

UNITED IRISH, DEFENDERS
AND THE REBELLION OF 1798

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ABSTRACT

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The thesis aims to establish the inter-relationships among the United Irish, the Defenders and the Rebellion of 1798. Chapter I outlines the general political and socio-economic situation of Ireland at the time. The next section summarizes the development of rural protest movements after 1760 and details the emergence of the Defenders. Chapter III describes the foundation and rise of the United Irish as a mainly urban reform movement, its suppression by the government, its rebirth as a revolutionary conspiracy, and its alliance with the Defenders. The next chapter deals with the maneuvers of the British and Irish authorities, especially the Fitzwilliam crisis, its implications, and the subsequent campaign of terror launched against the disaffected.

Chapter V sets forth the final moves by both the government and the radicals to prepare for the inevitable test of strength. A brief descriptive account of the rebellion is followed by an analysis of the reasons for the failure of the rising. Finally, the last chapter is a brief resumé of the immediate results of the outbreak and its suppression.

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Introduction

It is the purpose of this thesis to establish the inter-relationships among the United Irish, the Defenders and the Rebellion of 1798. In order to achieve this, it has been necessary to delve into a number of areas of research in order to set forth the perspective within which the movements of protest in Ireland developed in the late eighteenth century.

The thesis outlines the socio-economic and political factors which led to the outbreak of the rebellion and includes a descriptive account of the rising itself, which has been kept brief intentionally since some fine accounts of the rebellion are available, notably Thomas Pakenham's The Year of Liberty. The thesis then proceeds to analyse the reasons for the failure of the disaffected in 1798.

Various problems have presented themselves during the course of this study. Perhaps the most important is the divergence of aims between the "leaders" and "followers" prior to and especially during the rebellion, a disharmony reflected in the relationship between the United Irish and the almost purely lower-class, rural Defenders. This leads to the difficulty of establishing the links between the United Irish leaders and some of the Irish and British Whigs just prior to the rising.

In another sense, these same difficulties can be viewed as a conflict between economic-class interests and nationalist-political aspirations as the motivation for rebellion. Moreover, religious sectarianism constantly crops up as a disruptive element, distorting both of the above motivations. Finally, there is the problem of interpreting the intentions of the Irish and British authorities during the last decade of the eighteenth century. These questions underlie the paper, and the attempt to answer them is contained in Chapter VII.

The source material available in Montreal on the subject is extensive, most of it at the McLennan Library of McGill University and the Vanier Library of the Loyola Campus of Concordia University. The most important materials employed in writing this thesis fall into various categories. Among primary sources great reliance has been placed upon the reports of the secret committees of the Irish and British Parliaments (1798-1799), upon the published manuscript collections of the Earls of Charlemont and Carlisle and J.B. Fortescue (Lord Grenville), and upon the Memoirs and Correspondence of Viscount Castlereagh. The collections of documents edited by John T. Gilbert (composed in the main of an "Account of Secret Service Money, 1797-1804" and a selection of the correspondence of Thomas Pelham) and W.H. Crawford and B. Trainor (relating to the socio-economic history of Ulster) have proved invaluable. For the early development of the United Irish I have relied heavily upon The Drennan Letters, and the Proceedings of the Dublin Society of United Irishmen. For the later period and the rebellion itself the most significant sources have been the memoirs of Joseph Holt and William Farrell, as well as the diary of Sir John Moore.

One source of great significance is the Prisoners Petitions and Cases, Volume I (1778-1805), of which I was kindly lent a microfilm copy by my advisor, Professor George Rudé of Concordia University. This was of considerable help in identifying a large number of those arrested and charged with sedition. Other primary sources of note are Howell's collection of State Trials, Cobbett's Parliamentary History and A Collection of State Papers relative to the War against France.

Among secondary sources, the most important to this work has been W.E.H. Lecky's six-volume History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century, as well as the extensive work of R.R. Madden on the United Irishmen and of R.B. McDowell on various aspects of late eighteenth-century Irish history. For the rise of the United Irish, Rosamond Jacob's work proved disappointing, but Hereward Senior's Orangeism

in Ireland and Britain was helpful about rural unrest. With regard to the socio-economic and political background, the works by Edith M. Johnston, K.H. Connell, T.J. Kiernan, L. Cullen, Maureen Wall and David Large cited in the bibliography were indispensable. Thomas Moore's biography of Lord Edward Fitzgerald was also useful. For the details of the rebellion itself I relied upon the contemporary histories of George Taylor (highly favorable to the Protestant Ascendancy cause) and J.B. Gordon, and the recent account by Thomas Pakenham.

It is my hope that this thesis will serve both to enlighten the study of Irish history and of revolutionary movements in general. I believe that it points to the fundamentally socio-economic origins of the Rebellion of 1798 and that its political objectives were distorted by sectarian passion to which the actions of the British-dominated Ascendancy materially contributed. The rebellion failed partly because the revolutionary leaders rarely led, partly because religious bigotry diverted much of the energy of the insurgents, and partly because the power of a foreign nation, Great Britain, was thrown behind the tottering Anglo-Irish Ascendancy.

1. See Donald McCartney, "The writing of history in Ireland, 1800-50", Irish Historical Studies, X: 352-5, 360-1.

Chapter I: The English Connection

Ireland late in the eighteenth century was in theory a monarchy whose sovereign happened to be the same as that of Great Britain. In fact, it was a dependent colony, ruled indirectly by the British cabinet through a Viceroy and the "Ascendancy" of planted British and Scots settled on the island during the previous three hundred years, principally through the efforts of James I and Cromwell. The first confiscated well over a million acres of Irish land, mainly in Ulster,¹ while Cromwell's policy resulted in an even more drastic redistribution: 50% or more of the land changed hands in seventeen counties and 33% or more in another ten; these changes were concentrated in the other three provinces.² This policy left Ireland not only politically dependent, but internally divided along national and religious lines which usually coincided. The Penal Laws against Catholics and the trade restrictions imposed upon the country, as well as the corrupt and inefficient system of government necessary to maintain the semblance of independence without ceding the reality, worsened a situation already rife with the probability of violence.

The Socio-Economic Structure

The population of Ireland by 1780, while estimated by contemporaries at between 2,500,000 and 3,000,000, was probably closer to 4,000,000.³ During the last decades of the century it increased rapidly, almost certainly passing the five million mark well before the end of the century.⁴

1. Thomas Mac Nevin, The History of the Volunteers of 1782 (Dublin, n.d.), pp. 28-9

2. Karl S. Bottigheimer, English Money and Irish Land (Oxford, 1971), pp. 214-5

3. K.H. Connell, The Population of Ireland (London, 1950), pp. 4, 25

4. Ibid. p. 25. Connell estimates the Irish population at 4,753,000 in 1791; the Census of 1821 reported the population as 6,802,000.

The major reason for the almost astonishing growth of the Irish population during this period - and the trend continued until the Famine - was earlier marriage, made possible by a complex set of factors. Irish agriculture, due to market pressures and British legislation, had before 1780 become dominated by pasturage, which necessitated relatively large tracts of land for the sustenance of a family. However, after 1780 a return to arable farming set in which allowed for the sub-division of farms - preferable due to rising rents and the desire of younger sons to establish their own families. This, coupled to the adoption of the potato as the staple crop, allowed a farmer to support a family with less capital, and thus at an earlier age.⁵

5. Ibid., p. 90. See also pp. 52, 121, 242-4. The figures establishing the sudden change from pasture to arable farming are remarkable. Exports of wheat rose from 13,358 barrels in 1772-9 to 65,704 in 1780-9; of oats from 95,887 barrels to 210,964 during the same periods; of barley from 22,116 barrels to 76,425; of oatmeal from 51,407 cwt. to 71,833; and of flour from 11,746 cwt. to 49,890. The value of all corn exports rose from £65,000 in 1772-9 to £252,000 in 1780-9: Connell, p. 268. Meanwhile, exports of beef dropped from 187,756 barrels in 1780 to 136,651 in 1785, to 126,994 in 1790, and to 124,607 in 1795; exports of pork fell from 96,554 barrels in 1780 to 58,446 in 1785, but did rise again to 100,266 in 1790 and to 129,922 in 1795; L. Cullen, Anglo-Irish Trade, 1660-1800 (Manchester, 1968) p. 70. Also W.E.H. Lecky, A History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century. (London, 1892), Vol. II, pp. 1-2.

The increase in population, as well as the steady rise in prices during the last decades of the century, led to a spiral of rent increases as land became scarcer and more valuable.⁶ The situation was most serious in Ulster where farms, due to the income derived from piece-work for the linen industry, had already been smaller and the population denser;⁷ on the other hand, Connaught was barely affected by the trend until very late in the century, and there a major factor was the influx of Catholic peasants driven from Ulster by land-hungry Protestants and Presbyterians.⁸

6. Connell, p.69. See also Cullen, pp.24-5. Cullen's argument that these increases were not as drastic as often described is unsubstantiated. For example, the gross rental per annum on the Fitzwilliam estates in Wicklow, Wexford and Kildare increased by 86.3% between 1746 and 1783, and by a further 89.6% by 1815; on the Kenmare estates in Kerry and Limerick the increase was 300% between 1747 and 1796, and a further 80.4% by 1814. But regional factors, and the personality of the owner, were important, and some tenants were more fortunate than others. Thus, the increase on the estates of the liberal Lord Charlemont in Armagh and Tyrone was only 33.8% between 1750 and 1798. Of course, none of these figures are conclusive since they are for gross rental, not individual rents, but they do seem to lend credence to what was certainly believed to be a widespread trend at the time. See David Large, "The Wealth of the greater Irish landowners, 1750-1815, Irish Historical Studies," March 1966, XV: 28-29 and his Appendix.

7. Cullen, p. 9. See also James Barkley Woodburn, The Ulster Scot (London, 1914), p.230

8. J.G. Simms, "Connacht in the eighteenth century", Irish Historical Studies (September, 1958), XI: 119-120.

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The restiveness of the peasant in the face of rising rents was exacerbated by the wretchedness and poverty of his life, and by the distance between himself and his landlord.⁹ The latter situation was inevitable because the landlord and tenant were separated not only by class distinction, but also by land-agents or middle-men (tenants who in their turn rented out part or all of their land).¹⁰ Moreover, many landlords were absentees - their rents in 1773 are estimated at £351,500.¹¹ who were not only as far removed from their tenants as possible, but did little to improve their estates or establish improved farming methods.¹² Thus, while the lot of some of the peasants may have improved during the last decades of the century as general prosperity increased, their life was usually still one of bare subsistence. Moreover, the increasing subdivision of land and rise in population led to a great increase in the number of very poor farmers and farm laborers, and to a good deal of insecurity in land tenure¹³ - a situation not helped by speculators drawn by the prospect of profit due to rising rents.¹⁴

9. Connell, p. 62.

10. Ibid., pp. 62-63, 65-68.

11. Edith M. Johnston, Great Britain and Ireland 1760-1800 (Edinburgh and London, 1963), pp. 404-405.

12. Large, pp. 29, 34. See also Connell, pp. 64-65 and Woodburn, p. 230.

13. Cullen, p. 7 and Connell, pp. 67, 86-7, 187. See also Aspects of Irish Social History 1750-1800, ed. W.H. Crawford and B. Traihor (H.M.S.O., Belfast, 1969), p. xiii (hereafter Aspects). Also Lecky, II: 3-11. The argument of Peter Gibbon, "The origins of the Orange Order and the United Irishmen", Economy and Society, (1972) 1:138 is contradicted by all contemporary sources who stress the importance of middlemen in the last decades of the century.

14. Woodburn, p. 230.

All of this led to a good deal of rural unrest and to an increasingly explosive situation.

Since Ireland was a predominantly rural society,¹⁵ the increasing class conflict among farmers, middlemen and landlords represented a serious threat to social stability. But this conflict existed within an historical perspective which left the parties not only separated, but in two different worlds. The great majority of the people were Catholics - about 70% - and most of these were peasants. About 20% of the population was Presbyterian - almost all farmers or businessmen, while the remainder was Protestant.*

Both of the latter two groups had been planted in the country (for the most part) and were British and Scotch in origin. But it was the Protestants who were the great landlords; only 10% of the population, they owned about 85% of the land.¹⁶ The Presbyterian colony was in Ulster - and there the possibility of conflict between them and the Catholics was very real; however, the Protestants were dominant almost everywhere - they were the Ascendancy who collected the rents, who gave the laws, and to the support of whose church, established by law, everyone had to pay tithes which rose as prices did.¹⁷ Thus the Catholic peasants, disenfranchised and unable to own land due to the Penal Laws, poor, isolated, and increasingly insecure of their future, felt little attachment to the Ascendancy. And the Presbyterian farmers,

15. Cullen, p. 6.

16. William James Mac Neven, Pieces of Irish History (New York, 1807), pp. 8-9. Arthur Young estimated that the Protestants owned 95% of the cultivable land: p. 25

17. Aspects, p. 27

* The word "Protestant", when used in opposition to "Presbyterian", refers in this thesis to the established Church of Ireland.

while afraid of being swamped by the Catholic majority, were nevertheless also resentful of the landlord class. Rising rents and tithes, in fact, gave Catholic and Presbyterian farmers a common grievance against the Ascendancy. Only in Connaught, where many of the landlords were Catholic, was the situation different, since the peasant still felt a personal bond with the gentry. Ironically, this calm was partly shattered when radicalized peasants were driven south by Presbyterians who turned on them rather than on their landlords. The peasants of Connaught, already angered by the introduction of some Protestant colonies, soon became more restive as land became scarcer and rents rose.¹⁸ But while rural unrest was widespread after 1780, no serious threat to the "system" could be launched by these poor, illiterate people whose natural leaders - the gentry - were more often than not their opponents. The leadership must come from elsewhere: from the industrial and commercial middle classes.

The middle classes developed rapidly during the eighteenth century, basing themselves mainly upon the linen industry, trade, and service facilities. The manufacture of linens expanded rapidly during the century, and replaced wool as the principal Irish export. Thus, while linen exports in 1740 amounted to 6,627,772 yards, in 1790 the total was 37,322,126;¹⁹ moreover, by 1788 linen accounted for 70.5% of Ireland's total exports to Britain. By 1798 this figure would drop to 58.2%, as butter, pork and beef exports increased.²⁰ The industry was centered in Belfast and Neury, while much of the work was done by farmers in the adjacent counties of Ulster. Brewing and sugar refining were probably the only other two industries of significance. Trade, on the other hand, was centered in Dublin, as was banking, and finance; Cork, Limerick, Belfast, Neury and Waterford; while significant ports, were on a far smaller scale.²¹ Ireland's major exports were linen;

18. Simms, pp. 116-119.

19. Cullen, p. 60.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 11-12, 77, 79, 92-3, 108, 170, 174.

livestock, and produce, while she imported coal, drapery, sugar, hops, tea, and tobacco.²²

As stated above, the linen industry was centered in Ulster, and was strongest in Antrim, Down, Armagh and Tyrone where the farmers grew the natural product and then wove the cloth. The rest of Ulster, parts of Leinster, and Munster; and most of Connaught were devoted mainly to subsistence or small commodity farming (potatoes, wheat; flax in Ulster). Pasture, however, remained prevalent in large parts of Leinster and Munster, with cattle and pigs being the most common grazers. Apart from the shipping and finance industry of the north and the Dublin region, the coal mines of Kilhenny, and a few other isolated industries, the only other exception to the agricultural nature of Ireland was the fishing and smuggling of the coastal towns, especially those of Connaught. Thus the commercial middle class was centered in a few port cities, especially Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Waterford, and Belfast, as well as the inland linen center, Neury. In the latter two cities most were Presbyterian, while elsewhere they were mainly Catholic, with a large contingent of Protestant and Dissenting merchants in Dublin - some of them English. Except in the north, the richer ones were mainly involved in the export of agricultural products, the import of manufactured goods and luxuries, and finance. The industrialists were a small minority.²³

The development of the Irish economy along these lines was spawned for the most part by the industrial expansion of Britain, which provided a growing market for Irish linen and agricultural production.²⁴ The result was the rapid expansion of the economy:

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 50, 52.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 11-17, 139-142; Gibbon, pp. 139-40; Connell, pp. 119-20.

24. Cullen, pp. 205-6.

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exports rose from L712,497 in 1710 to L1,862,834 in 1750 to L4,855,319 in 1790, while imports were valued at L554,248 in 1710, L1,531,654 in 1750 and L3,829,914 in 1790.²⁵ Moreover, Ireland almost always had a trade surplus during the century, both in general and with Britain. However, the price was an increasing dependancy on the British market, and the loss of others: exports to Britain rose from 50.7% of the total in 1710 to 76.1% in 1790, while British imports increased from 53.9% to 69.5% during the same period.²⁶ Irish merchants came to rely on British credit,²⁷ and the net effect was to tie the Irish economy tightly to that of Britain. Cullen's argument that this was inevitable and beneficial²⁸ is questionable on both points, and while British restrictions on Irish trade may not have been the only factors, they were certainly of significance in limiting the economy, as was the drainage of capital caused by absentee landlords and pensioners, which probably more than offset the trade surplus.²⁹ Ireland did lack natural resources, and her trade was certainly active under British tutelage, but the final result of her dependence on and restriction by Britain, and the drainage of her capital by the Ascendancy, was the limitation and distortion of her economy. Even Lord Buckinghamshire, the Lord Lieutenant in 1779, realized this:

The great leading mischief is the rise of Rents, the whole of which advance is, in addition to the former remittance, drawn from hence by those persons of property who never reside here. And this circumstance also operates in a degree with regard to those in general settled in Ireland, who are very much disposed to expend the superfluity of their revenue in foreign countries. 30

25. *Ibid.*, p. 45

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 17, 45, 179

27. *Ibid.*, p. 98

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 205-6

29. See Connell, p. 65. An example of the degree to which absentee and other landlords tended to "pocket" their money is given by Charlemont whose rents between 1798 and 1800 totalled L35,224, of which sum he kept L31,282: Large, p.34. See also Johnston, pp. 246-8.

30. Lord Buckinghamshire to Lord Weymouth, May 28, 1779, quoted in Johnston, p. 247.

Since the Protestant landlords rarely got involved in business, the Irish middle classes developed primarily among the Presbyterian and other Dissenting groups, especially the Quakers.³¹ However, despite Cullen's doubts, Maureen Wall seems to establish that a thriving community of middle-class Catholics did develop during the century, taking advantage of their other disabilities to concentrate on trade and avoid extravagance.³² The Catholics benefitted from connections with merchants in Europe, as the Dissenters did with merchants in Britain and America, who shared their religion.³³ Thus the emerging middle classes, with connections in Europe and America, and almost all without links with the Ascendancy, were sympathetic to criticism of the corrupt system of government, annoyed by the periodic restrictions on Irish trade imposed by British policy, and suited to lead a movement for reform, or - should the right circumstances arise - even revolution. Thus the government feared that the mass of the people would indeed find the leadership they lacked in the shops and offices of Dublin, Belfast, and Cork.

31. Cullen, pp. 23, 93 and p. 232.

32. Maureen Wall, "The rise of a catholic middle class in eighteenth-century Ireland", Irish Historical Studies, (September, 1958) XI:102-3. For Cullen's partial disagreement, see Cullen, p. 23.

33. Wall, pp. 112-4. Also Cullen, pp. 92-3. The richest merchant in the last decade of the century, Edward Byrne, was a Catholic: Wall, pp. 2-3.

Castle Government

The landed, Protestant Ascendancy, whose roots lay in Britain, was not only a socially, but also a politically, dominant group which controlled Irish government. However, being such a small minority, it had to rely on British support to impose its will, just as the latter needed it to keep control of the island. While the Ascendancy did occasionally attempt to gain support for its policies within the country, it more frequently tried to divide the opposition along religious or class lines. It was, in essence, a colony of Britain which in its turn colonized the Irish.³⁴

The reasons for British interest in Ireland were many, but a good summary was given by T.C. Grenville in 1784: "Ireland is too great to be unconnected with us, and too near us to be dependent on a foreign state, and too little to be independent..."³⁵ Thus the maintenance of British rule in Ireland was a fundamental tenet of the Imperial government: moreover, since they saw the existence of the Ascendancy as essential to that end, its continuation was also necessary. Therefore, the British government would go to almost any length to support its adherents - and to protect them: as Patrick O'Farrell puts it, to Britain the Protestant Ascendancy was Ireland.³⁶ As for the nationalist and social yearnings of the rest of the people, they were always - must always be - incomprehensible or abhorrent.

Formally, the Lord Lieutenant was supreme in Ireland, and governed through Parliament: According to Poynings Law, all Irish legislation must have the approval of the British and Irish privy councils, while the Lord Lieutenant took his instructions from the

34. Johnston, pp. 2-3

35. T.C. Grenville to the Duke of Rutland, 1784, quoted in Johnston, p. 1.

36. Patrick O'Farrell, Ireland's English Question (London, 1871) p. 53

(English cabinet. And even after the repeal of that law, the King - on the advice of the British cabinet - could still veto a bill.³⁷ Moreover, the English King, who was also King of Ireland, controlled a large number of revenues in perpetuity, appointed judges and army officers, and was head of the established Church of Ireland.³⁸ Despite all of this power to intervene directly, the British needed the support of the Ascendancy, and the Parliament was a necessary prop to the Lord Lieutenant. But since the support of the people was not considered important, the Parliament was very restricted in franchise.

The House of Lords was naturally open only to the Ascendancy, but the House of Commons was almost equally its instrument. Of the three hundred members of the lower house, 236 were elected for boroughs, most of which were controlled by a peer through influence, and by means of a restricted franchise.³⁹ Even the sixty-four members from the thirty-two counties were often subservient since only freeholders could vote, and landlords could create or import enough of these to overwhelm the small number of local ones in many counties.⁴⁰ Prior to 1793, in fact, there were less than one thousand voters in six counties, and less than two thousand in thirteen others.⁴¹ Thus, in 1780, Lord Buckinghamshire drew up a list which showed ten peers in control of 54 M.P.'s (with four more usually), four Bishops dominating eight, and nine Commoners controlling 24 more

37. Johnston, pp. 89, 90, 99.

38. Ibid., pp. 13-15.

39. Ibid., pp. 3-4.

40. Ibid., pp. 124-7: freeholders could vote in any county, and could vote more than once; thus, landlords would often exchange them.

41. Ibid., p. 117.

(as well as four others in most cases.)⁴² Another list showed eleven peers returning fifty-one M.P.'s, and thirty-one other peers controlling another 56, while thirty-five commoners returned 77 more, and four Bishops 8 others.⁴³ Thus, as Edith Johnston establishes, the Irish Parliament represented property, not people, and the only valid property in Ireland was land.⁴⁴

While the Ascendancy controlled the Parliament, however, it was still necessary for the Lord Lieutenant to achieve and maintain its support, and to effect this the main tools were pensions, places and peerages.⁴⁵ And since the government, (i.e., the Lord Lieutenant, Chief Secretary, Chancellor, Provost, Commissioner of the Revenue, Vice Treasurer, and his Deputy, Teller of the Exchequer, Prime Sergeant, Attorney-General and Solicitor-General)⁴⁶ were appointed - directly or indirectly - by the British government, and were fundamentally not responsible to the Parliament, the process of government was one of petty bargaining - no more and no less. This made the situation of any Lord Lieutenant far from secure, and meant that a Parliamentary revolt could occur at any time. Each new Viceroy had to make new promises, as well as fulfill those of his predecessor, and the system led to corruption, venality, and treachery.⁴⁷ Seats were naturally of value, and were bought and sold, sometimes with almost comic results, as when arbitrators

42. Ibid., pp. 357-361.

43. Ibid., pp. 329-330.

44. Ibid., p. 201.

45. Ibid., pp. 28, 226-7.

46. Ibid., pp. 228-9.

47. Ibid., pp. 273-279. See also T.V. Kiernan, History of the Financial Administration of Ireland to 1817 (London, 1930) p. 275.

had to be appointed to decide the value of a seat which John O'Neill wished to sell to the Marquis of Waterford in 1792.⁴⁸ The entire system was draining the country: pensions in 1785 alone cost the government £95,000.⁴⁹ Moreover, government policy changed with the Lord Lieutenant and he was replaced whenever he lost the confidence of the British or Irish cabinet or Parliament. Thus, there were six Viceroys between 1781 and 1784, and four between 1795 and 1798.⁵⁰

The Lord Lieutenant, representative of the Imperial government, thus ruled Ireland by means of what was always a rather tenuous, inefficient hold on the House of Commons (the upper house was easily controlled through the twenty-two Bishops, and the power to create new peers.)⁵¹ The real difficulty was that the Ascendancy seemed at times unaware of its role as British pawn, and this made it increasingly difficult for the English to maintain its rule, a process which led eventually to the Union.⁵² The great Ascendancy families would form alliances, and those not favored by the Viceroy would go into opposition.⁵³ While such opposition rarely represented the interests of the Irish people, it could nevertheless make government difficult; however, it could also mislead the British as to the real grievances of the people. In the end, the British had so tied themselves to the Ascendancy that they could barely understand outbreaks of violence incomprehensible to those who

48. Aspects, number 56.

49. Kiernan, p. 276.

50. Ibid., p. 275; Johnston, Chart opposite p. 1.

51. Johnston, p. 206.

52. O'Farrell, p. 67.

53. Johnston, pp. 217, 274-9.

had closed their eyes to the Ireland beyond the drawing rooms of the aristocracy.⁵⁴ Imperial rule could not respond to the desires of the people: this made it not only unbearable, but at times ludicrous. Of course, the Ascendancy - afraid that its privileges would be swept away - made no effort to enlighten the British authorities as to the true situation, and in fact always held over the heads of English ministers the threat of withdrawing its support if it was over-ruled. To the great Protestant families, and their captive British allies, all radicalism was treasonous, all demands for Parliamentary Reform were republican, and all requests for Catholic Emancipation were part of a Papist plot.

Politics and Reform 1779-1791

The American Revolution had a great impact upon the Irish, although the reactions to it were varied. Certainly it represented a challenge to both the power and the idea of the Empire, and it presented the nation with an opportunity to demand a revaluation of its status. The Presbyterians of Ulster, who had ties with many co-religionists in America (a great number had recently been driven to emigrate by rising rents⁵⁵), were deeply affected by the notion of liberty;⁵⁶ the Ascendancy, on the other hand, was split: some wanted to maintain the status quo, others to strengthen their positions and diminish British control: The Catholics, leaderless, expected little benefit and were not deceived.

To fight the war, Britain had had to withdraw troops from Ireland, and when the French became involved fears of an invasion led to the spontaneous recruitment of Volunteer Companies, raised

54. O'Farrell, pp. 53-58.

55. Woodburn, p. 230. See also The Drennan Letters, ed. D.A. Chart (H.M.S.O., Belfast, 1931), p. 15 (1783).

56. Aspects, number 73, note.

by lords and gentry or among business and tradesmen in the towns, which were loyal to the Crown. In fact, one reason for their existence was the fear that the Catholics would help an invading force; the latter, naturally, were excluded - in fact, they couldn't legally bear arms.⁵⁷ Within a year 50,000 Volunteers had been raised, and the government was obliged to distribute 16,000 guns to them.⁵⁸ Such a formidable force could, of course, be a powerful political lever, and it was soon employed by those seeking reform to pry concessions from the Irish and English governments. Essentially, the activists among the Protestants, those who were interested in a greater degree of independence (or failed to understand their own reliance upon British support), allied themselves with the Presbyterians to attain some degree of reform.

The first target of their agitation were the commercial restrictions which Britain had imposed. The measure of 1699 which had destroyed Irish woolen manufacture by preventing its export was still bitterly resented by Irish merchants, as was their exclusion from the benefits of the Navigation Laws.⁵⁹ Moreover, the embargo placed upon the export of Irish provisions at the beginning of the war had greatly damaged that trade.⁶⁰ The campaign was stimulated by a pamphlet entitled "The Commercial Restraints of Ireland..." by the Provost of Trinity College.

Grattan brought the matter before the House of Commons in 1779 when he moved that restrictions on the export of woolen and other manufactures be removed, and that free trade be allowed with

57. Kiernan, pp. 220-1 and Woodburn, p. 233.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 221; MacNevin, p. 142; Woodburn, p. 233.

59. Richard Koebner, *Empire* (New York, 1961) p. 242. See also Thomas Mac Nevin, pp. 62-3.

60. Johnston, p. 246. The argument, cited by Johnston, of Theresa O'Connor that the effect was to greatly increase the export of provisions seems to be refuted by trade statistics. See Cullen, p. 70.

America, the West Indies and British Africa.⁶¹ Using their power to deny tax money, as well as the threat of the Volunteers and a campaign of non-importation of British goods, a majority in the Irish lower house forced the Imperial authorities to relent in the next year and grant all the demands.⁶²

Grattan and his allies now turned their attention to the issue of Ireland's constitutional dependence on Britain. At a meeting of 143 Volunteer corps from Ulster at Dungannon on February 15, 1782, it was resolved:

....That a claim of any body of men, other than King, Lords, and Commons of Ireland, to make laws to bind this kingdom, is unconstitutional, illegal, and a grievance.

....That the ports of this country are by right open to all foreign countries not at war with the King; and that any burden thereupon, or obstruction thereto, save only by the Parliament of Ireland, are unconstitutional, illegal, and a grievance.⁶³

In April Grattan introduced similar resolutions in the House of Commons, and on May 27 the Lord Lieutenant announced that all the demands would be met.⁶⁴ The Irish Parliament was now - apparently - independent. But nothing, or very little, had really changed. The Ascendancy was still dominant within Ireland, and still dependent on Britain for support; the Irish economy, after nearly a hundred years of restriction, was firmly tied to that of England; and the vast majority of the people, the original, Catholic inhabitants, were still landless and powerless. Grattan and his allies represented only the liberal Ascendancy, not the people.⁶⁵ However spontaneous or reluctant their allegiance, all of them

61. Kiernan, p. 222; and Thomas Mac Nevin, p. 123.

62. Kiernan, pp. 223-4; Thomas Mac Nevin, p. 123.

63. Thomas Mac Nevin, pp. 156-7.

64. Kiernan, pp. 226-229.

65. See O'Farrell, pp. 58-9.

acknowledged the primary importance of imperial unity.⁶⁶

On the issues of Parliamentary Reform and Catholic Emancipation the Ascendancy showed its true colour. In 1782 a bill was passed which gave the Catholics a great measure of social equality before the law. In their own country they could now own property, freely exercise their religion, be educated, marry, and carry arms!⁶⁷

But the Protestants would not grant them political equality, nor even allow for a wider franchise under some scheme of Parliamentary Reform, lest they lose control of the Parliament, and the British, equally anxious that the Irish legislature be amenable, decided to support them.⁶⁸

This policy was to be even more firmly implanted in Pitt's mind after Grattan rejected his proposal for closer commercial and political ties between the two countries on an equitable basis.⁶⁹ The Ascendancy, having obtained its demands by 1782, for the most part desired no further change. The few who wished to go further, like Grattan, were in a minority; moreover, they soon found themselves in conflict with those who were not at all sympathetic to the British connection - in any form.

66. Koebner, p. 249. As James Hope, an Ulster rebel, stated: "...so long as men of rank and fortune lead a people, they will modify abuses, reform to a certain extent, but they never will remove any real grievances that press down the people." R.R.Madden, Antrim and Down in '98 (Glasgow, n.d.) p. 101.

67. Thoma's Mac Nevin, pp. 163-4.

68. Johnston, pp. 203-4.

69. Koebner, p. 266.

Since Catholics could bear arms, they could now join the Volunteers, and that body became increasingly split between moderates and radicals. Agreement was general that some form of Parliamentary Reform was needed, but they broke asunder on the Catholic question. Finally a majority pushed through resolutions which ignored it entirely, and these the House of Commons felt little hesitation in rejecting, since they had lost any rapport with the people.⁷⁰ The comments of Drennan, a future United Irishman, are interesting since they indicate the real intentions of many of the Protestant Volunteers:

The Roman Catholic question was our ruin, but if the reformers had not pretended a wish for alliance with them on the grand question, government would have anticipated the volunteers and made the Catholic Volunteers act against the Protestants.⁷¹

This broke the power of the movement, and it was increasingly abandoned by the wealthy and respectable. Grattan would later comment:

....The old, the original Volunteers had become respectable because they represented the property of the nation, but attempts had been made to arm the poverty of the kingdom. They had originally been the armed property of Ireland. Were they to become the armed beggary?...⁷²

Another word for the armed property of Ireland is, of course, the Ascendancy, and it was its cause that triumphed in 1782, not that of the Irish people. But the British government would nevertheless become concerned over that victory, because the Protestants became increasingly untrustworthy and inefficient.

70. Thomas Mac Nevin, pp. 195-197; and J.B. Woodburn, pp. 244-7. See also Johnston, p. 5.

71. The Drennan Letters, p. 24 (1784)

72. Woodburn, p. 246.

When, for example, the Irish Parliament tried to take advantage of the Regency Crisis in 1789 to further its independent status, and coincidentally aided the British Whigs, it was scarcely an indication of its reliability in the eyes of Pitt.⁷³ In fact, the situation was becoming increasingly intolerable to both the Irish people and the British government.

73. Johnston, pp. 5-7, 290.

Chapter II: The Defenders of Ireland

Beneath the exalted political maneuvers of the powers-that-be, a grim struggle was going on, the struggle of the peasant to defend himself against rising rents, the payment of tithes, and the danger of losing his land. The Irish peasantry consisted of three types: the small proprietor with secure tenure; the small proprietor with insecure tenure; and the landless laborer.¹ All of these groups would be affected by changes in the agricultural situation during the last forty years of the eighteenth century.

Rural Unrest, 1760-1791

In the 1750's disease struck the cattle of Germany, Holland and Britain, pushing up the price of beef. This led many landlords to turn from arable farming to pasturage, opening common fields to herds of cattle and discontinuing leases which expired. This naturally drove many starving peasants from their homes. But the great absentee landlords were rarely responsible: they had usually leased their land to intermediaries who then sublet, as established in Chapter I. Since each sublettor expected a profit on the exchange, the rent per acre increased.²

This led in 1761 to the emergence of the Whiteboy movement, which was provoked by the attempt to enclose common fields. It originated in Limerick, Tipperary, Waterford and Cork, all counties in the south. The Whiteboys congregated in large, disciplined parties, tore down fences and houghed cattle (i.e., cut their hamstrings). The movement spread across the south, and turned its attention also to tithes, which the small Catholic peasants paid to the Protestant clergy— the great cattle grazers were exempt! Moreover few of the beneficiaries fulfilled any of their pastoral or social duties. And the tithe was most severe in the very poor southern districts.³

1. W.E.H. Lecky, A History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century (London, 1892) Vol. II, p. 3 (His source is Sir James Caldwell, Proposal for Employing Children, etc. (1771))

2. Ibid., pp. 1-8

3. Ibid., pp. 11-17

The tithe was also rented out to middlemen who then collected it with profit, and the Whiteboys attacked these men remorselessly. They forbade anyone else to bid for a farm when the tenant's lease expired. But murder and outrage were rare - the Whiteboys were well organized and disciplined, obeying their perennial leader "Captain Right". But rumours that the Whiteboys were led by French or Papist agents were rampant, and Lord Halifax, after investigating the matter, reported in 1762:

....No French officers in disguise have been taken; no trace of traitorous or suspicious foreign correspondence has been discovered....It does not even appear that these rioters were furnished with many arms....Protestants, as well as Papists, have been concerned in these tumults....I cannot yet find that any matter of state or religion has been mentioned at their meetings....4

And Lord Charlemont concluded:

....The real causes were indeed not difficult to be ascertained. Exorbitant rents, low wages, want of employment in a country destitute of manufacture, where desolation and famine were the effects of fertility....Farms of enormous extent let by their rapacious and indolent proprietors to monopolizing land-jobbers, by whom small portions of them were again let and relet to intermediate oppressors, and by them sub-divided for five times their value among the wretched starvers upon potatoes and water. Taxes yearly increasing, and, still more, tithes, which the Catholic, without any possible benefit, unwillingly pays in addition to his priest's money, and by whose oppressive assessment the despairing cultivator, instead of being rewarded for his industry, is taxed in proportion as he is industrious. Misery, oppression, and famine, these were undoubtedly the first and original causes....5

4. Quoted in Ibid., p. 33.

5. The Manuscripts and Correspondence of James, First Earl of Charlemont, Vol. I (Historical Manuscripts Commission, London, 1891), p. 21. (hereafter Charlemont MSS). See also Hereward Senior, Orangeism in Ireland and Britain, 1795-1836 (London, and Toronto, 1966), pp. 4-5.

It must be remembered that this was the opinion of an aristocrat who was no more than liberal and not overly sympathetic to Catholics.

But agrarian unrest was not restricted to the south. In 1763 groups of northern peasants began gathering in Derry, Armagh, Tyrone, and Fermanagh, wearing oak boughs in their hats. Most were Protestants and Dissenters, and they had two major grievances: the Road Act, which obliged them to repair secondary roads, and the attempt by some of the established clergy to raise tithes. Charlemont, as governor of Ulster, acted with moderation and the movement petered out. Only a few leaders were caught - one in Armagh had an estate of £100 per year.⁶

In 1771 trouble again erupted in Ulster, mainly in Antrim and Down, when the Marquis of Donegal, in order to build "Holkam Hall", rather than renewing his leases at a moderate increase, demanded £100,000 in fines - which his tenants could not pay. He then turned the leases over to two or three rich Belfast merchants. Much of Ulster was already suffering from the effects of rising rents and subletting at exorbitant profits, and thousands of ejected tenants were soon banded together, calling themselves Steelboys or Hearts of Steel. They destroyed or maimed large numbers of cattle, and attacked the houses of landlords or rich tenants. Harsh measures failed to quiet the disturbances, but a lenient approach succeeded in ending the uprising in 1773. Many of those affected, however, had emigrated to America rather than continue the apparently hopeless battle for land and justice in the north.⁷

The south, meanwhile, was beset by periodic outbreaks of Whiteboy violence. Between 1775 and 1785 it flared regularly in Kildare, Kilkenny and Queen's County, and in the latter year

6. Ibid.,; also Charlemont MSS, II: 137-42, 274; and Lecky, II: 46-7.

7. Ibid., pp. 47-51.

once again, spread widely through the south. Always the main grievances were the raising of rent or the opening of bids on land when a lease had expired, and tithes, although the main emphasis altered. The movement became more violent as the years passed, and attacks on individuals, including Protestant clergymen, increased. But the Whiteboys had no political policies, and one of their proclamations, issued in Cork in 1787, stressed their loyalty to the King, the government and the laws, and that they did not want to rob the landlord, only to restrict him to his rights.⁸

The Rise of the Defenders

The war provoked by the American Revolution cut off many of the markets for Irish cattle and linen, and this had two effects. In some areas a return to arable farming ensued, while in Ulster the weavers found increased difficulty in selling their cloth. Since the reversion to arable allowed for further subletting, and the increased use of the potato allowed a family to live on less land - one acre could support six people for a year, while an acre of wheat could only support two⁹ - the pressure for land in many areas greatly increased, while in Ulster the linen situation further undermined rural stability.

This led in 1784 to the emergence of the Peep O'Day Boys - Protestant and Presbyterian weaver-peasants - who, unsupported by the gentry, began raiding Catholic homes. They burned looms or houses and looted. Lord Charlemont, and other large landowners, tried to oppose them with the Volunteers, but the Catholic peasants were wary of these mainly Protestant corps.¹⁰ In a diary kept at the time John Byrne recorded in 1785:

8. Lecky, II: 20-9.

9. K.H. Connell, The Population of Ireland 1750-1845 (Oxford, 1950) p. 123.

10. Senior, pp. 7, 8, 10.

This year the first company of Armagh volunteers published a manifesto against the Peep O'Day Boys for plundering the Papists of arms and concluded that there was a disgraceful zeal that seemed to have actuated both parties....¹¹

But the Volunteers were inadequate, and a Presbyterian minister initiated a society of Defenders to protect the Catholics. Protestant landlords encouraged this, and Protestant shopkeepers sold them arms. Moreover, many Protestants joined the society.¹² All of this ecumenical spirit was, of course, actuated by the fact that the Peep O'Day Boys were trying to lower rents, and were hurting the linen industry by destroying Catholic looms. For example, by 1792 rents had been driven down in Meath and Cavan, and the tithe was becoming difficult to collect.¹³ But by then the Defenders had become an almost purely Catholic organization.¹⁴ Byrne explains why in his diary for 1788:

The Defending parties combined among themselves not to purchase any goods from any Protestant that they knew to be (in) any way active in aiding or abetting the Peep O'Day Boys and that was the worst sort of revenge that any set of men in their senses could think of, for it turned many well disposed Protestants against them that hitherto espoused their cause; for who else in the County of Armagh could be of any service to them in the time of distress? And by turning their

11. John Byrne, "An impartial account of the late disturbance in the County of Armagh etc.", extracts in Aspects of Irish Social History 1750-1800, ed. W.H. Crawford and B. Trainer (HMSO, Belfast, 1969), no. 74 (hereafter Aspects).

12. Ibid., See also Senior, p. 8.

13. Senior, p. 13.

14. Ibid., p. 10.

best friends against them they have got both
the rich and poor for their enemies....

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The Peep O'Day Boys followed suit and refused to buy from Catholics, and the division along religious lines became increasingly firm. The two rival groups fought periodic battles, but the Defenders were far better organized.¹⁶ By 1789 there were eighteen Defender lodges, extending as far south as Dublin. Their main strength was in Tyrone, Armagh, Down, Monaghan, Cavan, Louth and Meath. In the last county and in the south they directed their attacks against landlords and the established clergy, since there were few non-Catholic peasants; while in Ulster they defended themselves in areas which were predominantly Protestant, but often attacked Protestant farmers in majority-Catholic areas.¹⁷ Thus the situation in Ulster was explosive, but it indicated a general unrest among the rural population beset by rising rents: the Catholic-Protestant clashes in Ulster were more indicative, it should be added, of this, than of religious animosity. The real source of the problem lay elsewhere, but it was always easier for a poor man to attack another than to take on his landlord, and always tempting for the illiterate to blame an "alien" than to understand the basis of his problem. And, of course, the Catholics could rightfully feel that the Protestants were interlopers who had stolen their land, while the latter feared that someday they would indeed be dispossessed by the masses of the native population.

By 1791 Ireland was a land of hate, fear, and degradation, but a land in which a new torch of hope was burning, a torch lit in a nearby county whose creed of "liberty, equality, fraternity" was to inspire some Irishmen to abandon the hate and the fear, and

15. John Byrne in Aspects, no. 74.

16. Ibid.

17. Senior, pp. 12-13.

to seek to join all Irishmen in a struggle for their own independent destiny.

Defenders and Orangemen

During the early 1790's Defenderism continued to spread across Ireland, and its success struck fear into the hearts of landlords. Its adherents grew strong in Roscommon and Longford, and paraded in all the counties near Dublin. In Connaught about 1300 people were transported or forced to serve in the navy on a charge of Defenderism.¹⁸ - most of them undoubtedly driven there from Ulster. But the motives of the Defenders were strangely vague in the view of the Secret Committee of the House of Lords:

....they do not appear to have any distinct particular object in view, but they talk of being relieved from hearth-money, tithes, county cesses, and the lowering their rents....

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The objects which the committee enumerated, however, seem in fact quite "distinct". But the committee was under other delusions. It reported that they were "...in general poor ignorant labouring men....", but it continued:

....Their measures appear to have been concerted and conducted with the utmost secrecy and a degree of regularity and system not usual in people of such mean condition, and as if directed by men of a superior rank....²⁰

That they were secretive is accurate, but there is no evidence that they were at that time under the orders of sophisticated radicals. In fact, the secrecy of the Defenders was always far more difficult for the government to penetrate than was that of the sophisticated United Irishmen.

18. William James Mac Neven, Pieces of Irish History (New York, 1807) pp. 111-12; and Lecky, III: 420.

19. The Report of the Secret Committee of the House of Commons (Dublin, 1798), Appendices, p.37: Report from the Secret Committee of the House of Lords (1793). (hereafter H. of C., 1798). A "cess" was obligatory labour owed to the government.

20. Ibid.

The peasants, Catholic and Protestant alike, were feeling the tightening squeeze of tithes, rising rents and prices which, because of the war, increased on what they bought (due to a lack of supply from foreign countries) but decreased on what they sold (because foreign markets were closed and the Irish market glutted by surplus British goods). This cycle could not be dissociated from the political and economic domination of the island by England, and the peasants began to grow more aware of this because of United Irish propaganda. Moreover, the raising of militia to defend Ireland was by no means popular with the peasants, and disturbances were reported in Wexford and Queen's County in 1793 due to this alone.²¹ The Defenders soon began planting cells in the fertile ranks of the new militia, which was mainly Catholic. Meanwhile the Protestants were organizing themselves to defend their homes against the Catholics, while landlords, including Catholics, armed their retainers.²²

The Defenders were made up mainly of very poor Catholics, both peasants and artisan-workers, and were led by alehouse keepers, artisans, low schoolmasters, a few middling farmers and priests in the rural areas, while in Dublin the movement was very strong among the weavers and mechanics. Their aims were to abolish taxes, and cesses (work provided free on public projects), to lower rents, tithes and the price of potatoes and meal, and to redistribute property.²³

Violence on a large scale became more and more common. Haliday reported to Charlemont on July 2, 1793 that a riot had occurred at Castlereagh near Belfast when some poor people "attacked" the magistrates and their dragoon guards. He continued:

....The troop then charged through the dispersing populace, sword in hand; five were laid dead on the spot, many more mortally wounded (three of whom, that I know of, are since dead), and a great number severely....After the people were dispersed and flying the dragoons divided, and, unofficered, galloped a circuit of two miles in different directions, cutting down and slashing every one they met or overtook, most of whom had never been in the tumult, but were peaceably going about their own business, some

21. Mary Leadbeater, The Leadbeater Papers (London, 1862), Vol. I, P. 198.

22. Senior, pp. 13-14.

23. Lecky, III: 388, 390.

of them to our market....All confidence in government, or in parliament, is lostI must add that those wretches at Castlereagh had no intention of a riot, not a gun among them, nor even a pitchfork.²⁴

In May of the next year Drennan reported that more than forty Catholics had been killed at Cavan by the Dublin Militia, which had also burned Ballinā.²⁵ These were not isolated incidents: the country was becoming increasingly polarized between rich and poor, Protestant and Catholic, loyalist and radical.

The situation in Ulster remained the worst. The Defenders and Peep O'Day Boys were constantly engaging in skirmishes, but the latter were becoming increasingly aggressive as the authorities came to fear the former and therefore countenance and even support the activities of their adversaries. In October of 1795 Richard Jephson wrote to Charlemont:

....I find that the old quarrel between the 'Peep O'Day Boys' and the 'Defenders' has come to an alarming height indeed, and though there is at present a temporary suspension of hostilities, yet the gentlemen of the country...live in daily expectation of a renewal of the same commotions. In the meanwhile, the outrages that have past have left some of their worst effects behind them - a deadly and irreconcilable rancour in the minds of the lower people, and such a dread of violence as induces a great many of the better sort of people to desert their houses. It is impossible for the Protestant gentry to keep up the farce of impartiality between the parties, or to disavow the absolute necessity of giving a considerable degree

24. Charlemont MSS., III: 216.

25. The 'Drennan Letters', ed. D.A. Chart (HMSO, Belfast, 1931) p. 203.

of support to the Protestant party....²⁶

It was indeed necessary for the gentry to support the Protestants if they were not to face the danger of a revolt of all the peasants against them.

Finally, in the same year, after two minor engagements, several thousand Defenders attacked a smaller Protestant force at the Diamond but were repulsed, losing at least sixteen killed. Shortly after the battle the first Orange Lodge was founded.²⁷ The objective of the gentry who established the movement was to get control of the Protestant rural movements, and thus it was hoped to exclude poor Protestants from leadership in the organization.²⁸ But the gentry were not completely successful. Peep O'Day Boys continued driving Catholic tenants out of Armagh, posting signs on their doors which read "to hell or Connaught".²⁹ The landlords naturally did not want their tenants driven out, which lowered rents, but nevertheless at least 4,000 were hounded out of the county.³⁰

The government was equivocal in its stance, but the landlords increasingly had to throw in their lot with their Protestant tenants. The difficulty was that their efforts to get control of the movement were tenuous at best, while their attempts to suppress the Defenders met with very little success. In June of 1796 Haliday reported from Belfast:

....The lower ranks are almost universally in a sulky, discontented mood. Outrages are daily or nightly committing, reform is no longer their cry; religion merely the pretence; revolution - for the sake of plunder and something worse - the real object. A worthy gentleman, well acquainted with the county of Down, told me, two days ago, he

26. Charlemont MSS, III: 265.

27. Mac Neven, pp. 113-4; Senior, pp. 15-19.

28. Senior, p. 20.

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 20-30.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

had a list of fifty-seven houses 'wrecked'... by the 'Orange boys' since the assizes in that county, and ten in the county of Armagh - wrecked in the cruellest manner - unroofed, doors, windows, and furniture destroyed, webs cut out of the loom, and with the yarn, etc., carried off or burned, the wretched inhabitants of course obliged to fly (under threats, too, of being murdered if they do not), many to the south and west of Ireland, where they may eventually do some good by diffusing manufactures; thousands to America. Our friend, A. Johnston, who lately returned from Derry, saw many fine American ships lying there, and was assured that they would carry off five thousand passengers, a large proportion of these proscribed Catholics.

31

Thus despite gentry efforts, the Orangemen became associated with anti-Catholic violence. And, although such violence was often caused by the poor when out of the surveillance of their Orange leaders, the landlords often did join in the outrages. In Kerry a party of the Kerry militia burnt the village of Kilrea in December, 1796; they were led by a magistrate.³² Nor was the violence aimed only at peasants; in Armagh a mill was burned when the owner refused to dismiss his Catholic employees.³³ The government finally authorized the recruitment of yeomanry corps in an attempt to put the landlords in control of the Protestant rural movement, and the corps were formed for the most part through the agency of the Orange Lodges.³⁴ But gentry control was never firm, especially since some of the magistrates and officers were rabidly anti-Catholic themselves.

31. Charlemont MSS, III: 275.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 291.

33. Senior, pp. 37-8.

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 45-6, 50.

By the end of 1796 the rural situation was little short of chaotic. In some areas almost open war, whether against landlords or among the peasantry, was raging. The worst situation existed in the north, but all across the island the potential for massive violence was evident. And besides the real grievances of the peasants, there was always the fear and suspicion inspired by religious sectarianism.

Chapter III: The United Irishmen

The event which launched a new wave of Irish radicalism, a radicalism whose implications included not only dissident sections of the Ascendancy, but also the common people - urban and rural, Catholic and Protestant - was the French Revolution. Its influence would shape the reform movement which emerged, would cause the British authorities to suppress the Irish stirrings with vigour due to their fear of a French invasion, and would finally drive the radicals and the government into a bloody, all-out contest for control of the island. Those on the side of reform would be split asunder as the decade progressed: some would come to be satisfied, or would accept the status quo reluctantly because they feared the radical alternative which was emerging; others would cast aside reform in favor of violent revolution. And increasingly, the struggle would involve the common people, first those in the towns, then the farmers and rural labourers as well. Both sides would employ intimidation and terror; both would build their forces for the final conflict; and both would bide their time in anticipation of the best moment to strike.

The First United Irish Societies

The Irish Volunteers, although they had lost their great political leverage, had remained in existence. Some of the regiments had become hotbeds of radicalism, even of republicanism. One such was the First, or Green, Company in Belfast, composed mainly of small, Scotch Presbyterian shopkeepers.¹ Eleven of these businessmen (four were merchants, two were in the linen, and two in the woolen,

1. Harold Nicolson, The Desire to Please, A Study of Hamilton Rowan and the United Irishmen (London, 1943), p. 85.

industry) formed a secret committee in 1791 which was dedicated to radical reform.² These men took an historic step when they invited a young radical named Theobald Wolfe Tone to Belfast as an honorary member after the publication of his pamphlet, "An Argument on behalf of the Catholics of Ireland, by a Northern Whig", on August 1, 1791.³ This publication had also brought Tone into contact with the Catholic Committee⁴, and he undoubtedly conceived at this point - if he had not already - the potentiality of an alliance of the Presbyterians and Catholics against the Ascendancy. On October 14 Tone and his friend Thomas Russell met

2. Rosamond Jacob, The Rise of the United Irishmen 1791-94 (London, 1937), p. 54. The eleven were: Samuel Neilson, woolen draper; William Sinclair, linen manufacturer; William McCleery, tanner; William Tennant, merchant; William Simms, merchant; Robert Simms, merchant; Henry Haslett, woolen draper; Thomas McCabe, watchmaker; Gilbert McIlveen, linen draper; Samuel McTier and a man named Campbell. McTier was also a merchant: The Drennan Letters, 1776-1819, ed. D.A. Chart (HMSO, Belfast, 1931), p. 40-41.

3. Theobald Wolfe Tone, Life and Adventures, ed. by his son (Glasgow, 1876), pp. 49-50. Also R.R. Madden, The United Irishmen (Dublin, 1858), p. 5.

4. Tone, p. 49.

with the secret committee and formed the first Society of United Irishmen.⁵ The idea of such a society had been in the air for a few months,⁶ and it spread rapidly. On November 9 another society was established in Dublin. Among its original members were Tone, Simon Butler (the brother of Lord Mountgarret), Napper Tandy, Dr. William Drennan, and Archibald Hamilton Rowan.

The constitution of the new society stated its purpose in idealistic terms, beneath which lurked a deep political commitment:

....This society is constituted for the purpose of forwarding a brotherhood of affection, a communion of rights, and a union of power among Irishmen of every religious persuasion, and thereby to obtain a complete reform in the legislature, founded on the principles of civil, political, and religious liberty.⁷

Parliamentary Reform and Catholic Emancipation - this was the formula which became the basis of United Irish propaganda until the society was suppressed in 1794. When it re-emerged as a secret organization, its purpose and its tactics were altered. Even at inception, the United Irish had demonstrated their disaffection from the British connection:

....the weight of English influence in the government of this country is so great, as to require a cordial union among all the People of Ireland, to maintain that balance which is essential to the preservation of our liberties, and extension of our commerce.⁸

This indicates the desire of the Belfast merchants to be free once and for all of British restrictions on their commerce. While

5. Nicolson, p. 87.

6. The Report from the Secret Committee of the House of Commons, (Dublin, 1798), Appendices: pp.86-92. (hereafter H.of C., 1798)

7. Ibid., Appendices, p. 236.

8. Ibid., Appendices, p. 235.

some were sincere in their espousal of the Catholic cause, some adopted it only for strategic reasons. But while most were still concerned only with reform, Tone was not. In the preamble to the constitution he had inserted the following:

....we have no National Government; we are ruled by Englishmen, and the servants of Englishmen, whose object is the interest of another country; whose instrument is corruption, and whose strength is the weakness of Ireland....⁹

Even this, however, did not express Tone's real feelings: in a private letter to Russell which he attached to the draft constitution, he wrote:

The foregoing contain my true and sincere opinion of the state of this country, so far as in the present juncture it may be advisable to publish it; they certainly fall short of the truth, but truth itself must sometimes condescend to temporize. My unalterable opinion is that the bane of Irish prosperity is the influence of England. I believe that influence will ever be extended while the connection between the two countries continues. Nevertheless, I know that opinion is for the present too hardy, though a very little time may establish it universally....I have not said one word which looks like a wish for separation, though I give it to you and your friends as my most decided opinion that such an event would be a regeneration for this country.¹⁰

Tone feared not so much the reaction of the government as of the Belfast Presbyterians, few of whom relished the concept of being isolated in an independent Ireland ruled by its Catholic majority.¹¹

9. *Ibid.*

10. Reproduced in Nicolson, pp. 88-9. Also H. of C., 1798, Appendices, p. 43.

11. Nicolson, p. 89.

In fact, Tone's known sympathy for republicanism lost him much personal support in Belfast.¹²

The United Irishmen, then, were dedicated to constitutional reform. As Patrick O'Farrell points out, such movements never really threatened the basis of the British connection or the Protestant Ascendancy.¹³ But it contained elements, exemplified by Tone, which represented a new factor in Irish politics. It is worthwhile here to quote Rosamond Jacobs:

Before 1791, there were in the country only the British colonists and the enslaved Irish; after that year parties took a new division—those who stood for privilege and foreign government, and those, of both Irish and British stock, who stood for an Irish nation, democratic and independent.¹⁴

While there is truth to this, it is important to remember that not all United Irishmen favored an independent Ireland, and that until the very end the society would be plagued by the religious divisions which it sought to overcome. Thus the year 1791 marked a beginning, but in no sense a consummation, to the development of Irish nationalism.

The first open meeting of the Belfast society on October 18, 1791, drew a gathering of twenty-eight members.¹⁵ By December 27 the society had grown to fifty-five.¹⁶ The Dublin society was similar in size.¹⁷ But the United Irish were far from "united". The first trauma occurred within weeks of its establishment when Dr. William Drennan, a prosperous Presbyterian living in Dublin, suggested that each member be required to take a "test", which read as follows:

12. Madden, p. 12.

13. Patrick O'Farrell, Ireland's English Question, (London, 1971), p. 57.

14. Jacob, p. 66.

15. Ibid., p. 67; Nicolson, p. 87.

16. Proceedings of the Dublin Society of United Irishmen, ed. R.B. McDowell, Analecta Hibernica (Irish Manuscripts Commission, Dublin, 1949), p. 8 (hereafter Proceedings).

17. R.B. McDowell, "The Personnel of the Dublin Society of United Irishmen, 1791-4", Irish Historical Studies, II:14 (hereafter McDowell, "Personnel").

I, A.B., do voluntarily declare, that I will persevere in endeavouring to form a brotherhood of affection among Irishmen of every religious persuasion, and that I will also persevere in my endeavours to obtain an equal, full and adequate representation of all the people of Ireland (in the Commons House of Parliament¹⁸). I do further declare that neither hopes, fears, rewards or punishments shall ever induce me, directly or indirectly, to inform on or give evidence against any member or members of this or similar societies, for any act or expression of theirs, done or made collectively or individually in or out of this society, in pursuance of the spirit of this obligation.¹⁹

Tone, Russell and Stokes, a Fellow of Trinity College, opposed the test as too rhetorical, argumentative and indeterminate.²⁰ Whether Tone wanted the test to be stronger, or did not want any at all for the sake of expediency, he was outvoted and some members, including Stokes, left the organization.²¹ And on February 7, 1792 the Dublin society decided that all members must take the test within two weeks.²²

18. These words were omitted in the revised test of 1795. See McNeven's testimony: Report from the Secret Committee of the House of Lords (Dublin, 1798), Appendices, p. 37 (hereafter H. of L., 1798).

19. H. of C., 1798, Appendices, p. 237.

20. The Drennan Letters, pp. 65-6.

21. Ibid., p. 66.

22. Proceedings, p. 12.

The government was concerned with the subversive effects of French principles, and the United Irish immediately became a target of its attentions. Within six weeks of its establishment the authorities had made contact with a bankrupt member of the society who reported its Dublin activities for the next thirty months, when his testimony was used to outlaw the organization.²³ But not all government moves were surreptitious. In the House of Commons early in 1792 the Solicitor General, John Toler, referred to Butler and Tandy, executives of the society, as "too despicable for notice."²⁴ While this brought attention to the United Irish, something Toler scarcely desired, its outcome was more to his liking. Undoubtedly he was relying on Tandy's reputed cowardice to discredit the society, and it almost did. After demanding an apology, which Toler refused, he threatened to publish an account of the affair. The Solicitor General ordered his arrest, and Tandy went into hiding.²⁵ This was the government's hope, and Drennan recorded that the United Irish were prepared to abandon their Dublin secretary if he did not surrender himself.²⁶ Rowan stepped forward and re-established the integrity of the society by his moderation and his refusal to back down. Tandy, though, had been personally discredited:

....Poor Tandy, after 18 years struggle, against his own interest, in the public cause, has nearly lost his reputation as a gentleman in a quarter of an hour. He is in town, and, I hear, looks ill, and at a loss ready to adopt advice (a bad thing, or a bad symptom in such affairs when a man should be a judge for himself, and not suffer anyone to direct). He resists the idea of Newgate, and says he will defend himself rather than go there. His situation is bad, and he should endeavour by some risk to make it better.²⁷

23. Ibid., p.3. His name was Thomas Collins.

24. Jacob, p. 80.

25. Ibid.

26. The Drennan Letters, p. 82.

27. Ibid., p. 86.

But all he could do was surrender himself, which he did, and spent a night in jail.²⁸

Whatever the covert intentions of men such as Tone, the United Irish concentrated their propaganda on the two issues mentioned previously, Catholic Emancipation and Parliamentary Reform. With regard to the former question they had a natural ally in the Catholic Committee, which had petitioned Parliament late in 1790 to amend the Penal Code, and had tried again early in the next year. These efforts failed, and the committee split when the conservative lords and gentry in the organization were persuaded by the government not to press their case too strongly.²⁹ This resulted in the virtual secession of sixty-eight members, led by Lord Kenmare, when the majority of the committee refused to adhere to the ubiquitous stance of their titled "leaders". Kenmare may have been promised that some relief would be granted, but a bill introduced by Sir Hercules Langrishe and supported by Grattan, was soundly beaten early in 1792.³⁰ The government probably decided that nothing need be granted since the Catholics were disunited, and that nothing should be granted unless they all accepted it. But the matter involved deep prejudices and important interests.

Catholics were considered morally and socially inferior by most Protestants, even Presbyterians.³¹ Many of the latter supported their cause only to acquire their alliance, but they also wanted to be ruled by them. Both the Irish and British governments were aware of this, and used it to their advantage. The Imperial Government the issue had long been plain: the Viceroy, Westmorland, wrote to Pitt:

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 86-7.

29. William James Mac Neven, *Pieces of Irish History* (New York, 1807), pp. 19-20.

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 21-3.

31. R.B. McDowell, *Irish Public Opinion, 1750-1800* (London, 1943), p. 183 (hereafter McDowell, *Opinion*).

It may be said what is it to England whether Catholics or Protestants have the pre-eminence in Ireland? I answer, it is of as much consequence as the connection between the two countries, for on that it depends. While you maintain the Protestant Ascendancy, the ruling powers in Ireland look to England as the foundation of their authority and influence. The Executive Government of both countries must ever (as it has always been) be under the same control. A Catholic Government could maintain itself without the aid of England.³²

But the Catholic Committee was determined to press on. Tone replaced Richard Burke, the son of Edmond, as secretary in 1792, at a salary of £200 a year.³³ The committee, after the secession of the sixty-eight, represented the Catholic commercial classes, and thus shared many interests with the Belfast Presbyterian merchants who formed the backbone of the United Irish Society. In fact, the committee's president in 1792, Edward Byrne, was the richest merchant in Ireland.³⁴ But there were suspicions of the relationship between the government and the Catholics: it was rumoured that Burke had been a spy of Pitt - he was certainly in contact with Dundas as Charlemont testified in a letter:

....This Catholic plenipotentiary....was invited hither by the party, and comes over charged with letters of credence, not, I believe, from Pitt, but from his worthy coadjutor, the immaculate Dundas, who, jealous of the growing prosperity of Ireland, and fearful lest it should finally interfere with the interests of his native country, has wished to raise disturbances, or at the least to promote such a disunion as may possibly end in a union.³⁵

32. Westmorland to Pitt, in Jacob, p. 96.

33. Tone, pp. 55-7.

34. Maureen Wall, "The rise of a catholic middle class in eighteenth century Ireland", *Irish Historical Studies*, X: 107-9.

35. Manuscripts and Correspondence of James, First Earl of Charlemont, Vol. II: (Historical Manuscripts Commission, London, 1894), p. 186. (hereafter Charlemont MSS).

Drennan certainly thought Burke a spy, and noted rumours that even Tone had been bought off.³⁶ He expressed his fears in a letter to Samuel McTier:

....Some say that Government want to bring about an Union with Britain....by telling the Catholics their enlargement in civil rights will depend on their co-operation for a union and their dissociation from the furious part of the Presbyterians....³⁷

This would be, of course, the only way that the British - in the view of Pitt and Westmorland, as well as many others - could enfranchise the mass of the Catholics without risking the loss of the island.

But the Catholic Committee had called for the election, by manhood suffrage, of a Catholic Convention, something which terrified both the Irish and British authorities. Efforts were made to prevent the elections since, in Tone's words, "....it was sufficiently evident that, if the representatives of three millions of oppressed people were once suffered to meet it would not afterwards be safe, or indeed possible, to refuse their just demands..."³⁸ But the situation was not quite so clear-cut. The Catholics were by no means united: the bishops strongly opposed the idea of a convention,³⁹ while the members of the committee were unequal in their zeal and determination. Drennan saw the difficulty which the reformers were facing:

(Do not) breathe any suspicions of the Catholics for the present. If they see we suspect them, they will suspect us. Let us not run a risk of losing them now when their business is nearly decided and ours is but beginning....The cry of revolution and republicanism is raised against us. No King,

36. The Drennan Letters, pp. 96, 107.

37. Ibid., p. 77.

38. Tone, pp. 59-60. See also MacNeven, p. 27.

39. MacNeven, p. 27.

etc. Take great care to obviate this. Our present pursuits ought to terminate in an equal and impartial representation of the people, and let posterity go on to republicanism if they chose (sic).⁴⁰

The radical Presbyterians were supporting the Catholic cause; they expected the latter in turn to support Parliamentary Reform.

The Catholic Convention met in Dublin on December 3, 1792. Its 244 delegates passed a resolution, proposed by Luke Teeling (a United Irishman from Antrim), which called for complete Catholic emancipation.⁴¹ The government was frightened, and asked Pitt for military assistance, which he refused.⁴² Moreover, the Catholic cause soon gained two new converts, John Thomas Troy, Archbishop of Dublin and H. Moylan, Bishop of Cork.⁴³ Pitt, faced with

impending war and the collapse of the money market, had little choice but to pacify the Catholics, yet he wanted to do so in such a way as to break their alliance with the radicals.⁴⁴ So he offered them the franchise and most other "privileges", but held back entrance to Parliament, the Bench and city corporations.

These proposals passed handily through Parliament, and thus the onus was put upon the committee to accept or reject them. Predictably they split: Tone, McCormick and Sweetman wanted to hold out, but Keogh convinced a majority to acquiesce, the final blow being the passage of the Militia Bill.⁴⁵ The committee then dissolved, voting £1,500 to Tone, and £2,000 for a statue of George III!⁴⁶

The collapse of organized Catholic resistance to the government left the radicals vulnerable. The other ally - or wing - of the United Irish, the Volunteers, had taken the lead in pressing for

40. The Drennan Letters, p. 108.

41. Jacob, p. 121.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid., pp. 124-5.

44. Ibid., p. 129. Also McDowell, Opinion, p. 185.

45. Jacob, pp. 130, 133-9.

46. Ibid., p. 139.

Parliamentary Reform. A convention had been called at Dungannon for February 15, 1793 which would represent the people of Ulster.⁴⁷ The government was aware of the danger posed by the convention, and early in 1793 passed an Arms Act which allowed the authorities to disarm the Volunteers.⁴⁸ Men of property and influence, whether Volunteers or not, almost all opposed the Dungannon meeting, while the Dissenting clergy was silent because of its financial dependence on the government.⁴⁹ Moreover, those who favored parliamentary reform were split over the question of a property qualification. The case for universal suffrage was eloquently set forth by Drennan:

It must be a representation impartial, that is, without preference to any sect or religious persuasion (sic); adequate, that is, proportioned to its end, the freedom and happiness of Ireland: it must be a representation of the people, that is, persons not property must be the rule of representation; not land, but lives; not money but men.⁵⁰

But the problem which faced the United Irish is evidenced by the fact that Drennan himself, while presenting universal suffrage as the ideal, argued against its immediate adoption by the society, stressing that it was "premature, impolitic and impracticable".⁵¹

47. Mac Neven, pp. 35, 44.

48. Jacob, p. 153.

49. The Drennan Letters, pp. 119, 125.

50. "United Irish Plans of Parliamentary Reform, 1793", Select Documents presented by R.B. McDowell, Irish Historical Studies, III: 45. (hereafter "Plans").

51. The Drennan Letters, p. 119. Also "Plans", p. 45.

But Thomas Addis Emmet managed to carry a majority of the Dublin United Irish committee on the constitution with him in favor of Drennan's own plan. The vote, however, eleven to nine, indicated the divisiveness of the issue, and the United Irish plan for Parliamentary Reform was not published until February, 1794. Charges of republicanism made the society wary, and it was only the Whig proposal in Parliament which forced the radicals to make public their plan.⁵²

Thus it was in an atmosphere of suspicion and dissension that the delegates gathered at Dungannon. They passed resolutions advocating a complete reform of Parliament, including the entire enfranchisement of Catholics, but they also condemned republicanism and social levelling.⁵³ But their attempt to appear loyal had no effect on the government and, once the Catholics were neutralized by the passage and acceptance of the government's bill, the administration moved swiftly against their old allies. The Volunteers were virtually outlawed, and Belfast was terrorized.⁵⁴

The United Irish, though, were the most resolute enemy of the government, and it was against them that action would soon have to be taken, because they were growing stronger. By the end of 1792 there were four societies in Belfast alone,⁵⁵ while the Dublin Society had grown from 146 members in August, 1792 to 240 in December and to 350 in March, 1793.⁵⁶ The reasons for the increasing importance of the society were the destruction or discrediting of its rivals, and the devastation inflicted on the Irish economy by the war. Drennan wrote in May, 1793:

52. The Drennan Letters, p. 119 and "Plans", pp. 39-41.

53. Jacob, p. 158.

54. Ibid., pp. 158-166.

55. Ibid., p. 156.

56. McDowell, "Personnel", p. 14.

....the natural vent of the goods in foreign parts is kept shut by the war, and....at the same time England is disburthening her glutted market upon us and throwing all at an under-selling rate into our market when she cannot dispose of her goods abroad. A general system of protecting duties, to fend off at such a time as this, would appear the best remedy....
What is the cause? War. What is the cure? Peace. What will prevent relapse? A National House of Commons.⁵⁷

Thus, on March 15, a Dr. Bourke suggested to the Dublin society that foreign manufactures be boycotted.⁵⁸ This was not stimulated by pure idealism, as an examination of the membership of the United Irish makes clear.

The Dublin society early in 1793 was composed of over three hundred members. Of these 140 are known to have been Catholic and 130 Protestant. The occupations of its members were as follows:⁵⁹

Cloth merchants.....	67	Apothecaries.....	8
Textile Manufacturers.....	31	Chandlers.....	7
Merchants.....	32	Jewellers.....	6
Attorneys.....	30	Ironmongers.....	6
Barristers.....	26	Soldiers.....	6
Physicians.....	16	Shoemakers.....	4
Tanners.....	11	Tailors.....	4
Booksellers and Printers.....	14	Wine Merchants....	4
Grocers.....	15	Builders.....	4
Distillers and Brewers.....	12	Schoolmaster.....	1

There were also thirty country gentlemen, but no farmers. Of the total, McDowell calculates that ninety-nine were intellectuals, while an equal number were in the clothing business.⁶⁰ The former included idealists and men of ambition; the latter were violently opposed to any British restrictions on Irish trade, and wanted

57. The Drennan Letters, p. 162.

58. Proceedings, p. 69.

59. McDowell, "Personnel", p. 15

60. Ibid., pp. 16-17.

protective tariffs against the encroachment of British manufactures. The same was true of the societies in Belfast and the other ports, and the war made them even more anxious to rid themselves of the Imperial yoke. By January of 1793 the Dublin Society was even considering whether arms were needed.⁶¹

Societies were springing up; the Northern Star and United Irish proclamations were spreading the radical message.⁶² The government could not tolerate the situation much longer. Already Rowan had been charged with libel, but not yet tried.⁶³ On March 15, 1793 Butler and Bond were arrested.⁶⁴ Their expenses in Newgate were paid by the United Irish, and they took liberal advantage of the situation: within six weeks they had spent £100 on wine alone.⁶⁵

And early in the next year Rowan was convicted of seditious libel and sentenced to two years' imprisonment.⁶⁶ But these methods were ineffectual, and the authorities decided to employ stronger measures.

61. Proceedings, p. 57.

62. Jacob, pp. 174-8. The Northern Star had the largest circulation of any Irish newspaper at that time: 4,200.

63. Nicolson, pp. 97-8.

64. Proceedings, p. 12.

65. The Drennan Letters, p. 160.

66. Jacob, p. 220.

New Alliances

To do so they turned to another aspect of the Society: its foreign connections. The United Irish had always been strongly influenced by the example of the French Revolution, but had never established any real contact with the government of that country. But as early as February, 1792 the Dublin Society had received a letter from the Revolution Society of Norwich.⁶⁷ And the society had ideological ties with the Corresponding Society and the Constitutional Society in England, as well as The Friends of the People in Scotland.⁶⁸ All of these connections frightened the authorities, but the evidence which they needed was of a link with France.

There had been some indirect contacts between the radicals and the French since the revolution, one of the most notable being Lord Edward Fitzgerald's sojourn in Paris in 1792. He had lodged with Thomas Paine, and had attended a meeting at which he toasted the revolution and renounced his title. This impropriety apparently led to his dismissal from the army.⁶⁹ But in April, 1794 an agent - or spy - of the French, the Rev. William Jackson, crossed to England. There he met John Cockayne, who informed the authorities of his mission. This was the opportunity for which Pitt had been waiting, and Cockayne was told to accompany Jackson on his trip to Ireland. The French agent, once in Dublin, established contact with some of the most important United Irish leaders: Butler, Lewins, Tone and Rowan. Tone even wrote a memorial concerning the state of Ireland which he left with Rowan, who supplied Jackson with a copy. On April 28 the latter was arrested and charged with high treason.

67. Proceedings, p. 12.

68. Report of the Committee of Secrecy of the House of Commons (London, 1799), pp. xi-xii. (hereafter H. of C., 1799).

69. Thomas Moore, The Life and Death of Lord Edward Fitzgerald (New York, 1831), Vol. I, pp. 129-137. But Malone reported to Charlemont on December 3, 1792 that Fitzgerald had been dismissed because of his involvement in the establishment of small country banks on little capital which reaped large profits: Charlemont MSS., II, : 205.

For a fee of £300 Cockayne had betrayed his friend and, along with him, some of the most important radical leaders.⁷⁰ Rowan, aware of his predicament, managed to escape. Tone was urged by George Knox and Wolfe, the Attorney General, to flee, but refused. The former and Marcus Beresford managed to arrange terms for him. Drennan commented at the time:

T(one) has, I believe, entered into some honourable compromise with Government. He will not give evidence against any man, which saves his own honour. He will not be prosecuted... They say they have enough to hang Jackson without him, and probably they are right. Their great aim is to get rid of us by prosecution, persecution, or the terror of it. (71)

Tone also had to leave Ireland.

The government had had the society in a state of terror for weeks: fewer and fewer members were attending meetings.⁷² The final blow fell on May 4 - only one week after Jackson's arrest - when the Dublin society was suppressed.⁷³ The United Irish could no longer meet openly, but if the authorities believed that they had rid themselves of the society they were mistaken. Like a phoenix it would re-emerge almost instantly as a secret organization, devoted no longer to reform but to revolution. The British had not killed the dog; they had merely awakened it.

Faced by the Orange menace, the Defenders were naturally susceptible to an offer of alliance. And the United Irish, in their new guise as a secret, revolutionary society, needed the support of the Catholic masses to achieve their objectives. Tandy

70. Madden, pp. 17-21, 556-567.

71. The Drennan Letters, p. 211.

72. Proceedings, pp. 76, 111, 114.

73. Jacob, p. 231.

had long worked to achieve good relations with the Defenders,⁷⁴ and the two groups moved quickly together in 1796. In Ulster Henry Joy McCracken was employed by the United Irish to cement the alliance,⁷⁵ although there the two factions remained more or less separate due to the religious division between them (i.e. in Ulster the United Irish were mainly Presbyterian).⁷⁶ In the south the alliance was even firmer: Camden wrote: "....'The United Irish of Belfast....took advantage of this ill conduct of the Dissenters in Armagh to form a junction with the societies of Defenders in the Western and Midland Counties.'"⁷⁷ Outside of Ulster the two movements tended to merge, and members would take both oaths.⁷⁸

The alliance meant that the United Irish by 1796 were not only revolutionary rather than reformist, but had also adopted new policies. Thus a United society in County Down in 1795 advocated the abolition of tithes, hearth-money and cesses, as well as excise taxes.⁷⁹ They now represented what the government had always feared: an alliance of the middle classes with the Catholic masses. And in the memoir presented to the Irish government by Emmet, O'Conner and Mac Neven the contribution of Orangeism to that alliance was made clear:

74. Mac Neven, p. 48.

75. R.R. Madden, Antrim and Down in '98 (Glasgow, n.d.), p. 13.

76. Moore, II: 7.

77. Senior, pp. 48-9.

78. Moore, II: 7.

79. Aspects of Irish Social History 1750-1800, ed. W.H. Crawford and B. Trainor (H.M.S.O., Belfast, 1969), no. 77.

To the Armagh persecution is the Union of Irishmen most exceedingly indebted. The persons and properties of the wretched catholics of that county were exposed to the merciless attacks of an Orange Faction, which was certainly in many instances uncontrolled (sic) by the justices of peace, and claimed to be all supported by government.... wherever the Orange system was introduced, particularly in catholic counties, it was uniformly observed that the numbers of United Irishmen encreased (sic) most astonishingly. The alarm which an Orange lodge excited among the catholics made them look for refuge by joining together in the United system; and as their number was always greater than that of bigoted protestants, our harvest was ten-fold....⁸⁰

Since the Orangemen were reputedly dedicated to the extermination of the Catholics, the result is scarcely surprising.⁸¹

The United societies were, from the very beginning, based upon a maze of cells, each interconnected but separate. Each cell, or society, contained - ideally - twelve members: when a society was deemed too large, it was split. Each society elected a secretary and a treasurer; the former represented his cell on a Lower Baronial Committee, which in turn sent a representative to an Upper Baronial Committee. The same manner of election filled the places on District, County and Provincial Directories. And above all, elected secretly by the latter, was the General Executive Directory.⁸² When the United Irish re-established themselves on a para-military basis after their suppression, the military organization was simply grafted onto the civilian, and each society also elected a sergeant; these officers in turn chose captains, who then chose colonels. This development first occurred in Ulster late in 1796 and in

80. Mac Neven, p. 178.

81. Hereward Senior, Orangeism in Ireland and Britain, 1795-1836 (London and Toronto), 1966, p. 13.

82. H. of C., 1799, pp. x-xi.

Leinster in the spring of 1797, but was extended to Munster only in 1798.⁸³ Thus by the end of 1796 they had become a formidable organization, which was still growing. The societies were arming themselves⁸⁴, and the number of sworn members was already significant. Returns provided by a spy for October, 1796 showed the following membership:

Down	11,016 men
Antrim	15,000
Derry	3,696
Tyrone	4,355
Donegal	2,000
Armagh	1,000
Louth	1,600
Cork	1,600
Monaghan	1,000
Others	16,000 (Meath, Westmeath, Kildare, Dublin)
TOTAL	57,267

85

The situation was rapidly getting out of the government's control. Something would have to be done, and soon. On November 6, 1796 Camden gave an indication of what was to come: he "proclaimed" the counties of Antrim, Down, Tyrone, Londonderry and Armagh because of treasonous assassinations and the destruction of cattle to prevent the recruitment of militia, because of intimidation of those who would not join the "treasonable conspiracies", and because men often marched in military formation "under pretence of saving corn and digging potatoes".⁸⁶ Such proclamations would become commonplace in the following year.

83. H. of C., 1798, Appendices, p. 308; Report from the Secret Committee of the House of Lords (Dublin, 1798), Appendices, p. 57.

84. H. of C., 1798, Appendices, p. 53.

85. Ibid., pp. 80-81.

86. Ibid., pp. 115-6.

Chapter IV: Government Policy and Repression, 1794-1797.

The war with the revolutionary government in France provided the radicals in Ireland with the prospect of external aid. This danger, which the British authorities were well aware of, led them to take severe measures against any dissent. And the impetus which the hardships caused by the war gave to the radicals made their suppression even more important. However, politics was also to play its part in the decisions made by Pitt and his colleagues in the Parliaments of England and Ireland, a fact which makes it at times difficult to follow the pattern of their policy.

Prelude to Decision, 1794-1796

The suppression of the United Irish was a reflection of the policy which Pitt was following in England. The Secret Committee of the House of Commons had concluded in its report of May 16, 1794, that the Society for Constitutional Information and the London Corresponding Society were seditious and dangerous.¹ Consequently, on the same day Pitt moved: "...That leave be given to bring in a bill to empower his majesty to secure and detain such persons as his majesty shall suspect are conspiring against his person and government."² The bill went through its last reading the next day by a vote of 172 to 22. Pitt was moving swiftly to stifle opposition, and he took another step soon after, one which put an end to any effective restraint upon him in Parliament. He managed in July to convince the pro-war Whigs led by Portland to join his government.³

Portland had not entered the coalition selflessly: he wanted

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1. The Parliamentary History of England, Vol. XXI (London, 1818), cols. 475-497. (hereafter Cobbett).
 2. Ibid., col. 505 (see also cols. 497-505).
 3. R.B. McDowell, "The Fitzwilliam episode", Irish Historical Studies, XV: 115. (hereafter McDowell, "Fitzwilliam").

to wrest control of the Irish administration from the Tories, and consequently he chose the Home Office rather than Foreign Affairs and insisted that Lord Fitzwilliam become Viceroy.⁴ Portland apparently believed that he had Pitt's accession to the replacement of the Fitzgibbon-Beresford faction by the Whig (Ponsonby - Grattan) group, and to their policy of total Catholic emancipation.⁵ Thus on August 23 Fitzwilliam wrote to both Grattan and Charlemont, asking them to support his administration.⁶ The result was that the expectations of both Whigs and Catholics were aroused. Pitt was furious at these premature communications, and almost cancelled Fitzwilliam's appointment. But a compromise was worked out with the aid of Burke and Grattan, and the new Lord Lieutenant agreed to the following statement of policy:

They stated that Lord F.'s view was: To support in Ireland the English Government, considering Mr. Pitt as the Prime Minister, without whom no material measure as to things or persons is to be concerted or done... No vindictive removals; those which may be necessary for convenience to be settled here by amicable concert.⁷

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4. Ibid., p. 116. Also The Manuscripts of the Earl of Carlisle (Historical Manuscripts Commission, London, 1897), p. 720. (hereafter Carlisle MSS). And Henry Richard Lord Holland, Memoirs of the Whig Party during my Time, ed. by his son, (London, 1852), Vol. I, p. 74.
 5. McDowell, "Fitzwilliam", p. 117.
 6. The Manuscripts and Correspondence of James, First Earl of Charlemont, Vol. II, (Historical Manuscripts Commission, London, 1894), p. 246. Also Edith M. Johnston, Great Britain and Ireland 1760-1800, A Study in Political Administration (Edinburgh and London, 1963), pp. 108-9.
 7. Reproduced in Johnston, p. 110.

At a subsequent cabinet meeting attended by Pitt, Portland, Grenville, Spencer, Windham and the new Viceroy, it was agreed that George Ponsonby could be appointed Solicitor General, but not Attorney General, and that Fitzwilliam should commit himself to no pro-Catholic policy without first consulting the cabinet,⁸ and should discourage any moves to accomplish it. The Lord Lieutenant then departed for Ireland and arrived on January 4, 1795. Meanwhile Grattan had also returned from England, and instructed Edward Byrne and Keogh, two Catholic leaders, to "pour in petitions to parliament".⁹

Despite his apparent instructions, on January 7 Fitzwilliam proposed the dismissal of Wolfe as Attorney General, and his replacement by Ponsonby.¹⁰ On the same day he summarily dismissed John Beresford from the Commissionership of the Revenue, but did not report this to Portland until January 15.¹¹ And on the latter day he removed Sackville Hamilton and Edward Cooke, the two Under

8. Johnston, pp. 110-111; also The Manuscripts of J.B. Fortescue, Esq., (Historical Manuscripts Commission, London, 1892) Vol. III, pp. 35-38: Memorandum of Lord Grenville, March, 1795 (hereafter Fortescue MSS).

9. McDowell, "Fitzwilliam", p. 122.

10. Carlisle MSS, p. 715.

11. Ibid., p. 716. Also Johnston, p. 112. Fitzwilliam felt that his power was "incompatible" with that of Beresford: Fitzwilliam to Grenville, Feb. 9, 1795: Fortescue MSS, III: 17.

Secretaries, from office.¹² Five days' earlier Toler's resignation as Solicitor General had also been requested.¹³ The whole matter began resembling a coup d'état. When the Irish Parliament met on January 22, the treasury bench was occupied by Grattan, Curran, the Ponsonbys and their followers. Moreover, Grattan immediately moved a bill to grant Catholics the rights still denied them.¹⁴ Portland tried to reverse the course of his impetuous colleague, but it was far too late. Pitt was not willing to see his allies in the Irish administration overthrown at a single stroke, nor was he willing to see the Catholics totally emancipated unless the island was united to Britain.¹⁵ On February 21 Portland wrote to his protégé, informing him of his fall:

...the true interest, I mean the cause of Government abstractly considered, requires that you should not continue to administer that of Ireland. Whatever may be the determination of Mr. Beresford and of the Attorney Genl., or the designation of the Office destined for Mr. Ponsonby, or any of the questions... there appears such a concurrence in the views, such a deference to the suggestions and wishes and such an acquiescence in the prejudices of Grattan and the Ponsonbys, that there seems to me no other way of rescuing you and English Government from the annihilation, which is impending over it but by the distressful and affecting measure which I venture to propose...

16

Fitzwilliam himself blamed his removal entirely on his dismissal of Beresford and the personal enmity of Pitt, and claimed that he had had full authority to act as he did on the Catholic question, or that he was at least not contradicted by the cabinet when he proposed the measure.¹⁷ Among others, Sir Jonah Barrington

12. Johnston, p. 112.

13. McDowell, "Fitzwilliam", p. 123.

14. Ibid., p. 125.

15. Johnston, p. 116.

16. Reproduced in Johnston, p. 115.

17. Carlisle MSS, pp. 717-721. Also Holland, p. 75; Cobbett XXXI, col. 1515; and H.M. Hyde, The Rise of Castlereagh (London, 1933) p. 130.

has suggested that Pitt intentionally deceived Fitzwilliam so as to raise, and then shatter, the aspirations of the Catholics, hoping that this would provoke a rebellion which could be crushed and a union imposed.¹⁸ This whole theory assumes, however, that the Catholic masses were greatly aroused by the issue of "their" emancipation". But Thomas Addis Emmet, in testimony before the Committee of Secrecy of the House of Lords in 1798, said:

I believe the mass of the people do not care a feather for Catholic Emancipation, neither did they care for Parliamentary Reform, till it was explained to them as leading to other objects which they looked to, principally the abolition of tithes....¹⁹

Yet Rex Syndergaard argues that the effect of Fitzwilliam's recall was, in effect, the rebellion of 1798.²⁰ This is to totally overestimate the interest of the Catholic peasantry in the affair. For example, only the Catholics of Dublin were conspicuous in protesting the Lord Lieutenant's recall, and they were joined by the Protestant merchants and traders, freemen and freeholders of the city, as well as the Protestant freeholders of Kildare, Wexford, Antrim and Derry. And when Fitzwilliam departed on March 25 all the shops of Dublin closed, while troops had to be called out to quell disturbances when his successor, Lord Camden, arrived.²¹ Thus his recall was deeply resented by the Catholic upper and middle classes, and by the radical Protestants; as we shall see later, the common people were stirred by other considerations.

18. Sir Jonah Barrington, Rise and Fall of the Irish Nation (Paris 1833), reported in Rex Syndergaard, "The Fitzwilliam Crisis and Irish Nationalism", Eire-Ireland, VI: 74.

19. Report from the Secret Committee of the House of Lords (Dublin, 1798), Appendices, p. 56 (hereafter H. of L., 1798).

20. Syndergaard, VI: 72-77.

21. Jacob, p. 242.

However, this is not to deny that all those involved were concerned by the probable long-term effects of Catholic Emancipation. Fitzwilliam wanted to bring about a unification of all the upper and middle classes in support of the government, as he wrote to Portland on February 10, 1795:

....We have occasion enough for having unanimity among the higher orders. We cannot depend upon the affection and attachment of the lower. The whole united strength of the higher may be necessary to control and keep the lower in order....We must unite the higher orders in our common cause....²²

But Pitt and Portland took a different view, and on February 20 Fitzwilliam wrote almost desperately to the latter:

....Can it be in the contemplation of any man that a state of disturbance or rebellion here will tend to the desirable end (which, I think, I discover to be alluded to in your letter) of an union between the two kingdoms? Doubtless the end is most desirable, and perhaps the safety of the two kingdoms may finally depend upon its attainment; but are the means risked such as are justifiable, or such as any man would wish to risk in hope of attaining the end?....²³

Certainly Pitt was at least contemplating the idea, as even W.E.H. Lecky concludes.²⁴

But the crisis also affected another group: the Whig Ascendancy. This had been their attempt to impose their control upon the Irish administration, and their liberal solution upon Irish government. If Pitt did deceive Holland and/or Fitzwilliam, then he did it to precipitate the Whig move before the groundwork for it had been

22. Quoted in W.E.H. Lecky, A History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century (London, 1892), Vol. III, pp. 282-3.

23. Quoted in Ibid., p. 295.

24. Ibid., p. 260-1.

properly laid. It seems more likely, though, that Portland used Fitzwilliam as his front in the power-grab, and when it failed, he abandoned him. Certainly it seems inconceivable that the Viceroy took it upon himself to simply ignore all the instructions he had been given, unless it was at least implied to him by Pitt or Portland that he could, or even should, do so. But it was inevitable that Pitt would not allow the Lord Lieutenant to replace the Tory Ascendancy in its hold on the administration, while also threatening the entire Ascendancy and the tie to Britain by his pro-Catholic policy. For Pitt the Catholic issue was tied to a union; perhaps that dual policy was what he hoped Fitzwilliam would achieve but, when the latter seemed about to grant the first without the second, he had to dismiss him.²⁵ But, whatever his motivation, Pitt's action seriously disillusioned the Whig section of the Ascendancy, and convinced the radicals, Catholic and Protestant alike, that the status quo could only be changed by violence, if they were not convinced already.

The United Irish had been dormant since their suppression in 1794, but the Fitzwilliam affair and the rural situation regenerated them, and they officially transformed themselves into a secret society.²⁶ But the disillusionment of the Catholic and Presbyterian radicals was now shared by some liberal members of the Ascendancy, and four men of considerable importance joined the new society: Lord Edward Fitzgerald, Arthur O'Connor, Thomas Addis Emmet and Dr. William James Mac Neven.²⁷ The first two had been members of Parliament, and all were Episcopalians. Fitzgerald and O'Connor had both been in France, and both were deeply influenced by their experiences there. These men gave the society a respectability

25. See Syndergaard, pp. 74-5.

26. See H. of L., 1798, Appendices, p. 23.

27. Thomas Moore, The Life and Death of Lord Edward Fitzgerald (New York, 1831), Vol. I, p. 188.

which, it had not previously enjoyed, and the name Fitzgerald was one which could rouse the Catholic peasantry by its ancient lineage. But Fitzgerald and O'Connor were also men of sufficient stature that they could negotiate on semi-diplomatic terms with the French.

Many of those who had concluded that only violence could set Ireland free, had also decided that violence could only succeed if French aid was forthcoming. Tone had gone to America and there impressed upon the French ambassador the dependence of England upon Ireland for provisions and manpower: "England cannot exist without Ireland. Without the latter her destructive power would be annihilated....without the supplies from Ireland, England could not subsist very long."²⁸ The ambassador was sufficiently impressed to offer Tone financial help in getting to France. Tone received aid from the American Ambassador in Paris, James Monroe, and began negotiating with the French, including Carnot, for the sending of an invasion force to Ireland.²⁹ He asked for a force of 20,000 men, but said that 5,000 should suffice; however, "...as to 2,000 men, they might as well send twenty...."³⁰ He also wanted Hoche to lead the army. But the deal was only closed when, unknown to Tone, Fitzgerald and O'Connor met Hoche in Switzerland during the summer of 1796.³¹

Thus the United Irish had by 1796 committed themselves to an armed insurrection aided by the French. Unfortunately the French fleet which sailed into Bantry Bay in December of 1796, with 15,000 men on board, was prevented from landing by adverse winds.³² But there was no one on shore to help because the United Irish, who had been informed by a French messenger in October or November that the fleet was soon coming, later received, and believed, a forged letter

28. J.J.St. Mark, "Wolfe Tone's Diplomacy in America: August-December, 1795", *Eire-Ireland*, VII: 8; reproduction of Tone's memorial to the French Government, 1795.

29. Theobald Wolfe Tone, *Life and Adventures* (Glasgow, n.d.), pp. 99-107.

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 102-3.

31. H. of L, 1798, pp. 10-11. Strangely enough, when Hoche asked Tone his opinion of Fitzgerald and O'Connor, without telling him the reason, he also asked him about Fitzgibbon! - Tone, pp. 142-3.

32. Tone, pp. 157-168.

apparently from France which informed them that the project was postponed.³³ There can be no doubt that this was the work of an English agent, and excellent work it was! The result was that the people were not organized and prepared to greet the invaders, and instead helped the troops sent by the government.³⁴ The radicals learned their lesson, and in April, 1797 despatched Edward John Lewins to France as their agent. (Tone was, in the French army).³⁵

Despite the failure of the Bantry Bay expedition, however, the situation of the government was deteriorating. Those who were enthusiastic in its support were an ever diminishing group; or so it seemed. The Northern Star was growing, while the government subsidized paper in Belfast declined.³⁶ Business continued to be adversely affected by the war, while military expenditures rose drastically: from £745,827 in 1793-1794 (fiscal year) to £1,855,368 in 1795-1796.³⁷ But beyond this, and far more serious, was the rural unrest which was growing more and more widespread.

The Reign of Reaction: 1797

By the beginning of 1797 Ireland was rapidly slipping into anarchy. The United Irish-Defender alliance in Ulster, employing tactics of intimidation and terror against landlords and magistrates, had put the government's authority in that area in severe jeopardy.

Camden wrote to Lord Grenville on April 18:

....The system of United Irishmen has spread in a manner almost incredible in the north; and by threats and actual assassinations, they have driven all their gentlemen from their residence, whom they have not forced into a sort of compliance with their views. I am endeavoring to find

33. H.ofL., 1798, p. 11.

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid.

36. A. Aspinall, Politics and the Press, c.1780-1850 (London, 1949), p. 110.

37. T.J. Kiernan, History of the Financial Administration of Ireland to 1817 (London, 1930), p. 217.

some opportunity of letting them feel the weight of military arguments....In the mean time this system has been introduced with some success into the south and west of Ireland. The Roman Catholics are again extremely active, and some of their popular preachers....are endeavouring to inflame their congregations against Government.³⁸

The trouble in the north was worst in Derry, where the problem of rising rents had been exacerbated by a recent development which

Camden reported to Portland on April 3:

....Several companies in the City of London own large tracts of ground in it (Derry); they have lately refused to renew leases, except at exorbitant fines or great increase of rent. The consequence has been, that the few gentlemen who resided there, and were disposed to improve their estates, have been driven from that county....³⁹

In Armagh troops had been attacked by a force of two or three hundred rebels, while Camden had reported to Portland on March 9 that there was serious trouble in Down, Donegal, Kildare, Louth, Fermanagh and King's County. Consequently he ordered these districts disarmed, and placed Ulster under martial law.⁴⁰

Camden was by no means overestimating the danger which the United Irish posed to the government in Ulster. The returns of the Provincial Meeting of the Ulster societies on April 14 indicate that there were 116,844 United Irishmen sworn in the ten northern counties by that date, including 22,716 in Antrim, 28,577 in Down, 10,500 in Derry, 17,000 in Armagh and 14,000 in Tyrone.⁴¹

38. Fortescue MSS, III: 314-5.

39. W.E.H. Lecky, A History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century (London, 1892; reprint, New York, 1969) Vol. IV, p. 13.

40. Ibid., pp. 14, 18; and The Report of the Secret Committee of the House of Commons (Dublin, 1798), Appendices, p. 117. (hereafter H. of C., 1798).

41. H. of C., 1798, Appendices, p. 132.

Moreover, the societies were in daily expectation of aid from the invasion force at the Texel.⁴² Thus it had become essential that the United Irish in Ulster be broken and disarmed, and Camden's almost repetitious proclamations under the Insurrection Act led to an ever more concentrated effort to terrorize the north into submission,⁴³ or perhaps into open revolt! The latter was the motive suggested by a letter of May 8 to Camden written, it would seem, by Charlemont or someone in his confidence:

War in Ireland is, without doubt, the object of the British ministry in Ireland; and the avidity of the ministerialists in Ireland for what they wish to call rebellion, has been publicly manifested beyond contradiction. All rebellions, hitherto so called in Ireland, have either been provoked by ministers for the time being, with a view to confiscations, or they have been incited by resentments, and for reprisals of antecedent confiscations. These are the never-ceasing earthquakes, which have shaken and convulsed the whole kingdom. Such have been the revolutions and counter-revolutions of Ireland. These eternal vicissitudes of disquiet and reprisals have left indelible impressions of terror upon the national mind and memory of Ireland. If the rage should recur, through the inevitable and still lurking impulse of confiscations, a century of quiet may be fatally harrowed up into civil war by the madness of a single hour. I hope that irrevocable war is not yet decided or inextricably involved....⁴⁴

Certainly, as Camden himself admitted to Lord Grenville in a letter of November 3, the government had intended to answer terror with terror,⁴⁵ but it seems equally clear that there were those in the administration who were anything but alarmed at the prospect of driving the United Irish into open rebellion. One of these was Beresford,⁴⁶ and it should be remembered that two years earlier Pitt had sided with him and the Conservative Ascendancy against Fitzwilliam and the liberals.

42. *Ibid.*, pp. 138; 141.

43. *Ibid.*, pp. 122-125, 129-30; also pp. 6-7 of the report itself.

44. Charlemont MSS, II: 298.

45. Fortescue MSS, III: 389.

46. Lecky, IV: 21-2.

Since Fitzwilliam's recall the polarization within Ireland had proceeded rapidly, and the loyalist minority had become increasingly adamant and extremist. General Knox, who wanted the Orangemen armed, wrote to Pelham on April 14:

....The present...is a contest of the poor against the rich, and of the Irishmen against the British Government. Many foolish men of property have joined in the rebellion from the latter motive, but the loyalty of every Irishman who is unconnected with property is artificial....⁴⁷

The government in Britain had decided in 1795 that it must support the Tory, Protestant Ascendancy, and this decision led it, and its subservient regime in Dublin, to be drawn at last to the support of the Orange faction which represented only a small fraction of the Irish population. Thus whether Pitt or Portland actually wanted a rebellion and a Union in 1795 or at some later date, their policy led inevitably to both. It was not in the first instance coercion which led to revolt, but rising rents, tithes, and the restriction of Irish trade. The government, by tying itself to the Ascendancy which alone benefitted from the first two of these, could not alleviate the plight of the peasants, just as it could not help the Irish commercial classes to the detriment of their English counterparts. Once the authorities had made their choice, the United Irish had no alternative but violence, just as the government had no other weapon with which to oppose them. On May 26 the Rev. Edward Hudson wrote to Charlemont:

....reform and intimidation were the chief recruiting serjeants for the societies. But, my lord, government itself is lending them

47. Quoted in Lecky, IV: 57.

another, by establishing a system of mere coercion without any mixture of conciliation. Should we escape invasion, I do believe government has strength to carry this system into effect, at least for some time. But what would be the consequence of such success? The overturning the constitution from its base and establishing in its stead a gloomy despotism....⁴⁸

But what but a despotism would allow the Ascendancy to continue to dominate the vast majority of the Irish people? For a Protestant liberal the situation might seem clouded, but for Pitt it was clear, very clear.

The United Irish were no longer a small party of Presbyterian merchants in Belfast and Dublin. They had, by advocating the abolition of tithes and the lowering of rents, attracted the support of the majority of Catholic, and many Protestant, peasants. They had also been joined by some liberal members of the Ascendancy, and were increasingly supported by the Catholic clergy. One informer even reported that Dr. Troy, the Bishop of Dublin, had been sworn a member.⁴⁹ But, while this made the United Irish powerful in numbers and prestige, it also led to inevitable divisions. Thus, while some members wanted estates confiscated and land given to the peasants,⁵⁰ such policies could scarcely meet with the approval of such men as Lord Edward Fitzgerald. Moreover, there was also division among the leadership as to what tactics to employ. In June, 1797 many of the United leaders met in Dublin to consider whether or not to rise immediately, an idea strongly supported by the Defender chiefs in Down and Armagh, Charles Teeling and A. Lowry, as well as another

48. Charlemont MSS. II: 299.

49. John T. Gilbert, ed., Documents relating to Ireland 1795-1804 (Shannon 1893; reprint:1970), p. 114.

50. Ibid., pp. 113-4.

northerner, Tennant, but opposed by others who believed that only Ulster was prepared to revolt. The latter won the day, and Teeling, Lowry and Tennant fled to France.⁵¹ According to the Report of the Secret Committee of the House of Commons (1798) it was the Leinster delegates who opposed the plan for immediate rebellion,⁵² although Fitzgerald supported it.⁵³ Since the Leinster Directory consisted of such radicals as O'Connor, Jackson, Bond and Mac Neven, as well as Fitzgerald, this can only be explained by the lack of preparation in the southern counties and the hope of French assistance. It is also very likely that the southerners failed to understand the degree of pressure which the government was applying in Ulster, and the danger of a split along religious lines between United Irishmen and Defenders in that province.⁵⁴

Despite these divisions, and the unpreparedness of the United system outside of Ulster, the situation confronting the government during 1797 was grave, and if their efforts in the north had failed, a subsequent rising throughout the island, especially if abetted by the French, would probably have succeeded. The latter had already promised aid, and late in the year sent word that a fleet would arrive in April of 1798.⁵⁵ And besides its strength in Ulster, by November the United Irish were firmly established in Carlow, Kildare, Kilkenny, Wexford and Wicklow, while Cork was disaffected due to its loss of trade.⁵⁶ Even Connaught was suspect due to the large number of Catholics and United Irish driven from Ulster.⁵⁷

Moreover, the military forces at the disposal of the government were suspect. There were in Ireland in February, 1797 about 63,000 troops: 15,000 regulars, 18,000 militia and 30,000 yeomen.⁵⁸

51. H. of C., 1798, Appendices, p. 164: information given by John Hughes of Belfast. Also Moore, II: 4-5 and R.R. Madden, Antrim and Down, in '98, (Glasgow, n.d.), p. 13.

52. H. of C., 1798, p. 23.

53. Moore, II: 4

54. R.R. Madden, The United Irishmen (Dublin, 1858), p. 233.

55. H. of L., 1798, Appendices, p. 52: testimony of T.A. Emmet.

56. Lecky, IV: 129-133.

57. Ibid., pp. 139-40.

58. Ibid., p. 35.

But the militia in particular was of very doubtful loyalty. At a United Irish provincial meeting in Armagh on November 14 it was reported that of the 4,000 militia in Antrim, 700 were disaffected, as were 1,000 of the 1,100 in Down, 1,000 of the 2,700 in Tyrone, 200 of the 4,200 in Armagh, and 700 of the 2,000 in Donegal.⁵⁹ Also, the plan of revolt which the United Irish had rejected in the spring had been inspired by the offer of a deputation of sergeants of the Clare, Kilkenny and Kildare Militias to seize the royal barrack and the Castle itself.⁶⁰ And the Report of the Secret Committee of the House of Commons (1798) reported the courts martial of twenty-three privates and one corporal in various militia units during May and July of 1797 for mutiny and sedition, as well as that of one corporal and two privates of the Second Fencible Dragoons.⁶¹ The government was in obvious peril, but, by acting with speed in the north before the United Irish were fully prepared and organized elsewhere, it had by the end of the year greatly improved its position. Once the plan of immediate insurrection had been rejected, the Ulstermen would seem to have lost much of their conviction. For example, whereas in April of 1797 provincial returns showed that society members in Ulster had at least 6,638 guns in their possession,⁶² in the first twenty days of July 8, 300 were surrendered and another 2,500 seized.⁶³ Of course, many of the latter were the property of non-radicals; nevertheless, despite the revulsion of public opinion in the face of the brutality employed by the authorities in the north, there can be little doubt that their tactics were far from ineffective.

But mistakes had been made: the execution of William Orr on October 14, 1797 at the age of thirty-one led to the famous

59. H. of C., 1798, Appendices, p. 142.

60. Moore, II: 4.

61. H. of C. 1798, Appendices, pp. 281-93.

62. Ibid., p. 132.

63. Lecky, IV: 100.

rallying cry, "Remember Orr", since he had been convicted by an intimidated, drunken jury.⁶⁴ The ransacking of the Northern Star worried even Camden,⁶⁵ and the Press, established by O'Connor, Fitzgerald, Bond, Jackson, Chambers and McNally, replaced it in September.⁶⁶ Moreover, while repression had met with significant success in the north, it had undoubtedly disposed many in the other provinces to join the United Irish. Grattan and Lord Henry Fitzgerald (Edward's brother) had both refused to run for re-election,⁶⁷ and the government by the end of 1797 was totally dependent for support upon the British authorities and the Orange, or Conservative Ascendancy, group. On November 21, Camden wrote to Grenville:

...The cruelties which are exercised are dreadful, and the familiarity and meetings of the United Irishmen proves the determination with which they are inclined to pursue their system. I wish I saw any probability that a different line of conduct could ensure quiet and give satisfaction; but I am at present clear it cannot advantageously be adopted.⁶⁸

The British decision to tie its rule in Ireland to the support of the Conservative Ascendancy, especially at a time of political turmoil and economic dislocation, led inevitably to the unrest which could only be suppressed by force. By the end of 1797 both sides knew that an open rebellion was inevitable, and both were playing for or with time. The British wanted to weaken the United Irish before any outbreak, but they also wanted any outbreak to occur before French aid could be extended to the insurgents. This put the United Irish in a quandary: they wanted to wait for French help, but how long could they wait? One more turn of the screw, and Ireland would explode.

64. Madden, The United Irishmen, p. 256.

65. Fortescue MSS, III: 386 (Camden to Grenville, Nov. 3, 1797).

66. Lecky, IV: 196 and Madden, The United Irishmen, p. 242.

67. Moore, I: 212.

68. Fortescue MSS, III: 399.

Chapter V: Prelude to Rebellion

Here frowns the despot conscious of his might;
 The sword makes law, and then desperses right;
 Ruled by the hand of tyranny hell-taught,
 To circumscribe the boundaries of thought.
 There abject treachery stalks without one blush
 The gems of patriotic worth to crush.

By the end of 1797 the government had apparently crushed the spirit of resistance, and extinguished the flame of liberty, in the north; it now turned its attention to the counties around Dublin, in the province of Leinster. Terror was still its primary weapon, but it had others also at its disposal, and it intended to use them. The United Irish had always been plagued by spies and informers, but the authorities were now preparing to disrupt its executive committees, and decapitate the societies. Moreover, the ever inflammable material of religious bigotry was seen as the best means of disuniting the fraternal union of all Irishmen. An interesting exchange took place between Dr. William James Mac Neven and some members of the House of Commons at his examination before that assembly on August 8, 1798:

Speaker: Pray, sir, what do you think occasioned the insurrection?

MacNeven: The insurrection was occasioned by the house-burnings, the whippings to extort confessions, the torture of various kinds, the free quarters; and the murders committed upon the people by the magistrates and the army.

Speaker: This only took place since the insurrection.

MacNeven: It is more than twelve months...since these horrors were perpetrated by the Antient Britons about Neury; and long before the insurrection they were quite

1. William Hamilton Drummond, The man of age (Belfast, 1797), reproduced in R.B. McDowell, Irish Public Opinion, 1750-1800 (London, 1944), p. 217.

common through the counties of Kildare and Carlow, and began to be practiced with very great activity in the counties of Wicklow and Wexford.²

Thus the government continued to increase the pressure, challenging the United Irish to either rebel or submit before any foreign aid could reach them. The strategy worked: the reasons why will be outlined in this chapter, and analysed in Chapter VII.

United Irish Organization and Plans, 1798

The official leaders of the United Irish were still, as they had always been, mainly men of relatively high social standing; in the urban areas they were usually from the commercial and professional classes, while in the countryside they were for the most part landowners; or even farmers of moderate means. The national executive early in 1798 was composed of six men: Oliver Bond, the treasurer, a wealthy woolen draper and the son of a dissenting minister; Lord Edward Fitzgerald, brother of the Duke of Leinster, a landowner and aristocrat, who had had military experience in America, a member of one of the foremost Protestant, Norman-Irish families; Arthur O'Connor, nephew of Lord Longueville, wealthy and aristocratic; Richard McCormick, a Dublin manufacturer; Thomas Addis Emmet, an eminent lawyer; and William James MacNeven, a physician.³ Thus there were two representatives of the landowning interests, two from the commercial and two from the professional classes; while McCormick and MacNeven were the only Catholics.⁴ But these men, whose social position gave the United Irish an aura of respectability, were remote from the vast masses of the Catholic peasantry,

2. William James MacNeven, Pieces of Irish History (New York, 1807) pp. 202-3.

3. W.E.H. Lecky, A History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century (London, 1892; reprint: New York, 1969), Vol. IV, pp. 252-6; and R.R. Madden, The United Irishmen (Dublin, 1858), p. 392.

4. Madden, p. 252.

and were also highly vulnerable to arrest. In fact, not one of them would take any active part in the rebellion itself, which would be led by less prominent men. For one thing, government harassment during the months preceeding the revolt made it increasingly difficult for the leaders to meet, or to properly organize the societies in preparation for a rebellion. Moreover, the leadership was constantly beset by factionalism, suspicion and disagreement during these last months, and was increasingly unable to control the masses who wanted to rise in response to the degradations of the military and the Orangemen.

While the United Irish leaders were mostly men of social standing and at least moderate wealth, their followers were not: the bulk was made up of small farmers or agricultural laborers, small tradesmen, weavers, industrial workers and domestic servants.⁵ On paper the societies were very formidable in numbers. United Irish returns for May, 1797 show that their membership in Ulster totalled 111,725 (down 5,000 from the April return mentioned in Chapter Four), of whom 26,153 were in Down, 22,716 in Antrim, 17,000 in Armagh, 14,000 in Tyrone and 10,500 in Derry. The total in the other counties which reported (Louth, Kildare, Meath, Dublin county and city) was only 16,198.⁶ In contrast to this concentration in Ulster, by February 26, 1798 national returns showed 110,990 members in Ulster, 100,634 in Munster, and 55,672 in Leinster, including 12,895 in Wicklow, 11,689 in Queen's County, 10,863 in Kildare, and 9,414 in Carlow.⁷ And by April 19 the membership in Leinster had further increased, with 14,000 in Wicklow, 11,910 in Kildare and 11,300 in Carlow, as well as 8,597 in the city of Dublin, a figure four times that of only

5. A more thorough discussion of the question of the composition of the United Irish societies and the rebel forces in 1798 will be included in Chapter VII. See Lecky, IV: 228.

6. The Report of the Secret Committee of the House of Commons (Dublin, 1798), Appendices, chart facing p. 217, and p. 218. (hereafter H. of C., 1798).

7. Ibid., Appendices, p. 177..

twenty-two days before.⁸ But these were paper numbers, and in some cases represented only paper men, while in others they were underestimates, especially in the case of Wexford which - for whatever reason - was never mentioned.

There had always been a degree of discrepancy between the official objectives of the United Irish, and their secret designs, although by 1798 the difference had become of little import. The societies, while still theoretically attached to the principles of Parliamentary Reform and Catholic Emancipation, had been driven to adopt far more sweeping objectives. Thus on February 19, 1798 a resolution was presented to the national executive from the Ulster and Leinster provincial directories:

....Resolved, that we will pay no attention whatever to any attempt that may be made by either House of Parliament to divert the public mind from the grand object we have in view, as nothing short of the complete emancipation of our country will satisfy us.⁹

The United Irish were now aiming at nothing less than a revolution which would establish a provisional republic,¹⁰ and had long ago invited the aid of republican France to achieve this end. They were agreed upon the necessity of independence from Britain, and the abolition of tithes. There was also a strong feeling among many that the Irish Church should be disestablished.¹¹ Thus United proclamations had by now become openly treasonable, as exemplified by a hand-bill aimed at the subversion of the military:

....Seduction made you soldiers, but nature made you men. Let her call awaken every noble and generous sentiment in your breasts, never to turn your arms against your fellow-men,

8. Ibid., Appendices, p. 234.

9. Report from the Secret Committee of the House of Lords (Dublin, 1798), p. 19. (hereafter H. of L., 1798.)

10. MacNeven, p. 234.

11. Ibid., pp. 206-9; and H. of L., 1798, pp. 15-16 and Appendices pp. 55-6.

whose crimes are hatred to tyranny and oppression, and a love of liberty....
 Our tyrants talk of treason, forgetting
 there can be none except against the rights
 and interests of the people....¹²

As discussed earlier, the desire of the various individuals and classes within the society for independence sprang from different interests and desires. The farmers and agricultural laborers wanted the burden of tithes and rising rents alleviated, while the commercial classes wanted to be relieved from the restrictions placed on Irish trade and industrial development by British tutelage. The professionals and intellectuals desired the wider horizon and brighter prospects which an Irish republic would offer to men of education and ability, without titles or connections. All wanted to be freed of the drain placed upon Irish manpower and resources by British wars. And then there were the more radical dreams, of universal education, of an end to all religious bigotry, even of an end to, or curtailment of, the rights of private property. But these latter were little more than ideals which some of the leaders believed in, but whose importance was restricted to a small minority. And in the case of property, most of the leaders were very interested in its protection, not its destruction.¹³

But for the present the United Irish had to concentrate upon more immediate objectives, upon the organization of their forces, plans for a rising, the subversion of the military, especially the militia, and negotiations with the French. They also warned the people against the consumption of alcohol, so that they would remain sober and the government lose the tax which it collected.

12. H. of C., 1798, Appendices, p. 301.

13. A more detailed analysis of the divisions among the rebels will be included in Chapter VII.

on its sale. In the same vein tracts were circulated telling the people not to buy quit-rents from the government, nor accept paper currency. One such notice was quite blunt in its implications:

.....We need not tell you that the value of any bank note rests upon the credit of him who issues it. And in our opinion, the issuer of this paper is a bankrupt, who in all likelihood must shortly shut up, and run away....

14

And the Catholic peasants were being roused by stories of an Orange plot to annihilate them, stories given apparent validity by the Orange - yeoman atrocities which were being constantly reported, and which were sanctioned by the authorities.¹⁵

The United Irish were also continuing to wage an effective press and propaganda campaign against the government. The destruction of the Northern Star had been a blow, but as mentioned earlier, in the fall of 1797 Arthur O'Connor established the Press, among whose contributors were Thomas Moore, T.A. Emmet, Robert Emmet, William Sampson and John Sheares.¹⁶ It was a well written newspaper, which left no doubt as to its political program: in the issue of December 2, 1797 it addressed the following plea to the students of Trinity College:

You, my fellow-students, have explored the pages of history....Ireland is singular in suffering, and in cowardice; she could crush her tormentors, and yet they embowel her; she could be free, yet she is a slave.¹⁷

It was suppressed on March 6, 1798.¹⁸ But an even more violent paper, the Union Star, which advocated assassination and listed

14. H. of C., 1798, Appendices, p. 278. See also p. 280, and Lecky, IV: 229-30.

15. Lecky, IV: 236. See also H. of C., 1798, Appendices, p. 252.

16. Madden, pp. 242, 250-3.

17. H. of C., 1798, Appendices, pp. 265-6.

18. Madden, pp. 242, 251.

appropriate victims, was allowed to continue in existence until the rebellion.¹⁹ This fact alone lends credibility to the charge of R. Madden that its publisher, Walter Cox, was in the pay of the government.²⁰ He later received a pension, but O'Connor was convinced of his innocence.²¹ It seems likely in fact that he was a double agent, but on which side his genuine sympathies lay is uncertain.²²

The government feared the evident popularity of the radical newspapers, and had in many cases to subsidize conservative journals which were in dire financial straits such as the Belfast News-Letter, the Waterford Herald and the Leinster Journal.²³ But the authorities could not compete effectively on this level with the United Irish who had superior literary talent and a far more rousing cause. Even songs were used to excite the patriotic and revolutionary zeal of the populace, such as "The Fatal Blow":

Too long have tyrants ruled the land,
Too long you spare the ruffian band;
The blood by vile oppressors shed
Calls vengeance on each guilty head.²⁴

The government could not equal United Irish propaganda: it could only suppress it, just as it could not answer the complaints of the radicals: it could only destroy them.

Countdown to Decision

By 1798 the situation in Ireland was desperate. The economy was racked by inflation and stagnation - a combination familiar to the present-day reader. Restrictions on trade due to the war with France were forcing cutbacks in production, while taxes were rising to meet increasingly heavy government expenditures. Thus

19. H. of C., 1798, Appendices, p. 253; Madden, pp. 36, 270-2.

20. Madden, pp. 36, 270-2.

21. Ibid., p. 237.

22. See ibid., pp. 234, 272, 274-9, 406, 432.

23. A. Aspinall, Politics and the Press, c. 1780-1850 (London, 1949) pp. 109-113.

24. H. of C., 1798, Appendices, p. 278.

civil expenditures rose from L688,533 in 1793-94 to L879,581 in 1798-99, while military spending exploded from L745,827 to L3,865,530 during the same period.²⁵ And the Irish debt had climbed from L2,344,314 in 1791 to L9,485,756 in 1797, of which L6,196,316 was owed to Britain.²⁶ Between December, 1797 and August, 1798 the government borrowed L4,966,666 at six or seven percent interest rates.²⁷

The situation was so bad that the Restriction Act of 1797 had prevented the circulation of gold, but this only added to the inflationary spiral. The Committee of the British House of Commons on the Condition of the Irish Currency reported in 1804 on the Act:

It compelled the Bank to refrain from sending into circulation, Gold, the only common medium between the Countries - it gave occasion to the great Issue of Paper which followed to replace the Gold so withdrawn, and removed at the same time the best and most effective check against the depreciation of that Paper, namely its convertibility into Gold at the will of the holder. It... excited individuals to speculations which interfered with the steady natural Rates of Exchange - the number of speculators so encouraged contributed to raise the price of Bills on England, which being paid for in depreciated Paper the rate of Exchange rose proportionately.²⁸

This inflation, however, was by no means accompanied by growing prosperity.

The linen industry was in dire straits,²⁹ and on January 31, 1798 the Earl of Moira wrote to Lord Charlemont: "...the grievous pressure of the taxes in this country, and the wants of the multitude of workmen, servants, etc., dismissed from employ, threaten

25. T.J. Kiernan, History of the Financial Administration of Ireland to 1817 (London, 1930), p. 217.

26. Lecky, V: 107.

27. Ibid.

28. The Irish Pound 1797-1826, A Reprint of the Report of the Committee of 1804 of the British House of Commons on the Condition of the Irish Currency... (London, 1955), p. 70. See also pp. 71-7.

29. The Manuscripts and Correspondence of James, First Earl of Charlemont, Vol. II (Historical Manuscripts Commission, London, 1894). (hereafter Charlemont Mss)

a ferment here that might leave Ireland to its fate...³⁰ Both credit and the industry based upon it were collapsing under the burden of war and wartime taxation, and by 1797 there were in Dublin alone 37,000 in a state of "extreme destitution".³¹ Despite the official confidence of the government,³² the Earl of Moira gave the British House of Lords, on November 22, 1797 a grim picture of the Irish condition:

....What is the situation of the trade of Ireland? Desponding, drooping and distressed; her labourers in penury, her manufactures subsisting upon public charity. Look at the condition of the manufacturers of Dublin: 27,000 have been kept by the bounty of the public from perishing with want. Look at other parts of Ireland. I myself know that the manufacturers of Newry are almost stoop...³³

Thus the inflation so evident in rents³⁴ and prices finally reached a point of crisis in 1797-98, and began undermining the entire Irish economy which was also plagued by war restrictions.

However, while the economic situation favored the spread of radical ideas, the United Irish were beset by many internal difficulties. Not only were they confronted by the violence of the government, but they themselves were far from united. The societies were riddled with spies and informers, men such as Leonard McNally, a barrister who defended many United Irishmen in the courts - but told the prosecution all the plans of the defense;³⁵ Samuel Turner, the United agent in Hamburg;³⁶ and Thomas Reynolds, a close associate of Fitzgerald and a member of the Leinster executive.³⁷ The presence of informers in their midst not only destroyed the secrecy of the societies, and led eventually to the decapitation

30. Ibid., p. 315.

31. Lecky, IV:225-6. However, The Parliamentary History of England, Vol. XXXIII (London, 1818) col. 1059 seems to suggest only 27,000 were destitute in Dublin. (hereafter Cobbett.)

32. Thus the Speaker of the Irish House of Commons, in his speech to the Lord Lieutenant on March 24, 1798 expressed satisfaction with: "...the great increase of trade during the war, in the general confidence which attends private as well as public credit, in the unusual plenty which our agriculture supplies, and in the prosperous state of all our manufactures, but most particularly of our great staple, the linen": A Collection of State Papers, relative to the War Against France, Vol. VII (London, 1799), p. 555.

of the United leadership, but it also caused an air of suspicion to pervade the membership. A good example is provided by the secret condemnation of James Hope, a very loyal radical, on suspicion of treachery. He escaped drowning only because his intended assassin got drunk rather than carry out his assignment.³⁸ Moreover, robberies and atrocities were often carried out in the name of the United Irish, sometimes through government inspiration, which were by no means sanctioned by them.³⁹ And beyond all this, the leaders were divided among themselves.

The split in the leadership, which occurred late in 1797, was primarily over whether to await French help or strike alone. The death of General Hoche in September, 1797, the expulsion of Carnot from the French Directory, and the accession of General Bonaparte had greatly reduced the chances of any effective French assistance for the Irish insurgents.⁴⁰ But this did not mean an end to French interest in the Irish situation, and on December 26, 1797 Pelham wrote to Edward Cooke, upon the information of McNally:⁴¹

I learn from my friend that lord E. Fitzgerald received some days since orders from Paris to urge an insurrection here with all speed, in order to draw troops from England. In consequence of it, there was a meeting of the head committee, where he and O'Connor urged immediate measures of vigour. They proposed arming a body of five hundred with short swords; that this body should repair to all the mass houses at midnight mass on Christmas morning, that by false attacks they should persuade the people and raise a cry that the Orangemen were murdering the Catholics; that having raised the uproar they should begin their attack on the

33. Cobbett, XXXIII: 1059.

34. Some rents by 1800 were ten times what they were a century earlier: see Aspects of Irish Social History 1750-1800, ed. W.H. Crawford and B. Trainor (HMSO, Belfast, 1969), no. 3. (hereafter Aspects.) And subdivision of land had been increasing during the last years of the century: Lecky, III: 401, 408-9.

35. Madden, pp. 472-9; John T. Gilbert, ed. "Documents relating to Ireland 1795-1804" (Dublin, 1893; reprint: Shannon, 1970), pp. x-xi.

36. R.R. Madden, Antrim and Down in '98 (Glasgow, n.d.), pp. 105-6, 116.

37. Lecky, IV: 260-4.

38. Madden, Antrim and Down, pp. 109-10.

39. Ibid., p. 110.

Castle, etc. Many priests were anxious for this plan, but Emmet, Chambers, etc., opposed, and in consequence the bishops, who were against outrage, put off mass till seven o'clock in the morning. The moderate party are against insurrection till the French land.⁴²

Emmet and Chambers were supported by the wealthier commercial and professional classes, and the dispute led to violent and prolonged antipathy between the former and O'Connor.⁴³ Fitzgerald, who was appointed Commander-in-Chief and head of the military committee in January, 1798, was not only anxious that action be taken before the government could suppress the movement, but was also wary of the consequences of a large-scale French invasion, since he feared that it might be difficult to get rid of their "allies" once the British had been expelled.⁴⁴ In the end Emmet's view prevailed, either because French assistance was considered imminent, or because he threatened to denounce the executive to the authorities if they proceeded with their resolution.⁴⁵ Thus the decision to rise was postponed, and in the intervening months the government would move effectively to deprive the society of its leaders, and drive the masses to a rebellion which was unplanned, uncoordinated, unassisted, and rather easily suppressed. The United Irish did try to prevent this, and in January or February it was decided to establish a general staff. The colonels were instructed to return three names to the Provincial Directory, which then chose from these one Adjutant General for each county. Each of the latter officers were directly responsible to the provincial executive, and reported to it.⁴⁶

40. Madden, The United Irishmen, pp. 108-10.

41. Lecky, IV: 195.

42. Gilbert, p. 119.

43. Madden, The United Irishmen, pp. 235, 240-1, 399; also Frank MacDermot, "Arthur O'Connor", Irish Historical Studies (March, 1966), XV: 57.

44. Madden, The United Irishmen, p. 398; Lecky, IV: 197-8; 257; Henry Richard Lord Holland, Memoirs of The Whig Party during My Time, ed. by his son, (London, 1852), Vol. I, pp. 104-5.

45. Lecky, IV: 257.

46. H. of L., 1798, Appendices, p. 54; H. of C., 1798, Appendices, pp. 152-3, 178-9.

The government, aware that matters were soon likely to reach a climax, decided to move against the radical leaders. The first to be apprehended was Arthur O'Connor, a member of the national, Leinster and Ulster executives.⁴⁷ He had been arrested without charge and imprisoned for six months in 1797, but had been released.⁴⁸ Early in 1798 he crossed to Britain, apparently on a mission to France, where he intended to urge the despatch of an invasion force and to replace Lewis who was suspected of treachery.⁴⁹ In Britain he associated freely with Fox, Sheridan and Erskine, and the former at least was probably aware of the nature of his mission to France.⁵⁰ On February 28 O'Connor, along with the Rev. James Coigly, John Allen, John Binns and Jeremiah Leary were arrested at Margate.⁵¹ According to McNally, MacNeven, Drennan and McCormick were pleased to have him out of the way, and it can be imagined that Emmet shared their sentiments.⁵² But in England his arrest was protested in Parliament by Lord Holland and other Whigs,⁵³ while at his trial his character was attested to by Fox, Sheridan, Erskine, Grattan and the Earl of Suffolk.⁵⁴ He, along with the others except O'Coigly, was acquitted. The latter was found guilty and executed on June 7, 1798.⁵⁵ O'Connor later confessed, thus casting suspicion on all the Whigs who had testified in his defense.⁵⁶

47. Ibid., p. 228.

48. Ibid., p. 297.

49. W.J. Fitzpatrick, Secret Service under Pitt (London, 1892), p. 15; Lecky, IV: 258.

50. MacDermot, p. 58; Madden, The United Irishmen, p. 297.

51. Ibid.

52. Lecky IV: 258.

53. Cobbett, XXXIII: 1458-1481.

54. T.B. and T.J. Howell, A Complete Collection of State Trials and Proceedings for High Treason, and Other Crimes and Misdemeanors, Vol. XXVII (London, 1820), pp. 38-51.

55. Ibid., p. 51.

56. MacDermot, p. 59; Holland I: 121-2. Certainly it was well known that O'Connor was implicated with the United Irish, and the fact that Fox, (continued on next page.)

It is most probable that O'Connor's stay in England was also aimed at furthering links between the United Irish and radical groups in Britain. While there he was almost certainly in contact with the United Englishmen, a society which had been established in Manchester in the previous year.⁵⁷ At the same time another society, the United Scotsmen, had been founded, and the aim of the three United Societies was to establish three independent republics in the British Isles.⁵⁸ But the most formidable group in England was the United Irish, composed of exiles and lower-class immigrants.⁵⁹ The fleet was deeply infected by United principles, as the mutinies of 1797 demonstrated, and plans were even considered to send United Irishmen in small boats to England who would join with the radicals in London and cause an insurrection to prevent reinforcements from being sent to Ireland.⁶⁰

Sheridan, etc., testified not to his innocence, but to his character, must objectively be seen as either suspect or insincere: in the latter case, it would have been aimed towards political advantage in Britain, i.e., to represent Pitt as a tyrant, persecuting an innocent, upstanding man of good family for his radical convictions: See Cobbett XXXIII: 156, 1458-8].

57. Report of the Committee of Secrecy of the House of Commons (London, 1799), pp. xxvi-xxx (hereafter H. of C., 1799).

58. Ibid., pp. xxxi-xxxv.

59. Ibid., pp. xxxvii-xxxviii.

60. Ibid., pp. xxxvi, xxxviii-xxxix.

Beyond the confines of the British Isles, the United Irish had close contacts with the French and Dutch authorities, and in Hamburg there had been established the Philanthropic Society which included Irish, British, French, Dutch and German revolutionaries.⁶¹ The Committee of Secrecy of the British House of Commons concluded in its report:

...the real objects of the instigators of these proceedings, in both kingdoms, were... the entire overthrow of the British constitution, the general confiscation of property, and the erection of a democratic republic, founded on the ruins of all religion, and of all political and civil society, and framed after the model of France.

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Pitt's answer to this rampant radicalism had been the Treason and Sedition bills, and finally the suspension of Habeas Corpus, but he was worried, even paranoid, about the situation in Britain.⁶³ Still, however threatening the radicals might seem in England, in Ireland the problem was far more serious, and the explosion imminent.

By the spring of 1798 the government felt that the time to strike decisively at the leadership of the United Irish had come,⁶⁴ and consequently on March 12 fifteen members of the Leinster executive were arrested at the house of Oliver Bond, including Bond himself, John Chambers and James Dickson. Emmet, MacNeven, Sweetman and

61. Ibid., pp. xi-xii.

62. Ibid., pp. xli.

63. Report of the Manuscripts of J.B. Fortescue, Esq. Vol. IV (Historical Manuscripts Commission, London, 1905), pp. 166-7. (hereafter Fortescue, MSS).

64. Hereward Senior, Orangeism in Ireland and Britain, 1795-1836 (London and Toronto, 1966), p. 95.

Jackson were apprehended at the same time, but Fitzgerald, apparently warned by Reynolds, was not present at the meeting and escaped capture.⁶⁵ W.J. Fitzpatrick believes that the informer who betrayed the executive was Samuel Turner, but most authorities consider Reynolds to have been the culprit, despite his warning to Fitzgerald.⁶⁶ The reaction of the radicals in Dublin to these arrests was one of almost impotent anger and frustration, as was demonstrated by an attempted attack on Lord Clare which he drove off by drawing a pistol.⁶⁷

65. Lecky, IV: 262-3; Fitzpatrick, p. 7.

66. Ibid., IV: 260-3; Fitzpatrick, pp. 8-10; Thomas Moore, The Life and Death of Lord Edward Fitzgerald (New York, 1831), Vol. II, pp. 12-13. Reynolds confessed to the act, and between September 29, 1798 and March 4, 1799 he received £5,000 from the Irish government, which tends to make his responsibility for the act probable, if not certain: H. of C., 1798, Appendices, pp. 170-1; Moore, Vol. II, pp. 12-13; Gilbert, p. 26.

67. The Manuscripts of the Earl of Carlisle, (Historical Manuscripts Commission, London, 1897), pp. 728-9 (hereafter Carlisle MSS).

A new Leinster executive, headed by the Sheares Brothers, was soon in existence,⁶⁸ but the organization of the societies had been seriously disrupted by the arrests of March 12. And on March 20 Camden put Ireland under martial law due to "...a traitorous Conspiracy existing within this kingdom..."⁶⁹. This proclamation led to even greater brutality on the part of the troops, and genuine atrocities were frequent.⁷⁰ Not that the authorities had that many troops at their disposal: Cooke estimated the total military forces in Ireland at 84,670, including 30,901 regulars, 30,000 yeomen and 22,269 militia.⁷¹ And the loyalty and reliability of all but the regulars

68. Lecky, IV: 292.

69. H. of C., 1798, Appendices, p. 331. See also Senior, p. 96.

70. Lecky, IV: 265-76.

71. P. Brendan Bradley, Bantry Bay: Ireland in the Days of Napoleon and Wolfe Tone, (London, 1931), p. 73. At the beginning of 1798 General Moore estimated total Irish forces as follows: Regulars and Fencibles, 18,601; Militia, 21,590; Artillery, about 1,600; Yeomanry, 35,000; total, 76,791, including 18,000-20,000 cavalry: Sir John Moore, The Diary of Sir John Moore, ed. J.F. Maurice (London, 1904), Vol. I, p. 270.

and the Orange yeomanry was highly questionable. Such forces were adequate to terrorize the country, but how would they fare against large rebel armies, or against French veterans? These were the questions which must have haunted Camden and Pitt. Certainly they bothered Abercrombie, the Commander-in-Chief, who said of his army that it was "...in a state of licentiousness which must render it formidable to everyone but the enemy..."⁷²

72. Quoted in Thomas Pakenham, The Year of Liberty (London, 1969), p. 59. Cornwallis later said the militia were "...contempible (sic) before the enemy when any serious resistance is made to them, but ferocious and cruel in the extreme when any poor wretches with or without arms come within their power...": G.A. Hayes-McCoy, Irish Battles (London and Harlow, 1969), p. 277. Sir John Moore, p. 273, comments that most of the militia colonels were appointed for political purposes, and were "...in general profligate and idle, serving for the emolument, but neither, from a sense of duty nor of military distinction..." G.A. Hayes-McCoy, p. 276, comments about the general situation: "...The troops were widely scattered in small detachments with little or no apparent regard to the dictates of defensive strategy. Discipline was poor ...Most of the officers had leave for the greater part of the year and the men had long furloughs. Only for two months or so during the year were all the troops of a regiment assembled together for exercise and review...."

Lord Edward Fitzgerald, who had escaped arrest on March 12, was still at large, and the government was aware that much of the military organization of the United Irish depended on him. Moreover, his status as a great Protestant noble made him especially popular with the Northern gentry and peasantry.⁷³ He was also an experienced soldier who demonstrated a rather remarkable understanding of what is now termed guerilla warfare.⁷⁴ He was considering various plans, one of which was to call for a rising in the North to draw troops from Dublin, after which 45,000 men from Wicklow, Kildare and Dublin counties would seize the capital and the money in the banks. A more desperate scheme involved an attack on the Chancellor and peers gathered for the trial of the Earl of Kingston for murder.⁷⁵ After the arrest of the executive, Fitzgerald was constantly in hiding, usually in Dublin.⁷⁶ He had considered going to France, but had decided that he was too deeply committed "...to be able to withdraw with honour."⁷⁷ Some men of importance at first wanted him to escape,

73. Lecky, IV: 307.

74. See Appendix 1.

75. Lecky, IV: 297-301.

76. Thomas Moore, II: 50.

77. Ibid., p. 43. See also pp. 32-3.

such as Lord Clare who told a relative of the United Irish leader:
"...For God's sake get this young man out of the country:-the ports
shall be thrown open to you, and no hindrance whatever offered."⁷⁸

Fitzgerald continued to see his associates including some of
dubious loyalty, such as John Hughes and Walter Cox.⁷⁹ On May 18
an attempt to arrest him was thwarted by his bodyguards,⁸⁰ but

78. Ibid.

79. Madden, The United Irishmen, p. 406.

80. Madden, Antrim and Down, pp. 117-8.

the next evening, after a violent struggle, he was arrested.⁸¹

81. Pakenham, pp. 107-11. See also Nicholas Murphy, "An Account of the Arrest of the late Lord Edward Fitzgerald", reproduced in Madden, The United Irishmen, pp. 415 ff. The question of who betrayed Fitzgerald has puzzled historians, who have suggested that it was Murphy at whose house he was arrested, Samuel Neilson, who left him suddenly just before his arrest, Joel Hulbert, or Thomas Reynolds. Suspicion can also be placed on Walter Cox, and one popular story blames a servant who noticed Fitzgerald at Murphy's. But the most likely culprits are John Hughes or Francis Magan and Francis Higgins. Magan was a member of the new executive, and he probably informed Higgins, the editor of the Freeman's Journal, who told Cooke. In the Secret Service accounts, an entry for June 20, 1798 states: "F.H., discovery of L.E.F. - £1,000."; which tends to confirm the identity of Francis Higgins as the culprit. However, John Hughes, whose initials, J.H., might also be indicated, was at the time an important government agent, and he saw Fitzgerald late in March: Madden, The United Irishmen, pp. 274-7, 438, 443-5; Thomas Moore, Vol. II, pp. 35, 221-3; Madden, Antrim and Down, pp. 140-1; Joseph Farrington, The Farrington Diary, ed. James Greig, (London, 1922), Vol. I, p. 232; Pakenham, pp. 101-10; Patrick Byrne, Lord Edward Fitzgerald (London, 1955), p. 160; J.B. Woodburn, The Ulster Scot (London, 1914), p. 283; Gilbert, pp. x, 16; and H. of L., 1798, Appendices, pp. 29-30.

The loss of their Commander-in-Chief was a grievous blow to the United Irish. MacNeven later wrote: "...The Irish nation could not sustain a greater misfortune in the person of any one individual, then befel (sic) it in the loss of Fitzgerald at that critical moment..."⁸²

The new Leinster executive, headed by the Sheares brothers and including the government agent Magan, was deeply divided and apprehensive after the arrest of Fitzgerald. The two Sheares had adopted a plan to seize the Lord Lieutenant and privy councillors and take possession of Dublin.⁸³ To achieve this John Sheares had approached Captain John Armstrong of the King's County Militia and asked him to get his force to desert. The scheme was desperate, but Sheares told Armstrong:

...the country was tired with the prosecutions, and that the people threatened, if the rising did not immediately take place, they would take the oath of allegiance, and give up their arms....⁸⁴

In order to rouse the ardour of the people, John Sheares composed a stirring address calling the people to arms, and to revenge.⁸⁵ This proclamation was extremely violent in tone, and was subsequently rejected, self-servingly, by Emmet.⁸⁶ But Neilson had other plans, and on May 23 he gathered a number of people in fields near Newgate in order to attack the prison and liberate Fitzgerald. He also intended an attack upon Kilmainham Jail, and to gather forces in the countryside to march on Dublin. These developments were discovered only at the last moment by the government, but the split in the United leadership was hindering its efficiency. A letter to Neilson from John Sheares made the point clear:

I have fought you in every direction, but unfortunately in vain...I am acquainted with the destructive design you meditate, and am resolved to counteract it whatever

82. Viscount Castlereagh, Memoirs and Correspondence, ed. his brother, (London, 1848), Vol. I, pp. 462-3.

83. Howell, XXVII, p. 310-13.

84. Ibid., p. 314.

85. See Appendix II.

86. H. of L., 1798, Appendices, p. 55.

it may cost me... the scheme is so totally destitute of any apology even from the plea of folly or passion, that I cannot avoid attributing its origin to a worse cause... my resolution and that of my friends is this, if you do not by nine o'clock this evening, give us every necessary and sacred assurance, that you will counteract and prevent the perpetration of this plot against all that you ought to hold dear, notice of it shall be given to the government without a moment's delay...

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The letter apparently referred specifically to Neilson's plan to attack Kilmainham Jail,⁸⁸ but Sheares probably feared that any premature gesture would alert the authorities and abort his intended seizure of the capital. Unfortunately, the government had long been aware of the latter plan.⁸⁹

Since the arrest of the original Leinster executive, the United societies had been in a state of panic. Few men were willing to attend meetings of the provincial executive. Most believed that some of their colleagues were in the pay of the government, and all came to meetings armed.⁹⁰ By May 23 the Leinster executive was in complete turmoil. William Lawless had fled, while the Sheares and Neilson were pursuing different objectives. And then, that very morning, the two Sheares and Byrne were arrested, while troops were stationed at strategic

87. H. of C., 1798, Appendices, p. 323.

88. H. of L., 1798, Appendices, p. 49.

89. Pakenham, pp. 110-14.

90. William Farrell, Carlow in '98, The Autobiography of William Farrell of Carlow, ed. R. J. McHugh (Dublin, 1949), pp. 71-3.

points throughout Dublin.⁹¹ In the evening Neilson, in drunken but heroic oblivion, was apprehended outside Newgate.⁹² But the course was now set, orders had gone out for the rising, and, despite the loss of any central command, the rebels were already gathering. Fires were lit as signals on the Wicklow mountains, and the Belfast, Limerick, Cork and Athlone mail coaches were stopped on the roads. The rebellion of 1798 was blazing forth all across Leinster; but in Ulster; the heartland of the United movement, all remained silent.⁹³

91. Ibid., Lecky, IV: 312.

92. Pakenham, pp. 119-20.

93. W.H. Maxwell, History of the Irish Rebellion in 1798 (London, 1845), pp. 56-7.

Chapter VI: Rebellion

All United Irish planning had centered on the capture of Dublin, and the forces from the surrounding counties were to converge on the capital. But the arrests of May 23 had disorganized the rebels in or near Dublin, and the government had broken up any United assemblies in the city. Thus the armies gathering in the other counties were really no longer parts of a master plan, but isolated forces intent on local objectives which, although they did not yet know it, no longer led directly and imminently to the investment of and triumphal entry into a capital beset by internal revolt.

The Rising in Leinster

In Kildare the government's campaign of terror had been proceeding apace, and the authorities believed that the United cause there was broken. But on the evening of May 23 the rebels began gathering under the command of Michael Reynolds and Dr. John Esmonde, a yeoman lieutenant: both were Catholics. Their force, joined by deserters from the yeomanry and militia, forced General Dundas to temporarily abandon most of the county. Rebel armies had also assembled in Queen's, Meath and Carlow.¹ However, an attempt to capture the town of Carlow failed,² while on May 26 the rebels in Meath, stationed across the Dublin-Belfast road, were routed at Tara Hill. These developments dispirited the Kildare insurgents, and they opened negotiations with Dundas. But an unprovoked attack upon their camp, while it scattered the rebels, put an end to the chance of a peaceful settlement in Kildare, King's and Queen's counties.³

1. J.B. Gordon, History of the Rebellion in Ireland in the year 1798. (Workington, 1806), pp. 5; 7-8, 14-16; Thomas Pakenham, The Year of Liberty (London, 1969), pp. 126-38, 151-5, 180; W.E.H. Lecky, A History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century (London, 1892), Vol. IV, pp. 331-6.

2. William Farrell, Carlow in '98. The Autobiography of William Farréll of Carlow, ed. R.J. McHugh (Dublin, 1949), pp. 88-91.

3. Pakenham, pp. 181-7; Lecky, IV: 336-8; Gordon, pp. 19-20.

Meanwhile, the insurgents were gathering in Wexford. By May 27 4,000 had assembled under Father John Murphy at Oulart,⁴ a place where the rent charged cottiers (very poor farmers) was so high that they could afford to eat only one meal a day.⁵ After routing a large force of militia, killing over one hundred, the rebels captured Enniscorthy on May 28. The army left the loyalists in the town to their fate. The insurgents then established their camp at Vinegar Hill, and their force there soon exceeded 10,000. After the ambush and massacre of a hundred reinforcements near Wexford, that town was abandoned by the army. On May 30 the rebels made their triumphal entry.⁶ The next day the insurgent army was divided into three divisions: one was led by the new Commander-in-Chief, Beauchamp Bagenal Harvey, a Protestant gentleman, and Father Phillip Roche; another by Captains Redmond and Doyle, and Father Kearns; and the third by Anthony Perry and Fathers John and Michael Murphy.⁷

At the same time a provisional government was established in Wexford, which included a National Committee, a Council of Five-hundred and a Council of Elders. A retired British officer, Captain Matthew Keogh, was appointed military governor. The Irish republic had been proclaimed in the county, and almost 100,000 rebels were soon under arms to defend it. However, it was essential that they break out of Wexford. The British, on the other hand, were determined to keep them isolated, and on June 1 the force under Redmond was prevented from smashing through into Kildare and Carlow.⁸

Then, on June 4, Father John Murphy ambushed a large British force under Colonel Walpole, Camden's personal aide, which was one of two columns advancing into Wexford itself. This led to a

4. Lecky, IV:355-6; George Taylor, A History of the Rise, Progress, Cruelties, and Suppression of the Rebellion in the County of Wexford in the Year 1798.... (Belleville, 1864), p. 34.

5. Lecky, III: 414.

6. Gordon, pp. 61-2, 67-75, 91-6; Pakenham, pp. 173-7.

7. Lecky, IV: 101; Gordon, p. 97; Taylor, p. 54. Joseph Holt considered Perry a good soldier, ready to suppress cruelty: Joseph Holt, Memoirs, ed. T. Crofton Croker (London, 1838), Vol. I, pp. 58-9. Harvey had an income of £2,000 a year, and property worth £20,000: The Annual Register, 1798 (London, 1800): Chronicle, p. 55.

8. Gordon, pp. 106-9; Taylor, pp. 56-8, 96, 211; Lecky, IV:368-9; Pakenham, pp. 213-5.

general retreat by General Loftus, who abandoned the entries into Wicklow. But the rebels, rather than pursuing their victory, wasted five days plundering the abandoned towns. On the same day Harvey had attacked New Ross with the main insurgent army. His men were badly disorganized, although their courage was awesome. After over seven hours of hard fighting, the last rebels were finally driven from the town. At least 1,500 had died in the battle.⁹ The setback was a crucial one, as Castlereagh commented: "...Had the rebels carried Ross, the insurrection would have immediately pervaded the counties of Waterford and Kilkenny...."¹⁰

While the battle of New Ross was being fought, those rebels who had stayed in camp proceeded to massacre 121 prisoners. They shot 37 and burned 184 to death in a barn. Twenty of those killed were women and children, while at least eight were Catholic.¹¹ Harvey was greatly distressed by what had happened. He had tried to open negotiations with the British commander at New Ross before the attack, but his messenger had been shot. He now had his council of officers approve a general order which stated that deserters were to be shot, stolen horses and property were to be returned on pain of death, and murder, plundering and burning were to be punished by execution. But he had lost all rapport with his followers, and on June 7 he was replaced as commander by Father Roche, a change which effected a decrease in the number of murders. Harvey wrote rather pathetically: "I now see my folly in embarking with these people; if they succeed, I shall be murdered by them; if they are defeated I shall be hanged."¹²

There is no doubt that many of the prosperous United Irish

9. Taylor, pp.59-78; Gordon, pp.109-27; Pakenham, pp.206-8,221-6, 228-39. See also Report of the Manuscripts of J.B.Fortescue, Esq. (Historical Manuscripts Commission, London, 1905), Vol: IV: p.234 (hereafter Fortescue MSS), and W.H.Maxwell, History of the Irish Rebellion in 1798 (London, 1845), p.317 for estimates of rebel losses.

10. Quoted in Lecky, IV: 401.

11. Gordon, pp.127-31; Taylor, pp. 80-6.

12. Lecky, IV: 287. Gordon, p. 132. See also The Report of the Secret Committee of the House of Commons (Dublin, 1798), Appendices, pp.329-30; (hereafter H. of C., 1798); Taylor, pp.88-94; Lecky, IV:424.

leaders were now becoming frightened, and were also losing their sway over the insurgents. The common peasants were infuriated and desperate, and turned instinctively to their priests for leadership. Many carried "Protections" signed by a priest which read: "No gun, pistol, sword, or any other offensive weapon, can hurt or otherwise injure the person who has this paper in his possession...."¹³

Much of their anger was aimed at Protestants, who were also, of course, usually landlords, but their attitude could be quite ambivalent.

A good example is provided by a Mr. Dawson, a Protestant landlord, who was about to be murdered by some rebels, when others arrived and suggested he be made their commander!¹⁴ But sectarian fervour was running high, and after the battle of New Ross one priest stated: "Brethren, you see you are victorious every where...this visibly is the work of God, who is determined that the heretics, who have reigned upwards of one hundred years, should now be extirpated, and the true Catholic religion be established."¹⁵

The rebels now turned their attention to Arklow which barred the route into Wicklow and Kildare, beyond which lay Dublin. But the British were aware of the threat, and on June 6 the garrison was strongly reinforced. Finally, on June 9 Anthony Perry, Billy Byrne and Father Michael Murphy attacked the town with at least 20,000 men, of whom 5,000 had guns. They attacked from two sides, but both their frontal assault and their attempt to outflank the British failed.¹⁶ This defeat put an end to any real hope the rebels had of victory. G.A. Hayes-McCoy comments: "...with their defeat at Arklow the rebels had lost the initiative - and when the initiative is lost no revolution can succeed...."¹⁷

13. Taylor, pp. 92-3.

14. Gordon, pp. 54-5.

15. The sermon is credited to Father Bañnow: H. of C., 1798, Appendices, p. 328. See also Gordon, pp. 133-4; Taylor, pp. 92-3, 97, 107.

16. G.A. Hayes-McCoy, *Irish Battles*, (London and Harlow, 1969), pp. 284-91, 298-305; Pakenham, pp. 240-2; Gordon, pp. 134-41; Taylor, pp. 108, 111-4, 120. Lecky, IV:428 estimates that 1,000 rebels were killed in the battle; Pakenham, p. 281 states only 200-300 were killed, which seems too low a number.

17. Hayes-McCoy, p. 310.

To the government, however, the situation was not yet so clear, and the atmosphere at the Castle was one of concern mingled with awe or even panic. On June 8 Castlereagh wrote to Thomas Pelham:

The enemy are in great force....Their numbers consist of the entire male inhabitants of Wexford, and the greatest proportion of those of Wicklow, Kildare, Carlow, and Kilkenny. From Carlow to Dublin, I am told, scarcely an inhabitant is to be seen....Rely upon it there never was in any country so formidable an effort on the part of the people.¹⁸

And on June 11 Camden wrote to Pelham: "....the complexion this rebellion wears is the most serious it is possible to conceive.

Unless Great Britain pours an immense force into Ireland the country is lost...."¹⁹ The next day Castlereagh wrote to Wickham in a similar vein,²⁰ and on June 13 he informed Pelham: "....The rebellion in Wexford has disappointed all my speculations. I had not a conception that insurgents could remain together and act in such numbers..."²¹

These appeals were not in vain. The British Parliament passed an act allowing English militia units to serve in Ireland. On June 16 five regular regiments landed at Waterford, and by the end of the month the first English militia units had arrived.²²

But the Irish administration was plagued by another problem: that of leadership. The island had not had a Commander-in-Chief since a cabal of Castle officials had forced Abercrombie's resignation after his order criticizing the discipline of his army. He had wanted to reform the military, and had advised moderation in quelling disturbances. Despite the support of Camden, Pelham, Elliot and Knox,

18. John T. Gilbert, ed., Documents relating to Ireland 1795-1804. (Dublin, 1893; reprint: Shannon, 1970), p. 131.

19. Ibid., p. 132.

20. Viscount Castlereagh, Memoirs and Correspondence, ed. his brother (London, 1848), Vol. I, p. 219.

21. Gilbert, p. 133.

22. Lecky, IV: 441.

he was ousted by the pro-Orange group headed by the Earl of Clare, Beresford, Foster and General Lake. The latter had replaced him as commander in fact, although not in title, but was considered inadequate.²³ As early as March 26 Camden had suggested that he be replaced by Cornwallis, who would become both Lord Lieutenant and Commander-in-Chief. But Pitt had rejected this, fearing that it would be linked to Abercrombie's dismissal. He wrote: "...It would leave it a doubt (sic) whether we supported you or him, and would I think at once disband the supporters of Government, and deliver over the country to the conspirators..."²⁴ By June 10, however, the situation had changed, and the King suggested to Pitt that Cornwallis replace the "too much agitated" Camden.²⁵ On June 12 the former accepted the position.²⁶ Not everyone was pleased by such a sudden change,²⁷ but the reasons for it were well summed up by Lord Carlisle in a letter to Pitt on June 9:

Ireland...cannot be saved, if you permit an hour longer almost (sic) the military defence of that country to depend upon the tactical dictates of Chancellors, Speakers of the House of Commons, etc...under the present circumstances, the best soldier would make the best Lord Lieutenant, one on whom no junto there would presume to fling their shackles...I confess Lord Cornwallis naturally occurs to me.

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Pitt also felt that the Ascendancy had been allowed too much leeway.²⁹

On June 19 the army began advancing into Wexford. The next day, despite the efforts of Edward Hay (a member of the provisional government), a group of extremists executed 97 prisoners. Most of the leaders were absent, and only the arrival of Edward Roche put an end to the slaughter. The army drove the rebels from Vinegar

23. Sir John Moore, The Diary of Sir John Moore, ed. J.F. Maurice (London, 1904), Vol. I, pp. 271, 283-8; Thomas Moore, The Life and Death of Lord Edward Fitzgerald (New York, 1831), Vol. II, pp. 100-1; Henry Richard Lord Holland, Memoirs of the Whig Party during My Time, ed. his son (London, 1852), Vol. I, p. 112; Hereward Senior, Orangeism in Ireland and Britain, 1795-1836 (London and Toronto, 1966), p. 89; Lecky, IV: 214; Pakenham, pp. 59-68.

24. A. Aspinall, ed., The Later Correspondence of George III (Cambridge, 1967), Vol. III, p. 75.

25. Ibid.

26. Fortescue MSS IV: 236.

Hill on the same day, and on June 21 Matthew Keughe offered General Moore the surrender of Wexford. Lake refused the offer, however, and the insurgents abandoned the town. But Lake's intransigence made a quick, clean end to hostilities impossible.³⁰ The rebels were no longer an effective military force, but the remnants would continue to fight for months.

The insurgents, now led by Anthony Perry, Father Kearns and Edward Roche, managed to slip out of Wexford and tried to raise the counties of Kilkenny, Carlow and Queen's, but met with little response, and were finally driven into the Wicklow mountains. But Perry would not give up, and he led the most determined of his followers into Kildare where a large number of rebels under William Aylmer had been holding out in the bogs of that country since early in the uprising. However, while Perry marched further north into Louth and Meath, Aylmer surrendered on terms. This was made possible by the agreement of Clare to support Cornwallis and Castlereagh in their policy of accommodation.³¹ The Marquis of Buckingham reported:

....Lord Cornwallis knows that in many instances the surrender of individuals and even of parties has been checked; and, in some, the wretches actually refused when

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27. Portland certainly was dubious: Aspinall, III:77. So was Edward Cooke, who wrote to Pelham on June 16: "I do not like this manoeuvre of a change at all, nor can I possibly see what good can result from it except loss of reputation to my lord lieutenant". Gilbert, p. 141. And Thomas Grenville wanted Camden and Cornwallis to rule jointly, with the former controlling civil, and the latter military, matters, lest all civil affairs fall into the hands of the Irish cabinet: T. Grenville to Lord Grenville, June 13, 1798 in Fortescue MSS, IV:236. The Marquis of Buckingham also suggested to Lord Grenville on June 12 that a civil Lord Deputy be dispatched for civil affairs: Fortescue MSS:IV:235.
28. The Manuscripts of the Earl of Carlisle (Historical Manuscripts Commission, London, 1897), p. 729.
29. Pakenham, p. 277.
30. Gordon, pp. 144-7, 152-8; Pakenham, pp. 290-7; Taylor, pp. 145-57.
31. Lecky, IV:6-7; Gordon, pp. 162-4, 175-8; Taylor, pp. 159, 174-5, 181-3; Pakenham, pp. 310-17.

suing for the proclamation pardons. The entire surrender of the Kildare corps took place on the twenty-first....³²

Perry and Father Kearns, however, were captured by some yeomen and hanged.³³

Meanwhile, in Wicklow the rebels under Roche were continuing a guerilla campaign. But a new leader had emerged: Joseph Holt. His first important exploit was to ambush some British cavalry in their pursuit of an apparently defeated insurgent force.³⁴ He became an expert in the tactics of guerilla warfare, and during July, August and September he led his men, who were eventually little more than a band, in raids throughout the Wicklow mountains. He was constantly setting ambushes, and almost miraculously escaping from traps set for him by the British. Not until November 10 did he surrender on terms.³⁵

But the rebellion had been very bloodily suppressed, and even Cornwallis was disgusted:

"....The accounts that you see of the numbers of the enemy killed in every action....are, I conclude, greatly exaggerated....I am sure that a very small proportion of them only, could be killed in battle, and I am much afraid that any man in a brown coat who is found within several miles of the field of action is butchered without discrimination."³⁶

It was upon these bloodied stones that peace now had to be restored.

The Dogs that didn't Bark: Ulster and Munster

Since the disarming of 1797, and the failure of nerve of the colonels in Ulster at that time, the northern counties had not stirred. They were aware of the plan for an insurrection around

32. Fortescue MSS, IV: 264.

33. Pakenham, p. 317.

34. Holt, I: 76-7; Lecky, V:12. Holt claimed that he had planned the retreat, but for such an undisciplined force to stage a feigned withdrawal under fire seems very unlikely. Moreover, he claimed that 370 soldiers were killed in the battle, which would be a very large number under the circumstances.

35. Holt, I: 281. A good example of his tactics can be found on pp. 180-5.

36. Lecky, V: 9.

Dublin late in May, but took no steps to aid in its accomplishment. However, on May 10 seven new members were appointed to the executive: "...a silversmith, for Armagh, a presbyterian clergyman for Tyrone, a probationer presbyterian clergyman for Donegal, a farmer for Louth, an adjutant general for Derry, a cloth merchant for Antrim, and a farmer for Monaghan...."³⁷ The new executive met on May 29 and one member berated the meeting for its betrayal of Leinster, and Ulster itself. It was decided that a rising should be organized, and all the representatives thought their people would fight; except the member from Down. But at a meeting of colonels on May 31 only two out of 23 agreed to take action.³⁸ Henry Joy McCracken, however, had assumed command in Antrim after the resignation of the previous general, and he was intent upon action. He planned that risings should occur in Antrim and Randalstown on June 7; in Saintfield on June 9; and at Ballynahinch on June 13. But the entire Ulster organization was rotten with informers: McCracken's orders were delivered by three of them to General Nugent, while his messenger to Down never arrived. Nevertheless, on June 6 the young general called for a rising in Antrim.³⁹ Few of the colonels of Antrim answered the call, however, and Lecky estimates that only 3,000-4,000 men joined McCracken. He should, according to plan, have been able to raise about 21,000 men, 7,000 of them Defenders; but no such numbers materialized.⁴⁰

37. H. of C., 1798, Appendices, p. 159.

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 160-1.

39. R.R. Madden, *Antrim and Down in '98* (Glasgow, n.d.), pp. 36-7, 123.

40. Lecky, IV:416. Madden, pp. 36-7, 47 reports the estimate of James Hope, a participant, who gives the total force as 500, which seems an extremely small number. He does, however, later talk vaguely about reinforcements: p. 48.

McCracken's force marched into Antrim on June 7, but reinforcements under General Nugent arrived while the battle was in progress and drove the insurgents from the town. The rebels retreated to a nearby hill; but in James Hope's words: "....There was nothing more to be hoped or to be done; all went home, with the exception of a very small number, of which I was one...."⁴¹ By June 11 the rebels had given up hope, and those left on the hill agreed to an amnesty and surrendered their arms. But McCracken was captured and executed in Belfast.⁴² Hope said of him:

When all our leaders deserted us, Henry Joy McCracken stood alone faithful to the last. He led on the forlorn hope of the cause at Antrim, and brought the government to terms with all but the leaders.⁴³

Very few had answered his call, and most of the Defenders never made their appearance.⁴⁴

Meanwhile, on June 8 rebels began gathering around Saintfield in Down. On the next day they elected Henry Munro their general; according to him he had left his home only to escape rampaging Orange yeomanry. The official United general, the Rev. Steele Dickson, and his colonels had been arrested on June 7, but the insurgents had gathered anyway. Munro was a small Lisburn merchant who had no military credentials, but nevertheless he ambushed a British force near Saintfield on his first day of command.⁴⁵ But the Defenders were suspicious of their Presbyterian commander and allies.⁴⁶ On June 12 General Nugent marched against them with about 1,500 men. The troops set to plunder during the night but Munro refused to attack under cover of darkness. Many of the rebels, including possibly a body of 2,000 Catholics, deserted

41. Madden, p. 49. See also pp. 36-48; Gordon, pp. 179-80; Lecky, IV: 416-8.

42. Madden, pp. 50-3, 58, 127; Gordon, p. 180; Lecky, IV: 418.

43. Madden, p. 127.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 42; Pakenham, pp. 249, 257.

45. Madden, pp. 229-31; Gordon, pp. 181-2; Lecky, IV: 419; Pakenham, p. 257.

46. Pakenham, p. 261.

during the night. Their force had numbered about 7,000 at the peak, but there were probably less than 5,000 left by the morning of June 13. Munro's attack on the occupied town was soon repulsed, due mainly to British artillery fire, and his men fled, pursued by the cavalry.⁴⁷ The rebels melted away, and Munro was captured on June 15. He was later tried and executed.

The 10,000-15,000 men who had risen in Antrim and Down were the only visible elements of the great United army of Ulster envisaged by provincial returns. Except for a very brief outbreak in Derry, no one else moved to set up the tree of liberty in its Irish birthplace. On June 15 Castlereagh wrote to William Elliot: "The rebels fought at Ballynahinch (Co. Down), as in Wexford, with determined bravery, but without the fanaticism of the southerns...."⁴⁸

Ulster was not the only dog which, mysteriously, did not bark. Although the United Irish only began organizing in Munster in 1797, with the arrival of some Catholic refugees from Ulster, the area was ripe for their cause. Tithes, due to the profits of middle men who farmed them, were extremely high and rural unrest was widespread.⁴⁹ Lord Shannon wrote on November 9, 1797: "....'I am persuaded that there are few, if any, of the lower orders in this country who have not taken the United Irish oath....'"⁵⁰ Moreover, the large Methodist community was suspect, as were the people of Cork, due, according to General Dalrymple, to the loss of trade. And the military in the area were also affected.⁵¹ In fact, the United Irish, especially John Sheares, put great faith in Munster, above all Cork.⁵² And on paper the province was expected to produce 100,000 insurgents.⁵³ But to take an oath as a United Irishman and

47. Madden, pp. 235-7; Lecky, IV: 421-2; Pakenham, pp. 262-4; Gordon, pp. 182-3.

48. Gilbert, p. 136.

49. Maxwell, p. 221; Lecky, IV: 136.

50. Lecky, IV: 137.

51. *Ibid.*, pp. 133-5.

52. Patrick Byrne, *Lord Edward Fitzgerald* (London, 1955), p. 203. See also H. of C., 1798, Appendices, p. 294.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 177.

to become a rebel are not the same thing, and despite the fears of the authorities very few cared to adopt the latter option.⁵⁴ A few skirmishes and a small rising in Cork, on June 19, very easily suppressed, were the only signs of the great United Irish legions of Munster.⁵⁵

The Republic of Connaught

Bonaparte had decided that the conquest of Egypt offered better prospects than an invasion of Ireland, and on May 20 he had set sail for the Middle East. But General Humbert was left at La Rochelle with 1,000 men, General Hardy at Brest with 3,000, and General Kilmaine in reserve with 9,000.⁵⁶ The former, however, grew impatient and, on his own initiative, according to Tone, set sail for Ireland on August 6 with 1,036 men.⁵⁷ Humbert's force landed at Killala in Mayo on August 22, and easily took possession of the town. Proclamations were distributed, such as the following:

The Frenchmen whom you see in your country do not come to subjugate you, and to conquer Ireland. Armed in the cause of the equality of man, and the liberty of nations, they come to make you free; they come to give you their assistance in breaking the yoke of the infamous English Government; they come to assist you to re-conquer the property of your ancestors, of which you have been despoiled by odious and base usurpers....⁵⁸

The British had been worried about a rising in Connaught during the Wexford rebellion, and had reports that the province was well organized.⁵⁹ The people were susceptible to nationalist propaganda because of the establishment of Protestant communities or colonies

54. Sir James Stewart feared a rising in Munster, and delayed General Moore and his forces in Cork on June 9: Sir John Moore, I:293-4. See also Gilbert, p. 134.

55. Lecky, V: 2.

56. Theobald Wolfe Tone, Life and Adventures, ed. his son (London, Glasgow, Manchester and Birmingham, n.d.), p. 207.

57. Ibid., p. 208; Lecky, V: 41.

58. Report of the Committee of Secrecy of the House of Commons (London, 1799), Appendices, p. 37.

59. Gilbert, p. 134. Oliver Bond, testifying on August 14 before the Secret Committee of the Irish House of Lords, was asked, "Did you understand that Connaught in general was well organized?" He

and schools, as well as the arrival of United Irish refugees from Ulster.⁶⁰ But the Irish peasantry did not rally to Humbert's standard to the extent expected; Some Catholic gentlemen did join the army, such as George Blake and one O'Dowd, bringing their tenants with them, while other peasants joined individually, attracted by the lure of good rations, bright uniforms and the hope of plunder.⁶¹ But many of the latter soon grew tired of any discipline and deserted. It seems likely, however, that many of the Catholic gentry and landlords were quite prepared to join the French if they were successful, but were not going to commit themselves prematurely: James Moore O'Donnell, an important man in the province due to his lineage, provides an example.⁶²

On August 25 Humbert marched inland with 700-800 French troops and probably an equal number of Irish insurgents. He approached the British position at Castlebar and attacked early on the morning of August 27. Lake had taken command of the British force, which consisted of 1,000-1,700 troops, but his army panicked and fled under light fire.⁶³

Many of the militiamen deserted to the French, but those who fled committed the usual depredations and greatly increased sympathy for the French among the peasantry.⁶⁴ After his victory, Humbert proclaimed a provisional republic of Connaught. He named John Moore, a young Catholic Whig, president, and appointed magistrates and a council of twelve to assist him. More Catholic gentlemen, as well as peasants, now rallied to the French standard and rumours of risings in Connaught and Meath were widespread.⁶⁵

answered, "I understood it was.": Report from the Secret Committee of the House of Lords (Dublin, 1798), Appendices, p. 58.

60. J.G. Simms, "Connaught in the eighteenth century", Irish Historical Studies (September, 1958), XI: 124; Lecky, V: 55-6.

61. Simms, pp. 129-30; Lecky, V: 46.

62. Simms, pp. 128-9.

63. Sir John Moore, I: 314; Pakenham, pp. 351-6; Lecky, V: 51. The Marquis of Buckingham wrote to Lord Grenville that the British troops had fled "in the most cowardly manner.": Fortescue MSS, IV. 290.

64. Sir John Moore, p. 314; Lecky, V: 53, 59; Pakenham, p. 358.

65. Simms, p. 132; Pakenham, pp. 361-2.

Cornwallis, however, who had taken personal command of operations against Humbert, had overwhelming forces at his disposal. Humbert now decided to strike inland towards Roscommon, but his chances of success are indicated by the fact that on September 5 Buckingham reported to Lord Grenville that Major Plunkett, the United Irish organizer in Roscommon, had surrendered.⁶⁶ But a minor rising, precipitated by stories of an impending Orange massacre, was breaking out in Longford and Westmeath. Humbert, however, was ignorant of this. On hearing, however, of the outbreak in the Midlands, Humbert turned about and marched in that direction on September 6. But the insurgents had been routed on the previous day.⁶⁷

Finally, on September 8, Cornwallis surrounded the French at Ballinamuck with at least 10,000 men. After a short engagement Humbert surrendered with his force of 844 French soldiers. The remaining Irish recruits, about 1,000 in number, were shown no quarter after the capitulation of their allies, and about 500 were mercilessly cut down.⁶⁸ The French left at Killala also surrendered, but 800 or 900 insurgents gathered to defend it. They were routed by 1,200 militia on September 23, who then proceeded to plunder and murder in the area. The only depredations of the insurgents had been to burn a few large Protestant houses, and to attack a colony of Ulster weavers.⁶⁹

Meanwhile Napper Tandy had landed with a few French troops in Donegal on September 16, but, hearing of Humbert's surrender, he set sail again.⁷⁰ A few days later another French convoy, carrying 3,000 troops, set sail for Ireland. On board was Theobald Wolfe Tone. On October 11 the small fleet was intercepted off Loch Swilly by a British squadron and forced to engage. The French were soon

66. Fortescue MSS, IV: 301.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 302; Pakenham, pp. 366-71.

68. Pakenham, pp. 372-3; Lecky, V: 62-3.

69. Simms, p. 132; Lecky, V: 56-7, 64-6.

70. Lecky, V: 71-3; Pakenham, pp. 379-80.

overpowered, and Tone, on board the Hoche, was advised to flee on one of the frigates. He refused: "Shall it be said that I fled, whilst the French were fighting the battles of my country?"⁷¹ He was captured and tried for treason. On November 11 he cut his own throat, and died of his wound eight days later.⁷² One last French fleet, carrying 2,000 troops, appeared in Killala Bay on October 27, but soon after sailed away.⁷³

The rebellion of 1798 was over. The French had failed to launch a successful invasion, the risings in Leinster and Ulster had been suppressed, and the United Irish leaders had come to terms. But many peasants, at least 15,000, had been killed in battle or massacred after an engagement or executed. Cornwallis' rule saw the execution of 81 rebels and the banishment or transportation of 418 more. Loyalists, who were alone eligible, later claimed £823,517 in property damage.⁷⁴ The green bough of liberty, planted so robustly in France, had unfortunately withered on Irish soil. The British had put an end to the Irish republic, and they would soon put an end to the last vestiges of Irish independence.

71. Tone, p. 211. See also R.R. Madden, The United Irishmen (Dublin, 1858), p. 109; Lecky, V: 74-5.

72. Tone, p. 225; Lecky, V: 75.

73. Madden, The United Irishmen, p. 116.

74. Lecky, V: 105-7.

Chapter VII: Postmortem

Forget not the field where they perished,
 The truest, the last of the brave;
 All gone, and the bright hopes they cherished,
 Gone with them, and quenched in their grave.

Thomas Moore

In the Report from the Committee of Secrecy of the British House of Commons of 1799 it was stated, in relation to the United Irish:this Society has proved the most powerful engine, in the hands of conspirators, against the Government of their country, which has ever yet been devised....² If this was the case, then why did the rebellion of 1798 fail: why was it, for all practical purposes, crushed within two months? The rebels were, of course, defeated militarily, and - on a primary level - military reasons led to their downfall. G.A. Hayes-McCoy comments:

The Wexford insurgents - men of the fields and of the little towns, farmers, the sons of small landed proprietors; workers - were courageous, determined and capable of great endurance; but it would be absurd to call them soldiers. A handful of them had been yeomen, and there were professional fowlers, seamen and a few ex-soldiers among them, but the great mass was totally unskilled in the use of arms....They lacked leaders, a plan of operations, money, arms, ammunition, suppliesThe Society of United Irishmen had certainly been for some time organized on a military basis, but extensive disarmament, and the widespread arrest of its leaders had upset its preparations....³

The arrests and disarming had seriously disorganized the United Irish, and consequently there was little coordination among the

1. Quoted in R.R. Madden, Antrim and Down in '98 (Glasgow, n.d.), p. 227. Thomas Moore was a famous Irish poet, and the biographer of Lord Edward Fitzgerald.
2. Report of the Committee of Secrecy of the House of Commons (London, 1799), p. ix.
3. G.A. Hayes-McCoy, Irish Battles (London, 1969), p. 287.

various rebel forces. Moreover, the French failed to arrive in time, and when they did arrive they were insufficient in number. A force of five or ten thousand French troops, bringing 50,000 or 100,000 extra guns with them, would probably have been adequate to reverse the immediate outcome of the rebellion. The militia also failed to desert in the numbers that were expected by the United leaders. Another factor was the failure of the United Irish to stage any major uprisings in Ulster or Munster. On the surface, these were the reasons for the rebel defeat. However, there were deeper causes which accounted for many of the failings of the rebel movement.

United Irish and Rebels

It has been established that the United Irish had their roots among the commercial and professional classes, whom a Tory described in 1796 as

...men of industry and general good character....elated by the sudden acquisition of wealth, who with strong but uneducated minds perpetually brood over the artificial distinctions birth and rank create in society....(and) talk themselves and their auditors into a conviction that landed property supplies the means of oppression and the education of a gentleman the habits of aggravating such....4

But these men were not only jealous of the aristocracy; they were also, as mentioned earlier, grieved by the restrictions on Irish trade which the war was greatly exacerbating, by the damage being done to the entire Irish economy by war-induced inflation, and by the limits placed on native talent and initiative by the British connection. However, their transformation into a secret society and subsequent alliance with the Defenders had introduced large numbers of the lower classes, greatly concerned with tithes and rising rents, into the organization. Thus, when the rebellion itself broke out, the latter formed the vast majority of the

4. Henry Alexander to ---- Aug. 1, 1796, quoted in R.B. McDowell, Irish Public Opinion, 1750-1800 (London, 1943), p. 195.

participants. Pakenham concludes of the rebels in Leinster: "....The heart of the movement were the Catholic middle class, business and professional men at the one end of the social scale, farmers and artisans at the other...."⁵ At first glance, certain statistics which this author has compiled would tend to support his conclusion. The first list based upon Prisoners Petitions and Cases, 1778-1805, shows that of fifty-three identified rebels in Leinster four were merchants or manufacturers, one was a large businessman, five were small businessmen, six craftsmen, one a professional and eighteen farmers, while only four were farm laborers and four workers. Moreover, only one was of the gentry class⁶. And another list, compiled from various sources, reveals that of 120 identified rebels or United Irishmen in Leinster, ten were merchants or manufacturers, ten others were small businessmen, nine were professionals, eleven craftsmen, four apothecaries and twelve farmers, while sixteen were of the landlord or gentry classes, one was a farm laborer, and four were workers. The same list shows that of 62 rebels or United Irishmen in Ulster, 18 were merchants or manufacturers, seven were apothecaries and three farmers, compared to no landlords or gentry, no farm laborers and only two workers.⁷ These figures, however, are misleading if they are not properly interpreted.

In the first place, the system of justice employed by the authorities during and just after the rebellion ensured that the majority of the disaffected would remain nameless: except for relatively prominent men in positions of leadership, most of the rebels were either killed in battle; massacred or summarily executed, or allowed to return home. Very few indeed were arrested and tried,

5. Thomas Pakenham, The Year of Liberty (London, 1969), p. 162. See also pp. 151, 314.

6. See Appendix III.

7. See Appendix IV.

as the government had no incentive to fill the prisons with thousands of poor farmers and workmen. Thus the first list quite naturally contains a very high proportion of the names of leaders, as indeed does the second. In fact, the majority of the rebels were closer to being "lower" than "middle" class: most were either farmers and farm laborers (the difference between a farmer with a small acreage of poor land and a laborer on a prosperous estate or farm, in terms of class, is irrelevant if it exists at all) or artisans (craftsmen) and small businessmen: they were regarded by the upper classes as a rabble, and, indeed, in class terms that is what they were, not the somehow orderly and sedate "middle" class which Pakenham seems to suggest. However, very few of these men were among the leadership, a fact which the lists attest to. The leaders, besides those few who did arise from the masses, were merchants, professionals, businessmen, officers, landlords, gentry, and clergy. The military and clergy, like the rest, deserve some attention. On the first list we find only two priests in Munster, one minister in Ulster, three regular soldiers, and one yeoman in Leinster.⁸ But the second list alludes to twelve priests, one Presbyterian minister, eight regular and five yeoman officers, as well as four yeoman privates and 17 militia, in Leinster. In Ulster we find sixteen Presbyterian ministers and five militia listed; in Connaught, three militia; in Munster, one militiaman; and from unknown localities, three yeoman officers.⁹

The priests, gentry and military officers were, in fact, by far the most important of the leaders who emerged in the course of the rebellion, due to the arrests proceeding the outbreak, to the failure in all the major cities, and to the distance between the urban

8. See Appendix III.

9. See Appendix IV.

middle classes and the rural masses. In class terms the latter might seem to be asking their oppressors to lead them to freedom," but in human terms they were turning instinctively to those among their natural leaders who would side with them. These, then, were respectively the leaders and followers in the rebellion. But there were a few others, men not openly associated with the rising, whose connection with it nevertheless deserves some consideration.

In his examination before the Secret Committee of the House of Commons of Ireland MacNeven stated: "....The property in the Union is immense; but persons in a situation to be more easily watched, were not required to render themselves particularly conspicuous."¹⁰

And Emmet wrote at the end of the account of his testimony:

After the regular examination was closed, I was asked by many of the members whether there were many persons of property in the Union. I answered that there was immense property in it. They acknowledged there was great personal property in it, but wished to know was there much landed property; I answered there was....¹¹

There is significant evidence which indicates that these statements were no mere boasting after the fact. In a Secret Intelligence Report from Paris transmitted to Cornwallis by Portland on July 25, 1798 the following passage appears:

I, however, take great pleasure in acquainting you with what I have been about, viz., trying to bring over to the side of the United Irish what is called the Independent Interest, alias the Country Gentlemen, all of whom have commands either in the Yeomanry or Militia, and to whom the safety of the interior will be entrusted, whilst the regular troops march against the

10. William James MacNeven, Pieces of Irish History (New York, 1807), p. 205.

11. Ibid., p. 234.

enemy. These gentlemen have always been much against the Government, but feared, in a revolution, the loss of their property.... For some time past, a union has been formed among this body for the purpose of forcing England into whatever measures they choose as soon as an invasion takes place.... they are all now completely up to the formation of a Republic and a separation from Britain, provided the French Directory will give, under their seal, the terms and conditions Ireland has a right to expect and demands....¹²

But these landlords and gentry were shrewd men, and believed that French aid was necessary to the success of any rebellion. Thus on April 8, 1798 the Rev. Edward Hudson wrote to Lord Charlemont:

.... Many persons of substance entered into the scheme from fear; and yet some of them seem at present the most alert. What this proceeds from I cannot well tell, but am inclined to think it is from the increased expectation of foreign visitors, for it is generally believed here that Ireland, not England, is the object.¹³

There seems little doubt that a considerable number of the gentry, and some large landowners in fact - besides those openly implicated - had ties with the United Irish; but they were unwilling to show themselves in the field unless a considerable French force landed, or a spontaneous rebellion achieved unexpected success. We have already cited in this context the case of James Moore O'Donnell in Connaught.¹⁴ But some even larger fish were most likely involved.

12. Viscount Castlereagh, Memoirs and Correspondence, ed. his brother, (London, 1848), Vol. I, p. 232.

13. The Manuscripts and Correspondence of James, First Earl of Charlemont, Vol. II (Historical Manuscripts Commission, London, 1894), p. 320. (hereafter Charlemont MSS).

14. J.G. Simms, "Connacht in the eighteenth century", Irish Historical Studies, XI: 128-9.

On July 23 Buckingham reported to Lord Grenville on the information being supplied by the state prisoners:

....They were full of contempt of the general officers who have acted against them, and of resentment against the Dublin Directory who induced them to rise under the assurance that all Ireland was to rise on the 23rd May. There is no doubt from their general language that many of the demagogues in Parliament have been very deeply dipped with them. The Duke of Leinster is now very openly talked of; and it is certain that all the men most active in this rising in Kildare have, within these months, received from him very valuable leases upon his estate, or are in other respects dependent on him. Still, however, I do not think that it is the wish of Government to press that inquiry as far as I think it ought against him and others.....¹⁵

The Duke of Leinster, one of the largest landowners in Ireland, was also Lord Edward Fitzgerald's brother, and one of the leading Whig aristocrats. The Whigs had been extremely upset since the recall of Fitzwilliam: they wished for Catholic Emancipation, Parliamentary Reform, a trade agreement with Britain, and an amelioration of the condition of the poor.¹⁶ On May 15, 1797 Grattan, Curran, Ponsonby and their allies had withdrawn from Parliament, and at the time Curran's arrest was debated in the Council.¹⁷ Curran had long been defending United Irishmen in the courts, and there were definitely close connections between the Whigs and the radicals. For example, on February 8, 1798 Dr. Drennan wrote to Mrs. McTier:

....(Sampson) is a compounder of parties

15. Report of the Manuscripts of J.B. Fortescue, Esq. (Historical Manuscripts Commission, London, 1905), Vol. IV, p. 265. (hereafter Fortescue MSS).

16. McDowell, p. 229.

17. R.R. Madden, The United Irishmen (Dublin, 1858); p. 251.

here, and thinks with some reason he is able to manage them all, in what they are willing to do. I met Ponsonby and Curran going to his room...as if they were going into a b____ house, and I knew Fitzgerald and others were with him at the time....¹⁸

But of far more significance is the testimony given by John Hughes to the Secret Committee of the Irish House of Lords on August 3, 1798:

.....Neilson took Sweetman's carriage to Mr. Grattan's, and brought him (Hughes) along with him.--When they got to Mr. Grattan's, Neilson told him he had something to say to Mr. Grattan in private, and desired him to take a walk in the domain....He returned in about half an hour...Grattan said he supposed he was an United Irishman; he said he was...Neilson and he left Grattan's about twelve in the day; they walked to their carriage which was at Enniskerry; he asked Neilson what had passed between Grattan and him, -- Neilson evaded the question but said generally that he had gone down to Grattan to ask him whether he would come forward, and that he had sworn him....¹⁹

Moreover, whether Grattan was ever sworn as a United Irishman or not, there is no doubt that serious and suspicious links did exist between the leading Irish Whigs and the United Irish. Nor did such ties end in Ireland. Fitzgerald and O'Connor were very friendly with Fox and Sheridan;²⁰ and on June 7, 1798 Fox wrote to Lord Henry Fitzgerald: "If you see my dear, dear Edward, I need not

18. The Drennan Letters, ed. D.A. Chart (H.M.S.O., Belfast, 1931), p. 267.

19. Report from the Secret Committee of the House of Lords (Dublin, 1798), Appendices, p. 30. (hereafter H. of L., 1798). Madden, Antrim and Down, p. 100 comments: "...But Grattan was with a party, not with the people, though he took the test of the United Irishmen from Mr. Samuel Neilson, and the rules of the society from its founder..." But Neilson testified before the Committee on August 9: "...I was twice with Mr. Grattan...in April 1798.-I either shewed (sic) Mr. Grattan the last constitution of the Society of United Irishmen, or explained it to him, and pressed him to come forward.-I was accompanied at these interviews by

desire you to tell him that I love him with the warmest affection...²¹
 Moreover, John Moore, who became President of the Republic of Connaught,
 "...was a very active personal friend of Mr. Fox in the Whig Club, of
 which he was a constant member and attendant..."²²

But although it seems incontestable that there existed strong
 links between the Whigs and the United Irish, it also seems evident
 that the objectives of the two groups were distinct. In effect
 the Whigs were quite willing to countenance unrest which might lead
 to reform, as well as Pitt's downfall,²³ but nothing more. But
 neither the Whigs nor most of the United leaders were prepared for
 the fury of the common people which was to ravage Wexford.

The United Irish leaders were indeed greatly concerned by
 economic and social inequalities. O'Connor proposed Irish indepen-
 dence from Britain in order that her trade be freed from all foreign
 restriction and that her wealth no longer be poured into the coffers
 of absentees, as well as the the abolition of tithes and religious
 establishment.²⁴ But while most agreed in general with these views,
 only a few were interested in any more basic social upheaval.²⁵ One
 of the latter was James Hope, a strong supporter of fixity of tenure
 for tenants, who later wrote:

....It was my settled opinion that the
 condition of the labouring class, was the
 fundamental question at issue between the
 rulers and the people, and there could be
 no solid foundation for liberty, till
 measures were adopted that went to the
 root of the evil, and were specially
 directed to the restoration of the natural
 right of the people, the right of deriving

John Sweetman and Oliver Bond-But I do not believe Mr. Grattan
 was ever an United Irishman...I never did swear Mr. Grattan,
 nor have I ever said that I swore him....": H. of L., 1798,
 Appendices, p.50. At the time some, like Drennan, believed that
 the government was trying to "frame" Grattan, but, if that is
 the case, it seems strange that no attempt was made to try him,
 while his name was removed from the Privy Council list: The
Drennan Letters, p.280; Madden, The United Irishmen, pp.111-8.

20. Madden, The United Irishmen, pp. 378-9.

21. Thomas Moore, The Life and Death of Lord Edward Fitzgerald
 (New York, 1931), Vol. II, p.93.

22. Buckingham to Grenville, Sept.10, 1798, in Fortescue MSS, IV:305.

23. See Madden, The United Irishmen, pp.378-9.

24. Ibid., p.346; McDowell, p.198. See also H. of L., 1798, Appendices,
 pp.45,56; MacNeven, pp.207-9.

25. McDowell, p. 202.

a substance from the soil on which
their labour was expended....²⁶

Men who agreed with Hope supported plans for a redistribution of Irish land,²⁷ while other, more cynical leaders, were prepared to promise land to soldiers who would desert to the rebels.²⁸ The Report from the Secret Committee of the House of Lords (1798) concluded rather ambiguously:

...the people were next taught to believe that their organization would lead to the abolition of tithes, and to a distribution of property, inasmuch as they would become members of a democracy which would govern the country....²⁹

But Thomas Addis Emmet in his testimony before the Secret Committee of the Irish House of Commons, probably best summed up the view of the majority of the United Irish leadership:

Speaker: You say that a revolution is inevitable, unless a reform be granted: what would be the consequence of such a reform in redressing what you call the grievances of the people?

Emmet: In the first place, I look to the abolition of tythes. I think such a reformed legislature would also produce an amelioration of the state of the poor, and a diminution of the rents of lands, would establish a system of national education, would regulate the commercial intercourse between Great Britain and Ireland, on the footing of perfect equality, and correct the bloody nature of your criminal code.³⁰

26. Madden, Antrim and Down, p.108. See also p. 150.

27. W.E.H. Lecky, A History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century (London, 1892), Vol. IV: p. 267; W.J. Fitzpatrick, Secret Service under Pitt (London, 1892), pp. 32-3.

28. T.B. and T.J. Howell, A Complete Collection of State Trials and Proceedings for High Treason, and Other Crimes and Misdemeanors, Vol. XXVII (London, 1820), p. 313; Documents relating to Ireland 1795-1804, ed. John T. Gilbert (Dublin, 1893; reprint, Shannon, 1970), p. 107.

29. H. of L., 1798, p. 7.

But at a later point in his testimony an interesting exchange took place:

Speaker: Would putting the commercial intercourse on the footing of equality, satisfy the people?

Emmet: I think that equality of situations would go nearer satisfying the people than any of the other equalities that have been alluded to.³¹

Of course, this was the issue which most concerned the commercial classes, and, while it did greatly affect all other groups, they were also deeply interested in other issues. The peasantry was interested in prosperity and an increase in trade, but also in the lowering of rents and the abolition of tithes. Thus Emmet's latter statement applied far more strongly to the urban than to the rural population, and far more to the United leaders than to the masses.

Thus it is evident that the leaders of the "revolutionary" movement were not prepared for the type of rebellion which broke out in Wexford. For example, at the peak of the provisional government in that county, many rebels were proclaiming the glories of social revolution, preaching the destruction of the aristocracy, the equal division of land and even denouncing the iniquities of commerce.³² Moreover, the removal by arrest or fear of many of the upper-class leaders had increased the spontaneity of the outbreak, and had forced poorer and more radical men to the fore. The arrests, in effect, had both undermined the coherence of the movement, while at the same time driving it towards greater violence and more fundamental upheaval.

30. MacNeven, pp.227-8.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 231.

32. Pakenham, p. 286.

In effect, it was in the moment of crisis that the upper and middle class nature of the leadership, and its consequent isolation from the people, fatally injured the United movement. Not only were the leaders marked men, and thus in danger of arrest; because of their social standing, but they had a lot to lose if they took part in an unsuccessful uprising. Moreover, many of them were frightened by the obvious initiative of the common people and of the potential for some fundamental social upheaval. Thus, many radical Catholics drew back from the abyss of revolution, and on May 30 an address pledging loyalty, and condemning rebellion, was presented to the Lord Lieutenant which had been signed by Lords Fingal, Southwell, Gormanstown and Kenmore, as well as 72 baronets; many gentlemen and professors of divinity, and 2,000 other Catholics of wealth or property.³³ Even such radical Catholics as Keogh and Byrne loudly disavowed the rebellion.³⁴ And the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, fearful of its property and of atheistic republicanism, was equally vociferous in denouncing the uprising. For example, on April 6, 1798 Dr. Edward Dillon, Bishop of Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora, addressed his dioceses in these terms: "...you are bound both by the law of God and the law of nature, to obey the ordinances of the State in all civil and temporal concerns... The law of God commands us to obey the rulers of the land...."³⁵

And among the Protestants and Presbyterians the situation was similar. On June 12 Castlereagh wrote to Wickham: "By accounts from the North to-day, there does not appear, as yet, any extension of the evil in that province. In some parts of Antrim, the principle of property, I suspect, rather than repentance, has induced a partial

33. W.H. Maxwell, History of the Irish Rebellion in 1798 (London, 1845), pp. 447-8.

34. McDowell, p. 241.

35. Castlereagh, I:173. In May, 1798 Dr. Troy of Dublin addressed his clergy in a similar vein: ibid., pp. 210-11. See also McDowell, pp. 241-2.

submission...."³⁶ Many of the leading United Irishmen, moreover, were convinced of the necessity of French aid to the accomplishment of an orderly, nationalist revolution.³⁷ The middle class leaders, both mercantile and professional, did indeed want to acquire a share of the power which the propertied classes wielded, but only a few were prepared to acquiesce in any more far-reaching social upheaval. In effect, the disorganization of the United movement allowed the common people to express and fight for their more basic desires, and it was not only the religious passion, but also the levelling instinct, demonstrated by many of the Leinster insurgents before and during the rebellion, which led many of the United leaders who were not in prison to abstain from participation. And many of those who did come forward, such as Bagenal Harvey, subsequently regretted their decision.

The landed and wealthy leadership of the United Irish had raised the expectations of the people, but when the societies were virtually decapitated by government action and by treachery, the people had risen anyway, and had chosen leaders who would fight for what they - the masses - wanted. Inevitably, most of those United leaders still at liberty had, at that point, abandoned the struggle. Those gentry who were not virtually forced to lead, did not;³⁸ the middle classes and professionals in the towns remained dormant, in awe of the raging fury of the poor people of the land. Some of the more radical and committed leaders stood forth, some were forced to; but many of those who led the pike charges against the thin red line of royal troops were priests, small gentry or small farmers, craftsmen or shopkeepers. And behind them were many far poorer. So it was that while there was a lot of property and wealth represented within the United

36. Castlereagh, I:220. See also Maxwell, p. 331.

37. Madden, Antrim and Down, pp. 105-6.

38. One interesting example was reported by Hudson to Charlemont on July 18, 1798: "....That they had leaders of an higher description than those who appeared, I well know. Whether or no these approved of the insurrection, I do not so well know. But, in either case, their conduct would have been the same. They would have let the blackguards try the first brush, and then have been determined by the event. Two of these gentry, not quite so prudent as the rest, were forced out on the first

societies, there was very little among the rebels in the field. As Henry Joy McCracken wrote to his wife on June 18, 1798: "...You will no doubt hear a great number of stories respecting the situation of this country: its present unfortunate state is entirely owing to treachery. The rich always betray the poor...."³⁹

The Religious Bogey

One of the most puzzling aspects of the rebellion is that it blazed forth most seriously in Wexford, a county which never even appeared on United returns. This, indeed, points out the spontaneous nature of much rebel activity, and its very tenuous links with United Irish leadership and planning. James Hope, a Northern United Irishman and rebel, commented:

The counties of Wexford and Wicklow, which had not been so long organized, were selected by government for singular vengeance. A considerable number of the Foundling Hospital Boys, of Dublin, had been nursed in those counties, and having settled in it, without any natural ties of blood or kindred, prejudiced by their education against the Roman Catholics they were found to be ready tools, from their

day, and, had not the rebellion been so suddenly quelled, most of the rest would have submitted to the same gentle kind of ravishment. One of the two has a tolerable fortune in possession, and a larger in expectancy, is a magistrate, a constant grand juror, and lately resigned a company in the militia. He has got a smart wound. I confess, however, that he seems to have been only the dupe of the other, who is a cunning scoundrel of about £300 per annum, and contrived it so that they were both ravished together, and carried to the rebel army in Ballymeria."

Charlemont MSS, II: 327.

39. Madden, Antrim and Down, p. 69.

local knowledge, to point out the men who were suspected. Thus they became a public scourge in those parts....and regularly employed either as yeomen or spies.⁴⁰

Reports of yeoman and Orange atrocities were spread among the people by United Irish agents, and when the rebellion broke out the people were little interested in religious tolerance and, in such matters, could scarcely be controlled.⁴¹ Nor was this feeling limited to Wexford: throughout Leinster and Ulster fear of yeoman and Orange activity had reached acute levels of paranoia, as had the terror felt in many Protestant hearts at the rumours of an impending rising of the Catholic masses which would include the massacre of all the "heretics".⁴² Cooke wrote:

....The popish spirit...has been set up against the Protestants by reporting every Protestant to be an Orangeman, and by inculcating that every Orangeman has sworn to exterminate the Papists; to these fictions are added the real pressure of high rents from the undertakers of land, and high tithes..⁴³

Once the rebellion had broken out, the mutual terror and violence of both religious groups in Leinster naturally increased. On May 31 Lord Auckland wrote:

We hear accounts from Wexford of their murdering gentlemen, Protestant clergymen, and others; four or five families whom I knew personally have been massacred. Shocking as this is, it has at least contributed to draw off many Protestants who were before among the United Men.⁴⁴

40. Ibid.; p. 107.

41. Hereward Senior, Orangeism in Ireland and Britain, 1795-1836 (London and Toronto, 1966), pp. 97-8; Lecky, IV: 236.

42. Ibid., p. 126; Senior, p. 81.

43. Quoted in Ibid., pp. 93-4.

44. Fortescue MSS, IV: 225.

And on July 6 Buckingham wrote to Lord Grenville:

...Much as I had trusted to my knowledge of this country, I had not a conception of the extent to which the religious differences are now carried: or of the creed of persecution, preached by both sects, as indispensable to the peace of the country. The barbarities and the bigotry of the Catholics can only be equalled by the project of extirpation of which all good Protestants talk with great composure as the only cure for the present, and the only sure preventive for the future...

45

In fact, a considerable number of Protestants, including five clergymen,⁴⁶ were massacred in Leinster: the total was probably about five or six hundred.⁴⁷ But some United men had apparently planned an even more systematic massacre of the Orangemen and loyalists:⁴⁸ when the rebellion broke out, the bloodshed was neither so widespread nor so discriminating as these men had foreseen.

At its height in Wexford, however, religious prejudice was a powerful force. Many of the rebels carried catechisms which, in reference to the massacre of Protestants at Scullabogue, stated: "We are bound to believe that the late holy massacre was lawful, and justly put into execution against Protestants, and that we should continue the same as long as we can do it with safety to ourselves".⁴⁹ To counteract this spirit, Edward Roche (Father Roche's brother) issued an address to the people: "...remember that this is not a war for religion, but for liberty, that there are a great number of men, who are Protestants who wish well to the cause in which we are engaged."⁵⁰ Others among the leaders also tried to prevent sectarian violence, but it was not easy,

45. Ibid., p. 245.

46. Maxwell, p. 252.

47. Ibid., p. 156.

48. Gilbert, p. 112.

49. George Taylor, A History of the Rise, Progress, Cruelties, and Suppression of the Rebellion in the County of Wexford in the Year 1798 (Belleville, 1864), p. 115.

50. Ibid., p. 135.

and it was usually the priests who were best able to put a brake upon the violence that occurred.⁵¹

But the yeomen and Orangemen were more than equal in their bigotry. Their violence had been a major trigger or immediate cause of the uprising. In Leinster they destroyed or damaged fourteen Catholic chapels during the rebellion, including eight in Wexford. However, their victory only increased their ardour, and they accounted for fifteen more chapels during the remaining months of 1798 (eighteen of them in Wexford), for twenty-seven others in 1799 (fifteen in Wexford), and for seven more in 1800 (four in Wexford).⁵² The indiscriminate slaughter of the rebels and of anyone mistaken for a rebel during and after battles has already been discussed, but once the back of the revolt had been broken the violence of the yeomanry scarcely abated. Rebels hiding in the mountains were relentlessly hunted down, and reprisals were taken for Protestants killed during the rebellion. At Castledown seven Catholics were killed because four Protestants had died earlier, and at Aughrim seventeen were massacred in revenge for the death of a yeoman and his family.⁵³

The injection of religious passion into the situation was undoubtedly a stimulant to the cause of the disaffected in Wexford, Wicklow and some other areas in Leinster, but it had a negative effect in Ulster where there were large numbers of Presbyterians. These had been disturbed by the United Irish alliance with the Defenders: many of them had been quite prepared to use the Catholics, but were afraid of being dominated by them. In effect, they wanted the support of the Catholics, while they did not want to support them.⁵⁴ This alliance drove some United men to join

51. Pakenham, p. 290.

52. Maxwell, p. 446.

53. Ibid., p. 188.

54. Moore, II: 6-7.

the Orange lodges, some sincerely, some cynically, as Hope points out:most of the United Irishmen, known as the Foreign-aid men, found some means of secret connection with them; some took the Orange oath in personal confidence, and were reported in the lodges to be loyal men.⁵⁵ Orangeism had spread rapidly in Ulster since 1796, and on May 19, 1798 the Rev. Edward Hudson wrote to Charlemont:

....I proceeded to Glenary (Antrim) in which neighbourhood many houses exhibited melancholy proofs of the devastations of the 'Orangemen.' From thence to Lisburn that party is completely triumphant and increasing with astonishing rapidity. All the way to Ardee (Louth) I found it going on, but less in the county Down than elsewhere...Your old Ballymascan Volunteers (in Louth) who six months ago were almost all 'United Irishmen', are now complete 'Orangemen', which is more congenial with their feelings....⁵⁶

The weakening of the United movement in Ulster and the rise of Orangeism was due not only to the alliance with the Defenders, but also to the disarming and other government measures in the province, as well as the failure of the radical leaders to decide on a rising in 1797.

However, the situation was further aggravated in 1798 when an attempt was made to make the Presbyterian United Irishmen take the Defender oath. Hudson reported to Charlemont on July 18: "...the 'Defender's' oath, though taken by very great numbers, was resisted by so many, even of the most zealous, that a schism was apprehended..⁵⁷ The attempt to force United Irishmen who were non-Catholics to take the Defender oath frightened many, and

55. Madden, *Antrim and Down*, p. 102. See also Senior, p. 104.

56. Charlemont MSS, II: 322-3.

57. *Ibid.*, p.327. See also p. 321.

undoubtedly drove some into the Orange lodges. And once the rebellion had broken out in the south, many Presbyterians became even more concerned about the threat of Catholic domination. On June 2, 1798 Cooke wrote to Wickham: "...The quiet of the North...is to me unaccountable; but I feel⁵⁸ that the Popish tinge in the rebellion, and the treatment of France to (sic) Switzerland and America, has really done much, and in addition to the Army, the force of Orange yeomanry is really formidable." The radicals were also sceptical about the prospect of French aid, and were concerned not only about the French attitude towards Switzerland and America, but also about Bonaparte's conquest of Genoa and the overthrow of Carnot and Barthélemy on 18 fructidor.⁵⁹ And the arrest and subsequent death of the great Protestant radical, Lord Edward Fitzgerald, had also cooled the ardour of the northern United Irishmen.⁶⁰

Thus it is not surprising that the rebellion in the North, when it finally broke out, failed to live up to expectations. On June 2 Hudson wrote to Charlemont: "...the disaffected are so completely down in spirits that in these parts government may settle the matter as they like..."⁶¹ For not only were the Presbyterians and Protestants less than zealous, but the Catholic United Irishmen and Defenders were almost totally apathetic, probably due to their suspicion of their "heretical" allies, many of whom, after all, had joined the Orangemen.⁶² Sectarianism, then, aided the class divisions among the disaffected in turning the rebellion into an exercise in violent futility. Many of the rebels were, in fact, distracted from the task of fighting the army by their desire to seek out and destroy Protestants.

58. Quoted in Lecky, IV: 413.

59. *Ibid.*, pp. 405-8. See also J.B. Woodburn, The Ulster Scot: His History and Religion (London, 1914), pp. 308-9.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 290.

61. Charlemont MSS, II: 325.

62. See Pakenham, pp. 249-51.

The Role of Government: Divide et Impera

But while the rebels were divided among themselves, the strength of the British-supported regime which they attempted to overthrow should not be underestimated. Militarily, for example, Castlereagh had 100,000 troops under arms in Ireland by the time Humbert's invasion force landed. Moreover, the government had done much to undermine, and sow dissension among, the disaffected. The disarming of various counties, especially in Ulster, had weakened the radicals, while the support which the authorities gave the Orange Lodges strengthened the forces of reaction. Moreover, this support also helped entwine sectarianism ever more deeply into the fabric of Irish politics. This naturally left the British with an opponent divided and weakened. And the Royal Navy did all it could to prevent the French from effectively intervening, a development which could have neutralized the British impact and allowed a true test of strength between the people and the Ascendancy. It seems likely that, in such a struggle, the latter would have been at least very severely tested.

The government relied primarily upon various forms of suppression to disrupt the activities of the disaffected. Terror and intimidation were two of its main instruments, and these were in great part responsible for the outbreak of the rebellion.⁶³

The radicals indeed used the attitude of the government to attract recruits,⁶⁴ but in the end they were forced by the people to rise prematurely. The result was not surprising, as Sir John Moore commented;

....The mode which has been followed to

63. See MacNeven, pp.202,220.

64. McDowell, pp. 216-7.

quiet the disturbances in this country has been to proclaim the districts in which the people appeared to be most violent, and to let loose the military, who were encouraged in acts of great violence against all who were supposed to be disaffected. Individuals have been taken up upon suspicion, and without any trial sent out of the country. By these means the disturbances have been quelled, an apparent calm produced, but the disaffection has been undoubtedly increased⁶⁵.

Lord Holland was even more outspoken:

...The fact, however, is incontrovertible that the people of Ireland were driven to resistance, which possibly they meditated before, by the free quarters and the excesses of the soldiery, which were such as are not permitted in civilised warfare, even in an enemy's country. Trials, if they must so be called, were carried on, without number, under Martial Law.... Floggings, picketings, death, were the usual sentences, and these were sometimes commuted into banishment, serving in the fleet, or transference to a foreign service....⁶⁶

Not only was this system of "coercion" frequently protested by the Whigs in the British Parliament,⁶⁷ but Lords Oxford and Mortimer went so far as to state:

...it is a mortal truth that cannot be denied, that if men have been driven, by flogging and by tortures, contrary to all law and reason, into open resistance, the guilt and consequences of that

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65. Sir John Moore, The Diary of Sir John Moore, ed. Sir J.F. Maurice (London, 1904), Vol. I, p. 271.
66. Henry Richard Lord Holland, Memoirs of the Whig Party during My Time, ed. his son (London, 1852), Vol. I, p. 113.
67. The Parliamentary History of England, Vol. XXXIII (London, 1818), cols. 134, 1058, 1488-9 (hereafter Cobbett).

...resistance are imputable to those who flog and torture...and not to those who are thereby driven into resistance.

68

Even Major-General Sir Charles Asgill in Kilkenny felt called upon on April 17, 1798 to ask Abercrombie if such violent measures could produce any beneficial results.⁶⁹

The Orange faction was, of course, constantly pressuring the government to maintain a firm stand, but the question arises as to who was using who by 1798. The British had tied themselves to the Tory Ascendancy, but Pitt had become increasingly dissatisfied with his allies who seemed quite unable to control the situation. He could, however, only move during or just after a crisis, a crisis such as a major rebellion. Both he and the Tory Ascendancy wanted any rebellion which did occur to take place in isolation,⁷⁰ but the risk involved would seem to indicate that Pitt was interested not only in the prevention of a successful rebellion, but also in the occurrence of an unsuccessful one. The Earl of Moira wrote to Charlemont on March 25, 1798:

...I have reason to think that the minister is determined to continue the system of terror in Ireland, though it is very obvious that he sees the growing difficulties here, and is very uneasy about them. I fear that he thinks a convulsion in Ireland might be useful in distracting attention from his failures and his mismanagement of our resources....

71

Certainly Pitt was by 1798 intent upon changing the system of government in Ireland by implementing a Union.⁷² As early as February 23, 1798 Alexander Annesly, a London solicitor and supporter

68. Ibid., col. 1519.

69. Castlereagh, I: 184-5.

70. Patrick Byrne, Lord Edward Fitzgerald (London, 1955), pp. 195-6; Lecky, IV: 187-192; Senior, p. 95 comments: "...As informers had kept the government aware of the main activities and plans of the rebel leaders, it was possible for the Castle to choose its own moment to strike..."

71. Charlemont MSS, II: 317.

72. Pakenham, p. 277. See also Lecky, IV: 330.

of Pitt, had told Joseph Farington that "...He looks upon Union with Ireland certain, probably postponed this year to be brot forwd (sic) next - must be or Ireland lost."⁷³ And on May 28, only five days after the outbreak of the rebellion, Pitt wrote to Camden: "...Cannot crushing the rebellion be followed by an Act appointing Commissioners to treat for an Union?..."⁷⁴ He was undoubtedly surprised by the extent and violence of the revolt in Wexford, but there seems little doubt that he was neither surprised by, nor overly concerned with, the outbreak of open rebellion in Ireland. The Ascendancy had to be frightened, split, and discredited if a Union was ever to be agreed to by the Irish Parliament.⁷⁵ Thus the Whig attempt to gain control in Ireland, first by using Fitzwilliam and then by attempting to utilize the demands of the Catholics and the United Irish, had played into Pitt's hands. The result was that the Ascendancy was seriously split and thus unable to unite in opposition to the project of a Union, just as the people were divided by the religious animosities which the rebellion drove to fever heat. While the Orangemen, and their Tory Ascendancy supporters, were mainly responsible for this, there seems little doubt that Pitt and his Irish subordinates did little to stop this development until after the rebellion, when both right and left were polarized and insecure: under such circumstances Pitt was able to acquire sufficient support to pass the Union due to the fears, animosities and mutual suspicion of the two sides in Ireland.⁷⁶

The results of the polarization in Ireland, once the rebellion had broken out, were best reflected in the uncontrolled brutality of the yeomanry. General Moore commented about the situation in

73. Joseph Farington, The Farington Diary, ed. James Greig (London, 1922), Vol. I, p. 228.

74. The Later Correspondence of George III, ed. A. Aspinall, (Cambridge, 1967), Vol. III, p. 68.

75. Buckingham commented to Grenville on June 3, 1798 that a Union "...never can be if it be not now...": Fortescue MSS, IV: 227.

76. Not that Pitt was sincerely sympathetic to the Orangemen: in fact, he and some of his closest adherents deplored their excesses, and the Union was indeed intended to suppress their power as well as that of the radicals. However, it was essential

Wicklow:

...They (the rebels) soon dispersed and threw away their arms, and the greatest part of them came in and accepted the protections which were still held out to them. They would have done this sooner had it not been for the violence and atrocity of the yeomen, who shot many of them, they had received protections, and burned houses and committed the most unpardonable acts...the presence of the troops was perhaps necessary for some time longer, but more to check the yeomen and Protestants than the people in general...77

That the common people were terrified by the yeomanry was by no means surprising: on October 26, 1798 Lady Sarah Napier wrote to the Duke of Richmond:

...in most of the yeomanry corps it was an understood thing that they were to go out, without their officers, in no less number than nine (for their own safety), and shoot whomever they thought or suspected to be rebels, and not to bring them in prisoners.78

But the yeomanry was not alone in its attitude to the rebels: James Farrell described graphically the aftermath of the unsuccessful attack by the rebels on Carlow:

The army, now having no enemy to oppose them, turned their attention at once to the cabins and made short work of them by setting every one of them on fire and

to Pitt that neither side be allowed to become too strong until the Union was passed. Divide et Impera describes very well his policy in Ireland from 1795 to 1800. See McDowell, p. 239 re the British attitude to Orange excesses.

77. Sir John Moore, I: 311. See also Charlemont MSS, II: 332.

78. Thomas Moore, II: 200

all that were in them, men, women and children...While the houses were burning, the rest of the enraged soldiers were in full cry through the town, dragging the terrified creatures out of every hiding-place they could find and either shooting them on the spot or hanging them out of gateways or signposts...There was no opposition, as they were nearly dead with fear beforehand without touching them at all and to make bad worse a report was circulated that all the Catholics in town would be put to death at their own doors...

79

And while such excesses cannot be said to have been official policy, nor can they be seen as diametrically opposed to the wishes of those in power. For example, on June 3, 1798 the King wrote to Henry Dundas: "...I trust...that as the sword is drawn it (will) not be returned into the sheath untill (sic) the whole country has submitted without condition; the making any compromise would be perfect destruction..."⁸⁰ To avoid such "perfect destruction" the natural condition was presumably the large-scale destruction of human beings.

The government, however, had not relied entirely upon terror to provoke and suppress the rebellion. As mentioned earlier, the arrests of key leaders had done much to disrupt the United Irish plans. This, however, had an interesting result which is indicated by Emmet's testimony before the Secret Committee of the House of Lords:

Lord Chancellor: Don't you think the arrests of the 12th of March caused it (the rebellion)?

79. William Farrell, *Carlow in '98, The Autobiography of William Farrell of Carlow*, ed. R.J. McHugh (Dublin, 1949), pp. 91-2.

80. Aspinall, II: 71.

Emmet: No; but I believe if it had not been for these arrests, it would not have taken place; for the people, irritated by what they suffered, had been long pressing the executive to consent to an insurrection, but they had resisted or eluded it, and even determined to persevere in the same line; after these arrests, however, other persons came forward, who were irritated and thought differently, who consented to let that partial insurrection take place.

81

Thus the arrests helped drive the disaffected into a premature rebellion. But they also, by removing many of the leaders, led to a great deal of spontaneity on the part of the mass of the people, something which might insure the defeat of the rebellion; but also could signal ominous developments in the future - from the British and Ascendancy's point of view.

In the short term, however, the authorities had acted with great perception. Beyond even the terror and arrests and aid to sectarian passion, the government had further injected confusion, fear and suspicion into the camp of the dissidents by its use of spies. No one knew whom to trust. Fear or treachery led many United officers to resign, often at the last moment, and when the rebels finally took the field they were led by such spontaneously chosen leaders as Henry Munro.⁸² In Antrim, McCracken led the revolt, but his officers refused to report and he consequently had no organized staff at all.⁸³ James Hope commented:

The greatest part of our officers, especially of those who were called colonels, either gave secret information to the enemy, or neutralized

81. MacNeven, p. 220. And John Sheares reported to Captain Armstrong, who later informed: "...the country was tired with the prosecutions, and that the people threatened, if the risings did not immediately take place, they would take the oath of allegiance, and give up their arms...": Howell, XXVII: 314.

82. See Madden, Antrim and Down, p. 43; H. of L., 1798, Appendices, pp. 50-51.

83. Madden, Antrim and Down, p. 47.

the exertions of individuals as far as their influence extended.

84

And the failure of their officers to lead them created havoc among those insurgents who did assemble: they were little more than a rudderless mob, and their generals not only could not count on their steadiness but were - with good reason - afraid to be abandoned by them.⁸⁵

No rebels so divided and so badly led can succeed. Even an almost legendary figure like Joseph Holt was afraid to be betrayed by his own men.⁸⁶ The United Irish leaders, due both to their class interests and to the actions of the government, had lost contact with the mass of the people. In the end, the latter rose anyway, and fought a desperate, hopeless battle against their oppressors.⁸⁷ The immediate result was very bloody, very tragic and quite futile. But that result would be, over a hundred years later, reversed.

84. Ibid., p. 123.

85. Pakenham, p. 259.

86. Joseph Holt, Memoirs, ed. T. Crofton Croker (London, 1838), Vol. I, pp. 149-51.

87. See the comment of Barrington Moore Jr., Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy (Boston, 1966), p. 479: "...By themselves the peasants have never been able to accomplish a revolution... The peasants have to have leaders from other classes..." Too many of these leaders were either arrested or betrayed the people for the rebellion of 1798 to have succeeded.

Thus freedom now so seldom wakes,
The only thro' she gives,
Is when some heart indignant breaks;
To show that still she lives.

The rebellion had been bloodily repressed, and the violence which had reached its peak during the uprising continued afterwards. In the weeks following the army's recapture of Wexford, 65 rebels were hanged in the town.² Thousands of suspects were rounded up and held in prison or on convict ships. Many persons were imprisoned without any charge being laid against them, and the mood of the Ascendancy was anything but generous. Thus, when a member of the Committee on the Rebellion Bill moved that trials be granted all those being held, his amendment was refused without a division.³

Repression

Late in July of 1798 many of the influential United Irish prisoners decided to enter into negotiations with the government in order to save their lives. The authorities were responsive, and respite Oliver Bond's execution on July 27. Two days later agreement was reached and all State Prisoners were required to sign the following document:

...the undersigned prisoners...engage to give every information in their power of the whole of the internal transactions of the United Irishmen; and...each of the prisoners shall give detailed information of every transaction that has passed between the United Irishmen and foreign.

1. Thomas Moore, "The Harp that once through Tara's Halls", in The Oxford Book of Irish Verse, ed. Donagh MacDonagh and Lennox Robinson (Oxford, 1958), p. 32.
2. W.E.H. Lecky, A History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century (London, 1892; reprint: New York, 1969), Vol. IV, pp. 462-3; Thomas Pakenham, The Year of Liberty (London, 1969), pp. 305-6.
3. A Collection of State Papers, relative to the War against France, Volume VIII (London, 1799), pp. 446 (hereafter State Papers).

states: but...the prisoners are not, by naming or describing, to implicate any person whatever; and...they are ready to emigrate to such country as shall be agreed on between them and government...

4

This agreement was not immediately honored by the government, and many of the State Prisoners were held for a number of years. Twenty of the most important were transferred to Fort George in Scotland, including Arthur O'Connor, T.A. Emmet, Samuel Neilson, William James MacNeven and the Rev. Steele Dickson. They were only released in 1802.⁵ Three others were still in Newgate prison in Dublin in 1800,⁶ while Thomas and Patrick Lynch of Kildare, both under twenty, were still in prison a year later.⁷

But the treatment of other, less influential men was often far more severe. As mentioned earlier, by February of 1799 almost one hundred rebels had been officially executed, and 418 banished or

4. William James MacNeven, Pieces of Irish History....(New York, 1807), pp. 154-5; John T. Gilbert, ed., Documents relating to Ireland 1795-1804 (Dublin, 1893; reprint: Shannon, 1970), pp. 143-4, 162-3.

5. R.R. Madden, The United Irishmen (Dublin, 1858), pp. 328-9.

6. Prisoners Petitions and Cases, 1778-1805, State Papers (State Paper Office, Dublin), Vol. I, no. 429. (hereafter Petitions).

7. Ibid., no. 707.

transported.⁸ Many more had undoubtedly been summarily hanged.⁹ Moreover, according to a conservative estimate, about 1,000 were eventually sentenced to transportation or banishment, about 325 of whom arrived in Australia.¹⁰ But many others were allowed to rot in prison or on ships. Some examples illustrate the fickle nature of Irish justice.

The Rev. Peter O'Neill was charged with murder during the rebellion and received 500 lashes, after which he confessed to avoid further torture. His accuser was subsequently convicted of the same charge and declared that the minister was innocent. The Lord Lieutenant ordered his release in 1800, but it was too late: he was already on his way to Botany Bay.¹¹ John Temple of Antrim was held from 1798 until 1802 without charge or trial and when his release was ordered, he also was already en route to Australia.¹² And attempts to transport men who could not be properly convicted were

8. Viscount Castlereagh, Memoirs and Correspondence, ed. his brother. (London, 1848), Vol. II, p. 192 (Cornwallis to Portland, February 28, 1799). See also Lecky, V: 105.

9. See Lecky V: 105-6.

10. George Rudé, "Early Irish rebels in Australia", Historical Studies, XVI: 17. Contrast the more "liberal" estimate of T.J. Kiernan who puts the figure of those arriving in Australia at 700: T.J. Kiernan, Transportation from Ireland to Sydney 1791-1816 (Canberra, 1954), pp. 13, 29.

11. Petitions, I, no. 549.

12. Ibid., no. 784.

not uncommon.¹³

There were others whose fate was even worse. To cite a few examples among many, Pat Farrell, the son of a wealthy man in Carlow, under twenty and in poor health, was badly flogged but managed to liberate himself by enlisting in the army. His father then purchased his discharge, but he died two years later.¹⁴ And Dick Heydon, an overseer and yeoman who took the United oath, was bailed out of prison by two wealthy friends, but when they arrived he was hanging in the yard.¹⁵

While wealth and influence afforded no guarantee of leniency, they could help. Thus William Farrell escaped any severe penalty due to the efforts of his sister, one of the wealthiest women in Carlow.¹⁶ Any information supplied was naturally counted to a prisoner's credit. Joseph Holt received a visit in his cell from Lord Cornwallis himself, and he provided the government with a considerable amount of evidence.¹⁷ Rumours to this effect were widespread in Australia when Holt lived there, and, although he denied them vehemently in his memoirs, they seem to have been well substantiated.¹⁸ Thus the system of justice in Ireland was far from fair, and many relatively unimplicated in the rebellion suffered more severely than others more heavily implicated. Moreover, politics

13. *Ibid.*, nos. 661-2.

14. William Farrell, *Carlow in '98, The Autobiography of William Farrell of Carlow*, ed. Roger J. McHugh (Dublin, 1949), p. 155.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 164.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 188, 218, 230-1.

17. Joseph Holt, *Memoirs*, ed. T. Crofton Croker (London, 1838), Vol. I, p. 303; *Castlereagh*, II: 186-7.

18. Holt, II: 428-9.

tended to play a larger part in the imposition of judgment than justice did.¹⁹

The Embers of Rebellion

There was no abrupt end to the violence provoked by the rebellion of 1798. In November widespread harassment of the army continued in Wicklow, Wexford, Kildare, Meath and Westmeath, as well as in the area around Dublin.²⁰ And on December 20 Cooke reported to Castlereagh that "...there are symptoms of returning turbulence in Wicklow, Kildare, Wexford, Antrim, Down, Tipperary..."²¹ And the day before Beresford had written to Castlereagh that, due to the proposal for a Union, the United Irish "...is rising like a phoenix from its ashes..."²² On January 22, 1799 Mayo and Antrim were proclaimed under martial law,²³ while on February 23 the Rev. Edward Hudson reported to Charlemont that Defenderism was making progress in the latter county.²⁴ And by September 18 the situation had grown worse,

19. See John O'Donovan, "The Irish Judiciary in the 18th.-and 19th. Centuries", Eire-Ireland, VI: 53.

20. Buckingham to Grenville, Nov. 5, 1798: The Manuscripts of J.B. Fortescue, Esq..., Vol. IV (Historical Manuscripts Commission, London, 1905), pp. 361-2 (hereafter Fortescue MSS).

21. Castlereagh, II: 49-50.

22. Ibid., p. 51.

23. Ibid., p. 73.

24. The Manuscripts and Correspondence of James, First Earl of Charlemont, Vol. II (Historical Manuscripts Commission, London, 1894), p. 347. (hereafter Charlemont MSS).

and Cooke wrote to Castlereagh: "...Be assured that the Defender system is spreading dangerously..."²⁵ In Connaught houghing of cattle was rampant once more, while in Cork it was difficult to collect the tithe, and attacks on those attempting to do so were frequent.²⁶ In his evidence, given on February 21, 1799 Joseph Holt even reported that 20,000 rebels were organized in Cork and were planning to rise on Easter Sunday. Moreover, they were expecting assistance from the French, the Spanish and the Dutch.²⁷

The proposed Union began increasingly to cause disaffection, and the Marquess of Waterford wrote to Castlereagh on September 9 that he feared an alliance between those opposed to a Union with the rebels, and that he was "...decided the entire lower class are on the point to rise and murder..."²⁸ And on October 8 a wealthy Catholic informed a government agent that the rich were to be massacred.²⁹ However, while sporadic violence continued, and there were minor uprisings in Wicklow, Limerick and Carlow during 1802 and 1803, the back of the revolutionary movement had really been broken in 1798. The final whimper of the United spirit was the abortive uprising in Dublin in 1803 led by Robert Emmet.³⁰

25. Castlereagh, II: 403.

26. Ibid., p. 174 (Castlereagh to Portland, February 14, 1799).

27. Ibid., pp. 186-7.

28. Ibid., p. 394.

29. Ibid., p. 416.

30. See J.B. Gordon, History of the Rebellion in Ireland, in the year 1798... (Workington, 1806), pp. 213-20.

However, while the spirit of 1798 had died, it would later be reborn under other names.

Furthermore, the rancour between Catholics and non-Catholics in Ireland had been stimulated by the rebellion, especially in Ulster. On June 10, 1799 the Rev. Edward Hudson reported to Charlemont that distrust between the two communities was growing, and that even Presbyterians who had taken the Defender oath were now suspicious of the Catholics,³¹ while on July 5 he wrote:

"...The word "Protestant", which was becoming obsolete in the north, has regained its influence, and all of that description seem drawing closer together. I only wish their affections may not be so entire to each other as to exclude all others from a share of them. The Orange system has principally contributed to this..."³²

This development would have ominous consequences in the future.

The Union

Pitt was now convinced that the system of government in Ireland must be changed; whatever hesitation he may have had in the matter before the rebellion had now been resolved. Patrick O'Farrell comments:

The Union testified to the failure of the Irish Protestant Ascendancy to govern Ireland. Having won constitutional independence in 1782, the Irish Parliament demonstrated its inability to please England, to pacify Ireland, or prevent its degeneration into rebellion in 1798...³³

31. Charlemont MSS, II: 354.

32. Ibid.

33. Patrick O'Farrell, Ireland's English Question (London, 1971), p. 67.

As argued earlier, however, Pitt may well have foreseen the occasion of a rebellion as a necessary prerequisite to the enactment of a Union. Lord Holland wrote later:

...the insurrection in Ireland was the chief cause of the Union, by furnishing the English Government with both the means and the pretext for accomplishing a measure which in no other circumstances could have been attempted...³⁴

It was, above all, indicative of the British desire to keep control of Ireland, something which Pitt felt could no longer be secured by the unreliable Ascendancy.

The Union was first proposed on January 22, 1799. The proposal was warmly received in the British Parliament, but it was narrowly defeated in the Irish House of Commons.³⁵

Pitt, however, was not prepared to allow the idea to die after a single reverse, and he set Castlereagh and Edward Cooke to get the proposal approved.³⁶

But there was serious, although disunited, opposition. The Orange Lodges were hostile to a Union, as were many of the country gentlemen and barristers who feared a loss of influence based on the Dublin parliament, and the merchants and bankers of Dublin who disliked the abolition of tariffs and the acquisition of a share of the British debt that would ensue.³⁷ After the January setback, Castlereagh proposed to Portland on February 1 that it would be necessary to pay £1,433,000 in compensation to the two latter groups.³⁸ This

34. Henry Richard Lord Holland, Memoirs of the Whig Party during my Time, ed. his son (London, 1852), Vol. I, p. 106.

35. See State Papers, VIII: 443-4; Castlereagh, II: 72-5; Gilbert, pp. 198-203.

36. Edith M. Johnston, Great Britain and Ireland 1760-1800 (Edinburgh and London, 1963), p. 64; Holland, I: 139.

37. Castlereagh, II: 43, 46-8, 128, 150-1.

38. Ibid., pp. 150-1.

act of bribery prevented such opponents from coalescing firmly against the Union.

However, the opposition of the Orangemen and other elements of the Ascendancy had an ironic effect, as Buckingham reported to Grenville on January 2, 1799:

...The foolish and almost Jacobin association of all the Orangemen against the Union has had the fortunate effect of turning all the Catholics (except the republicans of that persuasion) to the measure...³⁹

As a result, the union received the unanimous support of the Catholic bishops, and even the benign neutrality of the Presbyterians of Ulster.⁴⁰ Of course, there were other reasons for their support. The Catholics hoped, and were led to expect, that further concessions would be granted them as soon as a Union was passed, while the Presbyterian opinion was undoubtedly strongly influenced by a feeling among those involved in the linen industry that a Union would guarantee their protected status in the British market.⁴¹

39. Fortescue MSS, IV: 435-6. Holland, I: 138 stated: "...All parties received the mention of a Union with dislike, some with abhorrence; but the violence expressed by those persons who were most hateful to the people, at the prospect of such a measure, if it did not reconcile, at least softened the opposition of the Roman Catholics (sic) to it..."

40. Fortescue MSS, IV: 445, 447; Castlereagh, II: 414.

41. Castlereagh II: 80; R.B. McDowell, Irish Public Opinion, 1750-1800 (London, 1944), p. 254.

National and economic arguments were brought to bear against the idea of a Union, while its proponents argued on the grounds of empire and efficiency.⁴² But ideas were not to decide the issue.

Bribery, as we have seen, weakened one area of opposition; deception allowed the government to maintain strong Catholic support. Thus Castlereagh wrote to Portland on January 28, 1799:

...Were the Catholic question to be now carried, the great argument for a Union would be lost, at least, as far as the Catholics are concerned: it seems therefore more important than ever for Government to resist its adoption, on the grounds that without a Union it must be destructive; with it, that it may be safe...⁴³

However, although the Union was carried by the Irish Parliament in 1800 and came into effect on January 1, 1801, the Catholics were not enfranchised until 1829. While it may be true that the authorities were willing to lend a sympathetic ear to Catholic claims, they were certainly not prepared to challenge the opposition to them which was all too firmly entrenched. Cooke and Elliot both resigned due to the continued inequality of the Catholics.⁴⁴ Their feelings had been reflected eloquently in a letter from Cornwallis to Pelham on October 15, 1798:

42. McDowell, pp. 250-1, 254-7.

43. Castlereagh, II: 140. He argued persuasively: "...The Catholics, therefore, if offered equality without a Union, will probably prefer it to equality with a Union; for, in the latter case, they must ever be content with inferiority; in the former, they would probably by degrees gain ascendancy." Portland thought similarly: *ibid.*, pp. 147-8.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 30; Johnston, p. 64.

I am sensible that it is the easiest point to carry (a Union); but I begin to have great doubts whether it will not prove an insuperable bar, instead of being a step towards the admission of Catholics, which is the only measure that can give permanent tranquillity to this wretched country.

45

But Pitt was not willing to abandon the Ascendancy and grant real power to the people. Thus bribery, with money or honors, was used blatantly to pass the Union, and the desires of the people ignored.

Edith M. Johnston comments:

...the fact that the Irish ruling class was separated by race and religion from the rest of the nation and only the "ascendancy" were united to the parliament of Great Britain in 1800, encouraged the divergence of the Irish nation, whose exclusion made the Union incomplete and was the ultimate reason for its failure...

46

Since the British refused to satisfy the Irish people, they were forced to coerce them. But the use of force against a subject nation, whatever its temporary benefits, never leads to lasting peace, as the English were long and painfully to learn.

The rebellion drama had begun with various protagonists: Pitt and the British government, the Tory and Whig sections of the Ascendancy, the United Irish, the Defenders and the Orangemen. The rebellion had led to the victory of Pitt, the Tory Ascendancy and the Orangemen and the crushing of the United Irish and Defenders.

45. Gilbert, p. 193.

46. Johnston, p. 297.

The prize earned by the victors was the Union, a result which eventually weakened the power of the Ascendancy, leaving the British to maintain their sway in Ireland almost unaided, except in Ulster.

This would prove costly because those defeated in 1798 refused to lie down, as subsequent events have shown. But Pitt had little choice, because by 1798 the Ascendancy was already vulnerable and dependent, and the meteoric rise of a nationalist movement in the country indicated that the days of its oppressors were numbered.

APPENDIX I

A paper found in the writing box of Lord Edward Fitzgerald after his arrest on March 12, 1798.*

If ever any unfortunate cause should put our city, with the other parts of the country into the possession of a cruel and tyrannical enemy, whose government by repeated oppressions, might drive us, into the last stage of desperate resistance, our conduct then should be regulated in a manner best calculated for obtaining victory.

The following thoughts are humbly offered
for the inspection of every real Irishman.

It is supposed that the enemy have a well appointed and disciplined standing army.--

In such a case every man ought to consider how that army could be attacked, or repelled, and what advantage their discipline and numbers might give them in a populous city, acting in concert with the adjoining counties.

It is well known that an officer of any skill in his profession, would be very cautious of bringing the best disciplined troops into a large city in a state of insurrection, for the following reasons:

His troops, by the breadth of the streets, are obliged to have a very narrow front, and however numerous, only three men deep can be brought into action, which in the widest of our streets, cannot be more than sixty men, as a space must be left on each side or flank, for the men who discharge to retreat to the rear (sic), that their places may be occupied by the next in succession, who are loaded, so though there are a thousand men in a street, not more than sixty can act at one time, and should they be attacked by an irregular body armed with pikes or such bold weapons, if the sixty men in front were defeated, the whole body, however numerous, are unable to assist, and immediately become a small mob in uniform, from the inferiority of number, in comparison to the people, and easily disposed of.

Another inconvenience might destroy the order of this army. Perhaps at the same moment, they may be dreadfully galled from the housetops, by showers of bricks, coping stones, etc. which may be at hand, without imitating the women of Paris, who carried the stones of the unpaved streets to the windows and tops of the houses in their aprons.

Another disadvantage on the part of the soldiers, would be, as they are regulated by the word of command, or stroke of the drum, they must be left to their individual discretion, as such communications must be drowned in the noise and clamour of a popular tumult.

In the next place, that part of the populace, who could not get into the engagement, would be employed in unpaving the streets,

so as to impede the movements of horse or artillery; and in the avenues where the army were likely to pass, numbers would be engaged forming barriers of hogsheads, carts, cars, counters, doors, etc. the forcing of which barriers, by the army would be disputed. While like ones, were forming at every twenty or thirty yards or any convenient distances, situation might require; should such precautions be well observed, the progress of an army, through one street or over one bridge would be very tedious, and attended with great loss, if it would not be destroyed, at the same time the neighbouring counties might rise in a Mass and dispose of the troops scattered in their vicinity, and prevent a junction or a passage of any army intended for the city; they would tear up the roads, and barricade every convenient distance with trees, timber, implements of husbandry, etc. at the same time lining the hedges, walls, ditches and houses, with men armed with muskets, who would keep up a well directed fire.

However well exercised standing armies are supposed to be, by frequent reviews, and sham battles, they are never prepared for broken roads, or enclosed fields, in a country like ours covered with innumerable and continued intersections of ditches and hedges, every one of which are an advantage to an irregular body, and may with advantage be disputed, against an army as so many fortifications and entrenchments.

The people in the city would have an advantage by being armed with pikes or such weapons, the first attack if possible should be made by men whose pikes were nine or ten feet long, by that means they could act in ranks deeper than the soldiery, whose arms are much shorter, then the deep files of the pike men, by being weightier, must easily break the thin order of the army.

The Charge of the pike men, should be made in a smart trot, on the flank or extremity of every rank, there should be intrepid men placed to keep the fronts even, that at closing every point should tell together, they should have at the same time, two or three like bodies at convenient distances in the rere (sic), who would be brought up if wanting to support the front, which would give confidence to their brothers in action, as it would tend to discourage the enemy, at the same time, there should be in the rere (sic) of each division, some men of spirit to keep the ranks as close as possible.

The apparent strength of the army, should not intimidate as closing on it makes its powder and ball useless, all its superiority is in fighting at a distance; all its skill ceases and all its action must be suspended, when it once is within reach of the pike. The reason of printing and writing this, is to remind the people of discussing military subjects.

* Report from the Secret Committee of the House of Lords, Dublin, 1798, Appendicies, pp. 59-61.

APPENDIX II

The Address to the Irish people found in the possession of John Sheares, and in his handwriting, after his arrest on May 23, 1798.*

Irishmen,

Your Country is free and you are about to be avenged (already) that Vile Government which has so long and so Cruelly oppressed You, is no more; some of its most Atrocious Monsters have already paid the forfeit of their Lives, and the rest are in our hands (waiting their fate.) The National Flag, the Sacred Green, is at this Moment flying over the Ruins of Despotism, and that Capital (sic) which a few hours past (was the Scene) Witnessed the Debauchery, (the Machinations) plots and Crimes of your Tyrants, is now the Citadel of Triumphant Patriotism and Virtue. Arise then, United Sons of Ireland; arise like a great and powerful people, Determined to (live) be free or die, Arm Yourselves by every means in your power, and Rush like Lions on your Foes; Consider, that (in Disarming your Enemy) for every Enemy you disarm, you arm a friend, and thus become doubly powerful; In the Cause of Liberty, inaction is Cowardice, and the Coward shall forfeit the Property he has not the Courage to protect. Let his Arms be Seized and Transferred to those Gallant (Patriots) Spirits who want, and will use them; Yes, Irishmen, we swear by that eternal Justice, in whose Cause you fight, that the brave Patriot, who survives the present glorious Struggle, and the family of him who has fallen, or shall fall hereafter in it, shall Receive from the hands of a grateful Nation, an ample Recompence out of (those funds) that property which the Crimes of our Enemies (shall) have Forfeited into its hands, and his Name (too) shall be Inscribed on the National Record of Irish Revolution, as a glorious Example to all posterity; But we likewise swear to punish Robbery with death and Infamy.

We also swear, that we will never Sheathe the Sword until every (person) being in the Country is restored to those equal Rights, which the God of Nature has given to all Men, -- Until an Order of things shall be established, in which no Superiority shall be acknowledged among the Citizens of Erin, but that (which) of Virtue and Talent (shall Intitle (sic) to.)

As for those degenerate Wretches who turn their Swords against their Native Country, the National Vengeance awaits them: Let them find no quarter unless they shall prove their Repentance by speedily deserting, Exchanging from the Standard of Slavery, for that of Freedom, under which their former Errors may be buried, and they may Share the Glory and advantages that are due to the Patriot Bands of Ireland.

Many of the Military feel the love of Liberty glow within their Breasts, and have (already to) joined the National Standard receive (those) with open Arms....But for the Wretch who turns his Sword against his Native Country let the National Vengeance

be Visited on him, let him find no Quarter....

Rouse all the Energies of your Souls; call forth all the Merits and abilities which a Vicious Government Consigned to obscurity and under the conduct of your Chosen Leaders March with Steady Step to Victory; heed not the Glare of (a Mercenary) hired Soldiery, or Aristocratic Yeomanry, they Cannot stand the Vigorous Shock of Freedom,....the Detested Government of England to which we Vow eternal hatred, shall learn, that the Treasures (the, it) they Exhausts (sic) on (their mercenary) its accoutered Slaves for the purpose of Butchering Irishmen shall but further Enable us to turn their Swords on its devoted head.

Attack them in every direction by Day and by Night; avail yourselves of the Natural Advantages of your Country, which are Innumerable, and with which you are better acquainted than they; Where you cannot Oppose them in full force, Constantly harass their Rear and their flanks; Cut off their provisions and Magazines and prevent them as much as possible from Uniting their forces;....War alone must occupy every mind, and every hand in Ireland, until its long oppressed Soil be purged of all its Enemies.

Vengeance, Irishmen, Vengeance on your Oppressors - Remember what thousands of your dearest friends have perished by their (Murders, Cruel plots) Merciless Orders; Remember their burnings, their rackings, their torturings, their Military Massacres, and their legal Murders. Remember ORR.

* The Report from the Secret Committee of the House of Commons, Dublin, 1798, Appendicies, pp. 206-8. Those words in brackets were crossed out on the original.

APPENDIX III

The Occupation of some United Irishmen, Defenders and Rebels,
compiled from Prisoners Petitions.

	Dublin	Wexford	Leinster	Belfast	Ulster	Connaught	Munster	?
Cloth Merchant,					1			
Manufacturer	3							
Merchant	1			1			2	
Professional*			1				1	
Large Business			1					
Small Business	2	3					2	1
Apothecary								1
Craftsman	4		2	2	1		1	
Landlord-Gentry		1				2		
Farmer		6	12			1	5	1
Farm Laborer			4				1	
Land Stewart	1							
Worker in Cloth			1		1			
Worker	3							
Priest							2	
Presbyterian								
Minister					1			
Clerical	2			1				
Regular Soldier	1	1	1					
Yeoman			1					
Militiaman								
Other			2					2
TOTALS	17	11	25	4	3	3	14	5

* Doctors, Attorneys, Teachers.

Source: Prisoners Petitions and Cases, Vol. I, 1778-1805, State
Paper Office.

APPENDIX IV

The Occupations of some United Irishmen, Defenders and Rebels,
compiled from various sources.

	Dublin	Wexford	Leinster	Belfast	Ulster	Connaught	Munster	?
Cloth Merchant,								
Manufacturer	3		2	5	5			
Merchant	5			5	3			
Professional*	7	(1)	2	4	3			1
Large Business								
Small Business	5	2	3	3	4			1
Apothecary	1		3		4			1
Craftsmen	6		5	4	2			6
Landlord-Gentry	2	5	9		3	2		1
Farmer		3	9		3			1
Farm Laborer			1					
Land Stewart			3					
Worker in Cloth	1				1			
Worker	3				1			1
Priest	2	10						1
Presbyterian								
Minister.			1	2	14			2
Clerical	1		2	1	1			
Regular Soldier								3
Yeoman			(4)					
Yeoman Officer		(1)	2 & (2)			(1)		2
Regular Officer		1 & (1)		1				5
Militiaman	2	2	13		5	3	1	
Other	1	1	2	2				1
TOTALS	39	24	57	26	36	5	1	26

* Doctors, Attorneys, Teachers.

() Brackets indicate that the person is included under another occupation.

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