SECURING THE NATION

Radicalism and Security in 1790s Britain

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Thesis submitted for a Master of Arts by Research

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Submitted August 2013

Dedicated to the two most important women in my life: my mother, who fostered and encouraged my passion for learning and adventure; and my wife, whose love, guidance and support have made this work both possible and enjoyable.

Abstract

In the midst of the age of enlightenment, revolution and political enfranchisement, the English radical movement of the 1790s was an important mobiliser of lower class, liberal and radical thought, education, association, complaint and support for socio-political reform. However, the British government of William Pitt the Younger, operating in the wake of the cataclysmic French Revolution, viewed this movement first with suspicion and eventually outright hostility, and, perceiving in it a threat to the interests, institutions and prosperity of both the ruling elite and the wider nation, sought the means to repress radicalism and remove it from the active political sphere. My task in this thesis, in contributing both to the fields of security studies and the socio-political history of 1790s England, is to analyse how this was done by applying the recently conceived concept of 'securitization', as constructed by the Copenhagen School, to the government's attempts to identify and combat radicalism as a threat to national security. In doing so I seek to enrich our understanding of how and why the government chose to utilise particular strategies, actions and discourses in its ultimately successful attempts to securitize and temporarily suppress radicalism, and to explore how these measures facilitated, shaped, improved, enlarged and in turn were influenced by the means of security governance employed by the state to monitor, investigate, prosecute, denigrate and repress radicalism and other perceived threats to national security. Complimentary to this I explore the radical reaction to the government's securitization, particularly the resulting enhanced and reshaped use of the state's security and surveillance services, and the effect this was believed to have on British society, liberty, governance and values. Finally I aim to assess the utility of the securitization framework as a tool for analysing historical and contemporary security issues in a domestic state-based context.

Contents

Introduction

'It is often in the name of cultural integrity, as well as social stability and national security, that democratic reforms based on human rights are resisted by authoritarian governments.'[1] – Aung San Suu Kyi, 1994

The desire for security is one of the most fundamental aspects of human nature, a need that seeks fulfilment in all areas of life, be they personal, financial, social or political. As Hobbes wrote, the primary motivator for people to forgo their complete independence and come together to form groups of mutual interest under a governmental structure 'is nothing else but the security of a man's person, in his life, and in the means of so preserving life, as not to be weary of it'.[2] Complete individual freedom is sacrificed in the interests of profiting from the collective strength, benefits and security of the group. Any grouping together of people will involve politics, and as Dillon argues all politics is in essence the 'politics of security', attempting to fulfil and maintain the fundamental reason for coming together in the first place. This has remained a truism of government throughout the ages, until, in our modern era, we beheld a world in which

> security became the predicate upon which the architectonic political discourses of modernity were constructed; upon which the vernacular architecture of modern political power, exemplified in the State, was based; and from which the institutions and practices of modern (inter)national politics, including modern democratic politics, ultimately seek to derive their grounding and foundational legitimacy.[3]

The first and foremost aim of any modern state government is to maintain national security, defending the state from external enemies and preserving peace, order and prosperity within. This is crucial to its right to rule and recognition as a legitimate member of the international order. Yet it is axiomatic that maintaining national security

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[1] Aung San Suu Kyi, 'Empowerment for a Culture of Peace and Development', in *Freedom from Fear and other writings*, New Ed., London, Penguin Books, 2010, p. 264. N.B. All spelling, grammar and punctuation in quotes utilised in this work has been retained as in the original sources, uncorrected and unmarked.

[2] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan, or, The Matter, Form, and Power of a Common-Wealth Ecclesiastical and Civil*, London, Andrew Crooke, 1651, p. 66.

[3] Michael Dillon, *Politics of Security*, London, Routledge, 1996, pp. 12-13.

will inevitably involve infringement upon and potential threats to the individual security and liberty of a state's citizens. The need to uphold the law, detect security threats, maintain domestic harmony and garner the resources necessary to defend against potential enemies are all important duties of state. However they also carry inherent risks to the individual and are liable to be misused and exploited in the interests of government and/or a ruling elite. As Suu Kyi has stated, the very necessity and importance of national security, stability and integrity makes them eminently suitable devices for justifying actions that threaten and infringe upon the very things they claim to protect. History abounds with abuses of liberty, rights and security carried out by governments upon the pretext of defending national security. Conflicts have inevitably arisen between the security needs of state and citizen, nation and sub-group, national sovereignty and the global community. Therefore security is a hotly debated topic, as people of all stripes seek to provide opinions on security's place and use in society.

These issues lie at the heart of this thesis. I aim here to explore debates over who is responsible for security, what is to be secured, how it is be secured, what is to be considered a likely and/or acceptable threat to security, how security issues are to be identified and analysed, and what impact the response to such matters can have upon a society and the citizens who comprise it. Security remains a vital component of our daily lives, state policy and international relations. As an oft-contested subjective entity that exists as much in the realm of individual and collective consciousness as in reality, it is an important, vibrant and rewarding area of research. While securities, threats and vulnerabilities can be measured and assessed as concrete tangible elements, we can also study the manner in which these elements are created, interpreted, debated, acquired, exchanged, relinquished, addressed, attacked, guarded, and utilised in advancing particular arguments, aims, policies and needs. A better understanding of the rhetoric and reasoning underpinning state security policy, the methods employed in protecting and enforcing national security, and the impact of these policies and methods upon society, is crucial in improving our ability to understand, assess, critique and develop present and future security-related stratagems and institutions and their impact upon individual security, rights and liberties. Examining historical aspects of security, be they cases in international relations, or studies of domestic security as undertaken here, is an effective means of achieving this.

As noted above, my focus in this thesis is on national security in a domestic context – on the means of maintaining the sovereignty, internal security, order and institutions of the state against predominantly internal threats. While some aspects of domestic security policy are relatively straightforward and generally accepted, others are heavily disputed, and as such this is an area fraught with difficulty, competing interests, debate, ideology, rhetoric, prejudice, repression and violence. In our modern state system governments are responsible for deciding and implementing security policy. However, in most states the rulers cannot act completely on their own initiative, but must persuade a significant proportion of their people that their actions regarding security are necessary, justified and effective. The Copenhagen School has provided us with a means of examining the methods by which a particular actor identifies a threat to security and proposes actions deemed necessary to ward against and defeat that threat. This process is called "securitization", and while it is only a recent invention as a conceptual method of analysis, it is proposed here that it is highly useful in understanding, critiquing and learning from historical security issues and events.[4] My task here is to explore one particular securitization case – that made in 1790s Great Britain by the government of William Pitt the Younger against the political movement and ideology of radicalism.

A Radical Awakening

In the wake of the American and especially the French Revolutions, there arose in Britain a new form of political radicalism. Emerging in 1791, radical ideology combined the British traditions of liberalism, Whiggism and constitutionalism with the Franco-American principles of rights, equality, republicanism and democracy. Radicalism was primarily a working and middle-class movement, politically active mostly in the form of public associations, mass meetings, later small clandestine societies and the publication of a staggering array of pamphlets, tracts, journals, newspapers, books and other works, outlining grievances with the current state of British society and outlining ideas for parliamentary, political, economic and social reform. As an off-shoot of sorts of liberalism, radicals formed an uneasy alliance with

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[4] See Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998. The American spelling of 'securitization' and 'securitizing' has been retained in this work in keeping with the spelling employed by the creators of the concept.

liberal reformers and Foxite Whigs, who shared some of their goals for reform but often balked at their more radical and far-reaching proposals.

Radicalism was the first mass political movement in Britain targeted at, composed of and often led by working and lower-middle class people, spread throughout the country but concentrated particularly in industrial and commercial hubs like London, Sheffield, Manchester and Edinburgh. Their desire for reform and in some instances outright revolution, coupled with their sympathy for and connections with like-minded associations and political activists in France, Ireland and elsewhere, presented the Pitt government with a unique issue to address, one made all the more pressing and hazardous by the ongoing upheaval and violence in France, the state of war between that troubled country and Britain, and increasing unrest in Ireland. McCann argues that the

> French Revolution had demonstrated to the English ruling classes the precariousness of their privilege, and the need to police attempts within Britain to mobilize non-propertied classes in support of an extended franchise and parliamentary reform.[5]

The government, fearing the outbreak of a similar revolution in Britain, soon decided that radicalism presented an unacceptable risk to order and security, and set about pursuing the means to stamp it out. The story of the 1790s is therefore one of a clash between the interests of a ruling elite and a newly-politicised popular collective eager to enter and claim a place in the political realm and ensure the implementation of the reforms believed necessary to fulfil and protect their rights and liberties and improve their political representation and access to economic and social prosperity. This clash must be viewed and analysed as intrinsically linked with the wider struggle and conflict raging across contemporary Europe and North America between the forces of aristocracy, tradition and empire, and the new or revitalised concepts of democracy, popular sovereignty, natural rights and independence.[6]

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[5] Andrew McCann, *Cultural Politics in the 1790s: Literature, Radicalism and the Public Sphere*, Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan, 1999, p. 59.

[6] See Albert Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty: the English democratic movement in the age of the French Revolution*, London, Hutchinson, 1979, passim; Jenny Graham, *The Nation, The Law and The King: reform politics in England, 1789-1799*, 2 vols., Oxford, University Press of America, 2000, passim; J. Ann Hone, *For the Cause of Truth: radicalism in London 1796-1821*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1982, pp. 11-133; E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, New Ed., Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1991, pp. 84-203 & 515-42; Roger Wells, *Insurrection: the British experience, 1795-1803*, Gloucester, A. Sutton, 1983, passim.

Aims and Means

As discussed in the source review below, radicalism and the politics of 1790s Britain have been extensively studied by scholars hailing from a wide range of backgrounds and approaches. In particular, the government's repression of radicalism has been studied and assessed by Goodwin, Thompson, Barrell, Mori, Emsley, Hone, Wells and others.[7] In this area debates have centred around the real aims, intentions and actions of the radicals and their societies, and the nature, legitimacy and efficacy of the government's measures in response to radicalism and related affairs in France and Ireland. I am primarily concerned with the latter, and seek to offer a new perspective by considering and emphasising the importance of security in understanding and analysing the government's actions and the radical reaction to them. In such novel and intense circumstances, the Pitt government's decision to securitize radicalism offers us a highly useful and interesting case study of a successful securitization carried out by a state's rulers against elements of their own people. Pitt and his colleagues of course did not view their actions and policies as a 'securitization', nor did they seek to follow a predetermined model. Nonetheless I contend that deliberate attempts to make radicalism a security issue were a key component of ministerial efforts to negate and supress it, and therefore I believe that applying the securitization framework to this context will provide us with greater insight into the causes and effects of the government's actions. To this end I will explore why the government chose to utilise particular discourses, dispositives, technologies and concepts in shaping and advancing its policies; ascertain why they were successful in this case; and consider what elements may be of general application and assistance in attempting a securitizing move. I will argue that the securitization of radicalism was an effective, congruous and generally well-applied means of achieving the government's aims of eliminating active radicalism and justifying policies and actions deemed necessary for maintaining order and security. While it is not my intention to judge whether these actions and interpretations were justified or meritorious, a deeper understanding of the reasoning and motivations behind them will naturally be of assistance in debating this matter.

Additionally, I seek to shed new light on how this securitization facilitated and in turn was developed by the state's use of its security, surveillance and intelligence services, drawing and exploring connections between policy, information, structure and

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[7] See the Sources and Literature review below for details on these works.

operations. In particular I will argue that securitization facilitated a restructuring, centralising and expanding of the existing security and intelligence apparatus, and examine how and why this occurred. To compliment this I will document and assess a relatively unexplored area of radical and liberal discourse – the response to state surveillance and investigation, particularly by means of 'spies and informers', and the alleged impact these operations would have on British society and state-citizen relations. In focusing on just one aspect of the ramifications and instruments of a securitization event, I hope through in-depth analysis to demonstrate and explain, at least in part, the impact that instances of securitization can have upon the institutions, operations and cultural norms of the society in question, and on the capacity of the allegedly threatening party to respond to and counteract the securitizing moves against it. Finally in the course of this study I aim to explore and advocate the effectiveness of securitization as a model for understanding, assessing and interpreting historical and contemporary security issues and responses in a domestic state context.

This thesis is divided into four chapters, dealing in turn with the following topics:

- the securitization of radicalism in 1790s Britain
- the development of the state's security and intelligence services and their deployment against radicalism
- the radical and liberal response to and arguments against the government's surveillance, investigation and repression of radical activities, and their alleged impact upon society, particularly regarding the use of 'spies and informers'
- a final chapter exploring my conclusions and the lessons to be drawn from these discussions

The focus throughout is on affairs in England, but events in and examples from Scotland and Ireland are also referenced where they are of relevance and applicability to the English and/or security context.

Sources and Literature

Primary

The UK National Archives contain a wide range of manuscript evidence relevant to the topics of intelligence, security and the repression of radicalism. Particularly useful are

the Home Office, Privy Council and Treasury Solicitor papers. The Home Office correspondence includes reports sent in by informers, magistrates, constables and post masters, as well as instructions, advice and acknowledgements sent by home office officials to these sources. The Scottish and Irish correspondence also contains letters from informers and correspondence between Home Office and local officials on matters pertaining to security and information collection. The Privy Council papers consist of evidence, testimonies and examinations concerning cases for treason and sedition investigated in the 1790s. Reports from spies and informers may also be found in the Treasury Solicitor's papers, which contain further evidence relating to the state trials, including the briefs, plans and indictments of the prosecution in the trials of Thomas Hardy, John Horne Tooke, Arthur O'Connor, Edward Despard and others. Mention may also be made of the Foreign Office papers, particularly those from Hamburg, which provide additional insight into intelligence pertaining to domestic matters sent from officials stationed abroad.[8]

Two further sources of interest are the papers of William Wickham held in Winchester and the published correspondence of the Viscount Castlereagh.[9] Wickham was heavily involved in intelligence and security work throughout the 1790s and his papers provide interesting insight into his methods and correspondence. Castlereagh served as Chief Secretary for Ireland from 1798-1801 and his correspondence with Wickham and the Home Office is useful in analysing the manner in which intelligence and security activities were co-ordinated between England and Ireland during this period. In a similar vein the Irish Rebellion Papers in Dublin, while not directly relevant to English affairs, contain numerous reports and letters from informers, shedding considerable light on the manner and quality of their operations and information. These papers can be used to both complement and contrast the activities of their counterparts in England. The selected papers of the London Corresponding Society (LCS), edited and published by Mary Thale, also contain a wealth of spy reports and a myriad of LCS documents.[10] These allow us to further examine the quality of the information sent to the government by its spies, the activities of these informers within the society, and the manner in

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[8] For a full list of the archival and manuscript sources used in this work, see the bibliography.
[9] Richard Stewart, Viscount Castlereagh, *Memoirs and Correspondence of Viscount Castlereagh, Second Marquess of Londonderry*, vols. 1-2, ed. C. Vane, Marquess of Londonderry, London, Henry Colburn, 1848.
[10] Mary Thale, ed., *Selections From The Papers Of The London Corresponding Society, 1792-1799*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983.

which the LCS reacted to and attempted to deal with the threat and presence of spies in its midst.

The recorded proceedings of the state trials and parliamentary debates of the 1790s contain ample evidence on the securitization of radicalism. The reports of the secret committees of both the Commons and the Lords on radicalism and treason were key components of the government's securitizing move, heavily based on evidence obtained from informers and other sources of information. The nature and content of the reports demonstrates the manner in which the government sought to justify its actions in the interests of national security and conduct the propaganda war against radicalism by relying on and interpreting such evidence to its advantage. The debates in parliament surrounding these reports, the trials and the bills intended to curb the perceived radical threat likewise bear witness to the government's methods and arguments and the Foxite opposition's response questioning the reliability and efficacy of the government's sources and actions. The trials represent another securitization battleground, fought out between the government and the radical/liberal defence, in which the issues of security, repression, surveillance and spies often took centre stage.[11]

Contemporary newspapers are a valuable source of information on the securitization, repression and response to radicalism, the activities of spies and informers and the manner in which these issues were perceived and debated by various shades of political opinion. The majority of papers from the 1790s available in digital form were published in London, and while this unfortunately narrows their scope as sources of news and opinion, they nonetheless provide us with much useful material. Papers such as the *Morning Chronicle*, *Morning Post*, *The Times*, *True Briton*, *Oracle* and *St James's Chronicle* provide us with news reports of arrests, trials, politics, parliamentary proceedings and investigations; opinion pieces and letters on the nature of radicalism and the use of spies; and published extracts and poems commenting on these topics. Newspapers therefore serve a dual function – they provide us both with information on historical events and a window into the opinions, perceptions, debates, prejudices and beliefs that characterised the period.

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[11] See T. B. & T. J. Howell, eds., *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, and Continued From The Year 1783 To The Present Time* (*ST*), vols. 22-28, London, Longman et al., 1817-20; *The Parliamentary History of England, From The Earliest Period To The Year 1803* (*PH*), vols. 28-35, London, Longman et al., 1816-19.

The explosion in the publication of pamphlets, addresses, essays, lectures, speeches and cartoons in the early 1790s enables us to study in depth the political and social debate on all manner of issues, not least of which are the topics of security, sedition, surveillance, spies and informers. Radicals, liberals and loyalists were all keen to propagate and argue their views and refute those they disagreed with. These topics also feature in debates and arguments concerning a wide range of issues, from liberty and rights to reform, justice, morality and foreign affairs. Their prevalence demonstrates their importance and volatility in the period and provides us with several avenues from which to analyse their impact upon English society. While it is unfortunate that government repression significantly reduced the publication of pamphlets etc. post-1795, this development is itself indicative of the impact of securitization, surveillance and repression upon the radical movement. Finally, another window into the liberal/radical mind is provided by published correspondence, such as the letters of the liberal young gentlemen William Pattisson, Thomas Amyot and Henry Crabb Robinson.[12]

Secondary

The history of 1790s Britain and Ireland may be found in a wide range of works, extending from the general to the highly specialised. The role of 1790s domestic British politics in the wider narratives of the French Revolution, the Enlightenment, and the Revolutionary/Napoleonic Wars, and its connections both with earlier British political debates and the later struggles for reform and change in the nineteenth century, have ensured that this topic has received considerable attention from scholars of numerous backgrounds. Many scholars have found this to be a rewarding and instructive era on which to write, and in the last two centuries the history of the period has been approached from a variety of angles, ranging from broad historical narratives to works exploring particular political, social, military, legal, economic and clandestine aspects of this tumultuous and important decade.

In considering the role and impact of domestic security and radical securitization in these momentous events, some of the general histories of 1790s radicalism have been particularly useful. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* begins with

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[12] Penelope J. Corfield and Chris Evans, eds., *Youth and Revolution in the 1790s: letters of William Pattisson, Thomas Amyot, and Henry Crabb Robinson*, Far Thrupp, A. Sutton, 1996.

an analysis of the rise of the working-class radical organisations in the 1790s.[13] Thompson documented the manner in which informers were used to penetrate and record the activities of these organisations, and the government's response to what it increasingly perceived as the radical menace. He also briefly assessed the nature and motives of informers, their impact on the radical societies, and their utility to the government. Goodwin's *The Friends of Liberty* offers a comprehensive survey of the history of 1790s British radicalism, documenting in detail the growth and ideology of the radical movement, the political and social debates, the reaction of the government, and the denouement at the end of the decade as the government moved to definitively stamp out the last embers of an increasingly desperate and dying struggle.[14] More recently, Graham's *The Nation, The Law and The King: reform politics in England, 1789-1799* has charted similar waters in great detail. In the course of their narratives both works comment extensively on the repression of radicalism, the role of spies and informers in surveillance, arrests, trials and propaganda, and the manner in which their use and supposed profligacy affected the actions, political debates and atmosphere of the period.[15] Wells' *Insurrection: the British experience, 1795-1803* focuses on the insurrectionary challenges faced by the government in Britain and Ireland in the wake of the suppression and downfall of the popular reform movements in 1795.[16]

A number of other publications may be cited that analyse the political and social events of the 1790s, the debates between government, loyalists, reformers and radicals, and the manner in which the government and its agents permeated ever deeper into public and private spheres of society. The place and role of security forms an integral part of these discussions. Attention is drawn here to the works of Barrell, Black, Dozier, Ehrman,

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[13] E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*.
[14] Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty*.
[15] Graham, *The Nation, The Law and The King*.
[16] Wells, *Insurrection*.

Elliott, Evans, Goodrich, McCann, Mori, Royle, Stafford and Wagner.[17] Also noteworthy is Habermas' classic account of the bourgeois public sphere in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.[18] The effect of loyalist activities and arguments upon public opinion has been examined in articles by Gilmartin, Ginter, Mori and Philp.[19] Another particularly important work is Barrell's *Imagining the King's Death*, which comprehensively covers the treason trials of the early 1790s.[20] While his primary aim was to demonstrate the manner in which the government attempted to construct and utilise a new interpretation of treason, he also covered many other aspects of the trials and associated proceedings in great depth. This included the government's attempts to securitize radicalism and the use of evidence from government spies in the witness box and parliamentary reports.

The British government's security and intelligence services and their use in response to the radical threat have been most closely analysed by Durey, Wells, Emsley, Poole, Hone and Bartlett. Arguments in this area tend to revolve around the effectiveness of the government's information-gathering and investigative methods, the quality of its analysis, the depth and accuracy of its knowledge, and the structure and motivations of the services responsible for these tasks. Opinions on these matters are vital in determining whether one views the government's actions as being either unduly repressive or justified. Emsley's important article 'The home office and its sources of

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[17] John Barrell, *The Spirit of Despotism: invasions of privacy in the 1790s*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006; Eugene Black, *The Association: British Extraparliamentary Political Organization 1769-1793*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1963; Robert R. Dozier, *For King, Constitution and Country: The English Loyalists and the French Revolution*, Lexington, University Press of Kentucky, 1983; John Ehrman, *The Younger Pitt*, 3 vols., London, Constable and Company Limited, 1983; Marianne Elliott, *Partners in Revolution: the United Irishmen and France*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1982; Chris Evans, *Debating the Revolution: Britain in the 1790s*, London, I. B. Tauris, 2006; Amanda Goodrich, *Debating England's Aristocracy in the 1790s: Pamphlets, Polemics and Political Ideas*, Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 2005; McCann, *Cultural Politics in the 1790s*; Jennifer Mori, *William Pitt and the French Revolution 1785-1795*, Edinburgh, Keele University Press, 1997; Edward Royle and James Walvin, *English Radicals and Reformers, 1760-1848*, Lexington, University Press of Kentucky, 1982; William Stafford, *Socialism, Radicalism and Nostalgia: social criticism in Britain, 1775-1830*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987; Corinna Wagner, 'Domestic Invasions: John Thelwall and the Exploitation of Privacy', in Steve Poole, ed., *John Thelwall: Radical Romantic and Acquitted Felon*, London, Pickering & Chatto, 2009, pp. 95-106.

[18] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, English Translation by Thomas Burger, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1989.

[19] Kevin Gilmartin, 'In the Theatre of Counterrevolution: Loyalist Association and Conservative Opinion in the 1790s', *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 41, no. 3 (2002), pp. 291-328; Donald E. Ginter, 'The Loyalist Association Movement of 1792-93 and British Public Opinion', *The Historical Journal*, vol. 9, no. 2 (1966), pp. 179-90; Jennifer Mori, 'Languages of Loyalism: Patriotism, Nationhood and the State in the 1790s', *English Historical Review*, vol. 118, no. 475 (2003), pp. 33-58; Mark Philp, 'Vulgar Conservatism, 1792-3', *English Historical Review*, vol. 110, no. 435 (1995), pp. 42-69.

[20] John Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death: figurative treason, fantasies of regicide, 1793-1796*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000.

information and investigation 1791-1801' was the first attempt to assess this topic in depth.[21] While he was successful in identifying many informers and the manner in which their information was received by the Home Office, he did not document the changes and improvements made by the government to the structure and methods of the secret service during this time. In a series of articles, Emsley and Poole have debated the nature and extent of the government's repression and persecution of radicalism. Emsley provided detailed information and figures on prosecutions and the effects of legislation, but Poole demonstrated that figures in themselves may not be a reliable guide to government policy or the true state of affairs.[22] Hone pursued the matter further, investigating the reliability of the government's sources and the manner in which it analysed and interpreted information in order to determine the reasoning and justifications for its actions in the struggle against London-based radicalism.[23] In *Insurrection* Wells devoted a chapter to an analysis of the structure, operations and growth of the British secret service during the 1790s, and his narrative of the insurrectionary threats faced by the government contains a detailed analysis of the security services at work.

Bartlett's *Revolutionary Dublin, 1795-1801*, in addition to publishing the letters of the Irish informer Francis Higgins, investigates and assesses the Irish side of intelligence work and its close links with British security, exploring the government's use of numerous informers and other sources of information in this period and Dublin Castle's ability to analyse their copious information and turn it into accurate and usable intelligence.[24] Durey, in a number of articles and his ground-breaking book *William Wickham, Master Spy*, charted the development of the British secret service and for the first time documented the creation of the Inner Office in 1797-98 as the nerve centre of

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[21] Clive Emsley, 'The Home Office and its sources of information and investigation 1791-1801', *The English Historical Review*, vol. 94, no. 372 (1979), pp. 532-61.
[22] Clive Emsley, 'An Aspect of Pitt's 'Terror': Prosecutions for Sedition during the 1790s', *Social History*, vol. 6, no. 2 (1981), pp. 155-84; Clive Emsley, 'Repression, 'Terror' and the Rule of Law in England during the Decade of the French Revolution', *The English Historical Review*, vol. 100, no. 397 (1985), pp. 801-825; Steve Poole, 'Pitt's Terror Reconsidered: Jacobinism and the Law in Two South-West Counties, 1791-1803', *Southern History*, vol. 17 (1995), pp. 65-87.
[23] Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*.
[24] Thomas Bartlett, ed., *Revolutionary Dublin, 1795-1801: The Letters of Francis Higgins to Dublin Castle*, Dublin, Four Courts Press, 2004.

British intelligence.[25] Durey assessed the manner in which this office acquired and analysed information and co-ordinated the surveillance of and actions against suspected rebels in both Britain and Ireland from 1798-1802. Mention may also be made in this regard of the work of Sparrow. While her primary focus was on the international activities of British agents, particularly concerning France, her work also touches on the domestic security role of the Alien Office and the important connections between domestic and international intelligence.[26] Other works noteworthy for matters pertaining to information collection include Nelson's *The Home Office, 1782-1801*, Higgs' *The Information State in England* and Ellis' *The Post Office in the Eighteenth Century*.[27] The role of the informer in eighteenth-century British criminal law and law enforcement has been discussed in works by Hay, King, McLynn, Radzinowicz and Winslow.[28] On a more general level Cobb has analysed the mentality, motivations and reliability of informers both as sources of information and a means of law enforcement in *The Police and the People: French Popular Protest 1789-1820*.[29]

Scottish radicalism has until recently received far less attention than affairs in England. The definitive account remains Meikle's informative but dated *Scotland and the French Revolution*, first published in 1912.[30] However scholars can now benefit from McFarland's *Ireland and Scotland in the Age of Revolution: planting the green bough*, examining the links between Irish and Scottish radicalism; and Harris' *The Scottish People and the French Revolution*, documenting 1790s popular political culture, the rise

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[25] Michael Durey, *William Wickham, Master Spy: The Secret War Against the French Revolution*, London, Pickering & Chatto, 2009. See also Durey's 'William Maume: United Irishman and Informer in Two Hemispheres', *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, vol. 18 (2003), pp. 118-140 & 'William Wickham, the Christ Church Connection and the Rise and Fall of the Security Service in Britain, 1793-1801', *English Historical Review*, vol. cxxi, no. 492 (2006), pp. 714-45.

[26] Elizabeth Sparrow, 'The Alien Office, 1792-1806', *The Historical Journal*, vol. 33, no. 2 (1990), pp. 361-84; *Secret Service: British agents in France, 1792-1815*, Woodbridge, Boydell Press, 1999.

[27] R. R. Nelson, *The Home Office, 1782-1801*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1969; Edward Higgs, *The Information State in England: The Central Collection of Information on Citizens since 1500*, Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004; Kenneth Ellis, *The Post Office in the Eighteenth Century: a study in administrative history*, London, Oxford University Press, 1969.

[28] Douglas Hay, 'Poaching and the Game Laws on Cannock Chase', in Douglas Hay, ed., *Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England*, London, Allen Lane, 1975, pp. 189-253; Frank McLynn, *Crime and Punishment in Eighteenth-century England*, London, Routledge, 1989; Peter King, *Crime, Justice, and Discretion in England, 1740-1820*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000; Leon Radzinowicz, *A History of English Criminal Law and its Administration from 1750*, 5 vols., London, Steven & Sons Limited, 1948-1986; Cal Winslow, 'Sussex Smugglers', in Douglas Hay, ed., *Albion's Fatal Tree*, pp. 119-66.

[29] Richard Cobb, *The Police and the People: French Popular Protest 1789-1820*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1970.

[30] Henry W. Meikle, *Scotland and the French Revolution*, New Ed., London, Frank Cass & Co Ltd, 1969.

of radicalism, and the government/loyalist response.[31] These works explore government security and surveillance in Scotland and the important role of local radicalism – significant and highly-relevant counterparts to affairs south of the border.

The analytical framework of securitization was developed by Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde in *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. Buzan's earlier work *People, States & Fear* is also very useful in examining aspects of domestic and national security in a state context.[32] A method for analysing historical instances of securitization has recently been proposed by de Graaf and Zwierlein in 'Historicizing Security – Entering the Conspiracy Dispositive'.[33] Zwierlein has undertaken similar work in developing a new definition of conspiracy theory useful for historical research. At this stage the historical application of the securitization framework in a state context is in its infancy, especially as applied to pre twentieth-century cases. Two early forays into this field may be found in the works of de Graaf and Cubitt.[34] Finally, the practice of denunciation, being a key component of conspiracy and securitizing discourses, has been explored in an eighteenth-century context by Lucas in 'The Theory and Practice of Denunciation in the French Revolution'.[35]

This thesis, in emphasising and discussing the importance and role of security in the history of 1790s Britain, seeks to contribute both to the realm of security studies, particularly in exploring the applicability and utility of the securitization model in domestic and historical contexts, the political, social and psychological uses and impact of security, and the operation of the Pitt government's security services; and to the fields of eighteenth-century studies and the socio-political history of England, in its

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[31] E. W. McFarland, *Ireland and Scotland in the Age of Revolution: planting the green bough*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1994; Bob Harris, *The Scottish People and the French Revolution*, London, Pickering & Chatto, 2008.

[32] Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, *Security*; Barry Buzan, *People, States & Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, 2nd Ed., Harlow, Pearson Education Limited, 1991.

[33] Beatrice de Graaf and Cornel Zwierlein, 'Historicizing Security – Entering the Conspiracy Dispositive', *Historical Social Research*, vol. 38, no. 1 (2013), pp. 46-64.

[34] Cornel Zwierlein, 'Security Politics and Conspiracy Theories in the Emerging European State System (15th/16th c.)', *Historical Social Research*, vol. 38, no. 1 (2013), pp. 65-95; Beatrice de Graaf, 'The Black International Conspiracy as Security Dispositive in the Netherlands, 1880-1900', *Historical Social Research*, vol. 38, no. 1 (2013), pp. 142-165; Geoffrey Cubitt, 'Conspiracism, Secrecy and Security in Restoration France: Denouncing the Jesuit Menace', *Historical Social Research*, vol. 38, no. 1 (2013), pp. 107-128.

[35] Colin Lucas, 'The Theory and Practice of Denunciation in the French Revolution', in Sheila Fitzpatrick and Robert Gellately, eds., *Accusatory Practices: Denunciation in Modern European History, 1789-1989*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1997.

attempts to expand our understanding of 1790s politics, law enforcement, state administration, literature, ideologies, beliefs and social relations.

Chapter One – The Securitization of Radicalism

'A conspiracy clearly proved need not be traced distinctly through all its branches and ramifications; its existence, and the danger to the state from its nature, are sufficient to justify the temporary suspension of that security for our liberty, which by law is our birth-right.'[36] – The Earl of Carnarvon on the proposed suspension of habeas corpus, 22 May 1794

Securitization is the process, as identified and developed by Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde of the Copenhagen School, in which a securitizing actor performs a securitizing move/s by identifying an existential threat/s to a referent object/s. The move will result in a successful securitization if the alleged threat or threatening party (referred to as the 'referent subject') is accepted as posing a legitimate threat to the survival of a referent object deemed worthy of extraordinary protection by a significant proportion of the relevant audience, justifying its priority status and the implementation of emergency measures against it that go above and beyond the rules normally binding the securitizing actor. A referent object can be physical, institutional or conceptual; essentially anything capable of being undermined, damaged or destroyed by external agency. Buzan et al. describe securitization as the 'intersubjective establishment of an existential threat with a saliency sufficient to have substantial political effects'.[37] It is a speech act, the subjective 'process of constructing a shared understanding of what is to be considered and collectively responded to as a threat'.[38] The securitizing actor must construct a plausible narrative of object, threat, priority and solution, understandable and acceptable to an audience who recognise the authority of the actor to make and act upon such claims. Securitization is thus a step above politicisation, in which an issue is made 'part of public policy, requiring government decision and resource allocations'[39] that are debated and decided upon in an at least partially open forum. By contrast, a securitized issue is defined as one that requires 'emergency measures and justifying actions outside the normal bounds of political procedure', prioritised above the 'normal haggling of

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[36] *PH* 31, col. 595.
[37] Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, *Security*, p. 25.
[38] Ibid., p. 26.
[39] Ibid., p. 23.

politics'.[40] The securitizing actor has claimed for themselves 'a need for and a right to treat it by extraordinary means' in order to ensure the elimination of the threat and the survival of the referent object.[41]

The discourses, institutions, propositions and measures enacted by the securitizing actor may be thought of as a security dispositive, created and utilised as a means of achieving a successful securitization and control over security issues. Foucault introduced the notion of a dispositive as 'a way to grasp and analyze the ensemble of power relations at distinct historical moments, without reducing them to a fully coherent or overarching structure'.[42] De Graaf and Zwierlein argue that in the realm of security, the concept of a dispositive 'makes it possible to identify and analyze the precise interplay of security's administrative practices, legal categorizations, cultural imaginations, and calculative technologies'.[43] De Graaf also notes that 'Security rests on the basis of certain images of danger, threat and destruction' that need to be communicated to the relevant audience in an effective and persuasive manner.[44] A security dispositive is essentially a power play, enacted within and utilising particular webs of knowledge, imagery and interrelations in order to attach a sense of urgency, legitimacy and immediacy to a particular threat situation. As Cubitt notes, it therefore 'reinforces the notions of urgency and response that are implicit in the concept of securitization itself'.[45] Furthermore, as de Graaf and Zwierlein explain, a security dispositive provides a means of legitimising present action against an anticipated future event by 'mobilizing governmental practices and expert knowledge and implementing exceptional measures' to define, securitize and eliminate a perceived threat. In doing so the securitizing actor may utilise new and existing "technologies of imagination" – 'techniques…aimed at visualizing and representing the threat' – and 'new modes of security governance'.[46] We may seek to explore and determine how the use of the former legitimises and shapes the latter.[47]

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[40] Ibid., pp. 24 & 29.
[41] Ibid., p. 26.
[42] De Graaf and Zwierlein, 'Historicizing Security – Entering the Conspiracy Dispositive', p. 51.
[43] Ibid.
[44] De Graaf, 'The Black International Conspiracy as Security Dispositive in the Netherlands, 1880-1900', p. 162.
[45] Cubitt, 'Conspiracism, Secrecy and Security in Restoration France', p. 110.
[46] De Graaf and Zwierlein, 'Historicizing Security – Entering the Conspiracy Dispositive', pp. 52 & 59-60.
[47] Ibid., pp. 46-64; Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, *Security*, pp. 21-47 & 141-62; Cubitt, 'Conspiracism, Secrecy and Security in Restoration France', pp. 109-111; De Graaf, 'The Black International Conspiracy as Security Dispositive in the Netherlands, 1880-1900', pp. 154-63.

In each securitizing move, one must identify the following elements: the referent object, securitizing actor, referent subject, the "terrain" of the threat i.e. the areas in which the threat is carried out (politics, war, economics etc.), the audience of the actor, and the means by which the actor makes their securitizing move.[48] One may also identify and consider functional actors – parties apart from the securitizing actor who have an impact upon the course and outcome of the securitizing move. The move will be followed by whatever extraordinary measures are deemed necessary to defeat the existential threat. Buzan et al. state that 'A successful securitization thus has three components (or steps): existential threats, emergency action, and effects on interunit relations by breaking free of rules.'[49] How did these elements and components manifest themselves in the securitization of radicalism in 1790s Britain? Radicalism, both as an active political ideology and in the form of radical societies such as the LCS and the Society for Constitutional Information, was identified by the Pitt government as an existential threat to the sovereignty and status of the British king, parliament and constitution, by means of alleged intentions and plans to carry out alternations to the composition and powers of parliament, executive and monarch by force, potential violence and a usurpation of sovereignty. In government eyes this constituted a political threat to what Buzan et al. describe as 'the internal legitimacy' of the state, 'which relates primarily to ideologies and other constitutive ideas and issues defining the state' – in this case the sovereignty of parliament and its right to govern in conjunction with the executive as a legitimate representative of the British people of behalf of the ruling monarch.[50]

This securitizing move was performed by the government to convince parliament and the British people of the need to use extreme and novel measures to eradicate the radical threat and protect the political status quo. Tomline asserts that Pitt

> perceived the formidable co-operation of internal and external enemies; but the former could not be effectually resisted, except by open war, nor the latter without coercive acts of the legislature: and he was persuaded, that neither of these expedients, exclusive to his own earnest wish not to have recourse to them, would be approved, till their necessity was obvious and incontestable.[51]

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[48] Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, *Security*, pp. 35-42; Cubitt, 'Conspiracism, Secrecy and Security in Restoration France', p. 110.
[49] Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, *Security*, p. 26.
[50] Ibid., p. 144.
[51] George Tomline, *Memoirs of the Life of the Right Honorable William Pitt*, 2nd Ed., Vol. 3, London, John Murray, 1821, p. 548.

In the climate and context of the time the Prime Minister and his colleagues believed that radicalism was dangerous, French republicanism intolerable and reform inadvisable. However, they could not act immediately or without justification, for as Mori states, 'Public opinion was not a force the Pitt ministry could afford to ignore', and ministers recognised that 'all government was based on consent'. They therefore set about convincing the public and their fellow MPs of the need for war and repression, by securitizing and linking the French and domestic threats 'as a diabolical menace to the laws, liberties and constitution of Britain.'[52] Loyalists and their associations played an important role as functional actors assisting the government in constructing and carrying out its securitizing move and exercising the measures deemed necessary to tackle the radical threat, while liberal groups such as the Foxite Society of the Friends of the People acted as a counterweight, championing the need for reform, supporting the right of radicals to associate, debate, speak and publish, and fighting against the government's securitizing move, security measures and repression. The press, sharply divided between loyalist and radical firms sandwiching a more neutral assortment of papers, also played an active political and ideological role. The securitizing move was followed by a number of extraordinary actions the government used to monitor, investigate and repress radicalism and remove the threat it was believed to pose to national security. The nature of some of these measures and their effects on British society shall be discussed below.

The government had to overcome a number of obstacles in order to make a successful securitizing move. English radicalism had existed since at least the mid eighteenth century and the age of John Wilkes, and one may perhaps trace it even further back in time. Regardless of its origins, by the 1790s it had unquestionably existed for some time as a legal and legitimate political and social ideology. Popular, religious and political dissent also had strong traditions on English soil. Furthermore, the cause its leaders advanced most strongly in public – a moderate parliamentary reform – had earlier been espoused by Pitt himself and his colleague the Duke of Richmond, and was widely perceived as a legitimate political argument that challenged particular details of the current state/government system and policies rather than threatening the constitutional structure as a whole. Therefore, it would require a concerted and systematic effort by the government in order to turn radicalism into an intolerable existential threat to an

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[52] Mori, 'Languages of Loyalism', pp. 34-35.

independent referent object worthy of especial protection in the eyes of public and parliamentary opinion.[53]

Senior ministers and their supporters employed a number of means to facilitate their securitizing move. None of these were in themselves new or revolutionary, but the identification of a radical conspiracy as a new form of plot played a significant part in distinguishing it from past actions and movements and in emphasising the seriousness, novelty and extreme danger of the threat, necessitating original and innovative means to combat it. The securitization of radicalism did not occur quickly or instantaneously, but rather grew and solidified over the course of the 1790s, marching in step with the perceived nature of the threat and efforts to supress it, until any form of public or association radicalism was effectively outlawed in 1799, with public opinion being largely either supportive of or indifferent to its demise. Even though particular themes and tactics persisted throughout the decade, the attempts to securitize and repress radicalism increased at particular moments punctuated by occasional lulls in activity or backward steps, as circumstances and policy dictated. Other (mostly loyalist) actors also suggested, dictated or even proposed contrary securitizing tactics, sometimes resulting in muddles, confusion and contradiction. While radicalism as a whole eventually came to be identified as an existential threat, at different times certain components of radical activity were focused on and given increased emphasis as being particularly hazardous to national security. The means employed by the government and its allies to securitize and combat radicalism were therefore akin to tools from a tool kit, each being employed or redeployed at what was judged to be the appropriate moment to achieve the government's aims, with some proving more effective than others. Let us now analyse in greater detail what they were.

A Traitorous Conspiracy

Conspiracy theories were exceedingly common in the late eighteenth century. Zwierlein has defined a conspiracy theory as

> a narrative of a possible past and present, often also containing elements of future predictions, claiming to be the true representation of *the* past and present which is built from some commonly accepted elements…and some elements that are not proven but possible and that

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[53] Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty*, pp. 32-98; Mori, *William Pitt and the French Revolution 1785-1795*, pp. 17-44; Royle and Walvin, *English Radicals and Reformers, 1760-1848*, pp. 13-47.

bridge the gaps of knowledge and understanding concerning a certain event or sequence of events…A conspiracy theory mostly has an explanatory, an appellative-affective and a denunciation function.[54]

As a means of establishing causation and agency, such theories are well-suited to the securitizing task of subjectively identifying, interpreting and denouncing a particular threat within a defined political and social space. As Cubitt notes, 'discourses evoking them [conspiracies] can articulate the ways in which security actors and security agencies view the world around them'.[55] De Graaf explores the means of applying these discourses to threat identification, stating that while a subversive and hidden plot may be 'beyond measurement' and concrete description, it is 'not beyond imagination, and here the technologies of imagination [come] in useful as means of rendering the imagined threat as positively measurable and visible as possible'. Conspiracy theories provide a familiar and flexible framework with which to achieve such visualisation, facilitating the 'expansion of the referent subject, referent object, and the rise of new modes of governance'.[56] Barrell has also written persuasively on the importance of imagination in 1790s political, legal and literary discourses, and of its role in constructing the modern form of treason by means of 'newfangled doctrines, the flights of figurative imagination, of "wit and invention"'.[57]

Furthermore, as de Graaf and Zwierlein point out, '"Conspiracy" functions as a legitimizing argument, serving and fuelling a larger, encompassing security regime' and being 'used as a political weapon by political entrepreneurs claiming to speak for a threatened majority'.[58] Yet it can also simultaneously delegitimise a target subject by accusing it of harbouring or acting as a cover for a hidden group or plot with illicit intentions. Conspiracy thinking can therefore serve to identify, describe, denounce and delegitimise a subject in the eyes of a relevant audience. Lucas argues that in such situations denunciation is 'harnessed as an instrument of state power'.[59] Conspiracy theory is therefore a highly effective means of interpreting a scenario in a manner that empowers the actor and facilitates a securitizing move and the use of extraordinary

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[54] Zwierlein, 'Security Politics and Conspiracy Theories in the Emerging European State System', pp. 72-73.
[55] Cubitt, 'Conspiracism, Secrecy and Security in Restoration France', p. 111.
[56] De Graaf, 'The Black International Conspiracy as Security Dispositive in the Netherlands, 1880-1900', p. 162.
[57] Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death*, p. 343.
[58] De Graaf and Zwierlein, 'Historicizing Security – Entering the Conspiracy Dispositive', p. 55.
[59] Lucas, 'The Theory and Practice of Denunciation in the French Revolution', p. 33.

measures against a target threat. In our period Revolutionary France abounded with claims of plots, conspiracies and counter-conspiracies, and claims of secret international or foreign conspiracies were commonly cited as being responsible for all-manner of significant events in Europe and North America. Wood has argued that the Enlightenment commitment to reason, the certainty of cause and effect and the centrality of human agency often manifested itself in 'attributing events to the concerted designs of willful individuals'.[60] Wells posits that 'Secrecy, intrigue and conspiracy are the hallmarks of politics in the [seventeen] nineties', and indeed Britons were far from immune from conspiracy paranoia, especially when it came to fears over the presence and activities of foreigners, subversives and Catholics.[61] Senior politicians like Pitt and his fellow ministers were equally prone to belief in hidden plots and forces, especially if they conformed with their own preconceived notions and perceptions. It is thus no surprise to find that the government believed in a grand radical conspiracy, or that it was perceived as a suitable means of securitizing radicalism and legitimating the use of extraordinary means to crush it.[62]

Right from the beginnings of the popular radical societies in 1792, the government suspected that they harboured republican and Jacobin principles and secretly targeted the overthrow of the entire constitution. In April 1792 Henry Dundas alluded to 'the Associations of Sheffield and Manchester, whose avowed object was nothing less than the overthrow of the constitution', while in May 1793 Pitt argued that in some radical societies 'French principles were inculcated as the true standard of political belief, and the example of the French government proposed as a worthy object of imitation'.[63] Lord Grenville claimed that 'The hands of Government must be strengthened if the country is to be saved', yet for the time being the government was content to rely on loyalism,

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[60] Gordon S. Wood, 'Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style: Causality and Deceit in the Eighteenth Century', *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 39, no. 3 (1982), p. 411.

[61] Wells, *Insurrection*, p. 43.

[62] Cubitt, 'Conspiracism, Secrecy and Security in Restoration France', pp. 109-111 & 124-25; De Graaf, 'The Black International Conspiracy as Security Dispositive in the Netherlands, 1880-1900', pp. 142-45 & 154-63; De Graaf and Zwierlein, 'Historicizing Security – Entering the Conspiracy Dispositive', pp. 55-58; Evans, *Debating the Revolution*, pp. 82-84; Wood, 'Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style', pp. 401-441; Zwierlein, 'Security Politics and Conspiracy Theories in the Emerging European State System', pp. 67-75.

[63] *PH* 29, col. 1337; *PH* 30, col. 893.

surveillance, deterrence and an active campaign against sedition, rather than target the societies directly.[64]

However, by spring 1794, the government and the Portland Whigs had become convinced that radical efforts and principles had now been channelled into a detailed and systematic conspiracy to subvert the constitution, claim all sovereignty and authority for themselves, and reform the legislature and executive by force. The government and the parliamentary secret committees appointed to investigate radical activities claimed that the public radical platform of limited parliamentary reform in line with that outlined by the Duke of Richmond in 1782 was a mask for this traitorous conspiracy, involving all the major radical societies in Britain. Radicalism was turned from an extra-parliamentary and loosely-organised political movement into a systematic and concerted plot to overthrow the state; an existential threat with reform as a mask and liberals and moderates as its duped and therefore delegitimised allies, incapable of acting without propagating (wittingly or otherwise) the treasonous radical cause. The *First Report from the Committee of Secrecy of the House of Commons respecting Seditious Practices* informed the Commons that the radical societies had been plotting 'a traitorous conspiracy for the subversion of the established laws and constitution, and the introduction of that system of anarchy and confusion which has fatally prevailed in France'. This conspiracy was 'every day more and more likely to affect the internal peace and security of these kingdoms, and to require, in the most urgent manner, the immediate and vigilant attention of parliament'.[65] It was the intention of the societies 'to supersede the House of Commons in its representative capacity, and to assume to itself all the functions and powers of a national legislature' by means of a convention formed for the purpose of 'making their resolutions to be law'.[66]

Pitt argued that 'the pretext of reform, under which they masked their purpose, was far from being the true object of their intentions', which they had contemplated 'from the very outset'. But 'Happily for this country' they had 'thrown off the mask just when the bulk of the nation unanimously were uniting with government in vigilance and care for its protection'. The planned convention was not to be a collection of radical

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[64] The Duke of Buckingham and Chandos, ed., *Memoirs of the Court and Cabinets of George the Third*, Vol. 2, London, Hurst and Blackett, 1853, Lord Grenville to The Marquis of Buckingham, 14 November 1792, p. 228.
[65] *PH* 31, cols. 475-76 & 496.
[66] Ibid., cols. 495 & 893.

'representatives…for the accomplishment of particular legal purposes' but was to represent 'the whole body of the people of England' and 'exercise legislative and judicial capacities', usurping the power of parliament.[67] Edmund Burke darkly warned that

> Parliamentary reform was the pretext for all the sedition that had been sown for many years in this country. But the real object in view…was nothing more nor less than the usurpation, and, in the end, the plunder, of the state. This was parliamentary reform; and for this purpose, whole classes of the working people of the country were to be jacobinized![68]

William Windham concurred, arguing that it was 'plain as the sun' that the societies' declared support for reform was simply a mask 'for their real intention of a total annihilation of all property, constitution, and religion'.[69] The implications of such arguments were clear – it was obvious to anyone who looked closely that the radicals intended subversion, usurpation and the full implementation of French principles, and only those who allowed themselves to be duped by the conspiracy, either from incompetence or a secret support for the radical cause, could fail to see this.

The conspiracy theory's adaptability and fear-factor maintained its usefulness as a securitizing force throughout the 1790s. In May 1794 it was used to justify the arrest of Hardy and his colleagues on a charge of treason for their part in planning the imminent insurrection. Habeas corpus was suspended to facilitate their ongoing detainment and investigation. Government MPs and alarmist Whigs lined up to support these measures and their necessity for preserving national security. Pitt himself stated that there was 'not one moment to be lost in arming the executive power with those additional means, which might be sufficient effectually to stop the farther progress' of the radical plans. Therefore it was necessary 'to enact a temporary suspension of the Habeas Corpus laws'.[70] What point was there in maintaining this particular part of the constitution, he argued, if the whole constitution should otherwise be destroyed? Burke did not deny that 'Habeas Corpus was unquestionably one of our most invaluable securities; but in times of great emergency, even that must be given up temporarily with a view to the preservation of the whole'.[71] Canning thundered that 'extraordinary measures required

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[67] Ibid., cols. 498, 500 & 502.
[68] Ibid., cols 518-19.
[69] Ibid., col. 546.
[70] Ibid., cols. 497 & 505.
[71] Ibid., col. 520.

extraordinary powers for their suppression', while William Young argued that 'we had to deal with men of dangerous and desperate characters. When Cicero suppressed the conspiracy of Catiline, he was obliged to step beyond the strict letter of the law'. It was the 'duty of the House' to do likewise.[72]

Later in the year Hardy, Horne Tooke and John Thelwall were tried for high treason. The prosecutions, along with the many others for sedition and treason, were not only attempts to punish, detain and silence radical agitators, but were themselves aspects of the government's securitizing move. The very sight of radical leaders in court was designed to alert the public and produce the evidence as to the supposedly dangerous and criminal plans and principles of radicalism, further justifying the need to combat it by extraordinary measures. The Attorney-General John Scott claimed that the primary reason for prosecuting the defendants for treason rather than a lesser charge was 'the great object of satisfying the country and making them aware of their danger'. For 'It appeared to me to be more essential to securing the public safety that the whole of their transactions should be published, than that any of these Individuals should be convicted.'[73] Despite the acquittal of all the accused, Pitt was convinced that the evidence produced at the trials nonetheless proved the conspiracy[74] and

> had a strong effect upon the public. When that immense mass of matter was laid open, and the real designs of these societies developed, it served to open the eyes of the unwary, to check the incautious, and to deter the timid.[75]

He maintained that with this support 'The circumstances of the time demanded that a discretionary power should be given to ministers', to continue to pursue the conspiracy and protect the 'public safety', for by a judicious use of such power the people would 'be happily rescued from all the dangers that assailed them'.[76]

Furthermore, the continuing conspiracy was posited as necessitating the Two Acts of 1795, as it allowed the government to connect radical mass meetings with apparent violence against the king (on 29 October 1795), subversion of the public towards

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[72] Ibid., cols. 535 & 529.
[73] *Lord Eldon's Anecdote Book*, ed. Anthony L. J. Lincoln and Robert L. McEwen, London, Stevens & Sons, 1960, p. 56, quoted in Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty*, p. 340.
[74] For other opinions on the evidence produced at the trials, see below, pp. 36-37.
[75] *PH* 32, col. 378.
[76] *PH 31*, cols. 1188-89.

rebellion, and a new "modern" species of treason[77], thus demonstrating the need to ban such meetings, increase state power, surveillance and vigilance, and add a new form of treason to the statute books.[78] Canning claimed that

> there was an intimate connexion between the proceedings at Copenhagen-house [the last public mass radical meeting], and the disgraceful outrage which followed. An attempt had been made against the king, and a hand bill was circulated on the practice of "king-killing"…If the attack on the sovereign immediately followed the circulation of such abominable doctrine, he did not see how the connexion could be discredited.[79]

A Narrative of the Insults Offered to the King argued that 'the machinations of foreign enemies', combined with indigenous 'preparations to inflame the public mind', had inspired the attack. Radical leaders, whose plans were 'laid with a sagacity worthy of a better cause', had taken advantage of

> the distress of the moment, of the fever of the times, with a shrewd promptitude, that shews, however despicable the common herd may be with respect to their abilities or importance, they are in the hands of men who know well how to set their talents, such as they are, in motion, and while they skulk secure, thrust them on to acts of treason and desperation.[80]

The new republican treason allegedly found a fruitful breeding ground in public meetings and the agitation of contempt for king, constitution and parliament.[81] William Pulteney warned against the dangers of 'inflammatory assemblies where sedition was copiously dealt out to the multitude', leading them astray by their 'ignorance' and imbibing of 'insidious poison'. The MP argued that 'If treason and sedition were afloat, the current ought to be stopped; and if the laws already in force were inadequate, some regulation ought to be made to save every thing dear to Englishmen.'[82] Windham strongly agreed, arguing that the country stood near a 'dreadful precipice', necessitating

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[77] See below, pp. 41-42.

[78] The so-called 'Two Acts', passed in December 1795, were the Treasonable and Seditious Practices Act (36 Geo.3 c.7) 1795 and the Seditious Meetings Act (36 Geo.3 c.8) 1795. The former widened the scope of the law of treason such that it now encompassed not only direct attempts against the life and reign of the king, but also any acts that may agitate or result in attempts either to restrain, coerce or overawe the king or parliament; while the latter made it an offence to hold any meeting of more than fifty people for the discussion of public grievances or the consideration of any address or petition without obtaining prior authorisation from a magistrate. See Goodwin, pp. 387-88.

[79] *PH 32*, col. 301.

[80] *A Narrative of the Insults Offered to the King, On his Way to and from the House of Lords, On Thursday Last*, London, J. Owen, 1795, pp. 13 & 11.

[81] *PH 32*, col. 485.

[82] Ibid., col. 284.

ministers to 'exert a vigour beyond the law, as exercised in ordinary times and under ordinary circumstances'. Or perhaps the times rather required 'stronger laws, and the exertion of more efficacious means to put those laws in execution'.[83] The *True Briton* likewise advocated

> the adoption of decisive measures for the Suppression of those unlawful Meetings and Societies, in which such disaffection originates, as the only effectual means of eradicating an evil, which threatens the very existence of Civil Society.

It was imperative that the 'Magistracy...from the highest to the lowest, should be called forth into immediate and effectual exertion' to ensure '*the security of our Persons, our Property,* and *of every thing valuable in Society*' by shutting up 'those infamous Schools of Treason and Sedition' who desire 'to corrupt the minds of the rising generation', so that 'the torrent of their poisonous Principles may, as far as possible, be prevented from extending its destructive rage'.[84]

Finally in 1798-99, in the wake of the United Irish Rebellion and the discovery of a definite clandestine plot to instigate an insurrection on British soil, the conspiracy theory was used to paint the United movement as being merely the latest radical attempt to secure the aim they had sought since the beginning – the 'entire overthrow of the British constitution…and the erection of a democratic republic'.[85] As Arthur Young had warned, driving the radical movement underground had only made '*resistance a question of prudence*, though not of morality'.[86] The conspiracy had simply changed form, not substance. The *Anti-Jacobin* asserted that the verdict against James Coigly in May 1798 had 'settled for ever the question so long agitated between the opposite Political Parties in this Country'. For the '*condemnation* of *one* man for *conspiring* against his Country, *does* incontrovertibly *establish* the existence of the Conspiracy'. In the loyalist mind, individual guilt was proof of a wider conspiracy, while individual innocence merely bespoke a lack of evidence against that one individual. The verdict demonstrated that parliament had 'been justified in confiding extraordinary powers to the EXECUTIVE GOVERNMENT of the Country' and showed that 'the EXECUTIVE GOVERNMENT, in the active and necessary use of those extraordinary powers' was

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[83] Ibid., cols. 385-86.
[84] *True Briton* (*TB*), 6 November 1795, emphasis in original.
[85] *PH* 34, col. 613.
[86] Arthur Young, *An Enquiry Into The State Of The Public Mind Amongst The Lower Classes: And On The Means Of Turning It To The Welfare Of The State*, Dublin, J. Moore, 1798, p. 8, emphasis in original.

acting with 'the conviction, and the support of the great mass of the People'.[87] The case and associated evidence therefore justified the government's earlier acts of repression and securitization and reinforced the people's support for its past and present actions, for as the Earl of Liverpool claimed it was now undoubted that 'the measures of security which Parliament adopted to frustrate [radical] designs, were loudly called for, by the atrocious and desperate attempts of the most daring and flagitious traitors'.[88]

Via the evidence obtained from the Maidstone trial, British and Irish intelligence and despairing Irish radicals, British domestic radicalism was linked to rebellion, violence and invasion in Ireland, clandestine and open French aggression, and unified republican collusion.[89] The 1799 *Report from the Committee of Secrecy of the House of Commons* informed parliament that

> your committee have found the clearest proofs of a systematic design, long since adopted and acted upon in France, in conjunction with domestic traitors, and pursued up to the present with unabated perseverance, to overturn the laws, constitution, and government, and every existing establishment…both in Great Britain and Ireland, as well as to dissolve the connexion between the two kingdoms, so necessary to the security and prosperity of both…The most effectual engine employed for this purpose, has been the institution of political societies, of a nature and description before unknown in any country, and inconsistent with public tranquillity, and with the existence of regular government.[90]

As Goodwin states, the report speciously

> analysed the whole evolution of the radical movement in Britain since the early 1790s as if it had always been the clandestine, treasonable and republican conspiracy that it only became on the eve of its dissolution.[91]

This allowed the government to extend the conspiracy in time and space and securitize radicalism as the vehicle for a single ongoing grand design to subvert the British Isles and assist the French invasion of Britain and/or Ireland – an existential threat whose ongoing existence was intolerable in any form. The effect of the report on public and

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[87] *Anti-Jacobin*, 28 May 1798, emphases in original.
[88] Charles Jenkinson, Earl of Liverpool, *State of the Country in the Autumn of 1798*, 2nd Ed., London, J. Wright, 1798, p. 20.
[89] See Durey, *William Wickham, Master Spy*, pp. 113-34; Elliott, *Partners in Revolution*, pp. 165-213; Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty*, pp. 416-50; James Quinn, 'The Kilmainham treaty of 1798', in Thomas Bartlett, David Dickson, Dáire Keogh & Kevin Whelan, eds., *1798: A Bicentenary Perspective*, Dublin, Four Courts Press, 2003, pp. 423-36; Wells, *Insurrection*, pp. 110-77.
[90] *PH* 34, cols. 579-80.
[91] Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty*, p. 451.

parliamentary opinion was clearly at the forefront of the minds of its composers, for one of the briefs attached to its supporting documentation notes that 'The nature and extent of these extracts to be regulated by the manner in which the committee is composed, and the greater or less degree of alarm that the Cabinet would wish to create.'[92] Wickham admitted to Castlereagh that the report was intended 'to explain the state of things, in a manner that must draw the attention of the public as well to a sense of the general danger as to the means of preventing it'.[93] These means were swiftly identified. It was the committee's

> unanimous opinion, that the system of secret societies…cannot be suffered to exist in these kingdoms, compatibly with the safety of their government, and constitution, and with their security against foreign force and domestic treason.[94]

Pitt duly proclaimed that, being 'in a contest for every consideration that is most valuable to us', it was now necessary to ban the radical societies outright and re-suspend habeas corpus.[95] This was done with little opposition. Graham concludes that 'the effect of the government's legislation and prosecutions in 1799, was, for a time at least, to silence almost altogether the voice of political dissent'.[96]

The government's theory was a wonderfully malleable and effective tool for securitizing radicalism. The claimed existence of a grand secret conspiracy allowed the government to paper over any deficiencies in its evidence, either by pointing to the certainty and inevitable direction of the conspiracy and its principles as a whole – as Mori states, by equating 'community of spirit with a confederacy of purpose' – or by using the careful secrecy of radical preparations as an excuse for the state's inability to procure information on particular aspects of their operations.[97] After the treason trials, Scott maintained that 'he was convinced that a conspiracy had existed, and did still exist', for the 'numbers concerned, their characters and dispositions, were sufficient evidence, that there was a combination of the most dangerous tendency'.[98] After the

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[92] 'Heads of Evidence to be offered to a secret Committee', n.d. (1799), National Archives (NA), London, HO 100/101, fols. 121-22, quoted in Wells, *Insurrection*, p. 42.
[93] Castlereagh, *Memoirs and Correspondence of Viscount Castlereagh, Second Marquess of Londonderry*, Vol. 2, Wickham to Castlereagh, 20 March 1799, p. 216.
[94] *PH* 34, col. 614.
[95] Ibid., col. 985.
[96] Graham, *The Nation, the Law and the King*, Vol. 2, p. 866.
[97] Mori, *William Pitt and the French Revolution 1785-1795*, p. 241.
[98] *PH* 31, col. 1170.

mass meetings and attack on the king of 1795, Thomas Powys made a similar assumption, stating in the Commons that

> the House had not, it was true, nor need it have, specific evidence of the treasonable designs of the meetings. The notoriety alone was enough to justify the legislature in resorting to strong regulations, to prevent the consequences that might arise from such inflammatory assemblies.[99]

Whatever doubts they may have harboured in private, many loyalists were publicly adamant that the nature and existence of the conspiracy was plain on the record of the evidence presented at the treason trials. John Bowles argued that such confirmation was obtainable

> not by attending to the impulse of vague suspicion, or to the suggestions of general alarm; not even by listening merely to the fatherly admonition of a gracious and affecting Prince, or to the wise and seasonable measures of a vigilant Legislature; but by pursuing a body of proof, regularly brought forward in the face of day, and submitted to severest scrutiny of public examination.[100]

There was no need nor cause for the government to dissemble, misdirect and speculate, reasoned Bowles, when the proof was there for all to see. As for secrecy, at Hardy's trial Chief Justice Eyre informed the jury that 'though multitudes are made parties to these proceedings, there is every reason in the world to believe, that but few are engaged in the depth of the project', implying a commitment to secrecy that both pointed towards conspiracy and explained the difficulty of proving it.[101] The 1799 Commons report explained that the societies' 'principle of secrecy, generally enforced by unlawful oaths…peculiarly fits them for the most desperate enterprizes' while at the same time providing 'an obvious tendency to elude detection…and to defeat legal enquiry'.[102]

Loyalists could also allege the existence of the "hidden hand" of French Jacobins and republicans that either directed, supported or inspired British radical operations, on the mere premise that their interpretation of the conspiracy indicated this must be the case, even though the supporting evidence was circumstantial at best. Pitt certainly believed in this external assistance, for as Mori states in his view

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[99] *PH* 32, col. 367.
[100] *TB*, 10 January 1795.
[101] *ST* 24, col. 1378.
[102] *PH* 34, col. 613.

The remarkable outward cohesion of the parliamentary reform movement during the 1790s could only be put down to an external agency. The British public did not, thought Pitt, behave under normal conditions with such determination and consistency. Radical unity could only be a product of French aid.[103]

This perception, that the "lower orders" were incapable of independent action or orderly political activity without direction and assistance from some higher or foreign power, was common in government and loyalist circles, forming a key aspect of the conspiracy theory and securitizing move. Pitt described the societies as a 'jacobin army' and alleged that

The conduct of the French, in all its circumstances, bore a peculiar application to this country; it presented the fruits opening, in due season, the legitimate offspring of those trees, under the specious pretext of liberty, planted against this country and its allies.[104]

Furthermore, the presence of so many French émigrés in England ostensibly fleeing the Revolution was deeply suspected by loyalists as being a means for republicans to secretly enter and operate in the country. In January 1793 *The Times* had praised the immediate impact of the pending Aliens Act, noting that London was now 'cleared of hundreds of the French vermin who came hither to breed rebellion and assassination'.[105] In the Lords Loughborough likewise praised the act for addressing the presence of foreigners who 'came hither for the purpose of, and who were active in doing all they could to create confusion'.[106] The Home Office certainly viewed these aliens as a grave security threat, necessitating urgent measures, with Sir Evan Nepean once commenting that

in the performance of this service some steps may be necessary to be taken not exactly justifiable by Law, but it times like the present, when dangerous incendiaries are daily resorting to this Country, avowedly with mischievous intentions, it is not necessary to be very nice.[107]

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[103] Mori, *William Pitt and the French Revolution 1785-1795*, p. 262.
[104] *PH* 31, col. 505; *PH* 30, col. 892.
[105] *The Times*, 2 January 1793.
[106] Lord Loughborough, 'Substance of the Speech of the Right Honourable Lord Loughborough in the House of Lords, on the third reading of the Bill for establishing certain Regulations respecting Aliens, December 26, 1792', in *Publications Printed by Order of the Society For Preserving Liberty and Property Against Republicans and Levellers*, No. 6, London, J. Downes, 1792, p. 15.
[107] NA, HO 42/23, Nepean to Patrick McManus, n.d. (1792), quoted in Nelson, *The Home Office, 1782-1801*, p. 124.

The evidence of French collusion unearthed in 1798 was spuriously seized upon as proof that these earlier insinuations and rumours had been correct.

The conspiracy was therefore used to make the facts fit the government argument, rather than the other way around. Barrell argues that the secret committees could interpret the statements of the radical societies

> as having only one "possible purpose", as proving "strongly and unequivocally" a design to overthrow the constitution, only because it had begun by assuming what it was appointed to prove. The argument was back to front: the committee claimed to establish that the intentions of the SCI were revolutionary on the grounds that the society had adopted the doctrines of Paine and the French Convention; in fact it was arguing that because its intentions were revolutionary the SCI…must have adopted those doctrines. By starting from this assumption, the reports of the Commons' committee were imagining – at least in part – the conspiracy they claimed to have discovered.[108]

By viewing the societies' plans, statements and intentions through the lens of the conspiracy, the committees were assigning them an interpretation and composition that naturally conformed to the matrix of the government's theory. This method was far from impartial and accurate, but it certainly benefited the government's efforts to prove and publicise the traitorous plot. It also allowed ministers to attribute a cohesiveness and unity of purpose to the radical movement, allegedly from its very beginnings, which simply did not exist. By the end of the decade, the 1799 secret committee report went so far as to assert that

> The extent and uniformity of this systematic conspiracy, are equally striking. The formation and structure of all these societies, in this country, in Ireland, and on the continent, are similar; their views and principles are the same, as well as the means which they employ to extend their influence. A continued intercourse and concert has been maintained from their first origin to the present moment…[109]

In this way radicalism could be identified, targeted, denounced and securitized as one comprehensive block, rather than having to allow that particular radicals, ideas, societies or forms of radicalism may be more or less tolerable and reasonable.

Conspiracy thinking formed a key part of government attempts to distance 1790s radicalism from earlier British antecedents, and to divorce it from the more acceptable

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[108] Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death*, p. 198.
[109] *PH* 34, col. 580.

and debatable cause of reform, while simultaneously doing great damage to this cause and the liberals who supported it. This was viewed as advantageous by a government that regarded any parliamentary reform as inadvisable in the current climate and valued any means of discrediting the Foxite opposition. The government could minimise its need to properly consider and debate popular grievances and political/state deficiencies by maximising the conspiratorial threat. Even moderate reform was deemed unwise simply because, as Pitt said, it would be impossible to achieve a 'separation of the friends of moderate reform and the determined enemies of the constitution'. There was therefore a grave 'danger of introducing an evil of much greater magnitude than that which we are now desirous to repair'. The Prime Minister claimed that a reform would neither improve the lot of the people nor satisfy the radicals, for 'Those men who treat parliament as an usurpation, and monarchy as an invasion of the rights of man, would not receive a reform which was not the recognition of their right'.[110] Reform was therefore not a cause any loyal citizen should champion. Some loyalists even argued that any form of proactive political opposition was disloyal and dangerous at a time of national emergency, with Loughborough advising that any actions calculated to diminish confidence in the government would 'increase the danger with which the country was threatened'. Rather it was necessary for all parties to 'unite in their efforts to preserve our glorious Constitution', for any divisions were ill-advised 'when the enemy were at the gate, and some of them within the citadel'.[111]

The government claimed that even if some radicals *were* moderate men who genuinely supported legal reform, and regardless of whether a few individuals like Thomas Walker, Hardy and Thelwall were acquitted of the charges against them, radicalism remained a dangerous and intolerable threat because it propagated and harboured a treasonous despicable plot that was greater than the sum or participation of any one part. Scott, smarting from his defeats in the trials, told the Commons that 'it was by no means necessary that any of the individuals accused of treason, should have been convicted, in order to justify parliament' in suspending habeas corpus. For that decision rested upon 'the existence of a conspiracy', this being 'a subject upon which parliament was fully

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[110] *PH* 33, cols. 671 & 674.
[111] Loughborough, 'Substance of the Speech of the Right Honourable Lord Loughborough in the House of Lords, on the third reading of the Bill for establishing certain Regulations respecting Aliens, December 26, 1792', pp. 15-16.

competent to decide for itself', as it had indeed done before the trials.[112] The loyalist pamphlet *Treason Triumphant* advised the government that

> The conspiracy being implicitly admitted, it is your immediate duty to prevent the profligate and unprincipled…from executing their horrid designs. The late acquittals have served only to inflame their hopes and increase their presumption.[113]

James Adair argued that from the written evidence alone it was 'impossible than any individual could doubt of the existence of a treasonable conspiracy', an opinion shared by many of his conservative colleagues.[114] Bowles castigated the defence counsel Thomas Erskine for taking advantage of 'the unavoidable prolixity and complication of the case, arising out of the nature and extent of the Conspiracy, which it was necessary to unfold' and condemned him for attempting

> to convince the Jury that a Conspiracy against the Monarchy had no real existence, although it had been strictly investigated, and solemnly affirmed by both Houses of Parliament…and although every man in the kingdom in his heart believes, that if the plans and designs which were charged and proved to have constituted that Conspiracy had been effected, the Government would have been instantly overthrown.

The trials therefore, having 'established the existence of the crime', in fact meant that 'the danger is encreased, and the necessity of vigilance and precaution…encreased also'.[115] As for the defendants, Windham notoriously described each of them as an 'acquitted felon' whose clear 'moral guilt' reinforced the need for ongoing vigilance and emergency measures.[116]

Conspiracists asserted that all incidents demonstrating a radical tendency towards force, violence and rebellion – the Watt conspiracy, the pop-gun plot, the Walker case, food and crimping riots, the naval mutinies of 1797, the United Irish rebellion, even the penetration of French agents into Ireland – were part of the master plan to introduce

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[112] *PH* 31, cols. 1155-56.
[113] *Treason Triumphant Over Law and Constitution! Addressed to Both Houses of Parliament*, London, J. Downes, 1795, p. 23.
[114] *PH* 31, col. 1181.
[115] *TB*, 15 November 1794, 10 & 22 January 1795.
[116] *PH* 31, col. 1029.

anarchy and disorder into Britain and seize power.[117] In one example in August 1794, following the recent crimping riots in London, the police magistrate Patrick Colquhoun advised the Duke of Portland that 'I have strong grounds to believe that these Riots have been incited by the leaders of the Seditious Societies, whose views extend very far beyond the Recruiting Houses'. He believed the riots were initiated by the societies 'for the purpose of introducing anarchy & confusion into the capital that they may with more ease carry into execution these designs which they are hatching for the purpose of overthrowing the Government'. Nepean was informed that 'it is to be feared the mischief would extend itself especially if there are evil disposed Persons ready to make use of the prejudices and passions of the common People to serve their own Purposes'.[118]

However, while some individual members may well have joined the riots, it is almost certain that the radical societies actually played no organised or active role in either instigating or exploiting them, for as Stevenson opines 'there is little evidence to substantiate the view that the riots were planned, either by the radical sections of the Whigs or the radical societies'.[119] This did not stop loyalists from exploiting them for their own purposes, once again raising the spectre of radical conspiracy to explain and delegitimise popular agitation and grievance. *St. James's Chronicle* stated that

> It was evidently apparent that the mob was led on by persons above the common rank, whose aim it is…to raise a general riot in the metropolis…It is greatly to be apprehended, that there exists a scheme to raise mobs, and disturb the peace of the Metropolis.

The paper was in no doubt as to who was behind this scheme, arguing that as 'some persons in those mobs frequently cry out, *Liberty Fraternity, and Peace with France*, it is an easy matter to conjecture by what party they are encouraged thus illegally to

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[117] See Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death*, pp. 170-81, 252-84 & 445-503; Elliott, *Partners in Revolution*, pp. 124-240; Clive Emsley, 'The London "Insurrection" of December 1792: Fact, Fiction, or Fantasy?', *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 17, no. 2 (1978), pp. 66-86; Clive Emsley, 'The Pop-Gun Plot, 1794', in Michael T. Davis, ed., *Radicalism and Revolution in Britain, 1775-1848*, Houndmills, Macmillan Press Ltd, 2000, pp. 56-68; Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty*, passim; Frida Knight, *The Strange Case of Thomas Walker: Ten Years in the Life of a Manchester Radical*, London, Lawrence & Wishart Ltd., 1957, pp. 122-65; Meikle, *Scotland and the French Revolution*, pp. 149-53; Mori, *William Pitt and the French Revolution 1785-1795*, pp. 238-44; N. A. M. Rodger, 'Mutiny or subversion? Spithead and the Nore', in Thomas Bartlett, David Dickson, Dáire Keogh & Kevin Whelan, eds., *1798*, pp. 549-64; John Stevenson, 'The London "Crimp" Riots of 1794', *International Review of Social History*, vol. 16, no. 1, (1971), pp. 40-58; Wells, *Insurrection*, pp. 79-177.
[118] NA, HO 42/33, fols.160-61, Colquhoun to Portland, 21 August 1794; fols. 234-35, Colquhoun to (Unknown), 22 August 1794; fols. 114-15, William Devaynez to Nepean, 20 August 1794.
[119] Stevenson, 'The London "Crimp" Riots of 1794', p. 54.

assemble'.[120] In each of these cases, the ability to smear radicalism and create suspicion was more important than actually proving radical guilt or the involvement of conspirators, for alarm and insinuations were alone sufficient to reinforce the government's case for ongoing investigations and the use of increased repressive powers against the radical menace. The grand conspiracy magnified the power and reach of the radical societies, explaining their involvement in so many different plots and events and allowing each incident to reinforce and build the general alarm.

Yet for all the alarm it caused the conspiracy theory also held out hope that if the government could just unmask the conspirators and bring them to justice, radicalism would cease a pose a threat to peace and order. This was an important aspect of the securitization process, as it gave the government the means to convince the public of its ability to tackle and defeat the radical menace, as long as it was given the tools and support necessary to do so. In December 1792 Loughborough expressed his desire 'that all the inhabitants of this kingdom would join heart and hand in assisting the Executive Government' to confront the radical threat, for by such actions 'we should be safe–without it we might be ruined'.[121] Later, after the arrests in May 1794, Grenville informed the Lords that the conspiracy could be defeated if the government took 'such measures as might best tend to defeat all such purposes, and to bring the authors and abettors of them to public justice'. By such efforts, 'the conspiracy was discovered in time, the plans of the conspirators developed, and their intentions frustrated'.[122] The 1799 secret committee report glowingly praised the government's success in having

> obtained early and accurate information of the chief designs and measures of the conspirators; and the striking manner in which the most important particulars of the secret intelligence thus procured, have, in a great variety of instances, been completely confirmed by events now notorious to the world…

This information had availed 'the early and uniform defeat of all attempts to disturb the public tranquillity of this kingdom', allowing the government to demonstrate both the necessity and success of their measures to combat radicalism.[123]

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[120] *St. James's Chronicle*, 23 August 1794, emphasis in original.
[121] Loughborough, 'Substance of the Speech of the Right Honourable Lord Loughborough in the House of Lords, on the third reading of the Bill for establishing certain Regulations respecting Aliens, December 26, 1792', p. 15.
[122] *PH* 31, cols. 910 & 912.
[123] *PH* 34, col. 581.

One the most important aspects of the conspiracy theory was its ability to link the radical threat to suitable referent objects that the public could accept as independent of the government itself and important enough to merit protection by extraordinary means. As Buzan notes, 'If domestic threats are accepted as a national security problem, then the government is provided with a powerful tool to legitimize the use of force against its political opposition.'[124] Pitt and his colleagues were in no doubt that their radical opponents posed a threat both to their own grip on power and to the general preservation of oligarchic government and its hold on British sovereignty. Buzan et al. state that 'Sovereignty can be existentially threatened by anything that questions recognition, legitimacy, or governing authority.'[125] The radical reform arguments threatened all three, as their refusal to recognise the current parliament and government as truly representative of the people undermined their legitimacy and public recognition and therefore their authority to govern. However while many of the elite viewed their and the nation's interests as virtually synonymous, the government realised that it could not claim such naked self-interest as an acceptable referent object. Suitable alternatives would be required to engage the public as a whole and convince them that radicalism posed a threat to their interests and security too, rather than merely those of a ruling elite.

As such, the referent objects the radical conspiracy was alleged to threaten were initially identified as the constitution and the sovereignty of parliament. The second report of the Lords secret committee avowed the existence of a conspiracy aimed at 'subverting, by their authority, the whole frame of the government, and the constitution of this realm, its monarchy, its parliament, and its fundamental laws'.[126] Bowles claimed that even the radicals' stated aims of universal suffrage and annual parliaments 'would be as fatal to the Constitution, and which are in fact as incompatible with the existence of Monarchy, as the actual establishment of a Republic'.[127] Exactly what comprised the constitution was vague and unclear, but the government and loyalists were convinced of its excellence, liberality and key role in the nation's happiness and prosperity. Pitt argued that the current constitution provided order, justice and decency, and 'the people of

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[124] Buzan, *People, States & Fear*, p. 105.
[125] Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, *Security*, p. 22.
[126] *PH* 31, col. 893.
[127] John Bowles, *A Third Letter To A British Merchant: Containing Reflections On The Foreign and Domestic Politics Of This Country, Together With Strictures On The Conduct Of Opposition*, 2nd Ed., London, T. N. Longman, 1797, p. 48.

England…are sensible of the security which they enjoy for these blessings from the frame of our excellent constitution; and…are prepared to defend it against every attack'.[128] This curious mix of imprecision and sanctification made the constitution an ideal referent object. The government and its allies could make broad statements that any attempt to alter even a part of the constitution threatened the integrity and utility of the whole, as the *True Briton* did in claiming that 'an attack upon one branch of the Legislature, if successful, is as likely to destroy the whole Constitution as an attack upon another'; and push the issue further by alleging that radicals secretly wished to deliberately overthrow the *entire* constitution, without being precise about how either threat would actually manifest itself in practice.[129]

The sovereignty of parliament and its authority to represent the people were defined as an indisputable and prosperous element of the constitution, secured by the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and popular support. It was integral to the maintenance of both the constitution and the monarchy, and any attempt to usurp or change it by force was a threat to national security. As the *True Briton* argued: 'Destroy the legal representation of the people in Parliament assembled, and the King's power is at an end.'[130] Pitt claimed that in proposing a convention the societies intended to 'wrest from the parliament that power which the people and the constitution had lodged in their hands'. Radicals were therefore defying the people's will, and such plans required the adoption of the 'proper steps to check their execution, and punish those who were so wicked as to devise them'.[131]

The radical threat was identified as a new and "modern" or "Jacobin" form of treason, aimed at the constitution and its institutions rather than the king directly. One pamphleteer warned against the perils of the new 'Jacobin Treason, in which the King's name is never mentioned, and the only usurper is Universal Suffrage'.[132] Bowles described the radical conspiracy as 'a species entirely novel in these times, but infinitely more subtle in its nature, more easy in its progress, and more extensively ruinous in its tendency, than any of which former times has a conception'. The current laws were 'inadequate to reach the evasion of modern artifice' and 'The source of all social

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[128] *PH* 30, col. 896.
[129] *TB*, 11 November 1794.
[130] Ibid.
[131] *PH* 31, cols. 502 & 504.
[132] *Treason Triumphant Over Law and Constitution!*, p. 38.

security, the tenor of Justice, had failed the Constitution at the moment of danger'. The laws thus had to be rendered 'more effectual for the protection of Government against the wily machinations of French Revolutionary Treason'.[133] The resulting new and extraordinary measures eventually included the Treasonable and Seditious Practices Act, which allowed the government to secure for parliament and in effect the executive itself the same protection afforded to the monarch.

However, while these objects remained on the table throughout the 1790s, as 1794 progressed and the debate about radicalism intensified, the government felt it necessary to garner even further support for its securitizing move and to that end began to argue that the very existence of the monarchy and the life and reign of the present king were in danger. The use of George III as a referent object allowed the government to attach the radical threat to a tangible, popular and personable figure the public could relate to and empathise with, rather than relying solely on the vaguer and potentially disputed notions of sovereignty and constitution. One loyalist argued that when attempting to sway the common people, 'To talk to them of the constitution is vain: they can only respect the constitution in its true representative and visual emblem, the King's person.'[134] *A Narrative of the Insults Offered to the King* argued that this king was 'a man whose happiness, and the prosperity of his whole family is, by the just balance of our constitution, so intimately connected' with that of the people, that 'it is impossible to separate them'.[135] The king was portrayed as representing and protecting the continuance of not only all order and good government, but the very identity of Britain itself, such that any threat to the reign of the king threatened both the existing government and the very foundations of society, and vice versa. Eyre informed the grand jury of the treason trials that should any man or group 'design to overthrow the whole government of the country, to pull down and to subvert from its very foundations the British monarchy', this would result in 'a horrible ruin and devastation, which no King could survive'.[136] This was reinforced in October 1795 by the attack on the king and the alleged attempt against his life. John Addington stated that 'The atrocious attack on his majesty was not only an attack upon the king, but…it was an attack also upon the

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[133] *TB*, 10 & 22 January 1795; Bowles, *A Third Letter To A British Merchant*, p. 48.
[134] British Library (BL), Add. MS 16922, fol. 139, quoted in Philp, 'Vulgar Conservatism, 1792-3', p. 54.
[135] *A Narrative of the Insults Offered to the King, On his Way to and from the House of Lords, On Thursday Last*, p. 13.
[136] Joseph Gurney, *The Trial of Thomas Hardy for High Treason*, Vol. 1, London, Self-Published, 1794, p. 7.

Lords and Commons, and was apparently the effect of a dark, diabolical, and premeditated conspiracy.'[137] Bowles claimed that 'The daring attack on his Majesty's person…was the obvious and natural consequence' of the radical efforts 'to propagate the most seditious doctrines, and to inflame the minds of the populace'.[138] This supposed link between the attack and radical agitation was particularly important in securing the necessary public and parliamentary support to pass and enforce the Seditious Meetings Act, a grievous blow to the radical cause.

Finally, morality and property were also identified as referent objects threatened by radicalism. By using morality, loyalists could emphasise the allegedly subversive and corrupting nature of radicalism, and project it as a conspiracy not only against a particular institution or idea but against the very fabric of society. William Hamilton Reid decried the radical habit 'of ridiculing every thing before held sacred' and making 'infidelity as familiar as possible with the lower orders'.[139] The second report from the Lords committee of 1794 likewise condemned the radical 'avowal of those doctrines which had led that convention to all those excesses which have proved so destructive in France to the principles of social order, of religion, and of morality'.[140] The threat to property on the other hand, that great bastion of British status and order, described by Young as the 'principle of our constitution', was directed squarely at the middle classes, pointing out that whatever sympathy they may have for radical ideas and grievances, the threat to their hard won gains and possessions overawed any notion of tolerance or reform.[141] One loyalist writer pleaded for 'the union of all ranks of property, in defence of the Constitution'. He argued that the popular reform movement 'must be speedily crushed, or the liberty and property of Britons are no more'.[142] William Wilberforce argued that radical doctrines advocated a 'detestable and destructive system;…hostile to all property, to all personal security and domestic comfort', and pointed out 'that it was not only the wealthy and the noble that became its victims'.[143] Therefore both national *and* individual security were at stake and it was in the interests of not only the elite but all property owners to support the government's moves to combat the radical threat. In

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[137] *PH* 32, col. 394.
[138] Bowles, *A Third Letter To A British Merchant*, p. 48.
[139] William Hamilton Reid, *The Rise and Dissolution of the Infidel Societies in this Metropolis*, London, J. Hatchard, 1800, p. 3.
[140] *PH* 31, col. 888.
[141] Arthur Young, *The Example of France a Warning to Britain*, 3rd Ed., Bury St. Edmunds, J. Rackham, 1793, p. 106.
[142] *Treason Triumphant Over Law and Constitution!*, pp. 7 & 9.
[143] *PH* 31, col. 1018.

sum, the concepts of constitution, parliamentary sovereignty, monarchy and morality were powerful and persuasive referent objects that allowed the government to convince the public that radicalism constituted an existential and unacceptable threat to the security and prosperity of the entire nation-state apparatus, justifying and shaping both its securitizing moves and threat response.

French Principles

British radicalism was described by the government as being indelibly attached to what they described as "French principles", being a volatile mix of republicanism, Jacobinism, democracy, revolution, natural rights, equality, sedition and a general desire for anarchy and disorder. The publicly-avowed beliefs in Anglo-Saxon constitutionalism, British liberties and limited parliamentary reform professed by many radicals and societies were declared to be a mere cover for the far more comprehensive, disruptive, foreign and dangerous ideology borrowed from France that really drove the radical movement. This served a number of purposes in the securitization of radicalism.

Firstly, it allowed the government to paint radicalism as inherently incompatible with limited reform, order and the maintenance of the current constitution and state structure, and to separate it from earlier native forms of radicalism and dissent. French principles were believed to be calculated towards the subversion and democratisation of the common people, and were therefore liable to create a sense of grievance, rights-consciousness and a loss of respect for the existing institutions of class, authority, constitution and commerce; ultimately leading to sedition, disorder, social breakdown and insurrection. The 1794 Commons secret committee report stated that this was an important part of the radical conspiracy, calculated with 'art and industry' to subvert and corrupt the 'lower orders' and 'prepare them to be the instruments of the most dangerous and desperate designs'.[144] McCann argues that

> Anti-Jacobin writers represented radical textual dissemination as a manipulative mode of indoctrination that, by flattering the egos of hitherto disempowered subjects, ushered them to the precipice of revolutionary violence.[145]

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[144] *PH* 31, col. 708.
[145] McCann, *Cultural Politics in the 1790s*, p. 112.

This belief justified the prosecution and suppression of what Bowles once described as the 'Gallic Republican Faction', banning their works and prosecuting those bold or careless enough to speak seditious words and promote radical ideas.[146] Young warned that this was necessary to save the lower classes from themselves, against a tide of sedition 'presented in a thousand forms to the attention of classes who are devoid of skill to disentangle duplicity, unprepared with any antidote to repel such poison'.[147]

Furthermore, the government argued that the radical societies' alleged adherence to French principles demonstrated that they were *actively* dedicated to nothing less than a root and branch upheaval of the constitution. At Hardy's trial, John Mitford argued that such principles

> are utterly inconsistent with monarchy; they are utterly inconsistent with a House of Lords, and with many other parts of our establishment; and therefore, persons who attempt to procure the establishment of these principles…must be conceived, *prima facie*, to have within their view the intent of destroying the existing government...and of forming a constitution of government upon their own principles…[148]

The Commons secret committee concluded that if one considered the radical 'approbation…of the doctrine of the Rights of Man, as stated in Paine's publications' and furthermore 'the subsequent approbation of the French system; and consider that these are the principles which the promoters of a convention evidently make the foundation of all their proceedings', then one could only conclude that the societies aimed 'at nothing less than…a traitorous conspiracy for the subversion of the established laws and constitution'.[149] The *True Briton* concurred, stating that 'those who have applauded Mr. PAINE'S Book, and who have sent complimentary Addresses to the French Convention', cannot maintain that this was done 'only with a view to *Parliamentary Reform*'.[150] Likewise Pitt posited that if the

> principle of individual suffrage be granted, and be carried to its utmost extent, it goes to subvert the peerage, to depose the king, and, in fine, to extinguish every hereditary distinction,

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[146] Bowles, *A Third Letter To A British Merchant*, p. 45.
[147] Young, *An Enquiry Into The State Of The Public Mind Amongst The Lower Classes*, p. 9.
[148] *ST* 24, col. 1198.
[149] *PH* 31, col. 496.
[150] *TB*, 17 November 1794, emphasis in original.

and every privileged order, and to establish that system of equalizing anarchy announced in the code of French legislation, and attested in the blood of the massacres at Paris.[151]

As such, Young concluded that any 'small concessions to satisfy the moderate' would merely 'be made a vantage ground for new demands' and a gradual tumble into anarchy.[152]

This brings us to our next point – the focus on French principles facilitated the government's portrayal of recent and contemporary events in France as being indicative of the desires and consequences of domestic radicalism. McCann argues that events in France 'could be produced as an image of what lay hidden behind a political culture that, in Britain at least, was tending towards constitutional avenues, not rebellion'.[153] They visualised and pointed to a penchant and desire for violence, revolution and anarchy lying just below the surface of reformist respectability. The common use of the terms "Jacobin societies" and "Jacobinism" in regards to British radicalism was designed to reinforce the supposed similarity between radical and Jacobin ideology and to smear domestic radicalism by conflating it with the horrors and fanaticism of French Jacobinism. Pitt argued that 'those who have introduced into this island, Jacobin principles, Jacobin names, and Jacobin acts, were the defenders of the French government' and its 'aggravated horrors'.[154] Windham argued that 'it was a fallacy to suppose, that whatever effect democratic principles might have in France there was any chance of their being innocent in England'. Rather 'the freedom of our government gave the greater latitude for the introduction of those new principles', increasing their destructive potential.[155] John Anstruther targeted the practice of associating specifically, claimed that to radical 'clubs and meetings…France had owed all its miseries', while Dundas looked instead to the plan for a convention, arguing that 'it has a direct tendency to introduce that system of anarchy and confusion, with all their attendant evils, of which a neighbouring country has afforded so fatal an example'.[156] As Pitt concluded, why were the radical societies 'so eager to bring about such a convention?

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[151] *PH* 30, cols. 900-901.
[152] Young, *The Example of France a Warning to Britain*, p. 104.
[153] McCann, *Cultural Politics in the 1790s*, p. 116.
[154] *PH* 32, col. 583; *PH* 31, col. 503.
[155] *PH* 31, col. 547.
[156] *PH* 32, col. 327; *PH* 31, col. 541.

Because this, as they themselves stated, was the precise mode by which France had effected her revolution'.[157]

The adoption of French principles also provided apparent substance to government and loyalist claims and insinuations that domestic radicals were secretly in league with or even directed by French republican agents and politicians. In the Commons Adair claimed that if radicals secretly wished

> to depose their king, to abolish monarchy, to annihilate the peers, and to establish in England a representative government, on the broad basis of liberty and equality, as explained and practised in France, it is not difficult to conceive that they might consider "the cause of the French convention as intimately blended with their own."[158]

Burke believed some eighty thousand British citizens to be

> pure Jacobins; utterly incapable of amendment; object of eternal vigilance; and when they break out, of legal constraint…They desire a change; and…If they cannot have it by English cabal, they will make no sort of scruple of having it by the cabal of France, into which already they are virtually incorporated.[159]

This common cause and association, reinforced by earlier open communications and fraternisation between the leading societies, French republicans and the National Convention[160], surely hinted at continued collaboration with the enemy, and radical efforts to spread disaffection were believed to signify a willingness or even an earnest desire to assist French clandestine and military efforts. At their trial in April 1794, Walker was accused of conspiring to not only 'overthrow the constitution and government of this kingdom' but also to 'aid and assist the French…in case such enemies should enter into and invade this kingdom in a warlike and hostile manner'.[161] Despite an inability to prove such accusations at the time, they still damaged the reputation of radicalism and contributed to its securitization, all the more so post the revelations and events of 1798, after which the Commons secret committee could claim to have proven that the societies' 'reliance on the assistance and co-operation of France,

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[157] *PH* 31, col. 917.
[158] Ibid., cols. 1108-1109.
[159] Edmund Burke, *Thoughts on the Prospect of a Regicide Peace, in a Series of Letters*, London, J. Owen, 1796, pp. 17-18.
[160] This only occurred prior to the French declaration of war upon Britain on 1 Febuary 1793, after which all communication, or at least that carried on by public means, abruptly ceased.
[161] *ST* 23, cols. 1071-72 & 1074-75.

by which they expect ultimately to effect their purposes, continues undiminished', as it had done throughout the decade.[162]

Don't you know we're at war?

The state of war with France post-January 1793 was a crucial aspect of the securitization of radicalism. The war naturally made national security and potential weaknesses government priorities, as it sought to achieve its goals and protect its interests in a long-running battle with the French and their allies. Buzan states that 'Insecurity reflects a combination of threats and vulnerabilities'.[163] A state may possess particular vulnerabilities on account of its location, geography, ethnic composition, political structure and ideology, and internal (in)stability, but these will only cause insecurity if threats are deemed to exist (or at least potentially exist) that may exploit these vulnerabilities to the detriment of the state.[164] In our case, an internal fifth column, allied with French republicans and/or Irish rebels, was viewed by the British government as a significant vulnerability in the war with France and the efforts to suppress the Irish independence movement. Radicalism, in fulfilling this role as a potential force for destabilisation, disorder, sedition, and waste of resources, not only posed a security threat in itself but also represented a weakness capable of exploitation by French agents and soldiers. Loyalists feared the horror of insurrection coupled with invasion, with one pamphlet-writer arguing that 'each has its separate chance, and will produce the other'. This left Britain 'in the state of a wretch who kneels bound before the executioner, whose hand is upon his scimitar, ready to unsheath it, while his death depends upon the turn up of a die, with two bloody faces'.[165]

Robert Jenkinson claimed in parliament that 'it was the intention of the French to kindle the flame of civil war in this country', and indeed by the spread of radicalism and the assistance of the societies 'they had got a great way towards making the lower order of society discontented'.[166] These fears were apparently justified by the United plots and uprisings of 1798, coupled with the heightened fears of French invasion, prompting the

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[162] *PH* 34, col. 613.
[163] Buzan, *People, States & Fear*, p. 112.
[164] Ibid., pp. 112-42; Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, *Security*, pp. 150-54.
[165] *An Address To The Nation, Showing The Necessity Of Forming An Armed Association, In Consequence Of The Conspiracy Of The Republicans In Ireland To Subvert The Constitution*, London, J. Sewell & J. Wright, 1797, p. 90.
[166] *PH* 30, col. 205.

1799 secret committee report to advise that only if 'vigilance and precaution' is maintained can the nation 'look forward with confidence to the ultimate disappointment and defeat of the projects which have been so long pursued by our foreign and domestic enemies'.[167] Wells states that 'The threat of invasion provided a favourable background when the government took its case to parliament' for further measures to repress radicalism and other potential threats to national security.[168] Any dissent was viewed as a sign of disloyalty and potential French sympathies, with Young arguing that in a time when invasion threatened, 'all must contribute heart and hand in the defence of every thing dear to human nature'.[169] This gave the government a largely free hand to set the agenda for what these contributions and sacrifices were to be, facilitating its measures to increase security as it saw fit. A war was also no time to discuss or pursue even limited reform, let alone more radical notions of greater social and economic equality. In the Commons, Windham argued that reform was too hazardous to contemplate at such a time, declaring that 'This is no occasion for an infusion of new blood, which, instead of being salutary, might prove fatal' and questioning whether one should seek to 'repair your house in the hurricane season?'[170] Anstruther also claimed that the time to push for reform 'was ill chosen, when the country was engaged in a war, and after attempts had been made to agitate the minds of men by the propagation of principles incompatible with the existence of any government'.[171]

In turn, the presence of domestic radicalism and its alleged links with French republicans were often used to justify continuing the war. French republicanism, being inherently subversive, had to be defeated and removed from its homeland in order to bring peace to Britain and Ireland. The much feared and oft quoted Decree of Fraternity, passed by the French Convention in November 1792, offering 'fraternity and assistance to all people who wish to recover their liberty', was declared by Pitt to be 'hostile…to the human race' and 'calculated every where to sow the seeds of rebellion and civil contention, and to spread war from one end of Europe to the other'. France's conduct 'militated against the dearest and most valuable interests of this country'.[172] Burke

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[167] *PH* 34, col. 614.
[168] Wells, *Insurrection*, p. 168.
[169] Arthur Young, *National Danger, and the Means of Safety*, London, W. Richardson, 1797, p. 16.
[170] *PH* 28, col. 467.
[171] *PH* 30, col. 889.
[172] Decree of Fraternity, National Convention, France, 19 November 1792, in Edward Baines, *History of the wars of the French revolution*, Vol. 1, London, Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1818, p. 62; *PH* 30, cols. 347-48.

claimed that republican France 'held out temptations the most seductive to the enlightened lower orders of all countries, and furnished instruments for the overthrow of their government'.[173] Therefore, as Dudley Ryder concluded, 'When a nation like France was aggrandizing her power, and threatening the subversion of every state, there certainly was a necessity for raising the utmost strength to oppose her progress.'[174] Dundas stated that he hoped to see 'the re-establishment of such a government in France as would…protect other powers from a renewal of that spirit of restlessness and intrigue which has so often been fatal to the tranquillity of Europe'.[175] Only then could the government be sure of its national and domestic security.

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[173] Ibid., col. 384.
[174] Ibid., col. 1314.
[175] *The Manuscripts of J. B. Fortescue Preserved at Dropmore*, Vol. 2, Historical Manuscripts Commission, 1894-99, Dundas to Sir J. Murray, 12 September 1792, p. 313, quoted in Mori, *William Pitt and the French Revolution 1785-1795*, p. 120.

Chapter Two – Defending the State

'(T)hese Farming societies…have been productive of far more good than harm, in as much as they have turned the publick attention from Political to Domestic pursuits. Besides their progress is well watched and we are minutely informed of every thing that passes among them; so that on the least appearance of their assuming any thing like political character or consequence we should be ready to meet and prevent the mischief, and we have various & abundant means of doing so.'[176] – William Wickham to Henry Addington on Irish security affairs, 3 January 1803

The securitization of radicalism had a significant effect on the state's development and use of its security and intelligence services. Such services are of course fundamental to any attempt to identify, understand and combat threats to national security, and as such are an ideal platform on which to assess the manner in which a securitization event can shape and impact upon the institutions, activities and cultural norms of a society. As discussed in the preceding chapter, the securitization of radicalism was a process that developed over the course of the 1790s, as the government continued to monitor radical activities and tailor its response accordingly, ultimately culminating in the decision to eradicate it altogether as an active political force at the end of the decade. The steps taken against radicalism in sequence may briefly be described as surveillance, prosecution, suppression, investigation, obstruction and elimination. The work of a surveillance and investigative apparatus was crucial to the government's actions and it is our task here to examine the manner in which this apparatus was utilised, developed and centralised throughout the 1790s to serve the shifting needs of the state and its securitizing moves. How did the securitization of radicalism shape and enable security service use and development, and how in turn did service operations facilitate securitization?

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[176] Hampshire Record Office (HRO), Winchester, 38M49/1/45/1, Wickham to Addington, 3 January 1803.

Beginnings

In the early 1790s information collection was carried out on a decidedly ad hoc and irregular basis, as it had been for much of the eighteenth century. The Home Office, presided over by Dundas from June 1791 to July 1794, was officially in charge of domestic intelligence. The Office ran its own spies, responded to particular threats as they arose, paid agents to procure particular information and sought to maintain ongoing correspondence with numerous other sources of information. These included the new police offices in London, established by the Middlesex Justices Act in 1792 on the model of the original Bow Street office.[177] The police magistrates ran spies and gathered information via their salaried constables. Bow Street enjoyed a special position as it stood outside of the legislative apparatus, and its constables could thus be used in a more flexible and expansive manner. In the counties local magistrates were primarily responsible for information collection and dissemination and the preservation of order. On 21 May 1792 the king issued a proclamation against seditious writings, in which he commanded all magistrates to 'make diligent inquiry in order to discover the authors and printers of such wicked and seditious writings'.[178] However without a proper police force or official investigative personnel of any kind, local authorities were forced to rely on informers and agents whom they could pay or otherwise persuade to provide them with information. Local officials enjoyed a large degree of autonomy from the central state apparatus, and the manner in which magistrates, mayors, solicitors and justices of the peace performed their tasks, and their zeal for investigating radical activity, varied from place to place, being largely dependent on the character and political allegiances of each official and local administration. Occasionally the Home Office requested local magistrates to investigate particular matters, and at times sent their own agents to assist. The authorities in Scotland were closely monitored by Dundas himself. His nephew the Lord Advocate Robert Dundas ran his own spy network, particularly targeting the radical groups in Edinburgh, while as elsewhere in the kingdom excise officers and their numerous contacts provided another useful source of information.

The Post Office also played an active role in the collection of information. Local postmasters were tasked with the collection and reporting of information on all manner of topics and activities within their respective areas, though again their zeal and

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[177] Middlesex Justices Act (33 Geo.3 c.53) 1792.
[178] *PH* 29, col. 1477.

efficiency in completing these functions varied from office to office. Reports were sent to the head office in London for examination. As Ellis notes, 'the office also created intelligence by opening, detaining, or copying correspondence, and sending "interceptions" to the Secretaries of State'.[179] Suspect individuals had their mail opened on Home Office orders, while other articles drew the Post Office's attention due to their appearance or destination. The LCS was aware of the Post Office's intelligence role, informing a fellow society in Birmingham in June 1793 that 'The post we no ways rely on, as many of our letters have already been intercepted.'[180] Customs officials and military units were further sources of information. The former were bolstered by the passing of the Aliens Act in 1793, which increased their powers and responsibilities under a new hierarchy of superintendents reporting to the Alien Office (a sub-branch of the Home Office), whilst amongst the armed forces militia units in particular were of significant use in gathering information owing to their close ties to local areas.[181] The Alien Office, responsible for interviewing and monitoring foreign immigrants, quickly became an important source of information, solicited in particular from French émigrés fleeing the Revolution. Charles Lullin, an early member of the new office, recalled that the superintendents of aliens, including Wickham, were assigned 'the task of regularising a branch of Police...which, both in its permissive and coercive attributions, had, up to that time, been nearly overlooked or neglected'.[182] Wickham himself stated that it was his job 'to open some channels of Information by which better intelligence might be obtained of their several views and proceedings, with the intent...that the whole might be reduced to something like a regular system'.[183] Fears over the subversive influence of French agents, the ability of republicans to slip into the country posing as legitimate émigrés, and of connections between these agents and local radicals, ensured that the Aliens Act was well-received as a necessary security measure in an unstable climate.

It may thus be said that in the context of the eighteenth century the sources of information at the Home Office's disposal were substantial. However, as Nelson points out, 'Simply collecting the information...does not suffice to provide usable

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[179] Ellis, *The Post Office in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 62.
[180] *PH* 31, col. 820.
[181] Aliens Act (33 Geo.3 c.4) 1793.
[182] HRO, 38M49/1/56/40, Charles Lullin, 'Life of Wickham'.
[183] NA, HO 1/2, Wickham to Thomas Brodrick, 5 September 1794, quoted in Nelson, *The Home Office, 1782-1801*, p. 130.

intelligence.' Someone must 'collate and analyze' the raw information in order to turn it into usable intelligence, reports and estimates.[184] Yet in Britain, while the basic principles of the intelligence cycle were understood and recognised as important, prior to 1798 the tasks of information collection, communication and analysis were neither centralised nor systematised. The intelligence roles of the police, Post Office, Foreign Office, local magistrates and customs officials were not fully integrated with the operations of the Home Office. Furthermore, despite exhortations from the king himself to 'transmit to one of our principal secretaries of state, due and full information', the communication of intelligence from the provinces to the Home Office was erratic, Home Office staff numbers were small and there is no record from this time of a comprehensive system for the collating, filing and analysis of information.[185] Data obtained directly by Home Office officials and county magistrates had to be sorted and analysed amongst the plethora of far less reliable correspondence sent voluntarily by loyalists, local elites, opportunists and cranks of all kinds. Yet the personnel available to carry out this mammoth task were so limited that at one point in April 1793, a friend of Nepean – the principle undersecretary of the Home Office from 1782-1794 – stated that 'I may without exaggeration say almost the whole official business is now thrown upon his shoulders, and it is the astonishment of every person how he holds…out.'[186] Faced with these disadvantages the Office's ability to turn information into useful intelligence was limited and the government's capacity to monitor the nation was dependant largely on individual initiative and chance discoveries rather than any systematic approach.[187]

Yet despite these drawbacks the Home Office was able to achieve a reasonably effective collection and analysis of relevant information on working-class radicalism because the importance of the LCS and its associated provincial organisations was quickly realised. These were public organisations with open membership, easily infiltrated by informers. The first known report from an informer within the LCS was written by George Lynam

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[184] Nelson, *The Home Office, 1782-1801*, p. 86.
[185] *PH* 29, col. 1477.
[186] John Graves Simcoe, *The Correspondence of Lieut. Governor John Graves Simcoe*, ed. E. A. Cruikshank, Vol. 1, Toronto, Ontario Historical Society, 1923-31, Alexander Davison to John Graves Simcoe, 29 April 1793, p. 320, quoted in Nelson, *The Home Office, 1782-1801*, p. 30.
[187] Durey, *William Wickham, Master Spy*, pp. 23-46; Ellis, *The Post Office in the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 60-77; Emsley, 'The Home Office and its sources of information and investigation 1791-1801', pp. 532-61; Harris, *The Scottish People and the French Revolution*, pp. 118-19; Nelson, *The Home Office, 1782-1801*, pp. 28-31, 72-94 & 123-30; Sparrow, 'The Alien Office, 1792-1806', pp. 361-67; Sparrow, *Secret Service*, pp. 7-26.

in October 1792. Initially their role was simply to inform the Home Office on the proceedings, opinions and intentions of the new radical associations. Dundas stated that

> I most certainly thought it my duty…to have a constant lookout after the proceedings of the societies, which I believed to be meditating mischief and sedition, & and that therefore I always had, and always would take care to have persons amongst them to watch their plans & give me immediate information of every design they had in hand.[188]

By this means and the efforts of its magistrates the government gained a reliable picture of the new radical societies, even if this knowledge did not always translate to understanding or reassurance. Yet despite the concerns of the Home Secretary and others, until late 1793 the incoming reports did not suggest a need for anything other than ongoing surveillance, and the government and its agents continued merely to observe. No significant alternation to the state's information-gathering and investigative capacity was yet deemed necessary.[189]

While the central government remained largely passive, radicals nonetheless faced a serious threat from loyalist magistrates, informers and associations, spurred on by the king's May proclamation, the hope of reward and rising fears of seditious threats to the maintenance of order and security. On 20 November 1792 the lawyer and public official John Reeves founded the Association for Preserving Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers. Branches of this and similar associations quickly sprung up across the country. Apart from attacking suspected radicals and their businesses, disrupting radical meetings, preventing the dissemination of radical literature, organising loyalist marches and publishing pamphlets, the associations encouraged people to inform on citizens who uttered or wrote seditious words. Informers were soon to be found in many pubs, coffee-houses, taverns and radical meetings, and numerous prosecutions for sedition were brought before the authorities, often with the active assistance of the associations. Citizen's arrests and denouncement – defined by Fitzpatrick and Gellately as 'spontaneous communications from individual citizens to the state…containing accusations of wrongdoing by other citizens or officials and

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[188] NA, HO 42/21, fols. 508-11, Dundas to J. Noble, 12 September 1792, quoted in Mori, *William Pitt and the French Revolution 1785-1795*, p. 182.
[189] Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty*, pp. 238 & 263-66; Mori, *William Pitt and the French Revolution 1785-1795*, pp. 119-30 & 180-85.

implicitly or explicitly calling for punishment' – were also encouraged.[190] The number of prosecutions for sedition in the 1790s is difficult to determine. Clive Emsley's figure of under 200 has been questioned by historians such as Steve Poole, who has demonstrated that only a careful investigation of the records of each county could give us a figure anywhere near accurate. To this must be added the many cases which did not proceed to trial but would still have resulted in hardship for the accused. Certainly the number of cases declined as the decade progressed after the initial flurry in 1792-93, as loyalist activism decreased and radicalism declined in the face of repression and invasion fears. But ultimately the threat of being reported to and charged by the local authorities varied from place to place depending on the strength of loyalism and the vigilance, beliefs and allegiances of the magistrates in each area.[191]

A Change of Pace

The loyalist persecution of radicalism, in most cases tacitly approved by the government, initially reassured ministers that further direct action was unnecessary. However as 1793 progressed and radicalism experienced a resurgence in activity and popularity, the government eventually deemed it necessary to intervene more directly in radical affairs and attempt a securitizing move against them. Late 1793 therefore witnessed a change in government policy. Amidst increasing concerns about the threat from French agents and collaborators, the disbanded British Convention in Edinburgh in October-December 1793, proposals for a new convention in London in mid 1794 and fears that the radical societies were intending to usurp parliament's authority and achieve reform by force, the government began to act in a more aggressive manner. As ministers began to suspect the existence of a radical plot, the Home Office moved beyond passively monitoring the radical societies and focused the efforts of new and

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[190] Sheila Fitzpatrick and Robert Gellately, 'Introduction to the Practices of Denunciation in Modern European History', in Fitzpatrick and Gellately, eds., *Accusatory Practices: Denunciation in Modern European History, 1789-1989*, p. 1.

[191] Barrell, *The Spirit of Depotism*, pp. 75-102; Black, *The Association*, pp. 233-74; Hywel M. Davies, 'Loyalism in Wales, 1792-1793', *Welsh History Review*, vol. 20, no. 4 (2001), pp. 687-716; Dozier, *For King, Constitution and Country*, pp. 55-102; Emsley, 'An Aspect of Pitt's 'Terror'', pp. 155-84, Emsley, 'Repression, 'Terror' and the Rule of Law in England during the Decade of the French Revolution', pp. 801-825; Gilmartin, 'In the Theatre of Counterrevolution', pp. 291-328; Ginter, 'The Loyalist Association Movement of 1792-93 and British Public Opinion', pp. 179-90; Philp, 'Vulgar Conservatism, 1792-3', pp. 42-69; Poole, 'Pitt's Terror Reconsidered', pp. 65-87.

existing spies on collecting information pertaining to allegedly treasonous activities.[192] For example in April the LCS spy Edward Gosling disclosed that Wickham, then serving as a police magistrate, had 'desired me…to direct my attention particularly to discover whether they were serious in their conversation and really intend to procure Arms or had any secreted'.[193] Reports from Gosling and other new spies such as John Groves and John Taylor contained details of intentions and preparations to use force to achieve reform and possibly even overthrow the monarchy. Gosling alleged that the prominent radical John Baxter stated 'Is there one Man in the Society who believes a Parliamentary Reform is all we want; no not one', for indeed 'a Revolution might be effected in a few Hours'.[194]

The government's altered and increased use of spies and informers, attempting to uncover evidence of a suspected conspiracy, produced mixed results. The accuracy of their reports and the role played by spies themselves in directing the proceedings of the societies is not easily assessed. Three things at least may be noted. Despite extensive searches clear physical evidence of treasonable designs of the type alleged by some spies was not forthcoming. Furthermore in 1794 the government's spies became far more active in the affairs of the LCS and there is a marked difference in the tone and nature of the information provided compared with that received in 1792-93. But whether this was due more to the imaginations of the spies, the promptings of the Home Office, or a real rise in extremism within the radical societies is the subject of ongoing debate. Finally the extent to which the government truly believed the increasingly alarming information it received is unknown. Wickham at least appears to have given it credence, informing the Home Office in May that amongst the radical societies 'the intention to overturn the Government of the Country is openly avowed'.[195] Whatever its true motives, the Home Office's efforts convinced the Cabinet that decisive action was

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[192] As part of the ministerial reshuffle following the decision of the Portland Whigs to join the government, the Duke of Portland himself became Home Secretary in July 1794, while Dundas was moved to the new position of Secretary of State for War. This had important repercussions for the direction of Home Office policy and operations as Portland and his colleagues were generally even more alarmed by and distrustful of radicalism than the Pittites.

[193] NA, TS 11/965/3510A, quoted in Thale, ed., *Selections From The Papers Of The London Corresponding Society, 1792-1799*, p. 140.

[194] 'Spy Gosling's "Information": 9 May 1794', NA, TS 11/954/3498, in Thale, ed., *Selections From The Papers Of The London Corresponding Society, 1792-1799*, p. 157.

[195] 'Substance of Several Informations on the Views and Proceedings of the Different Republican Meetings known by the Name of Corresponding Societies, particularly those at the Eastern end of the Town and in the City: 6 May 1794', NA, TS 11/965/3510 A/2, quoted in Durey, *William Wickham, Master Spy*, p. 43.

needed. Sufficient evidence was obtained to bring the radical leaders Hardy, Horne Tooke and Thelwall to trial on a charge of treason, and to justify the arrest of several other prominent figures, while information from spies also played a key role in the government's efforts to convince the public that the radical societies were plotting a treasonous conspiracy to overthrow king, constitution and parliament.

However the government's decision to place its own spies on the witness stand at the trials in November-December 1794 proved a mistake. The defence counsels Erskine and Vicary Gibbs skilfully attacked their character and credibility and attempted, with some success, to paint the alleged conspiracy as a fabrication based purely on evidence from untrustworthy spies. Erskine referred to the witness George Sanderson as 'good Mr. Spy' and argued that Groves 'has been guilty not only of a suppression of the truth, but he has been guilty of direct perjury'.[196] He summed up the crown's case by arguing that the evidence obtained from 'natural' sources was plain and innocent in meaning, and it was only 'whenever a different complexion was to be given to it' that the prosecution relied on 'the medium of spies and informers, and of men…of the most abandoned and profligate characters'.[197] The defence's strategy and targeting of informers appears to have been successful. Public contempt and distaste for the appearance of spies in court was widespread. All three radicals were acquitted and the charges against the others dropped. While it is impossible to know the reasoning behind the juries' decisions, the government's extreme reluctance to use spies as witnesses in all future state trials signifies that they at least believed that such a practice had proved inadvisable and detrimental to the case.[198]

Earlier in the year informers had caused further problems for the government. In the case of the radical cotton-merchant Walker the informer Thomas Dunn was convicted of perjury and found to have been coerced by loyalist officials, while Walker was acquitted. In the "pop-gun plot", the chief informer Thomas Upton was found to be a serial fabricator with a grudge against the accused, and despite long detentions and an

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[196] *ST* 24, cols. 709 & 1143.
[197] Ibid., col. 959.
[198] Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death*, pp. 127-441; Durey, *William Wickham, Master Spy*, pp. 37-46; Ehrman, *The Younger Pitt: the reluctant transition*, pp. 393-402; Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty*, pp. 268-358; Graham, *The Nation, The Law and The King*, Vol. 2, pp. 539-639; Harris, *The Scottish People and the French Revolution*, pp. 75-123; McFarland, *Ireland and Scotland in the Age of Revolution*, pp. 112-16; Meikle, *Scotland and the French Revolution*, pp. 137-53; Mori, *William Pitt and the French Revolution 1785-1795*, pp. 191-96 & 237-47; E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 130-54.

eventual trial for treason, no-one was ever convicted. The whole story was widely disbelieved, and the government's continued pursuit of the matter did it little credit. Even the king had been sceptical, noting that while 'any informer that comes voluntary forward is not to be entirely neglected, yet that he must be looked at with a jealous eye, he being most frequently actuated alone by the object of obtaining money'.[199] Finally the Scottish plotter Robert Watt was identified in court as an ex-informer for Robert Dundas, and despite Dundas' claims that Watt was no longer acting in that capacity but entirely on his own initiative, many radicals suspected him to be an *agent provocateur*. Nonetheless, Watt was convicted of treason and hanged. While the alarm caused by these affairs was useful in increasing public fears about radicalism, the government's involvement with such sordid characters and events damaged its integrity and the credibility of its securitizing moves.[200]

However despite these embarrassments and failures in court, the government's actions and use of spies still dealt crippling blows to the radical movement. Evidence from informers, including the unidentified "JB", was vital in securing the convictions of William Skirving, Maurice Margarot and Joseph Gerrald for sedition in Scotland. While no conspiracy was proved in court, the accumulated evidence allowed loyalists and MPs to affirm its existence and convince a majority of the public of the danger, justifying the arrest of leading radicals and suspension of habeas corpus. The arrests and trials caused significant financial, emotional and social hardship, depriving the societies of important leaders and creating fear and disorder amongst many members. The mere knowledge that spies were present also created arguments, accusations, distrust and hesitancy. During the internal LCS trial of Groves on the charge that he was a spy, William Metcalfe reported that 'The Committee was much exasperated much abusive language passed and he would have been excluded the Society at once', had not calmer heads intervened.[201] Groves had earlier argued that 'If a Citizen made a Motion which seemed anyways spirited he was set down as a Spy', yet in other instances 'If a Citizen sat in a Corner & said Nothing he was watching their proceedings that he might the better report

[199] George III, *The Later Correspondence of George III*, Vol. 2, ed. A. Aspinall, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1963, George III to Portland, 30 September 1794, p. 249.
[200] Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death*, pp. 170-81, 252-84 & 445-503; Emsley, 'The Pop-Gun Plot, 1794', pp. 56-68; Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty*, pp. 334-37; Knight, *The Strange Case of Thomas Walker*, pp. 122-65; Meikle, *Scotland and the French Revolution*, pp. 149-53.
[201] 'Report from spy Metcalfe: LCS Committee of Correspondence, 29 August 1794 [57]', NA, TS 11/956/3501, in Thale, ed., *Selections From The Papers Of The London Corresponding Society, 1792-1799*, p. 216.

it'. In these circumstances 'Citizens hardly knew how to act'.[202] Such scenes were obviously not conducive to furthering the society's interests.

The government's use of spies and informers and its methods of surveillance and investigation in 1794 demonstrate both positive and negative aspects of security work and its connection with government policy. The government's willingness to give credence to information from spies allowed it to harass and demonise the radicals, but its failure to conduct proper checks and willingness to persevere with persons of obviously dubious character exposed it to public ridicule and defeat in the courts. However voluntary informers *could* prove truly useful. Lynam's information was generally sober and reliable (although he became flustered at Hardy's trial) and the Home Office could rely on information like that provided by Robert Alderson in Norwich. Alderson informed the Office that

> Exaggerated communications are worse than no communications at all…I shall therefore not think it worthwhile to send you any but such as I can pledge myself for the liberal veracity of such as appear to me to be deserving of the notice of government.[203]

Most informers were not so meticulous. Voluntary information arrived at the desks of Home Office officials and local magistrates in vast quantities, and was only followed up or investigated by government agents when thought to be reliable and/or of especial interest. In this manner the government attempted to maximise the productivity of its limited resources and keep abreast of as many relevant matters within the kingdom as possible, although at times it was still deceived by false or inaccurate reports. Attempts to coerce questionable characters like Dunn into giving information often proved disastrous. By contrast with these methods, the likes of Metcalfe, Groves and Gosling were agents specifically infiltrated into the LCS and the SCI in order to report their activities and potential sedition to the government. Metcalfe informed Portland that the Home Office undersecretary Nepean had

> requested that I would attend to the disaffected societies and endeavour to find out their intentions and designs, that Government being acquainted therewith might have an

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[202] 'Report from spy Groves: LCS Division 2, 21 July 1794', NA, TS 11/965/3510A, in Thale, ed., *Selections From The Papers Of The London Corresponding Society, 1792-1799*, p. 201.
[203] NA, HO 42/23, fol. 131, Alderson to Nepean, 16 December 1792, quoted in Emsley, 'The Home Office and its sources of information and investigation 1791-1801', p. 541.

opportunity of frustrating any measures which they might have in agitation hostile to the Constitution…[204]

While these agents provided highly useful information and a means of prosecuting and securitizing radical activities, their proclivity for becoming over-involved in the societies' operations and eagerness to please their handlers, combined with further lapses in background checking, again exposed the government to accusations of provocation, deception and misunderstanding.

Nonetheless the evidence suggests that, aside from irregular cases like those involving Upton, Dunn and Watt, the majority of the time the Home Office made a reasonable attempt to secure reliable accurate information and gain a realistic perspective of the state of the country. Conspiracy theories and securitization certainly influenced the manner in which the government employed its spies and other resources, but still did not yet precipitate a major change in structure. In the absence of a regular police force or a large bureaucracy the need to employ spies and agents to acquire and investigate information was unavoidable. Where possible multiple sources were utilised, allowing information to be cross-checked and tested for accuracy. Wickham once informed Castlereagh that some intelligence he had received was most probably accurate because it came from several different sources, with 'all these informations mutually confirming each other, though derived from different channels, and from individuals wholly unconnected with, and unacquainted with, each other'.[205] The Home Office retained a healthy scepticism and a realisation of the limitations of its sources. Portland once asked one magistrate 'to contrive some means of ascertaining the correctness' of the information he received from a particular informer, for the current picture of good order was 'not lightly to be questioned upon the Reports of those who may suppose their importance to increase in proportion to the discoveries they may be supposed to make of Plots and combinations'.[206] Requests and reports received from provincial magistrates were generally given as much consideration as time allowed. However against these factors one must consider the fractured and limited resources at the government's disposal, the significant potential for misunderstanding and misinterpretation, the manner in which the government's prejudices affected its activities, the influence of

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[204] NA, HO 42/34, fols. 11-12, Metcalfe to Portland, 5 January 1795.
[205] Castlereagh, *Memoirs and Correspondence of Viscount Castlereagh, Second Marquess of Londonderry*, Vol. 1, Wickham to Castlereagh, 8 June 1798, p. 217.
[206] NA, HO 43/13, fols. 102-103, Portland to Ralph Fletcher, 14 July 1801.

political factors, and the disputed extent and repercussions of the reliance placed on informers. These issues were hotly debated by contemporaries and will be analysed further in the following chapter.

The backgrounds and standings of spies and informers covered the whole spectrum of society, from aristocrats to humble artisans. Motives were equally diverse. Some spies claimed to inform out of principle and as a service to king and country. Robert Holden informed the Home Office that

> You know my Zeal in the Cause, and my Readiness to support Government…I shall at all times be ready to inform Government of any Proceeding or Opinions of a dangerous Tendency, conceiving it my Duty as a Member of that State in which I enjoy Protection, to contribute to its Support…[207]

Another informer claimed that he was 'a friend to parliamentary Reform', but fearing violence and unrest, he decided to turn informer, for 'he by no means approved of such means being used to bring it about'.[208] In Ireland some radicals like Leonard McNally who had grown disenchanted with the intentions of their colleagues sought to prevent further damage to the radical cause by advising the government on how to proceed, urging moderation, and assisting them to nip the extremists' plans in the bud. McNally advised Dublin Castle that

> I write to you with the free and uninfluenced mind of a friend, who wishes to represent every thing that occurs to his observation with undisguised truth, considering that the only means by which you can, with justice and propriety guide your judgment.[209]

Other informers acted in the hope of securing promotion or reward. Not a few were in debt and resorted to spying for financial gain. Agents like Metcalfe who perceived their activities almost as a fully-fledged profession may be contrasted with casual informers who often reported out of fear and misunderstanding. Some spies enjoyed the sense of adventure, danger, influence and notoriety that came with their activities, while others like McNally and George Orr were turned by the government in exchange for their freedom from imprisonment and prosecution. Finally some became informers due to a falling out with or perceived slight from a fellow radical or neighbour. James Powell

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[207] NA, HO 42/31, Holden to F. F. Foljambe, 1 June 1794, quoted in Emsley, 'The Home Office and its sources of information and investigation 1791-1801', p. 541.
[208] NA, HO 42/40, fols. 1-2, Duke of Richmond to Portland, 21 May 1797.
[209] National Archives of Ireland (NAI), Dublin, Rebellion Papers 620/1/121/97, McNally to Edward Cooke, n.d. (1798).

turned to spying after a radical colleague fled to the United States with his wife, while in April 1794 a Cambridgeshire farmer reported his landlord for seditious words after an argument over rent.

The methods of information collection varied depending on the type of spy or informer. The terms appear to have been used fairly interchangeably during the 1790s, but in modern parlance Emsley notes that we may 'classify as spies those paid agents who were recruited by the authorities to join popular societies and to report on their activities', while 'the informer, in contrast, volunteered his information'.[210] Some informers simply reported talk and gossip overheard in a local tavern. Others specifically frequented the known haunts of radicals in the hope of obtaining information on their activities, while those who counted radicals amongst their friends and acquaintances could entertain them or seek out their company. In August 1797 the Irishman Thomas Boyle sought more money from Dublin Castle for the expenses incurred in cultivating the company of United Irishmen, advising that

> My keeping a Decent appearance…every day in the week increases much my outlaying as the people I associate with for Information, their company could not be got into if I did not do so…I never neglect sitting at all their meetings and paying my Expenses with spirit.[211]

Agents sent on missions by the Home Office and local magistrates interviewed persons of interest, tracked suspects and attended radical meetings. Some committed loyalists like Reeves and John Gretton retained their own spies, whose information they duly passed on to the government. However there does not appear to have been anyone in England quite comparable with the notorious Irish newspaper editor Higgins, who ran his own personal network of spies and sent regular reports to the Castle on all manner of radical activities. Higgins boasted that

> From the numbers that I hold intercourse with and who frequently call, I receive intelligence of every transaction going forward in the city [Dublin], and of the meetings holding for the most wicked purposes.[212]

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[210] Emsley, 'The Home Office and its sources of information and investigation 1791-1801', p. 539.
[211] NAI, Rebellion Papers 620/18/3, Boyle to Cooke, 2 August 1797.
[212] Bartlett, ed., *Revolutionary Dublin, 1795-1801*, Higgins to Cooke, 23 April 1797, p. 147.

Informers like Thomas Collins and John Tunbridge who were already members of the societies could simply report what transpired at their meetings and discussions, while other sources, particularly those like Gosling and Frederick Nodder who joined a group specifically to spy on it, went further by actively seeking out information on specific topics or obtaining positions of greater access and influence. Some of these spies certainly strayed dangerously close to themselves provoking the sedition they reported. Powell appears to have covered his potentially suspicious zeal for radical action by posing as over-excitable and simple. Thelwall was aware of his unguarded divulgence of information to the Privy Council prior to the trials of 1794 but put it down solely to 'unguarded simplicity', while Francis Place later wrote that 'There was no absurdity no sort of proceeding among them [the LCS] that Powell did not eagerly go into nothing which any villainous spy could suggest that he would not adopt'. Nonetheless he concluded that his friend was 'honest, but silly'.[213] Finally we may mention the agents abroad like Samuel Turner, who insinuated their way into the confidence of resident and passing radicals and took advantage of their role in facilitating radical plans and communications by betraying them to the government.[214]

Raising the Stakes

As 1795 dawned the government's gains from the preceding year were not immediately apparent. In parliament Pitt's ministers became embroiled in a vigorous and spiteful debate about the outcome of the treason trials and the ongoing place of radicalism in society. Most of the government's best spies had been exposed at the trials and it would take time for new ones to be found, while ministers remained undecided on how to proceed in their dealings with radicalism. In January the now former spy Metcalfe made

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[213] Cecil Thelwall, *The Life of John Thelwall*, Vol. 1, London, John Macrone, 1837, p. 248; Francis Place, *The Autobiography of Francis Place*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1972, pp. 179-80.
[214] Thomas Bartlett, 'Informers, Informants and Information: The secret history of the 1790s re-considered', in Thomas Bartlett, David Dickson, Dáire Keogh & Kevin Whelan, eds., *1798*, pp. 406-22; Thomas Bartlett, 'The Life and Opinions of Leonard MacNally (1752-1820): Playwright, Barrister, United Irishman, and Informer', in Hiram Morgan, ed., *Information, Media and Power through the Ages*, Dublin, University College Dublin Press, 2001, pp. 113-36; Bartlett, ed., *Revolutionary Dublin, 1795-1801*, pp. 13-68; Cobb, *The Police and the People*, pp. 5-13; Durey, 'William Maume', pp. 121-36; Durey, *William Wickham, Master Spy*, pp. 127-32; Elliott, *Partners in Revolution*, passim; Emsley, 'The Home Office and its sources of information and investigation 1791-1801', pp. 532-61; Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, pp. 41-82; Nelson, *The Home Office, 1782-1801*, pp. 95-122; Bernard Porter, *Plots and Paranoia: A history of political espionage in Britain, 1790-1988*, London, Unwin 1989, pp. 29-35; E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 529-39; Wells, *Insurrection*, pp. 28-43.

an unsuccessful attempt to hire the assistant secretary of the LCS Joseph Burks as an informer. Burks claimed that Metcalfe

> offered to introduce me to *Mr. Ford*, at the Duke of *Portland's* Office, Whitehall;…that if I would accept the offer, I should have *fifty guineas prompt payment*, and *one guinea regularly for each weekly report*.[215]

However it was not until July that the government found a truly valuable new source of information in the person of Powell, sometime acting president of the LCS and member of both the Executive and General Committees.

While the government hesitated the radical societies managed to regroup and achieve a significant increase in membership, influence and activity, such that by the end of the year it was decided that the strength of the societies was becoming too great a concern to tolerate any longer unchallenged. The October attack on the king provided the government with a pretext for introducing the Two Acts. It was anticipated that the Acts would increase the power and prevalence of spies and informers, as the scope for reporting on treasonous and seditious practices had been considerably widened. However in practice the Two Acts were rarely used, and the fear alone of informers and serious punishment sufficed to quickly remove radicalism from the public sphere and dramatically reduce the size and importance of the societies. Spies dogged the efforts of the LCS to rekindle enthusiasm for the radical cause both in London and the counties and kept the government well-appraised of their activities. Thelwall finally abandoned his lectures after continued harassment, and the LCS members John Binns and John Gale Jones were arrested and tried for sedition while attempting to reanimate radicalism in Birmingham. Word of their impending mission was passed to the Home Office by Powell, and spies reported on their meetings in Birmingham prior to their arrest by local magistrates. However in court the evidence of the crown's witnesses was disputed by those of the defence. Binns was acquitted and Jones, while convicted, was not sentenced.[216]

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[215] Joseph Burks, Letter to the Telegraph, 14 January 1795, in Richard Lee, *Oppression!!! The Appeal of Captain Perry, to the People of England*, London, British Tree of Liberty, 1795, p. 15, emphases in original. See also Thale, ed., *Selections From The Papers Of The London Corresponding Society, 1792-1799*, p. 241.

[216] Ehrman, *The Younger Pitt: the reluctant transition*, pp. 450-60; Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty*, pp. 359-415; Graham, *The Nation, The Law and the King*, Vol. 2, pp. 641-741; Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, pp. 11-40; Mori, *William Pitt and the French Revolution 1785-1795*, pp. 248-63; E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 149-63; Wells, *Insurrection*, pp. 44-47.

1796 and most of 1797 passed with the government embroiled in debates over the war, Irish affairs, subsistence and taxation, while radical leaders reconsidered their position. However as 1797 progressed it gradually witnessed a significant change of approach by both the government and the radicals. The radical cause fell into the hands of extremists, United Irishmen and republicans who supported a forceful overthrow of the government. As Thomis and Holt state, 'Only when prosecutions and new legislation inhibited and intimidated the open reform agitation did a minority of diehard reformers go underground to plan the very revolts that the government had feared'.[217] In response the Home Office reorganised its intelligence services to confront this new situation. The presence of clandestine societies with international links and insurrectionary intentions convinced the government of the need for change, and although the details of this restructuring were kept secret, ministers trusted that its noticeable effects upon society, in terms of increased surveillance, repression and central intervention in local affairs, would be accepted by a majority of the populace as being in the interests of national security.

Historians such as Nelson, Emsley and Baxter and Donnelly have argued that there was no centralised state system of surveillance and investigation at any point in the 1790s, with Nelson arguing that 'The great variation in the value of the reports of the spies reflects the absence of any concerted system', while Baxter and Donnelly claimed that the Home Office 'was quite deficient in the area of information retrieval. There was no cross-reference system and therefore the Home Office was often incapable of ascertaining the reliability of reports sent to it'.[218] This view has been convincingly challenged by scholars such as Wells, Sparrow and Durey, who have demonstrated the existence and importance of the centralised secret service of the late 1790s. The hub of the overhauled service was the newly constituted Inner Office, placed under the leadership of the spymaster Wickham. This new body was a department of the Alien Office, chosen because, as Wickham stated, not only was it already experienced in matters of intelligence, investigation and surveillance, but it also had 'the Chief and Singular merit…that from its very nature, no other Office could ever know any thing of

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[217] Malcolm I. Thomis and Peter Holt, *Threats of Revolution in Britain, 1789-1848*, Houndmills, Macmillan, 1977, p. 17.
[218] Nelson, *The Home Office, 1782-1801*, p. 101; J. L. Baxter and F. K. Donnelly, 'The Revolutionary "Underground" in the West Riding: Myth or Reality?', *Past & Present*, Vol. 64 (1974), p. 126.

what was passing there, unless instructed from the Fountain Head'.[219] It was therefore ideally suited to secret service activities.

Under Wickham the Inner Office quietly became a genuine secret service headquarters, with centralised responsibility for all intelligence and domestic security matters. Durey argues that the available evidence demonstrates 'Wickham's awareness of the importance of the intelligence cycle' and the need for careful and effective planning, collection, analysis and production.[220] Under his leadership intelligence from many different domestic and foreign sources was sent to the Inner Office, where it was closely analysed by Wickham and his small team of specialists and integrated into the Office's wider picture of the current security situation. Wickham described the new structure as a 'System of *Preventitive* Police', conducive to a policy of pre-emptive strikes against threats and plots, and claimed that

> without bustle, noise or anything that can attract Public Attention, Government possess here the most powerful means of Observation and Information…that was ever placed in the hands of a Free Government…[221]

Each member of the small staff was placed in charge of a different aspect of the Office's work. Lullin recalled that Wickham quickly set about

> regularizing & apportioning the various branches of correspondence to different individuals according to their respective abilities & aptitude & no doubt the service derived considerable advantage from this arrangement…The organising this new establishment & setting to work its various & intricate branches, in addition to his usual daily & important occupations at the Home Office, called for Mr. Wickham's indefatigable exertions.[222]

In order to improve the collation and analysis of the vast quantities of information received at the Inner Office, Wickham created a comprehensive filing and record system, a part of which has survived in the Irish Rebellion Papers (see Figure 2.1).[223] This is a register entitled "Book of Informations", sub-titled the "Book of Suspects". As Durey describes it, the register

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[219] BL, Pelham Papers Add. MS 33107, fols. 1-4, Wickham to Portland, 3 January 1801, quoted in Nelson, *The Home Office, 1782-1801*, p. 130.
[220] Durey, *William Wickham, Master Spy*, p. 109.
[221] BL, Add. MS 33107, f. 3, Wickham to Portland, 3 January 1801, quoted in Wells, *Insurrection*, p. 30.
[222] HRO, 38M49/1/56/40, Charles Lullin, 'Life of Wickham'.
[223] NAI, Rebellion Papers 620/1/216, 'Book of Informations'.

contains several hundred names of suspects, in rough alphabetical order, with dates, names or initials of informants, and relevant information. There are cross-linkages between individual names, based on a letter/number code.[224]

The Irish Chancellor Lord Redesdale described the register as

an alphabetical list of all the persons against whom informations have been made, the nature of the information, when given, and by whom, so that no character of that description may be unknown to Government.[225]

These registers allowed the Office staff to quickly locate and place information on suspects in the official secret books. In order to be truly effective this system required comprehensive information-gathering capabilities. Nelson notes that 'In ordinary times little correspondence passed between the Home Office and the officials in the counties and provincial cities'.[226] However, with the flow of correspondence having already increased early in the decade, the Home Office now redoubled its requests to county magistrates to send all information of interest to London, and in turn instructed them on specific matters or where necessary sent a trusted agent or officer to provide assistance. Financial aid was given to those working in particularly troublesome areas. The instructing of magistrates was of course not a new practice,[227] but it was now placed on a more systematic and regular footing. As Durey argues, this employment of the existing authorities within the Inner Office system was both an 'efficient use of resources' and a check on the 'potential power of the security service'.[228]

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[224] Durey, *William Wickham, Master Spy*, p. 110.

[225] Devon Record Office 152M/C1803/OZ80, Redesdale to Henry Addington, 11 August 1803, quoted in Durey, *William Wickham, Master Spy*, p. 109.

[226] Nelson, *The Home Office, 1782-1801*, p. 102.

[227] To give one example, in September 1792 Dundas warned the mayor of Bristol of the dangers posed by the new radical societies, stating that 'It is…extremely desirable that their Proceedings should be carefully attended to'. NA, HO 13/9, Dundas to John Noble, 12 September 1792, quoted in Nelson, *The Home Office, 1782-1801*, p. 105.

[228] Durey, 'William Wickham, the Christ Church Connection and the Rise and Fall of the Security Service in Britain, 1793-1801', p. 741.
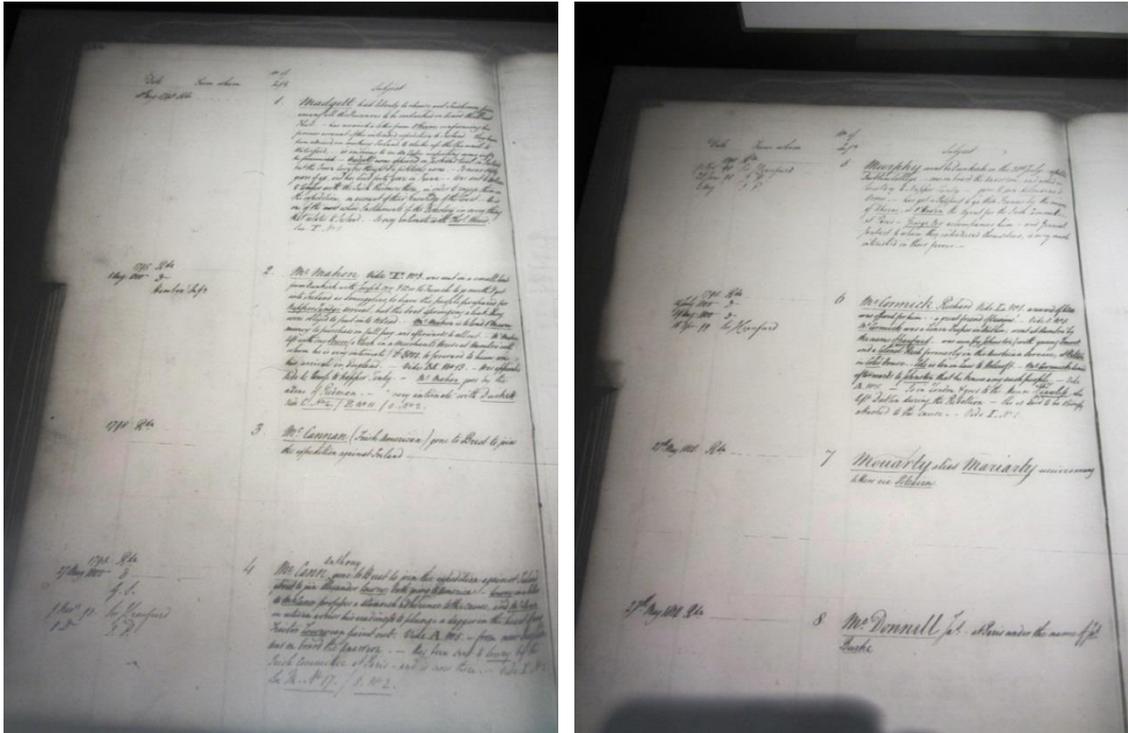
Figure 2.1 – The 'Book of Informations'

In the capital itself two of Wickham's primary allies were Francis Freeling, resident-surveyor of the Post Office responsible for the opening and inspection of mail, and Richard Ford, magistrate of the Bow Street Police Office. Freeling worked closely with Wickham on the regular Post Office tasks of opening suspect mail and compiling postmaster intelligence reports. The Inner, Post and Foreign Offices contained a number of experts in the arts of intelligence work, from cyphers and secret inks to the breaking of codes, as demonstrated in some examples below drawn from the papers of the spy James Talbot (see Figure 2.2).[229] Ford took much of the responsibility for conducting investigations and examining suspects and also ran his own network of spies and runners. The police magistrate was both honest and scrupulous in his work. On one occasion in the Despard case he advised the informer John Moody that 'I do not wish to be made acquainted with any thing…that may tend to prejudice the state prisoners on their approaching Trial, I do not think that would be fair'.[230] Bow Street was a critical element of the security network, for as a 1798 Commons select committee reported, 'This is the Office with which the County Magistrates correspond, from which arises

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[229] Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Talbot b. 27-29, (Unknown) to John Jervis, 21 January 1797, other documents of unknown provenance.
[230] NA, PC 1/3117, fols. 59-60, Ford to Moody, 16 January 1803.

much Business for the Magistrates, Clerks, and Officers.'[231] The Inner Office also worked closely with the authorities in Dublin Castle, receiving all useful and relevant information and in turn advising the Castle on intelligence and matters pertaining to Irish affairs. At this time the undersecretary Edward Cooke also began to reorganise and improve Irish intelligence. Bartlett argues that 'from mid-1797 on, there was a purposefulness about the Castle's intelligence-gathering that is striking'.[232] With notable success Cooke sought to promote a more systematic and productive analysis of intelligence, and his targeting of information on particular United Irish leaders and agents was critical to operations on both islands.

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[231] 'Account of Business and Duties of the Police Offices and of the Bow-street Office in 1798', *Parliamentary Papers* (1810), Vol. 4, pp. 375, 460-61 & 472, in Radzinowicz, *A History of English Criminal Law and its Administration from 1750*, Vol. 2, p. 508.
[232] Bartlett, 'Informers, Informants and Information', in Thomas Bartlett, David Dickson, Dáire Keogh & Kevin Whelan, eds., *1798*, p. 421.
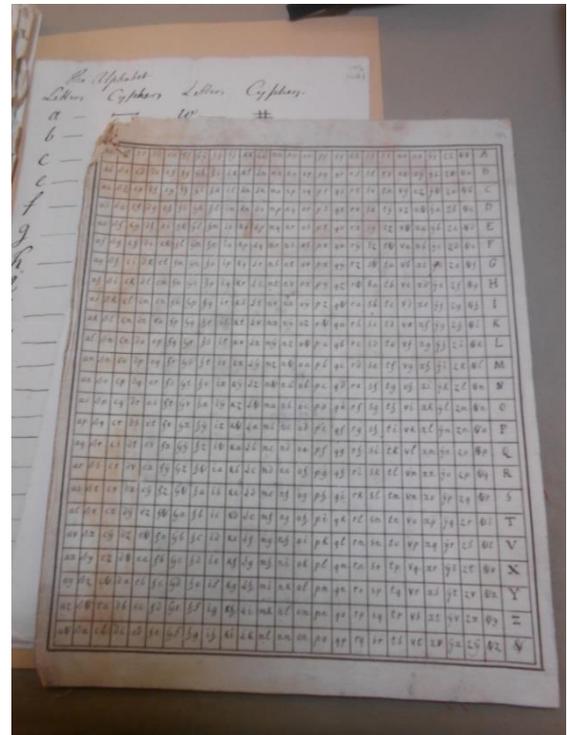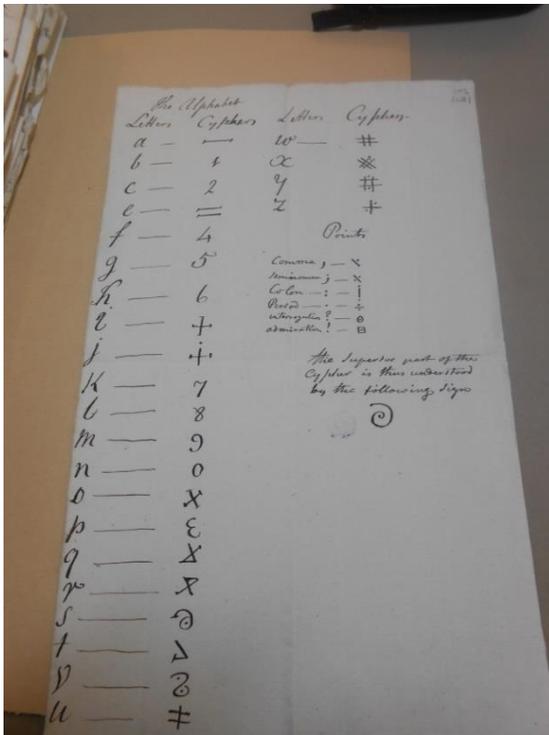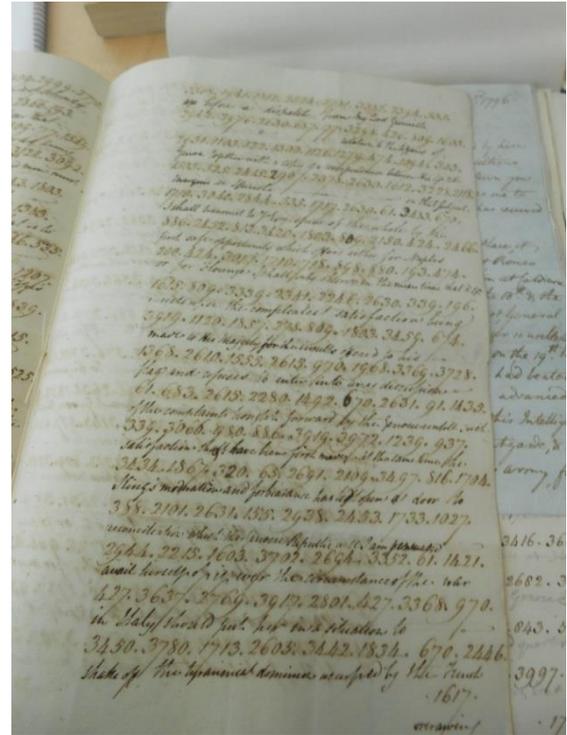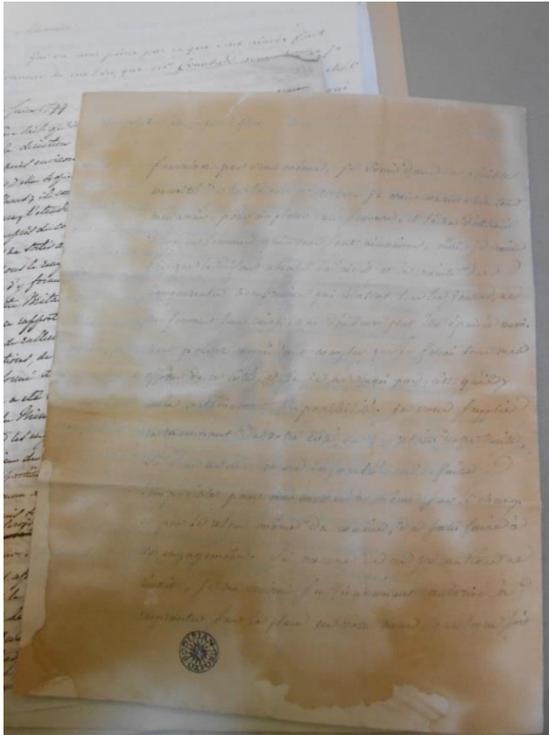
Figure 2.2 – Cyphers and Secret Inks

In this manner Britain developed an effective secret service operating an international intelligence system aimed at ensuring domestic security and protecting British interests against threats planned and developed by participants acting in multiple countries. While domestic spies continued to ply their trade against radical groups in Britain and

United Irishmen across the sea, greater collaboration between English, Scottish, Irish, French and German intelligence officers meant that domestic information could now be used in conjunction with intelligence from foreign sources to track plans and connections between Irish, French and British radicals, carry out counter-intelligence operations, and trail suspected radical activists even as they travelled from country to country. Procedures to ensure the good character and utility of spies were improved, and a more careful analysis and cross-checking of information received allowed the Home Office to boost its ability to determine its veracity and context. Wickham insisted that all potential new spies were first given a trial period, and where possible sought a personal interview to establish their credentials, while Portland warned magistrates that although good informers were 'very useful and necessary and very praiseworthy', they were sometimes led astray even by 'very good motives and by a very laudable zeal', and must therefore be listened to with a caution to 'which the occupation in which they employ themselves cannot improperly subject them'.[233] Where possible informers recruited from within the radical societies were preferred over self-appointed spies and infiltration agents of the type used in 1794. In many cases informers were given standardised payments for regular trustworthy reports, avoiding many of the pitfalls arising from an over-eagerness to impress. For this reason in one instance Portland advised a local magistrate to recruit someone 'who, by some or other of the means usually employed for such purposes, may be prevailed upon to disclose the purposes and proceedings of those who attend and take a leading part in this society'.[234] By contrast ad hoc funding based on the importance of the information provided was generally avoided as it tended to encourage exaggeration and invention.[235]

This overhaul of the secret service continued apace even as a plan conceived by the United societies in late 1797 required its urgent attention. The United Irishmen Coigly, O'Connor, John Allen and Arthur Leary along with Binns planned to go to Paris to apprise the Directory of the new United movement and push for a French invasion of Ireland and England in support of a combined radical uprising. The Inner Office was

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[233] NA, HO 43/13, fols. 102-103, Portland to Fletcher, 14 July 1801.
[234] NA, HO 43/10, fols. 469-71, Portland to the Earl of Warwick, 2 July 1798, quoted in Emsley, 'The Home Office and its sources of information and investigation 1791-1801', p. 557.
[235] Durey, *William Wickham, Master Spy*, pp. 106-113 & 134-37; Durey, 'William Wickham, the Christ Church Connection and the Rise and Fall of the Security Service in Britain, 1793-1801', pp. 714-17 & 728-42; Emsley, 'The Home Office and its sources of information and investigation 1791-1801', pp. 532-61; Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, pp. 59-82; Sparrow, 'The Alien Office, 1792-1806', pp. 373-75; Wells, *Insurrection*, pp. 28-43.

well-informed on these activities. Powell and other spies kept the government informed of affairs in London, while in Manchester a member of the Manchester Corresponding Society named Robert Gray had turned informer and notified the proactive local magistrate Thomas Bayley of renewed radical Anglo-Irish efforts in Lancashire. Bayley reported this information to the Home Office, and conducted further investigations under the instruction of Portland and Wickham. Additionally, attempts to subvert the local militia were reported by Sergeant Joseph Tankard, who feigned interest in the plans of the United Englishmen to gain their confidence.

In Hamburg, a hotbed of agent activity thanks to its position as a key port for travellers moving between France and the British Isles, the United Irish turncoat Turner provided the most important evidence of all. The Irish Lord Lieutenant Camden informed Portland that Turner 'has it in his power to perform the most essential services at this moment to this country', with the informer being able to supply detailed information on Coigly's mission and other connections between France and the Isles.[236] Further intelligence was also solicited from Ireland via Dublin Castle, where informers such as McNally and Nicholas Mageean kept the authorities abreast of plans for rebellion and the seeking of French assistance, while the informant Higgins sent out spies to search for Coigly upon his return to Ireland in January 1798. Wickham kept Cooke and Camden closely involved in proceedings, at one point advising the former that 'in a transaction of this kind, the information collected in one Country tends naturally to throw great light on that which is procured in the other'.[237] Coigly was tracked in his travels to Dublin, Manchester and London by Bow Street Runners, while other suspects were also monitored.

Aware that Coigly and his associates were now heading for the south coast of England en route to France, Bow Street arrested them at Margate on 28 February 1798. Further arrests and charges followed in April in London and Manchester. In Ireland the leadership of the UI was likewise crushed as spies betrayed their identities, plans and whereabouts to the Castle. In Britain those arrested in Margate were the only ones brought to trial for high treason. Having seen the prejudicial effects of using spy evidence in court, the government this time chose to maintain the cover of its spies and rely exclusively on evidence obtained conventionally, despite protests from Dublin.

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[236] NA, HO 100/75, fols. 138-40, Earl of Camden to Portland, 11 March 1798.
[237] NA, HO 100/75, fols. 148-49, Wickham to Cooke, n.d. (1798).

This proved to be a double-edged sword, for as Grenville noted the policy meant that 'it may not be possible to bring such evidence of guilt as will suffice to convict them in the ordinary course of law'.[238] And indeed while the Inner Office's policy allowed it to retain its extremely important informers and removed a potential doubt from the minds of the jury, the remaining evidence sufficed to convict Coigly alone.

This was another temporary public relations embarrassment for the government, although mitigated by Coigly's conviction, but the long-term effects were far more beneficial to its interests. O'Connor and Binns were immediately re-arrested on fresh charges while many other radicals remained imprisoned without trial. The government resuspended habeas corpus in April. In its eyes this was justified by the wealth of intelligence in its possession proving the existence of the United conspiracy, and thirty-seven leading radicals were detained until March 1801. Despite their inability to otherwise secure convictions, Wickham and Portland were convinced that retaining the cover of their sources was of primary importance. In June 1798, upon apprehending further suspects, Wickham informed Castlereagh that

> It is evident, under the present circumstances, and with the evidence of the nature of that of which Government here is at present in possession, strong and decisive as it is, that none of these persons can be brought to trial without exposing secrets of the last importance to the State, the revealing of which may implicate the safety of the two kingdoms.[239]

Therefore it was determined that the best policy was one of preventative detention until such time as radical extremism and invasion were no longer deemed significant threats to British security. Trials were only sought when, in the words of the prosecutor Charles Abbot, they could satisfactorily be pursued 'without disclosing those sources of useful intelligence, which will remain unsuspected and unimpaired, for the future security of the state'.[240] This policy proved to be very successful. Intelligence from Home Office and Dublin Castle investigations confirmed the links between the United societies and the French Directory. This gave the government conclusive public proof of the multi-national conspiracy against the state, prompting further repressive legislation. Irish connections and intelligence, facilitated by the revamped secret service, thus proved the

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[238] Castlereagh, *Memoirs and Correspondence of Viscount Castlereagh, Second Marquess of Londonderry*, Vol. 1, Grenville to (Unknown), 9 May 1798, p. 202.
[239] Ibid., Wickham to Castlereagh, 8 June 1798, p. 218.
[240] Joseph Gurney and William Brodie Gurney, *The Trial of Edward Marcus Despard, Esquire. For High Treason*, London, M. Gurney, 1803, pp. 44-45.

final downfall of the British radical societies. Bereft of the majority of its leaders, fearful of imprisonment and prosecution, hindered by repressive legislation and continually harassed by government agents and loyalists, the underground radical movement was checked and reduced to little more than a whimper.[241]

Having struck hard in the first half of 1798, the Inner Office ran an organised and efficient secret service until the Peace of Amiens between Britain and Bonaparte's France in March 1802. Ongoing intelligence from its widespread sources, including the reliable new London-based operatives Tunbridge, Moody and William Gent, recruited from within the radical societies, allowed it to maintain a vigilant surveillance of all radical and suspicious activities. Knowledge and accuracy were the watchwords of the Office. As Hone argues

> The surviving correspondence of the government with these regular informers…suggests that the government neither sought nor received "alarmist" information, but valued the collection and storage of "intelligence", however humdrum.[242]

With radicalism laid so low such measures were deemed sufficient, and investigations generally resulted in warnings and disruption rather than arrests. Only twice, in March-April 1799 and November 1802, were a large number of arrests carried out, following a running surveillance of renewed Anglo-Irish plotting, including the Despard conspiracy of 1802. In the first case the government could not obtain sufficient concrete evidence to successfully prosecute those arrested, resorting instead to its policy of detainment without trial, but in the latter Colonel Despard and six fellow conspirators were convicted of treason and executed.[243] The radical impetus was checked again, no further plots materialised on British soil and the secret service apparatus of 1798 gradually fell into complete disuse.[244]

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[241] Bartlett, ed., *Revolutionary Dublin, 1795-1801*, Higgins to Cooke, 12 January 1798, pp. 211-14; Durey, *William Wickham, Master Spy*, pp. 113-34; Elliott, *Partners in Revolution*, pp. 165-240; Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty*, pp. 416-50; Graham, *The Nation, The Law and The King*, Vol. 2, pp. 803-866; Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, pp. 50-59; Wells, *Insurrection*, pp. 110-77.
[242] Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, p. 65.
[243] Marianne Elliott, 'The "Despard Conspiracy" Reconsidered', *Past & Present*, Vol. 75 (1977), pp. 46-61; Elliott, *Partners in Revolution*, pp. 243-322; Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, pp. 86-117; E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 515-28; Wells, *Insurrection*, pp. 188-252.
[244] The reasons for this decline and disbandment will be discussed in Chapter Four.

Chapter Three – Defending the People

'The immediate object of government, is security.

The means employed by government, is restriction, an abridgement of individual independence…

Without independence men cannot become either wise, or useful, or happy.

Consequently, the most desirable state of mankind, is that which maintains general security, with the smallest incroachment upon individual independence.'[245] *– William Godwin, 1793*

Radicals feared, resented and disagreed with the government's deployment of its security and intelligence services to monitor British society and investigate and repress radical activities and sentiments. In particular they took aim at the use of spies and informers, as they presented an easily identifiable target historically despised by large sections of the population. Spies, informers and constables, as the principle agents of state surveillance, were a product both of the government's securitizing move against radicalism and the efforts to eliminate the existential threat it was believed to pose. The radical response to their employment, proliferation and activities was a key component of the wider fight against government and loyalist securitization and repression, and as such provides us with an insightful and interesting case study of the manner in which a referent subject and their allies can attempt to counter a securitizing move and the means used to enforce it. What discourses, arguments and tactics did the radicals employ, and how were they used to discredit the government's securitization? What were the motives, traditions, beliefs, literature, schools of thought and contemporary issues that animated, shaped and influenced radical arguments?

As an issue relevant both to securitization and the push for reform, the radical[246] attack on government surveillance and investigation was sustained and multi-faceted, approaching the subject from a range of angles and drawing on diverse sources of

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[245] William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, and its Influence on Morals and Happiness*, 3rd Ed., Vol. 1, London, G. G. and J. Robinson, 1798, pp. xxiv-xxv.

[246] For reasons of clarity and simplicity, in this chapter the words 'radical' and 'radicalism', unless specifically stated otherwise, shall be used as generic terms for all the diverse forms of radical, liberal, democratic and reformist thinkers and ideologies found in 1790s England.

evidence. The radical reaction to spies and informers took place not only in the public arena but also amongst themselves, as radical leaders discussed and advised the means necessary to successfully counteract government surveillance and repression. Radicalism endured as a force throughout the 1790s, but the arguments over this fiercely-contested topic reached their peak in 1794-95 – the years of the major treason trials and the final flourishing of public radicalism prior to the passing of the Two Acts in December 1795. The major subjects of discussion rose and fell in response to particular events and the fortunes of the radical cause, but some key themes remained consistent throughout. We shall address these issues individually, exploring the arguments concerning justice, liberty, law, good government, morality, space and traditions.

Justice, Liberty and the Constitution

The radical attack on the securitization of radicalism proceeded on two fronts. Firstly, it was argued that the government's policy was reactionary, short-sighted, deceptive, repressive and unjust, driven by self-interest and a desire to maintain the position and privileges of the ruling elite. Secondly, it was posited that the methods employed by the government to maintain security were themselves likely to produce injustices, misconceptions and infringements on civil liberties. This is our primary focus here. The perceived use of spies and informers as the government's principle means of obtaining information and evidence on radical and allegedly seditious activity was of grave concern. Spies were not regarded as reliable witnesses. Not only was their information likely to be inaccurate due to a lack of context and understanding or a poor memory, as was ably demonstrated by Erskine at Hardy's trial, it was also widely believed that many informers would deliberately give false, prejudiced, exaggerated or misleading information, in the hope of gaining increased rewards and further employment. This would compromise the course of judicial proceedings, impinging the truth and increasing the possibility of the judge or jury arriving at an incorrect and unjust verdict.

With the government believed to be deliberately targeting and securitizing radical activity, radicals argued that such policies were likely to lead informers into exaggerating and constructing speech and activities that could be construed as seditious, treasonous and threatening, and thus of increased interest and use to the government and

loyalist associations. At Hardy's trial Erskine warned the jury about the potential hazards of evidence presented by spies, noting that a person who

> gives evidence against persons into whose confidence he has endeavoured to insinuate himself, is to be heard and attended to with very great caution and reserve; his value rises according to the importance of his testimony, he is a more or less valuable witness according as the acts which he communicates to his employers are more or less criminal; he is interested therefore to enhance them…[247]

As Cobb notes, for the informer 'to be successful, he needs to prove that he has access to secrets that would otherwise be unknown to the authorities, and, in order to make money, he needs to provide a great deal of information'.[248] This lends itself to a doctoring and selective interpreting of their information. Or as William Godwin put it, the spy

> undertakes to remember words, and he has an invincible bias upon his mind, inducing him to construe them in a particular way, and insensibly to change them for words more definite and injurious. His very income depends on the frequency of his tales, and he is paid in proportion as the tales that he brings, whether true or false, tend to the destruction of the persons to whom they relate.[249]

At the trial of Coigly et al., the defence counsel Robert Dallas conceded that while spies may be of some use in providing general information to the government, 'the LAW demands *credible* witnesses'.[250] Yet the character of spies and the nature of the role precluded them from possessing such credibility, and they therefore should never be utilised in court. The questioning of spies in open court was believed to further compromise their already doubtful truthfulness and integrity. A letter published in the *Morning Chronicle* argued that

> I am of opinion that it should be a principle of jurisprudence, not to admit the evidence of a Spy…A known Spy is no Spy. It must therefore be apparent to a Jury, that he is *swearing his last*; that he can have no object but to secure the favour of his employers, and consequently that he will swear *au plus fort*.[251]

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[247] *ST* 24, col. 1138.
[248] Cobb, *The Police and the People*, p. 5.
[249] William Godwin, *Considerations on Lord Grenville and Mr. Pitt's Bills, Concerning Treasonable and Seditious Practices, and Unlawful Assemblies*, London, J. Johnson, 1795, p. 50.
[250] *ST* 27, col. 215, emphasis in original.
[251] *Morning Chronicle* (*MC*), 14 November 1794, emphases in original.

Lord Stanhope was dismayed by having seen 'what I never hope any of us will see in an English court, a certain set of Spies and Informers…procured to confound the best, the most noble and respectable Juries'.[252]

Even the harsh penalties for perjury were seen as little hindrance to the willingness of spies to lie from the witness box. Thomas Holcroft described the spy as a man 'who must accuse, or must demonstrate that his office is useless', a 'trained and hired perjurer', while Samuel Coleridge bewailed the existence of 'hired spies' and 'hungry informers…who have graduated in guilt and passed through all degrees of serviceable iniquity from loss of memory to equivocation, and from equivocation to perjury'.[253] Worse still, it was argued that some spies acted as *agents provocateurs*, advocating and/or encouraging extreme or seditious policies in order to strengthen the government's case against the radical societies; or enticing individual people towards seditious speech, enabling the informer to prosecute the entrapped speaker and collect the reward arising from a successful conviction. Godwin described the spy as a 'man that insinuates himself into your confidence in order to betray you. He pretends to be uncommonly vehement and intemperate, that he may excite you to be the same'.[254] Richard Sheridan contended that by his very nature

> The spy, in order to avoid suspicion, is obliged to assume an appearance of zeal and activity: he is the first to disseminate the doctrines of sedition, or to countenance the designs of violence; he deludes the weak by the speciousness of his arguments, and inflames the turbulent by the fury of his zeal.[255]

An extract from Charles Johnstone's novel *Chrysal, or the Adventures of a Guinea*, published by the *Morning Post*, explained these methods to the public, opining that the informer insinuates

> himself into a Society for the gains of Treachery. When he enters he finds a community without criminality, he then leaves no methods unattempted, for the purpose of rendering that

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[252] *Morning Post* (*MP*), 5 May 1795.

[253] Thomas Holcroft, *A Narrative of Facts, Relating to a Prosecution for High Treason; Including the Address to the Jury, Which the Court refused to hear: With Letters to the Attorney General, Lord Chief Justice Eyre, Mr. Serjeant Adair, the Honourable Thomas Erskine, and Vicary Gibbs, Esq. and the Defence The Author had prepared, if he had been brought to Trial*, London, H. D. Symonds, 1795, p. 66; Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Plot Discovered; or An Address to the People, Against Ministerial Treason*, Bristol, 1795, p. 12.

[254] Godwin, *Considerations on Lord Grenville and Mr. Pitt's Bills, Concerning Treasonable and Seditious Practices, and Unlawful Assemblies*, p. 50.

[255] *PH* 31, col. 1067.

Society, in some of its weaker parts…tainted with his own poisonous guilt, and thus he attains his ends…[256]

Thelwall also blasted the government's 'tools of venality and corruption', exposing their 'covert arts and secret machinations'. He proclaimed to spies that

Your's is the palm of perjury: and how without this attribute should ye be fit tools for those who are destroying liberty, at the time that they pretend to reverence the Constitution? Your's is the palm of fraud and base hypocrisy–pretended patriotism with you, as with your masters, is the engine with which you work out your own selfish and treacherous designs.[257]

These claims formed an important part of the successful defences of Thelwall, Hardy and Horne Tooke in 1794.

Radicals also believed that the employment and prevalence of spies was likely to result in an increase in investigations and prosecutions for alleged treason and sedition, initiated by the state, loyalist associations and private individuals, motivated more by the corrupting and unscrupulous pursuit of personal gain than any sense of justice or duty. The *Morning Post* argued that as a result of the increase in accusations and willingness to prosecute alleged offenders,

every wretch in the Country, who has, either through Malice or Envy, a dislike to his Neighbour, will have now an opportunity of gratifying his malicious intentions…Those who have commenced Spies and Informers…will crowd the Prisons with Innocent people, as long as the Liberties of Englishmen are at the mercy of such debased and infamous Characters.[258]

One radical work quoted Jonathan Swift, who had argued that 'such ignominious wretches let their private passions into…their clandestine informations, and often wreak their particular spite or malice against the person whom they are set to watch'.[259] Indeed informers were to be found willing to report even the most trivial of utterances. The

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[256] *MP*, 19 November 1794.

[257] John Thelwall, *Peaceful Discussion, and not Tumultuary Violence the Means of Addressing National Grievances*, London, J. Thelwall, 1795, p. 4; John Thelwall, 'On the Importance of avoiding personal Factions and Divisions, among the Friends of Reform', *The Tribune No. XXIII*, 1795, in John Thelwall, *The Tribune, A Periodical Publication, Consisting Chiefly of the Political Lectures of J. Thelwall*, Vol. 2, London, Self-Published, 1795, p. 172.

[258] *MP*, 30 May 1794.

[259] Jonathan Swift, *Sermon on False Witness*, in *The Manual of Liberty: or Testimonies in Behalf of the Rights of Mankind*, London, H. D. Symonds, 1795, p. 171.

Morning Chronicle recounted that one man was reported and detained in a tavern for exclaiming that '*Treason* was only *Reason*, with a T at the beginning of it'.[260]

Radicals argued that citizens could not be free to discuss their thoughts, opinions and grievances in a society pervaded by spies and informers, especially if these thoughts had a radical tendency. Abraham Jones described how

> Spies had been introduced, not only into frequented haunts, but into the recesses of society: conversation was proscribed, and opinion interdicted or dangerous, every Coffee-house had its Informer, every family apprehended a Traitor in its own bosom.[261]

People therefore had to be ever-weary and cautious in their speech, bearing, associations and actions, or else live constantly under threat of being reported or prosecuted by an informer who chanced upon or invented words or conduct deemed offensive or dangerous and potentially open to prosecution. Erskine observed that 'liberty of thought and speech is as necessary to preserve, as it was to form' the British Constitution. Yet the power and prevalence of spies and informers eradicated these liberties. For

> While such a host of men…are combined to overwhelm the unhappy man who may venture to utter a sentiment which a weak or biased understanding may torture into a seditious meaning, liberty of thought, liberty of speech, liberty of publication, which may justly be called the palladium of British liberty, cannot exist.[262]

In court Erskine was even able to quote Burke on this topic, for the fervent enemy of radicalism had once argued that under an administration that freely employed and rewarded informers

> the obnoxious people are slaves, not only to the government, but they live at the mercy of every individual; they are at once the slaves of the whole community, and of every part of it; and the worst and most unmerciful men are those on whom goodness must depend.[263]

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[260] *MC*, 16 September 1794.

[261] Abraham Jones, *The State of the Country in the Month of November, 1794*, London, J. Owen and B. Crosby, 1794, p. 18.

[262] Thomas Erskine, source not provided, quoted in Charles Pigott, *Persecution. The Case of Charles Pigott: Contained in the Defence He Had Prepared, and Which Would Have Been Delivered By Him on His Trial, if the Grand Jury Had Not Thrown Out the Bill Preferred Against Him*, London, D. I. Eaton, 1793, pp. 10-11.

[263] *ST 24*, col. 959. Burke's original speech – the 'Speech at Bristol Before the Election of 1780' – may be found in Edmund Burke, *The Speeches of the Right Hon. Edmund Burke*, ed. James Burke, Dublin, James Duffy, Sons & Co., 1853, p. 150.

The government claimed to be defending the constitution, when in fact its own actions were infringing upon and placing it at risk. Christopher Wyvill warned his fellow Yorkshiremen that they were witnessing the implementation of

> the system of a State Inquisition, begun by the employment of spies and informers, in every corner of the kingdom; you have witnessed the growth of that system, in its natural consequences, the most violent State prosecutions, and the most rigorous and unprecedented punishments…[264]

Thelwall lamented that 'the boasted freedom of Britons is no more, and every man of intellect and virtue lies at the mercy of the pimps and lacqueys of courtiers and court expectants'.[265] The radical orator despaired at this calamity, for as Wagner notes, 'The free exchange of ideas Thelwall envisaged became impossible in the environment of surveillance that settled over Britain in the mid-1790s.'[266]

John Butler argued that spies and prohibitive legislation destroyed freedom of expression, for by their actions 'the jaws of patriots are clinched-the pens of writers cramped-the press muzzled-the mind of man fettered-literary genius curtailed-and liberty scouted like a vagrant'.[267] An anonymous cartoon from November 1795 entitled *A lock'd jaw for John Bull* (see Figure 3.1) depicted Butler's summation of the state of affairs, with Pitt locking the jaw of the nation to prevent any further airing of grievances and political ideas in public.[268] The *Morning Post* reported that 'The Arts are almost put a stop to by the present system of Government prosecutions', for few artists 'will venture on an historical subject, lest it may be considered by some vile Spy as democratic'.[269] The writing and publication of even vaguely political pieces became an extremely hazardous business, with informers being ever ready to report any potentially seditious content to the authorities. In a poem, Peter Pindar described the actions of informers thus:

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[264] Christopher Wyvill, *The Address To the Worthy Freeholders of Yorkshire*, 1795, in Graham, *The Nation, The Law and The King*, Vol. 2, p. 933.

[265] John Thelwall, *The Moral Tendency of a System of Spies and Informers, and the Conduct to be Observed by the Friends of Liberty During the Continuance of such a System*, in John Thelwall, *Political Lectures. Volume the First–Part the first: containing the Lecture on Spies and Informers, and the First Lecture on Prosecutions for Political Opinion*, 4th Ed., London, Eaton and Smith, 1795, p. 6.

[266] Wagner, 'Domestic Invasions', p. 103.

[267] John Butler, *The Political Fugitive: Being a Brief Discussion into the Modern System of British Politics; and the Unparalleled Rigor of Political Persecution: Together With Several Miscellaneous Observations on the Abuses and Corruptions of the English Government*, New York, Thomas Greenleaf, 1794, p. 27.

[268] 'A lock'd jaw for John Bull', London, S. W. Fores, 1795, British Museum Image Collection.

[269] *MP*, 23 October 1794.

> Prerogative, ye Gods! will soon look fierce,
>
> Hunt with his hounds the shops for prints and verse
>
> And find the likenesses of *men on high*–
>
> Make of the booksellers and bards a hash–
>
> Smell *rank rebellion* in a *star* or *dash*,
>
> And bid the sneering culprit hang or fly.[270]

Prosecutions often followed for those so reported to the authorities.
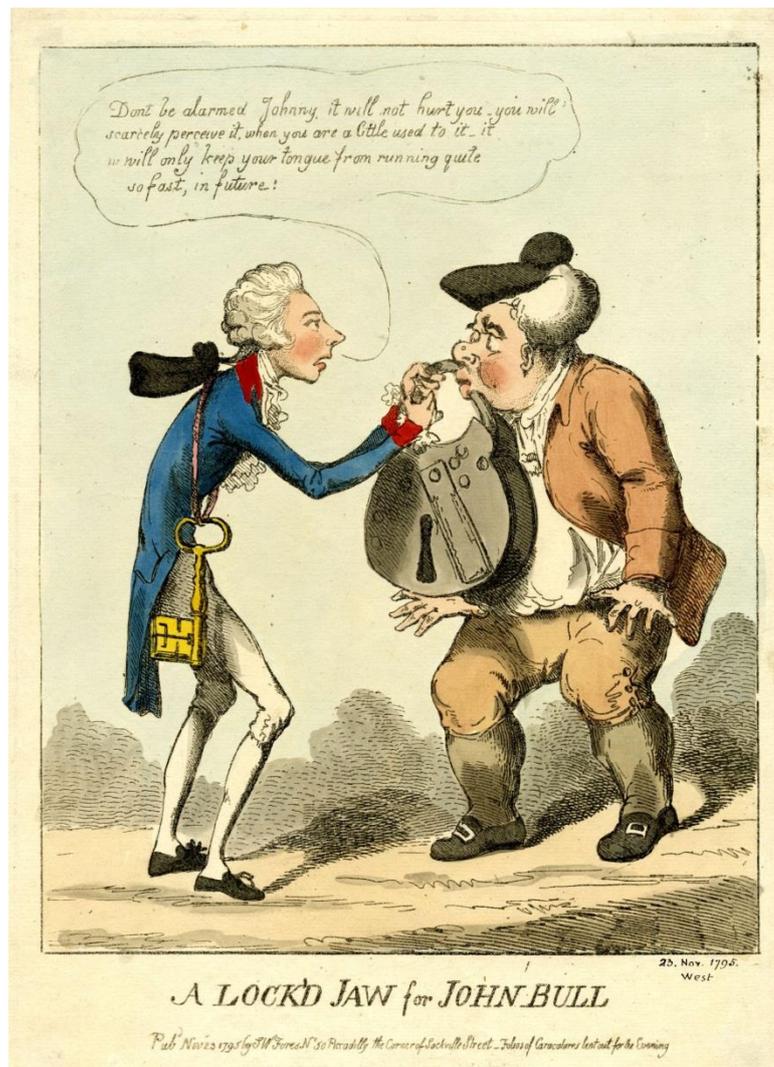
Figure 3.1 – *A lock'd jaw for John Bull*

The threat of spies and prosecution frightened most people out of any engagement with politics whatsoever. Securitization turned many political and social issues into black and

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[270] Peter Pindar (John Wolcot), *Ode To An Informer*, in Peter Pindar, *The Works of Peter Pindar, Esquire*, Vol. 3, London, Wood, Vernon, H. Walker and P. Bell, 1805, p. 563.

white matters of national security, with any dissent from loyalist opinion deemed seditious or detrimental to the interests of the state. Vicesimus Knox argued that as a result the people 'are terrified into a tame and silent acquiescence. They learn to consider politics as a dangerous subject, not to be touched without hazard of liberty or life'.[271] Joseph Towers lamented that it was now considered unsafe in 'England, once considered as a free country, to speak of kings or ministers of state, or to converse on any political subjects'.[272] Loyalist associations such as the Reeves Societies – the one seemingly legitimate outlet for political discussion and participation – were feared and castigated by radicals for their persecution and narrow-mindedness, described by Knox as a 'most dangerous conspiracy of sycophants against a free constitution', responsible for 'undermining the fair fabric of liberty' by their excessive encouragement of informers and efforts to suppress and prosecute all radical thought.[273] Towers argued that they greatly contributed to the stifling of political debate, by attempting 'to be judges of what was, and what was not, seditious conversation' and by preventing 'freedom of speech from being enjoyed in inns, in taverns, in coffee-houses, in ale-houses'.[274] Informers and the associations that encouraged and rewarded them were therefore a blight on the free-born Englishman, incompatible with his ability to exercise his supposedly inalienable rights and liberties.

Governance

Radical opinion differed regarding the reasoning and process behind the government's interpretation of the evidence garnered from its spies and informers. The *Morning Chronicle* was undecided, noting that two conclusions were possible:

> either that Ministers, having correct information, joined in the supposed conspiracy *to mislead the Public*; or that Ministers themselves were deceived, and that the employment of Spies is as little to be relied upon, as an engine of government, as their evidence ought to be in a Court of Justice.[275]

The *Morning Post* believed the latter scenario, arguing that

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[271] Vicesimus Knox, *The Spirit of Despotism*, Reprint, Trenton, Wilson & Blackwell, 1802, p. 98.
[272] Joseph Towers, *Thoughts on National Insanity*, London, J. Johnson, J. Debrett and J. Hamilton, 1797, p. 23.
[273] Knox, *The Spirit of Despotism*, pp. 137-138.
[274] Towers, *Thoughts on National Insanity*, p. 23.
[275] *MC*, 28 November 1794, emphasis in original.

If Government form their opinion of the People, as we apprehend they do, on the representation of Spies and Informers, it is no wonder that the character of the Nation is libelled; and that harsh measures are used by timid people, who dream of nothing but *Sans Culottes* and Hobgoblins.[276]

Sheridan agreed, averring that a minister who relied on informers for information 'must be eternally the dupe of those vile spies, whose interest it is to deceive him as well as to betray others'.[277]

Charles Pigott, however, was more directly critical of the government, favouring the first scenario and arguing that the spy was a mere 'underling of government, send to watch over the words and actions of innocent men', in order to falsely implicate them in seditious crimes, so as 'to satisfy the bloody vengeance of an infernal minister'.[278] Holcroft claimed that the reports of spies were construed in such a way as to 'fit the treasonable model [their] employers had provided', backed by Thelwall's assertion that 'when Ministers want high Treason and can get no respectable evidence of its existence, they must hang up their men upon such testimony as they can procure'.[279] One radical work quoted a passage from Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, in which Gulliver visited the kingdom of Tribnia, a land full of informers and accusers. It is noted that

> The plots of that kingdom are usually the workmanship of those persons who desire to raise their own characters of profound politicians; to restore new vigour to a crazy administration [and] to stifle or divert general discontents…It is first agreed, and settled among them, what suspected persons shall be accused of a plot; then effectual care is taken to secure all their letters and papers, and put the owners in chains.[280]

The analogies with this particular interpretation of the government's actions and the role played by its spies were obvious and striking.

On a less conspiratorial level, Robinson believed that one must look to and critique the law enforcement system itself and its operators, rather than simply blaming those who sought to profit by it, asserting that the 'law, or at least the administration of it, is bad,

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[276] *MP*, 28 December 1793.
[277] *PH* 31, col. 1069.
[278] Charles Pigott, *A Political Dictionary: Explaining the True Meaning of Words*, London, D. I. Eaton, 1795, p. 134.
[279] Holcroft, *A Narrative of Facts, Relating to a Prosecution for High Treason; Including the Address to the Jury, Which the Court refused to hear*, p. 60; John Thelwall, 'Lecture on the system of terror and persecution adopted by the present ministry', *The Tribune No. XII*, 1795, in Thelwall, *The Tribune, A Periodical Publication, Consisting Chiefly of the Political Lectures of J. Thelwall*, Vol. 1, p. 270.
[280] Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, Part III, in *The Manual of Liberty*, p. 167.

which cannot be laudably and honourably enforced by voluntary, and even mercenary informations'.[281] These radicals therefore believed that the government was wholly accountable for the actions of its spies, disparaged as the 'bloodhounds of administration'.[282] In sum, if the government was indeed misled, then securitization and repression were genuine responses based on a faulty understanding, still contemptible for their misguidedness and ignorance but more a result of fear and poor intelligence work than a deliberate attempt at unwarranted repression. However if the government was in fact working from a preconceived agendum and employing its spies accordingly, then its actions were a cynical and calculated ploy to obtain, create and twist the evidence necessary to justify a securitization already determined.

All radicals could at least agree that the picture the government presented to the public concerning radicalism and the societies was false or inaccurate on many counts. As Thelwall argued, those who rely on spies for their information cannot possibly have a correct understanding, as it is in the spy's 'interest to deceive, because their salaries depend upon keeping their employers in good humour'.[283] Cobb argues that

> an informer will often construct an elaborate "plot" where there is an open and probably harmless association, that he will make machiavellian conspirators of simple and angry men, and that he will scent daggers – or pretend to scent daggers – where there are kitchen knives and spoons. For the informer, nothing can be quite what it seems…[284]

Such conspiracy paranoia certainly rubbed off strongly on the government. Sheridan targeted Pitt directly, claiming that the minister 'had no communication with the people of England except through the medium of spies and informers'; therefore 'he is unacquainted with the mode in which their sentiments are expressed, and cannot make allowance for the language of toasts and resolutions adopted in an unguarded and convivial hour'.[285] Or as Daniel Isaac Eaton's *Politics for the People* more whimsically put it, 'Signor Gulielmo Pittachio…will produce his justly celebrated CURIOUS SPY

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[281] Henry Crabb Robinson, 'On the Essential and Accidental Characteristics of Informers', *The Cabinet: By a Society of Gentlemen*, Vol. 1, Norwich, 1795, pp. 281-86, in Corfield and Evans, eds., *Youth and Revolution in the 1790s*, p. 185.

[282] *Politics for the People: or, a Salmagundy for Swine*, Vol. 2, no. 29, London, D. I. Eaton, 1795, p. 458.

[283] Thelwall, *The Moral Tendency of a System of Spies and Informers, and the Conduct to be Observed by the Friends of Liberty During the Continuance of such a System*, p. 26.

[284] Cobb, *The Police and the People*, pp. 6-7.

[285] *PH* 31, col. 1068.

GLASSES, which distort and misrepresent all objects that are looked at through them'.[286] Pitt saw only what he wanted or was led to see.

Whatever the exact truth of the government's beliefs and actions, radicals were convinced that its use of such secretive and underhand methods betrayed its elitism, despotism, corruption, securitizing tendencies and lack of understanding of the real needs and grievances of the people. *Politics for the People* argued that 'Spies are the principal agents of a government weak, restless, and mutinous'.[287] The editor of the Irish spy Edward Newell's memoirs left no doubt as to his thoughts on the topic:

> A government conducted and supported by the agency of those heedless and miserable wretches called spies and informers, is not only contemptible to foreign powers, and detestable to those over whom it would rule; but by its very nature it undermines the obligations of religion, and the restraints of conscience. It seeks only its own safety, whilst it disregards the means by which that safety is secured.[288]

The *Morning Chronicle* quoted Baron Montesquieu's statement that 'the usual practice of good Princes' is not to employ spies, and later opined that spies had 'never been resorted to in former times as a State-engine but in the very worst of governments – that of the tyrant, the usurper, or the despot'.[289] Knox expressed similar sentiments, claiming that 'A ministry must be sadly corrupt…which can so far degrade itself as to require the assistance of the vilest of the human race', for the use of spies 'argues an endeavor to govern in a manner unauthorized by that constitution which the employers of spies and informers pretend to protect'.[290] The notorious character of informers inevitably tainted their employers. In criticising the matter in which the crown proceeded in the 1794 treason trials, young Thomas Amyot wrote that

> A more pitiful Set of Ragamuffins could not have been picked up in the Highways than that which government has brought forward as witnesses on these trials. To be sure a Spy is a Character despicable enough; no man of Conscience or Character would assume it.[291]

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[286] *Politics for the People*, Vol. 2, no. 25, p. 388.
[287] Ibid., Vol. 1, no. 10, p. 136.
[288] Edward Newell, *The Apostacy of Newell, Containing the Life and Confessions of that Celebrated Informer*, London, Self-Published, 1798, p. v.
[289] *MC*, 2 January 1795 & 23 January 1798.
[290] Knox, *The Spirit of Despotism*, pp. 132 & 136.
[291] Amyot to Pattisson, 9 December 1794, in Corfield and Evans, eds., *Youth and Revolution in the 1790s*, p. 104.

Any policies that relied on such tactics and lowlifes must surely be being pursued heedless of the true interests of the nation.

Radicals also rejected the government's arguments for the necessity of extraordinary measures such as increased surveillance and employment of spies in order to preserve peace and security. Knox argued that 'There are excellent laws, and there are magistrates and officers dispersed all over the kingdom, who are bound to take cognizance of any illegal and injurious practices, and to prevent them by a timely interference.' Anything further was not calculated to maintain security but was rather a sign of the government's contempt for the entirety of the common people:

> The employment of spies and informers is a virtual declaration of hostilities against the people. It argues a want of confidence in them. It argues a fear and jealousy of them. It argues a desire to destroy them by ambuscade.[292]

Charles Grey argued against policies that would turn respectable magistrates into informers. As a result 'A system of espionage was to take place by order of the crown. It was as surprising as it was odious, that such a proclamation should issue from the sovereign of a free people.'[293] The surgeon John Stuart Taylor suggested that history teaches that 'those nations are the most deficient in civil liberty, where the system of espionage has been most prevalent'.[294] A people living exposed to such surveillance and espionage can enjoy neither freedom nor security.

The debate over spies also formed part of the wider radical movement to increase the transparency of the mechanisms of government and state administration. Evans states that the radicals 'insisted that the exercise of power should be a transparent process, one that could be understood and monitored by citizens', thereby improving its accountability and liberality.[295] While private life was arguably to be respected, a man's public and state conduct must be open to scrutiny; and government reasoning, decision-making and policy should be public knowledge wherever possible. The *Morning Chronicle* quoted Montesquieu's observation that 'A Prince ought to act towards his subjects with candour, frankness and confidence.'[296] This was seen as being the honourable and benevolent way to govern a state. However the Pitt government's

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[292] Knox, *The Spirit of Despotism*, pp. 135-36 & 132.
[293] *PH* 29, col. 1483.
[294] John Stuart Taylor, 'Spies and Informers', *The Cabinet*, Vol. 1, p. 151.
[295] Evans, *Debating the Revolution*, pp. 67-68.
[296] *MC*, 2 January 1795.

willingness to employ spies, surveillance and secret services flew square in the face of these calls for greater transparency, and left it open to accusations that its actions were despotic, alarmist and couched in hypocritical secrecy and obfuscation. In September 1794 the *Morning Chronicle* argued that the government was acting as if the conviction of the former-informer Watt 'amounts to complete proof of *all* the extravagant tales with which the timid and the credulous were alarmed'. The paper also claimed that Windham stated 'some things are the more to be believed from the very circumstance that they cannot be proved'. It was thought that such convoluted nonsense stemmed from the paranoia within parliament and the executive that radicalism was inherently dangerous and conspiratorial. If this could not be proved then the radical societies simply *must* be hiding it, making it even more likely that they were actively plotting something. The *Chronicle* aptly called this 'ministerial logic'.[297]

Suspicion and alarm may serve where the law and evidence fails, and the perceived government policy to foster such commotion was attacked by radicals on the grounds that it was calculated to facilitate its unjust securitizing move, deceive the public and allow it to wage war against both internal and external targets on its own terms, violating the rights and liberties of the people and suppressing inconvenient truths with tales of conspiracies and dark tidings. *Politics for the People* alleged that the government had 'excited a sudden, but temporary commotion through the kingdom', caused 'for the infamous and scandalous intention of raising *alarms* in men's minds that the State was in imminent danger of being subverted', during which 'Ministers seized the opportunity as being favourable to their knavish and infernal plans' and struck forcefully against radicalism and France while the people were in a 'kind of stupor, which did not evaporate till it was too late'.[298] The *Morning Post* concurred, arguing that the alarm raised by spies and government created an 'apathy' amongst many of the public towards 'the most dangerous infractions on the Constitutional Rights of Britons'.[299] The pop-gun plot and the trials of Watt and Walker were all perceived by radicals as instances of created or exaggerated treason and alarm, while Richard

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[297] *MC*, 30 September 1794, my emphasis.
[298] *Politics for the People*, Vol. 2, no. 27, pp. 428-29, emphasis in original.
[299] *MP*, 17 October 1794.

Newton's cartoon *A Bugaboo!!!* of June 1792 (see Figure 3.2) listed spies and informers amongst other tools used by Pitt to alarm the nation and increase national security.[300]
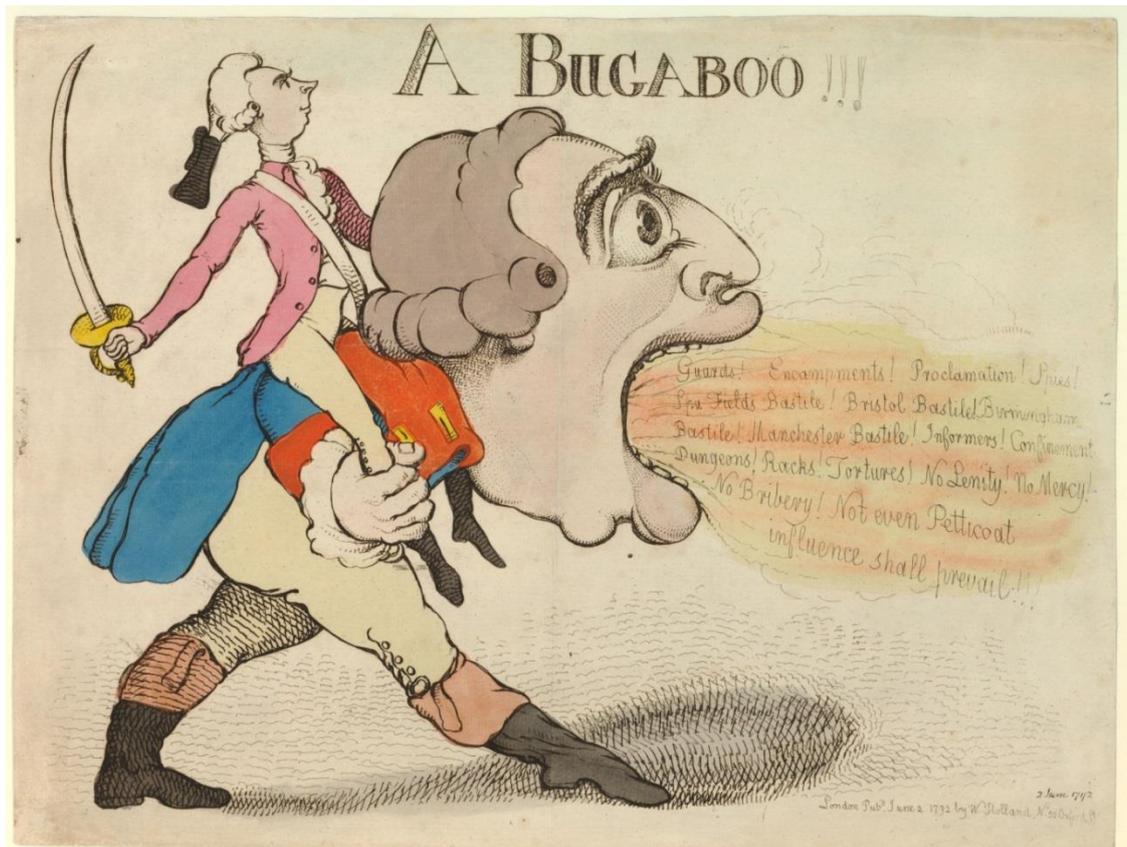
Figure 3.2 – *A Bugaboo!!!*

Such alarm could also be used to divide the public and turn it against those blamed for necessitating the alarm in the first place. Thelwall argued that

> the wretch…who hires perjured spies and tumultuous assassins to breed confusion…that he may charge that confusion upon those whom he has basely and insolently injured; such a man, by his detestable arts, and sneaking tricks, proves that he knows himself to be a juggler, and that his cause is as rotten as his heart is hollow.[301]

John Gale Jones posited that 'Ministers have been studiously endeavouring to disunite the people at home', while in the Commons George Tierney argued that 'I see that government are acting thus. Those whom they cannot prove to be guilty, they will

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[300] Richard Newton, 'A Bugaboo!!!', London, William Holland, 1792, British Museum Image Collection.
[301] John Thelwall, 'The Second Lecture on the Causes of the present Dearness and Scarcity of Provisions', *The Tribune No. XVII*, 1795, in Thelwall, *The Tribune, A Periodical Publication, Consisting Chiefly of the Political Lectures of J. Thelwall*, Vol. 2, p. 42.

punish for their suspicion. To support this system, we must have a swarm of spies and informers.'[302] Public opinion distorted in this manner was channelled into loyalist associations, church and king mobs, and of course spying and informing, for as Wagner states,

> a once docile or impartial public may be convinced to identify political threat where previously it had seen none. That same public may also be convinced that part of their civic duty was to eject that threat from their midst.[303]

As discussed in Chapter Two, threat awareness was heightened throughout Britain, occasioning a dramatic rise in investigations, reports, prosecutions and persecutions of suspected radical activity.

In radical eyes security services and spies therefore served as a means of repression and the advancement of an unjust and unmerited securitization; achieved by restricting freedom of speech, debate and opinion, creating alarm, and encouraging betrayal, suspicion, investigation and persecution of the affairs of others, and the giving of false testimony. These measures assisted the government in shaping public opinion, exaggerating threats to security, building successful prosecutions and justifying repressive actions and extraordinary measures against supposedly dangerous and criminally-minded radical societies and individuals. Securitization was not a legitimate response to a real threat but a means of cultivating public and parliamentary support for policies designed to maintain and benefit the current political and social order.

Morals, Values and Community

Morality, be it social, political or religious, never lay far from the consciousness of late eighteenth-century British society, even if it had not reached the all-encompassing importance of the era of Victorian values. Undoubtedly it formed an important part of the debate over surveillance and security. We have already seen how loyalists attempted to appropriate morality as a referent object threatened by radical activity. Yet just like the constitution, radicals countered that it was in fact the government's own actions that threatened and corrupted the morals of society, particularly through the employment and encouragement given to spies and informers. The profession of informer was one of the

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[302] John Gale Jones, *Sketch of a Speech Delivered at the Westminster Forum, on the 9th, 16th, 23rd, and 30th December 1794*, London, Self-Published, 1795, p. 38; *PH* 34, col. 991.
[303] Wagner, 'Domestic Invasions', p. 103.

most despised if begrudgingly tolerated in Georgian England, regardless of their area of operations. Many radicals were convinced that the incentives given by the government to such characters debased and corrupted both the individuals and the communities in which they operated, and they were not slow to make their outrage known, or to use them as a means of attacking government policies.

Informers were believed to be base and dishonest characters, devoid of integrity, betrayers of trust and confidence, pariahs of the community who put financial and personal gain before all notions of decency and fellow-feeling. Their rewards came only at the expense of others, often as a result of a willingness to lie about, deceive and betray their fellow citizens. A small sample of the numerous references to the poor character and morals of spies and informers will suffice to demonstrate the depth of the contempt in which they were held. In the radical press they were variously described as 'despicable characters…held in universal detestation'; an 'infamous race'; 'miscreants'; and 'villains'.[304] 'In the courts the spy was described by Dallas as a man 'fallen so low as to lose all scrupulous feeling'. Dallas noted that

> If it be in the pursuit of blood that he is employed, he will have so many vices to practise, that it is utterly incredible he should preserve the feeling to arrest him in any part of the career leading to murder, when that should become necessary to his views.[305]

Erskine castigated Groves as a 'dishonest man' and a 'miscreant', and brought up discreditable instances from Gosling's past.[306] Other spies also served as easy targets on account of notable defects in their character and evidence. Upton was described in *Politics for the People* as an 'incendiary, next a horse-stealer, then the contriver and bespeaker of an instrument for compassing the death of the King', a plot described by Francis Plowden as a 'malicious and artful fabrication'.[307] Watt fared even worse, with the *Morning Post* opining that the 'people looking on him as a Vile Spy of Government, did not issue as much as a sigh of Compassion at his Execution'.[308] Spies were not spared in parliament either. Charles James Fox stated that 'of such characters there were no words in the English language which could sufficiently mark his contempt and detestation', while Joseph Jekyll lamented the existence of a 'villainous horde of spies,

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[304] *MP*, 22 December 1794; *MC*, 27 July 1794; *MP*, 18 January 1793; *MP*, 13 December 1793.
[305] *ST* 27, col. 215.
[306] *ST* 24, cols. 1143 & 719-29.
[307] *Politics for the People*, Vol. 2, no. 18, p. 282; Francis Plowden, *A Short History of the British Empire During the Year 1794*, London, G. G. and J. Robinson, 1795, p. 254.
[308] *MP*, 22 October 1794.

informers, and perjured witnesses'.[309] Elsewhere, Coleridge called spies 'perjured conspirators against the lives and liberties of the people', matched by Daniel Stuart's description of them as men who 'have lost all sense of shame and honesty; who must have abandoned all hopes of ever being respectable in society'.[310]

As noted above, radicals also attacked the encouragement and incentives given to informers by the government and loyalist associations, arguing that this would tempt people into acts of dishonesty, perjury, voyeurism, greed, covetousness and betrayal, and teach them that vice could be worthy of reward by the state. Ousby states that 'Loyalty to the profession of spying involved disloyalty in the actual social relationships which form the basis of society.' There was an

> incompatibility between the spy's loyalty to his employer and to the social group of which he is a sworn and trusted member. The defence of national security in this case apparently involved an assault upon social ethics.[311]

At Hardy's trial, Erskine railed against the manner in which Lynam and his fellow spies betrayed the trust and friendship of their fellow LCS members, exploiting and damaging the social bonds that unite fellow citizens. Erskine argued that Lynam took his notes

> *bona fide* as a delegate, and yet *bona fide* as an informer;–what a happy combination of fidelity! faithful to serve, and faithful to betray!–correct to record for the business of the society, and correct to dissolve and to punish it![312]

These arguments were picked up by other radicals. An anonymous letter published in the *Morning Chronicle* argued that spies and informers 'corrupt the source of social intimacy and confidence, vitiate every noble and generous sentiment of the human heart, taint the purity of moral evidence, and promote the growth of perjury by royal bounties'[313], while Holcroft noted that spies and informers are a 'poison which envenoms the whole state of social existence, infuses itself to every heart, and there broods suspicion, hatred, perjury, and rancour only fit for fiends'.[314]

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[309] *PH* 32, cols. 374 & 511.
[310] Coleridge, *The Plot Discovered; or An Address to the People, Against Ministerial Treason*, p. 6; Daniel Stuart, *Peace and Reform, Against War and Corruption*, 4th Ed., London, J. Ridgway, 1795, p. 62.
[311] Ian Ousby, '"My servant Caleb": Godwin's *Caleb Williams* and the political trials of the 1790s', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 1 (1974), p. 50.
[312] *ST* 24, cols. 962-63.
[313] *MC*, 18 December 1794.
[314] Holcroft, *A Narrative of Facts, Relating to a Prosecution for High Treason; Including the Address to the Jury, Which the Court refused to hear*, p. 62.

Knox argued that the government was failing its moral responsibility to the people, noting that when ministers

> patronize such miscreants as spies and informers, they certainly corrupt the public morals, by leading the people, over whom their examples must always have great influence, to believe, that treachery, perjury, and murder are crimes of a venial nature…They teach one of the most corrupting maxims; for they teach, "That when ends eagerly desired by knaves in power are to be accomplished, the means must be pursued, however base and dishonest."[315]

Thelwall was not about to let the government or Reeves Societies plead ignorance over the vices of their tools either, arguing that

> We must look to the consequences of *measures*…and it was their duty, as the grand movers of the infernal engine thus set to work…to consider, before the experiment was adopted, what were the mischiefs to the morals and happiness of society, which were likely to be effected by its operations?

Thelwall posited that any reasoned man would have realised that such operations could only have resulted in an 'anarchy of morals', for 'if the *principles of morality* are once overthrown, nothing like political security can possibly be expected in any state'.[316] A few years later Robert Southey came to the same conclusion, arguing that 'Government do not seem to be aware, that when they offer premiums for treachery, they are corrupting the morals of the people, and thereby weakening their own security.'[317] The mechanisms that minister and loyalist used to securitize and repress radicalism would thus result in the very thing they were trying to avoid – a collapse in political and social security.

Radicals argued that the government's policies and measures were not only immoral but liable to tear at the very fabric that held communities and common decency together, sacrificing collective for national security. Communities grow and survive upon shared values, order, trust and support of one another, bound by ties of kin, friendship, loyalty and mutual understanding. The actions of informers are predominantly anathema to these fundamental aspects of community, setting an individual against their fellow

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[315] Knox, *The Spirit of Despotism*, p. 135.
[316] Thelwall, *The Moral Tendency of a System of Spies and Informers, and the Conduct to be Observed by the Friends of Liberty During the Continuance of such a System*, pp. 21-22, emphases in original.
[317] Robert Southey, *Letters from England*, London, The Cresset Press, 1951, p. 92.

citizens, creating conflict, and threatening to sever and corrupt existing ties and values.[318] For as Victor Navasky wrote many years later,

> the role of the informer [is] to pollute the public well, to poison social life in general, to destroy the very possibility of community; for the informer operates on the principle of betrayal and a community survives on the principle of trust.[319]

Yet in the 1790s the government appeared quite happy to utilise such potentially destructive measures in the fight against sedition and radicalism. This could have significant repercussions. Warner and Ivis argue that

> An intervention that rewards informers creates enormous stresses within the community that it targets, forcing each of its members to choose among three possible careers or alliances: solidarity with the larger community, collaboration with other informers, and membership in neither group…From one community three are created, and for the moment each is weaker than its parent.[320]

The presence of informers obliges community members to react and choose sides, turning communities and even families into divisive battlegrounds. In the 1790s it was argued that the support afforded to spies by government and loyalist groups had tipped the balance in the spies' favour. In the words of a letter-writer to the *Morning Chronicle*, the employment of government spies had 'armed one portion of the community to beat down the other'.[321]

Many radicals and careless individuals could certainly bear witness to the truth of this statement, despite warnings about the dangers inherent in the government's policies. As early as 1792 Fox argued that the increasing focus on surveillance and informing would 'set father against father, brother against brother, and neighbour against neighbour'. He was astonished that 'in this way you [the government] expect to maintain the peace and tranquillity of the country!'[322] Godwin believed that the prevalence of spies and informers turned the whole nation into 'two classes of hypocrites: hypocrites, who hold out a false appearance, the better to ensnare; and hypocrites, who hold out a false

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[318] Jessica Warner and Frank Ivis, 'Informers and Their Social Networks in Eighteenth-Century London: A Comparison of Two Communities', *Social Science History*, vol. 25, no. 4 (2001), pp. 563-64 & 580-82.
[319] Victor Navasky, *Naming Names*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1991, p. 347.
[320] Warner and Ivis, 'Informers and Their Social Networks in Eighteenth-Century London', p. 563.
[321] *MC*, 9 January 1795.
[322] *PH* 32, col. 21.

appearance, that they may not be ensnared'.[323] Finally Taylor concluded that 'Well and truly has it been observed, that for society to exist in peace, they must have one common connexion of interest, one universal tie of happiness.' Yet the informer is opposed to this interest, for they cannot contribute to 'honour and prosperity; nor can this reptile claim kindred with any part of the community…the virtuous citizen will regard him with detestation, the vicious citizen with fear'.[324]

Public and Private Spaces

The increase in spies and informers and government agents was believed to presage unwanted and harmful changes to the existing concepts of public and private space, and the intrusion of national and local government forces into what had previously been considered private space, protected and free from outside interference. The spy debate formed part of wider discussions in eighteenth-century England regarding the definition and status of public and private spheres, battles for control and position in the public sphere, and concerns over the increasing invasion of the private sphere by state, politics and media.

Government surveillance and intervention increasingly infringed upon and consumed the public sphere over the course of the 1790s. McCann argues that the Two Acts in particular 'attempted to effectively dismantle the infrastructures of the public sphere – freedom of speech, of the press and of association'.[325] Public spaces, from taverns to coffee-houses to market squares, became a primary target for informers. Radicals of all stripes voiced fears over the unwelcome intrusion of spies into these spaces, eavesdropping on and interfering in meetings, personal conversations, intimate moments shared with friends and relations and statements made in relaxed and convivial company. It was argued that frightened citizens would no longer dare to freely speak their minds for fear of being reported by informers, while the consumption of alcohol would pose another threat on account of its loosening of the tongue and faculties. Inns and coffee-houses would suffer from a constrained atmosphere and a possible loss of trade, while, as the lawyer Felix Vaughan observed, good citizens 'ought to look

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[323] Godwin, *Considerations on Lord Grenville and Mr. Pitt's Bills, Concerning Treasonable and Seditious Practices, and Unlawful Assemblies*, p. 51.
[324] Taylor, 'Spies and Informers', p. 150.
[325] McCann, *Cultural Politics in the 1790s*, p. 66.

around' and carefully monitor their speech even amongst friends or in their own home lest there be a 'spy, or an informer…within hearing'.[326] One radical pondered

> What liquor can flow to inspire hilarity, promote mental relaxation, expand the heart, and elevate the soul by friendly communications, in the presence of concealed spies, informers, and perjurers; every little society must disperse…and the publican be reduced to the dismal visitation of having *no customers*, but *gentlemen* billetted by the constable.

For alas 'Had not every advantage been taken of words spoken in a drunken frolic, by the testimony of hired spies and informers, and numbers prosecuted to infinite damage and ruin?'[327]

Indeed radical opinions had increasingly been viewed by many of the public and state authorities as outrageous, unwelcome and potentially criminal; liable to find the speaker hauled before a local magistrate on an often flimsy and/or twisted charge of sedition. Holcroft perceptively summed up the lamentable state of affairs:

> Every county assize and quarter sessions condemned some poor ignorant enthusiast to imprisonment, for follies at which infancy and idiotism scarcely could have taken fright; and men of respectable characters and honest intentions, in the fury of their new-born zeal, thought it a heroical act of duty to watch the conduct of their very intimates, excite them to utter what have been opprobriously called seditious and treasonable words, and afterwards to turn informers against the intemperance they had provoked.[328]

Knox complained that spies would pick up on some 'incautious comment' and ensure that it was 'carried to the agent of despotism, who, like the tiger, thirsting for human blood, lies watching for his prey in the covert of obscurity'.[329] Citizens were no longer deemed safe in public environments, and McCann concludes that for radicals

> the extent to which existing modes of pubic interaction and opinion formation were seen as complicit with popular violence, mass indoctrination and forms of government-sponsored repression encouraged a paranoid retreat from the public sphere and a corresponding

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[326] *ST* 22, col. 933.

[327] *Cursory Remarks on the Convention Bill Now Pending in Parliament*, London, J. Davenport, 1795, pp. 85-86 & 16.

[328] Holcroft, *A Narrative of Facts, Relating to a Prosecution for High Treason; Including the Address to the Jury, Which the Court refused to hear*, pp. 8-9.

[329] Knox, *The Spirit of Despotism*, p. 54.

valorization of private space as the site of uncoerced communality and the ideal speech community.[330]

However they were to find little more comfort in the private realm than they had experienced in the public.

McCann notes that in the eighteenth century, 'the private was transformed into a sentimentalized tableau that stabilized a specific mythology of rational, harmonious communal existence'.[331] This understanding of a protected and wholesome private space where citizens could speak and mingle free from public intrusion shaped the radical understanding and critique of the state's alleged infringement upon this sanctified realm. Radicals argued that private life would be compromised and infringed upon as a result of the new emphasis on surveillance, destroying the customs and conventions that traditionally protected a citizen's private affairs from unsolicited observation, and instead encouraging and sanctioning the intrusion of outsiders and the betrayal of confidences. The threat posed directly by the potential presence of spies and informers was not the only cause of concern. The perceived rise of a culture and atmosphere geared towards watchfulness, suspicion and spying, demonstrated by the wealth of stories and articles abounding from the period regarding spy scares, suspicious behaviour and the activities of informers, was also criticised as being an inevitable and undesirable result of the government's policies.[332] While Thelwall believed that 'The police is organized into a complete system Espionage, and spies and informers are marshalled and stationed in every district', government and loyalist agents were not the only threat. It was now also the case that 'in every class and situation of society are to be found daring banditti who act…upon the maxim promulgated from the treasury bench', eager to pry into the private affairs of fellow citizens.[333]

Burke, again quoted by Erskine, had argued that in such conditions

> The seeds of destruction are sown in civil intercourse and in social habitudes. The blood of
> wholesome kindred is infected. The tables and beds are surrounded with snares. All the means

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[330] McCann, *Cultural Politics in the 1790s*, p. 61.
[331] Ibid., p. 62.
[332] This can also be seen in several works of fiction from the 1790s, including William Godwin's *Things as They Are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams*, Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, and the works of Charlotte Smith, such as *Desmond*, *The Old Manor House*, *The Banished Man*, *Marchmont* and *The Young Philosopher*.
[333] John Thelwall, *An Appeal to Popular Opinion, Against Kidnapping & Murder; Including a Narrative of the Late Atrocious Proceedings, at Yarmouth*, London, J. S. Jordan, 1796, p. 5.

given by Providence to make life safe and comfortable, are perverted into instruments of terror and torment.[334]

Erskine himself spoke of 'the misery and disgrace of society' when it existed 'under the lash of informers, running before the law, and hunting men through the privacies of domestic life'.[335] Thelwall argued that it was the role of the authorities to maintain the tranquillity and security of private life, for 'the magistrate should protect every man in the enjoyment of his lawful privileges'. Yet instead the state now chose to order, permit and reward violations and intrusions upon the private, so that 'our persons have no security'.[336] The orator lamented that 'even our own houses and our own tables furnish no longer a sanctuary and an altar where it is safe to offer the free incense of friendly conversation…In short, every key hole is an informer'.[337] As Barrell explains, the loyalist associations were believed to be the chief instruments of these breaches of domestic quiet, for 'they constituted a usurpation of the powers of government, undertaken with the government's full consent, even connivance'.[338] Pigott bewailed that

> there now exists an association…formed for the express purpose of encouraging and rewarding these *miscreants* [informers],…who annoy us in every quarter, who usurp a controul over our very amusements and conversations, however innocent or rational they may be, who debauch the fidelity of our servants, and prying into the inmost secrets and actions of families and of individuals, striking at every thing most dear in society, at the expense of honesty, good faith, hospitality, and domestic quiet, are only anxious…to display their venal and malignant zeal…[339]

As Pigott noted, servants were now likewise perceived as the potential tools of state surveillance and repression, with Fox fearing that 'The servant who stood behind his chair, if wicked enough, might betray him, and, seduced by those in power, might give information which would endanger both his liberty and his life.'[340]

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[334] *ST* 24, col. 959.
[335] *ST* 22, col. 502.
[336] Thelwall, *An Appeal to Popular Opinion, Against Kidnapping & Murder; Including a Narrative of the Late Atrocious Proceedings, at Yarmouth*, pp. 38 & 40.
[337] Thelwall, *The Moral Tendency of a System of Spies and Informers, and the Conduct to be Observed by the Friends of Liberty During the Continuance of such a System*, p. 6.
[338] Barrell, *The Spirit of Despotism*, p. 99.
[339] Pigott, *Persecution. The Case of Charles Pigott*, p. 10.
[340] *PH* 32, col. 517.

In their invasion of privacy, a particularly important issue was the perceived threat spies posed to mutual trust and expectations of confidentiality and intimacy between friends, family and colleagues. Regarding our period, Habermas has argued that

> In the intimate sphere of the conjugal family privatized individuals viewed themselves as independent even from the private sphere of their economic activity – as persons capable of entering into "purely human" relations with one another.[341]

The apparent infringement of this convention was raised repeatedly by radical orators and writers, for the ability to trust and talk candidly with their fellows was paramount to their plans to achieve political reform. Richard Lee asked:

> shall Englishmen, grown jealous of each other, dread to express their sense of wrongs, even to their closest intimates, from an apprehension that…their friend they may find a spy, set to watch over them for the worst of purposes?

Such a society was worse than 'savage nature', a scene of 'prostituted humanity'.[342] John Cartwright also queried 'must Englishmen now, instead of the blessing of social and manly intercourse, have the curse of spies and betrayers, and false accusers?'[343] One radical writer argued that due to the increase in anonymous accusations and reports, 'the pleasing confidence of friendship and the domestic enjoyments of life, were poisoned by the introduction of a general system of suspicion and distrust'.[344] Such confidence was vital to the continuance of frank and intellectual discussion and the preservation of trust and security in relationships, yet it appeared that the government and its loyalist allies cared little about such issues and their culpability in perpetuating them.

One notable bone of contention regarding space was the coffee-house. These were believed to be places where people of all ranks could discuss a wide variety of issues, including politics, for it was assumed that, as Barrell notes, 'the participants in coffee-house conversation agreed that the space of conversation was a private space'.[345]

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[341] Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p. 48.

[342] Richard Lee, *Bill of Rights, the Birth-Right of Englishmen: A Short Account of That Statute, With Observations Thereon; Recommended to the Consideration of the People of England, at the Alarming Period of 1795*, London, Tree of Liberty, 1795, p. 5.

[343] John Cartwright, *The Commonwealth in Danger; with an Introduction*, London, J. Johnson, 1795, p. clv.

[344] *Considerations on the French War, in which the Circumstances Leading to it, its Object, and the Resources of Britain For Carrying it on, are examined, in a Letter, to the Rt. Honble. William Pitt*, London, D. I. Eaton, 1794, p. 16.

[345] Barrell, *The Spirit of Despotism*, p. 80.

Therefore, even though the house was open to all and thus a public space, the conversations held within were, as Habermas states, 'Included in the private realm', for 'it was a public sphere constituted by private people'.[346] Yet, as Barrell argues, the alarm about sedition in the early 1790s meant that now for many 'the duty to divulge what was spoken in coffee houses must have seemed greater than the duty to respect the private terms of conversation'.[347] At John Frost's 1793 trial for speaking seditious words in a coffee-house, Erskine argued that coffee-house conversation remained a private space, and therefore the words spoken as mere opinions or thoughts must not be reported as 'the objects of criminal justice, because the happiness and security of social life, which are the very end and object of all law and justice, forbid the communication of them'. Informers had no right to eavesdrop on, intervene in and report such conversations, as this constituted a breach of manners, decency and convention. Only 'criminal intention', and not 'indecent levities' or even 'grave opinions unconnected with conduct, are to be exposed to the magistrate'; only then does 'the public duty call for the violation of the private'.[348] Scott, acting for the crown, vehemently disagreed. While he concurred with Erskine that private confidences should be respected, he argued that a coffee-house is definitively a public space in its entirety, and therefore Frost was 'not entitled to the protection that belongs to the confidences of private life'.[349] Under this interpretation, the informer was simply doing their duty in reporting a seditious and unlawful intention made manifest in a public space. Areas of privacy within a public space simply did not exist. The jury appears to have agreed with Scott, and coffee-houses and taverns remained the active hunting grounds of informers throughout the 1790s.[350]

In the bigger picture what radicals were fighting against was a politicising and securitizing of areas previously held to be private and beyond the limits of state and public intrusion. As Barrell argues, the loyalist and government intrusion into the private affairs of radicals, ostensibly for reasons of security and order, combined with the inevitable radical response, moved the reform debate into 'Activities and spaces which had previously been thought to be private, in the sense not just that they were

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[346] Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p. 30.
[347] Barrell, *The Spirit of Despotism*, p. 82.
[348] *ST* 22, col. 502.
[349] Ibid., col. 511.
[350] Barrell, *The Spirit of Despotism*, pp. 75-102.

"outside" politics, but were, by general agreement, positively insulated from it'.[351] Radicals believed that the corruption inherent in the public sphere and eighteenth-century politics must be prevented as much as possible from entering into and damaging private affairs. However the government's actions in increasing surveillance and investigation did just the opposite, for, as Knox argued, they 'teach men to carry the profligacy of public characters and conduct into the sequestered walks of private life…They destroy at once the confidential comforts and the most valuable virtues of private life'.[352] Such actions replaced honesty with deception, trust with suspicion, and neighbourly concern with fretful surveillance.[353]

Traditions

Part of the radical case against the government's use of spies, informers and increased police forces was the quintessentially British argument that the encouragement and use of such personnel was foreign to the national character, and to traditional means of law enforcement, state intervention and the preservation of order. In the 1790s the creation of a large fully-professional police force was still over three decades away, and outside of London local magistrates could rely only on a few unpaid constables. Even the police forces in London as described in Chapter Two were small and thus limited in their ability to patrol such a large city. Nonetheless these forces and the increased use of constables in the provinces drew the ire of the radicals, who viewed their presence as an unwarranted and potentially corrupt intrusion on civil liberties.[354] Thelwall argued that the police were a French appropriation, created 'under pretence of keeping the peace, but in reality, I believe, for the express purpose of organizing the system of spies and informers'.[355]

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[351] Ibid., p. 4.

[352] Knox, *The Spirit of Despotism*, p. 135.

[353] Barrell, *The Spirit of Despotism*, pp. 1-13; Harriet Guest, 'Suspicious Minds: Spies and Surveillance in Charlotte Smith's Novels of the 1790s', in Peter de Bolla, Nigel Leask and David Simpson, eds., *Land, Nation and Culture, 1740-1840: Thinking the Republic of Taste*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, pp. 169-73 & 185; Wagner, 'Domestic Invasions', pp. 95-106.

[354] See Clive Emsley, *The English Police: A Political and Social History*, 2nd Ed., London, Longman, 1996, pp. 8-64; John Tobias, *Crime and Police in England, 1700-1900*, Dublin, Gill and Macmillan, 1979, pp. 25-56 & 74-116.

[355] John Thelwall, 'Report on the State of Popular Opinion, and the Causes of the rapid Diffusion of Democratic Principles. Part the Third', *The Tribune No. XXVI*, 1795, in Thelwall, *The Tribune, A Periodical Publication, Consisting Chiefly of the Political Lectures of J. Thelwall*, Vol. 2, p. 249.

The history of informers in England is more problematic. Their use as a means of law enforcement has been enshrined in statutes since at least the fourteenth century, and their existence in society and use in enforcing a wide range of laws have until recently been fluctuating but ever-present features of English life throughout the centuries. Informers have never been popular, and the occupation was widely viewed as being fit only for those devoid of integrity, status and good character. This was particularly true when informers targeted laws or regulations that found little favour with the people, such as the notorious Gin Acts of the 1730s. Communities, industries and criminal networks frequently closed ranks against informers, defying all attempts to penetrate them and ostracising, assaulting or even murdering those who dared to try. Warner and Ivis describe instances in 1730s London in which 'informers were dragged along the streets or were forced to march in a procession', and one in which an informer was 'set upon an Ass…whilst others beat and pelted him, leading him up and down Bond-street'.[356] In 1771 the informer Daniel Clark was murdered by Spitalfields weavers. One of the offenders claimed that Clark had been 'thirsting after their Blood not thro' any motive of Justice but mearly for Reward'. The crime was thus justified and it was claimed that

> We are now satisfied having put an End to the existence of that Monster in human Shape, the fear of whom kept several families in a starving Condition by keeping them from their principal Support thro the Apprehension of being Informed against.[357]

Despite these failings, generally even amongst radicals it was believed that informers were sometimes necessary to enforce the law, especially when directed against violent criminals. Colquhoun, despite his admission that 'many dissolute characters have taken up this trade, seldom with a view to benefit the public', nonetheless maintained that common informers were 'indispensably necessary to the execution of the laws'.[358] While often unpopular, the role of "thief-taker" was carried out successfully in a semi-

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[356] Jessica Warner and Frank Ivis, '"Damn You, You Informing Bitch." *Vox Populi* and the Unmaking of the Gin Act of 1736', *Journal of Social History*, vol. 33, no. 2 (1999), p. 310; *The London Daily Post, and General Advertiser*, 5 August 1738, quoted in Warner and Ivis, '"Damn You, You Informing Bitch."', p. 310.

[357] *London Gazette*, 11136 and 11138, April 1771, quoted in E. P. Thompson, 'The Crime of Anonymity', in Douglas Hay, ed., *Albion's Fatal Tree*, p. 271.

[358] Patrick Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Functions and Duties of a Constable*, London, W. Bulmer & Co., 1803, p. 57, quoted in Radzinowicz, *A History of English Criminal Law and its Administration from 1750*, Vol. 2, p. 153.

professional capacity by some enterprising individuals, and common informers remained an ongoing feature of English society.[359] It was the political informer and the *politicising* of informers that were the main targets of radical wrath. The distinction between government or loyalist spies and common informers allowed the radicals to describe the former as distinctly "un-English", despite their prevalence during previous episodes of unrest such as the Jacobite rebellions.[360] The political informer was viewed as an even more unwelcome and illiberal innovation than their common colleague, a product of securitization prone to bias, unscrupulous behaviour, increased intrusiveness and a penchant for swearing whatever magistrates or ministers wanted them to. For as Fox noted such spies were often 'blind dupes of the folly, or unconscious instruments of the wicked policy of ministers'.[361] Fox was willing to concede that there were some 'useful and meritorious spies', while one letter-writer proposed that they could be employed in a manner that fostered 'an interest in the truth and exactness of the information they give'.[362] Robinson speculated that in a country

> where *law* is the actual manifestation of the general *will*, and where the executive power is but the instrument to fulfil and to accomplish it;- there the profession of a public informer would be honourable and useful…

Yet he recoiled with 'utmost abhorrence' from 'the man who gains a vile subsistence by catching at the indiscreet but zealous and well-meant effusions of a *reforming* fellow-citizen; by torturing every hasty expression into sedition or treason'.[363] Informers had no business reporting and censoring the opinions and political activities of others. For liberals like Fox and Robinson, the issue lay not with the basic role of the informer, but rather the manner in which they were used and encouraged by the current government,

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[359] Hay, 'Poaching and the Game Laws on Cannock Chase', pp. 198-200; McLynn, *Crime and Punishment in Eighteenth-century England*, pp. 21-31; Porter, *Plots and Paranoia*, pp. 35-40; Radzinowicz, *A History of English Criminal Law and its Administration from 1750*, Vol. 2, pp. 138-61; John Styles, '"Our traitorous money makers": the Yorkshire coiners and the law, 1760-83', in John Brewer and John Styles, eds., *An Ungovernable People: The English and their law in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries*, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1983, pp. 215-21; E. P. Thompson, 'The Crime of Anonymity', pp. 270-71; Warner and Ivis, '"Damn You, You Informing Bitch."', pp. 299-321; Warner and Ivis, 'Informers and Their Social Networks in Eighteenth-Century London', pp. 563-82; Winslow, 'Sussex Smugglers', pp. 136-46.

[360] For the use of spies and informers during the Jocobite era, see Hugh Douglas, *Jacobite Spy Wars: Moles, Rogues and Treachery*, Thrupp, Sutton Publishing, 1999; Paul S. Fritz, 'The Anti-Jacobite Intelligence System of the English Ministers, 1715-1745', *The Historical Journal*, vol. 16, no. 2 (1973), pp. 265-89.

[361] *PH* 32, col. 375.

[362] *PH* 32, col. 374; *MC*, 14 November 1794.

[363] Robinson, 'On the Essential and Accidental Characteristics of Informers', p. 184, emphases in original.

increasing their threat to liberty, security and justice. They therefore believed that a change in the latter would improve the respectability and utility of the former, removing the informer from the political and securitized realms, reducing the incentive to exaggerate and deceive, and making the task more attractive to a better class of citizens.[364]

In radical minds the correct role of state surveillance and law enforcement was to protect society from legitimate criminal threats to life, security and property, operating primarily in a reactive rather than proactive capacity. While some central state involvement was conceded as necessary, radicals believed that competent local magistrates, assisted by a minimal number of agents and constables, should retain their long-standing role as the primary means of enforcing law and order. Centralised nation-wide surveillance and law enforcement institutions were rejected, as were any increase in or reshaping of the use of spies and informers, and had radicals been aware of the secret service system of the late 1790s they would almost certainly have condemned it as a draconian, unnecessary and un-British affront to rights, liberty and privacy, incompatible with the limited liberal state they championed. It was not that national security was unimportant, but rather that the securitization of radicalism was regarded as a false or phony pretext for an unfounded and self-aggrandising increase in the size, structures and scope of the security forces at the state's disposal.

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[364] Ibid., pp. 184-86.

Chapter Four - Conclusions

'(T)his society have beheld with rising indignation, proportioned to the enormity of the evil, the late rapid advances of despotism in Britain; the invasion of public security; the contempt of popular opinion; and the violation of all those provisions of the constitution intended to protect the people against the encroachments of power and prerogative.'[365]
– The London Corresponding Society, 11 April 1794

Radical attempts to counteract their securitization and repression at the hands of government and loyalist forces were ultimately unsuccessful, both in the individual battlegrounds such as the security services explored above, and in the overall struggle to maintain radicalism as an active political agent and achieve long-desired political, social and economic reform. In our concluding chapter, I will attempt to answer four questions: Why did the Pitt government's securitizing move against radicalism succeed? How effective is the securitization framework as a means of analysing historical domestic security issues? What was the impact of the government's security measures upon British society and the security services? What lessons can be learnt from the radical response to their securitization? In addressing these questions, it is hoped that we may increase our understanding of the factors that effect and facilitate securitization, and the impact that a resultant engagement and reconfiguration of the state's security apparatus can have upon the target existential threat and the society in which the security threat/response dynamic is carried out. We will also consider the effectiveness and limitations of the government's developing security services, and finally ponder some final thoughts on the nature and study of security and its place in the history of the 1790s.

Threat Identification

What conditions, factors, knowledge and actions are necessary or favourable in allowing an actor (generally the government) to make a successful securitizing move against a domestic political threat? Firstly, the actor must be able to construct a

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[365] *PH* 31, col. 491.

plausible narrative identifying, describing and interpreting the threat and the actions, beliefs, intentions and resources of the referent subject in a manner that affirms the existential nature of the threat and the need for emergency measures to counter it. As seen in our case, conspiracy theory, as a powerful and persuasive denouncing, (de)legitimising and explaining agent, is one highly useful way of achieving this, as is a systematic attack on the ideology and principles of the target so as to identify its very existence as inherently and/or deliberately calculated to threaten the referent object. There are other means that may be equally serviceable in constructing a narrative, such as an alleged intention to initiate civil war or collude with foreign enemies, but the methods utilised by Pitt's government were particularly well-suited to the terrain, context and nature of the radical threat. As discussed in Chapter One, the radical conspiracy theory served a number of purposes and facilitated a range of tactics aimed at turning radicalism into an insidious existential threat in the public mind. Like the government's alarmism about invasion, disorder and French subversion, the propagation of a conspiracy theory effectively tapped into a popular mindset, in this case one highly receptive to notions of secrecy, guiding forces, hidden agendas and definitive expositions.

However while conspiracy theories and fears of hidden forces are powerful securitizing agents in their own right, they have a far greater impact on the audience if they are attached to particular persons. This is the second point − that a threat should ideally be attributable to particular persons or at least a particular group or organisation. While the identified persons may not be considered as the ultimate leaders of a plot or conspiracy, they nonetheless serve as a useful reference point and object of denigration for the relevant audience. They also demonstrate the actor's ability to counter the threat, while if necessary allowing a simultaneous belief in continuing conspiratorial powers behind the scenes. As Cubitt argues,

> Conspiracist discourse…oscillates between a preoccupation with exposure of individual guilt…and the interpretive mapping of sinister patterns in history and current affairs, in which emphasis is placed on the deceptiveness of surface appearances and the binary character of a reality shaped by the confrontations of good and evil…[366]

Identifying and combating the "face" of a threat allows an actor to pose as a proactive champion against the forces of evil and destruction. It therefore follows that those so

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[366] Cubitt, 'Conspiracism, Secrecy and Security in Restoration France', p. 111.

identified are generally chosen on the basis of their accessibility, tangibility, status, poor reputation and character, and the ability of the securitising actor to prove, remove and punish their involvement in threatening activity. In the early 1790s the London-based LCS and SCI were singled-out by the government as the leaders of the treasonous radical conspiracy, supported by a myriad of societies in other areas, while later in the decade the various United groups were identified as responsible for a clandestine plot. In the case of the former, their size, organisation, notoriety, status, guiding principles, composition and novelty made them ideal targets as an identifiable front for the radical threat, while the latter were presented as the domestic arm of an international conspiracy, and a vindication of earlier warnings. Individual leaders were also effective as representatives of the threat, especially well-known figures like Thomas Paine, Horne Tooke, Thelwall and O'Connor, although more obscure individuals like Hardy and Coigly were also serviceable if solid evidence of their guilt could be brought against them.

Thirdly, it is extremely useful if the target threat can be linked to support for and/or from a disliked or hostile foreign actor. Alleged connections with a major power such as the Soviet Union or an international terrorist organisation have ably filled this role in recent times. In our case, government and loyalist attempts to allege radical collusion with French republicans bore much fruit in convincing the public of the subversive and destructive nature of radicalism. The descent of the French Revolution into terror, violence and chaos, coupled with the declaration of war between Britain and France in February 1793, were significant blows to the radical cause, and key components of the government's securitizing strategy against it. Without these events, it is unlikely that the government could have succeeded in presenting radicalism as an *existential* threat requiring an emergency response, nor in maintaining the securitization and repression of radicalism for so many years. Public and parliamentary resistance to increased executive power and intrusiveness would presumably have been stronger in the absence of paranoia about invasion and subversion and patriotism inflamed by traditional Francophobia and desire to defeat the enemy. Instead, many liberals and radicals were trapped between their belief in reform and the need for national defence. The reformer Benjamin Flower summed this up in May 1798 when he wrote that 'It is very difficult to say how an honest man, who wishes well to his Country, and who abhors despotism

in all its forms, ought to act.'[367] Later links with Ireland were also highly effective in this regard. The government gained considerable and conclusive mileage in securitizing radicalism through the United debacle and the retrospective historicising it facilitated. Fifth-column paranoia has been a common feature of many securitizing moves against domestic threats, often successful because it magnifies the subject's potential resources and scope for action and plays on popular prejudices, divisions and fears, particularly when used in conjunction with conspiracy theories. Indeed such concerns and insecurities are vital components of an environment conducive to successful securitization. As we have observed, the Pitt government cleverly utilised anti-French, anti-Irish and loyalist sentiment, widespread conservatism, divisions of class and ideology and fears concerning war, disorder and revolutionary upheaval to isolate radicalism and create alarm and prejudice against its actions, principles and ongoing existence.

An actor also needs to be able to identify a suitable referent object. Unless it has recourse to excessive force or can claim an overwhelming right to rule, a government that is unable to sufficiently disassociate its own interests from those of a suitable independent object is unlikely to achieve its desired securitization, for it will almost inevitably be conceived as a political, factional or party act rather than one in the national interest. The chosen object must be deemed worthy of special protection, which in a domestic context generally implies an ideal or institution perceived as necessary for the ongoing survival of the state. Buzan notes that in any strong state, its

> ideas and institutions are inseparably intertwined. The idea of democracy or communism is useless without the institutions to put it into operation, just as the institutions would be pointless, and maybe even impossible, without the idea to give them definition and purpose. This interdependence means that institutions and organizing ideologies tend to stand or fall together in the context of any particular state…[368]

In our study, the government wisely used the ideas embodied in the constitution – parliamentary sovereignty, limited monarchy and liberalism – and intertwined them with the physical institutions of king, parliament and the magistracy as referent objects threatened by radicalism. The liberal constitutional idea of the state was welded to specific institutions, such that the one could not survive without the other. An attack on

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[367] *Cambridge Intelligencer*, 28 April 1798, quoted in Graham, *The Nation, The Law and The King*, Vol. 2, p. 855.
[368] Buzan, *People, States & Fear*, p. 86.

either represented an attack on the whole, and therefore posed a threat to the very foundations of the state. This was crucial in taking the radical threat beyond the realm of the merely political and turning it into a matter of national security, interpreting it as an attack not on the interests of the ruling elite but rather on those of the British nation-state and its people.

Fifthly, the availability of independent civil support will greatly assist a government actor. Such support, be it loyalist, patriotic, nationalist, ideological or self-interested, allows the actor to claim substantial backing for their cause, and provides a means of presenting additional arguments in its favour and placing pressure on people believed to be associated with or supportive of the threatening party. Without it, the actor must almost single-handedly convince the whole of its audience from scratch, a decidedly more difficult task that also probably robs it of the chance to play on societal divisions and tensions. In 1790s Britain, loyalist and government-paid writers, papers and associations played a vital and active role in supporting, reinforcing and at times leading the securitization and repression of radicalism. Loyalism was not merely an instrument of the government, for as Mori states it 'was an empowering movement that gave its followers a public presence and political voice with which to criticize the polity they sought to defend'.[369] Nonetheless, in matters of security loyalists were powerful if occasionally troublesome allies who allowed the government to claim widespread public support for its policies and provided it with what Rea has described as 'a popular organisation which could pursue the aims of the Ministry without bearing the burden of responsibility which was constitutionally attached to formal organs of administration'.[370] As early as 1792 Pitt argued that the foundation of the loyalist associations would create 'the Impression and Effect of Numbers on our side', while Loughborough stated that they were 'highly meritorious, as tending to strengthen the hands of Government, and by keeping men upon their guard to prevent the insidious designs of their enemies'.[371] While the securitization of radicalism was predominantly a top-down affair, without the loyalist groundswell of active civil support it is unlikely that the government's moves would have been successful.

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[369] Mori, 'Languages of Loyalism', p. 33.
[370] R. R. Rea, '"The Liberty of the Press" as an Issue in English Politics, 1792-1793', *The Historian*, vol. 24 (1961), p. 29, quoted in Graham, *The Nation, The Law and The King*, Vol. 2, p. 880.
[371] Pitt to Dundas, 25 November 1792, Clements Library, Pitt Papers, quoted in Graham, *The Nation, The Law and The King*, Vol. 2, p. 880; Loughborough, 'Substance of the Speech of the Right Honourable Lord Loughborough in the House of Lords, on the third reading of the Bill for establishing certain Regulations respecting Aliens, December 26, 1792', p. 14.

This brings us to the next point – communication and technologies of imagination. An obviously vital component of any securitizing move is the ability to communicate with and persuade the relevant audience – in the domestic context generally politicians, officials and the common people, and occasionally particular business, class and group interests – of the existence of an existential threat. After all, as Buzan et al. point out, 'Successful securitization is not decided by the securitizer but by the audience of the security speech act: Does the audience accept that something is an existential threat to a shared value?'[372] Even in the modern era of mass communication and media this is not a simple task, as the actor must engage with the audience in a manner both engaging and persuasive. In our case, the government appealed primarily to parliament and the bourgeois public sphere as defined by Habermas – that 'sphere of private people come together as a public' for the purposes of 'ration-critical public debate' and the forming of public opinion – but also made efforts to persuade the lower classes by means of cheap pamphlets, newspapers and sermons.[373] It cultivated the public and parliamentary imagination both in the mediums and methods it used to communicate its arguments, emphasising the scale, novelty, subversiveness, foreignness and immediacy of the radical threat. Graham argues that 'in the counter-offensive launched by the government in the winter of 1792-93, the role of propaganda was a crucial factor in rallying loyalist opinion' and 'establishing their influence'.[374] Mori likewise states that 'Unofficial routes through which public compliance with official initiatives could be sought were of great use to the governors of a decentralized state', and indeed the government's own efforts were strongly backed by subsidised and loyalist initiatives.[375] Together they ensured that the securitizing message was clearly articulated and widely disseminated.

Finally the securitizing actor must claim and demonstrate an ability to combat and defeat the existential threat. Failure to do so will result in a loss of confidence in the actor and their arguments, and a rise in fear, tension and alarm potentially leading to violence, disorder, economic slump and a lack of respect for authority. On the other hand, success will contribute to approval of the securitizing move and recognition of the need to support the actor in its struggle to overcome the threat. As Evans states, Pitt's government argued that 'The defence of good order required that conspiracy be

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[372] Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, *Security*, p. 31.
[373] Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, pp. 27-28.
[374] Graham, *The Nation, the Law and the King*, Vol. 2, p. 878.
[375] Mori, 'Languages of Loyalism', p. 34.

unmasked' and claimed that if granted the necessary extraordinary powers and support, it could indeed do so and stem the tide of radical plots and principles.[376] It then backed up this claim with a succession of actions demonstrating its commitment and ability to fight the radical menace with the forces placed at its disposal. This willingness to act reinforced the government's proactivity, the gravity of the threat, and the feeling of involvement experienced by politicians and public alike.

In conclusion the government's securitizing move against radicalism, "upgrading" it from a political movement to an existential threat to national security, succeeded because it constructed a plausible threat narrative that successfully played on popular fears, concerns, beliefs and prejudices; its effort was sustained, multi-faceted and ably supported by loyalist works, papers and associations; it identified suitable referent objects deemed worthy of protection and preservation; it was carried out in conditions conducive to fear, alarm and insecurity; and because, despite a frequent lack of solid evidence, the government was able to gather sufficient information, make accusations and interpret statements, intentions and events in such a way as to at least cast significant doubts, suspicion and unease in the public mind over the potential threat posed by radicalism. Despite occasional setbacks and mistakes, the securitization and elimination of radicalism was carried out with the requisite force, intelligence, conviction and restraint to make it consistently and conclusively acceptable and successful.

Securitization was initially constructed primarily as a model for the study of security in international relations. However as I hope this and other emerging studies have demonstrated, it also provides the tools and flexibility necessary to undertake an insightful and systematic analysis of domestic securitization events. Complications in applying the model are more likely to arise from utilising it in too rigid a fashion, rather than any inherent flaws in the model itself. However if a significant flaw does exist, at least in a domestic context, it may be the model's insistence that a securitizing move is only being made when the actor is attempting to identify a threat as being instantly existential. The reality is often not so clear cut, and the fact that a state actor is grappling with a perceived threat to security and using it to justify particular measures and policies should still warrant classification and examination as a securitization event, even if the threat is either not yet identified as existential or the state not yet committed

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[376] Evans, *Debating the Revolution*, p. 83.

to completely eliminating it by any means necessary. A securitization event *can* be a single effort, such as the identification of another country as an existential threat in anticipation of a war, but more often it is a process that develops over time and only gradually comes to the point of portraying a referent subject as an existential threat that must be eliminated, as is the case in our study. This flaw does not invalidate the entire model, nor need it detract from its effectiveness as a model of analysis in domestic contexts.

It is here that the security dispositive, as described by de Graaf and Zwierlein, becomes particularly useful. Rather than an attempt to chart a concrete and instrumentalist chain of moves and developments culminating in a complete securitization event, in the context of a dispositive the securitization model becomes a 'conceptual tool kit' in which 'the development and change of…security dispositives can be analysed over time'.[377] The concepts of actor, object, subject, speech-act, securitizing move and the placing of an issue on an elevated and distinct plane are all relevant and useful in studying and understanding government security policy and actions, even if they do not occur in a linear and systematic fashion or result in a zero-sum outcome. A narrative of events or of a particular discourse may still be discerned and described, but it may and need not be continuous or cohesive, as was the case with the treasonous conspiracy theory. The identification and attempted elimination of an *existential* threat therefore becomes just one possible but still important component of a government's efforts to maintain national security and defend whatever it deems worthy of protection. In our case, the government was in fact consistently seeking for a way to eliminate or at least marginalise radicalism as an active political force from 1794-99. However as discussed in Chapter One the manner in which it attempted to justify its actions and combat the threat changed over time in response to circumstances, the shifting nature of the threat and the presence of other relevant factors such as the course of the war with France. Nonetheless, an analysis of the dispositive surrounding these actions, carefully utilising the tools provided by the securitization framework, still allows us to meaningfully examine and interpret them not as preordained or isolated steps but as parts of an ongoing and uncertain struggle to understand and confront a potential security threat increasingly viewed as existential. I therefore believe that the securitization framework and security dispositive have a useful place and analytical role not only in security

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[377] De Graaf and Zwierlein, 'Historicizing Security – Entering the Conspiracy Dispositive', p. 53.

studies, but also in a wide range of other fields, be they political, social, cultural, economic or military.

Threat Response

The securitization of radicalism justified an increase in security measures and surveillance, allowing the government to ramp up its operations without incurring significant public or political hostility. While it did not directly facilitate the centralisation and systematisation of the late 1790s, alongside the war with France it provided the conditions, inspiration and tools necessary for their implementation in secret. This expansion and reorganisation of the state's security services was an important landmark in the history of British security and intelligence and a vital component of the surveillance, repression and elimination of the radical movement. At the start of the decade, the ad hoc, scattered and divided approach to intelligence and security was surprisingly effective, given the circumstances. In the absence of a large bureaucracy, a strong central government or a specialised intelligence department, the methods available to and adopted by the Home Office, London police and county magistrates were limited but not without their merits. They demonstrate the value of proactive local officials in touch with the affairs and concerns of their people, the usefulness of accurate informers paid regularly, the benefits accruing from even a small police force if handled well, the profuseness of the post as a source of information, and the ability of only a handful of dedicated bureaucrats to make some sense out of a vast mass of information. However, the lack of co-ordination and coercive power meant that the government was over-reliant on individual magistrates and officials, beset by what Hone describes as a 'tangle of problems' arising from 'the strong traditions of local autonomy and weak central administration'.[378] With no centralised intelligence analysis and an excessive dependence on often unreliable spies and informers, the government was often unable to determine fact from fiction, or to build an impartial and active assessment of the state of the country and the status of potential threats to security. Instead, the picture of radicalism the government constructed, while correct in many of the details, was tainted by inaccurate information, fear, prejudice, guesswork and lack of understanding, resulting in a composition that was flawed, biased and made to fit a particular narrative rather than being allowed to speak for itself. This suited the

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[378] Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, p. 66.

government's securitizing move as regards the accusations and evidence against radicalism, but limited its ability to actually counter the radical threat, undertake successful prosecutions and maintain national security.

By contrast the creation of the Inner Office system demonstrates the significant advantages accruing from even a limited centralisation of intelligence and security services; improving the quality of incoming information, facilitating the development of a relatively specialised, impartial and ongoing intelligence analysis, and forging an ability to create strategic assessments, monitor suspects and respond to threats manifesting across multiple regions and borders. It also reduced the divide between foreign and domestic intelligence, allowing a more accurate and integrated assessment of any links between internal and external agents. By the latter part of the 1790s, the security services under Wickham, Ford, Portland and their colleagues were operating with an unprecedented degree of organisation, centralisation, efficiency and professionalism. Sparrow has described it as an 'expanding foreign and home secret service', creating 'a complete system of surveillance for suspects, whether British or foreign', while Wells has opined that 'the regularity and the efficiency of the secret service are striking'.[379] The intelligence and security weapons at the government's disposal at the start of the decade were far from negligible, but their overhaul recognised and responded to the need to confront a new type of threat, one that was international in scope and driven by predominantly middle and working class societies bound by a shared ideology.

Despite being weighed down by the baggage of prejudice, county independence, sparse resources a minimal police force, the revolutionised intelligence and security apparatus highlights the difference between ad hoc unco-ordinated information collection as necessitated by circumstances, and an ongoing security service operating a concerted policy of surveillance, analysis and threat response. Durey argues that this period witnessed 'the emergence of a functioning intelligence nerve centre within the Alien Office that was increasingly proactive rather than reactive', with the revamped service combining a general level of surveillance with a specific targeting of particular threats and hotspots in order to achieve their timely elimination and public disparagement.[380] The government was now able to gather intelligence that was of equal utility both in

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[379] Sparrow, 'The Alien Office, 1792-1806', pp. 362-63; Wells, *Insurrection*, p. 41.
[380] Durey, *William Wickham, Master Spy*, p. 136.

securitizing *and* combating radicalism. The British arm of the United threat was carefully monitored, investigated and broken up with a minimum of fuss under the direction of a small group of semi-professional officials. The government over-reached in putting O'Connor and Binns on trial in 1798, and was shameless in its twisted use of intelligence for the purposes of securitization, vindication and propaganda, but otherwise it allowed the Inner Office to get on with its job, enabling it to avoid unnecessary scandal and the pitfalls of recent years. It maintained a useful network of trustworthy agents and informers and a competent grip on security matters and radical threats until its disbandment in 1802-03. The identification of radicalism as an existential threat had made these innovations, unthinkable at the start of the decade, both necessary and acceptable.

However with the (albeit brief) coming of peace in 1802, the Addington government saw no further need for such a centralised system, despite Wickham's pleas that it could adapt itself 'at once to a State of Peace…and to all opinions and prejudices which a Free People jealous of its Liberties may be supposed fairly and rightly to entertain'.[381] Nelson notes that 'Eighteenth-century statesmen envisioned the central government as interfering in local affairs in the natural order of things only when emergencies so demanded', and in 1802-03, with the radical emergency seemingly dispelled, the system it spawned was scaled back and central interference in local affairs minimalised.[382] The small London police were retained, but it was another half-century before policing became a country-wide affair, and there was no place for an ongoing semi-independent domestic secret service. In this case, securitization did not result in a permanent change to either the structure or mentality of security governance, but rather facilitated predominantly temporary measures to address a particular threat. As in other aspects of the repression of radicalism, there were limitations on how far the government was prepared to go, both publicly and in secret, in restructuring its security and administrative systems. It was willing to increase and diversify its traditional sources of investigation and law enforcement – spies, police, agents and militia – in order to monitor, investigate and harass a particular group of the population, and to implement a proactive central secret service headquarters with improved means of collection, analysis and direction, but the actual administrative apparatus of magistrates and officials remained unchanged. The Pitt government evidently felt it either unnecessary,

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[381] BL, Add. MS 33107, f. 3, Wickham to Portland, 3 January 1801, quoted in Wells, *Insurrection*, p. 30.
[382] Nelson, *The Home Office, 1782-1801*, p. 113.

unwise or impossible (due to public opinion or available resources) to do anything further, and the majority of the primary innovations were scrapped by Addington's ministry. However the disbandment of the key components of the centralised service and failure to document their structure and methods meant that much of the specialist knowledge and experience acquired during its brief existence was lost and forgotten. While some institutional memory and knowledge was most likely retained at least for a time, on the whole the Alien Office system proved a short-term experiment whose major innovations were not implemented again for over a century. Nonetheless it deserves a distinguished place in the history of British intelligence and security, for as Sparrow states it was 'the first comprehensive British secret service in the modern sense', paving the way for later nineteenth and twentieth-century intelligence operations.[383]

The real societal impact of the government's securitization of radicalism and employment of its security services is difficult to judge. Radical rhetoric about invasions of privacy, the degradation of morality, family and social breakdown and corrupted justice was passionate and in most cases spoken out of a genuine belief that surveillance, spies and informers posed a grave threat to such cherished and important institutions, but this does not necessarily mean that the reality matched the words. Further research would be required to determine whether the government's actions and the prevalence of spies really did result in significant changes to moral values, family harmony, respect for privacy, social behaviour and expectations of trust and confidence.[384] However some comments at least can be made on one important area – the unprecedented state penetration of and interaction with society and its impact on notions of public and private space, law enforcement and security, described by James Thompson as 'the real source of terror in the industrial age of discipline and surveillance'.[385]

As discussed in Chapter Three, the increase in state surveillance and oppression, and the resultant impetuous given to state and self-appointed informers and agents to delve into and interfere with the public and private realms, were new and deeply disturbing

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[383] Sparrow, 'The Alien Office, 1792-1806', p. 362.
[384] Barrell's *The Spirit of Despotism* is a good starting point in exploring these issues, but there is much more that could be investigated.
[385] James Thompson, 'Surveillance in William Godwin's *Caleb Williams*', in Kenneth W. Graham, ed., *Gothic Fictions: Prohibition/Transgression*, New York, AMS Press, 1989, p. 192.

developments for many radicals and liberals. Radicals were initially optimistic that the widening public sphere and growing influence of public opinion would significantly benefit their cause. Habermas argues that by the beginning of the nineteenth century, the importance of public opinion had reached such heights that

> the public's involvement in the critical debate of political issues had become organized to such an extent that in the role of a permanent critical commentator it had definitively broken the exclusiveness of Parliament and evolved into the officially designated discussion partner of the delegate.[386]

However while this assessment may have been somewhat close to the truth at the beginning of the 1790s, in the short-term it was not to last or prove as permanent as Habermas claimed. Public opinion was certainly a powerful force in the early part of the decade, ignored by MPs at their peril. Yet although the bourgeois public sphere, inhabited by Foxite Whigs and gentlemen reformers, initially remained relatively open to public debate, within reason, the entry of the lower classes into the public realm and the construction of public opinion, creating what may be viewed as a "popular sphere", was eventually deemed unacceptable by the government and its supporters. No sooner had the public sphere opened to radical and working class discourses and activities, in the form of printed works, public and association meetings, lectures and informal debates, than it rapidly began to contract again. As the decade progressed it swiftly became a dangerous space for the dissemination of radical opinions and arguments, inhabited by increasing numbers of spies and informers ever-ready to report, twist, exaggerate or fabricate information of interest to the authorities.

Radicals learned that the public arena was not a place for the free dissemination and discussion of ideas, but rather one in which some ideas were more acceptable than others, and in which there loomed an ever-present threat of being harassed and persecuted by loyalist groups and state officials and reported, correctly or otherwise, for sedition, illegal association and other crimes. Even liberal debate was increasingly stifled and shut down by the threat of sedition laws, censorship, guilt by association with radicalism and the general atmosphere of repression and intransigence. Public opinion, both as a by-product of rational-critical debate and the general mood of the populace, remained a factor in late 1790s politics, and ministers continued to be wary of maintaining public support for their policies and actions. However it had lost much of

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[386] Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p. 66.

the dynamism and expressiveness it possessed at the beginning of the decade, and to the extent it did exist such opinion had become more a by-product of loyalist and government propaganda, alarmism and war rhetoric, described by McCann as 'a form of administered consciousness'[387], than any genuine manifestation of public concerns and open debate.[388]

Worse still in radical eyes, privately-held opinions, whether given in conversations in public places or in the truly private setting of the home or closed meeting, were now fair game for informers to eavesdrop on and report to the authorities, who could choose to act if they felt such opinions to be seditious or otherwise illegal. This invasion of the private was not directly sanctioned or advocated by the government, but it *was* given tacit approval and encouragement by the government's willingness to reward and act on relevant information however obtained, and by statements emphasising the need to hunt and persecute radicalism wherever it may be found. Barrell states that it was believed among radicals that 'The fence which had once divided private from public space had been removed, and space traditionally regarded as private was redefined as public as soon as it was used for the discussion of public affairs.'[389] While some examples do exist, such as those of Walker and Thomas Muir, the true prevalence of spies and surveillance in the private domain cannot be determined, although the radical fears were most probably disproportionate with the reality. Nonetheless these fears were genuine, and such fears were in themselves likely to be damaging to personal relations. They also accord with the broader politicisation of the private in the 1790s described by Barrell in *The Spirit of Despotism*, in which 'almost any space or topic could become the subject of political conflict, even those that might seem too trivial, too quotidian, too far removed from politics to be susceptible to being politicized'.[390] Securitization was simply an extra impetus for this opening of the private, for the tavern corner, work space, dinner table and even the cottage hearth were now considered the potential breeding grounds of sedition, conspiracy and other threats to national security, thus becoming legitimate and necessary places for surveillance and investigation.

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[387] McCann, *Cultural Politics in the 1790s*, p. 61.
[388] Ibid., pp. 59-144; Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, pp. 27-67.
[389] Barrell, *The Spirit of Despotism*, p. 8.
[390] Ibid., p. 15 & passim. See also James Thompson, 'Surveillance in William Godwin's *Caleb Williams*', pp. 173-92.

Centralised security and intelligence services also resulted in changes to state-society relations, for although it did not significantly alter the daily activities and responsibilities of local magistrates, the communication of greater quantities of information to a single office and instructions flowing in the opposite direction increased the state's knowledge of the affairs of its citizens and its direct involvement in their lives, be it in the form of spies passing on information, informers denouncing seditious words and publications, or Bow Street Runners and state officials sent to conduct investigations and co-ordinate operations. Despite what Wells describes as a 'lack of constitutional clarity and legality surrounding the growth of the intelligence system', increased surveillance, repressive legislation, prosecution, and the practice of pre-emptive and preventive security made it more likely that citizens, particularly if involved in political and/or public affairs, would come to the attention of agents of the state, particularly in the towns and cities.[391] This was especially the case in London, where, as Nelson notes,

> The mounting fear of radicals, the control over the public offices in the metropolis, [and] the use of spying…had drawn the [Home Office] Secretary of State into a more direct part in the process of preserving order in London than had ever before been the case.[392]

The increased interest in domestic surveillance extended to the king himself. In 1799 Wickham expressed his 'great surprize' that he met with the king for 'three quarters of an hour, and the greater part of the questions and observations turned upon the Home Office'.[393] The security system of the 1790s represented a new if temporary layer of contact and interaction between state and citizen, one that presaged but didn't directly lead to later developments in state security and information collection and demonstrated the advantages accruing to government from such innovations.[394]

Threat Reply

Radical writers and orators certainly gained notable mileage for their cause from their fierce attack on the government's security services and use of spies. However the

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[391] Wells, *Insurrection*, p. 41.
[392] Nelson, *The Home Office, 1782-1801*, p. 122.
[393] BL, Add. MS 59011, fols. 150-51, Wickham to Grenville, n.d. (1799), quoted in Wells, *Insurrection*, p. 31.
[394] For details on the eighteenth-century British state's use of surveillance and local administration to obtain information on its citizens, of which the needs of security are both a part and a shaping force, see Higgs, *The Information State in England*, pp. 10-19 & 28-63.

radical arguments, either on these or other matters, ultimately failed to convince the public of the need to reject the government's securitizing move and support the radical cause, or to dissuade the government from continuing its securitizing moves and measures. It is argued here that in order for a referent subject to successfully counter a securitizing move in a domestic context, they must be able to prove either that their cause is irresistible – that it should be permitted and/or implemented regardless of the risks involved – or that they do not pose a threat commensurate with that alleged by the securitizing actor, and as such the extraordinary and repressive actions proposed by the actor constitute a risk of damage to society, state, liberty and security unjustified by the hazards posed by the threat itself – in other words, that the ends do not justify the means. Radicalism failed both in selling the case for urgent reform and in countering the government's claims that it posed an existential threat necessitating extraordinary measures to eliminate it.

A couple of points may first be made on the deficiencies and misconceptions in the radical arguments against spies, informers and surveillance. While many radical arguments about the corruption of justice, extension of state power and degradation of communities by immoral spies and invasive magistrates contained much truth; on some issues it was clear to many that their arguments were exaggerated, inaccurate or disingenuous. Despite radical claims to the contrary, not all government sources were spies, nor was all evidence from spies and informers inaccurate or deceptive. The government was not as biased and incompetent in their collection and analysis of information and evidence as some radicals believed. As Thompson argues, 'It was in the interests of magistrates to obtain accurate information. They disliked being sent on fool's errands after non-existent depots of arms, or wasting their time in pursuit of tavern demagogues.'[395] Senior ministers were indeed deeply suspicious of radicalism and increasingly of the opinion that it was best to eradicate it altogether as an active movement. However while this definitely coloured and prejudiced their approach to the surveillance, investigation and prosecution of the societies and later the clandestine United groups, it does not mean that they were deliberately intent on securing or manufacturing incriminating evidence by any means necessary, or that their perceptions of radicalism were entirely without foundation. Attempting to build a solid case for treason from the available evidence is not the same as constructing one prima facie. Nor

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[395] E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 535.

were they incompetent or callous in their methods of information collection and analysis. High-grade intelligence was vital in allowing the government to make correct decisions, and Durey states that the Inner Office in particular functioned as a repository and analytical centre for 'strategic information, to assist in formulating policy and to help to answer major political questions', such as 'the prospects of rebellion in Ireland', and the existence 'of conspiratorial links between Ireland, Britain and France'.[396]

The Home Office was aware of the need to treat the information it received with caution and an understanding of the context and nature of its sources. For the most part it sought out sources that were reliable and trustworthy, and as we have seen attempts were made throughout the decade to improve the collection and analysis of information. Nonetheless it is inevitable that the government's extensive reliance on and projected expectations of spies and informers shaped its perceptions and beliefs on the nature of radicalism and the state of the country, and it is undoubtedly true that at times the government simply sought or interpreted information to suit its own paranoia, preconceptions and agenda, rather than allowing it to speak for itself. While the government did not deliberately employ perjurers, liars and *agents provocateurs*, on some occasions it failed to look closely at the actions of its spies, accepting and trumpeting their favourable evidence on almost face value and disregarding proper caution and analysis. It is also true that on occasion the government knowingly misled the public and parliament about radicalism, above and beyond its securitizing spin, perhaps most notably in the secret committee report of 1799. Ultimately though it appears that the government's use of spies was primarily pragmatic – it was deemed necessary to monitor and investigate radical activity and the employment of spies and informers was seen as the best and principal means of achieving this, regardless of the drawbacks such methods entailed. Sedition and treason were soon suspected amongst the societies and evidence sought to confirm and prove this belief correct. Hone sums this up by stating that

> The government had certain assumptions and relied on its particular "channels of authentic information". Results had been obtained by probing in certain directions, and these tended to determine future investigations.[397]

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[396] Durey, *William Wickham, Master Spy*, p. 108.
[397] Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, p. 82.

This interpretation tallies with some aspects of radical discourse on the government's handling of spies and security, but clearly differs on others.

Viewed as a whole, the radicals' arguments against the state's security services may perhaps be best understood as a form of counter-securitization, often employing the same language and techniques as their opponents to define the government's institutions and actions as an inquisition against free thought and action posing grave and unwarranted threats to the referent objects of justice, privacy, liberty, community, morality, tradition, social relations and individual and collective security. However, as in other areas, the radicals lost the battle over security. Undoubtedly the government's suspension and severe curtailment of a number of protections and liberties in the interests of national security did indeed constitute a loss of freedom and individual security. As Buzan notes,

> While the state provides some security to the individual, it can only do so by imposing threats…Although they are powerfully balanced by the domestic and external security which the state provides, these threats, and therefore the contradiction between individual and national security, are unavoidable.[398]

In 1790s Britain individuals, particularly those of radical leanings, were exposed to a greater risk of arrest and indefinite imprisonment, personal and financial loss, threats to their health and well-being, increased surveillance and breaches of privacy. They had reduced recourse to assistance from the law, the authorities and supportive organisations should they find their security infringed upon, and the institutions of justice, community and morality were all to some degree compromised by the state's actions. As Graham concludes, the government's policies inaugurated 'a period of persecution and manipulation of law at the local and national level which…had its closest precedent, as many contemporaries remarked, in the reign of the Stuarts'.[399]

Yet the lack of open dissent in the late 1790s suggests that the majority of the British people tolerated these infringements and negative impacts, either because they accepted the government's securitizing argument that national security was at grave risk from radicalism, and, thus being either apathetical or opposed to the radical cause, believed that the government's measures were appropriate to the circumstances, being genuinely and for the most part accurately targeted only at those who threatened the interests and

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[398] Buzan, *People, States & Fear*, p. 50.
[399] Graham, *The Nation, the Law and the King*, Vol. 2, p. 883.

security of the state; or because they felt themselves to be too cowered, powerless or insufficiently concerned to oppose the government's actions. Supporters could argue that while the overhauled security services did expand the state's ability to monitor and investigate all its citizens, it also increased the accuracy and reliability of its intelligence, making it more likely that the correct suspects were targeted and prosecuted successfully. Any collateral damage was therefore tolerable – a justified imposition on individual security to contain a specific threat and ensure collective survival and prosperity, rather than the radical depiction of a general assault on individual rights and liberties and an aggrandisement of state power under the phony pretext of national security. Furthermore, many people evidently either accepted the government's argument that the eventual lapse of radicalism into dangerous revolutionary underground cells was a product of radical ambitions rather than state repression, or acknowledged the need to contain the new threat regardless of its provenance. Therefore throughout the 1790s the elite either supported the government or remained neutral in the face of war and security scares; while a majority of the middle classes were convinced that the security provided by the military and repressive efforts of the government to their current financial, material and political possessions outweighed any concurrent loss of personal security and liberty. Even the working classes were divided on the key issues, a fact bearing out the strength of the government's position.

In sum, a strongly-backed securitizing move against a grand existential threat to national security, requiring concerted action to defeat it, triumphed over a counter-argument denying the existence of such a threat and condemning the impact and implications of the actor's actions as unjustified and unacceptable. Given the government's sound use and exploitation of the advantages identified earlier in this chapter, it is little wonder that despite occasional hiccups over failed trials and embarrassing revelations it was ultimately successful in its securitizing move against radicalism. In such adverse conditions, radicals lacked a sufficient platform to match the government's reach and influence over their target audience – the British public and parliamentarians. This was especially true post-1795, for by that stage ongoing prosecutions, persecution and legislative reforms had crippled their ability to engage and persuade the public, and this surely contributed to the decline of radicalism and the increasing strength and success of the government's move. In classifying radicalism as an existential threat securitization robbed it of a legitimate place in the national political

debate, ensuring that the radical arguments advancing their cause and combating the government's actions were either disregarded or dismissed.

National (In)Security

Security – individual, collective and national – is an ever-present factor of state and society. As an inter-subjective entity, it is as potent in the realm of perception and imagination as it is in tangible reality, making it an ideal means of political justification. Securitization is an act of labelling, empowering and othering, designed to influence and define people's beliefs, perceptions and collective consciousness, identify particular groups and ideologies as intolerable, increase state power and sanction acts of repression, violence, surveillance, restriction and ostracism. As such, it is both powerful and potentially dangerous, used as much to coerce and oppress as to protect. With such significant contemporary and future consequences, the study of security from both empirical and theoretical perspectives is a vital and important area of research and analysis. In contributing to this pool of knowledge and analysis, this study has sought to demonstrate that the securitization model and security dispositive are important and highly useful means of examining and understanding not only contemporary international security events and issues but also historical and domestic ones, enriching our understanding of the past and ability to analyse, interpret and critique the present.

In the 1790s Pitt's government was convinced that democratic reform was untimely. In the unsettled circumstances of the time it was not content to address radicalism as merely a political or ideological issue. Instead it portrayed radicalism as an existential threat to national security, unworthy of a place in active political and civil society. However the government, while far from democratic, was not authoritarian, and it existed in an age and society in which public opinion, particularly that of the upper and middle classes, was an important factor in permitting and shaping the implementation of government policies. Therefore, the securitization of radicalism and the resultant measures to repress it and reform the security services required securitizing moves to convince both public and parliament of their necessity and efficacy. Applying the securitization model to this dispositive has allowed us to unpack and analyse the various components of these moves, and to understand why the government successfully chose security as a key platform for ostracising and confronting radicalism, and why it utilised particular arguments and discourses in projecting its interpretation of the radical threat.

It also reveals the intimate links between this securitization and the reshaping of the state's security services, explaining the significant but limited and ultimately temporary changes to their mentality, structure and methods, and the importance of these measures in identifying and defeating threats to security.

Finally, the radical response to these measures opens a new window into radical ideology and discourse, particularly regarding the contested grounds of security and state-citizen relations. For radicals, state measures to protect and enforce national security gravely weakened individual and collective security, and contesting these measures required efforts to convince the public that the realities of these infringements on security and liberty outweighed imagined threats to national security. However the government won both this argument and the struggle for political supremacy, and it is perhaps fitting to close with the observation that this was a victory achieved as much by word as by deed. As radicals learned to their cost, spoken security is the foundation for action, and it is in the discourses of security dispositives that notions of threat, safety, reverence and response are created, argued, disseminated and initiated. In this regard, no less than their political legacy, the story of the 1790s radicals and their government and loyalist opponents continues to hold valuable lessons for us today.

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