

Burning Tom Paine: Loyalism and Counter-Revolution in Britain, 1792–1793

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Between November 1792 and March 1793, the author of The Rights of Man, Tom Paine, was burnt in effigy in a number of places throughout England. Occurring at the time of Louis Capet's trial and execution and at the onset of the Terror in France, the effigy burnings of Paine are often seen as evidence of the basically conservative and traditionally libertarian sentiments of the British populace and, in some instances, as testimony to a populist, counter-revolutionary nationalism. However, an examination of some 200 incidents noted in the London and provincial press and of the "pulp literature" of loyalism indicates that the effigy burnings were an attempt by sectors of the British ruling class and its middling allies to fashion a "popular" loyalism without encouraging democratic sentiments and to warn radicals against disseminating their views. The effigy burnings were successful in capturing public space for the loyalist cause, but their ability to win over a large audience was more problematic. The opposition to naval recruitment in early 1793 suggests that the loyalist encouragement of the war effort met with a mixed response; the high incidence of food rioting in 1794 and 1795 suggests that the loyalist investment in economic growth and social paternalism met with considerable scepticism, if not contempt. Loyalists might trumpet the social reciprocities between rich and poor, but their ability to command popular allegiance depended ultimately upon performing those responsibilities, not simply parading them.

De novembre 1792 à mars 1793, on brûla en effigie l'auteur de The Rights of Man, Tom Paine, dans un certain nombre d'endroits en Angleterre. Ces événements, qui se déroulaient en même temps que le procès et l'exécution de Louis Capet et au début de la Terreur en France, sont souvent pris en preuve des sentiments fondamentalement conservateurs et traditionnellement libertariens de la population britannique et, dans certains cas, comme le témoignage d'un nationalisme populiste contre-révolutionnaire. Toutefois, un examen de quelque 200 incidents signalés dans la presse londonienne et provinciale et dans la « littérature bon marché » du loyalisme indique que le brûlage des effigies était une tentative par les secteurs de

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la classe dirigeante britannique et ses alliés de fabriquer un loyalisme « populaire » sans encourager les sentiments démocratiques et de prévenir les radicaux de ne pas propager leurs vues. Le brûlage des effigies a réussi à faire connaître la cause loyaliste sur la place publique, mais il a eu plus de difficulté à rallier un vaste auditoire. L'opposition au recrutement naval au début de 1793 donne à croire que l'encouragement loyaliste à l'effort de guerre a reçu un accueil mitigé; l'incidence élevée d'émeutes alimentaires en 1794 et en 1795 semble indiquer que l'investissement loyaliste dans la croissance économique et le paternalisme social a suscité beaucoup de scepticisme, voire du mépris. Les loyalistes pouvaient claironner les réciprocités sociales entre les riches et les pauvres, mais leur capacité à commander l'allégeance du peuple dépendait en bout de ligne de l'exercice de ces responsabilités, pas de leur seul étalage.

Come who will buy my rights of Man, Sirs
 Newly found by Citizen Paine out
 If you stick it in your Thatch
 Tis like a lighted Match
 For keeping wind or rain out.
 (Loyalist ballad, 1792)¹

Tom Paine has been spoken of as made up altogether of inflammatory materials — hence it is that he has furnished a *blaze* in almost every town in this kingdom. (*Northampton Mercury*, December 29, 1792)

WITHIN THE LAST DECADE, the study of loyalism in its various manifestations has excited the attention of eighteenth-century historians. Partly in reaction to the radical social history of the sixties and seventies, partly as a dialogue with the current conservative trend in British politics, historians have re-examined the varied and shifting response of the British to the French revolution. The grand narrative of E. P. Thompson, the notion that the opening years of the revolution produced a form of political apartheid in Britain that pitched an incipient plebeian Jacobinism against an increasingly reactionary ruling class, no longer commands the assent it once did. Historians have questioned the purchase of Jacobinism among the artisans and the labouring poor. They have suggested that the propagation of French revolutionary ideas by ex-patriots such as Tom Paine did not meld very well with the indigenous traditions of British radicalism. They have also pointed to the successful mobilization of loyalism among wide sections of the public, not simply within the ruling class itself.² Indeed, some have argued

1 British Library (hereafter BL), Add. Ms. 16925, f. 168.

2 Robert Dozier, *For King, Constitution and Country* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1983); H. T. Dickinson, "Popular Loyalism in Britain in the 1790s", in Eckhart Hellmuth, ed., *The Transformation of Political Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 503–534, and "Popular Conservatism and Militant Loyalism, 1789–1815", in Dickinson, ed., *Britain and the French Revolu-*

that the British mobilization against the French revolution was critical to the formation of new national identities that successfully transcended, if they did not entirely subordinate, those of class.³

As a contribution to this debate I examine one dramatic episode of loyalism in the months following the September massacres in Paris and the trial of Louis XVI, that is, in the months when the French revolution veered away from the initial liberal constitutional experiment towards a militant republicanism. This episode concerns the formation of loyalist associations from mid-November 1792 to March 1793 and the effigy burnings of Tom Paine at loyalist meetings and festivals. Conservatives at the time trumpeted these loyalist associations and the mock executions that often accompanied them as incontrovertible evidence of the popular endorsement of “King and Constitution” and of the singular isolation of Francophilic radicals in British society. The effigy burnings of Tom Paine, remarked the *Leicester Chronicle*, revealed “the sincere loyalty of the populace at large”.⁴ Historians have sometimes been leery of such categorical judgements, but increasingly they have seen the effigy burnings as part of a highly successful loyalist campaign to win the hearts and minds of the subordinate classes.⁵ Can such an interpretation be sustained? What does a close examination of these effigy burnings and their broader context reveal?

When Britons first learnt of the summoning of the Estates General in the spring of 1789, culminating in the Declaration of the Rights of Man in August, their reaction was generally favourable. Widespread sections of the public welcomed the fall of French absolutism and applauded its most flamboyant symbolic act, the storming of the Bastille. Representations of this political drama were performed in London and in provincial towns like Norwich to the rapturous applause of audiences who interpreted the destruction of this infamous castle as a sign that France’s dawn of freedom had at last arrived.⁶ As long as French politics could be accommodated within a

tion, 1789–1815 (London: MacMillan, 1989), pp. 103–126; Frank O’Gorman, *The Long Eighteenth Century: British Political and Social History, 1688–1832* (London: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 242, 266–273. On Thompson’s reading of the French revolution, see David Eastwood, “E. P. Thompson, Britain, and the French Revolution”, *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 39 (1995), pp. 77–88; Mark Philp, “Thompson, Godwin, and the French Revolution”, *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 39 (1995), pp. 79–101.

3 Linda Colley, *Britons, Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), chap. 4–7.

4 *Leicester Chronicle*, January 11, 1793. Similar wording was used by the *York Courant*, December 31, 1792. See Dozier, *For King, Constitution, and Country*, p. 90.

5 Mark Philp, for example, who has recently written an important article on the language of loyalism that guards against easy attributions of its “popularity”, nonetheless sees it as capable and as successful as radicalism in capturing a plebeian clientele through its rituals and spectacle. See Philp, “Thompson, Godwin, and the French Revolution”, pp. 95–96, and “Vulgar Conservatism, 1792–3”, *English Historical Review*, vol. 110 (February 1995), pp. 42–69.

6 Henry Meister, *Letters Written During a Residence in England* (London, 1799), pp. 29–30; see also

British constitutionalist tradition that revered 1688, this euphoria persisted. It was only in the following year, when the French staged the triumphal *Fête de la Fédération* at the Champ de Mars, that dissenting voices were publicly first heard. Conservatives were perturbed by the very explicit demotion of the king to the status of a mere citizen. They were also troubled by the radicals' enthusiastic endorsement of the National Assembly and their willingness to reverse the interpretive flow of previous arguments by suggesting that the British might draw inspiration from the French.⁷ Edmund Burke echoed these misgivings in his well-publicized *Reflections*, focusing in particular upon those radical Dissenters whom he believed misunderstood the singularity of the French revolution and its incompatibility with British political traditions. Yet Burke's tract, with its alarmist and sentimental portrayal of a French royal family at the mercy of ruffianly mobs, did not initially win a wholehearted concurrence in propertied circles. Only when the totality of the French political crisis became clearer in the summer of 1792 did his arguments seem ominously portentous.

The temper of British policies in 1792 was qualitatively different from what it had been two years earlier. Much of that can be attributed to Tom Paine. Born in Thetford, Paine began his working life as an apprentice staymaker and then ran through a variety of jobs, as privateer, excise officer, teacher, and grocer, before moving to Philadelphia, where he made a name for himself as a radical journalist of the American revolution. Returning to England in the late 1780s, Paine was one of a dozen or so writers who responded to Burke's depiction of the French revolution. *The Rights of Man* was the sharpest of these ripostes; certainly it was the most radical and iconoclastic. Paine mocked Burke's sentimental defence of the *ancien régime* and urged his readers to emulate the example of the French by shaking off the shackles of the past. Dismissing historically based arguments for political reform and rejecting the notion that the 1688 *coup d'état* set precedents for change, he boldly grounded his case for democracy in natural rights. This viewpoint advocated the abolition of hereditary titles in favour of republican citizenship and a concept of popular sovereignty that drew inspiration from the revolutionary experience of America and France. It featured a denunciation of state religions and the mumbo-jumbo of majesty that had held subjects in thrall. Much of what Paine said was arguably too radical for many of his audience, but the manner in which he said it, the way in which he privileged his readers as citizens capable of making rational choices today and not tomorrow, was deeply engaging if not compelling. It also found a singularly broad audience. Paine's ideas were not simply addressed to the regular readers of reforming tracts, the middling sort of the

Gazetteer and Daily Advertiser, July 20, 1790; C. B. Jewson, *The Jacobin City* (Glasgow: Blackie, 1975), p. 16.

⁷ *Public Advertiser*, July 20 and 23, 1790; Meister, *Letters*, p. 30.

more progressive towns. Written in a plain, homespun style and reproduced in cheap editions, they particularly appealed to the small master artisans and journeymen on the margins of the political nation.

Paine's denunciation of the British constitution and audacious support of the French fortified democratic rhetoric and the imperatives of reform. By 1792 his intervention had also emboldened artisans of a questioning temper to form their own associations. Popular democratic societies emerged in over 30 towns throughout England and Scotland, cropping up in places like Derby, not noted for radical endeavour.⁸ In London, Norwich, and Sheffield, they rapidly proliferated, forming divisions or "tythings" that were formally federated. In Norwich there were no less than 42 clubs in the city that avidly discussed Paine's ideas, not to mention those that sprouted in the countryside.⁹

Even in areas where clubs and debating societies had not been woven into the texture of political life, radical activity surfaced. At Wem and other neighbouring towns, people were described as "clamorous in reform and revolution principles".¹⁰ In the Plymouth dockyards, hitherto a bastion of patriotism, bread-and-butter clubs become fora for radical discussion.¹¹ At Newcastle-under-Lyme, where Paine's writings found fertile ground, it was reported that "more than two thirds of this populous Neighbourhood" were "ripe for Revolt, especially the lower class of Inhabitants".¹² The same militancy was found in the industrial areas of the Midlands and the North. At Leicester, one Home Office correspondent remarked upon the "mutinous disposition of the lower orders of the People" and of radical graffiti being chalked upon the walls amid mounting protests about the price of coal and provisions.¹³ In the Durham coalfield, where there was a groundswell of discontent about high taxes, coal duties, and the extravagancies of the Court, the rector of Walsingham feared that Painite ideas would incite insurrection. "In this part of the county of Durham where thousands of poor men are employed together in the lead mines and collieries", he remarked,

it may be supposed that the least spark of discontent accidentally caught by any individuals would be rapidly communicated to the whole, especially as they are in general only employed half the week and therefore have much time for conversation. As the cheapness of Mr. Paine's books has put it in the

8 See *Newcastle Chronicle*, December 8, 1792; Public Records Office (hereafter PRO), HO 42/22/217. See also Gregory Claeys, *Thomas Paine: Social and Political Thought* (London: Routledge Chapman & Hall, 1989), p. 118.

9 PRO, HO 42/22/520.

10 BL, Add. Ms. 16927, ff. 23, 43–44.

11 BL, Add. Ms. 16927, f. 41.

12 PRO, HO 42/22/474.

13 PRO, HO 42/20/378, 386–395; HO 42/22/217. For radical activity in Warrington, Wakefield, Birmingham, and Leeds, see HO 42/20/378, 42/22/85–86, 42/23/10; Robert Isaac and Samuel Wilberforce, *The Life of William Wilberforce*, 5 vols. (London, 1838), pp. ii, 3–4.

power of the poorest man to purchase them, there are, I believe, many of them now in circulation amongst such people, who with great industry communicate those dangerous yet fascinating opinions of equality amongst their companions. We have not yet been at all riotous but the conversation of many of them has a strong tendency to levelling and republicanism.¹⁴

It is difficult to gauge the precise contours of Painite radicalism in 1792, or how deeply those ideas penetrated the labouring world. Historians have tended to focus upon the radical societies themselves, forgetting that the dissemination of Paine's ideas was remarkably widespread. Cheap runs and extracts made *The Rights of Man* a familiar work in Belfast and Dublin, and translations in Welsh and Scots Gaelic took it further into the Celtic periphery. By the spring of 1793, Paine's two-part tract had even reached the Western Isles of Scotland via Greenock.¹⁵ *The Rights of Man* not only reached the remoter parts of Britain; its sales and distribution were unprecedented, with perhaps 250,000 copies of parts I and II in circulation by 1793.¹⁶ These figures reveal a rapidly expanding political frontier, one that certainly troubled members of the ruling class. After all, Paine had proposed an end to hereditary and honorific distinctions, a suggestion that was itself deeply threatening to a society that revered social deference. As one correspondent reported to Lord Grenville, if the "lowest classes" were taught to believe they were degraded in society, "good order and regularity" would be imperilled.¹⁷ Paine also advocated (in part II of *The Rights of Man*) a redistributive taxation that would have eliminated the largest estates in England and Ireland and pared down the patronage system that buoyed up many an aristocratic fortune. Not surprisingly, Painite ideas of equality were regarded as a frontal attack upon property, despite radical protests to the contrary.¹⁸ "The Equality of the friends of freedom is an *Equality of Rights* founded on *Equal Laws*, extending *alike* to the *Poor & to the Rich*," wrote one radical to Reeves, "not an Equality of Possessions as you have lately & wickedly suggested."¹⁹

In concurring with this view, historians have tended to regard the loyalist diatribe against equality as alarmist and to discount the social issues that

14 BL, Add. Ms. 16927, ff. 45–61; see also the comments of the Bishop of Durham in the aftermath of the 1793 strike, PRO, HO 42/23/768. On the manufacturing towns of Yorkshire, see BL, Add. Ms. 16923, f. 67; PRO, HO 42/22/502–503.

15 PRO, HO 42/25/356–361; David Dickson, "Paine and Ireland", in Dickson, Daire Keogh, and Kevin Whelan, eds., *The United Irishmen, Republicanism, Radicalism and Rebellion* (Dublin: Dufour, 1993), pp. 135–150; William Law Mathieson, *The Awakening of Scotland* (Glasgow, 1910), p. 124; PRO, HO 42/24/682.

16 For sales of *The Rights of Man*, see E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 117.

17 PRO, HO 42/22/330.

18 "Equality of Property never entered the head of the most violent Reformer in France." *Newcastle Chronicle*, December 8, 1792.

19 BL, Add. Ms. 16923, ff. 3–4.

sometimes surfaced in Painite circles. Yet these are worth considering. One spokesman for the Sheffield Constitutional Society, for example, complained not only of the vast differences in social status but also of the very unequal appropriation of the “goods and fruits of the earth which, (exclusive of private property justly obtained), was originally intended for the general use and benefit of all”.²⁰ This sort of rhetoric encouraged strikes for higher wages. In the countryside, it prompted demands for a reduction of rents, an end to enclosure, and a restitution of customary rights to ameliorate the condition of the poor tradesman and labourer. In the Hebrides, it prompted crofters to question the proprietorship of the ruling laird on the grounds that their labour alone generated the wealth that the islands could yield.²¹ Such demands for land reform were sometimes amplified by radicals who provocatively sent loyalists mock resolutions detailing plans of expropriation.²²

Symbolic gestures of citizenly camaraderie also generated fears about the escalating demands that could accompany egalitarian doctrines. The proprietor of a coffee house in London, for instance, was aghast when he learned that a gentleman radical had addressed a local perukemaker as “Citizen” when requesting a new wig for “this first year of Equality”.²³ “This letter from a man of fortune to a man of the lower Class, calling him Citizen, his equal, and Stileing it in the first year of Equality”, he remarked, “can certainly convey nothing but an Intention to Inflamm the minds of the people, and particularly the lower class, who headed by such Villains would stop at nothing, but render the life and Property of every Individual at Stake.”

If conservatives were troubled by what equality might mean in the radical lexicon, they were also disturbed by the very imponderability of the new radical constituency. The rather sedate Revolution societies that had initially welcomed the French revolution were easy to locate, and their visibility made them easy targets for loyalist violence. Indeed, after the Birmingham riots of July 1791, when Church and King mobs disrupted a Bastille Day celebration and destroyed the houses of its principal organizers and spokesmen, bourgeois reformers thought twice about invoking France as the exemplary political nation.²⁴

20 Benjamin Damm, *An Address to the Public on True Representation and the Unity of Man* (Sheffield, 1792), p. 6.

21 PRO, HO 42/22/522–523; HO 42/23/213, 436–437; HO 42/25/356–361. Resolutions complaining of the expropriation of rural property from farm labourers came from the Society of the Friends of the People at Ingham Swan, Norfolk. For another radical proposal for land reform, see PRO, HO 42/22/306–310. The tract, written by Thomas Bentley of Sudbury, Suffolk, was entitled *A Short View of the Evils and Grievances which at this time oppress the British Empire through the Corruption of its Government* (London, 1792). For a criticism of enclosure and the amalgamation of farms into large units, see Thomas Bentley, *The poor man’s answer to the rich associator* (London, 1793), p. 3.

22 See BL, Add. Ms. 16923, ff. 187–188.

23 PRO, HO 42/22/494.

24 For the riots, see R. B. Rose, “The Priestly Riots of 1791”, *Past and Present*, vol. 18 (November 1960), pp. 68–88; John Money, *Experience and Identity: Birmingham and the West Midlands*,

By contrast, the more popular societies were less visible and bolder in their endorsement of the French revolution. On Bastille Day, the Aldgate Friends of the People defiantly praised the National Assembly and wished its army every success in its impending struggle against counter-revolutionary forces.²⁵ This gesture of solidarity was renewed by several popular societies in subsequent months as Austro-Prussian armies invaded France and the revolution took a more radical turn. By November 1792 they had endorsed the French republic and the demise of monarchical “tyranny”. “It is a maxim of mine”, declared one Scottish radical, “that a king should be sacrificed to the nation once in a hundred years.”²⁶ In London two radical societies organized an effigy burning of the Duke of Brunswick, George III’s brother-in-law and the general in charge of the Austro-Prussian counter-revolution. According to the *General Evening Post*, a crowd of 500 assembled in the Borough and paraded “the figure of a man very richly dressed and decorated with a diadem” with the standard “Universal Liberty and no despots” carried before them. Later they took the effigy to a gallows on Kennington Common where it was burnt to the tune of “Ça Ira”.²⁷

While radical Londoners were torching one of the French republic’s foremost adversaries, their Scottish counterparts were planting liberty trees, those symbols of regenerative freedom first popularized by the Americans in their resistance to the *Stamp Act* and widely revered by the French.²⁸ Some of these plantings were prevented by the authorities, but in Dundee, Perth, Aberdeen, and several other Scottish towns, liberty poles were conspicuously erected in the centre of town, sometimes to cries of “No King”.²⁹ These demonstrations of radical solidarity were capped by a large-scale festival at Sheffield celebrating the French army’s success at Valmy. Here, in the provincial mecca of radicalism, over 5,000 supporters participated

1760–1800 (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1977), pp. 223–229, 261–263.

For the reluctance to celebrate Bastille Day after 1791, see *Leeds Mercury*, July 21, 1792; Albert Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty: The English Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 238; Carl B. Cone, *The English Jacobins* (New York, 1968), pp. 132–133; Mary Thale, ed., *Selections from the Papers of the London Corresponding Society, 1792–1799* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 17.

25 *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, July 16, 1792.

26 PRO, HO 42/23/16.

27 *General Evening Post*, November 6–8, 1792. For the attempt to enact the same ritual in Norwich, see PRO, HO 42/22/520.

28 PRO, HO 42/23/292, 424–425. On the plans to burn the Duke of Brunswick in effigy, see PRO, HO 42/22/520 and the *Times*, November 8, 1792. On the tree of liberty, see BL, Add. Ms. 16921, f. 122 and 16923, ff. 10–11.

29 *Ipswich Journal*, December 8, 1792; Kenneth J. Logue, *Popular Disturbances in Scotland 1780–1815* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1979), pp. 148–154; Mathieson, *The Awakening of Scotland*, p. 125. Liberty trees were also erected at Stonehaven, Focabers, Auchtermuchy, and Strathmiglo. For an attempt to plant a liberty tree on Kennington Common, see *Leicester Journal*, November 30, 1792. For liberty trees at Alnwick and South Shields, see PRO, HO 42/24/171, 574.

in a parade through the streets in which a banner was displayed lampooning Burke's contempt for popular radicalism and the government's prosecution of Paine for seditious libel.³⁰ When that decision came down and Paine was predictably found guilty (*in absentia*, for he had fled to France), the London crowd also expressed dissent with the decision by drawing the carriage of Paine's defence counsel, Thomas Erskine, back to his house.³¹

Before Paine's trial was concluded, loyalists had moved to contain the march of radicalism. In response to a royal proclamation in May against seditious publications and activities, nearly 400 addresses had been received by the crown from county and borough authorities promising greater vigilance in the battle against radicalism.³² This initiative was resumed in mid-November following Justice Ashhurst's charge to the Middlesex grand jury in which he attacked the radical infatuation with equality and insisted that society could not survive "without proper subordination and respect for the state".³³ The following day John Reeves formed a loyalist association to counteract the groundswell of sedition and encouraged others to do the same. Within months this call was answered by at least 1,500 local societies, creating a movement of prodigious proportions.³⁴

Not all loyalist associations were of the same stamp. To pledge allegiance to King and Constitution did not necessarily rule out reform, although it clearly drew the line at Painite radicalism. In fact, reformers sometimes attempted to insinuate the desire for change into their addresses. In the county of Warwickshire, for example, magistrates and gentlemen under the chairmanship of Lord Beauchamp framed an address that expressed confidence that the legislature would reform abuses in the state in a constitutional manner. Similar wording can be found in other resolutions, including those of the gentlemen, merchants, and inhabitants of Leeds, of the Manchester Dissenters, and of the London merchants, bankers, and traders who met at Merchant Taylors' Hall.³⁵ Sometimes, as at Liverpool and Durham, reform-

30 PRO, HO 42/23/436-437; *Sheffield Register*, November 30, 1792, cited by Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 113. See also the *Star*, December 4, 1792.

31 *General Evening Post*, December 18-20, 1792. Some people hissed at the verdict of guilty and were taken into custody. According to the *Newcastle Advertiser* of December 29, 1792, however, some people praised Erskine but damned Tom Paine.

32 See David Eastwood, "Patriotism and the English State in the 1790s", in Mark Philp, ed., *The French Revolution and British Popular Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 154. Eastwood notes 386 addresses between June and September 1, 1792, based on PRO, HO 42/21/478.

33 *Star*, November 21, 1792.

34 Dozier, *For King, Constitution, and Country*, p. 62. Reeves's association claimed that over 2,000 associations were formed. See Austin Mitchell, "The Association Movement of 1792-3", *Historical Journal*, vol. 4 (1961), p. 62; Dickinson, "Popular Conservatism", p. 115.

35 *Manchester Mercury*, January 1, 1793; *General Evening Post*, December 4-6, 20-22, 1792 and January 1-3, 1793; *Leeds Mercury*, December 22, 1792. On reformist addresses, see Mitchell, "The Association Movement", pp. 62-63; Donald E. Ginter, "The Loyalist Association Movement of 1792-3 and British Public Opinion", *Historical Journal*, vol. 9 (1966), pp. 179-190.

ers had to pack meetings to get resolutions amenable to their taste, only to have them overturned at subsequent meetings. In other cases, as at Yarmouth, different resolutions were passed by opposing factions.³⁶ Even so, the loyalist declarations that mentioned reform were in a conspicuous minority, notwithstanding the efforts of the aristocratic Friends of the People.³⁷ In the propertied front against Painite radicalism, conservative resolutions echoing Reeves held sway.

Like many other loyalists who emulated him, Reeves perceived his project as a policing operation. As a lawyer and former governor of Newfoundland, his natural inclination was to encourage the surveillance and prosecution of Painite radicalism. In the first instance this was to be achieved by mobilizing local authorities and employers against radical sympathizers, sometimes to the point of pressuring all householders to declare their allegiance to King and Constitution. At Chipping Sodbury all the inhabitants were induced to declare their loyalty. In the Suffolk village of Halesworth, there was a door-to-door canvass for signatures, with only seven villagers refusing to sign.³⁸ At Woodbridge, the local association recommended that all employers and traders warn “their servants, journeymen, apprentices, neighbours and all persons” of the dangers of courting radical ideas.³⁹ Such a tactic worked best in smaller communities where the consequences of social ostracism could be severe, but it was certainly applied successfully in urban contexts as well. In London, some parishes policed their neighbourhoods and pressured tradesmen into conformity.⁴⁰ At Wakefield, a former American merchant and two other gentlemen went from door to door soliciting signatures for the loyalist resolution. In six days they had collected 1,700, roughly one in four resident adults. In Bath, where over 6,000 signatures were appended to the loyalist declaration in just two months, a number of employers signed up all members of their work force, leaving the entire list for the mayor to inspect.⁴¹ Such examples should make one wary of reading too much “popularity” into the seemingly impressive numbers who joined a loyalist association.⁴²

This strategy was buttressed by a strict surveillance of taverns and

36 *Ipswich Journal*, December 15, 1792; Mitchell, “The Association Movement”, p. 63. See also the attempt by the town clerk of Grimsby to frame a reformist address, one who had the intrepidity to say he had read Paine’s books and liked them. BL, Add. Ms. 16928, f. 7.

37 Open letter, dated December 15, 1792, reprinted in the *Newcastle Chronicle*, January 5, 1793.

38 *Ipswich Journal*, January 5, 1793; *Bath Herald*, January 5, 1793.

39 *Ipswich Journal*, January 26, 1793.

40 [Daniel Stuart], *Peace and reform: against war and corruption* (London, 1794), p. 19.

41 Steve Poole, “‘Loyalisms’: Popular Politics and the Nation, 1792–1805: A South Western Perspective” (unpublished typescript), pp. 25–30; R. S. Neale, *Bath, 1680–1850: A Social History* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 312; BL, Add. Ms. 16923, f. 67. Wakefield calculations based on the presumption that 60% of the population was adult. Total population 10,581 in 1801.

42 See Dickinson, “Popular Conservatism”, p. 113.

alehouses, whose landlords were threatened with the loss of their licences if they allowed radical groups to meet on their premises. Judging by the number of loyalist declarations by the alehouse keepers themselves, this warning was taken very seriously. Thomas Hardy of the London Corresponding Society recalled that the loyalists “overawed the publicans so much that none of them would admit us into their houses”, forcing the LCS to meet privately and to shift its rendezvous continually.⁴³

Besides clamping down on radical meetings, the loyalist associations answered the government’s call in May 1792 to combat sedition, corresponding with Whitehall on cases that seemed to merit crown intervention, but also prosecuting some themselves. The creation of associations to coordinate and finance private prosecutions was not new; similar societies had been formed throughout the eighteenth century, sometimes in response to royal proclamations, but their extension into the political sphere was novel. Predictably it encountered opposition on the grounds that it would generate a climate of vigilance that was inimical to the values of a free society. The Friends of the Liberty of the Press, for example, claimed that such sedition hunting intruded upon private opinions and intimidated juries to acquiesce to the forces of reaction, thereby undermining any libertarian gains made by the *Libel Act* of 1792.⁴⁴

These fears proved hyperbolic, but they were not altogether unjustified. Although some juries refused to be cowed by the loyalist backlash, the exemplary punishments of sedition and the informal harassment of well-known Jacobins did stay the radical advance, especially in areas where it had gained a fragile foothold. The provincial press, in particular, was severely weakened, with the owners or printers of several radical newspapers succumbing to either prosecution or intimidation.⁴⁵ In some instances the printers were clearly framed. This was true of Thomas Walker, the proprietor of the *Manchester Herald*, and of Richard Phillips, the printer of the *Leicester Herald*. In the latter case, Phillips was prosecuted by the town clerk, whose father, the deputy bailiff, was responsible for nominating the jury. Phillips was not allowed to challenge the jury, even though there were

43 Thale, ed., *Selections from the Papers of the London Corresponding Society*, p. 30.

44 *Morning Chronicle*, January 24, 1793. See also Joseph Towers, *Remarks on the Conduct, Principles and Publications of the Association at the Crown and Anchor in the Strand for Preserving Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers* (London, 1793), passim, and *Thoughts on National Insanity* (London, 1797), pp. 22–24.

45 On these matters, see Clive Emsley, “An Aspect of Pitt’s ‘Terror’: Prosecutions for Sedition During the 1790s”, *Social History*, vol. 6 (May 1981), pp. 155–184, and “Repression, ‘Terror’ and the Rule of Law in England During the Decade of the French Revolution”, *English Historical Review*, vol. 100 (October 1985), pp. 801–825. See also A. Temple Patterson, *Radical Leicester*; Goodwin, *Friends of Liberty*, p. 380 n. 115, which reveals that the crown prosecution of the Sheffield printer, James Montgomery, was intended to “put a stop to the Associated Clubs in Sheffield” and to curb “the insolence they have uniformly manifested”.

precedents for doing so, with the result that he was found guilty and sentenced to prison for 18 months.⁴⁶

Although some historians have questioned the degree to which the government and its allies instituted a “legal terror” against Jacobin sympathizers,⁴⁷ there seems little doubt that this first wave of prosecution was intended to nip radicalism in the bud. In January 1793, a bill-sticker named William Carter was prosecuted at the Clerkenwell sessions at the crown’s expense for posting an address from the London Corresponding Society on the question of parliamentary reform. The Attorney General remarked that “it might appear somewhat singular that he should bring a poor miserable bill-sticker before the court as the object of a public prosecution; but it was a lamentable truth that the libel in question was of the most alarming nature.”⁴⁸ The culprit was sentenced to six months’ imprisonment for promoting “sedition” and had to find securities for his good behaviour to the tune of £100 for himself and two sureties of £50 each.

Several months later, William Winterbotham, a Baptist preacher and manufacturer from Plymouth, was convicted for delivering a sermon on November 5, 1792, that adopted a stance on the 1688 revolution not unlike that of Dr. Richard Price two years earlier. The prosecutor, Serjeant Rooke, even suggested that Gunpowder Plot sermons should avoid political themes, especially to “an assembly of between two and three hundred low, ignorant people”, a line of argument that conveniently ignored customary practice.⁴⁹ Although the assize judge noted that the evidence against Winterbotham was inconclusive and contradictory, the jurymen in this most loyal of counties found him guilty on several counts, leaving Justice Ashhurst to sentence him to four years’ imprisonment and a £200 fine. Such prosecutory zeal led the Foxite *Morning Chronicle* to report satirically that a man was prosecuted for speaking seditious words in his sleep, and that a magpie was brought to court for chirping “No King”.⁵⁰ A “minute inquiry” was made into the bird’s “political principles, and the company it usually kept”, the paper quipped, and, because “it was observed to wag its tail several times”, it was charged with contempt of court.

As these cases reveal, loyalists hoped to close down radical space. Legal prosecutions were only part of this strategy. Equally important was the active propagation of loyalism, by address, sermon, tract, and festival. All were well-tried aspects of the loyalist arsenal, having been deployed with varying degrees of success during Forty-Five, the American war, and the

46 *Newcastle Chronicle*, May 4, 1797; Emsley, “An Aspect of Pitt’s ‘Terror’ ”, p. 165.

47 Emsley, “An Aspect of Pitt’s ‘Terror’ ” and “Repression, ‘Terror’ and the Rule of Law”.

48 *Ipswich Journal*, January 12, 1793.

49 *The Trial of William Winterbottom, Assistant Preacher at How’s Lane Meeting, Plymouth ... On the 25th of July 1793 for SEDITIOUS WORDS* (London, 2nd ed., 1794), pp. 67–68.

50 *Morning Chronicle*, October 11 and 14, 1793.

Regency crisis of 1789. Yet the pervasive and seemingly imponderable appeal of Painite ideas, which surfaced even in the areas of confirmed loyalism, made conservatives uncertain of their audience. It prompted them to consider new ways of mustering support in a more popular idiom.

Not all loyalists were happy about this. Reeves, for instance, entertained quite elitist notions of how associations should run, a stance that some felt was too exclusive. One correspondent from Lincolnshire believed that Reeves's preference for gentlemanly associators would deter the "middle Class of Society" from joining the movement.⁵¹ Others advised that loyalist societies would prosper more successfully if their advertisements were pitched to "inhabitants" or "Englishmen". Robert Horner of Mells Park, Somerset, recommended that loyalists regulate their subscriptions so that "the lower Class of People, equally Valuable Citizens, might not be deter'd from offering their Mite".⁵² Behind these discussions lay the issue of whether the loyalist societies should emphasize social hierarchy and deference or a populism that sailed close to the radical wind.⁵³

Such differences were most explicit in relation to the labouring poor. Sarah Trimmer believed the working population could be pacified with a moral tract and a loaf every Sunday. In her view, weekly charity and instruction would "put a whole neighbourhood of poor people into good humour with their superiors".⁵⁴ Yet other loyalists doubted whether such a strategy would be sufficient to placate a politically articulate populace whose exposure to Painite ideas had undermined their allegiance to the current regime.⁵⁵ What was needed, they argued, were popular tracts or ballads outlining the palpable benefits of British rule and the hazards of Jacobinism. A few even believed that loyalism could be fortified by drawing upon the French revolutionary experience itself, either by insisting upon oaths to the Constitution (as at the *Fête de la Fédération*) or by emulating the craze for the *tricolore*.⁵⁶

No consensus was necessary on these issues because the formation of loyalist associations was left to local initiative. Yet the responses that Reeves received from local chairmen did prompt him to compete more keenly with the Society for Constitutional Information for the popular market. Although the Crown and Anchor association initially focused upon weightier tracts such as Paley's *Reasons for Contentment* and Justice Ashhurst's *Charge*, it was soon distributing cheaper tracts such as *One Pennyworth of Truth* as well as prints, songs, and broadsides, many of which

51 BL, Add. Ms. 16919, f. 162.

52 BL, Add. Ms. 16922, ff. 24, 122.

53 For a similar argument, see Philp, "Vulgar Conservatism".

54 BL, Add. Ms. 16921, f. 122.

55 BL, Add. Ms. 16919, ff. 149–150; 16920, ff. 18–19; 16926, f. 36.

56 BL, Add. Ms. 16919, ff. 67–68, 144–145.

could be bought in bulk. The message of these was frequently crude and xenophobic, full of anti-Gallican rhetoric in which an honest and industrious John Bull was favourably juxtaposed to an undernourished, vagabond Jacobin or to unscrupulous Painites who ensnared the unwary with empty promises of equality.

At the same time many tracts did compare Britain's libertarian trajectory with that of France. Britain's long-standing tradition of liberty, so the argument ran, had brought palpable gains for everyone: a rule of law, security of property, religious concord, domestic and commercial felicity. By contrast, the French revolutionary experience engendered scarcity, atheism, unparalleled political violence, and the spectre of mob rule. The contrast was vividly depicted in Rowlandson's famous print of 1792 which juxtaposed a contented Britannia against a turbulent, sanguinary French Medusa, but it recurred time and again in popular tracts such as Thomas Bull's dialogue with his brother John in *One Pennyworth of Truth* or Job Joiner's *Word of Advice* to his shopmates.⁵⁷ Although some authors invoked the image of a static, hierarchical society, the language of loyalism was often nationalist and libertarian. In fact, the loyalist defence of existing inequalities often drew less upon doctrines of natural law and the great chain of being than upon those derived from political economy.⁵⁸ Inequality was an inevitable and necessary feature of capitalist society, providing new opportunities for the enterprising and employment for the many. "It appears from history and observation", remarked one Briton,

that the inequality of rank and fortune in this blessed country is more the result of every man's own exertion than of any controuling institution of the State. ... Men become rich who have persevered with industry in the application to trade and commerce, to manufacturers, and other useful employments. ... It is by the effects of this industry that the gentleman is enabled to support his station, and the merchant and tradesman to employ their clerks, journeymen, and apprentices. ... By this happy inequality and dependence of one man upon another, employment is found for all in their several vocations to which they have been called by design or accident. This inequality and dependence is so infinitely diversified in this country that there is no place upon earth where there are so many ways in which a man, by his talents and industry, may raise himself above his equals. ... Were all equalized, whence would arise the superfluity to pay servants their hire, or to purchase the productions of art

57 These tracts were not only printed separately in their thousands, but sometimes reprinted *in toto* in the newspapers. On these two, see *Ipswich Journal*, December 15, 1792 and January 12, 1793. *One Pennyworth of Truth* also linked Jacobin equality with gender equality and mourned the dangers of "petticoat government".

58 On this issue, see Gregory Claeys, "The French Revolution Debate and British Political Thought", *History of Political Thought*, vol. 11 (1990), pp. 59–80. Claeys arguably exaggerates the modernity of loyalist thought; in my view its language was more protean.

and manufacture! No commerce, no credit, no resource for the active but in robbery, and all those public disorders which make life miserable.⁵⁹

The saturation of the market with loyalist tracts and songs was accompanied by generous doles of charity in an attempt to reaffirm the paternalist image of the ruling class. As one loyalist remarked, “[I]t must be right for the Lower & Poor Class to see that the Opulent are willing to protect & provide for them.”⁶⁰ This was all the more necessary in the context of spiralling prices and incipient bread riots in places as far afield as Inverness, Dundee, Leicester, Yarmouth, Swansea, and Cornwall. In Derbyshire, local squires killed a sheep or two for the poor of their parishes. At Barton-under-Needwood, a subscription was opened to supply poor people with wheat at five shillings a strike.⁶¹ In the south and east of England, where sheep rot was common and worms and slugs had damaged the wheat, similar gestures were made. In Dorset, justices of the peace ordered the overseers to relieve every “industrious and peaceable poor person” so they might supplement their wages to achieve a “comfortable support” for their families. In Essex, many parishes raised subscriptions to subsidize provisions for the poor.⁶² At Earlsham, farmers raised the wages of their labourers and provided corn at five shillings a bushel; at Halesworth, in Suffolk, poor people were supplied with coal at eight pence a bushel. The principal landowner there, Sir Joshua Vanneck, doled out four pounds of beef and half a crown to every labourer in the parish, while the Sunday school children were regaled with plum pudding and ale to the strains of “God Save the King”.⁶³

Local festivals were also exploited to drive home the benefits of the status quo. At the opening of a new spinning mill at Twerton near Bath, 280 mechanics and woolcombers were treated by the proprietors amid toasts to “Church and King”.⁶⁴ At Halifax, the local benefit societies processed the town “wearing blue silk sashes round their shoulders and cockades in their hats with the words (in silver) KING AND CONSTITUTION”. Later they heard a sermon in which it was claimed that “none but True Englishmen enjoy the pleasing fruits of sterling liberty”.⁶⁵ Royal anniversaries, predictably, saw a new lease of life. In Birmingham, loyalists celebrated the King’s birthday at the very Hotel where reformers had been denounced and heckled for commemorating Bastille Day in 1791. At Manchester, over 100 gentle-

59 *Ipswich Journal*, December 8, 1792. For similar arguments, see *Felix Farley’s Bristol Journal*, December 1, 1792.

60 PRO, HO 42/24/464.

61 *Derby Mercury*, December 27, 1792. For bread riots in 1792–1793, see Andrew Charlesworth, ed., *An Atlas of Rural Protest in Britain, 1548–1900* (London and Canberra: St. Martins, 1983), p. 95.

62 *Lloyd’s Evening Post*, January 7–9, 1793; *Bath Chronicle*, November 22, 1792.

63 *Ipswich Journal*, December 15, 1792, and January 5, 1793.

64 *Felix Farley’s Bristol Journal*, November 3, 1792.

65 *Leeds Mercury*, January 12, 1793. For other examples, see *Manchester Mercury*, January 8, 1793.

men of the Church and King Club commemorated the Queen's birthday to the resounding toasts of the King, the Queen, the royal family, and Britain's mixed constitution. Beer was freely distributed to those in the street.⁶⁶

The most typical and publicized feature of loyalist festival, nonetheless, was the effigy burning of Tom Paine. A familiar purgative rite, deeply embedded in popular political culture, effigy burnings were an obvious way of consolidating loyalism in a traditional idiom, especially if they were lubricated with beer and ale. Reformers frequently disparaged this practice as a cheap spectacle that demeaned the political capacities of the common people. Reeves himself received a satirical letter from the "Hampshire Seditious Hunters" of Winchester, who reported that when "their Committee met having nothing to do — they ordered an Effigy for Tom Paine to be made, dressed in Black — the Church giving the Coat, the College the Waistcoat and Breeches, and the Corporation the Hat, Wig and a Halter". The letter continued, "They also caused a Mob to assemble to carry this Effigy about the City" and the "Mayor and one Alderman — being of the true Jacobite Breed, gave Money to the Mob to Hallo Church and King and then to burn the Effigy." Unfortunately, the writer noted, "when the Mob got drunk, some few did cry out Tom Pain for ever — Tom Pain for ever."⁶⁷ Clearly the author was warning Reeves and his fellow reactionaries that the choreography of loyalist festival could be disrupted, that rent-a-crowds might turn on their purchasers and subvert the assigned script.

Loyalists themselves had few misgivings that this would happen and generally applauded the ritual execration of Britain's most notorious radical. Some were sceptical. William Wilberforce, for example, set little store on such "hasty effusions" of loyalism and deplored the festive exuberance they would engender. The Home Office also expressed some reservations about the army burning Paine in effigy in the woollen towns of Wiltshire. Yet here magistrates wholeheartedly welcomed the enterprise and those at Trowbridge and Bradford personally attended the ceremony.⁶⁸

Burning Paine in effigy was a predictable counterpoint to the radical demonstrations that troubled many men of property: to the mock execution of the Home Secretary, Henry Dundas, for example, or of the Duke of Brunswick, or even to the Sheffield revel in which Burke was ridden in effigy on a hog as a rejoinder to his dismissive characterization of the lower class as the "swinish multitude".⁶⁹ More generally, burning Tom Paine was

66 *Manchester Mercury*, January 22, 1793; *Swinney's Birmingham and Stafford Gazette*, June 6, 1793, found in PRO, HO 42/25/516. In London it was reported that the illuminations on the Queen's birthday "were not altogether confined to the gaming houses and the tradesmen". See *Morning Chronicle*, January 19, 1793. For loyalist activity on other birthdays, see the *Times*, June 5, 1792 and August 17, 1793; *Manchester Mercury*, June 11, 1793; *Sun*, August 21, 1793.

67 BL, Add. Ms. 16928, f. 5.

68 PRO, HO 42/24/231 b-c; Isaac and Wilberforce, *The Life of William Wilberforce*, vol. 2, p. 6.

69 *Morning Chronicle*, December 4, 1792. For the effigy burnings of Dundas, see Logue, *Popular Disturbances*, pp. 133–148. I owe the first reference to Susan Foote.

a clear warning to his supporters that their espousal of radicalism would not be tolerated. In purging Paine, loyalists were symbolically intimidating their local opponents into silence, if not submission. As one Lincolnshire reformer later remarked, such mock executions were designed to “frighten the *few* persons in every town who chose not to join the mad Tory party”.⁷⁰

The first Paine burning I have discovered occurred on November 12 in Manchester. It was likely staged by one of the Church and King clubs in that town as the local rivalry between loyalists and reformers escalated, culminating in a full-scale Church and King riot in early December.⁷¹ By that time, as Paine’s trial for seditious libel approached, further effigy burnings had taken place. Two weeks before his trial *in absentia* at the London Guildhall, Paine’s effigy was hanged at Croyden on a 14-foot gibbet before a crowd of 1,000 people. Within a fortnight the radical hero was burnt in effigy at several places in the West Country as well as in Ipswich and Lancashire. In Bristol, Paine was burnt three times in two days: first at Redcliffe Hill in the shadow of the spires of the most imposing Anglican church in town, and subsequently at Brandon Hill and the Old Market.⁷² Thereafter Paine’s mock execution became a fairly regular feature of Church and King junkets, often capping the formation of new loyalist associations. At Didsbury, where the locals had assembled “to give a public testimony of their loyalty”, Paine was formally tried by a mock jury, found guilty, led to the place of execution by a band, probably playing the “Rogue’s March”. There he was burnt “amidst the acclamations of a great concourse of people from the surrounding country”.⁷³

Just how many effigy burnings of Paine occurred in the winter of 1792–1793 it is impossible to say. Newspapers seldom reported all the incidents that came within their purview and sometimes admitted that they simply did not have room to do so.⁷⁴ The more radical papers predictably tended to downplay the incidence and significance of the effigy burnings; the more conservative tended to dwell on them. In late December the *Bristol Journal* even claimed that Paine had been burnt in effigy “from one end of

70 William Gardiner, *Music and Friends* (London, 1838), vol. 1, p. 221, cited in Roland Hill, *Georgian Lincoln*, p. 166.

71 *Manchester Mercury*, November 20, 1792. On Manchester politics, see John Bohstedt, *Riots and Community Politics in England and Wales, 1790–1810* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp. 107–114.

72 *Times*, December 8 and 20, 1792; *Manchester Mercury*, December 18, 1792; *British Gazette and Public Advertiser*, December 20, 1792; *Felix Farley’s Bristol Journal*, December 22, 1792; *Ipswich Journal*, December 22, 1792. Latimer claimed that Paine was burnt in every parish in Bristol, but I have found no evidence for this in the contemporary newspaper reports. John Latimer, *The Annals of Bristol in the Eighteenth Century* (Bristol, 1893; reprint Bath, 1970), p. 499.

73 *Manchester Mercury*, February 5, 1793.

74 *Shrewsbury Chronicle*, January 18, 1793; *Leicester Journal*, January 4, 1793; *Manchester Mercury*, January 8, 1793.

the country to the other".⁷⁵ This was an exaggeration, for many mock executions of Paine occurred in January rather than the month before. Even in February, Paine's effigy was still being torched with some regularity, dwindling significantly in the following month.⁷⁶

From a survey of some 23 provincial and eight London-based newspapers, together with a perusal of secondary and archival sources, I have been able to locate 208 effigy burnings of Paine in the four months from December 1792 to March 1793. Since Bath and Bristol burnt Paine on more than one occasion, the number of places cited in these sources amounts to 205. Given the nature of eighteenth-century reporting and the constraints of space that prevented even the most enthusiastic of publishers from printing all the accounts they had received, it would seem quite plausible that Paine was burnt in at least 300 towns and villages in England and Wales, making him the most celebrated of political victims in Georgian England after Guy Fawkes.⁷⁷

My own limited list suggests that mock executions of Paine were most popular in the South-West, where as many as 72 effigy burnings occurred, some 35 per cent of all those located. This impressive number must be partly attributed to the assiduous reportage of Mr. Trewman, the proprietor of the *Exeter Flying Post*, who also happened to be the treasurer of the prestigious Country-House loyalist association in that town. The South-East and North-West were also reasonably well represented (20 and 18 per cent of the total), particularly in the counties south and west of London and in the vicinity of Manchester, where Church and King mobs were especially active. Fewer effigy burnings were mentioned in the Midlands (13 per cent), somewhat surprisingly given its traditional Tory temper. Still fewer appear to have occurred in the North-East (10 per cent) and in East Anglia and Lincolnshire (5 per cent), even allowing for the under-reporting in those predominately rural counties.⁷⁸ Even so, as the map reveals, few areas of a 30-mile radius in England were exempt from these political rituals, the remoter parts of Cumberland, Westmorland, Northumberland, Yorkshire, and Cornwall excepted.

As one might expect from such a widespread incidence of Paine burnings, most of the places mentioned in the newspapers and affiliated sources were

75 *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, December 20, 1792. The same claim was made by the *Manchester Mercury*, January 1, 1793.

76 Of those that I have been able to date with some certainty, 53 occurred in December, 60 in January, 16 in February, and 3 in March.

77 See also Dozier, *For King, Constitution, and Country*, p. 91.

78 Hill, *Georgian Lincoln*, p. 161. William Gardiner remarked that "it was a common and disgusting sight to witness the figure of a man whipped, and dragged through the streets, and afterwards hung up and burnt, with a label in his hat, printed in large letters, 'Tom Paine'." The North-West is also under-represented in my sample. Dickinson notes 20 or so effigy burnings in the region; I have found 17. See Dickinson, "Popular Conservatism", p. 118.

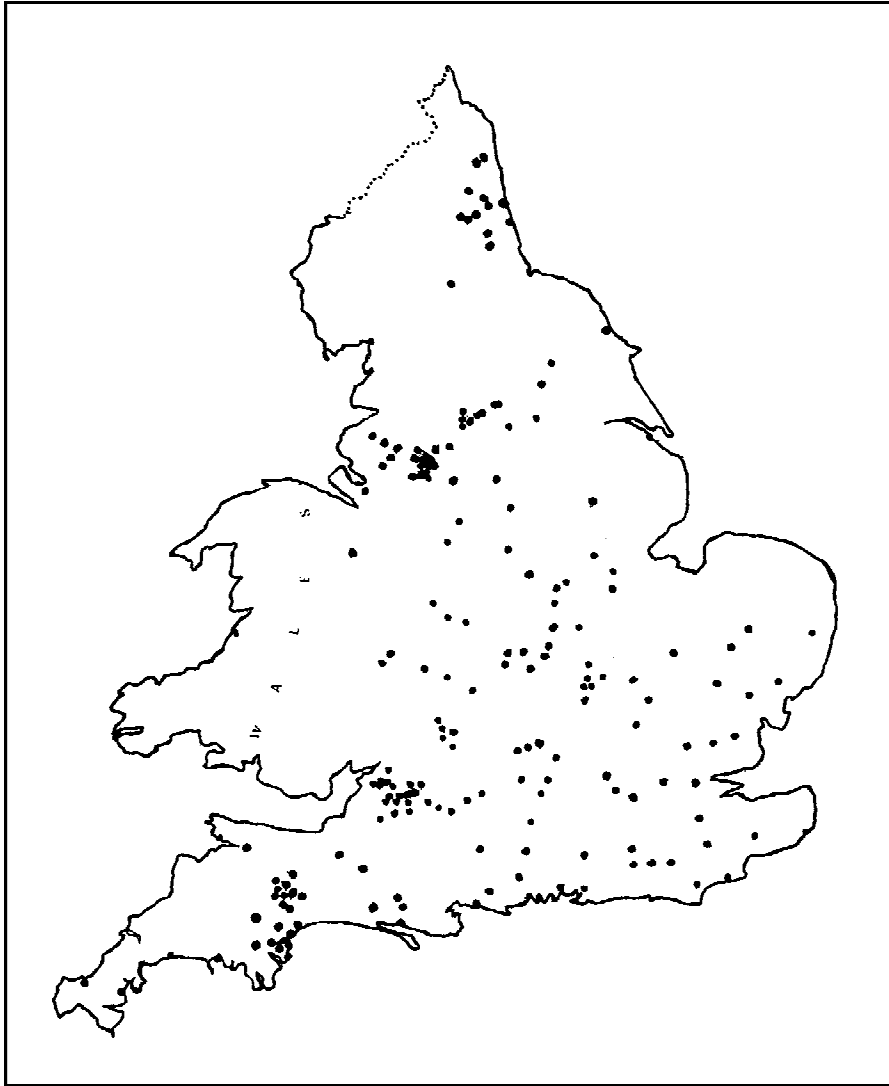


Figure 1: Effigy burnings of Tom Paine, November 1792–March 1793

villages or townships rather than towns. Some 60 per cent of all burnings, in fact, occurred in places with fewer than 2,000 inhabitants. Most of the towns that executed Paine were also small, with 68 per cent of them (62 of 91) having populations of under 5,000. Indeed, of the ten largest towns in England, only five appear to have burnt Paine in effigy.⁷⁹ Even so, county

⁷⁹ Manchester, Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, and Plymouth did burn Paine in effigy; London, Liverpool, Sheffield, Newcastle, and Norwich did not.

towns were reasonably well represented, as were the ports and naval centres, including Falmouth, Plymouth, Poole, Dover, Ipswich, Sunderland, and North and South Shields. Burgeoning industrial towns such as Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds, Oldham, Stockport, and Wakefield also made the roster, as did many of the older woollen towns of the South-West. Although the *Times* claimed that every principal town in the country burnt Paine in effigy,⁸⁰ some were noteworthy by their absence. The radical strongholds of London, Norwich, and Sheffield did not torch Tom Paine. In the latter, the local True Blues were physically deterred from demonstrating their commitment to King and Country by their vociferously radical opponents.⁸¹ Liverpool does not appear to have done so either, despite its long-standing reputation for loyalism and incipient Orangeism. Nor did Newcastle, where Painite sympathies among keelmen and sailors were fuelled by protracted labour disputes and a fulsome opposition to impressment that had quickly been communicated to other eastern ports.⁸² Here it would seem that loyalists feared the demonstrations of anti-Jacobinism might badly backfire.

Burning Tom Paine was nonetheless an event witnessed by hundreds of thousands of Englishmen and women. Even allowing for journalistic exaggeration, the numbers reported in the press are impressive: 5,000 in Marlborough; 3,000 in Leeds; 2,000 in Chagford, Dukinfield, and Nettlebed; 1,000 in Bridport and Croydon; 300 in the Hampshire village of Cosham, just outside Portsmouth. Very few accounts mention any figures at all, but of the 13 that do, the average attendance amounted to 1,454 people.⁸³ Since this tiny group is fortuitously representative of the towns and villages known to have burnt Tom Paine in effigy, we may speculate that perhaps 400,000 people watched a mock execution of Britain's most notorious radical. That amounts to about one in ten adults in England and Wales.

Many of these mock executions were elaborately staged. It is misleading to regard them as "spontaneous demonstrations of loyalty".⁸⁴ The dummies of Paine were seldom as crude as that of the Hanoverian monarch burnt by the Hill Top lads of Walsall in 1751, which had a barber's block for a head

80 *Times*, December 21, 1792.

81 PRO, HO 42/23/330-331.

82 On these disputes, see PRO, HO 42/24/97 et seq.; *Newcastle Advertiser*, November 24 and December 1, 1792.

83 In descending order of magnitude they are as follows: Marlborough, 5,000; Leeds, 3,000; Chagford, Dukinfield, and Nettlebed, 2,000 each; Bridport, Croyden, and Box, Wiltshire, 1,000 each; Saddleworth, 700; Chapel Milton, 500; Cosham, 300; Cross Street and Ellesmere, 200 each. Most accounts are descriptive rather than numerate: at Plymouth, for example, the "concourse of people" attending the effigy burning was described as "amazing" (see *Exeter Flyer Post*, December 13, 1792). At Dover, "some thousands of spectators" watched the effigy burning (*Lloyd's Evening Post*, December 17-19, 1792).

84 Mitchell, "The Association Movement", p. 61.

and clothes made of brown paper.⁸⁵ They were more akin to the effigy of Henry Dundas burnt by the Edinburgh crowd on the King's birthday in 1792, one that had been constructed in a blacksmith's shop and had a hat, coat, breeches, stockings, and shoes.⁸⁶ Sometimes they were more elaborate still. At Worcester the effigy was described as "well-dressed"; at Pershore it was "very handsomely dressed in black". At Devizes, Paine was dressed in mourning with a white cockade, holding his seditious writings in one hand and a penitential scroll in the other. At Exmouth, he donned a "democratic Black coat" with a republican wig flowing to his shoulders, and was said to have "a countenance sly, treacherous and seditious".⁸⁷ Occasionally Paine's effigy was filled with fireworks for dramatic effect or capped with a sponge to enhance its penitence.⁸⁸ Such effigies required considerable preparation and appear to have been often financed by gentlemen, or perhaps by public subscription through a network of loyalist clubs.

Paine was also accorded the formalities of a traitor's trial and execution. It is, of course, possible to find quite impromptu burnings of Paine. At Datchet, in Berkshire, for example, an effigy of the radical was quickly hoisted on a nine-foot gibbet for the pleasure of the King as he passed from Windsor to Westminster.⁸⁹ Yet in towns in particular, Paine was formally convicted, placed in the local jail, sometimes in chains, and taken to the place of execution by mock sheriffs, javelin men and chimney sweeps substituting as clergymen. At Bath-Easton, Paine was attended by "several persons as official superintendents", including a high sheriff, a clergyman, a clerk, 24 javelin men, two high and 24 petty constables, and "an executioner with a large ax". Numerous freeholders closed the procession on horseback. At North Shields, Paine was attended "by an ingenious mock-chaplain, who excited the laughter of the populace to almost immoderate degree".⁹⁰ At a market cross or prominent hill, Paine's effigy was then hoisted on a gibbet for several hours to allow the crowd an opportunity to pelt or whip him. Only later would the effigy be burnt on a bonfire, having sometimes been eviscerated and chopped up to emulate a hanging, drawing, and quartering.

85 PRO, SP 36/113/73–86. See also the description in Paul Kleber Monod, *Jacobitism and the English People, 1688–1788* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 205. Monod does not mention that the clothes were made of brown paper, cut by Thomas James, a buckle engraver from Walsall, for "half a dozen ale".

86 Logue, *Popular Disturbances*, p. 137. For the Walsall effigy burning, see Monod, *Jacobitism and the English People*, pp. 205–209.

87 *Exeter Flying Post*, January 3, 1793; *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, December 29, 1792; *Berrow's Worcester Journal*, January 24 and 31, 1793.

88 *Lloyd's Evening Post*, January 16–18 and 18–21, 1793.

89 *General Evening Post*, December 25–27, 1792.

90 *Newcastle Advertiser*, January 19, 1793; *Bath Register*, February 2, 1793; *Bath Chronicle*, February 14, 1793.

Occasionally there would be variations to this ritual. Paine's effigy was sometimes whipped at the cart's tail. At Pershore it was "stripped to the Duff and flogged on the back all round the town"; at Tunbridge Wells, a man was placed inside the effigy to amuse spectators with his howling. At Kibworth, in Leicestershire, the effigy was tarred, but not feathered; at Totnes it was hanged on an iron gallows outside of town; at Bath-Easton in an iron cage.⁹¹ In Quickworth, Paine's effigy was beheaded, a punishment normally reserved for aristocrats but one that was perhaps a retaliatory act for Louis XIV's execution, which many thought (mistakenly) Paine had endorsed. At Dukinfield, Paine's effigy was banished from the community in a balloon, a novelty that drew people from afar, for the crowd that watched this spectacle exceeded the number of inhabitants in this Cheshire village.⁹²

Generally speaking, the mock executions of Paine were highly ritualized events that replicated a traitor's trial and punishment and connoted the punishment he deserved, had he been present at his actual trial. Paine was seldom subjected to a charivari or a skimmington ride, despite the fact that Evangelical critics sometimes exposed him as a wife-beater and unscrupulous suitor, a man of wayward principles, both political and familial.⁹³ The only occasions I have encountered occurred at Chester-le-street and at the Northumberland village of Middleton, where an effigy of Paine rode the stang around the streets.⁹⁴ Loyalists rarely execrated Paine in a folk idiom; normally they used quite formal legal rites and procedures.

The use of legal rites, props (gaols and gallows), and even personnel (common hangmen sometimes officiated at executions) was predictable in view of the fact that the leading organizers of these effigy burnings were gentlemen of authority: magistrates, prominent landlords, or perhaps tradesmen and farmers who were likely to have been members of grand juries. It is difficult to determine just how many large property owners actually organized mock executions of Tom Paine. Many accounts are frustratingly

91 *Bath Chronicle*, February 14, 1793; *Exeter Flying Post*, December 20, 1792; *Berrow's Worcester Journal*, January 31, 1793; *Northampton Mercury*, December 22, 1792; *Sussex Weekly Advertiser*, December 24, 1792.

92 *Manchester Chronicle*, January 19 and March 9, 1793.

93 See Francis Oldys [George Chalmers], *The Life of Thomas Paine* (London, 1793), which was printed in at least six editions within a year and sold for two guineas per 100. For a suggestion that loyalist societies circulate the pamphlet, see BL, Add. Ms. 16924, f. 65. Clive Emsley stresses the "traditional folkloric rough musicking" of the Paine burnings, although he offers no solid evidence for this statement. See Clive Emsley, "The Impact of the French Revolution on British Politics and Society", in Ceri Crossley and Ian Small, eds., *The French Revolution and British Culture* (Oxford, 1989), p. 57.

94 *Newcastle Advertiser*, January 5, 1793. Riding the stang was a familiar punishment in the Newcastle area. Two months earlier, the sailors of North Shields had vilified fellow seaman who ignored the injunction to strike for higher wages by subjecting them to this punishment. See *Bath Chronicle*, November 22, 1792.

brief. The leadership of prominent landowners and employers was certainly foregrounded in the press, however. At St. Ives and Topsham, the local squires officiated; at Didsbury, the members of the local hunt; at Barnard Castle, the gentlemen of the Old Constitution Society. At Nettlebed, in the Chiltern hills, the effigy burning was organized by a group of “very respectable gentlemen farmers”; at Prestwich, by the “respectable inhabitants of the township”. The same was true of Disley, where squire Legh of Lyme closed the festival by distributing three fat bullocks to the poor.⁹⁵

In a few instances due deference was shown to local patrons by having effigies of Paine taken to their country houses in a circuitous route to the gallows. At Plymtree, where the mock execution was managed by the Dean of Exeter, the loyalist parade visited the house of the rector, then the Dean’s country seat at Hayne before returning to the town green. There, while the vestry had dinner and a local band played “God Save the King”, “the lower class of people were formed in a line before the windows, and a penny loaf and beef [was] distributed to every individual.”⁹⁶

As these accounts suggest, the choreography of Paine-burning ceremonies often strove to emphasize, not minimize, social hierarchy. The labouring poor were expected to visit the houses of the gentry, to line up for food, to wait while the bigwigs had their dinner before the final burning of the effigy took place. Other loyalist meetings were also organized in the same way. One magistrate reported to Reeves that at the signing of the loyalist declaration at Medlands, near Exeter, the gentlemen, clergy, and yeoman farmers of the hundred dined in one room, the tenant farmers in another, while “that truly usefull class of persons, the Day Labourers, ... were regal’d with wine of the country (cyder) and join’d in chorus with those within, singing ‘God save the King’ and other Loyal and constitutional Songs.”⁹⁷ Although historians have sometimes suggested that the British and French developed similar strategies of political engagement in this era, incorporating an ever-widening audience,⁹⁸ the loyalist political idiom was in fact quite different from that propounded across the Channel. Loyalist meetings explicitly rejected the egalitarian spacing of French festivals such as the *Fête de la Fédération*, where local deputations from villages and towns were brought to the Champ de Mars to swear an oath to the new constitution. In loyalist festival, day-labourers were constituted as subjects within an already well-defined social order that observed the properties of social rank.

95 *Manchester Mercury*, December 18, 1792; February 5 and March 26, 1793; *Newcastle Courant*, December 29, 1792; *Reading Mercury*, February 4, 1793; *Exeter Flying Post*, January 24 and February 14, 1793. For other examples, see *Berrow’s Worcester Journal*, January 24, 1793; *Ipswich Journal*, December 29, 1792, and January 5, 1793.

96 *Exeter Flying Post*, March 14, 1793. For another example of Paine-burning processions touring country seats, see the account at Topsham in the *Exeter Flying Post*, January 24, 1793.

97 BL, Add. Ms. 16924, f. 29.

98 Colley, *Britons*, p. 228.

At the same time loyalist demonstrations cannot be totally written off as a ruling-class show. The climate of intimidation and surveillance certainly induced dependents to collaborate, however willingly, in loyalist displays of solidarity. In some villages whole parishes were mustered to hear diatribes against Tom Paine and his works.⁹⁹ Against this, loyalist gatherings were not without some popular purchase. Loyalist clubs did germinate among the middling and lower sort, especially in towns such as Manchester, where Paine was burnt twice at Deansgate as well as at four or five outlying villages. Where these societies did not exist, sick and benefit clubs sometimes served as the basis for conservative rallies.¹⁰⁰

Furthermore, anti-Painite parades did not always take place in social milieux one usually associates with rural deference. Outside the larger towns, many of those reported in the press occurred in townships or villages with industrial or mixed economies, often with populations of 1,000 or more.¹⁰¹ Some were self-consciously staged as community events. At the small village of Chapel Milton in the Peak district, for example, 500 people turned out to burn Tom Paine, whose effigy was attended by a band playing “God Save the King” and 24 youths carrying guns decorated with sashes and blue and red cockades. At Heptonstall, in the West Riding, the Paine-burning ceremony also had a community air, with women sporting blue ribbons with the words “King and Constitution”.¹⁰² Perhaps the most impressive parade of this type occurred at Kingswood, near Bristol. Here the huge procession featured 100 Sunday school boys holding loyalist banners and “many hundreds of colliers &c belonging to several Friendly Societies or Clubs with blue cockades in their hats, large elegant silk colours with their respective devices and mottos as ‘God Save the King — King and Constitution &c’ in letters of gold”. Hitherto noted for its “ungovernable” disposition and still prone to riot, this predominantly Methodist community was staunchly loyalist.¹⁰³

What disposed poorer men and women to rally to the cause of King and Constitution? How can we account for the “blind zeal” that some loyalists attributed to the lower-class endorsement of Paine burnings? Or for the

99 *Shrewsbury Chronicle*, February 1, 1793; *Hampshire Chronicle*, January 14, 1793.

100 *Manchester Mercury*, January 8, 1793; Dickinson, “Popular Conservatism”, p. 155. For other loyalist celebrations by friendly societies, see *Newcastle Advertiser*, January 5, 1793; *Leeds Mercury*, January 12, 1793.

101 These conclusions are based upon occupational information found in the 1801 census, *British Parliamentary Papers* (1801–1802), vol. 6, *passim*.

102 *Manchester Mercury*, January 1 and 22, 1793.

103 Robert W. Malcolmson, “‘A Set of Ungovernable People’: The Kingswood Colliers in the Eighteenth Century”, in John Brewer and John Styles, eds., *An Ungovernable People: The English and Their Law in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1980), pp. 123–127. For the Paine-burning ceremony, see *Bristol Gazette and Public Advertiser*, March 7, 1793.

crudely written notices that informed the local gentry that “all Loyal subjects” might have “the Pleasure to see Pain trators Effige & his Books” burnt on the morrow?¹⁰⁴ In towns where sectarian rivalries informed popular politics, loyalist sentiment could be fuelled by a continuing hostility to Dissent. It was no accident that Paine was sometimes burnt in association with Priestley and that the old Tory slogan of “Down with the Rump” resonated through the streets. In Cambridge mobs shouting “King and Constitution” ransacked the houses of prominent Dissenters and demolished the new meeting house. At Guisborough the Dissenting chapel was set on fire, while at Birmingham the establishment of the “Loyal True Blues” precipitated attacks upon prominent Dissenting reformers in a style reminiscent of 1791.¹⁰⁵ Here, as in south Lancashire, traditional antagonisms generated a populist Toryism that giped at the bourgeois pretensions of progressive Dissent and precipitated continuing attacks upon well-known local reformers by Church and King mobs.¹⁰⁶

More generally, however, it was the conjunction of Painite radicalism with the accelerating crisis in France that shaped the loyalist response. Such a conjunction was visibly exemplified by bedecking Paine’s effigy with a *tricolore*, by styling him “Monsieur Égalité”, by calling him a regicide (even though Paine recommended that Louis Capet be banished to America rather than guillotined), or by having a devil accompany him to the gallows singing “Ça Ira”.¹⁰⁷ Even the more conventional execution of this notorious “leveller”, with *The Rights of Man* in one hand and a pair of stays in the other, connoted the upstart quality of those speculative politics whose imperatives had led to anarchy in France. As Gilray’s well-known print of January 1793 sought to emphasize, corsetting Britannia in the Parisian mode would squeeze all the life out of her.¹⁰⁸ Certainly the onset of the Terror, the ensuing economic dislocation, and the trial and execution of the king reinforced British prejudices about the political authoritarianism of their traditional enemies and the dubious benefits of “Liberty and Equality”. The French, declared one loyalist, had traded “Slavery” for “licentious Anarchy, overlooking that Golden mean which Liberty, like the Moral Virtues, consists in”.¹⁰⁹ “Englishmen”, declared another, were “not likely to learn

104 *Newcastle Chronicle*, January 19, 1793; BL, Add. Ms. 16923, f. 67.

105 *Ipswich Journal*, December 8 and 22, 1792; January 5, 1793.

106 For an account of these attacks, see Alan Booth, “Popular Loyalism and Public Violence in the North-West of England, 1790–1800”, *Social History*, vol. 8, no. 3 (October 1983), pp. 295–313.

107 *Exeter Flying Post*, December 13, 1792; *Bath Journal*, February 25, 1793; *Manchester Mercury*, February 26, 1793; *Bristol Gazette and Public Advertiser*, March 7, 1793. News of Paine’s recommendation to the National Assembly concerning the fate of Louis XVI (or Capet) did not reach the provincial press until late January 1793. Even so, loyalists chose to ignore it, for Paine was burnt as a regicide at Disley and Lyme weeks later.

108 “Fashion Before Ease”, January 2, 1793, BMC 000.

109 Anonymous, *Liberty and Equality, treated of in a Short Story, addressed from a Poor Man to his Equals* (London, 1792), p. 35.

liberty from men who for centuries have submitted to a regular course of slavery".¹¹⁰ Such sentiments appealed pre-eminently to the propertied owners who feared that French equality would undermine their stake in British society, but it could invoke a broader patriotism, drawing upon the allegiance of the industrious and devout, including those who were members of benefit societies. Even those with nothing to lose were sometimes fearful of revolutionary anarchy, fears that were vigorously fanned by loyalist propaganda. "I have heard the Common Labourers at their work," one correspondent wrote to Dundas, "nay women and children, on repeating the Cruelties of the French to them, vow vengeance and utter imprecations against these Murderers."¹¹¹

Loyalists could therefore mobilize a popular clientele by stoking the embers of sectarian rivalry and fuelling the politics of fear. Yet it is important to stress that anti-Painite festivals were often initiated to check the contagion of radicalism that threatened to erupt in the winter of 1792–1793. This was especially the case where effigy burnings of Paine were noticeably clustered. In Manchester, for example, two radical societies had joined the London Corresponding Society in sending a laudatory address to the French National Convention in September 1792. Led by the well-known fustian manufacturer, Thomas Walker, the radicals' provocative actions, including calls to send money to aid the French revolutionary forces, set off alarm bells within the loyalist camp.¹¹² The December proclamation against seditious writings prompted a loyalist rally and a Church and King riot in the streets of Manchester, and this was quickly followed by a crop of effigy burnings of Tom Paine, both in Manchester and in no less than eight towns within a fifteen-mile radius. As one deputy constable remarked of the riot on December 11, when the windows of Walker's house and the print-shop of the *Herald* were smashed, "it is good to frighten these people".¹¹³ Paine burnings were part of the same cycle of intimidation.

The visibility of radical societies was less marked in the populous areas of Wiltshire and East Somerset, but here loyalists appear to have been particularly concerned with the possible conjunction of political and industrial grievances. In 1791–1792 there had been a spate of protests against the introduction of machinery in the textile industry, and a strike by 2,000 colliers in August 1792 at the Mendip pits left the military in the area precariously stretched.¹¹⁴ The possibility that this unrest might fuel political

110 *Sussex Weekly Advertiser*, December 24, 1792. W. Savell Esq., to the loyalist meeting of the Pevensey Rape, December 17, 1792.

111 PRO, HO 42/24/286.

112 Thale, ed., *Selections from the Papers of the London Corresponding Society*, pp. 20–21; Bohstedt, *Riots and Community Politics*, pp. 103–114.

113 Bohstedt, *Riots and Community Politics*, p. 111.

114 Adrian Randall, *Before the Luddites* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 80–83; Neale, *Bath*, p. 326.

radicalism was not lost on the troops' officers, who were especially concerned that their men might succumb to the radical proselytizing that was occurring in their billets. As one dragoon captain remarked, radical discussions were "the constant topick of every Alehouse in which they are quartered".¹¹⁵ The effigy burnings in the major towns and industrial villages of this area, including Bradford and Trowbridge where "violent Levellers" were especially active, was designed to forestall this possibility.¹¹⁶ More generally they were intended as a morale booster for troops in hostile territory and as an effort to inhibit the fusion of industrial and political protest.

The same concerns may well have prevailed in the woollen manufacturing areas of Gloucestershire, where there was a deep suspicion of the spinning jenny and protests against the introduction of scribbling machines, and where Painite radicalism was beginning to take root. As Lord Berkeley anxiously remarked a few years later, "a vein of bad materials runs through the lower order of the clothing part of the county which still continues to study Tom Paine with a few political clubs of the very dregs."¹¹⁷ Similar anxieties may well have plagued magistrates and gentry in other parts of the West Country textile industry, for effigy burnings were staged in villages in or close to some of the more militant wool-combing towns such as Bradninch, Taunton, and Exeter, where opposition to the scribbling machines was mounting.¹¹⁸

The conjunction of industrial with political protest certainly occurred in the North-East ports of the Tyne and Wear. Here the opposition to impressment revealed a confidence and audacity that deeply troubled the local magistrates. In the months prior to the mobilization against France, the sailors of the Tyne had been in a militant mood. At North and South Shields, seamen had bargained hard for higher wages in the merchant marine, methodically striking the sails of ships in port and punishing blacklegs by either forcing them to ride the stang or by leading them in a humiliating fashion through the streets with their jackets turned inside out and their faces blacked.¹¹⁹ The reverberative effect of this strike was felt all along the Tyne, with other riverside workers, including the powerful keelmen, demanding wage increases to tide them over a winter of spiralling food prices.

Once war was in the offing, the collective solidarity of the seamen led them to demand a higher level of wages in the British navy (40 shillings a month as opposed to the standard 22 shillings) to allow them to support

115 PRO, HO 42/23/466 b-c, Capt. Crawford to Dundas, December 20, 1792.

116 PRO, HO 42/23/466 b-c.

117 PRO, HO 50/41, Berkeley to Dundas, April 4, 1798, cited in Randall, *Before the Luddites*, p. 274. See the views of Sir George Onesiphorous Paul, cited by Roger Wells, *Wretched Faces: Famine in Wartime England, 1793-1801* (Gloucester, 1988), p. 135. He thought that "Paines doctrines had only been inhaled by a few in 1793", but was troubled by the possible mix of social and political protest in the hunger of 1795.

118 PRO, HO 42/25/495.

119 *Bath Chronicle*, November 22, 1792; *Lloyd's Evening Post*, November 19-21, 1792.

their wives and dependants. It also led them to question the very legitimacy of impressment, on the grounds that it deprived them of the rights of personal protection allowed every free-born Englishmen.¹²⁰ Resolutions to this effect were drawn up at a series of mass meetings at Newcastle, Sunderland, and Shields.¹²¹ They were delivered to the Newcastle regulating officer, Captain Rothe, in the mayor's chamber, as well as being printed in the local and London newspapers and communicated to other ports. Although the seamen outwardly declared they would defend themselves "by every legal Method from Impress", it was very clear that the customary modes of collective resistance had not been ruled out. Constables sent to disperse the Newcastle mass meeting were brusquely told that it would not disband until the press gang had been broken up. One member of the seamen's deputation told Rothe, "they had to a Man come to a resolution not to be pressed and that they would sooner lose their lives".¹²² Within days, a threatening letter from the Sunderland sailors was dropped in front of their local rendezvous informing Lieutenant Abbs that his gang "had better take Care of themselves for if they do not We will take Care of them and very soon ... the sooner they are out of the Way the better for themselves, for we are determined to be resolute."

What made the situation especially alarming to the magistrates was the prospect of an escalating conflict involving all the workers currently out of work or on strike on the Tyne: keelmen, iron casters, joiners, shipwrights; not to mention the shoemakers and sawyers who were beginning to voice their grievances.¹²³ "Our streets are crouded with Workmen of all Descriptions unemployed," remarked Nathaniel Clayton, "who all seem to be waiting for some Change."¹²⁴ Clayton believed this aspiration for change was unfocused, but others were less confident that this was the case. In the town where Thomas Spence and Jean-Paul Marat had served their political apprenticeships, they were deeply disturbed by the rapid dissemination of Paineite radicalism along the waterfront.¹²⁵ Sixpenny editions of *The Rights of Man* were selling in their hundreds, and at South Shields a liberty pole was erected in the marketplace. One magistrate reported he had heard crowds shouting, "No King, Tom Paine for ever".¹²⁶

These circumstances prompted magistrates to organize a series of Paine burnings to contain the radical tide. Loyalists torched Paine in Shields, Sunderland, and several industrial villages, including those near the Crowley

120 PRO, HO 42/24/321–322; *Newcastle Chronicle*, February 2, 1793.

121 PRO, HO 42/23/752, 755; 42/24/321–322.

122 PRO, HO 42/24/319–320.

123 PRO, HO 42/24/574, 597, 613–614.

124 PRO, HO 42/23/772–774.

125 It was calculated that 1,000 copies of Paine's *The Rights of Man*, printed in cheap sixpenny editions, had been sold in the Newcastle area in the summer of 1792. PRO, HO 42/23/2.

126 PRO, HO 42/24/613–614, 42/24/574, 42/23/2.

works at Swalwell and Winlaton Mill. Here loyalists hoped that the works' dependence upon government war contracts would insulate workers from radical counter-currents; in fact, the loyalist fervour of the Crowley workers was opposed by a "tumultuous assembly of keelmen and their wives", who pelted them with stones and even threatened their lives.¹²⁷

The evidence of the North and South-West thus suggests that public displays of loyalism did not always command the support attributed to them; that they were sometimes face-saving exercises designed to prop up flagging spirits in a sea of disaffection; that they may even have paradoxically stiffened radical resolve and highlighted the differences between the politics of the property holders (and their clients) and those of the excluded.¹²⁸ As Mark Philp has recently argued, the language of popular loyalism was ambiguously and contradictorily inclusive, venturing to attract the allegiance of the common people while portraying them as political simpletons in need of upper-class guidance.¹²⁹

This argument becomes all the more compelling when we consider the choreography of loyalist festival, which too often inscribed ordinary people as passive subjects of a quasi-paternalist order rather than as active citizens, and the highly charged political atmosphere in which it took place. Loyalists were in a strong position to command public space, and they did not always command the real allegiances of the people. If Paine burnings deterred some from forthright demonstration of radicalism, they also induced others to treat loyalist festival with irreverence. One pamphlet recalled that several men who were hired to burn Tom Paine in effigy waited on the Devonshire gentlemen who employed them to ascertain "if there was any other *gemmen* among his friends whom he wished to have burned, as they were ready to do it for the same quantity of beer".¹³⁰

There are other indicators that the loyalist campaign of 1792–1793 generated more heat than genuine assent. The first pertains to the recruitment drives for war with France. In part II of *The Rights of Man*, Tom Paine had called for a de-escalation of the armed confrontation with France and a substantial reduction of the armed forces. The hoopla of war, he argued, was too frequently a political ruse to amuse the multitude and detract it from looking into the "defects and abuses of government". In a new era of reform and peace, he continued, "the oppressed soldier will become a freeman and the tortured sailor, no longer dragged along the streets like a felon, will pursue his mercantile voyage in safety".¹³¹ This hostility to war and to the

127 M. W. Flinn, *Men of Iron: The Crowleys in the Early Iron Industry* (Edinburgh, 1962), p. 248.

128 On this last point, see Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 123.

129 Philp, "Vulgar Conservatism".

130 *Tom Paine's jests: being an entirely new and select collection of patriotic bon mots, repartees &c on political subjects* (London, 1794), p. 35.

131 Tom Paine, *The Rights of Man*, ed. Henry Collins (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1969), pp. 289–290.

manner of wartime recruitment was echoed in a number of other radical tracts as the mobilization against France began.¹³²

To the loyalists, of course, the revolutionary thrust of French politics made war both inevitable and desirable. As early as May 1792, Church and King clubs had been deploring the “insanity of our Gallic neighbours” and bracing themselves for a confrontation.¹³³ By the end of the year, war seemed very likely and loyalists were rousing “every true Briton” to “shed his blood” in defence of the constitution.¹³⁴ Not surprisingly, within weeks of the declaration of war with France, loyalist associations were busily advertising bounties for seamen and raising funds for the families of those local volunteers “who shall die in the noble cause of fighting for their *King and Country*”.¹³⁵ Even within inland towns, loyalist associations were encouraged to subscribe towards such funds so that the navy would rapidly achieve its full complement.¹³⁶

Had loyalism fallen on fertile ground, one would have expected the mobilization for war to have been noticeably successful. Yet it was not. On a purely numerical count, it is true, the opposition to naval recruitment was unexceptional. Eighteen anti-impressment affrays were reported in the press and to the Admiralty during the first nine months of the war. This was rather less than in previous wars, and conspicuously less than in the mobilization for the Nootka Sound crisis of 1790, when 40 affrays were reported in the space of six months.¹³⁷ Yet in terms of the scale of protest and the evasions that followed it, the opposition to impressment was significant. The declaration of war in 1793 precipitated five major riots in the North-Eastern ports of the Tyne and Wear and the transformation of Whitby into a virtual “no-go” area for the Admiralty’s gangs. On Clydeside, where the radical disaffection of Glasgow and Paisley spilled on to the river, Captain Brenton found it difficult to recruit men after the initial flush of volunteers had eased off. At Greenock, the carpenters, caulkers, riggers, and seamen resolved “to stand by and support one another” in case of a hot press, and on two occasions burnt the small boats of the press gangs in the public square. By November, Brenton openly doubted whether his own gang would be able to confront the

132 J. Sharpe, *A Rhapsody to E[dmund] B[urke]* (Sheffield, 1792), p. 12; *Birmingham Society for Constitutional Information* (Birmingham, 1792), p. 9; *An Address to the People* (Coventry, 1793), pp. 3, 9; *Le Tocsin! or the Address of Citizen Famine to the Oppressors of his Country* (Hampstead, 1793?), p. 6; *An Account of the Proceedings of the British Convention held in Edinburgh, the 19th of November 1793* (London, 1794), p. 37.

133 *Ipswich Journal*, June 9, 1792, reporting the toasts of a Church and King Club at Yarmouth on Restoration day (May 29).

134 See the piece by “Briton” in the *Ipswich Journal*, December 1 and 8, 1792.

135 *Ipswich Journal*, March 9 and 16, 1793; Dozier, *For King, Constitution, and Country*, pp. 106–110.

136 *Bath Herald*, March 9, 1793.

137 My inventory records 20 such affrays for the opening nine months of mobilization in the Seven Years’ War and 27 in the American War. These figures are derived from newspapers, the records of the Admiralty Solicitor, and the in-letters of recruiting captains in Adm 1.

Greenock mob “which are at all times watching the motions of the rendezvous boats”.¹³⁸ To complicate matters further, the magistrates of the town were so intimidated by the quayside workers that they refused to back the press warrants. The following summer, an attempted raid on the town was opposed by 200 armed men and Greenock continued to defy the gangs.¹³⁹

Clydeside and Tyneside were perhaps exceptional in their opposition to impressment, and no doubt exceptional, too, in the degree to which that opposition was reinforced by radical ideology. Yet elsewhere the state of naval recruitment was precarious. Although the navy recruited strongly in some of the areas where loyalist associations had been active, most noticeably in Bristol, Exeter, and Liverpool, this was by no means true of all. In Cornwall, for example, Admiral MacBride complained that the seafarers headed for fishing villages of Newquay, St. Ives, and Mousehole once the fishing season was over; “those places are not only the resort of smugglers,” he remarked, “but of Deserters and Stragglers of all sorts, where they find a safe refuge.”¹⁴⁰ Similarly in Barnstaple, Bideford, Poole, Weymouth, and Portland Bill, the admiralty found itself in difficulties, particularly at the Bill where the stone masons openly resisted the press gangs. The same was true of Whitehaven, where it was reported that the local colliers “turn out upon the least alarm & rescue the pressed men”.¹⁴¹ These impediments to naval recruitment ultimately forced the government to pass the *Quota Acts*, which instituted a form of quasi-conscription for all areas of Britain, in landlocked counties as well as coastal. They were not a great success, but together with an embargo on mercantile shipping in early 1795 and huge bounties to volunteers at a time of severe shortages, they did help to break the bottleneck in wartime recruitment. Few seamen could resist the equivalent of a year’s wages in bounty in the near famine year of 1795, and it was not surprising that a fair proportion of them eventually volunteered as quota men in the coastal counties.¹⁴²

There is little evidence, then, that the loyalist festival significantly bolstered the war effort by encouraging men to take up arms against the revolu-

138 PRO, Adm 1/1509 (Brenton), letters of February 3, June 6, November 14 and 28, 1793. For radicalism on Clydeside and Glasgow, see Mathieson, *The Awakening of Scotland*, pp. 122–123; PRO, Adm 1/1509 (Brenton), February 16, 1793, which concerns the Painite radicalism of the midshipman of the *Polly* tender, who was discovered drinking Tom Paine’s health in Glasgow taverns and even entered on the Book of Arrivals at Greenock the following words: “The Perseverance, from France, Tom Paine, commander.” For further evidence, see Thale, ed., *Selections from the Papers of the London Corresponding Society*, pp. 35, 54, n. 119, 360; Ian McIntyre, *Dirt and Diety: A Life of Robert Burns* (London: HarperCollins, Trafalgar, 1995), pp. 296, 312–313.

139 PRO, Adm 1/1509 (Brenton), November 28, 1793, and June 19, 1794.

140 PRO, Adm 1/579.

141 PRO, Adm 1/579.

142 *North Riding Naval Recruits: The Quota Acts and the Quota Men, 1795–7*, introduction by Clive Emsley (Northallerton: North Yorkshire County Record Office Publications no. 18, 1977), appendices A and B.

tionary foe. Neither is there compelling evidence that loyalist rhetoric harmonized relations between the rich and the poor, a matter on which loyalists set great store. Within a month of the effigy burning of Paine at Chudleigh in South Devon, a “considerable number of people” descended upon nearby Teignmouth to detain a vessel loaded with barley that was rumoured to be bound for the continent.¹⁴³ Further interventions occurred in Cornwall, where tanners seized a vessel laden with corn and “levelled several houses” to the ground.¹⁴⁴ These incidents illustrated that the reciprocities between rich and poor which were part of the ideology of loyalism could easily fragment.

This was very evident in the crisis year of 1795. On this occasion crowds imprisoned magistrates in Denbigh, rejected all taxes that had not been voted by the people, and demanded the abolition of the militia and the *Quota Act*.¹⁴⁵ In the textile region of Gloucestershire, where loyalist associations had been particularly active two years earlier, gentlemen were threatened with the guillotine if food prices were not lowered. One seditious letter proclaimed, “No King but a constitution down down down.”¹⁴⁶ Although relatively few food riots had the political resonances of this one in 1795, there was little evidence that hungry villagers would defer to their superiors in the interests of wartime order and security. In fact, one in six of the towns and villages that had staged Paine burnings two years earlier protested against poor food supplies, with crowds often fixing their own prices to remedy the situation.¹⁴⁷

In terms of creating a popular front against revolutionary France and harmonizing relations between rich and poor, therefore, the loyalist experiment of 1792–1793 left little enduring legacy. Reeves’s initiative certainly helped to consolidate the propertied classes’ allegiance to the political order and allowed property owners outside the elite some opportunity to play their part in counter-revolutionary effort, but it did not command the wholehearted loyalties of the people. Historians who have argued to the contrary have been too impressed with the massive propaganda enterprise that the loyalists launched in the winter of 1792–1793 without attending to the degree to which this enterprise genuinely ingratiated ordinary people to the political and social order. The pattern of recruitment in 1793 to 1795 and the dramatic upsurge of food rioting in areas where loyalism was elaborately choreographed suggest that the association movement met with considerable scepticism. Indeed, this may explain why the loyalist experiment was itself short-lived, giving way to a volunteer movement that ensured that internal dissension might be met with

143 *Bath Chronicle*, February 7, 1793.

144 *Bath Chronicle*, February 21, 1793.

145 Gwyn A. Williams, *The Search for Beulah Land* (London, 1980), p. 28.

146 PRO, HO 42/36/205–208.

147 For a comprehensive list of 1795 food riots, see Wells, *Wretched Faces*, appendices.

armed regiments captained by the propertied. Even then, volunteer regiments proved somewhat unreliable, for some were known to sympathize with food rioters in 1795. Yet in the re-enactment of loyalist celebrations on the occasion of royal anniversaries and naval victories, conservatives could be assured that the superficial *bonhomie* of festive paternalism would be adequately policed and relatively unsullied by radical signifiers. As in 1792–1793, conservatives would continue to appropriate public space, even if they could not successfully resolve the battle for hearts and minds.