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III. CHARLES JAMES FOX AND THE WHIG OPPOSITION IN 1792

By H. BUTTERFIELD

I

If the year 1792 has come to be remembered for political crises which made it one of the turning-points in English history, it has been famous also for the auspiciousness of its commencement, the optimism and the promise that characterized its earliest months. In January and February Pitt repeatedly drew the attention of parliament to the increasing prosperity of the country and the flourishing state of the public revenue; and opposition did not pretend to deny this, but merely said that the prosperity 'was no feather in the minister's cap', since it was due to circumstances independent of government. Even that aggressive admirer of the French Revolution, Earl Stanhope, wrote to a Frenchman: 'We are already free... and England is now the richest, the most prosperous and—climate apart—the happiest country in Europe.' Even that determined reformer, the Rev. Christopher Wyvill, joined the crowd of witnesses to the country's good fortune, though he speculated that if a great European war should break out, 'the English people would probably then renew, but in a louder tone', the cry for parliamentary reform. Pitt attributed the prosperity to the rise of machinery, the credit facilities, the 'exploring and enterprising spirit of our merchants', and the mode in which money was continually being fed back into industry. He claimed that something was due, however, to the internal tranquillity of the nation and 'the natural effects of a free but well regulated government'.[1] The correspondence of the year 1792 often gives evidence of the sense of rising prosperity; and to this would be attributed on the one hand the general attachment to the constitution, and on the other hand the indifference of the nation to matters of foreign policy.[2] Even later in the year, when Pitt's enemies were charging him with the deliberate manufacture of a scare and a crisis, those who knew the ministry more intimately regarded it as unduly preoccupied with the state of the funds, and therefore too inclined to conceal the alarm that was actually felt.[3]

Though Burke had done his best—and had said that it was useless to try

[1] *Parliamentary History*, XXIX, 785, 816, 830, 832–5, 837; Stanhope and Gooch, *The Life of Charles Third Earl Stanhope* (1914), p. 113; C. Wyvill, *Political Papers*, III, Appendix, 'Defence of Dr Price', pp. 92–3.

[2] E.g. *Journals* [*and Correspondence*] *of* [*William, Lord*] *Auckland*, II, 398; G. S. Veitch, *The Genesis of Parliamentary Reform*, p. 210.

[3] E.g. *The Diaries and Correspondence of the Rt. Hon. George Rose*, I, 117: 'I know how very desirous you gentlemen of finance are to avoid giving the least alarm to the funds.' Cf. H[istorical] M[anuscripts] C[ommission], *Dropmore MSS.* II, 350.

any more just then[4]—to draw the government out of its attitude of neutrality in respect of revolutionary France, Pitt on 17 February made the famous statement that 'unquestionably there never was a time in the history of this country, when, from the situation of Europe, we might more reasonably expect fifteen years of peace, than we may at the present moment'. In his formulation of foreign policy he made the maintenance of peace the great objective, since upon this, he said, depended the continuance of our prosperity.[5] The constant advertising of this principle for much of the year laid the government open later to the reproach that public opinion was left unprepared for the contingency of a possible change of policy.[6]

Fox declared in the House of Commons on 17 February that

> Opposition at present could not be said to be engaged in a struggle for power, the other party were too decidedly superior in numbers, and too much in the confidence of the country to admit of such an idea on their part.[7]

There were some who at a later time were ready to trace the divisions amongst the opposition Whigs to the time of the great struggle over the question of the Regency in 1788–9; and Edmund Burke confessed that the historical ideas which underlay his attitude to the French Revolution—and particularly to hereditary monarchy—had been developed in his mind during the course of the same controversy. On the appearance of Burke's *Reflections* Lord John Cavendish had noted the divisions in the party, and had distinguished what he called 'our allies' who 'have now and then run wild' from 'our original set' which had always contended for a 'temperate resistance to the abuse of power'.[8] The 'original set', however, though they had greatly admired the *Reflections*, had left Burke standing high and dry after his breach with Sheridan and Fox; and they—not Burke—were the ones who had put party first, for they had been moved somewhat by the 'fear of showing that there were divisions' in their ranks. The head of the party, the Duke of Portland, declined to discuss the issue of the French Revolution with Burke. Those members of the opposition who had been most influenced by Burke in the past, and who were to be amongst the earliest to go over to his views in 1792, not only refused to converse with him on this question but were shunning his society at the beginning of the year.[9] The younger wing of the party gloated over his defeat, and in January 1792 he declared that they had

> thought proper to render me obnoxious to the party, odious to the prince [of Wales]...and at least suspected by the body of my country. That is, they have endeavoured completely and fundamentally to ruin me and mine.[10]

[4] [Fitzwilliam and Bourke], *Correspondence of...Burke* (1844), III, 343.
[5] *Parliamentary History*, XXIX, 826, 835.
[6] See p. 327 below; cf. n. 82.
[7] *Parliamentary History*, XXIX, 846, 849.
[8] *Correspondence of...Burke*, III, 171.
[9] *Life and Letters of Sir Gilbert Elliot, First Earl of Minto*, II, 7–8.
[10] *Correspondence of...Burke*, III, 402.

The breach with his own party, however, had not brought Burke into agreement with Pitt, who at the time of the famous scene with Fox had declared himself reassured by the statement of the latter in favour of aristocracy. In September 1791 Burke had found Pitt and Grenville 'quite out of all apprehensions of any effect from the French Revolution on this kingdom, either at present, or at any time to come'.[11] In February 1792 he stated in respect of the same topic, 'It is plain that they [the ministers] wish to be rid of my interference'.[12] Earl Fitzwilliam, who stood at the right hand of Portland amongst the leaders of the opposition, was nearest to Burke, perhaps, both in sentiment and in opinion. Within the party he was doing 'all he can to set things right on his part, so far as private conversation goes'.[13] In November 1791 Burke refused his offer of 'large pecuniary assistance', since he might soon be called upon to 'speak strong things' against the party in which Fitzwilliam was so prominent. He wrote

> The Business of the Hastings prosecution I cannot abandon. My stay in Parliament will not be one hour after that business is closed. The time to its conclusion, though I hope short, appears to me as long as it can do to Mr Fox, or Mr Fitzpatrick, or Mr Sheridan, or Mr Windham, or Mr Church, or Mr Pelham, or Mr Francis, or whoever else is the most ardent admirer of the French system. My intention, almost a resolution, is during that painful Interval not to intermeddle with political matters except it relates to some change in the constitution or that by bringing on French Questions I am called not to fly from my ground....Neither with the Ministers nor with the new-modeld Whiggs will I act, or take any employment whatsoever.[14]

The attitude of the opposition leaders to Burke's quarrel with Fox on the subject of the French Revolution was illustrated by a letter from Earl Fitzwilliam a little later in the year 1792:

> An attack on C[harles Fox]...could not prove the means of reclaiming him...it was sure to produce the contrary effects. By pinning the words upon him it pinned him to the sentiment, whether he would or not, and by interesting many for the individual, it riveted them to the opinion; nay, perhaps it made many proselytes the other way, by engaging them to profess publicly what they were doubting about, and what they would since have been glad to have rejected, had they never been led to profess ...Even now, while Ch[arles] is deprecating generally the Revolution, he holds fast to his original sentiment, which, had it not been so much marked, would

[11] Ibid. III, 344.
[12] Ibid. III, 415.
[13] Ibid.; cf. ibid. III, 237.
[14] Wentworth Woodhouse MSS. [of Earl Fitzwilliam, now in the Sheffield Central Library], E. Burke to Lord Fitzwilliam, 21 Nov. 1791. Cf. ibid. copy of E. Burke to H. Dundas, 22 Mar. 1792: 'Twelve years have been spent in this one Indian pursuit....I am now an old man of 27 Years' service in Parliament....I desire only that the House should not abandon an old worn out Soldier in the exposed Post in which they have placed me; and in which I am content to die, but not to be disgraced....You and Mr Pitt and Mr Fox and the other great Men who act a part on the Stage, if you fail in this, have other ways of indemnifying your reputations. I have none.' Cf. also *Correspondence of...Burke*, III, 408.

have passed bye (*sic*) very little noticed by others, and no more thought of by himself, but as the flourish of the period.[15]

Lord Stormont, who opened the debates of January 1792 with an extravagant declaration against all kinds of reform, said soon after the breach between Burke and Fox that the latter 'has given a very unexceptionable creed'.[16] Burke on a number of occasions (and in certain moods) was willing to admit 'that inwardly even Fox did not differ from me materially if at all'.[17] At the opening of the year 1792 the opposition newspapers repeatedly pointed out that Fox had been misunderstood or was being misrepresented or had changed his views. Those on the side of the government seemed anxious to coax him into moderation by the device of frequently praising his reasonableness.[18] He wrote to Fitzwilliam on 16 March 1792:

> Our apprehensions are raised by different objects; *you* seem to dread the prevalence of Paine's opinions (which in fact I detest as much as you do) while I am much more afraid of the total annihilation of all principles of liberty and resistance, an event which I am sure you would be as sorry to see as I.

The truth was that Fox still remained fixed in his ancient view that the King, George III, was the enemy, the only danger to the constitution. Burke was driven to hysteria by his frantic desire to persuade the governing classes that henceforward the essential menace was directed against their very existence as an order. He knew that if the blow should actually fall, the Whig aristocracy would necessarily come over to his side, come over even to the side of George III. In the autumn of 1791 they had provided him with sufficient evidence to convince Dundas and the King that when the issue arose 'the leading

[15] H.M.C. *Castle Howard MSS.* p. 699. Papers on the side of government, e.g. *Public Advertiser*, 28 Feb. 1792, echoed the common view, that if Burke had not 'urged the controversy Paine...most probably would have been a silent man'. Cf. p. 300 below, for Burke's part in provoking the revival of the Society for Constitutional Information.

[16] *Parliamentary History*, XXIX, 749; *Correspondence of...Burke*, III, 235.

[17] Ibid. III, 236; cf. ibid. III, 532, where Burke says: 'I really do believe him to be [as good an aristocrat as the rest of us]; but, perhaps, do not the more excuse him.' Mme d'Arblay, *Diary and Letters* (1904), V, 92–3 (18 June 1792), reports Fox as having been heard to say, concerning the *Reflections*, 'Well! Burke is right—but Burke is often right, only he is right too soon'; while Burke was heard to say that Fox 'can never internally like the French Revolution, He is entangled; but, in himself, if he should find no other objection to it, he has at least too much taste for such a revolution'. In the Bodleian Library the Burke transcripts of Rev. R. H. Murray include a letter of 13 Apr. 1792, in which Burke writes: 'They are not persuaded that Mr Fox and the other gentlemen who do not favour me with their good opinions, vary as much from my sentiments (which are their own) as I *apprehend*, and as they *profess* to do; or if there really exists such a diversity, that it is not likely to be followed with such effects as I had dreaded from the propagation of the principles and politics which they encourage. I heartily wish, without being able to change my opinions, that these my excellent friends may be found in the right.'

[18] E.g. *Public Advertiser*, 10 Jan.: 'Mr Fox possesses too good an understanding, much as it is usurped by Party, to reject the counsels of experience'; ibid. 31 Mar.: 'Mr Fox has been unfairly charged with inconsistencies....But by taking the whole substance....' *Morning Chronicle*, 11 Jan.: 'At no period has so much industry been used to misrepresent Mr Fox's political character.' *Morning Post*, 16 Jan.: 'In fact when Mr Fox delivered his sentiments the Constituent Assembly had made very little progress in the new system.'

characters in the country think soundly on the only point that can endanger the prosperity of the country'.[19]

The Whig lords, however, could not be entirely sure of Fox; and Fox himself was ready to say to them 'I feel as much or perhaps more than you do how much *as a party* we must be losing every day by the present state of things'. On 16 March he wrote a long letter to Earl Fitzwilliam on the three matters which were the main subject of difference between them. Concerning the first, which related to religious liberty, he maintained that, though he went further than most men in theory, the difference between them did not really exist in practice. The second related to the slave trade, on which Fitzwilliam and other Whig lords were opposed to the views of both Fox and Pitt. Fox refused to make any compromise on the subject of this trade, and said, 'I should prefer the abolition of it to any political good that can be gained or even wished, for the party or the country'. The letter continued:

> The third point is parliamentary reform, on which the truth is that I am more bound by former declarations and consistency, than by any strong opinion I entertain in its favour. I am far from being sanguine that any new scheme would produce better parliaments than the present mode of election has furnished; but perhaps the house of Commons in the present reign has been so dragged through the dirt and bespattered, in early times by the Whigs and in later by the King and Pitt and the Tories that one constructed on a new plan might be better from the mere circumstance of its novelty. However this is all speculation and very uncertain, and I much doubt whether the part which you have taken on the question be not upon the whole the most manly and judicious. You will observe that I have not mentioned the French Revolution, I have not because I never can allow that while we agree about what is and what ought to be the constitution of our own country, it can be of any importance how far we do so about what passes in France. I certainly thought the Revolution of France the greatest event that ever happened for the happiness of mankind. The *present* state of that country alarms me very much, because if the confusion there should terminate in the re-establishment of the antient despotism I should think it a decisive blow to all liberty in Europe at least for centuries.

Later in the year another member of the party, the Earl of Carlisle, while attacking Fox and complaining of his general conduct, said, 'I acquit him of any real love of reform of Parliament'.[20]

Fox could have serious misgivings on the subject of parliamentary reform,

[19] Wentworth Woodhouse MSS., H. Dundas to E. Burke, 26 Sept. 1791; Windsor Castle MSS., George III, 6873, H. Dundas to George III, 1 Oct. 1791. Cf. Bodleian Library, Transcripts of Burke Letters by Rev. R. H. Murray, E. Burke to R. Burke junr., 28 Oct. 1791: 'There are two men high in the party who would certainly be affected by these things if they ever attended to them, or combined them with each other or followed them up. . . . But one of them does not even read the Newspapers.'

[20] Milton MSS. [of Earl Fitzwilliam, now with the Northamptonshire Record Society at Lamport Hall], C. J. Fox to Earl Fitzwilliam, 16 Mar. 1792. I have to thank Mr H. V. F. Somerset for calling my attention to this document, which does not seem to survive in its entirety, though Mr P. I. King, Assistant Secretary to the Northamptonshire Record Society, has kindly communicated to me from the same collection a transcript of the missing section. Cf. ibid. the Earl of Carlisle to Earl Fitzwilliam, 19 Oct. 1792.

even before the alarms and crises of 1792 had really begun. In regard to the French Revolution he showed during the course of the year that he was shocked and disgusted by the developments which were taking place. Down to the month of November the leading members of the party were still hoping and expecting that he would declare himself on the aristocratic side. He differed from Fitzwilliam—and at the same time from Burke—in the direction that his fears and apprehensions took; for he hated the things they dreaded, only he saw no menace from these, no menace from anything save monarchical despotism. Indeed, where he most differed from his friends was in what might be called the 'set' of his personality, the fact that, deeper than any political theory, was a kind of instinct for liberty which moved him in many of his decisions and tended to make him impetuously anti-government. Both in 1792 and later he seems to stress the importance, furthermore, of having an opposition for the sake of opposition; and for this reason the cause of party itself had a great place in his political thinking, and even his letter of 16 March shows that he would be opposed to anything like a 'national government'. That letter concluded:

> The time may come when our constancy will not have been in vain and the country may reap some advantage from the existence of a body of men who are passionately attached to the principles of liberty and yet think those principles very compatible with our present constitution, and all the rights of property. However if our Party is useful, we must not forget that it's foundation is *Whig* and that upon that principle only we are necessary or even useful. If a Tory party is necessary for the support of the constitution, God knows there is one and strong enough and too strong in my judgement, but if I am wrong, let us go to it and strengthen it which can only be done by our party becoming part of a Tory Party and that by being dissolved, because it is evident that the Tory Party will be stronger being *one*, than by being divided into two different factions.... The times are bad very bad for us, but perhaps we are of that sort which in bad times is most useful, and we may be in our proper place.[21]

In gradual stages during March, April and May there came to the surface in England a movement which, though it was being prepared in the preceding months, only now began to show something of its true character, and to dismay many people who had hitherto been comparatively undisturbed by the occasional flutter of pamphlets, meetings and celebrations. The reform movement of 1780 had been led by Yorkshire and Middlesex and had gathered into itself chiefly the home counties—its leaders still envisaged it as primarily a county movement. What now confronted the government was an eruption of a different character which presented, virtually for the first time, the problem of the rising industrial towns. Towards the close of 1791 Thomas Hardy and a group of 'tradesmen, mechanicks and shopkeepers' began the meetings which led to the formation of the London Corresponding Society, though it

[21] This part of Fox's letter is only given from the transcript mentioned in n. 20 above.

was not until the following April that this body actually presented itself to the public. Hardy declared that the society began by thinking itself the first of its kind, but soon learned that a similar society had already taken form in Sheffield;[22] and this one—called the Society for Constitutional Information—claimed in March to be four months old and to possess nearly two thousand members, apart from similar bodies which existed in the adjacent towns and villages. Sheffield seems to have been the place which first provoked serious apprehension, and in June a secret inquiry into the conditions in some of the large industrial towns was particularly disturbing in its report on this town, though fairly reassuring concerning other places. According to the report the agitators 'seem with great judgment to have chosen this as the centre of all their seditious machinations'.[23] Manchester came before the public in a sensational manner also in March; but here it was 'a set of people of a higher description' who had associated for radical purposes, without yet greatly affecting the lower classes; and in any case the supporters of Church and King were already embodied in that town, where they still represented the prevailing group.[24] In Norwich, which began to give some alarm at the same time, and which claimed that its societies then numbered some hundreds of members, including some considerable business men, the Revolution Society protested in April against the idea that the conflict in which they were engaged was one which could be properly envisaged as a conflict between rich and poor.[25] The

[22] [British Museum] Add. MSS. 27811, f. 7, Thos. Hardy to the Manchester Society for Constitutional Information, 7 Apr. 1792: 'we flattered ourselves that no other societies in the nation were formed upon the same principles.' Ibid. ff. 4–5, Thos. Hardy to Rev. Mr Bryant, 8 Mar. 1792. For the early history of the Sheffield Society, see G. P. Jones, 'The Reform Movement in Sheffield', *Hunter Archaeological Society*, IV (1929–37); J. Taylor, 'The Sheffield Constitutional Society, 1791–95', ibid. V (1938–43); [Public Record Office] T[reasury] S[olicitor] 11/952, no. 3496[2], John Alcock to the editors of *The English Chronicle*, 15 Jan. 1792; ibid. Samuel Ashton to the London Society for Constitutional Information, 14 Mar. 1792, with enclosure; T.S. 11/951, no. 3495, J. H. Tooke to the Sheffield Constitutional Society, 2 Mar. 1792.

[23] [Public Record Office,] H[ome] O[ffice] 42/20, no. 176, Col. de Lancy to Dundas, 13 June, copy: 'The Manufactures of this Town are of a nature to require so little capital to carry them on, that a man with a very small sum of money can employ 2, 3 or 4 men, and this being generally the case, there are not in this, as in other great Towns, any number of persons of sufficient weight who could by their influence, or the number of their dependents, act with any effect in case of a disturbance, and as the wages given to the journeymen are very high, it is pretty generally the practice for them to work for three days, in which they earn sufficient to enable them to drink and riot for the rest of the week, consequently no place can be more fit for seditious purposes.'

[24] Ibid. Concerning Birmingham the report was more favourable, though 'both parties are carrying on a literary war, no day passing without some publication...tending to inflame the animosity'. In Liverpool, 'however the people of the Town might differ in relation to their opinions of the present Administration, yet in support of the general government and constitution of the country, they were, with few exceptions, firmly united'. The Mayor of Liverpool, though he had to report strikes and labour troubles, wrote to the Home Office, 5 June (H.O. 42/20, no. 61), 'Rely upon it, Sir, that in this Town there is no danger of any political Commotion'.

[25] T.S. 11/952, no. 3496[2]. T. Goff, Chairman of the Norwich Revolution Society to the London Society for Constitutional Information, 26 Apr. 1792: 'Surely the interests of all the industrious, from the richest merchant to the poorest mechanic, are in every community the

condition of these towns caused serious apprehension. In Sheffield, for example (as in Birmingham), there was hardly any civil power. Attempts to 'establish a police in the town had hitherto failed'. And the situation of the soldiery was said to be 'very unpleasant'.[26]

A London body of quite different character from the ones which have been mentioned—the famous Society for Constitutional Information—had been brought into existence at the time of the Yorkshire movement of 1780, but had now been practically dormant for a number of years. In May 1791 one of its members, Jeremiah Batley, proposed that it should address the public with a condemnation of Burke, his object being to 're-animate' that body, for 'previous to this publication our Society scarcely evidenced a particle of life'. He succeeded too well in his object, for, against his will, there was inserted into his resolution a glorification of Tom Paine, 'exclusive of all the more moderate and judicial opponents of Burke's principles'; while in the following spring he declared that the society needed not stimulants but sedatives, and that 'our members rapidly increase and the influence of individuals who formerly had weight is, I fear, daily diminishing'. Very soon he ceased all attendance, and other members shortly resigned, claiming that now, under the leadership of Horne Tooke and the influence of Paine, the society was departing from its original purpose which had merely been parliamentary reform.[27]

It happened that Horne Tooke had been taking under his guardianship also the new societies that were being formed in various provincial towns. Amongst the papers that came into the hands of the government at a later time we can still see constitutions, rules and addresses of various societies, the manuscript of which has been corrected in his unmistakable hand. Amongst these were the early papers of the London Corresponding Society; and it was generally the case that the humble members of such bodies were pathetically eager for

same; to lessen the numbers of the unproductive, to whose maintenance they contribute... and to do away such institutions and imposts as abridge the means of maintenance, by resisting the demand for labour, or by sharing its reward.' At this time there were seven confederated clubs in Norwich.

[26] H.O. 42/20, no. 176. Report of Col. de Lancy, 13 June: 'I was concerned to find that the magistrates of the place scarcely deserved the name...two justices of the peace have been in the habit of coming once a fortnight...the one nearer town, having made some efforts during the Riots last year...the populace burned a part of his property and since that time he has been very little in the country.' The other lived about 14 miles from the town. 'The people of property, who ought to exert themselves, are so much alarmed, that they dare not even speak their sentiments if in opposition to the populace....The first object of the associators is to get the soldiers over to their party....I am therefore of opinion that continuing the Troops in the manufacturing Towns, but particularly in Sheffield, is so full of danger, that I cannot help suggesting the propriety of quartering them in the adjacent towns.'

[27] C. Wyvill, *Political Papers*, v, pp. iv–v and 3–7. On 8 Apr. 1793, Jeremiah Batley wrote to Edmund Burke a letter (Bodleian Library, Transcripts of Burke Letters by Rev. R. H. Murray), explaining the conservative nature of his reforming views and the manner in which he first joined the Society for Constitutional Information and then withdrew from it. For the revival of this society, see also P. A. Brown, *The French Revolution in English History*, p. 53.

advice.[28] It is Tooke, moreover, who can be seen putting these various bodies into touch with one another;[29] and it was the feature of the movement that the name of the society—'Friends of the People', 'Society for Constitutional Information', etc.—did not matter, since all were being brought into a great confederacy and adapted to the same model; while new towns, when they formed their own groups, would write to the older societies for advice. Tooke induced other places to adopt the Sheffield device of splitting the society into small divisions, each assembling separately, but electing delegates to a general council for the whole locality.[30] The one body which kept its separate character—somewhat as before—however, was the revived London Society for Constitutional Information which was moving to a presidential position, giving guidance and stimulus to the whole agitation. This body had the money for the kind of work which it had first undertaken in 1780—namely, publishing the propaganda, printing thousands of addresses by some local society for example, and a hundred thousand in the case of a particularly inflammatory Manchester manifesto later in the year. It also helped the local societies by circulating literature to them.[31]

Earl Fitzwilliam, at Wentworth Woodhouse, was in an excellent position for observation, and was one of the first to take alarm at a time when the character of the movement was not yet recognized. We find that on 6 April 1792 information of his from the unruly town of Sheffield had been communicated by

[28] E.g. T.S. 11/951, no. 3495: Copy of Preamble and Rules of London Corresponding Society. Cf. Add. MSS. 27811, f. 6, T. Hardy to J. H. Tooke, 27 Mar. 1792, where it appears that Paine also assisted in the drawing up of the first address.

[29] The Sheffield Society took the initiative; for, after making an attempt to secure London connexions by addressing an inquiry to 'the Editors of *The English Chronicle*' (T.S. 11/952, no. 3496[2]), they sent what was clearly a similar inquiry to Tooke, apparently on 16 Feb., and Tooke replied 2 Mar. (T.S. 11/951, no. 3495; cf. index to Horne Tooke's papers in the same parcel) referring them to the London Society for Constitutional Information and informing them of the forthcoming establishment of the London Corresponding Society. Tooke had been in communication with the Radicals in the provincial towns at an earlier date, however, for there are drafts, partly in his hand, of an address of 20 Aug. 1791, celebrating the anniversary of the downfall of feudalism in France, and stating, 'Beneath the feudal System all Europe has long groaned, and *from it England* is *not yet free*....But....We sincerely [rejoice] in the Freedom of others, till we shall happily accomplish our own' (ibid.). A copy of this was printed in Sheffield on 20 Sept., but on 29 Aug. Thos. Cooper wrote to Tooke from Manchester that the local reforming newspaper did not dare, for fear of prosecution, to publish a document which he describes both as 'the letter signed J.H.T.' and as 'your address'. Cooper declared the intention of founding a more radical newspaper which 'will *at first* be gentle, but always decidedly democratic', and asked Tooke to provide communications for it (ibid.). The editors of the Sheffield *Patriot* declared on 11 June 1792 that their new periodical 'owes its Existence to a hint from the [Society for Constitutional Information] that small and cheap publications would be of great benefit' (T.S. 11/952, no. 3496[2]).

[30] T.S. 11/951, no. 3495, J. H. Tooke to the Sheffield Constitutional Society, 2 Mar. 1792, and T. S. 11/952, no. 3496, Samuel Ashton to the London Society for Constitutional Information, 14 Mar. 1792.

[31] On 23 Mar. it decided on the policy of communicating all its resolutions to the societies with which it was in correspondence, and at the same time it adopted the procedure which Tooke had prompted the societies in the provincial towns to ask for—namely, the election as honorary members of a number of people whom each of these societies had nominated for the purpose.

the Lord Lieutenant, the Duke of Norfolk, to the Home Secretary, and Fitzwilliam was assured that 'the subject and its importance was now fully felt and understood by Dundas and his associates'.[32] Perhaps the earliest to see the danger in the country as a whole, however, was the Rev. Christopher Wyvill, who was keeping in touch with the situation, particularly in Yorkshire and in London, waiting for the moment to revive the county movement of 1780. It is curious to note that in his *Defence of Price* he had just committed himself to the view that 'the Proselytes to Republican notions are few at present and inconsiderable'.[33] In April and May—and even before the pamphlet had actually come out—he was writing, 'There is a fermentation begun in the mind of the public'; 'we are drawing near to a more serious crisis than ever before experienced'. He even declared: 'Whether the Government or the Opposition are duly apprized of these threatening circumstances I know not.'

> Had I been apprized six weeks ago, that Paine's principles are spreading not only at Sheffield and Manchester, but also in the neighbourhood of Leeds and Wakefield ...also in Scotland and Ireland to a very alarming degree, I certainly should have expressed my detestation of the man...with greater force and vehemence.[34]

At the beginning of the year both government and opposition had agreed that 'in parliament there was but one voice' on the subject of the system of government. Lord Grenville had declared that 'there was no danger to be apprehended'; while Fox had said that the constitution was 'essentially good' and that 'everything is to be risked to preserve it'.[35] By March we begin to meet certain vague expressions of uneasiness; but it does not appear that either the government or the opposition realized, as Wyvill did, what was happening, or that Wyvill himself had really seen the inner side of the developments that he deplored. This was the situation when the Association of the Friends of the People was brought to birth in March and April 1792.[36]

II

In the ranks of the opposition at this time there was a set of men—chiefly younger men not yet incorporated into the aristocratic tradition—who had long been reported to be tempestuous and discontented, and who were not inclined to sit with their arms folded, watching the eclipse of all their hopes. They included Charles Grey, Lambton, Tierney and the Earl of Lauderdale; and besides Sheridan, Philip Francis, an older man, had lately come to hold a

[32] Wentworth Woodhouse MSS., The Duke of Portland to Lord Fitzwilliam, 6 Apr. 1792.
[33] *Political Papers*, III, App. p. 69. [34] Ibid. V, 1–2, 20–6, 30–2, 66–71.
[35] *Parliamentary History*, XXIX, 749–50, 773.
[36] Lord Auckland, writing to Lord Henry [Spencer] from Beckenham on 13 Apr. 1792 (Add. MSS. 34442, ff. 74–5) expressed the view that the Dutch could be reassured about 'the Sheffield Democracy', for though these people 'occasionally talk nonsense and treason with that Fluency and impunity which are usual at all times in this Country among certain classes...the Sheffield business had been treated with little regard or seriousness in any mention which I had heard of it'. In H.O. 42/20 there is an account by the magistrates, and in T.S. 11/952, no. 3496[2], another by the associators (both dated 10 May 1792) of a conflict between citizens of Sheffield and the troops in that town.

leading position among them. They were extravagant in their demonstrations in favour of the French Revolution, and for two years at least Burke had not been the only person to suspect them of an undue influence over Fox—a man often undiscriminating in his private friendships and quixotically faithful to his friends.

The success of a legal action against George Rose, the Secretary of the Treasury, led them to demand in the House of Commons an inquiry into the practices of the ministerial party during the Westminster election of 1788. They decided to follow the example of 1769 and 1779, and to exploit this electoral issue by generalizing the grievance and carrying their complaint to the country at large. They called a meeting of the electors of Westminster, and, though they were afterwards taunted with having failed to secure the attendance they desired,[37] the assembly agreed to the presentation of a petition. On 22 March the *Morning Chronicle* made the following comment on the part played by Philip Francis during the proceedings:

> There is clearly as Mr Francis said but one effectual means of procuring a Reformation in the representation of the people, namely by a systematic plan of Association extended throughout the whole Island, maintained by subscription, connected, informed and disciplined by correspondence.[38]

Arising from all this, on 11 April was held the formal meeting at which the Association of the Friends of the People was officially constituted. It pledged itself to a programme of parliamentary reform; undertook to correspond with the various groups in the country which were working to the same end; and instituted a system of non-resident members who would be able to establish affiliated societies in all parts of the country. Far from being alive to the nature of the agitation which was arising in the towns, the promoters of this society assumed that they had to defend the case for mooting the question of parliamentary reform in a time of tranquillity. They did not claim that public opinion was making their action necessary—on the contrary, they entertained the possibility that the country might be sunk in sloth. Against the assertion

[37] *Public Advertiser*, 23 Mar. 1792.

[38] The Master of Trinity, in his *Lord Grey of the Reform Bill* (2nd ed. 1929), p. 44n., has noted that 'The "Association" and "Associators" are the words used for the Society of Friends of the People and its members in the correspondence and speeches of the year 1792'. I have discussed the significance of the conception of the association in the movement of 1780 in my *George III, Lord North and the People 1779–80*, pp. 255–68, and the initial pretensions of the Friends of the People to fulfil the same role in 1792 helps to explain the shock they created in Apr. and May. That the more extreme ideas of 1780 were in the air is illustrated, for example, by *Public Advertiser*, 7 Jan. 1792: 'There can be no doubt that the Party in this country are meditating a kind of Sub-Parliament'; ibid. 25 Jan.: 'the lower tribes of opposition who issue daring invitations for the people to meet and appoint delegates from every town in the kingdom'; ibid. 22 Mar.: 'The Blue and Buff Patriots now urge the people to form Associations in order to Force the House of Commons to redress the evils'; ibid. 24 Mar.: 'Associations for the purpose of compelling the representative body...what is this but to instigate the mob to take arms?' Cf. *Morning Chronicle*, 23 Mar.: 'Associations are the only means of procuring redress'; ibid. 27 Mar.: 'Let us put an end to all quackery.... In every populous town associations on the most legal and temperate principles are now forming to obtain by the arms of reason [parliamentary reform].'

that no specific grievances existed to justify their action, they said that the non-existence of immediate grievances was no argument against their proposal, and they did not adduce any particular complaint save Pitt's armament against Russia in the preceding year, which they said had been made in defiance of the wishes of the country. It is clear that they intended incidentally to assimilate or to collect under their leadership the various local bodies which they knew already existed here and there, and which they seem to have regarded as innocuous reforming clubs.[39]

It was the Holland House story at a later time that the whole undertaking was 'the after-dinner freak of irresponsible young aristocrats'; and this is not the only source for the view that a number of people became engaged in it 'from a sort of table-companionship and from a heedless kind of assent'.[40] Charles Grey, who was the first to affix his signature to the undertaking and acted as the chief parliamentary spokesman of the movement, not only declared his repentance later but formulated in this connexion precisely the idea which Burke in 1792 had regarded as the crux of the matter:

> There were men joined with him in that Society, [he said,] whose views, though he did not know it at the time, were widely different from his own, and with whom it was not safe to have any communication.

Another of the ringleaders, Lauderdale, was reported to be heartily sick of the society by July, though unable to see how to get rid of it. He lived to vote against the Reform Bill of 1832. Even by 7 May Colonel Fullarton declared himself ashamed of his conduct in joining the movement and was saying that he only wished for a fair opportunity of quitting it. On 4 June five members seceded because in their absence the famous Major Cartwright, of the Society for Constitutional Information, had been admitted to membership of the association. Another member, James Mackintosh, who had just been elected an honorary member of the Society for Constitutional Information, later went over to the side of Burke.[41]

Precisely in the period when this association was being brought to birth, the

[39] C. Wyvill, *Political Papers*, III, App. pp. 128–9, 135–6, 144–8, Addresses of the Friends of the People, 11 Apr., 26 Apr. and 5 May 1792.

[40] Lord Holland, *Memorials of the Whig Party*, I, 13–14; Lady Holland, *Journal*, I, 101; *Life...of Sir Gilbert Elliot*, II, 21, speaking of Colonel Fullarton. Of Dudley North the letter notes also 'He got into the association by his connection with Lord Lauderdale, who is very light-headed on all subjects'.

[41] *Political Memoranda of the Duke of Leeds*, p. 182; *Life...of Sir Gilbert Elliot*, II, 21; C. Wyvill, *Political Papers*, III, App. pp. 169–73; R. J. Mackintosh, *Memoirs of...the Rt. Hon. James Mackintosh* (1835), II, 88. Fullarton sent explanations of his conduct to Windham and Burke on 20 Feb. 1793 (Add. MSS. 37873, ff. 203–4; Bodleian Library, Transcripts of Rev. R. H. Murray). On 14 June Henry Erskine explained that, though he believed in reform and naturally desired to act with his brother Thomas, he considered 'that *this* is of all others the most improper time...and that the mode adopted is at the present conjuncture the most unfortunate that could have been devised' (*Life...of Sir Gilbert Elliot*, II, 57–60). Thomas Erskine was talking about the association on 18 June and 'said much of the use they had made of his name, though he had never yet been to the society', as he had so little time (Mme d'Arblay, *Diary and Letters*, V, 97).

democratic societies in the various towns of England brought themselves to the notice of the public in a spectacular manner, and began to reveal both their extremist character and their policy of close interconnexion. In the middle of February Part II of Paine's *Rights of Man* had appeared, and owing to the nature of its social teaching it had instantly been recognized as more dangerous in its tendency than Part I. It was the character of this work which made Christopher Wyvill so apprehensive as he observed the surprising progress of Paine's ideas. He wrote on 4 April:

> I have no doubt that the tempting offer of annuities to the poor out of the great estates of the rich may raise him a formidable party among the lowest of the class, whose fury concurring with national distress on other accounts might be very destructive indeed.[42]

The Sheffield society decided early in the year to publish a cheap edition of Part I of the *Rights of Man*; and though they were advised to excise the more objectionable passages it would appear that Paine required the reproduction to be unmutilated and the distribution to be restricted to members of the local society.[43] It was Horne Tooke who on 2 March called the attention of that society to Part II and sent them twelve copies, with a hint that 'it becomes us to shew that the Protectors of the Public Cause will in Return be supported by the Public'—a hint apparently that the societies should rally around Paine. There followed a series of resolutions in favour of Paine—Manchester declaring that Pitt's recent reduction in taxes was due to him; Sheffield asserting that nearly two thousand members of the local society had 'derived more knowledge from the works of Mr Paine...than from any other author on the subject'; while the delegates of the United Constitutional Societies of Norwich registered the wish (shortly afterwards echoed by Manchester) that Paine 'would live to see his labours crowned with success'. Early in May the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland was announcing that the London Society for Constitutional Information had entered into a correspondence and a league of friendship with the United Irishmen.[44] On 11 May, in view of the outbreak of war, the society sanctioned an address to the Jacobin Club in Paris, announcing: 'The principles we now declare are not peculiar to the society which addresses you. They are extending with accumulating force through every part of our country.' This communication contained the assertion that the English were faced by 'that same enemy' as the French, namely, 'a herd of Courtiers fattening on the spoils of the Public'.[45] On 18 May Paine announced to the society that in response to appeals from local bodies he intended to produce a cheap edition of the *Rights of Man* for general circulation; and he hinted that the

[42] C. Wyvill, *Political Papers*, v, 66–71; cf. ibid. v, 22–6.

[43] T.S. 11/951, no. 3495; J. H. Tooke to the Sheffield Constitutional Society, 2 Mar. 1792; C. Wyvill, *Political Papers*, v, 43–7. Paine gave his consent 5 Mar.

[44] C[ambridge] U[niversity] L[ibrary] Add. MSS. 6958[6], Transcript, Earl of Westmorland to R. Hobart, 4 May 1792.

[45] *State Trials*, XXIV, 303.

ministry 'intends bringing a prosecution'. The resulting resolutions of the society in support of Paine,[46] and the communications with the Jacobins, seriously perturbed the Association of the Friends of the People.[47]

There were now two bodies purporting to provide leadership and cohesion for the agitation in the country on behalf of reform; first the London Society for Constitutional Information, and secondly the Association of the Friends of the People. Christopher Wyvill represented almost a third, for if he approved of this latter body, he pointed out that success was impossible for them unless they referred the whole question to the county associations and revived the machinery of 1780.[48] In reality the question of leadership had been virtually decided owing to the activity of Horne Tooke as we have already seen. In his view 'the large and respectable manufacturing Towns are the great Ballance to the Aristocratic Interests of the Country if the same discreetful zealous Activity should prevail in others as in Sheffield'.

The alarm was great and the anger of political circles was concentrated on the Friends of the People, as though all the other manifestations of disorder had been due to them. It was a serious matter that this new association destroyed the unanimity in the parliamentary world—destroyed the united front against agitators—and made reform an inescapable issue in the near future. It was noted, furthermore, that some of the members of the body—Philip Francis and William Baker (of Hertfordshire) for example—were themselves very recent converts to the idea of parliamentary reform. The radical societies were ready later to admit the encouragement they received from the fact that members of the governing class had now taken up their cause.[49] It was a further objection against the association that it specified no particular plan of reform and so gave the signal for what was bound to be half a year of feverish agitation. Earl Fitzwilliam later wrote of its leaders that he could not give

[46] Copy of the Resolutions in H.O. 42/20. On 4 July, 'being the anniversary of the Independence of America', Paine informed the society that the cheap edition of Part I was already in circulation at 30*s.* a thousand, for retailing at 6*d.* The papers of the society include orders for copies, e.g. 100 for Leicester, while Sheffield ordered 500 (T.S. 11/952, no. 3496[2], J. Gales to D. Adams, 11 July).

[47] C. Wyvill, *Political Papers*, III, App. p. 170; *Parliamentary History*, XXXI, 762–3. Appendix to the Second Report of the Committee of Secrecy.

[48] E.g. *Political Papers*, V, 55–8, C. Wyvill to Ralph Milbanke, 21 May 1792: 'It would', he said, 'obviate the objection that these measures come from a self-created body.' Cf. ibid. pp. 66–71, C. Wyvill to Wm. Burgh, 16 May 1792, where Wyvill adds that it is the professed intention of the Friends of the People to adopt this course. On 4 May, writing to the Duke of Grafton, ibid. VI, 269, he flattered himself that 'objections to Reform...which are grounded merely on the circumstances of the time or on the mode of moving it, will be overruled by those declarations of public opinion which may be expected next winter from many respectable districts'; cf. ibid. p. 345, where he particularly specifies the north of England and expects 'more numerous petitions than in any former period'.

[49] Thos. Hardy's admission is in G. M. Trevelyan, *Lord Grey of the Reform Bill*, pp. 45–6. Cf. C. Wyvill, *Political Papers*, III, 161–4. The Committee of the Society for Constitutional Information, Sheffield to the Friends of the People, 14 May: 'Your sentiments...are perfectly in unison with ours...[we believed] that in due time men of more respectable character and great abilities would step forward.'

much credit to their sincerity on behalf of parliamentary reform. They were moved by the 'desire of speedy pre-eminence', he said, and they planned to supersede Portland, not expecting that 'he would resist in the manly manner he did, nor that he would receive so distinguished and decisive a support'.[50] According to a Whig view they adopted parliamentary reform precisely because they were looking for the issue which would be more tormenting than anything else to Pitt. On 29 April the Whig leaders who opposed the new movement had a confidential meeting under Portland at Burlington House. They determined to take their stand against the association when Grey should give notice on the following day of his intention to move a plan of reform.

By 30 April Pitt was writing to George III that the movers and supporters of the new association 'feel very strongly the Embarrassments which they have brought on themselves'. Three days later Windham wrote, 'I am not sure whether already some of them do not begin to be alarmed'. Sir Gilbert Elliot wrote on 7 May, 'the fact is they feel themselves already to be in a scrape.... The affair seems less formidable than it might have been, and is likely enough, by want of heartiness in many of the members, and by divisions amongst themselves to dwindle and expire pretty quietly.'[51] In their second address, of 5 May, the Friends of the People were on the defensive. They declared that the disposition of the country in favour of reform 'has not been created by any effort of ours'; and that, once they had collected the sense of the country and achieved their reform, they were determined to disband—'We GO NO FURTHER'. From the first their relations with other societies only brought them embarrassment, and led to serious conflicts within their own body—conflicts between the original leaders and some of the rank and file they had collected.[52] The

[50] H.M.C. *Castle Howard MSS.* p. 698, to Lord Carlisle.

[51] Windsor Castle MSS., George III, 6947; *Windham Papers*, I, 100–5, to W. J. Gurney; *Life...of Sir Gilbert Elliot*, II, 20.

[52] On 27 Apr. the Society for Constitutional Information wrote to the new Association questioning whether any member of parliament could be a friend of the people, demanding 'the People's Rights in their full extent', and declaring its intention of warning the 'brethren' against treachery. The reply of the Friends of the People, adopted 12 May, stated that the new association would have nothing to do with reforms which, 'however specious in theory, can never be accomplished without violence'. It also announced the refusal of 'all further intercourse' (C. Wyvill, *Political Papers*, III, App. pp. 149–58). This attitude of the Friends of the People was later used to support the case against the Society for Constitutional Information in the trial of Thomas Hardy (*State Trials*, XXIV, 298–301), but it raised great controversy in the new association on 12 May (C. Wyvill, *Political Papers*, V, 47; *Public Advertiser*, 14 May; cf. *Morning Herald*, 8 May), and certain men like Mackintosh, T. Brand Hollis, Sawbridge, James Martin, Lord Daer, and Capel Lofft were members of both societies. The controversies concerning the attempt to admit to membership T. Cooper (which failed) and J. Cartwright (which succeeded) led to five resignations from the Friends of the People in June. In the meantime the Sheffield Society for Constitutional Information had written to the Friends of the People (see n. 49 above) and had suggested the establishment in London of a convention of deputies from all parts of the country. The association replied on 24 May, that it could give no immediate answer on this subject, but that discreet language was called for and they could only correspond with bodies which displayed moderation (C. Wyvill, *Political Papers*, III, 165–9). Without waiting for the answer, the Sheffield Society, in a letter which, though addressed to the Society for Constitutional Information, shows corrections made by

more radical societies met them with taunts and with distrust; and in the papers of Horne Tooke there is a note which suggests that the majority of the new society might be disguised agents of the ministry, determined to defeat the reform they pretended to promote.[53]

It became a matter of some importance to learn what the attitude of Fox would be to this association, and to the whole question of parliamentary reform in the new situation of things. He had had nothing to do with the foundation of the Friends of the People, and said at the time:

> that he had never been consulted about it and that the Associators seemed determined not to listen to any advice, and particularly not to have his.[54]

He stated at the Whig Club in June that:

> however warmly he wished for a moderate reform in the system of our representation, he did not agree with [some of his friends in the view] that, under all the obvious circumstances of the day, the present was the proper season for the agitation of the question.[55]

Fox did not join the association and neither did the group of his old and intimate friends—the faithful followers like Hare, Fitzpatrick and Lord Robert Spencer. There were others, such as the Duke of Bedford, who were ready to follow Fox in anything in succeeding years, and they also are to be found declaring their disapproval of the new society.[56] Burke relates that when Fox was asked by another of his supporters whether he would agree to his joining the society he expressed his disapprobation.[57] Fox had special reasons for resenting the institution of the Society of the Friends of the People; for the event had put him in a personal dilemma, and had made a split in the party almost inevitable, whatever decision he might make. He, who was so faithful to his friends, however, found it difficult—especially in view of his own past—to break with these particular friends merely because they had taken up the question of parliamentary reform. He adopted what was strange for him—a mediatorial position; so that we find some people describing him as a trimmer,

Tooke, declared on 28 May that they were not satisfied with the addresses, etc., of the Friends of the People and 'shall not attempt any further Communication with them until we are favoured with your sentiments' (*State Trials*, XXIV, 299–300). The Friends of the People in Southwark, formally instituted at a meeting on 19 Apr. 1792 (Minutes in T.S. 11/952, no. 3496[2]), held a meeting in May, at which Lord Daer and John Cartwright (representing the Society for Constitutional Information) were present, and declared their disapproval of the Whig Society whose name they had borrowed, because it went 'no further than the reform of Parliament' (*Public Advertiser*, 10 and 14 May).

[53] T.S. 11/951, no. 3495, n.d.

[54] Lady Holland, *Memoirs*, I, 15n., Thomas Pelham to Lady Webster, 15 June 1792. Lauderdale said they were determined not to consult Fox 'in order that he might not be involved if they failed'; but when they found themselves embarrassed they did their best to involve not only Fox but the Duke of Portland, who greatly resented this.

[55] *Morning Chronicle*, 6 June.

[56] Lord Holland, *Memorials of the Whig Party*, pp. 11–15.

[57] 'Observations on the Conduct of the Minority', *Works*, VII, 229. Coke refused to join the society and declared during the summer that 'this was not the moment to attempt reform'. A. M. W. Stirling, *Coke of Norfolk and his Friends* (new ed. 1912), pp. 241, 243.

a rôle in which he was not regarded as being very happy.[58] He used his influence, for example, to moderate the new movement, and was regarded as responsible for the defensive attitude adopted by the Friends of the People in their address of 5 May. He wished that now, as in the past, the members of the great Whig connexion should be free to choose whether they would support or oppose parliamentary reform. His own friends had made such a system less feasible now than before, however; for since they insisted on making such a reform an immediate issue, they could not prevent it from being the biggest and bitterest issue of the day.

The conduct of the Younger Pitt was a matter for some conjecture at first, in view of the ardour he had once shown for parliamentary reform. His attachment to that cause was already doubted by many people, especially as he had so strongly resisted proposals for the relief of dissenters. Some, however, still clung to the hope that he would take strength from the new tide of opinion and gather all the reformist groups under his leadership. It has been rightly pointed out that, if Pitt had chosen such a course, it would have been possible for George III to dismiss him and create an anti-reform ministry with the help of those leading members of the opposition who were more stubbornly hostile than anybody else to any change in the existing system.[59] On 30 April, when Grey gave notice in the House of Commons of his intention to propose a plan of parliamentary reform, Pitt still declared his belief that a moderate reform would be advisable for the purpose he had always had in mind—namely, to make the people more secure in the benefits they now enjoyed—and this would seem to go at least as far as Fox himself had done in his letter of 16 March to Earl Fitzwilliam. Pitt, moreover, was not far from Fox in his further view that the time was not appropriate for the raising of so serious an issue; for Fox himself, in the same debate,

> admitted that he would not have advised the bringing forward of the proposed motion at that time, but said that since it had been done he would support it.

It is astonishing, therefore, how close to one another some of the opposing leaders were in their basic views at this stage in the crisis. In the same debate some of the opposition Whigs gave the undertaking that they would offer a firm resistance to all plans of parliamentary reform at that time; but even Windham, who was particularly alarmist, quickly corrected a report that in his speech he had vowed always to oppose reform, under whatever circumstances it might be proposed.[60] George III asked what was the good of Fox's refusing to join the Friends of the People, if he defended that body, as he had done in the House of Commons on 30 April.[61] On the other hand, the Friends

[58] *Life...of Sir Gilbert Elliot*, II, 31, Sir Gilbert to Lady Elliot, 24 May; *Political Memoranda of the Duke of Leeds*, p. 195. At the Whig Club Fox confessed his pleasure that his conduct 'had received the approbation of both sides' (*Morning Chronicle*, 6 June).

[59] D. G. Barnes, *George III and William Pitt*, p. 220.

[60] *Windham Papers*, I, 100–5.

[61] Stanhope, *Life of William Pitt* (1879), I, 493.

of the People were complaining in November that he still did not clearly declare himself.

The fact that the opposition members who were hostile to the Friends of the People had met separately for their discussion of policy on 29 April gave the Younger Pitt what he afterwards confessed to be an exaggerated impression of the divisions in that party. The result of this was a series of discussions intended to draw the more conservative section of the party first of all to the support of the ministry and then to an actual participation in it. Lord Loughborough, the former Alexander Wedderburn, who had come over with North into coalition with Fox, was in communication with his old friend, William Eden, now Lord Auckland, who was closely connected with the ministry. Pitt used this channel to suggest that the Whig leaders should attend the Privy Council and collaborate in the issuing of a proclamation against seditious writings, and he offered to make one or two of them Privy Councillors specifically for that purpose. Loughborough was not at first sure that this was the best way in which to provoke from men of all parties a declaration in favour of the existing order; but the plan received the King's assent, and Portland gave it a favourable reception though, at the suggestion of Lord Stormont, he declined to accept the idea of actual attendance at the Council or the proposed creation of new Privy Councillors. A proclamation was submitted to him, however, and after a discussion at a meeting of his friends was actually amended in certain points at their request; though even some of those who disapproved of the Friends of the People felt that certain parts of it struck too directly at their recent associates.

Fox secured a meeting of reformers and anti-reformers at his house on 24 May, the night before the debate on this proclamation, and used the opportunity to make a particularly earnest attempt 'to prevent things going to extremities tomorrow'. He convinced some of those who were hostile to reform that it was 'desirable to preserve good blood amongst us that we may not be entirely disabled from reuniting on other points after this foolish business is at rest'. The ingrained jealousies of the Whigs were touched by the cry that the old enemy, Pitt, was merely using the opportunity in order to divide the party. That Fox was having some moderate degree of success with such arguments is shown by the letter which the Duke of Portland wrote that night to Pitt, expressing the fear that he might be 'disappointed in the extent of the support' which the proclamation would have in the House, though he still counted—rightly—that its enemies would not risk a division.[62] The impression produced by the debate of 25 May was very different from that of the one previously mentioned, on 30 April; for on both sides of the divided party 'strong professions' were now made of belief in the need for the great Whig connexion, whether it should be in office or out of office. Henceforward we

[62] C.U.L. Add. MSS. 6958[6], Transcript, the Duke of Portland to W. Pitt, 24 May.

find on the side of the ministry confessions of surprise that Fox still retained such a hold on the party, and especially on the Duke of Portland.

The proclamation met the need for mobilizing that loyalty to the constitution which, though widespread, tended to be latent, leaving all the activity to the discontented. It provoked replies which showed how many regions were still unaffected by the agitation, and it was met with loyal addresses, though Manchester, Sheffield and Norwich made their protests heard.[63] Sir Gilbert Elliot noted that it produced a more moderate attitude in the Friends of the People: 'I am persuaded they will step out of it very quietly next year after losing the first motion they make for reform.' The politicians in Westminster were unduly reassured, perhaps, by the mere fact that all was now quiet in the governing circles, and that it had proved possible to alarm and awaken public opinion generally. The opposition Whigs had been made to realize the way in which their existence as a party was threatened, but they had been rallied by Fox and, for the party's sake, they were seeking to minimize the differences within their ranks.

On the whole, therefore, the predicament of the opposition Whigs came to seem less desperate at the end than in the middle of May, while the decision to dismiss the Lord Chancellor—taken on the 16th when the policy of collaboration was at its height—had in the meantime made the situation of Pitt himself somewhat more difficult. On 15 May a particularly unpleasant piece of recalcitrancy on the part of Lord Thurlow—a thing that could hardly have been predictable when the ministry first broached the idea of planning the proclamation with the opposition Whigs—had given Pitt the option of showing the forgiving spirit which George III recommended or ridding the ministry of its most troublesome member. The obvious person to succeed Thurlow was Lord Loughborough, the man who had induced his friends in the opposition to share the responsibility for the proclamation. Dundas was soon proposing to Loughborough a coalition, and mentioned four places in the Cabinet and two or three in the Privy Council as available for Portland and his followers.

Edmund Burke, who was now beginning to be consulted by the more conservative of the Whigs, strongly supported such an arrangement, provided it was based on a clear understanding that French principles would be resisted at home and abroad. He was willing even to see Fox included in it provided Fox should give clear guarantees for his future conduct. Earl Fitzwilliam at a meeting of leaders on 9 June read out some resolutions of the Sheffield

[63] In Manchester the Constitutional Society on 2 June blamed the proclamation for creating alarm and exhorted people not to attend a meeting for an address in 'the present agitated state of the public mind'. In Sheffield one general meeting rejected the proposed address which was only carried by the device of summoning another meeting merely for those who were willing to sign it (T.S. 11/952, no. 3496[2], the editors of *The Patriot* to the London Society for Constitutional Information, 11 June; ibid. letters from S. Ashton, 6 and 12 June; *Sheffield Register*, 15 June). The Common Council of the city of Norwich rejected the address by 31 to 16 after it had been carried by the aldermen (T.S. 11/952, no. 3496[2], T. Goff to S. Adams, 19 June).

Society, showed the greatest alarm, and insisted that the government should be supported.[64] The Duke of Portland displayed so much eagerness—both now and later—for the plan that we may judge him to have half-foreseen that such a coalition was the only thing that could save the party from break-up. He was reported to have said (or agreed) on 10 June that 'Pitt was of such consequence in the country and the Prince of Wales so little respected' that it would be impossible to form a Portland administration without including Pitt; while later it was being said amongst the opposition that Pitt could only be overthrown by an upheaval that would be fatal to the existing order. Portland evidently believed on 10 June that 'not only every overture...should be listened to, but even overtures made...:were it practicable'.[65]

When the overture from Dundas was disclosed Fox was evidently a little hurt that Pitt had not made a direct approach to him; though he would say facetiously in this period that he always loved coalitions, or that 'it was so damned right a thing that it must be done'. Sometimes, however, he proved unusually sullen and perverse; for if the coalition were to be actually brought about his predicament was bound to be an unhappy one. He seems to have been responsible for putting the case that the junction must be a genuine coalition—not a mere accession to the ministry of Pitt—and he took the line that the distribution of places should not rest on 'the criterion of present possession'. Portland and Fitzwilliam insisted in fact that Pitt should surrender the Treasury to some neutral person like the Duke of Leeds; and they seem to have envisaged a combination in which Pitt and Fox would both serve as secretaries of state. Others did not regard Pitt as being so hard-pressed as to justify the demand for his resignation, and it was asserted that the mere equalizing of offices would not give Fox an equivalent authority in the House of Commons or in the government, in view of the position which Pitt had acquired during his long tenure of power. Loughborough said that he could not communicate a demand for the resignation of Pitt, and he was regarded later as having used his place in the ranks of the opposition Whigs for the purpose of disintegrating the party so that he could become Lord Chancellor.[66]

[64] [1st Earl of] Malmesbury, *Diaries and Correspondence*, II, 453. Later in the month we see Fitzwilliam and the Duke of Norfolk making arrangements 'for the purpose of fixing some channel of communication with the Secretary of State's Office, respecting the transactions at Sheffield'. H.O. 42/20, no. 197, Earl Fitzwilliam to J. King, 23 June. In the Wentworth Woodhouse MSS. Box A, Bundle S, there exist very rough notes, which are in Burke's hand and may belong to this time, on the kind of assurances which would be required from Fox, concerning his attitude to the followers of Paine and the Friends of the People. They run on into a disquisition concerning the dangers likely to arise even from popular demonstrations in favour of the existing system, supposing such demonstrations to be called for. Next to this is the draft of a statement to be made on behalf of the King, urging Portland's duty not to refuse an invitation to join the ministry, and not to expect that the innovators would be regarded as admissible.

[65] Malmesbury, *Diaries and Correspondence*, II, 454–5.

[66] Wentworth Woodhouse MSS., Earl Fitzwilliam to Lady Rockingham, 28 Feb. 1793: 'This circumstance led in the course of last spring to an apparent junction of Ministry and a part of Opposition against a small part of the latter: the very appearance of this though for a

In the Fox–North coalition it was in fact the former followers of North who were the more ready in general to put an end to the party. The resignation of Thurlow left the ministry in a difficult but not a desperate situation, though Fox and his friends held the hope that with his assistance they might still secure the overthrow of Pitt. It was suggested that it was still open for Pitt to make it up with Thurlow, while in matters which affected the security of the existing order the minister knew already that he could count on strong support from the opposition Whigs in any case. Pitt's position was difficult and unpleasant because, though his numbers were secure in both Houses, Lord Grenville was left with little effective support in actual debate in the House of Lords. Grenville's letters to his brother, however, make it clear that he envisaged the continuance of the existing situation with equanimity.

Pitt had stated from the first that only Fox's recent conduct—particularly in regard to the Friends of the People—might make it difficult to admit him into the Cabinet without a little delay. Towards the end of June he himself put an end to the discussions for the time being, saying that, though he personally had no objections, some of his friends were refusing to agree to the admission of Fox. He was careful to leave it to be understood that the negotiation was only suspended for the time being. Burke took the line from this moment that at any rate all systematic opposition to government should cease. What clearly emerged from the discussions and now established itself in the minds of the opposition was the fact that Fox would never serve under Pitt and that even a collaboration between these men on equal terms was a thing which could hardly be regarded as feasible. Burke, in his comment on the whole episode, wrote, 'I saw the mischief of any arrangement that should make Fox desperate'. Fox, furthermore, had declared that his own friends must be provided for, that is to say, Sheridan and his colleagues, whom some of the Portland Whigs themselves would have refused to see in office at this time. There was now raised more intensely in their ranks the question whether the Friends of the People should continue to be regarded as members of the party at all.[67] On the other hand, the suggestion was made to Pitt that, in the event of an alliance, the aristocratic section of the Whigs would expect him to curb his enthusiasm for the abolition of the slave-trade—a matter on which he showed himself not disinclined to be amenable.

temporary and single purpose was mischievous, but it gave rise to what was more so, a good plausible opportunity for parts of the Opposition to communicate directly with Government, which has ended...in furnishing the Woolsack of our house with a Chancellor—But this is not all: it certainly has given to others a leaning the same way, and it gave to the person particularly alluded to, the course of a whole summer to work more efficiently towards that end, whilst in the character of Opposition, he could sow the seed of jealousy, suspicion and mistrust of those he spoke of as his friends, allies and associates.' The government newspapers in August gibe at what they describe as the desperate attempts of the opposition to gain a share in the government. See also Postscript, p. 330.

[67] [Lord John Russell], *Memorials [and Correspondence] of [Charles James] Fox*, III, 23; J. L. Campbell, *Lives of the Chancellors*, VI, 359–60; H.M.C. *Castle Howard MSS.* p. 696.

By various courtesies—supporting the Duke of Portland in the election of a Chancellor for Oxford University and offering him the Garter, for example—Pitt kept the opposition either aware of his friendly intentions or alarmed by his desire to divide the party.[68] The Duke of Portland still clung to the idea of a coalition, and in July and August readily accepted the unfortunate intervention of the Duke of Leeds on behalf of such an arrangement. It is possible that Fox was the prime mover in this matter, for Portland declared that he had no faith in the scheme 'in consequence of Fox's promoting it', and when Fox wrote to Portland immediately after the opening of the affair he said, 'I wished you to see the Duke of Leeds and am glad you have seen him because I take for granted that through him it will be known to the King that if Pitt has given him any hopes of dividing us, these hopes are delusive'.[69] A few days after the initial interview between Portland and Leeds, Fox wrote to the former:

> When I read the account you sent St. John of your conversation with the D[uke] of L[eeds] I was a good deal struck with his apparent backwardness to communicate your sentiments to the King because I had heard that he had professed on the contrary great readiness for such an employment. Upon inquiry I find that he expected from you a direct request that he would make such a communication, and that without such a request he does not think himself authorized to do it.... If you see no objection, I am sure I do not, to your writing a few lines to him referring to your conversation *and expressing a wish* that your sentiments might be known to his Majesty, in order that if the country suffers from the present weakness of Government, the K[ing] should know that nothing can be imputed to any backwardness in you or your friends to do their part and take their share in forming a strong Administration. Whether there will be any great use in this I do not know, but... I think it might be the means of ascertaining whether there is any possibility of our coming in on other terms than those of submission to Pitt. If such a possibility exists I am eager for seizing and improving it.[70]

The written authorization was provided by Portland, but Leeds cut a ridiculous figure when he saw the King on 14 August, as it was only too apparent that he himself hoped to succeed Pitt at the Treasury. This was the occasion when George III described his instructions to Pitt on the subject of the opposition Whigs as having been: 'Anything Complimentary to them, but no Power!' Pitt was clearly offended by the whole manœuvre, and emphatically asserted, in an interview with Leeds, that 'there had been no thoughts of any

[68] E.g. Fox MSS. in the possession of the Master of Trinity, C. J. Fox to the Duke of Portland [21 July 1792]: 'Pitt has now made his third offer, the great seal to Ld. L[oughborough], India to Ld. North and the Garter to you, whether if these are known they will strengthen him in the opinion of the public, or raise him in that of his Party, I much doubt, but that is his business.'

[69] Malmesbury, *Diaries and Correspondence*, II, 470; Fox MSS., C. J. Fox to the Duke of Portland, 21 July, Fox adds: 'I agree with you in doubting much the D. of L.'s influence anywhere.'

[70] Fox MSS. Cf. Malmesbury, *Diaries and Correspondence*, II, 470–1. Curiously enough, Leeds in his *Political Memoranda*, pp. 179–80, states that Fox was pressing that he should see the King, and initiating the suggestion that Portland would provide him with a written authorization—this on 25 July, the day before Fox's similar communication to Portland.

alteration in the government'. It was felt necessary to soften this answer when it was communicated to the opposition leaders, and 'particularly to Mr Fox', as it would only have served to encourage the latter in his view that Pitt had never meant anything but betrayal from the very first.[71] The Duke of York later asserted that Fox had said to him in 1792 that it was important to form a coalition, since if war broke out and he himself were still in opposition he would have to be against the war. The remark is not entirely out of character; though it was questioned whether Fox's meaning on this occasion had not been misunderstood.

'What is become of the Society of the Friends of the People?', said *The Times* on 10 July; '...Silent are their resolutions—dumb is their oratory.' Wyvill reported of them on good authority, just over a week later, that they 'have elected, of late, none but persons of a temperate character'. Even on 10 October *The Times* was still asserting, 'The Society called Friends of the People...was terrified into *nonentity* by the Royal Proclamation'. 'The reform does not get into fashion', wrote Anthony Storer. On 14 July the societies refrained from public celebrations, though they had talked of braving the tumult that such demonstrations might have provoked. Constantly we hear the same burden: 'Our Reform Clubs are much on the decline.' 'We have nothing but peace and prosperity.' The genuineness of the alarms of April and May is confirmed by the readiness with which people now allowed themselves to be reassured. Wyvill was informed that there was 'no hope of a County Meeting...in Suffolk'. He had already been told not to hope for anything from the west. He said that 'a time of peace and prosperity like the present' was a proper opportunity for correcting abuses. On 16 September he was told by Stanhope 'I am clear that no attempt at present for a Parliamentary Reform can produce any good'. Even Richard Burke wrote, 'The internal affairs of England have taken a very happy turn, at least for the moment'.

III

Burke's insistence that the fate of England could not be disconnected from events on the continent was strongly confirmed by the way in which the situation at home answered to developments at the other side of the Channel in the

[71] On 12 Sept. Portland betrayed his disappointment in a letter to Burke (Wentworth Woodhouse MSS.): 'As you know my Sentiments upon the subject of a Coalition, You will have no difficulty in believing the regret which I feel at the termination which has been put to any present idea of it. The Benefits which I imagined mankind in general might derive from such an Administration had led me to look forward to the formation of it with a degree of enthusiasm which made me imagine all the parties disposed to meet for the purpose of forming the arrangement with that temper of mind and that spirit which vaults over all subordinates and interested considerations. Dundas's language intitled me, as I thought, to indulge this idea. But I am sure I was mistaken, *that* never was, and is not, the sentiment of those with whom He is connected. They do not wish for power for the only purpose which makes that wish justifiable. They have no principle. They know not what *party* is, but for the desire of annihilating it, and suppose favors emoluments and Patronage a compensation for the loss of Consistency of Character.'

latter part of the year. The events of 10 August in Paris excited a general revulsion in the country, though on the 18th of the month *The Times* was asking, 'Who pays the expense of printing and engraving all those dangerous, disgraceful, treasonable and seditious prints which are stuck up in Oxford St, the Haymarket and other desperate print shops?' A great influx of French émigrés gave some misgiving on the subject of possibly undesirable elements in their midst; and, as large floods of still more undesirable ones were to be expected once the Duke of Brunswick reached Paris, the discussions were opened which led in the beginning of 1793 to the passage of an Aliens Act. The assumption that the invading armies would soon reach Paris helped to reassure the governing classes and to confirm the country in what was regarded as a state of tranquillity or political truce; and the newspapers would still talk of Fox's 'secession from the Reformers', though his views were a matter of doubt, since during the summer he saw little of his political friends, whether reformers or anti-reformers. The Duke of Portland met him in August and wrote concerning his opinions:

> I am satisfied that if the Courts of Vienna and Berlin adhere to the terms of their Declarations that He will be right, it is not to be expected that he will retract what he said of his expectations of the effect of the French Revolution in its outset, I mean the Opinion that he unfortunately gave respecting the beauty of the Fabrick, but I have little if any doubt but that he will declare that no part of the Building has been carried on conformably to the expectations he had formed, and that, in itself, in all its parts, excepting its foundation, and in all the means used to raise and establish it He will condemn it most explicitly and declare it as he did to me in speaking of the state of it and the events that had lately happen'd respecting that it is horrid and horrible.[72]

The news of the September massacres had a more disturbing effect on the country; for it convinced the more recalcitrant societies—two months too soon—that Pitt must be thinking of joining in the war against France. In consequence, they desired to 'quieten French jealousies' and 'encourage them in their struggle' as well as to 'check... all open or even underhanded Ministerial attempts' to engage in hostilities. Margarot and Hardy, of the London Corresponding Society, proposed to Horne Tooke on 15 September the policy of securing 'the Assent of all the different societies throughout the Nation to an Animated (but safe) Declaration assuring France that we entertained most friendly dispositions' and 'will, to the utmost of our power, discountenance all Hostile attempts on the part of the Ministry should the latter be base enough

[72] Milton MSS., the Duke of Portland to Earl Fitzwilliam, 26 Sept. Portland held that Malmesbury had recently gained an unfair impression of Fox because he had unwisely pressed him to approve of the interference of the German powers in France. Fox had insisted that the 'forcing any *constitution* upon a people by arms... was horrible'; and on this Portland said, 'I confess I do not at all differ from Fox, and yet I do not disapprove... the invasion of France... the French themselves... have made it a case of necessity'.

to forfeit the Nation's pledged word of neutrality'.[73] When, immediately afterwards, Tom Paine went to take his seat in the French National Convention, he was accompanied by John Frost, who carried a letter from Horne Tooke asking for the name of a French intermediary in London so that gifts in money could be transmitted to France, £1000 in the first place, but in all probability 'several thousands' later.[74] Towards the end of October a letter to the society conveyed a message of thanks from a M. Audibert for the gift of arms and suggested that instead of arms they might usefully send shoes.[75]

Early in October there was anxiety in England concerning the fate of the Duke of Brunswick; and William Windham, writing in his diary on the 6th, declared that the 'crisis' was 'very anxious'. The democrats were full of faith, and even on the 5th Joel Barlow was writing, 'A great Revolution in the management of the affairs of nations is doubtless soon to be expected through all Europe'. On the 7th the definite news of the retreat reached the ministry and caused such a surprise that a number of people separately decided that the movement could only be regarded as a tactical ruse. Lord Grenville, on the other hand, thought it necessary to deny both at home and abroad the charge that the British government had taken any part in bringing about Brunswick's withdrawal. The effect of the event on the reforming societies was to produce an extraordinary activity and exaltation, and on 10 October *The Times* was again declaring, 'The Police should look to those Revolution mongers who are pasting up bills with a view to incite a mob to rise'. From this moment we begin to see references in letters to 'the very disagreeable spirit amongst the common people' in one region and another; and the evidence which gentlemen now provided about their own localities was much less reassuring than the messages that had come in during May and June. Repeatedly we read in the following weeks of 'the increased activity of our Republicans since the Duke of Brunswick's retreat'. What was chiefly remarkable in this period was the emergence of new societies in places like Birmingham, Leicester and Nottingham, accompanied by the increasing boldness in the public declarations of the older ones. Dundas, who was examining the situation in Scotland reported on 12 November: 'The great scenes of attempts to do mischief in this country are Edinburgh, Glasgow, Paisley, Perth, Dundee, and Aberdeen—all the towns whose manufactures are flourishing.'[76] Ten days later he, too, was writing,

If the spirit of liberty and equality continues to spread with the same rapidity it has done since the failure of the Duke of Brunswick...it will be in vain for any

[73] T.S. 11/951, no. 3495, M. Margarot and Thos. Hardy to J. H. Tooke, 15 and 16 Sept. Cf. Hardy's formal proposal of this to the Society for Constitutional Information, 21 Sept., J. Holland Rose, *William Pitt and the Great War* (1911), pp. 65–6.

[74] T.S. 11/951, no. 3495.

[75] Ibid. R. Mercy to J. H. Tooke, 29 Oct.

[76] Cf. ibid. Walter Miller (of Perth) to J. H. Tooke: 'You may obtain assistance from a quarter where perhaps you would have list [least] expected it....The Scotch nation...as they are nowise influenced by the aristocratical Church, perhaps the body of the people (particularly in the boroughs) are almost as ripe for reform as they are in England.'

military that can possibly be spared from this country to quell that spirit which ferments at such a rate that it must break out into open sedition.

It happened that in Ireland the crisis seemed to be coming to a climax in the same period. It was felt, however, that the risk would be very great if troops were sent out of England in answer to the cry of distress from the administration in Dublin.

Here was a concerted design for something like a revolution in the country, which threatened trouble through unpredictable incidents, especially as here and there it was seen that some arms were being assembled, on what purported—and were no doubt seriously felt—to be defensive grounds. It transpired that the central government itself could do little to check the agitation, and Lord Grenville pointed out how 'the Protestant succession was established...by the exertions of every magistrate and officer...throughout the country'. Furthermore, because there was no actual plan of insurrection, the law itself proved to be inadequate to the situation. Buckingham wrote to his brother, Grenville, 'it is hopeless to restrain [the societies] unless it should be practicable to declare them so far incorporated as to make every member liable to the fine'. In any case, all inquiries showed the inadequacy of the military force at the disposal of the government in the event of serious trouble in the towns; while Buckingham provided his brother with the evidence for his assertion that in certain regions the militia was 'tainted'. By this time both friends and enemies of the ministry had come to be impatient of its inattention and its apathy.[77] It is interesting to see (especially in view of the parallel cases which have been noted earlier in the year) that on the two issues which provoked Fox to his bitter attacks against the government in December—on the question of the war against France and the policy of 'repression'—the aristocratic Whigs were ahead of Pitt and Grenville in their demand for a strong policy; so that Fox's later attacks on the ministry struck even more directly at a number of his friends.

Even concerning the Austro-Prussian war against France, Grenville, who declared that he had never expected any good from it, could still go on saying in November, 'I bless God that we had the wit to keep ourselves out of this glorious enterprise'. This was after the Duke of Portland had confessed his sympathy with the attack on France, and had begun to wonder about an actual English intervention in the conflict. In the middle of October Portland wrote to Fitzwilliam:

Though I could not reconcile my mind to the idea of having the Constitution of a country regulated and dictated by an over-bearing Military Force, I could not but

[77] Buckingham declared to Grenville on 8 Nov., 'I think you will find yourselves much charged with neglect or with a mistaken line of conduct'. He claimed that his opinions were shared 'by all ranks of people', who proclaimed them 'with great dissatisfaction and increasing alarm'. He confessed later that he had thought 'the inattention of government proceeded from some system' (H.M.C. *Dropmore MSS.* II, 326–8).

wish success to the Powers who had marched into France. Though I am very glad that the other powers of Europe thought fit to interfere I have not been able to make up my mind enough to say that I would have advised this country [to do so].

He retained some of his former views and noted that we were 'not bound by treaty to support the old French Government'. He added, however, 'I almost wish to be convinced that these notions are ill-founded, and yet the reverse of them would carry me so far that I cannot but acknowledge my apprehension of them to you'.[78] Three weeks after this, Grenville was still affirming 'We shall do nothing', and confessing:

I am every day more and more confirmed in [my opinion] that... this country and Holland ought to remain quiet as long as it is possible to do so even with some degree of forebearance and tolerance beyond what in other circumstances might have been judged right.

It was part of the opposition which became tired of waiting for the government to take action, and, after the desperate news of the battle of Jemappes (6 November), resorted to what Burke called 'a very bold step indeed... which we knew could not be justified by the common rules of Prudence'. The Duke of Portland became at least an accessory to the measure, though he still showed himself embarrassed and irresolute; indeed, at the last moment he had to have his mind made up for him. After the news of Jemappes, William Windham was in London, feverishly discussing the crisis with various political friends. He came into close consultation with Loughborough, and with Burke, who reported later:

We were all of opinion that everything depended on the resolution of Ministers to act with vigour and with a prompt decision. My opinion was (grounded both on the nature of things and on the direct declarations of some of them) that their inertness and want of all mental, as well as active resources, was owing to a consciousness of the fundamental weakness of their System, and its want of Basis in the strong permanent Aristocratical interests of the country.

Loughborough put forward the view, in which the other two men concurred, that there should be no thought of a formal coalition, and no 'active opposition for the purpose of changing the ministry or even for disabling its operations... because... nothing ought to be done which could make the Motive to the Sup-

[78] Wentworth Woodhouse MSS., The Duke of Portland to Earl Fitzwilliam, 17 Oct. 1792. Portland was being hard pressed at this period by Windham, to whom he wrote on 13 Oct. that he had great faith 'founded on the very general diffusion and distribution of property, the perfect security in which it is enjoyed, the great opulence... the superabundance of employment and wages' (*Windham Papers*, I, 106–7). Loughborough was also pressing him and reported to Carlisle on 26 Oct. that he had seen Portland 'under a recent alarm from a festival which had been made in his neighbourhood to celebrate the success of the French with an appearance of somewhat more cost than the sixpenny contributions of the company.... These feelings are much warmer in his mind than when you last saw him, but I do not think his resolution is yet formed to act up to them' (H.M.C. *Carlisle Papers*, p. 697).

port of Ministers in the smallest degree equivocal'. Burke and Windham met Pitt and Grenville on the 13th and, without pretending to have any authorization, said that if the ministers 'on their part, were willing to take such steps as the exigency of the times required', many of the opposition Whigs were disposed to give support to such a policy; though they would ask for 'a fair communication of the substance of the measures on which that support would be required, and as much, and as fair information on the subject as necessary official and Cabinet reserves would permit'. It transpired that Burke and Windham had in mind, amongst other things, an actual 'offensive' against revolutionary France. They found the ministers 'not very explicit with regard to the vigour of any measure they might pursue as to internal or external policy'. Pitt and Grenville naturally angled for a still firmer commitment from the opposition, and asked for 'more certain and definite assurances of support from the heads of the Party'. The Duke of Portland was immediately informed of what had happened, and, 'without determining anything, seemed not at all displeased with what we had done'.[79]

At this very time the Marquis of Buckingham was pushing Lord Grenville to an explanation of the inactivity of the government in respect of the agitation at home. On this very day instructions were sent to Lord Auckland at the Hague, committing the country to the support of her ally, Holland, though on Auckland's suggestion it was also decided to look for a fresh way of escape by attempting to intervene for the purpose of bringing about a general continental peace. It was at this moment that Pitt declared 'the whole situation... so delicate and critical, that I have thought it right to request the presence of all the members of the Cabinet'. In a letter to the Marquis of Stafford he asked for his views in writing if he could not deliver them in person; whereupon Stafford, in his reply, put out the hint: 'I wish you may not find it necessary at the meeting of Parliament, by some means to strengthen the hands of the executive government, for the seditious are going great lengths.'[80]

On the following day Grenville wrote to his brother: 'the hands of government must be strengthened if the country is to be saved.' Concerning the troubled state of affairs at home Grenville declared:

> The real fact is, that these people were completely quelled, and their spirit destroyed, till the Duke of Brunswick's retreat.... Steps are now taking by Government to purchase these libels, with a view to indictment at the Christmas Quarter Sessions; but this is a thing that can be done but once and could not be continued without an expense equal to that of the old French police.

[79] Burke wrote an account of this immediately afterwards in a letter to his son which has been endorsed with a wrong date and is erroneously attributed to 'September 1792' in *Correspondence of... Burke*, III, 523–30. He wrote a much longer report to Earl Fitzwilliam, 29 Nov. (Wentworth Woodhouse MSS.). Windham has an account of it in a letter to J. Coxe Hippisley, 28 Mar. 1793 (*Windham Papers*, I, 113–20).

[80] Bodleian Library, Transcripts of Rev. R. H. Murray. Burke's paper is printed in *Works*, VII, 87–116, under the title 'Heads for Consideration on the present State of Affairs'.

The intervention of the opposition reinforced the government, therefore, at what transpired to be the pivotal moment. In the following March Windham wrote of the interview with Pitt:

> It is not impossible that on that little circumstance much of the subsequent conduct of government, much in consequence of that of the dispositions and plans of foreign powers, and much therefore in the end, of the fate of Europe may have turned. I have always been a great tracer of the effect of little things.

The attempt to provoke Pitt and Grenville to a stronger anti-revolutionary policy at least coincided in a remarkable way with what proved to be a moment of strategic decision in regard to both internal and external politics. At the same time, it is hardly possible to overlook the importance in this whole episode of the influence of Burke, who declared that, in the midst of the opposition Whigs, he felt for a moment as though the good old days had returned. As early as 23 October he had written to Earl Fitzwilliam, 'In three weeks' time Europe, by Land and by Sea, is delivered up as a defenceless prey'. He had then expanded this letter into a paper entitled 'Thoughts on the Present Posture of Affairs', in which he had declared that

> by a change effected in about three weeks, France has been able to penetrate into the heart of Germany; to make an absolute conquest of Savoy; to menace an immediate invasion of the Netherlands; and to awe and overbear the whole Helvetick body... she is enabled to give law to the whole Mediterranean.

After Jemappes, which was more alarming than anything that had happened before, Burke presented a copy of this paper to Pitt, and he handed another copy to Grenville at the interview on 13 November, while he was also making use of it to awaken the alarms of the opposition Whigs. It was his claim

> That there never was, nor is, nor ever will be, or ever can be, the least rational hope of making an impression on France by any continental powers, if England is not a part, is not the directing part, is not the soul of the whole confederacy against it.[81]

When it came to be realized amongst the Whigs that the 'strong measures' which Burke and Windham were pressing the ministry to adopt were understood to comprise 'an offensive war against France', some of even the more conservative members of the opposition were inclined to protest, however, because they thought that public opinion would not tolerate such a policy. Thomas Grenville appealed to Lord Fitzwilliam,[82] and then confronted Burke

[81] *Diaries and Correspondence of the Rt. Hon. George Rose*, I, 114–17.

[82] Wentworth Woodhouse MSS., Thomas Grenville to Earl Fitzwilliam, 15 Nov.: 'The success of the French arms has already made so much impression in this country & added so many partizans to it's cause, that (if I am not much mistaken) a declaration of *offensive war against France* might probably at once produce here all the dangers & calamities which you & I equally fear....Look round and see the subscriptions openly advertised for assisting the French, the new enthusiasm which grows out of an admiration of their success, the busy and active spirits which have availed themselves of this to make their cause popular among all the societies and associations which exist throughout the country, see too that they have been taught (wisely I think) by government to believe that this country takes no part in the confederacy against France.' Cf. ibid. Thomas Grenville to Earl Fitzwilliam, 29 Oct. 1793, giving later recollections of this period.

himself with his objections, though the Duke of Portland combated these latter 'with as much energy and as decisively as I ever heard him argue anything in my life'. Fitzwilliam, in turn, though he went further than Thomas Grenville in allowing 'the principle of interference in the internal Government of foreign countries', agreed with him as to the 'impropriety of opposition being active on the present occasion' and 'making itself, by advising the executive government of the country, a blind and helpless instrument in the hands of administration'. Windham intervened with Fitzwilliam, suggesting that 'new assurances [to ministers] by imposing new responsibilities may excite to greater vigour and that at any rate this would have a good effect in alarming and exciting the country'. In this letter we can see a summary of the actual programme which Windham, along with Burke, was so anxious for the government to adopt without delay. He desired 'a vigorous exertion of law in the suppression of libellous papers and seditious acts'; and he urged that the time had come when it was necessary to put the country into a state of defence. He had a third point in view, namely, 'joining any confederacy [against France]'; but he was now willing to admit that, in regard to this, 'I am sensible there is more difficulty and danger'.[83]

At a dinner attended not by Fitzwilliam but by other friends who generally shared his alarmist views, Burke found that, though he thought the majority was with him, the minority prevailed—or rather 'doubt and indecision' predominated—especially as Portland himself now seemed more 'embarrassed' and 'did not strongly express his sentiments'. Foreign affairs were shelved during the discussion, and the idea of a suspension of opposition was resisted by some on the ground that such a policy could not be carried in the party. 'The result of the whole in my mind is this', wrote Burke, 'that Windham and I are not authorised to give the Ministers at present any very distinct idea of support, but what they may conclude from your conduct at the end of the last session.'[84] In the next few days Loughborough declined the invitation to accept the great seal, though he offered to give his advice as a Privy Councillor if that should ever be wanted; and Grenville declared on 25 November, 'Our hopes of anything really useful from Opposition are, I am sorry to say, nearly vanished'. The upshot of it all was that Burke and Windham had done something to strengthen the hands of ministers and to remind them that a considerable section of the opposition was likely to remain true to the kind of policy that had been adopted for the May proclamation.[85] And it is clear that in the

[83] Wentworth Woodhouse MSS., Thomas Grenville to Earl Fitzwilliam, 17 Nov.: ibid. E. Burke to Earl Fitzwilliam, 29 Nov.; Milton MSS., W. Windham to Earl Fitzwilliam, 17 Nov.

[84] Wentworth Woodhouse MSS., E. Burke to Earl Fitzwilliam, 29 Nov. Burke said that he came to this dinner feeling 'with a degree of satisfaction which I had not experienced for a long time', that 'as in old times', he was meeting 'so many Friends'.

[85] On 18 Nov. Loughborough, in a conversation with Pitt, confirmed the report originally given by Burke and Windham on the disposition of the opposition Whigs, and specified some who would be sure to support the government (D. G. Barnes, *George III and William Pitt*, p. 253, W. Pitt to Lord Grenville, 18 Nov.). See also Postscript, p. 330, below.

next fortnight the Duke of Portland received some communication from ministers concerning the measures they now proposed to take.

The strength of the feeling that this episode could produce in the party of the opposition Whigs is illustrated almost a year later when Earl Fitzwilliam was pushed into the position of having to defend himself for having refused to sponsor Richard Burke for one of his parliamentary boroughs. He could not forget, he said, how Richard's father had 'delivered himself over into the hands of Pitt, formally and professedly last November'. He could not overlook it, though he was willing to do all honour to Edmund's motives, and he had hoped to be able to keep his grudge against him undisclosed. In the following month Fitzwilliam had to discuss the case of Windham and wrote to Portland:

> The first step that he took last year, I mean his proffer of his party to Pitt, without communication with you, your modesty may look over, but...I cannot forget, that without [our Leader's] sanction or participation, He and We together were offer'd up to a Minister, by Him, an Individual among us.

Yet in the same letter he wrote of the other branch of the party, 'I never will *act in party* with men who call on 40,000 weavers to dictate political measures to the Government'.[86]

If this was the attitude of Fitzwilliam to the conduct of Burke and Windham, it will not be difficult for us to imagine the mountainous anger of Fox when he heard what had happened. 'The sentiments of Fox in the meantime', wrote Windham later, 'remained in a great measure unknown. He had been absent from Town during the greater part of the summer and little...was known of his sentiments.' Burke declared that when he came to London in November, just before the interview with the ministers, he

> was not without strong hopes that Fox would come out right. I flattered myself that the nastiness and turpitude of the thing would have been disgustful to his taste.... I thought that he had, as many others had, an honorable retreat before him; and that he would avail himself of it, to reunite himself with his oldest and best friends.

Fox had begun to recover from his initial horror at the events of 10 August, when there had come the news of the September massacres—'the most heart-breaking event that ever happened'. It was the retreat of Brunswick that had revived him, and brought out his declaration, 'no public event, not excepting Saratoga and York Town, ever happened that gave me so much delight'. Early in November he was canvassed, along with other people, by Windham, who reported that 'three or four conversations to which he seemed to be dragged

[86] Wentworth Woodhouse MSS., Earl Fitzwilliam to R. Burke, 27 Aug. [1793]; ibid. Earl Fitzwilliam to the Duke of Portland, Sept. 1793. Cf., however, ibid. the Duke of Portland to Earl Fitzwilliam, 22 Sept. 1793: 'I never never saw, nor can I yet see Burke and Windham's visit to Pitt in the same light in which it has always been viewed by you, perhaps it had better been avoided, but yet I do not know that I should have protested against it had I been previously informed of it.'

rather unwillingly gave me an early impression that our difference was not of a temporary or superficial sort'. According to Burke, Windham

found him no way altered. His opinion was that the danger to this country chiefly consisted in the growth of Tory principles, and that what happened in France was likely to be useful to us in keeping alive and invigorating the spirit of Liberty. He was disposed to lower and palliate whatever seemed shocking in their procedure.[87]

Repeatedly Fox betrays the fact that, far from realizing that the French Revolution had altered the character of the English political scene, he interpreted the political history of contemporary France in terms of English constitutional history. Until after 10 August the Jacobins were right against the Feuillants, he had come to believe; for the Feuillants were ministers who lacked the confidence of parliament—they helped the King to exercise the veto and use his prerogatives against the wishes of the Assembly. 'He who defends this cannot be a Whig', he wrote to Lord Holland. '. . . I must disapprove unless I abandon every political principle of my life.'[88] Always in the discussions of this period it appears that for Fox, the essential issue was the question of the power of the King.

Then, on 13 November, took place the unconventional interview between Burke, Windham and the ministers—a matter which had been mooted in the discussions of the previous days, though not actually authorized by the leaders of the opposition. It is from this moment that Fox takes the decisive turn and puts himself firmly against the whole policy of the aristocratic section of the party. On the 14th, Tierney, who, since 29 October, had been asking for a revival of consultation amongst the leading members of the Friends of the People, heard from Lord Robert Spencer that Fox 'was disposed to come forward as stoutly as we could desire on the subject of Parliamentary Reform', though he was anxious to know the precise plan that was in contemplation. Tierney still declared, however,

If Fox does not come forth speedily in his true natural colours and speak boldly what I am certain he thinks, he will be lost.

On 23 November Fox wrote to Lord Holland:

The French disclaim any intention of interference in Dutch affairs, but whether their disclaimer, even if sincere, is much to be relied upon, I doubt. Our Ministry are much alarmed. . . . I shall think them . . . mad . . . if they suffer anything to draw them into a war with France, and yet it is as impossible for a nation as for an individual to say that at all events she will not fight. In this case, I think myself sure

[87] Wentworth Woodhouse MSS., E. Burke to Earl Fitzwilliam, 29 Nov. If Portland noticed (n. 72 above) that Fox was inclined to set up a resistance when a man like Malmesbury was pressing him, this was true most of all when Fox was talking to Windham, whom he confessed a little later to find 'very provoking', and whose entry into the room sometimes made him perceptibly more recalcitrant. Thomas Grenville, who sometimes acted as a link between Fox and the 'aristocratic' party, with which he now sympathized, merely recorded after Jemappes that he found it as difficult as usual to induce Fox to share his apprehensions.

[88] *Memorials of Fox*, II, 366–78.

that it can be avoided with honour, and therefore I suppose it will be, though I do really think that Pitt in these businesses is a great bungler. . . . Though [the French] are conquering, it is chiefly upon the territories of their declared enemies, or those whom they know to be in substance and effect so, such as the King of Sardinia &c.[89]

On the following day, 24 November, Portland had an interview with Fox, and concerning this he wrote as follows to Fitzwilliam:

It was so little satisfactory that I have had neither spirits nor fortitude to make you a report of it. The disposition and temper of his mind seemed to me so much more warped than it was at the beginning of the year when *we* talked with Him upon the subject of the French Revolution and the Association of the Friends of the People. He appeared so little affected by the horrors which the former had produced in the course of the summer, He is so hostile to, what he calls, the cause of Kings, and consequently so satisfied and pleased with the failure of the Prussian and Austrian Powers, that He is in a manner insensible to the effects of the increasing power of France and to that Lust of Dominion which is to me as evident in their present Representative Government as in the Zenith of their Monarchical Glory. His eyes appeared to be not at all more open than they were in the Spring to the danger to which this Country is exposed by the inundation of Levelling Doctrines and the support they derive from the success of the French Arms; the interest he used to profess for the preservation of the Constitution seemed much less lively and I am sorry to say that I fear I observed symptoms of no very strong indisposition to submit to the experiment of a new and possibly a republican form of Government.[90]

If we ask why Fox proved so much less amenable than he had been before in his conversations with either Portland or Fitzwilliam, we may impute this in part (as the duke himself was inclined to do) to the fact that he had just emerged from a heated argument with Windham. We must note, however, that Portland described him as being at the same time 'extremely chagrined and exasperated' by the visit which Burke and Windham had made to Pitt. We may

[89] Trevelyan, *Lord Grey of the Reform Bill*, pp. 60–1; *Memorials . . . of Fox*, II, 379–80.

[90] Wentworth Woodhouse MSS., the Duke of Portland to Earl Fitzwilliam, 30 Nov. Burke, writing to Earl Fitzwilliam, 29 Nov. (ibid.), gives additional details of the views put forward by Fox on this occasion, though he only has them at second hand. 'I understand that [Fox] says, he apprehends no danger to the internal state of the kingdom; which, however he checks by saying that he has not lived much about for this good while past. That he is of opinion we ought to recognise the French Republic; and that having done this we ought to inform that Republic that we shall not quietly see them add the Austrian Netherlands to their dominion. That however these countries are not to be restored to the Emperor but left to choose a government for themselves. He did not say who were to be the persons to elect this government. That as to the interior affairs, he thought satisfaction ought to be given to the Catholics in Ireland. That in England the test ought to be repealed. That in Scotland, the Boroughs ought to be settled according to Sheridan's Bill. As to the rest, a regular Opposition was to be carried on as usual.' Burke offered the criticism: 'Mr Fox's scheme of taking the Netherlands from the Emperor and electing some fashion of a Republic nominally independent is not likely to cause any difference between him and his friends in France. It is exactly the scheme they propose themselves and which they, and all the World think is their mode of extending an universal Empire. No man can dream that in the present state of things or any which can be divined in future that such a Republic can be really and substantially independent. It must cling to that power to which it owes its origin . . . and Great Britain is to cede in one day to that Nation, the Object for which she has carried on so many wars, and that Holland must not follow it is ridiculous to imagine.'

think that much wishful thinking had been necessary during the course of the year to prevent the actual rupture of the Portland connexion; and only a duality in the position of Fox, and a determination to keep the party whole, can quite explain the varied impressions that he had given to different types of people, though something sympathetic in his nature made him adapt his expressions or moods or intentions to the person he happened to be interviewing at the moment. Henceforward his attitude is clear. On 26 November he actually protests against the view of one of his friends 'that there was much disposition on...the Aristocratic part of the Party to concede and conciliate'. He insists that 'not one symptom of the kind has appeared to me. The rascals of the Democratic party...have not set their wits to pervert' Lauderdale, Grey and Sheridan 'in the way that those on the Aristocratic side have to pervert the Duke of Portland, Fitzwilliam, Windham etc.' On 29 November another of Fox's letters, though it refers to the events of the preceding May, seems to carry the suggestion that he was likely to have been provoked and incensed by the interview which Burke and Windham had had with Pitt:

> Though Parliamentary Reform was not, as Burke says, in the original contract, yet neither was opposition to it in that contract, and Grey had reason to be surprised at so violent a schism arising from his undertaking what many of us had done before him. Indeed the taking of such an alarm, on such a ground, and running to Pitt upon it were very bad symptoms.[91]

On 30 November, Anstruther, who had been working with Burke and Windham during the course of the month, described Fox's 'system of politics' as being:

> If we stand forward and load Pitt as the author of the present state of the country and run down his whole system of foreign politics, the government must stop and he resign. That is, if we carry on a violent and hostile opposition which he [Fox] adds it is safe to do and very advisable in the present moment. I am afraid he has persuaded Lord Guildford of this, at least as I learn from Adam, who is himself fully persuaded of its propriety. I am the more unhappy at all this because I know that many of the most violent look to Fox as a leader, and separation from his friends may possibly accelerate such an event.[92]

By this time not only had the decrees of the French Convention and the threat to Holland—together with the revolutionary activity in places like Amsterdam—intensified the international situation, but on 29 November the London Corresponding Society, addressing the other societies in Great Britain, had declared:

> Unless we are greatly deceived the time is approaching when the Object for which we struggle is likely to come within our reach.[93]

[91] Trevelyan, *Lord Grey of the Reform Bill*, pp. 61–2.

[92] Add. MSS. 37873, ff. 181–2, J. Anstruther to W. Windham, 30 Nov. In the postscript of a letter to Portland of 26 July (Fox MSS.), Fox had written, 'I have some difficulty to keep my temper when I hear of the friends of *this* Ministry complain of the weakness of Government & reflect upon it's original formation'.

[93] T.S. 11/952, no. 3496[2].

If the country gentlemen had been the first to take alarm in the first half of November, the news that seditious publications were to be proceeded against and the foundation of an Association for the Protection of Liberty and Property against Levellers now helped to awaken the apprehension and the loyalty of a great portion of the country as a whole. On 1 December Fox learned of the determination of the ministry to call out the militia in certain parts of the country—particularly in the north and along the coast—a measure which compelled them (or rather, perhaps we should say, enabled them) to summon parliament at an earlier date than had been anticipated. Fox was in a rage; for he saw immediately that the calling out of the militia and the summoning of parliament would have to be justified by the plea that an insurrection was taking place. He wrote: 'I fairly own that if they have done this I shall grow savage and not think a French *Lanterne* too bad for them.' He described the ministers as 'monsters, who for the purpose of weakening or destroying the honourable connection of the Whigs, would not scruple to run the risque of a Civil War'. When Fitzwilliam arrived in London early in December he wrote, 'I have seen C[harles] F[ox]....I by no means like him'.[94]

On the issue of the policy that was to be adopted towards revolutionary France, it would appear that even now Fox differed from the aristocratic leaders of his own party more than he differed from Pitt himself. A letter of 30 November from Portland to Fitzwilliam makes it clear that both of these noblemen had agreed with Burke and Windham on the advisability of forming an actual confederacy against France. When Fitzwilliam came to London early in December it was his repeated complaint that Pitt and Grenville were still too weak in their foreign policy. He writes of Pitt's recent measures:

> But all this has in view *internal* security—not one word of *external* politics—it is even doubted whether the ministers have yet turn'd their eyes that way farther than to let it be known that if the peace of Holland is infring'd we are bound by solemn treaty to defend her and that we will do so: beyond this I fear the energy of government does not go.

A few days later Fitzwilliam was writing again:

> They have taken such assiduous pains to prejudice the public mind against war, that if they now think only defensive preparations necessary, it will be the greatest disappointment and most unpalatable to get the publick even to that; beyond it will be most unpopular indeed.[95]

The divergence from Fox was so serious that we might wonder whether Pitt himself could have differed from him so greatly on this subject. Fox, in fact, had now chosen his course, and a certain section of the opposition Whigs was

[94] Trevelyan, *Lord Grey of the Reform Bill*, pp. 65–6 (in the Fox MSS. there is a similar letter to W. Adams). Milton MSS., copy of the first of three letters written by Earl Fitzwilliam to Lady Fitzwilliam early in December, and wrongly endorsed as 'January 1793'.

[95] Milton MSS., Earl Fitzwilliam to Lady Fitzwilliam [letters of early Dec. 1792 but wrongly endorsed Jan. 1793].

anxious to make it plain to the world that the old connexion was therefore at an end. If both Fox and some of the principal noblemen still strove hard to keep the party together, it would seem that 'connexion' still stood in their minds as almost an end in itself—irrespective of differences of policy within it—as though the ultimate object was to maintain a combination of forces that would be able to hold the King in check. Either in the interview of 24 November, or in a chastened mood soon afterwards, Fox managed to convince Portland that he was 'perfectly right in the case of any attack on Holland'—a conviction concerning his attitude and intentions which others amongst the opposition Whigs seem to have arrived at independently. Immediately after the interview, letters of Fox, written in a more gentle tone, induced Portland to believe even that Fox 'now sees the necessity of curbing the pride and power of France in other respects'. All this gave the duke the idea that if the party could be held together a little longer, a French attack on Holland or some other development in the situation would save the connexion, provided nothing irrevocable had been allowed to happen in the meantime.[96]

It is clear from his letters in December to Mrs Armistead that Fox still hoped to be able to rally the party and maintain the connexion in the very way, and on the very arguments, that had given him success in the previous May. He confessed that 'now that the danger of parting has been in my mind I find that my regard and affection for the D[uke] of P[ortland] and Lord F[itzwilliam] is still greater than I knew myself'.[97] Even now, in any case, it transpired that ancient resentments against Pitt—resentments carefully nursed by Fox—continued to have their effect on both Portland and Fitzwilliam. For a moment Fox seems to have induced Fitzwilliam to doubt how Pitt could use certain local outbreaks and disturbances which had occurred—particularly in Scotland—to provide that proof of 'insurrection' which it was necessary for him to produce in order to justify the calling out of the militia. Burke argued, however, that if one were to take the law as literally as Fox had taken it, then one would have to recognize the fact that the law did not require any particular 'amount' of insurrection; and Fitzwilliam rallied to the more general view that the country was in genuine danger, though Pitt, by reason of his previous negligence, had been compelled to commit a technical breach of the law.[98]

[96] Wentworth Woodhouse MSS., Lord Loughborough to E. Burke, 30 Dec. By 11 Dec. Fox, though not doubting the necessity of assisting the Dutch if attacked, 'seemed inclined to think the opening of the Scheldt was not a sufficient motive, and would not even be considered as such by the Dutch themselves'. Malmesbury, *Diaries and Correspondence*, II, 474.

[97] Fox MSS., C. J. Fox to Mrs Armistead, 13 Dec.

[98] See the letters mentioned in n. 95. Cf. Malmesbury, *Diaries and Correspondence*, II, 474, 'Lord Fitzwilliam quoted what was passing at Sheffield and Leeds—he blamed the Ministry for neglect and carelessness, which had reduced them to the embarrassing dilemma of calling together Parliament, he believed against the *letter of law*, though justified by the circumstances of the times—Tom Grenville said nearly the same, and the few words which fell from the Dukes of Devonshire and Portland were to the same effect'. Burke's views are given in a paper in his hand amongst the Wentworth Woodhouse MSS.—clearly the draft of a speech for the opening of parliament.

While most of the leaders of the party agreed on the eve of the meeting of parliament—that is to say on 12 December—that they would not propose or support an amendment to the Address, Fox 'with an oath declared *that there was no address at this moment Pitt could frame, he would not propose an amendment to, and divide the House upon*'.

When parliament met on 13 December, therefore, the great conflict found the opposition leaders on opposite sides upon the questions which had become the burning issue of the day. Unconvincing attempts were made to paper over the cracks—we even find the great lords in one House voting with the government while members of the same families in the other House appear to have been deputed to vote for Fox. The Whig connexion was now dividing into three parts. The reformers did not hesitate to say at this crisis that the very summoning of the two Houses was illegal and the parliament itself a usurpation; while Fox went on maintaining in their favour that a difference concerning particular measures of government was no reason for a suspension of the systematic opposition of the whole party to Pitt, especially as it was admitted that Pitt had created difficulties for himself by his negligence at an earlier period.[99] Windham and his friends—with strong support from those who had formerly been followers of Lord North [100]—demanded on the other hand that Portland should break entirely with Fox and the reformers who seemed to have captured him; and they insisted at the same time that since the weakening of government would be a misfortune, all systematic opposition should be declared at an end. Portland and Fitzwilliam, however, did not lose hope that Fox might return to the fold when the fever was over, and refused to suspend their general opposition to the ministry, especially as they held that their refusal to coalesce with Pitt and to come into office would make their support of anti-revolutionary measures more obviously impartial and more useful in its moral effect. Portland was therefore open to the charge that his conduct in December was still ambiguous, indecisive and weak.[101] He wanted the government to be strong, and yet he clung to a policy that was directed to the weakening of it. The party was allowed to disintegrate (to the great advantage of Pitt) for lack of clear leadership at this moment.

On 16 January 1793 Lord Malmesbury communicated to Portland his intention of giving an unconditional support to government in future. At the same time Lord Loughborough was undertaking the negotiation which resulted in his becoming Lord Chancellor. On 10 February twenty-one members—representing one of the three sections of the party—met under Windham and

[99] E.g. Fox MSS., C. J. Fox to the Duke of Portland, [31 Dec. 1792].

[100] *The Morning Post* of 31 Dec. declared that it was 'not to be wondered at' that Sir Gilbert Elliot should have 'deserted the Party; the wonder is that he and many more of Lord North's Tory squad who came over at the Coalition should have had the patience to remain so long without the loaves and fishes'.

[101] Against the familiar hostile accounts in Malmesbury, *Diaries and Correspondence*, II, 473 et seqq., and *Life...of Sir Gilbert Elliot*, II, 79 et seqq., should be placed Wentworth Woodhouse MSS., the Duke of Portland to Earl Fitzwilliam, 29 Dec.

Burke and minuted their decision to support the government.[102] Windham wrote in March:

> In point of fact we all find ourselves now acting without a leader and with no other concert than that which we have been able to make out among ourselves. The only meetings therefore of the party that have taken place on our side have been at my house. Much against my will I have been obliged to act as a sort of head of a party.[103]

In the summer the aristocratic leaders of the party rallied for a subscription to rescue Fox from debt and provide him with a settled income.[104] In September they were winding up the finances of the party—unwilling to open their purses any longer for the assistance of newspapers 'avowedly enlisted in the cause of Anarchy'.[105]

[102] Add. MSS. 37873, f. 195. Cf. *Windham Papers*, I, 110–12, Thos. Grenville to W. Windham, 10 Feb. 1793, protesting against this.

[103] Ibid. I, 113–20.

[104] Milton MSS., the Duke of Bedford to Earl Fitzwilliam, n.d. [1793], respecting the desire to increase the sum already raised; and enclosures, containing a list of those to whom the further appeal is to be made.

[105] Milton MSS., William Adam to Earl Fitzwilliam, 19 Sept. 1793; ibid. the Duke of Portland to Earl Fitzwilliam, 23 Sept. 1793. A further letter from Adam to Fitzwilliam says, 'I cannot but look to Your Lordship's words, in your last Letter, that state the party as dissolved, with great regret'. After this episode Adam offered to mediate an explanation between Fox and the noble leaders (ibid. W. Adam to Earl Fitzwilliam, 31 Oct. 1793); but Portland, who traced the misunderstandings to 'that accursed Association of Friends of the People' wrote, 'I must say that it seems to me that after *all that has passed* it is not for *us* to *seek* an explanation'.

POSTSCRIPT. In the Melville Papers in the W. L. Clements Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan, the 'Melville Correspondence, 1780–1830' includes (nos. 85–9 and 94–6) letters from Lord Loughborough to Dundas, 19 May, and in July and August. As early as 18 May Loughborough was made aware that he might become Lord Chancellor. He instantly declined, and suggested that ministers ought to make up their quarrels. He confessed however that for some time he had held that in present circumstances 'a change of ministers would be inconsistent with publick Safety'. Then he incited and encouraged the ministerial attempt to capture the leading Whigs, and advised them as to tactics—a policy not indefensible, especially as he could have had the Chancellorship at any time. On 26 August he dared to say that the Duke of Portland had often declared 'that a Change of Ministry at this time would be a pernicious measure'. But he advised Dundas that a junction 'would be so defective without Mr Fox, that the Government would be safer as it is'. In the same Library, in the *Pitt Papers*, vol. I, are Pitt's letters of 14 October and 8, 15, 17, 18, 27 and 28 November to Dundas, who had gone to Scotland in the first days of October, initially for a holiday. These letters reveal Pitt's growing alarm, his anxiety for legal advice, and his desire to secure that the overture from Burke and Windham should facilitate Loughborough's acceptance of office. They do not support a Machiavellian interpretation of his policy.