]Bohstedt, Riots and Community Politics, 104-105; G.M. Ditchfield, "The Campaign in Lancashire and Cheshire for the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. 1787-1790," Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire 126 (1976): 110.

attended so much to religious and political disputes as to the coarse music of her honour."[41]

Yet in July of 1791 three town magistrates, prompted by local celebrations of Bastille Day instigated a popular riot against Dissenters and reformers which was to have an enormous effect on Dissent in Birmingham for decades to come. For three days Dissenters' homes and churches were attacked and the magistrates, who began the demonstration, quickly lost control of it. By the end of the so-called Priestley Riots, the house of radical Dissenter Joseph Priestley had been sacked and burned along with twelve other Dissenters' homes and two Dissenter meeting houses. Priestley and several other reformers were driven out of the town and, after the local authorities regained control, the struggle continued in a massive print war.[42]

If Birmingham was not previously torn apart with sectarian conflict, why had the Priestley Riots occurred? While the standard interpretations focus on the religious

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[41]William Hutton, The Life of William Hutton (London: Baldwin, Craddock and Co, 1817), 172, 167; Eric Hopkins, Birmingham: The First Manufacturing Town, 100; R.V. Ram, "Influence on the Patterns of Belief and Social Action Among Birmingham Dissenters between 1750-1870," in Alan Bryman, ed. Religion in the Birmingham Area: Essays in the Sociology of Religion (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, n.d.), 34.

[42]H.T. Dickinson, British Radicalism and the French Revolution, 1789-1815 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 32; Robert K Bent, Old and New Birmingham: A History of the Town and Its People, 2 vols. (Birmingham: Houghton and Hammond, 1880), 1: 169; R.B. Rose, "The Priestley Riots of 1791," Past and Present 18 (November 1960), 83.

nature of the controversy, it is doubtful that religious prejudice was the sole cause of the riots. Rather, Priestley and his fellow Birmingham Dissenters represented much more than simply different religious beliefs. Dissenters, whether they desired sustained political and economic reform or just a repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, were regarded as a threat to the natural order of church, king, and constitution. Thus according to R.B. Rose, religious dissent, philosophical speculation, republicanism, political, and economic reform were now regarded as all related. The Priestley Riots thus spoke more to the conservatism of the Birmingham population than to their religious intolerance. Yet, as R.B. Rose pointed out in his study of the Priestley Riots, this violence did leave the lasting scar of sectarian division in the political life of the town and thus such divisions have to be considered whenever other political campaigns are explored.[43]

Altogether, the effects of the campaign to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts on later petitioning cannot be underestimated. First, the leaders of other reform movements, including those who led the repeal of the Orders-in-Councils, were often Dissenters. Josiah Wedgwood II, Ebenezer Rhodes, William Roscoe, William Rathbone, Thomas Thornely (Liverpool merchant) and other prominent figures who led the 1812 petitioning were all Dissenters. Yet it is also true that

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[43]Checkland, "Economic Attitudes in Liverpool," 62; Hopkins, Birmingham: The First Manufacturing Town, 37; Rose, "The Priestley Riots of 1791," 83.

many supporters were not Dissenters and indeed Thomas Attwood and Richard Spooner of Birmingham were prominent Anglicans. However, in the few names extant from the petitioning in Liverpool, there was a clear connection between Anglican and anti-repeal efforts and Dissenter support for the repeal of the Orders-in-Council. Though sectarianism clearly was not an issue raised by this largely economic campaign, political mobilization certainly occurred within church and chapel alignments. The existence of this undercurrent of sectarianism also created immediate polarization whenever divisive issues arose in the provinces. We can see the remnant of the attempts to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts as late as 1812, two decades after the controversy. Finally, the Test and Corporation repeal effort in 1789, although a failure, did strengthen the sense of middle class identity and unity within the Dissenting communities themselves.[44]

5. Creating a World View: The Loyalist Movement

The campaign in 1789 to repeal the Test and Corporation Act also marked the beginning of the conservative reaction to the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. In examining political mobilization and the campaign to repeal the Orders-in-Council it is important to examine this reaction both because of the effect it had on the repeal supporters and on

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[44]Ditchfield, "The Campaign in Lancashire and Cheshire," 112.

those who supported the government's trade restrictions. For if the reformers of 1812 carried the methods and ideals of previous reforming campaigns, then it is also important to understand the ideals of the opponents of the repeal of the Orders-in-Council.

Clearly the 1780s and 1790s were an important formative period for English loyalism. At the beginning of the 1780s before the French Revolution, the language of loyalism was largely monopolized by radicals and reformers. Men like Major Cartwright and John Wilkes claimed vociferously that they were the true English patriots since they were the upholders and promoters of the ancient constitution. These reformers and radicals also claimed that they had a program for their patriotism: end the corruption that separated Englishmen from their ancient and inherited rights. Thus, the language of patriotism served both to legitimize political opposition and to strengthen movements from parliamentary reform to religious toleration.[45]

The reformers' hold on the language of loyalism slipped away dramatically in the 1790s, however. First, as historian Linda Colley points out in her seminal works on national consciousness in the late eighteenth century, several events combined to create in Britons a sense of unity centered on

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[45]Hugh Cunningham, "The Language of Patriotism," in Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of the British National Identity, ed. Ralph Samuels, 3 vols. (New York: Routledge, 1989), 3: 58; Linda Colley, "Radical Patriotism in the 18th Century," in Samuels, 3: 169-181.

king, constitution, and country. Colley found that this loyalism was promoted largely without governmental initiative and was bolstered by the effects of eighteenth century wars (the Seven Years War, American Revolution and Napoleonic War, specifically), the revolution in communications, and a genuine affection for an aging monarch. The result in Britain was the creation of an unprecedented sense of national unity even before war with France was undertaken in 1793.[46]

The grassroots development of loyalism changed profoundly, however, with the outbreak of the wars with France in 1792. The success of the French republic in defeating the coalition of European powers frightened Britons and forced them to turn inward to check threats to their own country and constitution. Not only did the loyalists completely usurp the language of patriotism from reformers and radicals but they now agreed that men like Thomas Paine and groups like the London Corresponding Society who once proclaimed <u>their</u> loyalty to the ancient constitution were, in fact, threats to English liberty. The result of the war crisis of 1792 was the formation of the Association for the Preservation of Liberty

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[46]Linda Colley, "Whose Nation? Class and National Consciousness in Britain 1750-1830," <u>Past and Present</u> 113 (February 1989): 97-117; and "The Apotheosis of George III: Loyalty, Royalty and the British Nation, 1760-1820," <u>Past and Present</u> 102 (February 1984): 94-130.

and Property and a host of loyalist associations and "Church and King" clubs all over Britain.[47]

Although the association movement only lasted until mid-1793 when the first wave of war fear died down, it was tremendously important for the formation of loyalist attitudes in the years to come. Not only did the loyalists grasp for themselves the ideals of patriotism but they kept them alive, albeit in waves of enthusiasm, for the next twenty years. Not only did they capture the language but they turned that language into a potent ideology in this period. The loyalists of 1792 found a powerful and popular weapon. Loyalism transcended political, economic, and religious boundaries and unified the whole nation, and, conversely, seriously weakened reformers and radicals. By sweeping in the local corporations, the clergy and the government at Westminster, loyalists did not need to resort to violence to achieve their goal of social control. They were after all an "organized majority, backed by the law of the land." Those who did not take seriously the pressure the local loyalist associations asserted certainly had cause to regret. Petitions supporting

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[47]Robert R. Dozier, For King, Constitution, and Country: The English Loyalists and the French Revolution (Lexington, Ky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1983). For an article which maintains that the government was behind the association movement see Austin Mitchell, "The Association Movement of 1792-1793," Historical Journal 4 (1961): 56-77. For a refutation of this thesis see Donald E. Ginter, "The Loyalist Association Movement of 1792-1793," Historical Journal 9 (1966): 179-190. Finally, see Black, The Association, 234-274 for a particularly harsh treatment of the movement.

loyalist aims were carried from door to door and opponents duly noted. Publicans who allowed a radical meeting to be held in their taverns found their licenses revoked. Booksellers learned that the ever-vigilant loyalism could mean prosecution for libel if they published reformist tracts or pamphlets. Altogether, it is impossible to calculate the influence of loyalism during the Napoleonic wars not because it was government sponsored or informant driven but because it was popular.[48]

It is quite clear that the opponents of the repeal of the Orders-in-Council understood the power of loyalism and sought to link their opposition to patriotism. Nine of the ten petitions sent in support of the Orders-in-Council used the language of patriotism to bolster their argument for maintaining the restrictions. They specifically steered clear of the issue of the orders' effectiveness and the distress in the country. Rather, these petitions pointed to the necessity of thwarting the war aims of Napoleon. Repeal would play right into the hands of the "implacable and insidious enemy" according to the supporters of the Orders-in-Council in Bolton. The Orders-in-Council were "just and necessary" as retaliation to a system first adopted by the enemy, supporters maintained in Sunderland. The magistrates, merchants and manufacturers of Birmingham pointed out that the Orders-in-

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[48]Dozier, For King, Constitution, and Country, 80; Mitchell, "The Association Movement," 66.

Council were not a "measure of mere commercial regulation" but a "measure of states policy" and thus should not be questioned. Supporters of repeal were attempting to excite "the lower orders of the community to act out of tumult and disorder, destructing their own happiness and (were) disgraceful to the national character," according to the masters, wardens and commonality of Bristol. Finally, supporters of repeal also noted that Parliament should be allowed to legislate without popular pressure especially in this time of war when it was necessary to give confidence to the "indefatigable exertions and unblemished integrity of His Majesty's Ministers."[49]

It was not only in petitions to Parliament that the language of patriotism was used to gain supporters, however. Newspapers sympathetic to the government or unwilling to see the revocation of an important wartime policy also turned to this familiar theme to persuade readers to support the government. For some editors this was clearly a political ploy aimed at bolstering the Tory government. The Liverpool Courier for example, which was the organ of the Tory corporation, deprecated those who opposed the ministry and urgently recommended patriotism "from every inhabitant, whether in public or private life." Other editors, however, found the issue to be much more complicated. Publishers of

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[49]"Minutes of Evidence," 3: 237, 375, 377, 395-396; Midland Chronicle, 11 April 1812.

newspapers like the Birmingham Commercial Advertiser and Aston's Commercial Herald (Manchester) generally strayed little from their neutral advertiser format. Yet, while they stayed largely silent on the economic and political debate surrounding the Orders-in-Council, both did allow their fears of repeal to come through in letters to the editor. In a letter printed on 20 April 1812 in the Birmingham Commercial Advertiser, Job Nott, Jr. urged his fellow citizens to stop fanning the flames of discontent and disloyalty and instead seek "loyalty and veneration for those laws by which the nation has for so long a period flourished with honour and renown."[50]

Thus, supporters of the government in the Orders-in-Council debate of 1812 presented their argument wrapped in the familiar clothes of patriotism. 1812 was not 1792, however, and the public was not as willing to accept such blind patriotism without question. While it is true that many in the nation rallied when Prime Minister Spencer Perceval was assassinated on 12 May 1812, the populace, especially in those areas hardest hit by commercial failures, separated their loyalty to the constitution from blind loyalty to governmental

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[50] Liverpool Courier, 30 March 1812; Birmingham Commercial Advertiser, 20 April 1812. For other newspaper accounts carrying the language of patriotism see Wheeler's Manchester Chronicle, 9 January 1808, 29 February 1812; Liverpool Mercury, 8 May 1812. See also the loyalty petition from Birmingham, perhaps the best example of all of the petitions against the repeal of the Orders-in-Council, Midland Chronicle, 11 April 1812.

policy. Thus, for example, Thomas Attwood, the chief Birmingham spokesman against the Orders-in-Council, led a loyalty petition which was sent to the Prince Regent, the future George IV, after the death of Perceval. It was thus apparent by 1812 that the impulse of reform had returned and that patriotism was no longer the sole property of the status quo nor was it strong enough by itself to snuff out these reforming endeavors.[51]

Finally, the language of patriotism could prove dangerous when a populace was suffering from war weariness and economic desperation. In April of 1812 Manchester Tories requested the boroughreeve to call a meeting in support of the Prince Regent's decision to maintain the Perceval government in power.[52] Coming on the heels of extreme economic distress and general social ferment in the town, this was a risky decision. After the publication of handbills urging opponents of the meeting to gather in full force to renounce "those fatal principles that have been so pregnant with calamity," the Tories attempted at the last minute to call off the loyalty meeting. It was, however, too late. On 8 April 1812 the Manchester Exchange Hall, where the meeting had been

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[51]See the Midland Chronicle, 23 May 1812 for the petition of loyalty to the Prince Regent at the death of Perceval.

[52]The Prince Regent, the future George IV, gained full royal power in April of 1812 under the provisions of the regency bill passed in 1810 and thus could have, if he wished, replace Perceval with a Whig government. The Prince by this time had lost his affection for Whiggism, however.

scheduled, was the scene of a riot where thousands gathered, sacked the newsroom, dining room and broke windows, chairs, tables, and chandeliers. Significantly, what began as a call for an address of loyalty ended in a cry against governmental corruption and a call for parliamentary reform. What was unimaginable in 1792 was not in 1812; namely, that loyalism in and by itself was not enough to insure unquestioned support from the populace.[53]

6. Conclusion

If the issues of economic and parliamentary reform and religious toleration shaped the world views of the opponents of the Orders-in-Council, patriotism and the language of loyalty were equally important for its supporters. It would be easy to draw the simple conclusion that Whig supporters of reform always opposed the Orders-in-Council and that supporters for the government were always identified with Toryism and maintenance of the status quo. To do so would ignore the rich undercurrent of ideas and relationships present in these provincial campaigns. Recently, J.E. Cookson has also made the mistake of labelling the opponents of the Orders-in-Council as "friends of peace" who used the

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[53]Bohstedt, Riots and Community Politics, 158-160; Broadsides and Pamphlets, 2 April 1812, 6 April 1812, "Now or Never," n.d, Manchester Central Library, Manchester; Manchester Gazette, 9 May 1812; Wheeler's Manchester Chronicle, 28 March 1812, 11 April 1812. For the advertisement calling for the loyalty address along with those who local elites who supported it see Manchester Mercury, 31 March 1812.

petitioning campaign as a tool to further their goal of ending the war. Many signers were not necessarily opposed to the war: they just opposed the draconian measures carried out by the government during the war. Altogether, both of these arguments assume more national political consciousness than certainly existed in 1812 and they do not speak to the unique ways in which political mobilization was carried out at the local level. As James Bradley aptly pointed out in his work on the American Revolution, "petitioning follows time honored, geographically defined centers of distinct political orientation."[54] We have to look then at a fusion of local relationships with the ideals presented in these petitions to find those concentric circles that linked people and provided the political mobilization necessary to carry on a campaign that was both provincial and national.

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[54]Bradley, Religion, Revolution and English Radicalism, 64; For a book that lays out the thesis that the Orders-in-Council and other early nineteenth century movements were a result of the actions of liberal "friends of peace" see J.E. Cookson, The Friends of Peace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

CHAPTER II

WILLIAM ROSCOE, LIVERPOOL AND THE ORDERS-IN-COUNCIL: 1808-1812

"I see a measure of state policy, confessedly an experiment, fail of its object, and by its operation reduce you to extreme distress---I see a number of respectable merchants, whose interests are materially detrimented by this measure, prepare to state to the highest powers, their grievances and yours which springs from the same source.--In order to give greater weight and publicity to their proceedings, they wish to submit them to a general town-meeting. But the chief magistrate refuses to give them an opportunity of doing so; and even interferes to preclude them from inviting public concurrences of those who are friendly to the proposed measures." In this way did M.N. ("in my signature I trust you will recognize an old friend") condemn the Liverpool Tory oligarchy in the pages of the Liverpool Mercury. His vitriolic denunciation of the corporation's overt interference in the debate over the Orders-in-Council addressed not just the economic distress experienced because

of those measures but the much larger local political struggle which was an important element in the repeal campaign. Indeed, in Liverpool as in no other city in the realm, the controversy over the Orders-in-Council revealed a sophisticated network of political mobilization which pitted Tory, Anglican, conservative Liverpudlians against the Whig, Dissenter, reformers.[1]

1. Background: Economic Growth in Liverpool

The economic consequences of the Orders-in-Council were important to Liverpool. Liverpool became a major port in Britain during the eighteenth century. Trade, empire and slavery led to phenomenal growth in Liverpool shipping throughout the entire eighteenth century. Thomas Baines, writing in the 1850s about this growth, estimated that the average amount of shipping entering the port was 24,404 tons in 1744 and an astonishing 260,380 tons in 1792. By 1811 that amount had jumped to 611,190 tons. As one of Britain's fastest growing ports, Liverpool became a major entrepot for imports such as cotton, silk, linen, sugar, rice, coffee, and tea and exports such as manufactured woolens, cottons, metalwares and a host of other products made throughout the Midlands and the North. Along with this economic growth there also came rapid population growth as well. In 1777, Liverpool

[1]Liverpool Mercury, 20 December 1811.

boasted of 34,107 citizens. By 1811 its population stood at 94,376.[2]

The position of Liverpool as one of the leading ports in Britain owed much to its relationship with the United States. William Rathbone IV, a merchant and ship-owner, estimated in 1808 that trade with the United States accounted for five-sixteenths of Liverpool's commerce and was growing. The mutual dependence between the United States and the port of Liverpool led to the development of a close relationship between American and Liverpool shippers and their agents, who carefully watched prices, local harbor conditions, and economic and political developments in the two countries. In 1801 Liverpudlians who were engaged in trade with the United States established the American Chamber of Commerce to co-ordinate their activities, monitor conditions at the Liverpool docks and to serve as a political pressure group to advance their economic interests when necessary.[3]

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[2]Thomas Baines, History of the Commerce and Town of Liverpool (London: Longmans, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1852), 491, 545; B.J. Tolley, "The Liverpool Campaign Against the Order in Council and War of 1812," in Liverpool and Merseyside, ed. J.R. Harris (New York: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1969), 131; Ralph Davis, The Industrial Revolution and British Overseas Trade (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1979), 94, 110.

[3]Tolley, "The Liverpool Campaign," 101-102. The American Chamber of Commerce maintained extensive records of their meetings which are intact at the Liverpool Records Office. Minute Book I covers the first decade of its existence (1801-1812).

Thus, the trade restrictions undertaken by Britain and France after 1806 created much anxiety among the American merchants of Liverpool. The constant revisions of the Orders-in-Council and the various American responses which ranged from the draconian Embargo of 1808 to the false sense of normality created by Macon's Bill No. 2[4] created great swings of prosperity and distress and left Liverpool merchants and ship-owners despairing for their futures. In letters to the editor, particularly in the Whig Liverpool Mercury, these fears for the future were vented. "I do not hesitate to say, that no individual in a private station has so much to answer for to his country as Mr. [James] Stephens," lamented Civis, referring to the man often accused of formulating Britain's retaliatory policy. "Many a half ruined creditor; many a poor starving family, may lay their distresses at the door of that gentleman."[5]

The uncertainty over governmental policy also meant that commercial houses could not engage in normal shipping. With the imposition of Macon's Bill against Britain in February of

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[4]The Embargo, instituted by President Thomas Jefferson on December 22, 1807, forbad exporting from and importing into the United States. Macon's Bill No. 2. passed on May 1, 1810, opened trade with all belligerents but offered the incentive that if either Britain or France yielded on their trade restrictions, the United States would respond by placing an embargo on the belligerent who maintained its trade restrictions.

[5]Liverpool Mercury, 18 October, 1811.

1811[6], the risk of confiscation became too great and ships sat idly in the docks as agents waited for policy to change in Britain or America. Shipping firms like the Rathbones, Cropper-Benson, and Alexander McGregor sailed with passengers only, instructed to wait for revision or abandonment of the Orders-in-Council before they shipped any goods. This, of course, left some smaller commercial houses bankrupt and a myriad of industries idle as Lancashire manufacturers found their markets dried up or too unpredictable to employ their usual complement of workers. N.Y., writing to the Liverpool Mercury in April of 1812, sarcastically noted that ships still sailed for America but now they carried "sand, gravel and paving stone" whereas America could now give "cotton, rice and naval stores."[7]

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[6]In August of 1810, President James Madison was erroneously led to believe that Napoleon was lifting France's trade restrictions. Thus, Macon's Bill No. 2 was put into effect AGAINST British trade. In truth, Napoleon did not lift his trade restrictions and thus American merchants gained no advantage from Madison's policy.

[7]Tolley, "The Liverpool Campaign," 104-106; Liverpool Mercury, 24 April 1812. In the hearings held in April of 1812 on the effectiveness of the Orders-in-Council many witnesses, including those who came from Liverpool, maintained that they were holding goods or had been told to hold goods until the Orders-in-Council were revised or revoked. Ironically, the reluctance of merchants to ship their goods in this uncertain economic climate turned fears about the effects of the Orders-in-Council into self-fulfilling prophecies. See Parliament, "Minutes of Evidence Taken Before the Committee of the Whole House to Whom it was Referred, to Consider of the Several Petitions which have been Presented to the House, in this Session of Parliament, Relating to the Orders-in-Council," Sessional Papers (Commons), vol 3 (1812): passim.

The sarcasm of N.Y. pointed to another equally serious concern felt by Liverpool commercial and manufacturing interests: would the United States need the trade once the war ended? This caused particular anxiety among Liverpudlians engaged in shipping, manufacture, and commerce as evidence increasingly pointed to the growing self-sufficiency of the United States. Thomas Thornely, appearing before Parliament's committee of inquiry into the Orders-in-Council in May of 1812 produced a letter addressed from a New York commercial house to his firm of Martin, Hope, and Thornely in which the correspondent stated that "our country is in a infinitely better state than is generally supposed; shipowners and importing merchants feel the present state of things, but the agriculture of the middle states, where grain is the staple commodity, were never more prosperous." Mercator, writing in the Liverpool Mercury in October of 1811, maintained that manufacture was widespread in America and that with the restraint placed on its growth by the existence of Anglo-American commerce now gone, Americans could now supply themselves. British trade restrictions, many Liverpudlians feared, had the effect of encouraging these efforts at self-sufficiency.[8]

Thus, it is clear that economic issues and the relationship between the United States and Liverpool deeply

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[8]"Minutes of Evidence," 345; Liverpool Mercury, 11 October 1811.

affected the lives of many in the city. It should not be surprising, then, that Liverpudlians led the way in the repeal efforts of both 1808 and 1812. It would be a great mistake, however, to see economic conditions as the sole or even the primary catalyst in the political mobilization which occurred over this issue. For the Orders-in-Council repeal campaign was only part of a series of confrontations between two clearly defined and organized groups: the Tory Anglican corporation led by John Gladstone, John Bourne, and John Bridge Aspinall (freemen and corporation leaders) and the Whig Dissenter anti-corporation reformers led by William Roscoe, William Rathbone IV (and V after his father's death in 1809) and Thomas Thornely. The issues over which these two groups sparred ranged from slavery to religion to political reform. By 1812, their interests and affiliations were clear and thus mobilization could and did occur within these two clearly defined circles.

2. Whig Dissenters and Tory Anglicans: Previous Confrontations

The quarter century of confrontation between these two groups by 1812 owed much to the strength of the personalities involved. Both the Tory Anglicans and the Whig Dissenters boasted supporters of local and national standing. Their conflicts were a microcosm of the national experience which accompanied the great changes that occurred in Britain from 1780 to 1812. When confrontation arose over the role of Dissenters in political life, the necessity of political

reform, the morality of the slave trade or a host of other issues, these men demonstrated their awareness of political issues which were of national importance. Yet, it should be pointed out that their awareness always stemmed primarily from the local context in which they framed and debated these issues. The meaning given to these issues was shaped by community and regional experience and by the means and mechanisms available for the political mobilization which took place.[9]

The Tory Anglicans who dominated Liverpool politics through control of the corporation were a clique of a dozen local grandees who dominated the office of mayor, aldermen and common council. Among them were prominent mercantile families like the Aspinalls, Gladstones, Staniforths, Boltons, Bournes, Tarletons, and Hollinsheads.[10] These families formed a self-

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[9]This national awareness in a local context is also stressed by Frank O'Gorman in his work, Voters, Patrons and Parties: The Unreformed Electoral System of Hanoverian England, 1734-1832 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1989). According to O'Gorman, "the size of the Liverpool electorate . . . its political awareness, its regular contests, and its tendency to be represented by national figures . . . lent a competitive national orientation to its politics." See page 351.

[10]The patriarch of the Aspinalls in the early nineteenth century was John Bridge Aspinall. John Gladstone dominated the Gladstone family and was the father of Prime Minister William Ewart Gladstone. Thomas Staniforth led his family and had been succeeded by his son, Samuel, by 1812 (Samuel was chosen mayor in that year). John Bolton was head of the Bolton family. Finally, H.B. Hollinhead was the long-time head of the Hollinhead dynasty and, like Samuel and Thomas Staniforth and John Bridge Aspinall, served a term as mayor of Liverpool.

perpetuating elite with son following father into positions of local power and, of course, into the coveted status of freemen. These Liverpool grandees generally worshipped together at St. George's Church, the most prominent Anglican house of worship in the city and locus of the corporation's sectarian ties to the state. Within the Anglican church itself, their local positions of political importance also gave these families clout in the governing body of the church, the local vestry. The vestry, of course, determined how funds were spent within the church itself, and while their work was often routine, it touched everyone in the town. For the local vestry was charged with the collection of the church rate and the poor rate and thus oversaw the distribution of poor relief, to which all rate payers had to contribute. In addition to their control of the local, Anglican power base, these great Tory families also founded political clubs in the early nineteenth century like the Backbone Club, the Canning Club (in honor of George Canning), and the Pitt Club as a means to express opinions on national issues and to provide cells of organizations during parliamentary election campaigns.[11]

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[11]Robert Donald Thornton, James Currie, The Entire Stranger and Robert Burns (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1963), 115; Barbara Whittingham-Jones, "Liverpool's Political Clubs 1812-1830," Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire 3 (1960): 117-138. The Backbone Club was formed in 1812 by John Gladstone in support of George Canning's parliamentary campaign in the city. The Canning Club was formed the same year, supported Canning but also wished to uphold, the ideas of William Pitt. The Pitt Club founded in 1814 was apolitical, celebrating instead the legacy of Pitt and keeping alive his memory. See Whittington-Jones,

Economically, the local Tory grandees also formed some of the most important mercantile and shipowning interests in the city. Their shipping interests, however, unlike the Dissenting reformers of the American Chamber of Commerce, were dominated by trade with the West Indian market and with the slave trade. The Staniforths were bankers but also merchants who held shares in slave vessels. Thomas Staniforth was appointed to the first Committee of the African Association in 1777; its aim was to protect the interests of slavers. Likewise, the Boltons, the Aspinalls, Tarletons, Hollinheads, and the Gladstones were West Indian shipowners with an interest in the slave trade. These mercantile aristocrats also used their positions in the corporation to protect this controversial trade. In 1787, 1791, 1796, 1799 and 1807 the Liverpool Common Council sent petitions to Parliament protesting legislation aimed at abolishing the slave trade. Indeed, through the corporation's efforts the slave trade thrived as a major source of revenue for Liverpool. In 1804 at the peak of Liverpool's involvement in this infamous trade, over 120 local ships participated in importing slaves from Africa. Besides protecting their economic interests, these local grandees also proved themselves a constant ally of the government at Westminster both before and during the Napoleonic Wars. They expressed this loyalty through a myriad of petitions supporting governmental policy against Wilkesite

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"Liverpool Political Clubs," 119-125.

agitation, against the American Revolution, against Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts and, of course against any opposition to the government's wartime policy after 1792. In exchange, they sought protection for their shipping interests in Africa and the West Indies, and allied to thwart the reforming efforts of the Whig Dissenters led by William Roscoe.[12]

If the Anglican Tory corporation was dominated by strong self-perpetuating families, the Whig Dissenter interest was equally endowed with great families and great personalities. Clearly the local leader of the Whig Dissenters was Liverpool banker, writer, and philanthropist, William Roscoe.

Throughout the twenty-five years of conflict between these two groups, William Roscoe clearly stood out as the most prominent local political figure. Born in Liverpool in 1753, Roscoe was apprenticed as an attorney, formed the early local banking firm of Leyland, Clarke, and Roscoe and made a national reputation as a writer. He gained great renown for his biography of Lorenzo d'Medici in the early 1780s but his identification with reform came in 1787 with the publication of his poem "The Wrongs of Africa," in which he condemned Liverpool's important source of commerce, the slave trade. Roscoe was equally enthusiastic in his writings about the

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[12]John Hughes, Liverpool Banks and Bankers (Liverpool: Henry Young and Sons, 1906), 62; Gomer Williams, The History of the Liverpool Privateers and Letters of Marque with an Account of the Liverpool Slave Trade (London: William Heinemann, 1897), 617.

French Revolution. Like other Britons, he welcomed the fall of the Bastille in July of 1789, believing that it ushered in a new era of political liberty. He celebrated the revolution in works such as "The Song for the Anniversary of the French Revolution" (1791) and "Unfold, Father Time, thy Long Record Unfold" (1791). In 1806, Roscoe, who gained popularity among many Liverpudlians for his reforming efforts and was supported by powerful Lancashire political leaders like Lord Stanley and Lord Sefton, mounted a challenge against the corporation's candidates Isaac Gascoyne and Banastre Tarleton for a seat in Parliament. Roscoe's victory in 1806 over long-time Liverpool M.P. Tarleton was as much a surprise to him as it was to Tarleton's supporters. Roscoe's willingness to expend large sums to bribe voters, however, was an important factor in his election, as Roscoe himself admitted. Thus began Roscoe's brief parliamentary career.[13]

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[13]For the best biography of Roscoe, see George Chandler, William Roscoe of Liverpool (London: B.T. Balsford, Ltd., 1953). For a sampling of Roscoe's letters and the opinions of his son, Henry Roscoe on his father's career, see Henry Roscoe, The Life of William Roscoe 2 vols. (London: T. Cadell and W. Blackwood, 1833). Finally, for Roscoe the banker see Hughes, 62. F.E. Sanderson in his article about politics in unreformed Liverpool claimed that Roscoe spent 12,000 pounds on the election most of it bribing voters. This large sum was necessary since he was challenging two well entrenched opponents, General Isaac Gascoyne (M.P. from Liverpool since 1796) and General Banastre Tarleton (M.P. from Liverpool since 1802). Roscoe himself admitted to this large expenditure but saw it as a necessary element of Liverpool politics. F.E. Sanderson, "The Structure of Politics in Liverpool 1780-1807," Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire 127 (1977): 77. R.G. Thorne in his history of the House of Commons also attributes much of Roscoe's success to the tremendous sums he spent, although he puts the figure

During Roscoe's tenure in Parliament, which spanned the short-lived ministry of "All the Talents,"[14] (1806-1807), Roscoe promised his fellow Liverpudlians that he would seek a gradual end to the slave trade, restrict or end the monopoly of the East India Company, and push for parliamentary reform. In London, however, he found parliamentary politics repulsive and his efforts ineffectual without his network of Liverpool connections. He was rarely in the House of Commons, failed entirely to make the resounding speeches expected of him and was overwhelmed by requests for assistance in the passage of legislation by constituents anxious to take advantage of having an active reformer in office. Ironically, he was in Parliament long enough to see the complete abolition of the slave trade in 1807 but, at Parliament's dissolution that same year, Roscoe faced a hostile homecoming as his fellow Liverpudlians accused him of destroying their livelihoods by supporting immediate abolition. Roscoe himself admitted that he had "given unpardonable offence to many of those concerned with that traffic [i.e. the slave trade]." Indeed, the violent confrontation with his local townsmen convinced Roscoe of the wisdom of not seeking re-election and he bowed out to

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slightly lower than did Sanderson. See R.G. Thorne, The House of Commons, 1790-1820, 5 vols. (London: Secker and Warburg, 1986), 2: 231. Finally, for more on the life of Roscoe see G.W. Mathew, William Roscoe (London: The Mitre Press, 1931).

[14]The Ministry of "All the Talents" was a short-lived coalition government composed of Whigs and Tories that came to power after William Pitt was forced to resign over the issue of Catholic Emancipation in 1807.

the longtime corporation candidates Gascoyne and Tarleton. With his brief national political career ended, Roscoe settled back into the political struggles of Liverpool life though he could now add to his political connections important Westminster men like Sir Samuel Romilly, William Wilberforce, and Thomas Creevy.[15]

In Liverpool Roscoe led a group of vocal reformers who challenged the power of the Liverpool corporation. They were united by economic interest and by religious and reformist convictions. Their first natural alliance was religious. The leaders of this reforming community, Thomas Thornely, William Rathbone (IV and V), James Currie, Rev. John Yates, Rev. William Shepherd, Arthur Heywood and, James Cropper, were all Dissenters. With the exception of the Rathbones, Heywoods and Croppers, who were Quakers[16], all were Unitarians. Shepherd and Yates were both Unitarian ministers and Thornely and Roscoe served in the important capacity of trustees of the largest Unitarian chapel in Liverpool, Renshaw Street Chapel. Likewise, James Currie and James Cropper were trustees of

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[15]Thorne, The House of Commons, 2: 230; Roscoe, The Life of William Roscoe, 388-391; Chandler, William Roscoe, 115-116; Ian Seller, "William Roscoe, The Roscoe Circle and Radical Politics in Liverpool, 1787-1807," Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire 120 (1968): 57-60.

[16]William Rathbone V married a Unitarian and was expelled from the Quakers for his radical views. He later joined a Unitarian congregation. See the excellent study of the Rathbones of Liverpool by Eleanor Rathbone, William Rathbone: A Memoir (London: MacMillan and Co., 1905), 39.

Kay's Street (or Paradise Street, as it was later renamed) Unitarian chapel.[17]

The Dissenting affiliation of the Liverpool reformers is of great significance. As J.C.D. Clark points out in his work English Society 1688-1832, "religion provided for Anglicans a nationwide definition of unity, and, for non-Anglicans, the definition of their inferior status."[18] Indeed, Clark's view that the confessional state was one of the chief pillars of the ancien regime in England was certainly exemplified in Liverpool where Dissenters were in almost all cases restricted from being freemen. Although Dr. James Currie was awarded this status because of his service as a physician, his case was an exception. One of the greatest of ironies in this narrow political system was that even though Roscoe could be elected to the House of Commons in 1806, he could not vote in

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[17]Until 1811 the main Unitarian chapel was Benn's Garden Chapel, but in that year Unitarian built a new chapel on Renshaw Street. See George Eyre Evans, A History of Renshaw Street Chapel and its Inhabitants (London: C. Green and Sons, 1887). For the background of William Shepherd see Francis Nicholson, Memorials of the Family of Nicholson (Kendal: Titus Wilson and Sons, 1928). For more on John Yates see H.D. Roberts, Hope Street Church: Liverpool and The Allied Nonconformity (Liverpool: Liverpool Booksellers, 1909). Finally, for nonconformity in general in Liverpool see Anna Holt, Walking Together: A Study of Liverpool Nonconformity, 1688-1938 (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1938). For the life and work of James Currie see Thornton, James Currie.

[18]J.C.D. Clark, English Society, 1688-1832 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 90. To Clark religious dissent became the most important factor in the destruction of the confessional state and thus the ancien regime in England with Catholic Emancipation and not the Reform Bill the pivotal event.

his own election since he was not a freeman. This local discriminatory practice united Dissenters in opposition against the corporation and their discontent flared up in a host of issues affecting the town.[19]

Secondly, the Dissenting chapel was an important locus of association and political mobilization. Both Unitarian chapels, Paradise Street and Renshaw Street, participated quite assertively in community affairs and local politics. Though they were restricted from being freemen, Dissenters attended local political forums en masse and made their opinions known. Not even the Anglican vestry meeting was freed from controversy. As Henry Peet, editor of the Liverpool vestry books, noted, "as rate-payers Dissenters were entitled to be present at Vestry meeting, and to vote on all questions. Whenever a favorable opportunity presented itself, they would champion any cause which they thought would place the Established Church at a disadvantage."[20]

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[19]J.C.D. Clark, English Society 1688-1832 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 90. To Clark, religious dissent in the nineteenth century became the most important factor in the destruction of the ancien regime, that is the pre-reform political system in Britain. It should also be noted that the corporation controlled the selection of freemen. While Liverpool was a rather substantial borough with between 2,000 and 3,000 voters, the corporation by controlling selection and by filling the ranks of freemen not with the rising middle classes but with craftsmen generally insured that they could control the outcome of any vote. According to O'Gorman, in every Parliamentary election from 1780 until 1830 over sixty percent of freemen were craftsmen or laborers by profession. O'Gorman, 206.

[20]Henry Peet, ed., Liverpool Vestry Books, 2 vols. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1915), 2: xxxvii.

On the national level Liverpool Dissenters also took a very forceful stand against the Test and Corporation Acts, which restricted their access to national political office. During the 1790 campaign against these discriminatory measures, Liverpool Dissenters led by Dr. James Currie formed a local organization to aid in the national repeal effort, corresponded with other Dissenting communities in Lancashire and Cheshire, and published resolutions in the local newspapers calling for "universal toleration and a completely non-confessional state, in which religious opinions would play no part in the selection of candidates for public office." Although their efforts failed, the Liverpool Dissenters' commitment to repeal certainly strengthened their unity of purpose, and reactivated the networks of political contact and cooperation which could be available for future campaigns.[21]

In addition to uniting to protect their sectarian interests, the Dissenter chapels developed a tight community of mutual sympathy and friendship. While the Tory Anglican community best preserved its power and ideology through the control of the corporation, dominance in the local Anglican church, the self-perpetuating oligarchy, control of the selection of freemen, economic ties, and political clubs, the Whig, Dissenter reformers united first through their religious

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[21]G.M. Ditchfield, "The Campaign in Lancashire and Cheshire for the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, 1787-1790," Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire 126 (1976): 118; Seller, "William Roscoe," 50.

affiliation. The role of the Dissenting chapel as the locus of political mobilization thus should not be ignored. The Dissenter community provided mutual aid, sympathy, and a means for drawing in men who supported reform. For example, Rev. William Shepherd lived during his youth with Rev. John Yates, minister at Paradise Street Chapel. By Yates he was introduced into the entire circle of Liverpool Dissenter reformers and it was through Yates that he met Roscoe and become involved in intellectual groups formed by local Dissenters.[22]

Though not as prominent nor as well developed as the Tories, a Dissenter network in business also existed in Liverpool, and many Dissenters were prominent merchants or manufacturers in the town. While the Tory Anglican oligarchy was clearly united in its interest in West Indian shipping and in the slave trade, such a firm business association was not established by Dissenters. Roscoe, for example, was a banker, a lawyer, and a writer. Arthur Heywood was a shipowner with connections in the slave trade; George Booth was an important corn merchant in the town; Thomas Thornely was a prosperous merchant and operator of a shipping firm with connections to the American trade; Currie was a well-known local physician; Yates and Shepherd were ministers; and the Rathbones were very successful shipowners. Yet, with this diversity in economic interests, there were economic networks between these men.

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[22]Nicholson, Memorials of the Family of Nicholson, 110.

They clearly formed their own separate economic, philosophic and religious community and aided one another when possible. William Rathbone IV, one of the most prosperous Dissenters, brought into his firm as apprentices both James Cropper and Thomas Thornely, men who later became part of this Dissenter network and close personal associates of Rathbone. Dissenters also had the most prominent voice in the American Chamber of Commerce, the organization formed in 1801 to foster commercial relations between the United States and Liverpool. Although it initially had a more varied membership, many of the pro-corporation members who participated in the Chamber meetings simply ceased attending by 1808 as Dissenters like James and Thomas Cropper, Thomas Thornely, and William Rathbone began to dominate the organization.[23]

Finally, the Whig Dissenter reformers united politically. In Liverpool they were visible in their opposition to the slave trade, their support for local and national political reform (particularly reform in the selection of freemen and the governing organization of the town), support for repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, and support for local

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[23]See Rathbone, William Rathbone, 10. For the early life and work of James Cropper see Kenneth Charlton, "James Cropper and Agricultural Improvement in the Early Nineteenth Century," Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire 112 (1960): 65-78. Membership in the American Chamber of Commerce was gleaned from American Chamber of Commerce Minute Book I, 1801-1812.

philanthropic projects like the creation of the Liverpool Athenaenum, a local library and reading room begun in 1797.[24]

Since the Liverpool Dissenters had little ability to shape political elections directly, the political organizations they formed were more on the order of philosophical and debating societies. In the 1780s the first such organization emerged, the Liverpool Philosophical and Literary Society. Currie, Roscoe, Rathbone IV, Shepherd, and Yates were all members. They proclaimed that they were being led by the ideal of "congeniality of sentiment and common efforts to promote the public interest." Although records of this early society are no longer extant, it is known that it disbanded by the mid-1780s. After the beginning of the French Revolution, however, another such organization was founded by Currie and Roscoe. Not only were all of the prominent Dissenters members, but the Debating Society's weekly meetings invited lively public discussion about great political changes occurring at home and abroad and drew large audiences. Although the society clearly prospered, by 1797 many of its members feared that it contravened the Seditious Meetings Act of 1795 and thus decided to disband rather than face arrest. Surely, however, the leaders of the Philosophical and Debating

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[24]Thornton, James Currie, 165.

Society continued to meet in private to discuss the affairs of the day.[25]

The sharp religious, political, and economic divisions between these two well-established circles in Liverpool led to a host of confrontations between 1787 and 1808. Indeed, by the time the Orders-in-Council campaign was underway in 1808, Roscoe and his circle had experienced more than six public confrontations with the corporation interests. The most sustained and vitriolic clash between these two groups was over the very nature of Liverpool government itself. The powerful mercantile families who led Liverpool created and maintained a closed borough. Their power was centered in the Common Council and the mayoralty which were elected by freemen, those who had been given the "freedom" of the town through birth, servitude or gift of the Common Council. Although the freemen themselves were quite socially mixed, that is from a wide range of social classes, the corporation kept tight control over the creation of new freemen. Some contemporaries even suggested that the council wanted to maintain a population of freemen who were of "humble origin" so that they could be easily influenced by bribes, alcohol, and other pressures. Moreover, the council reduced the overall number of freemen in Liverpool throughout the eighteenth century. According to F.E. Sanderson, while

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[25]See Seller, "William Roscoe," for further exploration of these philosophical and debating societies; Whittingham-Jones, "Liverpool's Political Clubs," 134.

freemen represented twenty percent of the adult male population in 1734, that number shrank to only three percent by 1812. As one local historian aptly noted, "the freedom at that period, was confined to the sons and apprentices of freemen, and all others were utterly excluded from it except a few generals and one or two eminent statesmen who had distinguished themselves in the defense of the slave trade." This fact was bore out by recent research by Frank O'Gorman who found that while less than thirty percent (approximately 3,000 freemen) were gentlemen or merchants and manufacturers, over seventy percent were craftsmen, laborers or engaged in agriculture.[26]

The corporation did more than merely control the number of freemen. It also sought to restrict contested elections either for local offices or for seats in Parliament. The council could usually get their candidates elected to the two seats Liverpool had in the House of Commons in large measure because of the control it had over the selection of freemen and the expense entailed in running against the corporation's well-financed candidates. Roscoe's election in 1806 must be seen as an aberration rather than a common occurrence. It should also be remembered that even his election came as a result of spending huge sums on the electorate in order to win

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[26]Sanderson, "The Structure of Politics," 68, 71; Ramsey Muir, William Roscoe: An Inaugural Lecture (Liverpool: University of Liverpool, 1906), 28. O'Gorman, Voters, Patrons and Parties, 206.

the seat, sums so large, in fact, that Roscoe found it impossible to attempt a re-election bid in 1807. The corporation-sponsored team of Gascoyne and Tarleton and, after 1812, Canning and Gascoyne, was re-elected in every parliamentary election for decades. Moreover, the council also had the sole right to select the members of its own body, thus preventing any contested elections when vacancies opened.

Tight control over all local power and the persistent charges of venality led to a series of clashes between the corporation and anti-corporation interests. While Roscoe and his friends clearly were a part of this long-standing grievance (Dr. James Currie being the only one who was granted the status of a freemen among Roscoe's allies), they were not alone in their struggle. Many Tories who were not a part of the council membership and independent freemen sorely resented the power of the Common Council and the self-perpetuating nature of its membership. In 1790 this resentment resulted in a local petitioning effort that amassed 1,098 signatures demanding that the mayor call a "common hall," an assembly of freemen that had the right to fill existing vacancies on the council. Not only did the mayor, John Sparling, refuse to grant the request, but the corporation refused to consider self-reform even though its questionable practices were investigated by the House of Commons three times during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Although the petitioners gave up on their demands for a common hall when it

was obvious that the corporation would fight any measure aimed at reform, this grievance and the overall venality and exclusivity of the corporation were the issues which united many independent freemen and other excluded Liverpudlians with reformers like Roscoe and Rathbone and certainly helped William Roscoe win the parliamentary election in 1806.[27]

If conflict over the control of local political power underpinned the debate between these two well-defined groups, certainly the slave trade provided an issue which gave their conflict a moral tone and intensified local public debate. Not only was the corporation willing to use its local political resources to protect and promote the slave trade in which many of their members were involved, but, by the late eighteenth century, Dissenter reformers became increasingly committed to the abolition of slavery and the slave trade.

The leading voice of the Liverpool abolitionists was, of course, William Roscoe. His local fame as a writer sprang from the influential poem "The Wrongs of Africa," which he published in 1787. Yet Roscoe clearly did not fight alone against the slave trade and, in fact, Dissenters and abolitionists became linked throughout the twenty years that slavery was debated in Liverpool. Prominent Dissenters organized both national and local groups aimed at spreading

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[27]Francois Vigier, Change and Apathy: Liverpool and Manchester During the Industrial Revolution (London: M.I.T. Press, 1970), 71; James Picton, ed. Municipal Archive and Records from A.D. 1700 to the Passing of the Municipal Reform Act 1835 (Liverpool: Gilbert and Walmsley, 1886), 203.

their abolitionist message. In 1783 a local group led by Quaker William Rathbone was established to foster abolitionism and in 1787 Roscoe, Rathbone IV and V, Currie, Yates, and William Wallace joined the newly created Society for the Abolition of the African Slave Trade which met in London.[28]

Although the Dissenters wrote pamphlets, poems, broadsides and spoke publicly against the wrongs of the slave trade, the corporation members met this challenge to their commercial interests with vigor. In 1788 and each subsequent time that petitions against the slave trade were sent to Parliament from Liverpool abolitionists, the corporation responded with counter petitions and vitriolic articles in sympathetic newspapers such as the Liverpool Courier and Gore's Liverpool Advertiser. In 1788, the corporation even awarded the freedom of the city to several Liverpudlians who lobbied the House of Commons in support of the slave trade.[29]

It is clear that slavery created a potentially explosive issue in Liverpool. In 1788, for example, after Roscoe published "A General View of the African Slave Trade," a fierce print campaign erupted between him and the Rev. Raymond Harris, a Jesuit priest and slavery apologist. The debate occupied the attention of the town for nearly the whole year. The corporation's support for Harris (who was later thanked and awarded £100 by the corporation) and the overall popular

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[28]Williams, History of the Liverpool Privateers, 568.

[29]Ibid., 611.

support for the slave trade meant that it took a great deal of moral courage to oppose this important source of local revenue. As the issue was debated throughout the early 1790s, there were threats to abolitionists' lives and property and the young James Cropper, employed as an apprentice in William Rathbone's shipping firm, was warned by his family to "keep cool and say little." Such warnings were justified considering the hostile reception William Roscoe received in Liverpool after Parliament abolished the slave trade in 1807 during his short career in the House of Commons.[30]

Finally, the last major area of confrontation which occurred between these two well-defined circles concerned national politics: the government at Westminster and its conduct in the wars against the French Revolution and Napoleon. For the corporation, the outbreak of war between Britain and France in 1793 could not have been more fortuitous. The Dissenter reformers' challenge to corporation power, the campaign against the Test and Corporation Acts, and the slave trade controversy could now be swept away in a tide of patriotism toward the wartime government. Corporation leaders also hoped that they would benefit from the national government's overall strengthening of law and order. The Dissenter reformers, however, were not so easily cowed into

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[30]Seller, "William Roscoe," 50; James Charlton "James Cropper and Liverpool's Contribution to the Anti-Slavery Movement," Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire 123 (1971): 57.

retreating from their commitment to reform. Thus, while the corporation staunchly and vehemently supported every governmental policy, the Dissenter reformers challenged the usefulness of the war, called for parliamentary reform and openly thwarted loyalty petitions and other public measures of support for the government at Westminster.

The reformers' greatest period of challenge to the corporation over the conduct of the war occurred between 1792-1795, the pivotal years when war against the French Revolution began and when Britain faced the greatest threat of invasion from French forces. The essential positions of the two groups on the issue of the war itself were also established in these crucial years; the corporation demonstrated its public support for the war and the government's conduct of the war; Dissenter reformers protested the war and Britain's commitment to destroying the French Revolution. In three incidents, in 1792, 1794 and 1795, these two groups clashed publicly as corporation-sponsored loyalty addresses were directly challenged by the Dissenter reformers. In 1792 in a response to the rise of the Jacobins to power in France, the corporation prepared addresses of loyalty to the King and even encouraged the local populace to commit acts of violence against local reformers. In June and December of 1792 loyalty addresses to the King were prepared and in widely-attended public meetings the corporation condemned "the wild and delusive theories tending to weaken the sentiments of

obedience to the laws, and veneration for our happy constitution both civil and religious" and promised to "resist at the hazard of our lives and fortunes, all attempts that are so obviously and vitally repugnant to every principle of reason, gratitude and duty."[31]

William Rathbone IV responded with his own pamphlet, "Equality," and warned the mayor of the consequences of inciting violence. He had only to point to riots which occurred in Manchester in March, June and December of 1792 to demonstrate the danger in encouraging violence. Moreover, the corporation overestimated support for its anti-Jacobinical position, and in the December petitioning effort it was forced by local pressure to retreat from its initial vitriolic language to a more moderate stance. Yet it was clear that the corporation did have much local support from Tory and corporation sympathizers, who threatened Rathbone and his fellow "sanculottes" [sic] for publishing the pamphlet and supporting moderation.[32]

The conflicts of 1794 and 1795 were, in essence, simply repetitions of the first confrontation. In 1794, Roscoe and his fellow reformers again fought a corporation sponsored loyalty address, actively interrupted the petitioning meeting but failed to stop the corporation's efforts, which resulted

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[31]Picton, Municiple Archive, 188.

[32]Sanderson, "The Structure of Politics in Liverpool," 81; Seller, "William Roscoe," 52.

in over 12,000 signatures. In 1795, the extent of popular support for loyalism and concomitant hostility to the Liverpudlian reformers was demonstrated by Mayor John Gregson's refusal to grant a request by the reformers to present a peace petition to Parliament. Over two hundred merchants requested the refusal, fearing that it would be "mischievous" and Gregson and the corporation were only too happy to agree.[33]

The threat of invasion and the popular support for loyalism marked a temporary end to the Dissenter and corporation public conflict. By 1795, reformers were carefully watched, organizations like the Liverpool Literary Society were threatened by Pittite legislation against seditious meetings, and many reformers turned away from public affairs, some even purchasing land in the United States as a possible means of escape from further oppression. Yet if the reformers lamented that politics was now reduced to "personal aggrandizement" instead of public service and that the populace seemed to abandon them, it was only a temporary setback. By 1808, the war was in its second decade, the threat of invasion had ceased, and the government at Westminster was now engaged in economic warfare with Napoleon.

The many confrontations in the period from 1790-1810 thus were important in framing the attitudes of these two distinct

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[33]J.A. Picton, Memorials of Liverpool (Liverpool: Gilbert and Walmsley, 1903), 241.

Liverpool circles. Although some of the original supporters of their causes were dead by 1808, when Roscoe and his fellow Dissenters challenged the corporation's support for the Orders-in-Council, they brought into this debate all of the previous conflicts which had created their two alliances over two decades, and thus the mobilization which occurred in the spring of 1808 and in the spring of 1812 was based not only on economic self-interest but on the world views and the networks created by these two opposing groups.

The corporation effectively controlled political discourse and dissent from 1798 to 1806. Predictably, they supported the government's campaigns against Napoleon, sent periodic addresses of appreciation and loyalty to the Crown (particularly after the Battle of Trafalgar), and as a whole benefitted from the overall popular air of acceptance toward the war. However, not only did many of the Dissenter reformers maintain their opposition to the war, albeit a quiet opposition, but when the war turned to economic annihilation after 1806, the detached, faraway conflict became an immediate local concern.

William Roscoe's short and largely unsuccessful parliamentary career in 1806-1807 was clearly a turning point away from the domination of the Liverpool corporation over the political discourse of the town. While he was forced to withdraw when the populace reacted violently toward his successful efforts in Parliament to abolish the slave trade,

the political situation did not return to its previous apathy even after Roscoe himself retreated from public life. The longevity of the war and its escalation meant that Liverpudlians increasingly had to calculate how much economic destruction they could withstand. For some, this meant opposition to Britain's commitment to economic warfare and trade restrictions against neutrals (particularly the United States). For others, however, in Liverpool and elsewhere, it meant renewed opposition to the war itself.

3. Liverpool and the 1808 Orders-in-Council Repeal Campaign

It was again Roscoe who opened the debate against the war and the Orders-in-Council. In January 1808 he published the most controversial pamphlet of his career, Considerations of the Causes of the Present War, in which he condemned the government for its failure to negotiate with Napoleon, denounced the escalation of the conflict to the economic sphere, and called for an end to the hostilities. It was an immediate success; Roscoe's London publishers marketed four editions within a few months, and it was read by influential members of Parliament and by the young lawyer and contributor to the Edinburgh Review, Henry Brougham, who praised Roscoe's ideas for being "so precisely the same with those of which I have long been a zealous, though feeble and anonymous advocate."[34]

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[34]Henry Brougham to William Roscoe, 28 January 1808, Roscoe Papers, Liverpool Records Office, Liverpool. For the publication figures on the pamphlet see letter from Messrs.

Roscoe's pamphlet was only a part of a renewed campaign for peace that erupted in Yorkshire and Lancashire in 1807-1808. This renewed agitation for peace after more than a decade of inactivity helped spark meetings and petitions in cities like Leeds and Manchester and in manufacturing towns like Bolton and Huddersfield. Yet, Roscoe's pamphlet also created much controversy. His efforts at promoting peace were met with scorn by the Liverpool corporation and by many outside of the town as well. The Times of London proclaimed Roscoe's ideas to be "jacobinical," accused him of supporting Napoleon, and sarcastically noted that Roscoe expected Britain to "throw away our sword, and beg our assailant to desist from his blows."[35]

In Liverpool, the corporation used as its voice the newly created ultra Tory newspaper the Liverpool Courier (begun in January 1808) to condemn Roscoe's writings. In its pages Roscoe's efforts at peace were widely assailed. Thomas Kaye, the editor of the newspaper, deprecated the efforts of peace petitioners in neighboring Manchester and Bolton and claimed

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Cadice and Davies to William Roscoe, 1 February 1808, Roscoe Papers.

[35]The Times (London), 11 February 1808. In his book, The Friends of Peace, J.E. Cookson maintained that Yorkshire and Lancashire became the center for this peace activity largely because of the flourishing Dissenter population. These Dissenter reformers he labels "liberals" and sees these early efforts at organization rewarded with the final repeal over the Orders-in-Council and in post-war reform movements. See J.E. Cookson, The Friends of Peace (Cambridge) Cambridge University Press, 1982), passim.

that they were signed by "hundreds of fictitious names, in forged handwriting and by boys from six to twelve years old." Roscoe himself was criticized in the pages of the newspaper for promoting the ideas of peace, for being influenced by "party zeal," and for being the agent of a "violent party of men." The power of the corporation and the wide condemnation of the petitioners in the conservative press was so great that Liverpudlians were unable to raise a public meeting or send a peace petition to Parliament in 1808. Pressure from the corporation meant that the reformers had to look in other directions to express their disapproval against the government's wartime policies.[36]

It was in the midst of this renewed clamoring for peace that Liverpool merchants began their campaign against the Orders-in-Council. It was natural that Liverpudlian reformers would reject the government's retaliatory trade policy. Merchants, particularly American merchants, had much to lose by the trade restrictions and the concomitant deterioration of Anglo-American relations. The passage of the Embargo Act by the United States Congress in December of 1807 demonstrated that Liverpool's greatest commercial ally would not sit idly by as her commerce was treated as a tool of war by the British and the French. Moreover, the corporation's support for the expansion of the Orders-in-Council and its overt delight at seeing West Indian trade protected and so openly supported

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[36]Liverpool Courier, 16 March, 6 April 1808.

only furthered the longstanding rift between these two bitter enemies. Thus, after a decade of silence, political mobilization and public controversy again erupted pitting the Tory, Anglican corporation against the Whig, Dissenter reformers.

On 2 March 1808, merchants concerned with the American trade met at the Royal Hotel to discuss the Orders-in-Council. Though claiming themselves to be non-partisan, Dissenter reformers clearly led the meeting. James Cropper chaired the meeting. William Rathbone IV spoke of the "ties of affinity" and the "similarities of language, of manner and habits" which bound America and Britain. The merchants listened as Dissenters John Richardson and Thomas Martin defended Rathbone's views. And, after the passage of two petitions, one for the House of Commons and one for the House of Lords, Cropper, Rathbone IV, and Martin were chosen as delegates to present their town's petition and opinions to Parliament.[37]

If there were doubts that this was indeed a continuation of the twenty-year-long local political struggle between these two groups, the response of the corporation to the repeal petitions laid this idea to rest. In a manner reminiscent of the 1790s, the corporation, seeing its interests and hold on public opinion threatened, called a meeting for 16 March 1808 to present a loyalty address to the Crown. Its purpose was

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[37]Baines, History of the Town and Commerce of Liverpool, 531.

simple--to show support for governmental policy including the Orders-in-Council and to thwart efforts to force a repeal of the measures. Roscoe and the "opposition party" packed the meeting and offered a counter petition again condemning the conduct of the government and the continuation of the Orders-in-Council. Both petitions received signatures and it was clear that Roscoe's efforts had a damning effect on the corporation: his petition received 14,000 signatures while the corporation could only muster 9,000 supporters. Thus Roscoe rallied much public support for the cause of repeal and created a conflict which engaged the town for the next month. The Liverpool Courier again became the official voice of condemnation for Roscoe's actions. Roscoe and friends were accused of inciting violence, of "impairing (Britain's) energies through domestic dissention" and throwing the country "into the arms of the enemy." The corporation also decided to counter the repeal efforts with a petition of their own and gathered the support of over thirty merchant houses who, on 23 March 1808, presented a petition supporting the Orders-in-Council.[38]

Perhaps because the economic issue touched the lives of more Liverpudlians than previous reforming campaigns or because of the commitment of the two sides to success, the Orders-in-Council campaign created the greatest cleavage in public opinion in the twenty year struggle between these two

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[38]Liverpool Courier, 2, 16, 23 March 1808.

groups. Dissenter reformers proclaimed the necessity of American commercial ties and the right of free trade. They argued that their opinions were shared by the most respectable merchants in the city and that they had the force of great numbers behind them. Their opponents argued that the reformers sought only their own economic self-interest and that they lacked a "patriotic feeling which absorbs the consideration of low gains in the great concerns of the nation." The opponents of repeal also argued that <u>their</u> supporters were the most respectable merchants, that the quality and not the quantity of the signers must be weighed and that "public clamour" and the "literary popguns" of Roscoe and his supporters were "to us a matter of no import whatever."[39]

Meanwhile, the delegates sent to present the Liverpool repeal petition to Parliament received an education in parliamentary proceedings. Rathbone, Cropper, and Martin found that not only was their parliamentary representative, Banastre Tarleton, "despised even by his own side" and completely uncooperative toward their efforts, but, to their dismay, the petition to the House of Commons was rejected on the grounds of informality. The Liverpool delegates also found little support from fellow provincial cities, which were apathetic or outright hostile to their efforts. While William Rathbone condemned the conduct of members of parliament for

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[39]<u>Liverpool Courier</u>, 23, 30 March 1808.

supporting the Orders measures, his greatest censure was aimed at his fellow Britons. "Are not the people still more ignorant, debased, profligate and infatuated," Rathbone lamented to Roscoe, who remained in Liverpool to organize support. "How are the Councils of administration to be changed when men support them. Leeds, Birmingham, Bristol not a petition from either of them is to be procured."[40]

The agitation for repeal did give the delegates the opportunity to meet influential Whigs in the House of Commons. Rathbone mentioned his warm acquaintance with Lords Derby, Grenville and Lauderdale, Thomas Creevy, Earl Grey and, of course, Henry Brougham, the man selected to represent the repeal interests at the bar of the House of Commons. Although only five provincial petitions against the measures reached Parliament, agitation by members of Commons and the American Embargo act led to a parliamentary inquiry in the spring of 1808. It was perhaps this inquiry which had the greatest effect on the delegates. Not only did they get to witness the way in which Parliament managed its affairs, but Rathbone in particular came away with a strong affection for Brougham. "He is a host for talent and intelligence; and so pleasant in his manner, he is daily with us. And I suppose our selection of him as Counsel and (as I hope) our influence with the Londoners to do the same will be of great service in bringing

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[40]William Rathbone to William Roscoe, 29 February 1808, 23 March 1808, Roscoe Papers.

him forward." Indeed, Rathbone's predictions came true. Brougham gained a national reputation and became a life-long friend of many of the Liverpudlians he first became acquainted with in this 1808 campaign. His letters to Roscoe discussing reform and the affairs of state became quite frequent. He corresponded with Thornely, Martin and the elder Rathbone, a man with whom he developed a particularly close friendship.[41]

For all of the experience they gained, however, the delegates came home empty-handed. The provinces seemed steeped in apathy. The inquiry pitted Brougham against the equally talented Sir James Stephens (who many argue was the author of the Orders-in-Council), and it failed to produce enough important credible businessmen to show that the Orders-in-Council were creating economic destruction. Many communities were indeed war weary and seeking change. They channeled their energies, however, into petitions demanding peace, a completely futile gesture which ignored entirely the role of the Orders-in-Council in their distress. In Liverpool there was little doubt that, though much controversy was created by the issue, many were deeply divided about what should be done. Opposing a wartime measure aimed at hurting the enemy and giving in to pressure from former colonies simply was too much to ask of many merchants in the spring of

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[41]William Rathbone to William Roscoe n.d., 1808, Roscoe Papers. For Brougham's advice to Roscoe on conducting extra-parliamentary agitation see Henry Brougham to William Roscoe, n.d., 1808, Roscoe Papers.

1808. After all, substantive proof of the effects of economic retaliation and the embargo did not yet exist. The appeal of loyalty was still strong, and many viewed the war and the Orders-in-Council as vital to Britain's national survival.

If the reformers failed to achieve their goal of repeal, however, they did learn from this experience. The delegates brought back from Westminster a deep distrust and cynicism toward the parliamentary process; this undoubtedly affected their judgment in the subsequent repeal campaign. In the future, they also realized the need to expend more effort on drafting their petitions, on gaining supporters, and on showing the unique and devastating effect that Liverpool suffered from the Orders-in-Council. The petitioners also learned that conflating their demands for repeal with other political objectives weakened their overall effectiveness. In the future, they must seek to be more focused on the one problem at hand. The reformers also needed to involve more local organizations in their efforts. Surely the Dissenting chapels were an important source of mobilization for the reformers, but what seems unusual was the lack of comment (in the Minutes and in any public forum) or efforts from the American Chamber of Commerce. The reason for this silence was unclear, but perhaps it can be attributed to the membership's own division on the question of repeal. In the future, more support from prominent local merchants was seen as a necessity. Liverpool reformers also realized the importance

of establishing greater ties with other provincial groups who sought repeal. This became a particularly important element in Brougham's later strategy, and in 1812 he wrote, lobbied, and advised a number of separate local repeal efforts and spread the ideas which came out of these efforts to various provincial cities. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the reformers needed a local voice for their opinions and actions. The corporation used to great effect the pages of the Liverpool Courier to spread their message of loyalism. Yet, the reformers lacked such a weapon. No newspaper was sympathetic and none would publish editorial views from men like Roscoe. This enormous problem was solved on 5 July 1811 when Egerton Smith, local printer and book seller, published the first Liverpool Mercury, the voice for reform in Liverpool for years to come. Its very first issue demonstrated to the public its political standing and ironically also confirmed the growing relationship between Henry Brougham and the Liverpool reformers. For on its first page, Smith chose to print a letter from William Roscoe to Henry Brougham which publicly called for parliamentary reform. The campaign to repeal the Orders-in-Council also helped to reopen the floodgate of other reforming ideals.[42]

4. Reprise: 1812

Despite the corporation's obvious satisfaction in seeing its opponents so soundly beaten in yet another local struggle,

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[42]Liverpool Mercury, 5 June 1811.

repeal supporters had one powerful weapon in their arsenal, time. It was clear that the various provincial interests which petitioned had not been able as a group to present enough evidence of national economic dislocation and thus the provinces as a whole remained apathetic. In Liverpool and elsewhere, the appeal of patriotism and loyalty to governmental policy still received support in the face of stagnant yet not desperate economic conditions. Yet by 1811-1812, Anglo-American relations stood at the brink of collapse. While there was some economic recovery in 1809-1810 when trade with the United States resumed, this ended with the imposition of Macon's Bill in February 1811. The renewed American embargo against British trade again left British ships sitting idly in their docks. As in 1808, Midland, West Riding, and Lancashire industries felt the effects of declining markets and unemployment as the number of bankruptcies swelled. Moreover, the Perceval government which came to power in 1809 not only sought to maintain the Orders but meant to extend them by utilizing the Orders as a way to promote domestic shipping through the issuance of licenses for trade with the continent, licenses which were meant to favor British shipping at the expense of neutral carriers. Evidence was ample by 1811 that not only were the Orders to remain in place for the duration of the war but that the government was willing to ignore its domestic industrial production and risk a war with America to maintain them in force. Thus not only were

economic issues becoming imperative but again merchants and manufacturers throughout the Midlands and the North realized that they must coalesce in order that their voice in the political nation would be heard.

In Liverpool the deterioration of Anglo-American relations and the concomitant decline in activity at the docks again led the city's Dissenter reformers to be at the forefront of the campaign against the Orders-in-Council. In the renewed struggle, however, they employed the lessons they learned from their previous failure. To overcome the power of the corporation, the reformers realized the importance of mobilizing a larger proportion of the populace both locally and in other provincial cities. To achieve this, they turned to the literary and organizational efforts of local reformers such as William Roscoe and to national political leaders like Henry Brougham, elected M.P. from Camelford in 1810.

The first stirring of renewed agitation against the Orders-in-Council came from within the American merchant and shipping community itself and was a spontaneous result of the declining economic activities at the docks. In February of 1811 a special meeting of the American Chamber of Commerce was called by president Cyrus Morrell. The Chamber, completely inactive in the previous campaign, now wished to contact Banastre Tarleton Liverpool Member of Parliament to inquire whether there were any plans to seek repeal of the Orders-in-Council. It is unclear exactly what specifically led to the

Chamber's concern. The invocation of Macon's Bill against Great Britain could not yet have been known. It is clear from the minutes however, that the members of the Chamber were distressed at the level of unemployment in their city and hoped that a reopening of Anglo-American trade would offer some relief. The minutes of the Chamber record no response to their request.[43]

The growing concern for Liverpool's economic future was next taken up by Egerton Smith in the Liverpool Mercury. In September and October of 1811 weekly correspondence began to appear from "Mercator," "Civis," and "Viator" urging a repeal of the Orders-in-Council. "Mercator" in particular provided cogent arguments for repeal in his weekly letter to the newspaper. Although his identity can only be surmised, he was certainly connected with the American trade for he provided information from American agents and statistics on the declining Anglo-American trade to demonstrate the effects of the Orders on domestic and foreign commerce and on the growing industrial self-sufficiency of the United States:

> In maintaining the Orders in Council, and in depriving ourselves of our commercial connections with America, are we not supporting a phantom and giving up the substance, for that which does not appear to be even the shadow of advantage? But, says Mr. Perceval, the Orders in Council are intended to compel the Continent of Europe to receive our produce and manufactures--for such a purpose what is

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[43]American Chamber of Commerce, Minute Book I, February 1811.

> the sacrifice of America?--Excellent politician!--This scheme has existed four years, and we find ourselves more completely excluded from the Continent than ever--many kinds of colonial produce most deplorably reduced in nominal, and destroyed as to real value--our manufacturers in a state of alarming depression, and America still refusing submission to our measures.[44]

It is unclear what role the usual nucleus of Dissenter reformers played in this early stage of renewed agitation. Since the identity of the writers of the editorials is not known, they cannot be directly attributed to Rathbone, Thornely, or Roscoe, though clearly the forceful arguments presented lends support to a claim that these men, who had strong ties to the American trade, gave their acquiescence and perhaps literary support to the efforts. The American Chamber, of course, was clearly dominated by anti-corporation reform supporters. The prominent role it took in this renewed campaign reveals that the test of loyalty would not deter them from combatting the threat to their economic prosperity.

Economic conditions deteriorated markedly enough throughout 1811 that by November the American Chamber was moved to hold another special meeting to discuss the Orders. At the meeting they drew up resolutions requesting a repeal of the Orders and decided to hold a larger public meeting at the Golden Lion Inn on Dale Street to seek public support for these resolutions in a petition to the Prince Regent. A

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[44]Liverpool Mercury, 20 September 1811.

formal requisition to call this public meeting (as required by local law) was made to the Mayor John Bourne by James Cropper and Thomas Martin, who had presented Liverpool's petition against the Orders in 1808, and was supported in local advertisements in the Liverpool Mercury and Billings Commercial Advertiser by Thornely, Rathbone, Booth, Thomas Cropper, and nine other merchants.[45] Yet the mayor, with the Common Council and West Indian shipping interests behind him, refused to call the meeting and further told those who made the request that there was no possibility that he would grant their request in the future.

The corporation seems to have easily beaten back the opening salvo from its familiar enemy. Indeed, with the support of the Perceval government at Westminster and the imminent threat of Luddite violence in Lancashire, Nottinghamshire, and Yorkshire, by the winter of 1811 the corporation could and did cite the surrounding turmoil to bolster its claim that it could not allow a breach of the peace to occur. The opposition would have to be content with having its petition sent quietly around the city without the benefit of a public forum to promote it and without the legitimacy that a public meeting would give it.

Yet in the fall of 1811 two important events occurred to keep alive the repeal efforts and guarantee growing support

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[45]Liverpool Mercury, 13 December 1811; Billings Liverpool Advteriser, 9 December 1811.

throughout the provinces. First, Bourne's refusal was openly debated in the Liverpool Mercury and reported in other provincial newspapers like the Midland Chronicle (Birmingham), Nottingham Journal and Cowdroy's Manchester Gazette. The provincial press thus became a very important vehicle in mobilizing opinion and efforts on behalf of those supporting repeal. In Liverpool itself this meant a vitriolic denunciation of the corporation's actions by the editor of the Mercury and by local citizens who wrote editorials to the newspaper. In the 20 December 1811 edition, for example, "M.N." furiously denounced Bourne:

> Is not the American trade of importance to the town? Let our Chief Magistrate ask the starving mechanics of every description who are deprived of work by the absence of that trade. Let him ask the families of the laborers who have been lately discharged in consequence of the failure of the Dock duties. Let him ask the substantial shop-keeper. Let him enquire of the once active publican, and they will tell him that whatever may be his feelings, to them the American trade is of vital importance.[46]

Significantly, M.N. also urged the local freemen to shed their yoke of servility to the corporation and use this refusal as a springboard to demands that the corporation be more responsive to the people. Clearly, the conflict over the Orders-in-Council again demonstrated that embedded in the

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[46]Liverpool Mercury, 20 December 1811.

concern for economic conditions was the continual opposition to the corporation's immense power.

In the months ahead the positions of those who wanted repeal of the Orders-in-Council and those who opposed it hardened and became more bitter than in any previous confrontation. This was clearly the result of the power of the local press. With the Liverpool Courier speaking for the corporation and the Liverpool Mercury speaking for the opposition and particularly for Roscoe, the Orders-in-Council campaign became very much a print war, something unique in the history of these conflicts. The corporation maintained its staunch loyalty to the government's wartime policy or, as the Courier, said to "British principles and feelings." The Mercury meanwhile called on its readers to support a repeal of the Orders and any measure which restricted their trade or endangered their livelihoods. "Every restriction and every monopoly of trade, cannot be continued even by the most obstinate and pertinacious minister," maintained Egerton Smith.[47]

Despite the support of a vocal newspaper, the advocates of repeal needed a leader with political acumen. Although William Roscoe was an accomplished writer and spokesmen for local reforming efforts, he was not a tactician. The renewed campaign for repeal in Liverpool was, in fact, threatened not

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[47]Liverpool Courier, 29 April 1812; Liverpool Mercury, 13 March 1812.

only by the corporation's tactics but by the reformers themselves. For Roscoe in particular wished to link repeal of the Orders-in-Council to issues like corporation venality and the need for parliamentary reform. As in 1808, when many communities conflated repeal with peace, Liverpudlians were urged by Roscoe to support reform in parliamentary representation as the way to achieve repeal. Thus the second notable event which occurred in the fall of 1811 was the renewal of ties between Liverpudlians and Henry Brougham, now a Member of Parliament. Though the Liverpool reformers had a sympathetic press and the American merchants fully behind them, they still needed Brougham's support and tactical ability.

Brougham's guidance was of paramount importance to the reformers. From November 1811 until repeal succeeded in June 1812, Brougham corresponded with Roscoe and Thornely, gave his counsel to Liverpool reformers who sought him out in London and, of course, championed their cause in Parliament. In fact, Thomas Thornely consulted with Brougham as early as November 1811, when the American Chamber drew up its resolutions for repeal of the Orders. Then as later, Brougham responded by providing recommendations on what issues should be raised in the resolutions and by encouraging the Liverpudlians to "show the <u>local</u> effects of the Orders on the town of Liverpool" and he urged them to resist the temptation to rely too heavily on London connections in advancing their

campaign. As the November resolutions demonstrate, Brougham's advice was heeded.[48]

One element of advice which the Liverpool reformers particularly heeded was documenting how the Orders-in-Council caused specific difficulties in Liverpool. Indeed, one of the most notable weaknesses of the 1808 petitioning effort was the lack of individualism in the responses from the petitioning cities. Roscoe, Thornely and others determined not to make this mistake again, so while they sought Brougham's advice actively they clearly did not want him linked directly to the petitioning movement in Liverpool itself. For example, when Brougham offered to allow the Liverpool Mercury to publish a letter which he wrote to supporters of repeal in Birmingham on the necessity and right to petition the House of Commons against the Orders-in-Council, Thornely and Roscoe politely declined. As Roscoe explained:

> I need not say how fully we coincide in every sentiment you have expressed; but on the best consideration we can give we have been inclined to with hold (sic) it; not because such sentiments are not very proper to rouse the public to a sense of their situation, but because we think you have a higher and more important province assigned you than to come forward in your own name as the Person suggesting them. On such an occasion it might be observed, that when the People are distressed they will be ready enough to speak of their own accord; and it might in some degree prevent the good effects of your exertions, to be told in the House, that

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[48]Henry Brougham to Thomas Thornely, 14, 22 November 1811, Brougham Papers, University College Library, London.

> the petitions to which you refer were the consequence of your efforts. Other points had some weight in our decision, but this was the most important.[49]

Thornely did assure Brougham that the letter would be circulated "in such a way among the leading men, as to procure that witness in petitions which will be desired from your strong recommendation of the importance of the measure."[50] However, they were committed to controlling their own petitioning efforts without the appearance of manipulation from politicians at Westminster.

Finally, Brougham shrewdly advised Thomas Thornely of the importance of focusing on the repeal of the Orders to the exclusion of other issues. He counseled that they should "avoid all introduction of political topics unconnected with the serious matters which immediately press" and, perhaps in a reference to Roscoe's specific interests, he also recommended that the issue of parliamentary reform "should be kept separate from your present object."[51] Indeed, evidence from the petitions demonstrates that references to tangential issues such as peace were absent in 1812. In fact, the singularity of the petitioners' focus became an integral part

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[49]William Roscoe to Henry Brougham, 11 March 1812, Roscoe Papers.

[50]Thomas Thornely to Henry Brougham, 11 March 1812, Brougham Papers.

[51]Henry Brougham, The Life and Times of Henry, Lord Brougham, 2 vols. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1871), 2: 14.

of their success. Despite the obvious difficulty presented by the corporation, the supporters of repeal under the guidance of Brougham and with the power of the Liverpool Mercury kept the issue very much alive in the city throughout the winter and spring of 1812. Although the Courier kept up a steady stream of invectives against the campaign in general and Brougham in particular, Roscoe, Thornely, Rathbone, Cropper and their followers continued to gain supporters even though they were not permitted to have a public meeting on the issue. In March of 1812 as other provincial cities organized their own repeal supporters and as the overall economic situation continued to decline, Roscoe scored a small victory by convincing the corporation to call a public meeting to petition against the East India Company monopoly, a campaign which in many ways paralleled the Orders-in-Council effort. Corporation members, though chiefly involved in the West Indian shipping trade, were anxious to see the East opened up to freer trade and agreed to petition against a renewal of the East India Company's charter. At the March 17th meeting held in the town hall, Roscoe finally had his opportunity to speak publicly about the course of Liverpool's economic future. Although the mayor urged him to speak only of the East India Company issue, Roscoe used this chance to publicly denounce the Orders, the foundation of the city's calamities. Free trade and an avoidance of a war with America, Roscoe announced, were the remedies for Liverpool's troubles. By

evening's end, not only had the case against the Orders-in-Council been brought fully out into the open, but a petition against the East India Company monopoly, with both the corporation and the reformers' support was readied for circulation in the city.[52]

Meanwhile, as impetus for repeal of the Orders-in-Council grew among other provincial cities in the spring of 1812, Liverpool remained central to the campaign. Letters between Roscoe and Brougham reveal that Liverpool reformers were contacting other groups in cities like Birmingham and Glasgow. The organizations and actions of other provincial repeal efforts also gained wide publication in Liverpool as well. For example, in April of 1812 the Mercury reported on the Birmingham public meeting against the Orders and published its petition in full. Pressure was clearly mounting on the government at Westminster. On 3 March in the House of Commons Brougham moved that the House be dissolved into a Committee of the Whole House to investigate the Orders. Although his initiative failed, it did so by only seventy-two votes, a division which Brougham proclaimed "good" because the government had to muster all of its strength to defeat his

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[52]Liverpool Mercury, 20 March 1812.

motion and because the narrow defeat guaranteed that Brougham would bring the subject up again in subsequent debate.[53]

Emboldened by the growing interest in other cities, the Liverpool reformers decided to revise the American Chamber's November Resolutions against the Orders-in-Council and circulate them throughout the city for additional signatures, this time to be presented not to the Prince Regent but to the House of Commons. Before the petition was presented to Commons on 27 April, 6,662 signatures were obtained. Predictably, the corporation responded by denouncing the effort and mounting a loyalty petition to be sent to the Prince Regent. This renewed local conflict was played out in full again in the pages of the opposing newspapers. It provides a unique opportunity in the long history of the partisan conflict, for published with the petitions was for the first time a list of names for and against the repeal initiative. Those whose signatures appeared in the local press supporting the repeal included, of course, the usual coterie of reformers: Rathbone, Martin, Roscoe, and Thornely. A total of thirty-six individuals or firms publicly registered themselves as supporting repeal and of those thirty-six, twenty-four were listed as merchants in the 1812 Liverpool

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[53]For Brougham's exploration of connections that should be made between Liverpool and other petitioning interests, particularly in Glasgow, see Henry Brougham to William Roscoe, n.d., Roscoe Papers. For the Birmingham petition see the Liverpool Mercury, 10 April 1812. For Brougham's opinion of his narrow defeat in the 3 March vote in the House of Commons see Brougham, Life and Times, 2: 15.

directory. Three were brokers, one a victualler, one a gunsmith, one a bookseller, one a banker, one a mercer (dealer in textile fabrics), one a tailor and two who remain unidentified. Fifteen of the repealers were members of the American Chamber of Commerce which linked them to the American trade.[54] The Dissenter connection, of course, was also apparent. Fifteen of the signers could be linked to membership in a dissenting chapel in the city.[55]

The supporters of the loyalty petition and thus opposed to repeal included, of course, the Bournes, Aspinalls, Gladstones, and Thomas Kaye, publisher of the Liverpool Courier. Thirty individuals or firms signed the loyalty petition printed in the Courier. In addition to the group of corporation members, there were nineteen men identified as merchants, and one miller, one carpenter, one baker, one printer, and six who remain unidentified. None could be found to be Dissenters, several like the Gladstones and Aspinalls served on St. George's vestry, and only one belonged to the American Chamber. Thus, it was highly likely that the

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[54]Membership in the American Chamber of Commerce was gleaned from Minute Book I, 1800-1812, Liverpool Records Office.

[55]Religious affiliations were gleaned from a variety of sources including biographies, articles and works on the Dissenter community in Liverpool. Some religious affiliations were found in parish records from St George's Anglican Church, Renshaw Street Unitarian Chapel and Paradise Street Unitarian Chapel. Names of supporters and opponents of the repeal effort were found in the Liverpool Courier and the Liverpool Mercury.

opponents were not linked to the American trade and thus probably did not find their fortunes significantly threatened by the Orders. It is interesting to note that although there were the obvious sectarian and political differences between these two groups, there was, however, no demonstrable economic disparity. In fact, except for the area of trade in which each side specialized (American versus West Indian trade) these two groups could and did claim that they represented the most respectable interests in the city.

The day after Liverpool's petition against the Orders was presented to the House of Commons, Brougham won a concession from the government on forming Parliament into a Committee of the Whole House and inviting witnesses from the provinces to testify on the effects of the Orders. For Brougham, who had worked so diligently to bring the various provincial interests together, this was a personal as well as parliamentary triumph which he immediately reported to Roscoe at the first opportunity. Brougham believed the hearings would be crucial to success, for they would be a "running sore in their [the Tory government] side . . . and a rallying point for the discontented and suffering." He urged Roscoe to gather potential witnesses so that the evidence as to the distress in Liverpool and in the countryside would be as strong as possible and, of course, linked to the Orders-in-Council.[56]

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[56]Henry Brougham to William Roscoe, n.d., Roscoe Papers.

Roscoe replied to Brougham by organizing William Rathbone V, John Richardson, Thomas Thornely, W.R. Brown and James Cropper into a committee to represent Liverpool repeal interests in London. The reformers also wrote to other manufacturing towns urging them to prepare evidence for the committee, though by Thornely's admission they received little positive reply for their efforts. They also prepared for the inevitable onslaught from the corporation, which was as determined as ever to meet the reformers' challenge. John Gladstone, J.B. Aspinall, Joseph B. Yates, and Joseph Poole were sent by the corporation to the hearings to represent their interests.

Not only did the delegation of opponents to the Orders-in-Council have to contend with the corporation, but they found that their petition and the conditions of distress described therein sparked a heated exchange between Thomas Creevy, M.P. from Thetford who was a native of Liverpool and proponent of repeal, and Banastre Tarleton, member of Parliament from Liverpool and firm supporter of the corporation's interests. Tarleton denied any distress in the city at all and strongly implied that the petition's description of hardship was a fabrication. Roscoe and his supporters replied vehemently against this charge. Not only did they present a wealth of evidence at the Committee hearings, but Roscoe also personally sent Creevy, a champion of the Liverpudlian cause, a personal copy of the petition and

a certificate of the authenticity of the claims made in the resolutions. In London the Liverpool representatives were second only to Birmingham in influencing Parliament with their evidence of distress and depression in their city. Countering the claims of continued prosperity made by Aspinall and Gladstone, Richardson and Rathbone pointed to the many ships which were idle in the docks and Thornely produced a letter from a New York merchant which stated that the United States was "in an infinitely better state than is generally supposed," lending credence to the claim that the Orders were encouraging American industry.[57]

Brougham's relentless questioning of witnesses even after Prime Minister Spencer Perceval's assassination on 11 May and the overall weakness of the government's case were reported in full by letter from the delegates to supporters back in Liverpool and by reports in the Liverpool Mercury, which endeavored to carry as much of the parliamentary debate as possible. On 9 June Thornely reported to Roscoe that Brougham was readying his final, dramatic, parliamentary assault demanding the repeal of the Orders-in-Council. It was part of a co-ordinated effort at parliamentary oratory and provincial petitioning aimed at overwhelming the new Tory government. Indeed, with the help of Liverpool and other provincial cities whose citizens were convinced that their destitution stemmed

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[57]William Roscoe to Thomas Creevy, 23 April 1812, Creevy Papers, University College Library, London; "Minutes of Evidence," 3: 350.

from this governmental policy, Castlereagh quietly announced on 23 June that the Orders would be revoked without further debate.

Liverpool, like other provincial cities, reacted to the news with public rejoicing. Roscoe told Thomas Creevy it was as if the town had "risen from the dead." "The Customs House and docks are crowded," Roscoe proudly announced, and assured Creevy that if he and Brougham ran for seats in Parliament from Liverpool they could surely be elected. On 25 June the American Chamber held a special meeting and announced that vessels could proceed to the United States without restriction and voted a £500 contribution toward defraying the expense of the Liverpool parliamentary delegation. For once, however, Thomas Kaye in the pages of the Courier sounded a note of appropriate caution. It is too soon for rejoicing, he said. Wait until the effects of the repeal are felt. Otherwise those who engage in merriment will find themselves embarrassed and their exercises mere "folly." Indeed, before the Orders were repealed, the United States Congress declared war on Britain; Liverpool merchants would not see their trade restored until after war ceased in 1815.[58]

Despite the fact that Brougham and his supporters achieved a pyrrhic victory, for Liverpudlians it was the first success against corporation interests since the abolition of

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[58]William Roscoe to Thomas Creevy, 1 July 1812, Creevy Papers; American Chamber of Commerce, Minute Book I, 25 June 1812; Liverpool Courier, 8 July 1812.

the slave trade in 1807. The repeal of the Orders-in-Council also sparked renewed enthusiasm for further agitation against corporation power in Liverpool and propelled provincial men like William Roscoe into renewed positions of national fame as proponents of agitation for peace, parliamentary reform, and other measures. In the July 1812 edition of the Edinburgh Review, for example, Roscoe's reforming opinions were aired in two separate articles. The first was an examination of his 1808 pamphlet Causes and Consequences of the Present War and the second a review of "A Letter to Henry Brougham on the Subject of Parliamentary Reform," which the Liverpool Mercury had first published in 1811. In addition, Roscoe found himself courted by radical reformers like Major Cartwright, who sought supporters for his Hampden Club from among the ranks of those who supported repeal of the Orders. Though Roscoe was clearly reluctant to give his unequivocal support to Cartwright, as evidenced from his careful replies to Cartwright's inquiries, there is no doubt that the extra-parliamentary activity in the provinces gained a new respectability and that Liverpudlians in particular benefitted from this new national esteem.[59]

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[59]For Cartwright and Roscoe's communication see William Roscoe to Major Cartwright, May 1811, Major Cartwright to Roscoe, n.d., Major Cartwright to William Roscoe, 3 November 1812, Roscoe Papers.

5. Liverpool and the 1812 Parliamentary Election

Roscoe's reluctance to throw his support to radical reformers like Cartwright was probably a result of the larger campaign he and other Liverpudlians undertook after repeal of the Orders-in-Council. In 29 September 1812 Parliament was dissolved and elections announced. This move was anticipated since a new government, led by Lord Liverpool, had been installed after the death of Spencer Perceval in May. For both the Liverpool reformers and Henry Brougham, flushed with victory over the repeal of the Orders-in-Council, this was an extraordinary opportunity, for Brougham found that his safe seat at Camelford was being sold and he therefore faced the election without a constituency. Concurrently, Roscoe and his supporters perceived an opportunity to wrest power from the corporation oligarchy by defeating one of their parliamentary candidates, Tarleton or Gascoyne, in the upcoming election. On 4 September 1812, the first step in placing Brougham's name before the freemen of Liverpool took place at a public dinner honoring him for his activities on behalf of the merchants and manufacturers of the city in the campaign to repeal the Orders-in-Council. Brougham's appearance there was not unique, for he was honored in a number of provincial cities (including Birmingham) in the autumn of 1812. Yet, it was clear to the organizers of the Liverpool dinner that this was a trial campaign appearance. Brougham and Liverpool reformers like Thornely, Roscoe, and Martin had been in contact

throughout the summer of 1812 and the congratulatory dinner was seen as a way to gauge public opinion.

Even Brougham himself understood his risk in appearing as a candidate prematurely. On August 25, he confided to Dr. William Shepherd that "the cause" would be undermined if the war with America continued. He feared that he and his supporters would face ridicule for a campaign that had essentially failed in its objectives since the United States had declared war on Britain. Furthermore, he concluded to Roscoe, perhaps the congratulatory dinner should be postponed until the Anglo-American conflict was settled. "While the country is suffering under the calamities of newly extended warfare," Brougham urged, "I should be unable to meet you with that satisfaction which the success of the Petitioners is, no doubt, calculated to excite."[60] Thomas Creevy must have concurred with Brougham's reluctance since he refused an invitation to be honored with Brougham at the congratulatory dinner. Undoubtedly, he was unprepared to abandon his safe seat at Thetford for the uncertainties of a Liverpool election, even though he had gained much popularity among the Liverpool reformers for supporting them in the House of Commons during the repeal struggle.[61]

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[60]Henry Brougham to William Shepherd, 25 August 1812, Brougham Papers; Henry Brougham to William Roscoe, n.d., Roscoe Papers.

[61]Thomas Creevy to William Roscoe, 25 August 1812, Roscoe Papers.

Despite doubts, the celebratory dinner occurred as planned on 4 September 1812. Two-hundred and five people attended including Lords Derby, Sefton, and Stanley, Major Cartwright, Josiah Wedgewood II (Staffordshire Potteries), Shakespear Phillips and George Woods (Manchester), Thomas Potts, Thomas Attwood and Richard Spooner (Birmingham). There they reaffirmed the success of the Orders-in-Council campaign and toasted the part Brougham played in its success. Although he later assured Earl Grey that he had not canvassed or committed himself, it was clear from the overwhelming success of the dinner and the warm regard in which he was held by these provincial luminaries that Brougham decided there to make his stand at the Liverpool poll. By the end of September both Brougham and a very reluctant Creevy had been formally nominated to run for Parliament in the upcoming Liverpool election. Creevy was so pessimistic about his chances of winning at the polls, however, that he made arrangements to retain his seat at Thetford just in case the campaign ended in failure.[62]

Creevy had good cause to be concerned about his and Brougham's chances at Liverpool. Not only was the body of freemen largely controlled by the corporation, but many of the Whig supporters were excluded and the corporation was

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[62]For a full account of the Liverpool dinner see the Liverpool Mercury, 11 September 1812. For Creevy acceptance address see Political Pamphlets and Broadsides, Creevy's Acceptance Address, 1 October 1812, Liverpool Records Office, Liverpool.

determined more than in any previous campaign to defeat its opponents. Even Brougham had no illusions as to his chances of election. "No one . . . had any very sanguine expectations that the Whig interest could defeat entirely all the Tory power, the corporation interest, and the government influence." Indeed, on September 25 the corporation responded to the challenge of the Creevy/Brougham candidacy in the most startling way: they invited George Canning, Foreign Secretary under Perceval and ardent supporter of the Orders-in-Council, to be their candidate in the upcoming election.[63]

The October election in Liverpool saw all of the strains of local conflict converge into one extraordinary struggle. On the one hand, there was the election with no fewer than five candidates (Brougham, Creevy, Canning, Gascoyne and Tarleton) for the two Liverpool parliamentary seats. There was also the issue of corporation influence and patronage of the freemen of the town. The election also became a test of the growing power of the American merchants and manufacturers. Finally, because the campaign pitted two of the nation's best known public figures against each other, it became a propaganda war which featured the Liverpool Mercury, the Liverpool Courier and dozens of election squibs, broadsides, and pamphlets.

The Liverpool campaign also demonstrated that even in one of the most venal of parliamentary boroughs national,

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[63]Picton, Memorials, 1: 286.

issue-oriented politics was beginning to compete with the corporation controlled electoral process. The Brougham/Creevy candidacy was an audacious move by the Liverpool reformers against corporation interests and concern about the outcome of the race against Canning/Gascoyne/Tarleton spread far beyond Liverpool. Brougham's correspondence demonstrates that men from other provincial cities wrote and pledged their support. For their part, the Liverpool supporters of Brougham and Creevy solicited funds from those who benefitted from Brougham's campaign against the Orders-in-Council. In a letter to Thomas Attwood of Birmingham, for example, Roscoe pointed to the importance of the election of Brougham. "Mr. Brougham, if elected, will not be the representative of Liverpool only. Both he and Mr. Creevy will be the advocates of peace, and the firm supporters of manufacturing and mercantile interest of every part of the country." Although this was a convincing argument, Attwood replied that there were few available funds that his fellow Birminghamites could spare in the midst of a severe trade depression. Though the success of the Liverpool reformers in convincing outsiders of the importance of helping to fund the campaign was decidedly mixed, it is quite clear that the success or the failure of the Brougham candidacy was looked upon as a crucial test of reforming support in the provinces and that the campaign

illustrated the growing power of national rather than local issues to sway the voters.[64]

It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that this was a campaign conducted solely on issues, either local or national. Clearly the buying and selling of votes and outbursts of violence were still an integral part of the electoral process. One of the most interesting letters in Brougham's lengthy correspondence in this period was from a Liverpudlian named Daniel Morat, who, while offering his loyalty and support to Brougham, also offered to procure him five votes. It is unclear what remuneration he expected in return, as Brougham's reply (if there was any) does not exist. Surely, Brougham certainly expected such behavior. Not only did he enter Parliament through a rotten borough, but William Roscoe was elected in 1806 to a parliamentary seat from Liverpool largely because of his willingness to bribe voters. Brougham estimated after the contest ended that each vote Canning received came at a cost of twenty to thirty guineas

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[64]For Brougham's provincial supporters see particularly James Loch to Henry Brougham, 12 August 1812, William Vizard to Henry Brougham, n.d., John Allen to Henry Brougham, 26 September 1812, John Douglas to Henry Brougham, 4 August 1812, Brougham Papers. William Roscoe's request to Birmingham supporters of Brougham through Thomas Attwood was refused in a letter to Roscoe, 12 October 1812, Roscoe Papers. In his letter, Attwood pointed out that his associates had incurred enormous expense in fighting the Orders-in-Council, the East India Company monopoly and in purchasing a plate for Brougham in honor of his campaign against the Orders. He also mentioned that his friends in Birmingham were in no financial position to provide funds for any outside activities at that time.

and that Canning expended in excess of £20,000. The dawn of a party, platform, and national political campaigns was clearly still far in the future.[65]

The Liverpool poll began on 8 October and lasted for eight days. It was clear to all concerned that the election was a contest between Canning and Brougham and it was the records of these two men which were attacked and lauded in the press, squibs, pamphlets, speeches and other outpourings of support and vilification that accompanied this election. The corporation interest employed Thomas Kaye's Liverpool Courier, which provided a stream of editorials and printed countless squibs for the Canning cause. The corporation also used its Canningite political society, the Backbone Club, formed in the autumn of 1812 to aid in the campaign and to organize all of the activities in behalf of their candidates. The Whigs had the full support of Egerton Smith and the Liverpool Mercury and employed their own squib writer, the Rev. William Shepherd, but lacked an effective political club around which they could organize their activities. Their only political organization was the "Freeman's Club" led by Thomas Green, a local auctioneer and reformer who created his club of working men in 1807 to support the efforts of Roscoe in his parliamentary election. On behalf of the working men of

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[65]Daniel Morat to Henry Brougham, n.d., Henry Brougham to Earl Grey, 16 October 1812, Brougham Papers. See also Thorne and his lengthy analysis of the 1812 Liverpool election, 2: 231-233.

Liverpool, Green took on an active and prominent role in the 1812 election, though clearly his organization was not an adequate match for the well-run corporation campaign.[66]

Brougham's campaign speeches stressed to Liverpudlians the need for peace, parliamentary reform and an end to the economic distress which plagued the country. He emphasized his record against the slave trade and the Orders-in Council and urged the people to remember that he understood the interests of the merchants and manufacturers. Canning responded with strong support for the war, reminded his audience of recent victories in Spain and Russia, opposed any tampering with parliamentary representation, and pledged himself to the king and constitution.[67]

Election squibs reveal, however, that the issues which were put to the freemen were much more aimed at arousing passions than serious political debate. Canning was viewed by the squib writers as the candidate of corrupt interests. "How strangely the people muster their loyalty, And follow George Canning as if he were royalty," as a squib put it. His policies led to oppression both political and economic. Yet Canning, who was not a member of Lord Liverpool's government at Westminster, really did not have a record with extensive

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[66]Whittington-Jones, "Liverpool's Political Clubs," passim.

[67]Picton, Memorials, 1: 309-312.

blemishes and the Whigs had to rely mostly on the war and the corporation's influence as its propaganda weapons.[68]

Canning supporters, however, used squibs with deadly effect. Brougham was charged with Jacobinism, with associating with radicals like Burdett and Tooke, with plotting to overturn English laws and religion, and with abandoning a war in which Britain was now achieving significant victories. Perhaps the flavor of these squibs can be gathered from A Report of the State of the Election Garden:

> The **Red Roses** flourish in beauty, sweetness and numbers.
> The **Pinks** are few and beginning to wither.
> **Passion** flowers never grew in greater exuberance.
> **Grace**, **Heartsease** and **Laurels** adorn Mr Canning's Garden.
> **Rue**, **Croak**us, **Wormwood**, **Nightshade**, **Nettles**, and **Mushrooms** spring up in quantities in Mr. B.'s soil.
> **Mint** is very unproductive with Mr. B.
> **Box** tolerably luxuriant.
> **Medlars** and **Cockcombs** in plenty.
> **Thyme** is dying away every moment.
> **Anemone**-y would be very acceptable to Mr. B.
> **Li**lies and **Broom** grow very kindly together.
> Parson Sh--p--rd has sent a **Sweet William.**
> The **Crown Imperial** is a plant adored by Mr. Canning, and his party, but very obnoxious to his opponents.
> The **British Oak** in Mr. B.'s garden has been hurt by a thick **Fog**, and the **Croppers** in attempting to prune it, have stunted its natural growth.
> As the Garden of Mr. B. is rather sickly, he has sheltered it by **two Banks**, but they are almost useless.

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[68]Ibid., 312.

> **Pease** very undesirable at present. While the **Broom** and **Fox**glove are trampled under foot, the **Rose** by the vigor of its own **Constitution** shall flourish, the pride, wonder, and beauty of the world among the **Everlastings** to the end of **Thyme.** Signed **BOTANICUS.**[69]

Although Brougham used his considerable skills as an orator to keep his candidacy alive throughout the first five days of the poll, by the sixth day he trailed Canning by forty-six votes. But when he was offered a compromise whereby he would agree to abandon Creevy and take one of the two seats, Brougham refused. This act sealed his fate. Canning and Gascoyne agreed to team up (Tarleton was forced out of the race, having only polled eleven voters) and urged the remaining voters to divide their two votes between them. By the eighth day, Brougham/Creevy trailed Canning/Gascoyne by 513 votes and Brougham conceded the election.[70]

Brougham's defeat in Liverpool can be attributed to several factors. First, his loyalty to Creevy, though admirable, was misplaced. Creevy was a colorless, reluctant candidate who engendered little enthusiasm even though he was respected by the Liverpool reformers. His pessimism paid off and Creevy was returned from Thetford to serve in the upcoming

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[69]Broadsides Relating to the Election of 1812, Liverpool Records Office, Liverpool. Note that the Canningites were represented by the color red and Brougham and the Whigs by Pink. Thus in public processions each side was made immediately identifiable by the color of their banners.

[70]Whittington-Jones, "Liverpool's Political Clubs," 118; Liverpool Poll Book for 1812, Liverpool Records Office, Liverpool.

Parliament. Brougham also depended on his parliamentary record to gain supporters. Unfortunately, by the autumn of 1812, war with the United States blotted out the summer triumph over the Orders-in-Council and Brougham's support for peace and parliamentary reform left him open to charges of disloyalty and radicalism. Moreover, Brougham was an ardent abolitionist and the issue of the slave trade still engendered much debate in the city even though it was abolished in 1807. The Tory squib writers aimed with deadly effectiveness at Brougham and his reforming beliefs, beliefs not yet popular with a majority of Liverpudlians. In fact, the pollbook demonstrates that Brougham did not receive a majority of support from any occupational group in the city, from gentlemen, merchants and brokers, who supported the Canning/Gascoyne ticket three to one, or from artisans, whose support for Canning was also solid. While the issues raised in the campaign contributed to this lack of support, it was more likely caused by the fact that Brougham's ardent supporters, Whigs like Roscoe, Rathbone, Thornely, and any other Dissenters, were not freemen and could not vote. Corporation control over the franchise and dispersement of patronage, in the end, must be viewed as a most significant cause of Brougham's defeat.[71]

Brougham himself was sanguine about his defeat. In a classic early nineteenth century commentary on electoral

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[71]Liverpool Poll Book, (1812): 7.

politics, Brougham recounted to Earl Grey the obstacles to gaining election in a borough like Liverpool:

> I do not regret our taking the chance. We ran them amazingly hard--on Sunday last they would have compromised --on Monday they thought themselves quite beaten-- and on Tuesday--but on Wednesday things looked up . . . The fact is they all received their subscriptions and said if 50,000 were required they were resolved to do it. They gave 20 and 30 guineas a vote and the thing was done. Our friends have not spent £8,000 and sums are still flowing in from all parts . . . Indeed if I cared much for popularity I am well satisfied, for never was anybody so supported and the enemy has only the voter--they who polled after crying out to us that their hearts were with us but they dared not. . . . The miracle is our having made such a fight, and they look gloomy on their own victory because they know to what they owe it. You can have no idea of the nature of the Liverpool election, it is quite peculiar to the place. You have every night to go to the different clubs, benefits, societies, etc., which meet and speechify. This is from 1/2 past 6 to one in the morning at least and you have to speak to each man who polls at the bar between 10 and 5. It lasted 8 days. . . . Some few accidents happened. Two or three men being killed and others seriously wounded, but all who knew Liverpool formerly say nothing was ever seen so quiet at an election there.[72]

For all the hope that national issues would dominate the election, in the end Brougham concluded that Liverpool was a closed borough. "Think of such men as Roscoe, having no vote--while every slave captain who served seven years'

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[72]Henry Brougham to Earl Grey, 16 October 1812, Brougham Papers.

apprenticeship to that traffic of blood was enabled to vote against the person who made it a felony . . . Every means of influence was exhausted and at last gold carried the day."[73]

6. Conclusion

With the election over, Brougham returned again to his writing and the agitation in Liverpool which began in the spring had finally ended. Roscoe felt that the failure to elect Brougham, though disappointing, did serve to spread a more "enlightened spirit of improvement among the people at large." This was to be Roscoe's last major political agitation. Financial difficulties forced him into bankruptcy in 1820, and he spent his last years quietly in Liverpool still urging reform, but relinquishing a leadership role to others. Ironically, the corporation against whom Roscoe fought so many battles did award him the freedom of the city before his death in 1831.[74]

Other Liverpool reformers benefitted from the experience they gained in this campaign against the Orders-in-Council. Thomas Thornely ran for a Parliamentary seat from Liverpool in 1831. Though unsuccessful, he was elected to a seat from Wolverhampton in 1834 and served in the House of Commons for twenty years. James Cropper became an important national advocate of the abolition of slavery. Largely through his efforts the London Society for Mitigating and Gradually

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[73]Thorne, 2: 233.

[74]Roscoe, The Life of William Roscoe, 2: 48.

Abolishing the State of Slavery Throughout the British Dominions was formed in 1823. His opposition to slavery was met with the same virulent opposition from the corporation as Roscoe's campaign against the slave trade at the beginning of the century. Finally, William Rathbone IV and V, whose reform efforts were certainly among the most famous in Liverpool, set an example for future generations of Rathbones. William Rathbone VI and Eleanor Rathbone became members of Parliament, carrying on the tradition of reform begun in the late eighteenth century in these hard fought campaigns.[75]

Thus, the campaign to repeal the Orders-in-Council demonstrated the complex matrix of political mobilization in Liverpool. More than any other previous political agitation in the city, this campaign combined local political issues, sectarianism, and economic concerns within a broader context which included issues such as parliamentary reform, the continued existence of the confessional state and, of course, the Napoleonic War and loyalism, issues which over decades produced two distinct groups with two distinct world views that formed the foundation of their continual struggle. Yet the Orders-in-Council campaign did not simply demonstrate these issues, it added to them. For it pitted for the first time in a public debate the growing American merchant and

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[75]K. Frank Herd, Lancashire Stories (London: T.C. and E.C. Jack, n.d.), 123; Charlton, "James Cropper, 123; Eleanor F. Rathbone, William Rathbone: A Memoir (London: MacMillan and Co., 1905).

manufacturing interest against the West Indian merchants. This campaign also directly led to the development of an opposition press willing to agitate against the entrenched interests of the corporation. Finally, the Orders-in-Council campaign and the subsequent election not only reopened the competition in the city after a decade of silence, it also witnessed the establishment of new forms of political organization to carry on the fight. For after 1812, not only would the Tories use more sophisticated methods of political mobilization to arouse supporters to their cause, but never again would the Whigs be cowed by the threat of repression. The Orders-in-Council campaign demonstrated to them, in the end, that extra-parliamentary agitation could be effective even against what Brougham was led to call "greatest of the rotten boroughs," Liverpool.[76]

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[76]After Canning's victory no less than four political societies were formed in Liverpool. In 1812, as a direct result of the election the Canning Club (to support George Canning) and the Concentric Club (formed by Egerton Smith to provide support for Whig interests) were begun. In 1814 the Pitt Club, to celebrate the legacy of William Pitt and to promote "King and Constitution was established; it lasted until 1819. Finally, in 1818 the True Blue Club was formed to support Isaac Gascoyne and his continued bids for the seats in parliament; It was Henry Brougham who coined the term, "the greatest of the rotten borough" in describing Liverpool. See Rathbone, William Rathbone, 43.

CHAPTER III

"PEACE, LAW, ORDER, LOYALTY AND UNION:" THOMAS ATTWOOD, BIRMINGHAM AND THE ORDERS-IN-COUNCIL REPEAL CAMPAIGN

"Remember, my friends, our weapons are PEACE, LAW, ORDER, LOYALTY and UNION. Let us hold to these weapons, and I tell you that the day is not distant when the liberty and prosperity of our country will be restored."[1] Although Thomas Attwood addressed these words to supporters of the Birmingham Political Union during the campaign for parliamentary reform in the 1830s, they could have been spoken in 1812. For it was in the campaign to repeal the Orders-in-Council, twenty years before, that Attwood first developed his ideas about extra-parliamentary agitation. Therefore, although these two periods of extra-parliamentary activity had differing objectives, they were still quite clearly related. For Attwood gained his initial political experience through his activities on behalf of the Orders-in-Council in 1812 and he

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[1]C.M. Wakefield, The Life of Thomas Attwood (London: Harrison and Sons, 1885), iv.

came away with attitudes about national government and local political mobilization which were to last his entire lifetime. It would not even be amiss to state that Birmingham itself made great strides toward political maturity during the activities relating to the Orders-in-Council. For this campaign revealed not a sophisticated network of political mobilization stretching back decades, as in Liverpool, but an emerging web of relationships which pointed to future struggles concerning the very course of both Britain's and Birmingham's economic development.

1. The Beginning of Conflict

The commercial leaders of Birmingham clearly were not as predisposed to activism over the Orders-in-Council as were those in Liverpool, given that city's close shipping ties to the United States. The trade restrictions imposed by the Orders-in-Council neither polarized opinion in Birmingham when they were first introduced in 1808, nor caused the local press to devote much energy to a discussion of the limited petitioning campaign that did ensue. Yet by 1812 the local economy had sustained the impact of four years of economic dislocation and the interruption of trade with the United States for four years threatened to imperil the great economic growth Birmingham had achieved throughout the last several decades.

Like Liverpool, Birmingham witnessed tremendous growth in the eighteenth century. Through a web of small and large

workshops, the growth of local banking institutions, and the efforts of innovative entrepreneurs like Matthew Boulton (perfecter of the steam engine), Edward Thomason (prominent button and toy maker), and Samuel Garbett (local merchant, manufacturer, and outspoken champion of free trade issues), Birmingham gained a regional and national reputation as a center for the production of metal goods. Indeed, the rapid expansion in the production of metalwares made it the largest group of exports outside textiles by the end of the eighteenth century and thus a very important contributor to Britain's industrial development.[2]

As a major manufacturing center, Birmingham also experienced a phenomenal population increase. In 1770, for example, the population of the city stood at 37,000. In a decade it increased to 50,000 and by 1801 it was 71,000 and showed no sign of levelling off. While Liverpool depended heavily on the docks for her prosperity, Birmingham was noted for its diversity of occupations, from gunmaking, button and buckle manufacture to a host of other metallurgical trades which were carried on in numerous small and large manufacturing firms throughout the city. By the end of the eighteenth century Birmingham's success and growing self-

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[2]Ralph Davis, The Industrial Revolution and British Overseas Trade (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1979), 25.

confidence led Arthur Young to proclaim it to be the "first manufacturing town in the world."[3]

While the export trade was quite important to Birmingham's prosperity, many manufacturers actually gained substantial profits from Britain's long struggle with Napoleon despite the imposition of trade restrictions with overseas markets. Although perhaps some local residents had a tendency to exaggerate the numbers employed in wartime industry after the war ended, it was nevertheless important according to David J. Moss. An estimated £4,500,000 were spent on government contracts in Birmingham during the war, some £225,000 a year. This reliance on governmental patronage produced two important results. First, the town was more insulated than other towns from immediate wartime trade fluctuations. This does not mean that it was never adversely affected by trade restrictions and other wartime governmental policies but that its tie to government contracts cushioned it from immediate economic crisis. Second, the important manufacturing firms in the town took an active interest in the affairs of Westminster even though the city was not directly represented in Parliament. It was natural that Birmingham's growing and articulate middle class looked to Parliament to protect its interests. Unfortunately, the unresponsiveness of

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[3]Paul Langford, A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 418; Eric Hopkins, Birmingham: The First Manufacturing Town in the World 1760-1840 (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1987), 26.

representatives like Sir Charles Mordaunt, member of Parliament from Warwickshire, led many local residents to the conclusion that they would have to seek other means of expressing their grievances to a Parliament unaware or unconcerned with the growing Midlands.[4]

Birmingham's merchant and manufacturing elites' response to the Orders-in-Council was determined both by the growing awareness of the economic dislocations caused by the trade restrictions and the town's well-established system of trade. Unlike Liverpool, Birmingham was not affected by the Orders-in-Council when they were instituted in 1808. Although Birmingham firms did a substantial export trade to the United States[5] (mostly through the growing port of Liverpool), economic conditions in the town and in the region in 1808 were not critical enough for businessmen to join in Liverpool's effort to petition against the Orders-in-Council. In fact, Liverpudlian William Rathbone lamented to William Roscoe during the 1808 petitioning effort that "Leeds, Birmingham, and Bristol, not a petition from either of these is to be procured though in the two former the suffering of all classes

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[4]David J. Moss, "Birmingham and the Campaigns Against the Orders-in-Council and East India Company Charter, 1812-1813," Canadian Journal of History 11 (1976): 174. Birmingham, of course, did not have direct parliamentary representation. They had to depend on Warwickshire county members like Mordaunt to champion their interests in Parliament.

[5]According to Ralph Davis, Britain exported over fifty-percent of its metalwares to the United States in the period from 1804-1816.

are [sic] deeply felt, widespread and rapidly increasing." Despite Rathbone's allegation of widespread economic suffering in Birmingham, evidence does not in fact sustain his claims that the city was experiencing widespread distress. None of the town's three local weekly newspapers stressed economic distress and there are no records of any local efforts to draw the townsmen into the national debate on the impact of the measures.[6]

This changed by 1812, however. If the Orders-in-Council had not immediately created economic dislocation, the strengthening of the trade restrictions by the Perceval government and the determination of the United States to punish Great Britain with its own policy of trade restrictions led to real hardships in Birmingham, particularly after 1811 as America began to enforce the provisions of Macon's Bill Number Two.[7] By 1812 unemployment had soared. Before the parliamentary inquiry on the Orders-in-Council, Thomas Attwood claimed that two-thirds of the local population was unemployed by the spring of 1812 and that the interruption of trade with the United States had already resulted in the loss of £1,000,000 worth of trade. Richard Spooner, partner in the

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[6]William Rathbone to William Roscoe, 23 March 1808, Roscoe Papers, Liverpool Records Office, Liverpool. In 1808 and 1812 the three local newspapers serving Birmingham were Aris' Birmingham Gazette, the Midland Chronicle, and the Birmingham Commercial Herald and General Advertiser.

[7]See Chapter One for a full explanation of American trade restrictions including Macon's Bill Number Two passed by Congress in May of 1810.

banking firm of Attwood and Spooner, maintained that merchants and manufacturers, reluctant to discharge workers, were forced to seek out massive loans to keep their businesses going and that many faced ruin if conditions did not soon return to normal. With their economic positions in an ever more precarious situation daily, it was thus clear to most merchant and manufacturing elites by the spring of 1812 that they must actively join Liverpool and other cities in demanding a change in governmental policy or risk further economic deterioration.[8]

The opening salvos in the campaign for repeal in Birmingham came from the Midland Chronicle, published by J. Orton Smith and Hawkes Smith. In February of 1812 it began printing letters to the editor in support of repeal and by March it carried editorials urging support for Henry Brougham's efforts in Parliament. "Let then the inhabitants of Birmingham, since they are allowed on all hands to suffer most from the privations of the American trade, come forward in a body, and in a respectful, but decided voice, petition for the removal of the grand cause of this distress--the Orders-in-Council," the editors of the Chronicle urged.[9]

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[8]Parliament, "Minutes of Evidence Taken before the Committee of the Whole House to whom it was Referred, to consider of the several Petitions which have been presented to the House, in this Session of Parliament," Sessional Papers (Commons), vol. 3 (1812): 21, 53; Moss, "Birmingham and the Campaigns," 178.

[9]Midland Chronicle, 7 March 1812.

In addition to press support, the cause of repeal was also boosted through the activities of the Inland Commercial Committee, a loosely organized group of local businessmen who met sporadically to discuss trade issues. On 24 February 1812, sensing that economic conditions would deteriorate further without government action, they gathered and elected as their spokesman banker Richard Spooner, who was asked to lead a delegation to Westminster to voice their concerns and present a preliminary petition urging immediate repeal of the Orders-in-Council.[10]

What began to emerge in Birmingham in the early spring of 1812 was a network of support for repeal and at the same time the appearance of new leaders to direct the local effort. Richard Spooner and his business partner and friend Thomas Attwood very quickly assumed the leadership of the repeal effort. Not only was this surprising because of their youth (both were in their twenties), but also because of their political inexperience. Their leadership of this extra-parliamentary campaign was also unusual, for neither had previously demonstrated any reforming zeal; in fact both were committed Tory Anglicans, as were their fathers before them, and were respected members of their community. Yet Spooner and Attwood, despite their youth and inexperience, certainly were well-known in Birmingham, for they were the youngest

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[10]Conrad Gill, History of Birmingham, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), 1: 115.

members of the banking firm Attwood & Spooner, formed in 1791 by their fathers Isaac Spooner and Matthias Attwood. As bankers, not only were Attwood and Spooner engaged in a respected profession, but they also quite naturally came in contact with a wide number of people engaged in a wide variety of economic pursuits. Their local renown was such that in October, 1811, Attwood was appointed to the mostly ceremonial post of high bailiff; his friend Richard Spooner followed him in that position in 1812. Although their appointments probably did not signify a meteoric rise to power, it did show the prominence of the two bankers in the city and proved crucial during the tense months of 1812.[11]

As leader of the Birmingham delegation from the Inland Commercial Committee, Richard Spooner met with Prime Minister Spencer Perceval on 2 March 1812. Although he presented Birmingham's petition and was received courteously by the prime minster, his efforts were largely fruitless. He returned to Birmingham not only discouraged at the lack of progress made but also disgusted at the indifference of governmental ministers toward the provincial economic situation. Yet he did not leave London completely empty-handed. For it was at this time that Spooner became acquainted with the champion of the repeal campaign, Henry

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[11]David J. Moss, Thomas Attwood: The Biography of a Radical (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990), 36.

Brougham, who urged him to return to Birmingham and raise a public meeting in support of the repeal effort.[12]

It was upon Spooner's return that sustained efforts at political mobilization began. Although Attwood was at first reluctant to join his partner's enthusiastic pursuit of repeal of the Orders-in-Council, as high bailiff he was required by local law to sanction all public meetings. Unlike the mayor of Liverpool, Attwood agreed to call a public meeting on 31 March 1812 to discuss the Orders-in-Council.

Attwood's reluctance clearly stemmed from the controversy already stirring in the town over the issue of the Orders-in-Council. Although merchant and manufacturing elites enthusiastically joined in the growing nation-wide movement against the East India Company recharter, there was no such agreement on the contentious issue of supporting repeal of a major governmental policy. Either from personal conviction or familial pressure, Attwood initially remained aloof from the debate, concentrating instead on pontificating on the advantages that would result from free trade with China. Indeed, on 4 March, only two days after Spooner's unsuccessful trip to London, Attwood led a public meeting which drew up a petition against the East India Company recharter. The Orders-in-Council were not mentioned even though Attwood

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[12]Orders In Council: A Report of the Proceedings of the Meeting Held at the Royal Hotel, Birmingham, March 31st 1812 On the Subject of the Orders in Council (Birmingham: Orton and Hawkes Smith, 1812), 1.

addressed the assemblage on the necessity of restoring Birmingham's economic stability.[13]

The local consensus on the East India Company recharter did demonstrate Birmingham's capacity to become involved in national extra-parliamentary movements. Although the town did not have the long history of petitioning that Liverpool had by 1812, Attwood and the supporters of the petition against the renewal of the East India Company charter did gain widespread endorsements for the movement and also received much attention from the three local newspapers, the Midland Chronicle, Aris' Birmingham Gazette, and the Birmingham Commercial Herald and General Advertiser. The public meeting on 4 March was conducted without controversy, letters to the editor appeared in the local press supporting the petition, and seventy-one individuals or firms publicly confirmed their opposition to recharter in advertisements which appeared in the local newspapers.[14]

Although many local town leaders were satisfied with the East India Company charter petition and envisioned it as Birmingham's major contribution to the national economic

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[13]Wakefield, The Life of Thomas Attwood, 22; Moss, Thomas Attwood, 41; Moss, "Birmingham and the Campaigns," 179. The familial pressure may well have come from his wife Elizabeth, who was from a well-established Tory Anglican family, and who wished her husband Thomas to stay away from potentially controversial issues.

[14]Midland Chronicle, 28 February 1812, 6 March 1812; Birmingham Commercial Herald, 24 February 1812, 3, 10 March 1812; Aris' Birmingham Gazette, 9 March 1812.

debate, Richard Spooner, whose real concern was the repeal of the Orders-in-Council, undoubtedly saw the East India Company petition as a prelude, the first effort at shaking the town from its complacency. Thus while Attwood personally refrained from endorsing the Orders-in-Council repeal movement, Spooner prepared for the public meeting scheduled for 31 March.

Although a month had elapsed since Spooner's meeting in London, when he spoke to the assemblage on the night of 31 March his speech endorsing repeal vividly described his frustrating encounter at Westminster. Not only did he remind his listeners of the economic misery which engulfed the town and the entire country, but he also related the indifference with which he was received by the vice-president of the Board of Trade, Mr. George Rose. "We (Great Britain and France) are like two men with our heads in a bucket of water," Rose candidly confided to Spooner, "and we must see which can stand drowning the longest." Not only did this arouse the indignation of those present, but Spooner's anecdote, which demonstrated the callous disregard for provincial suffering by the Perceval government, was reprinted and repeated throughout the provinces.[15]

Despite Spooner's great efforts at persuading the assemblage on the necessity of supporting repeal, controversy erupted before the meeting even considered the petition against the Orders-in-Council. First, Mr. George Villiers, a

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[15]Orders In Council: A Report of the Proceedings, 4.

local magistrate, arose and condemned the entire proceedings. He maintained that the ministry at Westminster was the proper judge of ways to break the enemy's will and that passage of a petition "would be the surest way to dispirit Englishmen, prolong the war, and add to the strength and importance of Bonaparte." He was followed by Mr. Richard Bird, a local attorney, who denied the claims of distress made by Spooner and others and furthermore stated that a petition would "embarrass the wheels of Government without the possibility of doing good." Finally, Richard Spooner's father, Isaac, rose to condemn the proceedings as "premature and highly impolitic."[16]

Despite the tensions which were obviously produced by the proceedings, the petition against the Orders-in-Council passed overwhelmingly and was prepared for signatures. The controversy generated there nearly guaranteed that, as in Liverpool, the town would become polarized over the issue. The heat provoked by the public meeting led Elizabeth Attwood to declare to her husband Thomas that she was pleased that Attwood had "presided over their deliberations" but had reserved all personal commitment. Her comments probably stemmed from the way in which the controversy had split the Spooner family.[17]

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[16]Ibid., 4-9.

[17]Moss, Thomas Attwood, 42. Attwood's initial reluctance leads to the question of how he came to be regarded as the leader of the Orders-in-Council repeal campaign. Although he

The circulation of the Orders-in-Council petition was the action which prompted large-scale mobilization in Birmingham in the spring of 1812. On 4 April a letter from "Cato" in the Midland Chronicle predicted the emergence of a counter-petition in response to the repeal effort underway. On 10 April this prediction was fulfilled with the publication in the Midland Chronicle of a counter petition signed by 167 men condemning the public meeting and the entire petitioning affair. The prominent leaders of the counter-petitioning campaign were George Villiers, Isaac Spooner, and James Woolley. The opening salvos in the campaign to mobilize supporters for these two positions had truly begun.[18]

2. Background of Political Mobilization in Birmingham

In examining political mobilization in Liverpool, it is possible to detect an extended and complex web of mobilization woven from decades of institutionalized confrontation between Tory Anglican conservative Liverpudlians and Whig Dissenter reformers. Their world views and identities developed in no small part from these fratricidal struggles over a myriad of issues arising from religion and economics and local political

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later claimed much greater leadership than he in fact demonstrated, he did come to be looked upon by local residents as the natural leader of this campaign because of his position as high bailiff for the town. In fact, judging from the energy which Spooner expended on the campaign and the leadership role he was accorded by the Inland Commercial Committee, Moss is quite correct in seeing Richard Spooner as the real leader behind the movement for repeal.

[18]Midland Chronicle, 3, 10 April 1812; Aris' Birmingham Gazette, 6 April 1812.

power. No such formalized network of political mobilization existed in Birmingham in 1812. Yet each side gathered strong partisan support from followers who shared common interests and world views. What can be shown in Birmingham, in fact, was not mature political mobilization but an evolving network which gradually became formalized through the campaign to repeal the Orders-in-Council.

As in Liverpool, the only way to understand this network is to place it within Birmingham's common background and identity. While the markers are not laid out as plainly as in Liverpool, nevertheless Birmingham's past development does provide an understanding of the political mobilization which develops in 1812.

The place to begin in understanding this political mobilization is with the individuals who publicly took a position in this struggle. In Liverpool, only the core organizers of the campaign were identified through newspaper advertisements. The repeal petition, which contained thousands of signatures, perished in the parliamentary fire of 1834 and no copies are extant in Liverpool. In contrast, a larger number of individuals can be examined in Birmingham through the newspaper advertisements which carried their names. It is an examination of these individuals that will form the basis of an understanding of political mobilization in Birmingham.

The supporters of repeal obviously had the weight of numbers on their side. Two-hundred and ninety-one men signed the requisition for a public meeting to petition against the Orders-in-Council which appeared in a front page advertisement in the Midland Chronicle of 28 March 1812. Only one-hundred sixty-seven publicly opposed the petitioning effort after the 31 March meeting. Thus supporters had won the first round and could claim that their position represented the wishes of a majority of the respectable elite in the town.[19]

Economically, the two groups were largely composed of "respectable" middle class members of the community. The leaders of the repeal effort were Thomas Attwood and Richard Spooner, both young bankers, men who were certainly prominent personalities in the town and who doubtless discussed the important issues of the day with townsmen at the counter of their firm. The repeal list also included former public officials like Henry Perkins, high bailiff in 1807, Samuel Ryland, low bailiff in 1803, and Thomas Pemberton, a constable

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[19]It was common for the process of petition mobilization to begin well in advance of the drawing up of the petition. In this case, it is assumed that those who urged that a meeting be held to petition for repeal of the Orders-in-Council did in fact support such a petition. The actual petition as it appears in the local newspapers again, like Liverpool's, only contained a core of leadership, not the extensive names that the requisition did. The reason seems to be quite simple. Supporters of repeal who paid for these extensive advertisements wished to use their resources most effectively by mobilizing supporters to turn out in numbers for the petitioning meeting. After the petition's passage, supporters can be gathered through other organizations and businesses in the town.

in 1812. In addition seventeen signers served as members of the influential Street Commission, a body chartered by Parliament in 1769 to promote public improvements in the town. Finally, the supporters of repeal also won the backing of W. Hawkes Smith and J. Orton Smith, publishers of the Midland Chronicle.

Opponents of the repeal petition could also count "respectable" middle class townsmen among their number. They were led by Isaac Spooner, a banker, George Villiers, a local magistrate and merchant, and James Woolley, a prominent manufacturer, former high bailiff and member of the Street Commission. In addition, the opponents of repeal were supported by eighteen men who served on the vestry of St. Martin's Church and numerous men who served in various public capacities like William Taylor, high bailiff in 1809, and Joseph Blunt, constable in 1807. Finally, twenty signers had also served on the Street Commission and thus had a conspicuous place in public affairs. What this analysis shows, in short, is that neither side could claim that they represented Birmingham's "respectable" class; both could claim pillars of the community among their supporters.[20]

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[20]The lists of the individuals were gleaned from the Midland Chronicle. Those supporting the public meeting for repeal appeared in the 28 March 1812 edition. Those opposed to the repeal effort appeared on 10 April 1812. For a list of vestry members see Town Book, Birmingham Reference Library, Birmingham. For lists of local government office holders see G. Henry Wright, Chronicles of the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce (Birmingham: n.p., 1913). Finally, the Street Commission, which had largely taken over the local management

A closer scrutiny of the signers' occupations reveals a marked difference in these two groups. The two hundred ninety-one supporters of the repeal movement represented interests which were affected by the trade restrictions with the United States, and this economic tie was the relationship which united these supporters the most. The supporters of repeal came from occupations such as merchants (17), brass founders (7), button makers (17), gunsmiths (8), ironmongers (nail makers, fire shovel and tong makers, etc.--15) and various metallurgical producers (70). From those whose occupations could be discerned, only forty were engaged in trades which would be mostly local in nature (victualler, coal dealer, confectioner, saddler) while over two-hundred fifty were engaged in occupations which most likely brought them into contact with either provincial or international trade.

By contrast, while some merchants and manufacturers opposed repeal, most of the one hundred sixty-seven opponents of repeal clearly came from the professional classes or from occupations completely unrelated to international trade. For

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of the town by 1812 kept concise minutes of its proceedings. Its membership can be found in Street Commission Minutes, Birmingham Reference Library, Brimingham. It is clear from the survey of past political activities of the signers of the anti-repeal petition that the vestry was one of the key networks of their support. In Birmingham and in most towns throughout the provinces, vestries served as the main dispenser of poor relief. As in other towns, the dispersal of funds raised by rate-payers undoubtedly generated occasional controversy in Birmingham but clearly not on the scale witnessed in Liverpool with its very tightly organized and excluded Dissenter minority who constantly attempted to disrupt vestry meetings.

example, there were five attorneys, two surgeons, a clergyman, and a lieutenant colonel who supported the anti-repeal movement. More striking was the support from those engaging in occupations unrelated to foreign trade such as baker (2), umbrella maker (1), chemist (2), shoemaker (1), distiller (3), huckster (peddler--2), dance master (1), pawn broker (1) and victualler (4). In fact, only seventeen of the 167 opponents of the repeal campaign worked in metallurgical occupations, the chief source of Birmingham's international trade. Most of the opponents of repeal depended strictly on the local market or were engaged in professional occupations unaffected by trade issues at all. Thus, a breakdown of these two opposing groups by occupation reveals that, while many who sought repeal of the Orders-in-Council were involved in occupations which tied into the international trade, many of those opposed to repeal worked in professions either not related to trade or related only to local and not international trade.[21]

Besides the economic ties which distinguished these signers, what other connections are discernible? The difficulty in answering this question lies in the lack of a formalized political organizational web in Birmingham. Unlike

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[21]Occupations of individual signers were gleaned from New Triennial Directory of Birmingham (Birmingham: Thomson and Wrightson, 1812). It should be pointed out that during the parliamentary hearings on the Orders-in-Council, Birmingham delegates, particularly Thomas Potts, accused the opponents of repeal of intentionally seeking support from those least affected by the Orders-in-Council. The occupation of James Cresshull, dancing master, was put up for specific ridicule.

Liverpool, Birmingham was a city without a large number of polarizing local organizations. This situation arose in part undoubtedly because Birmingham was not a corporation town and therefore did not have the natural formalizing structure provided by the corporation. In any case, political opinion was created and political articulacy expressed not through institutionalized politics but through informal organizations and relationships. [22]

While Birmingham did develop a network of clubs dedicated both to reform and to the political status quo in the 1770s and 1780s, John Money's examination of late eighteenth century Birmingham confirms the lack of formal institutional networks uniting residents and tying them to local and national affairs. Moreover, by the turn of the century many of the men who led and nurtured Birmingham's reforming organizations were deceased or had fled in the wake of sectarian violence.[23] Thus there was no sustained, institutional network of organization which naturally polarized the town as in Liverpool. Money found instead that Birmingham's organizational structure consisted of informal networks such as social clubs, debating societies, taverns and coffee houses. While it could be tentatively concluded that the

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[22]See page 31-36 for a fuller explanation of Birmingham's governmental structure.

[23]See pages 40-45 for a discussion of the sectarian violence which led to the abandonment of reforming activity in Birmingham after 1791.

local banking institutions and the newspaper offices were just such a source of political mobilization during the Orders-in-Council repeal campaign, it is clearly more difficult to ascertain this than in Liverpool with its highly structured network and political polarization.[24]

Another contrast with Liverpool was that in Birmingham sectarian interests did not polarize the mobilization of the Orders-in-Council campaign. While this may seem incredible in light of the infamous Priestley anti-Dissenter riots of 1791, there is simply little evidence that sectarianism played a role in political mobilization in the Orders-in-Council campaign. In fact, the leaders of both factions (Attwood and Spooner/Spooner, Villiers, Woolley) were all Anglicans. Furthermore, the sectarian affiliation of the signers reveals only a slight propensity of Dissenters to support repeal. While support from prominent Dissenters like William Hutton (who had been attacked in the Priestley Riots), John and Samuel Ryland, and Thomas Phipson may have aided in political

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[24]John Money, Experience and Identity: Birmingham and the West Midlands, 1760-1800 (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1977), chapters 3-6. Here Money discusses the informal networks which comprised Birmingham's political mobilization at the end of the eighteenth century. Note that during the Orders-in-Council campaign banks such as Attwoods/Spooners and Lloyds Bank organized by pro-repealer John Taylor probably provided the informal networks for political mobilization in Birmingham. At the same time local newspapers also acted in the same way. For example, the Midland Chronicle published by J. Orton Smith and Hawkes Smith was vehemently pro-repeal while the Birmingham Commercial Herald and General Advertiser under the proprietorship of Richard Jabet was just as vehemently anti-repeal.

mobilization for the supporters of repeal, it is difficult to conclude that sectarian interest was at the heart of the Orders-in-Council campaign as it surely was in Liverpool.[25]

While sectarianism may have played only a tangential role in the political mobilization of the Orders-in-Council campaign, Birmingham Dissenters did take a very active role in public life. Many sat as members of the Street Commission, the qualification for which was not religious affiliation but property ownership: members had to possess real or personal property of £1,000 or more. Dissenters were regularly elected to the post of low bailiff[26] and chapels such as New Meeting House and Carr's Lane encouraged their members to be politically active in local affairs. Moreover, these opportunities for political participation seemed to have created much political assimilation among Dissenters in Birmingham, particularly after the Priestley riots which eliminated many of the most radical Dissenters from the town, a political assimilation which clearly did not take place in Liverpool with its closed Anglican Tory corporation and its

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[25]Sectarian affiliations were gleaned from a variety of sources including biographies, obituaries, and town scrap books. Parish records in Birmingham were of limited value in determining sectarian connections.

[26]Traditionally in Birmingham the position of Low Bailiff was always reserved for a Dissenter. The High Bailiff was always an Anglican. Thus Eric Hopkins concludes that in effect, "the ruling elite was divided into two groups, the leading Anglicans and the leading Dissenters." Attwood and Spooner both served as High Bailiffs. See Hopkins, Birmingham, 137.

overt policy of Dissenter exclusion. This fact was also noted by Eric Hopkins, who maintains that sectarian divisions were of little importance in Birmingham. While Dissenters were found among the most prosperous entrepreneurs, Hopkins states that "there is nothing to show that Dissenters formed a significantly larger proportion of Birmingham's inhabitants and businessmen . . . Furthermore, it cannot always be assumed that because a manufacturer was a member of a Dissenting community, he would always be on cordial terms with his co-religionists who would be helpful to him in business. All in all, it would be unwise to attribute too much of the zeal of Birmingham entrepreneurs in the period 1760-1840 to religious conviction. It played its part, but was hardly a prime driving force." [27]

Without a strong formal network of organizations or religion to provide the means of political mobilization, Birmingham townsmen turned to a more immediate source of support: familial relationships. While Isaac and Richard Spooner were on decidedly opposite sides of the debate on the Orders-in-Council, this situation was quite rare. By

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[27]Hopkins, Birmingham, 101-102; John Bunce, History of the Corporation of Birmingham, 6 vols. (Birmingham: Cornish Brothers, 1878), 1: 71. R.W. Ram provided a statistical breakdown of Dissenter members of the Street Commission. Over time, the number of Dissenters on the Street Commission increased nearly one-hundred percent (1769-1828). R.W. Ram, "Influence on the Patterns of Belief and Social Action Among Birmingham Dissenters between 1750-1870," in Religion in the Birmingham Area: Essays in the Sociology of Religion, ed. Alan Bryman (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press, n.d.), 34, 100.

examining surnames it is possible to detect sixteen potential familial relationships (that is father/son or members of an extended family) within the names of those who supported repeal. In all, thirty-seven signers were probably tied through family relationships. In addition, many included as signers their firm's name, expanding the list of possible supporters.

Similar ties connected opponents of repeal. Fifteen probable familial relationships were discovered from the 167 signers; the Rabone family contributed four family members to the petition, for example, while John Cope, John Cope Junior and J & C Cope Company also registered their disapproval of the repeal petition. What all of this implied, of course, is that in Birmingham, in the absence of more sophisticated networks and relationships, political mobilization often centered on family connections rather than an institutionalized network.

Unfortunately, this initial analysis of the signers of the two requisitions has yielded little information about the world views of the two groups. After all, if they had no previous sectarian connection, were not united through a strong network of local organizations, and did not previously engage in widespread efforts of political mobilization, then how did they mobilize support and why did the Orders-in-Council stir such controversy in the town?

Since networks of organization and interest were embryonic in Birmingham, it seems clear that political mobilization in the 1812 repeal campaign rested primarily on economic interests and ideals which were formulated as a result of the trade restrictions. In fact, the beliefs forged in 1812 would be central to future efforts at mobilization in Birmingham as well. Among those who supported repeal, several conclusions can be drawn. First, many were of similar occupations and economic status and their interests lay in international trade. Second, many emerged in public life during the decade preceding the repeal movement, which indicates that they were probably youthful. For example, Thomas Attwood and Richard Spooner took their place in the Street Commission for the first time in January of 1812; Thomas and William Asbury appeared on the Street Commission's rolls for the first time in 1812; Thomas Atkin, Richard Baker, John Clarke, J.T. Lawrence, John Kendell, Thomas Potts, Thomas Phipson, Thomas Small, Joseph Shore, and W. Hawkes Smith all became Street Commissioners or bailiffs after 1803 and many (Potts, Phipson, Smith, Lawrence, and Shore) became prominent spokesmen in the Orders-in-Council repeal campaign.[28] While it is true that all of the repealers were not "new men," it is nonetheless striking that these newly emerging local political leaders as a whole chose to support repeal and break with the

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[28]Membership in the Street Commission can be found in their minute books in the Birmingham Reference Library.

past as represented by those supporting loyalty and governmental policy.[29]

Those who supported repeal, both new men and seasoned political leaders, wanted more than just the repeal of an odious governmental policy. Their petition in fact reveals an emerging ideology with a belief in free trade, suspicion and even hostility to Westminster, growing provincial and local awareness and identity, and the unabashed belief that as Englishmen and major manufacturers in the kingdom they had the right and duty to speak out against measures which were "subversive of national welfare and security." In short, Birmingham's growing merchant and manufacturing middle class was growing in articulacy and boldness and although they were not represented in Parliament, they were determined to make their positions heard on this and other issues which concerned them. Of all of the petitions received in Parliament in the spring of 1812, Birmingham's expressed more than mere

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[29]Phipson, Potts, Lawrence, Spooner, Attwood, and Shore were members of the Committee selected to represent Birmingham's case for repeal to Parliament and to circulate the repeal petition among their fellow townsmen. W. Hawkes Smith was editor of the Midland Chronicle, the most powerful voice for repeal in Birmingham. It should also be pointed out that several venerable local leaders and businessmen did join the repeal effort, including William Hutton, noted Dissenter and local historian, Charles Lloyd, prominent local leader and member of the Street Commission since 1789, and John Ryland, long time Street Commissioner, prominent Dissenter and businessmen who led past efforts at mobilizing Birmingham's manufacturing interests. Ryland, Lloyd and Hutton were also members of the Orders-in-Council repeal committee, and their prominent place in the effort certainly gave the cause the legitimacy of age.

unhappiness at the present economic dislocation and sought broader remedies and goals:

> Resolution 1: That it is the highest privilege, and the most important duty of British subjects to address the Legislature, whenever they conceive that any political measure is subversive of national welfare and security.
> Resolution 2: That the industry and ingenuity of British manufacturers, aided by the spirit of our invaluable Constitution, have produced those great mechanical improvements, and called forth that division of labor which have given to the Merchants of this country its pre-eminence in foreign markets, and have greatly contributed to support that naval superiority, which has hitherto constituted our strength and security as a nation.
> Resolution 3: That not only the revenue but the very existence of society in its present state, in this country, depends upon the prosperity of our Manufacturers and Commerce.
> Resolution 4: That we view with the deepest regret, the present ruinous situation of the Manufactures and Commerce of the United Kingdom, and are decidedly of the opinion, that the Orders-in-Council, by closing our commercial intercourse with the United States of America, are a principal cause of the evils we deplore. . . .
> Resolution 6: That when nearly all channels of our trade to the Continent of Europe are closed, the commerce of the East possessed by an exclusive monopoly and our national expenditure unparalleled in the annals of the world, we deem it incumbent upon us to recommend to the consideration of our legislature, the propriety of revoking those measures, which we conceive to have been originally contrary to the recognized laws of nations, inconsistent with the principles of sound policy, and which threaten to involve us in a war with our most valuable commercial connection, America; a country linked to us by the powerful

> affinities of common origin, similarity of languages, law, and manners. . . . Resolution 8. That this town and neighborhood, containing a most numerous population, and being unquestionably one of the most important manufacturing districts in the British Empire, have greatly depended upon a friendly intercourse with the Untied States of America, and are suffering most severely under the operation of the Orders in Council.[30]

Yet the petition with its bold resolutions was not carried unanimously and instead touched off a controversy which pitted father against son (the Spooners) and town leader against town leader. If the repeal campaign was aimed at broader remedies and goals for Birmingham through its developing ideology, then those who opposed this measure, those who spoke out in the public forum against the town's petition, saw in the campaign not bold middle class articulacy but something dangerous, perhaps even treasonous, represented in those resolutions and by that political mobilization.

The men who opposed the repeal effort were not, like their counterparts, organized strictly by economic interests. Many of their supporters were professional men without direct ties to provincial or international trade or local artisans and small shopkeepers unlikely to be interested themselves with the complexity of the trade issues. When the collective group presented their grievances in an advertisement opposing

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[30]Midland Chronicle, 25 April 1812. For Birmingham and this growing middle class and provincial-wide articulacy see Donald Read, The English Provinces, 1760-1960 (London: Edward Arnold, 1964).

the repeal petition on 10 April 1812, their reasoning was succinct. They expressed their deep regret for the repeal petition saying that it gave Napoleon, "an erroneous and unwarranted impression of the sentiments of many merchants and manufacturers." The Orders-in-Council were not just a commercial measure but "a measure of state policy." The complaint went on to state that it was highly impolitic to intervene with governmental policy in regards to the United States and the signers trusted in the Parliament to rescind the measures in a manner "consistent with the Honor of the Crown, and the Preservation of the maritime rights of the United Kingdom." Thus, their stated appeal was to patriotism and they condemned their opponents for the disloyalty they were demonstrating through the repeal petition.[31]

Patriotism and its role in the Napoleonic War was important for uniting the nation and for engendering continued enthusiasm for a war which was long and costly.[32] Yet, appeals to patriotism by 1812 were clearly not as effective as in the heady and danger-filled days of the 1790s. By 1812 public campaigns for reform had revived and the Orders-in-Council repeal campaign had usurped the language of patriotism. Moreover, by 1812 the populace was war-weary and economically strained. Appeals to patriotism, however, often

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[31]Midland Chronicle, 10 April 1812.

[32]See Chapter One for the discussion of patriotism and the wars of the French Revolution.

carried a subliminal message, as in Liverpool, where it was cleverly used by the local Tory Anglican grandees as a weapon against reform and innovation. Thus behind the facade of loyalty and patriotism there often lay an assumption about local political mobilization as well. This was undoubtedly true among the Birmingham opponents of repeal. Their opposition was a reflection of their collective world views which for many stretched back to the eighteenth century.

Therefore, part of the explanation for opposition to the Orders-in-Council lies in the age of the leaders of the opposition. While Thomas Attwood and Richard Spooner were young men in their twenties, Isaac Spooner, George Villiers, and James Woolley were a generation older. In fact, of those twenty men who opposed the repeal who were previously involved in the political life of the town as either office holders or members of the Street Commission, most began their political involvement in the 1780s, two decades earlier than those who supported repeal. Woolley, Villiers, Joseph Rabone, John Cope, Thomas Cooper, and William Ward were all early members of the Street Commission. Their names appear frequently in the 1780s and 1790s as spokesmen for their own generation. By 1812 they were middle aged or elderly and although they still possessed a prominent voice in the town, they were now forced to share their power with a wider and younger group of men, men with very different ideas from their own.

This does not mean, of course, that mere biological age was the determining factor, and it would be a mistake to dismiss the opponents of repeal, as did David Moss, as merely "older men whose memories and habits came from the eighteenth century." William Roscoe and William Rathbone of Liverpool were roughly the same age as Spooner and Villiers and yet their world views were shaped in a direction which supported reform. The answer lies, then, not in biological age but in the experience and world views of those who opposed repeal. The question that must be addressed, therefore, is what shaped their views, and presumably many of their supporters' views, and led to such a public backlash against Birmingham's participation in this national petitioning campaign?[33]

Many of the opponents of repeal matured during Birmingham's first great "growth" decades of the 1770s-1780s. It was a spectacular time in the life of the town with the work of men like Matthew Boulton, Samuel Garbett, Erasmus Darwin, and John Taylor bringing wealth and fame to the newly emerging manufacturing center. In general prosperity was accompanied by relative local order. Although Birmingham was not the consensual community described by Asa Briggs, it did seem to lack the class conflict of Manchester and the political corruption of Liverpool. Indeed, one of the great achievements of Birmingham in this period was the evolution of a governmental structure to replace the ancient manorial

[33]Moss, "Birmingham and the Campaigns," 181.

system lambasted by residents like William Hutton, who complained that Birmingham's manorial government of bailiffs, high tasters, constables, and magistrates was "nearly the same as the Saxons left it."[34]

While many, like William Hutton, sought a charter for Birmingham in the eighteenth century, this effort failed. What was sanctioned by Parliament in 1769 instead was the Street Commission, whose stated purpose was to "light and clean the streets of the town, to remove nuisances . . . and to levy for these purposes rates not exceeding eight pence in a pound."[35]

This act of Parliament had a great impact on the town. First, the Street Commission's mission was extended through 160further acts of Parliament in 1772, 1784 and 1801. It created for Birmingham an alternative to the manorial

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[34]For an examination of Asa Briggs' view of the consensual nature of Birmingham see Asa Briggs, History of the Corporation of Birmingham, 2 vols. (Birmingham: Cornish Books, 1952), vol. 2; Asa Briggs, Victorian Cities (London: Odham Books, 1963). His view of community consensus has been challenged by many later historians. A richer view of Birmingham's political and economic life has also been offered by Eric Hopkins in his work Birmingham: The First Manufacturing Town in the World and by John Money, Experience and Identity: Birmingham and the West Midlands: 1760-1800. Finally for an examination of working class trade organizations and their role in Birmingham in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries see Clive Behagg, "Custom, Class and Change: The Trade Societies of Birmingham," Social History 4 (1979): 455-480. William Hutton, a noted local Dissenter and local historian wrote of Birmingham manorial government in his work History of Birmingham (Birmingham: Knott and Lloyd, 1834), 167.

[35]Bunce, History of the Corporation of Birmingham, 1: 67.

government as it began to take on the responsibility of town improvements and local services. It was the Street Commission, for example, that sought to install the first modern water system in Birmingham in 1812. The Commission's efficiency led some to call the town the "best governed city in the world" by the end of the eighteenth century. While the Street Commission was able to fuse manufacturing interests and end Dissenter exclusion, thereby creating a widespread sense of local support, it did so while still restricting political power to the few who could meet the Commission's membership requirements. The Commission's minutes demonstrate the oligarchical nature of this new governmental body. There were thirteen initial members of the Commission who met the qualifications of ownership of £1,000 of real or personal property. In 1772, when the act was further extended by Parliament, nine more members were added. The average attendance at the meetings throughout the late eighteenth century was six or eight stalwart members like William Ward, John Cope, George Villiers, and James Woolley. Others who qualified for membership took only an inactive part in the work of the Commission and thus rarely attended. The Street Commission was an oligarchic and not a democratic body.

There are several implications in the creation of the Street Commission and its later relationship to the Orders-in-Council. First, many opponents of repeal were Commission members during the late eighteenth century and thus were some

of the first participants in the Commission's activities. They thus established themselves in a position of respect in the community, a position clearly not without controversy. After all, the Street Commission not only assumed most of the governmental responsibilities in the town but it also took on jobs which had been traditionally performed by the Anglican vestry and church wardens such as poor relief. In the absence of the local power they once held, the church wardens had to placate themselves, according to Rev. Philip Crowe, by an "increase in dignity." In 1772, the very year that the Commission's powers were enhanced and its size increased, according to Crowe the vestry gave the church wardens permission to "remove the font from the Chancel and build a seat for themselves" to better establish their public prominence.[36]

Yet open conflict did not develop between the Street Commissioners, the vestry, and the manorial officers because many local residents served in all three bodies. For example, James Woolley was appointed to the Street Commission in 1789, made high bailiff for 1801 and was a member of St. Martin's vestry. George Villiers was made a Street Commissioner in 1789 and also served on the vestry. Richard Pratchett was a made the high bailiff for 1804, was a vestryman and a Street Commissioner appointed in 1803. There were many men who made

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[36]Rev. Philip Crowe, St. Martin's in the Bull Ring: The Story of Seven Centuries (Birmingham: D.G. Rowney, 1975), 29.

these crossovers (both Anglicans and Dissenters but Dissenters obviously could not serve on the vestry, although they could serve as low bailiff) and in doing so maintained a sense of political stability in the town.[37]

Given that the Street Commission had existed for forty-three years by 1812, how did it fit into the controversy over the Orders-in-Council? After all, membership in the Street Commission did not ensure opposition to the Orders-in-Council. In fact, there were seventeen Street Commission members who favored the repeal movement. The answer lies within the membership of the Street Commission itself. For while the Commission had hitherto been largely a small, oligarchical body, by act of Parliament in 1812 its powers were again extended (this time to provide a water system for the town) and ninety-nine men, including many younger men like Richard Spooner and Thomas Attwood, were added to the membership rolls. It was these younger men, those who began serving in 1812 or in the few years prior to 1812, who were most likely to support repeal. Moreover, not only was the Commission growing larger, monthly meetings were growing more active as evidenced in the minute book. While six to eight members attended meetings in the 1790s, by the beginning of the nineteenth century that number rose to approximately fourteen and by April of 1812 more than thirty commissioners regularly

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[37]For holders of manorial offices see Catherine Hutton, The History of Birmingham (London: J. Nichols and Sons, 1819), 161.

attended meetings. That the widening of the oligarchy was, in fact, controversial and resented was obvious. Twice in the winter and spring of 1812, the Birmingham Commercial Herald and General Advertiser carried protests against the parliamentary bill aimed at extending the Commission's power. In December of 1811 thirty-three local townsmen publicly protested the proposed bill as "inexpedient and unnecessary." Of those thirty-three men, fifteen later opposed the Orders-in-Council repeal movement (five signers actually supported repeal). On 23 March 1812 another protest against the parliamentary bill was lodged within the pages of the Commercial Herald. This time the signers sought more than just informal opposition to the Street Bill. They sought and were refused a town meeting to discuss the subject. The refusal came from none other than the young and newly appointed high bailiff, Thomas Attwood, a Street Commissioner himself. Of the twenty-seven who signed this protest, eight later went on to oppose the Order-in-Council repeal movement, which was led by the high bailiff, Thomas Attwood.[38]

The conclusion which can be drawn from this controversy is that coterminous with the Orders-in-Council campaign in 1812 was a local debate on the future of the Street Commission. While most seemed to be quite content to allow the Commission to manage the affairs of the town when it was

[38]Birmingham Commercial Herald and General Advertiser, 30 December 1811, 23 March 1812.

a small and rather closed oligarchical body, by 1812 its rising numbers, greater responsibility, and younger membership led former supporters of the Commission to protest the extension of its power. One obvious way to extend this protest was by opposing not only the enlargement of the Commission's power but also the Orders-in-Council repeal effort which was led publicly by two young new Commission members, Richard Spooner and Thomas Attwood.

Of course, controversy within the Street Commission was only one element in the experiences of the opponents of repeal which framed their response in 1812. In fact, while the Street Commission controversy was important, certainly of equal importance were Birmingham's earlier failed efforts at political mobilization. Not only had Birmingham residents shown their reluctance to engage in national political debates throughout most of the eighteenth century but during the two episodes where large-scale town involvement became engaged, the result was local bitterness and even violence.[39]

Perhaps the more important of these eighteenth century activities for the later opponents of repeal efforts was Birmingham's involvement in the ill-fated General Chamber of Manufacturers. The Chamber, whose aim was to unite manufacturing interests all over the kingdom, was organized in

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[39]Note that Donald Read maintains that it was Tory domination which prevented reform efforts in Birmingham throughout the late eighteenth century. Read, The English Provinces, 43.

1785 through the efforts of Josiah Wedgwood and Samuel Garbett (the latter a Birmingham manufacturer). Although earlier tentative steps had been taken to try to create a united manufacturing front, it was not until 1785 when Prime Minister William Pitt proposed sweeping changes in the trade relationship between Britain and Ireland that the General Chamber of Manufacturers became a reality.[40]

The Chamber faced a number of hurdles, not the least of which was the mutual suspicion with which Britain's manufacturers regarded one other. As in other rising manufacturing towns like Manchester, there was no consensus from the merchant and manufacturing community on key economic issues like free trade. In Birmingham, Samuel Garbett and Matthew Boulton, the leaders of the local campaign, found that both suspicion and apathy had to be overcome before Birmingham manufacturers could speak with an effective united voice. Yet the potential was clearly there, for in 1783 Birmingham became one of the first towns in the nation to organize a General Commercial Committee. That committee aimed at exploring trade issues and corresponding with other manufacturing interests in the kingdom "so that the merchants and manufacturers in

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[40]See Chapter One for more background on the Chamber's efforts and activities.

different parts of the kingdom may unite in proper measure, for the common interest of the whole."[41]

The Birmingham Commercial Committee, although clearly not the most vocal of the local commercial organizations created throughout the kingdom, nevertheless created a working agenda supporting continued restrictions on trade with Ireland, opposition to excise taxes and support for a free trade agreement with France, even though the latter position caused a permanent rift with the General Chamber whose overall membership supported continued trade restrictions with the French.[42]

For the members of the Birmingham Commercial Committee the importance of the commercial campaign extended beyond participation with the General Chamber of Manufacturers. By 1787 the General Chamber collapsed in dismal failure over the fracas created by the proposed free trade treaty with France and even the best efforts of Wedgwood, Garbett, and others could not resurrect the moribund organization. In Birmingham, however, the local Commercial Committee continued to meet throughout 1788-1789. Yet in 1790 this committee too fell

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[41]An Account of the Manner in Which a Standing General Commercial Committee was Established at Birmingham for the Purpose of Watching Over and Conducting the Public Interest of the Town and Neighborhood (Birmingham: Pearson and Rollason, 1784). For a very general account of Garbett's association with the national General Chamber of Manufacturers see J.M. Norris, "Samuel Garbett and the Early Development of Industrial Lobbying in Great Britain," Economic History Review, ser. 2, 10 (1957-1958): 450-460.

[42]Money, Experience and Identity, 44.

into bitter argument. Forces allied with Garbett sought to use the committee's funds to petition Parliament against a proposal to export brass. Opponents strenuously opposed the involvement of the Commercial Committee in this extra-parliamentary petitioning effort. The battle erupted into one for control of the committee itself. Significantly, against Garbett there was allied a group led by James Woolley, Joseph Rabone and George Villiers, the same men who led the anti-petition campaign in 1812. In this earlier effort, they succeeded. Not only did they wrest control of the committee from Garbett, but they also succeeded in destroying it. The bitter struggle among individual members diminished interest in the entire enterprise. By the end of the 1790s, the Birmingham Commercial Committee was moribund, just like the General Chamber and its greatest contribution, the temporary uniting of local manufacturing interests, was overshadowed by the bitterness it left in its wake. Eric Hopkins noted that the committee failed because "the spirit of independence which characterized Birmingham entrepreneurs may have told against any concerted action when matters of controversy arose." Indeed, this seems a very reasonable conclusion given that the same core leadership sought to prevent the union merchant and manufacturing interests in 1812.[43]

Indeed, the Orders-in-Council campaign probably added to the suspicion already held by men like Woolley, Villiers and

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[43]Hopkins, 64.

Rabone of outdoor political mobilization. Just after the repeal campaign, in 1813, fifty men signed a public request for the creation of a new commercial society that would have been in effect a resurrection of the old Birmingham Commercial Committee. Those in favor of it were predominantly those who had supported repeal. Only three opponents of the repeal petition signed the public request in 1813, including Isaac Spooner. He was the only prominent opponent of repeal to cross over into this new camp of merchants and manufacturers dedicated to recreating a united front for local economic interests. Political mobilization in the future, then, would have to be organized by new men united by the economic realities of the present while forgetting the suspicions and failures of the past.[44]

Last, but still of great importance in forming the experience and world views of the opponents of repeal was Birmingham's most violent expression of political feeling, the Priestley Riots of 1791. While this outburst against Dissenters and dissenting chapels in July of 1791 clearly demonstrated the power of sectarian issues to arouse the local populace, the violence of July 1791 had an even deeper meaning and effect on the town than just the weakening of Dissenter interests.

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[44]G. Henry Wright, Chronicles of the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce (Birmingham n.p., 1913), 27, 51.

The Priestley Riots, a week of uncontrolled violence in Birmingham during July of 1791, were a curious mix of anti-Dissenter and anti-Jacobin emotion. On the one hand, as R.B. Rose points out in his pivotal article on the riots, there was much hostility toward prominent Dissenters like Joseph Priestley and the greater role that they were taking in public life. Not only did prominent Dissenters serve in various capacities in local public offices but Birmingham's Dissenters were among the most active in the nation in becoming involved in reforming efforts such as the campaign to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts in 1788-1790, an effort which was loudly condemned from the pulpits of St. Martin's and St. Philip's churches.[45]

Despite the war of words which developed over the Test and Corporation repeal campaign, it was not this effort or even the prominent role of Dissenters in public life which led to the riots in the summer of 1791. Rather, it was the transition from demands for religious to more radical political reform by Joseph Priestley and his supporters which led to this riot. More pointedly, on 14 July 1791 prominent Dissenters including Priestley attended a dinner commemorating and celebrating the capture of the Bastille. That night opponents of this "Jacobinical" dinner countered with handbills proclaiming "destruction to the Presbyterians" and

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[45]R.B. Rose, "The Priestley Riots of 1791," Past and Present 18 (November 1960): 71.

"Church and King Forever" and attacks began against Dissenter property. After three violent nights three Unitarian chapels, one Baptist meeting house, and twenty-seven personal homes were sacked, including those of Priestley, John Ryland and William Hutton.[46]

The Priestley Riots had a profound effect on the town. First, Birmingham's reform movement was severely damaged by this outburst. Not only did many prominent reformers, like Priestley himself, emigrate from the town but those, like William Hutton, who remained appeared thereafter more like an eccentric minority than a threat to the order of the town. Dissenters continued to serve in public capacities, but without the leadership of prominent men like Joseph Priestley their reforming efforts diminished considerably.[47]

The Priestley Riots were also a stunning success for Birmingham's "Church and King" faction, the faction which at the very least condoned the mob action. As R.B. Rose points

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[46]Both R.B. Rose and Eric Hopkins maintain that it was the political radicalism of the Dissenters and not the merely the fact that they were Dissenters which led to the Priestley riots. Hopkins concludes that "the riots were provoked as much by political as by religious fears, and the homes of Unitarians were attacked because of their criticisms of the British Government and support for French ideas of liberty rather than because of their doctrinal beliefs." Hopkins, Birmingham, 137.

[47]Money, Experience and Identity, 223. Money also concludes however that reform did not come to a complete standstill among Birmingham's Dissenter community because of instruction of the younger generation by Priestley and others. It is this younger generation Money says which carries on the tradition begun by Priestley and others.

out, in Birmingham it was the Church and King Club, not the local corporation nor closed oligarchy nor slave-trading merchants (as in Liverpool), which formed the core of loyalist sentiment in the town. The success of the Priestley Riots drove underground and out of town the Church and King club's major political opponents.[48]

At the center of this "Church and King" movement and presumably the greatest beneficiary of the Priestley Riots was the bastion of loyalty and "Church and King" sentiment in the town, the Bean Club, a loyalist dining club founded after the Restoration as a place where the town's elite could meet and discuss the most important issues of the day. Its members were among the most prominent citizens in the town. Manorial officers, Street Commissioners and even newspaper publishers (Samuel Aris of Aris' Birmingham Gazette) were counted among its members. Bean Club members thought of themselves as representing "Birmingham interests" and the club even became an important locus for Parliamentary political activity. At the very least, members of Parliament for Warwickshire paid their respects to the club by attending the annual August anniversary dinner. By the time of the Priestley Riots in 1791, however, the Bean Club had clearly become more conservative than at its inception. Its members included those belonging to the Church and King Club and to the Birmingham Association for the Preservation of Liberty and

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[48]Rose, "The Priestley Riots," 83.

Property. John Money credit its members with the "hounding of the Dissenters" during the crisis of 1791. While he cautions against viewing the Bean Club as a mere reactionary body, their commitment to church, king, and constitution, their increasingly narrow outlook, and the prominent position that many of its members held in the town gained for it the reputation of bastion of loyalism in Birmingham. Thus the elimination of their greatest competitor for both local power and political ideology was significant. In fact, after 1791 Bean Club members could gladly continue to serve with Birmingham Dissenters like William Hutton and Charles Lloyd on the Street Commission or in manorial offices with the knowledge that their position of ideological and political dominance was secure.

Again, the experience of the Priestley Riots and the subsequent domination of "Church and King" politics in Birmingham was of great importance in understanding the controversy stirred by the Orders-in-Council repeal campaign in 1812. For it is no coincidence that fifteen members of the anti-repeal movement belonged to the Bean Club including Richard Bird (who spoke out at the public meeting against the repeal petition), Matthew Linwood (local magistrate), James Woolley, and George Villiers.[49]

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[49]W.K.R. Bedford, Notes from the Minute Book of the Birmingham Bean Club 1754-1836, Birmingham Reference Library, Birmingham, 1889. Bean Club membership was found in this transcription. The fifteen were Anderson Ashmore, E. Baker, Richard Beumont, Richard Bird, James Berwick, John Cope, James

The connection between the anti-repeal activists and Bean Club membership was of crucial importance. Not only did the club provide a natural locus for political mobilization and a ready ideology which focused on loyalism, but the involvement of Bean Club members in 1812 also signifies a renewal of the campaign, successful in 1791, to retain control of local power, order, and political discourse. While the rational Dissenters were driven out of town or underground in 1791, by 1812 the movement for reform was located not just within the Dissenter community but within a broader base of interests, a base not easily or so successfully crushed. While the Church and King, Bean Club members were successful in 1791, in 1812 this longtime voice of tradition, order, and stability had to be content merely with expressing their public protest through an advertisement in the local press. Despite their long trail of success, by 1812 this faction led by men like Villiers, Woolley, and Rabone which was once the most powerful in Birmingham came increasingly to be viewed by the younger merchant and manufacturing elites as a feeble and quite eccentric voice from the past.

Thus the opponents of the repeal movement, like the opponents in Liverpool, possessed a distinct world view based on past experiences which formed their local identity. As prominent members of the town government, the failed

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Cockle, George Freese, J. Linwood, Matthew Linwood, J. Maudsley, William Smith, William Villiers, William Whateley, James Woolley.

Commercial Committee or the ever influential Bean Club, many of these men dominated local affairs for decades creating an illusion of unanimity. Yet an illusion was all it was, for they retained their positions at great cost both in terms of the conflict it produced and in Birmingham's general inability to move beyond its narrow conservative vision to participate in the emerging urban industrial culture that was taking shape in the provinces and in which Birmingham had the potential to lead. It was the desire for this new leadership role among the young middle class merchant and manufacturing elites and their expanded vision of Birmingham's economic future that played a crucial part in the Orders-in-Council repeal campaign in Birmingham for the new men of the town's political articulacy.[50]

3. The Orders-in-Council Repeal Campaign

Despite vocal disapproval from the opposition, the supporters of repeal did not collapse. In fact, their campaign was far more successful than they anticipated. While the opposition appeared to be well mobilized, it did not have public support behind it and largely limited its protest to newspaper advertisements against the campaign and occasional

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[50]Money, Experience and Identity, 281-282; Read, The English Provinces, 56-58.

letters to the editor in Aris' Birmingham Gazette and the Birmingham Commercial Herald and General Advertiser.[51]

Meanwhile, in Birmingham, Thomas Attwood and Richard Spooner gathered supporters for their twin campaigns against the Orders-in-Council and the reversal of the East India Company charter. On both fronts they were aided by the strong support for their positions in the Whig, reformist Midland Chronicle which poured out a weekly stream of criticism against the government at Westminster and its restrictive trade policies. In addition, a forty-eight page pamphlet entitled Seven Short and Plain Letters to the Inhabitants of Birmingham on the Leading Points Connected with the Orders in Council by "Philagathos" also appeared. In his seven letters, Sir Peter Payne, alias "Philagathos," played a role similar to that of "Mercator," the Liverpool writer whose cogent letters in the Liverpool Mercury during the fall and winter of 1811-1812 examined the background and the issues surrounding the

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[51]The most interesting letter of opposition to the Orders-in-Council repeal campaign to appear in the spring of 1812 was that which appeared on 20 April 1812 in the Birmingham Commercial Herald and General Advertiser from "Job Nott, Jr." The character of Job Nott, Bucklemaker and John Nott, Button Burnisher, were fictitious small local manufacturers who appeared in various publications beginning in the 1790s. These two characters provided more than just a convenient pseudonym for local writers. They were examples of patriotism and morality for all Birmingham to follow. In the 20 April letter "Job Nott, Jr" carried on this tradition by exhorting his fellow townsmen to fan the "flames of loyalty and veneration for those laws by which the nation has for so long a period flourished with honour and renown." For the history of Job Nott see Money, Experience and Identity, chapter 2.

Orders-in-Council and provided the evidence against the government's policy.[52]

In his Seven Short and Plain Letters, Payne patiently retraced the history of the trade restrictions. He discussed the development of the license system of trade with the continent, the illegality of the system of restrictions according to the law of nations, and the material progress of the United States. Payne concluded with an open challenge to those who opposed the repeal campaign: "Every man is undoubtedly at liberty to ride . . . his own hobby horse, but still, my respect for the Town of Birmingham encourages me to flatter myself, that had many of the facts adverted to in these letters, been more maturely considered, we should have been spared the mortification of seeing a motley group of Clergy, Gentry, Professional-men, etc, rush 'with one accord' to oppose the tenor of our petition."[53]

In addition to gathering local supporters through the press and other printed publications, Attwood and Spooner also began a correspondence with other provincial town leaders

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[52]Philagothos, [Peter Payne], Seven Short and Plain Letters to the Inhabitants of Birmingham on the Leading Points connected with the Orders-in-Council (Birmingham: James Belcher and Sons, 1812). Payne was a Bedfordshire radical Whig and influential midland reform agitator. In addition to the Seven Short and Plain Letters he also published Mr. Pitt, the Grand Political Delinquent in 1812 which was also highly critical of the Tory government. For more information on Payne's political activities see the Dictionary of National Biography.

[53]Payne, Seven Short and Plain Letters, 47.

involved in the debate on the Orders-in-Council including William Roscoe of Liverpool. More significantly, Birmingham supporters of repeal sought to place themselves squarely within the mainstream of this campaign by communicating with the Westminster leader of the repeal effort, Henry Brougham. Although the number of letters between the leadership of the campaign in Birmingham and outside supporters of repeal were not as large as those which transpired between Liverpudlians and other provincial repealers, nevertheless, considering Birmingham's general lack of experience in political mobilization and its previous reluctance to become involved in extra-parliamentary activity, their correspondence was significant. It demonstrated an awareness of the place Birmingham held *vis-a-vis* the provinces and Westminster.

Indeed, it was the prominent role which Birmingham assumed as a leader in this provincial campaign which was perhaps the most surprising of all. Not only were the proceedings of the Birmingham petition meeting carried in numerous provincial newspapers including the Manchester Mercury, the Leeds Mercury, and the Liverpool Mercury but the Birmingham delegation sent to testify before Parliament in April-May 1812 found themselves celebrities of sorts and its members were called by Brougham as the first witnesses against the government's policy.[54]

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[54]Thomas Attwood, Thomas Potts, Joseph Shaw, James Ryland, Richard Spooner, William Blakeway, Thomas Messenger, Jeremiah Ridout, George Roome, Robert Fiddian, Joshua Scholefield, and

Before the Committee of the Whole House, the Birmingham delegation set the tone for the whole proceedings. Witness after witness described the depression in the town, the high price of food, and the painful necessity of firing workers. While most admitted that they did not have in-depth knowledge about the Orders-in-Council nor in some cases had even read the petition against them with great care, they were firm in the conviction that these trade restrictions were the cause of their distress. As Thomas Messenger bluntly stated under cross examination, while he did not understand the Orders-in-Council fully, he did understand "that the Orders in Council was [sic] the reason of the trade not being open with America; and if the Orders in Council were taken off, the trade would be opened."[55]

Significantly, the delegation also made it known to the committee that they and not the opponents of repeal represented the true sentiment of the town. Under examination by Henry Brougham, Joshua Scholefield dismissed the 167 who signed the declaration opposing repeal. They did not represent one-twentieth of the mercantile interest in Birmingham, he claimed, and had inflated their numbers by seeking support from extended family members and those

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Joseph Webster testified at the parliamentary committee against the Orders-in-Council. Unlike Liverpool, the Birmingham opponents of repeal did not offer any witnesses for the Tory government. See "Minutes of Evidence," 1-80.

[55]Ibid., 66.

uninterested in the whole affair, including "a dancing-master and a clergyman." By contrast, Scholefield boasted, the supporters of repeal numbered 14,000 strong and represented the true merchant and manufacturing interest in the town and thus had the right to represent Birmingham's interests at Westminster.[56]

While some members of Parliament scoffed at Birmingham's evidence against the Orders-in-Council, the overall performance of the delegation was a great success. Not only was their testimony carried in full in the Midland Chronicle for local townsmen to read, but for once Birmingham led rather than trailed behind the efforts of other provincial cities. Moreover, since the debates on the trade policy lasted throughout May and June, the delegation had an opportunity to attend daily meetings with other provincial delegate members, thus joining in the wider effort to force the government to relent on its policy.

During their extended stay in London the delegates were also able to witness the workings of Parliament. For Thomas Attwood, Richard Spooner and others this experience only convinced them further that Parliament was corrupt and inept and that the nation's future lay in the provinces. In a letter to his wife, Attwood particularly lamented the quality of Parliamentary members. "Such a set of feeble mortals as the members of both Houses are, I did never expect to meet

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[56]Ibid., 102-103.

with in this world. The best among them are scarce equal to the worst in Birmingham."[57]

While this criticism certainly did not extend to Henry Brougham, Attwood and his fellow townsmen had a reason to view their own parliamentary representative, Sir Charles Mordaunt, member for Warwickshire, with scorn. For even as witness after witness described the distress in Birmingham and the town itself experienced food riots in April of 1812 as a result of high prices and the depression of wages, Mordaunt assiduously maintained before his colleagues in Commons that no distress existed in Birmingham at all. Attwood and his fellow delegates thus found betrayal within the ranks of Birmingham's only parliamentary representatives.[58]

Having gained experience in successful extra-parliamentary agitation, the delegation prepared to return to Birmingham after the government announced repeal of the Orders-in-Council on 23 June. Yet their return was much different from their departure, for they were successful and

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[57]Wakefield, The Life of Thomas Attwood, 24.

[58]The food riot in Birmingham occurred during the week of 18-25 April 1812 when demands were made by some in the local populace for price controls on potatoes. After the local magistrates assured the crowds that potatoes would be kept to a fair price, the riots subsided. Midland Chronicle 25 April 1812. Mordaunt's insistence that no distress existed, particularly in light of the brief but intense food riots set off a series of letters against Mordaunt from "Incola" and other local writers which appeared in the Midland Chronicle. Thus the issue of the Orders-in-Council dissolved into complaints about Birmingham's lack of true Parliamentary representation as well.

they came home as heroes. Even before their arrival, 700 Birmingham artisans led by George Edmonds and John Steer held a meeting on 17 June to express their gratitude to Thomas Attwood and Richard Spooner for their efforts on the town's behalf and to show their "obligations to their best friends and benefactors." In words reminiscent of future political campaigns, Joseph Wood, one of the spokesmen for the artisanal assembly, reminded his listeners that merchant, manufacturing, and laboring mechanics' interests were inseparable and thus artisans should unite to express their appreciation and solidarity.[59]

The Birmingham artisans also wished to show their gratitude in a tangible way. Not only did they place their 17 June resolutions in all of the local newspapers but when the Birmingham delegation returned on 1 July they were greeted at Attwood and Spooner's banking firm by 50,000 well-wishers carrying ribbons and streamers proclaiming "Friends of Commerce," "Birmingham has done its duty," and "Grateful Artizans [sic] welcome the Deputation." Attwood, the token leader of the delegation, was also presented with a silver plate purchased from funds collected by the artisans. Attwood and his fellow delegates thus found that the whole town and not just merchant and manufacturing interests were allied in support of their efforts. It should be pointed out that both contemporaries and later commentators of the 1812 campaign

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[59]Midland Chronicle, 20 June 1812.

pointed to the incredible solidarity achieved in this endeavor. Nineteenth century historian John Langford, for example, maintained that this was the first recorded instance of artisanal participation in public life. In any case, the potential presented by the large supportive crowds spanning a wide range of economic classes certainly did not escape the attention of Thomas Attwood. For the next twenty years the political mobilization which led to such success in the Orders-in-Council repeal campaign served as the most potent reminder of the potential of united action in achieving political goals.[60]

With success at Westminster and life returning to normal, the triumphant delegation settled down to host a series of self-congratulatory meetings, each designed in some way to unite the town in their common victory and to express again their proud provincial identity. On 7 July a public meeting was held to express gratitude to Brougham "for the pre-eminent ability, zeal, and perseverance manifested in his unparalleled exertions to obtain the revocation of the Orders-in-Council." Here merchants and manufacturing spokesmen not only lauded Brougham for his activities on behalf of their interests but also proclaimed that a new day had arrived in politics with statesmen like Brougham who would guard their concerns in the future. "We have always heard much of the landed interest,

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[60]Midland Chronicle, 4 July 1812; Wakefield, 28; John Langford, A Century of Birmingham Life, 2 vols. (Birmingham: E.C. Osborne, 1868), 1: 235.

and the East and West Indian Interest, " proclaimed Thomas Potts, "but the interest of the manufacturers of the country, has been neglected and overlooked." This condition, they assured themselves, was ending not because of the efforts of parliamentarians but because of their own self-awareness and united activities. The assembly also took the opportunity to recognize the Birmingham artisans who joined the "respectable" body of citizens in protesting the Orders-in-Council, thus showing that "there is no necessary connexion between a shabby coat and a riotous habit; nor should a leathern apron be stigmatized as a cloak for sedition."[61]

On 1 August, the town hosted a public dinner for Henry Brougham, still considered the hero of the campaign despite the war which had erupted with the United States. Again the Birmingham leaders of the repeal campaign underlined the contempt shown to the Birmingham delegation by members of Parliament during their stay in London and they extended their discussion to include issues like peace and parliamentary reform, demonstrating a new interest in the national political debate on those issues. Nor were the upcoming parliamentary elections overlooked. Although the meeting was ostensibly for Brougham, interest in finding a challenger for the Dugdale/Mordaunt ticket was keen and a toast was even raised by Matthias Attwood, Thomas' brother, to potential candidate

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[61]Langford, A Century of Birmingham Life, 1: 235; Midland Chronicle, 11, 18 July 1812.

H.J.W. Ward as the "successful candidate at the next election of Warwickshire."[62]

Those who hoped to carry this new political fervor into the fall election were disappointed. Although Richard Spooner among others flirted with the idea of challenging one of the Warwickshire seats he decided not to and informed Brougham on 16 October of his decision to stay out of the political fray, though he admitted that the current members for Warwickshire were not worthy to represent Birmingham. Despite the lack of a challenger, a public meeting was held to condemn Dugdale and Mordaunt, a public meeting which not surprisingly drew strong condemnation from magistrate George Villiers, who urged his fellow townsmen to return to their homes and abandon a meeting designed to excite "undue influence over the freeholders." Yet, as in the Orders-in-Council campaign, Villiers and his supporters' voices were drowned out by the new spokesmen for Birmingham, who claimed again that they represented the true voice of the town while the "hens and chickens" were just a "few individuals under the control of a magistrate." Despite the outburst and recriminations, however, Dugdale and Mordaunt were returned without opposition. Extra-parliamentary activity obviously had not yet translated into an effective

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[62]Midland Chronicle, 8 August 1812. For Attwood's personal feelings on war with America and the 1 August meeting see Thomas Attwood to Henry Brougham, 3, 10 August 1812, Brougham Papers, University College Library, London. Ward's candidacy never got off the ground. Dugdale and Mordaunt ran unopposed in 1812.

means of challenging the parliamentary oligarchy. Indeed, although Birmingham support was sought from Liverpudlians during Henry Brougham's ill-fated Parliamentary campaign in 1812, Attwood clearly was not confident enough of the nascent political mobilization in Birmingham to offer support and thus Birmingham's newly politicized men remained largely local in interest and certainly outside of the national parliamentary campaigns of 1812.[63]

4. Conclusion

By the winter of 1812 the spirited campaigns of the spring must have seemed quite distant. War with the United States insured that normal trade did not resume, although the extreme conditions of the spring had abated. Parliamentary elections ended without any major re-alignments and even Henry Brougham failed in his electoral bid in Liverpool. In many respects the effort against the Orders-in-Council might have looked like a failure. Yet, it clearly was not. For once, Birmingham had joined in a national political campaign. Its new leaders like Attwood and Spooner overcame the tremendous odds of local apathy and vocal opposition to demonstrate to the town the influence that Birmingham could have on the national political debate when it united. It did so not

[63]Midland Chronicle, 10 October 1812. For Richard Spooner's refusal to seek election from Warwickshire see Richard Spooner to Henry Brougham 16 October 1812, Brougham Papers. For the exchange between Attwood and Roscoe about supporting Brougham monetarily see Thomas Attwood to William Roscoe, 10 October 1812, 12 October 1812, Roscoe Papers.

without controversy but by breaking the power of the older, better organized, "church and king" oligarchy. In this repeal campaign Birmingham also united in a way that even the leaders of the movement could not have imagined. Not only did the town achieve national prominence as a spokesman for merchants and manufacturers but in Birmingham as in no other provincial city during the repeal campaign, support was broadened to include not just the middle class elite but the working class as well, a peaceful and powerful coalition which Attwood later emphasized during his leadership of the Birmingham Political Union in the 1830s.

For the next twenty years, the Orders-in-Council campaign was also the best example Birmingham reformers had of a successful extra-parliamentary contest. Not only did many, like Attwood and Spooner, gain their initial contact with political life from this movement but its success also led to permanent realignments in Birmingham's local political power. In the next crucial decades of transition in Birmingham and in the political life of the nation, many of the men who gained their first experience in political mobilization in 1812 would emerge as the new political voices of the town. These newly-empowered younger merchants and manufacturers set out immediately to continue the momentum created by the successful Orders-in-Council repeal campaign. By 1813 a new Commercial Committee was formed to offer a locus for political mobilization and a place to discuss the rapidly changing

economic situation in the town. In addition, many of the participants of the 1812 campaign went on to even more active participation in local political activities. John Ryland, Joseph Ridout, William Shore, John Simpson, and Thomas Pemberton became prominent local town leaders in the decades ahead. Others became involved in the national political debate over reform during the next two decades. For example, R.T. Cadbury, supporter of the 1812 repeal movement, played a vocal role in seeking political representation for Birmingham in the 1820s. George Edmonds, leader of the artisans' committee in 1812, went on to publish Edmonds' Weekly Recorder and Saturday Advertiser in Birmingham and become a prominent spokesman for reform. Many of Edmonds fellow artisans who publicly thanked Attwood and his fellow delegates later formed the core of the Birmingham chapter of the local Hampden Club and were supporters of the Birmingham Political Union in the 1830s. Other prominent opponents of the Orders-in-Council, like Richard Spooner, Charles Lloyd and John Ryland later supported abolitionism and led a local petitioning drive against slavery. Richard Spooner, whose later political experience was as a Tory and not a radical like his good friend Attwood, made an unsuccessful bid for a seat in Parliament in 1834. He was defeated by another influential member of the 1812 repeal movement, Joshua Scholefield. Scholefield, an important spokesman in Parliament during the hearings on the Orders-in-Council, not only became one of

Thomas Attwood's chief lieutenants during the Birmingham Political Union's agitation in the 1830s but he was also, with Attwood, Birmingham's first representative in the House of Commons.

Most importantly, however, Thomas Attwood, whose future held even greater fame than that achieved in 1812, gained many of his political ideas and attitudes from this early experience. For he came to believe from the Orders-in-Council repeal campaign that economic and political divisions could be overcome and that, as in 1812, a unified voice would be a successful voice. "Remember my friends," Attwood exhorted during the struggle for Parliamentary reform, "our weapons are PEACE, LAW, ORDER, LOYALTY, and UNION. Let us hold fast to these weapons, and I tell you that the day is not distant when the liberty and prosperity of our country will be restored." For Attwood, the genesis of this creed, so powerful in 1832, was in the experience and identity he gained during his youth as the organizer of the Orders-in-Council repeal campaign.[64]

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[64]Wakefield, The Life of Thomas Attwood, iv; Asa Briggs, "Press and Public in Early Nineteenth Century Birmingham," Dugdale Society Occasional Papers 8 (1949), 14; Robert K. Dent, Old and New Birmingham: A History of the Town and its People, 2 vols. (Birmingham: Houghton and Hammond, 1880), 1: 169; Minutes of the Birmingham Anti-Slavery Society, Birmingham Reference Library, Birmingham.

CHAPTER IV

MANCHESTER:
WORKING CLASS RADICALISM AND THE ORDERS-IN-COUNCIL

On 29 May 1811 the Journal of the House of Commons recorded a petition from "several thousand manufacturers and artizans [sic] in the towns of Bolton and Manchester." The petition spoke of the great poverty experienced in Manchester and Bolton and urged the House of Commons to restore normal relations with the United States before economic conditions declined further. Ironically, this was one of the earliest petitions received in Parliament during the repeal campaign of 1811 and 1812. Although brief and concerned mainly with economic issues, it does reveal Mancunian interest in the Orders-in-Council. Yet, curiously and more importantly for this study, there was no follow-up effort, little interest in sending local merchants and manufacturers to represent Manchester in the parliamentary inquiry held in the spring of 1812, and little display of public rejoicing when the trade restrictions were repealed in June of that year.

There was, in fact, a strange and deadening silence on this great issue which mobilized so many in the provinces

during the spring of 1812. The silence caused by the failure of Manchester's merchant and manufacturing elites to unite in support of repeal is certainly one of the most striking exceptions to the overall enthusiasm for the campaign against the Orders-in-Council manifested in the emerging industrial cities in the Midlands and Northern Britain. In order to understand more fully the nature of mobilization over the issue of the Orders-in-Council, it will be necessary to understand why it failed to occur in Manchester, a city where interest in the national trade restrictions existed but the capability for organization was lacking.[1]

1. Economic Development

Like other cities in the Midlands and the North, Manchester experienced rapid industrial growth during the eighteenth century. Its great industrial development centered largely on textiles especially, cotton production, which was important to the overall national process of industrialization. In Manchester and its hinterland, cotton employed thousands of men and women as mule spinners and handloom weavers. The number of handloom weavers actually increased dramatically at the end of the eighteenth century, as textiles gained greater importance in the city. Between 1795 and 1811 the number of handloom weavers in Lancashire grew from 75,000 to 225,000 as Irish immigrants, women and

[1]For the May 1811 Manchester petition see Parliament, Journal of the House of Commons, vol. 66 (1811): 383.

children flocked to weaving which was relatively unskilled and easily learned work. While it is certainly true that Mancunians were engaged in a wide range of industrial activities, including metallurgy and numerous artisanal crafts, it was, nevertheless, cotton textiles which employed the majority in the town .[2]

This economic growth also spurred on a population explosion as well. As in Liverpool, Birmingham, and other industrializing towns in the Midlands and the North, the growth in trade and industry meant a concomitant influx of newcomers to the towns. In the 1770s the population of Manchester was 27,246. By 1801 that number had increased to a striking 98,573. By 1811, on the eve of the national campaign to repeal the Orders-in-Council, that number had jumped to 136,260. According to Edward Baines, mid-nineteenth century chronicler of economic development in Lancashire, 38,141 families made up the population of Manchester in 1811. Of those 38,000 families, over 34,000 were engaged in trade or manufacture in Manchester while only 1,114 claimed to be involved in some form of agriculture. The remaining 3,000

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[2]John Bohstedt, Riots and Community Politics in England and Wales: 1790-1810 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1982), 132. For other works on the rise of the cotton trade in England see Edward Baines, Jr., History of the Cotton Manufacture in Great Britain (London: H. Fisher, R. Fisher, and P. Jackson, 1835); Michael M. Edwards, The Growth of the British Cotton Trade (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967); G.W. Daniels, "The Cotton Trade during the Revolution and Napoleonic Wars," Transactions of the Manchester Statistical Society (1915-1916); J.T. Slugg, Reminiscences of Manchester Fifty Years Ago (Manchester: J.E. Cornish, 1881).

families were engaged in professions such as law or medicine or were classified as "unemployed." So not only was Manchester's population growing at a phenomenal pace, but the overwhelming majority were employed in those growing manufacturing enterprises which changed both the physical and the economic face of the expanding town.[3]

Manchester's cotton manufacturers were naturally anxious that trade with the United States remain open. The growth of the textile industry in Manchester and in other Lancashire towns also meant a dependence on imported raw cotton. From 1781 until 1811 the amount of raw cotton consumed rose from 5.1 million pounds to an astonishing 91.5 million pounds yearly. Of that 91.5 million pounds, 62, 186,081 (or approximately 65%) came from the United States, Britain's primary supplier. Yet a stable supply of imported cotton clearly was not secure during the long Napoleonic Wars, especially after 1808 as relations between the United States and Britain deteriorated. In Liverpool, the main entrepot for American cotton, imports of cotton reached a high of 174,270 bales in 1810 only to fall sharply to 97,597 bales in 1811 and 78,188 bales in 1812 as a result of the disruption of trade

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[3]Edward Baines, Baine's Lancashire History, Directory and Gazetteer of the County of Lancashire, 2 vols. (Liverpool: William Walker and Co., 1825; reprint ed., New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1968), 2: 122.

caused by the Orders-in-Council and by the war with the United States.[4]

In addition to the importation of raw material, Mancunians were also dependent on the United States as an important market for finished textiles as well. According to Ralph Davis, in the period from 1804-1806 before trade restrictions went into effect, the United States imported more cotton goods from Britain than any other region including Europe. Even during the War of 1812, America still ranked as the second most important export market for British cotton goods, a remarkable fact in view of the supposed embargo against Britain carried on by the United States government.[5]

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[4]Bohstedt, Riots and Community Politics, 70; B.H. Tolley, "The Liverpool Campaign Against the Order in Council and the War of 1812, in Liverpool and Merseyside: Essays in the Economic and Social History of the Port and its hinterland, ed. J.R. Harris (London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd., 1969), 133. Baines, Cotton Manufacture, 302. For a further discussion of the cotton import trade in Britain see Norman Sydney Buck, The Development of the Organization of Anglo-American Trade: 1800-1850 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968); Sydney J. Chapman, The History of Trade between the United Kingdom and the United States with Special Reference to the effects of Tariffs (London: Swan Sonnenschein and Co., 1899). It should be pointed out that trade between the United States and Britain fluctuated greatly during the period when the Orders-in-Council were in effect. In 1808 trade was interrupted as a result of the President Thomas Jefferson's embargo against foreign trade. After James Madison took office in 1809, however, trade returned to some semblance of normality only to be interrupted again in 1811 with the imposition of Macon's Bill No. 2 against Britain. Trade between the two countries remained at a virtual standstill throughout 1811 and 1812.

[5]Ralph Davis, The Industrial Revolution and British Overseas Trade (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1979), 15. Davis' statistics show that in the period from 1804-1806 the United States imported 50% of all British exported cotton goods. During the period 1814-1816, that figure dropped to

In Manchester as in other rising industrial cities local merchants and manufacturers also joined organizations during the eighteenth century aimed at protecting their economic interests. In 1785 Mancunian merchant and manufacturing elites, along with others throughout Britain, united in an effort to force Prime Minister William Pitt to abandon plans to liberalize trade with Ireland. Organized in Manchester by Thomas Walker, a fustian merchant and radical reformer,[6] the General Chamber of Manufacturers was created with the goal of linking Northern and Midland manufacturers together for the first time. In Manchester, Walker and his fellow merchants and manufacturers were able to raise a petition with 50,000 signatures against Pitt's economic policy. Support for the General Chamber's activities in Manchester and in other industrial towns in the kingdom was so great that the Prime Minister was finally forced to relent in the face of the widespread opposition. In Manchester the victory of provincial merchant and manufacturers over Westminster was acclaimed with a celebration for Thomas Walker and John Richardson, who had organized the Mancunian effort in London. When they arrived back in Manchester the pair were welcomed as heroes. The whole town, including merchants, manufacturers, clergymen, and even local Tory town leaders all united in

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38%.

[6]Fustian is a durable cloth that is a mixture of cotton and linen.

celebration of their great triumph. Walker and Richardson were greeted with a procession of "javelin throwers, trumpeters, the lord of the manor and the deputy constable in their chariots, mounted dragoons and gentlemen, and groups of fustian cutters, master fustian shearers, packers, dyers, velvet dressers, and calenderers . . . whitsters . . . and pattern-card makers carrying the flags and emblems of their trade."[7]

As with the experience of Birmingham and the General Chamber of Manufacturers, however, this unity was short-lived. By 1786 a permanent split between merchant and manufacturing elites occurred over support for the Eden Treaty, Pitt's efforts at liberalizing trade with France. Many in town supported this treaty, counting on freer trade to boost production. Walker, the hero of the Manchester Chamber and the campaign of 1785, opposed this measure since it would allow for the freer importation of French fustian cloth and thus threaten his own livelihood. Not only was Walker's leadership as spokesman for Manchester's merchants and manufacturers now hotly disputed, but the rift which developed over this issue led to greater polarization between Tories and Whigs for control over the chamber's activities, a polarization which was aggravated by other conflicts that

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[7]Bohstedt, Riots and Community Politics, 103; Frieda Knight, The Strange Case of Thomas Walker (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1957), 30; Francis Espinasse, Lancashire Worthies (London: Simpkins, Marshall and Co., 1877), 307. Calenderers were cloth pressers and whitsters were cloth bleachers.

occurred during the 1790s. In the short term, however, Manchester's effort as a part of the General Chamber of Manufacturers was wrecked, the local organization was abandoned, and other avenues for merchant and manufacturers unity were sought.[8]

Many merchants and manufacturers gravitated to a new organization to advance their economic interests, the Manchester Commercial Society, founded in 1794. Like the American Chamber of Commerce in Liverpool and the Inland Commercial Committee in Birmingham, the Commercial Society was a loosely organized body which held periodic meetings to discuss economic issues. Unlike the activist American Chamber in Liverpool, however, the Mancunian Chamber seemed to have experienced conflict from its very inception. Agreement was never reached on issues such as free trade, with some following in Thomas Walker's path as a protectionist while others sought more open markets for Manchester's finished textile products. While issues involving American trade certainly must have been important to many merchants and manufacturers, according to Arthur Redford, the complex financial, economic, and legal questions produced by the complex system of government regulations enacted during the long Napoleonic War prevented the Committee from securing substantial benefits for its members. As in Birmingham by the

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[8]Knight, The Strange Case of Thomas Walker, 32; Bohstedt, Riots and Community Politics, 103.

beginning of the nineteenth century the Society was largely moribund and commercial unity among the merchant and manufacturers was practically non-existent. The lack of commercial unity in Manchester in the early nineteenth century is undoubtedly significant, for when economic crises and debates about the Orders-in-Council occurred after 1807, there was no effective commercial body to provide an organizational structure or a leadership base for response.[9]

2. Manchester's Reform Tradition

Despite the lack of a united commercial network to face the crises produced by the Orders-in-Council, Manchester did have a healthy tradition of political activism, a tradition that on first glance should have been accessible in the campaigns of 1808 and 1812. Mancunians were as politically active and as politically polarized between Tories and Whigs as Liverpudlians by the end of the eighteenth century. As in Birmingham and Liverpool, the contest which in many ways established this polarization was the campaign to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts in 1789. While in Birmingham and Liverpool this contest clearly pitted Tory Anglicans against Whig Dissenters, in Manchester the political mobilization was more complex. Political mobilization transcended strict sectarianism in Manchester with reformers like Thomas Walker, who was an Anglican but also a Whig, supporting repeal against

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[9]Arthur Redford, Manchester Merchants and Foreign Trade, 1794-1858 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1934), 51.

a Tory opposition which quickly made the issue one of loyalism. The Test and Corporation Repeal effort, although a failure, divided Manchester as no other previous issue had. Acrimonious public meetings were held both for and against repeal and Dissenters were denounced as subversive and disloyal to the crown. The bitter campaign spilled over to include sharp criticism of the ruling Tory oligarchy which, as in most of these emerging industrial cities, controlled all of Manchester's political bodies including the Court Leet, the Anglican vestry, and the Police Commission, and which was publicly opposed to the repeal movement.[10]

Although the national effort to gain repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts failed, it was an important catalyst in the creation in Manchester of Tory Anglican, Whig Dissenter

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[10]Like Birmingham, Manchester was governed by a number of local institutions which reflected its manorial past. The oldest was the Court Leet with its chief officer, the boroughreeve and constables. The Anglican vestry in Manchester, as in most towns, still directed poor relief and was often the center of controversy from rate-payers because of the way in which money was dispersed. Finally, in 1792 a Police Commission was created with the job of cleaning, lighting and policing the streets. As with the Court Leet and the vestry, it was staffed largely with Tories creating, as in Birmingham, a false sense of political unity. While the Police Commission did in time begin to assume many of the governmental functions in the town, it remained a part of the Tory Anglican power structure. Unlike Birmingham, the Manchester Police Commission's membership was neither widened nor liberalized in the early nineteenth century. See G.M. Ditchfield, "The Campaign in Lancashire and Cheshire for the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts," Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire 126 (1976): 109-138. See also Bohstedt, Riots and Community Politics, 75-80; Leon S. Marshall, The Development of Public Opinion in Manchester, 1780-1820 (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1946), 22-36.

polarization. Since Manchester was not governed by a town corporation, its local governmental structure likely would not have changed greatly if repeal had succeeded. As G.M. Ditchfield pointed out, however, the campaign helped concentrate dissatisfaction with the ruling elite, facilitated the development of radical consciousness, and exposed more clearly those groups opposed to change. Indeed, the failed repeal movement established the form for Manchester's political confrontation for the remainder of the decade with its acrimonious public meetings, vitriolic broadsides and veiled threats of violence. According to Frieda Knight, this was the beginning of "party," meaning permanent political alignments, and indeed, this does seem to be true. For by 1790 Thomas Walker and supporters like George Lloyd, Thomas Cooper, George Philips and Thomas Kershaw formed a Constitutional Society to press for more radical reform, and his opponents responded by organizing a "Church and King" club, one of the first in the nation.[11]

The polarization of politics among Manchester's middle class Tory and Whig elite was demonstrated in a number of subsequent campaigns which led to bitter public acrimony and

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[11]Ditchfield, "The Campaign in Lancashire and Cheshire," 109; Knight, The Strange Case of Thomas Walker, 39; Archibald Prentice, Historical Sketches and Personal Recollections of Manchester Intended to Illustrate the Progress of Public Opinion from 1792 to 1832, 3rd ed. (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1970), 5; Francis Vigier, Change and Apathy: Liverpool and Manchester during the Industrial Revolution (London: M.I.T. Press, 1970), 113-116.

open violence in the town. Like William Roscoe and the reformers of Liverpool, Walker stood ready at seemingly every occasion to strike out against Tory Anglicans and organizers of the "Church and King" club. Not only did the Constitutional Society circulate pamphlets supporting universal suffrage and other radical reforms, but as in Birmingham, reformers gathered to celebrate key events in the French Revolution such as the storming of the Bastille. It is little wonder that, as in Birmingham and Liverpool, political divisions became rigid, with the battle lines clearly drawn between Tory Anglican, opponents of reform and Whig Dissenter, reformers and supporters of the ideals of the French Revolution.[12]

Despite the appearance of strength, Manchester reformers' efforts were hampered by a lack of press support and by the power of the Tory opposition. Even adequate meeting facilities were difficult for reformers to obtain, as the Tory establishment pressured local innkeepers into refusing rooms for reformers' gatherings. The Tories also mobilized the local weekly newspapers, Wheeler's Manchester Chronicle and the Manchester Mercury, for their cause. Walker and the Constitutional Society responded in March of 1792 with a newspaper of their own called the Manchester Herald, one of the first radical presses in the nation. Under the editorship

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[12]Bohstedt, Riots and Community Politics, 107; Knight, The Strange Case of Thomas Walker, 47; Marshall, The Development of Public Opinion, 110-113.

of Matthew Faulkner and Samuel Birch, the Herald served as a locus for the reformers' campaigns, printing pamphlets and handbills in addition to the weekly newspaper. By the autumn of 1792, however, Church and King forces in Manchester coalesced enough to form a Loyal Association and on 12 December 1792 a riot broke out against the supporters and members of the Constitutional Society. The rioters, supported by the governing Tories, sought to destroy the radical press and to intimidate the reform leaders. They attacked the residences of Matthew Faulkner and Samuel Birch along with the offices of the Manchester Herald. While town officials watched, windows at Thomas Walker's residence were also broken out as the crowd sought to silence and intimidate the leader of the reform movement.[13]

The climax of this "Church and King" agitation occurred in 1793-1794. In March of 1793 Faulkner and Birch were indicted on six counts of seditious libel. The indictments, a part of a large-scale campaign to silence reforming presses throughout Britain by the Pitt government, caused the Manchester Herald to collapse and its editors to flee to America. The climax of attempts to silence Manchester's reformers came in April of 1794 when Walker and nine of his associates went on trial for treason. While the defendants

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[13]Knight, The Strange Case of Thomas Walker, 83-87; Bohstedt, Riots and Community Politics, 110-112. John Foster, Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution: Early Industrial Capitalism in three English Towns (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974), 35.

were acquitted, it came at an enormous cost financially. Thomas Walker, for example, spent some £3,000 on his defense and although found innocent of the charges remained weakened by the unsuccessful attack by his opponents. With the trials and the silencing of the reforming minority by the mid-1790s, the Tory Anglicans of Manchester, like the Tory Anglicans of Birmingham, could now rest easy, for they had destroyed their major competitors for power and for the loyalty of the populace. The result of the prosecutions also meant that for the next decade middle class reforming efforts ceased in Manchester. Walker abandoned his leadership role after facing social and financial ruin and other reformers also retreated from the political arena in the face of hostility from the Mancunian crowds. As Archibald Prentice, the mid-nineteenth century chronicler of reform in Manchester lamented, "many reformers became Whigs and many Whigs became nothing."[14]

This brief chronicle of Manchester's reforming activities suggests that, along with its role as the center of the thriving textile manufacture, the town's development was somewhat parallel to that of Liverpool and Birmingham. Merchants and manufacturers depended to a large degree on international trade; they all had an active interest in trade measures which came before Parliament and which affected their livelihoods; and merchants and manufacturing elites in the

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[14]Prentice, Historical Sketches, 16; Knight, The Strange Case of Thomas Walker, 87; Bohstedt, Riots and Community Politics, 113.

formative period from 1785-1795 had in all three cities played an active role in reform movements. Yet in all three cities these reform movements declined precipitously during the "Church and King" agitation of 1793-1795. Finally, among these three cities both Manchester and Birmingham witnessed the destruction of their reforming leadership and entered the nineteenth century in a transitional period between the pioneer reformers of the late eighteenth century and those who emerged to take up the banner of reform at the end of the Napoleonic Wars.

Yet, despite the striking similarities in conditions in these three cities, Manchester played a minor role in one of the greatest petitioning efforts in the nation's history and in an effort which certainly helped to launch the next generation of reform in the country. To understand why this important city had such a minor role in an effort which polarized so many communities, it is necessary to look beyond Manchester's merchant and manufacturing elite to the complex class polarization which framed Manchester's response in 1812 and which made the city in many respects completely different from either Birmingham or Liverpool.

3. Political Mobilization and the Handloom Weavers

If Birmingham has often been viewed as a consensual community of small shopkeepers and artisans, Manchester certainly has not. An important part of Mancunian political development in the late eighteenth century was the creation of

working class alliances that had the capacity to challenge middle class merchant and manufacturing elites on economic issues such as wages and prices. What is more important, however, is that the local tensions created by the coinciding political and class polarizations resulted in numerous political riots in the crucial decade of the 1790s. Unlike Liverpool, which institutionalized its political partisanship through petitions and confrontations between the local corporation and the reforming elites, Mancunians responded to the political debates which pitted Tories against Whigs in the 1790s with numerous political riots which sprang both from the partisan conflict between local elites and growing working class articulacy. While the most infamous was, of course, the 1792 "Church and King" riot, there were riots in 1794, 1795, and 1796 which accompanied heated political debates between "Church and King" forces and Manchester reformers. While the Tory elites were able to control and in some respects manipulate the crowds in the 1790s with their appeal to church and king, the mobilization of the working classes and the development of working class alliances shaped community action and response in the nineteenth century in a way completely unpredicted by the loyalists in the 1790s. This working class articulacy therefore was an element of political mobilization found in neither Liverpool nor Birmingham and was an element

which complicated Manchester's response to the campaign to repeal the Orders-in-Council.[15]

This growing class polarization is crucial in understanding Manchester's response to the national campaign to repeal the Orders-in-Council. Unlike any other industrializing city in the realm, Manchester's entire political, social, and economic identity was bound up in this polarization by the beginning of the nineteenth century. From the squalor and poverty of its working class neighborhoods to the strikes for higher wages which absorbed the attention of its spinners and weavers, Manchester experienced a level of class consciousness and labor organization usually associated with mid or late nineteenth century industrial development.[16] Most importantly for the campaign to repeal the Orders-in-Council, the period from 1808 to 1812, in addition to being one of great fluctuation in economic conditions throughout the country, was also one of the full emergence of organizations

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[15]For a detailed examination of Manchester's political riots in the 1790s see Bohstedt, Riots and Community Politics, 100-125.

[16]Both John and Barbara Hammond, Bohstedt and Baines give excellent accounts of the conditions of the cotton workers at the beginning of the nineteenth century. See John and Barbara Hammond, The Skilled Labourer (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1919; reprint, New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1967), 47-93; Bohstedt, Riots and Community Politics, 73, 100-101; Baines, Cotton Manufacture, 433-502.

for Manchester's working classes, particularly organizations for mule spinners and hand loom weavers.[17]

Despite acts of Parliament passed in 1799 and 1800 against combinations, spinners and weavers in Manchester were particularly successful in uniting against their employers through illegal unions or through friendly societies. For example, Manchester's mule spinners participated in strikes in 1795, 1797, 1801, 1803, 1804, 1805, 1807 and 1810, the latter accompanied by the creation of a general union of Lancashire mule spinners. Most importantly for the Orders-in-Council campaign, however, was the mobilization of handloom weavers and the strike in 1808. Handloom weavers, largely unskilled workers and a crucial part of the proto-industrialization of textiles in the early decades of the industrial revolution, organized initially, like the mule spinners, through friendly societies. These friendly societies, which provided health and funeral benefits for their members, blossomed at the beginning of the nineteenth century as workers sought some

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[17]The spinning mule or mule-jenny, invented by Samuel Compton around 1779 was a combination of the spinning jenny and the water-frame and had the advantage of producing a tough, durable thread unlike the jenny alone. The late eighteenth century was a time of prosperity for the handloom weaver as the mechanization of the spinning process created a great demand for more weavers. Thus wages were higher than at any other period in the history of weaving. However, an oversupply of weavers coupled with economic crises and the beginnings of mechanization in weaving by 1795 drove wages down ending this short period of prosperity. For a complete history of the early manufacturing process in textiles see Paul Mantoux, The Industrial Revolution in the Eighteenth Century: An Outline of the Beginnings of the Modern Factory System in England (New York: Harper and Row, 1961).

form of organization in the face of parliamentary prohibitions against unions. It is estimated that 800 such friendly societies existed in Lancashire by 1801, with handloom weavers making up a large part of the membership. The great impetus for this organizational effort came in the 1790s with the onset of war and an oversupply of handloom weavers in Lancashire. The result was a general lowering of wages, which was exacerbated by the length of the war and the economic dislocation caused by the periodic disruptions in international trade. In a survey of piece-rates for muslin weaving, Duncan Bythell demonstrated the devastating effects of this decline. While the average piece-rate[18] stood at 34s 0d in 1796, by 1800 that dropped to an average of 27s 6d. By 1807 the rate had further declined to 18s 6d.[19] Altogether, the period from 1796-1812 was one of almost total unrelenting decline and clearly the drop in wages coupled with the

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[18]The length of the piece differed depending on the type of cloth being woven (fustian, calico, velvet, fine-muslin, etc.) and the piece size did not remain fixed throughout this period. Until the onset of war with France a piece of cloth generally equalled between forty and forty-four yards. During the long war not only did the piece-wage drop but the size of piece also increased to between fifty and sixty yards. For more explanation see Mantoux, The Industrial Revolution, 443.

[19]When the piece rate was at its height and the piece size equalled forty to forty-four yards an average weaver could expect to make approximately 15s or 20s a week, according to historian Paul Mantoux. As the rate dropped and as the size increased to fifty or sixty yards per piece by the beginning of the nineteenth century the weekly wage of a weaver (that is assuming he worked fourteen hours a day six days a week) dropped to about 5s to 6s a week, one-third of the previous wage. See Mantoux, The Industrial Revolution, 423.

economic dislocation brought on by the war did make the first decade of the nineteenth century a difficult one for the weavers.[20]

The weavers' response was to organize. By the late 1790s a Weavers' Association was created, uniting Lancashire weavers in seeking parliamentary intervention in halting the decline in wages. In 1800 pressure from the association led Parliament to investigate the weavers' grievances and although they did not receive parliamentary legislation regulating wages as they hoped, the weavers' united effort did lead to the passage of the Arbitration Act of 1801 which provided for arbitration of wages between employers and weavers. This provided only limited relief for weavers' grievances, however. So the Weavers' Association continued to petition Parliament in support of a series of industrial measures which, though usually not granted, nevertheless demonstrated their

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[20]Duncan Bythell, The Handloom Weavers: A Study in the English Cotton Industry during the Industrial Revolution (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 99. The Hammonds also give evidence which points to an overall decline in this period of approximately fifty percent in piece-rate earnings. See J.L. and Barbara Hammond, The Skilled Labourer, 60. Finally, Edward Baines in his survey of wage decline among the weavers juxtaposed his data beside those of other workers in this manufacturing process. It is interesting to note that spinners also saw a steady decline in wages, though not as profound as that of the weavers while others such as fustian cutters, dyers, dressers, and warpers' wages remained constant over the long course of the war. It should also be pointed out that wages were declining at the same time that prices were rising. The war was a period of great inflation. For example, Baines points out provisions such as flour could rise as much as 70% in one year such as it did from 1811 (when twelve pounds cost approximately 3s 5d) to 1812 (when the same twelve pounds cost 4s 9d). Baines, Cotton Manufacture, 438.

solidarity and led Parliament to assemble another committee of inquiry into the weavers' conditions in 1808. It is significant that by the beginning of the nineteenth century in Manchester working class groups like the mule spinners and the weavers had organized and had established a sophisticated network of mutual support, certainly a better organized and more mobilized effort than was achieved by Manchester's merchant and manufacturing elites in this same period. An examination of the working class parliamentary petitioning drives also shows that their demands were much more successfully enunciated than that of the merchants and manufacturers, who remained largely inactive throughout the first decade of the nineteenth century.[21]

The organization of the weavers is crucial to an understanding of Manchester's response to the Orders-in-

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[21]Bythell, The Handloom Weavers, 100, 182. For a fuller examination of the Weavers' Association before 1808 see Bohstedt, Riots and Community Politics, 126-148; J.L. Hammond and Barbara Hammond, The Skilled Labourer: 1760-1832, 47-75. Also quite useful in discussing working class conditions in this period is the classic study by J.L. Hammond and Barbara Hammond, The Town Labourer: 1760-1832 (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1918). Note that historian John Foster maintains that the economic pressures created by the crises of the early nineteenth century broke down the old social structure which denied labor a sense of separate identity. Working class response to these crises led to a rejection of the control and manipulation of governing elites and to what he calls the creation of a separate working class trade union consciousness. See Foster, Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution, 41-43. In his seminal work, The Making of the English Working Class, E.P. Thompson also devotes an entire chapter to the mobilization of the weavers. See E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (New York: Alfred A.Knopf, 1963), chapter nine.

Council. By contrast with Birmingham, where the middle classes forged an alliance with the working classes in 1812, the assertiveness of working class organizations in Manchester created much tension between the working and middle classes. According to Arthur Redford the Manchester Commercial Society, created in 1794 to promote merchant and manufacturing interests, worked strenuously to prevent workers' combinations, which put the organization in opposition to the Weavers' Association and other working class alliances. The potential for violence displayed during the riots of the 1790s also certainly caused the merchants and manufacturers to ponder carefully support for any campaign which could cause unrest in the town. It thus seems unlikely that Manchester could achieve a successful coalition of working class and middle class interests that Birmingham experienced during the campaign to repeal the Orders-in-Council.[22]

4. The Campaign for Repeal of the Orders-in-Council

Although the working and middle classes did not coalesce in 1808 or 1812, the Manchester populace was quite politically involved and mobilized. Indeed, in 1808 Mancunians did organize and send to Parliament a petition against the Orders-in-Council containing more than 50,000 signatures.

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[22]Redford, Manchester Merchants, 65. Asa Briggs argues that an alliance of the working class and middle class such as Thomas Attwood created with the Birmingham Political Union was quite impossible in Manchester because of the strong weavers' organizations and the threat that they posed to the middle class merchants and manufacturers. See Asa Briggs, Victorian Cities (London: Odhams Books, Ltd., 1963), 86.

Significantly, this effort, along with all of the other major political activity in that crucial year, was organized not by a merchant and manufacturing elite but by the weavers.

Although the Manchester petition against the Orders-in-Council presented to Parliament on 11 March 1808 was ostensibly credited to the efforts of "several merchants and manufacturers," evidence suggests that this was part of a the well-organized effort by Mancunian weavers to translate their capacity for organization into support for repeal of the trade restrictions. Because Manchester's merchants and manufacturers lacked an organizational base and a recognized leadership, it is unlikely that they could garner 50,000 supporters in a petitioning drive. Moreover, with Walker and his generation either dead or retired from public life, there a new leadership had not yet emerged to take their place. Although Arthur Prentice and Leon Marshall have credited the 1808 petitioning effort to the work of a new generation of reformers led by John E. Taylor, a simple examination of the age of these supposed leaders makes this claim seem doubtful. In 1808 John E. Taylor was a mere seventeen years old. John Shuttleworth, another reformer credited with the 1808 petitioning drive, was seventeen and Absalom Watkin was eighteen, making the three men much younger than either Thomas Attwood and Richard Spooner of Birmingham, who were twenty-four in 1808 and twenty-eight when they led the Orders-in-Council repeal effort in 1812. Thus while it is true that

these men will be the "young businessmen who had inherited the views of the earlier Manchester reformers as a sort of tradition" in the post-bellum period (Taylor was later founder and publisher of the Manchester Guardian), it is doubtful they had assumed the mantle of leadership in 1808. Moreover, no public records from the period acknowledge their leadership roles. Therefore there is fairly strong evidence which suggests that a new generation had not yet taken the reins of reform in Manchester by 1808.[23]

It seems more likely that the weavers organized the repeal campaign as part of their efforts at economic reform in 1808. By the winter of that year the combination of trade depression and the stricter enforcement of the continental system by Napoleon led to real hardship among Lancashire weavers. Wages dropped to a level nearly half of that of the 1790s while prices for food and other commodities rose. The Weavers' Association, led by Joseph Hanson, a radical middle class manufacturer, sought amelioration of these conditions through legislative action. In quick succession from January to March of 1808 petitions for a weavers' minimum wage, peace, and the repeal of the Orders-in-Council were drawn up and received widespread support. The close proximity of the

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[23]Information about the age of these three leaders was taken from obituaries in the Manchester Guardian, 10 January 1844, 28 April 1854, and 24 June 1920. For the information claiming the leadership of these three men see Prentice, Historical Sketches, 40; Marshall, The Development of Public Opinion, 131.

campaigns suggests that the petitioning drives overlapped each other and, in fact, each received an impressive number of signatures. For example, when the petition against the Orders-in-Council reached Parliament in March of 1808 it contained 50,000 signatures. A broadside circulated in the spring of 1808 claimed that over 37,000 signed the petition urging an end to the war and called upon town citizens "not to lose a moment in adding their names to the number already subscribed to the petition for peace."[24]

These were by any standards in the early nineteenth century "monster" petitions and although none are extant for examination it can surely be conjectured that many signed all three appeals to Parliament and that political mobilization took place within the friendly societies and Weavers' Association. Unfortunately even these large-scale petitioning drives failed to move Parliament. While Parliament refused to consider demands for a cessation of hostilities, it did take up the Orders-in-Council and a minimum wage bill for weavers. Despite the Manchester weavers' organized and large-scale activity for political reform, the government under the Prime Ministership of Spencer Perceval determined not only to oppose any change in its policy of economic warfare against Napoleon, but also refused to intervene in the economic conditions of the weavers, and thus both political aims failed. Frustrated

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[24]"Peace," Broadsides and Pamphlets, 10 March 1808, Manchester Central Library, Manchester.

at the lack of action by the government, the Manchester weavers turned to more radical means to voice their demands after the failures of the spring of 1808.[25]

The campaigns for peace, a minimum wage, and a repeal of the Orders-in-Council which occurred simultaneously in the winter of 1808 ignited a renewal of partisan politics and violence in Manchester. Both Manchester's Tory Anglicans and many merchants and manufacturers strenuously opposed the petitions for peace and the repeal of the Orders-in-Council, and both groups used their considerable power in local politics and in the local press to condemn the activities of the petitioners. First, the organizers of the peace and repeal petitions were denied a public meeting by the boroughreeve to air their grievances, thus preventing a legitimate forum for debate and publicity for their cause. Nevertheless, both petitions gained support from thousands of Mancunians, testifying to the existence of the well-organized political network among the weavers which the leaders of the petitioning drives certainly utilized. Second, the Tory Anglican elites carried their message to the citizenry in the

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[25]For the petition against the Orders-in-Council see Journal of the House of Commons, vol. 63 (1808): 163. For the broadsides proclaiming support for the peace petitioning effort see "Peace," 10 March 1808, Broadsides and Pamphlets Collection, Manchester Central Library, Manchester. It should be pointed out that though few cities actually sent petitions against the Orders-in-Council in the spring of 1808 many cities in fact did produce petitions demanding peace. See Cowdroy's Manchester Gazette, 16 January, 20 February, 5 March 1808.

press through all three of the local weekly newspapers. Although ostensibly a moderate reformist newspaper, even the Manchester Gazette spoke little of the weavers' campaigns and only weakly endorsed a repeal of the Orders-in-Council. In fact, the latter was obviously associated in the minds of the Tory government with the drive for peace and other reforming measures and was roundly denounced in the pages of both the Manchester Mercury and the Manchester Chronicle. On 14 March 1808, only three days after the Manchester petition against the Orders-in-Council was presented to Parliament, an address to the townsmen of Manchester was written and placed in all three of the newspapers. Not only did it condemn the petitioning efforts that were being undertaken, but the signers held particular scorn for the demand for peace:

> How then are the Petitioners acting? Clearly their proceedings are unnecessary and may be mischievous. They may perplex and embarrass the deliberations of Parliament. They may embolden our enemy. They may lead him to imagine that we are a divided People, at a crisis when it is most necessary that we should be unanimous. They may induce him to rise to his demands. They may tempt him to hope that, by perseverance, he may compel us to accept any terms which he may be pleased to dictate; and that he may eventually reduce us to the same wretched state of subjection with the ill-fated Nations of the Continent. In short, A PETITION FOR PEACE, at the present juncture, is in effect, A PETITION FOR THE PROLONGATION OF WAR.[26]

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[26]Manchester Mercury, 22 March 1808; Manchester Chronicle, 19 March 1808; Manchester Gazette, 19 March 1808.

The address was signed by 131 men, most of whom were merchants and manufacturers, clearly demonstrating the alliance forged between the local Tory establishment and the merchants and manufacturers and the deep division caused by the campaign for peace.[27]

The many merchants and manufacturers who registered their opposition to the petitioning drives in the spring of 1808 were probably also concerned about the support given these efforts by the weavers. Clearly if the past was any example, controversy had a tendency to bring not just political agitation but violence. Indeed, by May of 1808 as conditions worsened and none of the demands of the petitioners were met, particularly the demand for a minimum wage, the Manchester weavers abandoned political measures and sought change through a strike. On 24 May 1808 thousands of weavers met at St. George's Field on the outskirts of Manchester to demand redress for their grievances. Although the Manchester town magistrates called out the cavalry and read the crowds the Riot Act, the weavers persisted. The second day, thousands, perhaps as many as 15,000, appeared again and this time they refused to disperse, encouraged by the leadership of the popular radical, Joseph Hanson, himself a manufacturer and the chief organizer of the failed petitioning effort. The weavers

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[27]Seventy-five of the signers of the anti-petitioning address whose occupations could be identified were either merchants or manufacturers. See Dean's Lancashire and Salford Directory for 1808-1809 (Manchester: R. and W. Davis, 1809).

were finally dispersed this time by clashes between the dragoons and the strikers which resulted in the death of one of the strikers and the injury of several others. The strike continued for two weeks creating continual tension in the town. In the long run, while peace and the repeal of the Orders-in-Council were not yet achieved, the weavers did receive through negotiation some modest increase in their wages. Nevertheless, the strike had its long term effect. Joseph Hanson, the prime target of the Anglican Tories, was arrested, tried for inciting riot, sentenced to six months imprisonment and fined £100. Local authorities, who were anxious not to stir further unrest, treated most of the other defendants with leniency, discharging many defendants and giving light sentences to the rest. Yet the strike and riot of May 1808 were extremely important. When political polarization surfaced, as it had in the 1790s, it created not peaceful agitation through institutionalized opposition and public meetings but violence. Archibald Prentice, himself a Mancunian radical during the 1820s, alleged that the strike and subsequent prosecution of Hanson led to "that bitter feeling of employed against employer which was manifested in 1812, 1817, 1826."[28] When Hanson emerged from prison he was greeted with popular acclaim by the weavers further

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[28]Prentice, Historical Sketches, 33; Bohstedt, Riots and Community Politics, 149-153; John and Barbara Hammond, The Skilled Labourer, 74-82. Joseph Hanson would not be present to lead the weavers in 1812; he died in September 1811.

demonstrating the political polarization which existed between the middle and the working classes.

Indeed, the importance of the strike cannot be overlooked when examining Manchester's subsequent role in the 1812 repeal campaign. In many ways, the 1812 petitioning effort against the Orders-in-Council was a reprise of what had taken place just four years earlier. Again, large scale political activity was in the hands of the weavers and again the merchant and manufacturing elites were suspicious or even hostile to a campaign which might threaten violence and further economic disruption in the town. Yet, this time the campaign for repeal succeeded, and Manchester would play only a peripheral role in that victory.

For the weavers, whose economic conditions were perilous at best during the latter years of the Napoleonic War, 1811 and 1812 were perhaps the worst since the 1790s. As relations with the United States, Britain's chief source for raw cotton, worsened, textile production fell dramatically. By the spring of 1812, 25,000 Mancunians, approximately one-fourth of the total population, were receiving poor relief.[29]

Again in 1812 Manchester weavers responded to the declining economic conditions by mobilizing and seeking redress through political reform chiefly through petitioning

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[29]Manchester Chronicle, 16 May 1812. The figure was quoted from an estimate given by Henry Lord Brougham at the Parliamentary inquiry held concerning the Orders-in-Council April-June 1812.

Parliament. In May of 1811 a petitioning drive was organized which garnered 40,000 signatures supporting relief from unemployment and a repeal of the Orders-in-Council. Addressing Parliament as "several thousand manufacturers and artizans [sic] of Manchester and Bolton", the petitioners spoke of the great poverty experienced in their towns:

> The Petitioners are reduced to the greatest distress, from the extensive depression of the various manufacturers occasioning a deficiency of employment and from great reduction of wages; which circumstances added to the high price of provisions, have subjected them to the most unexampled privations; and that the evils under which they so severely suffer are daily accumulating, and many of their employers, who flattered themselves with enjoying a competence, after many years of toil and industry, now find themselves reduced to complete poverty. . . . The great bulk of Petitioners are reduced to the most dreadful situation, beyond all former precedent and example, great numbers experiencing the total want of employ, and thousands daily suffering the absolute want of the necessities of life.[30]

The petitioners also had no doubt what remedies the government should take to ameliorate their condition. They urged a repeal of the Orders-in-Council which the petitioners claimed would "pave the way to a removal of the Non-Intercourse and Non-Importation Acts passed by the Congress and Senate of the United States of America."[31]

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[30]Journal of the House of Commons, vol. 66 (1811): 383.

[31]Ibid.

Even though Manchester weavers were in the forefront for the entire nation in this renewed effort to win repeal of the Orders-in-Council, their agitation received scant attention in Parliament and outright hostility in the town. Although it can be supposed that some middle class merchants supported this petitioning drive, it is obvious from their silence on the issue that merchant and manufacturing elites were not, in fact, the leaders of the campaign. Again, the fear of possible violence such as experienced in the weavers' strike in 1808 and the Luddism which was already gripping Nottinghamshire and the West Riding of Yorkshire by the winter of 1811-1812, undoubtedly prevented many merchants and manufacturers from supporting a campaign which could lead to partisan violence in the town.

The most potent representation of the ambivalence toward the May petition was the attitude in the press. Although the petitioning drive garnered 40,000 signatures according to writer Arthur Prentice,[32] neither the petition nor announcements about the petitioning effort appeared in any of the four local newspapers. In fact, even though the Manchester Gazette was known as a paper supporting moderate reform, it remained completely silent on the petitioning effort. Only the Manchester Chronicle mentioned the petition at all and that was in a summary of parliamentary activities

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[32]Undoubtedly as a regional capital, some of these signatures came from outside the town of Manchester.

in its 8 June 1811 edition. Thus except through the organized network of the weavers, local residents probably knew little about the petitioning effort undertaken in the spring of 1811 and by the summer it was all but forgotten.[33]

In Parliament, the Manchester petition was greeted with an equal lack of enthusiasm. Although the Mancunians had an impressive number of signatures for their petition, they had no middle class representative to present their argument to parliamentary members, no one to strike up an alliance with Lord Brougham, and no one to correspond with repeal supporters in other towns who were, for the most part, a full nine months away from organized activity anyway. Without the added voice of other communities or the "respectability" demonstrated by large-scale merchant and manufacturing support, the Manchester petition received polite attention and was quickly set aside. The Perceval government's only response was another perfunctory committee of inquiry into weavers' conditions. It met a total of four times and refused any interference in wages on the grounds that it would be "violating general principles of the first importance to the prosperity and

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[33]Manchester Chronicle, 8 June 1811. The editor, Charles Wheeler, offered no editorial opinion about the petition at all. Neither Marshall nor Prentice in their discussion of the Orders-in-Council repeal campaign mention this lack of press support certainly one of the most important reasons why news of the national campaign against the Orders-in-Council failed to make much impact in Manchester.

happiness of the community" and would not in any case alleviate the distress.[34]

Having seen yet again the futility of participating in extra-parliamentary political activity, the weavers turned their attention to more radical aims, specifically parliamentary reform and peace. In November of 1811, as Liverpool prepared its first Orders-in-Council repeal petition, an address for parliamentary reform and peace was drawn up in Manchester by radical cotton manufacturer John Knight, and a petitioning drive for these demands was undertaken even though town authorities refused requests for public meetings aimed at organizing supporters. Although these failed petitioning efforts did not result immediately in any local outbreaks of violence, the radicalization of the weavers, as in 1808, did provide the backdrop for yet another confrontation with the Tory elite.[35]

The confrontation which occurred was in some respects as sensational and important as the weavers' strike of 1808. While the 1808 strikers concentrated on economic grievances, by 1812 an important transition was underway from industrial complaints to political radicalism. In April of 1812 amidst the economic crisis, the national Orders-in-Council repeal

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[34]Bythell, The Handloom Weavers, 135.

[35]Bohstedt, Riots and Community Politics, 158; John Dinwiddy, "Luddism and Politics in the Northern Counties," Social History 4 (1978): 38

campaign, and the regency controversy,[36] 154 members of the Manchester Tory grandees signed a requisition which appeared in all four local newspapers for a public meeting to support the Prince Regent and the Tory Perceval government, now assured of maintaining its power. Although in hindsight this appeared a foolhardy move in a time of dearth and potential unrest, the Tories, using the example of 1808, undoubtedly assumed that the publicity they received in the press and at the public meeting would have the same effect that the anti-peace address had four years earlier: to overawe their opponents. Once the measures were decided upon, they counted on the laboring classes to be supportive, neutral or at least silent. Many of the 154 were long-time Tory activists who had signed the 1808 anti-peace petition, including James Ackers, John Leaf, Richard A. Farington, and John Silvester, well-established middle class Tory grandees who had served in public offices as far back as the 1790s. In addition, other distinguished local residents signed the petition, including C.W. Ethelson, John Gatliff, and John Clowes, fellows of Christ College, boroughreeve Richard Wood and constables Edward Lloyd and James Kearsley. Finally, many of the signers whose occupations could be traced through town directories

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[36]In April of 1812 the Prince Regent, the future George IV, received his full royal power as regent for the ailing George III. Since this was the first time in the two periods of regency that the prince gained unrestricted powers it was erroneously assumed that he would reject most of the policies and the ministers his father had chosen before his illness in 1810.

were merchants demonstrating again that support by the middle class merchants, leaned decidedly toward the Tories. Thus they prepared for their 8 April 1812 meeting in support of the Prince Regent and his government in the full confidence that they had the majority of the town's political and economic leaders behind them.[37]

The Tories seriously miscalculated, for their bold support for the hated Perceval government was immediately met with organized opposition. Handbills appeared almost immediately condemning the proposed meeting and urging open opposition to it. "Now or Never," one proclaimed. "Those inhabitants who do not wish for an Increase of Taxes and Poor Rate---An Advance in the Price of Provisions---A Scarcity of Work, and a Reduction of Wages, will not fail to go to the Meeting on Wednesday morning next, at the Exchange, and Oppose the 154 Persons." Another reminded the populace that they did not have to "bear the rod which chastens you, and kiss it too," and urged all to oppose the meeting. A "Warning Voice" urged his fellow Mancunians to "convert the resolutions which will be submitted to you into a constitutional call upon the government, to concede to the general wish and interests of

[37]Bohstedt, Riots and Community Politics, 79; Manchester Gazette, 4 April 1812; Aston's Commercial Herald, 7 April 1812; Manchester Chronicle, 4 April 1812; Manchester Mercury, 31 March 1812. For occupations see Dean's Lancashire and Salford Directory, 1808-1809.

the country, by renouncing those fatal principles that have been so pregnant with calamity." [38]

The mounting protest and mobilization of the working classes alarmed the local government. On the morning of 8 April the boroughreeve and constables hastily canceled the meeting, claiming in handbills that the Exchange staircase could not withstand the weight of the numbers expected to attend. It was, however, too late. At noon the Exchange building was attacked by an angry crowd that broke windows, destroyed glass lamps, furniture and a large portrait of Colonel Stanley, one of the members of Parliament from Lancashire. Order was restored with some difficulty and then only after Manchester magistrates J. Silvester and R. Wright read the Riot Act.[39]

The Exchange Riot was significant both in the campaign to repeal the Orders-in-Council and in the development of working class radicalism in Manchester. According to John Bohstedt, the riot was an important transition toward popular radicalism in Manchester. "Those meetings in 1812", he maintains, "mark

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[38]All of the handbills can be found in the collection of Handbills and Pamphlets, 1812, Manchester Central Library, Manchester. "Now or Never" was published by William Cowdroy, owner of the moderate Whig weekly, the Manchester Gazette. According to Prentice, it was attributed to the pen of John E. Taylor who was charged with libel for the publication. He was later acquitted. Prentice, Historical Sketches, 53.

[39]Manchester Chronicle, 11 April 1812; Manchester Mercury, 14 April 1812; Manchester Gazette, 11 April 1812; Marshall, The Development of Public Opinion, 135; Bohstedt, Riots and Community Politics, 159-160.

the merging of political radicalism and industrial grievances and point ahead to the popular Reform campaigns that were to reach their climax at Peterloo." Indeed, the Tory oligarchy which had so effectively manipulated political riots for decades with the appeal to loyalism, seemed to have lost control of the crowds. "For the first time, the Reformers rather than the Magistrates appeared to 'license' public political violence," Bohstedt concludes.[40]

The Exchange Riot also demonstrated again the power of working class mobilization in Manchester. While Manchester's small band of reformers had participated in the writing of handbills, the riot, like the May 1811 petition against the Orders-in-Council, was directed by working class networks who were obviously able to mobilize support from within the town and from the surrounding countryside from which many of the rioters were to have come. Many merchants and manufacturers wished to avoid any connection with an action as violent as the Exchange Riot, preferring to hide behind the cloak of neutrality or even support for the Police Commission which condemned the occurrence and offered a substantial reward for those with information about the rioters who sacked the Exchange Hall.[41]

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[40]Bohstedt, Riots and Community Politics, 160, 161.

[41]A £100 reward was offered for information pertaining to the rioters. Manchester Mercury, 14 April 1812.

While the Exchange Riot was the apex of mass reforming agitation, it did not end the violence in Manchester. In April food riots broke out in the town which caused the local magistrates to respond with increased force, including cavalry patrols and warnings to the crowds in the local newspapers. All four weeklies lamented the violence. The conservative Manchester Mercury condemned the rioters, comparing them to the "goths and vandals of antiquity" and urged a cessation of the agitation. In the face of both food riots and the Luddite machine-breaking activity, the Lancashire Lieutenancy met on 15 May and issued a warning to all potential rioters that it was the "bounden duty" of every man to protect the community and that "by law, any of his Majesty's subjects, military as well as civil, may arm themselves, and of course, may use ordinary means of force to suppress riots and disturbances."[42]

The continued unrest and violence in Manchester also determined local response to the campaign to repeal the Orders-in-Council in the spring of 1812. While some like Arthur Prentice and Leon Marshall claim that John E. Taylor and John Shuttleworth led Manchester reform efforts by this

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[42]Manchester Mercury, 23 April 1812; Manchester Chronicle, 23 May 1812. For a comparison between Manchester's food riots and the Luddite violence of 1811-1812, see Dinwiddy, "Luddism and Politics;" Frank O. Darvell, Popular Disturbance and Public Order in Regency England (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934); E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963); Malcolm Thomis, The Luddites (London: David and Charles, 1970).

time, their youth suggests that this was not the case. Moreover, even if Taylor and Shuttleworth led the local reform effort, they lacked an organizational network and supporters from among the merchant and manufacturing elite. Thus, the ability of reformers to play a role in the nationwide petitioning drive against the Orders-in-Council was also limited. For in all of the cities with widespread and successful local campaigns, not only was there at least some network among merchant and manufacturing elites who supported the repeal effort, but without this foundation within the middle class Henry Brougham, the parliamentary leader of the repeal effort, was reluctant to become involved in their effort.[43]

Although Brougham was perfectly willing to point to the distress and suffering among the working classes in the countryside in his speeches before the Committee of the Whole House in April and May of 1812, he did not call any working class men before the parliamentary committee and always stressed the importance of "respectability" and the "orderliness" of the petitioners. Although "respectable" perhaps did not have to connote the sturdy middle classes, in most cases when it was used, as when petitioners pointed to the source of their support, it did carry that meaning.[44]

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[43]For more on Brougham's leadership role see Chapter Six.

[44]In his recently published magisterial work, A Polite and Commercial People, Paul Langford addresses the issue of respectability and the middle classes. He concludes that

The violence and agitation coupled with the lack of middle class leadership in Manchester made Brougham weary of involving the town in his efforts to win repeal. For an appeal to the "people" to rise up against the government's policies would, Brougham undoubtedly knew, give credibility to Tory and Whig suspicion of out-of-doors campaigns. After all, leaders within his own party, like Earl Grey and Lord Grenville, were reluctant and even suspicious toward the involvement of the masses in political activity, and therefore Brougham had to balance both the hostility of the Perceval government and the misgivings within his own party toward the repeal campaign. Thus Brougham urged his supporters to remain orderly and urged his correspondents in the provinces to choose their supporters well. For example, while Brougham assured William Roscoe, leader of the repeal movement in Liverpool, that a provincial-wide campaign against the government's trade restrictions could succeed, he warned him to take great care in choosing delegates for the parliamentary inquiry. "I trust you will be circumspect in your choice of counsel and not only take such as may be adequate to the task,

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along with the increase in material possessions the middle classes cultivated this cult of respectability through education, marriage, religion, clubs and assemblies, and other associations to which they belonged. Certainly the appearance of respectability was central to the images the middle classes cultivated. See Paul Langford, A Polite and Commercial People: England, 1727-1783 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1989).

but such as may be in habits of unreserved communication with your friends in Parliament."[45]

Considering the care with which Brougham built his case and the respectability he wished to project, it is little wonder that Manchester's aroused state and strong independent working class networks were not suitable for his task. In fact, no correspondence with any Mancunian from this period exists in Brougham's personal letters, and although some Manchester merchants and manufacturers did participate in the parliamentary inquiry in May of 1812, their testimony was brief and routine compared with that of Birmingham and Liverpool whose delegates' testimonies received widespread coverage in the provincial press. It seems, moreover, that the weight of Manchester's merchant and manufacturing elite supported the Tories; reformers simply lacked the stature and reputation held by the ruling Tory grandees.[46]

In short, despite the obvious interest Manchester had in American trade, the lack of a network of merchant and manufacturing elites, the lack of a supportive press and the

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[45]Henry Brougham to William Roscoe, 20 February 1812, Roscoe Papers, Liverpool Records Office, Liverpool.

[46]Only four Manchester residents testified in the parliamentary hearings. Shakespear Phillips, an exporter of goods to the United States, obviously did make connections with other delegates since his name later appears as a guest at a dinner honoring Brougham in Birmingham in August of 1812. In addition, Mr. Timothy Wiggin, Mr. Thomas Withington, and Mr. Joseph Wright were the other Manchester witnesses. None of these men was listed by Prentice, the mid nineteenth century chronicler of Manchester reform, as a major reformer. See Prentice, Historical Sketches, 73.

widespread agitation in April and May resulted in Manchester's being largely bypassed by the repeal campaign in the spring of 1812. Although enough unity did exist among merchants and manufacturers to address a petition in March 1812 from "a most numerous and highly respectable" number of Mancunians to Parliament against the renewal of the East India Company charter,[47] not even this issue, which was widely supported, generated much attention. All four weeklies concentrated on the violence in Manchester or the Luddite disturbances in Lancashire, Nottinghamshire and the West Riding of Yorkshire. Little attention was paid to the debates in Parliament or to the parliamentary inquiry on the Orders-in-Council. The Manchester Mercury referred to the debates as "insipid" and "uninteresting" and even the Manchester Gazette, the town's only reform-minded newspaper, provided only weak endorsement of repeal through printing letters to the editor and petitions from other provincial campaigns supporting repeal. While readers learned of petitioning efforts in the Staffordshire Potteries and Birmingham, there was no mention of efforts underway in Manchester. The most ardent endorsement for repeal perhaps came from "J.P." who in a letter to the editor on 2 May 1812 urged his fellow citizens to "shake off the degrading servility" of the Orders-in-Council and "calmly

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[47]See Chapter One for more background on the effort to repeal the East India Company charter.

petition the legislature to have the ruinous and iniquitous Orders rescinded." Such vehemence, however, was rare.[48]

Manchester greeted the announcement of repeal on 23 June with little enthusiasm. On 26 June the Manchester Chronicle announced to its readers that the Orders were repealed but glumly noted that many inside the government doubted the effectiveness of this measure. Aston's Commercial Herald, while noting that repeal was a triumph for the British constitution, merely stated that "the voice of the people was against the Orders and the experiment of their revocation will be made."[49]

Moreover, those who supported the repeal effort in Manchester had abandoned their efforts months before repeal. While many towns in the provinces welcomed the announcement of the revocation with celebrations, the Manchester weavers had moved beyond moderate measures and now demanded more radical reforms. In May of 1812 a petitioning drive for peace and parliamentary reform was undertaken by Manchester weavers. On

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[48]Manchester Gazette, 2 May 1812; Manchester Mercury, 8 March 1812; The Manchester Gazette remained editorially silent until repeal was announced. It did publish the Birmingham petition against the Order-in-Council on 11 April 1812 but had previously published the proceedings of a meeting held in the Staffordshire Potteries against the repeal effort. Thus, even in its reportage it did not maintain a consistent opinion. For the Staffordshire Potteries opposition meeting see Manchester Gazette, 14 March 1812. See Chapter Five for an explanation of the ways in which newspapers used reportage and subtle devices such as the publication (or omission) of letters to the editor to sway opinion.

[49]Manchester Mercury, 26 June 1812; Aston's Commercial Herald, 30 June 1812.

11 June as supporters met to complete the resolutions in the petition, local magistrates interrupted the meeting, arrested thirty-eight of the organizers, and seized the resolutions. Although the thirty-eight were later acquitted of the charge of oath-taking, the swift and coercive measures undertaken by the local constables demonstrated the fear that the Tory elites now had of the crowd and the political consciousness that had developed among the working classes. Surely this rising tide of radicalism and reaction pointed toward future conflicts, most importantly toward the climax of these confrontations at Peterloo in 1819.[50]

5. Conclusion

Altogether, Manchester's contributions to the campaign to repeal the Orders-in-Council are very important for understanding political mobilization. First, the base of support for repeal of the Orders-in-Council in Manchester was clearly in the working classes, most importantly the weavers. Middle class reform was unquestionably in a period of transition in Manchester, and leaders of the post-Napoleonic War period such as John Taylor were too young to play a major role in 1812. At the same time, supporters of repeal, whether

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[50]Prentice, Historical Sketches, 77-79; Dinwiddy, "Luddism and Politics," 47-49. Note that Dinwiddy claims that the 11 June meeting was attended almost exclusively by the working class men. He maintains that seven spinners, twelve weavers, two tuners, two cutters, one joiner, one fustian-dresser, one tin-plate worker, one calico printer, four hatters, one sawyer and one bricklayer attended. Dinwiddy, "Luddism and Politics,"47.

in the working or the middle classes, lacked press support. In Birmingham and in Liverpool the existence of a sympathetic press was crucial to success in mobilizing and informing supporters. This was substantially lacking in Manchester, which had a strong local press and even a reform-minded newspaper; fear of violence and reluctance to endorse the weavers' efforts, however, resulted in silence or hostility toward the repeal effort. Altogether, the existence of a working class network which had the capacity for organization and mobilization proved to be too dangerous for merchant and manufacturing elites who remained uncommitted or opposed the campaign.

The lesson to be drawn from the experience of Manchester and failed political mobilization among the merchant and manufacturing elites is that ideology and interest are not enough to launch and sustain a successful political campaign. Surely the Mancunian middle classes supported an easing of trade restrictions with America, and surely many supported free trade in general as the East India Company charter petition demonstrated. Yet this alone did not provide enough of a catalyst to support repeal. The lack of capacity for action therefore becomes a key to the challenge posed by the Orders-in-Council repeal campaign. It was the organizational effort of the weavers and their political articulacy which led the way for reform and radicalism in Manchester in 1812 and in the crucial decades to come.

CHAPTER V

THE PROVINCIAL PRESS AND THE ORDERS-IN-COUNCIL

The process of political mobilization in the provincial cities engaged in the struggle over the Orders-in-Council naturally involved a number of organizations which acted to create a community of mutual interest and collective consciousness. This community informed its members and beckoned new recruits through a host of locally specific, accepted procedures. The circulation of petitions, the calling of public meetings, or even the striking of commemorative medallions were all an intricate part of the process of building and uniting support.[1] Thus, the dissenting chapel, the public house, the exchange building, even, as it has been shown, the local bank, all became vehicles for the mobilization and circulation of information needed to notify supporters of the progress of the campaign. Of all of these local options and customs, however, none was

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[1]For example, In his work on the commercialization of politics in late Georgian Britain, John Brewer examined commercialization and the Wilkite riots. See John Brewer, "Commercialization and Politics," in The Making of a Consumer Society, ed. Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J.H. Plumb (London: Europa Publications, 1982).

more important than the written word. The pamphlet, broadside, and, most significantly, the local newspaper were the common devices used in all of these provincial campaigns to stir and inform supporters. Without the existence of a sympathetic local press, it has been shown, the process of political mobilization faltered. It is therefore important to look more closely at the provincial press and especially at its means and methods of influencing the local populace on issues which it deemed important to the community.

1. Background: The Press in Late-Eighteenth Century Britain

By the beginning of the nineteenth century every major provincial city had at least two weeklies and local editors had access to the growing number of London daily newspapers. Yet, despite the obvious growth of the press in London and in the provinces throughout the last decades of the eighteenth century and the increasing emphasis placed on literacy and education by intellectual movements like the Enlightenment, few historians have devoted much attention to this thriving press and fewer still have tried to understand it in the way contemporaries did. Arthur Aspinall, who in the 1940s wrote the first comprehensive work on the British press, set the tone for decades of misunderstanding about the national and provincial press in the pre-reform period. During the prime ministership of William Pitt (1784-1801, 1804-1806), Aspinall claims, the typical newspaper was only "a small commercial

speculation designed primarily to advertise new books, quack medicines, theater programs, auction sales and shipping news. [It] contained only a few paragraphs of news and no leading articles; and its sale was measured in the hundreds." On the provincial press specifically, he categorically states that at the end of the eighteenth century only one-third of provincial editors could even intelligently write an editorial because most were printers whose skills were technical and not intellectual. Indeed, the provincial press was of such little value to the government, he argues, that it was not even subsidized to insure its political loyalty to the Crown.[2]

More recent historians of journalism have not dealt any more kindly with the late eighteenth century British press than did Aspinall. Echoing Aspinall's opinion, G.A. Cranfield as recently as 1978 maintains that the provincial editors in the late eighteenth century were unable to comment intelligently on public affairs issues. "There was scarcely a single provincial journalist who would have hazarded an

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[2]Arthur Aspinall, Politics and the Press 1780-1850 (London: Home and Van Thal, 1949), 381, 350. Overall, Aspinall also discounts the eighteenth century newspaper as an important source for shaping public opinion. They were "not independent and responsible organs of public opinion." Aspinall, v. Aspinall's work also suffers from a rambling, anecdotal and fragmentary style which was a major drawback to these early histories of the British press. For a similar early study which focuses on the limitations on the press and which utilizes this unsystematic approach see Henry Fox Bourne, English Newspapers: Chapters in the History of Journalism (London: Chatto and Windus, 1887).

original article on public affairs," Cranfield claims. "The provincial journalist of that day was in fact not much above a mechanic--a mere printer--and intellect had as little as possible to do with it." Stephen Koss, whose work deals mainly with the changes which occurred in the press during the Victorian era, simply dismisses eighteenth century journalistic efforts. "During preceding centuries newspapers were, at best, crude and transitory weapons for partisan combat. As such, they were virtually indistinguishable from other forms of political expression, among them the broadsheet, the pamphlet, the ballad, and the theater." Finally, although a recent study of eighteenth century English newspapers by Jeremy Black does demonstrate the effectiveness of the press in the dissemination of news and events, he concludes his study with a similarly narrow view of the influence of the press in the political life of the nation. "The overall impression that reading and studying a large number of London and provincial newspapers throughout the century has given this author is of a press that developed far less and was substantially less influential than is commonly believed."[3]

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[3]G.A. Cranfield, The Press and Society (London: Longmans, 1978), 178; Stephen Koss, The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 2. Jeremy Black, The English Press in the Eighteenth Century (London: Croom Helm, 1987), 238. These harsh treatments of the late Georgian press are also shared by

While these historians have undoubtedly erred in their deprecation of the late Georgian press, clearly it functioned and was perceived differently from the modern press in many ways. First, the late Georgian British press certainly was not "free" in comparison with that of the modern-day British media. Although official censorship did not exist after 1695, anything published which was deemed blasphemous, seditious, obscene, or defamatory could lead to the arrest of the journalist and the publisher. Although the effectiveness of arrest and subsequent trial by a sympathetic local jury is quite debatable, William Pitt attempted to severely restrict the press during the early stages of the war with France (1792-1795) by passing proclamations against seditious publications (1792), seditious meetings (1792, which regulated public reading rooms as well as public meetings), and by suspending habeas corpus (1795). Finally as part of the measures to control journalists' efforts, acts were passed by

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another well-known current historian of journalism, Alan J. Lee. Although he too focuses on changes in the Victorian era, his introduction does deal give a cursory overview of previous journalistic endeavors. Alan J. Lee, The Origins of the Popular Press in England, 1855-1914 (London: Croom and Helm, 1976). For other more sympathetic views of the provincial press in the late eighteenth century see John Brewer, Party, Ideology and Popular Politics at the Ascension of George III (London: Cambridge University Press, 1976), chapter nine; Donald Read, Press and People, 1790-1850: Opinion in Three English Cities (London: Edward Arnold, 1961), passim; John Money, Experience and Identity: Birmingham and the West Midlands, 1760-1800 (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1977), chapter three.

Parliament (23 & 24 George III C. 28) which imposed a system of registrations on printers of books, pamphlets and, of course, newspapers. Every press had to be registered with the national government and each edition of the newspaper itself had to contain the names and addresses of the printer and the publisher. The postal service was enlisted as the department for enforcing these regulations.[4]

Besides overt means of controlling the press through legal proceedings, the government also sought to minimize its effect on public opinion by imposing a high stamp tax on newspapers. All newspapers had to place the stamp on their publications at the cost of three and one-half pence per sheet which limited the typical newspaper to a single sheet (four pages). Thus, according to R.K. Webb, the Times cost seven pence by 1815, a very great expense for a laborer making perhaps five to ten shillings a week. This high cost made the newspaper a luxury that many could not afford. Of course there were effective methods for circumventing this onerous tax. First, one could run the risk of arrest and publish an

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[4]Aspinall, Politics and the Press, 34-39; It should be noted that Ivon Asquith maintains that persecutions for libel were almost always counter-productive. Not only were they difficult to prosecute but in general the publicity given to the libelous publication through the government's action only served to increase circulation. Ivon Asquith, "The Structure, Ownership, and Control of the Press, 1780-1855," in Newspaper History, ed. George Boyce, James Curran, and Pauline Wingate (London: Sage Publishers, 1978), 112.

unstamped newspaper. Many radical editors did engage in unstamped newspaper activities. However, the government assiduously prosecuted and shut down publishers who attempted to skirt the law and so a legitimate printer would find himself simply unable to avoid the tax. Second, a printer could creatively circumvent the tax by "redefining" his efforts as a pamphlet rather than a newspaper and thus pay less tax to the government. The undisputed master at this was certainly William Cobbett, who in 1816 began publishing the controversial weekly Political Register not as a newspaper but as a pamphlet, which kept his cost of production low and thus attracted mass readership.[5]

Yet clearly these are the exceptions. The typical provincial or London printer followed the law and suffered the consequence of a high selling price for his newspaper. The high tax also affected the quality of the final product. Because of the necessity of printing the entire newspaper on one sheet the print was painfully small and difficult to read. Donald Read proclaims the stamped press to be "extremely crude

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[5]R.K. Webb, Modern England: From the 18th Century to the Present ((New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1969), 159. Stephen Koss in his work on the Victorian press maintains that until this "tax on knowledge" was abolished the press in both the provinces and in London could not be truly independent, and therefore a "free" press was not created until the abolition of all such taxes in 1855. Koss, The Rise and Fall of the Political Press, 3-4.

and smudged productions" and indeed any cursory glance at a newspaper from that era proves this judgment to be true.[6]

Yet while much is made of the effect of the government's taxing policy, most historians do recognize the existence of "clubbing," a system of sharing newspapers. Newspapers both from London and from the provinces were expensive and valuable commodities eagerly sought after the day they were published or arrived through the post. Public houses, barber shops, coffee houses, reading rooms, and public lending libraries received copies which were passed through the hands of innumerable patrons and often read to those who were illiterate. According to R.K. Webb one copy of a London newspaper might be read by as many as thirty readers, and astute businessmen realized that newspapers attracted customers. As William Cobbett himself observed in 1807, "ask the landlord why he takes the newspaper; he'll tell you that it attracts people to his house; and in many ways its attractions are much stronger than those of the liquor there drunk, thousands and thousands of men having become sots through the attraction of those vehicles of novelty and falsehood." Although Cobbett may have exaggerated, it is obvious that the high government tax did not restrict the readership of the newspaper to only the elite. Rather, it

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[6]Donald Read, Press and People, 63.

probably spurred on creative methods for circulation of the news even if these methods did not directly benefit the printer through an increase in circulation.[7]

The final matter which prevented the press from being "free" in pre-reform Britain was the policy of government subsidies to sympathetic newspapers. There were several techniques used by William Pitt and successive Tory administrations to influence the press. First there was the policy of outright payment of cash subsidies, particularly to London daily newspaper printers. Although most government officials were careful not to have an open connection with the press, covert payments to sympathetic journalists were commonplace and expected. G.A. Cranfield estimates that in the 1790s the government spent £5,000 annually on controlling the London press alone. In fact, some journalists and printers came to depend so heavily on the subsidies that they actually threatened to publish inflammatory pieces in their publications if their requests for money were denied. Payment was given to Tory presses by the government and the opposition supported Whig presses. Clearly, however, the government was much more able and adept at making the necessary payments to keep their publishers satisfied. Indeed, Ivon Asquith

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[7]Ibid., 201; Webb, Modern England, 159; Arthur Aspinall, "The Circulation of Newspapers in the Early 19th Century," Review of English Literature 22 (January 1946): 37.

concludes that one of the failures of the Whig Party in the early nineteenth century was its inability and unwillingness to pay for the insertion of articles in friendly newspapers and its unwillingness to buy newspapers to become organs for their opinions.[8]

Cash subsidies, of course, were only the most overt form of government influence. Editors who sympathized with the government could be favored with secret government information which they used to boost circulation by providing "scoops" on their competitors. The government also openly purchased copies of newspapers and circulated them freely, insuring that the audience for their opinions was widened. Finally, the government owned newspapers, published pamphlets, and hired journalists to write pieces for the government that were inserted into the press, utilizing treasury money to pay the expenses. In this way, it was nearly impossible for the opposition to compete effectively with the vast resources, both monetary and journalistic, at the disposal of the government in power. It should also be pointed out, however, that the Whig opposition remained pitifully lackadaisical in its approach to managing the press. Henry Brougham, one of the earliest Whigs to recognize the potential of the press in

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[8]Cranfield, The Press and Society, 76; Aspinall, Politics and the Press, 168; Ivon Asquith, "The Whig Party and the Press in the Early Nineteenth Century," Bulletin of the Institute of Historic Research 49 (November 1976): 273.

propagating his party's ideas, lamented that Lord Grenville, Earl Grey and other influential Whig Party members were simply uninterested in courting the popular press or in strengthening their out-of-doors campaigns. "Those strange Whigs or Foxites could not bear the occasional personalities of the press, and on account of such injuries hates the press itself," Brougham lamented, and indeed their record of manipulating the press was poor.[9]

2. The Growth of the Provincial Press

Thus while the government did actively attempt to limit or at least direct the activities of the press, it would be a mistake to assume that it was solely government policy that made the growth of the provincial press difficult. A host of independent factors also contributed to printers' difficulties. First was the problem of profitability. While it is certainly true that it took less capital (about £2,000) to begin a provincial newspaper than one in London, the ability to turn a profit was also very difficult. A weekly circulation of 1,000 would earn only the pitifully small sum of £8. From this the stamp tax, newsmen's wages, newsprint, rent and cost of London subscriptions had to be paid. It is

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[9]Aspinall, Politics and the Press, 153-155, 166; Asquith, "The Whig Party," 276. Aspinall notes that the controversial pamphlet A Key to the Orders-in-Council written in 1812 to bolster support for the measure under attack by Henry Brougham was subsidized by the Treasury under the Spencer Perceval government.

little wonder that the provincial press was, according to Cranfield, plagued with bad debts.[10]

The provincial press therefore had to rely on advertisements as the means of achieving profitability. While this situation is not unlike that of the modern press, advertisers probably did exert more influence over the provincial press in the late Georgian period than they do today. While it is difficult to ascertain fully their influence, Terry Newett holds that advertisers felt that their patronage of a newspaper gave them license to expect favorable coverage of themselves and their products in the pages of the newspaper, in editorials and articles not just in paid advertisements. The newspaper printer also accepted "puffs," paid paragraphs inserted by advertisers which looked like legitimate news. Thus while Newett claims that the influence of the advertisers did not go so far as to jeopardize the public interest, their leverage clearly influenced the content of the newspaper and was a factor that no astute businessman/printer could overlook.[11]

Clearly the demands of advertisers, small circulation, and government regulation did make it an imposing task for the

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[10]Cranfield, The Press and Society, 185.

[11]Terry Newett, "Advertising and Editorial Integrity in the 19th century," in The Press in English Society from the 17th to the 19th Century, ed. Michael Harris and Lee Adam (London: Associated University Press, 1986).

provincial printer to establish his own journalistic independence. Newspapers with a reformist or radical slant found it particularly difficult to publish, especially in the 1790s during the period of "Church and King" agitation. For example, in 1794 James Montgomery began the Sheffield Iris, dedicated to civil and religious liberty and to abolitionism. Although he managed to publish his Iris for thirty years he did so at the risk of local and governmental censure. In 1796, for example, he was charged with seditious libel and imprisoned for a short time. Likewise, attempts to create a reform press in Manchester also ran into difficulties. In 1792 Matthew Faulkner, under the sponsorship of the local Constitutional Society, began the Manchester Herald. In December of 1792, however, "Church and King" supporters attacked the office of the newspaper and by March of 1793 Faulkner and his partner Samuel Birch had fled the country under indictment for seditious libel, and the newspaper had folded. Finally, during the 1790s the publishers of the Sheffield Register (1787-1794) and the Leicester Herald (1792-1795) also tried and failed in their attempts to sustain a newspaper dedicated to issues of reform. Of all of the provincial newspapers dedicated to reform only two prominent ones survived into the nineteenth century: the Cambridge

Intelligencer printed by Benjamin Flowers and the Leeds Mercury published by Edward Baines.[12]

Other provincial cities also found themselves without any local newspaper dedicated to reform. Even Liverpool, with its closely-knit clique of middle-class reformers, did not have a newspaper of their views until 1811 with the publication of the highly successful Liverpool Mercury by Egerton Smith. In Birmingham the most successful newspaper was the least political. Aris' Birmingham Gazette, under the editorship of Samuel Aris and later Jonathan Knott, was consistently profitable but at the cost of complete political neutrality. It concentrated instead on trade news and advertisement and Knott himself proudly proclaimed in 1814 "that it has been contrary to the plan of the paper to bias its readers by any leading article; it was preferred rather to give with fairness information on both sides of disputed questions." One reform-minded newspaper that was strikingly successful, however, was Edward Baines' Leeds Mercury, the voice of reform in Yorkshire after 1801 and a direct challenge to the pro-Tory Leeds Intelligencer owned by Thomas Wright. Despite the

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[12]Alexander Andrews, The History of British Journalism (New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1968), 126; Leon S. Marshall, The Development of Public Opinion in Manchester, 1780-1820 (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1946), 114; John Bohstedt, Riots and Community Politics (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 109-110; J.E. Cookson, The Friends of Peace: Anti-War Liberalism in England 1793-1815 (London: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 92.

difficulties faced by other reform-minded journalistic ventures, Baines prospered using the pages of the Mercury to support peace, parliamentary reform, and the abolition of slavery. As a consequence he gained enemies among the local grandees and the Leeds Common Council. Nevertheless, the Mercury's circulation increased rapidly, rising from just over 1,000 in 1801 to 2,000 by 1812, and Baines became a major provincial voice in the resurgent reformist efforts which emerged after 1810.[13]

Despite the success and even profitability achieved by some provincial newspapers, it is clear that their editors faced a daunting number of problems. They had to obey a plethora of national laws enacted to curb seditious writings and raise state revenues; they had to please both advertisers, their main source of revenue, and readers who expected a host of information in their local paper from shipping news and auction sales to national political coverage and local announcements. Most of all, perhaps, they had to rise above the view held by many that newspaper printing and printing in general were not quite respectable. Until 1807, for example, the Benchers at Lincoln's Inn had a rule which prohibited any

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[13]Asa Briggs, "Press and Public in Early Nineteenth Century Birmingham," Dugdale Society Occasional Papers 8 (1949): 8; James Grant, The History of the Newspaper Press, 3 vols. (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1872), 3: 313; Edward Baines, The Life of Edward Baines (London: Brown, Green and Longmans, 1851).

former printer from being called to the bar, and both Whigs and Tories were careful not to be associated too closely with a profession that even Henry Brougham referred to as "dirty work." Newspaper printers were alternately regarded as hucksters interested only in profit or as "persons of no faith" whose opinions were "merely framed to suit their readers." It was not until after the Napoleonic War, when more journalists began receiving university education and setting a higher standard for the content of their writing, that attitudes toward editors, printers, and journalists began to improve.[14]

Even with the recognition of the restrictions placed on the late Georgian provincial press, it was still more significant in shaping community consciousness than any other local institution. Some more recent historians have attempted to rescue the provincial newspaper from its denigrated status. For example, both B. W. Hill and Frank O'Gorman in their studies of politics in unreformed Britain recognized the power of the press in shaping the public discourse over events through the communication of political news, the popularization of issues and the widespread coverage of parliamentary debates. John Money, who examined the matrix of

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[14]Newett, "Advertising and Editorial Integrity," 154; Asquith, "The Whig Party," 277; Arthur Aspinall, "The Social Status of Journalists at the Beginning of the 19th Century," Review of English Literature 21 (January 1945): 222.

associations, events, and personalities which produced a distinct provincial consciousness in the late eighteenth century West Midlands, gave particular emphasis to the press. Through careful manipulation of reportage in even the most assiduously "neutral" newspapers like Aris' Political Gazette, a distinct "opposition in politics" was created, he maintains. Indeed, Money points out that through the three newspapers which existed in the Midlands during the late eighteenth century the populace "acquired a distinctive sense of their own identity."[15]

Perhaps no historian has done more to rescue the late Georgian press from its reputation as vulgar productions filled with "vapid essays and tables" than John Brewer. In his work Party Ideology and Popular Politics at the Ascension of George III, he addresses the prominence achieved by newspapers both in London and in the provinces by 1760. By this decade, Brewer concludes, newspapers were an important source of influence and opinion and he shows how the press helped to expand the political nation beyond the voting elite. Indeed, he believes that the press linked province and capital and pressman and politician through the sophisticated and

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[15]B.W. Hill, British Parliamentary Politics 1742-1832 (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1985); Frank O'Gorman, Patrons and Parties: The Unreformed Electoral System of Hanoverian England, 1734-1832 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987); John Money, Experience and Identity, 75.

growing network of coffee-houses, public houses, reading rooms and postal offices. "In consequence," he concludes, "the difference between the political sophistication of London and that of a provincial town was considerably diminished. More people had access to political information, and more were interested in politics."[16]

It is clear, then, that the value of the provincial press has not been forgotten by those trying to understand the structure of politics in unreformed Britain. Nevertheless, despite the worthwhile contributions of these recent historians, J.E. Cookson's lamentation in 1982 that the provincial press "certainly needs attention" is certainly still true a decade later.[17]

One of the greatest limitations in all of these studies of the provincial press is that newspapers have been examined very broadly in order to get a sense of influence and content. While many historians utilize the local press in a particular city to gauge opinion, an analysis of the coverage of a wide number of provincial newspapers on an issue of national importance is sorely lacking. The debate on the Orders-in-Council offers a significant opportunity both to test previous

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[16]John Brewer, Party Ideology and Popular Politics, 160.

[17]Andrews, The History of British Journalism, 273; Cookson, The Friends of Peace, 84.

assumptions made about the provincial press and to offer new insights into the individual workings of the newspapers.

3. The Provincial Press and the Orders-in-Council

In some ways, the study of provincial newspapers and the debate on the Orders-in-Council seems to confirm the disparaging views espouced by Aspinall and others. Most newspapers surveyed in 1811-1812 shied away from controversy and supported the government's position and many lacked a specific editorial opinion on the question of whether or not the retaliatory trade measures should be repealed. The Preston Journal, Preston Chronicle, Aris' Birmingham Gazette, Manchester Gazette, and the Shrewsbury Chronicle displayed no specific opinion through editorials or local letters to the editor or even through widespread coverage of the debate in Parliament on the Orders-in-Council. A few, like the Blackburn Mail and Aston's Manchester Commercial Herald or Manchester Exchange Herald, meekly took positions and expressed them only tentatively in the pages of their newspapers. Joseph Aston's only endorsement of the repeal campaign came in an editorial on 14 January 1812, in which he said, "a repeal of the Orders-in-Council, many well informed men think, would quicken industry, by again making exertion profitable; and would enable the government, by an increased revenue, to aid more effectively their friendly intentions to the Spanish and Portuguese." The Blackburn Mail merely stated

that the government should "rescind, continue, or modify" the Orders-in-Council as it felt was necessary.[18]

While these newspapers attempted to maintain editorial neutrality, just as many provincial newspapers took a very strong partisan stand on the issue of the Orders-in-Council. The Liverpool Mercury (pro-repeal), the Liverpool Courier (anti-repeal), the Birmingham Commercial Herald (anti-repeal), the Midland Chronicle (pro-repeal), Leeds Mercury (pro-repeal), Nottingham Journal (pro-repeal), Manchester Mercury (anti-repeal), Wheeler's Manchester Chronicle (anti-repeal), and the Northampton Mercury (anti-repeal) all took strong editorial positions on the issue. In Liverpool, the debate was carried on by two of the most virulently partisan newspapers in the provinces, the Courier and the Mercury, and the debate became in a real sense a newspaper war. In Birmingham, the animosity between newspapers was not apparent; nevertheless the partisanship was quite strong with the Midland Chronicle giving its full endorsement to repeal and the Birmingham Commercial Herald strongly, against. All of these newspapers sought to influence opinion through strongly worded leading articles such as the selection below which appeared in the Midland Chronicle on 2 May 1812:

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[18]Aston's Commercial Herald, 14 January 1812; Blackburn Mail, 25 March 1812. The newspapers discussed in this and in subsequent pages were surveyed specifically on the issue of the Orders-in-Council from 1808 until 1812 (when possible).

> The voice of 14,000 inhabitants of this town, in conjunction with numbers from other places, has resounded in the House of Commons and led to an inquiry as to the cause of their complaints . . . [and] has been a great means of awakening all ranks to a sense of their dangerous and precarious situation.[19]

In contrast, the anti-repeal Manchester Mercury warned its readers that the debate on the Orders was nothing more than a battle for control of Parliament. "This domestic struggle is not for British prosperity," the newspaper maintained, "but who shall hold the reins, who shall enjoy the loaves and fishes."[20]

Therefore, while some of the provincial newspapers surveyed did in fact conform to the paradigm of an editorially neutral publication, more demonstrated journalistic independence through strong leading articles meant to influence the local readership on this very important issue. The argument presented by Aspinall, Cranfield and others that provincial editors were incapable of editorial opinion simply cannot be sustained for these newspapers by the early nineteenth century.

The debate on the Orders-in-Council, however, revealed more than just editorial independence. The proprietors of these newspapers had more than editorials at their disposal to

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[19]Midland Chronicle, 2 May 1812.

[20]Manchester Mercury, 8 March 1812.

influence opinion. Through a host of other subtle but effective methods of reportage, the provincial press attempted to sway opinion and in doing so helped to create both community and provincial identity. Indeed, one of the strongest and most neglected contributions of the provincial press was the way in which it united communities and regions and aided in the creation of middle class consciousness. As the debate on the Orders-in-Council clearly shows, the group most affected by the government's measures was the merchant and manufacturing middle class, and it was their views that were expounded most vehemently in the pages of the provincial newspapers, which were, of course, usually owned by middle class printers.

The most commonly used means of raising local awareness was through the normal weekly coverage of events. Through the narrative of town meetings or vestry meetings or other important local organizations, the newspaper kept the townsmen abreast of the events of importance in their community. However, reportage was not an objective exercise. The editor of the publication could sway opinion merely in the way he chose to cover events. One of the clearest examples of this was the case of Manchester and the May 1811 petition to repeal the Orders-in-Council. Of the four local newspapers in Manchester, only the Manchester Chronicle even mentioned the petition against the Orders-in-Council circulated in the city

and that was only in its routine coverage of debates in the House of Commons. Moreover, no advertisements of public meetings to discuss the repeal effort were found and there was little coverage of the declining economic condition of many in the city and in the country as a whole. This journalistic silence certainly played a significant role in Manchester's lack of influence in the nation-wide debate on the Orders-in Council.[21]

Conversely, the Midland Chronicle covered both the Birmingham effort to petition against the Orders-in-Council and the parliamentary hearings in painstaking detail. Its efforts to inform the public were more extensive than any other provincial or London newspaper, including the Liverpool Mercury. Each week from February 1812, when the provincial-wide petitioning campaign began, until repeal was announced on 23 June, J. Orton Smith and Hawkes Smith, the editors of the newspaper, reported on the efforts of Richard Spooner and Thomas Attwood to gain local backing for repeal. They examined in full the testimony of the Birmingham delegation when it appeared before the Committee of the Wholes House in April of 1812. Through their reportage, the editors constantly enunciated their pro-repeal stance to the local populace.

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[21]Wheeler's Manchester Chronicle, 8 June 1811. The petition was raised and circulated around 29 May 1811. For more details on Manchester and the Orders-in-Council repeal campaign see chapter four.

Another very important tool at the disposal of the local editors was the ubiquitous letter to the editor, which he could use to advance a certain cause without the risk involved in editorials. In addition, although letters to the editors, which were a standard feature in these weekly newspapers, were certainly not always spontaneous outpourings of opinion, they may cautiously be used to gauge the opinion of townsmen on the important issues of the day. While prominent reformers like William Roscoe penned letters to the Liverpool Mercury in support of repeal, certainly the most prominent and often commented on series of letters to the editor appeared in the Liverpool Mercury from September-November 1811 written by "Mercator" (pseudonyms were always used by the authors of these letters but presumably many knew who had in fact written the letters). In the 750 word weekly letters displayed prominently on the front page of the newspaper, "Mercator" painstakingly explained the origins and the effects of the Orders-in-Council. He expounded on the consequences of the measures including the increase in the manufacturing capacity of the United States and the decrease in shipping in Liverpool. He presented a cogent argument against the government's policy and he urged readers to act. "Let us make our appeal to Parliament; in full confidence that our complaints will be heard, and that we shall be relieved from a system which was declared to be forced upon us by the

injuries of our enemy, and which has proved so highly detrimental to ourselves." This series of letters was of great importance not only for solidifying the position against the Orders-in-Council in Liverpool but for providing a clear and rational argument which could be utilized in other provincial campaigns against the trade restrictions.[22]

The Liverpool Mercury was certainly not the only newspaper which utilized letters to the editor. Writers opposed to the proposed repeal of the Orders-in-Council appeared with regularity in the Liverpool Courier, Birmingham Commercial Herald and other newspapers devoted to the government's position. Newspaper editors, who for a variety of reasons could not express their editorial opinions on the issue, also used the letters to the editor as a subtle means of persuasion. For example, although the usually reform-minded Manchester Gazette remained largely editorially neutral on the issue of the Orders-in-Council throughout the spring of 1812, it did print letters to the editor favorable to repeal, as in the case of the letter from "J.P." which appeared on 2 May 1812 calling for the populace to petition against the "ruinous and iniquitous orders."[23]

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[22]Liverpool Mercury, 11 October 1811.

[23]Manchester Gazette, 2 May 1812.

Finally, in addition to utilizing normal weekly reportage and letters to the editor to inform and persuade the local populace, provincial newspaper editors could also raise local consciousness through their most lucrative source of income, advertisements. Indeed, the insertion (or the refusal) of advertisements announcing upcoming public meetings to discuss or petition Parliament on issues of local concern was a very important means of influencing and uniting the local community. An integral part of the petitioning process, after all, was the convening of the public meeting in which the issue was discussed and the petition debated. The appeal in the press for persons to attend was the most effective means of raising awareness. And again, awareness could be raised with minimum threat to the newspaper editor. The most interesting example of this certainly was the local petition for repeal which appeared in the Nottingham Journal. The Journal throughout its history was clearly a Tory newspaper. Yet with the outbreak of Luddite violence in Nottingham in the winter and spring of 1811-1812, the populace was anxious for measures which would ease local tensions. Although the newspaper did not strongly endorse the repeal movement, it did give subtle support through publications of letters to the editor, front page advertisements of petitioning meetings and full reporting of the efforts to gain supporters for the petition. The Nottingham Journal was in fact the only

consistently Tory provincial newspaper to endorse the repeal campaign, though it admittedly did so through implication, not through direct editorial sanction.[24]

Edidtors did more than just advertise public meetings, however. The astute printers who owned the newspaper knew the pecuniary advantage of attempting to satisfy the interest of the readers for more information on the Orders. Thus, they sold a host of printed items in addition to their coverage of events in the press, including publications on trade issues and the effects of the Orders-in-Council on trade. For instance, the pamphlet A Key to the Orders-in-Council was paid for by the Perceval government to convince people of the advantage of retaining the trade restrictions. In Birmingham J. Orton Smith and Hawkes Smith did not just promote repeal through editorials, they also offered for sale in their offices publications such as Orders in Council: A Report of the Proceedings of the Meeting Held at the Royal Hotel in Birmingham,which detailed the meeting held to draw up the Birmingham petition, and Seven Short and Plain Letters to the Inhabitants of Birmingham on the Leading Points Connected with the Orders in Council by "Philagathos." Both were aimed at

[24]For coverage of the Nottingham repeal petition see the Nottingham Journal, 18 April 1812.

swaying neutral residents toward support for repeal and both were sold in the office of Orton and Hawkes Smith.[25]

Besides publications, however, the newspapers offered to their readers other items connected to the Orders-in-Council. For example, on 1 August 1812 after repeal was announced, the Midland Chronicle advertised that a medal of Henry Brougham could be purchased for two shillings and that a portrait print of the leader of repeal could be procured for one and one-half guinea. In this way, not only did the editor make his operation more profitable, but he also kept the political campaign alive in the minds of local residents even if this was not his original intent.[26]

While reportage, letters to the editor and advertisements helped communicate issues to the populace, they also served to raise community awareness as well. Indeed one of the most pervasive themes which emerges from a reading of provincial newspapers in the debates over the Orders-in-Council was how

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[25]Orders In Council: A Report of the Proceedings of the Meeting Held at the Royal Hotel, Birmingham, March 31st 1812 On the Subject of the Orders in Council (Birmingham: J. Orton and Hawkes Smith, 1812); Peter Payne, [Philagathos], Seven Short and Plain Letters to the Inhabitants of Birmingham on Leading Points Connected with the Orders In Council (Birmingham: James Belcher and Son, 1812).

[26]For a further discussion of the commercialization of politics in late Georgian England see John Brewer, "Commercialization and Politics," in The Making of a Consumer Society, ed. Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J.H. Plumb (London: Europa Publications, 1982).

the repeal effort always related to the conditions experienced by the local populace in the specific town where the newspaper originated. The importance of this revelation becomes greater when compared with the accepted interpretation of provincial newspapers in this period. Almost all historians have accepted the belief that the provincial press lacked both independence and individuality and leaned on the London press for news and opinion. The examination of the debate on the Orders-in-Council revealed just the opposite. Not only did provincial editors act independently, an examination of the London press demonstrates that these provincial editors actually led in coverage and debate on trade issues. None of the provincial newspapers showed evidence of using the London newspapers as their source of information and, in fact, an examination of the leading Whig organ, the London Morning Chronicle, shows a surprising lack of interest in the Orders-in-Council debate though it was led in Parliament by Whig Henry Brougham. It was not until 10 April 1812, in fact, that an editorial endorsing repeal was printed in the Chronicle, and most of the items on the Orders-in-Council campaign were reprints of advertisements or articles from provincial newspapers.[27]

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[27]Morning Chronicle, 10 April 1812.

Moreover, local supporters of repeal prized their provincial independence as evidenced by the letters of William Roscoe to Henry Brougham. Although Brougham offered Roscoe and the Liverpool Mercury the communications he had with members of the Birmingham delegation against the Orders-in-Council, he was politely refused because the Liverpudlians simply did not wish to be regarded as the tools of Westminster Whigs. As William Roscoe explained, "On such an occasion it might be observed, that when the People are distressed they will be ready enough to speak of their own accord; and it might in some degree prevent the good effects of your exertions to be told in the House that the petitions which you refer were the consequence of your efforts."[28] Moreover, if it can be demonstrated that the provincial press did not depend on London for its coverage and opinions on the Orders-in-Council, it should also be pointed out that the provincial press was scrutinized more in London than is usually recognized. Not only did the Morning Chronicle demonstrate interest in provincial events by repeating articles and advertisements found in the provincial press, but Henry Brougham throughout his correspondence showed his keen interest in the portrayal of his campaign against the Orders-in-Council in the Liverpool Mercury and other provincial

[28]William Roscoe to Henry Brougham, 11 March 1812, Roscoe Papers, Liverpool Records Office, Liverpool.

newspapers. He also used the provincial press extensively during his unsuccessful bid for election from Liverpool in October of 1812.[29]

Finally, while the provincial press clearly raised community awareness and helped to shape community identity, the debate on the Orders-in-Council also demonstrates that it served to promote provincial consciousness. In his work The Friends of Peace J.E. Cookson correctly identifies provincialism as one of the pervasive themes that appeared through a study of newspapers and the controversy over the Orders-in-Council. Provincialism was the building of relationships which united a region in opposition to other regions or to the capital. Although provincialism in early nineteenth century Britain clearly centered around economic issues (London mercantile interests versus manufacturing provincial interests), as Cookson points out, the Orders-in-Council debate reveals that local identity was linked with more than just the desire to force the government to liberalize its trade policy.[30]

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[29]For Brougham's use and interest in the Liverpool Mercury see William Roscoe to Henry Brougham, 22 October 1812, Brougham Papers, University College Library, London. Among Brougham's letters there were copies of provincial newspapers from this period including the Tyne Mercury published in Durham and the Liverpool Mercury.

[30]Cookson, The Friends of Peace, 84-114. For an examination of provincial identity in the late eighteenth century see Donald Read, The English Provinces, 1760-1960

An examination of the press reveals clearly the way in which this provincialism was sustained and advanced. First, newspapers promoted provincialism merely by the fact that they circulated over a broad area usually encompassing more than one large town or county. For example, the Leeds Mercury had subscribers throughout West Yorkshire and its back page listed dozens of distribution offices. The masthead of the Midland Chronicle proudly proclaimed that it was printed for "Warwick, Worcester, Stafford, Derby, Leicester, Oxford, Northampton and Gloucester." In addition to wide circulation, the most pervasive techniques used by all of these newspapers, no matter what their opinion on the Orders-in-Council, was the reprint. Notice of the Birmingham petition against the Orders-in-Council appeared in Manchester (the Mercury), Leeds (Mercury), and in Liverpool (Mercury). The petition from the Staffordshire Potteries supporting repeal of the Orders-in-Council appeared in the Leeds Mercury, the Shrewsbury Chronicle and the Liverpool Mercury.[31]

Not only did these newspapers carry advertisements of petitioning drives occurring in various towns but they also used reports which appeared in other provincial newspapers to

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(London: Edward Arnold, 1964).

[31]Manchester Mercury, 17 March 1812; Leeds Mercury, 4 April 1812; Liverpool Mercury, 10 April 1812; Leeds Mercury, 18 January 1812; Shrewsbury Chronicle, 7 February 1812; Liverpool Mercury, 31 January 1812.

keep their readers informed of the progress of the campaign in neighboring towns and to encourage or discourage efforts within their own. For example, the Liverpool Courier covered the Manchester Exchange riot of April 1812 in some detail, no doubt to warn its readers of the consequences of out-of-doors campaigns. Likewise Aston's Commercial Herald in Manchester gave full coverage to the anti-repeal petition from the Staffordshire Potteries which claimed that conditions of distress were exaggerated by those seeking repeal of the Orders-in-Council. In this way, the newspaper could share with the readers the efforts to sabotage the repeal movement in nearby towns.[32]

Does all of this cross reportage reveal attitudes toward London? Does it, as J.E. Cookson maintains, show a "resentment at the separation from the center of power and decision-making"? One of the strongest elements in the repeal effort was the portrayal of government leaders as venal and out of touch with their constituents. A letter to the editor from "Incola," for example, which appeared in the Midland Chronicle on 2 May 1812, condemned the reluctance of the Warwickshire parliamentary member Sir Charles Mordaunt to admit that distress existed in the Midlands. Furthermore, the provinces were often portrayed as virtuous sufferers from the

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[32]Liverpool Courier, 15 April 1812; Aston's Commercial Herald, 25 February 1812.

malfeasance of a corrupt capital. The accusation was often made that the license trade which emerged as part of the complex system the Orders-in-Council created was corrupt and benefitted members of Parliament who supported its continuation. As Egerton Smith of the Liverpool Mercury stated, the Orders-in-Council and the license system added "another chain to parliamentary subserviency" and thus must be abandoned. The future of Britain, it was implied throughout these pages, lay not with the corrupt and mendacious capital but the sober, hard-working and prosperous provinces.[33]

4. Conclusion

While the complete history of the provincial press is still to be written, the evidence presented here suggests that previous assumptions about the subservience of the press to London, the lack of independent opinion, the isolation and degradation of the provincial editors, and the inability of the provincial press to influence or manipulate opinion are false. Indeed, the provincial press by the early nineteenth century appears to be quite vibrant, not only elucidating opinion for local readers but helping to sustain and expand both community and regional consciousness and confidence. Indeed, J. Orton Smith and Hawkes Smith themselves expressed it best when they announced this to their readers every week

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[33]Liverpool Mercury, 6 March 1812.

on the Midland Chronicle masthead: "Let it be impressed upon your minds, let it be instilled into your children, that the Liberty of the Press is the Palladium of all civil, political, and religious rights of an Englishman--Junius."[34]

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[34]The Midland Chronicle published this weekly. The particular edition examined was 21 September 1811.

CHAPTER VI

HENRY BROUGHAM, POLITICS AT WESTMINSTER AND THE ORDERS-IN-COUNCIL

Throughout his long career Henry Lord Brougham had many achievements. He was a successful barrister winning cases of national importance such as the defense of Leigh and John Hunt, publishers of the controversial newspaper The Examiner, against charges of libel in 1812. He was also a notable orator whose speeches in Parliament were admired by friend and foe alike. Brougham also became one of the nation's most prominent spokesmen for reform both inside and outside of Parliament, championing causes such as parliamentary reform, educational reform and the abolition of slavery. To cap his career, Brougham was made Lord Chancellor during the Grey government in 1830. Finally, among his many accomplishments, Brougham could also add his support for the creation of University College, London, an achievement so satisfying to him that he placed his correspondence in its library before his death in 1868 at age ninety.[1]

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[1]There are several excellent biographies of Henry Brougham. See Robert Stewart, Henry Brougham, 1778-1868: His Public Career (London: The Bodley Head, 1985); Frances Hawes,

Yet despite this long list of achievements, when Brougham wrote his autobiography in 1871 he maintained that the campaign to repeal the Orders-in-Council was his greatest personal triumph. "The repeal of the Orders in Council was my greatest achievement," he wrote. "It was second to none of the many efforts made by me, and not altogether without success, to ameliorate the condition of my fellow-men. In these I had the sympathy and aid of others, but in the battle against the Orders in Council I fought alone.[2]

Perhaps in the Orders-in-Council campaign Brougham saw his own political maturation. Indeed, this effort more than any other thrust him into national prominence. Biographer Francis Hawes maintains that the campaign made Brougham "one of the first men in Parliament." Arthur Aspinall claims that it "increased enormously his already considerable reputation, and his popularity with the industrialists in the north."

Henry Brougham (New York: St Martin's Press, 1958); Chester W. New, The Life of Henry Brougham (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961); Arthur Aspinall, Lord Brougham and the Whig Party (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1927); G.T. Garratt, Lord Brougham (London: Macmillan and Co., 1935). See also W.D. Stockwell, "Contributions of Henry Brougham and William Ellis to the Political Economy" (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt, 1989). Finally, for Brougham's role in the defense of the Hunt's in the 1812 libel case see Robert Levy, "On the Pleasures of Forensic Rhetoric: Brougham and Gibbs in Rex v. John and Leigh Hunt," Renaissance and Modern Studies, 15 (1971): 85-102.

[2]Henry Lord Brougham, The Life and Times of Henry Lord Brougham, 3 vols. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1871), 2: 7.

Finally Robert Stewart says that "parliamentary history records few greater personal triumphs."[3]

Brougham's exertions on behalf of the petitioners takes on more importance,however, when it is examined in relation to politics at Westminster. For if the campaign to repeal the Orders-in-Council represented a moment of crystallization in Brougham's career so too did it represent a moment of crystallization in parliamentary politics, a key instance in the transition from inchoate political factions to political parties.

1. Background: The Emergence of Henry Lord Brougham

At first glance Henry Brougham's emergence as a catalyst for this great change seems unusual. Brougham was born in 1778 and was the son of a largely inconsequential squire who owned a modest estate in Scotland. Brougham's most important early experiences came during his youth, however, for he was educated in Edinburgh, then the center of the Scottish Enlightenment. According to Robert Stewart, "the air which Brougham breathed was infused with the spirit of rational inquiry." Indeed, as a precocious young scholar Brougham became attached to the ideas of the Enlightenment, specifically to the beliefs of philosophes like Voltaire. He gained a firm faith in reason and in progress, two convictions which were to last throughout his life. At the University of

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[3]Hawes, Henry Brougham, 72; Aspinall, Lord Brougham, 24; Stewart, Henry Brougham, 74.

Edinburgh Brougham also came to know men who were to have a tremendous influence on his life, including Francis Horner, later a fellow member of Parliament and reform advocate, and Francis Jeffrey, who would gain fame as publisher of the Edinburgh Review.[4]

Although Brougham was intellectually prepared for his career as a barrister and writer, his background was far removed from that of the aristocratic London society to which he aspired to belong. The House of Commons, to which Brougham aspired at an early age, was largely the preserve of the landed aristocracy, with over one-fifth of the membership consisting of peers or younger sons of peers and numerous others who had connections to the peerage through marriage and other ties. Although Brougham often liked to boast of his family's landed background, he did not readily fit in with either influential Tory or Whig political leaders. The Tory "Saints" like William Wilburforce, to whom Brougham first became attached because of their devotion to abolitionism, were far more pious and conservative than the young Brougham. Tories such as John Wilson Croker, publisher of the Tory Quarterly Review, found Brougham's Scottish reform-minded background suspicious. Even Whig leaders like Earl Grey and Lord Grenville held Brougham at arm's length because of his impetuousness and obvious maneuvering for a seat in the House of Commons. Thus although Brougham did become a popular

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[4]Stewart, Henry Brougham, 3.

member of London society, he did not fit into the political world. "What he had later to discover," biographer Chester New concludes, "was that these Whig grandees were as loath to allow a middle-class prodigy political privilege and opportunity as they were pleased to be entertained by his society." [5]

Despite his lack of connections at Westminster, Brougham launched his public career in 1802 not through any spectacular case at the Bar or even through election to the House of Commons but by the publication of the first Edinburgh Review. With his Scottish friends Sydney Smith, Francis Horner, and Francis Jeffrey, Brougham launched the quarterly in October of 1802 and ultimately contributed more than fifty articles to the journal. Here Brougham established himself as an abolitionist, supporter of free trade, and critic of the Napoleonic Wars.[6]

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[5]New, The Life of Henry Brougham, 33; Stewart, Henry Brougham, 32-40; Aspinall, Lord Brougham, 10-13. For a more comprehensive study of the background of the members of the House of Commons see R.G. Thorne, The House of Commons, 1790-1820, 5 vol. (London: Secker and Warburg, 1986).

[6]Stockwell and New list all of the articles in the Edinburgh Review attributed to Henry Brougham. For a fuller examination of Brougham's economic views see Biancamaria Fontana, "Henry Brougham and the Political Economy of the Edinburgh Review," Annali della Fondazione Luigi Einsudi, 16 (1982): 249-278. For another side of Henry Brougham's journalistic efforts see Trowbridge H. Ford, "Political Coverage in The Times, 1811-1841: the Role of Barnes and Brougham," Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research 59 (May 1986): 91-107.

Although only twenty-six years old in 1804, Brougham sought to be more than just a successful lawyer and reform-minded journalist, and in that year he moved from Edinburgh to London to achieve his goals. There Brougham baffled friends and acquaintances alike by shamelessly courting both Whigs and Tories in his quest for a seat in the House of Commons. While he was an admirer of William Pitt, the undisputed leader of the Tory faction in Parliament, Brougham was also sympathetic to many of the beliefs held by the Whig opposition. Thus throughout 1804 and 1805 Brougham supported neither the Whigs nor Tories, seeking instead the support of any faction which would be in the best position to secure him a seat in Parliament. Brougham's open political pandering, however, and the suspicion it engendered earned him the scorn of many inside and outside of government. Dr. James Currie, a Liverpudlian and later instrumental supporter of the Orders-in-Council repeal campaign, wrote Thomas Creevy during this period that Brougham was a "notorious prostitute" who was "setting himself up for sale." Even one of Brougham's closest friends, Francis Horner, puzzled over his political ploys. In an 1803 letter to James Loch, a mutual friend of Horner and Brougham and a member of Parliament, he confided his concern that, while talented, Brougham was "deficient in prudence" and that although he was certainly apt to rise to political power he might also "fix himself in that place too soon, before he

had gone through what, I presume, is a necessary routine of subordination."[7]

Although Brougham continued to court both Whigs and Tories throughout 1805-1806, his association with the reform-minded Edinburgh Review and his friendship with Whigs like Francis Horner in the end led him to seek out the Whigs as his allies. Although he still had not achieved his goal of gaining a seat in Parliament, by 1806 he was becoming increasingly recognized in London society and was a prominent member in Whig clubs such as Brooks and the "King of Clubs." When William Pitt died in January 1806, Brougham wrote his first decidedly Whig pamphlet, An Inquiry into the State of the Nation, in which he criticized Pitt and his supporters for their conduct of the war. With that his political fate was settled.

Although Brougham had chosen the Whigs, it is not at all clear that the Whigs had in fact chosen him. Although the Whigs came to power in 1806 in the so-called "Ministry of all the Talents" Brougham was still out of Parliament and was not offered a seat so that he could become a part of the ministry.

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[7]Leonard Horner, ed. Memoirs and Correspondence of Francis Horner, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1843), 2: 205; For Currie's letters see Dr. James Currie to Thomas Creevy, 2 October 1804, Creevy Papers, University College Library, London. For other correspondence covering Brougham's early years see R.M.H. Atkinson, and G.A. Jackson, ed. Brougham and his Early Friends: Letters to James Loch, 1798-1809, 3 vols. (London: Darling and Pead, 1908). For an entire article that examines criticisms of Brougham see Trowbridge H. Ford, "Lord Brougham Among his Critics," Tijdschrift voor rechts-geschiedenis. Revue d'histoire du droit," 49 (1981): 389-410.

Although he was given a token position in the ministry's delegation to Portugal in 1806, it was a post with little influence and his contributions were thought negligible. When the ministry faced a general election in 1807 Brougham's role was relegated to writing articles for the Whig press, specifically for the Edinburgh Review and the London Morning Chronicle. Although this was unquestionably an area in which Brougham excelled, it is certainly also true that the aristocratic Whig leadership did not wish to tarnish its own reputation by an association with journalism, a job even Brougham referred to as "dirty work."[8]

Despite Brougham's great disappointment at being refused a seat in Parliament, he demonstrated qualities during the 1807 election campaign for which he would be known during the rest of his political career, extraordinary energy and hard-work. Whig leader Henry Richard Vassall, Lord Holland, later remarked in his autobiography that Brougham was able to "fill every bookseller's shop with pamphlets, most London newspapers and all country ones with paragraphs and supplied a large portion of the boroughs throughout the kingdom with handbills adapted to the local interests of the candidates." Nevertheless, the Whigs lost their majority and power was

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[8]Hawes, Henry Brougham, 54; New, The Life of Henry Brougham, 45; Stewart, Henry Brougham,, 39.

returned to the Tories, under the leadership of William Henry Cavendish Bentinck, the Duke of Portland (1807-1809).[9]

Brougham did not enter the House of Commons until 1810. In the intervening years from 1807-1810, however, he was engaged in activities which had a profound effect on his and the nation's development. For during the ill-fated Whig "Ministry of all the Talents" the first in a series of measures was promulgated to counter Napoleon's military domination on the continent. Even though Brougham was allied with the Whigs by this time, he was vehemently opposed to "Fox's Blockade"[10] and attacked the entire system of trade restrictions when they were extended under the Tory Portland government after 1807. This opposition formed the basis for Brougham's initial rise to national prominence, the Orders-in-Council repeal campaign.

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[9]Lord Holland, Memoirs of the Whig Party, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1852-1854), 2: 228-229.

[10]Named for Whig Prime Minister Charles James Fox, Fox's Blockade provided for a limited continental blockade (specifically from Ostend to the Seine) and was issued on 16 May 1806. Napoleon responded in November 1806 with his Berlin Decree which placed a blockade on all British goods bound for the continent. Neither decree could be adequately enforced by the respective navies and so there ushered in the period of open commercial warfare. For more details see Reginald Horsman, The Causes of the War of 1812 (New York: A.S. Barnes and Co., 1962), chapter 4; Bradford Perkins, Prologue to War (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961), chapter 5; Eli F. Heckscher, The Continental System: An Economic Interpretation (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1922). Also see Chapter One in this study for more background on the Orders-in-Council.

2. Henry Brougham and the 1808 Orders-in-Council Repeal Campaign

For Henry Brougham the issue of trade restrictions was one singularly suited for his talents. Some of his earliest articles in the Edinburgh Review dealt with trade questions, and he was a longtime champion of free trade. Moreover, by 1808 the Orders-in-Council and the retaliatory measures undertaken by Napoleon had resulted in a complex network of commercial regulations which made trade issues a matter of intense discussion throughout the nation.[11]

The escalating trade warfare was also fortuitous for Brougham because the Whig party, led by ambivalent reformers like George Ponsonby, Earl Grey and William Windham Grenville, had not formulated any policy to counter these Tory measures. In fact they seemed to have no opinion or policy at all and when middle class merchants and manufacturers mobilized

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[11]After the Berlin Decree of 1806 the Tory ministry invoked the first Orders-in-Council in January 1807. The Order blockaded trade between enemy ports and prohibited trade between other ports at which the Berlin decree prevented English ships from unloading. In November 1807, the second Order-in-Council was announced which sought to force all continental European trade to first go through British ports and pay British tariffs. According to historian Denis Gray the purpose of this decree was to force France to trade through British ports as a symbol of submission to Britain. Napoleon responded with the Milan Decree in December of 1807 which made any vessel which submitted to British trade restrictions subject to seizure. Finally, in December of 1807 the United States responded to the British and the French with a total blockade of all imports and exports. For more on Napoleonic trade warfare see Denis Gray, Spencer Perceval, 1762-1812: The Evangelical Prime Minister (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1963); Heckscher, The Continental System, 109-125.

opposition to the Orders-in-Council in the spring of 1808 their attention turned not to members of Parliament but to Brougham who had expounded his fervent opposition to the whole system of trade restrictions in the pages of the Edinburgh Review. In his autobiography written some fifty years later Brougham still expressed indignation at the system of trade restrictions undertaken first by the Whigs under Fox and then by the Tories led by Portland and subsequently Perceval. "A more unsound, a more fatal policy never was conceived. The Whigs were in office at the date of the Berlin Decree; and that Government, instead of waiting to see how the neutral powers, especially America, would act . . . took a course little likely to injure France but fraught with certain and absolute destruction to ourselves." By January of 1808 Liverpudlians led by William Roscoe, William Rathbone and Thomas Thornely asked Brougham to represent merchant and manufacturing interests in a debate over the Orders-in-Council in Parliament and Brougham began preparing a case which would propel him to national fame.[12]

Brougham unquestionably faced an enormous task in trying to persuade Parliament to abandon a major component of its

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[12]Brougham, The Life and Times, 2: 9. Brougham wrote an article in the Edinburgh Review in January and October of 1807 condemning the whole system of trade restrictions. Although it would be insightful to delve into the growing relationship between Brougham and the provincial leaders of repeal like William Roscoe there was unfortunately, little correspondence in either the Brougham or Roscoe papers pertaining to this first Orders-in-Council repeal campaign.

wartime policy. Not only was the Tory ministry led by the Duke of Portland apparently secure in its position, but Brougham had to work outside of Parliament and could not necessarily count on fellow Whigs for support. Furthermore, a survey of many of the provincial newspapers[14] from this period demonstrates that the effects of the trade restrictions were not as yet apparent and it is equally clear from a survey of the press that many provincial leaders including merchants and manufacturers continued to back the government's policy as a matter of loyalty and patriotism. To counter such strong governmental support Brougham sought to show that undue economic distress was being caused by the measures and to prove that the Orders' primary purpose was not to defeat Napoleon but to protect British shipping interests, particularly the West Indian shipping interest. Thus it was Brougham who contacted provincial reformers like William Rathbone and William Roscoe (of Liverpool) and urged a petitioning drive, and it was unquestionably Brougham who helped turn the complex trade question into an out-of-doors popular campaign. Although only Manchester, Liverpool, London, and Hull sent petitions to Parliament against the Orders-in-Council, there was enough of an outcry against the

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[14]For a fuller examination of the provincial press and the campaign to repeal the Orders-in-Council see Chapter Five. It is also important to note that in many cities where petitions were enthusiastically raised in 1812, there was little or no activity in 1808. This was particularly true of Birmingham. See Chapter Three for more detail on Birmingham's early response to the trade restrictions.

trade restrictions to force the weak Portland ministry to call for the legislature to be convened into a Committee of the Whole House to investigate the complaints. As counsel for the merchants and manufacturers before this committee, Brougham produced witnesses and evidence at the bar of the House of Commons for three weeks in March of 1808 and forced the Portland ministry to mount a strong defense of its policy, something the Prime Minister had originally determined not to do.[15] Although Brougham's demand for an immediate repeal of the Orders-in-Council was rejected, his case nevertheless was not totally futile. His career was bolstered by his vigorous condemnation of the government's policy in the House of Commons He made a stirring and much publicized speech before the Committee of the Whole House though he was not yet a member of Parliament, and he earned the respect and gratitude of middle class merchants and manufacturers, a gratitude which would not be forgotten in 1812.[16]

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[15]It must be kept in mind that Brougham was chosen as the counsel for the merchants and manufacturers but he was not yet a member of Parliament. He was allowed to speak before the Committee of the Whole House and to make a speech on the floor of the House of Commons because he was the chosen counsel for the petitioners. Of the 1808 campaign Brougham later wrote in his memoirs: "As counsel for the merchants, manufacturers, and traders, I was heard at the bar of both Houses, and produced an overwhelming body of evidence in support of the petitions. This began in the spring of 1808, but all attempts to move the ministers proved unavailing; and it was not till four years after that there appeared any hope of a more favorable result." See Brougham, The Life and Times, 2: 12

[16]New, The Life of Henry Brougham, 41-44; Stewart, Henry Brougham, 41-44; Hawes, Henry Brougham, 56-57.

The fame achieved by the 1808 repeal campaign also led to Brougham's ascension into Parliament. While it is undoubtedly true that Brougham would have preferred to win his seat through an election, he nevertheless accepted an offer of a seat from the Duke of Bedford in 1810 and became member of the House of Commons from Camelford. Although it is ironic that the crusader for reform began his parliamentary career through a rotten borough, Brougham was content, for he had fulfilled his long-held ambition for a parliamentary career and could now influence national politics more directly from inside Westminster.

3. Parliamentary Politics in the Early Nineteenth Century

The political world which Brougham was so eager to join was one which in many respects detested or even feared men like him. As a lawyer and a journalist, Brougham represented everything that was alien and even suspicious to many aristocratic land-owning members of Parliament. As a champion for reform and for a more activist opposition Whig party he was admittedly intimidating to Tories and Whigs alike. As a tireless member of Parliament, however, Brougham, and his support for popular politics, would be crucial in helping to transform the ancient legislature and the political parties represented in it during an important transitional period in the nation's history.

While Brougham was only a junior member of the opposition when he entered the House of Commons in 1810, he was able to

assert much influence because political parties were in many respects still quite embryonic. While recent historians like John Phillips, B.W. Hill, Nicholas Rogers and Frank O'Gorman have successfully shown that there was widespread popular participation in the political process of unreformed Britain, nevertheless, this political participation was little directed by stable national political parties. Not only were organized and directed political parties difficult to sustain in this age of limited communication networks, but, more importantly, many factors conspired to limit the full development of parties. First, leaders of British political life in the late eighteenth century such as William Pitt and even Charles James Fox were ambivalent toward the very notion of political parties. Parties were often associated with destructive political factions and although personal parties did develop around both of these extraordinary leaders they were fragile indeed and certainly were not national political parties. In addition, the emergence of true parties was also hampered by the role of the royal family in the political life of the nation. The support for the Tories by King George III and the equally vehement attachment the Prince of Wales had for the Whigs certainly did not enhance the ability of these alignments to develop into full, independent political parties. Finally, the very appellations "Whig" and "Tory" carried much meaning by the end of the eighteenth century. Whiggery was associated most powerfully with the long rule of

Walpole and the Whigs of the early eighteenth century. Tory, of course, carried the burden of an association with Jacobitism. Altogether, according to historian R.G. Thorne the period was one of great party political confusion with many personal parties, many independent members and no real political parties.[16]

Therefore, even though the early decades of the reign of George III (1760-1820) generally lacked clear political parties, change did occur as a result of the French Revolution. No other single event was more influential than the upheaval in France in the transition in the political life of the British nation from mere political factions to the creation of true political parties. As a result of the French Revolution, the two parties gained their basic ideologies. For the Tories led by William Pitt, the revolution provided a mean to reiterate their fundamental belief in church, king and constitution, to emphasize the natural rule of property, and the danger and perhaps even treason of supporting reform. The

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[16]Thorne, The House of Commons, 2: 345-349. For the most recent discussion of popular politics and unreformed Britain see Frank O'Gorman, Voter Patrons and Parties: The Unreformed Electoral System of Hanoverian England, 1734-1832 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); John Phillips, Electoral Behavior in Unreformed England: Plumpers, Splitters and Straights (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982); Nicholas Rogers, Whigs and Cities: Popular Politics in the Age of Walpole and Pitt (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); B.W. Hill, Parliamentary Politics, 1742-1832 (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1985). See also the conclusion for greater explanation of their theses on popular politics and the role that the Orders-in-Council repeal campaign plays in this emerging revisionist work.

Tories also had as their natural ally George III, who though often ambivalent toward William Pitt and his unrelenting support for Catholic Emancipation, nevertheless saw in him the only real leader for a government faced with enormous difficulties abroad and keeping the peace at home.[17]

The French Revolution also afforded ideological opportunities for the Whigs as well. Led by Charles James Fox, the Whig cause of opposition to the Tories and to George III was bolstered initially by the revolution in France. The overthrow of the absolutist Bourbon regime helped stimulate a debate about the English constitution and reform which had begun with the rebellion in the American colonies in the 1770s. With the French Revolution, new impetus was given to a wide range of reform movements, from a repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts to parliamentary reform and a demand for free trade.[18]

Despite the potential presented by the French Revolution, Britain's involvement in war with France after 1792 insured that for the foreseeable future political parties would not emerge. Whig support for France, while understandable in

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[17]Frank O'Gorman, "Pitt and the 'Tory' Reaction to the French Revolution, 1789-1815," in Britain and the French Revolution, 1789-1815, ed. H.T. Dickinson (London: Macmillan Education, Ltd, 1989), 28; Frank O'Gorman, The Emergence of the British Two Party System, 1760-1832 (London: Edward Arnold, 1982), chapter two; H.T. Dickinson, British Radicalism and the French Revolution, 1789-1815 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), chapter two.

[18]See Chapter One for a fuller examination of these reform movements.

1789, proved a death knell in their attempt to wrest power from Pitt. As John Derry accurately pointed out in his summary of political alignments in this period, "once Britain was immersed in war, public opinion tolerated nothing which smacked however remotely of Jacobinism." For the Whigs the cost was enormous. Fox was unable to maintain even a semblance of party unity with many members defecting to the Tories because of the Whigs' earlier support of the French Revolution. The most notable Whig defector, of course, was Edmund Burke, whose condemnation of the French Revolution, Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790), set the tone for opposition to anything Jacobinical for the remainder of the century.[19] Although Fox was able to unite sixty stalwart Whigs around him during the next ten years of Tory rule, it would be inaccurate to claim that anything closely resembling clearly defined political parties existed at all. If anything, the French Revolution in the end disrupted the course toward party formation until the latter years of the Napoleonic Wars.[20]

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[19]Burke's role here, of course, is ironic for he helped to established Whig tradition in the 1770s with his support of the American Revolution. In Reflections on the Revolution in France he helped to establish Tory tradition with his opposition to the French Revolution.

[20]John Derry, Politics in the Age of Fox, Pitt and Liverpool: Continuity and Transformation (London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1989), 94; John Derry, "The Opposition Whigs and the French Revolution, 1789-1815," in Dickinson, chapter two; O'Gorman, The Emergence of the British Two Party System, 22-28. It should be pointed that recent research on the question of reform and the French Revolution has pointed out

By the time that Brougham made his move to London in 1804 even the Pittite and Foxite political factions were in great disarray. Pitt's term in office from 1804-1806 was beset by difficulties, the most important of which was his commitment to Catholic Emancipation, an issue which had forced him from power in 1801 and one which had alienated him from some fellow Tories and from the king, who threatened to abdicate before agreeing to this measure. Moreover, Pitt's antipathy to political parties meant that a true political party never really formed around him even though he had so dominated the political life of the nation since the outbreak of the French Revolution. Thus when Pitt died in January of 1806, the Tories were no closer to being a real united political party than they had been at the beginning of the long war in 1792.[21]

The Whigs were in even more disarray. Pitt's death in January of 1806 meant that at last after a decade in the wilderness, the Whig opposition would now achieve their goal of having political power. Led by the aging and dissipated

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that the revolution was only a part of the cause of the failure of reform. Equally important, Mark Philp maintains, was the fragmented character of reform movements in the 1780s and 1790s which must be taken into equal consideration when understanding the struggle against the conservative reaction of the 1790s. See Mark Philp, "The Fragmented Ideology of Reform," in The French Revolution and British Popular Politics ed. Mark Philp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 50-77.

[21]O'Gorman, The Emergence of the British Two-Party System, 54-55; Derry, Politics in the Age of Pitt and Fox, 131-133.

Fox and an uneasy alliance between William Windham Grenville and Earl Grey, the Whigs seemed confused about their political objectives once in power. Fox was a staunch opponent of the war and a supporter of Catholic Emancipation, two positions opposed by Grenville and most of the British populace. Now that he was in power, Fox wished to seize the opportunity to strike out against the influence of the Crown, a reform he had long supported. Grenville was opposed to emphasizing this issue, especially in view of the popularity of the venerated king, George III. On nearly every issue the conservatism of the Grenvillites clashed with the liberal views of the Foxites. In short, the Whigs during this period were, according to Archibald S. Foord like a "serpent whose head was pushed on by its tail."[22]

The Whigs' dilemma did not become easier when Fox died in September of 1806. Prospects for the party and for the "Ministry of All the Talents" seemed dim indeed. Francis Jeffrey of the Edinburgh Review lamented to Francis Horner, now a member of Parliament, that "Mr. Fox's party, the remains of the Old Whig faction was extinguished entirely with him."

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[22]Archibald S. Foord, His Majesty's Opposition, 1714-1830 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1964), 458; Richard Willis, "Fox, Grenville and the Recovery of Opposition, 1801-1804," Journal of British Studies 11 (May 1972): 408-411; Michael Roberts, The Whig Party, 1807-1812 (London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd., 1965), chapter three.

The Duke of Northumberland put it more succinctly. The opposition Whigs, he declared, are "falling to nothing."[23]

After Fox's death, the leadership of the party passed to Grenville, who became Prime Minister, Earl Grey, George Ponsonby, and George Tierney, all singularly ill-suited to maintain the ministry. Although the Whigs had preached for over a decade the necessity of peace and reform, they achieved nothing in either area during the short ministry. The poor overall quality of their leadership led even the Prince of Wales, who previously espoused Whig positions, to disassociate himself from the lackluster group. Moreover, the Whig government alienated even members of its own faction with its antipathy to reform and its vigorous prosecution of the war. Reformers like Francis Burdett, Samuel Whitbread and even the ambitious Henry Brougham found little within the ministry to capture their loyalty. When George III dismissed Parliament in 1807, again in disagreement over the question of Catholic Emancipation, the Tories under the Duke of Portland gained an impressive majority in Parliament. In assessing the failure of Grenville and Grey and the Whigs to sustain their majority and their ministry, John Derry maintains that they "appeared both opportunistic and unrealistic, both oversubtle and

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[23]Horner, Memoirs and Correspondence, 2: 374; Arthur Aspinall, ed. The Correspondence of the Prince of Wales, 1770-1812, 8 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 6: 250.

lamentably foolish, neither high principled nor politically astute."[24]

Out of office after 1807, the Whigs without Fox did little better than they had as leaders of the government. A multitude of opportunities presented themselves during the crucial last years of the war from scandals such as the Duke of York affair and the failed Walcharn campaign[25] to the king's final bout with insanity and the resulting regency crisis.[26] Furthermore, the Tories led by the chronically ill Duke of Portland until 1809 and then the unimaginative Spencer Perceval (1809-1812) had difficulties merely maintaining the popularity of a government associated with an increasingly unpopular war. Finally, the Tories had to face their own internal struggles, especially the fratricidal feud between Tories George Canning and Robert Castlereagh. Yet Grenville and Grey hesitated. Both seemed unwilling to appeal to the

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[24]Derry, Politics in the Age of Pitt, Fox and Liverpool, 136; Peter Jupp, Lord Grenville, 1759-1834 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1985), 422-424; H.W. Carless Davis, The Age of Grey and Peel (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1929), 124-126.

[25]The Duke of York Affair in 1809 concerned the selling of army commissions by the Duke of York who was forced by the scandal to resign as commander-in-chief of the army. The Walcharn campaign was intended to drive the French out of the Netherlands. Instead ill-equipped British troops remained on the island of Walcharn, their numbers drained by disease. In the end the campaign was called off and the whole fiasco became an embarrassment to the Portland and Perceval governments.

[26]It was thought that the creation of the regency would bring the Whigs back into power but the Prince of Wales' infatuation with the opposition had cooled after the death of Fox, his friend and political ally for a generation.

populace over these issues but were unable to bring enough pressure to bear on the government to cause its fall from power. As fellow Whig Francis Horner lamented, "their [Grenville and Grey] proceedings in this session, their backwardness upon some questions, and their indecisiveness about certain subjects, that are fundamental . . . have shaken my confidence, not in their views and intentions, but in their judgments and firmness."[27]

4. The Emergence of Brougham and the 1812 Repeal Campaign

It was into this maelstrom of difficulties and indecision that Henry Brougham took his seat in the House of Commons in 1810. Brougham's initial reluctance to join the Whigs becomes clearer in the light of their own failings, yet his role in the struggling party would be of enormous importance. For it was only Brougham and other younger Whigs who understood the significance of gaining popular support in their effort to challenge the Tories, and it would be they who would take advantage of the changing opinion in the nation during the last years of the Napoleonic Wars.[28]

During the long war, Tory support was sustained largely because of its strong appeal to church, king and constitution. Yet by 1810 this appeal began to weaken as a renewed demand for reform began to re-emerge in the provinces. Not only had

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[27]Horner, Memoirs and Correspondence, 2: 462; O'Gorman, The Emergence of the British Two-Party System, 40-41; Roberts, The Whig Party, chapter five.

[28]Roberts, The Whig Party, 296.

the war dragged on for nearly two decades but the prosecution of such a long conflict required massive new taxation and a government whose intrusions into the lives of ordinary people were greater than at any time in the nation's history. Additionally, the war helped to cause inflation and instability in the nation's currency, an instability which forced the suspension of cash payments after 1797, a policy which was greatly resented in the countryside.[29]

Many people, moreover, particularly in the industrializing Midlands and the North, began to oppose the war on ideological grounds. To these "Friends of Peace," as they were called, the war had failed to achieve any of its earlier objectives and had become an excuse for maintaining a repressive regime at home. These "Friends of Peace" not coincidentally also re-opened the issue of parliamentary reform, convinced that the war had also demonstrated the immense corruption at Westminster.[30]

Encapsulating this renewed reform vigor was the trade issue. As the campaign to repeal the Orders-in-Council in 1808 had shown, the system of trade retaliation had the

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[29]Francois Crouzet, "The Impact of the French Wars on the British Economy," in Dickinson, Britain and the French Revolution, 199-227; P.K. O'Brian, "Public Finance in the Wars with France, 1793-1815," Ibid., 165-187.

[30]Dickinson, British Radicalism, 66-68. Ian Christie, War and Revolution (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 296-303. For a fuller examination of the so-called "Friends of Peace" see J.E. Cookson, The Friends of Peace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

potential at least to explode into a provincial-wide popular movement, though it had not lived up to that expectation in 1808. By 1811-1812, however, economic conditions throughout the nation, and particularly in the industrial North, had worsened to the point where more provincial leaders were taking greater notice of the Orders and their effects.

Since there was unquestionably a re-emergence of reform sentiment in the nation by 1812, what were the Whigs willing to do to capitalize on it? Left to the moribund Whig leadership, very little. Neither Grey nor Grenville, Ponsonby nor Tierney would ally themselves with the "Friends of Peace" nor with those like Burdett and Cartwright who demanded parliamentary reform, a course far too radical for their moderate views. Thus, as Francis Jeffrey noted to Francis Horner, the Whig leadership sat stranded in the middle between the "timid, sordid, selfish worshippers of power and adherents of the Court, and the dangerous, discontented, half mischievous advocates for reform and innovation," unable to act because they were "utterly inefficient, and incapable of ever becoming efficient."[31]

Although the Whig leadership's personal experience with merchants and manufacturers was extremely limited, they could, however, support in clear conscience, repeal of the Orders-in-Council. The growing unpopularity of the measures in the countryside and even within the ranks of the Tories themselves

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[31]Horner, Memoirs and Correspondence, 2: 13

and the threat of war with the United States made opposition to the odious restrictions a natural course of action for Grenville and Grey. Little did the leadership realize, however, that in supporting Brougham and his determined effort to force repeal on the Tories they would actually achieve a major victory as a united opposition party and that this victory would in so many respects launch the future course for the Whig party.[32]

Despite support for repeal of the Orders-in-Council, neither Grey and Grenville prepared a strategy to challenge the Perceval government. Instead they completely relinquished the Whig response on the issue to Brougham, even though he had only been a member of the House of Commons for less than two years. In doing this, they were not only re-enforcing their antipathy and even suspicion of out-of-doors political campaigns, but they were also, in a curious way, exposing their own supine leadership and recognizing the capabilities of the younger Whigs in the party. For Brougham this was an opportunity to re-awaken acquaintances he had made in 1808 and

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[32]Among those Tories who had early doubts about the Orders-in-Council was the Earl of Bathurst, President of the Board of Trade in the Portland and Perceval ministries. Not only did he doubt the wisdom of granting licenses but he warned Perceval of the possible consequences of a war with the United States. Ironically, although Perceval was publicly staunchly committed to the restrictions, even he tried to moderate the measures in a way which would prevent popular agitation or war with the United States. See Historical Manuscripts Commission, Report of the Manuscripts of the Earl of Bathurst (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1923), 69; Grey, Spencer Perceval, 169-171.

to use his considerable skills as a journalist in the cause. In February of 1812 he again took up the pen against the Orders-in-Council in the pages of the Edinburgh Review in an article entitled "Disputes with America." There Brougham lambasted the government's trade policy, in effect opening his campaign against the Orders.[33]

In this article Brougham reiterated points he had emphasized since the beginning of the system of trade restrictions in 1806. He denied that this war posed a greater danger to Britain than previous conflicts and that therefore there was no inherent right to ignore established international law. Then he proceeded step by step to dismantle the Orders-in-Council, arguing that by Britain's own precedent the trade restrictions were illegal. First, the inability to enforce a full blockade over the territory specified in the Orders was, he said, in direct conflict with the rights of neutral nations. "The power of each party to execute his intentions, appear to be this natural limit [to the right of blockade]. Each belligerent should be strictly confined to such a blockade only as he has actual means of enforcing."[34]

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[33]"The Crisis of the Dispute with America," Edinburgh Review 19 (February 1812): 290-317; New, The Life of Henry Brougham, 60; Stewart, Henry Brougham, 72. It should be pointed out that all of the authors of the review articles were technically anonymous. Yet the author of influential articles was always known and Brougham's authorship of this article is unquestionable.

[34]"Disputes with America," 298.

Next, Brougham attacked the license system established by the Orders-in-Council which allowed trade with the enemy as long as special licenses were obtained, yet restricted the right of continental trade by neutral nations such as the United States. This, Brougham argued, negated any retaliatory effect the trade restrictions were supposed to have against Napoleon. What was created instead, he argued, was a monopoly on trade with the continent for British shippers "and this conduct was both contrary to the rule which it pretended to follow, and wholly incapable of either making the neutral cease to acquiesce in the enemy's illegal proceedings, or compelling the enemy to abandon those measures."[35]

Finally, Brougham reiterated the disaster that would befall Britain if a war with the United States occurred. Not only would it be provoked by Britain's illegal activities but it would only magnify the distress and discontent already experienced throughout the countryside. Here Brougham offered a hint as to the course of action he would recommend and that he in the end followed:

> We now must allow that the people alone can extricate the country from its difficulties; and that it would be idle to seek for a check of the pernicious system of the court and its ministers from any other quarter than the public voice. That voice, if firmly, yet peacefully raised, is, we know, irresistible. It has awed the most undaunted--steadied the most capricious--and disconcerted the most perfidious

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[35]Ibid., 304.

> princes. It has been found more than a match for monarchs, whose courage, seconded by the decent regularities of their private life, and upheld by talents of no ordinary description, seemed well fitted to overpower the liberties of their subjects, and to establish a dominion in which the royal will might prevail, uncontrolled by the sentiments or wishes of the community. Even against such an influence we have no doubt that it may still make itself heard with effect; and assuredly it can have nothing to dread from a conflict (if in the course of ages such conflicts should await it) with adversaries of different description. Let this voice but interfere . . . and peace with our brethren in America may still be maintained.[36]

After opening up the argument over the Orders-in-Council with his pen, Brougham then turned to the provinces and to the networks of support for the repeal campaign that were materializing. There is little doubt from reading his correspondence or even his autobiography that Brougham orchestrated the provincial response to the Orders-in-Council. While the cause of repeal was undoubtedly popular and became more so throughout the spring of 1812, Brougham did help the campaign through his management efforts. Through letters written to William Roscoe, Thomas Thornely of Liverpool and Thomas Attwood and Richard Spooner of Birmingham, Brougham kept the movement focused thus helping to turn provincial politics into a national campaign.[37]

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[36]Ibid., 292

[37]For more specific discussions of Brougham's management in the provinces see Chapters Two and Three.

Although Brougham and his correspondents avoided publicity about his involvement in provincial organization, it is clear that Brougham's influence was enormous. As early as November, 1811, Thomas Thornely, a prominent merchant and organizer of the Liverpool petitioning effort, sought Brougham's advice about the issues which should be raised in the petition. Brougham responded recommending that "whatever shows the local effects of the orders on the town of Liverpool ought to be put forward" and that the organizers should take care in demonstrating that the repeal effort came within their own community and not from Westminster.[38]

Brougham continued to advise the Liverpudlians on strategy throughout the spring of 1812, suggesting that they emphasize the devastating local effects of a possible war with America and urging them to condemn the license system set up by the Perceval government. Brougham did not communicate only with Liverpool leaders, however. He exchanged letters with Thomas Attwood and Richard Spooner of Birmingham and in one letter to Thornely he shared a communication he had with the Birmingham repeal deputation, attempting to connect the campaigns in order to present a united provincial-wide front. Thus while it would be inaccurate to say that Brougham went so far as to manipulate support for his repeal effort, his

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[38]Henry Brougham to Thomas Thornely, 14 November 1811, Brougham Papers, University College Library, London.

guiding hand was apparent throughout the provinces in the spring of 1812 and was absolutely necessary for success.[39]

In appealing to the merchants and manufacturers to petition and agitate against the government's policy, Brougham was also participating in a form of popular politics practically unprecedented from a sitting member of the House of Commons. This not only enhanced his reputation as a firebrand but it made him quite controversial with fellow parliamentary members as well. Lord Holland noted that Brougham was "formidable to his enemies . . . serviceable to his cause and occasionally popular out of doors." "The House did not like him," Holland concluded, "but they always feared and sometimes admired him."[40]

Brougham's growing support was so great that on 3 March 1812 he brought forth a motion before the House of Commons to create a select committee to investigate the consequences of the Orders-in-Council. Although the motion failed by seventy-two votes the closeness of the vote demonstrated the government's weakness on this issue, and the victory achieved over Brougham's motion was clearly a hollow one since it was

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[39]See Henry Brougham to Thomas Thornely, 22 November 1811, 18 February 1812, 9 March 1812, Brougham Papers; Thomas Thornely to Henry Brougham, 11 March 1812, Brougham Papers; Richard Spooner to Henry Brougham, 8 May 1812, Brougham Papers; Thomas Attwood to Henry Brougham 15 July 1812, 3 August 1812, 10 August 1812, Brougham Papers; Henry Brougham to William Roscoe, n.d., Roscoe Papers; William Roscoe to Henry Brougham 11 March 1812, Roscoe Papers.

[40]Holland, Memoirs of the Whig Party, 2: 46.

guaranteed to be only the first round in a continuing struggle. "The debate was sufficiently animated," Robert Plummer Ward, Tory member of Parliament, wrote in his diary on the night of 3 March; "and lasted until five in the morning. . . Canning, [who defended the Orders for the Tories] failed and failed so wofully [sic] that not even any gilding could be derived from his oratory to hide the dirt . . . His next procedure was to plunge into a sea of inconsistencies, little short of falsehood, or at least no man in the House believed." Ward further admitted to his diary that they had won the division only because of the great effort of the "country gentlemen who came up on purpose to vote."[41]

Indeed, the 3 March motion, though a failure for Brougham, was only the opening salvo in his renewed repeal effort, for an examination of the parliamentary debates reveals that the next months were occupied with the question of the efficacy of the trade restrictions. Petitions poured into the House of Commons and the House of Lords and each was read and debated. Not only did Brougham keep the pressure on the government, but more importantly he forced them into

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[41]Robert Plummer Ward, Memoirs of the Political and Literary Life of Plummer Ward, ed., Edmund Phipps, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1850), 1: 445, 450. See also New, The Life of Henry Brougham. 60; Brougham, The Life and Times, 2: 15.

constant debate and defense of measures that were an admitted central element of their wartime policy.[42]

The petitions and the pressure succeeded. On 28 April 1812 the Perceval government reluctantly approved the creation of a Committee of the Whole House to examine the Orders-in-Council. In repeating the tactics used in 1808, Brougham showed himself a master in the use of popular pressure. One-hundred witnesses were brought in from every major industrial center and for six weeks the business of Parliament focused solely on this issue which captured the attention of capital and the provinces alike.

Brougham, with the support of provincial leaders like Roscoe, Attwood and Josiah Wedgwood II, carried on the investigation relentlessly. When Spencer Perceval was assassinated on 11 May 1812, Brougham refused to consider a delay in the proceedings and his obstinance was greeted with derision by many members of Parliament. Lord Holland admiringly wrote that he "braved the censure of enemies and shocked the more timid and more gentle of his friends, by resolutely insisting, without regard to the feelings of individuals or the convenience of the Government, on the immediate relinquishment of the Orders-in-Council, before Mr. Perceval was cold in his grave."[43]

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[42]For the Parliamentary debates relating to the question of the Orders-in-Council see Hansard's Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 1st ser., vol. 23 (1812).

[43]Holland, Memoirs of the Whig Party, 2: 132.

In the end, of course, Brougham triumphed. On 16 June he made one of the most noted parliamentary speeches of his entire career, urging that the Orders-in-Council be rescinded. After again summing up the evidence presented by the witnesses brought before the Committee of the Whole House, the distress suffered because of the Orders-in-Council, and the deteriorating relationship with the United States, Brougham concluded by once again demanding an immediate recision:

> The advice which I tender is not the same which has at all times been offered to this country. There is one memorable era in our history, when other uses were made of our triumphs from those which I recommend. By the treaty of Utrecht, which the execrations of ages have left inadequately censured, we were content to obtain as the whole price of Ramillies and Blenheim, an additional share of the accursed slave trade. I give you other counsels. I would have you employ the glory which you have won at Talavera and Corunna, in restoring your commerce to its lawful, open, honest course; and rescue it from the mean and hateful channels in which it has lately been confined. And if any thoughtless boaster in America or elsewhere should vaunt that you had yielded through fear, I would not bid him wait until some new achievement of our arms put him in silence, but I would counsel you in silence to disregard him.[44]

Brougham's grandiloquent address need never have been given. On the same day, Castlereagh announced that the Orders-in-Council were being abandoned and on 23 June they were

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[44]Henry Brougham, Speeches of Henry Lord Brougham, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1838), 1: 462.

repealed. The normally disunited Whig opposition, now behaving like a united party, openly cheered.

5. Conclusion

During the long and difficult journey in the creation of the two-party system in Britain, it is certainly true that the Orders-in-Council repeal campaign has not received much attention and its importance should not be exaggerated. After all, victory did not end Tory rule or aristocratic domination or even prevent a war with the United States. For all of Brougham's success he failed in his attempt to win a parliamentary seat from Liverpool in October of 1812 and was out of the House of Commons for the next four years. In fact, before that failed election, a Tory ministry had been formed under the Earl of Liverpool that lasted until 1827, an astonishing fifteen years.

Yet the repeal campaign, though generally neglected by historians, was a key episode in the transition from political factions to political parties in the early nineteenth century. Victory over "traditional" England, that is agricultural, mercantile, and imperial England was achieved by the new coalition of industrial merchants and manufacturers who, though largely unable to cast a vote, nevertheless made their voices heard. Walter Bagehot noted that until the debate over the Orders-in-Council "men hardly knew how powerful our

trading classes had become." In the future, few would have an occasion to ever forget.[45]

Moreover, in adopting popular political mobilization as the means to achieve repeal, Brougham was not only foreshadowing the future by abandoning the polite conventions typical in British political life, but he was also creating an important new constituency in a more united Whig party, the middle class and its merchants and manufacturers who found in Brougham and then in his party spokesmen who understood their concerns and fought against the opposition within Parliament and within the Whig ranks itself.[46]

Finally, the success of the Orders-in-Council repeal campaign over entrenched attitudes in Parliament again revealed the ability of political mobilization and extra-parliamentary activity to affect governmental policy at Westminster even without the power of a widespread franchise. Without the vote and without clear political parties to direct the repeal effort, the populace nevertheless spoke with a voice which would echo in the great parliamentary reform efforts of the 1830s.

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[45]Norman St. John-Stevas, ed., Bagehot's Historical Essays (New York: New York University Press, 1966), 117; Clive Emsley, British Society and the French Wars, 1793-1815 (London: Macmillan, 1979), 166.

[46]Stewart, Henry Brougham, 74.

CONCLUSION

PETITIONING, POLITICAL MOBILIZATION, AND THE ORDERS-IN COUNCIL

Petitioning, as a major component in the politicization of Britain in the eighteenth century, has only recently received attention by historians. Although the mechanics of petitioning have been widely explored, specific national petitioning campaigns have been largely relegated to a description of the petitioners' demands buried in works dealing with larger political or social issues.[1]

It is only recently in the works of John Phillips[2] and James Bradley[3] that a fuller explanation of the role of petitioning in participatory politics in pre-reform Britain

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[1]Works on petitioning concentrate most heavily on the mechanics of petitioning. See David Judge "Public Petitioning and the House of Commons," Parliament Affairs 31 (1978): 391-405; Robert L. Nicholas, "Surrogate for Democracy: Nineteenth Century British Petitioning," The Maryland Historian 5 (1974): 43-52; Colin Leys, "Petitioning in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," Political Studies 3 (1955): 45-64.

[2]John Phillips, "Popular Politics in unreformed England," Journal of Modern History 52 (December 1980): 599-625.

[3]James Bradley, Popular Politics and the American Revolution in England (Macon, Ga: Mercer University Press, 1986).

has begun to emerge. Both of their studies rightly show how petitioning served as a voice for the franchised and the unfranchised, giving them a vehicle for expressing their opinions to Crown and Parliament and providing an opportunity for mobilization of a community or for an entire region. In this way the scope of the political nation was extended, particularly in times of national crisis when the populace could demonstrate to the government its support or opposition to national policy. For Bradley, the petitions against the American Revolution signed by thousands of Britons provides a very potent early example of popular agitation against a governmental policy and demonstrates the political awareness of the British populace in an era where most historians deny such awareness. In examining the contents of these parliamentary and crown petitions, Bradley not only demonstrates that they are important in gauging public opinion on national issues (such as the American Revolution) but he also shows quite forcefully that the "political nation," that is those who were aware of national issues and expressed their opinions in some overt manner, was clearly made up of more than just the enfranchised.[4]

In his seminal article on petitioning, Phillips concludes that it was also a major component of popular politics in unreformed Britain. In examining petitioning campaigns that occurred throughout the late eighteenth century, Phillips

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[4]Bradley, Popular Politics, passim.

maintains that the number of electors and non-electors signing petitions was almost equal, particularly in larger parliamentary boroughs. Again this shows that the "political nation" consisted of more than just those who held the privilege of voting and that this "political nation" was growing in awareness. Moreover, Phillips concludes, contrary to assertions made by earlier historians the lack of parliamentary representation did not prevent boroughs from actively participating in debates on subjects of national importance. Growing industrial cities like Birmingham did not let political debate pass them by just because they lacked direct representation and petitioning was an effective way to insure that their concerted voices were heard. By the end of the eighteenth century, Phillips points out, "administration and opposition alike were being forced to take greater interest in mobilized public opinion and the means through which it could be mobilized."[5]

It is the role of petitioning as a powerful and effective means of participatory community politics that this study has sought to explore. In examining the debate over the trade

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[5]Phillips, "Popular Politics," 616. John Money in his work on late eighteenth century Birmingham has also drawn some of the same conclusions. While he does not concentrate heavily on petitioning, like Phillips and Bradley he does define politics broadly including local clubs, coffee houses, taverns, and the press in his matrix of political organizations and sources for mobilization. In this way he shows both greater awareness and participation than thought possible by previous historians. See John Money, Experience and Identity: Birmingham and the West Midlands, 1760-1800 (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1977).

restrictions promulgated by the government through a series of Orders-in-Council, not only have Bradley's and Phillips' broad assertions about petitioning been sustained but an understanding of the petitioning process has also been extended by exploring the role of political mobilization in specific communities which sent petitions against the Orders-in-Council.

1. Historiography

In the broad context of participatory politics, this study has also added to the recent revisionist work carried on by Frank O'Gorman, John Phillips and others who have sought to understand what politics meant in an age before a widespread franchise. In doing so they challenged a view of unreformed political life established in the 1930s and long held by historians who studied late Georgian British political development.

From the 1930s until recent revisionist works, politics in unreformed Britain was largely regarded as a static, unchanging system based on patronage, influence, and corruption. In his very influential works The Structure of Politics at the Ascension of George III and England in the Age of the American Revolution, Sir Lewis Namier maintained that political parties did not exist, ideology played no role in politics, and therefore politics was relegated to the halls of Parliament, where the aristocracy and gentry stubbornly clung

to their self-perpetuating power while grasping at the spoils offered by the equally corrupt crown.[6]

More recently, Namier's theses have been carried on by John Cannon, Ian Christie, and J.C.D. Clark. Cannon's work, which focuses on the continued domination of the aristocracy in eighteenth century politics, also concludes that the populace lacked interest in issues of national importance. "The remarkable thing is not their [the middle class] assertiveness," Cannon writes, " but, from our point of view, their strange submissiveness, their acquiescence in aristocratic rule."[7]

Through his research, Ian Christie also lent credence to the "continuity thesis" popularized by Namier. In War and Revolution: Britain 1760-1815, Christie maintains that politics was a closed system controlled exclusively by the aristocracy. The electorate lacked independence and was

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[6]Namier's argument can be found most persuasively in The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1961) and England in the Age of the American Revolution 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1957). In these works, Namier tackles issues of political awareness, ideology and party, dismissing the importance of all three in the political development of mid-eighteenth century England.

[7]John Cannon, Aristocratic Century (Cambridge: Cambridge University Pres, 1984), 87. In this book he addresses the aristocracy's predominant role in the religious, political, social and economic life of eighteenth century Britain. See also Cannon's work Parliamentary Reform: 1640-1832 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1973). Here Cannon maintains that the lack of interest in parliamentary reform in the eighteenth century was the primary cause of its failure.

generally malleable, following their social superiors at election time.[8]

Historians have also looked back to the seventeenth century to discover clues as to the source of eighteenth century political stablity. In his most influential work, The Growth of Political Stability in England: 1675-1725, J.H. Plumb argues that England once experienced a rich contentious, partisan political life during the reign of Queen Anne but that the Hanoverian era witnessed a sharp diminution of that activity as political factions disappeared with the growth of one party government, the exploitation of patronage, and the proscription of political opposition.[9]

More recently the very controversial works of J.C.D. Clark further give credence to the Namierite thesis by labelling the pre-reform Britain (that is before 1832) as an ancien regime with the three pillars of Anglicanism, aristocracy, and monarchy dominating the political and social life of the nation with little or no interference from the politically impotent middle class.[10]

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[8]Ian Christie, Wars and Revolutions: Britain, 1760-1815 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

[9]J.H. Plumb, The Growth of Political Stability in England, 1675-1725 (New York: Macmillan, 1967).

[10]J.C.D. Clark's work is largely a response to the writings of E.P. Thompson, Christopher Hill and others who, in the 1960s, broke new ground in the study of the formation of the working class and the discontinuity brought on by the struggles of the seventeenth century. Clark's thesis of continuity can be most compactly absorbed in Revolution and Rebellion: State and Society in England in the seventeenth and

The Namierite school did not go unchallenged, of course. In the 1960s pioneers in the study of social history like E.P. Thompson have shown that there was far more political activity than previously recognized. The path-breaking nature of their work lay especially in the way they re-focused the concept of politics by demonstrating the powerful popular concern and mobilization over material issues and, in times of crises such as the French Revolution, over ideological issues as well. Thus not only would Thompson and his followers deny that stasis was the defining thread which ran through the eighteenth century but that, in fact, Britain fundamentally changed in that period away from the ancien regime and toward a bourgeois society where class conflict became a part of the political discourse, where political and class awareness was widespread and growing, and where traditional society hung on to power but only through hegemony over the political and judicial systems. Furthermore, George Rude, E.P. Thompson, and John Bohstedt convincingly demonstrate that activities such as riots, often deprecated as the actions of irrational and uneducated men by previous historians, were a form of political activity understood by the participants and the local grandees as well. According to Bohstedt, riots were even an important form of community politics where

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eighteenth centuries (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) and also English Society: Ideology, Social Structure and Political Practice during the Ancien Regime (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

participants mobilized to achieve specific goals and where not only the motives and issues at conflict but also pre-existing memberships enabled people to act collectively.[11]

Thus historians since the 1960s have challenged the notion of eighteenth century continuity and static aristocratic rule on several fronts. These important challenges to the continuity model were also extended by recent historians researching the electoral system of Augustan Britain. Again, as with the historians above, the chief finding was to demonstrate the vitality of the British populace in expressing their collective will and achieving their goals. In this case, the authors examined the unreformed political system, focusing on the very electorate which Namier and his supporters dismissed. John Derry, Nicholas Rogers, Frank O'Gorman, H.T. Dickinson, John Phillips, and John Brewer have all been in the forefront in this revisionist movement and in doing so have revised the notion of eighteenth century venality and exclusion to present a world of much greater political consciousness and awareness.

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[11]Undoubtedly the most important work of the 1960s Marxist historians was E.P. Thompson's The Making of the Working Class (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1963). Here he meticulously traces the threads of relationships throughout the eighteenth century which created the English working class. For George Rude's influential work on the role of crowds see The Crowd in History (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1959). Finally, for John Bohstedt's contribution see Riots and Community Politics in England and Wales, 1790-1820 (New York: Harvard University Press, 1983).

For John Derry, the reign of George III witnessed both political continuity and transformation. While recognizing the continued importance of traditional groups such as the aristocracy, he also sees the emergence and expansion in the early nineteenth century of a new party system based on the ideas established by Tory William Pitt and Whig Charles James Fox. Although the Pittite tradition remained the dominant political force from the 1780s until the 1820s, it was not a system in stasis. In fact, Derry notes that part of the Pittite success was merging traditional ideals about aristocratic rule, crown prerogative, and belief in limited, consensual government with a recognition of the need to respond to the emerging merchants and manufacturers and an acknowledgement of the changing nature of the economic structure in Britain during this important transitional period. Political alignments existed, he concludes, and the whole world of parliamentary politics was a great deal messier and more party-oriented than previously imagined.[12]

In their examination of the emergence of the British two party system in the same period, Frank O'Gorman and John Phillips go the next step beyond Derry to demonstrate that the appellations of Whig and Tory were appropriate party labels by the beginning of the nineteenth century; though embryonic political parties did exist. While the Whigs, led by Charles

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[12]John W. Derry, Politics in the Age of Fox, Pitt and Liverpool (London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1990).

James Fox, Earl Grey ,and Lord Grenville, had great difficulties overcoming the powerful Pittite political domination, nevertheless, political parties had emerged by the beginning of the nineteenth century even if they still had a long way to go in becoming true national parties.

More important than the rise of party, however, was O'Gorman's and Phillips' revisionist views of popular political participation. Both of these historians have led the way in showing that the political system, while imperfect and tainted with venality, was never closed and never fully controlled by the aristocracy. In fact, the wide variations in qualification for franchise meant that while some boroughs had a very narrow number of voters, some were quite open and contests, when they occurred, could be fractious. In fact, Phillips shows statistically that in the very period labelled static by Namier and his followers (1760-1780) the number of contested elections actually rose. Phillips concludes that "electoral politics played an increasingly important role in the political system during the reign of George III and to neglect its importance is to misinterpret the political environment of unreformed England."[13]

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[13]John A. Phillips, "The Structure of Electoral Politics in Unreformed England," Journal of British Studies 19 (Fall 1980): 76, 90-92. For a more detailed exploration of his theses about popular politics in the late eighteenth century see Electoral Behavior in Unreformed England: Plumpers, Splitters and Straights (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982.)

In his latest work on the unreformed electorate, O'Gorman demonstrates convincingly that not only was the unreformed electorate politically aware but that they required constant attention from the elected officials who could not count on their being "mindless fodder for venal agents." In addition, while the voters demonstrated their ability to remain independent in the face of attempts at control, they did practice their politics within a communal framework, where certain activities such as petitioning took on specific community meaning and where responses to issues depended largely on community, not national interests. Altogether, O'Gorman leaves little doubt that the debate over the existence of widespread political participation should be put to rest. "The unreformed electorate was no less powerfully influenced by movements and reactions against the oligarchy: the rise of extra-parliamentary opinion, the abiding and near-universal phenomena of electoral independence and anti-patronage revolts, the development of radical opinions within the electorate and the elusive and partial, but none the less widespread, growth of the force and influence of parliamentary party."[14]

Finally, Nicholas Rogers in his most recent study, Whigs and Cities: Popular Politics in the Age of Walpole and Pitt,

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[14]Frank O'Gorman, Voters, Patrons, and Parties: The Unreformed Electorate of Hanoverian England, 1734-1832 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1989), 384. See also his work The Emergence of the British Two-Party System (London: Edward Arnold, Ltd., 1982).

carries the idea of widespread participatory politics back before the reign of George III to the early Hanoverians. Examining the role of cities in the political life of the nation, Rogers comes to many of the same conclusions as O'Gorman and Phillips. First, he demonstrates that there was far more political activity in the early eighteenth century than previously recognized by historians. The electorate, especially in large boroughs, were neither passive nor ignorant and had a political awareness which stretched beyond their local boundaries; the political stability claimed by Plumb, therefore, did not exist. Like O'Gorman and Phillips, Rogers also recognizes the existence of political parties, most particularly for this early period, the Tory party, an important conclusion considering the long-held belief in the demise of Toryism after the failed Jacobite rising during the early Hanoverian period. Finally, Rogers maintains that although his period did not witness the full-blown development of middle class participation in British politics, there was a growing middling presence in these cities which registered their strong dislike of political oligarchy and aristocratic decadence. Altogether, Rogers sets out to show that popular participatory politics was an important aspect of early Hanoverian political sociology and that late eighteenth

century developments in this area were a continuation of not a break from this pattern.[15]

To suggest that political parties and popular political participation existed in unreformed Britain, however, does not explain how voters and the unenfranchised expressed their political opinion. In other words, did they exercise their votes haphazardly or was their political consciousness based on specific ideology? O'Gorman argues that by the end of the eighteenth century voters mobilized around both parochial and national issues including the American Revolution, the Wilkite affair and, of course, the French Revolution. Thus, according to O'Gorman, "the capacity of electors in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to mobilize around issues of parochial concern was matched by their growing sensitivity to issues with a 'national' or parliamentary reference."[16]

John Brewer and H.T. Dickinson also deal with this important issue. For these two historians, popular politics gained much of its impetus from important events that occurred during the reign of George III. An expanding press in London and in the provinces and a loosening of restrictions against parliamentary reporting united the country politically in ways never before possible. In addition, movements like the Wilkite agitation of the 1760s, the American Revolution in the

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[15]Nicholas Rogers, Whigs and Cities: Popular Politics in the Age of Walpole and Pitt (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1989).

[16]O'Gorman, Voters, Patrons and Parties, 285.

1770s, and the loyalist movement of the 1790s produced powerful symbols and slogans important in mobilizing and shaping ideology. Thus the franchised and the unenfranchised were politically aware and they exercised their political awareness through voting, petitioning, through local political parties, and through the local press. John Money, in his examination of Birmingham in the late eighteenth century, would seem to caution, however, that the recognition of awareness of national political issues should not blind historians to the essentially local character of political participation and ideology, a caution which is wholeheartedly shared by O'Gorman. The experience and identity of the locale was all-important for an understanding of how people reacted to national events.[17]

This short historiographical survey then draws attention to some very important new revelations about participatory politics in unreformed Britain. Rather than viewing the populace as uninterested, helpless, and apolitical, these historians collectively demonstrate that even within the framework of a limited franchise and strenuous efforts at control by local elites, the political nation was growing in awareness and in literacy, and was developing a national political consciousness as well.

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[17]John Brewer, Party, Ideology and Popular Politics at the Ascension of George III (London: Cambridge University Press, 1976); H.T. Dickinson, British Radicalism and the French Revolution, 1789-1815 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985); John Money, Experience and Identity, passim.

2. Final Conclusions

The petitioning campaign to repeal the Orders-in-Council corroborates much of the work of these revisionist historians. While the political mobilization which occurred as a result of the trade restrictions of the Orders-in-Council involved electoral politics only in a very few instances (such as Liverpool), it is clear that many of the assumptions made about electoral politics and popular participation are true for petitioning as well.

First, as important as the issue at hand (the trade restrictions and the economic depression) was the network of support that was built in organizing the petitioning campaign. Political mobilization meant that mechanisms, not just issues like opposition to trade restrictions, were at the center of the capacity of these communities to express their grievances. It was clear from reading transcriptions of the parliamentary investigation into the Orders-in-Council conducted in the spring of 1812 that many supporters of the petitioning drives understood little if anything about the complex trade restrictions. While the economic hardships experienced in the spring of 1812 were the catalyst for the opposition, equally important were the webs of relationships which made petitioning possible. In cities like Liverpool, for example, a network of support grew around relationships decades old and deeply rooted in past conflicts. The Dissenter meeting hall, the local political club, and the corporation were the loci of

political mobilization. In Birmingham the network was more fragile. It was built around familial relationships and generational ties, with the rising young merchants and manufacturers challenging an old bourgeoisie elite. The network in Birmingham was itself built by the petitioning campaign and was sustained beyond the campaign into the post-war period. In both cases, the economic issue around which they all based their opposition to the Orders-in-Council was only a very small part of the political mobilization. Religious issues, corporation and anti-corporation loyalties, and even generational alignments all played an equally important role in the political mobilization which made the petitioning campaign a success in these cities. In short, people mobilized by groups, not as individuals making decisions based solely on the opposition to the trade restrictions.

Moreover, the issue of trade restrictions was not enough by itself to guarantee support. The communal nature of politics, as O'Gorman has so well pointed out, was as important in the petitioning process as it was to electoral politics. Mancunian merchants certainly suffered as much as Liverpudlian shippers from the cut-off of trade with the United States but the community environment was not conducive to building a network of support for petitioning because of a series of important circumstances, specifically the disintegration of Manchester reform movements in the late

eighteenth century, the lack of a merchant and manufacturing network, and the existence of working class militancy, which threatened the middle class. Therefore, Manchester lacked the networks of political mobilization within the merchant and manufacturing community necessary to sustain a petitioning campaign. Thus all three of the provincial city studies demonstrate that whom one petitioned with was just as important or even more important than what one was petitioning for.

Second, this study reveals that there was a very high degree of political awareness and national political consciousness. This consciousness was sustained and extended in several ways. One of the most important at the provincial level was the provincial newspaper. After closely examining provincial newspapers, editorials, and letters to the editor, one simply cannot sustain the idea of the British populace as "mindless fodder." While it is probably true that few understood the full complexities of the Orders-in-Council, the petitioning campaign brought out very powerful issues both local and national, including local venality and parliamentary reform. Not only did the provincial editors spread the news of the local petitioning effort but through various methods of reportage they created a national campaign by relating news of other petitioning campaigns and the activities at Westminster. The local press was a crucial link in the process of political mobilization for both petitioning and electoral politics.

According to O'Gorman, it was the provincial newspaper which began to "reflect and thus encourage, a vigorous local political life."[18]

The merchants and manufacturers, who undoubtedly led these provincial campaigns, also demonstrated their awareness and increasing demand for political power to match their commercial power. One of the most powerful sub-themes of the petitions no doubt was the demand that provincial economic interests be heard and, in fact, it is clear that the defeat of the government on this issue was a turning point in merchant and manufacturer organization and agitation. Nowhere can this be better demonstrated than in the vigorous debate over free trade which emerged during the petitioning campaign. In re-opening the continuous issue of free trade and arguing for its importance to the growth of the British Empire, the merchants and manufacturers of Britain were also developing their ideology and defending their position as important producers of wealth in a country that still concentrated its political power in the hands of the landed aristocracy. The Orders-in-Council repeal campaign helped to shape ideals which were to last far beyond this single petitioning effort. In this regard, then, the repeal campaign can also be seen as an important moment in the creation of middle class

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[18]O'Gorman, Voters, Patrons, and Parties, 289.

consciousness, a consciousness which was to assert itself even more potently in 1831-1832.[19]

The Orders-in-Council repeal campaign also brought to the forefront men who, in a later generation, would be the leaders of reform in their provincial cities and the campaign was thus an important step in their political maturation. Thomas Thornely (Liverpool), Richard Spooner (Birmingham), Joshua Scholefield (Birmingham), and, of course, Thomas Attwood (Birmingham) all made contributions to reform after the end of the Napoleonic Wars. Many received their earliest political training through the repeal campaigns of 1808 and 1812 and many developed their economic and political ideologies as a part of their participation in those campaigns. There can be little doubt in the case of Attwood, for example, that the power demonstrated by the alliance of middle and working class men during the Orders-in-Council campaign was a great

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[19]In his recent work, A Polite and Commercial People Paul Langford traces the development of middle class consciousness in the eighteenth century. At the center of his thesis is the assertion that commerce broadly construed to mean not just trade but commerce with all of its ancillary components (political ideals, international relations and war, attitudes and values of those engaged in this commercial life) was the focal point of the changes which occurred in eighteenth century Britain. "Commerce not only expressed the peculiar modernity of the Hanoverian age, it also indicated the problems which preoccupied contemporaries and the uncertainties which clouded their confidence." Commerce and commercial concerns then helped create middle class consciousness in this period as commerce shaped the consciousness of the middle class merchants and manufacturers in the Orders-in-Council repeal campaign. See Paul Langford, A Polite and Commercial and Commercial People: England, 1727-1783 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1989), 2-3.

influence on his later work in behalf of the Birmingham Political Union.

The petitioning effort, which was managed, through not orchestrated, by Henry Lord Brougham in London, also provided an important moment of crystallization in the creation of political parties. After the death of Pitt and Fox in 1806, political loyalties at Westminster were somewhat in flux. The Whigs in particular lacked credible leadership and a program which could counter even weak ministries like the Tory Portland (1807-1809) and Perceval (1809-1812) governments. While it is certainly true that the Orders-in-Council petitioning effort did not radically alter political life at Westminster, at the same time the adoption of the repeal movement by the Whigs (admitted pushed on by Henry Brougham) led the fractured party into the role it would take after the war: the defender of middle class interests. This shift away from a total reliance on support from Whig landed elites was a major victory for new men in Parliament, like Brougham who came into the House of Commons in 1810. For when he entered Parliament, Grey, Grenville and the other Whig successors to Fox were not only discredited by a failed ministry in 1806 but their lackluster leadership provided no impetus for support by the provincial middle class. Victory in forcing the repeal of a major governmental policy began the fragmented party down the road to an alliance with the middle class, an alliance which would be of great importance in restoring the fortunes

of the Whigs after the Napoleonic Wars. In recognizing this, however, it is also important to realize that even the greatest victory and the accolades of dozens of merchants and manufacturers did not win Brougham a seat in 1812 from Liverpool, a borough whose electorate had close ties with the corporation. In this case it was made clear that national campaigns divorced from community politics were still in the future.

Finally, the Orders-in-Council repeal campaign and the victory over Lord Liverpool's Tory government provided hope to the reformers, to the middle class merchants and manufacturers, and to the war-weary country as a whole that participatory politics could be successful. Even though the government was unnaturally weakened because of the recent assassination of Prime Minister Spencer Perceval, nevertheless, the petitioners did not fail to learn some very important lessons from their victory. The most important lesson learned from the combined efforts of middle class merchants and manufacturers, of course, was that extra-parliamentary pressure could be successful. Although the supporters of repeal faced great odds both from local elites in their provincial cities and from the Tory government at Westminster, they prevailed, forcing a wartime government to abandon one of its key policies. It was not a lesson which would be forgotten, especially in the post-war period when

many of these provincial leaders again sought to pressure Parliament on other important issues.

In the end perhaps the complex web of political mobilization and the community politics described here was summed up most simply and most eloquently in one sentence written by a provincial editor expressing his opinion of the successful campaign: "Thus, at length, has the voice of the people gloriously triumphed over the strange infatuation of the men who preside at the head of affairs."[20] It was only one triumph but it echoed down in the many campaigns of reform which were to follow during the decades ahead.

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[20]Midland Chronicle, 20 June 1812.

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VITA

Anthonette Lynne McDaniel was born in New Market, Virginia on 26 November 1961. She was educated in the public schools in Rockingham County, Virginia. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree from Bridgewater College in 1984, her Master of the Arts from James Madison University in 1987 and her Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in 1992.