# CHARLES JAMES FOX: LEADER OF THE WHIG OPPOSITION IN THE ERA OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

Thesis for the Degree of M. A.

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N. Franklin Hurt

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# CHARLES JAMES FOX: LEADER OF THE WHIG OPPOSITION IN THE ERA OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

By

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An Abstract

Submitted to the College of Arts and Sciences
Michigan State University of Agriculture and
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ABSTRACT

The outbreak of the French Revolution was joyously hailed in England. No one in the realmwas more exuberant over the news than Charles James Fox, leader of the Whig opposition in the House of Commons. Like many Englishmen, he believed the upheaval was a grand surge for political liberty against Bourbon despotism. With the flight of the French royal family to Varrenes in June, 1791, however, most of his countrymen abandoned the idea that France was trying to emulate the Glorious Revolution of 1688. They realized that the cry for "Equality and Fraternity" implied considerably more than the Lockean concept of Revolution, and withdrew into apprehensive Francophobia. Charles Fox, however, persisted in his notion that the Revolution was only a great blow for "Liberty," and failed to recognize it as an egalitarian movement. Misunderstanding the upheaval, he defended it continually throughout the crimson era.

Fox was more realistic toward the French Republic's aggressive foreign policy. He deplored its menacing attitude toward Holland and the Austrian Netherlands in late 1792, and called for a full-scale armament to defend English shores. Hoping to avert an Anglo-French war, he demanded that the British government recognize the new Republic and restore regular diplomatic relations with France. His efforts were fruitless, and France declared war upon England and the United Provinces on February 1, 1793. Fox supported the prosecution

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of the war so long as Britain's only objective was to repulse French aggression. When this was briefly achieved in June, 1793, he demanded peace negotiations. Then, however, it appeared that the British government meant to continue hostilities along with the despots of Europe until the Revolution was extinguished and the Bourbons restored. Abhorring this object, Fox exerted himself to oppose and obstruct the ministry's war policy.

As leader of the aristocratic party in parliament, he was not very successful. His lifelong effort to strike a blow at the influence of the Crown was frustrated by George III's huge majorities built on the civil list. Under the most propitious conditions, Fox could collect only about seventy followers in Commons. His attitude toward the Revolution and his opposition to the war nearly blighted his minority. Alarmed by his sentiments, the more conservative members of the Whig party constantly threatened to desert to the ministerial ranks. Their misgivings were exacerbated by the ministry's efforts to equate Fox with the jacobins, and their eagerness to abandon him was encouraged by the younger Pitt's offers of high and lucrative places. Fox kept his party intact throughout 1792, but in the following year individual Whigs drifted into the ministerial camp, and a bloc of conservatives defected to Pitt in 1794. With his party reduced to about thirty adherents, Fox continued his demands for political reform and his opposition to Pitt's repressive policy.

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During the Revolution and the war with France, a number of societies emerged in England advocating parliamentary reform. Most of them desired annual parliaments and universal suffrage. Charles Fox's notions about reform did not embrace those tenets, and he refused to join any of the societies. Nevertheless, he tirelessly defended the more extreme reformers from the aspersive attacks by the British ministry. He constantly maintained that they were not tainted with jacobin ideas, and that domestic reform had no affinity with revolution abroad. Moreover, he persistently defended their right to organize, discuss, and publicly work for the achievement of their goals. Besides attacking the reformers as jacobins, the British government tried to manacle the country with stringent "security" measures. There was a proclamation against seditious writings, an Alien bill, a Habeas Corpus Suspension act, and an act prohibiting political meetings. Fox, of course, opposed all these measures with unrestrained vehemence. In a moment of despair, however, he seceded from parliament in 1797. It was an imprudent step, but he continued his opposition outdoors even at the risk of imprisonment.

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# INTRODUCTION

In speaking of Charles James Fox, commenters invariably liken him to figures of classical antiquity. Burke compared him with Cicero, whereas Disraeli did not think he ever rose above the level of Cataline. There is no gainsaying that he was one of the greatest orators of all ages, and if comparisons must be made he was probably most akin to his own French contemporary, Mirabeau. He stands forth in English political history as the most ardent spokesman for parliamentary supremacy, rivaled only by Pym and Shaftesbury. As a champion of personal and political liberty, he has no peers.

Born on January 24, 1749, to Henry Fox, afterwards Baron Holland, and the former Lady Caroline Lennox, Charles Fox was reared in one of the most opulent and influential families in the realm. His childhood was pleasant and unrestrained, as Lord Holland "brought up his children without the least regard to morality."[1] He attended Eton and Hartford College, Oxford, although his academic pursuits were frequently interrupted by family tours abroad. His education was rounded at the gambling tables of France where he was instructed and encouraged in the fine points of game by his father. In March, 1768, Fox was returned to parliament for

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1 Quoted in Dictionary of National Biography, ed., Leslie Stephen (London, 1889), XX, 95.

Midhurst in Sussex, one of Lord Holland's pocket boroughs. Taking his seat in November, he soon cut a great figure in Commons. After a lucky night at faro he would appear in the House in foppish habiliment, but following an evening of treys instead of deuces he would turn up dishevelled, unkempt, black with beard, and scratching his obese self. Nonetheless, he soon established himself in the vanguard of great orators. His delivery was marked by torrential railing, and when he became heated words piled upon one another until only a great roar filled the chamber. But he could debate as well as declaim, and he was not wanting of wit. Many M.P.'s felt his banderillas, though he usually saved the espadon for North or the younger Pitt.

During his initial five or six years in the British legislature, Fox advanced some rather wrongheaded ideas about the supremacy of parliament over popular liberties. In 1769, for example, he called for the seating of Colonel Henry Luttrell instead of the notorious John Wilkes in the disputed Middlesex election. That cause celebre involved the constitutionality of parliament seating a defeated candidate (Luttrell) instead of the legitimately elected, but outlawed, Wilkes. For his misguided attempts to impose rigorous laws on the press in 1771, he was soundly lampooned by the mordant and still unidentified pamphleteer, Junius. Meanwhile, he was raised to the Treasury Bench where he served under Lord North as one of the Lords of the Admiralty from February 24, 1770 until

February 20, 1772. After a short interlude in opposition for casting a vote against the government, he returned to office in December, 1772, as one of the junior Lords of the Treasury. For his opposition to the Royal Marriage Act, and his increasing hostility toward George III, he was dismissed from office on February 24, 1774. Thereafter, his notions about parliamentary supremacy were directed against the influence of the Crown rather than popular liberties.

From 1774 until his death in 1806, Fox spent his political career on the opposition benches excepting two very brief periods in office during the 1780's. To strike "a good stout blow at the influence of the Crown,"[2] became his transcendent objective. He vigorously defended the American colonists, and wore buff and blue, Washington's colors, to parliament throughout the War for Independence. During the conflict he persistently assailed the British government, and upon one occasion threatened to impeach ministers and make Lord North expiate his misdeeds on the public scaffold. When North's government fell in 1782, Fox entered the Rockingham ministry as Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. Within four months, he resigned after a rupture with Lord Shelburne, Secretary of State for Colonial Affairs, over the peace treaty with America. Next year, however, he returned to power after coalescing

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[2] Quoted in Christopher Hobhouse, Fox (Boston, 1935), p. 171.

with his erstwhile opponent, Lord North, in the "infamous coalition." George III even threatened to abdicate rather than accept this "unnatural combination,"[3] but remained and drove the coalition from office in December, 1783, by personally arranging for the defeat of Fox's India bill in the House of Lords. Returning to opposition, Fox continued to harangue the "secret influence" of the Crown and struck up a bitter rivalry with George III's new First Minister and hireling, William Pitt the younger. Also, he persisted in his efforts to achieve parliamentary reform, repeal the Test and Corporation Acts, and abolition of the slave trade. With the outbreak of the French Revolution, Fox entered the most luminous phase of his career. In praising the upheaval as a great blow for liberty, opposing the war with France, and resisting domestic oppression, he sacrificed friends, party, and public esteem. His opposition in this period is unexampled, and as Mr. A. J. P. Taylor recently commented, "there is no more glorious story in our history."[4]

In Western political philosophy, opposition is held to be an end in itself. It is the makeweight, if not the complement, of authority. In our own dying age of liberty, infected with investigating committees, the proscription of political parties, "brainwashing",

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[3] The Correspondence of King George the Third From 1760 to December 1783, ed., Sir John Fortescue (London, 1927), VI, 314-17.

[4] "Charles James Fox, champion of liberty," Manchester Guardian Weekly, vol. 75. No. 12, September 20, 1956, 11.

conformity, and almost absolute governmental control of the individual, it is to be hoped that another Charles Fox will soon step forth in real opposition.

# CHAPTER I

## FOX AND THE REVOLUTION

Charles James Fox, leader of the Whig opposition in the House of Commons, welcomed the news of the French Revolution. Like many Englishmen, he mistook the assault on the Bastille as a stroke for liberty instead of seeing that it was only a strategic move to defend Paris.[1] Learning of the destruction of the fortress, he rejoicingly exclaimed "How much the greatest event it is that ever happened in the world! and how much the best."[2] Heretofore a detractor of the Bourbon power, which he was wont to call "our ancient enemy and rival,"[3] Fox now grew enthusiastic over its prospective future. He even considered a trip to France, and instructed his good friend Richard Fitzpatrick who was destined for Paris to apprise the Duc d'Orleans, soon to be known as the fratricidal Philippe Egalite, "that all my prepossessions against French connections for this country will be at an end, and indeed most part of my European system of politics will be altered, if this Revolution has the consequences that I expect."[4] The Revolution did

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1 George Stead Veitch, Genesis of Parliamentary Reform (London, 1913), p. 118.

2 Memorials and Correspondence of Charles James Fox, ed., Lord John Russell (London, 1854), II, 361. Hereafter cited as Fox Memorials.

3 The Annual Register, or a View of the History, Politics and Literature, For the Year 1791, (London, 1795), XXXII, 113. Hereafter cited as Annual Register.

4 Fox Memorials, II, 361.

not result as Fox expected. To him, it was a crusade for political liberty similar to the British event of 1688, and he overlooked the implications of the latter two points in the new trinity. "Equality and Fraternity" had no place in Fox's political thinking, but his ardor for "Liberty" carried him into a half-understood defense of the doctrinal basis of the Revolution.

In 1789, most Englishmen shared Fox's exuberance over the French upheaval.[5] Some applauded the cataclysm as a just requital to Louis XVI for his interference in the late American war. Others, like Fox, viewed it as something analogous to the glorious advance toward Liberty which their ancestors had won against the last English despot at the close of the seventeenth century. Religious dissenters and political reformers especially were hopeful about events in France. On November 4, a group of them, known as the Society for Commemorating the Revolution in Great Britain, met at Old Jewry Chapel to celebrate the 101st anniversary of the Glorious Revolution. After the well-known Unitarian minister and political economist, Dr. Richard Price, had delivered his famous Discourse on the Love of Our Country, the celebrants repaired to the London Tavern where they voted a congratulatory address to the French National Assembly.[6] Public enthusiasm over the Revolution continued until the flight of

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5 W. T. Laprade, England and The French Revolution, 1789-1797, Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science. Ser. XXVII. Nos. 8-12 (Baltimore, 1909), 9-10.

6 The address is reprinted in Veitch, p. 122.

the French royal family to Varrenes on June 21, 1791. Meanwhile, "the newspapers teemed with addresses, votes, and resolutions, and every mail was laden with freash congratulations to the Jacobin Societies of France."[7]

For varied reasons, the governing class of England also smiled upon the French disturbance during its incipient phase. King George III believed the Revolution condign punishment for Bourbon meddling in the recent imperial dispute which had resulted in the loss of his American colonies.[8] The ministry, headed by Fox's arch political opponent, William Pitt, countenanced the imbroglio with indifference.[9] Pitt, however, saw its incapacitating effect upon Britain's great foreign rival, and abruptly declined the French government's plea for English grain in the summer of 1789. Most of the Whig opposition reflected Fox's attitude. In the House of Commons such notables as Richard Brinsley Sheridan, the playwright, Charles Grey, later Lord Grey of the Reform Bill, and Thomas Erskine, the eminent Whig barrister, acclaimed the Revolution, while in the upper chamber the Earl of Shelburne,[10] political economist, philosophic

7 Annual Register, XXXII, 115.

8 Donald G. Barnes, George III and William Pitt, 1783-1806 (Stanford, 1939), p. 204.

9 Lord W. W. Grenville to the Marquis of Buckingham, September 14, 1789. Memoirs of the Court and Cabinet of George the Third from the Original Family Documents, ed., the Duke of Buckingham and Chandos (London, 1853), II, 165. Hereafter cited as Court and Cabinets.

10 Shelburne had acquired the title Marquis of Landsdowne in 1784, but historians usually refer to him by the earlier title. To avoid confusion I have also used it.

speculator and friend of all free-thinkers, accorded his approbation along with the inventor Earl Stanhope, and the Scottish Lord Lauderdale. As the disorders abroad assumed frightening proportions, King, ministers, and many Whigs replaced their hopefulness with implacable Francophobia. For the nonce, however, they remained sanguine.

The news of the Revolution had its greatest impact upon Fox's long-time friend and political colleague, Edmund Burke. Mute with consternation of the "strange, nameless, wild enthusiastic thing established in the centre of Europe,"[11] Burke made no early pronouncement about the upheaval. Not until the debate on Army Estimates in February 1790, did he proffer his opinion. Then, he soared into high dudgeon over Fox's fervent avowal that the new form of government which France was likely to assume "would render her a better neighbour, and less disposed to hostility than when she was subject to the cabal and intrigue of ambitious and interested statesmen."[12] To the contrary, Burke retorted with indignation, "the French had shown themselves the ablest architects of ruin that had hitherto existed in the world," and had "expunged" their country "out of the system of Europe."[13] Instead of bringing peace

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11 Edmund Burke to John Trevor, January, 1791. Correspondence of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke; Between the Year 1744, and The Period of His Decease, in 1797, ed., Charles William, Earl Fitzwilliam and Sir Richard Bourke (London, 1844), III, 185. Hereafter cited as Burke Corr.

12 The Parliamentary History of England, From The Earliest Period to The Year 1803, ed., T. C. Hansard (London, 1817), XXVIII, 332. Hereafter cited as Parl. Hist.

13 Parl. Hist., XXVIII, 353.

and concord, Burke prophesied in Lear-like screams that the Revolution would eventuate in an "irrational, unprincipled, proscribing, confiscating, plundering, ferocious, bloody, and tyrannical democracy."[14] Continuing, he censured Fox's assertion that the traditional English fear of a standing army was now anachronistic in view of the new French lesson that "a man, by becoming a soldier, did not cease to be a citizen."[15] That was rank sophistry, said Burke, for the French soldiers were not citizens, but "base hireling mutineers, and mercenary sordid deserters wholly destitute of any honourable principle." Concluding his oracular flight, Burke cautioned his friend that he was prepared to abandon, if necessary, colleagues and party to combat the spread of French principles.[16]

Fox took the cue from Burke and proceeded to define his own position toward French affairs. First, he denied the suggestion that he was a friend to democracy, declaring himself "equally the enemy of all absolute forms of government, whether an absolute monarchy, or absolute aristocracy, or an absolute democracy."[17] Democracy, however, was not the object of the French. He was convinced that they were only trying to achieve political freedom and a mixed form of

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[14] Parl. Hist., XXVIII, 355.

[15] Parl. Hist., XXVIII, 330.

[16] Parl. Hist., XXVIII, 356.

[17] Parl. Hist., XXVIII, 364.

government as the English had done by the Glorious Revolution. From the event of 1688, he averred, "we had, undoubtedly, to date the definition and confirmation of our liberties; and the case was certainly more parallel to the revolution in France, than his right hon. friend seemed willing to allow." Furthermore, he lamented the recent scenes of bloodshed in France, but believed they should "be spoken of with some degree of compassion . . . when the severe tyranny under which the people had so long groaned was considered."[18] These remarks are of single importance because they clearly delineate Fox's constant posture toward the upheaval. Throughout the crimson era, he persistently maintained that France was only trying to achieve political freedom -- never realizing that Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity implied vastly more than the Lockean concept of revolution.

To Burke's chagrin, Fox was supported by the other member of the great Whig triumvirate, Richard Brinsley Sheridan. The playwright-orator concurred in Fox's view of the Revolution,[19] and scorned his other cohort's aspersions of the French attempt to break the manacles of Bourbon despotism. Caustic as his Critic, he ridiculed Burke's assertion that if the French people had waited patiently, their misery might, perhaps, have been alleviated, in due time, by a new constitution issued through the magnanimity of their monarch. "What!" exclaimed Sheridan, "was it preparing for them in

[18] Parl. Hist., XXVIII, 365.

[19] Parl. Hist., XXVIII, 367.

the camp of marshal Broglio? or were they to search for it in the ruins of the Bastile?"[20] In no vein for persiflage, Burke responded by severing his friendship with Sheridan.

Thus by early 1790, the tremors in France, even before they had shaken the basis of the Ancien Regime, were tearing asunder the parliamentary opposition in England. The Whig leaders were taking divergent and irreconcilable stands. Charles Fox and Richard Brinsley Sheridan eulogized the Revolution as a milestone in the march toward political liberty, whereas Edmund Burke vilified it as a leveling movement, "born of hell and chaos,"[21] which would ultimately bring law, morality, and religion under "the hoofs of the swinish multitude."[22] It also might be noted that the ministry, or at least its head, was beginning to take a more resolute, if not different position toward the upheaval. William Pitt now announced that "he agreed with Mr. Burke in every point he had urged relative to the late commotions in France."[23]

Burke's hostility to the Revolution, adopted by Pitt and reflected by the First Minister's overwhelming majority in parliament, virtually precluded the enactment of domestic reform legislation. The

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20 Parl. Hist., XXVIII, 369.

21 Annual Register, XXXIII, 135.

22 Edmund Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France, ed., Oskar Piest, The Library of Liberal Arts Ser., No. 46 (New York, 1955), p. 89.

23 Parl. Hist., XXVIII, 372.

efforts of Fox and other reformers to rectify the unequal representation in the House of Commons, abolish the slave trade, and repeal the antiquated Test and Corporation Acts were confounded with the egalitarian ideas sweeping across France. Fox strenuously combatted this practice, initiated by Burke and quickly pursued by Pitt, maintaining that there was absolutely no connection between foreign revolutionary principles and domestic reform measures. Both precedent and example supported his argument for England had witnessed numerous attempts to redress the constitution during the 1780's, and two of the most active participants in the reform movements had been Edmund Burke and William Pitt.[24] Now, however, they equated reform with revolution. Any motion which tended to alter the status quo was virulently assailed, and its author stigmatized as a jacobin.

The policy of aspersion began on March 2, 1790, when Fox introduced a motion to repeal the Test[25] and Corporation Acts[26] which had debarred catholics and protestant dissenters from public office and from the universities of Oxford and Cambridge since the reign of

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24 As a reformer in the 1780's, Burke did not exert himself beyond his bill for economic reform of 1780 which brought the Civil List under stricter supervision by parliament and eliminated a number of placemen and sinecures. Pitt, however, was an ardent reformer until 1785, when his bill to erase 100 rotten boroughs was defeated. Thereafter, he abandoned the cause.

25 25 Charles II. c. 2. Reprinted in Select Documents of English Constitutional History, ed., George Burton Adams and H. Morse Stephens (New York, 1910), pp. 436-38. Hereafter cited as Adams and Stephens.

26 13 Charles II, st. 2., c. 1. Reprinted in Adams and Stephens, pp. 425-27.

Charles II. While inveighing against those palladia of the Anglican Church, Fox lauded the French efforts "to secure the rights of men" against such bigoted and intolerant measures.[27] The remark elicited only wild vaporings from Burke who claimed that the dissenters were bent on the "robbery and plunder" of the established church like the anarchists in France.[28] A more cutting response, however, came from the Treasury Bench. Turning toward Fox, Pitt announced that he would oppose the motion because "he had no idea of such levelling principles as those which warranted to all citizens an equality of rights. . . ."[29] This was the First Minister's cue to his powerful majority that henceforth motions of reform were to be decried as revolutionary measures. It was promptly heeded and acted upon. Two days after Fox's motion was debated and rejected by a vote of 294 to 105, a bill for parliamentary reform was introduced by Henry Flood, the noted Irish reformer.[30] He was warmly assailed by ministerial followers, one of whom accused him of being a missionary of the French National Assembly who was trying to import leveling doctrines into England.[31] In defending Flood, Fox denounced the practice of equating

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27 Parl. Hist., XXVIII, 388.

28 Parl. Hist., XXVIII, 437.

29 Parl. Hist., XXVIII, 409.

30 The reformers themselves were not above purchasing seats in parliament in the eighteenth century. Flood, for example, bought his Winchester seat from the Duke of Chandos for £4,000 in 1784. See Dictionary of National Biography, ed., Leslie Stephen (London, 1889), XX, 333.

31 Parl. Hist., XXVIII, 470.

reform and revolution for "he thought the present state of France no objection to proceeding with the business of Reform then, because he never could agree, that what was passing abroad, ought to have any influence on their proceedings, in respect to their internal and national concerns."[32] Cogent as it sounded, Fox's argument was overridden by the fright methods of Burke and Pitt. Domestic reform, now linked with jacobinism, lost all possibility of success in the British legislature.

In 1790, however, most Englishmen outside parliament inclined to accept Fox's thesis that revolution abroad had no kinship with reform at home. Like the Whig leader, they still believed that the upheaval in France was an internal affair of the French people who were simply trying to wrest political liberty from their Bourbon despot. Therefore, Edmund Burke's alarming plea to the nation in October made few proselytes. His celebrated manifesto, Reflections on the Revolution in France, was motivated as much by detestation of English reformers as by abhorrence for French doctrines, and in this sense it may be considered as a continued attempt to identify efforts to redress the British constitution with jacobinism. Upon Burke's own admission, the tract was written primarily to expose Dr. Richard Price and the Earl of Shelburne, ardent reformers, "to the hatred, ridicule, and contempt of the whole world; as I always shall expose such calumniators, hypocrites, sowers of

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32 Parl. Hist., XXVIII, 472.

sedition, and approvers of murder and all its triumphs."[33]

The pamphlet enjoyed wide circulation and provoked much comment, but failed to win many adherents besides those already opposed to the Revolution.[34] Charles Fox of course thought The Reflections "mere madness,"[35] but a less abrupt observation was made by William Windham, a Whig who was veering towards Burke's position at this time and eventually became as denunciatory of the Revolution as the master himself. Shortly after the appearance of the treatise, Windham recorded that Burke was "a man decried, persecuted and proscribed; not being much valued, even by his own party, and by half the nation considered as little better than an ingenious madman!"[36] Windham's comment has been substantiated by modern scholarship.[37] In 1790, most Englishmen repudiated the Burke-Pitt view of the French Revolution as a great leveling disease. They still shared Fox's contention that the French were only trying to secure liberty without smashing the political and social structure of their country. Also, they supported the Whig leader's disavowal

33 Edmund Burke to Philip Francis, February 20, 1790. Burke Corr., III, 140-41.

34 Carl B. Cone, "Pamphlet Replies to Burke's Reflections," Southwestern Social Science Quarterly, XXVI (1945-46), 22-34.

35 Fox to Henry, Lord Holland, May 26, 1791. Fox Memorials, II, 363.

36 The Diary of The Right Honourable William Windham, ed., Mrs. Henry Baring (London, 1866), p. 213. Hereafter cited as Windham's Diary.

37 Barnes, p. 236.
Laprade, p. 9.
Philip Anthony Brown, The French Revolution in English History (London, 1923), p. 88.

of any connection between revolution in France and reform in England.

Next year Fox's enthusiasm about French affairs nearly overshot the rim of political discretion. At times it swelled into romantic proportions, endangering his hold on the Whig party and his public esteem. His initial burst of intensified exuberance came during the Oczakow armament debates on April 15. The discussion centered about Pitt's attempt to compel Russia to abandon the Black Sea fortress of Oczakow which she had recently captured from the Turks. The First Minister believed that Catherine II's southward thrust might jeopardize British interests in the Mediterranean, and he had asked parliament to support his demands for Russian withdrawal by voting an armament. Fox, of course, opposed the request as he believed the danger less real and imminent than Pitt had depicted it.[38] But his declamation ranged considerably beyond strict objections to the motion before the House. He proceeded to assert that the time had arrived when England could safely retire the balance of power concept as the keystone of her foreign policy, since the altered government of France would give "neither insult nor injustice" to the

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38 Catherine II gratefully acknowledged Fox's opposition to the British demands on Russia by placing his bust on a shelf in her boudoir between the marble-head replicas of Cicero and Demosthenes. Horace Walpole to Mary Berry, July 26, 1791. Horace Walpole's Correspondence With May and Agnes Berry and Barbara Cecilia Seton, ed., W. S. Lewis and A. Doyle Wallace (New Haven, 1949), XI, 323. Hereafter cited as Walpole Corr.

countries of Europe.[39] The concept could be revived if another formidable power like Bourbon France emerged, but until then its maintenance was unnecessary. Then, growing warm over French experiments, Fox declared that "he for one, admired the new constitution of France, considered altogether, as the most stupendous and glorious edifice of liberty, which had been erected on the foundation of human integrity in any time or country."[40] The encomium did not pass without repercussions.

According to the quidnunc Horace Walpole, Fox's "most considerable friends were much hurt, and protested to him" over this panegyric which he had "most imprudently thrown out."[41] In fact, the words were scarcely from Fox when Edmund Burke shot to his feet "in much visible emotion", but he was silenced by cries of "Question" and gave way to the division.[42] Fox, however, maintained his position, and several days later he announced in the House that he did not intend "to recede from anything he had formerly advanced." He also pointed out that despite his praise of the efforts of the French to remodel their government "he never had stated any republican principles, with regard to this country, in or out of parliament. . ."[43]

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39 Parl. Hist., XXIX, 247.

40 Parl. Hist., XXIX, 248. Fox remarked shortly afterwards that his encomium was delivered upon the French Revolution and not the new French constitution. There was a difference, but it did not modify Fox's attitude in the least.

41 Horace Walpole to Mary Berry, May 12, 1791. Walpole Corr., XI, 263.

42 Parl. Hist., XXIX, 249.

43 Parl. Hist., XXIX, 361.

But this did not assuage Burke, who again warned Fox that he was ready to abandon cohorts and party to resist French principles. A breach between "the two illustrious friends was distinctly foreseen."[44]

The "fatal day of rupture with Burke,"[45] as Windham called it, occurred on May 6, 1791, during the debate on the Quebec Government Bill. This anomalous debate, which scarcely touched upon the business at hand, illumined the strikingly different conceptions of the Revolution held by the two Whig titans. Burke opened by reprobating the new French creed called "the rights of man" which taught that all men were free by nature and equal in respect to rights.[46] This doctrine, he cried, was "replete with every mortal evil . . . and every demon of mischief to overspread the face of the earth." In France, it had provoked outrages upon royalty by "a tumultous rabble," and led to the creation of a government founded upon "plots, murders, and assassinations."[47] Burke was called to order no less than seven times during the course of this aberrant flight, and finally he accused Fox of inciting his own followers to make the interruptions. After disavowing this charge, Fox acknowledged Burke as his political mentor who had taught him the imprudence of drawing "a bill of indictment against a whole people."[48] As for the French Revolution, he still

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44 Annual Register, XXXIII, 114.

45 Windham's Diary, p. 225.

46 Parl. Hist., XXIX, 364.

47 Parl. Hist., XXIX, 366.

48 Parl. Hist., XXIX, 379.

deemed it "one of the most glorious events in the history of mankind,"[49] because "the rights of man" which it was aiming to secure "were in fact the basis of every rational constitution, and even of the British constitution itself, as our statute book proved: since, if he knew anything of the original compact between the people of England and its government, as stated in that volume, it was a recognition of the original inherent rights of the people as men, which no prescription could supercede, no accident remove or obliterate."[50] Burke and Fox were worlds apart. To the former, the rights of man was a leveling scythe which would raze social and political barriers and demolish traditional institutions. To Fox, they represented nothing more than the established or "natural born rights of Englishmen" as set forth in Magna Carta, the Petition of Right, and the Bill of Rights. Little wonder the friendship snapped.

Burke terminated the connection. Replying to Fox's defense of the rights of man, he admitted that it was indiscreet at his age to provoke enemies "or give his friends occasion to desert him; yet if his firm adherence to the British Constitution placed him in such a dilemma, he would risk all; and, as public duty and public prudence taught him, with his last words exclaim, 'Fly from the French constitution.'" Hereupon, Fox, who was sitting near his colleague, leaned over and whispered that there was no loss of friendship. Burke,

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[49] Parl. Hist., XXIX, 377.

[50] Parl. Hist., XXIX, 379.

however, retorted "Yes, there was a loss of friend - he knew the price of his conduct - he had done his duty at the price of his friend - their friendship was at an end."[51] Thus, one of the greatest friendships in English political history ended on the floor of the House of Commons. The House was astonished, and Fox was so disturbed that "tears trickled down his cheeks, and he strove to give utterance to feelings . . . ."[52] The foreseen rupture had occurred, and it threatened to cleave the Whig opposition.

The divisive force came from Burke. Instead of retiring from parliament in the face of discredit, as contemporary journalists predicted,[53] he remained and began a vigorous attack upon Fox and other so-called "French Whigs."[54] Within a month of the breach, he published his Appeal From the New to the Old Whigs, assailing those who continued "to countenance the French insanity" as "mistaken politicians" and "bad men."[55] His efforts, however, failed to reduce

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51 Parl. Hist., XXIX, 387.

52 Parl. Hist., XXIX, 386.

53 The following paragraph appeared in the Morning Chronicle of May 12, 1791. "The great and firm body of the Whigs of England, true to their principles, have decided on the dispute between Mr. Fox and Mr. Burke; and the former is declared to have maintained the pure doctrines by which they are bound together, and upon which they have invariably acted. The consequence is, that Mr. Burke retires from parliament." The passage is reprinted in Parl. Hist., XXIX, 416.

54 Edmund Burke to William Weddell, January 31, 1792. Burke Corr., III, 408.

55 Edmund Burke, Appeal from The New to The Old Whigs (London, 1791), p. 14.

Fox's support. Both Windham and Sir Samuel Romilly, the law reformer, noted after the rupture that "Fox has gained with the public by his conduct, and Burke has lost much."[56]

It was a frightening turn of events in France rather than Burke's fulminations which threatened Fox's control of the opposition in parliament and popularity outdoors. On June 21, 1791, the French royal family absconded to Varrenes where it was arrested and returned to Paris under guard. Englishmen were appalled by "the very unexpected event"[57] which portended ill to monarchs everywhere. In the following month, "Church and King" mobs at Birmingham were even encouraged by the local magistrates to wreak depradations upon a group of dissenters who met to commemorate the second anniversary of the fall of the Bastille.[58] While marauding in the name of established order, the rioters destroyed the home and laboratory of the famed dissenter, scientist, and friend of Charles Fox, Dr. Joseph Priestley. The government was lax about putting down the commotions, and George III himself declared: "I cannot but feel pleased that Priestley is the

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56 Windham's Diary, p. 223-33. Sir Samuel Romilly to Madame G___. May 20, 1791. Memoirs of The Life of Sir Samuel Romilly, written by himself; with a Selection From His Corresponcence, edited by his sons (London, 1840), I, 426. Hereafter cited as Romilly Corr.

57 Lord W. W. Grenville to the Marquis of Buckingham, June 25, 1791. Court and Cabinets, II, 192.

58 During the debates in the House about the Birmingham mobs no one, not even the ministers, attempted to exonerate the local magistrates from their disgraceful conduct. There is no doubt that they incited the mobs to attack the dissenters. See Parl. Hist., XXIX, 1431-64.

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sufferer for the doctrines he and his party have instilled."[59] Fear was taking hold of Englishmen, and they looked askance at "Mr. Fox's glorious fabric, the French Revolution"[60] and at Mr. Fox himself.

The story of Fox's alleged letter to Barnave, one of the French jacobin leaders, probably had a damaging effect upon the Whig chieftain's reputation. The letter, supposedly written in July, 1791, has not been located, and only two references to it have been found in contemporary material. Nonetheless, it provokes several questions which deserve more than lower margin comment. Allusions to the letter occur in the diplomatic exchanges between Lord W. W. Grenville, Foreign Secretary, and William Eden, Lord Auckland, British ambassador to the Hague. On July 29, 1791, Grenville wrote to Auckland:

> What do you think of Fox's letter to Barnave? I cannot vouch for the words, but you may depend upon the fact of a letter having been written. Is not the idea of Ministers from Opposition to the different Courts of Europe a new one in this country? I never heard of it before, and should think that if it could be proved, I mean legally proved, it would go very near to an impeachable misdemeanour. In the meantime, I trust it will not fail to get out into the public here, and to make the impression it ought to do.[61]

Auckland replied on August 2:

> The incident of Mr. Fox's letter to Barnave is curious if true; there is a similar report here; and it is also said

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59 Quoted in Brown, p. 81.

60 Quoted in Laprade, p. 41.

61 The Manuscripts of J. B. Fortescue, Esq., preserved at Dropmore, ed., Historical Manuscripts Commission, Fourteenth Report, Appendix, Part V (London, 1894), II, 144. Hereafter cited as Dropmore MSS.

> that Mr. Wyndham of Norfolk is also a great admirer of the present leaders of the National Assembly. If these opinions lead to a communication, and if the same system should extend itself to political discussions between England and other countries, as has been surmised in regard to Woronzow and reported in some of the correspondence in respect to Mr. Adair's journey to Petersburg, it would become a very scandalous indiscretion; and, though it would not be easy to subject it to the animadversion of the law, it would, when known, make an impression at least as penal in regard to the parties as any legal judgement could be. But it is not fair to form any opinion as to the supposed letter to Barnave until we have seen it.[62]

Three plausible conjectures can be made about this reputed letter: 1) Fox was carrying on an indiscreet correspondence with leaders in the National Assembly; perhaps, suggesting that a representative of the Whig opposition visit Paris to discuss relations between England and France. 2) Grenville was sowing rumors in accordance with the ministry's efforts to stigmatize Fox as a republican. 3) Fox, in a moment of enthusiasm over the Revolution, dashed off a note of congratulations to its leaders. The first possibility is highly unlikely, although it cannot be completely discounted. During the crisis with Russia it was bruited about that Fox had sent his own representative, the Robert Adair referred to in Auckland's letter, to Petersburg in order to frustrate the official British demands on Catherine II to withdraw from Oczakow. The story has never been satisfactorily disproven, though Adair flatly denied it in 1842-- fifty-one years afterwards.[63] True or not, contemporaries

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62 Dropmore mss., II, 150.

63 Adair's denial is reprinted in Fox Memorials, II, 383-87.

did not believe Fox above sending personal envoys to foreign governments. That Grenville was playing upon this popular belief and trying to forge it into a treasonous connection between Fox and the jacobins is incredible. If that were his purpose, his note was too clumsy to deceive an adroit diplomat like Auckland. The phraselogy rings with doubt, e.g., the note begins "I cannot vouch for the words, but you may depend upon the fact of such a letter having been written." Furthermore, if rumors were to be spread, the ministry's hack writers could have found a wider and more gullible audience. The third possibility is the most likely one. Fox's ardor for the Revolution at this time, his impetuosity, and his rashness have already been demonstrated. The letter, if there were one, was probably nothing more than a congratulatory note to Barnave. The public impact of the missive is as indeterminable as its historicity, since no further mention of it has been found. But hazarding a final conjecture, it is probable, considering the mounting sentiment against the Revolution, that the story lost Fox support wherever it lodged.

In 1792, implacable aversion to the French tumult developed in England. Ministers strained themselves to blacken reformers with the republican tar brush, and also inaugurated a repressive program against "seditious writings." Fox's opposition to these measures will be fully discussed in a later chapter, "Reform and Repression." Suffice it to say here that he strongly denounced them as designs to frighten the public and stir dissension among the Whigs.

Despite the growing Francophobia, Fox persistently defended the upheaval as a stroke for liberty. "His opinions of the French Revolution," he told the House of Commons in May, "were precisely the same now that they ever had been," and no "temporary or accidental defeat that the French might suffer in their struggle for liberty, would stagger his mind with regard to their success in the result." Furthermore, he was thoroughly convinced that the French people were justified in revolting. Although the wags were saying that "no two legged animal" could be found who would credit the tales about the Bastille prior to 1789, Fox "acknowledged himself to be that animal."[64] He did not believe, however, that there was the slightest possibility of the Revolution spreading to Great Britain unless conditions there became as intolerable as they had been in Bourbon France.[65]

These asseverations of faith in the Revolution provoked heated attacks from Fox's opponents. Henry Dundas, Home Secretary, accused Fox and his lawyer-friend Thomas Erskine, defense attorney for Tom Paine, of trying to "excite" the people.[66] George III and William Pitt practically charged the Whig leader with abetting rebellion,[67] while Edmund Burke, rankling over the course of his wayward pupil, merely blustered that "a downright fool is as capable

64 Parl. Hist., XXIX, 1401.

65 Parl. Hist., XXIX, 1316.

66 Parl. Hist., XXIX, 1337.

67 Parl. Hist., XXIX, 1513.

of government as Charles Fox."[68] Neither traduction nor the horrifying rush of events in France, however, dented Fox's admiration of the Revolution.

During the summer and autumn of 1792, it became shockingly evident that the French tumult was far more than a struggle to gain political liberty and secure it by constitutional means. Monarchy itself was swept away on August 10, when mobs stormed the Tuileries, slaughtered some 800 of Louis XVI's Swiss Guard, and imprisoned the King and Queen. The crimson tide gushed on erupting again in the September massacres which raged for four days taking 1614 lives.[69] Then the torrent was diverted into a militant foreign policy. Dumouriez's legions swept the Austrians from the Netherlands in October, and on November 16 the National Convention resolved that French armies would assist all peoples who wished "to recover their liberties," i.e., rid themselves of crowned rulers. Several days later, the Convention issued a decree opening the Scheldt River, which had been limited to the exclusive navigation of the Dutch since the treaty of Munster in 1648. A new dispensation, with international overtones, was unfolding from France. It bore no kinship with the Glorious Revolution of 1688.

England was filled with consternation. License, not liberty, appeared to be the aim of the French. Edmund Burke besought the

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68 Parl. Hist., XXIX, 1391.

69 Louis Madelin, The French Revolution (New York, 1928), p. 287.

cabinet to join Prussia and Austria who had invaded France to stamp out the contagion.[70] This advice was rejected as England was still committed to neutrality. Nevertheless, Earl Gower, British ambassador at Paris was recalled shortly after the Tuileries episode. In the autumn months, ministers became increasingly apprehensive and raised a jacobin phantasmagoria. Finally, they called out the militia to stem what their modern counterparts would call "infiltration," and to guard against invasion.

Charles Fox deplored the excesses in France, but did not alter his conception of the Revolution. To him, it remained a true struggle for liberty. Writing about French affairs to his nephew, Henry, Lord Holland, on September 3, 1792, he declared it "impossible not to look with disgust at the bloody means which have been taken, even supposing the end to be good . . . And yet, with all their faults and all their nonsense, I do interest myself for their success to the greatest degree. It is a great crisis for the real cause of liberty, whatever we may think of the particular people who are to fight the present battle."[71] Several days later, Fox again demonstrated his misconception of the cataclysm: "I had just made up my mind to the events of the 10th of August, when the horrid accounts of the 2nd of this month [the September massacres] arrived,

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70 Edmund Burke to Lord W. W. Grenville, August 18, 1792. Burke Corr., III, 508-9.

71 Fox Memorials, II, 368-69.

and I really consider the horrors of that day and night as the most heart-breaking event that ever happened to those, who, like me, are fundamentally and unalterably attached to the true course."[72] One other factor in this late 1792 correspondence which attests to Fox's misunderstanding of the Revolution was his notion that the jacobins were primarily trying to establish the precedent of ministerial responsibility to a majority in the legislature. Here, Fox was reading Whig ideas into the Revolution. He believed that the French upheaval was a contest between crown and subjects which would result beneficially for the people when it was recognized that the majority party in the legislature should control ministerial posts.[73]

While Fox speculated over the course of jacobinism, the British government resolved to counter it. Late in 1792, ministers conjured up a republican specter which was allegedly infecting the land. They sent agents into the country to buy "libels" savoring of French ideas "with a view to indictments at the Christmas sessions."[74] On December 5, they called out the militia from Scotland around to Wales, and when parliament met a week later they informed it through the King's speech that "acts of riot and insurrection" were raging in

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72 Fox to Henry, Lord Holland, September ?, 1792. Fox Memorials, II, 371.

73 Fox to Henry, Lord Holland, October 12, 1792. Fox Memorials, II, 373-74.

74 Lord W. W. Grenville to the Marquis of Buckingham, November 14, 1792. Court and Cabinets, II, 227.

the country because of a subversive design "pursued in connexion and concert with persons in foreign countries."[75] Actually, there was no threat to Great Britain's internal security in the fall of 1792. There were a few riots in the Scottish towns of Pirth and Dundee, but they appear to have sprung from a demand for higher wages by artisans. Even Pitt's ministerial colleagues and followers attested to the "improbability of internal commotion here . . . ."[76] On November 14, Lord Grenville himself wrote to his brother that stories of subversion were just canards of "landed gentlemen," and admonished "not too hastily to give credit to them."[77] Nonetheless, the jacobin scare was promoted; probably, as Professor W. T. Laprade has suggested, to drive frightened Whigs away from Fox and into the ministerial camp.[78]

Fox was infuriated with these tactics, and he railed against them with unrestrained vehemence. He was averse to any curbs on freedom of expression. Trusting that common sense would reject pernicious ideas, he even declared that "open avowal of inhuman and absurd doctrines ought, in my opinion, to be permitted in every

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75 Parl. Hist., XXIX, 1556-57.

76 Henry Addington to Pole Carew, December 5, 1792. The Life and Correspondence of the Right Honourable Henry Addington, First Viscount Sidmouth, ed., George Pellew (London, 1847), I, 96.

77 Lord Grenville to the Marquis of Buckingham, November 14, 1792. Court and Cabinets, II, 228.

78 Laprade, p. 60.

country."[79] Upon learning that ministers had called out the militia, he burst into flaming indignation. His reaction, dashed off in a letter to the Duke of Portland, is worth citing in extenso.

> My Dear Lord,
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> I send you enclosed a note I have just received from Adam. If they mention danger of Insurrection, or rather, as they must do to legalise their proceedings, of Rebellion, surely the first measure all honest men ought to take is to impeach them for so wicked and detestable a falsehood. I fairly own that, if they have done this, I shall grow savage, and not think a French Lanterne too bad for them. Surely it is impossible -- if any thing were impossible for such monsters, who, for the purpose of weakening or destroying the honorable connection of the Whigs, would not scruple to risk a civil war. I cannot trust myself to write any more, for I confess I am too much heated.
>
> Yours affectionately,
>
> C. J. Fox[80]

When parliament met on December 13, Fox disappointed no one for he veritably did "grow savage." In one of the most virulent denunciations of his political career, he assailed ministers as scare-mongers more despicable than Titus Oates and threatened to impeach them. They had insidiously divided the country by erecting "every man, not merely into an inquisitor, but into a judge, a spy, an informer - to set father against father, brother against brother,

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79 Fox to Henry, Lord Holland, November 23, 1792. Fox Memorials, II, 380.

80 Fox Memorials, IV, 291-92.

and neighbour against neighbour . . . ."[81] If division were to take place, Fox announced that henceforth he would cause the House of Commons to divide on every measure Mr. Pitt introduced. Settling to particulars, he impugned the existence of any commotion: "An insurrection! Where is it? Good God! . . . I will take upon me to say, that it is not the notoriety of the insurrection which prevents those gentlemen from communicating to us the particulars, but their non-existence."[82] He concluded by animadverting upon the doctrines of Tom Paine, who had debased the "rights of man" slogan. He still believed that the rights of man were not dangerous leveling principles, but the safe-guards to individual liberty which girded the British as well as the new French constitution.[83]

This marks the high point of Fox's preoccupation with the Revolution, per se. He continued to defend it, of course, on the grounds that France was struggling for liberty and "had justice completely on her side."[84] Even during the Terror he believed "the success of the wretches who now govern Paris is like to be the least evil of any that can happen."[85] Although he deplored the executions

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81 Parl. Hist., XXX, 21.

82 Parl. Hist., XXX, 14.

83 Parl. Hist., XXX, 41.

84 Parl. Hist., XXX, 60.

85 Fox to Henry, Lord Holland, August 22, 1793. Fox Memorials, III, 47.

of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, he remarked as late as 1795 that even the heinous regime of Robespierre was preferable to the restoration of the Bourbon line.[86]

Fox never understood the objectives of the Revolution. To him, it remained a great crusade of the French people to secure personal and political liberty from their despotic rulers. He completely overlooked the implications of "Equality and Fraternity" which aimed at a thorough political and social revision of the Ancien Regime. A recognition and understanding of those tenets would have modified his enthusiasm over the upheaval. Fox was no opponent to the institution of monarchy so long as it did not oppress subjects or intrude upon the legislative domain. His hatred for the Bourbons, therefore, cannot be considered as disdain for monarchy itself. They had abused their prerogative by oppressing the people and dispensening with the Estates-General for over a century. He believed that the Revolution was an effort of the French people to regain their liberties and preserve them from future monarchical encroachment by erecting a system of constitutional checks. To him, it remained a French effort to emulate the British event of 1688.

After November 15, 1792, Fox exercised himself to avert war with France. The need for diplomacy rather than eulogies of the

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86 Fox to Henry, Lord Holland, May 17, 1795. Fox Memorials, III, 107.

Revolution became his central theme. He persistently demanded that a British representative be sent to Paris, but to no avail. Then, after hostilities between England and France broke out on February 1, 1793, Fox poured all his energies into truculent denunciations of Pitt's war policy.

## Chapter II

## FOX AND THE WAR

Unlike his attitude toward the Revolution, Charles Fox had no illusions about the progress of French arms. He was as apprehensive as anyone in the kingdom. France's aggression in the Austrian Netherlands, the National Convention's menacing attitude toward Holland, and the so-called "propaganda decree"[1] of November 19, 1792, pledging French assistance to any people who wished to regain their liberties, filled the Whig leader with grim forebodings. He clearly saw that these maneuvers imperiled Britain's continental allies, and "threatened external danger" to England itself.[2] But diplomacy, he believed, could avert war. Unfortunately, the French Executive Council was not in a conciliatory vein, and hostilities commenced on February 1, 1793. So long as England's only objective was to repel French aggression, Fox supported the war. When the object was achieved momentarily in June, 1793, he called for peace negotiations. Then, however, it became apparent that the British ministry intended to pursue the conflict, along with the despotic powers of Europe, until monarchy was restored in France. This meant a war of

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1 This is the term Professor Leo Gershoy uses to describe the decree of November 19. I do not think it a misnomer. See Leo Gershoy, The French Revolution and Napoleon (New York, 1947), p. 241.

2 Parl. Hist., XXX, 193.

extermination, and Fox denounced the new policy, which, he contended, was a result of the alliance with Austria, Prussia, Russia, and Spain. From the summer of 1793 until his secession from parliament in 1797, he persistently demanded that England disavow the restoration of the Bourbons as her aim and open negotiations with whatever regime happened to be topside in France.

Quite emphatically, Fox declared that "he was not one who with an indifferent eye saw the progress of the French arms."[3] Despite his "partiality" toward France, he suffered no illusions about her militant foreign policy. External aggression had no affinity with the philosophic goals of the Revolution. Even though France and Austria were already at war, he had difficulty reconciling himself to Dumouriez's conquest of the Austrian Netherlands in October, 1792.[4] As for the National Convention's decree opening the Scheldt River, he deemed it a bellicose threat to Holland, England's staunchest ally. The river had been closed to the exclusive navigation of the Dutch since the treaty of Munster in 1648, and the privilege had been renewed periodically. As recent as 1788, England had pledged herself to uphold Holland's use of the waterway. Fox admitted that if Holland invoked this

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[3] Parl. Hist., XXX, 40-41.

[4] Fox to Henry, Lord Holland, November 23, 1792. Fox Memorials, II, 379.

treaty against France, England was committed to support her.[5] Furthermore, he considered the decree of November 19, pledging French arms to any people wishing to regain their liberties, as "an insult."[6] In fact, he believed it tantamount to "a declaration of hostilities" unless the National Convention repealed it or vouchsafed a satisfactory explanation.[7]

Though alarmed, Fox was unwilling to hazard war before trying every avenue of diplomacy. He deplored the British government's recall of Earl Gower, ambassador to Paris, and believed its refusal to recognize the new republican regime in France "a crime."[8] If regular diplomatic intercourse were restored, he believed that salient differences between the two countries might be settled. Therefore, on December 15, 1792, he presented the House of Commons with a motion to send a minister to Paris. First, he pointed out that it was a very unpropitious time for a war with France, in view of that country's growing military strength.[9] Then he attacked the ministry's refusal to recognize the French Republic. If war came, he argued, England would eventually have to treat with the republican regime. Therefore, it would be prudent to re-establish

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5 Parl. Hist., XXX,222.

6 Parl. Hist., XXX, 305.

7 Parl. Hist., XXX, 222.

8 Parl. Hist., XXX, 65.

9 Parl. Hist., XXX, 24.

regular diplomatic relations now, while there still remained a possibility of averting war, preserving Holland's monopoly of the Scheldt, and obtaining a revocation or at least a satisfactory explanation of the November 19 decree.[10]

This was not a cry for peace at any price. Fox had no intentions of sending a British ambassador across the Channel to make supplicating overtures to the National Convention. French insolence required firm dealing. If a minister were sent to Paris, he told the House, he "would not instruct him to petition . . . but to demand satisfaction; and if that were denied, to return."[11] By satisfaction he meant that France must acknowledge Holland's neutrality and exclusive navigation of the Scheldt, and make an acceptable explanation, if not a revocation, of the November 19 decree. Like Frederick the Great, he also realized that diplomacy without arms was as meaningless as music without instruments. He "wished that by negotiation a war might be averted, but he was not willing that we should even negotiate unarmed," and "if a neutrality was preserved in, he would still vote for an armament." This was not mere cant, for Fox supported the government's call for an additional 9,000 seamen declaring that he "was as eager as any man could possibly be for an armament" and was ready to vote an increase of 40,000 seamen.[12]

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10 Parl. Hist., XXX, 126.

11 Parl. Hist., XXX, 125.

12 Parl. Hist., XXX, 140-41.

The House of Commons rejected Fox's motion for a minister to Paris, and from a constitutional viewpoint it was obliged to do so. As Robert Banks Jenkinson, later Lord Liverpool, pointed out, the motion was a bald attempt to invade the executive's prerogative of negotiating and making war or peace.[13] Had it passed, a precedent certainly would have been established for legislative interference with the executive's conduct of foreign affairs. Disapproval of the motion, however, was premised not so much on constitutional grounds as on a frenzied disinclination, if not fear, to have any relations with the French Republic. Insane as Burke, Lord Sheffield, M. P. for Coventry, ranted that any dealings with France, "the vilest of all nations," would only bring butchery and rape to England. Therefore, "no communication, no measures, no treaties should be maintained" with the republican "robbers and cut-throats."[14] Burke himself saw no reason for negotiating with the "French savages," for as far as he was concerned "we are now engaged in actual war."[15] This vaporing was reiterated by an overwhelming number of M. P.'s. Hysteria, not constitutional objections, wrought the defeat of Fox's motion to send a minister to Paris.

Although a ministerial majority rejected his motion, Fox could not arraign the British government for severing all diplomatic

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[13] Parl. Hist., XXX, 86.

[14] Parl. Hist., XXX, 81.

[15] Parl. Hist., XXX, 112.

ties with France. Lord Grenville, British Foreign Secretary, continued to deal with M. Chauvelin, Louis XVI's minister plenipotentiary in London. Chauvelin was retained in his capacity by the National Convention after France was proclaimed a republic on September 20, 1792, but the British government, refusing to recognize the new regime abroad, continued to treat with him as a representative of the deposed monarch. Chauvelin did not insist upon recognition as an agent of the Republic after September 20, so a semi-diplomatic liaison was preserved between England and France.

Grenville communicated with Chauvelin until the execution of Louis XVI on January 24, 1793.[16] His notes to the French plenipotentiary amounted to demands for satisfaction, but they were accorded evasive replies and patent dissimulation. Replying to the British Foreign Secretary's call for an explanation of the November 19 decree, Chauvelin explained that it was not intended to provoke disturbances in other countries, but to pledge French assistance to any nation when its "general will" determined to regain liberty.[17] Understandably, the British government rejected this appeal to the Social Contract as a satisfactory explanation. Chauvelin's response about the decree concerning

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16 The diplomatic exchanges between Grenville and Chauvelin from May 12, 1792 to January 24, 1793 are reprinted in Parl. Hist., XXX, 238-70.

17 Chauvelin to Grenville, December 27, 1792. Parl. Hist., XXX, 251.

Holland the Scheldt was pure subterfuge. While the plenipotentiary was disavowing French designs upon Holland, so long as the Dutch remained neutral, a vessel of the Republic forced its way up the Scheldt and attacked Antwerp.[18] Then the news of Louis XVI's execution reached England, and Chauvelin was ordered to leave the country. A diplomatic settlement appeared impossible. Hope of averting war revived briefly during the last week of January, 1793, when General Dumouriez, commander of French forces in the Austrian Netherlands, sought an interview with Lord Auckland, British ambassador at the Hague. The British government quickly dispatched instructions authorizing Auckland to negotiate with the French general.[19] Before the communique reached the Hague, however, France had declared was on England and the United Provinces.

Fox, of course, criticized the government's diplomatic tactics and even impugned its sincerity. The negotiation with Chauvelin, he contended, was a "farce and delusion" to veil the ministry's decision for war.[20] French transgressions were causes of complaint, but not grounds for war until every diplomatic means was exhausted. Embargoing corn shipments to France, and

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18 Napoleon later characterized the French occupation of Antwerp as "a loaded pistol aimed at the heart of England." Quoted in Gershoy, p. 243.

19 Annual Register, XXXV, 55.

20 Parl. Hist., XXX, 426.

ordering Chauvelin out of the country, he alleged, were measures designed to provoke war with the Republic.[21] Overlooking the French seizure of Antwerp, he declared that ministers were coercing Holland to invoke its treaty of alliance with England as a pretext for war.[22] The validity of these charges has been pretty well established.[23] In dealing with the French, Fox might have demonstrated more sincerity than the ministry but his tactics would have been almost the same.

Actually, there was only a shade of difference between his posture toward France's militant foreign policy and that of the British government. Fox would have recognized the republican regime and sent an agent to Paris; the ministry would not. In view of the Republic's violation of treaties and aggression while professing a desire for peace, it is doubtful that Fox's proposal

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21 Parl. Hist., XXX, 374. An embargo had been placed on corn shipments destined to France on November 15, 1792.

22 Parl. Hist., XXX, 305.

23 It seems that Pitt had decided upon war during January, 1793. The tenor of his speeches at that time indicates that he had resolved upon such a step. Also, on January 20, Lord Loughborough, who had just come from a conference with Pitt, told his friend Lord Malmesbury "that war was a decided measure; that Pitt saw it was inevitable, and that the sooner it was begun the better. That we might possess ourselves of the French islands, that the nation was now disposed for war, etc." Diaries and Correspondence of James Harris, First Earl of Malmesbury, ed., the Third Earl of Malmesbury (London, 1844), II, 501. Hereafter cited as Malmesbury Diaries. Most modern scholars accept the thesis that Pitt had decided upon war in January, 1793. See Barnes, pp. 270-71. Laprade, pp. 99-126. Gershoy, 243.

would have succeeded in averting war. Aside from recognition and sending a minister to Paris, his program for negotiating with the French paralleled Grenville's procedure. Fox had declared that he would make stiff demands upon France. Grenville did, but his notes were scorned. The Whig leader had called for a satisfactory explanation of the November 19 decree. So had the British Foreign Secretary, but Chauvelin's reply, replete with abstract terminology, was as unacceptable to Fox as it was to the ministry.[24] Moreover, Fox had agreed with the government that no settlement could be reached until France disclaimed the idea of aggression upon Holland. He had admitted that any violation of Dutch neutrality would constitute a cause of war. Shortly afterwards France seized Antwerp. Finally, he had concurred with the ministry's notion that negotiations should be backed with a large-scale armament.

The war was commenced on February 1, 1793, with France's declaration of hostilities against England and Holland. Fox gave a qualified support to its prosecution. The only justifiable object of the conflict, he maintained, was to repel French aggression. "Various things have been done by the French," he declared, "manifestly extending beyond their own country and affecting the interests of us and our allies; for which, unless satisfaction was given, we must enforce satisfaction by arms. This he considered as the only principle on which the necessity of the war could be truly

[24] Parl. Hist., XXX, 305-6.

defended, and in this he was sure the great majority of the House and of the country were of the same opinion."[25] Fox constantly repeated this point. Until French aggression against England and Holland was repulsed, he would support the war. But the conflict had no other purpose. In fact, he tried to limit England's wartime objectives by parliamentary resolution.

On February 18, Fox moved five resolutions which would have greatly restricted the ministry's war policy. The first article renounced any intention of Great Britain to interfere with the internal affairs of France. The following three articles merely laid strictures on the ministry for failing to try every diplomatic means to avert war, and also censured its indifference towards the recent dismemberment of Poland by Austria, Prussia, and Russia. Article five would have debarred England from any alliance which might prevent her from making a separate peace with France.[26] The first and last articles were the important ones. They would have prohibited the British government from intervening in France in behalf of the royalists, and would have prevented it from entering any alliance aiming to restore monarchy in France. The resolutions were negatived by 270 votes to 44,[27] but they underline Fox's wish to confine England's military objective to the repulse of French aggression.

25 Parl. Hist., XXX, 425.

26 Parl. Hist., XXX, 431-32.

27 Parl. Hist., XXX, 453.

By June, 1793, the French armies had been thrown behind their own borders, and Fox deemed it time to end hostilities. The progress of French arms against Great Britain and Holland had been stopped, and since that was the only just purpose of the war, it must now cease. Therefore, on June 17, Fox moved that negotiations pursuant to a peace treaty be opened with the French government. French aggrandizement had been stopped, he argued, "and we could not justify to ourselves the continuance of the war solely upon the ground that France had declared war against us. When we had put an end to aggression, then was the time to put an end to the war so commenced."[28] Furthermore, peace was absolutely necessary to England's dwindling commerce.[29] Finally, he was convinced that the French people wanted peace, and would relinquish the West Indies, already under siege by the British, as an indemnity.[30]

The motion and its author were roundly denounced. William Pitt decried it as "impolitic and preposterous" since "peace is impossible," and accused Fox of attempting "to create groundless discontents and dissatisfaction with the present state of affairs."[31] Edmund Burke, of course, went into a paroxysm of rage, avowing that the only token of indemnity which could be expected from France was "the bloody head of Louis 16th."[32] Other members joined in the

[28] Parl. Hist., XXX, 996.

[29] Parl. Hist., XXX, 999.

[30] Parl. Hist., XXX, 999-1002.

[31] Parl. Hist., XXX, 1013.

[32] Parl. Hist., XXX, 1012.

thunderous outcry, and the motion was rejected by a vote of 187 to 47. Abhorrence of the measure was echoed in Windsor Castle where George III sat pointing the finger of disloyalty at Fox. "I cannot help observing," wrote the King, "that it seems very extraordinary that any one could advance so strong a proposition, and I trust one so contrary to the good sense of the majority of the whole nation, and such as no one but an advocate for the wicked conduct of the leaders of that unhappy country can subscribe to."[33] Reaction to the motion also uncovered a demarche in the ministry's war policy.

During the debate of the motion, Pitt intimated that England might interfere with the internal affairs of France. Previously, he had disavowed this object.[34] In fact, Fox's view of the war as a defensive contest, aimed at stemming French aggression had been generally accepted. Now, however, it appeared that the British government meant to prosecute the war until the republican regime was displaced. In a cautiously stated reply to Fox about the ministry's objectives, Pitt declared that he intended to continue hostilities until adequate reparation and security could be achieved. Then, in a very cryptic passage, he stated:

> I do not say that if, without any interference, sufficient security and reparation could be had for this country, I would not, in that case, be of opinion that we ought to

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[33] Quoted in Earl Stanhope, Life of the Right Honourable William Pitt (London, 1861), II, XVIII.

[34] Parl. Hist., XXX, 358.

> abstain from all interference and allow their government to remain even upon its present footing. But I consider the question of obtaining those while the same principle that now prevails continues to actuate their government to be extremely difficult, if not impossible. I should certainly think, that the best security we could obtain, would be in the end of that wild ungoverned system, from which it is necessary to guard.[35]

Shortly afterwards, Pitt dispelled all doubts about the exact meaning of this pronouncement.

Between June, 1793 and January, 1794, it became evident that the First Minister meant to pursue the war until the republican regime in Paris was replaced by a monarchical system. By late August, he consummated his first coalition which linked England with Austria, Prussia, Russia, Holland, Spain, Portugal, Sardinia, and Naples. The despotic heads in this league were bent upon the restoration of the Bourbons. During the summer of 1792, a combined force of Austrians and Prussians, commanded by the Duke of Brunswick, had even invaded France to smother the Revolution. By pledging his country to act in concert with these powers, and not to make a separate peace, Pitt virtually committed England to continue the war until monarchy was restored in France. That this was the new military objective of the British government was underscored by the Royal Declaration of October 29, drafted by Pitt and Grenville, which promised political asylum to Frenchmen who declared themselves in favor of the re-establishment of hereditary

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35 Parl. Hist., XXX, 1017.

monarchy.[36] When parliament convened on January 21, 1794, it was apprised through the King's Speech that his majesty's government meant to continue hostilities, since peace and security were still "obstructed by the prevalance of a system in France equally incompatible with the happiness of that country, and with the tranquillity of other nations."[37] All of Charles Fox's misgivings were now confirmed.

From the beginning of hostilities, and even before, Fox had deprecated the idea of invading France in behalf of monarchy. Austria and Prussia had tried coercion in the summer of 1792, and Fox had lavished abuse on Brunswick's horde. He termed the march upon France an "Invasion of the Barbarians,"[38] and was more jubilant over the French conquest of the combined armies at Valmy than he had been about the victories of the colonists over the British during the American war. Hearing of Valmy, he exclaimed, "No! no public event, not excepting Saratoga and York Town ever happened that gave me so much delight."[39] Soon after England went to war, Fox obtained an open admission from Pitt that the British government was not pursuing the conflict to restore monarchy in France.[40] As we have seen, he also tried to preclude British

36 A reprint of the declaration may be found in Parl. Hist., XXX, 1057-60.

37 Parl. Hist., XXX, 1046.

38 Fox to Henry, Lord Holland, September 3, 1792. Fox Memorials, II, 368.

39 Fox to Henry, Lord Holland, October 12, 1792. Fox Memorials, II, 372.

40 Parl. Hist., XXX, 358.

interference with the internal affairs of France by parliamentary resolution. Furthermore, he dreaded any alliance with the despotic rulers on the continent, lest it commit England to vastly more than the repulse of French arms.

Fox wanted no pact with the "detested league" of continental despots who were anxious to suffocate the Revolution and restore the Bourbons.[41] By entering an alliance with Austria, Prussia, and Russia, he feared that England would commit herself to their objectives, and forego any opportunity of negotiating a separate peace with France. He was thoroughly convinced that Austria and Prussia especially were the harpies to the peace and security of Europe. By the declaration of Pillnitz in 1790, they had threatened to invade France and eradicate the Revolution. Two years later, a combined army of Austrians and Prussians did invade, and its leader, the Duke of Brunswick, had issued a proclamation promising death to all rebels and the complete destruction of Paris if the French royal family were harmed.[42] And to divert themselves in eastern Europe, they had partitioned Poland along with the Czarina of Russia. Fox was persuaded that no trust could be placed in them. He demanded that England eschew "this abominable confederacy of kings," averring that "if we had quarrels, we should fight them by ourselves; or if we were to have allies, that we should keep our

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[41] Parl. Hist., XXX, 431.

[42] Brunswick's proclamation is reprinted in Parl. Hist., XXX, 16-17.

cause of quarrel completely separate from theirs and, without intermeddling with the internal concerns of the French republic, not burthen ourselves with any stipulations which should prevent us at any time from making a separate peace, without the concurrence or approbation of those sovereigns."[43] Moreover, no alliance could conquer France and restore the Bourbons. Hoping for that, said Fox, was like "expecting figs from thistles."[44] He was substantially correct.

The allied campaign of 1793 failed completely. Until September, the armies of the first coalition were victorious, and even pierced French territory. But with the re-organization of the French army by Carnot, the monarchical forces were rolled back. A British contingent under the Duke of York was almost crushed near Dunkirk in early September. A month later the Austrians, under Coburg, were conquered at Wattingnies and the royalist strongholds of Lyons and Toulon in southern France were taken by republican forces. On the Eastern front, the Prussians were thrown back in December. By the end of the year, the allies could only boast of British gains in the French West Indies.[45] Fox was correct; a quick conquest of France was impossible. The only sane course was to press for an "honourable and secure peace," not withstanding the

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[43] Parl. Hist., XXX, 431.

[44] Fox to Henry, Lord Holland, August 1, 1793. Fox Memorials, III, 43.

[45] For a more detailed account of the 1793 campaign see Gershoy, pp. 268-69.

complexion of the present regime in France.

Throughout 1794, Fox persistently demanded that peace negotiations be opened with the French Republic. In view of France's military strength, he considered it fatuous to think she could be conquered. Moreover, the British government had "deluded this country into a ruinous war" by allying it with the despotic powers of Europe and committing it to the restoration of the Bourbons. This, Fox charged, was patent fraud. Ministers had gone to war, ostensibly, to repel French aggression against England and Holland, "but their object in reality was the subversion of the ruling powers in France."[46] Since this was an illusory and unobtainable goal, he believed "that we ought to treat with the present or with any other government to which the present may give place in France." Again, he was not calling for peace at any price. It should be based on "honourable and secure" terms; "and if peace cannot be concluded on such terms," he avowed, "I will grant that the war ought to be carried on."[47]

All Fox's efforts to open peace negotiations were defeated. His motion to re-establish peace with France, presented to the House on January 21, 1794 was rejected by a vote of 277 to 59,[48] after Pitt announced in debate that he chose "to perservere

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[46] Parl. Hist., XXX, 1253.

[47] Parl. Hist., XXX, 1258.

[48] Parl. Hist., XXX, 1287.

in the war, even amidst the worst disasters . . . than to conclude a peace with the ruling powers in France on their present system."[49] Two months later, Samuel Whitbread, m. p. for Bedford and an ardent supporter of Fox, also moved for a separate peace with the French. Naturally, the Whig leader spoke in favor of the motion, demanding that England disentangle itself from Austria and Prussia, "the fomentors of this contest."[50] This motion was defeated by 138 votes to 26.[51] On May 30, Fox moved fourteen resolutions for putting an end to the war. It was "madness" to continue hostilities. While England lavished men and money, her allies failed to fulfill their treaty obligations; and, he argued, after a glance at the front one "could not help thinking the conquest of France a more desperate crusade than ever."[52] These were practical conclusions, but the terms which Fox proposed as a basis for negotiations were highly impractical. In light of France's sweeping victories during the 1794 campaign, it was being more than sanguine to expect that she would accept a status quo ante bellum settlement.[53] The motion was drowned, of course, by a vote of 208 to 55.[54] With the failure of these efforts

[49] Parl. Hist., XXX, 1283.
[50] Parl. Hist., XXX, 1466.
[51] Parl. Hist., XXX, 1486.
[52] Parl. Hist., XXXI, 626.
[53] Parl. Hist., XXXI, 632.
[54] Parl. Hist., XXXI, 658.

to terminate hostilities, Fox exerted himself to obstruct the ministry's war measures and to reduce England's support of the coalition.

He vociferously denounced the government's bill to enlist French emigres in the British army. The measure was introduced on April 11, and provoked heated exchanges. Before Fox spoke his colleague Richard Brinsley Sheridan observed that if the emigres were recruited, sent to France, and captured they would be murdered as counter-revolutionaries rather than treated as prisoners of war. Supposing such a contingency, he inquired if Britain would revenge the fate of the emigres by retaliating on French prisoners, and mad Burke screamed "Yes."[55] The House was astonished, and Fox animadverted on this piece of lunacy. Then he assailed the bill as a measure which would prolong the war since it virtually "pledged the faith of this country to the restoration of their [the emigres'] rights, titles, privileges, and properties which they had lost by the Revolution, and that we would overturn the present existing government of France by force of arms."[56] He conceived this motion as just another ramification of England's alliance with the despotic powers of Europe who were bent on restoring the Ancien Regime in France.[57]

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55 Parl. Hist., XXXI, 377.

56 Parl. Hist., XXXI, 373.

57 Parl. Hist., XXXI, 408-9.

As the war continued, Fox developed chronic malaise over the first coalition, and he tried to reduce England's support of the arrangement. Austria and Prussia particularly were the targets of his wrath. He had never trusted them. To him, their "unwarrantable and impious" declaration of Pillnitz and their subsequent invasion of France had instigated the war. Then they had lured the British ministry into their design to crush the French Republic and restore the Bourbons. Once they received British assistance, however, they proved themselves sluggards and drones. There was no gainsaying that the King of Prussia had relaxed his efforts during the 1794 campaign, and when Pitt moved the acceptance of a mutual assistance treaty with the German ruler, whereby England agreed to pay Frederick William II £ 2,500,000 in exchange for 62,400 Prussian troops, Fox soared into high dudgeon. Why, he asked, should Great Britain subsidize the Prussian monarch when he was manifesting a disinclination to continue in the war as a principal? By continuing these payments, Fox averred that Britain could only expect similar laxity from other members of the coalition. Soon Austria and Spain would ask England to reimburse them for their miserable showings, and "we might be brought to pay for every man and every horse in Europe, employed against France in the present dreadful contest."[58] To avert this contingency, and to loosen the threads of the coalition, he proposed an amendment to the treaty which would have reduced the

[58] Parl. Hist., XXXI, 444.

Prussian subsidy to £ 1,150,000. Needless to say, this attempt was defeated, but Fox's distrust of the allies was soon justified.

Between the autumn of 1794 and the summer of 1795, Pitt's shaky coalition splintered to pieces on a reef of petty self-interests. Prussia sued for peace with France in the fall of 1794, so she could transfer her troops from the Rhine to Poland, where Frederick William intended to join Austria and Russia in the third partition. The treaty of peace was not concluded until April 5, 1795. Meanwhile, Holland surrendered, and following a re-organization of her government, the ascendant Dutch republicans agreed to join their French co-religionists in arms against England. The Franco-Dutch treaty was signed at the Hague on May 16, 1795, and two months later Spain defected from the coalition. The Austrian emperor did not slither out of the alliance, but he contributed little to the war against France while occupied with the spoliation of Poland.[59] Deserted by the allies, and confronted with extraordinary French triumphs, the British government could scarcely hope to restore monarchy in France. There developed in 1795, a disposition to open peace negotiations with the Republic.

A number of regular ministerial supporters now joined Fox in clamoring for peace with France. In fact, when parliament convened on December 30, 1794, Pitt's closest friend, William

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[59] Gershoy, pp. 301-6.

Wilberforce, moved an amendment to the address of thanks advising his majesty to seek peace with France on "just and reasonable terms."[60] Fox, of course, supported the amendment which was defeated by 246 votes to 73.[61] The significance of this division is that the usual minority of thirty or forty, which had persistently called for peace negotiations, now increased to 73 votes. Several weeks later the number rose to 86, when Fox's truculent young protege, Charles Grey, moved that peace negotiations be commenced.[62] On May 27, Wilberforce again moved that "the present circumstances of France, ought not to preclude the government of this country from entertaining proposals for a general pacification."[63] This motion also attracted 86 votes. It was apparent that an increasing number of m.p.'s were for ending hostilities. With his coalition gone, and his parliamentary majority slipping away, Pitt heeded the warning.

Between January and October, 1795, the First Minister conformed to the mounting aversion toward the war. Gradually, and painfully, he renounced the restoration of monarchy in France as his objective, and accepted the idea of negotiating with the republican regime. His reversal must have been uncomfortable. Having prosecuted the war for a year and a half in league with the despotic

60 Parl. Hist., XXXI, 1026.

61 Parl. Hist., XXXI, 1061.

62 Parl. Hist., XXXI, 1246.

63 Parl. Hist., XXXII, 9.

heads of Europe, Pitt blandly announced on January 26, that there had been "great misconstructions and misconceptions with respect to what he had stated on former occasions to be his sentiments, as to the re-establishment of monarchy, which he by no means wished to be considered as a sine qua non to the attainment of peace . . . ."[64] He was slower, however, in agreeing to peace negotiations. The first signal of Pitt's willingness to negotiate with France emerged during the debate on Wilberforce's motion in May. Then, the First Minister surprisingly declared: "To look for negotiation at the present moment is premature, though I look to it at no remote period."[65] When parliament convened on October 29, it was announced through the king's speech that the British government was now disposed to open peace negotiations.[66] Pitt had no alternative. His alliance was gone, and the growing desire for peace was paring his majority. Moreover, he probably believed that suitable terms could be obtained from the new government of France, which was not as ultrademocratic as its forerunners.[67]

Fox was jubilant over the ministry's decision to open peace negotiations with France. He considered it a virtual

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64 Parl. Hist., XXXI, 1226.

65 Parl. Hist., XXXII, 28.

66 Parl. Hist., XXXII, 143.

67 Barnes, p. 278.

recantation of the government's entire war policy, besides "a complete absolution of all his past sins." After a royal message was read in the House on December 8, repeating the wish of his majesty's government to treat with the French Directory, Fox exalted his own prescience. "Ministers had made a total retraction of all the charges they had brought against him for the motions he had made," he observed, "and for the doctrines he had held from the commencement of the war to the present day: they had fully acquitted him, and had positively declared that, in every sentiment he had uttered, he was right, and that the House should have acted upon his opinion; for all along, he had maintained the doctrine now laid down in his majesty's message."[68] After chaffing ministers, Fox prodded them to open negotiations with the French post-haste. The people of England and France wanted peace, and he was confident that it could be achieved.

Within a fortnight, however, his hopes gloomed. On December 24, he lamented to his nephew that "the later accounts from Paris lead me to think that the French are less earnest in their wishes than I had supposed . . . ."[69] Two months later, he abandoned all sanguineness, observing that "the ministry cannot make any peace without incredible sacrifices. The minds of the two Governments are as hostile to each other, and their mutual

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68 Parl. Hist., XXXII, 586.

69 Fox Memorials, III, 128.

diffidence so rooted, that it must be next to a miracle, if they can agree till absolute necessity forces them."[70] Fox's afterthoughts proved correct.

The French did not want peace in 1796. With a new constitution, a new government, and a new model army under the new leadership of Napoleon Bonaparte, they chose to continue their old play at power politics. In March, the Directory responded to Britain's peace overtures with extravagant demands.[71] Nonetheless, the British government again tried to open peace negotiations in September, but the attempt was equally unsuccessful. With French armies striking through Austria, southern Germany, and Italy, the Directory was not inclined to restore Belgium to the emperor or withdraw from Italy as the British ministry proposed. France meant to pursue the war. It accorded contumely to England's peace overtures, and, on December 19, the British representative, Lord Malmesbury was ordered to leave Paris within forty-eight hours.[72]

Fox, of course, blamed the British government for the collapse of negotiations. On December 30, he even moved a vote of censure on ministers for their inept and insincere conduct while treating with the French. The negotiations had failed, he charged, because ministers insisted upon the return of Belgium to Austria as

70 Fox to Henry, Lord Holland, February 18, 1796. Fox Memorials, III, 130.

71 Barnes, p. 280.

72 Malmesbury Diaries, III, 364.

a sine quo non for peace.[73] Also, they had aggravated the French Directory by talking of a status quo ante bellum settlement.[74] This was mere gasconade in the regular line of opposition. Earlier in the year, Fox had expressed little hope of obtaining peace. He had impugned France's sincerity, and surely he saw that the astounding progress of her armies precluded a settlement except on the most abject terms for her foes. By insisting that Belgium be restored to Austria Malmesbury probably did give umbrage to the Directory, but even had he offered it to France, it is doubtful that her leaders would have been more disposed to peace in 1796. As for the charge that ministers had galled the French by suggesting a status quo ante bellum settlement, Fox was overlooking his own motion of May 30, 1794, calling for peace negotiations on the same terms.[75] He could find a stronger case to embarrass the ministry.

His opportunity came with the great naval mutinies in the spring of 1797. The mutinies of Spithead and the Nore sprang from the brutal methods of the press gang, poor living conditions, inadequate pay, and a barbarous disciplinary system. On April 15, the fleet at Spithead rebelled, and the government promised to redress the grievances of the mutineers and to grant them an indemnity by royal proclamation against future recrimination. But

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73 Parl. Hist., XXXII, 1492.

74 Parl. Hist., XXXII, 1489.

75 See above p. 47.

official promises were not forthcoming, and two weeks later the Spithead fleet, then at St. Helens, again refused to obey orders. The seamen refused to budge until their demands were satisfied. Meanwhile, the spirit of mutiny touched the fleet at the Nore which defended the Thames and London.[76]

Fox was indignant over the ministry's "criminal conduct" during these incidents.[77] By delaying the promised redress of grievances, he charged that ministers had aroused the suspicions of the Spithead fleet, encouraged further insubordination, and contributed to the second mutiny. Undeniably, the government had lingered in fulfilling its promise to the disgruntled sailors. In fact, Pitt did not introduce bills to increase the food allowance and pay of the seamen until May 9, when the whole channel fleet threatened to erupt into a mutinous conflagration. This "scandalous delay,"[78] as Fox termed it, provided the opposition with cannon-fodder. Here was an excellent chance to embarrass the government. On May 10, Whitbread introduced a motion to censure Pitt for his dilatory conduct, and Fox tried to expand it into a general stricture upon the ministry.[79] Needless to say, it suffered the common fate of every motion which Fox and his friends had introduced

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[76] This paragraph is based on the account of the mutinies found in Barnes, pp. 310-13.

[77] Parl. Hist., XXXIII, 480.

[78] Parl. Hist., XXXIII, 479.

[79] Parl. Hist., XXXIII, 509.

since the beginning of the war. A number of his followers believed it pointless to continue their unrewarding opposition.

Therefore, in July, 1797, Fox acquiesced, "from indolence rather than from judgement," in the "ill-advised secession from Parliament" recommended by Grey, Lord Lauderdale, and the Duke of Bedford.[80] The imprudence of this maneuver will be discussed in a later chapter. During the next five years, Fox sequestered himself from political concerns at his beloved St. Anne's Hill, where he was solaced by his mistress, Mrs. Armitstead, the beauty of his estate, and literary pursuits. But absence from the House and inactivity soon gave way to bitterness. Occasionally he did go down to parliament, but he preferred to stay away because of the "chance of saying indiscreet things." And in 1801 he sourly remarked to Grey: "I am gone somewhat further in hate to the English Government than perhaps you and the rest of my friends are, and certainly further than can with prudence be avowed. The triumph of the French Government over the English does in fact afford me a degree of pleasure which it is very difficult to disguise."[81]

Fox's opposition to the war was admirable and astute, but ineffectual. He had hoped to avert hostilities through diplomacy.

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80 Henry Richard Lord Holland, Memoirs of the Whig Party, ed., Henry Edward Lord Holland (London, 1852), I, 84.

81 Fox Memorials, III, 349.

His program for negotiating differed from the ministry's only on the points of recognizing the republican regime and sending a minister to Paris. But considering the bellicose attitude of the French convention in 1792, it is doubtful that Fox's scheme would have proved successful. When war came, he supported its prosecution so long as England's only objective was to repel French aggression. He even tried to limit the ministry's war policy to this objective by parliamentary resolution. When it appeared, however, that Pitt and his colleagues meant to pursue hostilities along with the despotic heads of Europe until the Bourbons were restored, Fox withdrew his support of the war. From June, 1793, until his secession in 1797, he persistently called for peace negotiations, tried to obstruct the ministry's war policy, weaken the coalition, and embarrass ministers by votes of censure. In view of the unworthy objective of Pitt's coalition, these were commendable measures. Their impotence derived from the break up of the Whig party.

## Chapter III

## FOX AND THE WHIG PARTY

Fox's enthusiasm for the Revolution and his opposition to the war undermined his leadership of the Whig party. His frequent eulogies of the French upheaval along with his attempts to frustrate the ministerial war policy alarmed the more conservative members of the party and ultimately drove them into alliance with Pitt. They preferred callous reaction to the stigma of republicanism. The first rift within the party occurred in the spring of 1792, when Pitt inaugurated his repressive policy and accelerated his attempt to identify domestic reformers with French jacobins. By playing upon the misgivings of those Whigs who were averse to the Revolution and seriously concerned about Fox's sympathetic attitude towards it, Pitt hoped to bring them into the ministerial camp and reduce his rival's following to an insignificant and ineffectual coterie. The First Minister tried to ease the prospect of abandoning Fox by dangling a number of lucrative offices and places before the frightened Whigs. Some members were eager to jump into Pitt's alluring web. Fox, however, curbed their enthusiasm, and held his party intact until the summer of 1794, when the conservative Whigs formally joined the ministry. Before tracing the maneuvers, shifts, and re-alignment of the politicians between June, 1792, and July, 1794, it may not be amiss to outline Charles Fox's concept of a political party and its role in the state.

Fox's concept of party was rooted in his lifelong struggle with George III. Throughout his political career he considered the third Hanoverian as nothing less than a reincarnated Stuart king who was bent upon royal absolutism. Party, Fox believed, was the only effective makeweight to the growing influence of the Crown. He was not alone in his conviction about George III. It was shared by many of his contemporaries,[1] and has been ingenuously accepted by an astonishing number of nineteenth and twentieth century historians. Thanks to the unrivaled scholarship of Sir Lewis Namier, the myth has been exploded. George III may have been a bigoted, meddlesome, and very adroit politician, but he was not, and had no intentions of being, Bolingbroke's Patriot King.

Throughout his political career, Fox held "that party is by far the best system, if not the only one, for supporting the cause of liberty in this country . . . and this system, and this alone, has prevented Great Britain from falling into what Hume calls, its euthanasia of absolute monarchy."[2] The independent, or as Fox would

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1 Probably the most notable example of contemporary suspicion about George III was the famous Dunning resolution passed by the House of Commons in 1779 declaring "That the influence of the Crown has increased, is increasing, and ought to be diminished." Suspicion about the King's allegedly despotic tendencies was echoed by the cartoonists and pamphleteers of the day. For instance, one caricature appeared portraying George III doting over a miniature of Oliver Cromwell. It is reprinted in A. S. Turberville, English Men and Manners in the Eighteenth Century (Oxford, 1926), p. 82

2 Fox to Henry, Lord Holland, October 5, 1794. Fox Memorials, III, 88-89.

say, "insulated" man in politics was "always liable to act both corruptly and absurdly" because of the many decisions he was bound to make on the basis of sheer private interest.[3] Activated by no higher goals than private gain, the lone politician would fall prey to the "temptations of titles and emoluments" proferred by the Crown.[4] With the increase of royal hirelings in the British legislature, the prerogative would be augmented, personal and political liberties would be subverted, "and then comes Mr. Hume's Euthanasia."[5] Party was the check to this process. By engaging himself with an organized group, Fox held that the politician would not be confronted with myriad decisions impinging upon his private fortunes: "if a man has once engaged in a party the occasions for new decisions are more rare, and consequently the corrupt influences operate less." That the party itself might be a sinkhole of corruption was of no count to Fox. So long as it secured men from royal temptings it was inherently good. A party arrangement committed to the opposition of royal influence would even invest its members with "public virtue," "comprehensive understanding," and serve as "the highest advantage to the morals and happiness of mankind."[6] It

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3 Fox to Henry, Lord Holland, October 5, 1794. Fox Memorials, III, 90.

4 Fox to Henry, Lord Holland, October 5, 1794. Fox Memorials, III, 91.

5 Fox to Henry, Lord Holland, ? ?, 1796. Fox Memorials, III, 135.

6 Fox to Henry, Lord Holland, October 5, 1794. Fox Memorials, III, 90-91.

was not to be built upon ordinary men.

It must be drawn from an aristocracy. To Fox, aristocracy was the keystone of both government and the party system. It was "the proper poise of the constitution," the balancing factor between the monarchical and the democratic factors.[7] Furthermore, the aristocratic party was the true guardian of English liberties. "I cannot help feeling every day more and more," he once wrote to his nephew, "that in this country, at least, an aristocratic party is absolutely necessary to the preservation of liberty . . . ."[8] This elite was, of course, to be based upon "property and rank,"[9] and was to manifest "that sort of energy, that sort of spirit, and that sort of enterprise which made a country great and happy."[10] This included a patriarchal regard for "the inferior classes" whose demands should be countenanced, but tempered with "aristocratic leaven."[11] Herein, of course, is the explanatory link between Fox's ardor for parliamentary reform and his hostility to universal suffrage. Although his concept of party was grounded in feudal elitism, it contained a notion which is peculiar to

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7 Parl. Hist., XXIX, 409.

8 January 5, 1799. Fox Memorials, III, 149.

9 Fox to Henry, Lord Holland, March 9, 1794. Fox Memorials, III, 67.

10 Lord John Russell, The Life and Times of Charles James Fox (London, 1859), II, 271.

11 Fox to Henry, Lord Holland, ? ?, 1796. Fox Memorials, III, 136.

nineteenth and twentieth century political development.

Fox always held that ministers should be responsible to the majority group in parliament. This was a novel doctrine in the late eighteenth century, and it did not mature until after 1830. Before the second third of the nineteenth century, the appointment and dismissal of ministers was a recognized prerogative of the English Crown. In Fox's lifetime, the notion of ministerial responsibility to a "faction" in the legislature was considered an overt challenge to kingship itself. George III held that it was "forcing his closet," and in 1782 he even threatened to abdicate rather than accept the "infamous coalition" of Charles Fox and Lord North to manage the affairs of state.[12] Fox's notion of ministerial responsibility to the preponderant group in the legislature was the logical outgrowth of his concept of party. With a majority in parliament and with ministerial posts and patronage at its disposal, an aristocratic party could offset the "temptations of titles and emoluments" issuing from the civil list. It could secure its own factotums, curtail royal influence, and virtually reduce the crown to a cipher. In short, Fox hoped to supplant Windsor with Holland House.

The Whig party of the eighteenth century was a loosely knit group acting upon a broad and by no means rigid set of principles.

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12 The papers of abdication which George III drafted in 1782 are reprinted in The Correspondence of King George the Third from 1760 to December 1783, ed., Sir John Fortescue (London, 1928), VI, 314-317.

Primarily, it was an aristocratic body, based on the great families which had emerged ascendant from the Glorious Revolution, and its nominal head was customarily a nobleman. During Fox's own career, the party was ostensibly under the leadership of the Marquis of Rockingham from 1756 to 1782 and then under the Duke of Portland. In practice, real leadership usually devolved upon a "House of Commons man." From 1782 until his death in 1806, Charles Fox was actual leader of the Whig party. Although it had an homogeneous basis, the party was in no sense a monolithic body. It was composed of various splinter groups with divergent objects. There was abundant disagreement on matters like parliamentary reform, abolition of the slave trade, and the repeal of the Test and Corporation acts. About the only common goal of those who professed to be Whigs was, as Fox put it, "to give a good stout blow to the influence of the Crown."[13] Additionally, those who acknowledged Charles Fox as their leader held that ministers should be responsible to a majority in parliament and that the Treasury Bench should be composed of men sharing similar political ideas.

Under Fox, the Whig party was neither large nor very effective, in the sense of winning elections and carrying motions in parliament. With a good attendance and a favorable sentiment in the House of Commons, Fox could count on about seventy or eighty votes. This was the best he could do against the court party of George III

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13 Quoted in Christopher Hobhouse, Fox (Boston, 1935), p. 171.

and Pitt, whose commanding majority of two hundred followers was built on the civil list and government patronage. In fact, the only notable piece of legislation Fox ever succeeded in putting through parliament was his Libel Act of 1792, which gave juries rather than judges the authority to decide what constituted libel.[14]

As we have seen, Fox's attitude toward the French Revolution offended "his most considerable friends."[15] It also threatened his leadership of the Whigs, and ultimately reduced the party to some thirty devoted followers. By the spring of 1792, Fox's more conservative adherents were thoroughly alarmed about his panegyrics of the French upheaval, and began to veer towards Pitt. The First Minister was eager to stir their misgivings, and he increased the tempo of his efforts to couple English admirers of the Revolution and domestic reformers with jacobinism. His object, of course, was to bring the frightened Whigs into the ministerial camp, cut the opposition to a few boisterous voices in the wilderness, and cast the stigma of republicanism upon Charles Fox and his more radical adherents.

The Society of the Friends of the People was the first lever Pitt used to dislodge the conservative Whigs from Fox. This haplessly named organization was formed on April 11, 1792, by Charles

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[14] 32 George III. c. 60. Reprinted in Adams and Stephens, p. 495.

[15] See above p. 13.

Grey and some 100 other young Whigs, only 29 of whom were m.p.'s.[16] Its objects were to secure more frequent elections and to achieve "a more equal representation of the people in parliament."[17] Most of the Society's members were good friends or ardent followers of Charles Fox, but they declined to ask him to join or to consult with them "until they saw the probability of success, in order that he might not be involved if they failed." A sparing sentiment, but it piqued Fox, who lamented that the "Association seemed determined not to have any advice, and particularly not to have his."[18] Nonetheless, he defended it from the aspersive onslaught of Pitt.

By depicting the society as nothing less than a jacobin cabal, the First Minister played upon the apprehensions of the conservative Whigs and made a direct bid for their support. His opportunity came on April 30, when Grey informed the House that in accordance with the recent declaration made by the society, he would introduce a measure for parliamentary reform in the next session.[19] The erstwhile reformer William Pitt decried this pronouncement in the extremest terms of sanctimonious patriotism.

16 A list of the Society's members is printed in Parl. Hist., XXIX, 1304.

17 Parl. Hist., XXIX, 1303.

18 Quoted in Veitch, p. 197.

19 The Society's "Address to the People of Great Britain," announcing its objectives is reprinted in Parl. Hist., XXIX, 1305-9.

He admitted that he had changed his mind about reform,[20] since, at this time, it would only plunge the country into "anarchy and confusion."[21] Then, he turned full cannonade on the Society of the Friends of the People, compounding it with the sans-culottes: "He had seen with concern that those gentlemen of whom he spoke, who were members of that House, were connected with others, who professed not reform only, but direct hostility to the very form of our government. This afforded suspicion, that the motion for a reform was nothing more than the preliminary to the overthrow of the whole system of our present government; and if they succeeded, they would overthrow what he thought the best constitution that was ever formed on the habitable globe." To pursue reform at this time, Pitt concluded in his stinging manner, "was to follow a madness which had been called liberty in another country . . . ."[22]

Fox defended Grey and the society, thereby opening himself to traduction. Naturally, he was indignant about Pitt's denigration of a cause which the First Minister had fervently championed during his initial four years in the House. In abandoning and denouncing parliamentary reform, Pitt was guilty of apostasy.[23] As for the charge that reformers were "infuriated republicans," Fox retorted that those who truckled behind the First Minister were nothing but "slaves of despotism." Although he had

[20] Parl. Hist., XXIX, 1307.
[21] Parl. Hist., XXIX, 1302.
[22] Parl. Hist., XXIX, 1311-12.
[23] Parl. Hist., XXIX, 1313.

not joined the Society of the Friends of the People, the Whig leader averred that "he saw no danger . . . in continued reform, and had no difficulty in declaring himself a friend to improvement of every kind."[24] This defense of the reformers brought a sharp pronouncement from George III who was as eager as Pitt to break the opposition and reduce Charles Fox to insignificance. The King held that "the most daring outrage to a regular government committed by the new Society, which yesterday published its manifesto in several of the newspapers, could only be equalled by some of its leaders standing forth the same day to avow their similar sentiments in the House of Commons; and I cannot see any substantial difference in their being joined in the debate by Mr. Fox, and his not being a member of the society."[25] These royal and ministerial attacks, however, failed to bring over any alarmed Whigs.

But the effort was renewed shortly. In mid May, ministers invited the Duke of Portland, grand seigneur among the conservative Whigs, and some of his followers to attend a Privy Council meeting to discuss a proposed proclamation against seditious writings.[26] Portland and his friends declined the invitation, but Lord Grenville believed it "impossible for them not to support us" in parliament when the measure was introduced.[27] The proclamation was submitted to

24 Parl. Hist., XXIX, 1317.

25 Reprinted in Stanhope, II, XIV.

26 Malmesbury Diaries, II, 424.

27 Court and Cabinets, II, 207.

the commons on May 25, and Pitt strained himself to cleave the Whigs. After Fox had assailed the proclamation as an "insidious and ambiguous" measure bearing "all the features of that craft which belonged to the quarter from whence it came,"[28] Pitt turned on him with equal malice. Addressing himself to the conservative Whigs, the First Minister observed that "Mr. Fox differed from all others. He saw no necessity for any proclamation at all. He saw no danger in writings, which had for their tendency the total overthrow of the Constitution."[29] These tactics, however, still failed to divide the Whigs.

Despite ministerial efforts to cleave it, Fox retained a firm hold over his party. Lord Grenville even acknowledged the refusal of Portland and his friends to attend the Privy Council meeting as "an additional proof of the decisive influence Fox possesses over their minds when he chooses to exert it."[30] Some of the Whigs wavered but none jumped sides when the proclamation against seditious writings was presented in parliament. Lord North and William Windham, for example, regretted that they must differ from Fox on this particular measure, but explicitly stated that they did not intend to abandon him.[31] Fox kept the waiverers in line

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28 Parl. Hist., XXIX, 1509.

29 Parl. Hist., XXIX, 1513.

30 Court and Cabinets, II, 207.

31 Parl. Hist., XXIX, 1492, 1501.

with a friendly but strong reproof. He pointed out that the proclamation was designed to promote fear of sedition rather than to check it, and to create dissension in the party. Those Whigs, said Fox, who believed that his opposition to the proclamation sprang from disloyalty were "made the dupes of the deep and artful designs which ministers had in view."[32] He concluded with a plea for unity. For the nonce, unity was preserved but there were rumblings of discontent.

In early June, the conservative Whigs began to consider seriously a junction with Pitt. Lord Loughborough, Lord Fitzwilliam, Lord Malmesbury, and the Duke of Portland met at the latter's home, Burlington House, on June 9 to discuss the matter. Burke was there also, and he exhorted them to break with Fox, who, he avowed, was "tainted with French politics and principles."[33] After Burke departed, the noblemen agreed that it would be "highly disagreeable" to separate from Fox, but that "the state of the times . . . called out for a junction."[34] On the following day, the Duke of Portland even declared that a coalition with the ministry was "so desirable a measure, that not only every overture tending towards one should be listened to, but even overtures made to promote it, were it practicable."[35] When this grumbling reached Pitt's ear he hastened

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32 Parl. Hist., XXIX, 1509.

33 Malmesbury Diaries, II, 419.

34 Malmesbury Diaries, II, 419-20.

35 Malmesbury Diaries, II, 421.

to extend something more "practicable" and palpable to the conservative Whigs than patriotism.

On June 13, the First Minister tendered a number of high and lucrative posts as inducements to abandon Fox. The offer came through Henry Dundas, Home Secretary and Pitt's ranking henchman. Dundas contacted Loughborough, who was eager to replace the recently cashiered Lord Thurlow on the woolsack.[36] He apprised the aspiring Lord Chancellor that Pitt would welcome a "permanent union" with the conservative Whigs, and was prepared to accomodate them in a number of places, viz., in positions of Lord Chancellor, Secretary of State for Home Affairs [Dundas's own office], President of the Council, and Privy Seal besides two or three Privy Councillors' places in the House of Commons, and the Lord Lieutenancy of Ireland.[37] An astonishing offer. Loughborough refused to believe it until confirmed by the First Minister. Also, he was anxious to learn if it had the sanction of Pitt's royal master. On the following evening [June 14], Loughborough dined with Pitt at Dundas's home, and received what he believed an explicit and sincere answer from the

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36 There had been considerable antagonism between Pitt and Thurlow, and when the Lord Chancellor spoke against the First Minister's scheme for attaching a sinking fund to every future state loan, Pitt demanded his dismissal. On May 15, 1792, the First Minister informed the King that a choice must be made between himself and Lord Thurlow. Thurlow was asked to relinquish the Great Seal. For a more extensive account of this incident see Barnes, p. 238.

37 Malmesbury Diaries, II, 424-25.

First Minister who said "he did not come with the King's command to propose a coalition, but that he would be responsible that it would please the King and the Queen, and that the only difficulty at all likely to arise was about Fox, and that difficulty owing to Fox's conduct in Parliament during the last four months." Then came the most astonishing statement during the interview. After remarking that he did not believe there was any insuperable barrier between himself and Fox that would bar their serving together, "Pitt said that it perhaps would not be quite easy to give Fox the Foreign Department immediately, but that in a few months he certainly might have it."[38] A very curious remark.

Three possible constructions may be placed on it. Firstly, it may be accepted as a sincere expression of willingness to let bygones be bygones. Pitt was not that gratuitous. Secondly, it may be interpreted as a legerdemain to include Fox in the ministry, muzzle him with officialdom, and thus give Pitt a free and unopposed hand to pursue his repressive policy. Such an interpretation would be as specious as the first was naive. If elevated to a ministerial post, Fox would have caused Pitt more discomfort than he already did on the opposition benches. He would have divided the council, worked at cross purposes with Pitt, and given the First Minister infinite embarrassment on matters of policy. Moreover, official position and duty would not have muzzled Fox.

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[38] Malmesbury Diaries, II, 426.

Instead of submitting to silence, he would have resigned and returned to opposition. The most likely explanation of Pitt's remark is that it was a polite way of telling Loughborough and his conservative friends that separation from Fox was the price they must pay for the tendered office. It was a clever attempt to split the Whig party, and leave Fox with his Friends of the People, who were already laboring under the shadow of republicanism.

This conclusion rests on two factors. First, Pitt admitted that he had not consulted the King about the proposed coalition, but that he meant to get both his master's and the Queen's assent. He could speak with some assurance that the King might admit Portland and the conservatives, but he knew, and so did Loughborough, that George III would never admit Charles Fox to ministerial rank. Had the King not threatened to abdicate in 1782, when necessity compelled him to accept Fox and North? Secondly, Pitt knew that if Fox were invited to join the ministry he [Pitt] would have to comply with the Whig leader's punctilio about equality. On the previous day, Fox had declared himself agreeable to a coalition if Pitt would resign and re-enter the ministry on an equal footing of power and patronage control with the Whigs.[39] Pitt would never assent to this. His remark about giving the Foreign Office to Fox not "immediately, but in a few months" was merely a subtle way of placing a premium on his bait.

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39 Malmesbury Diaries, II, 425.

This was Fox's construction of Pitt's curious remark. After divining the ruse, the Whig leader became abrupt and indignant. But there was considerable acumen mingled with his indignation. On June 16, he told Lord Malmesbury, one of the principal Whigs involved in these negotiations, who recorded every turn in his diary, that "he doubted Pitt's sincerity, and suspected he had no other view than to weaken their party and strengthen his own -- that to divide the opposition was his great object . . . that it was impossible ever to suppose Pitt would admit him to an equal share of power, and that whatever might be his own feelings or readiness to give way, he could not, for the sake of honour and pride of the Party, come in on any other terms."[40] Convinced of Pitt's insincerity, he exerted himself to block the negotiations.

To counterpoise the First Minister's tactics, Fox persuaded the Duke of Portland to insist upon Pitt's resignation as First Lord of the Treasury prior to a coalition, with the understanding that he [Pitt] would re-join the ministry in a lesser post. The Treasury should be occupied by "some neutral man," like the Duke of Leeds.[41] This, and Fox's other demand that the Whigs be given equal power and patronage if they entered the ministry, was certain to preclude a junction. Pitt would never accede to such humiliating terms. Anyway, Portland was adamant about the First Minister

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[40] Malmesbury Diaries, II, 427.

[41] Malmesbury Diaries, II, 425.

resigning before the conservative Whigs would enter a coalition.[42] His insistence on this point even caused dissension among the waiverers themselves. Some, like Lord Fitzwilliam, agreed with Fox and Portland about "the indispensible necessity of Pitt resigning the Treasury for another cabinet office." Others, like the anxious Loughborough "really thought it unreasonable to expect that Pitt should quit the Treasury."[43] By fomenting argument among the conservative Whigs over the means of coalescing with Pitt, Fox curbed their eagerness and held the party intact. Musing over the difficulties of the prospective coalition, Burke observed correctly that "Mr. Fox's coach stops the way . . . ."[44]

Between June 20, and July 11, 1792, a stalemate developed in the negotiations between the conservative Whigs and Pitt. The Duke of Portland, who completely agreed with Fox about the terms of the coalition, resisted the proddings of his office-anxious companions. Despite his disapproval of Fox's attitude toward the Revolution, he refused to abandon him or to sanction the conduct of any Whig who joined the ministerial ranks before Fox's terms were satisfied. Pitt, of course, refused to acknowledge Fox's terms as a basis for negotiating a junction. So for about three weeks there was considerable shuffling, but no significant political maneuvering. Burke implored Portland and other conservatives to break with Fox,

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42 Malmesbury Diaries, II, 434.

43 Malmesbury Diaries, II, 430-31.

44 Malmesbury Diaries, II, 433.

join Pitt, and end all "systematic opposition." The Duke, of course, rejected this as "unwise and unsafe" advice.[45] With Portland secured, Fox disported himself by baffling the waiverers. On one occasion he enheartened them by declaring that a coalition "was so damned right a thing, that it must be done."[46] Then he dispirited their hopes for concession by speaking of "the impossibility of his acting under Pitt," and becoming "harsh, impracticable, and opinionative."[47]

Pitt tried to break the deadlock with additional inducements. On July 11, Portland was informed that the First Minister "still ardently wishes for an arrangement," and was prepared to offer the Governor-Generalship of India to the waiverers.[48] Shortly afterwards, the Great Seal was extended to Loughborough again, and the Garter and the Chancellorship of Oxford were proferred to Portland.[49] The Duke spurned all these lures and his obstinacy may be attributed to Fox's influence over him. Replying to Portland's request for advice about these latest overtures, Fox wrote: "I think with you that your acceptance of the Garter at this moment could produce no good effect in any view whatever, and that it might possibly

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45 Malmesbury Diaries, II, 433-34.

46 Malmesbury Diaries, II, 432.

47 Malmesbury Diaries, II, 435.

48 Malmesbury Diaries, II, 436.

49 Malmesbury Diaries, II, 438.

do much mischief; the greatest of all to the public in my judgement, if it should tend (which I confess I do not think impossible) to lessen your weight and influence."[50] This terminated the first phase of the maneuvering. Fox opened the next stage to test the soundness of Pitt's overtures.

Convinced that the First Minister was trying to destroy the Whig party, Fox determined to test the validity of his offer. Any official appointments would have to be sanctioned by the King, and Fox suspicioned that Pitt was making his astonishing offers without royal approval.[51] There was some basis for his doubts. In June, the First Minister had admitted to Loughborough that he had commenced the negotiations without the King's approbation, although he meant to secure both the King's and the Queen's approval.[52] Between June 13, and July 22, Pitt did obtain the King's assent to treat with the conservative Whigs. George III, however, admonished him "to shew any marks of distinction to the respectable part of the party, provided it was not accompanied with too much power."[53] Practically all of Pitt's enticements were offices accompanied with considerable power. Moreover, in limiting negotiations to "the respectable part of the party," the King definitely

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50 July 21, 1792. Fox Memorials, IV, 286.

51 Malmesbury Diaries, II, 439.

52 See above p. 72.

53 Dropmore MSS., II, 294.

overruled Pitt's earlier talk about including Fox in the ministry "in a few months." If it could be proved that Pitt had exceeded his authority, and that the King had no intention of giving great offices to the conservative Whigs, Fox could give the lie to his rival and maintain his party intact.

The Duke of Leeds was the instrument Fox used to corroborate his suspicions. Leeds had served in the cabinet as Foreign Secretary until his rupture with Pitt over policy during the Oczakow crisis in 1791. He was anxious to re-enter the ministry, and was elated when Portland mentioned him in June as a possible "neutral man" for the First Lord of the Treasury in case Pitt resigned for a subordinate post. The Duke, says Malmesbury, was "carried away more by his own imagination and sanguine hopes, in which his string of toad-eaters encourage him, than by reason and reflection."[54] Believing himself to be "on a footing of perfect confidence" at Windsor, Leeds proposed that he intercede with the King to facilitate a union between the ministerial ranks and the conservative Whigs.[55] Portland was dubious about this proposal, but Fox seized upon it. On July 31, Lord Malmesbury wrote Leeds that "Fox has great satisfaction from your idea of seeing the King, as he considers the success of the whole to depend on His Majesty having an arrangement in his wishes; the ascertaining that, he looks

[54] Malmesbury Diaries, II, 438.

[55] Malmesbury Diaries, II, 437-38.

upon as a material point, and which nothing is so likely to do as what you intend."[56] Also, Fox specified that Leeds must talk with the King about a coalition before he conferred with Pitt and Dundas. In other words, Fox intended to use Leeds to ascertain how agreeable George III was to a union, and to determine whether he [the King] would concede the offices which Pitt had tendered. If there appeared to be discrepancy between the King and his chief minister, Fox's suspicion would be confirmed. Royal reluctance to bestow the offices would establish Fox's contention that Pitt had merely been dangling lucrative bait before the conservative Whigs as an enticement to join the ministerial camp.

On August 14, Leeds obtained an interview with the King in the Library of the Queen's Lodge. Presuming that George III was familiar with the recent transactions between Pitt and Portland, he began to discuss his own ideas for a union. But he was cut short. "To my great surprise," Leeds wrote in his diary that night, "the King answered that he had not heard anything upon the subject for a long time. That Mr. Pitt had indeed some months ago mentioned something like an opening on the part of the Duke of Portland and friends, to which H. M. had answered, "Anything Complimentary to them, but no power!!!"[57] Fox's misgivings were substantiated. Pitt

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56 Malmesbury Diaries, II, 440.

57 The Political Memoranda of Francis Fifth Duke of Leeds, ed., Oscar Browning (Westminister, 1884), p. 188. Hereafter cited as Leeds Memoranda.

had disguised his maneuvers from the King, who had no intentions of making openings for "the respectable part of the party." Leeds, of course, was bewildered, and Pitt embarrassed. The contretemps is worth tracing to its conclusion.

Four days later Leeds met with Pitt to secure an explanation. Meanwhile the First Minister had reversed his position, probably after a very uncomfortable session with George III. On August 22, he informed the already perplexed Duke that "there had been no thought of any alteration in the Government, that circumstances did not call for it, nor did the people wish it, and that no new arrangement, either by a change or coalition, had ever been in contemplation!!!"[58] Stunned, Leeds groped his way to Lord Malmesbury's where he reported his strange intelligence. That night he recorded in his diary what Professor Donald G. Barnes has termed "the most delicious passage in Leeds's Memoranda:"[59]

> We agreed it would be right to soften it to the Duke of Portland and particularly to Mr. Fox, for as he had all along doubted Mr. Pitt's being sincerely disposed towards the arrangement in question, what had now passed would be a matter of triumph to his discernment, and he might perhaps not have discretion enough to be silent, and the whole getting wind might be productive of many bad consequences.[60]

Fox, of course, did learn about the interview, and he was an astute enough politician not to remain silent, but to use the news discreetly

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58 Leeds Memoranda, p. 194.

59 Barnes, p. 252.

60 Leeds Memoranda, p. 196.

as a brace for party solidarity. Unfortunately, it did not prove a very strong band.

Pitt continued to excite the fears of the conservative Whigs about the Revolution. He was assisted by the extreme turn of events in France during the autumn of 1792. As we have seen, the British government used the September massacres, the National Convention's militant foreign policy, and the "propaganda decrees" as an excuse to raise a jacobin scare in England and to call out the militia.[61] When parliament met on December 12, talk of "libels," "sedition," "insurrection," and "treason," cascaded from the Treasury Bench. Fox, of course, inveighed against these fear-provoking tactics, but his more conservative followers were thoroughly alarmed. Mere safety from suspicion within the ministerial fold now counted as much with them as the prospect of office had during the previous summer. Cravenly, they renounced Fox, badgered the Duke of Portland to abandon him, and to support government measures.

The haste and eagerness displayed by the conservative Whigs to break with Fox is reflected in their prevailings upon Portland. On December 16, a group of them met with the Duke at Burlington House to discuss Fox's unshakable veneration of the Revolution in general, and his opposition to the government's security measures in particular. Sir Gilbert Elliot, M. P. for Helston and an inveterate conservative, opened with a strong harangue against Fox's conduct, which, he claimed

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61 See above p. 24.

was "founded on the worst principles, on those on which the French Revolution was founded."[62] By continuing to associate with the Whig leader, Elliot argued that the conservatives partook of his "bad reputation and unpopularity." Therefore, he implored Portland to express publicly "entire disapprobation of Fox's conduct and principles . . . and separate from him amicably, but decidedly."[63] The Duke rejected this proposal, but during the following week he was hounded by Loughborough, Malmesbury, Elliot, and Windham to renounce Fox openly. Though he "lamented Fox's conduct," Portland would not break with him.

The conservatives, however, did persuade the Duke to support the government. On December 21, he promised to declare his approval of ministerial policy in the House of Lords. But to the chagrin of his followers, his speech was noncommittal.[64] Elliot, Malmesbury, and Windham were "hurt and vexed" by Portland's failure to make an explicit statement in favor of the government, and chided him severely at a meeting on the 24th. Also, they spoke harshly of Fox, demanding that the Duke separate from him, and publicly accord his support to the government. The Duke confessed that his failure "was a weakness, arising from a predilection and tenderness to Fox; and to this cause must be ascribed the backwardness

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62 Malmesbury Diaries, II, 443.

63 Malmesbury Diaries, II, 444.

64 Malmesbury Diaries, II, 447.

which he had hitherto shewn to take those explicit and decisive steps . . . ."[65] Again, he would not separate from Fox, but he agreed to announce his support of the government "immediately" in the House of Lords. Also, he directed his son, Lord Titchfield, to do the same in Commons, and authorized his followers to repeat his sentiments.

Portland again disappointed his conservative followers. "To the great concern and grief of his friends, [he] did not say a word" in parliament on December 26, when he was supposed to declare his support of the ministry.[66] Now they were convinced "that Fox had an invariable ascendency over him."[67] Nonetheless, the right-wingers proceeded as they had been authorized, and on the 28th Sir Gilbert Elliot announced in Commons, after renouncing his own political connections with Fox, that henceforth those Whigs who acknowledged the Duke of Portland as their leader would support the ministry.[68] Fox was enraged and questioned Elliot's authority to say that the Duke intended to give his approval to ministerial policy. When the House recessed, he hastened to a Whig meeting at Burlington where he was "angry, and rude in his manners."[69]

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65 Malmesbury Diaries, II, 454.

66 Malmesbury Diaries, II, 455.

67 Malmesbury Diaries, II, 460.

68 Parl. Hist., XXX, 176-77.

69 Malmesbury Diaries, II, 460.

Only bitterness and misunderstanding resulted from the meeting. Both Fox and Elliot pledged themselves to the Duke of Portland and appealed to him for a clarification. Fox contended that Sir Gilbert's speech had conveyed the idea that the Duke intended to renounce him and cast his lot with the government. Elliot, on the other hand, claimed that he only meant to sever his personal connections with Fox, not the Duke's. As for supporting the government, he pointed out that on December 24 Portland had authorized his followers to announce this step. The Duke admitted that Elliot was correct in stating his sentiments about endorsing the ministry, but that he had sanctioned nobody to terminate his friendship and political connection with Fox. Difficulties appeared solved until Fox recalled "that nine days before (Sunday, 16) the Duke had agreed with him, in the most unequivocal manner, that he saw no reason why opposition should not be carried on against the present Government on the same principles and from the same reasons as ever." This confused matters again, for Portland did not deny the statement. The conclave adjourned with Fox "angry," the Duke "embarrassed and perplexed beyond measure," and the conservatives prepared to join Pitt.[70]

Fox's grip over the right-wingers was now loose, but not lost. On December 24, it will be recalled, Portland had appointed his son, Lord Titchfield, to declare in the House of Commons that

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[70] Malmesbury Diaries, II, 460.

the conservative Whigs would support the government during the present crisis. Titchfield was to make his announcement on December 31, 1792. That morning, Fox penned a mandate to the Duke urging him to countermand his instructions.[71] It was a desperate attempt to deter the conservatives from jumping into the ministerial ranks. Meanwhile, Windham was at Burlington House writing the speech Titchfield was to deliver that afternoon. Titchfield gave the speech announcing that his father and other conservatives were prepared to support the government, but his concluding remarks, aimed at the ministers, were so violent that they virtually destroyed the effect of his pronouncement. Malmesbury and others surmised that "Fox had come to Burlington House later than Windham, and added those last sentences."[72] Not a nice conjecture, but a plausible one considering Portland's submissiveness to Fox. Anyway, the conservatives were so disgusted with the Duke that they considered leaving him, too.

This phase of the struggle within the Whig party abated in January, 1793. For several weeks the conservatives were so irate with Portland that they considered scouting him as well as Fox and joining Pitt.[73] Their indignation subsided, however, and Loughborough was the only one who deserted to the ministerial ranks. He accepted the

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71 Fox Memorials, IV, 292-96.

72 Malmesbury Diaries, II, 462-63.

73 Malmesbury Diaries, II, 463-66.

Great Seal on January 26.[74] To the disappointment of the government, no great number immediately followed his example. Despite their antipathy for the Revolution, and suspicions about Fox and the Friends of the People, the right-wingers still balked at formally joining or supporting the government. The ensuing calm, however, did not reconcile them to Fox. Their sentiments were best expressed by Sir Gilbert Elliot who wrote Malmesbury at the end of the month that "a return to Fox, or of Fox to us, appears, as you say, highly improbable; and every step he and those with whom he has exclusively connected himself seem to take, renders our separation wider, and anything like co-operation more irreconcileable [sic] with our principles."[75] Nevertheless, he rejected the idea of joining the ministry as repugnant to public duty and personal feelings. Unity among the Whigs was preserved in name only.

Between February, 1793, and July, 1794, a liaison was maintained between the ministry and the Portland Whigs. The war with France, and Fox's opposition to it, bloated their apprehensions, and made them anxious to arrange a modus vivendi with the British government. During this period, no calumnious device was spared to detach them openly from Fox. On September 29, 1793, Burke sent a lengthy dissertation to the Duke of Portland charging Fox with fifty-four

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74 Malmesbury Diaries, II, 469.

75 January 27, 1793. Malmesbury Diaries, II, 474.

counts of treason,[76] and the administration's hack writers assailed him [Fox] daily. The Morning Chronicle was not overstating the case when it said on January 2, 1794: "Mr. Fox, for more than twelve months past, has been most violently attacked in a continued series of ministerial libels, without the least proof of any mismanagement in office, or dishonourable practice in opposition. Thus unblemished in his public conduct, indefatigable pains have been taken to blacken his private character; and when facts are wanting to support the attempt, bad intentions are alleged against him as a positive charge."[77] Fox did forestall an en masse desertion, although a number of conservatives drifted into the ministerial camp individually. As his opposition to the war grew more implacable, the rate of defection increased and his minority dwindled to thirty some adherents.

Not until July, 1794, did the conservative Whigs formally coalesce with the ministry. They would brook Fox's sympathy for France no longer, and openly joined Pitt. Portland was created third Secretary of State, Earl Fitzwilliam was made Lord President of the Council, the Privy Seal was given to Earl Spencer, and William Windham became Secretary at War.[78] Other conservatives, who were

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76 Laprade, pp. 128-29.

77 Quoted in Laprade, p. 131.

78 Later in 1794, Earl Fitzwilliam became Lord Lieutenant of Ireland and was succeeded as President of the Council by Earl Mansfield. Also, Lord Spencer was placed at the head of the Admiralty, succeeding Pitt's brother, Lord Chatham, who became Lord Privy Seal. Court and Cabinets, II, 270.

already voting with the government, openly announced their support of the ministry. The union, however, did not meet with general approval. Fox, of course, censured it as a "deadly blow to public confidence in public men; a very serious evil to the public in his opinion."[79] This general stricture found definition in the adverse reactions of some of Pitt's friends. The First Minister's private secretary, George Rose, disapproved of the union because it would appear to the public as "a junction of parties on a footing of mutual interests, or of sharing power to preserve a continuance of it."[80] Also, the Marquis of Buckingham, Lord Grenville's brother, believed that it partook of the odium attending the Fox-North coalition in 1782.[81]

The union of the Portland Whigs with the ministry in 1794 left Charles Fox politically denuded. Previously, he had held the party intact and faced the Treasury Bench with a united opposition, in name if not in fact. His hold over the conservatives may be attributed to his exposure of Pitt's devious efforts to divide the party and to his "invariable ascendency" over the Duke of Portland.

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79 Parl. Hist., XXI, 1125.

80 George Rose to George Prettyman Tomline, Bishop of Lincoln, July 11, 1794. The Diaries and Correspondence of the Right Hon. George Rose: Containing Letters of the Most Distinguished Statesmen of His Day, ed., Reverend Leveson Vernon Harcourt (London, 1860), I, 194.

81 Marquis of Buckingham to Lord Grenville, July 8, 1794. Dropmore MSS., II, 597-98.

Between January, 1793, and July, 1794, the right wing dissolved as individual members began to follow the government's long train into the lobbies at division time. Yet, a semblance of unity prevailed until Portland and the others formally joined Pitt. Then Fox was left with about three dozen ardent followers, most of whom were Friends of the People. Together, they labored along under the stigma of republicanism, fighting valiantly for enlightened reforms and against the ministry's benighted policy of repression.

# Chapter IV

## REFORM AND REPRESSION

Fox did not join any of the reform societies which mushroomed in England after the outbreak of the French Revolution. He did, however, defend them tirelessly from the defamatory and persecuting attacks of the British government, maintaining that there was no affinity between domestic reform and revolution abroad. His unwillingness to connect himself with these groups may be explained by his aversion to universal suffrage, which was a cardinal point to most of them. He was always a spokesman for parliamentary reform, but his concept of it did not extend beyond what was accomplished in 1832. Some of the societies which emerged in England during the era of the Revolution were composed of retainers and artisans with democratic aims. Fox would neither join them nor subscribe to their programs, but he did defend their right to discuss and work publicly toward their goals. Attacks upon the reform societies, however, were not the only aspects of the government's repressive policy. There was a proclamation against seditious writings, an Alien bill, a measure prohibiting public meetings for political purposes, and even the right of habeas corpus was suspended. These were only the salient features of Pitt's tyranny. Charles Fox's opposition to all the ministry's grinding

measures in this period has been termed his "finest hour."[1] It was. His denunciation of the war and his admiration of the Revolution cost him friends, political connections and public esteem. In a moment of lethargy and despair, he seceded from parliament but he did not abandon resistance. In fact, his increased rashness nearly brought him imprisonment in the Tower.

The outbreak of the French Revolution heartened reformers in England. It seemed to ring open an age of change and liberty moored only by reason. We have seen that Charles Fox believed it "the greatest event . . . that ever happened in the world."[2] Other Englishmen of a liberal bent were also inspired. The Dissenters raised their clamor for repeal of the Test and Corporation acts, and several well organized groups emerged to work for a reform of the British parliament where "seats for legislation were as notoriously rented as the standings for cattle at a fair."[3] The Society for Promoting Constitutional Information, which had been active in the early 1780's, was revived in 1791. It was soon joined in its efforts to achieve annual parliaments, more equal representation, and universal suffrage by the London Corresponding

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1 A. J. P. Taylor, "Charles James Fox, champion of liberty," Manchester Guardian Weekly, vol. 75, no. 12 September 20, 1956, 11.

2 See above p. 1.

3 Parl. Hist., XXX, 462. The remark was made originally by the cantankerous old reformer, John Horne Tooke, and was parroted in Commons by M.P.'s who were enthusiastic about reform.

Society.[4] This latter group was the most important of the reform societies, because it marks the emergence of the workingman into British politics.[5] The London Corresponding Society was founded by a shoemaker, Thomas Hardy, on January 25, 1792. With dues at a penny per week, the group attracted between five and ten thousand unfranchised laborers within eight months.[6] Needless to say, the very composition of this group brought it under suspicion by the government. A third organization, the Society of the Friends of the People, was formed in April, 1792. We have noted that this group was made up of opulent and relatively advanced thinking Whig gentlemen who hoped to obtain a more equal representation and more frequent elections.[7] Drawn from the aristocracy, the Friends of the People emphatically abjured universal suffrage as an object. Nonetheless, they did not escape the baleful scrutiny and oppression of the British ministry.

Charles Fox joined none of these groups, although he constantly defended them. He was always a reformer, but his refusal to connect himself with Hardy's organization or the Society for Promoting Constitutional Information is readily understood. His

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[4] Barnes, p. 303.

[5] George Macaulay Trevelyan, Lord Grey of the Reform Bill (London, 1929), p. 31.

[6] Veitch, p. 218.

[7] See above p. 66.

concept of reform did not embrace their idea of universal suffrage, "to which he was an avowed enemy." In fact, he even declined a request by the London Corresponding Society to present a petition in parliament stating its democratic aims.[8] More from misunderstanding than disinclination, he did not enter the Society of the Friends of the People, although he supported its measures.[9] Composed of liberal Whigs, this group distinguished itself from the other reform societies by its moderate aims. Its declaration for more equal representation in parliament and more frequent elections is probably the most succinct approximation of Fox's views on reform adducible. Though he disassociated himself from these groups, and even disapproved of some of them, Fox persistently defended their right to organize, discuss, and publicly work toward the achievement of their goals. It was an onerous, but commendable, task.

The ministerial attack upon the reformers did not gain full momentum until the spring of 1792. Previously, Pitt and Burke had tried to dovetail them with jacobinism by innuendo, but the broadside assault did not commence until Grey announced the

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8 Fox to Thomas Hardy, May 2, 1793. A Complete Collection of State Trials and Proceedings for High Treason and Other Crimes and Misdemeanors from the Earliest Period to the Year 1803, With Notes and Other Illustrations, ed., T. B. Howell and continued from the year 1783 to the present by Thomas Jones Howell (London, 1818), XXIV, 791. Hereafter cited as State Trials.

9 See above p. 66.

objectives of the Friends of the People on April 30, 1792. The First Minister's reaction to the pronouncement has already been noted. His assertion that reform would plunge the country into "anarchy and confusion" indicates the attitude which he maintained toward the subject throughout the revolutionary era. From 1792 onwards, he accused reformers of trying "to adopt the French model, not as a temporary, but as a permanent rule of practice," and charged that "under the pretence of a parliamentary reform, [they] would introduce a tyranny worse than that of Caligula."[10] But verbal attacks were merely his softest weapon, for he eventually employed the legal apparatus of the state to blight the reformers. Why Pitt abandoned and persecuted a cause which he had championed during his early years in parliament is difficult to ascertain. The answer probably lies in his eagerness to split the Whig opposition and increase his own political strength. The practices of some of the reform groups, however, facilitated his efforts to link them with the jacobins.

The London Corresponding Society and the Society for Promoting Constitutional Information maintained a felicitous and innocuous communication with the French National Convention until the outbreak of hostilities between England and France. Congratulatory addresses to the French were nothing unusual during the early stages of the Revolution. We have seen that the dissenters proffered their

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10 Parl. Hist., XXXI, 917, 919.

best wishes to the National Assembly in late 1789, and noted that "every mail was laden with freash congratulations to the Jacobin Societies" during the ensuing two years.[11] Events during the summer of 1792 -- the storming of the Tuilieres, imprisonment of Louis XVI, and the September massacres -- curtailed most of this activity. Hardy's organization and the Society for Promoting Constitutional Information, however, continued to laud the French and even sent emissaries to the National Convention in late 1792. On November 7, both groups sent a message to the French legislature expressing a wish for a "Triple Alliance, not of crowned heads, but of the people of America, France, and Great Britain [which] will give liberty to Europe and peace to the world."[12] Through two of its agents in Paris, Joel Barlow and John Frost, the London Corresponding Society presented the Convention with a more than tepid address on November 28, declaring that "After the example given by France, Revolutions will become easy. Reason is about to make rapid progress; and it would not be extraordinary if in a much less space of time than can be imagined, the French should send addresses of congratulations to a National Convention of England."[13] As a token of real empathy, the society followed the

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11 See above pp. 2-3.

12 Quoted in John Holland Rose, Life of William Pitt (New York, 1924), II, pp. 67-68.

13 Quoted in John Holland Rose, II, p. 70.

address with a benevolence of 1,000 pair of shoes to the French army. These ill-timed gestures were strongly denounced and vilified by the British government.

Ministers condemned these proceedings in the most hectoring terms when parliament met on December 13. Dundas, the Home Secretary, culled the London Corresponding Society for attack, noting that it was formed "on the model of the affiliated societies abroad, held a correspondence with France, for the purpose of overturning the constitution, and even sent members to Paris to procure instructions." Then, with an obvious and flagrant barb for Hardy's group, he attributed all present discontents to "the seditious spirit of the lower classes."[14] Burke and some of the other conservative Whigs joined in chanting against the reformers, and "their connexion with the band of French robbers and assassins."[15] Fox, of course, was equally vituperative in parrying these attempts to smear the societies with the stench of republicanism. He acknowledged that some of the reformers had "indulged themselves . . . in silly and frantic speculations, and . . . published toasts, etc., that are objectionable," but he denied that they were connected with the jacobins or were working for the overthrow of the British constitution.[16] For the nonce, only words were hurled at the societies and the movement for parliamentary reform continued.

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14 Parl. Hist., XXX, 46.

15 Parl. Hist., XXX, 55.

16 Parl. Hist., XXX, 23.

The outbreak of hostilities between England and France neither reduced nor distracted the zeal of the reformers. They did, of course, cease corresponding with the National Convention, but the chauvinistic enthusiasm which attends the beginning of all wars did not abate their eagerness to reapportion representation in the British legislature. Even Fox, who was no zealot about this matter, informed a French agent in England on February 2, 1793, that "We [presumably the liberal wing of the Whig party or the Friends of the People] desire a reform; we desire it good, although founded on [a] constitutional basis. We do not desire a war with France, if there is no aggression made against Holland; and if this war is solely to take place to secure the opening of the Scheldt, we will even present the minister's desire to make war as a desire to prevent reform."[17] Many other Englishmen still wanted reform despite the war. On February 18, a group from Nottingham presented the House of Commons with a petition for legislative reapportionment and universal suffrage. Similar petitions were made to parliament in May by reformers from Sheffield, Norwich, Westminister, Suffolk, Poole, Warwick, Huddersfield, Dundee, Paisley, Montrose, Perth, Edinburgh, and numerous other counties and boroughs both in England and Scotland.[18] And on May 6, Charles Grey laid an elaborate motion

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17 Quoted in Veitch, pp. 240-41.

18 Parl. Hist., XXX, 786.

for reform before the House in behalf of the Friends of the People.[19] All of these measures were disparaged by the ministry, and none received the approval of the House of Commons. The tenets expressed in some of the petitions were repugnant to Fox's concept of reform, but he defended every one of them.

Charles Fox's attitude toward parliamentary reform is well defined in his defense of these measures. Speaking in their behalf did not imply carte blanche approval of their doctrines. Some of the petitions contained motions antithetical to Fox's concept of reform, and in many cases his defense sprang more from indignation over the ministry's aspersive tactics than from sympathy with the measure before the House. Most of the petitions contained a clause for universal suffrage which Fox considered a most "extravagant" idea.[20] In fact, he declared during the debate on the Sheffield petition [May 7, 1792] that "there was not in the kingdom a more steady and decided enemy to general and universal representation, than himself."[21] He explained his aversion to it on grounds of impracticability, stating that "there was no practical mode of collecting suffrage, and that by attempting it, what from the operation of hope on some, fear on others, and all the sinister means of influence that would certainly be exerted, fewer individual

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19 Grey's motion is reprinted in Parl. Hist., XXX, 788-89.

20 Parl. Hist., XXX, 462.

21 Parl. Hist., XXX, 915.

opinions would be collected than by an appeal to a limited number."[22] This, however, seems to be a superficial explanation. Fox's aristocratic concept of society, government, and party probably would be a more adequate explanation of his antipathy for universal suffrage. As a reformer, he abjured all thoroughgoing schemes for revising the British constitution. Distinctly moderate on this head, he was for examining the old fabric "with care and reverence," repairing it where it had decayed, amending it where defective, propping it up where it wanted support, and passing it on to posterity in an improved condition.[23] His moderate proclivities, however, did not inhibit him from defending the more extreme reformers, who soon became victims of judicial tyranny.

During the summer of 1793, the legal machinery of the state was invoked to crush the reformers. Thomas Muir and Reverend Thomas Palmer, two brilliant young men who had agitated for reform in Scotland, were indicted for sedition, tried by prejudiced judges and juries, and sentenced to transportation. Muir wastried in August before the High Court of Justiciary at Edinburgh, presided over by Lord Braxfield, "the Scottish Jeffreys."[24] From the beginning of the trial he was virtually a condemned man, for Braxfield

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22 Parl. Hist., XXX, 915.

23 Parl. Hist., XXX, 916.

24 State Trials, XXIII, 117-237.

who had prejudged the case, vitiated all chance for fairness by prevailing on the jurors to "come awa', and help us to hang ane o' the damned scoondrels."[25] Besides jury meddling, Braxfield indulged in lengthy political exhortations. Putting the case to the jury, he wondered "whether it was perfectly innocent or not in Mr. Muir, at such a time, to go about among ignorant country people, and among the lower classes of the people."[26] Then he asked, "What right had they to representation? . . . A Government in every country should be just like a corporation; and in this country, it is made up of the landed interest, which alone has a right to be represented; as for the rabble, who have nothing but personal property, what hold has the nation of them?"[27] This oblique procedure secured Muir's conviction, and he was transported to Botany Bay for fourteen years. Palmer, a scholar and friend of the late Dr. Samuel Johnson, was tried in September at the Circuit Court in Perth.[28] Although Braxfield did not try the case, the defendant was doomed since Henry Dundas had recently labeled him "the most determined rebel in Scotland."[29] Palmer was found guilty of sedition and sentenced to seven years transportation. Emboldened

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25 Quoted in Brown, p. 96.

26 State Trials, XXIII, 229.

27 State Trials, XXIII, 231.

28 State Trials, XXIII, 237-82.

29 Quoted in Brown, p. 96.

by the proceedings in Scotland, Pitt prepared to strike at English reformers through the courts.

Between May and October, 1794, the British government worked sedulously and ruthlessly to indict and convict reformers in England. The trials themselves did not commence until autumn. Meanwhile, the country experienced a witch-hunt for prodigal reformers similar to the royalist search conducted by the Jacobin Club in France. Thomas Hardy, and seven of his followers in the London Corresponding Society, were arrested and imprisoned for promoting a convention which, allegedly, intended to conspire against the British government. Also, the testy old reformer and linguist John Horne Tooke was taken into custody besides six members of the Society for Promoting Constitutional Information. Others were also arrested. The personal papers of the suspects were seized, their quarters ransacked, and their families treated with disrespect.[30] Some of the prisoners were subjected to lengthy periods of interrogation by the Privy Council, and accorded contumely and threats. William Sharp, a member of the Society for Promoting Constitutional Information, reported that upon refusing to answer questions put to him by the Council, Pitt blurted "Well, we can do without his evidence. Let him be sent to prison, and hanged with the rest of them in the Tower."[31] This was the language of a

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[30] Brown, pp. 118-19.

[31] Quoted in Brown, p. 122.

Jeffreys, but thanks to the good sense of English jurors what portended to be another "bloody assize" was knocked into a fiasco.

The British government was discredited and embarrassed by the state trials of 1794. The evidence adduced against the defendants charged with treason was flimsy, and not a conviction was obtained. Hardy went before the bar on October 28.[32] John Scott, later Lord Eldon, opened for the Crown with a nine hour speech. Hearing of this, ex-Chancellor Thurlow exclaimed, "Nine hours. Then there is no treason, by God!"[33] The shoemaker was defended by Thomas Erskine, Fox's cohort who had acted as defense counsel for Tom Paine in 1792. The ordeal lasted nine days before the case went to the jury, which declared Hardy "not guilty." The verdict was cheerfully greeted, and the leader of the Corresponding Society was carried on the shoulders of his adherents through the Strand, Pall Mall, Piccadilly, and the Haymarket.[34] Undismayed, the government resumed the prosecutions on November 17, by setting the redoubtable John Horne Tooke before the bar.[35] It could not have selected a more formidable defendant after the Hardy verdict. The witty, irascible old linguist even eclipsed

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32 State Trials, XXIV, 199-1384.

33 Quoted in Brown, p. 127.

34 Brown, p. 128.

35 State Trials, XXV, 1-748.

Erskine in his dexterous cross-examination of government witnesses. Poking jibes and barbs, he asked permission of the court to hum a tune in order that it might determine whether or not the limerick was treasonable, asked the Bishop of Gloucester if Cambridge University did not confer the master of arts degree upon any creature capable of answering a rational question, and made the government's stellar witness, the right honorable Mr. William Pitt, appear a fool.[36] Immediately after withdrawing, the jury returned with a verdict of "not guilty". The government was discredited. Many of the reformers were released, and the few subjected to trials were acquitted. No one had been more indignant about these trials than Charles Fox.

But as leader of a fractured opposition, there was little Fox could do except publicly castigate the infamous proceedings. To no avail, he submitted a protest to Dundas respecting the sentences of Muir and Palmer,[37] and supported a motion in parliament charging that improper evidence and witnesses had been admitted in the trials of those two unfortunate Scots. Also, he vehemently censured Braxfield, whose "ignorance, levity, and hypocrisy," even surpassed the turpitude which had disgraced the bench during the reigns of the Stuarts.[38] He considered the talk of conspiracy in

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36 State Trials, XXV, 743-44.

37 Veitch, p. 262.

38 Parl. Hist., XXX, 569.

England "nonsense," and denounced the arrests of the reformers in the summer of 1794 as "the most mischievous and at the same time the most foolish" measure yet taken by the British ministry. To Fox, there was little difference between Pitt and Robespierre.[39] Quite understandably, he rejoiced over the acquittals of Hardy, Tooke, and the others. The decisions in these cases vindicated his contention that there was no connection between domestic reform and revolution across the channel. Moreover, as practically every historian writing about this period has observed, if the reformers had been convicted of treason Fox, Grey and members of the opposition probably would have followed them to the bar.[40] Fortunately, the English courts were not debased into counter-revolutionary tribunals, and the reform movement continued.

Fox opposed the government's other repressive measures as strongly as he denounced its attacks on the reformers. He constantly maintained that there was not the remotest possibility of revolution in England, and that anyone trying to incite the people would be "pronounced fitter for Bedlam than for Newgate."[41] As for the influx of French ideas, he believed it so limited "as to

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39 Fox to Henry, Lord Holland, June 23, 1794. Fox Memorials, III, 77.

40 Before attending Hardy's trial, Grey wrote to his fiance, Miss Ponsoby: "I believe I shall attend it in order to learn how to conduct myself when it comes to my turn." Quoted in Edward Lascelles, The Life of Charles James Fox (London, 1936), pp. 264-65.

41 Parl. Hist., XXXI, 928.

afford no serious cause of alarm to any mind of rational constancy."[42] He was correct. Both contemporaries and modern scholars attest to the relative calm in England during the French Revolution. Probably the most succinct and competent remark about public tranquillity was made by Sir Samuel Romilly, the noted legalist, in July, 1794, when Pitt was trying to resuscitate Star Chamber. "A great deal, indeed," Romilly wrote to a foreign acquaintance, "has been said, both here and abroad, of the dangerous designs which are entertained and cherished by many persons in this country; but there has not hitherto been the smallest indication by any open acts of any such dangers existing; and whatever interruptions of tranquillity have happened, have been by the too zealous friends of quiet and good order riotously demonstrating their loyalty and attachment to the constitution."[43] Since there was no internal disturbance, the ministry fabricated one.

Political pamphleteers as well as reformers were harassed by the British government. In May, 1792, a royal proclamation against seditious writings was issued,[44] and during the following months the country was netted with ministerial agents to collect

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42 Parl. Hist., XXX, 220.

43 Sir Samuel Romilly to Madame G____, July 29, 1794. Romilly Corr., II, 39.

44 The proclamation is reprinted in Parl. Hist., XXIX, 1476-77.

"libels" and "seditious tracts."[45] The most renowned of all the publicists, Tom Paine who was now a delegate in the French Convention, had already been tried and convicted, in absentia, for seditious libel.[46] The trial was a ministerial warning to Paine's emulators.[47] These measures were denounced by Fox, who called for the unrestricted circulation of all political tracts. He was confident that the good sense of Englishmen would scout seditious or absurd doctrines. Moreover, no one in the kingdom had more valid grounds for complaining about libelous attacks, for almost daily the government's hack writers poured abuse upon him and Grey. But such squibs as One Pennyworth of Truth, from Thomas Bull to His Brother John calling for "Destruction to Fox and all his Jacobin crew" were not suppressed.[48] While ministers hunted for seditious libels, they canalized their own scurrilous ones through the super-patriot John Reeves, leader of the high-church, high Tory Crown and Anchor Association.[49]

The government virtually manacled the country with security measures. We have noted that in December, 1792, the

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45 Lord W. W. Grenville to the Marquis of Buckingham, November 14, 1792. Court and Cabinets, II, 227. Also, see above p. 24.

46 State Trials, XXII, 357-470.

47 John Holland Rose, II, 172.

48 Parl. Hist., XXX, 134.

49 Brown, pp. 83-84.

militia was called out to squash imaginary riots and insurrections.[50] Also, cumbersome restrictions were laid upon foreigners in England, especially the newly arrived French emigres who were placed on a probationary status by the Alien bill of 1793. This act obliged them to reside in prescribed districts and report their movements to the government. It was carried through parliament by tremulous anxiety over the influx of revolutionary ideas. Most of the legislators feared that unregulated immigration would provide a causeway for jacobin agents into England. None, however, displayed their misgivings so grandiosely as Edmund Burke. In speaking for the Alien bill on December 28, 1792, Burke enacted one of the wildest and most aberrant scenes known to the chambers of parliament. After alleging that French agents had ordered 3,000 daggers from a Birmingham manufacturer, he drew a poniard from his coat, "and with much vehemence of action threw it on the floor." He concluded with a screaming exhortation "to keep the French infection from this country; their principles from our minds, and their daggers from our hearts."[51] The fear-provoking tactics, however, did not go unchallenged.

Sheridan introduced a motion for inquiry into the alleged seditious practices on February 28, 1793. Ministers, he charged, had purposely created alarm and suspicion to divert public attention while

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50 See above p. 24.

51 Parl. Hist., XXX, 189.

they steered the country into war. Also, he called on them to adduce proof of the insurrections, sedition, and treason which were prattled about on the Treasury Bench.[52] Fox, of course, supported the motion, and poignantly inquired if it was "a justifiable expedient of government to tell the public, that treasons and conspiracies existed, and neither to prosecute nor endeavour to discover the conspirators and traitors?"[53] A provoking question, for aside from Paine, the government had not prosecuted anyone for political offences during the jacobin scare of 1792. Nonetheless, Sheridan's motion was defeated and repression continued.

The most odious aspect of the ministry's domestic policy, however, was not perpetrated until May, 1794. Then, Pitt introduced a bill in Commons to suspend habeas corpus.[54] This measure signaled the beginning of his attempt to destroy the reformers by judicial tyranny. He even premised the motion on the contention that the societies were seeking to replace the British constitution with a jacobin system. "Who was there," asked the First Minister, "that knew what Jacobins and Jacobin principles were, but must see, in the pretences of reform in parliament held out by the societies, the

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52 Parl. Hist., XXX, 524.

53 Parl. Hist., XXX, 548.

54 34 George III, c. 54. Reprinted in Adams and Stephens, pp. 496-97.

arrogant claims of the same class of men who lorded it in France . ."[55] This reasoning was as fallacious as the measure was presumptuous. Since the outbreak of the war the societies had severed correspondence with the French, and their loyalty was unimpeachable.[56] Nevertheless, the bill was passed over the objections of Charles Fox and his minority of 28 by a vote of 146.[57] We have already seen the persecuting effects this measure had on the reformers prior to the state trials in the autumn of 1794. It may not be amiss to note Fox's virulent opposition to it.

Fox and his followers harangued the Habeas Corpus Suspension bill unremittingly. He pointed out that during the past two years the reform societies had met publicly and given copies of their proceedings to the newspapers.[58] Their record was open and clear, and it was absurd to contend that their transactions demanded a suspension of habeas corpus. Fox, however, was more fearful about the ultimate dangers of suspension than the charges leveled against the societies. So far as he was concerned, all the charges might be true but he would still oppose suspension. By taking away habeas corpus, he averred that the cornerstone of the constitution would be

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55 Parl. Hist., XXXI, 503.

56 This is even acknowledged by Pitt's multi-volume apologist, John Holland Rose, II, 167.

57 Parl. Hist., XXXI, 573.

58 Parl. Hist., XXXI, 506.

destroyed and the personal freedom of every man in the kingdom would be jeopardized.[59] Additionally, he asked, "What was to be done beyond this? After suspending the Habeas Corpus act, what would he [Pitt] do more? Would he prohibit all meetings of the people so as to debar them from all discussions on political subjects, and prevent all free intercourse between man and man? And when this should be found ineffectual, would he give to ministers the power of making arbitrary imprisonment perpetual? Would he still further go on in the exact and horrid imitation of the men who now held France in anarchy, and establish a revolutionary tribunal, or what perhaps, he would call an anti-revolutionary tribunal? Where would he stop?"[60] Searching questions which were answered, partially, by the inquisition and state trials of 1794.

In January, 1795, Fox ardently supported Sheridan's motion to repeal the suspension act. He reminded the House of the iniquitous proceedings following the act, and noted that its sole achievement had been to establish the baselessness of the ministry's allegations of treason. Attempting to justify the suspension act, Pitt of course was unable to adduce any specific instances of riot or conspiracy. He merely alluded to "machinations of the disaffected," which, he charged, were rendered more dangerous by the speeches of gentlemen on the other side of the House.[61] Sheridan's motion to

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59 Parl. Hist., XXXI, 510.

60 Parl. Hist., XXXI, 551-52.

61 Parl. Hist., XXXI, 1189.

restore habeas corpus was defeated, and Englishmen continued to be deprived of the fundamental safeguard of their liberties.

Ministers, however, soon found a pretext to strangle the remnants of civil liberty in England. On October 29, 1795, George III's coach was stoned by a mob when the King came down to open parliament.[62] While proceeding through Westminister, the royal carriage was surrounded by an angry band, of about 60 people, yelling "No War! No George!" "Peace! Peace!"[63] Before it reached parliament, the windows were broken by stones or pellets from an air gun.[64] Fortunately, the King was unscathed. This incident provided ministers with an idyllic opportunity to accomplish what they had failed to do by the state trials in the previous year. The outrage upon the King was attributed to the London Corresponding Society, which had held a mass meeting at Islington on October 27. Libels, violence, and "treason itself," Pitt claimed, had proceeded from that meeting.[65] Therefore, on November 6, the government introduced the Treasonable Practices bill in the House of Lords where

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62 Testimonies about the incident may be found in Parl. Hist., XXXII, 144-55.

63 Parl. Hist., XXXII, 148, 153.

64 Parl. Hist., XXXII, 150.

65 Parl. Hist., XXXII, 274.

it was passed a week later.[66] This measure inflicted penalties for treason upon anyone speaking or writing against the British constitution. Meanwhile, Pitt placed before Commons the Seditious Meeting bill, which provided that a magistrate must attend any meeting of fifty or more persons not convened by local authorities.[67] Also, the magistrate was empowered to stop any speech, arrest any speaker, and to disperse the meeting. These measures, commonly known as the Two Acts, were obviously aimed at the reformers, and they did not pass without causing the most tempestuous debates heard in parliament during this restless era.

Fox's opposition to these bills is unrivaled by any exertions he ever made against government measures. When the Seditious Meetings bill was introduced in Commons on November 10, he firmly denied that the assault upon the King, which he roundly deplored, had proceeded from the earlier meeting of the reformers.[68] Then he pointed out that the right to assemble was a cardinal point of English freedom, and by depriving the people of the right to meet, discuss, and petition against grievances the ministry was inviting revolution. But this ratiocination did not deter ministers, who brought into Commons the Treasonable Practices bill when it had been

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66 36 George III. c. 7. Reprinted in The Law and Working of the Constitution: Documents 1660-1914, ed., W. C. Costin and J. Steven Watson (London, 1952), II, 10-12. Hereafter cited as Costin and Watson.

67 36 George III. c. 8. Reprinted in Costin and Watson, II, 12-16.

68 Parl. Hist., XXII, 277.

approved by the upper chamber. Since reason apparently had lost weight with parliament, Fox now assailed the Two Acts and their authors with unexampled fury. On November 23, he announced in what may be considered the most violent speech of his career that if ministers passed these measures, "by means of the corrupt influence they possessed in the two houses of parliament," he would go to the people, and "as to their obedience, he should tell them, that it was no longer a question of moral obligation and duty, but of prudence." This was not all, for he concluded by charging Pitt with "glaring and open treason."[69] Responding with his natural invective, the First Minister promised Fox that treason would be punished wherever it was found.[70] He was followed by Windham, now Secretary at War, who warned Fox that if he exhorted the people to resist the Two Acts the ministry would "exert a vigour beyond the law." This brought cries of "Hear, Hear!" and "Take down his words" from the other side of the House.[71] The opposition now prepared to go to the people.

As soon as the nefarious bills were introduced in parliament, the Whig Club met and decided to place the issue before the public. On November 11, the Whigs resolved "to rouse the people, before it becomes too late, to act by any other means than force . . . ."[72]

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[69] Parl. Hist., XXXII, 383.

[70] Parl. Hist., XXXII, 385.

[71] Parl. Hist., XXXII, 386.

[72] Fox to Henry, Lord Holland, November 15, 1795. Fox Memorials, III, 125.

Charles Fox considered it an "act of duty to brave all the calumny" which ministers would heap on them,[73] and on November 12 he exhorted 30,000 Englishmen to petition against the Two Acts.[74] He was convinced that ministers were trying to impose despotism, and anyone who denied it was "a fool, or a hypocrite."[75] Only activity and exertion by those who cherished liberty could "prevent Mr. Hume's Euthanasia from taking place."[76] Fox and the Whigs "led the way in this celebrated opposition," but they were joined by various groups who were equally jealous about English freedom. The London Corresponding Society, the electors of Westminister, and the freeholders of Middlesex also held mass meetings and remonstrated against the impending legislation.[77] Moreover, the agitation was not confined to the politically articulate. According to the Annual Register the Two Acts caused alarm "in every part of the nation," and there never had been "in the memory of the oldest man, so firm and decided a plurality of adversaries to the ministerial measures as on this occasion: the interest of the public seemed so deeply at stake, that individuals, not only of the decent, but of the most vulgar professions, gave up a considerable portion of their time and

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73 Fox to Henry, Lord Holland, November 15, 1795. Fox Memorials, III, 124.

74 Parl. Hist., XXXII, 341.

75 Fox to Henry, Lord Holland, November 15, 1795. Fox Memorials, III, 125.

76 Fox to Henry, Lord Holland, December 24, 1795. Fox Memorials, III, 129.

77 Annual Register, XXXVIII, 40.

occupations in attending the numerous meetings that were called in every part of the kingdom, to the professed intent of counteracting this attempt of the ministry."[78] The government, however, employed its own extra-parliamentary tactics.

To counter petitions against the Two Acts, ministers sent agents into the country to circulate addresses favoring the bills. Besides distributing propaganda, "the spies," as Fox termed them,[79] obtained the signatures of customs and excise officials, military men and other "ministerial dependents" on petitions approving the measures. Despite their exertions, the agents were able to produce only 64 petitions bearing about 30,000 signatures favoring the bills in contrast to the 100 remonstrances loaded with 130,000 signatures against the Two Acts. The ministry was also assisted, and embarrassed, by John Reeves, head of the Crown and Anchor Society as well as the Association against Republicans and Levellers, whose ultramonarchical fanaticism prompted him to make disparaging utterances about the British legislature. In a zealous defense of the bills, Reeves compared the constitution to a tree, likening kingship to the trunk and lords and commons to branches which might be "lopped off" and "cast into the fire."[80] Even ministers found this language repugnant, and the chauvinist was cited for libel

78 Annual Register, XXXVIII, 39-40.

79 Annual Register, XXXVIII, 33.

80 Annual Register, XXXVIII, 41.

of parliament.[81]

Unfortunately, the Treasonable Practices bill and the Seditious Meeting bill were ratified by parliament in early December, 1795. Empowered to control, or even prohibit public meetings, the government now could smash the reform societies, or any other group which sought the redress of grievances. Awaiting its demise, the London Corresponding Society voted an address of thanks to Fox "for his determined, and unequivocal opposition to these Bills both in and out of Parliament."[82] The battle, however, had left him worn and discouraged. Continued opposition in parliament seemed useless, since Pitt's majority had virtually given the First Minister dictatorial powers. Moreover, there was little hope of extra-parliamentary resistance after the passage of the Two Acts, for as Fox remarked to his nephew in February, 1796, "the whole country seems dead."[83] Therefore, he soon acceded to the idea of secession from parliament.

The Whig secession from parliament in 1797 was a most imprudent maneuver. Firstly, it was ineffective as it kept no

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81 The debates concerning Reeves' libel of parliament may be found in Parl. Hist., XXXII, 308-82.

82 Quoted in J. L. Le Bret Hammond, Charles James Fox: A Political Study (London, 1903), p. 125, n. 1.

83 Fox to Henry, Lord Holland, February 18, 1796. Fox Memorials, III, 129.

semblance of agreement or unity. During the following four or five years, individual Whigs crept back to the opposition benches, thereby giving the impression that the party had completely dissolved. Secondly, secession meant the end of systematic opposition, and desertion of public duty by the Whigs. As Sir George Macaulay Trevelyan has observed, the House of Commons was the one place in the kingdom where Pitt could not silence discussion. So long as the government could be publicly denounced it was derelict of the Whigs to abandon opposition. Moreover, the newspapers still printed parliamentary debates, and they were about the only remaining means by which the minority could reach the people without fear of prosecution.[84] We have already seen that Charles Fox acquiesced in the secession, "from indolence rather than from judgement," and disported himself at St. Anne's Hill during the ensuing five years. Not all of his leisure, however, was devoted to Mrs. Armitstead and Ariosto.

During this interlude, Fox's rashness exceeded his bitterness over political matters. His remarks about hating ministers, and delighting in the triumphs of the French government over the English have been noted.[85] In early 1798, however, he came perilously close to imprisonment in the Tower. On January 24, the Duke of Norfolk delivered a fiery speech to a group celebrating Fox's birthday at

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[84] Trevelyan, p. 99.

[85] See above p. 57.

the Crown and Anchor Tavern. He denounced the government, compared the Whig leader to Washington as a champion of liberty, and ended by proposing that the company "drink our Sovereign's health - the majesty of the People."[86] Learning of the toast, the ministry dismissed the Duke from his command of a militia regiment and from the Lord Lieutenancy of the West Riding. Rankling with indignation over these cavalier tactics, Fox defiantly repeated Norfolk's toast at a meeting of the Whig Club on May 11, and also exhorted his followers "to use every effort to shake off the yoke of our English tyrants."[87] Hearing of this audacity, Pitt had Fox's name struck from the Privy Council list and even suggested a stay in the Tower for his incorrigible adversary.[88] Soberer counsel prevailed, and Fox was not immured. But this brush with authority did not deter him, and he continued to assail the British government with unabated ferocity -- thereby becoming the only man in England who could successfully defy Pitt.

During the era of the Revolution and war with France, the British government imposed an excruciating policy of repression. It bore most heavily upon reformers, particularly those who sought the achievement of annual parliaments and universal suffrage. They were investigated, interrogated, and even arraigned for treason. Fortunately, they were acquitted by English jurors who refused to imitate the

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86 Quoted in Lascelles, p. 284.

87 Quoted in Hammond, p. 134.

88 Lascelles, p. 285.

jacobin tribunals, and the acquittals vindicated Charles Fox's contention that domestic reform had no affinity with revolution in France. Fox, of course, assailed the repression as tirelessly as he defended the reformers. He had no sympathy with some of the societies, whose democratic notions about parliamentary reform were quite alien to his aristocratic concept of government. Nevertheless, he persistently spoke for their right to organize, discuss, and publicly work for the achievement of their goals. Everyone of the government's measures met his implacable resistance. The proclamation against seditious writings, calling out the militia, the Alien bill, the Habeas Corpus Suspension bill, the state trials, and the Two Acts were virulently opposed and denounced by Fox. In opposing the Two Acts, he even tried "to rouse the people" by public meetings. But his efforts were ineffectual against Pitt's servile majority in parliament, and he despairingly abandoned the British legislature in 1797. His resistance continued, however, and even the threat of imprisonment failed to deter the opposition of Charles James Fox.

# CONCLUSION

Charles Fox totally misconstrued the French Revolution. To him, it was a great stroke for liberty similar to the Glorious Revolution of 1688. The French people, he believed, were only trying to dilute Bourbon despotism with constitutional safeguards for personal and political freedom. Through their reanimated legislature, they were contesting for "the rights of man" against royal absolutism. Herein, Fox believed, was the parallel between the French upheaval and the event of 1688, since "the rights of man" were precisely those things achieved by the British over the last Stuart despot. He was completely mistaken. The French Revolution bore no affinity to the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Entranced with the notion of universal "Liberty", he ignored the implications of "Equality and Fraternity". A recognition and understanding of these doctrines undoubtedly would have dispirited his enthusiasm over the Revolution. As leader of the aristocratic party in England, with aversion for universal suffrage, he certainly would not have championed the upheaval if he had recognized it as an egalitarian crusade. Oblivious to its full import, he entered into a half-understood defense of a movement entirely antithetical to his own concept of society and government.

Fox was more realistic about France's militant foreign policy. He looked askance at Dumouriez's conquest of the Austrian

Netherlands, the National Convention's decree opening the Scheldt River and the decree of November 19, 1792, pledging French arms to any people wishing to depose their crowned rulers. He considered these offences as grounds for complaint, but not for war. He sought to avert hostilities by recognizing the French Republic and sending a minister to Paris. He was not calling for peace at any price, as he strongly recommended that negotiations should be backed by a large-scale armament. Parliament, of course, rejected his motion for restoring regular diplomatic relations with France, and considering the National Convention's bellicose attitude in late 1792, it is doubtful that Fox's proposal would have succeeded in averting war. Aside from recognizing the Republican regime and sending a minister to Paris, the British ministry pursued a negotiation with the French plenipotentiary along the lines Fox had suggested. The talks collapsed, however, and France declared war on England and the United Provinces. Fox supported the prosecution of the war so long as England's sole objective was to repel French aggression. He even tried to restrict the government's war policy to this objective by parliamentary resolution, and when the French armies were thrown back in June, 1793, he demanded peace negotiations. Then, however, it appeared that Pitt intended to continue hostilities in league with the crowned despots of Europe until the Revolution was smothered and the Bourbons restored. Abhorring this object, Fox withdrew his support of the war. Henceforth, he clamored for peace

negotiations, tried to frustrate the government's war policy, reduce England's support of the first coalition, and embarrass ministers by votes of censure. It was an admirable but ineffectual opposition, owing to the break up of the Whig party.

As parliamentary leader of the Whig aristocracy, Fox was not very successful. His lifelong effort to reduce the influence of the Crown, and its overwhelming majority in parliament, was blunted by George III's skillful distribution of the civil list. Though rooted in feudal elitism, his concept of government and party did embrace the notion of ministerial responsibility to a majority in parliament -- a notion peculiar to nineteenth and twentieth century political development. It was a device Fox would have liked to use to wrest control of ministerial posts and patronage from the royal prerogative. His enthusiasm over the Revolution and his opposition to the war with France undermined his control of the Whig party. Alarmed by Fox's attitude, the conservative members threatened to desert to the ministerial ranks. Their apprehensions were exacerbated by Pitt who compounded Fox with the jacobins, and their eagerness to join the government was encouraged by the First Minister's offers of high and lucrative places. Between June and January, 1792, the Whig leader held his party intact by exposing Pitt's devious means to cleave the opposition and by his complete sway over the Duke of Portland. During the ensuing two years, however, numerous Whigs drifted into the ministerial camp individually. Finally, in

July, 1794, Portland and his followers openly abandoned Fox and coalesced with the ministry. This reduced the Whig opposition to Charles Fox and about thirty adherents, who struggled on under the incubus of jacobinism in their efforts to achieve needed reforms and to obstruct the ministry's policy of repression.

With the outbreak of the French Revolution, a number of societies advocating parliamentary reform emerged in England. Most of them proposed such schemes as annual parliaments or universal suffrage. Eschewing these doctrines, Fox joined none of the organizations. His ideas about parliamentary reform did not extend beyond the elimination of the most flagrantly rotten boroughs and a partial redistribution of legislative seats. As a leader of the aristocratic party, he was not for broadening the electorate. Nevertheless, he vigorously defended the reform societies from the ministry's aspersive onslaught, and tirelessly proclaimed their right to organize, discuss and publicly work toward their objectives. The acquittals of the reformers in the state trials of 1794 may be regarded as vindications of his contention that domestic reform had no kinship with revolution abroad. Besides the attack upon the reformers, Fox assailed every other repressive measure introduced by the British government. Believing in the unrestricted circulation of ideas, he deplored the proclamation against seditious writings, he denounced the ministry's effort to create a jacobin scare by calling out the militia, assailed the Alien bill, harangued the Habeas Corpus

Suspension bill as an act of tyranny, and exhorted the people to oppose the Two Acts by every non-violent means. Ineffectual against the government's overwhelming majority in parliament, he seceded from the legislature in 1797. His opposition, however, continued notwithstanding Pitt's threat of imprisonment. It was an intrepid stand. In the era of the Revolution and the war with France, two obstacles stood between England and despotism -- the fleet and Charles James Fox.

# BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

This is a selective bibliographical note. That is, I discuss only those works which were germane to the study, relied upon heavily, and cited extensively in the footnotes. Other items, which I am aware of and have "looked at," but deemed of secondary importance to the essay, are included in the complete bibliographical list following the note.

Primary Sources:

The most important source for the study was The Parliamentary History of England, From the Earliest Period to the Year 1803, ed., T. C. Hansard. 36 vols. London, 1817. Besides the debates in both houses of parliament, this collection includes division lists, royal proclamations, treaties, diplomatic correspondence, and pertinent selections from contemporary newspapers. It is an indispensable source for the study of English political history in any period. It is of pre-eminent importance to a study of Charles Fox, who spent practically his entire adult life in Commons. Significant, but disappointing, were the Memorials and Correspondence of Charles James Fox, ed., Lord John Russell. 4 vols. London, 1854. A more inept, inadequate, and abominably poor job of editing is unimaginable. Russell, a nineteenth century Whig leader, obviously omitted material which did not reflect favorably upon his predecessor. Consequently, the edition is marred by

cavernous lacunae. For example, no correspondence is included for the year 1790, and only two letters are reprinted for the year 1791. Lamentable omissions, for it was during these two years that Fox's ideas about the Revolution were germinating. Furthermore, the selections are poorly arranged. In short, this is a thoroughly incompetent edition. Since Fox was a rash, outspoken leader of the opposition during most of his career, the investigator does not have to bore deeply to ascertain his political policy, tactics, and maneuvers. To make tenable appraisals of his leading adversaries, however, requires drilling through bedrock. The most important materials concerning William Pitt repose, unpublished, in the Public Records Office in England. But illuminating glimpses of the First Minister may be found in the Memoirs of the Court and Cabinets of George the Third, from Original Family Documents, ed., The Duke of Buckingham and Chandos. 4 vols. London, 1853. Letters from Lord Grenville to his brother the Duke of Buckingham are contained in this collection. Not a few of them reveal Pitt's hand in the jacobin scare and the repressive policy. Additional Grenville correspondence is located in The Manuscripts of J. B. Fortescue, Esq., Preserved at Dropmore, ed., Historical Manuscripts Commission. 10 vols. London, 1894. Diplomatic notes compose the bulk of this collection, although some of Pitt's personal letters are included. Interesting is the Correspondence of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke; Between the Year 1744, and the Period of His Decease, in 1797,

ed., Charles William, Earl Fitzwilliam and Sir Richard Bourke. 4 vols. London, 1844. Burke's letters between 1789 and 1797 depict, even more vigorously than the Reflections, his prodigous and malignant abhorrence for anything or anyone promoting change. His correspondence abounds with wild lashes at the reformers whom he denounced as "abettors of treason and murder." About the only significant items, however, are his letters to the British government prior to February 1, 1793, imploring it to invade France and smother the Revolution. This collection is not a paragon of editing, and considerable material has been omitted. Memoranda of another Whig who deserted Fox may be found in The Diary of the Right Hon. William Windham, ed., Mrs. Henry Baring. London, 1866. Although Windham followed Burke into reaction against the Revolution, he did maintain a degree of equilibrium, and was able to make fairly astute observations on political affairs. Probably the most balanced account of British politics in the era of the Revolution may be found in the Memoirs of the Life of Sir Samuel Romilly, Written by Himself; with a Selection from His Correspondence, edited by his sons. 3 vols. London, 1840. Romilly was a staunch Whig, but he was also a firm minded lawyer who was not duped by political ballyhoo. The most informative and detailed source concerning the disintegration of the Whig party in 1792 and 1793 is the Diaries and Correspondence of James Harris, First Earl of Malmesbury, ed., Third Earl of Malmesbury. 4 vols. London, 1845. Malmesbury recorded every turn

during the negotiations between the conservative Whigs and Pitt. He was an accurate observer, capable of clearheaded analyses. Another source upon the subject is The Political Memoranda of Francis Fifth Duke of Leeds, ed., Oscar Browning. Camden Soc., New Ser., No. 35. London, 1884. Leeds, a rather dull witted fellow, had a talent for blundering into and muddling through webbed situations, the gravity of which usually struck him while he was recording in his journal. A thorough account of the reform societies and their activities in this period emerged during the treason trials of 1794. Hence, a full reservoir on the subject may be tapped in A Complete Collection of State Trials and Proceedings for High Treason and Other Crimes and Misdemeanors from the Earliest Period to the Year 1783, with Notes and Other Illustrations, ed., T. B. Howell and continued from the year 1783 to the present time by Thomas Jones Howell. 33 vols. London, 1824. A contemporary review of political events is The Annual Register, or a View of the History, Politics and Literature for the Year ---, 197 vols. London, 1758 +. Two competent editions of statutes and royal proclamation are: Select Documents of English Constitutional History, ed., George Burton Adams and H. Morse Stephens. New York, 1923. The Law and Working of the Constitution: Documents 1660-1914, eds., W. C. Costin and J. Steven Watson. 2 vols. London, 1952.

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The only noteworthy biography of Fox is Edward Lascelles, The Life of Charles James Fox. London, 1936. This is the least of many inferior works about the Whig leader, since a perfunctory effort was made to invest it with an aura of scholarship. With a dearth of competent secondary works about Fox, one is obliged to peer at him through the principal studies of his rival, Pitt. Superior among these is Donald G. Barnes, George III and William Pitt, 1783-1806. Stanford, 1939. The thesis of the book is that the younger Pitt was not the first Prime Minister free from royal control, but merely another of George III's political hirelings. Ancillary to his discussion of the King and Pitt, the author gives a clear appraisal of Fox's role in British politics during the latter portion of the eighteenth century. A ponderous biography, freighted with detail about English and European politics during this period, is John Holland Rose, Life of William Pitt. 2 vols. New York, 1924. The book is valuable for informative, but not for interpretative purposes. A monograph centered upon Pitt's career in the era of the Revolution is W. T. Laprade, England and the French Revolution, 1789-1797, Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science. Ser. XXVII. Nos. 8-12. Baltimore, 1909. The author maintains that Pitt virtually achieved dictatorial powers in this period by employing fear provoking tactics. He also gives a competent account of Fox during the period. An old and

laudatory biography of Pitt, significant only because of some of the First Minister's correspondence reprinted in the appendices, is Earl Stanhope, Life of the Right Honourable William Pitt. 4 vols. London, 1861. There are two excellent studies of the reform movement during this era. Activities of the reformers are covered in chapters 5 through 7 of George Stead Veitch, Genesis of Parliamentary Reform. London, 1913. This is an incisive and admirable study, and the author is not very complimentary toward Fox as a reformer. A monograph concerning the reform societies which emerged after the outbreak of the Revolution is Philip Anthony Brown, The French Revolution in English History. London, 1918. Another biography, whose panegyrical timber nearly overshadows the hitherto unpublished material set forth, is George Macaulay Trevelyan, Lord Grey of the Reform Bill. London, 1929. Some correspondence, heretofore unpublished, is reproduced illuminating aspects of Grey's early political career. The book, however, discloses no more than one would expect from a Whig historian writing about a Whig statesmen at the request of the latter's descendants. For a general view of the era through a French prism, I consulted Leo Gershoy, The French Revolution and Napoleon. New York, 1947.

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