

Thesis Abstract

This thesis was undertaken in the belief that there was scope for a new examination of the complex but fascinating interweaving of developments in France and Great Britain which led to their last violent confrontation of the eighteenth century. The six-month period which followed the overthrow of Louis XVI in the revolution of August 10, 1792, was a time of sudden, bewildering changes of fortune for France and for its immediate neighbours. Britain, though physically unscathed, was exposed to the influence and reality of the Revolution in a way totally unforeseen in the complacency of Pitt's address to Parliament at the beginning of 1792.

While studying the diplomatic exchanges between the two governments it became apparent that there were many pre-occupations of domestic politics which occupied positions of crucial significance in the minds of Pitt's administration and of the Convention and Conseil Executif. No-one who seeks to illuminate the deterioration of Anglo-French relations in the troubled autumn of 1792 can realistically avoid the internal concerns of either country. Consequently, there is considerable emphasis on British reaction to the supposed encroachment of revolutionary principles on domestic tranquillity during and after November, 1792, and the more introspective but fundamentally important absorption of the French in Louis XVI's

trial and the future shape of the Revolution itself, which festered throughout this period.

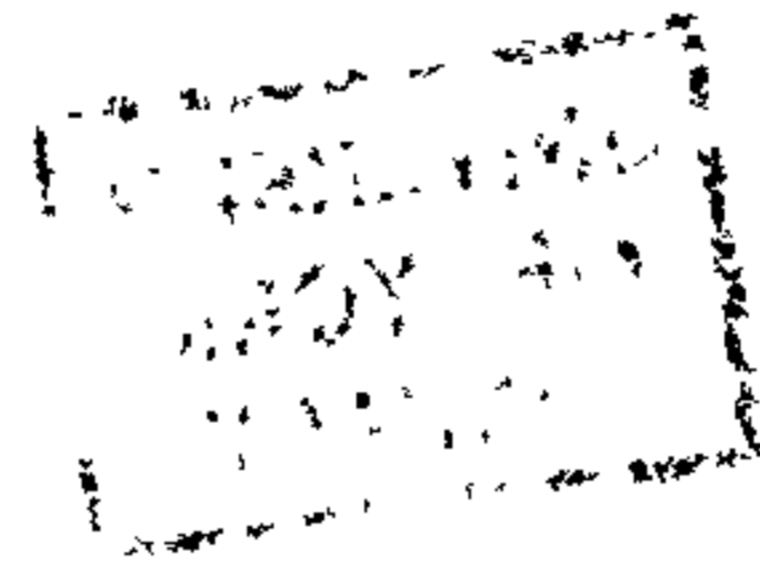
The overall impression is one of two governments caught in the contradictions of the collapse of the ancien regime, aware of the new forces of ideology and public opinion but only partially comprehending how to direct them, conducting their dealings with each other in a mixture of ignorance and prejudice rooted in the depths of their ancient rivalry. Caught up in this web, the leaders of the Revolution and of George III's England were unable to avert a conflict which was to bring about, as the conservatives had dreaded, "a universal change..... in the opinions, manners and customs of men."

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ANGLO-FRENCH RELATIONS, August 10th, 1792 to February 1st 1793

A study of Great Britain and France in the six months prior to
the outbreak of war

Linda M. Porter



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Prologue

The eighteenth century was an era of deep and bitter rivalry between Great Britain and France. The struggle for Imperial domination in which the two countries engaged was undertaken in the belief that the possession of overseas territories was fundamental for national economic survival and for political leadership in Europe. The relationship between the French and British governments was based on distrust in time of peace and a passion tinged with nationalistic overtones in time of war. The Revolution in France introduced new dimensions into the Anglo-French relationship while also feeding on ancient emotions, aspirations and prejudices. It is this complex of old resentment re-inforced by the new direction of revolutionary France which gives the period immediately prior to the Revolutionary Wars its special interest. This thesis is a study of six troubled months which witnessed the dissolution of Britain's convinced neutrality in French affairs and the onset of the most fiercely contested dispute between the two countries whose physical proximity was in almost complete contrast with their inability to comprehend each other's outlook.

The old view of the period between August 10th, 1792 and February 1st, 1793, developed by Professor J. Holland Rose in his two volume work on William Pitt the Younger before the First World War has occasionally

been modified but never seriously questioned. Relying, for the most part, on diplomatic sources, Professor Rose concluded that the British government taking their stand on international law and their commitment to their beleaguered Dutch allies, had behaved with utmost rectitude and even forbearance in the face of French arrogance, tergiversation and threats. The war is thus seen as a direct result of French aggression, a deliberate policy of harassment by a desperate people without any recognizable form of government. This view, however, did not originate in 1912, but in January, 1793 with the British government itself, who had carefully sought to demonstrate the intransigence of the revolutionaries. The French government held a similar opinion of the Pitt administration, but their arguments have been more readily obscured by the confusions of French administration after August 10th. and the harrowing background of furious tension which surrounded the trial and judgement of the king.

Even of itself, this abstracted diplomatic approach might have suggested an interpretation of affairs beyond the narrow confines of the official British explanation. The Anglo-Dutch relationship, an important element in the period before the outbreak of hostilities, was considerably more strained and complicated than is normally supposed, causing the British continued concern up to and beyond February 1st.

The United Provinces were also the centre of much undercover diplomatic activity, which was abortive but gives useful insights into French and British attitudes.

Beyond these initial qualifications, however, it soon becomes clear as one reaches into the writings, speeches and newspapers of the time that it is the climate in which decisions of both international and domestic importance were made which is of crucial significance for our understanding of the developments after the overthrow of the king of France. In order to comprehend the Anglo-French conflict of 1793, it is necessary to consider the leading political personages in both countries, the functioning of their governments and their major pre-occupations. This opens up a larger frame of reference in which an attempt is made to assess the interaction of domestic concerns and European events. In Britain the time between August 10th. 1792 and February 1st. 1793 was one of considerable trauma. The shock which ran through many sectors of society in November, 1792 has frequently been understressed. The British government believed that a series of internal problems might be transformed by the growing menace of the French Revolution as a military and ideological threat. Thereafter the British government viewed the progress of the Revolution by the light of their own situation. They had almost no useful intelligence from France,

but, more fundamentally, they lacked the ability to interpret it, so alien to them were French politics in the autumn of 1792. Perceiving with horror the novelty of the Revolution they clung all the more tenaciously to their long-established ideals of an ordered, prosperous society. At the turn of 1792-1793 no British politician could comment on domestic affairs without making the inevitable connection with France. The language of Edmund Burke, still regarded as extremist in August 1792, could be heard on many lips six months later.

The state of France after the deposition of Louis XVI is generally referred to as one of turmoil. Despite the difficulties of dealing with a period of the Revolution in which there was little administrative coherence and an alarming increase in faction-fighting amongst the deputies of the Convention, the Revolution's confrontation with Great Britain in 1793 cannot properly be understood without considering the issues which dominated France after August 10th, particularly the controversy over the trial of the king, a dilemma which bedevilled the country after the second revolution. While Louis lived the confusions and incongruities multiplied. The French were victorious in Europe but divided at home. Struggling with the remnants of administration from the Legislative Assembly aware of the possibility of civil war, the deputies impaled each other on the barbs of their

had yet to learn to cope with internal division in time of war. Dumouriez's victories could not supplant the doubts which intensified while the king lived. For this reason considerable emphasis has been placed on French domestic pre-occupations, particularly those relating to administration after August 10th. and to the king's trial. The picture presented is an attempt to indicate more than the causes of the breakdown of diplomatic relations between two neighbouring European states. Revolutionary France, propelled by the original impetus of Brissotin rhetoric and power-seeking into a continental war, struggled to produce cohesion and moral justification from doubt and disarray. Great Britain, proud of its orderly prosperity reacted swiftly and with alarm to the intrusion of the many-headed French monster into its insular tranquillity. Dominating public opinion after November, 1792, Pitt's government, formerly almost disdainful of Europe, prepared itself rather haphazardly for an unwelcome but inescapable conflict which, it believed, would shortly annihilate France and blot the Revolution from memory in defeat. Both countries stood at the cross-roads of the eighteenth century. In examining the wide range of problems which faced them after the events of August 10th. in France it is hoped that a fuller impression of a crucial and often comparatively neglected phase of the development of revolutionary Europe will be gained.

rhetoric. The British, amazed at the spectacle of such irreverence for parliamentary proceedings, did not know how to judge these men of physical and oratorical violence.

French foreign affairs were not conducted in such a rarified atmosphere but their exercise suffered from the same stresses. The French were not without competent diplomatists and agents, but they had placed a premium on revolutionary fervour rather than tact and experience. French representatives were compelled, often for the good of their careers, to present an exaggerated appearance of revolutionary patriotism in their public behaviour and in their reports. Yet a good number of these men were experienced in diplomacy, as were their English counterparts, and had begun their service under the ancien regime. The habits of intrigue which they had acquired were by no means a product of the difficulties of France in the months after August 10th. In the last two months of peace despatches sent from England were notable for a reasonable degree of accuracy and caution. The agents were amazed by the extent of English government reaction to the volatility of November but they recognized the very real possibility of war under such circumstances.

The domestic and foreign policies of France in these six months reveal to the full the near-ruinous effect of uncertainty and animosity on a country which

Chapter 1

Great Britain and France after the War of American Independence.

In deciding the outcome of the struggle between Great Britain and her rebellious North American subjects, France played a crucial role. A decade after the apparently stunning loss suffered by Britain, the two old Imperial rivals were at war once more. The circumstances had changed greatly, though throughout the long conflict, terminating only in 1815, there were echoes of the international pre-occupations and interests of an earlier age. When Britain and France went to war on February 1st. 1793, the French Revolution was on the point of passing into its fiercest and most desperate stage. Plagued by an internal struggle for power, by rising ideological conflicts and the unwelcome appearance of civil war, the French seemed to have deliberately courted disaster by declaring war on Europe as a whole. The British, who were psychologically well-prepared for war after an uneasy autumn, saw themselves not merely as the defenders of international law, but of a society which they believed to be prosperous, orderly and just. The two protagonists were ancient enemies, but with a new vocabulary and new concepts. The war which began in 1793 lasted a generation, and, despite attempts at resurrection, destroyed the form and the outlook of 18th. century society in both France and Great Britain.

The developments of the 1780's gave little indication of the nature of the conflict which was to follow. In Austria and Prussia in 1783 it was generally felt that the loss of her American colonies had reduced Britain to the rank of a second or third-rate power. Yet British politicians had often manifested a certain disdain for the grasping whirlwind of continental diplomacy and during the 1780's they exhibited caution in disregarding European squabbles and concentrated on building up the considerable empire which they still held. William Pitt, the young Prime Minister, was faced with political confusion and acrimony on taking office and passed through two anxious years until, in 1785, with a temporary unsatisfactory solution to the problem of Ireland and a long-term and more positive settlement of Indian affairs, he was able to give more of his attention to building up British resources and steering her again towards a role in Europe.

The British were to demonstrate, over a period of years, that their neighbours had been mistaken in their assessment of Britain's world role after the outcome of the War of Independence in America. Even before this loss, Britain was beginning to broaden its approach to the intricately related questions of colonies and trade.⁽¹⁾ The rigidity of heavy reliance on the mercantilist system, though still supported by some

(1) V. Harlow, The Founding of the Second British Empire, vol. ii.

prominent British politicians, was being replaced by a somewhat more flexible outlook. Britain not merely survived, but prospered under the impetus of developing trade and settlement in the areas remaining under her control, particularly Canada and India, as well as seeking a more permanent place in the trade of the Far East and the Pacific.

This ability to re-define her position and interests as an Imperial power was matched, though to a lesser degree, by an interest in reform at home. Pitt toyed with parliamentary reform in his first years of office, though he was soon to become convinced that circumstances were not suitable for altering the constitution. He was more effective in dealing with the economy, particularly in re-organization of financial departments. Aided by a number of expert colleagues he was able to bring about a period of stability and of growth to a country whose prestige was badly damaged in 1783.

Basing his policy of recovery on efficiency in government at home and expansion of Britain's commercial position overseas, Pitt moved back into the European arena through a series of trade negotiations. (1)

The most spectacular British success at this time was

(1) For details of these negotiations see J. Ehrman, The British Government and Commercial Negotiations with Europe, 1783-93, Cambridge, 1962.

the Eden Treaty of 1786 with France. Even while the terms of this treaty, which caused widespread controversy in France, were being argued over, the British government was coming out of seclusion to play a major part in the Dutch crisis of 1786-87. Though Pitt made no diplomatic commitment other than the Triple Alliance in the 1780's, British triumph in ridding the United Provinces of French influence further added to the confidence of his administration.

British recovery, though it had its high-spots, was essentially a gradual development harnessing existing resources. The stability of Britain during these years found its most obvious expression in the complacency of the ruling class. A predominantly rural society still, England was the preserve of a minority of landowners, whose attitude to life was characterized by an unrivalled degree of smugness. The long constitutional conflicts of the seventeenth century had produced a deep-seated belief that England had evolved to a maximum state of perfection. Reaction to the insidiousness of French revolutionary ideas, which seemed, after 1792, to threaten the roots of society, was to be swift and savage. It was from this group of landed gentlemen that the government found its firmest support in the months preceding the outbreak of war in 1793.

France during the 1780's followed a pattern very much the reverse of developments in Britain. The victory

of the Americans brought only financial disaster for the French. The government, having resorted to loans under the Controller-Generalship of Jacques Necker, was brought face to face in 1786 with the realization that a sweeping overhaul of the nation's fiscal system was fundamental to the health of the economy. The financial crisis focused French attention on internal disputes as the ancien regime clung defiantly to its standards in the last years of domestic peace. The monarchy, half-heartedly supporting important reform which would have undermined the financial privileges and social position of the nobility and clergy, was easily represented as a tyrannical institution cutting at the liberties of Frenchmen. Its most implacable opponents were not the old nobility but the lawyer-aristocracy of the parlements, a group mainly created a century before by Louis XIV. France became increasingly introverted during the years before the Revolution. The loss of the contest for supremacy in the United Provinces was bitter, coinciding as it did with the negotiation of a trade treaty considered detrimental to the French interest. After 1786 Britain and France were temporarily outside the mainstream of European diplomacy, which was more concerned with troubles in Scandinavia and Eastern Europe. Britain remained aloof from choice, France from necessity. Watched with occasional curiosity by statesmen across the Channel, the Bourbon victory of 1783 had given way to Revolution

in six years.

Thus Great Britain and France, within the space of a decade, had embarked on two very different courses which were to bring them together again in war at the beginning of 1793. The contrast between form of government, political practice and even the personalities of French and British politicians was marked before 1789, and was to become even more striking during the Revolution. The French politicians with whom Pitt's administration dealt in the 1780's were later replaced, not merely once, but many times. By 1792 the British knew very little about their future opponents and had almost no time to assess them, a situation which led to misjudgement of the abilities of some of the revolutionary leadership. This rapid changeover in French personnel was not paralleled in Britain. Offices changed hands as Pitt dispensed with older or indecisive men, but his major advisers at the outbreak of the French Revolution occupied vital positions ten years afterwards.

The theory of government in Britain, as well as its officers did not undergo the tumultuous changes of France. The conflict between king and parliament in the seventeenth century had resulted in the development of a limited monarchy, unique in Europe. The disputes on the position and prerogative of the king at the beginning of George III's reign had died down so that by 1783 the major topics of controversy were

the colonies and trade. Ministries were often based on the shifting alliances of groups of individuals rather than on the formidable machinery of the modern party system. The king, at this stage with over twenty years' experience in government, remained a considerable force. George III did not have an outstanding intellect but he took his duties seriously, attempted to keep himself well-informed and was always ready with an opinion. He did not initiate policy, but no minister could expect to by-pass his vigilance or deceive him with an ill-prepared line of argument. Since his assent was required for all measures of national importance it was necessary for the king and his chief minister to work together with reasonable harmony. George III had learned to curb his extremely definite feelings of prejudice in public contact with politicians, though he still could not abide Charles Fox. Throughout the entire period of this study the king was required to work with William Pitt, a young man whose illustrious father had terrorized him in the early years of his reign. Pitt and George III were never close, but they acquired a real feeling of mutual respect.

With the ending of the American war and the feelings aroused by the peace treaty, the ministry of the talented but largely isolated Shelburne came to an end. It was followed by the ungainly coalition of Fox and North, which appalled the king. He did not have to endure the ministry long. The coalition could not

survive the passions roused by Fox's East India Bill. Out of this quagmire of conflicting interests and allegiances Pitt emerged in 1783 as the one politician with some hope of providing the leadership in a more solidly-based administration. At the age of 24 he was the youngest person ever to occupy the position of First Lord of the Treasury.

Pitt was not without political experience, having been Chancellor of the Exchequer for a brief spell under Shelburne. At first, however, his ministry appeared very shaky; it was not until 1784 that a general election improved his position. The younger Pitt led Great Britain, in his first ministry of 17 years' duration, through a period first of real prosperity and growth in which parliamentary reform was still talked of as a possibility, and then through one of continual war with France and rising social and economic difficulties. Considering the great importance of the years 1783-1801, it is perhaps surprising that Pitt should remain essentially a shadowy figure, not a subject of controversy, but merely of lack of interest. Indeed, it seems that Pitt so committed himself to political life in this turbulent period, which he and few other Englishmen adequately understood, that he submerged his individuality in his devotion to government. Shortly after Pitt's death, those who had known Pitt best commented on this commitment to national affairs. "I don't recollect amidst

the many years in which we lived almost unremittingly together," wrote Dundas, "that I ever had a walk or a ride with him that a very considerable part of the time was not occupied in discussions of a public concern."⁽¹⁾ He left behind no works to propound his views, nor did he indulge in the petty detail of letter-writing by which even some ambassadors' wives of the period reveal themselves more completely than he. The correspondence he received was prodigious, but when one turns to Pitt himself as source there is little enough to satisfy the curiosity. Even his parliamentary speeches, frequently well-written and argued, lack the immediacy of those of Fox. As Pitt isolated himself from contemporary society so he has isolated himself from history. Though Pitt enjoyed company and could be an interesting and lively host he never particularly sought it. He showed not interest in the arts, in cultivating businessmen or in social contact with the Opposition. Pitt lost contact with society even more completely after Henry Dundas began to encourage him to drink.

Nevertheless, Pitt carried the name of a famous father and had been brought up in the conviction that he would one day play his part in the leadership of

(1) Lord Melville to Viscount Lowther, July 25th, 1806, H.M.C. 13th report, appendix part vii, Lonsdale Papers, p. 189.

his country, Unlike his father, however, Pitt was much more reliant on the advice and support of the small but important group of men who served him throughout his ministry. In the 1780's he would, upon occasion, take upon himself the drafting of instructions such as those sent to Sir James Harris at the Hague during the Dutch crisis of 1786-7, but there is much less sign of this independence during the crisis of the autumn of 1792.⁽¹⁾ Pitt's interest, like his judgement of men, was variable. When interest was aroused he could be forceful and effective, though there is a noticeable lack of willingness to take an independent line after the sobering lesson of the Oczakow crisis. On Pitt's powers of judgement even friends were not altogether complimentary - "He appeared to me," wrote Wilberforce, "to be defective in his knowledge of human nature, or that from some cause or another he was less sagacious than might have been expected from his superior talents in his estimate of future events and sometimes in his judgement of character."⁽²⁾

(1) See the letters written to Grenville immediately after news of the Revolution of August 10th. reached England, H.M.C. Fortescue M.S. op. cit. ii, p.p. 302-308 also his correspondence with Dundas in November, Pitt Papers, ii, below, Chapter 8.

(2) William Wilberforce quoted in Harlow, op. cit. ii, p. 247.

Pitt had earned the reputation of a belief in parliamentary reform. In this he was supposed to be the disciple of Shelburne; though he no doubt owed a great deal to his brief period under Shelburne's leadership, the older man's influence was probably more pervasive in a general than in a specific way. Pitt's interest in parliamentary reform was only a part of an interest in administration as a whole. In his deference to the perfection of the order which had produced the society in which he lived, Pitt was, as his most recent biographer has pointed out, intellectually up-to-date.⁽¹⁾ Change was to be effected from within the system, not forcibly from outside. Such were the feelings which Pitt shared with the men of his generation. Opponents and critics later accused him of betraying the issue of reform, without ever properly understanding his own limitations of outlook.

The men whom Pitt selected to Cabinet and advisory positions shared many of his views on order and stability in Britain. In 1792-3 they provided him with a solid front of support in his government's stand against the menaces of French subversion. Before this, his Cabinet, which was still developing as an institution had been characterized by lack of cohesion. Pitt was not in a strong position in the early years and this introverted young man was aided by ministers who were often them-

(1) J. Ehrman, The Younger Pitt, The Years of Acclaim, London, 1969. p. 166.

selves distant individuals. Some of these figures need be mentioned only briefly. The Secretary of State for Home Affairs, Thomas Townsend, Lord Sydney, was an unassuming man of meagre abilities.⁽¹⁾ The other Secretary of State, for Foreign Affairs, was the young Earl of Carmarthen, later Duke of Leeds.⁽²⁾ Carmarthen made up for inexperience by the enthusiasm with which he followed his duties, but his powers of judgement were not strong, he tended to make forth-right decisions based on personal prejudice and he became increasingly isolated from Pitt before he resigned during the debacle of the Oczakow crisis in 1791. The Duke of Richmond,⁽³⁾ who supervised defence and armaments, had far-ranging intellectual interests, including parliamentary reform; he could also be overbearing, a quality which did not attract him to Pitt as a close associate over any length of time. The Lord Chancellor, Thurlow,⁽⁴⁾ was high in the esteem of the king, but was such a caustic and formidable personage that he was someone not to be confided in, but dreaded.

Pitt's closest advisers and friends, who were later to occupy the positions of Sydney and Carmarthen, were

(1) Thomas Townsend, first Viscount Sydney, 1733-1800.

(2) Francis Osborne, 5th Duke of Leeds, 1751-1799.

(3) Lennox, Charles, 4th Duke of Richmond and Lennox, 1764-1819.

(4) Thurlow, Edward, first baron, 1731-1806.

the Scottish politician, Henry Dundas⁽¹⁾ and Pitt's cousin, William Wyndham Grenville, later Earl Grenville.⁽²⁾ There was little love lost between Grenville and Dundas but with Pitt they formed a triangle whose combined views and actions were of the utmost importance to the direction of British politics at a time when the revolution in France first began to intrude on the greener pastures of national revival, in the spring of 1792. Henry Dundas was one of the most competent and durable politicians of his age. His rise was based on perspicacity, political gambling and dishonesty. In the tradition of his family he managed the administration and personnel of Scottish politics. At the time when he decided to throw in his lot with Pitt, because he rated Pitt's chances of survival as higher than those of other contenders, he was already well-versed in the seamier side of political life. Unlike Pitt, he had never for a moment toyed with the idea of parliamentary reform; he had no wish to see the system altered and he scarcely felt any affinity with what seemed to him the dangerous connection of reform and subversion. The spectacle of the Scottish populace rioting and forming French-influenced corresponding societies in 1792 brought out all his instincts of organized suffocation of the impudence of the lower

(1) Dundas, Henry, First Viscount Melville, 1742-1811.

(2) Grenville, William Wyndham, baron, 1759-1834.

orders. He was a man with a strong head and a strong stomach. In London, fellow members of parliament regarded him as uncouth; he never attempted to disguise his Scots' accent or to participate in the more refined culture of the English capital.

Most people who had business with Pitt's other close adviser, his cousin on his mother's side, were struck unfavourably by Grenville's extreme reserve, which amounted almost to frigidity. Grenville was a politician, not a career diplomat, and his punctilious observance of diplomatic forms and etiquette was in marked contrast to the initiative and action sometimes displayed by the ambassadors abroad. Grenville worked hard and his intellect was sound. He had a full knowledge of European affairs and direct experience of diplomatic negotiations during the time he spent at the Hague in the final phases of the Dutch crisis. In his dealings with the agents of other nations Grenville seems to have stuck firmly to the view of himself as spokesman for the official policy of the king, a situation in which it would be improper for him to allow his own personality to come through. Chauvelin, the French ambassador in the last crucial months before the outbreak of war in 1793 found the British foreign minister virtually inscrutable. Admittedly Chauvelin was probably not Grenville's intellectual equal, but it remains true that Grenville was better at writing official declarations of British policy than in

participating in the cut and thrust of personal interviews and exchanges. Only in his letters to his elder brother, the crotchety and opinionated Marquis of Buckingham,⁽¹⁾ do we see a more open side of the Earl of Grenville.

There was a third figure amongst Pitt's non-Cabinet advisers in the 1780's who hardly stood on the same rank of personal proximity to the minister but whose abilities and immense specialized knowledge made him an indispensable aid at a point when one of Pitt's priorities was to build up British trade. This was the President of the Board of Trade, Charles Jenkinson, Lord Hawkesbury and later first Earl of Liverpool.⁽²⁾ Politically, Hawkesbury was something of a self-made success. He had the reputation of being a king's man and was regarded as untrustworthy by many of his contemporaries. Aloof in manner and bearing, Pitt and Grenville sometimes referred to him as the "Great Man." He was not an advocate of free trade but a supporter of the older mercantilist school. Despite his reputation and scorn of new commercial ideas he was of material assistance to the British government in the 1780's.

(1) Grenville, George Nugent-Temple, first Marquis of Buckingham, 1753-1813. Served as Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, 1782.

(2) Jenkinson, Charles, baron Hawkesbury and first Earl of Liverpool, 1727-1808

The governmental system within which Pitt and his colleagues worked was, despite the changes of the Revolution of 1688, in many respects, without organization or well-defined areas of responsibility and control. Though admired by Montesquieu and other Enlightenment thinkers it remained a mysterious structure to most of Pitt's contemporaries. A number of offices and departments had authority for unconnected aspects of government. The Navy, fundamental to British defence and prosperity, was administered by several different departments, including the Admiralty, Navy Board and Secretariat. Financial organization based on the Treasury, was archaic. Everywhere there were office-holders who had purchased the positions which they occupied and regarded them jealously as property. The Court continued to occupy a place of central importance in the interweavings of British administration. Despite limitations on his freedom of action, made statute in the 1680's, the monarch retained considerable influence in diplomatic and armed services appointments. The general tone of the manner in which things were carried out in Britain was leisurely. During the summer recess it was difficult to get anything done.

The organization of the Foreign Office and diplomatic service reveals much about the handling of international affairs. The Foreign Office as a distinct Ministry was only created in 1782. Its personnel was extremely small and only the Secretary of State himself

was significant in the policy-making process. In the 1780/s the Ministry was assisted by one under-secretary (two after 1790), ten clerks, a keeper of State papers, a Secretary of Latin, two commissioners of the paper office, two decypherers and a Deputy Gazette writer.⁽¹⁾ While the system certainly avoided the French pitfall of having work divided amongst numerous clerks, thus adding to the time taken to get things done, the British had so few assistants in their office that work piled up and often months passed before despatches were dealt with.

For the diplomats themselves the delays brought about by neglect and understaffing were regarded as one of the hazards of the career and not necessarily without benefit. In the absence of instructions envoys were often left reasonably free and the more capable ambassadors appreciated this. In the 1780/s and early '90/s the British ambassadorial service, the lower ranks of which were often occupied by the younger sons of nobility and politicians, was graced with some unusually distinguished figures. This was especially true of the embassy to the Hague, which was filled first by Sir James Harris, a man whose craft, wit and resource made him the outstanding diplomat of his

(1) Cobban, A. Ambassadors and Secret Agents, London, 1954, p. 17.

generation.⁽¹⁾ After Harris' departure his place was taken by the more pedestrian but very capable Lord Auckland, who, as William Eden, skilfully negotiated the 1786 commercial treaty with France.⁽²⁾ The French embassy itself had been less fortunate. In the 1780/s this vital position was occupied by Lord Dorset,⁽³⁾ who was at home in Parisian society but thoroughly incompetent in his diplomatic office. In the 1790/s, in Berlin and then Vienna, Auckland's younger brother Morton Eden,⁽⁴⁾ proved himself to be an ambitious man without recognizable ambition, whose chief skill lay

(1) Harris, James, first Earl of Malmesbury, 1746-1820. The most detailed account of Harris' career in the United Provinces is in Cobban, Ambassadors and Secret Agents, op. cit. He was not actively engaged in diplomacy between 1788 and 1796, when he was put in charge of secret negotiations for peace with France.

(2) Eden, William, first baron Auckland, 1744-1814. After considerable early experience in Irish affairs Eden embarked on a diplomatic career in 1786 which lasted until he left the Dutch embassy in 1793. He was later to serve Pitt and Addington as joint Post-Master-General and was President of the Board of Trade under the Ministry of All the Talents. See below, Chapter 7 and passim.

(3) Sackville, John, 3rd Duke of Dorset, 1745-1799.

(4) Eden, Morton, first baron Henley. 1752-1830.

in whining complaint. Lord Elgin, recently arrived at Brussels when the French armies began to menace the Austrian Netherlands, had to be coaxed into sending maps of the campaigns and caused great amusement by sending his butler with one despatch and especially recommending him to Lord Grenville's attention. (1)

In many cases the secretaries of legations were prevailed upon to send relevant information and some of them proved extremely useful in complying with such requests. The carrying of the despatches themselves was entrusted to individual messengers, who braved danger and the elements to carry the letters through. Often these men had good knowledge of a country's geography and language. Occasionally, they were given more scope to act as reporters and not just carriers, as in the case of one Mason, who observed the departure of Thomas Paine from Dover in September, 1792. (2)

(1) Bruce, Thomas, 7th. Earl of Elgin and 11th. Earl of Kincardine 1766-1841. After embarking on a military career, Elgin was appointed in 1792 to the Court of Brussels. It was in his capacity as ambassador to the Ottoman Empire that he first acquired an interest in, and later removed, the Elgin Marbles.

(2) Burges to Grenville, September 1792, H.M.C. Fortescue MS, op. cit. ii, p.3.

French government structure in the 1780/s was a product of the era of French grandeur, the reign of Louis XIV. During this long reign many reforms in administration begun by Henry IV were revived and made more effective. The intendants, in particular, became a vital part of the chain of control between Paris and the provinces. The organization of departments, ministries and provincial government had not altered significantly since the previous century. There were many capable men employed in the service of the French government, The personnel of the secretarial ranks of the Ministries was the preserve of respected bourgeois families, who were the favoured dependents of the Ministry and the king. Most of these men committed their working lives to the service of the French crown as did the intendants, amongst whom may be counted some of the most capable and enlightened individuals of the ancien regime. Yet there was one insuperable problem; all these men were functionaries. Whatever their interest in their work they had no freedom of initiative. Every new policy or major decision had to come from Paris, where the king and his ministers presided over the exercise of power.

Under these circumstances, the character and ability of the king were of crucial importance. The divine right of kings had received its most explicit formulation by Bossuet in his glorification of monarchy under Louis XIV. Louis' own views on his responsibilities,

his creation of government by spectacle, his devotion to the goal of glorifying France had all created a severe burden for his successors. Neither Louis XV nor Louis XVI was able to meet the demands put upon them; Louis XV lacked the interest in government or the strength of purpose necessary to devote himself to ruling. Louis XVI, though imbued with the same high principles as his predecessors, had insufficient faith in his own judgement and was too ready to listen to the personal whims of his wife and courtiers. The French monarchy had to be a force, to give vigorous intelligent leadership or it became merely the tool of faction and interest groups. It had gone so far down the road of decaying splendour that when efforts were made in the 1770's to restore royal power to the practical application of its absolutist theory, fierce opposition was met from those groups which had profited from the weakness of Bourbon direction in the 18th. century.

The greatest opposition to the attempts to establish a kind of Enlightened Despotism in France came from the landowners who, for social and economic motives refused to part with the principle of exemption from taxation on their estates and from the comparatively new aristocracy of the parlements. This small body of men who sat in the thirteen sovereign law courts of France was mainly descended from the noblesse de la robe, the titled group created from amongst prominent bourgeois families by Louis XIV. They regarded themselves

as guardians and interpreters of the French constitution and attacked all measures which seemed to undermine their position. Their chief importance for the French governmental process lay in the fact that they registered royal edicts and could block registration for a considerable time, which frequently occurred in the last years of the ancien regime. The parlementaires acquired a great deal of popularity at a time when extension of monarchical authority was a controversial issue by representing themselves to popular opinion as defenders of the liberties of Frenchmen. In truth, they were interested only in defending and maintaining the power which had accrued to their position. As a body they were self-centred and reactionary but it should be remembered that some prominent revolutionaries had served on the Parlement of Paris and had there registered disapproval of its stand. The monarchy had only one effective method of curbing the obstructiveness of the parlementaires and that was by banishing them from their positions. Such actions only contributed to parlementaire propaganda, making them appear as martyrs in the cause of justice and liberty.

Those who dominated the practice of French politics in the 1780's were the King, the Queen and the Ministers who occupied the posts of Controller General of Finances and Minister for Foreign Affairs. The King was a man with a slow mind easily swayed by stronger personalities. Isolated in his palace at Versailles,

it was easy for Louis to regard himself as the father of his subjects without ever really comprehending the deep currents in French life. But he was not as stupid as some of his nobles and his youngest brother, Artois. Louis XVI found his greatest reserve of dignity and force in the last months of his life as a prisoner upholding the power and trust which he embodied as a monarch. The British came late to any sympathy for Louis; after the Flight to Varennes the British minister in Paris was forthright in his condemnation of the king's folly.⁽¹⁾ George III viewed him as an equal who ought to receive the respect due to a king. Louis XVI's execution offended many sensibilities across the Channel, but the British reaction was not without political significance in terms of relations with revolutionary France later in January, 1793.⁽²⁾

Unlike Britain, where Queen Charlotte occupied herself with producing fifteen children, Marie Antoinette carved out for herself a significant and disastrous role in the politics of the ancien regime. The Austrian Archduchess had arrived in Paris as a high-spirited teenager. She understood little of France or of French politics but she soon became an important adviser to her young husband. Though her knowledge of specific issues was slight she had very definite

(1) Lord Gower to Grenville, June
H.M.C. Fortescue MS, op. cit. ii, p. 117.

(2) See below, Chapter 11.

opinions on individuals and it was in the sphere of appointments that she had the greatest influence on Louis XVI.

France's last controllers-general were faced with the mammoth task of decreasing French debts while at the same time injecting new life into the French economy. Turgot and Calonne both realized that little could be achieved while the privileged classes were permitted to continue their exemption from taxation. Their pursuit of this aim cost both of them their positions. Necker hoped that, given time, he could develop faith in the economy which would be a spur to production and investment, but his concealment of French bankruptcy was as unwise as it was dishonest. During the years in which Pitt was guiding Britain towards stability and growth by nourishing commerce the French were tied by the anachronism of their fiscal and economic system.

In strong contrast to the belated creation of a separate department for foreign affairs in Britain, the French ministry was regarded as the most important in the country. The last ministers of the ancien regime came from bourgeois families recently ennobled. The Comte de Vergennes, minister until 1787, had taken France into the American war and had been a vital figure in the peace negotiations of 1783. Despite the enmity of the queen and leading courtiers, Vergennes was a dominant political figure until his death.

His caution and hard work were well-known in diplomatic circles, but his reticence hid a certain amount of indecision. Vergennes had entered the war without any certainty that the Americans would ever act as indebted junior partners. In the relatively quiet years between 1783-6, Vergennes remained very much at the helm of French politics, until Calonne's announcement of the country's economic crisis brought the French government squarely back to consideration of impending crisis at home. Departing in timely fashion from the international scene, Vergennes died at the height of the Dutch crisis.

The organization of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was not materially altered until a major overhaul by Dumouriez in 1791. At this point, many employees of questionable revolutionary ardour were deprived of their positions. The allocation of correspondence sections, or bureaux, as they were known, dealing with various areas of the world was also expanded and altered. In 1783, the Ministry was composed of two directions politiques responsible for handling correspondence, as well as a bureau des archives, a bureau des fonds and a secretariat. Nearly all of these divisions individually employed more men than composed the entire staff of the British Foreign Office, and the chief civil servants within each section were men of some importance. (1)

(1) F. Masson, Le Département des Affaires Etrangères pendant la Révolution, Paris, 1877, Ch. 1.

The quality of diplomatic representation was variable and became even more unpredictable after the outbreak of the Revolution, when patriotism was more often important than ability. Although the personnel in French missions changed, often several times, during the Revolution, many of the men elevated to high diplomatic status had probably been on the fringes of diplomacy during the ancien regime. Their capacity for intrigue, however bungled, was at least the equal of their predecessors. The post of ambassador to the United Provinces at the Hague was disastrously filled through most of the 1780/s and 1790/s. The Marquis de Verac⁽¹⁾ was no match for Sir James Harris in 1787, though Lord Auckland, in 1792, was eventually to find some good points in his rival, the recalcitrant ambassador de Maulde⁽²⁾. The ambassadors of the revolutionary period came from widely different, and, in some cases, unspecified backgrounds. Chauvelin⁽³⁾ in London, was a former marquis, but citizen Thainville, sent to take

(1) Verac, Charles-Olivier de Saint-George, marquis de, 1743-1828

(2) de Maulde, Emmanuel, dates unknown, see below, Chapter 7, passim.

(3) Chauvelin, Bernard-Francois, Marquis de, B. Paris, 1766

Inherited the office of Master of the Wardrobe. 1791. aide-de-camp to marchal de Rochambeau. Named as Minister Plenipotentiary to Court of St. James, 19th. April, 1792. apparently on suggestion of Talleyrand. Recalled January 21st. 1793 and ordered by George III to leave Great Britain on January 24th. Named as ambassador to Florence on his return to France but imprisoned August, 1793 because of his noble background and suspect sympathies. Released after 9th. Thermidor. Served Napoleon after Brumaire.

over from de Maulde in the United Provinces, was a young officer in the revolutionary armies.⁽¹⁾

Standards of ambassadorial propriety and behaviour altered drastically. Edmond Genet was scarcely more popular at St. Petersburg than he was in the United States of America.⁽²⁾ Ambassadors harangued foreign courts and sometimes, as in the case of Bourgoing in Spain, lectured their own superiors in France.⁽³⁾

De Maulde defiantly stayed on at the Hague two months after he had been recalled.

A look at the many differences in the structure of government and diplomacy in Great Britain and France, provides further insights into the differences in outlook between the two societies. One important notion they did share, despite Pitt's attempt in connection

(1) Despatches to and from Thainville in A.A.E., C.P. Hollande, 583.

(2) Genet, Edmond 1763-1834, son of a pamphleteer and brother of two of Marie-Antoinette's ladies-in-waiting. Envoy to Russia and the U.S.A., where his outspokenness caused great controversy in the mid 1790's.

(3) Bourgoing, Jean-Francois, 1748-1811. Bourgoing was well established in diplomacy before the Revolution. He had accompanied Montmorin to Spain in 1777, as attache to the embassy. Minister at Madrid, 1791-3. Continued his diplomatic career under Napoleon.

with the Eden Treaty to ridicule such prejudices, was the conviction that they were inveterate rivals. The activities of revolutionary France in the autumn of 1792 strengthened the feeling that French aggression, whatever its form, was directed against peace in general and Great Britain in particular. The period between 1783 and 1791, with one exception, witnessed a lull before the impact of the Revolution on relative British calm was felt. (1) Pitt's government were not interested in war, or even much interested in Europe, unless their allies or traditional concepts of the balance of power seemed threatened. Britain reacted to the French revolution initially with only marginal interest. The want of information and curiosity about European affairs perplexed and rather disgusted Lord Auckland when he was on leave in England in the spring of 1792. (2) Up till the first week of November, 1792, Lord Grenville was of the opinion that Britain was better out of the European maelstrom. The contrast between this neutrality of British commitment to war in February, 1793, is striking.

In the menacing but nevertheless more tranquil world of the 1780's Pitt was concerned to build up British strength, and thus her role in Europe, steadily but cautiously. He was not interested in cultivating

(1) The exception was the Dutch crisis, see below.

(2) Auckland to Lord Henry Spencer, March 20 1792, Auckland

any definite set of alliances, though Carmarthen had hopes of establishing a northern alliance system between Austria, Prussia, Russia, Denmark and Great Britain. Pitt's major problems after 1783 were to foster trade and build up British interests in new colonial directions. Lord Hawkesbury, a protectionist, was important in the passing of 1786 Navigation Act. Hawkesbury had not yet been raised to the peerage in 1786, and it was in his capacity as Mr. Jenkinson that he took steps to ensure Britain the lion's share of the carrying trade, remarking, "if proper means could be devised to secure the navigation trade to Great Britain, though we had lost a dominion, we might almost be said to have gained an empire."⁽¹⁾

Britain also hoped to expand the area in which she traded. The enhanced importance of the Far East in British eyes was amply demonstrated by the government's inability to come to terms with their supposed allies, the Dutch, over commercial arrangements in Far Eastern waters. The resolution of the crisis over Indian government, which had led to Pitt's rise, was achieved in 1784, by setting up a ministerial-level board of control to supervise the government of Indian territories but leaving to the East India Company

(1) Jenkinson in House of Commons, April 11th 1786, quoted in

J. Ehrman, The Younger Pitt, p. 339.

the appointment of officials from governor-general down. The British also had hopes of improving their trade in the Malayan regions and enlarging its scope to include China. There was also need for action in the western portions of the empire and especially in Canada, which had received an influx of American loyalists after the war and was demanding a change in its constitutional arrangements. In 1789, Grenville, then Home-Secretary, introduced the Canada Act, which divided the country into a British upper region and a French lower one, each with Legislative Assembly and Council, executive Council and Lieutenant-Governors under the Governor-General. Though learning from the mistakes of American rule the government still believed that the British constitution should be extended, wherever feasible, to overseas dependencies.

Nearer to home the government was still faced with an insoluble problem in Ireland. Pitt's efforts to grant greater freedom to Irish trade and possibly introduce reforms into the Irish Parliament met with opposition from Protestants and suspicion from Catholic patriots. The defeat of the Irish propositions in 1785 was the first major reverse of Pitt's ministry. Ireland remained an arena which was dangerously open to internal disorder and exploitation of its grievances from outside; the threat of civil war there loomed in the minds of English politicians in 1792. Pitt and his closest colleagues had little respect for the

Protestant government in Dublin but they did not want to see a collapse of all order across the Irish Channel. (1)

Pitt's hopes of making the status of Ireland and her relations with the rest of Britain more reasonable were only a small part of the wider effort to develop a strong commercial empire in the many areas of British dominion which still remained after the loss of the American colonies. His attitude to the most favourable type of relations to be cultivated with Europe further reflected his commitment to prosperity and stability as the best means of restoring Britain to her rightful rank as a world power. Pitt's early emphasis in foreign relations was thus to make contact on a commercial level rather than to seek to play a forceful diplomatic role which might lead to the disturbance and expense of war. The most well-known product of this bout of commercial activity is the treaty negotiated with France by William Eden in 1786. However, there were seven other treaties under negotiation between 1785 and 1793, with Portugal, Spain, Russia, Poland, Prussia, the two Sicilies and Holland. Of these, only the Russians eventually signed a commercial convention with Great Britain, in March, 1793. It was in France that Britain had her most striking success in this decade of commercial endeavour. At first sight it seems strange that two countries who

(1) See Below, Chapter 5.

viewed each other with a great deal of suspicion should have been able to reach a significant and comprehensive commercial arrangement at a time when they were also wrestling for an influential hold over Dutch politics. The final agreement was probably reached because of Eden's skill and persistence and the support given him by prominent French ministers. The issue of the Treaty had become something of a faction fight within French ranks. The future Lord Auckland seems to have done his detailed preparation carefully before setting out and since he had not shown an over-delicacy for political attachment at home he obviously had much to gain by returning triumphant. The Treaty was controversial in both Great Britain and France. The French did not relish the prospect of their country being flooded by British manufactured goods but many British farmers and producers were suspicious at the thought of opening the doors too wide to France. Eden was angered by what appeared to him to be the unreasoning conservatism of his critics in Great Britain - "I am satisfied by all the sound principles of national policy.... that it would not only have been absurd, but immoral in the extreme to have declined the present experiment, great and precarious as it may be; in the present moment it gives bread and employment and prosperity to millions." (1)

(1) Eden to Sheffield, February, 1787, Auckland, Journals and Correspondence, op. cit. ii, p.p. 402-403.

Considering the slowness and obstructiveness which pervades the other treaties under discussion, particularly that with Spain, the signing of the 1786 treaty with France was a notable victory for Pitt's administration.

Yet in other areas of contact, Anglo-French rivalry, rather than amity, was still very evident. It was in the United Provinces that the French ancien regime had its last confrontation with Britain. The possession of a dominant hold over Dutch politics was of great importance for both countries. The British had actually been at war with the Dutch in the closing years of the wider American conflict; after 1783, they were struggling to establish their presence in the United Provinces by supporting the House of Orange against the aspirations of the Patriots, a predominantly bourgeois merchant group prominent in Amsterdam and Rotterdam. The Patriots were seeking to curb the power of the Stadtholder, who was, technically, the first servant of the state. They wished to establish a government which gave them a greater say in the policy-making process. Some of them had already absorbed the principles of the American Revolution but although their leaders took refuge in France after their defeat in 1787 they were not greatly in sympathy with the radicalism of the French Revolution, a fact which some Frenchmen realized in the autumn of 1792. The French continued to encourage them after

1787 without ever providing much active support.

The British government in 1786 had no wish to see French influence established in a small state which they rather regarded as their gateway to Europe and whose geographic and strategic interests seemed similar to their own. Pitt's administration were not particularly moved by the plight of the United Provinces, a once-thriving Imperial power now with a pathetically weak executive, bankrupt East India Company and almost non-existent navy. In fact, their lack of interest in the real state of the country they sought to direct led them to make some dangerous assumptions about Dutch strength which proved alarmingly unfounded as war with France became a distinct possibility in 1792.

Pitt's administration were not quick to realize the important hold which the French had established over Dutch affairs in 1786. The main credit for the vital preliminary work of undermining the French position must go to Sir James Harris, who faced an extremely difficult task when he first arrived at the Hague. Harris, with the support of the Stadtholder's wife Wilhelmina, a niece of Frederick the Great, and the Grand Pensionary of Holland, Van de Spiegel⁽¹⁾

(1) Van de Spiegel, Grand Pensionary of Holland, leading Dutch adviser and supporter of the Stadtholder until the fall of the United Provinces and his imprisonment in 1795. He was to play an important role in the secret negotiations with General Dumouriez, November, 1792-February, 1793.

attempted to build on the support of the remaining loyal provinces, particularly Gelderland, and establish a party which would be able to combat French influence. He was eventually given a substantial sum of secret service money but his main strengths lay in his ability which was far superior to that of the French ambassador at the Hague and the energetic support of Pitt, when the latter's interest was aroused. In mid-September, 1787, the British government announced that it could no longer remain a spectator of French interference in the United Provinces. By this time a situation approaching civil war existed. The Princess of Orange was temporarily arrested by a Patriot force and the French seemed to be organizing an army. At the height of the crisis, while Britain was demanding that the army camp at Givet be disbanded, the Prussians invaded Dutch territory. The French in 1787, were already beset by the domestic crisis which culminated in the Revolution. They had hoped to control the United Provinces by intrigue, not violence, and they backed down. In the first European crisis of his ministry Pitt had met with resounding success. Within the next year a Triple Alliance was signed between Great Britain, Prussia and the United Provinces, though the treaty remained, in reality, a dead letter. Britain had little sympathy for Prussia's aggressive policy, particularly in regard to Poland. Her main interest was to dominate the United Provinces, a wish which was fulfilled.

The successful conclusion of the Dutch crisis prompted Pitt to take a more direct line in ensuing problems with Spain and Russia. For France, the years between 1787 and 1789 were a period of great opposition to the French monarchy, ending in the summoning of the Estates-General for May, 1789, and the Revolution which followed. Early signals of the troubles of the future had been noticed by Auckland in 1787.⁽¹⁾ The aristocratic revolt of 1788, inspired by the parlementaires, had erupted into mob-action, often led by lawyers' clerks, which was especially serious in Brittany. The Third Estate was left with little option but to break the stranglehold of the two privileged orders and in what was really a series of revolts, triggered off by hunger and fear in the provinces, the French populace at length added its own physical presence to the weight of bourgeois demands. Louis XVI himself, just before the fall of the Bastille, shied away from a head-on clash, hoping that moderation would lead to a better chance of re-building his position. The spectacle of the strength and fury of the Parisian crowd prompted a caucus of leading moderates among the nobility to bring about the dramatic abolition of

(1) "There is a strong disposition in this country (France) to make changes in the constitution of the government....." Eden to Loughborough, November 8th, 1787, Auckland, Journals and Correspondence, op. cit. i, p. 446.

feudal rights on the night of August 4th. Despite these developments the political crisis of 1789 was not halted until the October days when Parisians decided to make their king more accessible by returning him from Versailles to the palace of the Tuileries in the capital. Within the first few months of the Revolution a hard core of nobles who could not stomach the changes, left in the early wave of emigration. Thereafter, in France, the Constituent Assembly sought unsuccessfully to deal with the problems of landownership and the loyalty of members of the Catholic Church, while the Royal Family grew more and more restive and the discontent of the urban and rural poor increased.

The British government had been an unconcerned spectator in most of these early developments of the French Revolution. To see France embroiled in domestic discord served the British interest well, so long as malcontents did not seem to be influencing the British Isles. A number of liberals praised French efforts at establishing a broader constitution which, it was felt, ought to be modelled on the British for maximum effectiveness.⁽¹⁾ When the first troubles of 1789 became known, Britain was still getting over the political controversy of the Regency Crisis, which might have brought an untimely end to Pitt's admini-

(1) Sheffield to Auckland, January 8th, 1790,
Auckland, Journals and Correspondence, op. cit. i,
p. 366.

stration. Two international episodes in the early years of the Revolution further illustrated Britain's lack of concern at developments in France. War seemed near on two occasions, but in neither case was the French Revolution an issue. In 1790 the government bristled at the possibility of conflict with Spain over an incident which had taken place at Nootka Sound, a remote north-west Pacific harbour. The territorial boundaries of this region were still in dispute and Spain stuck by her ancient claims to this coastline. The Duke of Leeds immediately took a tone in his correspondence with Spain which Pitt considered immoderate, but on hearing a set of details, which were not altogether accurate, from the owner of the seized ships, Pitt decided that full reparation must be demanded and a permanent agreement negotiated to settle the problem finally. The fur trade of the west Canadian coast had its outlet in Canton and Britain was also developing a whaling interest in the disputed region. The slowness of Spanish response brought a strong reaction from the British. The fleet was mobilized and, in face of this intransigence the Spanish tried to invoke the Family Compact, but received no positive assistance from the French Assembly. The role of the British secret service in bringing

about this result remains obscure.⁽¹⁾ The agreement eventually reached with Spain guaranteed British fishing rights in the Pacific Ocean, an important principle for an administration committed to overseas expansion. The British public had generally remained unexcited at the prospect of war with Spain, some finding it hard to believe that hostilities could break out over a place of which they had never heard.⁽²⁾

So far, Pitt had had a notable run of success in his dealings with Europe. In 1791, even as the situation in France worsened, his position seemed secure in both the domestic and international spheres. During 1791, there was, however, one setback in a confrontation with Russia. The British government had always regarded the pretensions of the northern European

(1) Both Mirabeau and Louis XVI at one stage showed eagerness to support the Spanish in their call for assistance. The British government had two agents, Hugh Elliott, 1752-1820, later envoy to Denmark, and William Augustus Miles, 1753(?) - 1817 (see below, Chapter 11) in Paris at the time.

(2) "Here we are going to war, and for what?..... Pitt is tired of peace. He bullied France so effectually three years ago that he is determined to try the same thing with Spain." (Anthony Storer to Auckland, October 22nd, 1790) Auckland, Journals and Correspondence, op. cit. 1, p. 374.

countries as rather distasteful. Pitt had kept out of the Swedish and Polish crises of 1788-9 with some difficulty. He was convinced by Ewart, his envoy in Berlin, that Prussia would support him in curbing the extension of Russian influence at the expense of the Turks. The point at issue was Russia's claim to the Black Sea port of Oczakow. Pitt was misinformed by Ewart and had miscalculated the reactions of both Catherine II of Russia and his own parliament. The Russian Empress did not respond to British threats by backing down and parliament proved unexpectedly obdurate when it refused to vote supplies for a fleet. The affair caused Pitt some loss of face but the dent in his record was only slight, though his self-confidence may have been more damaged.

Despite this minor cloud, most Englishmen were optimistic about the prospects of continued peace and prosperity. In France, the summer and autumn of 1791 brought a succession of crises and a new set of politicians. This combination pushed the country towards confrontation with Austria and Prussia, but gave no real indication that Anglo-French relations would break down within eighteen months.

Chapter 2

France and Great Britain, 1791 - 1792;

the background to the Revolution of August 10th.

"You have nothing to hope from the interior of your dominion. Nothing. Nothing." Richard Burke, J.P., to Louis XVI, 6th August 1791.

In the summer of 1791 the Constituent Assembly was nearing the end of its work amid an atmosphere of general unrest. The Civil Constitution of the Clergy had caused dissension throughout France, the economic situation was steadily worsening, and the émigrés, though without much prospect of immediate Imperial aid, began to mass their forces on the Rhine. The tense situation assumed crisis proportions overnight when Louis XVI, attempting to precipitate his confrontation with the Revolution, fled from Paris and was arrested at Varennes, a town some distance from the north-eastern border. Those who suspected the king's acquiescence in the measures taken by the Assembly, and who detested the influence of his wife, were to have their fears confirmed by the document which Louis, optimistically supposing imminent freedom, left behind. The king stated that he had accepted the legislation passed in his name under sufferance. Such a disavowal of the system under which government had previously operated was particularly damaging at a moment, when a new constitution was about to be put into force. There were not many influential men yet prepared to face the

reality that the king's intransigence was calculated to jeopardize the long-term success of any kind of compromise between the ancien regime and the Revolution. The official version of Louis' flight was that he had been abducted, but the Assembly was acutely aware that the king's action invited turmoil and invasion and its interim measures foreshadowed the steps taken in August, 1792, when the Assembly once more assumed full sovereignty.

The flight to Varennes also provided a focus for the political agitation in Paris. The question of a republic was now freely discussed in the clubs.⁽¹⁾ It seemed that a fundamental difference of outlook was developing between those who wished merely to consolidate the gains of the Revolution achieved up to that point and those who were not satisfied with legislation which guaranteed the predominance of a comparatively prosperous professional elite. The feeling grew that the only way to safeguard liberty was to abolish the monarchy. The leaders of the Constituent

(1) It was also mooted in the press. Brissot's Le Patriote Francais strongly condemned Louis - "Que le roi ait déserté son poste de sa propre volonté, c'est un délit qui ne laisse aucun doute; le mémoire écrit et signé de sa main, en offre la preuve irrésistible..... il est évident, d'après cet écrit, que le roi ne veut point être ne peut être le roi de la nouvelle constitution."

Le Patriote Francais, ed. J.P. Brissot, June 25th. 1791.

were determined to take positive steps to avert the threat of disorder from the radicals' campaign. On July 17th, 1791, a crowd gathered on the Champs de Mars to demand the deposition of the king, was fired on, after an incident by Lafayette's National Guard. In the general suppression of radicals and the popular press which followed Danton fled to England and Desmoulins and Marat went into hiding.⁽¹⁾ The Champs de Mars rankled in the Republican mind for two years. It was mentioned in the trials of the Girondins and particularly that of Brissot,⁽²⁾ who had not been near the Champs de Mars on the day itself. His answers on his prior knowledge of the petition signed on July 17th, and of its wording, were very evasive.⁽³⁾

(1) In England Danton made the acquaintance of a number of men with radical sympathies, notably Thomas Holcroft, the playwright and Thomas Christie, a Scottish political writer. These links were not entirely lost; in the early autumn of 1792, Francois Noël, the secret agent sent by the Conseil Executif re-established contact with Danton's friends.

(2) Jean-Pierre Brissot, b.1754. Journalist. Editor of Le Patriote Francais and of the Société des Amis des Noirs, a negro emancipation group. Elected as deputy for Paris to the Legislative Assembly having sat in the Municipal Assembly of Paris. An opponent of Robespierre, he was arrested after the Revolution of 2nd. June, 1793 and guillotined October 31st. 1793.

(3) Trial of Brissot, A.N., W. 292.

The Assembly now pushed through its final measures towards the new Constitution, under which Louis was re-instated by taking the oath of September 14th. The Constitution embodied the aims of the bourgeois of liberal outlook, who had been by-passed by the privilege of the ancien regime. The distinction between active and passive citizens for electoral purposes was maintained and the allocation of seats for the legislature in the departements was based on a combination of population and taxation. The king still retained significant powers, notably in the exercise of the veto, which could postpone the passage of any decree for the length of three assemblies. He was also the nominal head of the diplomatic service and armed forces. The Constitution did not appeal to the more democratic outlook of a man like Robespierre and it was totally incompatible with the king's conception of his role. There was, however, general deference for the Constitution and a considerable amount of optimism when the new Legislative Assembly met.

The Constituant had voted in May, 1791, on the suggestion of Robespierre, to exclude its members from sitting in the next Assembly. The new legislature therefore inevitably contained men who had no experience of government and whose enthusiasm for the daunting task which lay ahead of them was not necessarily matched by ability. Some men, notably Brissot, were already established on the political scene. The

Legislative also contained a number of distinguished provincial lawyers, later labelled Girondins, ⁽¹⁾ by their opponents because of the departement which they represented. Linked by friendship with Brissot and with Madame Roland, ⁽²⁾ whose salon attracted several talented men, they formed an eloquent, though loosely-knit group.

The situation in which the Legislative Assembly took over the exercise of government was unpromising.

(1) Among the most prominent men from the south-west were Guadet, (Marguerite Elie), b.1755, leader of Bordeaux bar, 1789, ex. Bordeaux, June 1794, and Gensonne, (Armand), b. 1758, procureur of municipality of Bordeaux, 1790.

(2) Madame Roland (née Jeanne Philipon Manon) b. Paris, 1754. Talented and ambitious, she was obsessed by the virtues of ancient republicanism. Wife of Jean-Marie Roland, former inspector of commerce in Paris and inspector-general of manufactures at Lyon. In 1791 she established a salon at Paris. Her husband became Minister of the Interior, March 1792. He was dismissed June 13th. and re-instated 10th August, resigning 22nd January, 1793. Madame Roland was arrested after Revolution of 2nd June, 1793 and guillotined 9th November. Roland, who had fled to Rouen, committed suicide November 10th.

Madame Roland's circle also included Vergniaud (Pierre Victurnien) b.1753, a lawyer, ex. Paris 31st. October 1793 and Buzot (Francois Nicholas Leonard) b. 1760, lawyer, deputy for Eure in the Convention. Found dead with

Divisions in France seemed to be growing; the king himself, at the very head of government had given damning evidence of his disloyalty to the nation, yet efforts to bring him round were made over and over again. As well as the break-up of the Constitutional monarchy from within there was the growing threat, throughout the autumn, of conflict with Austria and Prussia. Brissot and his supporters attempted to turn this menace into a positive force, to unify France and to compel the king to show where his allegiance lay.

The British government had observed French tribulations without any official comment. Edmund and Richard Burke, Jr. attempted to chide ministers into action and met with a polite, even vaguely amused, but entirely negative response.⁽¹⁾ George III found some sympathy for the French royal family during and after the Flight to Varennes, but Lord Gower, in Paris, felt otherwise - "If this country ceases to be a monarchy it will be entirely the fault of Louis XVI. Blunder upon blunder, in consequence upon in consequence, a total want of energy of mind....."⁽²⁾ Most British politicians laid increasing emphasis on calm and prosperity at home, a comfortable contrast to the problems, both internal and external, which beset France.

(1) Dundas to Richard Burke, Jr., 20th September, 1791, Burke, Correspondence, vi, p. 404.

(2) Gower to Grenville, July 1st, 1791, H.M.C.

While Britain remained aloof, other European countries were compelled to register some comment on the course of the revolution in France. Before the Flight to Varennes both Austria and Prussia were concerned with the future of Poland and Russian intentions rather than with the fate of the French monarchy. France was only of peripheral interest, always provided that the revolutionaries did not become actually aggressive and push into Belgium or the Rhineland. Few people in France were aware of the Emperor's lack of enthusiasm for direct conflict, with the exception of Marie-Antoinette, who herself became convinced that the monarchy could only be restored to its former position by war, a war which would crush the revolution. The attempt at escape made by his sister had manoeuvred Leopold into a situation in which he felt some kind of formal statement, however hollow-sounding, had to be made. On August 27th. 1791, he and Frederick William II of Prussia issued the Declaration of Pilnitz, in which they undertook to restore order in France if other monarchs would join them. The French reacted sharply to the declaration, which they took as an insult and a menace, but no other monarchs came forward to assist Leopold and Frederick William. Lord Auckland found the declaration "ill-conceived and undignified" but no-one in England believed it to be a genuine threat.⁽¹⁾

(1) Auckland to Grenville, September 7th. 1791,
H.M.C. Fortescue MSS, ii, p.186.

"These great Princes," wrote Grenville to Dundas, "are desirous of saying much and of appearing to have a great influence in the course of events, but..... they are quite determined to do nothing."⁽¹⁾ Neither was there likely to be any aggression from Spain, still nominally tied to France by the Family Compact.

For a variety of reasons, however, almost every political grouping in France, except the Robespierriest minority in the Jacobins, were to commit themselves to war during the turn of the year 1791-2. The Brissotins and the Royalists for reasons already mentioned, Lafayette and Narbonne⁽²⁾ because they hoped a short and successful campaign would restore the prestige of the monarchy. The Assembly itself, increasingly influenced by Brissot, began to force the Emperor's hand in November, 1791, when it ordered the Elector of Trier, a protégé of the Emperor, to disperse the émigré forces on his territory. French foreign policy soon became little more than a web of mutual deceit, with Louis XVI publicly assenting to aggressive legis-

(1) Grenville to Dundas, September 14th. H.M.C. Fortescue MSS, 11, p. 192.

(2) Louis, Comte de Narbonne-Lara, b. Parma 1755. Col. of Royal Piedmont Regiment, Minister for War, December 1791-March 1792. Much disliked by Louis XVI. While in office, later escaped to England, returning after Brumaire. D. 1813.

lation while privately writing to Leopold urging him to oppose French demands. The Robespierrists were disgusted to note that no-one appreciated the very real dangers to which the French people were being exposed by men whom they suspected as empty self-seekers, perhaps even in league with the Court. Robespierre's criticisms went practically unheeded, but the deep suspicions engendered at this time were not forgotten in the power struggle of the autumn of 1792.

The belligerent sentiments of the Assembly were primarily directed against Austria and Prussia. Brissot affected to be knowledgeable on diplomatic affairs but there were others who fully appreciated the disadvantages of a European war and the need to take steps before hostilities began. The neutrality of England was of considerable importance and confirmation of the British attitude became necessary in January, 1792, as relations deteriorated with Austria.

At this point Talleyrand crossed the Channel on an unofficial mission to sound out Pitt's administration. Talleyrand's mission is particularly interesting for the light it throws on British policy at the beginning of 1792, since some of the same questions and problems were to recur in seven months' time. The initiative for the journey evidently came from Talleyrand⁽¹⁾ himself.

(1) Talleyrand - Perigord, Charles Maurice de. B.1754. Bishop of Autun. Took Civil Constitution of Clergy. In England and U.S. after August 10th, 1792. Adviser to Louis XVIII.

In a letter to his friend Biron, the future general, he related how he had suggested Biron as the emissary, but that Delessart,⁽¹⁾ the Foreign Minister, had insisted that Talleyrand go himself, on the grounds that this would bring home to Austria and Prussia France's determination to take strong action. Biron in his reply said that he doubted the Minister's good faith and believed that he was hoping to bring all the powers down on France - "je ne serais pas embarrassé de prouver autrement que par des conjectures qu'il cherche des ennemis à la France pour armer toutes les puissances contre la revolution; il a résisté à vos bons conseils tant qu'ils ont pu être utiles..... Quant à l'Angleterre, M. Delessart ne sait apparemment pas tout le bien qu'il fait en vous déterminant à y aller.....",⁽²⁾ but he went on to warn that Talleyrand would not receive a very warm reception in England. Carrying a letter of introduction explaining that he had no official status but was going "pour différents objets qui l'intéressent personnellement," Talleyrand arrived in England on

(1) Lessart, Antoine Valdec de. B.1742, Minister of Finance in 1790 and of the Interior in 1791. Minister for Foreign Affairs, November 1791-March 1792. Impeached by the Legislative Assembly, he was massacred at Versailles, 9th September, 1792.

(2) Biron to Talleyrand, 7th January, 1792. G. Pallain, ed. La Mission de Talleyrand à Londres en 1792.

January 24th, 1792. Four days later he saw Pitt, an interview which passed "tout en politesses." Grenville was still in the country, thus confirming Talleyrand's opinion that things were dealt with in a leisurely fashion, in England. Despite the vagueness of his interviews with the Ministry, Talleyrand was encouraged and stayed in England till early March. His own letters did not give many concrete details of his conversations, but a memoir written shortly after his return to France and the report he made on March 15th to the Comité Diplomatique⁽¹⁾ indicate that his mission had two predominant aims. The first was to seek positive assurances of neutrality and the second was to suggest exchanging the West Indian sugar island of Tobago for a loan of four or five million pounds.⁽²⁾ Neutrality was the most important issue, and to justify it Talleyrand could present a detailed argument. The main reason that France feared British reactions was the likelihood, in the event of war, of the invasion of the Low Countries. Talleyrand maintained in March 1792, as the Conseil Executif and Convention maintained right up to the outbreak of war in February, 1793, that there was no threat to the Dutch in any occupation

(1) A N, F7, 4395.

(2) J. Petrie, in a letter to Grenville dated March 13th, described the advantages and drawbacks of the island of Tobago. H.M.C. Fortescue MSS. (the Dropmore Papers) vol. ii, p. 256.

of Belgium. In this respect the Revolution of August 10th. marked no change in the official aspect of French foreign policy. These ideas were developed in a memoir entitled "Réflexions pour la négociation d'Angleterre en cas de guerre."⁽¹⁾ If war with Austria and Prussia was really unavoidable, it began, French troops would almost certainly penetrate the Low Countries. "Il est possible que l'Angleterre, en vertu de son traité de la Haye, avec feu Leopold et la Holland, prenne ombrage de l'envahissement de ces belles provinces, se fasse semblant de croire que nous voulons les joindres à l'empire français." In such a case, Talleyrand recommended the following argument "Vous avez été sage jusqu'à présent; vous avez respecté nos embarras. Nous vous déclarons que l'envahissement dont vous voulez faire le prétexte d'une menace contre nous est un acte purement défensif. Nous portons la guerre dans les états de la maison d'Autriche pour éviter notre ruine en opérant la sienne pour la punir de l'ingratitude et de la mauvaise politique avec lesquels elle sacrifie une alliance aussi avantageuse que la notre à de vaines préjugés. Nous vous attestons qu'il est contre les principes de notre constitution de conquérir. Nous déclarons que nous ne voulons point garder les pays ni les joindre à notre empire." This statement was an illustration of the way in which French foreign policy was to justify the contradiction between aggressive

(1) A.A.E. C.P. Angleterre, 580.

actions and its former pacific decrees. Talleyrand went on to suggest that if Holland chose to join Austria and Prussia, Britain should carefully weigh the advantages of engaging in a war with France. This would be an expensive venture, potentially damaging to British commerce. Invasion would be virtually impossible and even the traditional attractions might turn sour - "Vous prendrez nos Colonies? C'est peut être nous rendre service; car il faudra que vous vous prépariez à y soutenir l'affreuse guerre des noirs."

The British government would quite probably have found the tone of such advice not merely frank but patronizing.

The British government had refused to give Talleyrand any official assurance of their intended neutrality and he had had to be content with personal comments from Grenville and Pitt. On his return Talleyrand reported to the Comité Diplomatique that it seemed "highly probable" that, in the case of war, Britain would remain neutral.⁽¹⁾ Pitt's administration did not want to make the slightest commitment until the situation necessitated it. At the beginning of March Grenville instructed Gower that he was, if approached, to express himself to be "entirely unacquainted with the intentions of your government on this subject."⁽²⁾

(1) Talleyrand's report, 15th. March, 1792, A. N., F7, 4395.

(2) Grenville to Gower, March 9th, 1792, F.O. 27/38.

The country to which Talleyrand had come did not give the appearance of being especially interested in French affairs, or, indeed, foreign affairs in general. Lord Auckland, the ambassador to the Hague, was somewhat irritated by the ignorance which he found in London while on leave - "I have a long letter from Mr. Burges" (Under-Secretary in the Foreign Office), he wrote to his First Secretary in Holland, "but so far as politics are concerned the remarks which he makes are general and chiefly calculated to explain that England has little concern now in what is going forward on the Continent. He adds that the whole is involved too much in darkness to be a subject of speculation.... His remark that we have no concern in foreign politics is true, in another sense, to a degree that I cannot describe to you. I am every day seeing well-informed men of all descriptions and it is a strict truth..... that none of them have ever mentioned the death of the Emperor or the change of the Spanish Ministry otherwise than in the same tone with which you would remark the death or removal of a Burgomaster at Amsterdam. And this indifference to foreign affairs is general through the kingdom; you may find it even in our newspapers perhaps it may be justly attributed to the great prosperity of the country, which confines all attention to interior and insular details. I have lately much wished to pass a day at the Hague for the

sake of a little rational conversation."⁽¹⁾ It is possible that Auckland, once away from the international scene, rather over-stressed the detachment of Britain. He was an extremely well-informed and not particularly modest man.

The British government most certainly did not wish to be involved in a European war but they kept an eye on the situation throughout the first months of 1792. Auckland's observation on the lack of interest in Leopold II's death may have been true in terms of general conversation, but the government were far from blind to its significance. Grenville, writing to the British ambassador in Paris, required Lord Gower's "particular attention at a moment when the general interests of Europe appear to be so intimately connected with what is passing in France."⁽²⁾ It is true that the British government had no very great opinion of the policies of the European powers, and for this reason they were at pains to keep Holland out of any embroilment into which Austria, as ruler of Belgium, might wish to draw her. Lord Grenville was especially

(1) Auckland to Lord Henry Spencer, March 20th. 1792. Auckland, Journals and Correspondence, vol.ii, p.398.

(2) Grenville - Gower, March 20th. 1792. F.O. 27/38.

Gower, George Granville Leveson, Earl Gower, 1st Duke of Sutherland. 1758-1833. Edu. Oxford. Travelled extensively in Europe, appointed ambassador to France, 1790

scathing on the Austrian regime in the Low Countries -
 "I feel very strongly that this is not a time for
 embarking in gratuitous and unnecessary guaranties,
 particularly of forms of government and still more
 particularly in the case of a government wholly destitute
 both of wisdom and honesty."⁽¹⁾

The main explanation for the British attitude
 at the beginning of a year which was to see unprecedented
 changes in Europe lay in the domestic policy of Pitt's
 administration. Pitt-himself, optimistic that his plans
 for national revival were gradually leading the country
 towards prosperity and security, had ventured the
 opinion that England might reasonably expect fifteen
 years of peaceful development. In consequence, army
 and navy estimates had been reduced, no doubt another
 reason for Grenville's refusal to allow the Dutch to
 become involved in any military arrangement with the
 Emperor. The prospect of confrontation, or even un-
 necessary contact with revolutionary France, seemed
 unwise. Britain was certainly tranquil and prosperous
 in comparison with France, but the satisfaction of
 government supporters was not a universal sentiment.
 The populations of the growing manufacturing towns in
 Scotland and the north and midlands of England did
 not occupy their thoughts with the funds and the

(1) Grenville - Auckland, January 17th. H.M.C.

national annual revenue. They, like the artisans who practised crafts centuries' old, were concerned with the day-to-day necessities of life. Times, for them, were not easy, and their dissatisfaction grew, though it was more a sub-conscious sensation of discontent than an articulated grievance. The catalyst which transformed such widespread disenchantment into deep-felt criticism was the publication of the second part of Thomas Paine's "Rights of Man". The devastatingly irreverent tone of Paine's onslaught on a system which blanketed the investigation of improvement and change beneath the weight of deference for the past, cut at the roots of the society in which he lived. In America, Paine had seen a system based on equality of rights at work. He, for one, knew that times were changing.

"Mankind are not now to be told that they shall not think or they shall not read; and publications that go no further than to investigate principles of government, to invite men to reason and reflect, and to show the errors and excellencies of different systems, have a right to appear." Part II of the Rights of Man sold on an altogether unprecedented scale throughout the British Isles. Paine's audience, however, did not merely confine their activities to reading. Even before the appearance of his book groups had met in different parts of the country to discuss the need for reform of parliament and the franchise. The London Corresponding Society, opening its doors to members

unlimited, was formed in a tavern off the Strand in January, 1792. In a country where restlessness was increasing, the danger from the spread of French ideas was not to be underestimated, Lord Auckland wrote - "The extravagance and profligacy of their doctrines have not yet infected us materially; but I dread them as I would the plague in my neighbourhood...."(1)

The French, pre-occupied with the coming war were primarily interested in the assurance of neutrality which Talleyrand brought back with him, rather than any possible discomfiture of Pitt's administration. On March 1st. the Emperor Leopold died and his son Francis soon showed that he was not likely to compromise with the revolutionaries. The Brissotins moved still further towards direct hostilities, attacking the Austrian influence at Court and impeaching Delessart. Their position seemed assured with the installation of the Patriot Ministry on March 10th., after the dismissal of Narbonne. Roland, the new minister of the Interior and Claviere (2), Minister for

(1) Auckland - Grenville, March 14th. H.M.C. Fortescue MSS, op. cit. p. 262.

(2) Claviere, Etienne. b. 1735. Swiss banker. Exiled from Geneva after revolt of 1782. Links with Brissot. Minister of Finance March 1792 and again in August. Arrested 2nd. June, 1793. Tried by revolutionary tribunal. Committed suicide 8th. December, 1793.

Finance were friends of Brissot, but Dumouriez⁽¹⁾, who replaced Delessart, had rather different aims, since he envisaged a short war which would restore royal authority, rather than consolidate that of the Assembly. As the outbreak of war approached in April, Dumouriez continued the policy of keeping on reasonable terms with Great Britain and her Dutch ally by accrediting new ambassadors to the Courts of St. James and the Hague. The instructions to the British legation, which consisted of the former Marquis de Chauvelin⁽²⁾,

(1) Dumouriez, Charles Francois Duperier, b.1739. Welcomed the Revolution as an opportunity to improve on his chequered career. Foreign Minister, March-June, 1792. Commander of army of the north, won battles of Valmy and Jemappes (20th.Sept.and 6th Nov.1792), but became disenchanted with revolution and involved in bitter dispute over organization of supplies etc. for his army in occupied Belgium. Defeated at Neerwinden, March 18th, 1793, fled to the Austrian lines, 5th April. After an uncomfortable exile settled in England where he died in 1823.

(2) Chauvelin, Bernard-Francois, Marquis de. B. Paris,1766. Inherited the office of Master of the Wardrobe. 1791 aide-de-camp to marechal de Rochambeau. Named as Minister Plenipotentiary to Court of St. James, 19th. April 1792, apparently on suggestion of Talleyrand. Recalled January 21st, 1793 and ordered by George III to leave Great Britain on January 24th. Named as ambassador to Florence on his return to France but imprisoned August 1793 because of his noble background and suspect sympathies. Released after 9th.

Talleyrand and the Swiss Duroveray⁽¹⁾, indicated that France still felt some insecurity over Britain's reactions to the war - "Les dispositions manifestées par le Ministère Britannique à M. Talleyrand, durant sa mission à Londres, quelques favorables qu'elles paraissent au système de la neutralité, ne sont point suffisantes pour nous ^{inspirer} une parfaite sécurité sur les intentions réelles de cette puissance." It was feared that the British government, never entirely trust-worthy, might use the declaration of war as a pretext for changing their policies, especially if Holland seemed threatened. "Quelque soient les événements votre première attention devra être d'entretenir les dispositions témoignées à M. de Talleyrand, de faire valoir les raisons de politiques, tant intérieure qu'extérieure qui doivent détourner le Ministère Britannique, je ne dis pas d'entrer dans la combinaison des puissances contre la France, mais de la favoriser...."

This was followed by a detailed justification of the French position in which the actions of the European powers were compared to those of Louis XIV against Great Britain, on behalf of the Stuarts. "Le Ministère

(1) Duroveray, A Swiss with diplomatic experience and ability, intended as adviser to Chauvelin. His conduct gave rise to misgivings and he was recalled, 11th October, 1792. Remained in England and at the end of January, 1793 was passing on information to the British government.

ni la nation Britannique veuillent entrer dans un concert qui porte atteinte chez un peuple voisin à ce principe au quel la Grande-Bretagne est redevable de sa prospérité." The embassy was also instructed to report on the interior situation of the British Isles, although it was felt that the extent of the reforming spirit was probably exaggerated. (1)

The position of the new French diplomats was uncomfortable. Reaction to Chauvelin, as he was later to inform his enemies in France, was pointedly chilly, forcing him into comparative isolation. (2) "M. Chauvelin continues a stranger to his diplomatic brethren" wrote Under-Secretary Burges on 29th. May, "and does not gain upon the public opinion." (3) The instructions given to Emmanuel de Maulde, as ambassador to the Hague, differed considerably from Chauvelin's. In view of the British government's known interest in upholding the Stadtholder the wisdom of urging definite contacts with the Dutch Patriots was questionable, even though support was to be given with circumspection - "ses liaisons d'abord seront secrètes, et en leur donnant des espérances pour l'avenir il évitera de hâter une explosion tant que lui-même croira pouvoir s'assurer

(1) Projet d'Instruction, Chauvelin, Talleyrand, Duroveray, 19th. April, 1792. A.A.E. C.P. Angleterre 580.

(2) See Below.

(3) Burges to Auckland, May 29th, Auckland, Journals and Correspondence, ii, p.p. 409 - 410.

la neutralité parfaite. Car une révolution prématurée en Hollande pouvait nous attirer sur les bras toutes les forces de l'Angleterre et de la Prusse."

It was also stressed that continuing Dutch neutrality was the single most important benefit for which the ambassador was to strive. "Notre premier intérêt est d'avoir le moins d'ennemis possibles à combattre; de nous assurer, sinon l'amitié, du moins la parfaite neutralité des autres puissances, et surtout des celles qui ont avec nous des rapports plus rapprochés et plus directs."⁽¹⁾ The two sets of instructions were issued on April 19th. The following day the Assembly, realizing that its deliberately uncompromising attitude towards Austria had finally met with direct resistance, voted by an almost overwhelming majority to declare war. The French were quite correct in their assumption that the British government was unlikely to be unmoved by the imminent outbreak of war. On April 20th. Grenville wrote to Gower asking for a full reply and the best information "with respect to the present state of the French army on the frontiers of the Low Countries, to the supposed projects which may be, in contemplation of any invasion of the Austrian dominions."⁽²⁾

As France went to war, domestic concerns were still predominant across the Channel. Throughout the

(1) Instructions to de Maulde, seized by the British in November 1792. F.O. 37/42.

(2) Grenville - Gower, 20th. April 1792, F.O. 27/38.

summer of 1792 Britain watched the deterioration of government in France with some amazement but little real comprehension. Even so, the situation in the British Isles was not so stable as Pitt would have wished. The success of Paine began to alarm the authorities and strong action was advocated in order to stem a flood of seditious literature and to curb the activities of the so-called democrats. The first measure of repression was an indication of the manner in which the government attempted to handle later difficulties involving the explosive combination of sedition and discontent. The impulse for immediate steps came from Henry Dundas, the Home Secretary, early in May.

Dundas, himself a Scot, was disturbed by the agitation for burgh and parliamentary reform north of the border. An attack on the provost of Lanark early in May convinced him that a proclamation should be issued against seditious writings. "Whatever is right to be done," he wrote to Lord Chancellor Thurlow, "ought to be done quickly, and, above all, we must avoid impressing those who have on public grounds proffered their aid that his Majesty's government is backward and tardy in taking such steps as may be thought necessary for repressing those pernicious practices and doctrines which are afloat and which cannot be met and resisted at too early a stage."⁽¹⁾ Dundas had never shared even Pitt's

(1) Quoted in H. Furber, Henry Dundas, Viscount Melville (1936) p. 79.

early enthusiasm for parliamentary reform. He was determined to meet seditious literature with the full force of the law. His advice was taken and on May 21st. a royal proclamation against seditious writings was issued, requiring "a just confidence in the integrity and wisdom of parliament." The proclamation's success was dubious, for it brought Paine into even greater prominence. The Ministry derived some comfort from the flood of loyal addresses even though these were not entirely spontaneous. Letters exchanged between Lord Grenville and his brother, the Marquis of Buckingham, indicate that the addresses foreshadowed the more highly-organized Association movement of November, 1792. "I think the Address perfectly unexceptionable as it now stands," wrote Grenville, "but I should wish to add a sentence somewhere, expressing the satisfaction and concurrence of the country in the sentiments expressed by Parliament on this subject because I think it may not be indifferent to future debates, to have to quote expressions of this sort, in order to show that, on a great occasion like this, the sense of the people was immediately and completely expressed by Parliament..... Do you advertize the meeting in the London papers?"⁽¹⁾ A further point of similarity between the first signs of alarm in May and the emergency in November was the discussion of a coalition with

(1) Grenville to Buckingham, June 21st. 1792, Buckingham, Memoirs of the Courts and Cabinets of George III, vol. ii. p. 211.

the Whigs, a prospect which failed because of Fox's total unwillingness to work under Pitt and the Duke of Portland's refusal to desert Fox.

Despite the British government's fears of the effects of sedition on law and order at a time when discontent was evident in certain areas, there was no immediate danger of loss of control. At the beginning of June, 1792 in France, the final breakdown of the Constitutional compromise was imminent. There were several crucial factors in the development of the crisis. The first was the ineffectiveness of the Legislative Assembly, deserted by the radicals in the Jacobins and the people of Paris in the sections and scorned by the king. The Assembly's loss of initiative was exploited by the Jacobins, who grew closer to the people. It is significant, too, that distrust of the Assembly was not confined to Paris. The departmental fédérés, who arrived in Paris to celebrate the fête de la Fédération in July and to man the camp at Soissons near Paris, played an important part in the overthrow of the monarchy. Paris was physically responsible for many of the Revolution's greatest moments, but the song which immortalized the aspirations and the

defiance of the Revolution came from Marseilles. (1)
 Another vital element in the breakdown of government was the attitude of the king. Louis XVI, hoping to profit from the split which had developed between the people and their representatives, decided to defy the Assembly, believing that any ensuing disorders would leave the country absolutely defenceless in the face of the Prussian invasion. In the background of this combination of political difficulties was a renewal of the economic crisis, this time in the form of grain-shortages, accusations of hoarding, and the more serious menace of inflation.

The end followed swiftly on the outbreak of war. This was not simply because of the early disasters, caused by lack of discipline and training, in an army which had lost many of its officers through emigration. The Brissotins, who had urged the national benefits of war, had failed to appreciate that to arm ordinary men in the service of the revolution was to introduce

(1) The Marseillais came to Paris at the request of Charles BARBAROUX (b.1767), secretary-general of the Marseilles National Guard, who had been in Paris since February 1792 urging support for his municipality against the royalists of Arles and Avignon. Elected as deputy to the Convention for Bouches-du-Rhone he opposed the Parisian deputies and fled to the Gironde after the Revolution of June 2nd, 1793. Executed Bordeaux, 1794.

a new and formidable element into the political scene. Hitherto the people had intruded in the great crises of the revolution only when the power of physical persuasion was needed. Reduced to the status of passive citizen in the first years of the revolution, the common man discovered that the war had given him indispensability and identity. The volunteer who left his fields or his workshop to enrol in the army was not disposed to be used as a pawn in the struggle for political control. Willing to make heavy sacrifices, such men asked in return the guarantee of a system which would safeguard their livelihood and grant them a voice in the conduct of affairs.

Sensing the threat to its influence, the Assembly made a final effort to impose its will on the King. The decrees of May 27th. and 29th. and June 8th. ordered the deportation of non-juring priests, the abolition of the Constitutional Guard and the setting up of a camp of 20,000 national guardsmen near Paris. The coercive intentions of such legislation was obvious. The king, meeting force with force decided to veto the first and last decrees, though his decision was not formally known till June 19th. In the interim, more pressure was brought to bear on him in a letter from the Rolands. "Sire," it began, "l'etat ou se trouve la France, ne peut subsister longtemps. Il faut qu'il se termine par un coup d'etat, dont les suites doivent vous interessier autant qu'elles

intéressent l'empire.... une grande crise menace la France; elle ne peut être évitée que par l'établissement de la confiance du peuple dans les intentions de votre Majesté; mais cette confiance doit être établie non par des protestations, mais par des faits."(1)

The tone of such a letter showed not merely presumption but almost complete lack of appreciation of the king's character. Louis had never been happy with the Patriot Ministry and on June 13th, three days after the letter was written, he dismissed Roland, Claviere and Servan.(2) Dumouriez, never slow to assess the drift of events himself resigned within the next few days, taking up the post of general of the army of the north. Dumouriez was succeeded by two supporters of the king, first the Marquis de Chambonas and secondly the Chevalier Bigot de Sainte-Croix, who had almost no influence on affairs.

The day after his veto of the decrees became publicly known, the king received ominous warning that discontent in the capital might no longer be confined to discussion in the sections and denunciation in the Jacobins. On June 20th. a large crowd, who had been celebrating the anniversary of the tennis-court oath,

(1) Roland to Louis XVI, June 10th. 1792. Published in Le Patriote Français.

(2) Joseph Servan, Minister of War, May 1792. Re-appointed 10th. August, 1792, retired through ill-health in October.

broke into the Tuileries palace, surrounding and jostling the royal family, while demanding the sanction of the vetoed decrees and the re-instatement of the Patriot Ministers. Louis XVI dealt successfully with the intruders by an impressive display of composure and dignity. The origins of the journée of June 20th. remain obscure - "Cette manifestation..... ne fut l'oeuvre ni des partisans de Robespierre et de Danton, ni de ceux du Ministère Roland-Dumouriez, mais celle du peuple des faubourgs qui intervint brutalement dans la querelle entre la législature et le roi."⁽¹⁾ In the absence of definite proof, this definition of a spontaneous crowd action seems plausible.

There was some counter-demonstration, presumably royalist-inspired, during the following week, which brought forthright comments from the sections to the Assembly - "Les torches de la guerre civile s'allument.... c'est à vous de les éteindre."⁽²⁾ The Jacobins, always conscious of the popular mood, drew still closer to the sections after June 20th. "Si nous n'allons pas dans nos sections, nous n'aurons rien fait. Car on ne manquera pas de dire que nous ne sommes ici qu'une poignée de factieux."⁽³⁾ The position of Paris was

(1) Braesch, F. La Commune du Dix Août, 1792. Paris 1911. p. 48.

(2) The Gobelins section, quoted in Braesch, op. cit. p.68.

(3) Danton to the Jacobins, Journal des Debats de la Société des amis de la Constitution, no. 217.

strengthened still further at the end of June and the beginning of July by Lafayette's failure to close the Jacobins and the arrival of the federes from the departements to celebrate July 14th. The declaration of the state of emergency, la patrie en danger, on July 22nd. brought the entire question of the organization of government in a time of national crisis into immediate prominence. On July 15th. in the Jacobins, Billaud-Varenne had demanded the overthrow of the monarchy. (1)

The British spectators of the demise of the French monarchy, commented on the news transmitted from Paris with increasing amazement. More than once they compared the violence of France with the tranquillity of Britain. - "We have nothing here but peace and prosperity at home and no other concern in the miseries and misfortunes of other countries than what humanity calls for." (2) Grenville, writing to Gower on July 19th., summed up the essence of the British outlook, which was only dissipated by the events of the first two weeks of November, 1792.

(1) Billaud-Varenne (Jean Nicholas) b. 1756, was one of the most radical members of the Jacobins. Men such as he and Collot d'Herbois (Jean-Marie) b. 1750, became more influential during the summer of 1792. Both Billaud and Collot served on the Committee of Public Safety and were exiled to Cayenne in 1795. Billaud died in Haiti in 1799.

(2) Grenville to Gower July 19th, 1792, H.M.C. Fortescue Mss., ii, p. 294.

As the leaders of the Jacobins drew towards the sections, the Brissotins drew towards the king. They still had great influence in the Assembly but this was of no value if the Assembly itself was being bypassed by a third force. Striving desperately to outmanoeuvre their political opponents, Vergniaud, Gensonne and Guadet embarked on a dangerous and ultimately futile course. The correspondence which they began with the court is striking evidence that in their very great fear of a popular insurrection the Brissot-Roland group had lost all grasp of political realities. The inconsistency of their approach was astonishing. In May they had denounced the Austrian Committee at Court, an action which implied deep distrust of the king, yet in mid-July, in order to try to salvage a bankrupted political system, they were prepared to begin negotiations with the king for a new "Patriot" Ministry. Louis XVI was thus able to ensure the ineffectiveness of the Assembly. The king, like all Europe after the publication of the Duke of Brunswick's manifesto, was awaiting the Prussian invasion, with its promise of the destruction of Paris if resistance was met. (1)

While the Brissotins tried to save themselves through the monarchy, the sections, in permanent

(1) Brunswick's Manifesto, mainly drafted by the emigrés, was known in France at the end of July.

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session after July 25th. followed the lead of Billaud-Varenne. On July 30th. Theatre Francais admitted passive citizens and the next day Mauconseil repudiated its allegiance to the king. The authority of the Assembly was now virtually at an end. "Un nouveau ferment révolutionnaire tourmente dans sa base une organisation politique que la temps n'a pas consolidée," wrote Vergniaud. (1) France was menaced from within and without, a circumstance which the declaration of emergency, la patrie en danger, confirmed on July 22nd. In Paris the atmosphere was very tense. At the beginning of August the sections were determined to seek a decisive solution to the crisis, and on August 3rd. Pétion, (2) as mayor of Paris, presented a petition to the Assembly demanding the deposition of the king - *demeur*
"Tant que nous aurons un roi semblable, la liberté ne peut s'affermir et nous voulons (demeurons) libres. Par un reste d'indulgence nous aurions désiré pouvoir vous demander la suspension de Louis XVI, tant qu'existera

(1) Vergniaud to Boze, July 29th. Vatel, Vergniaud, Lettres, Manuscrits et Papiers.

(2) Pétion de Villeneuve, Jerome. b. 1753. Lawyer. Deputy for 3rd. Estate of Chartres. Escorted Louis XVI back to Paris after the flight to Varennes. Mayor of Paris 1791. Very popular in summer of 1792. His eclipse after August 10th. brought him into conflict with Robespierre. Found dead with Buzot, June 1794.

le danger de la patrie; mais la constitution s'y
oppose. Louis XVI invoque sans cesse la constitution;
nous l'invoquons à notre tour et nous demandons sa
déchéance."(1) The sections had called the Assembly's
 bluff. Its response enflamed popular opinion still
 further. On August 8th. it failed to impeach Lafayette,
 who had been unable to close the Jacobins club at the
 end of June. The next day, still hoping that the king
 might be brought to face the necessity of survival by
 working within the Constitution, it voted to suspend
 further discussion of petitions demanding the deposition
 of the king. The Commune held that the people must
 have recourse to insurrection to reclaim the sover-
 eignty which the king had usurped and the Assembly
 forfeited. In the night of August 9th-10th it met at
 the Hôtel de Ville to direct the struggle for power.

(1) Quoted in Braesch, op. cit. p.p. 144 - 145.

Chapter 3

The Revolution of August 10th. 1792 and its
immediate implications.

During the early hours of August 10th. the citizens of Paris were summoned to insurrection by the ringing of the tocsin of the Cordeliers Monastery. In the aftermath of the flight of the royal family from the Tuileries to the Manège, and the ensuing slaughter of the king's Swiss guard, the fury of the people could be plainly seen. The Assembly sat in permanent session, but at that point it was no more free or influential than Louis himself. The seeds of the dilemma which was to haunt France until the fall of Robespierre were sown within the first few hours of August 10th. The populace had risen in arms to reclaim the rights which the inaction and self interest of the Legislative Assembly had enabled the king to usurp; the people had been compelled to resort to violence to recapture its sovereignty. The basic problem was to find a form of government powerful enough to cope with the exigencies of a crumbling economy and a foreign war, yet so constructed that the sovereignty of the people, invested in its representatives, was seen to be exercised to the maximum public good and not abused. This was a problem of great complexity and inescapable immediacy; the men of the Convention, among whom very genuine convictions and political self-interest were intermingled, produced a series of expedients,

none of which provided a lasting solution to the difficulties inherent in the overthrow of Louis XVI.

The proclamation of the Commune on August 10th justified the insurrection and outlined the steps which were being taken to re-establish order. It was phrased with the confidence of men who had followed an irrevocable course of behaviour and who, in so doing, had seen their determination triumph. "Citoyens, le Peuple, placé entre la mort et l'esclavage vient de prévenir la ruine de la patrie en reprenant une seconde fois ses droits. Le souverain a parlé; des magistrats, nommés par la majorité des sections viennent de prendre séance à la Maison Commune. Cette mesure, nécessitée par les circonstances va rompre tous les fils de l'intrigue..... le peuple, cette a fois-ci ne sera pas levé en vain....."(1) The insurrectionary commune, which included Robespierre among other influential figures, was, in the main, composed of men who had sat on the two committees sent from the sections to discuss the deposition of the king. It had declared itself in permanent session during the night of August 9th-10th. Although the Assembly was still sitting the Commune was the only real authority in Paris, and, because it controlled the capital it also decided the fate of France.

(1) Proclamation of the Commune, 10th. August 1792, quoted in Braesch, op. cit.

The Revolution of August 10th. profoundly affected every aspect of administration and politics in France and was eventually responsible for transforming France's position in Europe. Although it had immediate effects on the monarchy, the Assembly and on diplomatic relations, it did not immediately dispel the uncertainty of the future. "Those who had actually participated in the insurrection or who unhesitatingly approved of it were few in number." Both the Commune and the Assembly claimed to represent the French nation but such a claim was premature and rash before provincial reaction to the events of August 10th. was known. In the uncertain period just before the revolution the Assembly had received a number of anti-republican petitions - "Legislateurs. La patrie est en danger des scélérats trament sa perte; c'est contre ceux que nous élevons la voix. Nous ne vous ferons point entendre les accents de la flatterie; c'est le langage des esclaves. Hommes libres, nous vous dirons la vérité, vous êtes dignes de l'entendre, vous êtes les représentants du peuple français. Nous avons voulu une constitution qui fixat les devoirs et les droits du peuple et du monarque." A similar petition from Lille was signed by men of varying occupations - "perruquier, tapissier, négociant, bourgeois, commis, soldat, homme de loi, cirier, épicier."⁽¹⁾ Similarly, the reaction of many functionaries in local government was far from certain. Many of these men were broadly

(1) Petitions to the National Assembly in A.N., B B 30/17.

in sympathy with the Rolandist viewpoint. Their commitment to a new and more radical form of government was cautious. Half-heartedness in the government of the provinces affected the nation's internal tranquillity and was a source of concern in Paris. As early as August 15th. the National Assembly decreed that all public officers were to take an oath of loyalty to the nation.

However indecisive the reactions of private individuals towards a change of administration, the Revolution of August 10th. had irreversibly sealed the fate of the monarchy. Although the king was merely suspended initially and his personal fate not decided on for some months, there was a considerable revulsion of feeling against him. The king was condemned in the revolutionary press as a traitor who had caused the blood of thousands of innocent patriots to be spilt. The violence of reaction varied but it pointed unanimously towards the same end. Le Thermometre du Jour considered that the revolution would be "bien plus fatale à Louis XVI qui l'a causée qu'au peuple qui ne s'y est porté qu'à l'extrémité; révolution que ce monarque eût pu facilement éviter s'il eût plutôt écouté la majorité du peuple dont il est le représentant que la majorité de ses valets." (1) Prudhomme, in Les Révolutions de Paris, inveighed against the fallen

(1) Le Thermometre du Jour, (ed. Dulaure) 11th. August, 1792.

tyrant - "Citoyens! la place de Louis-Néron et de Médicis-Antoinette n'est point dans les tours du Temple. Le soir même du dix aout leur tête devait tomber sous la guillotine, trop heureux d'expier, par une seul mort, le trépas de deux mille patriotes et l'intention bien constatée où ils étaient d'en égorger cent mille"(1)

Thus was raised one of the most important issues of the coming months, the contradiction between the triumph of the people and the continued existence of the king. This theme was developed at length by Saint-Just in the Convention and by Hébert in Le Père Duchesne where the vicious personal attacks on the royal family were apparently intended to bring home to the sans-culotte reader the corrupted nature of monarchy.

The end of the Legislative Assembly was also secured as an immediate result of August 10th; only 284 of its 749 deputies remained in session. This minority, though ousted for practical purposes by the Commune, clung to the vestiges of its former power and was not slow to attempt to re-impose its authority. There were certain fundamental steps which the Assembly alone could take, however discredited it was in the eyes of the men who had organized the revolution. Acting on the precedent established by the flight to Varennes, the Assembly suspended Louis XVI from his functions as laid down in the 1791 Constitution, and took upon

(1) Les Révolutions de Paris, (ed. L-M Prudhomme)

11th-18th. August, 1792.

itself full sovereign powers. Louis was replaced by a provisional Executive Council of six ministers. It was indeed vital for the Assembly to take some positive action, since it alone could legally speak in the name of the whole country and no other body had the power to legislate crucial interim measures or prepare for the election of a new parliament.

The Assembly was also quick to appreciate the need for official clarification of the position, partly as a means of restoring credibility to France on the international level. "L'Assemblée nationale doit à la Nation, à l'Europe, à la postérité, un compte sévère des motifs qui ont déterminé ses dernières résolutions. Placée entre le devoir de rester fidèle à ses serments, et celui de sauver la patrie, elle a voulu les remplir tous deux à la fois et faire tout ce qu'exigeait le salut public sans usurper les pouvoirs que le peuple ne lui avait pas confiés."

The Assembly had only seen one sure way in which liberty could be saved. - "C'était de recourir à la volonté suprême du Peuple et de lui inviter à exercer immédiatement ce droit inaliénable de souveraineté que la Constitution a reconnu et qu'elle n'avait pu soumettre à aucune restriction. L'intérêt public exigeait que le peuple manifestât sa volonté par le vœu d'une Convention nationale, formée des représentants

investis par lui des pouvoirs illimités...."(1)

The Assembly spoke authoritatively, even though the triumph of the people owed nothing to its efforts.

Moreover, such a proclamation disguised the fact that the deep-seated distrust and antagonisms of the first six months of 1792 were now fully in the open. In the weeks after the overthrow of the king it was by no means certain to whom political power would pass. The Commune soon found itself in open conflict with the Assembly, a dispute which developed into the prolonged struggle between Parisian and provincial deputies. The Brissotins, shaken but not defeated, looked to recoup their loss of prestige in the Convention.

While France began the construction of a new government the rest of Europe was compelled to revise its policy towards her. In Britain itself the government had reacted with a certain amount of alarm to the Revolution of August 10th., news of which reached Whitehall on August 15th. (2) An upheaval in France,

(1) "Exposition des motifs d'après lesquels l'Assemblée nationale a proclamé la convocation d'une Convention nationale et prononcé la suspension du pouvoir exécutif dans les mains du roi." A N, A D 1/102.

(2) The London Chronicle, August 16th, 1792. Burney Collection of Newspapers, B.M.

probably set off by the Prussian invasion, had been expected throughout the summer, but the suspension of the king caused dismay in government circles. Even before reports of August 10th. reached England Lord Gower had written asking if he should make some kind of formal statement about the safety of the royal family.⁽¹⁾ This request gave the British government some pause for thought, for though most men felt individual misgivings for the fate of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette, British policy had always been to remain neutral with regard to France's interior as well as external affairs. The decision on this subject was considered important enough to warrant Cabinet consultation. Grenville, who would normally have discussed the phraseology of an answer with Pitt, wrote to Dundas on August 8th - "I am unwilling to take upon myself a decision of so much importance without knowing the opinion of such of the King's other ministers as are within reach, and still more without submitting the point to the king himself."⁽²⁾ The despatch which Grenville submitted for Dundas' comments stated categorically that the British government felt that the French king and queen would derive no advantage from any British announcement respecting their present situation - "On the contrary..... all that can be done, by personal

(1) Gower to Grenville, August 4th, F.O. 27/39

(2) Grenville to Dundas, August 8th., F.O. 27/39

intimidation and by the apprehension of a superior force, appears already to have been done by the declaration of the Duke of Brunswick."⁽¹⁾ Pitt himself, in a brief but direct note to Grenville, summed up the essence of the British view of France on the eve of August 10th. - "I see by a copy of Lord Gower's despatch of the 4th. that he desires instructions with a view to the situation of the King and Queen, which, however, will probably be decided either by the Assembly or the mob before any instruction could reach him. Even if this were not so, I see no step that could be taken that would not do more harm than good."⁽²⁾

The crisis in France broke at an awkward time for Pitt's administration. When first news of the fall of the monarchy reached England, Grenville was out of London on his honeymoon. Dundas was in temporary charge of the Foreign Office, but the onus of decision-making fell to Pitt himself. Realizing that a number of important decisions regarding diplomatic etiquette, though inevitably with wider implications, would have to be taken without loss of time, Pitt betrayed some concern in his correspondence with other ministers. The future of official diplomatic relations and of the personal safety of embassy staff, was the first

(1) Grenville to Gower, August 8th., F.O. 27/39.

(2) Pitt to Grenville, August 9th., H.M.C., Fortescue

object of attention. Grenville was kept well-informed of Whitehall's views, "you will see, by the copy of the despatch sent today to Lord Gower, the line which we have thought it necessary to take after the late events in France. I wish we could have had time to know your sentiments first, but that seemed impossible. The Duke of Richmond, my brother, Lord Hawkesbury, Dundas and myself all concurred in thinking it absolutely necessary to lose no time in bringing Lord Gower from Paris."⁽¹⁾ Pitt added that it was now felt proper to make a general comment on the British government's fears for the personal safety of Louis XVI, as this might discourage those bent on further moves against the king from subsequently seeking refuge in Britain.

Such a comparative volte-face may have been brought about by pressure from Breteuil through the Bishop of Pamiers.⁽²⁾ The language in which the British government expressed their anxiety for the safety of the French king and queen was carefully chosen to ensure that those in power in Paris would understand that neutrality was still the basis of British policy towards France. On August 17th. Dundas sent the completed

(1) Pitt to Grenville, August 17th., H.M.C. Fortescue MS, op. cit, ii, p. 302.

(2) Baron de Breteuil, 1733 - 1807, a royalist, headed administration 11th July, 1789, after dismissal of Necker. Pitt referred to him in the letter previously cited.

despatch, which gave the official British reaction to August 10th. "As it appears, in the present state of affairs, the exercise of the executive power has been withdrawn from His Most Christian Majesty, the credentials which have hitherto been made use of by your Excellency can no longer be valid. His Majesty is therefore of opinion that you ought not to remain any longer in Paris, as well on this account as because this step appears to him the most conformable to the principles of neutrality which he has hitherto observed..... in all the conversations that you may have occasion to hold before your departure you will take care to express yourself in a manner conformable to the sentiments herein communicated to you and you will take especial care not to neglect any opportunity of declaring that at the same time His Majesty means to observe the principles of neutrality..... he does not conceive that he departs from these principles in manifesting..... his solicitude for the personal situation of their Most Christian Majesties and the Royal Family....."(1)

Gower's recall presented an immediate difficulty which was never satisfactorily solved in the remainder of the period before the outbreak of war. The problem was how to get information from Paris and who to employ

(1) Dundas to Gower, August 17th., Annual Register, 1792.

on this task. Burges,⁽¹⁾ the Foreign Office Under-Secretary, suggested, on August 15th., the sending of Captain George Monro, whose abilities he considered quite suitable for reporting day to day developments of the Parisian turmoil.⁽²⁾ A Foreign Office Messenger, Mason, accompanied Monro because he had a good command of French. Monro's mission was evidently considered temporary, to coincide with the French crisis. He was less effective in his reporting than William Lindsay, the Secretary to the French legation, who managed to leave France in the first week of September. Monro stayed less than two months in France, returning only in mid-December. Either through lack of available men or lack of forethought the British government had no permanent unofficial agent in France after August 10th.

Ambassadors from other foreign courts were also hastily withdrawn from France, which became practically isolated on the official level of diplomacy, though both the American and Spanish ambassadors remained in Paris for some time. Generally it was felt that any government established in France would be short-lived,

(1) Burges, James Bland, 1752 - 1824. Appointed to the Foreign Office in 1789. Wrote pamphlet attacking Paine. Retired from his position later to make room for a personal friend of Grenville's.

(2) Burges to Grenville, August 15th., H.M.C. Fortescue MS, op. cit. ii, p.p. 301-302. For George Monro himself, see below.

as the allied forces were believed to be capable of taking Paris without much opposition though nobody was very clear as to what might happen after that. The French found that the Revolution of August 10th. had posed problems within their own diplomatic service. A number of officials overseas professed their loyalty to Louis XVI and refused to serve the new government. - "Plusieurs agents ont abandonné leurs fonctions et ils ont donné pour motif de leur lâche désertion la suspension du roi." (1)

The over-riding aim of French foreign policy after August 10th., while the invasion still threatened and the disapproval of many governments seemed likely, was to ensure the continued neutrality of Great Britain. On August 18th. the Conseil Exécutif sent an official communication to Chauvelin explaining the situation in France for the benefit of the British ministry.

"Le conseil exécutif provisoire à qui la plus impérieuse des nécessités réelles du salut public vient de donner naissance au milieu des événements terribles du dix août croit devoir à toutes les puissances et particulièrement à celui qui comme l'Angleterre se sont maintenus à l'égard de la France dans les bornes d'une stricte neutralité, l'exposé le plus sincère des faits qui viennent de se passer, des fortes raisons qui les ont déterminés et des sentiments inaltérables qui animaient

(1) AN, F. 7, 4397.

la nation française." (1) The memoir went on to explain that confidence had long since been ebbing away from Louis XVI and that he had deliberately tried to encourage internal strife. The French were always anxious to draw the parallel between their own situation and that of Britain in the 17th. century. Replying to the note which Lord Gower communicated on his recall, which re-affirmed British neutrality and her continued intention not to meddle in French affairs, they wrote, "We are not surprised at such a declaration made by an enlightened and high-spirited nation who have been the first to acknowledge and establish the principles of the National Sovereignty..... who..... have not thought too dearly purchased by long convulsions and violent storms that liberty which has been productive of so much glory and prosperity." (2)

Although they wished to remain on reasonable terms with the British government, the Conseil Exécutif at first hesitated about keeping an ambassador in London. Their immediate response to the situation after August 10th. was to recall Chauvelin and to send only unofficial agents to Britain, to report on the state of affairs there and to keep open channels of communication

(1) Memoir of the Conseil Exécutif Provisoire to Chauvelin, August 18th. A.A.E., C.P. Angleterre, 582.

(2) English translation in the Chatham Papers, at the Public Record Office, P.R.O. 30/8/333.

should the need arise for more definite links. There were perhaps two reasons for this attitude. The Conseil Executif may have questioned the wisdom, even the tactfulness of maintaining a legation in London when the British had withdrawn Lord Gower. They may also have been unsure of Chauvelin's complete loyalty and of the feelings of Talleyrand and Duroveray towards the new order in Paris. On August 25th. Chauvelin received a note telling him that he would be recalled. (1) But Chauvelin had powerful friends, notably the Belgian banker, Edouard Walkiers, who was his father-in-law. He could also be very persuasive on paper and his plea to be permitted to stay in Great Britain was granted. Much to his fury, a succession of secret agents was also sent. The confusion which arose later over the role of French diplomats, official and secret, in Great Britain, appears to have resulted from this change of heart over retention of the embassy in London.

Since the British government received the official interpretation of French policy from the legation in Portman Square the reactions and attitudes of embassy staff were themselves of considerable significance. Chauvelin's enemies in France would have been appalled by his initial response to the fall of the monarchy, which he was unwise enough to put down in writing in the form of a note to the British government. He

(1) Lebrun to Chauvelin, August 25th., A.A.E.,
C.P. Angleterre, 582.

described the events of August 10th. as criminal and disastrous and went on, "La liberte de l'Assemblée nationale vient d'être violée..... dans ces tristes conjonctures le soussigné croirait manquer à ses devoirs les plus sacrés s'il ne se hâtait de réclamer en faveur de la nation et du roi dont les intérêts lui ont été légalement confiés les effets de cette sensibilité généreuse de cette amitié dont sa Majesté lui a donnée en diverses occasions les touchantes assurances."⁽¹⁾ The ambassador realized almost at once the extreme danger to which such public voicing of his private feelings might expose him. His request for the paper to be returned to him was granted by Pitt. In marked contrast were the comments which the ambassador sent to his own government. Commenting on the information which had come to light since August 10th. he wrote, "Je n'avais pas besoin, Monsieur, de ces nouvelles preuves pour avoir une opinion formée sur ces événements et pour gemil sur l'imprudence et la perfidie de ceux qui se sont trop longtemps joués du peuple et n'ont que trop justifiés sa fureur en l'amenant si près de sa perte."⁽²⁾

The Revolution of August 10th. had thrown the young ex-marquis into a position of extreme importance so far as the handling of the delicate diplomatic relations

(1) Memoir by Chauvelin, August 16th, in F.O. 27/39

(2) Chauvelin to Lebrun, August 31st. A.A.E.

between Great Britain and France was concerned. The situation required highly skilled handling and Chauvelin's inability to deal adequately with the problems of the autumn of 1792 did not necessarily arise from incompetence. Chauvelin was not simply the hot-headed, arrogant young fool that his detractors depicted. His main failing lay in the fact that he could not keep personal considerations out of his diplomatic tasks. His keen sensitivity saw insults too readily. He bitterly resented the other agents sent by the French government, complaining that their presence in Great Britain made a mockery of his position. To such men, especially Noël and Scipion Morgue, he was almost always obstructive and sometimes rude. His attitude created unforeseen difficulties at a time when the French government badly needed harmony among its agents in Britain. Yet the fault was not all Chauvelin's. There was some justification for his argument that the only thing to be gained from the proliferation of French agents in Great Britain was a variety of different opinions of the situation there. He was himself a hard-working man who constantly strove for information with which to supply his government. Ever since his arrival in May, 1792, his position had been acutely embarrassing. He subsequently denied that he had wanted to accept the post as ambassador and it is evident that he chafed at being put under the control of Talleyrand, and, feeling that he was little better than a figure-

head. In England he was received with extreme frigid-ity, for he was a nobleman who had betrayed his birth in the service of the Revolution. - "Je passais tellement à Londres pour un factieux et un jacobin que les liaisons de Fox et ses amis avec moi leur ont été reprochées l'année dernière sous ce rapport dans le parlement d'Angleterre."⁽¹⁾ Chauvelin has been charged with contributing to the deterioration of relations between England and France by deliberately mis-representing the gravity and extent of anti-government feeling in Britain. A careful reading of the ambassador's despatches (and, indeed, of those of some other French agents) shows that apparently sweeping remarks are frequently phrased in terms of possibilities rather than certainties. Chauvelin realized that he had to present a patriotic tone, critical of the British government, but he also knew that his own future and the continuance of peace between the two countries, was in the balance. The necessity of keeping the door of communication open with Pitt's administration and his own difficult position with regard to his own country were a constant strain for a young man whose impetuosity was greater than his diplomatic experience.

Out of tune with the developments in France and only occasionally and belatedly informed of what was going on there, Chauvelin had no option but to sit

(1) Letter written by Chauvelin, 22 Pluviose, an ii, A N, F 7, 4434.

Chapter 4

The structure and functioning of government in France after August 10th.

"On ne distingue point assez que nous ne sommes pas dans un temps de constitution; nous sommes en révolution et c'est des mesures uniquement révolutionnaires qu'il faut prendre." - Mairie, 28th. August, 1792.

It is necessary to examine the structure and functioning of government after the Revolution of August 10th. in order to appreciate the framework in which French policy, both domestic and foreign, was made, and to understand that the tensions were not merely brought about by the struggle for power but were also the result of an attempt to stabilize institutions adapted or created after August 10th., and to make them work effectively. Contemporaries in other parts of Europe were amazed at the spectacle of the development of the republican experiment in a country deeply and increasingly committed to war, the more so as in the autumn of 1792 the revolution seemed to be at war with itself. Many politicians in England could not believe that there was a government in France; they did not know where authority lay or to whom it should be ascribed and they were extremely reluctant to acknowledge the possibility that men generally regarded as rabble-rousers were capable of establishing a system which might survive in the face of all the odds. France did indeed present a bewildering picture to

anyone who tried to discern how policy was made from day to day, but it is easy to be over-impressed by the ravings in the Convention. In structure at least the French did not immediately make a radical departure from the old forms and in numerous cases offices were held by men who were already familiar with the exercise of politics. The working of the institutions adapted after August 10th. was envisaged as temporary until the promulgation of the new constitution. The essential problem which faced France in the autumn of 1792 was, in Saint-Just's words to form the republic.

The circumstances in which this formidable task was begun were themselves significant. There were in reality, two stages of development. The first was the period in which preparations were made for the opening of the Convention, six weeks between August 10th. and September 21st. in which the exercise of power was divided between the Paris Commune and the Conseil Executif Provisoire, which had taken over Louis XVI's executive functions. It was in this period, sometimes rather paradoxically referred to as the Interregnum, that the Prussian invasion was at its most menacing. This, in its turn, had direct bearing on events which underlined the gravity of the internal situation and the absence of a respected form of government. The September Massacres, in which about 1,300 prisoners, political and non-political, were murdered, horrified moderate opinion in France and outraged Britain.

These grim occurrences were a sign of the temperament of the people. It is possible to connect the months of August and September 1792 with the Terror of the Year II but the comparison does not immediately convey the true state of affairs. The First Terror lacked the organization of its successor. There were certainly some elements of emergency rule in 1792, for example, the sending of commissaires en mission into the departments and the requisitioning of men and arms, France, no longer a monarchy, but without any properly established alternative, had to rely for her immediate survival on the decisiveness of the Commune, the will of her people to resist invasion and the dubious prospects of Dumouriez's army. The second stage of development began with the first session of the Convention on 21st. September, when the new legislature, elected by universal suffrage, abolished royalty and started to decree both for the country's present needs and for the more permanent organization of its government. Government in France after August 10th. was thus in the hands of an executive of six ministers and a legislature of 749 members, much of whose business was delegated between committees. It would be unrealistic, however, to ignore the role of the Commune, both because of its importance in the weeks after the fall of the king and the mutual suspicions of the Commune and the Legislative Assembly, sentiments which were carried into the Convention, and played an important

part in the dispute between Paris and the provinces. This controversy formed part of the increasing rancour and introversion in the Convention, a mood which dominated the deputies at a time when more of their attention might reasonably have been concentrated on maintaining the goodwill of the neutral nations.

The British government, in official and unofficial contacts with France after August 10th, dealt with the executive power, yet very little was known of the functioning of the Conseil Exécutif Provisoire. Some of its ministers were scarcely more than names. Pitt's administration did not realize how Brissot and his associates had been compromised by the Revolution and tended to regard them still as the instigators of events, though they had already marked out Robespierre as an extremist. As the attention of observers was naturally drawn to the content and particularly the style of debate in the Convention, the role of the Conseil Exécutif was not given much consideration in general comments on French political proceedings. The significance of the Conseil at this time and the importance of some of its members should not, however, be overlooked.

The council of six ministers formerly used to advise Louis XVI was retained after August 10th. It began its work within three days of the insurrections and its links with the previous system of government were further strengthened by the inclusion of Roland, Clavière and Servan, the Patriot Ministers, dismissed

in June. Their re-instatement was probably an attempt on the part of the Assembly to balance the effect of the ascendancy of the Commune. The Ministers were appointed by the Assembly but could not be chosen from amongst the deputies. The only connection between the two branches of government occurred when the Ministers came to present their reports to the Assembly, and later the Convention. The theory of the separation of powers was by no means overthrown by the August revolution. The Council survived until 12 germinal, Year II, when it was abolished by order of the Committee of Public Safety. It has been generally assumed that in its function of promulgator of the decrees voted by the Convention, the Council was merely rubber-stamping decisions already made and it is true that the collective influence of the council was small, though early in September it was responsible for the important work of issuing commissioners with credentials. The Council as a body, however, became isolated from political life in a way that the ministers, each with individual responsibilities to his own department, did not.

In other respects the Conseil Executif suffered from the confusion which persisted throughout the autumn of 1792, and which was a sign of the instability of the republic. The Council alone was supposed to receive the correspondence of public functionaries and of the generals, but bewildered officials, frequently

uncertain as to the functions of the various authorities, often addressed their reports to the Convention. The Conseil was a product of the insecurity of the times, embodying a number of contradictions. At a period when the government of the 1791 Constitution was so hated one of its appendages was incorporated in the new system. Of the functioning of the Conseil Exécutif we know only the basic details. It met three times a week, the office of president being filled in rotation. Its secretary, Grouvelle, was only permitted to record the decisions taken so that we have no way of finding out about the deliberations which preceded them. It was rare for dissenting opinions to be expressed. There are reports from Beaumarchais and Madame Roland of disagreements within the council but their authenticity is hard to prove.⁽¹⁾ The ministers' chief contribution lay in their taking charge of certain areas of politics which were beyond the scope of the Convention and its committees. It was in this sphere that the actions and abilities of the six men were most significant.

The Conseil Exécutif provisoire consisted of Roland, Minister of the Interior, Servan, Minister for War, Monge, Minister for the Navy, Clavière, Minister

(1) See the introduction to the 1969 supplement to vol 1, of Recueil des Actes du Comité de Salut Public et du Conseil Exécutif Provisoire, ed. M. Bouloiseau.

for Public Contributions, Lebrun, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Danton, Minister for Justice. Though nearly all the Ministries had some connection with France's European position, that of Foreign Affairs was obviously of greatest significance for Anglo-French relations. But Lebrun was a newcomer to such high political office and he was not the Conseil's most important member. The man who dominated France in the critical period after August 10th. was the Minister for Justice, Georges-Jacques Danton. Despite the pretensions of the Rolands, Danton was the effective head of the Conseil Executif in the crucial first weeks of its existence. Danton's inclusion in the same body with men of strongly opposed temperament was probably intended as a concession to Paris and the Commune, for he had previously served as deputy procureur. His identification with the popular movement was likely to be useful at a time of instability when he might be needed to exercise his influence towards moderation. Condorcet, giving his reasons for having voted for Danton as Minister, said, "il fallait dans le ministère un homme qui eût la confiance de ce même peuple dont les agitations venaient de renverser le trône."⁽¹⁾

Danton's role in the French Revolution has been the subject of much controversy since Mathiez's

(1) Aulard, A., "Danton et la Révolution du dix août,"
La Révolution Française, 1893.

re-instatement of Robespierre painted Danton as an unprincipled scoundrel. His importance in the national crisis of the autumn of 1792 is, however, beyond challenge. "Danton..... a fait le dix août," wrote Billaud-Varenne, an opinion which, if not accurate does convey the regard in which the new Minister of Justice was held. No study of France after the Revolution of August 10th. would be complete without some assessment of Danton, since the extent of his influence in domestic and foreign affairs was considerable.

Danton, born in 1759 at Arcis-sur-Aube, was the same age as Pitt and Grenville. The revolutionaries and a number of their British counterparts in politics and diplomacy were relatively young men. Like Robespierre, Danton maintained his connections with his home town until his death. After the re-marriage of his mother Danton was sent by his step-father, Jean Recordain, to study at Troyes. In 1780 he arrived in Paris to study law and was still only a junior lawyer when he made an advantageous marriage to Antoinette-Gabrielle Charpentier in 1787. In the first years of the Revolution Danton became active in the Cordeliers Club where he met Camille Desmoulins. The speech he made when he took his first important post in Paris, that of deputy procureur, was typical of the direct and compelling character of his oratory, his most potent weapon. - "La nature m'a donné en partage les formes athlétiques et la physionomie âpre de la

liberté. Exempt du malheur d'être né d'une de ces races privilégiées suivant nos vieilles institutions, j'ai conservé, en créant seul mon existence civile, soit dans ma vie privée, soit dans la profession que j'avais embrassée de prouver que je savais allier le sang-froid de la raison et la chaleur de l'âme et la fermeté du caractère." (1)

The full force of this eloquence and of a very sharp political acumen was brought to bear on the situation of France after August 10th. The immediate necessity was to sink differences and organize the war effort. Danton was quick to appreciate that a show of unity and determination from those in power would be of immense value in producing and strengthening the will of the people to resist. His determination soon made itself felt among his weaker or less experienced colleagues. Madame Roland, in describing the appointment of the commissioners sent early in September wrote that the laziness of most of the ministers had enabled Danton to despatch his own nominees into the countryside. While Roland was advocating retiring across the Loire, Danton was telling the people that organization of resources and, above all, boldness, would defeat the Prussians. Instinct had enabled him to gauge with great perception the reactions of the volunteer. His position was further strengthened in

(1) Oeuvres de Danton, ed. A. Vermorel, Paris 1866, p.p. 109 - 114.

that, at a time of much mutual suspicion and recrimination, he seemed to be concerned with the survival of his country above all else. Indeed, it is rather surprising to note that at a period when men frequently indulged in lengthy denunciation and self-justification, Danton did not deal in personalities. A number of the commissioners on mission felt themselves responsible to Danton alone, as the only minister whose patriotism they considered to be beyond dispute.

It was such esteem that earned Danton the enmity of others in political life. Madame Roland's detestation of Danton was the reaction of a person unable to recognize ability which did not conform to her own views - "Je regardais cette figure repoussante et atroce et quoique je me disse bien qu'il ne fallait juger personne par parole, que je n'étais assurée de rien contre lui..... qu'enfin il fallait se défier des apparences, je ne pouvais appliquer l'idée d'un homme de bien sur ce visage....."(1) There were others, Robespierre himself at a later date, who suspected that Danton's familiarity (which Robespierre found as vulgar as Madame Roland) might be the mask of a time-server of dubious integrity. It has been suggested, in an attempt to balance the rather exaggerated views of Danton's career that for a man of his era there was no real contradiction between accepting or misappropriating money while at the same time maintaining a

(1) Madame Roland, Memoires, p.p. 254 - 255.

genuine commitment to a cause.⁽¹⁾ In this respect Robespierre's uprightness was unusual. Danton was a realistic politician and it would be difficult to explain his actions in the autumn of 1792, other than as those of a man who felt deep concern for the future of his country.

At the end of September Danton left the Ministry of Justice to the regret of some of his supporters who felt that his influence could be better used on the Conseil Executif than in the Convention.⁽²⁾ He was succeeded by Garat.⁽³⁾ His departure did not, however, mean that his influence over the Council was at an end. Especially with regard to foreign policy the advisory role which he played during the fruitless negotiations with the Prussians after their defeat at Valmy was probably carried on into the area of Anglo-French relations. References in the correspondence of Francois Noël, who continued to serve Danton in 1793, are sufficient to indicate Danton's influence even when he was only a deputy for Paris in the Convention.⁽⁴⁾ When

(1) See the article on Danton by G. Lefebvre in Études Sur la Révolution Française, Paris, 1963.

(2) "J'ai une peur terrible, mon cher Danton, que vous ne quittiez le ministère; j'en serai désolé car j'y ai besoin de votre tête....." Dumouriez to Danton, 28th. September, B N, n.a.f. 3534.

(3) Garat, Dominique-Joseph, 1749-1823, a writer and moderate.

(4) Letters from Noël to Danton, September-October, 1792,

questioned on the part he had played in the direction of foreign affairs at his trial, Danton was perhaps less than straightforward - "Pendant mon ministère il s'agit d'envoyer un ambassadeur à Londres pour resserrer l'alliance des deux peuples. Noël, journaliste contre-révolutionnaire est proposé par Lebrun et je ne m'y oppose pas. A ce reproche je répons que je n'étais pas Ministre des Affaires Etrangères. On m'a présenté les expéditions; je n'étais pas le despote du Conseil..."(1)

It is possible that Danton was seeking some kind of settlement which would have prevented the outbreak of hostilities with England, searching throughout the autumn for compromises which he personally thought would stabilize the revolution, even including saving the life of Louis XVI. He failed, however, to appreciate that in the atmosphere which prevailed after August 10th., any settlement which seemed to call in question the justifiability of the second revolution would have split France apart. The opinions which he expressed after August 10th., on Marat, Roland, the war with Britain and the state of the army in Belgium, were all carefully researched before his trial. (2)

Danton, in temperament so unlike Pitt, nevertheless similarly left behind few letters or writings indicative of his political philosophy. He was a man for whom government was the business of the moment rather than

(1) Oeuvres de Danton, op. cit. p. 288.

(2) A N, A F 11, 63.

the promulgation of theory. The Conseil Exécutif, on which he had made such a valuable contribution, ceased to exist a few days before his death.

It is not surprising that in the crucial weeks after the overthrow of the monarchy Danton's position in France caused him to be frequently consulted on overseas relations. After August 10th. the office of Minister for Foreign Affairs was filled by Pierre Lebrun-Tondu, former head of the Ministry's first division, which was responsible for correspondence with Britain. Lebrun had, in other words, been a senior official, but still of the class which the French termed, rather disparagingly, commis. "Il passait pour un esprit sage," wrote Madame Roland, "parce qu'il était assez bon commis. Il connaissait passablement sa carte diplomatique et savait rediger avec bon sens un rapport ou une lettre."⁽¹⁾ Madame Roland's judgement would not necessarily impress the reader that the new minister was a man of any great ability. Yet Lebrun, whose varied career had taken him through a variety of countries and occupations was not unfitted to fill the role now assigned to him. He was a reasonably competent man who had failed to find a place for himself before 1792. Lebrun was born in Noyon in 1754. As a youth he entered a seminary, but exhibited greater aptitude for mathematics than theology. He was allowed

(1) Quoted in F. Masson, op. cit. p. 163.

to enter the Observatory, but left after a short time to join the army. His departure from military service, whether desertion or not, was sudden and he eventually found his way to Liège, then in a state of upheaval just before its attempt to break from the Austrian Empire. At Liège he founded the Journal General de l'Europe, a paper which he continued to publish, until 11th. August 1792, in Paris after his flight from Liège during the revolt. Lebrun gradually established himself among those who were on the rising tide of the Revolution. In December, 1791 he led a deputation of Liègois to the Assembly to ask for the formation of a league of volunteers and he later became prominent on the Comité des Belges et Liègois Unis. He was introduced to Dumouriez, who appointed him in March, 1792 as head of the premier bureau of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In effect he took over from Dumouriez on August 13th., since neither of the general's successors, the Marquis de Chambonas or Bigot de Sainte-Croix had had any effect on the running of the department.

It has been said that Lebrun was influenced by Dumouriez, Danton and Brissot. The three make a rather unlikely trinity and each would have held different ideas on the running of the Ministry. Danton, though Minister of Justice, was, by his own admission consulted by Lebrun, but their relationship after Danton took

his seat in the Convention is not clear. (1) Dumouriez's scheme to push into Belgium was very close to Lebrun's heart but he could scarcely have had much immediate influence on his protégé once the Belgian campaign had begun to consume his attentions after Brunswick's retreat. Soon after August 10th. it appears that Lebrun did write to Dumouriez seeking basic advice on his new post - "Vous me demandez mes avis sur votre département, mon cher successeur, avec la franchise de l'homme qui a en lui-même tout ce qu'il faut pour faire un bon ministre, mais qui en même temps cherche à s'entourer de conseils pour choisir et se fortifier dans son système.." (2)

There is little to connect Lebrun with Brissot, though Brissot in his capacity as member of the Comité Diplomatique was undoubtedly important at the turn of the year when relations with England were severely strained.

It was to Lebrun's advantage that he had worked in his own ministry. He possessed first-hand knowledge of the mechanics of French diplomacy and he was able to write his instructions and reports clearly. He soon found, however, that directing foreign affairs was a complex task and that the situation was beyond his

(1) Danton received a number of payments from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in August and September, but these may have been used for sending secret agents into the provinces.

Masson, op. cit. p. 262.

(2) Dumouriez to Lebrun, August 16th., A.A.E., C.P. Pays-Bas, 183.

control. By the end of November it was evident that domestic affairs were impinging on France's relations with the whole of Europe, but Great Britain and Holland in particular. In such circumstances the Convention increasingly dictated the direction of policy. The paradox of military victory and domestic uneasiness gave a further edge to the use of impassioned rhetoric by politicians. Lebrun found himself, in December, in the position of having, for form's sake, to present defiant and aggressive-sounding reports to the Convention while still searching desperately to ward off impending hostilities with Britain. His links with Dumouriez proved his downfall after the general's defection. He was proscribed by the Revolution of June 2nd., 1793, but had to remain in office until a replacement was found. Before he could be formally arrested he fled and remained some time in hiding, where he produced an indignant defence of his conduct - "Ennemi de la liberte! Juste ciel! moi qui combats et qui souffre pour elle depuis dix ans. Conspirateur! - Et pourquoi? Moi, qui tous les despots ont proscrit et avoue a la mort? Traître à la Patrie! Moi qui ne sais plus dans quel coin du monde reposer ma tête, depuis que cette patrie si chère a cessé d'être pour moi un asyle assure." (1)

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs conducted correspondence with other nations, transmitted explanations

(1) Mémoires historiques et justificatifs de mon ministère, A. N, W 305.

of French policy to them through representatives in its embassies and was the only organ of French government with which the British dealt, although unofficially, during the autumn of 1792. But as the European conflict grew fiercer, threatening to encompass even the previously neutral nations, the activities of the other ministries were also of significance for the future of Anglo-French relations. The Ministry which was rapidly to assume crucial importance during the autumn and winter of 1792-3 was that for War. It was also the centre of a bitter dispute between Dumouriez as general of the army of the North and Pache as Minister, a dispute which cut at the roots of Dumouriez's victory in Belgium and reverberated in the faction-fighting of the Convention. The needs of the armies of the republic grew so rapidly that the Ministry of War, though it vastly increased the numbers of its employees, was quite unable to cope with the situation. The importance of the dispute over supplying Dumouriez's army was not lost on the British, who were watching anxiously in case Dumouriez decided to attack the Dutch. A printed copy of the report of Danton, Gossuin and the other commissioners to the army of the North was placed on file in the British Foreign Office. (1)

Two other ministries also came into contact with the British government in the period before war. The

(1) The report is in F.O. 27/41.

connections were indirect, but of some importance in revealing Britain's views of the republic's survival. Jean-Marie Roland's huge and disorganized Ministry of the Interior had wide-ranging responsibilities. Among these were subsistances, a pressing problem after August 10th. In face of the insufficient harvest France was forced to buy corn abroad. Roland had agents in Germany, England and the United Provinces, but they were closely watched by representatives of the British government. Pitt's administration, realizing the disastrous unrest which would be caused in France by food shortages, attempted to thwart French efforts to buy corn in Hamburg and Amsterdam and, on November 13th., an Order in Council was issued in London forbidding the export of grain. (1)

A further source of interest to the British government was the currency used by French agents to purchase grain. It was known that the assignat was falling in value and France's enemies believed that grain was being bought with a debased currency. The role of Claviere's Ministry of Public Contributions remains obscure in this respect but at the beginning of 1793, realizing the connection between the assignats and France's continued ability to survive, the British

(1) Rich, the consul in Amsterdam, reported regularly on French corn purchases from mid-November. See his letters of this period in F.O. 27/41 and F.O. 97/247.

government contemplated methods of manipulating the rate of exchange to the detriment of the French.

Pitt's administration did not like the idea of Clavière's purchasing gold with assignats which were worth next to nothing in any other money. (1)

Despite the contrasting structure of British and French Ministries, British politicians were at least accustomed to conducting business with a minister of the French Crown. The opening of the Convention, a new representative power, introduced an unknown element into the machinery of French government and the character of revolutionary politics. The British had very little way of comprehending the hopes and expectations which the Convention embodied at its outset, or the passions which soon threatened to divide it permanently.

Until the opening of the Convention, government in France had operated through the extraordinary measures taken to meet the crisis by existing institutions, the National Assembly, the ministerial council and the Paris Commune, which had themselves been modified to the needs of the situation after August 10th. The Convention at its commencement was regarded with very great reverence, for it was the aspect of government which represented the will of the sovereign people.

(1) Anonymous memoir written for Pitt at the beginning of 1793, P.R.O. 30/8/334. See below.

There was also a widespread feeling of optimism, in fact, a belief, that a lasting form of government would emerge from the Convention's labours. The violent oratory which soon came to characterize the debates greatly impeded the attainment of the aims for which it had been created, and did much to obscure its workings from the rest of Europe. Britain, generally accustomed to order and sobriety in parliamentary proceedings assumed that the appearance of anarchy in the legislature was a sign of disorder throughout government, in France. Some deputies were aware of this and feared the detrimental effect it would have on the republic's chances of recognition. However disorganized, the Convention was central to the functioning of government in France in the autumn of 1792 and to the political developments which influenced the nation's relations with Britain and the future of the Revolution itself.

For Frenchmen, one of the most significant aspects of the Convention was its importance as an institution and the principles which it embodied, the sovereignty of the people, the unity of the French nation and the obligations of the representative. These ideas, often connected in the writings and speeches of leading revolutionary figures, were frequently re-iterated in the first months of the Convention. They were capable of a variety of interpretations and the issue of unity of the nation was to become a subject of bitter dispute in 1793 and 1794, when "the Republic One And Indivisible"

was more of a political weapon than a reality.

The men who came to occupy the seats of the Convention were the first elected to national office by universal suffrage in France. Despite the distinctiveness of the body which they were about to form and the momentous nature of their task their elections had been conducted on a well-established pattern. Voting was conducted in primary and electoral assemblies, but in Paris, as a show of direct participation by the sections, the primary assemblies ratified the choices. Voting took place on 26th. August and 2nd. September. The number of those who participated was surprisingly small; there was certainly no justification for the representatives to claim that they had been elected by the people of France in any numerically literal sense. Only about one-tenth of seven million possible voters exercised their suffrage. The reasons for this seem almost certainly to lie in the instability of the times. The general air of uncertainty and recrimination would not have inspired men who had to vote aloud publicly.

The rump of the Legislative Assembly gave way to the 749 new deputies on 21st. September, 1792, the day after the Prussian invasion was halted at Valmy. The Convention's original aim was to present the country with a new constitution, laying down, in the meantime, the fabric of republican government. In the day-to-day sessions of the Convention the stormy exchanges delayed discussion of the content of the constitution.

On some occasions they even impeded the functioning of the Convention itself. The British do not appear to have devoted much attention to understanding the new institution across the Channel. Pitt and his colleagues had the debates available to them in Le Moniteur, the official government publication, but the debates obscured rather than illuminated the machinery of French government. At the opening of the Convention the main topics of British interest were the September Massacres and the fate of Brunswick's march on Paris. The British, too, inevitably made comparisons between the civilized nature of speech and criticism in the House of Commons and the frenzied tone of French proceedings. Even surroundings in France were uncomfortable. Meeting each day in the Manège, a cramped building altogether unsuitable for a debating chamber, the 749 men listened to speeches whose order had been decided in advance. The subjects might range over individual denunciation and justification to the introduction or discussion of vital pieces of legislation. The order of the day was frequently interrupted by shouts of criticism and derision, often encouraged from the public galleries. At the turn of the year 1792-3, the Montagnard deputies, who occupied the high seats on the left of the Manège, began to resort increasingly to organized barracking. Under such circumstances the office of President, which was originally a prestigious function, became unenviable in the extreme. The Assembly was supposed to become

silent when the President donned his red cap of liberty, but on more than one occasion the attack extended to him personally. The President once rang his bell for silence for fifteen minutes, until it broke. It is hardly surprising that British observers assumed that such spectacles revealed the complete lack of any proper government structure in France. The Convention's members, however, devoted more time to the business of politics. Sessions began each day at 9 a.m., though by no means all the deputies arrived at this hour. The Convention sat on Sundays and did not observe festivals such as Christmas Day.

The bulk of the work of preparing and shaping legislation was done outside the orbit of observation, in the committees of the Convention. The task of providing a basis for the republic was in the hands of a comparatively small number of men, some of whose members were not the inexperienced firebrands that foreign commentators depicted. It was from these committees that the Conseil Executif received the laws it was required to promulgate. Observers who were attempting to assess the stability of French government or arrive at some basic understanding of its structure would not readily have been aware of the contribution of the Convention's committees. A single spokesman generally explained the motives behind decisions which had been taken but because of the circumstances of the country certain committees, for example, those for

diplomacy, legislation and general security, were especially prominent. The Comité Diplomatique, for whom Brissot frequently acted as spokesman, played almost no part in Anglo-French relations until January 1793, concerning itself previously with Geneva and Belgium. The functioning of the Committees was considerably impaired by the general atmosphere of the Convention. Moreover, the very fact that work was split between so many groups did not help in giving shape to an overall system of legislation. Their effectiveness was hampered by national crisis and personal animosities, for their membership frequently overlapped. (1)

It was in the rivalries among the deputies themselves that the root cause of the functional difficulties of the provisional system of revolutionary government lay after August 10th. The differences had sprung from political disputes engendered in the Spring of 1792, but they were also caused by contrasting temperament and general outlook. They did not necessarily spring from any disparity of social background for the composition of the Convention was not in any way truly representative of the people of France as a whole. This is hardly surprising, for men with some education and means of support were likely to have

(1) There is no detailed study of the workings of the Committees of the Convention.

great advantages in elections over struggling artisans and peasants. The Convention was mainly composed of men from the middle to lower ranks of the bourgeois occupations. They may not all have been the equivalent of English gentlemen (though some of the Brissotins were) but they were hardly the rabble of the popular imagination in Britain.

It became evident from the moment of the opening of the Convention that the differences of opinion would resolve themselves into the emergence of broadly aligned groups. There were no parties in the modern understanding of the term; during the revolution, party or faction was a name used to discredit opponents, since it implied an attempt to destroy the state by encouraging disunity. The British concept of an Opposition was entirely alien. The opposing groups in the Convention were labelled Girondins and Montagnards but though each upheld a number of ideas, neither had a political programme. The distinctions were lost on the British, who viewed all the men in the Convention collectively as Jacobins of varying shades of extremism. Reacting slowly to changes in the French political climate, the British identified Brissot and his group as chief mischief-makers for some time after August 10th., not realizing the threat posed by Robespierre and the Parisian deputies. The Brissotins were jealous of lost pre-eminence and fearful of the intrusion of the masses into political life, fearing popular despotism as much

as they despised aristocratic privilege.

The Girondins were a loosely-knit group connected with Brissot and Roland. Their strategy was to establish dominance as soon as the Convention opened, basically by taking over the committees. Though apparently successful at first, they soon came under attack. Their failure arose from their identification with the discredited Legislative Assembly and its betrayal of the people before August 10th. and an excess of individualism in their ranks which made any united approach impossible. In the months before the proscription of many so-called Girondins on June 2nd., 1793, this loosely-knit grouping was to identify itself with several compromised causes; their demand for popular ratification of the king's judgement cast doubts on their commitment to the Revolution of August 10th., the reports of the Comité Diplomatique advocating war with England were subsequently reproached for being ill-advised and the defection of Dumouriez in the spring of 1793 connected Brissot and some of his acquaintances with a traitor. (1)

Robespierre was a familiar figure to British politicians, identified with the radical wing of the Revolution. The emergence of an organized group around him was not the subject of much British comment while

(1) The trial of the Girondins, A.N., W 292, turned particularly on their actions between August 10th., 1792 and June 2nd., 1793.

it was actually taking place. The Montagnards were connected with Paris but also attracted a growing number of departmental deputies. Aware of the debt they owed to the people in the overthrow of the king and the fighting in the war, many Montagnards were disturbed by the hardships inflicted on the people but the concept of regeneration of the state through unity and the direction of vigorous government exercised by a comparatively small number of men, shared by their leading figures, was basically too intellectual for there to be many points of resonance with the day-to-day demands of the sections. Using the Jacobins club as a discussion centre for pre-arranged action the Mountain was soon able to meet the disorganized attacks of the Brissotins. Seeing that their opponents had an essentially negative approach to the problems of government the Robespierrist deputies realized that the only way by which they might hope to dominate was by encouraging the confusion until it reached a point where the Brissotins were totally discredited.

In between these warring groups were the great number of deputies, whose allegiance tended to alter with the ebb and flow of the struggle but who felt no great personal commitment to either side. Initially these men were probably bewildered by the unseemly demonstrations in a body which the people had once regarded with reverence. In general their sympathies tended to be with the anti-Parisian stand of the

Brissotins, since they had no wish to be dominated by the capital. The continuation of hostility within the Convention came to be regarded as extremely detrimental to the security of France, and in December Barère emerged as spokesman for the Centre. Barère had sensed that the conduct of the Convention was forcing neutral Britain to dismiss the possibility of any firmly established government emerging in France. It was during the trial of the king that the Centre began to drift away from the Brissotins, when it became apparent that attempts to compromise would be construed as treachery. (1)

The original purpose of the Convention was never fulfilled. The Montagnard constitution of 1793 was not put into practice and the Convention remained until its dissolution on October 26th., 1795, a body uncertain of the purpose of its existence.

Bewildered by the outpouring of verbal violence in the Convention, possessing only scant information on the committees and the Conseil Exécutif, the British government may well have derived their highly unfavourable impressions of the conduct of politics in France from another source. The Parisian Commune, a body composed of municipal officials and section representatives, had brought about the Revolution of August 10th. and played a vital part in government for a short time

(1) See below, Chapter 9, passim.

afterwards. The personnel of the Commune, lawyers' clerks, lesser-known journalists, poor parish priests, corresponded much more closely than that of the Convention to the British image of mob domination. (1)

The deep split between the Commune and the Assembly was not understood in Britain, where Santerre, Pétion, Carra and Manuel were still mentioned as the instigators of revolutionary excess. (2) It was the effects of the Commune's vigorous emergency measures which the British knew most about and found most repellent. The September Massacres horrified British opinion and coloured the government's estimate of France for some time. Information received in Britain was very inaccurate, but it was the lurid detail of the slayings and the fact that no attempt was made to hunt down their perpetrators which aroused the greatest comment in Britain.

It is unlikely that the full facts of the September Massacres will ever be known but even if they were not formally instituted by the Commune there seems to have been tacit encouragement initially and subsequently no action was taken to stop them. The massacres coincided with the news that the fortress of Verdun was about to fall. The Commune, proclaiming that the enemy was at

(1) F. Braesch, op. cit., p.p. 245 - 264.

(2) Burke to Grenville, August 18th., 1792, Burke, Correspondence, ed. T. Copeland, J. Woods and others, vii, p.p. 173 - 178.

the gates of Paris, acted with vigour to safe-guard public order and restore morale in the capital. On September 2nd., a second comité de surveillance, a committee responsible for policing Paris, was instituted. Its members were not confirmed by the general council of the Commune and it contained some men, particularly Marat, who were regarded by more moderate members of the Commune as extremists.

The Commune's declaration of emergency pointed towards two courses of action. The first was a call to arms, embodied in the proclamation of 2nd September exhorting citizens to gather for military service on the Champs de Mars.⁽¹⁾ It was not enough, however, to concentrate solely on fighting the foreign enemy. The prisons were full of suspects and even the National Assembly was untrustworthy. A prison plot would have had a disastrous effect on Paris at a time when many men had joined the army and left the city dangerously undefended. The prison massacres which lasted from 2nd.- 7th. September were probably prompted by the belief that a treacherous group within the capital must be destroyed. The mentality of those who participated in the slayings is only comprehensible in terms of the intensity of the national crisis. The murderers

(1) Declaration of the Paris Commune, 2nd. September, 1792 cited in A. Bougeart, Documents Authentiques pour servir à l'histoire du Danton, p.118, Brussels, 1861

probably thought of themselves as performing a task and felt no regret for what they had done. There is no direct proof that the Comité de Surveillance of the Commune was responsible for the organization of the Massacres, but it considered them perfectly justifiable. There was a grim logic in the circular letter which it addressed to the départements on September 3rd, "La Commune de Paris se hâte d'informer ses frères de tous les départements qu'une partie des conspirateurs féroces détenus dans les prisons a été mise à mort par le peuple; actes de justice qui lui ont paru indispensables, pour retenir par la terreur les légions de traîtres cachés dans ses murs au moment où il allait marcher à l'ennemi....."(1)

The reaction of moderates was highly critical, but in England, where reports fixed the total of those dead at 7,000, there was universal disgust.⁽²⁾ Members of the diplomatic corps had known some of those murdered and shuddered to think of events in France - "all my ideas of happiness are shaken by the calamitous history of France, every circumstance of which passes,

(1) Circular letter of the comité de surveillance of the Paris Commune, signed Duplain, Panis, Sergent, Lenfant, Jordeuil, Marat, Defourges, Leclerc, Duffort and Cally⁴ quoted in Bougeart, op. cit. p.p. 121 - 122.

(2) Aust to Grenville, September 8th., H.M.C. Fortescue MS II, op. cit. p. 310.

from day to day, through my hands and disturbs my mind both sleeping and waking."⁽¹⁾ The murder of the Princesse de Lamballe especially captured the imagination, because of her rank and place in Parisian society. A telling contrast between the fury of the mob action on the streets and the artificiality of polite society was provided by William Lindsay a few days before he left Paris. The secretary to the British embassy was one of a number of diplomats taking dinner at the Palais Royal when noise of the mob outside brought them to the windows. The Duc d'Orleans obvious lack of interest on hearing that his former mistress's head was outside on a pike did not warm Lindsay's heart.⁽²⁾

The British appalled and depressed by the September news from Paris, were re-inforced in their view of the violence and instability of French government. They saw only a seething mass of violent men threatened with destruction by armed force from outside and their own immoderation from within. Lacking information and amazed by the later rush of French victory the British knew very little about the structure and functioning of government in France in the six months before the outbreak of war. Their impression of chaos was comprehensible and by no means inaccurate. The machinery of government in France after August 10th.

(1) Auckland to Sir Gilbert Elliot, September 29th. Life and Letters of Sir Gilbert Elliot, ed. Countess of Minto, ii, p.p. 66 - 68.

(2) Burges to Grenville. H.M.C. Fortescue MSS, ii, p. 311.

reflected the uncertainty of a nation which had declared itself a republic but had yet to adopt an organized republican system. The men who were attempting to consolidate the second revolution were caught in the contradictions; the situation and the measures taken were revolutionary but in order for administration to function with regularity it was necessary to incorporate, at least until the new constitution was ready, some of the previously existing institutions. The strains were great, but, much to the wonder of the rest of Europe, France continued to support a war, pursue diplomatic relations with the neutral states and organize the running of the capital and the provinces despite the increasing hostility between politicians. The continuity with the pre-August 10th. system in some branches was not fully appreciated by spectators nor was the ability and determination of some of the most prominent men in political life. It was generally felt that total collapse must inexorably approach. There was, though, no reason for either Great Britain or France to assume a breakdown of relations at the end of September. The British were comfortable in their neutrality and the French wished them to remain so.

PAGE

NUMBERING

AS ORIGINAL

It is some measure of the British view of the in-
stability of government in France after August 10th
that a well-qualified ambassador such as Lord Gower
was replaced by an itinerant government spy such as
 George Monro. (1) Monro was away from Paris between
 October 1st and some time towards the middle of
 December. While back in England he attended meetings
 of the London Corresponding Society and reported on
 them, which perhaps gives some indication of the
 British government's priorities. He was by no means
 a suitable choice for the demanding role which his
 position in Paris required him to fill. His description
 of the internal politics of France underlined the
 chaotic picture which was the overwhelming impression
 derived by those in authority in Britain, but it did
 so without reasoned argument for the opinions put
 forward. It would seem, in fact, that Monro's presence
 in France was as much designed to spy on the British
 radicals who lived there, far from harmoniously, in
 White's Hotel. His December letters told of arguments
 between Paine and Frost. Early in January his mission
 ended in some confusion when he was recognized by one
 of the men from a British corresponding society which
 he had penetrated and he was denounced as a spy.

(1) There are very few accessible details about Monro's
 background other than that he was an army captain, and
 possibly Scottish (A. Alger, Englishmen in the French Revolution).

Some of his despatches are published in O. Browning, ed. The

Despatches of Lord Gower, London, 1885. On his domestic activities
see his letter to Dundas from Bristol, 9th August, 1792 in
A. Aspinall, ed. Early English Trades Unions, 1949 and J. Walvin,
English Democratic Societies and Popular Radicalism, 1791-1800,
Part II. York D.Phil., 1970.

Chapter 5

The Months of Delusion - September and October 1792

Despite the advance of the Prussians and the disordered state of politics in Paris the French approached the many problems of foreign affairs after the revolution of August 10th with optimism. They knew that the crux of their relationship with Europe lay in the maintenance of the neutrality of Great Britain and her ally the Dutch (1). The diplomats and politicians were as aware as their predecessors that Britain was not an opponent to be considered lightly. The British navy continued to be regarded with a certain awe, not simply because of the number and strength of its ships, the majority of which, in the autumn of 1792, had not seen action for some years, but because the British were able to man an entire fleet in a matter of weeks through the ruthless weapon of the press-gang (2).

(1) Lebrun's speech to the Convention on September 28th (Le Moniteur vol. XIV p.p. 59-62) dealt with the attitudes of the various powers of Europe, stressing the importance of Anglo-Dutch neutrality, unlike the despatches it was intended for public consumption and bore marks of the rhetoric which was later to characterize French propaganda, especially the emphasis on the different outlook of governments and their subjects.

(2) "on sait que sa marine est dans tous les temps si bien ordonnée qu'en moins de six semaines elle peut avoir en mer une flotte considérable." Lebrun's speech, 28th September, *ibid.*

The French attitude

toward Britain in September and early October was not merely the result of a belief, often repeated, that it was against British interests to engage in hostilities. In place of the essentially negative standpoint of the earlier period of the revolution, which had consisted of both countries ignoring each others' difficulties at the official level, the French believed that they could propose the basis of an alliance. The idea of Britain joining with France against Spain, with the ultimate purpose of dividing South America between them seems an extremely unrealistic vision. The French may have felt that Britain was still capable of reacting favourably to a scheme which invoked the name of a traditional enemy, only two years after the incident at Nootka Sound. Moreover, Britain had recently lost an empire in North America and might be looking to recover her prestige elsewhere. The idea of an anti-Spanish alliance was fervently supported by Francisco Miranda, a Venezuelan who had become a French general⁽¹⁾. In other respects, too, France had reason to feel that after the disasters of the summer, foreign affairs

(1) Francisco Miranda, Dumouriez's subordinate; acquaintance of Brissot, became increasingly anxious at the position of the French armies in Belgium in the first months of 1793; brought before the revolutionary tribunal after Dumouriez's defection, but released. Miranda sought aid for South American liberty in Europe. Died a prisoner in Cadiz, 1816.

might become more stable. The Prussian invasion had been defeated by its own over-rigid high command, terrible weather, and the experience of Kellerman's troops at Valmy. The negotiations which followed removed the enemy from French soil. After Brunswick's retreat, the discomfiture of the allies appeared complete, for the French were pressing southwards into Savoy and the dominions of the King of Sardinia and Turin. The military successes were not, however, matched by corresponding development of stability at home. These contradictions contributed towards the hardening of French attitudes, particularly with respect to Britain.

The experimentation with new ideas, however unacceptable to those whom they were intended to impress, was a product of the situation in which the revolutionaries found themselves and perhaps also of their inexperience. The failure of the allies created a temporary vacuum, which they were trying to fill.

The apparent introversion of Great Britain was part of a well established policy of non-involvement in European affairs until Britain or her interests were directly threatened. This policy had almost become, if not among the government themselves, at least among the governing classes, an attitude of mind. The French were regarded as a contaminating influence, a nation incapable of satisfactorily ordering their own concerns. "However I be afflicted," wrote the Earl of Charlemont on the very day of the second revolution

in France, "I am not surprised at the present state of France. I know them well, and though heaven forbid that I should say they are not capable of liberty, yet most certainly they are by no means fitted for that constitution which their foolish philosophers have given them."⁽¹⁾ Similar opinions were to appear even more forcibly after the recall of Parliament on December 13th, when the European situation had changed dramatically. Charlemont's condescending views were echoed by Fox, who claimed to be pro-French⁽²⁾. Very few people had seriously considered the possibility of Prussian defeat, and, while the outcome remained in the balance the British government believed that neutrality was the only proper course to follow.

(1) Charlemont to Edmund Haliday, August 10th, 1792,

H.M.C. 12th report, Charlemont MSS, p.p. 197-198.

James Caulfield, first Earl of Charlemont, 1728-1799,

Irish statesman, favoured reform of Irish administration,

but opposed to Catholic emancipation and union with England.

(2) Fox to Lord Holland, September 3rd - "There is a want of dignity and propriety in everything they do.....

to be amusing themselves with funerals and inscription,

and demolitions of statues and creations of honorary

citizens is quite intolerable..... Memorials and

Correspondance of Charles James Fox, ed Ld John Russell,

vol. II, p.p. 368-370.

This line was maintained in the face of some foreign pressure. There were other pre-occupations of a more immediate nature, which tended to absorb attention while affairs on the continent seemed shrouded by uncertainty. The state of Ireland and Scotland gave rise to growing concern. In Ireland, as the Catholic movement for extension of civil rights gained momentum, the weakness of the Irish government at Dublin was fully revealed. At the same time, the agitation for reform of parliamentary representation in Scotland was also becoming more serious. Even in England itself there were signs of discontent. Riots were a normal part of life almost every year in late eighteenth century England but the harvest of 1792, though not a failure, was not sufficient to dispel fears of the results of a rise in bread prices.

There was, however, one problem which connected the situation in France more directly with the state of Britain. It was the first link in a chain of recognition which came to identify France with disruption in England. Shortly after the revolution of August 10th many Frenchmen, particularly nobles and priests, but also some former members of the Constituent Assembly escaped across the Channel to arrive penniless in Britain. Their numbers increased after the September Massacres. Most of the newcomers posed problems of social relief which could not be adequately met by the south coast ports. More serious, though,

was the nagging anxiety that a flood of foreigners of dubious background and opinions would be spread throughout England, where there was no provision for their surveillance. This filtering through of the continental upheaval contributed to rising uneasiness in Britain. The government were watching France, but little more. The delusion of both countries contrasted strongly with the startling events of November.

It is possible that the two administrations, despite the pressure of circumstances and inflexibility of outlook, would at least have modified their approach to the complexities of external relations if they had been provided with regular and enlightened reports from their agents on each other's soil. In this respect, the ending of official diplomatic links had a detrimental effect on Anglo-French relations. It is true that ambassadors were not necessarily efficient, and, as in the case of Chauvelin, were sometimes very unpopular in the countries to which they were appointed, but they were a constant source through which information could be received. It was up to their governments to assess their despatches. After August 10th relations between Britain and France suffered the disadvantages of an unsatisfactory but established link, in the form of the French legation at Portman Square, and intermittent spy reports from an army captain and an Irish priest, sent to Paris from Whitehall. Of the two, the English approach was by far the more casual.

Such an eventuality had apparently not occurred to his employers.

The unreliability of British intelligence was notorious after August 10th. Early in October a letter passed on from the Post Office at Dover stated that Brunswick had defeated the French and captured Dumouriez⁽¹⁾. Even this type of report was relatively sparse - "I met a person belonging to the Secretary of State's Office," wrote the Duke of Portland, "who assured me that everybody now knew as much of France as ministers did, and probably more, for that Thelusson received the earliest and best information from thence, and, he believed that what came to the Secretary of State's Office was the last and the worse."⁽²⁾ This impression would have been re-inforced by one of the Foreign Office under-secretaries' admission to the ambassador at The Hague. "I would willingly oblige your Excellency with any of our spare French

(1) Letter forwarded by Mr. Gibbon, Deputy Agent for His Majesty's packet boats at Dover, October 7th, F.O.-27/40

(2) Portland to William Windham, October 13th 1792.

The Windham Papers (ed. Lord Rosebery) p.p. 106-7

(B.M. Add. MSS. 37845)

Peter Thelusson (1737-1797), member of French Huguenot banking family. Came to England 1762, established head office in London.

papers, but having abandoned all French connections we have only a single set of Moniteurs at present which Lord Grenville reserves to himself."⁽¹⁾ French newspapers were obtainable in Great Britain, but divorced from the reality of day-to-day proceedings in France, which were hard enough for Frenchmen to understand, they lacked the immediacy of a reliable source in Paris itself. The only other suppliers of information, much of it more imaginary than useful, were the émigrés.

The French suffered from the British problem in reverse. They had too many agents, sending back, upon occasion, conflicting evidence. Such a situation arose out of an almost haphazard approach to the mechanism of diplomacy.⁽²⁾ In this respect, the influence of Danton, who was in a position to give advice but unable to supervise its practical application would seem to have led to unforeseen difficulties. The British were never sure whether the proliferation of French agents was the result of disorganization in Paris or, more sinister, part of a deliberate plot to encourage dissidents. What was originally an error of

(1) George Aust to Lord Auckland, October 23rd.

B.M. Add. MSS. 34445.

(2) Talleyrand, and especially Duroveray, who was recalled in October, were regarded with suspicion and exercised less influence than before August 10th. Duroveray did not comply and remained in England.

judgement, made at the highest level in the Executive Council, contributed towards increasing reservations on the intentions of France among British ministers. The mistake lay in the over-hasty decision to recall Chauvelin and replace him by a number of observers, of whom Francois Noël would be the principal. When it was decided to permit Chauvelin to remain in England, Noël's mission became, in effect redundant, a factor which he was himself to acknowledge indirectly. (1)

The difficulties, however, were to prove more complex than mere illogicality of approach by the French ministers. Lebrun had been premier commis of the first bureau of the ministry for some months and it is unlikely that he did not know of Chauvelin's extreme sensitivity. This had been forcibly demonstrated on July 27th. 1792, when the ambassador berated the Minister Chambonas for failing to appreciate the embarrassment caused by the unheralded arrival of Scipion Morgue as second secretary - "Si vous voulez bien reflechir, Monsieur, sur la nature des relations qui doivent exister entre un sous-secretaire de legation et le Ministre dans les Bureaux duquel il travaille, si vous considérez qu'il s'agit de quelqu'un qui doit vivre sous le même toit, manger à ma table, et de qui je dois répondre tant à la cour auprès de

(1) Noel to Lebrun, 18th September, A.A.E. C.P. Angleterre 582.

laquelle je suis accredité, qu'auprès du Roi et de la nation française vous sentirez, je pense, Monsieur, qu'en supposant même que la place fût nécessaire, elle ne devrait pas être donnée sans ma connaissance." (1)

Chauvelin took Noël's arrival with similar unconcealed displeasure, and was reported as saying at one point - "Ah quelle insulte plus cruelle peut on me faire que de me faire passer de mains en mains comme un enfant à qui l'ont fait changer de précepteurs...." (2) This clash of personalities was extremely disadvantageous to the French, who perhaps justified the retention of an official and unofficial agent on the grounds that such an arrangement would give a broader base to the intelligence from England. It is fairly evident that Chauvelin continued to be mistrusted - "M. Chauvelin," wrote Mergez to his cousin, Danton, "donc les principes sont très modérés quoiqu'au dehors il fasse le Patriote." (3)

The situation might have been a little eased if Noël had initially exhibited a modicum of tact. Though not exactly setting himself up as a direct rival to Chauvelin, Noël proceeded to go very much his own way. It could be argued that he was merely following the letter of his instructions, but circumstances

(1) Chauvelin to Chambonas, 27th July, A.A.E., C.P. Angleterre 581

(2) Noël to Lebrun, 9th October, A.A.E., C.P. Angleterre 582

(3) Mergez to Danton, 9th October, A.N., A.F. II, 63.

had altered their applicability. His contacts with the opposition were of little real value and it appears that he spoke almost no English, a significant drawback for a man in his position.⁽¹⁾ He developed and sustained an attack on Chauvelin which was based not on direct criticism, but on demonstrating that he was totally unnecessary in the position which he then occupied, that the British disregarded him completely, and that Chauvelin, though doubtless a talented young man, would be better employed anywhere other than in Britain. But Noël's position was not itself very secure. He was vehemently attacked by Marat in the revolutionary press, when it was known that he was going to England and he revealed himself to be a careless correspondent, irritating Lebrun by the incoherence of his despatches.⁽²⁾ In December he was ordered to take up the post of charge d'affaires at the Hague, an indication of the fact that, at a time when relations with England were fast deteriorating, Noël was regarded as dispensable. The dispute between himself and Chauvelin had resulted in the need for a

(1) Noël - Lebrun, 18th September, relating that he had dined the previous night with Priestley - "Quoiqu'il parle peu français, nous nous sommes fort bien entendus..." A.A.E., C.P. Angleterre 582.

(2) Lebrun to Noël, 30th October. A.A.E. C.P. Angleterre 583.

third agent, Aubriet, to be sent to survey both of them. (1) Chauvelin and Noël were both passed over in the struggle for an attempt at unofficial talks with Pitt's ministry by Maret at the end of November.

If there was any kind of categorization of the agents sent by France, it sometimes lay in differences of aim. One of the main reasons behind Chauvelin's retention may have been his ability to transmit accurate admiralty intelligence and to be present when and if the British government desired formal talks. (2) Noël was to maintain contacts with friends of France and let some of the ideas which France had for an alliance be known through them. There were others whose missions were temporary, as Lebrun explained to Chauvelin - "nous avons envoyé en Angleterre plusieurs personnes chargées de missions particulières.....ces

(1) A.A.E., C.P. Angleterre suppl.29, Aubriet to Maret, 28th November 1792.

(2) Chauvelin was able to obtain regular and accurate reports on the state of the British navy through a man named Vital, French by birth, who worked under the Duke of Richmond. On 7th November, Chauvelin wrote - "Il travaille dans le bureau ou s'expédie tous les ordres pour l'approvisionnement et pour l'armement, soit de l'armée de terre soit de la Marine. Par la nature de sa place il a connaissance de tout ce qui peut faire prévoir un armement. Il est à portée de juger de l'activité de l'importance et de la promptitude que le Ministre y met." Vital had been an agent since the days of la Luzerne. A.A.E., C.P. Angleterre 585 (Supple.1792)

missions passagères n'ayant aucun rapport avec la
 (v)ôtre vous n'aurez rien (à) leur dire ni (à) leur commun-
 iqué concernant le plan de négociation que vous êtes
 chargé de suivre."(1) All these men were also sending
 back reports on their view of English affairs in
 general. It is difficult to assess their overall
 influence in France, but the Council, daily occupied
 with many other concerns, did not bother themselves
 with unravelling the web. Noël summed up the efficacy
 of this confused attempt at widespread intelligence
 coverage when he said - "ces missions croisées ne
 valent pas le diable..."(2)

The French view of Britain in the early autumn
 months of 1792 was derived from the composite picture
 painted by the ambassador and Noël and also from the
 assessment of probable British reaction by French
 politicians. The early views of the internal situation
 were marked by a considerable degree of moderation.
 Ireland was always an area of interest and would be
 potentially a great danger to Great Britain in the event
 of hostilities between France and Britain - "Cette
 considération aussi puissante que délicate mérite
 d'être fortement pressée dans des entretiens particulières."(3)

(1) Lebrun to Chauvelin, 6th September, A.A.E. C.P. Angleterre
 582

(2) Noël to Danton, 14th September, A.N., A.F. II 63.

(3) "Instructions données à M. François Noël allant à
 Londres 29 aout." A.A.E. C.P. Angleterre 582.

No attempt was made at this early stage to connect disorder with a possible revolution. Noël, on his arrival, wrote - "il y a du mécontentement mais on ne peut pas tirer de fortes inductions de cet état de choses."⁽¹⁾ It was evident to French observers, however, that the British were alarmed by the association of violence with the term Jacobinism and that recent events in France had merely strengthened these, unfortunate impressions. Noël found that he had to exhibit caution. The adverse publicity which his mission had aroused in the French press had put the British government on the alert - "Si je suis signalé ici comme Jacobin, je n'ai rien à faire. Vous ne pouvez vous faire une idée de l'horreur qu'inspire ce mot."⁽²⁾ The news of the September Massacres and the clash of powers in France had further damaged the French cause - "la marche rétrograde de l'Assemblée nationale à l'égard de la Commune et le refus qu'a fait celle-ci d'^{obéir} ~~être~~ ^a la seule autorité que les bons citoyens reconnaissent ont fortifié ces mauvaises impressions."⁽³⁾

(1) Noël to Lebrun, September 3rd, A.A.E. C.P. Angleterre 582

(2) Noël to Lebrun, September 10th, A.A.E. C.P. Angleterre 582

(3) Noël to Lebrun, *ibid.*

It was in these early days that British doubts about the stability of government in France were formed.

The French were aware that the one-sided picture of affairs would not gain them any support or enhance their reputation in England. The suggestions put forward to improve this state of affairs were precisely the kind of undercover activity, directed at influencing public opinion, which were so much dreaded by the British government. The French faith in the merits of propaganda provided the revolution with a potent new weapon. On 14th September Marc-Antoine Jullien, then a friend of Brissot and Condorcet, but later a disciple of Robespierre, wrote that attempts ought to be made to clarify British public opinion on France - "C'est d'après ces considérations que j'oserais prier, Monsieur le Ministre.....d'envoyer incessamment dans la ville de Londres six ou douze agents secrets qui pourront être en correspondance exacte avec plusieurs patriotes de France.... Ces agents auront des recommandations auprès des journalistes bien intentionnés pour nous, qui par eux seront éclairés sur les faits qu'ils exposeront dans toute leur vérité..... que ces douze agents voyent chacun dans leur société particulière ou dans les cafés et lieux publics, mais sans jamais s'afficher, deux ou trois cent personnes, voilà déjà plus de trois mille anglais ramenés dans notre parti, qui par une multiplication progressive peuvent en ramener plus d'un million.....(1) Brissot supported

(1) Jullien to Lebrun, 14th September, A.A.E. C.P. Angleterre

Jullien's view. (1) It was a scheme more easily written about than put into practice but it was only a more extreme aspect of the French desire to publicize themselves and the decisions which they had taken by the more immediate expedient of translating the procès-verbaux of the 10th August into all the major European languages. (2)

These schemes were part of a belief that it was possible to enlighten other nations and to encourage goodwill towards France; the unsettling effect which might result in a country such as Britain was only dimly perceived. Indeed, both Noël and Chauvelin were later to complain that in order to present the British government with a definite set of proposals as a working basis for discussion fuller instructions would be needed. At the end of August, the French were still dealing in generalizations. The instructions given to Noël on August 29th indicated that no startling changes in Anglo-French relations were envisaged. British interests were not turned towards France - "L'intérêt de son prospérité commerciale fait à l'Angleterre une trop forte loi de la paix." The main purpose of Noël's mission was to ensure that Britain did not depart from the neutral conduct which

(1) Brissot to Lebrun, 15th September, *ibid.*

(2) Roland to Lebrun, 4th September, A.A.E. *Memoires et Documents*, France 648.

she had observed up till August 10th. There were hints that the kind of suspicions prevalent in ancien regime diplomacy were still very much alive - "comme il sera encore longtemps permis de révoquer en doute la sincérité des négociateurs anglais, Francois Noël, dès ses premières liaisons s'attachera à pénétrer les véritables intentions d'un gouvernement que plusieurs politiques s'obstient à regarder comme l'auteur de la prolongation de nos troubles." Despite the caution which the French agent needed to exercise, there was an attempt to re-assure and to suggest the basis of a more permanent alliance. The French were not slow to recognize that any possible invasion of the Austrian Netherlands might give Britain cause for grievance - "Un des principaux motifs de défiance de l'Angleterre est la crainte que les principes français et le voisinage des armées ne fasse renaître en Hollande les mouvements révolutionnaires dont elle est déjà le théâtre. Francois Noël sera autorisé à faire cesser à cet égard toute inquiétude. Il observera que les patriotes Belges ne sont nullement disposés à favoriser la cause des patriotes Hollandais..... On peut même assurer l'Angleterre que la France est disposée à ne lui donner aucun appui....." It was also stated that the Légion Batave, a military corps formed amongst Dutch patriots in Belgium, would be dissolved.

(1) "Instructions données à Francois Noël...." op. cit.

However well-intended these sentiments, they were further evidence that the French had no way of comprehending British reaction to a change in the established order of international affairs, or the growing fear of the creeping menace of French ideas.

The main aim in this early period of contact after the overthrow of the king was to gain the goodwill of Britain by proposing a scheme which would appeal to her self-interest and unite her permanently with France. The global vision of revolutionary politicians at this time, however eccentric it may appear, was another facet of the French penchant for propaganda. Noël had been authorized to put forward the idea of the division of South America so that France and Great Britain could work together for the peaceful development of the western world. This elaboration of the propagandist outlook continued during the succeeding months. It provided both a justification for French extension of the war and an antidote to the damaging effects of divisions within France itself. What seemed ridiculous in October appeared menacing in November when the French turned their attentions towards Europe rather than the American continent.

The attempt to establish a long-term extra-European foreign policy soon after the establishment of republican government was based on a decision to abandon the family compact with Spain. The position of Spain was crucial to both France and Great Britain.

in the period prior to the outbreak of war. Neither country could be entirely sure of Spanish reactions. The British were concerned that the Spanish government should not, through any fear of invasion across the Pyrenees, make a precipitate acknowledgement of the republic which would embarrass the rest of Europe. The French, on their side, had to ensure that they gained the goodwill of England before Spain was tempted to opt for safety by allying with Britain. Spain profited considerably from this state of affairs by playing on both countries.⁽¹⁾ The change of ministry from Aranda to Alcuia (the future Godoy) even enabled her to prolong the battle of wits. The Spanish persisted in claiming, particularly with regard to England, that ministerial instructions had not been made clear to them. Thus they successfully prevaricated without making any commitment. There may have been a certain amount of truth in Spanish protestations, for the diplomatic situation in Madrid was far from satisfactory. The French ambassador to Spain became involved in a dispute with Lebrun, which did not ease his position.⁽²⁾ Britain was, at this

(1) "Le dessein de l'Espagne est de se conserver en mesure avec les puissances coalisées, d'attendre le parti qui prendra la Cour de Berlin...." Lebrun to Bourgoing, 10th November, A.A.E. C.P. Espagne 634.

(2) The dispute was over a circular which Bourgoing had sent to French consuls and merchants without orders from Paris. A.A.E. C.P. Espagne 634, November 13th.

time, without an ambassador in Spain. Before the arrival of the Earl of St. Helens the embassy was under Francis Jackson, a very young first secretary, much suspected by Bourgoing, the French ambassador, as acting in a high-handed and anti-French manner.

The French, though confident that the bait of Louisiana would sway Britain in their favour, were not entirely sure of their position. They watched the situation very closely in September and October. In the last ten days of September Noël reported a rumour that the Spanish ambassador in London had been instructed to work in co-operation with the British government. Lebrun responded by advising him to cultivate the friendship of del Campo so that he could more easily assess the situation. Noël found this instruction difficult to carry out. Del Campo was well-established at the Court of St. James and on good terms with the king; Noël considered him unapproachable. Whatever their anxieties, the French derived some comfort from the belief that Spanish and British interests were, at root, still too conflicting for an alliance between them to work - "nous croyons difficilement que l'Espagne eut offert alors à l'Angleterre, comme motif déterminant, des avantages commerciaux dans ses portes de l'Amerique méridionale. L'Avidité anglaise d'une part et la jalousie espagnole de l'autre, relativement au commerce de ses pays d'outremer formeront longtemps encore un obstacle

insurmontable \attout traite de ce genre entre ces deux puissances; et vous en avez la preuve dans les négociations qui ont précédé et suivi l'affaire de Nootka Sound...." (1) It was felt that, if offered the opportunity, Britain would like to see the Family Compact ended altogether. Noël gave it as his opinion that this would be one of the main terms of any treaty which Britain and France might negotiate. The other likely British demands would be the safety of the king and queen, the cession of the West Indian island of St. Lucia, commercial preference in French ports and ratification of the 1786 commercial treaty. (2)

Such a treaty, or even the preliminary discussion of one was purely speculative. Yet for all of September and the first half of October it was the chief hope for future relations with Great Britain. Less academic were other negotiations at the end of September which may have contributed to the gradual re-assessment of links with Britain. The talks with the Prussians were a relatively obscure episode for the majority of Frenchmen. They appear to have been directed from the Paris end by Danton. Throughout the period of the Prussian invasion, Danton had been in touch with the armies. He corresponded with Dumouriez but, wishing to have an independent view of affairs at the front.

(1) Lebrun to Noël, 30th October, A.A.E. C.P. Angleterre 583

(2) Noël to Lebrun, 23rd September, A.A.E. C.P. Angleterre

(1)

he had sent Billaud-Varenne as observer. The criticism levelled at the outcome of the discussion with the Prussians was that the victory had not been followed through and that the enemy had been allowed to slip through French hands and to continue the war. At Danton's trial a member of the jury asked, "Pourriez-vous dire la raison pour laquelle Dumouriez ne poursuivit pas les Prussiens, lors de leur retraite?" To which Danton replied "Je ne me mêlais de la guerre que sous des rapports politiques; les opérations militaires m'étaient totalement étrangères. Au surplus, j'avais chargé Billaud-Varenne de surveiller Dumouriez, c'est lui qu'il faut interroger sur cette matière." (1)

The balance of strength, however, was by no means entirely on the French side. Their armies were spread throughout France, in the Rhineland and down to Savoy and Nice; it was more realistic to ensure that the Prussians abandoned their advance on Paris than to attempt the annihilation of the combined armies. The complete withdrawal of the invading forces provided an immediate safeguard for the stability of the republic in the crucial first weeks of its existence. It also enabled Dumouriez to follow a scheme near to his heart, that of turning his troops north into Belgium and using them in a country where the inhabitants were already ill-disposed towards their own government. The French could not hope to

(1) Oeuvres de Danton, ed. A. Vermorel, p. 291.

follow through their victory in the sense of ensuring that the Prussians and Austrians were permanently defeated. The retreat was a very grave setback and altered the entire situation but its significance lay primarily in the change of attitudes it brought about in Europe.

The Prussian negotiations, however limited their success, did bring about a change in the French view of themselves and their position in Europe.⁽¹⁾ They acquired a certain confidence which gave them a sense of national pride. This was made clear in the information sent to Chauvelin and Noël during the course of the discussions - "Vous y verrez 1) Que la nation française est reconnue, 2) qu'en demandant Louis XVI comme un représentant avec lequel il put traiter le Roi de Prusse, par une contradiction bizarre, fait une demande conforme à ce qu'avait établi la constitution contre laquelle les puissances liguées ont pris les armes, et dont elles ont accéléré la chute. 3) Vous y verrez l'aveu formel que l'ancien gouvernement n'était pas propre au bien du Royaume."⁽²⁾ These were

(1) The Executive Council particularly wished to avoid the impression that the Prussians might dictate to them over the future of Louis XVI - Lebrun's report to the Convention, 26th September, in Le Moniteur, t.xiv. p.p.59-62

(2) Lebrun to Noël and to Chauvelin, 28th September, A.A.E. C.P. Angleterre 582.

heartening deductions, but the Foreign Ministry was uneasy as to the extent of British influence over the Prussians. Consequently, Noël was directed to find out whether the Prussian line had been taken as the result of an agreement made with Britain before the invasion and whether the king of Prussia's propositions were sent to England at the same time, or even before, they were passed on to France. This was a curious development in the French view of Britain, as Anglo-Prussian relations had been extremely cool since the formation of the Triple Alliance in 1788. The French had found it difficult to dismiss the idea that at a time when significant changes were taking place on the continent the British foreign office was as aloof as it professed to be. There were widespread rumours in Europe that Britain had exercised an inhibiting influence on the Prussians. On October 26th, Grenville wrote to Elgin, the ambassador in Brussels, "I say nothing to you on the inexplicable event of so many great expectations. My public despatches will authorize you to contradict the foolish reports of our having contributed to this event, which, on the contrary, we cannot but regret."⁽¹⁾ French observers in Britain had reported that George III had a relapse into insanity on hearing the news of Brunswick's retreat.

The ignominious end of the ill-fated Prussian invasion had its effect on the position of the allies

(1) H.M.C. Fortescue MSS, ii, p. 324.

and the entire course of the war. For some weeks the allies, especially Austria, debated whether there was any possibility of continuing the war. The retreat, which began in earnest on October 1st gave the French some breathing space; it also afforded Great Britain the opportunity of re-assessing the position in Europe. The British government, though amazed by the military failure, had known for some time that there was little harmony between the Austrians and Prussians. The Austrians were in a difficult position; their armies had proved superior on the field but they were scarcely able to support the financial burden of a campaign which now seemed destined to carry on into the spring. There was talk in October and November of the Emperor acknowledging the French republic if the safety of the royal family was guaranteed.

The first news which reached Vienna was not credited by its inhabitants, but when repeated confirmation excluded all doubt respecting the authenticity of the fact there appeared symptoms of disappointment, discontent, astonishment. The Duke of Brunswick was suspected of having accepted a bribe, and the Cabinet of Berlin of having played false to Austria.....

"In regard to the government of this country, it would seem that the universal success of the French arms and still more the rapid progress and dissemination of their principles, has seriously alarmed the members who compose it and I do not think myself far wide of

truth in saying that these combined causes have disposed the leaders of this monarchy to listen to terms of accomodation in case any should be offered by France, which could be accepted without committing the honour of their sovereign....."(1)

The failure of the offensive on France and the lack of amity between Austria and Prussia brought into focus the aims of Catherine II of Russia. This development too was interesting for British observers. The despatches from Charles Whitworth in St. Petersburg, though slow to reach Whitehall confirmed suspicions that the Empress, however much she deprecated the French, was primarily concerned with maintaining control of Poland. Russia had only given a very small amount of financial and military aid, but this was enough to keep the Austrian Emperor and the King of Prussia bound to her while diverting their interest towards France rather than Poland. Brunswick's retreat, though a set-back to Catherine in the short-term, since she had no wish for any kind of peace to be made with France, held the promise of further advantage for the Russians. The British government became suspicious that Catherine would regard any French aggression as rendering inevitable British

(1) Alexander Straton (first secretary in Vienna) to Ld. Hervey, 12th November, F.O. 528/7, Hervey Papers.

entry into the conflict, thus leaving her free to hold complete sway over Poland and to turn her attentions once more against Turkey. (1)

Involvement in the war continued to appear both unnecessary and undesirable to the British government, even up till the first week of November, 1792. This insistence on neutrality was maintained in the face of evident displeasure in the reactions of the allies. The policy of neutrality was connected very closely with the British attitude to France and the views they had formed on the future course of the war. Pitt and his colleagues had no very great opinion of the general political competence of the Austrian and Prussian governments, but they had a very strong impression of the turbulence of France. They could not imagine stability and the will to resist gaining any ground under such circumstances. Consequently, there was little to be gained from making cause with the Austrians and Prussians and perhaps being tied to an agreement on the re-establishment of the ancien regime and the partition of France. Britain would be more influential in the role of mediator. The government could not see that events required them to abandon the position which they had adopted in April and pressure from the allies for definitive expressions only increased their belief in the

(1) Despatches for September, October, November in FO. 65/23

consistency of their approach to European affairs. In mid-September Dundas, after consultation with Pitt and Grenville, issued Sir James Murray, the British representative to Brunswick's army, with an outline of the government position with regard to France - "When the Duke of Brunswick again introduces any conversation of the nature he has lately done in his interviews with you, it will be easy for you to convey to him that the system of neutrality which His Majesty has adopted respecting the affairs of France, would of course have precluded him from obtruding his opinion on the subjects which might probably occur for the consideration of those powers whose armies had entered France under the command of the Duke of Brunswick..... At present, and uninformed as to the particular objects in view, it is impossible for me to say more than in general, to express the hopes of His Majesty that the result of the present interference of the powers of Germany may be the re-establishment of such a government in France as, on the one hand, would protect other powers from a renewal of that spirit of restlessness and intrigue which had so often been fatal to the tranquillity of Europe, and, on the other hand, secure to the Executive Government such a degree of energy and vigour as might enable it to extirpate those seeds of anarchy and misrule which had so peculiarly of late, characterized

the whole transactions of that distracted country.⁽¹⁾
 George III fully concurred in these sentiments, but
 he rather doubted the wisdom of actually stating them.⁽²⁾
 Pressure on the British government did not end at this
 point. The Austrian and Neapolitan ministers requested
 a further statement of British refusal to succour
 those who might harm the French royal family. The
 king's comment on this declaration typified the limit-
 ations of the British attitude in September - "The
 answer to the joint note of the Austrian and Neapolitan
 ministers..... is perfectly consonant with my senti-
 ments. Undoubtedly there is no step that I should
 not willingly take for the personal safety of the
 French king and his family that does not draw this
 country into meddling with the internal disturbances
 of that ill-fated kingdom; the taking every step not
 to shelter assassins is what we owe to our own
 characters."⁽³⁾

France was ill-fated but still she had not
 fallen. There were signs that though most Englishmen
 who had an interest in European developments could
 not credit the possibility of successful French

(1) Dundas to Sir James Murray, September 12th, H.M.C.
Fortescue MSS II, op. cit. p.313.

(2) George III to Lord Grenville, September 8th, H.M.C.
Fortescue MSS II, op. cit. p.310

(3) George III to Grenville, September 22nd, H.M.C. Fortescue
MSS II, op. cit. p.317.

resistance, they were still uneasy at the point when Brunswick's invasion was reaching its final phase. Grenville's brother voiced these feelings, as he tried to occupy himself with the problem of his estate - "You do not talk in your letter of any stay at Dropmore, and Woodward is anxious not to risk planting so early, and therefore I say nothing to you about your plants from my nursery till the last week of October. Before that period the Duke of Brunswick will be a man or a very little mouse. I have great faith in him, but..... in all events, it appears that the French army have recovered their panic, and, though they are as low as ever in my estimation, yet their new ally the month of October will operate very powerfully in their favour. I cannot describe to you the anxiety I feel, and my obligation to you for constant information."⁽¹⁾ The decisiveness with which Louis XVI had been removed from his functions had caused general surprise. Whatever the nagging doubts, the news that the Austrians were leaving French soil defied belief amongst those who had spent a lifetime in politics and diplomacy. It also had more grave implications, as Lord Auckland pointed out to his brother in Berlin - "On the 7th (of October) I received by a messenger from Brussels

(1) Buckingham to Grenville, October 7th, H.M.C. Portescue MSS II, op. cit. p.320

the first account of the retrograde motion of the combined armies. I confess to you that this is an event which surprises me beyond any that I recollect to have met with in a life of some experience in the bustle of this world. A step so little suitable to the declarations and manifestos which preceded the invasion by the combined armies would not have been otherwise than under the pressure of necessity..... The unfortunate royal family is left in a situation of more strife, hopelessness and danger than if no effort had been made in their favour..... These however are small considerations in comparison of the triumph given to the cause of Jacobinism."⁽¹⁾ Auckland always had an awareness of the influence of foreign affairs on domestic events. "Reaction in Britain did not make the connection with so much clarity. The news shook government circles, fixing attention on Europe temporarily, but the retreat appeared in Britain to have been the result of a combination of allied incompetence and French desperation. British observers were especially struck by the blot on Brunswick's military reputation. This assessment served to strengthen the belief that non-involvement had been a sensible policy which should be maintained. Some months would elapse before an

(1) Auckland to Sir Morton Eden, October 9th, Auckland, Journals and Correspondence, vol. II, p. 453

organized campaign could be undertaken once more. Meanwhile there was sufficient to occupy attention in the state of the British isles.

The government viewed the situation of Great Britain in September and October 1792 with watchfulness. The Opposition later accused them of complacency, but the politicians of Pitt's administration did not react with the totality of outlook which had early seized Burke.⁽¹⁾ They saw a number of separate problems and dealt with them as such. The general atmosphere was tinged with some uncertainty, but the autumn, unless the harvest had been good, was often a difficult season. There were signs of discontent in some sectors of the labouring population. In themselves these were not a cause for great alarm. It was in the general context of affairs, where there were new considerations, that they acquired significance. British radicals, who had gone into a form of hibernation during the summer while the future of France was in doubt, began to re-emerge and to publish prolifically. Once more the name of Paine was in the air. The position in Scotland, too, became more menacing and Ireland remained dangerously near violence, though for reasons which were more readily discernible.

(1) Burke urged Grenville to abandon neutrality on August 18th - Burke to Grenville, Burke, Correspondence (ed. J. Woods and others) vol. VII, p.p. 173-178.

None of these problems, however, had the immediate impact of the flood of French refugees, which first brought home the inescapable fact that events in France would have an effect on England.

The government quickly realized that the new emigrés were more than just a nuisance - "The influx of foreigners since the late outrages at Paris is immense and daily increasing. It will become very inconvenient to have the country, especially this metropolis filled with so very many strangers, if they (we) do not take some means to prevent it; but what is at present only an inconvenience will, in a short time, become truly dangerous."⁽¹⁾ The administration did not want a definite link of this sort with France. General concern was expressed for the aristocratic ladies and gentlemen who had been obliged to flee in circumstances of personal humiliation from France, but sympathy was not universal. Authorities at a number of ports began to grow uneasy wondering how they could feed, house and clothe the unfortunate emigrés. The streets of London thronged with them and subscriptions were opened for their relief. This, too, had its disadvantages - "The fools here are opening subscriptions for their relief and support, which, I understand, our own poor take

(1) Dundas to Grenville, September 12th, H.M.C. Fortescue MSS op. cit. p.314.

amiss, and in my judgement, not without reason."(1)

Opinion on the merits of the displaced French varied in government circles, but the general impression is that most of them were regarded as little more than tiresome after the initial sympathy induced by the horrific details of massacre and carnage in Paris on August 10th and during the September Massacres.

"I am miserable about the French emigrants being in this country," wrote George Rose, "to drive them out suddenly would be inhuman, but I sincerely wish we may get rid of them; they are almost all bad in one way or another; - I speak from personal communication with a great many of them, their folly and their wickedness is not to be conceived, - the first almost as mischievous as the last."(2)

Rose's comments brought out the more alarming factors behind the emigre problem; he was not an immoderate man but he had been thoroughly unnerved by his contact with Frenchmen. The royalists were an inconvenience, but the influx of those whose opinions could not be readily answered for was an urgent menace. It was suspected that many of those who had recently crossed the Channel held subversive and treasonable opinions, and had come to England to

(1) James Bland Burges to Auckland, September 14th, op.cit. p.p. 442-3.

(2) Rose to Auckland, October 1st, Add. MSS. 34,445.

spread their gospel on apparently fertile soil. Far from being dispirited or silenced by the turn of developments in France these largely anonymous men and women had penetrated into coffee houses and inns throughout the British Isles, disturbing the lower orders with their wild talk and threatening widespread confusion if their schemes could be brought to fruition. No time was lost in considering means of dealing with the emigré problem. Dundas' enquiries of Lords Kenyon and Loughborough foreshadowed the Alien Bill of December - "I would wish to know whether there occurs to you any means competent to be exercised by the Executive government, either for preventing the residence of foreigners in this country or for calling upon them under the special circumstances of the moment to give security for their peaceable and inoffensive conduct. I will not disguise from you that my anxiety on this subject is considerably increased by the knowledge which my official duty leads me to collect of the society which many of the foreigners already in this country frequent and the seditious and inflammatory language they are accustomed to hold."⁽¹⁾

From this time forward Dundas and Nepean, the Home-Office under-secretary were particularly vigilant, encouraging letters which gave descriptions of those coming from France and all other information which might

(1) Dundas to Kenyon and Loughborough, September 12th.

have bearing on French agents resident in Great Britain. Burges's assertion that "the late horrors in France have at least been attended with one good consequence, for they have turned the tide of general opinions here very suddenly,"⁽¹⁾ was misleading, for although it was true that revulsion against France was more widespread after the September Massacres, this was offset by the conviction that renewed agitation for reform could be directly French-inspired.

The reality of the threat posed by this supposedly wicked and determined group is not easily decided. Contemporaries, though far from explicit, were at pains to look for facts and names, even if the search was largely unavailing. At the end of October the Home Office possessed a list of suspected Jacobin emissaries, one of whom, Rotondo, was described as "more sanguinary than Marat" and had the improbable alias of Smith.⁽²⁾ One regular source of information on dangerous Frenchmen came from the emigré community, though both the Home and Foreign Office were on their guard against notoriously unreliable royalist informants. One striking aspect, which did not pass the notice of ministers, was the ease with which anyone could come and go across the Channel. Almost all of

(1) Burges to Auckland, 21st September, Auckland, op. cit p.p. 445-6.

(2) H.O. 1/1

the reports which found their way into official correspondence seemed ludicrous, either because they were embarrassingly vague or because they were choked with improbable details. Among the major cause of British fears were the men who had been prominent in the early days of the Revolution some of whom had sat in the Constituent Assembly. Though now cast out in their turn, it was naturally difficult for them not to talk about France. The government's uneasiness was strengthened by the multitude of Frenchmen of unofficial missions from Paris, whose true purposes could not readily be determined. The problem of the suspects in their midst had cast an early shadow on British views of the future of their relationship with the unknown forces across the Channel.

The unrest in Britain, though capable of aggravation by outside forces and the renewal of a domestic radical movement, was frequently associated with the demand for higher wages. A number of landowners were aware of the hardship caused by the rise in the price of bread and the existing heavy taxation of goods such as salt and candles, but the steps which they could take as individuals were little more than an example. Disorder began to spread in the developing industrial areas. At the very beginning of October a disturbance among the colliers at Wigan prompted Dundas to write to the Lord Mayor of Liverpool - "These combinations have of late become so frequent that it requires a

more than ordinary exertion of the civil powers to repress them."⁽¹⁾ Later on in the month there were riots at Leicester and Yarmouth. The government dealt with these outbreaks by sending military assistance when it was requested.

These occurrences were regarded as troublesome, but not unusual. Much more serious was the continuation of difficulties in Scotland. Early in October the situation was considered grave enough to warrant Dundas's personal presence in Edinburgh. The Home Secretary was alarmed by his first impressions of the Scottish situation and wished to convey his feelings as strongly as possible - "I am more and more satisfied that unless something effectual can be done by Parliament to check the indiscriminate practice of Association they will spread the fermentation of the country to such a height it will be impossible to restrain the effects of them. They stop at nothing.- It would appear they either wished to murder myself or to burn my house, for I was not two days arrived before notification of it was given in a very suspicious mode. Some boys were detected at midnight putting up billets of enclosed tenor on the corners of the different streets of Edinburgh..."⁽²⁾ The magistrates and gentlemen in

(1) Dundas to the Lord Mayor of Liverpool, 3rd October, H.O. 43/4

(2) Dundas to Nepean, October 14th, H.O. 102/6.

the larger Scottish towns were very worried by the growth of the movement for reform and Dundas quickly took steps to gain information on the disposition of manufacturers in the Scottish centres and of the numbers and occupation of the membership of the associations themselves.

The government were also concerned about Ireland. Pitt admitted in the middle of October that he felt that the position there was very far from satisfactory.⁽¹⁾ In government circles there were several men who had first-hand knowledge of Irish affairs. The advice which they gave contrasted strongly with the line the administration was influenced to adopt with respect to Scotland. The ineffectiveness of the Dublin government was acknowledged but attempts at direct intervention were discouraged. Buckingham had a particularly low opinion of the Irish government and felt sure that they would refuse to meet any Catholic demands even at the risk of civil war. - "I do not expect that the government of Ireland will abandon the question without a struggle, or that they could be induced by any recommendations from hence to relax or to negotiate

(1) Pitt to Dundas, October 14th - "You will receive from Nepean the last accounts from Ireland, which are far from being sufficiently particular, but which I think look very unfavourable." Pitt Papers II, University of Michigan Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

with the Catholics. I know that their two Houses will not hear of any other language than that which their fathers have held, with the purse and army of England at their backs. But I must ever deprecate with the most earnest and anxious solicitude, any encouragement to them to hope for assistance from this country..... and in a struggle in which (so long as it can be kept separate from French politics and connexion) we have nothing to fear and nothing to gain from the result."⁽¹⁾ Buckingham was very gloomy about the outcome of an armed struggle, saying that there was not enough armed force in Ireland to prevent the Protestants being driven back into the sea from the four corners of the island. The reaction of France and the influence of the Revolution was a curious contrast to the growing fear of France in the mainland, which, despite its difficulties, was not so ripe for exploitation as Ireland. The government apparently accepted the view that Irish difficulties were at root a religious grievance - "I scribble these few lines to set you right as to Irish affairs. The troubles of the world are amply sufficient and I have no reason to believe that there is any present danger of their extending to Ireland. The Jacobin faction in Ireland is thus far ridiculous and insignificant."⁽²⁾

(1) Buckingham to Grenville, October 14th, H.M.C.

Fortescue MSS. op. cit. p.322.

(2) Auckland to Sir Morton Eden, October 19th, Auckland, op. cit. p.457.

Domestic pre-occupation and a belief that there would be a lull in developments on the continent obscured from British eyes a hardening in the French attitude which was perceptible in the tone of despatches both from Paris to Portman Square and the French agents to Lebrun. This shift in approach appears to have been produced by contradictions in the situation of France. In Europe the French were suddenly free from the prospect of annihilation by counter-revolutionary forces. They had even been in a position to discuss terms with Prussia. The realization grew that it was necessary in terms of the republic's future in Europe and for the strengthening of national opinion at home to take a more positive position. Formal recognition seemed desirable. The adoption of an increasingly aggressive stance in diplomatic relations, though gradual, corresponded with the growth of disorder and disagreement in the Convention. The Brissotins attacked Paris relentlessly and they attempted to dismantle the provisional and extraordinary measures which had contributed to the survival of France in September. A less hesitant foreign policy might be hoped to balance the effects of dissension. The abandonment of the visionary scheme of union coincided with the reception of the news that the French West Indian islands, always a source of temptation to the British were in full revolt, having refused to permit ships carrying

commissioners of the republican government to put into port. (1) The general change of temper was matched by a firmer, less conciliatory tone by the French agents in Britain, though they had not altogether dismissed the idea of direct talks with Pitt's administration.

It is unlikely that French agents immediately sensed the drift of events in Paris. The newspapers were at their disposal but the Foreign Ministry seldom provided them with concrete details of internal developments. Chauvelin and Noël responded to the general awareness of resurgence of interest in France and the renewed discussion of parliamentary reform. They were not slow to pass their feelings back to France; it was natural that their own experience would lead them to seize on signs of agitation but it was also to their advantage to deal in possibilities of this nature, thus rendering their continued presence as observers in Great Britain indispensable.

The first signs of a firmer attitude came almost simultaneously from Chauvelin and Noël. On October 21st. the ambassador suggested that moves should now be made to get his credentials as Minister of the Republic recognized by Britain. Chauvelin based this on two major arguments; the first was that he considered the French republic to be the most solidly established government in the whole of Europe; the second was that

(1) The British described these incidents on October 8th.

the British people, as opposed to the British government, had shown signs of supporting France, a circumstance which would, in itself, give the administration pause for thought - "je ne dois pas vous cacher que toutes les sociétés patriotiques formées en Angleterre acquièrent chaque jour de nouveaux membres, qu'il se rédige dans plusieurs de celles qui sont établies à Londres des adresses pour la Convention nationale."⁽¹⁾ Noël's despatch, written the following day, contained more extreme statements. At this point, Noël seems to have become seized by the possibility of war. In such an eventuality, what were the motives which might restrain Britain? Ireland was likely to weigh heavily in British considerations, as was the advance of French principles in Great Britain. The number of those so far interested in the new ideas was, however, still restricted - "Les principes patriotiques circulent surtout à l'aide de la maçonnerie, confinée ici dans la classe des artisans de manufacture et de quelques citoyens plus aisés. Celle des tisserands entr'autres, composée en grande partie de descendants des français réfugiés est très nombreuse et très patriote." In view of these developments, Noël considered that the time had come to demand a definite statement of the British position - "On se tromperait beaucoup si l'on attendais quelque chose de grand et de noble de ce gouvernement...."

(1) Chauvelin to Lebrun, 21st. October, A.A.E., C.P.
Angleterre 583.

... Il ne nous convient plus d'acheter la neutralité au prix de la moindre cession...." He was always keen to impress on his superiors that his wide circle of contacts put him in a unique position with regard to the most reliable information - "Une guerre contre la France entraînerait peut-être le renversement du trône Britannique. Des les premiers pas que ferait le ministère les fonds tomberaient de 10%..... nous aurions dans ce moment sur les anglais les avantages qu'un peuple pauvre et courageux a sur un peuple riche..."(1)

The advice from England probably arrived too late in view of the slowness of communications, to influence the Minister and the Council in the decision which they had already taken by the end of the month. They believed there would be a change in the fortunes of France and of the outlook of Great Britain with respect to Europe. It was not realistic to think in terms of an alliance - "c'est une grande et belle idée sans doute que celle d'une alliance qui unirait cette nation avec la République, mais nous ne partageons pas les espérances de ceux qui peuvent croire à sa possibilité."(2) Long-standing suspicions of the effects of Britain's insular outlook were coming once more to the surface of the consciousness of French policy-makers.

(1) Noël to Lebrun, two despatches written on October 21st.

A.A.E., C.P. Angleterre, 583.

(2) Lebrun to Noël, 30th. October, A.A.E., C.P. Angleterre,

England's chief desire was to observe increasing disturbance in France, while she remained peaceful and grew rich. There was no conception of the store Britain set on the sanctity of treaties or the European balance of power. It now seemed that Britain's own position was far from secure and might provide a distraction which would prevent her from commencing hostilities - "L'esprit de domination qui caractérise l'Angleterre pourrait la déterminer peut-être à s'élever contre nous dans le cas où elle nous verrait prendre un essor rapide et capable de lui donner de l'ombrage, et sous ce rapport tout ce qui tiendrait à lui donner de l'occupation chez elle, comme les prétensions des Irlandais dont vous parler, ainsi que la lutte parlementaire dans la question de la représentation nationale; tout cela est d'un grand intérêt pour nous." The French however were only interested in British internal developments as a diversion for the British government which would distract her attentions from France. There is no indication that the French government believed that a revolution was about to overtake Britain, neither were they particularly interested in fomenting trouble. Their own interests and hopes were pinned elsewhere in Europe and it was here that British reaction should be carefully observed. Dumouriez was about to enter Belgium, an event which would probably be followed by an insurrection against the Austrians - "il faut à présent songer à l'effet

(1

que produirait cette nouvelle révolution tant en Hollande qu'en Angleterre." (1) Typically, French thinking was characterized by a mixture of perception and delusion. The republic had renounced all conquests so there was unlikely to be governmental alarm on that score, but the Dutch would undoubtedly be worried by proximity to a democratic republic. Despite the fact that these considerations were hypothetical, it was very important to know how British dispositions towards France might alter.

Thus two months after the suspension of Louis XVI both France and Great Britain, increasingly disturbed by domestic tension, had reluctantly accepted certain basic facts about each other. The French knew that the noble and liberating alliance with England was a dream and Britain realized that the French experiment in republican rule was likely to survive for several months. Neither society was in any way prepared for the momentous changes of November.

(1) *ibid.*

The Turning Point

The major European capitals in November 1792 provided telling glimpses into the state of international affairs and the emotions which move men. In remote St. Petersburg, Catherine II heard with satisfaction details of the confusion caused by the unexpected resistance of France. In Vienna and Berlin there was suspicion and resentment, the Austrians looking for a way to terminate their disastrous involvement in France, the Prussians smarting still from Brunswick's retreat, determined to pressurize their allies into continuing the campaign. In Brussels the court of the Austrian regent, Marie-Christine, had fled ignominiously, leaving the population to greet the advancing troops under general Dumouriez. At the Hague, the Stadtholder lived in a state of fear and indecision and his more able wife and chief ministers were similarly uncertain of the security of the Dutch provinces in the event of an insurrection by the Patriot party or the more awesome prospect of invasion by the French armies. In London there was uneasiness and tension as Pitt and his colleagues worked through the night on the apparently converging flood of rising internal discontent and disorder and the sudden changes on the map of Europe. In Paris there was jubilation at French military successes but there was also deep differences of opinion as the power struggle of Brissot and his friends and the

emerging ideology of the Montagnards clashed.

This was a period when foreign and internal affairs acted and re-acted on one another, until it was scarcely possible to separate issues, a development plainly visible by the time the British Parliament met in the middle of December. At the centre of this vortex of threatened disorders and wildly divergent emotions was the progress, even the survival of the Revolution and of the French republic. However unwillingly, the politicians of Europe began to view the crisis, and, through it, their own difficulties in a wider context.

The general panorama of north-western Europe, of the Low Countries, as well as of France and Great Britain, afforded nothing but uneasiness to those who upheld the established order. The spread of French arms and ideas combined with general social problems to produce a dangerously volatile public opinion in Britain and led to a crisis of government confidence which lost nothing in intensity for being largely self-induced. French successes placed a question mark over the future of society. Despite the feeling of fear and amazement which communicates itself across the centuries, the uncertainty was balanced by the apparent realities of the situation. Financially, militarily, even morally, the British believed themselves to be superior to the French. The depth of animosity in the Convention encouraged

foreign observers to hope that before many months had passed, France would destroy herself.

For the revolutionaries, the autumn of 1792 brought a further triumph for the people in arms. After the invasion of Belgium the world had to admit reluctantly that the French armies were not ludicrous but formidable. The swift change in military fortunes would safeguard the future of the republic for the winter of 1792-3 at least. The establishment of a hold on Europe encouraged the propaganda of the revolution so that what had once been almost a form of escapism, an abstract weapon to threaten an overconfident enemy now seemed to have been transformed into reality. Yet it is possible to be misled by the intransigent tone of the decrees and official reports relating to French foreign policy. They contrast markedly with the daily debates in the Convention, where many questions which were only indirectly connected with the European drama were examined by impassioned speakers. Behind the vindictiveness of these exchanges there is an impression that the deputies feared that the reality of their situation and of their prospects of survival was more immediately connected with the fate of Louis XVI in the Temple than with Dumouriez in Brussels. The king's overthrow may have been a predictable outcome of the German intervention, rather as his death was the signal for wavering governments to sever themselves from France, but many French-

men could not consider their country secure until Louis had been removed.

November was a month of glory and of anguish, of panic and bravado, of passion and oppression. Spurred on by the desperate realization that France must fight or die the Revolution, armed with pikes and principles now faced the traditional order. It was above all a time when the personalities of the many men, politicians, ambassadors and spies, played an increasingly important part in the shaping of events. The full force of the sweep of developments and of their effect on the future of Great Britain and France can only be felt by studying the details of the European panorama. In France, in Belgium, in Holland and in Britain the wider implications of the state of Europe influenced politicians towards an enforced re-assessment of their country's attitudes.

Chapter 6

France in November : victory and division.

"Voici le moment de crise arrivé...." Lebrun to

Noël, 11th November.

On November 6th Dumouriez's forces defeated the Austrians at Jemappes, near Mons. During the following week the news of this unexpected victory reverberated through Europe. It was known in England on the evening of November 9th; here the potential threat to the stability of Holland momentarily switched government attention from the spread of sedition and necessitated the immediate recall of the Cabinet, several of whom were still relaxing in their country seats. In Belgium however, all was action. Dumouriez had successfully followed the course he had determined on after Valmy. On November 14th he entered Brussels in triumph. His declaration to the Belgians was a document typical of the rhetoric of the republic and of the mixture of delusion and genuine sentiment which were soon to pose one of the major problems for the victors in the Austrian Netherlands - "nous entrons incassément sur votre territoire; nous y entrons pour vous aider à planter l'arbre de la liberté, sans nous mêler en rien à la constitution que vous voudrez adopter..... nous respecterons vos propriétés et vos lois. La plus exacte discipline regnera dans les armées françaises." (1)

(1) Published in Le Moniteur, vol. xiv, p.367

This statement anticipated the very great difficulties which were to follow for France and for Europe once the Austrian domination of Belgium had been broken. The Belgians, with a recent history of revolution and dissension among themselves, were unlikely to accept any kind of unity imposed from outside.

The French themselves, despite the warmth of their initial protestations of non-interference, quickly realized that the republic's security and even the survival of her economy, was inextricably connected with maintaining a firm presence in Belgium. Beyond these general issues, the occupation added a new dimension to the deepening feuds of the Convention. Many men were suspicious of Dumouriez's intentions, as Cambon pointed out - "Vous devez sentir combien serait illusoire la responsabilité d'un général entouré de toute la force d'opinion que lui auraient donnée ses victoires.... plus un general a de succès, plus il a de prépondérance dans l'opinion, et plus il est important qu'il n'ait point de maniement de finances....."(1)

With a victorious army behind him and a province at his feet he might be tempted to pursue his own course rather than one directed by the French government. The general's difficulties were

(1) Quoted in S. Tassier, Histoire de la Belgique sous l'occupation française en 1792 et 1793, Brussels, 1934, p.155.

not easy to assess from Paris and his high-handed manner in correspondence with Pache, the War Minister, did not calm the fears of men who remembered Lafayette only too clearly.

Despite the tension, France was a country of many moods in November 1792. The revolutionaries perceived that they had shaken Europe and were keen to know British reaction.⁽¹⁾ They had sensed immediately after the Revolution of August 10th. that the future of the two countries was linked. Their legislators, however, unwittingly jeopardized the maintenance of British neutrality by passing the November decrees, opening the Scheldt and declaring fraternity and assistance to oppressed peoples. No other country, however scornful of French stability, could be expected to dismiss such direct blows to the status quo. Yet, almost paradoxically, the ministers and politicians of France were acutely aware of the precarious state of the republic and of the devastating effect of violent language and violent emotion on emerging

(1) On November 23rd Lebrun instructed Chauvelin to report in detail on the British reaction to the opening of the Scheldt; the same day Grenville wrote to Auckland at the Hague, "I am strongly inclined to believe that it is the present intention of the prevailing party in France to respect the rights of this country and of The Republic....." F.O. 37/41

national consciousness and commitment to the Revolution. If their military success was not to be hollow and their propaganda empty noise, they must resolve the differences within France so that the republic could face the consequences of European reaction without disintegration.

The fall of Belgium to the French armies was unexpected because neither the allied German powers nor the rest of Europe had fully considered the possibility that Brunswick's retreat might not be the end of the season's campaigning. The cold and wet Low Countries were not a promising area for any army to march through but Dumouriez had every reason to abandon the traditional concepts of warfare and to rely instead on the likelihood that his superior numbers would put him in Brussels by the middle of the month. There were a number of contributory factors which assisted him in the successful conclusion of this manoeuvre. The courage of his sans-culottes volunteers was supported by well-trained and disciplined troops of the former royal army. The Austrians under Clerfayt found a resourceful enemy confronting them at Jemappes. Even more significant than the comparative strength of the armies was the state of the Austrian Netherlands themselves. The ill-feeling against the Imperial government, dating back to the reforms of Joseph II in the 1780/s had produced an atmosphere which was very much to the French advantage. The

history of revolt in Belgium did not, however, indicate that harmony between the inhabitants and their liberators would be long-lasting. In 1789, two groups had resisted Austria. The Statists were a "conservative" party, opposed to Austrian reforms, who wanted to uphold the privileges of the clergy and nobility.

W/ The Vonckists (so called after one of their leaders) were imbued with the more liberal ideas of the French Third Estate. They wished to reduce the power of the privileged groups, in an independent Belgium. In 1790 the Statists triumphed over their opponents, many of whom fled to France. Austrian predominance was restored early in 1791, after which a number of prominent Statists came to England.

The problem which faced France, and, most immediately, Dumouriez in mid-November was how to guide these parties, whose views clashed strongly, towards some measure of agreement. Without this, there could be no hope of speedy adaptation to their new situation for the Belgians and France could consequently be faced with playing a direct role in establishing equanimity. The greatest anxiety was that the Belgians would turn against the French army, thus making the occupation impossible to justify in the eyes of the rest of the world and accentuating military difficulties when hostilities recommenced in the spring. The French government had already been warned that the population was anti-Austrian rather than pro-French. "Il faut

être abusé soi-même ou vouloir égarer l'opinion publique pour prétendre que c'est par amour pour notre révolution que ce peuple nous appelle; il ne veut de nous que pour briser ses fers et, à l'exception de quelques chefs du parti très peu nombreux des Vonckistes... nous n'avons pas de véritables amis; la superstition et l'ignorance nous font regarder par la majorité comme des novateurs dangereux." (1) There were men who were willing to conform to French guidance whatever the cost to independence, but it soon became obvious that the disputes between the two leading Belgian groups would lead only to obstruction of the French - "Vous avez appris avec peine, mais sans surprise, ministre citoyen, que les Belges paraissaient vouloir rejeter le présent que nous leur offrons." (2)

The difficulty lay in finding the most effective means of dealing with this situation. Lebrun had first-hand knowledge of the Austrian Netherlands from the years he had spent in Liège, a bishopric independent of the Emperor, and it is probable that the Council were influenced by his advice. It was hoped to avert possible Belgian resentment at the beginning of the occupation by re-opening the river Scheldt. A month later, it was evident that more

(1) Quoted in Tassier, op. cit. p.59.

(2) Deshaquets to Lebrun, 28th. November, A.A.E., C.P. Pays Bas 185.

heavy-handed treatment was necessary. The war had cost France immense sums of money and it was unrealistic for neighbouring peoples, liberated from oppression by the French armies, to expect that no financial contribution would be required of them. Once established in Belgium, the French realized that sweeping measures would have to be taken covering every aspect of administration, and monetary legislation was very prominent in their considerations. General la Bourdonnaye, Dumouriez's assistant, had anticipated the development of French policy by issuing a proclamation relative to taxation - "les revenus percus au nom du ci-devant souverain continueraient à l'être, mais au profit de la République française."⁽¹⁾ This announcement angered the Belgians and infuriated Dumouriez, who was attempting to avoid provocative statements. The deterioration of relations throughout the month of November reinforced the view that a comprehensive law covering the treatment of occupied territories should be passed. The December 15th. decree, which provided for the confiscation of property of opponents of the people (a measure aimed at the church) and forced the Belgians to accept assignats, was an important step towards annexation.

The state of Belgium presented the French with a difficult and delicate problem at a time when the

(1) Quoted in Tassier, op. cit. p. 109.

other European countries were anxiously watching every move of the revolutionaries. The republic might have dealt more effectively with the unfortunate reaction of the population had it not been for one ultimately insurmountable complication. This was the character and ambition of General Dumouriez himself. After the battle of Jemappes Dumouriez occupied a position of extreme importance. Yet for Dumouriez, as for many other figures in the limelight in the autumn of 1792, the very successes of the war were to bring greater difficulties. The pressure was ceaseless and the criticism fierce and unyielding. The ambitions of the individual were quickly suffocated by the confusions which followed on the events in which they had themselves participated. Dumouriez was to experience much of the bitterness which marks the existence of a man who had held high office and who had known wide acclaim for the services he had performed for his country. In the collapse of his own views on the course of the Revolution and his place in it he permanently forfeited the esteem of his countrymen and condemned himself to a long exile.

When Dumouriez entered Brussels victorious on November 14th, 1792, he was at the height of his career. A soldier and a diplomatist, he was now 53 years old. The time seemed ripe to leave his mark on the revolution which had afforded him the opportunity of advancement. Before 1789 Dumouriez had been unable.

to break into the tight barrier of privilege and intrigue. Discontented with his situation and resentful of the narrowness of the existing system, Dumouriez occupied the post of military commandant at Cherbourg when the revolution began. He was not, however, lacking in self-confidence or in ability. Using his talents to their maximum effect, Dumouriez had advanced far by the time he became Foreign Minister in March, 1792. Talleyrand, who was similarly opportunistic but a great deal more flexible, regarded his new superior with condescension, commenting that the written style of his despatches left much to be desired.⁽¹⁾ Dumouriez's term in office was short, for, with the approaching overthrow of the monarchy, he decided to concentrate his energies on assisting in the military survival of France. It was in his capacity as general of the army of the north that Dumouriez demonstrated his greatest ability. He was a bold general, not afraid to take risks. In confronting the strictly-trained troops of the Duke of Brunswick, whose formality could result in an over-rigid approach, such qualities were extremely useful. More significant even than military and tactical experience was Dumouriez's personality in the camps. Although a

(1) Quoted in A. Sorel, "Un général diplomate au temps de la Révolution - Dumouriez," Revue des deux Mondes, 64 (1894), Part I, p. 315.

soldier of the ancien régime, Dumouriez could gauge expertly the type of direct approach welcomed by the inexperienced volunteers. The loyalties of such men were not easily won, nor, as the occupation of Belgium was to demonstrate, were they easily kept. The general was, however, extremely popular during the Valmy campaign. - "M. Dumouriez, ne cesse, jour et nuit de travailler; il est impossible de prendre plus à coeur les intérêts de la patrie, d'avoir plus de talents militaires et d'être imbu de meilleurs principes que se général..... Dumouriez a fait renaître la confiance. Chaque jour il va d'un camp à l'autre et parle au soldat, s'occupe de leurs besoins, organise l'état major et l'armée et se prépare au combat." (1) There was something compelling in Dumouriez's bearing - "un petit corps râblé et nerveux; figure commune, presque laide, physionomie agréable; oeil petit mais vif et hardi; bouche grande, mais douce et riante, quelquefois fine et dédaigneuse... Le ton net et ferme, des manières brusques sans être rudes et vives, et en même temps, retenues sans être emportées....." (2)

(1) Westermann to Danton, 10th September, 1792, quoted in Caron, P. Les Missions du Conseil Exécutif Provisoire et de la Commune de Paris dans l'Est et le Nord.

Paris, 1953, p.55.

(2) Roederer, Portraits, quoted in A. Sorel, Un général diplomate au temps de la Révolution, op. cit. p.309.

The combination of soldierly skills and rapport with his troops had greatly assisted Dumouriez in his assault on the Austrian Netherlands. The side of his character which became visible in his political career illustrates the eventual failure of his attempt to remain at the crest of the revolutionary wave. There were indications before his arrival in Brussels that although Dumouriez was capable of envisaging grand schemes he lacked both the depth of character and the necessary adaptability to circumstances to carry them through. He told Gensonne that he had resigned on June 15th. as Minister for Foreign Affairs as a result of Guadet's motion that he should present a rigorous account of the expenses of his department.⁽¹⁾ His fellow-generals and also the Ministers were well aware of his extreme sensitivity. After the battle of Valmy there had been ill-feeling between Dumouriez and Kellerman; the latter had claimed, with much justification, that the experience of his troops had decided the victory. Lebrun at this point attempted to appease Dumouriez's wounded pride by writing - "Songez, mon général, que la France entière vous regarde comme son héros, que vous avez l'estime, la confiance du Conseil, tous mes sentiments particuliers que votre destinée est clair."⁽²⁾

(1) Dumouriez to Gensonne, June 1792, B.N. n.a.f. 3534.

(2) Lebrun to Dumouriez, 7th October, B.N. n.a.f. 3534.

Dumouriez enjoyed the role of hero and he had far-reaching plans for the accomplishment of his destiny. The invasion of Belgium opened up the prospect of establishing a kind of buffer-state in the Low Countries, which France would protect but not annex. The perilous position of the Stadtholder in Holland would facilitate the early fall of those provinces to his troops. He may have considered handing back the United Provinces to the House of Orange in return for the recognition of Belgium, thus enabling him to act as virtual dictator, independent of anything other than general political guidance from Paris.⁽¹⁾ The scheme was a bold one but it illustrated very clearly how little Dumouriez understood the forces of the Revolution or the character and opinions of many of the deputies who approved of the military successes which had restored the Republic's credibility, but were also profoundly suspicious of the general's own motives. Dumouriez's conduct marks the behaviour of a man who had welcomed the Revolution merely as a disruptive weapon to be manipulated for his own profit without ever attempting to understand some of the major principles behind it. The vituperation of his critics in Paris incensed him. His reluctance to follow up the defeat of the Prussians displeased a number of

(1) See R.R. Palmer, The Age of the Democratic Revolution, vol.ii, p.p. 73-75.

commentators, but it was his own intentions, and his connections with the Brissotins, that gave rise to the most forthright condemnation - "Tu nous promets la conquête des Pays-Bas et tu ne veux pas chasser l'ennemi de notre territoire. Tu quittes ton poste dans le moment du danger, et pour quoi faire? Pour venir dénoncer deux bataillons composés des plus braves sans-culottes de Paris. C'est ainsi.... que Lafayette cherchait des poux à tous les patriotes.... c'est Brissot qui t'avait fait ministre..... c'est pour servir ses complots que tu nous as fait déclarer la guerre à l'Autriche dans un temps où nous n'avions ni argent, ni armes ni armées....." (1) Hébert had seized on every significant aspect of Dumouriez's past conduct and present situation which alarmed his opponents. Under such circumstances, Dumouriez's self-righteousness increased - "Citoyen President", he wrote to the Convention shortly after Jemappes - "plus j'ai de succès contre les ennemis extérieurs, plus la colonne de mes ennemis intérieurs doit se grossir. La méfiance est la pierre d'achoppement des républiques, et plus un citoyen est en évidence, plus ses sentiments, ses opinions et sa conduite doivent être connus de tous ses concitoyens. En conséquence, je crois devoir vous envoyer et vous prier de communiquer l'extrait d'une lettre

(1) Hébert, Le Pere Duchesne, no. 179.

que j'ai écrite le 30 octobre au citoyen ministre de la guerre. Cette lettre, ma conduite soutenue, et les services que je rendrai à la république serviront de réponse à toutes les qu'on débitera et débitera sur mon compte. Je vous prie de croire que j'ai cru cette démarche nécessaire pour la tranquillité de ma patrie et pour mon bonheur. Ainsi, j'attache le plus grand prix à sa publicité, est c'est la seule récompense que je sollicite." (1)

It was against this background of mixed acclamation and ill-concealed hostility that Dumouriez began his troubled months as commandant of the French forces in the former Austrian Netherlands. The situation heightened his negative qualities. His impiousness, his sensitivity increased. The seeds of his defection were sown in this uneasy period. The problems might well have been beyond the scope even of a man fully committed to the Convention, for it would have required remarkable insight to deal justly and firmly with the Belgians and to placate the deputies in Paris. Dumouriez had, however, totally failed to appreciate the implication of his schemes on the complex network of international relations. The arrangement, which he had in mind was unthinkable in all the major European capitals. The British government in

(1) Dumouriez to the President of the Convention, November 9th, Le Moniteur, 14., p.475.

particular held very definite views on the balance of power in North-Western Europe; their reasons for upholding the Dutch Stadtholder were strategic as well as political. The establishment of Dumouriez's state, whether independent of France or not, would threaten British control of the North Sea end of the Channel. Furthermore, Dumouriez, like many other Frenchmen, was unable to conceive in his own mind the fiercely defensive reaction of neighbouring countries to the prospect of infiltration of French ideas.

Within a few weeks the general realized that his position would be assailed by the French government, by the Belgians whom he was trying to reconcile, and very probably, by the Dutch and British governments. He needed to revise all his original plans, or at least make provision for their alteration. Some semblance of independence would be exercised by the Belgians in the local elections at the end of November, but the domination of the small number of men wanting to support France at any price would finally impose order and direction in the country's affairs. Dumouriez had hoped to support his army financially without heavy taxation or confiscation of supplies from the population but the clergy proved to be reticent in co-operation with loans. Even more important for the immediate future of the general's plans was the need to make arrangements for improving the supplies

of the French soldiers themselves. Although hailed as heroes the men were not properly shod, fed or clothed, nor did they have adequate medical facilities. In his determination to exercise control over this vital aspect of his army Dumouriez had made a number of hasty and unwise deals with unscrupulous suppliers. These men, who included the Simon brothers⁽¹⁾ and the abbé d'Espagnac⁽²⁾ had made large profits and were held to be directly responsible for the harshness of the common soldier. Despised for their greed and cynicism with regard to human suffering, such men were involved in the bitter quarrel between Dumouriez and Pache. The War Minister hoped that his centrally-supervised commission, which had charge of the purchasing of arms and supplies, would be more efficient and waste less money. In practice the bureau des achats did not meet these expectations, but it was the principle which infuriated Dumouriez. He considered the responsibility for such arrangements to be entirely the province of the commanding officer. At the back of his mind may have been the fear that his men would be hard enough to discipline without having his good faith and competence questioned from Paris.

As his difficulties multiplied and the ill-feeling deepened, the general's disillusion with the French

(1) See A. Matthiez, Autour de Danton, Paris, 1926, Chapter 9

(2) Espagnac had also purchased arms in the United Provinces; he was guillotined with Danton in 1794.

government grew. Yet Dumouriez was not the man to face the prospect of permanent disgrace without considering alternatives. Well-versed in the diplomacy of the ancien regime, he decided to encourage the interest first demonstrated in mid-November by the Dutch Grand Pensionary in exploratory discussions which might resolve the ambiguous position of the French armies in Belgium and their intentions towards the Dutch.⁽¹⁾ The general had been made aware of the Dutch viewpoint by de Maulde, the rebellious French ambassador to the Hague who regarded himself as Dumouriez's dependant. In following this opening, Dumouriez had to exhibit caution, and, initially a reasonable degree of detachment. He could not be certain of the best course to take until he assessed his position with regard to the neutral powers. The Dutch moves would be monitored, if not directed, by the British government. Similarly, Dumouriez could not but fail to consider the attitude of politicians in Paris. The confusion which had followed on his apparently brilliant success increased his bitterness. The mixed reaction and unpredictable behaviour of the Convention bewildered and angered him. At the beginning of the 19th century he described to Napoleon, a general whose success far outmatched his own, the tribulations and uncertainties of the autumn

(1) The first contact was on November 17th, see below Chapter 7.

of 1792 - "Dans le temps ou je fus chargé par le gouvernement qui existait en France, du commandement d'une partie des armées Françaises je vis tous les nuages de la révolution que moi-même j'avais provoqué s'accumuler sur un atmosphere qui tantôt ne me laissait entrevoir que la plus profonde obscurité.

Quel était le parti que j'avais à prendre au milieu des différentes factions qui sans cesse étaient renaissantes, où l'homme craignait de se rendre compte à lui-même de sa façon de penser et d'agir, dans un temps ou le crime servait de bases à toutes les actions et où je voyais sous le peuchant de sa ruina, un gouvernement dont j'étais de bonne fois l'ami et que je voulais soutenir dans ses droits et ses intérêts en épargnant le sang des défenseurs qui m'était confiés." (1)

Dumouriez could only have been the friend of a government which either genuinely supported his own policies or left him enough freedom to attempt their completion. Decisions on foreign affairs were taken at Paris against the background of clamour and accusation, a situation which hindered Dumouriez's aims. The divisions in the Convention tended to increase the vigilance of the Montagnard deputies who were alarmed at the prospect of allowing much independence

(1) Dumouriez to the First Consul, 3rd November, 1800, quoted in Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française, 1851.

of action to a man with an army at his back. The Conseil Executif and the Convention knew that the conquest of Belgium was a decisive step but while European and especially British reaction was unknown and while the pressure of internal affairs multiplied one of the victory's most important effects was to restore morale and prestige. It is in the light of these ambivalent emotions that the November decrees have to be viewed. To observers the fall of the Austrian Netherlands and the November decrees acquired an overall significance which contributed greatly to the fear of the remorseless progress of the Revolution. This impression was false, for many Frenchmen had criticized Dumouriez's determination to enter Belgium. Moreover, the two pieces of legislation which appeared to follow on his victory came from different sources and were the products of different responses within French government to the turning-point in French fortunes.

The November 16th. decree opening the river Scheldt came from the Conseil Executif, apparently on the recommendation of Lebrun. The opening of the river, closed by the Treaty of Munster in 1648, might be expected to have two positive effects. It was very much in line with revolutionary propaganda that a waterway, a natural feature which continued to flow despite man-made restrictions, should be declared free for navigation. Not only would this demonstrate to those in doubt about the Revolution's principles that

France would take every opportunity to break down barriers raised in the past by the self-interest of the great powers, but it would also appeal to many deputies in the Convention. The Brissotins were great believers in the usefulness of propaganda and many Montagnards were unlikely to oppose a measure which would bring benefits to long-oppressed peoples. This second aspect of the opening of the Scheldt was of more immediate significance to the Conseil Exécutif. Lebrun sensed that if France was to establish a lasting hold on Belgium without ill-feeling it was necessary to make a gesture of this kind. The resumption of shipping on the river would restore to Antwerp some of the commercial importance of which she had been deprived for over a century - "J'ai cru qu'il serait sage de se concilier la ville d'Anvers jusqu'à présent la plus opposée aux principes démocratiques il m'a paru qu'on y réussirait si l'on pouvait tourner vers de plus grands intérêts tel que le commerce, les esprits superstitieux des Anversois." (1)

The opening of the Scheldt, however, was unlikely to be viewed with approval by the British and Dutch governments. This was not because of any real threat to the commerce of Amsterdam, whose trade had been safeguarded in 1648. The general opinion on the river

(1) Lebrun to the Belges et Liégeois Unis, 18th November, 1792, A.N. FI^e, 30,¹. Quoted in Tassier, p. 118.

was summed up by Lord Auckland - "I do not believe that the navigation contended for is a point of much real importance; the channel of the river has long been bad for navigation and it is secretly supposed that the republic (the United Provinces) could at any time totally spoil it."⁽¹⁾ The main anxiety of the neutral powers was the attitude behind such a total disregard of Treaty Rights and international practice in the unilateral action of France. On the Scheldt issue the Conseil Exécutif maintained right up till the outbreak of war that this was entirely a Belgian matter which could in no real way affect Holland or Great Britain. The natural rights theory was developed in a suitably flowery style. Lebrun and his colleagues had unfortunately underestimated the adverse reaction of the British government, perhaps because to them the decree of 16th November was so evidently a piece of legislation calculated for its effect on the new area of French influence. Only after the outbreak of war was it possible to look back and attack the wisdom of this measure. The disastrous long-term significance of the decree was levelled at Lebrun at his trial - "Que le manifeste public pour l'ouverture et la libre navigation de l'Escaut, immédiatement après l'invasion des troupes

(1) Auckland to Grenville, November 28th., H.M.C.

françaises dans la Belgique fut plus particulièrement l'ouvrage de Lebrun que de tout autre et déposera éternellement des intelligences avec Pitt, en effet, sans ce manifeste Pitt marquait absolument de prétextes colorés pour armer contre la république..... mais une provocation faite à la Hollande légitimait les armements de l'Angleterre obligée des lors pour son honneur et sa gloire, à soutenir un allié et ces armements devaient à leur tour devenir l'occasion d'une rupture plus directe avec la République." (1)

Within a year the French had swung from understressing to over-stressing the importance of the Scheldt as a major factor in the deterioration of Anglo-French relations. At the time, the second decree of November 19th, caused more anxiety. This decree came not from the Council but the Convention. The circumstances of its introduction and acceptance were themselves significant for a full appreciation of the mentality of the Convention at the time. The deputies had received the news of Jemappes on November 10th amid universal rejoicing. Yet the decree offering fraternity and assistance to oppressed peoples came over a week later and though undoubtedly intended as a challenging assertion of France's new position and confidence was not properly the result of an atmosphere of euphoria. In the nine days between the news of the

(1) Trial of Lebrun, A.N. W. 305.

fall of Belgium and the passing of the 19th November decree the Convention was, in fact, devoting attention to entirely different business. The deputies heard a number of detailed and closely-reasoned speeches connected with the issues of the trial and form of judgement of Louis XVI.

The Convention was first moved back to a consideration of the implications of the fall of Belgium by Grégoire on November 15th - "Je demande que la Convention charge son comité de législation de lui faire un rapport sur la manière dont la nation française doit accorder sa protection aux peuples qui la réclament."⁽¹⁾ Four days later, amidst a variety of topics, Larevillière-Lepeaux proposed a decree on this subject - "La Convention nationale déclare, au nom de la nation française, qu'elle accordera fraternité et secours à tous les peuples qui voudront recouvrer leur liberté et charge le pouvoir exécutif de donner aux généraux les ordres nécessaires pour porter secours à ces peuples et défendre les citoyens qui auraient été vexés, ou qui pourraient l'être pour la cause de la liberté."⁽²⁾ "Dans le décret..... il y a de quoi

(1) Le Moniteur, 14, 1791. Further pressure for the decree came from the deputations from Savoy, Nice and the Rhineland who appeared at the bar of the Convention around that time.

(2) Le Moniteur, 14, p.517.

bouleverser l'Europe,"⁽¹⁾ wrote Camille Desmoulins.

The Conseil made no initial comment on the 19th November

decree in the diplomatic correspondence, though it was

only to be expected that such a piece of legislation,

however vague in wording, would excite comment and

concern. Lebrun did not mention the 19th November

decree to Chauvelin until 9th December. This failure

to sense the damaging effect of their propaganda

proved to be one of the most disastrous of the mis-

calculations and underestimations of French foreign

policy. Viewed realistically, the decree threatened

much without having any solid practical basis. It

almost appears as a belated justification of the

invasion of Belgium. None of the generals was in a

strong enough situation to give military assistance

to peoples struggling to throw off the chains of

tyranny. The Dutch patriots could legitimately expect

concrete aid to replace the token support, which had

caused them to hang on to French promises since 1786.

Yet they applied in vain for Dumouriez to take his

forces into Zealand and only a month previously Lebrun

had virtually disallowed them.⁽²⁾ The French perhaps

felt that the action they had taken and the principles

which they professed were explanation enough for the

decree. The justification which Lebrun eventually

(1) Quoted in Tassier, op. cit. p.237.

(2) See above, Chapter 5.

offered in a letter to Chauvelin on December 9th, was rather more specific than the original document - "Sur le décret du 19th novembre on ne peut s'allarmer que faute d'en comprendre le véritable sens. Lorsque nous promettons fraternité et assistance aux peuples qui veulent secouer le joug des princes avec lesquels nous sommes en guerre il n'y a nulle difficulté et le décret s'applique à ce cas dans la plus grande latitude sans qu'aucune puissance étrangère puisse le trouver mauvais. Par rapport aux pays qui appartiennent à des puissances absolument neutres la crainte que nous ne cherchions à y exciter et fomenter des mouvements séditieux a pu seule égarer les esprits dans l'interprétation du décret....."(1) This statement came too late for the British government to put much credence in it. Lebrun had failed to realize that other governments would view those struggling for liberty as rebellious subjects.

The November decrees appeared as the summit of France's new assertiveness. The reality of the Revolution's potential as a proselytizing force was irreversibly underlined in the minds of politicians throughout the continent. Yet the reality behind this most formidable of French arms was the insecure political situation within the country itself.

(1) Lebrun to Chauvelin, 9th December. A.A.E.

October and November were months of bitter recrimination within the Convention. The confusion spread amongst the clubs into the sections and was echoed with vehemence by the press. Hebert enjoined his sans-culottes readers....."Il faut en convenir nous ne savons pas nous gouverner.....nos armées font de merveilles et nous dans l'interieur nous perdons tout le fruit de nos victoires.....Hommes du 10 août, réveillez-vous....."(1) Issues which merited close enquiry were submerged in polemics. None of the deputies denied that the confusion of their proceedings was damaging to the wider needs of the republic, but the response of those most immediately involved in the bitter exchanges was to blame their opponents. Anything which resembled faction or party was the target for searing criticism. There were no parties as we understand them in the Convention but the atmosphere in which such terms were exchanged as insults is of significance. The tensions themselves became a force. Through constant repetition of the idea the name of Paris began to conjure up visions of mob violence and ruthless determination to dominate the rest of the country at all costs. Wherever there were disturbances as in the Eure and other districts where there was a shortage of available grain, Paris was evoked as the source of disorder. Yet there undoubtedly were sub-

(1) Hebert, Le Père Duchesne, no. 191.

sistance difficulties in a number of areas and on this question the people gave voice to their displeasure both physically and in writing. The demand for economic controls opened up an early difference between the Montagnards and their supporters outside the Convention. Amidst the increasing controversy among the politicians, press commentary further enflamed tempers. Some men believed that the solution lay in a concentration on the aspects of France's domestic and foreign concerns which were being neglected by the wranglings. Others thought that the only final answer was to crush those who threatened unity.

The attack on Paris was predictable in view of the circumstances surrounding the overthrow of the king. The relentless criticism did much damage to the harmony of the Convention within days of its opening. Whether the Brissotins liked it or not, the citizens of Paris had done invaluable service to the Revolution, and the onslaught of Barbaroux, Louvet and others increased the determination of their opponents for concerted action. The sections, too, contained many men who would not quietly respond to condemnation of their actions and opinions. The state of Paris was a subject of argument between the city's defenders and its critics but there was ground for some alarm. Unemployment in the city had risen as had the price of bread. Roland and the Brissotins sensed that here was a situation which could easily be exploited by Robespierre and his allies

within the Commune and sections. There were elements of political manoeuvring in their sweeping condemnations and alarmist reports to the provinces but Roland seems to have been genuinely nervous at the lack of security within the capital. At the end of October he wrote to Pache, his former protégé - "Je suis informé... qu'il existe encore dans Paris une fermentation sourde que des malveillants entretiennent dans l'esprit du peuple, et je sais que, si elle éclatait, il résulterait nécessairement des troubles qui exposeraient la tranquillité publique.... vous savez qu'une loi particulière vous a donné la faculté d'employer immédiatement la force armée dans la capital.... et je pense que vous pourriez faire un usage utile de cette faculté."⁽¹⁾ The previous day (October 29th.) Roland had presented his report on the state of Paris to the Convention; the picture was that of a city where the forces of law and order were dangerously weak - "Département sage, mais peu puissant; commune active et despote; peuple excellent, mais dont une partie saine est intimidée ou contrainte, tandis que l'autre est travaillée par des flatteurs et enflammée par la calomnie; confusion des pouvoirs, mépris des autorités; force publique faible ou nulle par un mauvais commandement, voilà Paris."⁽²⁾ Roland's findings were

(1) Roland to Pache, 30th October, Le Procès de Pache, ed. A. See, Paris 1911, p.18.

(2) Report read to the Convention, 29th October, Le Moniteur, 14, p.433.

supported by others, who were deeply committed to resisting Robespierre. This brought into play the emotions engendered during the disputes over the formation of a departmental guard. Barbaroux, in a powerfully argued speech on October 31st., attacked those who had accused men of his mind as desiring a federal republic - "les habitants du Midi à qui l'on suppose le projet de fédéralisme nous ont précisément donné des mandats contraires et nous ont fait signer que nous voterions pour une république unique."⁽¹⁾ These tactics were designed as a smokescreen. What was imperative was the speedy re-establishment of order and in this respect Paris was an obstacle. Whatever the truth of the Brissot-Roland group's allegations, the Comité de Sureté Générale was instructed to present its own report to the Convention. In this Bazire defended the Parisians. The deputies began to accuse each other of capitalizing on the tense atmosphere of Paris to further their own ends. In these bitter weeks the Brissotins' dramatization of the intricate balance of problem and emotion overshadowed the sober voices such as Barere's, trying to make themselves heard - "Terminons enfin ces duels politiques, ces combats singuliers de la vanité et de la haine... vous avez de grands travaux à faire sur la sureté générale, sur les colonies, sur l'instruction publique, sur la

(1) Speech of Barbaroux, 31st October, in B.N. L 6³⁸ series.

constitution; voila ce qui doit attirer vos regards et votre sollicitude journaliere."(1) There was much talk of public opinion as the final arbiter of the Convention; but these men were conscious of the fact that they could influence the direction of public opinion in their speeches and writings. The struggle for power had many dimensions which were incomprehensible to European observers, although from time to time the representatives were reminded of the potential size of their audience - "Citoyens, faisons, nous, une conjuration contre les perturbateurs de cette assemblée. Il faut que nous nous pénétrions de cette verité, ou que nous renoncions à remplir le devoir qui nous est impose par l'Europe entiere. Il faut que nous fassions des lois qui assurent la tranquillite publique; car il est des hommes qui se tiennent caches et qui nous observent. Le sort, je ne dis pas des 25 millions d'hommes de la republique francaise, mais des 100 millions qui habitent l'Europe depend de la conduite que nous allons tenir."(2)

However, it was their own countrymen that the deputies had first to convince. Their public proceedings were scrutinized in the press, which echoed the controversies raging in the government, for many members of the Convention edited or contributed to popular journals. A few papers, such as le Moniteur, confined themselves

(1) Barere, 5th November, Le Moniteur, 14, p.396.

(2) Kersaint, 1st November, Le Moniteur, 14, p.367.

almost entirely to straight reporting of news from Europe and of the previous day's debates. The majority however, tended to side either with Robespierre or with the anti-Montagnard views of Brissot. The Girondins heaped scorn on their opponents, hoping to make them appear foolish and, because of their rashness, dangerous. There were exceptions, notably Brissot's tribute to St. Just's maiden speech. The Montagnard press was chiefly represented by Robespierre himself in his "Lettres à ses commettans"; detailed and literary pieces which would probably not have been of great interest to a wide section of the population. Prudhomme's "Les Révolutions de Paris" were more overtly radical, but still they lacked the feeling of being at one with the aspirations and reactions of the ordinary man at his workbench or in the wineshops of the Faubourg St. Antoine.

Marat, the Friend of the People, had already tapped this area of sans-culotte consciousness. He had also brought upon himself the wrath of the moderates by his outspoken criticisms, his part in the September Massacres and his behaviour in the Convention. Marat seldom spoke without becoming abusive and receiving insults in his turn. But he made few major contributions to debates until December when he spoke on the king's trial. Some of the deputies evidently regarded him as little better than their resident trouble-maker. Marat, working within the Convention as well as through his journalism, was only one of a number of men who sought

to maintain the awareness of the people of Paris. This world was also the target of the Parisian city official, Jacques-René Hébert.

In his vivid writings, Hébert was not attempting a late 18th. century equivalent of gutter journalism. The directness of his language and literary approach seems to have been intended to fulfill two functions. The first of these was to give expression, in language which the men themselves would readily comprehend, to sans-culotte aspirations. To achieve this, Hébert created the archetypal sans-culotte figure, le Père Duchesne, with his moustache, his cap of liberty and his pipe, a figure who saw things in black and white to whom bluntness was a virtue and suavity a crime. Hébert himself may well have hoped that his journal would remind the quarrelsome and incompetent representatives that they had a duty to the men who had helped them to power, and that they would abdicate these responsibilities at their own peril - "vous semblez oublier que votre plus beau titre est celui de sans-culottes, que sans les sans-culottes vous ne seriez rien et que vous ne pouvez-^{être} rien sans eux."⁽¹⁾ Afraid that the people might be lulled into a false sense of security after August 10th, in the early autumn Hébert decided to remind this audience that noise was no substitute for orderly government -

"Ce n'est pas assez de vouloir être libres il faut savoir

(1) Le Père Duchesne, no. 182.

l'être. Il ne suffit pas, pour le devenir, de haïr les tyrans et les traîtres, de faire belles motions patriotiques, de donner à la nation ses boucles, ses montres, et de voler à l'ennemi; tout cela est bel et bon, mais sans la prudence et sans l'union, tout ce que nous ferons, s'en ira en eau de boudin. Un peu moins de poussière, mes amis, mais plus d'ordre dans nos démarches.... c'est à Paris sur tout qu'il faut maintenir l'ordre et la sûreté." (1)

Le Père Duchesne's gentle guidance of the people was in marked contrast with his growing disgust at the inability of the Convention to resolve its difficulties and govern France in what he considered to be a just and firm fashion. His proposed visit to the Convention was one of the most effective of his descriptions of the magnificent disdain of this awesome figure. "Je paraîtrai seul et... guard on me verra, mes sourcils noirs, mes larges moustaches, ma taille carrée; ma voix de tonnerre feront pâlir tous les jean-foutres qui mettent de batons dans les roues pour empêcher la machine de marcher." (2) Hébert's disgust at what he considered to be the absurd posturings in the Convention increased. He captured the anxieties and bewilderment of the people of the sections in his account of a walk through the Faubourg St. Antoine. Here people asked him for news of the armies, demanded

(1) Le Père Duchesne, no. 170.

(2) Le Père Duchesne, no. 182.

explanations of the inactivity of the Convention. Why, when the armies met with such stunning success was the interior of France subject to petty bickering? - "Père Duchesne, est-ce qu'il faut encore une révolution?"

The probable outcome of continued chaos within French government was thus clearly indicated.

Apart from his repeated pre-occupation with the contrast between French victory and French division, Hebert's journal was primarily concerned with the issue of the king's fate. Sensing that his audience would not be interested in the detailed arguments on the judgement, that they would not catch the theory or the eloquence of a St. Just, Hebert attacked the royal family themselves, playing on the weaknesses of their personality and even their physiognomy. Hebert was unmerciful to those whom he regarded as the emblems of the ancien regime and he extended his venom to Roland, Brissot and others who had betrayed the people. There is something distasteful about his sustained attack on Louis XVI, yet he revealed that he was not a man who gloried in bloodshed. The thought of the victims of the war, he said, made his hair stand on end. The Père Duchesne was merciful to the weak and oppressed and remorseless against those whose pursuit of personal power was at the root of France's internal strife. His journal, with its "grandes coleres" (1) and "grandes joies" was a vocal witness of the troubled (2) autumn and winter of 1792-3.

Hebert's example moved others to protest that the

deputies' arguments were obscuring the problems of the moment. Anonymous sans-culotte pamphlets assailed the Convention for its refusal to restrict the movement of grains and its failure to impose price controls. Here there was a fundamental difference of opinion for very few of the deputies were prepared to abandon the concept of free trade in corn. St. Just said at the end of November that a positive law on subsistances would never work. The solution lay in the establishment of a firm government with wise laws, since no temporary expedients would be of value in the anarchic situation which then prevailed.⁽¹⁾ This attitude was of small comfort for the general population of France. They were convinced that abundant grain lay hoarded by farmers who were too greedy to part with it at a just price - "forcez-donc, par un décret rigoureux, les gros propriétaires, les gros fermiers et tous ceux qui tiennent des magasins de cette denrée de première nécessité d'amener leur blé au marché. Taxez-en le prix suivant les différentes qualités et mettez-le dans les magasins qui seront sous votre surveillance directe."⁽²⁾ On November 14th. 36 sections demanded a law on subsistances. The ministers, however, preferred the traditional methods of purchasing at other European markets to make up the deficiency. The Parisian sans-culottes claimed that the

(1) Speech of St. Just, 29th. November, Le Moniteur, 14. p.610.

(2) Adresse des Braves Sans-Culottes à la Convention nationale, 28 Novembre, 1792. 8° L641, 203. (B.N.)

harvest of 1792 had been abundant, but the Conseil Executif were not confident. As early as 19th. September Lebrun had tried to buy from the rich American markets, writing to the minister at Philadelphia. - "La circonstance où nous nous trouvons.... par le défaut des subsistances de première nécessité dans plusieurs départements de l'Empire français rend indispensables des mesures de prévoyance les plus actives." (1) The despatch went on to explain that Roland had been advised by agents in London to look for grain in North America. The Council continued their attempts to buy in Hamburg, London and Amsterdam; other European governments realized that to deprive France of wheat might also entail further disorder for the French government. On November 13th. the British issued an Order in Council forbidding the export of any further grain. Such actions were not merely political manoeuvres for the grain situation was not good in England, and the government had no wish to feed the French at the risk of irritating their own population. The French were angered by the British attitude and made several protests through Chauvelin. They believed that the British were lifting the embargo for countries such as Spain and Portugal and applying it rigidly to France alone. "Le gouvernement anglais connaît les funestes conséquences qui peuvent en résulter pour notre repos intérieure, et c'est très certainement contre nos approvisionnements de bouche et

(1). Lebrun to Ternant, A.A.E., C.P. Etats-Unis, 36.

de guerre qu'il dirige ses premieres attaques."(1)

The contradictions at the base of France's situation in November were those of a nation successful in war but without an established government capable of ensuring that victory was anything other than ephemeral. The capture of Belgium, despite the ensuing problems of management, came at an opportune moment for the morale of a country disturbed by the battle within the political arena. These disputes threatened to become more desperate with the trial of the king to crystallize the differences. Brissot's friends were, by the end of November, temporarily on the defensive after the discovery of Louis XVI's secret correspondence in the iron chest which Roland had unwisely (or perhaps deliberately) opened without witnesses. The emotions engendered by the factions partially clouded France's appreciation of European reaction to the upheaval in the Low Countries. Politicians were certainly aware that there would have to be hasty re-assessments, especially in countries such as Great Britain, but they did not envisage any dangerous alteration of policy by the neutral nations. They were also aware that the British and Dutch governments had their own problems, but there was no way of sensing how British views of the interaction of domestic and foreign troubles would affect the policies of Pitt's administration.

(1) Chauvelin to Lebrun, January 3rd., 1793, A.A.E.,

C.P. Angleterre 580. (the letter is wrongly dated 1792.)

Chapter 7

The Threat to Holland.

"There is really such a brutish insensibility, a base selfishness in the conduct of this people, so far as I have had an opportunity of knowing it, that I cannot but think, that nothing will have any effect, but a direct menace to abandon them to their fate..... whatever they can hope to get done by another, they are perfectly certain not to do themselves...." William Windham writing of the Dutch to William Pitt, September 16th. 1794.

The country most immediately threatened by the occupation of the French armies in Belgium was the United Provinces. Once Brussels had fallen European eyes turned towards the Hague. "Vous me dites dans votre lettre de vous marquer quelles sont les sensations politiques que l'on ressent ici; elles sont vives mais dans un sens contraires à celles que l'on éprouve à la Haye. Dans cette dernière ville l'entrée de nos armées dans le Brabant a glacé d'effroi les plus zélés partisans du despotisme Stadhouderien.... Une déclaration que vient de donner l'ambassadeur d'Angleterre les rassure un peu et l'insolence finait dans leurs propos. La France, disent-ils, n'osera jamais attaquer la Hollande puis qu'alors elle aurait à faire avec l'Angleterre." At Amsterdam, the effect was rather different - "depuis l'entrée de Dumouriez à Bruxelles tous les patriotes s'attendent

à quelque message intéressante de sa part aux états."

In London there was evidently consternation - "les fonds Anglais ont baissé de cinq pourcent. Je ne puis par vous assurer ce fait comme certain, mais ce qu'il y a de sûr c'est qu'il y a quelque chose....."(1)

Boyer-Fonfrède's correspondent, in describing the state of Holland, had introduced as a matter of course that country's relationship with Britain, the effect of continental developments on the British Isles, and the triangular interaction of Britain, Holland and France on one another. The United Provinces were small but their strategic and commercial significance was crucial to the established European balance of power which France seemed determined to disrupt. Six years previously the British had won a protracted struggle for influence over the Dutch, and had firmly maintained the advantages of senior partner in the alliance brilliantly forged by Sir. James Harris. Frederick William II of Prussia, though connected with Holland and Great Britain by the Triple Alliance had chosen to concentrate his attentions first on Poland and Eastern Europe and later on France. The French had lost all hopes of dominating by the overthrow of the ruling party but they remained the protectors by word, if not by action, of the Patriotic movement. Though

(1) Letter written to Boyer-Fonfrède, 19th. November, 1792, in papers of Boyer-Fonfrède, A.N., W.292.

many Patriots had fled to the Austrian Netherlands after the collapse of the 1787 revolt, feeling still ran high in Amsterdam and other towns. With Dumouriez's forces so close the possibility of disturbances leading to insurrection was very real. French protestations that no aggression against the Stadtholder was contemplated were viewed with scepticism in England but this was not the only cause for concern. In November and the succeeding months it became apparent that, despite the presence of an able ambassador at the Hague, the Anglo-Dutch relationship was by no means mutually satisfactory. The Conseil Executif though aware of the uneasy situation in Holland, did not sufficiently trust Dumouriez to authorize him to exploit it; nor would they take the irrevocable step of invasion of the Dutch provinces until Britain's position and intentions became clearer. The future of the United Provinces was extremely important for both France and Great Britain, for although internal problems loomed large in the outlook of policy-makers on both sides of the Channel, Holland became, in effect, the testing-ground for British and French foreign policy and played an important role in the development of Anglo-French relations.

Apart from these broad considerations, the Hague was a scene of intense interest and activity at the turn of the year 1792-3. Men and women of varying stature and ability played a part in the uncertain

atmosphere of the times. The Dutch government was composed in the main, of the same politicians who had figured in the drama of 1786-7. The Princess of Orange's strength of character and powers of decision eased Lord Auckland's task of influencing the policies of the House of Orange. The Stadtholder had not acquired more vigour in the years of comparative calm - "His Serene Highness possesses so little energy and steadiness of mind that it is impossible to rely on him in any measure from one day to another....."(1) Fortunately for Dutch interests the Stadtholder's indecision was more than matched by the experience and talents of the Pensionary. Van de Spiegel had lived through difficult years. In the great crisis which his country was about to face he exhibited much thoughtfulness for its best interests. His greatest strength lay in his ability to handle men. He was a fitting ally for Auckland; who respected his political flair. Auckland himself, though with many years in the diplomatic service and the prestige of having negotiated the commercial treaty of 1786 behind him, found the pressures of the deteriorating European situation increasingly bewildering. The ambassador was a loyal servant of his government, anxious to maintain its pre-eminence in the United Provinces but also alarmed

(1) Auckland to Grenville, May 15th. 1792, H.M.C.
Fortescue MSS, op. cit. p.p. 269-270.

at the reports which reached him of unrest in Britain. Inclined to be convinced of his own rectitude, Auckland did not easily make adjustments in his approach appropriate to the difficulties which his task entailed. This was evident in his early reluctance to encourage unofficial links with General Dumouriez. He was, however, deeply committed to the prevention of war while any means of averting it remained open.

In contrast with the experience and acknowledged wiliness of the Grand Pensionary and the British ambassador, the French embassy at the Hague presented a picture of disarray not unlike its counterpart in London. The United Provinces had become a fertile breeding-ground for all kinds of secret-agents, arms-suppliers and adventurers. The French embassy spied on the speculators in guns and horses while all parties exused themselves to Lebrun. An exaggerated appearance of republican fervour and zeal for equality was paraded in the streets by Frenchmen competitively anxious for a good reputation at home. Yet, while insults were frequently offered to the Orange Party, this motley collection of men, amongst whom were Beaumarchais⁽¹⁾, the author, and the abbé d'Espagnac⁽²⁾,

(1) BEAUMARCHAIS, Pierre Augustin Caron de, 1732-1799. Clock-maker, musician, play-wright. Often embroiled in intrigue, he supplied guns to the revolutionary armies in the autumn of 1792.

(2) d'ESPAGNAC, M-R Sahuguet 1753-93. Forced to enter the priesthood by his father but chose to enter the world of finance. Supplier of weapons to the revolutionary armies. executed April, 1793. 1794.

munitions-dealer, maligned each other constantly.

The confusions of the French in the United Provinces were typified by the eccentric person and ambiguous position of the ambassador to the Hague, Emmanuel de Maulde⁽¹⁾. He had been appointed to the Hague post through the influence of Dumouriez, whose friendship he constantly relied on in the winter of 1792. Dumouriez's instructions had outlined the need for tact, cunning, prudence and patriotism in the difficult situation of the United Provinces but unhappily de Maulde lacked all of these qualities. The only cunning which he exhibited arose out of a kind of desperation. His dilemma was typical of that of numerous other men of his stamp. The Revolution had provided them with an ideal means of advancement but it required unusual restraint and political acumen to survive and to prosper in the shifts of fortune and

(1) MAULDE, Emmanuel de, the date, place of birth and fate of de Maulde are obscure. In a letter to the Convention written from prison he refers to the fact that he was arrested by order of the departement of Seine-et-Oise on April 8th. (presumably 1793) A.N., F 7,4434.

There are indications that he was over 40 and possibly over 50 years old; in a further justification of his innocence he stated that he had not been to London since 1769. A.N., F 7, 4774.

situation, de Maulde did not know the meaning of restraint. He had some conception of the problems likely to face him in his ambassadorial post but he could not find even a moderately successful way of dealing with them. He complained, and talked, too much; even in prison during the year II his self-justification was not silenced.⁽¹⁾ When he first arrived at the Hague he had presented himself as a thorough revolutionary and friend of the Dutch Patriots. Auckland suspected him of purveying sedition and expressed the hope that he would be recalled. The British ambassador, and indeed many of de Maulde's fellow-countrymen regarded him as incompetent and faintly ludicrous. - "Je ne puis même vous cacher que les dénonciations contre lui se multiplient tous les jours..... il y avait longtemps que j'avais conçu des soupçons sur sa conduite."⁽²⁾ There were accusations that de Maulde had been using the money supplied to him for the purchase of arms to line his own pockets. His chief failure was "son inactivité absolue dans le principal objet de sa mission, c'est à dire la politique." This was the man who had written of Lord Auckland,

(1) De Maulde's letters while in prison are to be found in A.N. F 7, 4774³⁹ and F 7, 4434 (Papiers saisis chez Danton.)

(2) Lebrun to Thainville, 26th November, A.A.E., C.P. Hollande 584.

"l'ambassadeur d'Angleterre qu'il ne doit son élévation qu'à ses connaissances mercantiles et à la corruption de notre ancien gouvernement, est tout décomposé de ses erreurs diplomatiques. Sous ce dernier rapport ce n'est qu'un charlatan fastueux." (1) Auckland.

privately regarded de Maulde as a sorry contrast to his own diplomatic abilities.

De Maulde may have done little to further the official aims of his mission, but he was very far from inactive. The pressures of financial embarrassment, brought about, he claimed, by personal losses in connection with commissions to buy horses and weapons for the French armies, encouraged him in the pursuit of furtive diplomatic goals even beyond the outbreak of war. (2) The fact that he defied Lebrun's official letter of recall on October 19th. until January, 1793, is telling evidence of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs'

(1) De Maulde to Lebrun, 1st. November, A.A.E. C.P. Hollande, 584.

(2) In the months of August and September most of the letters sent by Lebrun to de Maulde deal with the purchase of arms. De Maulde said on December 7th. that he could not leave Holland until outstanding financial questions were settled. A.A.E. C.P. Hollande, 584.

inability to deal with a recalcitrant diplomat. (1)

De Maulde remained in the Low Countries, based on the Hague but passing to and fro to Dumouriez in Antwerp.

His shield was Dumouriez. The Dutch Patriots distrusted him, Thainville, the young and inexperienced army officer sent as charge d'affaires could not bypass him. Noël, who arrived to take things in hand in January, 1793, found de Maulde's lack of co-operation infuriating. (2) Numbers of men seem to have been repelled by his self-importance. (3)

(1) Lebrun to de Maulde, October 19th. 1792, A.A.E., C.P. Hollande 584. De Maulde made endless excuses to justify his stay. On November 20th. he asserted that he had only recently received his letters of recall. In December he and Lebrun had an angry exchange in which de Maulde claimed that the Dutch Estates-General had not been notified officially of his recall.

(2) Noël to Lebrun, February 12th. 1793 - "M. Maulde n'a daigné..... avoir aucune communication avec moi.... quelque nécessaire que soit la discretion en diplomatie, je ne crois pas qu'elle dût être poussée jusqu'à ce point avec moi." A.A.E., C.P. Hollande, 585.

(3) "Haut et puissant seigneur, son excellence Maulde, car c'est ainsi qu'il s'annonce....." Anonymous letter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, February 21st. 1793, in A.A.E., Memoires et Documents, France 322.

De Maulde's connections with the victorious general in Belgium and his discontent with his superiors in Paris pre-disposed him to play the dangerous game of undercover diplomacy. He was not, however, alone in this field. Van de Spiegel, the Dutch Pensionary, apparently liked a diversity of sources and so he kept up communication also with a Dutch lady whose experience gave her a certain finesse. Etta Palm, also known as Madame d'Aelders was an adventuress born in the province of Groenigen in about 1752. Some years before the outbreak of the Revolution she had travelled to France where her activities on the fringes of diplomacy earned her the enmity of Breteuil. She seems to have travelled frequently between the Dutch provinces and France, since the Pensionary had made use of her before the autumn of 1792. In Paris she had become involved with the women of the salons of 1791. Her motives for leaving in October, 1792, are not clear, though she undoubtedly hoped to profit from sending information back to Lebrun, by whom she was not, technically, authorized before her journey. The French Minister though demonstrating some chagrin at the boldness of Madame's tactics for remuneration, was nevertheless impressed enough by the information and sharp analysis of her letters to agree to payment for regular

correspondence.⁽¹⁾ He wanted the official French policy to reach the Dutch, and, through them, the British. On November 26th. he wrote - "Je désire que dans vos conversations avec le grand personnage que vous connaissez, vous lui donniez des assurances des dispositions pacifiques de la République à l'égard des puissances qui garderont la neutralité. Vous lui ajouterez aussi, Madame, que nous n'agirons jamais offensivement contre aucune puissance que lorsque nous aurons eu la conviction d'une malveillance bien marquée ou d'un projet formé de nous attaquer."⁽²⁾

The French government were aware that Pitt and his ministers would observe their conduct towards Holland very closely. They had no intention of giving any ground for complaint, though naturally, their view of what might constitute a legitimate grievance did not correspond with English views on the security of the Dutch republic. Lebrun was also acting on the belief that concern for their Dutch ally would be offset if not actually overshadowed by Britain's internal

(1) The outbreak of war, in February, 1793, forced Madame d'Aelders to remain at the Hague. After the French invasion of 1794 she was imprisoned in the same fortress as Van de Spiegel. She was released in 1798. Gedenkstukken der Algemeene Geschiedenis van Nederland, vol. i.

(2) Lebrun to Madame d'Aelders, 26th. November, 1793. Gedenkstukken der Algemeene, i, op. cit. p.p. 193-4.

difficulties. The minister intended that it should be made abundantly clear to Britain that France did not threaten Holland. His view was seconded by the outlook of Frenchmen in England, particularly Chauvelin, whose assessment of the place of Holland in future Anglo-French relations was extremely over-simplified - "Puis qu'il est décidé dans le Conseil de la République que nous respecterons la Hollande, vous pouvez compter aujourd'hui, citoyen, sur l'inaction entière du gouvernement anglais et même sur la disposition favorable à notre égard, auxquelles il sera réduit par les circonstances, comme sur une des bases les plus solides de toutes vos combinaisons politiques"⁽¹⁾. He further reported that he had made known a detailed description of French intentions towards Belgium, which had duly got back to Pitt - "elles m'ont paru éclaircir bien des doutes et calmer bien des inquiétudes." At the end of November Chauvelin was able to present the official policy of his government in person to Grenville, for, despite his apparent complacency in his despatches to the Conseil Exécutif the French ambassador was aware of the value of a direct approach to the British government on a question which was so closely connected with the entire framework of Britain's European diplomacy. It fell to the young ambassador, rather than any of the unofficial agents present in Great Britain, to

(1) Chauvelin to Lebrun, 14th November, A.A.E. C.P. Angleterre 583.

attend the meeting with Lord Grenville on November 29th., in which the recent developments on the continent were discussed. The interview is of interest not merely for the assurances given by Chauvelin, and the different emphases placed by both men on the significance of the opinions exchanged. It was the first direct contact since the revolution of August 10th. and at a time when Pitt's government was striving to regain its equilibrium in the conduct of domestic policy, Grenville's remoteness was clearly evident. The interview had taken over a week to arrange and Chauvelin had, meanwhile, been placed in the awkward position of not exactly knowing his country's intentions with regard to Holland, which was the main object of the meeting. - "M. Chauvelin told me, in substance," wrote Grenville, "that circumstances changed so rapidly in France that he could only say now that, at the time when he wrote the note to desire to see me, he was authorized to contradict the reports which he observed to prevail in London of an intention on the part of France to attack Holland; that on the contrary he could have renewed the assurances which he had before given of their disposition to respect the neutral powers.... He spoke always of the opening of the Scheldt as a thing determined upon, saying that it was a natural right." (1)

(1) Grenville's minute of his meeting with Chauvelin, 29th. November, F.O. 27/40.

Both Chauvelin and Lebrun drew conclusions on British intentions towards France from the exchange of views at this late November meeting which were considerable misrepresentations of Grenville's guarded statements. The ambassador wrote that he did not think the British government were prepared to refuse recognition of the Republic. His comment was, in itself, negative, but the general tone of Chauvelin's report on the meeting was so optimistic that the Foreign Minister apparently did not read between the lines.⁽¹⁾ The British king and his ministers were very sensitive on the issue of recognition of the revolutionary government in France and did not regard it as a minor point.⁽²⁾ Lebrun was wrong when, responding to Chauvelin on December 5th., he wrote, "nous voyons..... que les difficultés seraient bientôt levées s'il n'était plus question que d'amener la cour de Londres à la reconnaissance formelle de la République."⁽³⁾

On the issue of the inviolability of Holland, Chauvelin's confidence was not even shared by other Frenchmen, who exhibited anxiety over Dumouriez's next move. Noël was not the man to leave England,

(1) Chauvelin to Lebrun, November 29th. 1792,
A.A.E. C.P. Angleterre, 583.

(2) See Below.

(3) Lebrun to Chauvelin, December 5th. 1792.
A.A.E. C.P. Angleterre, 584.

where he thought he had important contacts, without good cause. He believed that British alarm over the safety of Holland warranted immediate consultation with Dumouriez. On November 24th. he informed Lebrun that he was leaving for Belgium the next day. He remained there for over two weeks, returning on December 12th. During his absence, Maret gained the much sought-for interview with Pitt and Noël himself, ironically, was directed by Lebrun on December 7th. to leave England for the Hague. (1)

Hugues-Bernard Maret, premier commis of the first correspondence bureau of the Ministère des Affaires Etrangères had arrived in England on November 10th. having previously spent some time in the Austrian Netherlands. (2) The ostensible reason for his arrival in England was to bring the Duke of Orleans' daughter, her governess, Madame de Sillery, and the children of general Broglie, (3) back to France. He proposed to

(1) Letters from Noël to Lebrun, November 24th., December 13th., and from Lebrun to Noël, December 7th., 1792, in A.A.E., C.P. Angleterre, 584.

(2) Hugues-Bernard Maret, senior official of the Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, took part in the peace negotiations of 1786-7; created Duc d'Otranto by Napoleon.

(3) Maret to Lebrun, November 10th. and 17th. 1792. A.A.E., C.P. Angleterre, 583.

visit Dumouriez after crossing the Channel - "Il ne sera point inutile que je cause avec le général de la mesure dans laquelle vous avez autorisé Noël et Chauvelin à dire ici que vous vouliez vous tenir à l'égard de la Hollande. Si Dumouriez attaquaît Maestricht, comme il m'a dit qu'il en avait le projet les assurances données par nos agents sembleraient avec raison un procédé beaucoup trop royal." (1)

Maret and Noël were justified in their anxiety over Dumouriez's future plans. It was not immediately obvious after the occupation that although the general might make threatening noises his freedom of action was, in fact, constricted. His own views on Holland would not have soothed the British government's naturally dubious reaction to French assurances - "l'expédition serait si vite faite que l'Angleterre n'aurait pas le temps de s'y reconnaître. D'ailleurs la France la menacerait et la séduirait à la fois; elle la mettrait en demeure de choisir entre une guerre maritime et l'immense bénéfice que lui donnerait l'affranchissement des colonies espagnoles." If England did not respond to this exchange of interests, France still had nothing to fear - "Maîtres de la marine hollandaise, nous serions assez forts pour écraser l'Angleterre, surtout en intéressant les États-Unis d'Amérique au

(1) Maret to Lebrun, November 24th, 1792.

A.A.E., C.P. Angleterre, 583.

soutien de nos colonies....."(1) The scheme was evidently totally unrealistic, but in the tense atmosphere of late November sober judgements were not always made.

It was not only Dumouriez's unpredictability which gave rise to differences in the French view of Holland. Lebrun knew that de Maulde, the French ambassador at the Hague, was an unreliable man whose efficiency and patriotism were suspect. In view of the Anglo-Dutch alliance and the enhanced importance of the Hague as a diplomatic centre the French government needed a well-organized legation in the United Provinces as much as in London. In Holland, too, it became apparent that the revolutionaries had few men whose loyalty was beyond reproach and whose abilities in any way matched those of the seasoned diplomats of other powers. Plans were afoot to send G net, then at St. Petersburg, with credentials which would be presented to the Dutch Estates by December, in a switch indicative of the way French policy towards Great Britain and the war was shaping he was sent to Philadelphia in an attempt to influence the United States. At a critical point in Anglo-French relations there was no-one at the Dutch capital whose abilities

(1) Dumouriez to Lebrun, 30th. November, quoted in Sorel A., 'Dumouriez, un G n ral Diplomate', Revue des Deux Mondes, op. cit. p.p. 801-802.

were in any way the equal of Lord Auckland's. The French certainly received a quantity of unofficial information but the sources were irregular. Lebrun was furnished with frequent reports, characterized by a fair degree of impartiality by Madame d'Aelders. The letters sent by Madame to Lebrun painted a vivid picture of the tensions at the Hague and could not have left him in any doubts about the disarray of the French legation. She continually pointed out that de Maulde, Beaumarchais and several un-named bankers were representing the Convention as being without authority.

French protestations, whether delivered directly by Chauvelin or indirectly by the instructions Lebrun gave to French agents, were intended to calm British fears. The Conseil Exécutif wished to avoid the possibility that a defensive reaction from Britain would result in a departure from neutrality. They were not, however, fully aware of the British view of the Anglo-Dutch relationship. The importance of Holland as a major factor in the breakdown of relations between Great Britain and France in the months before the outbreak of war has been both misunderstood and exaggerated. It is generally assumed that once the Scheldt was declared open British obligations to uphold their treaty with the Dutch caused such an immediate polarization of relations between England and France that war became virtually unavoidable. This is a gross

over-simplification, since it ignores completely the intricate interplay of foreign and domestic preoccupations and the tensions between Britain and the Dutch, which grew in the last months of 1792. The British government found themselves contemplating war against France with the disquieting knowledge that the Dutch were almost totally unprepared militarily and by no means dependable politically.

Pitt's administration had failed to appreciate the strains inherent in an alliance which virtually amounted to English domination of every aspect of Dutch politics. The advantage which Britain expected to derive from interference in Holland in 1786-7 was clear as soon as order had been restored there - "It was not necessary for us to trouble ourselves with definitions of the legality of the government of this or that country, or the strict construction of the constitution; but it was enough if we saw an opportunity of restoring that party to power, which was most likely to prove a valuable friend to Great Britain in the day of future difficulty."⁽¹⁾ The words were Burke's, spoken in the House of Commons in 1787 but they were an early indication of the drawbacks of such a one-sided partnership. When the day of future difficulty did arrive, Great Britain had cause to

(1) Burke in the House of Commons, quoted in A. Cobban, Ambassadors and Secret Agents, p. 204.

wonder about the value of the friendship of the United Provinces. Solidarity of approach and joint neutrality had always been impressed on the Dutch as the only proper course which they and Britain could follow. Any inclination on the part of Dutch politicians to depart from this line was countered by quoting the terms of the Treaty. In adhering rigidly to this approach, without stopping to assess the wider implications of continental developments the British government was laying up, unwittingly, a store of trouble. The geographical situation of Holland was such that it was difficult for the provinces to remain neutral during a European conflict. The position of England was very different; she could declare herself neutral and remain so until circumstances of inclination brought about a decisive change of policy.

The difficulties extended beyond the major issues into the roots of the alliance. The Dutch were generally resentful of heavy-handed British control. Even the more placid and cautious officials such as the Grand Pensionary smarted under continued British dictation. At the turn of the year 1791-2, when Lord Auckland was on leave in England, there was a minor crisis as the Austrians tried to pressurize the Dutch to ally with them in a joint bid to stamp out dissension in the Low Countries. The British considered that such action would be foolhardy and firmly vetoed the idea - "we are determined at all hazards to abide by our decision

and to claim from the Republic the right we have to insist upon their not departing from the Convention to which we are joint parties."(1)

The most severe blow to the harmony of the alliance had not come from its political but its commercial aspect. In order to participate fully with the British the Dutch felt that their economic recovery must be effectively guaranteed and that the most satisfactory method of achieving this would be to reach an agreement on the Eastern trade and on neutral shipping rights. Pitt, Grenville and Dundas, who between them drew up a variety of modified schemes as a basis for a treaty were certainly hoping to settle the matter, but they did not share Sir James Harris's conviction that "if the alliance fails, the influence we have recovered here will very soon drop and the system we have taken such pains to restore be eclipsed at its dawn."(2)

By the time negotiations finally came to a halt, Lord Auckland, Harris's successor, was thoroughly alarmed - "I am convinced that we cannot now abandon the negotiation without abandoning every advantage of cordial friendship and concert with the United Provinces in

(1) Grenville to Auckland, December 17th, 1791, H.M.C. Fortescue MSS. op. cit. p. 240.

(2) Harris to Leeds, February 22nd. 1788, F.O. 37/21, cited in Harlow, V, The Founding of the Second British Empire, vol. ii, p.390.

time of peace and without leaving the two countries in a more dangerous predicament respecting each other in time of war."⁽¹⁾

The failure to set the alliance on the basis of genuine co-operation was comprehensible in view of the Stadtholder's known weakness and the fact that the ruling party had practically lost control of the situation in 1786-7. It was, however, to lead to mutual suspicions and recriminations when a difference of interest emerged in the face of possible hostilities against the French. After Jemappes the British government immediately realized that a gesture of support to the Dutch was required. Both Pitt and Grenville, however, were very far from happy that such a public pronouncement might embroil Great Britain in the European upheaval against her own interests. On November 13th., Pitt wrote to the Earl of Stafford - "The strange and unfortunate events which have followed one another so rapidly on the continent are in many views a matter of serious and anxious consideration. That which presses the most relates to the situation of Holland..... as must indeed be the case in consequence of the events in Flanders. However unfortunate it would be to find this country in any shape committed, it seems absolutely impossible to hesitate as to

(1) Auckland to Grenville, January 3rd. 1792, Add. MSS. 34,441, quoted in Harlow, op. cit. p.415.

supporting our ally in case of necessity and the explicit declaration of our sentiments is the most likely way to prevent the case occurring."⁽¹⁾

Similar views were expressed by Lord Grenville, who wrote to Auckland on the same day - "I trust the declaration to the states will produce its effect both in Holland and in France. If not, we are committed, and must make the best of it."⁽²⁾

The allied powers, sensing that Dutch security was an issue, through which they might at last draw Britain into continental troubles, found that British reservations were still very strong. On November 27th. Baron Jacobi, the Prussian ambassador in London, asked Grenville what measures would be taken to safeguard the internal tranquillity of Holland - "Pour ce qui regarde l'intérieur des Provinces le roi ne doit ni prendre ni même concerter des mesures à cet égard, que d'après la réquisition expresse du gouvernement hollandais, qui est seul à portée d'apprécier le danger et d'indiquer les moyens les plus efficaces d'y remédier."⁽³⁾

The declaration of which Pitt and Grenville had

(1) Pitt to Stafford, November 13th. G. Rose, Diaries and Correspondence, vol. i, p.p. 114-116.

(2) Grenville to Auckland, November 13th. H.M.C. Fortescue MSS. op. cit. p.332.

(3) Grenville's reply to Stadion, November 27th. F.O. 355/39. Jackson Papers.

spoken was the official statement made on November 13th. of British support for the Dutch in the event of a threat to the territory of the United Provinces. Commenting on the combination of startling events over recent months, the Foreign Secretary continued - "In this situation, however, His Majesty could not but feel that the only probable means of averting the danger is to meet it with firmness. And deeply as the king would lament on every account the necessity of giving any interruption to that state of external tranquillity from which his subjects derive so many advantages, His Majesty's regard to his engagements as well as his sense of the real and permanent interest of his people would leave him no hesitation as to the propriety of his assisting the Dutch republic as circumstances might require against any attempt made on the part of any other power to invade its dominions or to disturb its government." Auckland was instructed to publish this statement without loss of time. (1)

The British ministers considered that it had much wider implications than a mere re-assurance to the Dutch, "part of the effect to be expected from it must depend on its being known as early as possible both at Paris and at the headquarters of the French army." (2) The British government felt misgivings that they might be

(1) Grenville to Auckland, November 13th. F.O. 37/41.

(2) *ibid.*

committing themselves to involvement in Europe and hoped that a public statement of intent to Holland would have a real influence on the direction of French policy. Burges, the Under-Secretary, even considered that an unaccredited person should have been sent to Paris at the same time in order to reach a more definite understanding.⁽¹⁾ Surprisingly, however, the French showed very little immediate reaction to the declaration. The decree opening the Scheldt was presumably decided on before news of the declaration reached Paris. Very little was made of it until Chauvelin first mentioned it during the November 29th. interview.

The threat to Holland and the unpredictability of France had compelled Britain to renew her interest in European developments. Though loathe to depart from policies which had resulted in peace and prosperity, the British ministers sincerely hoped that adopting a firm tone against a country generally known to be far from secure in the functioning of its internal government might produce a more moderate approach from France. The government realized, however, that events warranted approaches to the Austrians and Prussians.

There were risks in remaining ignorant and isolated at such a time. Consequently the British government had to swallow its pride (less than a week earlier

(1) Burges to Auckland, November 13th. Auckland, Journals and Correspondence, vol. ii, p.p. 467-468.

Grenville had been congratulating himself on the wisdom of Britain's lack of involvement in Europe)⁽¹⁾ and express their desire to enter into communication with the Courts of Vienna and Berlin. Sir Morton Eden, Auckland's brother and ambassador to Prussia, was informed on November 13th. of the change of policy and the influence of the unexpected events in Flanders on the decision to seek contact - "you are not ignorant that His Majesty has from the beginning remained in a considerable degree uninformed of the nature of the plan which has been acted upon by the Courts of Vienna and Berlin relative to the affairs of France and of the views entertained by those courts with respect to the termination of the war. His Majesty having so repeatedly declined to make himself a party to that enterprize, forbore to urge for any more distinct explanation with respect to it receiving also the intimation of his own sentiments till circumstances should arise which might call for a mutual communication on the subject. The unforeseen events which have arisen and most particularly the success of the French arms in Flanders have now brought forward considerations in which the common interests and engagements of His Majesty and the King of Prussia

(1) Letter to Buckingham, November 7th. Buckingham, Memoirs of the Courts and Cabinets of George III, vol.ii, p.p. 223-225. See Chapter 8.

are deeply concerned."⁽¹⁾ Eden was ordered to present a copy of the declaration to the Dutch and told "you will add that His Majesty feels the present crisis too important to the general interests of Europe and particularly to those of his allies not to be anxious to be much more particularly acquainted than he now is with the situation and views of the Court of Berlin....." In a private accompanying despatch Eden was warned that he was not to comment on any specific suggestions for ending the conflict which the Prussians might put forward, neither was he to press for discussions if the government in Berlin seemed unwilling. The allies, offended by earlier British conduct, made no definite response for two months. These first moves for wider co-operation were followed by a more detailed plan suggested to the Prussians on December 29th., which sought European agreement on a form of mediation to end the war and the peace to be imposed on France.⁽²⁾ Though as yet largely unaware

(1) Grenville to Eden, November 13th. F.O. 64/26.

(2) Grenville to Whitworth, December 29th. F.O. 65/23.

See Chapter 10. In this plan, which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 10, the British wanted general agreement reached on terms of peace with France, the withdrawal of French armies into France, the abandonment of conquests, the repeal of acts threatening the sovereignty of other nations and a declaration not to foment discontent in other nations. In return the hostile powers must not interfere in France's internal affairs.

of the republic of Holland's inability to defend itself, the need to demonstrate to France that the United Provinces could not be overridden with impunity had caused the British government to extend its horizons beyond the comfortable but negative policy of neutrality.

The third element in the situation of Holland, which both the British and the French did not always keep in the forefront of their considerations, was the Dutch government's own view of its affairs. Madame d'Aelders kept Lebrun informed on the attitudes that she perceived and Auckland, too, tried to bring home to Grenville that a monolithic political approach, particularly in the uncertain military circumstances, was not always tactful or realistic. Replying to a letter in which the Foreign Secretary had suggested that measures for the ensuring of internal and European peace were identical for Britain and Holland, Auckland wrote - "What you have said, however, respecting the same system being applicable to the two countries, notwithstanding the diversity of their positions, will be contested by my friend the Pensionary, and perhaps with some force under the new circumstances which have taken place....."(1) The Pensionary was afraid that the fate of his small country might be decided before Britain could step in to do anything to help, rather

(1) Auckland to Grenville, November 9th. ^{H.M.C.} Fortescue
MSS, op. cit. p.329.

as Dumouriez had reasoned in the letter to Lebrun on November 30th.⁽¹⁾ His method of handling the French agents over the distinct possibility of invasion was masterly. Both Madame and de Maulde noted that the Dutch were uneasy at the proximity of French troops, but instead of threatening France with the wrath of Britain in the event of territorial infringements, Van de Spiegel cleverly shifted the onus of responsibility squarely on France, by crediting her with the highest motives - "Le magistrat ministre me dit en même temps de vous assurer, citoyen, qu'il a trop de confiance et d'estime dans le gouvernement, et le ministère de France pour avoir la moindre inquiétude." Such was Van de Spiegel's reaction to the opening of the Scheldt.⁽²⁾ The Pensionary never admitted that he feared an invasion, his anxiety was, he told de Maulde, that French troops might accidentally stray across the frontier. To avoid difficulties in these circumstances he suggested a proclamation which would provide for the restitution of land.⁽³⁾ These ideas were not the result of consultations with the British government. They were mentioned in the course of discussions which

(1) See above, Dumouriez to Lebrun, November 30th.

(2) Madame d'Aelders to Lebrun, 20th. November, Gedenkstukken der Algemeene, op. cit. p.p. 191-192.

(3) De Maulde to Lebrun, November 17th, Gedenkstukken der Algemeene, op. cit. p.p. 221-222.

the Pensionary held on his own initiative. Unlike Pitt and Grenville, Van de Spiegel had always realized, and acted on, the necessity of finding out as much as possible about the situation of France; this information was vital to the way in which he dealt with French agents. Madame d'Aelders was surprised at the intelligence of senior Dutch officials - "J'ai eu une très longue conférence avec le pouvoir exécutif. Je les ai trouvés modérés sur les événements dits funestes arrivés en France le 2 septembre et singulièrement instruits sur toute la constitution, et non seulement citant les principaux orateurs, mais encore les morceaux les plus intéressants de leurs discours."⁽¹⁾

From his contacts with Madame d'Aelders, and the evident bickering between Frenchmen at the Hague, Van de Spiegel would have gleaned some idea of the dissensions within French government and diplomacy. He was not the man to fail to manipulate these tensions to Dutch interests. It was the combination of Van de Spiegel's independent views and his ability to play the intricacies of the diplomatic game which led to the establishment of a channel through which General Dumouriez could be contacted.

The unofficial contacts with General Dumouriez, though failing to produce any positive result,

(1) Madame d'Aelders to Lebrun, November 9th.,
Gedenkstukken der Algemeene, op. cit. p.188.

demonstrated the different interests and emphasis of the British and Dutch governments, the Conseil Executif and its agents and generals. The negotiation, which began in mid-November carried on until after the outbreak of war. At every stage it illuminated the tensions of the wider sphere of suspicion and conflict in which its participants acted. It was born in Holland through the anxieties of the Dutch Grand Pensionary and the bitterness of the French ex-ambassador and it was in Holland, despite Lord Auckland's genuine attempts to salvage something from the outbreak of war, that it finally faded. During the course of the intrigue the men most directly involved learnt a great deal about the dangers of over-rigid opinions and the abstract justifications which their governments were to adopt in defence of a dreaded conflict. Auckland with his disdain and hauteur and de Maulde with his self-assured bravado, were fitting representatives of the two societies which were moving closer to hostilities. Despite their mutual dislike, their contact was not unfruitful. The forces which they sought to influence and direct were too great for them. It is to the credit of both men, but especially Auckland, a diplomat of well-established views, that they came to recognize this.

Emmanuel de Maulde was in every way a contrast to the Englishman's national pride and the Dutchman's studied urbanity.

By the time that Van de Spiegel decided to assess the Frenchman's usefulness, de Maulde was suspected by his own government and regarded as almost entirely untrustworthy by the British ambassador. De Maulde told Van de Spiegel that he would denounce the Conseil Exécutif at the bar of the Convention, but still he wrote to Paris urging an attack on Holland. ⁽¹⁾ There was only one constant in de Maulde's behaviour, but for Van de Spiegel's purposes this was sufficient. De Maulde did not waver in his support of Dumouriez. It was predictable that on November 17th. he would cover himself by giving Lebrun details of his conversations with Van de Spiegel and Auckland, but Dumouriez had an army and Van de Spiegel, with de Maulde, believed that this army might be the key to the future of Holland. ⁽²⁾

The secret negotiations which at one stage raised hopes of a meeting between Lord Auckland and Dumouriez began with an apparently casual exchange between the

(1) De Maulde to Lebrun, November 30th.

Gedenkstukken der Algemeene, i, op. cit. p.240

(2) Van de Spiegel noticed that De Maulde had chosen to emphasise the potentially decisive role of the army -

"Enfin dans les petites choses comme dans les grandes.....

.. la tournure de nos affaires; ce sera la force armée qui en décidera; ce seront ces gardes prétoriennes."

Auckland to Grenville, 19th November, F.O. 37/41

Grand Pensionary and de Maulde on November 17th.

Van de Spiegel, anxious about Dutch security and more aware than Auckland of the extreme slowness of naval and military preparations, had chosen his moment well. Rumours were circulating that de Maulde was financially embarrassed. The Pensionary and Auckland did not seem to know that de Maulde's recall was a month old and that he had disobeyed Lebrun's commands to return to Paris. Van de Spiegel saw de Maulde alone; he evidently regarded the interview as preliminary, a means of sounding out the Frenchman. De Maulde's sense of self-importance and his grievances were played upon. The ambassador expressed the fear that his recall would have deprived him of the opportunity of seeing Dutch officials - "Pourquoi cela?" replied Van de Spiegel - "nous vous aurions reçu comme un homme de votre naissance a droit de s'attendre, je crois même que le Prince vous aurait reçu sous ce titre et ne s'y refusera pas encore quand vous vous présenterez."⁽¹⁾

The Pensionary encouraged de Maulde's smouldering resentment against the Paris government, and having expressed, almost incidentally, some concern lest French troops should stray across the border, brought forth from de Maulde the admission that he would

(1) "Précis d'une conversation entre M. de Maulde et moi, 17 novembre." - by Van de Spiegel in Gedenkstukken de Algemeene, p.p. 229-231.

discuss such matters with his friend Dumouriez, and inform the Pensionary of the General's views. At the end of the discussion Van de Spiegel found a sure way of retaining de Maulde's interest. The mention of G[^]enet's proposed arrival had brought forth comment on the reception of his letters of credence. Van de Spiegel was careful not to commit himself beyond the limits prescribed by England on this question but he let de Maulde know that the Dutch retained an open mind on the question of recognition of the French republic. Both Holland and Great Britain, he affirmed ardently desired peace in Europe - "et quant à moi en mon particulier (je vous parle toujours avec confiance) si la base de la reconnaissance de votre République pouvait y contribuer, je l'envisagerais comme un bien pour l'humanité."

Two days after the first meeting, on 19th November, Van de Spiegel saw de Maulde again. He realized that he had aroused the Frenchman's interest and decided that now was the time to make his move. The mention of a European pacification had provided an ideal opening. Great Britain and Holland both wanted peace and it was not to France's interest to pursue the war. What, then, was the best way to open an exchange of views - "Devinerez-vous la réponse, Monsieur, c'est vous, oui, il n'y a que vous qui puissiez en faire les premières ouvertures confidentielles et la seule personne à qui vous pourriez vous ouvrir est le général

Dumouriez." Van de Spiegel recognized the necessity to flatter Dumouriez's vanity as well as de Maulde's. The general was already covered in laurels. He would be at the height of his success if he could exercise his influence for peace. Dumouriez and de Maulde would receive lasting acclaim in France and more solid recognition from Great Britain and Holland - "C'est ainsi que M. Dumouriez et vous, Monsieur, vous vous acquerriez un droit éternel à la gratitude de votre nation qui vous devra l'affermissement de la liberté; et en même temps j'ose vous assurer tant au général qu'à vous que l'Angleterre et la République se chargeront avec plaisir de la reconnaissance réelle du bienfait que vous aurez rendu à l'humanité....."

De Maulde replied that he would pass these ideas on to Dumouriez, whose influence had great weight on the Conseil Exécutif. He went on to say that France did possess immense resources and expressed the view that the neutral powers were afraid of the spread of French ideas. The Pensionary, however, did not take offence at these statements - "Je dois cependant la justice à M. de Maulde que ces propos ne sont pas allés jusqu'à l'exces; qu'il a parlé dans l'esprit du temps, mais avec modération....."(1)

(1) "Conversation entre M. de Maulde et Moi", 19th. November, Gedenkstukken der Algemeene, p.p. 233-235.

The British ambassador had, initially, a more limited view of the place of these contacts in international relations. His opinion of de Maulde was such that it seemed to him unlikely that any progress of major significance would be made. He was aware that both Dumouriez and de Maulde would have to be offered money and this principally occupied his thoughts in connection with the intrigue.⁽¹⁾ The chief advantages of the link established between the Hague and Dumouriez's camp at Antwerp were, so far as he could see, that the general's intentions towards Holland could be more readily assessed and a variety of interesting, if not altogether vital intelligence would be obtained. It is significant for Auckland's general view of the negotiation in its early stages that he was delighted by the "capture" of de Maulde's instructions on his appointment to the Hague, then some eight months out of date. Ensuing hauls provided him with numerous ill-assorted items, including a Latin ode to Dumouriez written by a Dutch Patriot.⁽²⁾

(1) On November 23rd., Auckland wrote a curiously veiled letter to de Maulde on the question of financial compensation, in which he referred to Dumouriez as "Le Heros", but stated that he had absolutely no authorization.

Gedenkstukken der Algemeene, op. cit. p. 237.

(2) Despatch and enclosures, December 13th. Auckland to Grenville, F.O. 37/41.

If Auckland was sceptical, the British government were even more guarded and they remained so throughout the course of the contact. Grenville did not intend to prohibit any exchange which held the promise of providing intelligence. On November 25th. he put before George III the proposal that an initial sum of money should be placed at Auckland's disposal. The king in his reply voiced the kind of doubts about the overall value of dealing with Dumouriez which grew in British circles - "I feel the advantage of a general peace if it can be effected to the real satisfaction of the various parties concerned, but at the same time not less forcibly a disinclination to France gaining her point and perhaps laying a foundation to encourage other countries to attempt the same game; for it is peace alone that can place the French Revolution on a permanent ground, as, then, all the European states must acknowledge this new republic." He had no objections to financing the link but acknowledged that he was "far from sanguine either that the French general will venture to speak out, or that, if he would, we can manage the business in a manner to satisfy the various courts concerned or even to escape blame from an appearance of being the first to acknowledge the French Revolution."⁽¹⁾

(1) George III to Lord Grenville, November 25th. H.M.C.
Fortescue MSS, op. cit. p. 339.

The king's words gave some indication of the perplexities of the European situation at the time. The Dutch, most immediately threatened by French troops, seized at a possibility of warding off invasion, if only temporarily. Dumouriez's difficulties in Belgium and his increasing isolation from the government of France made the dialogue with the neutral powers seem attractive. In Paris Van de Spiegel's words on the possibility of mediation and recognition were read with great interest. Lebrun communicated them very accurately to Chauvelin on November 30th. "Je vous transmets, citoyen, sous le plus grand secret les termes de l'ouverture confidentielle faite par M. de Maulde. Je vous parle, dit-il, au nom de cet état et de l'Angleterre, vos vrais amis, qui vous présentent une paix honorable et sure. Consentez à notre commune médiation. Présentez les bases, j'en vois une la reconnaissance de votre nouvelle constitution; comme médiateurs nous la reconnâtrons, que voulez-vous de plus? Ne voulant pas de conquêtes, vous serez et dans ce cas nous sommes les ennemis de ceux qui s'y refuseraient." Lebrun was impressed by this development but he was not entirely satisfied that the British government was itself fully apprized of what had been said - "je désirerais cependant savoir si elle a été faite de l'aveu et du consentement du Cabinet de St. James et si Lord Auckland dont nous connaissons depuis longtemps les ruses politiques a

recu des instructions à cet égard. Nous le soup-
 connons d'être concerfé avec le Grand Pensionnaire
 dans la vue de pénétrer nos projets relativement au
 voisinage de notre armée de la Hollande." (1) The
 Foreign Minister was wise to question the extent of the
 British government's involvement in developments in
 Holland, but his ambassador, Chauvelin, had gleaned
 nothing from Grenville's carefully worded official
 statements on Holland during the November 29th. meeting.
 Grenville gave no assurance that Britain concurred
 with French claims on the opening of the Scheldt and
 said that Britain would remain neutral if the rights
 of her allies were not violated. At the same time, a
 movement had taken place in England which led to an
 even greater division in outlook between the British
 and the French governments. Despite continued interest
 in the internal concerns of Britain, the French had
 no way of foreseeing or comprehending the shift in
 thinking which had affected the governing classes of
 England during the crisis of confidence in November.

(1) Lebrun to Chauvelin, 30th November, A.A.E.
 C. P. Angleterre, 583. Van de Spiegel's words are
 exactly as they appear in de Maulde's report to Lebrun
 of 21st November in Gedenkstukken der Algemeene, op. cit.
 p. 233.

Chapter 8

The November Crisis in Great Britain.

"So sure as we have an existence, if these things should go on in France..... in the ripeness of their time, the same tragedies will be acted in England..."
 Burke to Grenville, 18th August, 1792.

In mid-November, 1792, a startling and unexpected conjunction of internal problems and developments on the European continent produced in Great Britain such a variety and vehemence of general reaction that informed men, both within and outside the government, were thoroughly alarmed by the implications of the volatility of public opinion. "A universal change is preparing in the opinions, manners and customs of men...."(1) Here was a crisis of confidence and of consciousness which illuminates the day-to-day background of wider diplomatic considerations such as the inviolability of Holland and the opening of the river Scheldt. Individual members of Pitt's government, not usually noted for emotional responses to difficulties, were themselves sensible of the uniqueness of the tensions which gripped Great Britain. The country gentlemen, bewildered and fearful, were seized by the necessity for vigilance. In the spring they had responded with a flurry of pomposity to the irreverence of Thomas Paine. The man himself was now a

(1) W.A. Miles to Ld. Fortescue, November 12th, 1792
 Miles, Correspondence on the French Revolution, 1,
 p.p. 346-7.

deputy for the Pas-de-Calais in the French Convention, the very body responsible for the direction of the troops who had overrun the Austrian Netherlands and the governance of revolutionary France. The English squire, unaware that Paine was ill at ease in the rowdy debates, that he could speak almost no French, saw only the enormous mischief which this "mean-looking man" could do in the circumstances of November. All over the country, it was said that men were reading Paine; he had even been translated into Erse.⁽¹⁾

Who were his audience - "little tradesmen who have large families and pay great taxes, journeymen, artificers and poor day labourers to farmers and also bad-minded people who have nothing to lose...."⁽²⁾

The writer might also have added militiamen, even regular soldiers, as well as the hundreds of artisans, shop-keepers and the like who flocked weekly to join the London Corresponding Society and similar organizations in Norwich, Sheffield and Edinburgh.

The situation caught Pitt's government unawares. In the first ten days of November Pitt himself had decided to take definite steps to curb the spread of sedition. He knew that certain areas were experiencing economic difficulties and he was uneasy about

(1) Lord Henry Spencer to Lord Auckland, November 26th, Auckland, Journals and Correspondence, op. cit. p.p.468-9.

(2) Letter from correspondent in Reading to Lord Liverpool, December 12th, Add. MSS. 38,228.

Ireland and Scotland, though Dundas was attempting to restore the equilibrium north of the border. The situation on the continent, so Grenville believed, had resolved itself into stalemate until the spring campaign. British neutrality had evidently been extremely wise. The news of the fall of Belgium and the panic which ensued put the government in an awkward predicament. The sheer volume of work which piled up daily became exhausting. How could one take important decisions when the next day's news brought fresh developments to be considered? Influential members of the Opposition began to press for vigorous action, to restore morale and forestall the threat of disorder and insurrection. Voices began to identify British difficulties directly with the French Revolution, whose agents had poured in after August 10th. and September 2nd. and whose pernicious doctrines were choking the air of English liberty. In these weeks the government's outlook on France was transformed. Where before there had been lack of interest, born of a sense of security, there was now suspicion and fear. France's own actions in Europe provided ample proof of her perversity. The November crisis in Britain brought home to many Englishmen that revolutionary France was a threat to their entire way of life.

One of the more curious aspects of the widespread feeling of insecurity in Britain in November was that it was noticed by French agents in London

and commented on by Lebrun in Paris. No instructions were given, and no obvious attempt made, to exploit the government's embarrassment to French advantage. French instructions do not bear out the view, which has frequently been expressed, that the revolutionaries had brought upon themselves British wrath by their persistence in spreading discord in Great Britain.⁽¹⁾ It is true that at the beginning of December Peyrera was told to spread discord, if he could, in the British navy, but this move would appear to have been prompted by knowledge of antagonism to the press and fear of the British navy's ability to prepare for war almost immediately.⁽²⁾ The French agents were not nearly well-organized enough to do much practical damage, though doubts and uncertainties caused the British government to react very strongly to their presence. The French were not slow to perceive British fears but they made a very serious error in assessing the effect these would have on Franco-British relations. The British government's fear of propaganda could, according to Lebrun's despatch of November 11th., be easily countered; it would

(1) Particularly representative of the French attitude are Lebrun's two despatches to Châvelin of November 11th., A.A.E., C.P. Angleterre 583.

(2) Undated instructions (probably early December) to Peyrera, A.A.E. C.P. Angleterre, Supplément 29.

evidently be contradictory to interfere in British domestic concerns when France made it clear that she would brook no meddling in her own. Convincing the British government of France's good faith on this issue was entirely another matter. In general, however, Lebrun foresaw only indirect benefits to France from the present state of affairs across the Channel - "Au reste, il n'est pas malheureux que dans une circonstance aussi délicate, il se prépare dans les trois royaumes des événements capables d'occuper les Anglais chez eux et de les empêcher de porter toute leur attention sur nous."⁽¹⁾ This ingenuous attitude is the key to understanding French policy towards Britain in November and the early part of December. It should be remembered, too, that France had many more immediate interests; few concerns were so vital as the approaching trial of the king. Despite a better grasp of the need for information on all aspects of the other country's life, the revolutionaries had no common bond of experience, no common outlook, which would have enabled them to comprehend the reactions of an English squire to the spectre of murder and anarchy which he associated with the French Revolution. The French were well-informed on the state of England in November but they were totally unprepared for the repressive measures taken to maintain

(1) Lebrun to Chauvelin, 11th November, A.A.E., C.P. Angleterre, 583.

a stability which might be conveniently strained by dissension but which was not, in their eyes, on the verge of complete collapse.

From the viewpoint of Pitt's administration, the state of Scotland, though becoming more alarming in November, had long been a source of disquiet.⁽¹⁾ Public order had been a problem since the King's Birthday Riots in June. Troops had quelled these disturbances but they could not control the spread of serious discontent both economic and political. The economic grievances were brought about by a food-shortage and the enclosure of large areas of the Highlands for sheep-farming. A free-holder of Ross-shire outlined his predicament to Robert Dundas, the Lord Advocate, "The Sheriff will explain to your Lordship that we are at present so completely under the heel of the populace that, should they come to burn our houses or destroy our property in anyway their caprice may lead them to, we are incapable of resistance."⁽²⁾ This was written on the last day of July. By early October it was the extent of political reform associations which was seriously disturbing Henry Dundas. Scottish politics were based on a complex of family influence and local corruption. The agitation for reform of the burghs where self-electing

(1) See Chapter 5.

(2) Hugh Monro to Robert Dundas, July 31st, H.O. 102/5

and self-perpetuating town councils misruled and misappropriated had merged with the demands for better parliamentary representation.⁽¹⁾ The associations were strong in the emerging industrial areas; places mentioned were Dundee, Montrose, Aberdeen, Paisley, Perth and Edinburgh. Ever-resourceful and well-versed in the less respectable practices of government activity, Dundas had already sent spies to infiltrate association meetings in August. The situation, unfortunately, had deteriorated in October. Despite the fact that his prolonged absence from London was giving rise to critical comment in government circles, Dundas was not prepared to leave Scotland until he felt more happy about the situation. He stressed his fears to Pitt - "The contest here is with the lower orders of the people whose minds are poisoned up to the point of Liberty, Equality and an Agrarian law."⁽²⁾ Dundas' skill as a political manager was particularly useful in such circumstances. In a move strikingly similar to that employed only a week or so later by those initiating the English Loyalist Associations, he informed Pitt on November 12th. that he intended to enlist the support of prominent citizens and the church. This was an important step, but the most urgent need

(1) For the general situation in Scotland, see H.W. Meikle, Scotland and the French Revolution, Glasgow, 1912.

(2) Dundas to Pitt, November 12th, P.R.O. 30/8/157.

was to rectify the lamentable state of military defence in Scotland. He wrote to Pitt - "it is my duty to state to you, without the least reserve, that the force is very inadequate indeed and however unpleasant the communication may be to you it is necessary for you to make up your mind to a greater Military Establishment so long as the present fermentation in the people's minds exists. I suspect that this holds with respect to England as well as Scotland."⁽¹⁾

Two guard ships for the Firths of Forth and Clyde would also be useful. Dundas remained in Scotland until early December exchanging a stream of letters with Pitt. His reports were digested and acted upon, forming a crucial element in the government's approach to the problem of general and widespread disaffection.

One of the most distinctive features of the Scottish situation was that economic and political grievances had begun to merge into one body of agitation. In England at the beginning of November the two were still more distinct but the overall impression of uneasiness remained. One aspect of economic discontent was clearly visible in the troubles on Tyneside.

During the first two weeks of November the authorities found it necessary to assist the local magistrates to suppress an outbreak of rioting among the seamen at South Shields. The trouble arose after

(1) Dundas to Pitt, November 12th., P.R.O. 30/8/157.

an easterly wind had kept a large number of ships in port. When the wind changed the seamen "assembled in great numbers in different parts of the towns of North and South Shields and in boats upon the river Tyne, insisting that the masters of all ships should pay four guineas wages for the voyage."⁽¹⁾ The owners were eventually forced to comply with this demand, though the normal wage for voyages had previously been only fifty shillings. To put an end to the disorders the government sent three sloops to South Shields on November 5th and a fourth on November 13th. On the 7th. the Inskillen dragoons were ordered to march from York. After about ten days the disturbances ceased. The dispute itself had nothing to do with the spread of revolutionary principles and was not unusual for Tyneside where there had last been difficulty in September, 1791. In any other year the riots might well have been regarded as a troublesome but not altogether surprising occurrence. In November, 1792, however, they had more serious overtones. The central government realized with concern that local magistrates were ill-prepared to deal with organized crowds. The demonstration that available forces of law and order were often of little use in an emergency might have far-reaching ramifications if similar trouble grew on a national scale.

(1) Letter from North Shields to Pitt, November 3rd, H.O. 42/22.

The government though naturally concerned about the prevalence of riots on the Tyneside model, were primarily involved in the first two weeks of November with the fight to control a more pernicious and diffuse menace, namely the spread of seditious literature. The Marquis of Buckingham, Grenville's brother, believed that firm action on this score was imperative and taxed the government with what he held to be lack of vigour in their approach. - "I think you will find yourselves much charged with neglect or with a mistaken line of conduct in suffering these various and outrageous publications and overt acts to remain unpunished, which certainly have called loudly for the attention and exertions of the Crown servants."⁽¹⁾ Grenville seems to have been somewhat irritated by this advice. Everyone, he said, was willing to sound the alarm, but no-one bothered to send him any specific proof, without which the Attorney-General could not prosecute. The process of the law had to be observed: "Nothing that I know of has been neglected that could tend to put the law in force against them" (purveyors of seditious literature.)⁽²⁾

William Pitt shared Buckingham's concern over the

(1) Buckingham to Grenville, November 8th, ^{H.M.C.} Fortescue MSS
op. cit. p. 327.

(2) Grenville to Buckingham, November 14th. Buckingham,
op. cit. p.p. 226-228.

menace of sedition. His letters to Dundas made it clear that he was determined to take action, but he was still considering the alternatives and had not decided which scheme to adopt. One possibility, he wrote on November 8th., was to make the penalty for publishing seditious libels much more severe, perhaps classing continued publication as a felony. Equally effective might be registration of all printers, who would have to provide security which they would forfeit if government found it necessary to take legal proceedings against them. These ideas were scattered and semi-developed. They give the reader the impression of some degree of urgency in the minister's mind. "I am strongly persuaded of the absolute necessity of taking some effectual measures to prevent what will otherwise be every day increasing upon us. It is so material for us to be as well prepared as we can, and from the impression which I find is arising everywhere, it becomes so important, in point of appearance, to show that we are attending to them, that I cannot help anxiously wishing you here again.... I am very sanguine in thinking that with exertion we still have in our islands the means of preventing any serious interruption to the prosperity of the country, but with all the undoubted industry which appears now to be used to produce mischief, it is not possible to feel at ease."⁽¹⁾

(1) Pitt to Dundas, November 8th, Pitt Papers, vol. ii, University of Michigan Library.

Pitt was certainly disturbed by the widespread dissemination of subversive literature, but he still saw this as an entirely domestic problem. The direct link between internal discontent and revolutionary France had not yet been established in his mind.

Dundas in Scotland and Pitt in Whitehall believed there was need for vigilance but they disliked the obvious and heavy-handed measures suggested by men such as Buckingham. Grenville, too, as he had told Buckingham on November 8th, still firmly supported the view that the situation required only "watching much at home but doing very little indeed." This negative approach was equally applicable to international affairs - "All my ambition is that I may at some time hereafter when I am freed from all active concern in such a scene as this is, have the inexpressible satisfaction of being able to look back upon it, and to tell myself that I have contributed to keep my own country at least a little longer from sharing in all the evils of every sort that surround us."⁽¹⁾ Unknown to Grenville, the battle of Jemappes, fought the day before he confided his musings to his brother, had dissolved these dreams. The implications for European peace, particularly the safe-guarding of Holland were grave. Infinitely more alarming, however, for men

(1) Grenville to Buckingham, November 7th, Buckingham, Memoirs of the Courts and Cabinets of George III, vol.ii, p.p. 223-225.

who shared Grenville's reasonably moderate outlook was to witness the catalytic effect filtering through the great lords to the humble workmen of the sudden intrusion of French victory on English consciousness. Perhaps before mid-November no-one had ever really taken the French revolution very seriously. Evidently there was as yet no military or naval threat to Britain. It was the collapse of all restraint, of wildly contrasting public reception of the continental news and its application in the potentially unstable circumstances of England which so shocked the government.

The news of the French success was clearly an inspiration, to many men. The London Corresponding Society's numbers had been climbing during October, after news of Brunswick's retreat, but in November men were joining in their hundreds each week.⁽¹⁾ These men, shoe-makers, clock makers, carpenters, were almost entirely drawn from the artisans of London. Their secretary, Thomas Hardy, had himself described the social composition of the L.C.S. as "tradesmen, mechanics and shop-keepers." Amidst the pandemonium and exhilaration of their crowded meetings, these men of the "lower orders", sent addresses of congratulation to republican France and delegations to deliver them

(1) See J. Walvin, *English Democratic Societies and Popular Radicalism, 1791-1800* (Part II, *The Emergence of Popular Radicalism*), York D. Phil. Thesis, 1969.

to the Convention. Their own movement sprang from fundamentally different roots and experiences. They could not in any real sense copy the French or apply their forms of action to the English situation.

They had, nevertheless, received a spur to their crusade, realizing that they now stood on the threshold of participation in political life. Like Paine, they sensed that the climate had changed, so they told their French brothers "Though we appear comparatively so few at present, be assured, Frenchmen, that our number increases daily.... men, now ask each other, what is freedom? What are our rights?"⁽¹⁾ In other areas of England, too, the Corresponding Societies attracted more members. "I have been staying some time with my relation Lord Walpole," wrote Captain Horatio Nelson, "near Norwich, at which place and near it the Clubs are supported by members of the Corporation and they avow that till some of the nobles and others in Parliament are served as they were in France they will not be able to get their rights."⁽²⁾ In Sheffield a procession celebrating the French victories depicted Dundas as half man, half ass. On the last day of the

(1) Address of the London Corresponding Society to the Convention, November 1792, in the Annual Register for 1792.

(2) Nelson to the Duke of Clarence, 3rd November 1792, in Nicolas, N.H. ed. Nelson's Despatches, vol. i, p.p. 292-293.

month the Home Office was warned "in future the public opinion must always count for something."⁽¹⁾

In November 1792, it was hard for the majority of men to accept such statements. For the governing classes had also reacted animatedly to the French victories and their palpable effect on public opinion at home. Unable to keep pace of the tide of events, they suffered what can only be described as a psychological crisis. Their letters and diaries, the very intensity of their response to this threat to stability, betrayed their anguish. "France is drawing her nets round us on every side; and she has a party to destroy us within the toils. As to the growth of this contagion within our walls, as a mere domestic evil and unconnected with a dangerous foreign power, I have ever had little comparative apprehension. But combined with the foreign forces - there - there is the danger."⁽²⁾ Burke voiced a general fear. Suddenly the mutterings of ill-fed labourers, and underpaid seamen assumed menacing proportions, for these men were easy prey to the maxims of seditious literature and the persuasiveness of ubiquitous Jacobin agents. The government feared a direct attack on public order and an indirect attack on the basis of the only form of society they

(1) Benjamin Vaughan to the Home Office, November 30th, H.O. 42/22.

(2) Burke to Fitzwilliam, November 29th, Burke, op. cit. p. 317.

had ever known. When they looked at England, what did they see.... "pitmen, keelmen, cloth-dressers, cutlers: not only the weavers and labourers of Wapping and Spitalfields, whose colourful and rowdy demonstrations had often come out in support of Wilkes, but working men in villages and towns over the whole country claiming general rights for themselves."⁽¹⁾

The evidence of their own eyes now seemed to substantiate the belief that there was a direct link between revolutionary France and domestic discord. Lord Grenville, himself betraying less anxiety than the majority of his acquaintances, grasped perfectly the country's mood at the time. "Quietly reprimanding his brother's acceptance of every tale of riot and seditious assembly he commented "It is not unnatural, nor is it an unfavourable symptom, that people who are thoroughly frightened, as the body of landed gentlemen in this country are, should exaggerate these stories as they pass from one mouth to the other; but you, who know the course of this sort of reports, ought not too hastily to give credit to them."⁽²⁾

Suddenly, public opinion had become dangerously volatile. There were, however, those who still believed that

(1) E.P. Thompson in The Making of the English Working Class (Pelican, 1968) p.113.

(2) Grenville to Buckingham, November 14th, Buckingham, op. cit. p.p. 226-228.

swift and organized action was all that was needed to restore order, not just in the countryside but in men's generally disordered minds. On November 20th an organization was formed to realize this aim, under the title of the Association for the Preservation of Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers.

The man behind the Association was John Reeves, a lawyer who had returned from Newfoundland, where he had been chief justice, in the spring of 1792. After his return he had been granted the post of Receiver of the Public Offices, in which capacity he assisted in the re-organization of London's police-system.⁽¹⁾ Reeves was not a man who sought personal publicity, but William Cobbett left a remarkable description of him - "a really learned lawyer, and, politics aside, as good a man as ever lived. A clever man, a head as clear as spring water; considerate, mild, humane; made by nature to be an English judge. I did not break with him on account of politics. We said nothing about them for years. I always had the greatest regard for him...."⁽²⁾ Reeves had made it plain to Cobbett that in his estimation the only way for men like themselves to get anywhere in life was to toe the government line. The A.P.L.P., with all its outward

(1) The re-organization was done under the Middlesex Justices Act, 1792. See R.R. Nelson, The Home Office, 1782-1801.

(2) W. Cobbett, The Progress of a Plough-boy. p.p. 92-3.

show of spontaneity and national popularity was essentially the brain-child of this clever and cynical man, who had hit upon a simple and effective expedient for turning floating public opinion back towards Loyalism and Anti-Gallicanism.

The origins of the Association were never revealed, no doubt because Reeves was more concerned with establishing the movement than with answering potentially awkward questions.⁽¹⁾ A small group of people did meet in the Crown and Anchor Tavern on November 20th, where they agreed to appoint a committee, and issue an advertisement giving information of their intentions. Reeves had already prepared the resolutions so there was little, if any discussion, even at the Association's inception. Its course had already been decided. The watchword was to discourage "in every way that lies in our power the progress of such nefarious designs as are meditated by the wicked and senseless reformers of the present time." The Association's objects were the suppression of seditious publications, support of the laws, prevention of riots and the circulation

(1) On the Association movement see E.C. Black, The Association, Harvard University Press, 1963, A. Mitchell, The Association Movement of 1792-1793, Historical Journal, 1961, and D.Ginter, The Loyalist Association Movement, Historical Journal, 1966.

of tracts and publications of a suitable Loyalist tone, among the "lower orders."

Its aims published, the Association set about ensuring that the "ways" which lay in its power would be many and effective. First it had to perfect its own organization in London. On November 20th. a committee was nominated on which government supporters were strongly represented. Among those named were John Bowles, a Loyalist pamphleteer and Charles Yorke, M.P. for Cambridge, a man who had already made unpleasant the lives of dissenters in his constituency. London was only a beginning; Reeves wanted to foster a national Loyalist movement and he wanted results quickly, within a matter of two weeks if possible. In the provinces his task was relatively easy, thanks to the state of mind of Grenville's frightened country gentlemen. There was no difficulty in finding men willing to take the lead or form committees. All that was necessary was some general administrative guidance and a little advance publicity, in the form of reprints of the Association's inaugural declaration, published in favourable provincial newspapers. Reeves had the not inconsiderable resources of government at his disposal. The Post Office, engaged in preventing the spread of seditious pamphlets, gladly distributed Reeves' tracts, and those newspapers subsidized by government gave Reeves prominent display. The net spread wider and wider. Early in December, printed

letters were sent to known ministerialists, and, at the suggestion of the Times, to vicars, and to deans and chapters in cathedral towns. Circulated with the letter was a document with "a plan recommended to the inhabitants of country towns, villages etc. where it is proposed to institute societies similar to that held at the Crown and Anchor."⁽¹⁾ The plan included a model declaration and instructions on how to form an association, organize a committee and raise a subscription. The committee was the crux of Association organization. It ought to be "small as better adapted for the despatch of business, for it should be remembered that these are not open societies for talk and debate but for private consultation and real business."⁽²⁾ The quorum was frequently extremely small in relation to the size of the committee, so that, as Reeves desired, the whole of this large, "popular", Loyalist movement was in reality manipulated by a very small number of men. The chairman was nearly always a respected figure in the locality, a magistrate, member of parliament or leading merchant. The provincial associations seldom had to worry about funds, as their prominent members could easily meet the expenses of a small committee. The original Crown and Anchor

(1) See A. Mitchell, The Association Movement of 1792-3, Historical Journal, 1961, p.61.

(2) B.M. Add. MSS. 16,919. Cited in E.C. Black, The Association.

Association, however, had more definite need for contributions if it was to fulfill its programme of Loyalist publications.

The Association's attempt at literary persuasion is one of the most striking aspects of the entire movement, mainly for what it reveals of the mentality behind Loyalism. Large numbers of pamphlets, speeches and sermons were published and posted in taverns and coffee-houses. Another group of publications was aimed directly at the "lower orders." The style and the content of these didactic works illustrates that Reeves and his supporters worked from stereotyped images of the character and the intelligence of those they wanted to persuade. If these ludicrous and pathetic works accurately reflected the governing class's picture of the labouring sectors of the population then we are left with little alternative than to presume that many men really did have a picture of pitch-fork-carrying, slow-speaking yokels contemplating the "Rights of Man" in the shade of a hay-rick. Yet the Countess of Malmesbury found loyalist writings very clever and the Bishop of London was full of praise for Hannah More's "Village Politics." It was, he said, "universally extolled, it has been read and greatly admired at Windsor, and its fame is spreading over all parts of the kingdom. I gave one to the Attorney-general, who has recommended it to the Association at the Crown and Anchor, which will disperse it through

the country."⁽¹⁾ The work was written in the form of a dialogue between Tom Hod, the mason, who had been seduced by subversive ideas, and Jack Anvil, the stout-hearted blacksmith who succeeded in demonstrating to his unfortunate friend the folly of his new ideas. The contrast in style and effectiveness with Hebert's "Le Père Duchesne," also aimed at influencing a largely uneducated area of the population in France, is stark. ⁽²⁾

The propagation of these pastoral interludes was perhaps less harmful than some of the Association movement's other achievements. Reeves and his supporters had rallied to the need for presenting an effective front of Loyatism to suppress seditious and decide the waverers. They were not very particular how these ends were met. Almost all the information which the committee of the original Crown and Anchor Association received about people whose beliefs were suspect came in the form of anonymous letters. Reeves was quite prepared to use these without further enquiry. The handling of anonymous accusations so shocked Thomas Law, one committee member, that he took the matter up with Reeves. The chairman, however, did not appreciate criticism of his running of the society and Law was

(1) Bishop of London to Hannah More, (n.d.), Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs. Hannah More, ed. W. Roberts, N.Y. 1835, i, p.414.

(2) See R.K. Webb, The British Working Class Reader, London, 1955.

forced to resign. In January, 1793, he exposed this aspect of the Association's work to the Morning Chronicle.

Denunciation was one way of intimidating those who appeared less than enthusiastic about the Loyalist upsurge. Another was pressure, more or less subtle, as in the boycotting of shops whose owners were suspected of Painite sympathies. A certain amount of physical violence was also permissible, so this body of men, always eager to condemn rioting, sat back while a mob attacked Thomas Walker's house in Manchester and gave direct encouragement, often in the form of ale, to anyone who would burn effigies of Tom Paine. The Association's activities also had the unpleasant effect of bringing ancient antipathies to the surface once more. The dissenters, especially, suffered, many correspondents linking dissent and sedition in their information. In the space of a few weeks Reeves had admirably succeeded in stifling a great deal of disaffected sentiment. It would be difficult to fault the thoroughness of Reeves' organization or to deny that the Association movement acted as a brake on the radicals. Men of power, influence and determination were not easily defied. But Reeves had not succeeded in creating a national popular movement. He had only defined more clearly the interests of one group, the placemen who had been nominated to the first committee and the gentry and wealthy manufacturers who formed the backbone of the national movement.

In describing the Loyalist reaction to the November crisis we speak of Reeves, but his name conceals the activities of others. The part played by the government in the Loyalist movement is far from clear. It is fairly evident that Reeves could not have developed his plans without some measure of ministerial approval and assistance. He served the government; he knew Evan Nepean⁽¹⁾ the Home Office Under-Secretary, Chamberlayne and White, the Treasury Solicitors and John Heriot, whose newspapers, the Sun and the True Briton had been created with government backing on October 1st.⁽²⁾ Yet Reeves maintained, both in 1792 and later, that his action was independent— "None of the King's ministers knew or heard of this association till they saw the first advertisement in the public prints. It was planned without their knowledge and has been conducted to the present moment without their aid."⁽³⁾ Yet as early as November 17th.

(1) Nepean, Evan (1751-1822). As youth, entered navy as a clerk. 1782. Under-Secretary of State in Shelburne's administration. 1784. Commissioner of the Privy Seal. Able second-in-command to Dundas at the Home Office. 1794. Under-Secretary for War. In 1812 became Governor of Bombay.

(2) See letter of John Taylor to Lord Liverpool, 31st. August, 1819, quoted in Aspinall, A. Politics and the Press, 1947.

(3) Association Papers, Preface iv, quoted in Mitchell, op. cit. p.59.

the Home Office had in its possession a form of a declaration for just such an Association as Reeves'.⁽¹⁾

It is impossible to prove direct connivance, at least at the ministerial level, before November 20th. The government was following a policy of deliberate inscrutability during the worst days of the crisis. Pitt and his colleagues had worries beyond the immediate effects of the general anxiety. Uncertainty had led to an alarming drop in the funds. On the 16th November the Morning Chronicle reported "Our funds have had a fall of 3% within these two days....." This was at first ascribed to government inaction, but within a week a further fall was said to be the result of "the panic of ministers, who, now trembling for their own indiscretions, communicate their fears by sympathy to all around them."⁽²⁾ The truth would seem to be that in so swift-changing a situation Pitt did not reach any definite conclusions on the best way to proceed until about November 25th. The cumulative effect of the troubles in England and the intrusion of French victory in Europe was described by Noël - "Chacune, prise isolément peut paraître légère. Mais réunies en masse, elles portent un caractère très allarmant pour le gouvernement."⁽³⁾ Pitt's indecision

(1) H.O. 42/22.

(2) The Morning Chronicle, November 16th. (B.M. Burney Collection)

(3) Noël to Lebrun, 22nd. November, A.A.E., C.P. Angleterre

and anxiety are evident from his correspondence with Dundas.⁽¹⁾ These are the letters of a man under considerable strain, conscious that something must speedily be done to restore equilibrium, but uncertain of the most effective means of achieving this goal. The tensions of the time are clearly brought out in the impression that Pitt was almost thinking aloud. Reeves' Association was to provide him with an unexpectedly straight-forward solution to the problems of public order and confidence which were at the root of Britain's internal difficulties.

On November 25th, Pitt wrote to Dundas on the action he was contemplating to ensure the country's internal stability. Here he mentioned the Association for the first time - "A printed paper appeared a few days ago.... which I like in everthing but its having adopted the objectionable term of Association. It has produced a great impression, which shows that there is a spirit and disposition to activity which, if we give it in the outset a right direction, may be improved upon to very important purposes. With this view we have privately prepared a form of a declaration founded on the same principles as those stated in the printed paper but more carefully and precisely defining the object to which we think every measure of this sort ought to be confined. We mean not to let it be known

(1) In the Pitt Papers, vii, op. cit.

that it comes from us but are privately taking steps which I have no doubt will be effectual to procure public meetings at which this paper may be approved and signed by as many respectable names as can be collected in London, Westminster and the Borough. Our idea then is to procure declarations of the same nature and perhaps in the same words in all the counties and great towns of England. We mean to endeavour to confine any general meetings held for this purpose solely to signing such a declaration, raising subscriptions and electing a small committee to superintend the management of the fund and the detail of prosecution and of circulating useful writings. The meetings might then adjourn from time to time at long intervals, to receive the report of their committee, pass the accounts and renew, if necessary their subscriptions to the fund. In this way we hope to avoid the inconvenience of much public discussion at numerous meetings and yet to have the impression and effect of numbers on our side."⁽¹⁾ The writer of this piece might easily have been John Reeves himself, so clearly had Pitt described the organization and aims of the Loyalist movement. The letter does itself provide very specific proof of the directions being given to Reeves. On the previous day, November 24th, the Crown and Anchor Association, had announced its intention of setting up branches in the same areas mentioned by

(1) Pitt to Dundas, November 25th. Pitt Papers, 11, op.cit.

Pitt, London, Westminster and the Borough of Southwark. Impressed by the immediate response to Reeves' first advertisement the government had decided that Reeves was an ideal front for a campaign of repression. The sudden upsurge of loyal sentiments would appear to be the genuine expression of a national feeling. Control of the movement from the centre need never be known because the extensive response would mask it. For Pitt and his colleagues the Association, despite the unfortunate connotations of Lord George Gordon's Protestant Association and the riots of 1780, provided an ideal solution to the problem of steadying public opinion. When Dundas received a copy of the Crown and Anchor advertisement he commented "I daresay the measure if followed through with perseverance may have good effects when Mr. Pitt has chalked out to them their line."⁽¹⁾ The Opposition berated Pitt's apparent complacency without ever realizing the extent of his work behind the scenes.

Indeed, the rush of Opposition activity was in marked contrast to the government's more cautious approach. The crisis in November led to a deep and irreparable split in the ranks of the Whigs. Burke

(1) Dundas to Nepean, November 25th, H.O. 102/6. An interesting letter in which Dundas made it clear that he did not think that the Association, or other supporters of government, would gain anything by attacking France or French politics verbally.

had long foreseen a disaster on the home front and now he found other men to join him in his crusade against Jacobinism. On November 13th. he and William Windham took the unusual step of calling on Pitt and Grenville in person, "Within these two days," Pitt wrote to Dundas, "there is again an appearance that the leaders of the Opposition feel the crisis as they ought.... Wyndham and Burke came jointly to Grenville and myself to profess their strong belief (though not speaking from direct authority) that there would be a determination in the principal friends to give a complete support to any vigorous measures at home or abroad, and to do this thoroughly without looking to any arrangement of office."⁽¹⁾ On November 17th, Chauvelin reported that the progress of French ideas was playing havoc with the Opposition. Even such a stalwart supporter as Perry, editor of the Morning Chronicle had been very reluctant to include in his paper an article written by Chauvelin explaining the motives behind the Belgian invasion. The real cause of Opposition fears lay, however, in the state of domestic affairs - "un événement qui n'a guère moins contribué que la prise de Mons à mettre plusieurs membres de l'Opposition à la disposition du gouvernement, ce sont les adresses énergiques envoyées à la Convention par les sociétés patriotiques, - le style

(1) Pitt to Dundas, November 15th, Pitt Papers, ii, op. cit.

des adresses les a effrayés, et paraît avoir décidé le Ministère à essayer de résister par la force au torrent de l'opinion qui se forme en notre faveur." (1)

Welcome though Burke's move was, it did place further pressure on the government to take a firm line, though their concern was well concealed from the two Whigs, - "they (Pitt and Grenville) were not very explicit with regard to the vigour of any measures which they might pursue as to interior or exterior objects - but they did not deny that such might be necessary." (2) When Pitt discovered that some of the other "principal" Whigs in particular, the Duke of Portland, were not prepared to follow Burke's line and abandon Fox, he was displeased.

The ministry were not very explicit about vigorous measures because in mid-November they lacked the spur of Reeves. Even so, there was another area which could not be overlooked in safeguarding the security of the realm. Of more immediate significance, while the situation remained so tense, was the preparation and arming of a force of men to keep the peace in the country. In the development of Pitt's ideas on the militia the anxieties of the last week of November and of the oppressiveness of decision-making are

(1) Chauvelin to Lebrun, 17th November A.A.E.

C.P. Angleterre 583.

(2) Burke to Fitzwilliam, November 29th, Burke, op. cit.

p. 317.

clearly visible. On November 25th. he acknowledged that Dundas' exhortations from Scotland had played a major part in crystallizing his own views - "Your statement respecting the military force will enable me to take steps for preparing the army estimates with a view to the necessary augmentation, which I will do without loss of time..... my idea is that in England, the Lord Lieutenants of counties should, in case of riot, be enabled to add to any extent volunteer companies, under officers properly qualified, to the present militia, and to grant commissions for this purpose."⁽¹⁾ The advantage of this scheme was that the extent of such a force could be easily ascertained. Only two days later, on November 27th. Pitt had changed his mind. The state of Scotland and the wild rumours circulating in England of unidentified French-inspired groups attacking the Tower and trying to raise revolt in the capital had left no alternative but to "call out the whole, or some part of the militia very speedily."⁽²⁾ The government's belief that there was an absolute necessity for an armed force had outweighed^{ed} the knowledge, plentifully supplied by Buckingham, that the militia was sadly lacking in training and weapons and that several corps, in particular the Duke of Norfolk's, were tainted by

(1) Pitt to Dundas, November 27th, Pitt Papers, ii, op. cit.

(2) Pitt to Dundas, November 29th, Pitt Papers, ii, op. cit.

subversive principles by the "little books" which they possessed. (1)

Despite the fear, expressed by both Pitt and Grenville, that attempts to create serious trouble would be made before the measures in contemplation had been brought to fruition, the government was now well on the road to regaining complete control of the country. The calling out of the militia was justified on the grounds of a state of insurrection. By law, Parliament was required to meet within a fortnight of such a proclamation. Even those members of the Opposition, including Sir Gilbert Elliot, who were inclined to support ministerial actions to end the crisis were dismayed by the means employed to achieve calm. (2) They argued that the militia was merely a pretext and that the government, so alarmed by the situation which they had drifted into through apparent inconclusiveness, had felt the necessity for immediate legislative measures and had no other way of re-assembling Parliament, which had been prorogued until January, 1793. Pitt's emphasis on the militia does not altogether bear out this view. He was so anxious to assemble the militia that he had even thought

(1) Buckingham to Grenville, November 27th, ^{H.A.C.} Fortescue MSS, op. cit. p.p. 345-6.

(2) Sir Gilbert Elliot to Lady Elliot, December 13th
Elliot, Letters, ed. Countess of Minto, ii, p.p. 80-82

of resorting to commissions of array. But he was also fully aware that the recall of parliament would enable him to take a number of important legislative steps. On November 28th he wrote that he was contemplating suspending Habeas Corpus and that he intended bringing in an Aliens Bill. (1)

Their minds made up, Pitt and his cabinet pressed ahead with the implementation of their policy. The Association movement, gaining daily in numbers and effectiveness, was under their guidance. The five thousand men of the militia, embodied by Royal proclamation on December 1st, were guarding London, the Home Counties and the east coast. Parliament was ready to meet again on December 13th.

The crisis situation in November had very grave implications for the future. The news from the continent had caused the propertied classes to fear that disturbances in Britain might get out of control. They had no way of assessing the effect of seditious literature other than by the state of public opinion. Never before had turbulence seemed so sinister and threatening. In this situation, when balanced reactions were strikingly scarce, William Pitt and his advisers decided that the only safe course was to summon up the banner of King, Country and Constitution. More than this, it was widely accepted that revolutionary France had intruded into every issue of policy. Pitt himself

(1) Pitt to Dundas, November 28th, Pitt Papers, ii, op, cit.

was beginning to think that the necessity of taking strong measures had not proved without advantage. Speaking of the issue of supporting Holland, he said - "I do not know whether I flatter myself but I begin to be persuaded that the necessity will lead to measures which are on the whole the best for the internal situation of the country."⁽¹⁾ This thinking had also begun to influence British policy towards France. On November 26th. Grenville wrote - "If the French are determined to force us to a rupture it seems of little moment what is the particular occasion that is to be taken for it except with a view to the benefit of standing on the most advantageous ground, with respect to the public opinion in the two countries..."⁽²⁾ The Ministry, too, had accepted the existence of public opinion by the end of November, and realized that it could be a double-edged weapon. Few people, however, as the Parliamentary debates were to reveal, could forget the atmosphere of mid-November, vividly re-captured by Windham in his speech defending the Ministry's actions - "It was his belief, however, that there were serious and well-founded alarms, from the conduct, not of the officers of government, but from those who had sworn an enmity to all government. Did not the whole country feel it? Was not every town, village

(1) Pitt to Dundas, November 27th, Pitt Papers.

(2) Grenville to Auckland, November 26th. F.O. 37/41.

or hamlet filled with apprehension? Could a man enter into his own house, or could he walk in a field without observing that it occupied the whole attention of all ranks and descriptions of people."⁽¹⁾ The November crisis had led to a general hardening of the ministerial attitude which did not augur well for those concerned to preserve peace and persuade the government to introduce reforms into the parliamentary system - "The true reason of the pretended alarm will soon appear; and it will be found that the only persons who have really cause for apprehension are the landed, the monied and the leading interest of England.... but the true meaning of all this alarm... is that it is the preface to a foreign war. The public mind is put into this ferment to prepare us for the encounter."⁽²⁾

(1) Windham in the debates on the King's Speech, December 13th, 1792, Cobbett, Parliamentary History.

(2) The Morning Chronicle, December 10th.

Chapter 9

The Trial of Louis XVI

"Si le roi est innocent, le peuple est coupable."

St. Just.

There was one striking similarity between the situations of France and Great Britain at the beginning of December, 1792, a similarity which was, paradoxically, a vital unseen factor in the collapse of Anglo-French relations. The introspection of both countries had a potent influence on international developments. The bases of the British attitude, lying deep in the comfortable policy of neutrality were brought to a crescendo by the domestic and European crisis of November. The roots of France's pre-occupation were in the Revolution of August 10th.

The trial and execution of Louis XVI have sometimes been seen as little more than an episode in the development of political rivalry in the Convention. In the course of Anglo-French relations the trial seems almost irrelevant. Yet it is impossible to understand the motives and pre-occupation of the men who directed policy and the formulation of decision in France, whether domestic or European without considering the significance of the king's trial. Only then can the startling disparity of outlook and pre-occupation on either side of the Channel be fully appreciated. S/

The war in Europe had reached an enforced halt, brought about by the onset of winter, at the beginning

of December 1792. This uneasy situation afforded none of the interested parties, whether actively engaged in the struggle or anxious spectators, much satisfaction. The Prussians had succeeded in bringing sufficient pressure to bear on the reluctant Austrians to ensure the resumption of hostilities against France in the spring.⁽¹⁾ The neutral powers were now so acutely aware of the strength and unpredictability of the Revolution in arms that none of them could view the situation with much confidence. The Spanish, still attempting to ensure their own inviolability by political manoeuvring, were nevertheless afraid of an attack across the Pyrenees. The Stadtholder of the United Provinces alarmed Lord Auckland, the British ambassador, by telling him that he feared imminent insurrection by French sympathizers, the Patriots.⁽²⁾ The British government faced December with reasonable assurance that the extensive measures which they had taken to calm and direct public opinion would quickly make their beneficial effect apparent. Pitt himself was still some way from admitting that this tacit

(1) The British, however, were kept waiting for any definite information or comment on their proposals of November 13th, until January 1793. See Chapter 7.

(2) Auckland to Grenville, December 20th, F.O. 37/42.

recognition of the pervasiveness of the French threat to stability in the western European continent would lead to open conflict within a short time between England and France. The French themselves, however, had many and increasing troubles. Dumouriez's discontent grew daily in Belgium. French diplomatic representatives in London and at the Hague persisted in putting their own interests before those of France. Even the magnificent men of France, the volunteers who had, in popular opinion, saved their country, appeared to be living under delusions. Camus and Gossuin, two of the deputies sent to report on the state of the armies in Belgium, wrote on December 4th - "Nous avons trouvés dans presque tout notre voyage les routes couvertes de volontaires qui revenaient vers Paris avec armes et bagages; il nous paraissait inconcevable que des Français, des soldats de la liberté, revinssent en si grande nombre dans leurs foyers avant que la guerre fut terminée. Nous avons découvert la cause de cette espèce de désertion qui dégarnit les camps et pourrait diminuer notablement la force nécessaire à nos armées. On a répandu parmi les troupes..... la supposition d'un décret que la patrie n'était plus en danger." (1)

The isolation of the soldiers in Belgium reflected

(1) Camus and Gossuin to the President of the Convention 4th December, Le Moniteur, vol. 14, p693.

the growing contradiction of the Revolution's apparent strengths, and real weaknesses. The republic was about to undergo its first crisis of identity, on an issue of inescapable importance. In the middle of November, after much preliminary obstruction by Brissot and some of his friends, the first debates on the form of trial and judgement of the king focused attention on Louis XVI once more. The trial was to pass through three major stages. Firstly, in November, there were discussions on the methods and legality of trying Louis. These received further impetus with the discovery of the incriminating iron box in the Tuileries on November 20th. On December 3rd. the trial was decreed and Louis formally indicted on December 11th. The second stage began late in November when the king appeared before the bar to hear his defence read. There followed a number of extremely important speeches on the question of referring the king's judgement to the people in primary assemblies. Finally, in mid-January the deputies voted individually on Louis's judgement and sentence. (1)

(1) The speeches, debates and voting on the king's trial can be followed from mid-November 1792 to mid-January, 1793, in the Journal des Debats of the Convention and in Le Moniteur, vols. 15 & 16. Introduction to the problems surrounding the king's trial and excerpts from relevant documents may also be found in the more convenient edition drawn together by A. Soboul, Le Procès de Louis XVI, Paris, 1966.

Unless one attempts to arrive at some understanding of the issues caught up in the trial of the king and of the development of the debate which ensued, it is impossible to realize the depth of feeling involved, amongst all shades of opinion within and outside the Convention, or to place the arguments and emotions in the context of France's situation at the turn of the year 1792-3. The trial was not merely an occasion for the intensification of the power struggle within the Convention. The person and fate of the king were so inextricably connected, in the minds of the ordinary citizens, as well as politicians, with the Revolution of August 10th. and its implications, that the trial inevitably absorbed interest and attention to a degree that could not be comprehended by contemporaries. This was certainly the issue which crystallized differences within the Convention, but in a sense, the differences were themselves a sign that no lasting or satisfactory settlement had emerged after August 10th. Little had been done towards the drawing up of a new constitution, the war had taken on greater proportions and victory had brought added responsibilities. There was no new, systematic government functioning and yet the symbol of abuse, oppression and treachery lived on in the person of Louis XVI. For some, perhaps a small minority, the problems were clear-cut, and the solution simple. St. Just knew that no-one could reign innocently. It followed that

the king must die; while he lived there could never be strong laws, or unity and without these the word republic had only a hollow sound. But for others the situation was a great deal more complex. There were those who believed that kingship was a crime, but still thought of Louis as victim rather than criminal and who would have saved his life because of this weakness. Brissot and his associates were split by uncertainty in which there was more than an element of self-interest. This was present, too, in the considerations of Robespierre's followers, but the Montagnards had one significant advantage over Brissot, they were beginning to formulate an ideology and to represent, however vaguely, the interests of the people. The so-called Girondins were dissolving back into individualism. Their attack lacked overall cohesion for this reason. Debates on the trial produced the most vivid explosion so far seen in the Convention. Moderation was made even more difficult by the presence of the far from apathetic people of Paris, whose spokesmen, whether Hébert or anonymous pamphleteers, were drawing parallels in the popular mind between the Convention's inconclusiveness and increasing economic hardship. The trial also added another dimension to the dispute which centred on the importance of Paris and its relationship with the provinces. The sections might demand Louis's death, but outside Paris opinion was inclined to be more moderate, and

some areas, for example Rouen, were still strongly influenced by royalists.

The Convention's dilemma contrasts strongly with the orderly discussions of the English House of Commons. Here the venom against revolutionary France was increasing, but the speakers, whatever their convictions, were seldom anything other than correct in their appearance and speech. The most violent act they could manage was Burke's theatrical gesture of throwing a supposedly republican dagger on the floor, which is said to have brought forth only muffled laughter. The British Parliament, alarmed by signs of discontent at home and amazed by the extent of French success in Europe and the gravity of the war, nevertheless had no way of understanding that the trial of the king was crucial to the future of the revolution itself.

An examination of the trial of Louis XVI involves separate consideration of a number of points which were connected in the mentality of the times. Firstly, there are the issues which the trial raised and the dilemma which resulted in the Convention. However abstract a number of the points on inviolability, sovereignty of the people and obligations of the representative seem at first reading, it soon becomes evident that the personalities of those involved, of the king and of his accusers, were themselves significant. The situation in which the ideas of these men

were developing needs also to be explored. It is necessary to bear in mind not merely the exploitation of the dispute between Paris and the provinces, but also the effect which popular opinion in general was having on events. Extreme elements outside the Convention, such as Jean Varlet and the ex-priest Jacques Roux, were exhorting the people to take note of the Convention's tardiness in trying Louis XVI. Hebert continued his efforts to educate the sans-culottes into consciousness of their role in enforcing recognition of the importance of the small craftsman and wage-earner. Barère, in an effort to bring about a weakening of the fierce introspection of the Convention, had warned the deputies that the eyes of Europe were on France. Many members were more immediately aware that the trial of the king was being taken up by a growing body of public opinion in the capital and that this invisible force could no longer be discounted. The Brissotins even acknowledged public opinion, though in a somewhat forced and roundabout way, when they manoeuvred for the adoption of the appeal to the people for their verdict on Louis's sentence. Despite all these influences, pulling it in a number of different directions, the Convention nevertheless found a solution to its problems. The death of Louis XVI was voted by a roll-call procedure known as the appel nominal — an exhausting and emotionally draining method whereby every single deputy was required to vote aloud. The king's execution, on

January 21st, 1793, brought the French Revolution decisively and inescapably face to face with the neutral powers and particularly England. Pitt and his government had no way of grasping the importance of Louis's trial and death for Frenchmen; to them it represented the most extreme example of the virulence of the revolution and the great difference which had developed in the consciousness of their two societies.

It became evident during the earliest discussions of the form of the king's trial that here was the issue which would touch the essence of the nation's existence. The future, indeed, the very nature of the Revolution were central to the points raised in the Convention and the welter of opinions expressed in the Parisian sections and in the provinces of France. A definite and final pronouncement on the king was inherent in the Revolution of August 10th. In the first two months after the insurrection, frustration had grown amongst all areas of political opinion in the French capital. The Convention, plagued by the antagonisms of its most gifted men, had failed signally to provide the systematic lead which the supporters of the overthrow of the king had expected. No-one could think about Louis's trial without going back to August 10th. and the reasons for suspending the king. The supporters of the second revolution had overthrown Louis XVI for a variety of reasons, many of which were still uppermost in their

minds in December. Above all, the king's accusers, shared the conviction that Louis would have been the instrument of bringing the Prussians into Paris and that he was not merely a traitor but a murderer - "you caused the blood of Frenchmen to flow," asserted article 12 of Louis's indictment. The combination of factors which had led to August 10th. included other potent recollections. During the summer of 1792, Louis had revealed his complete intractability. The war had given many ordinary men a sense of identity and a sense of purpose. The realization of their political significance was perhaps not very sophisticated, and certainly Hebert for one seems to have believed that it needed guidance and moulding, but it was born in times of unusual crisis and national tension and the atmosphere of the autumn of 1792, with the grain shortage and growing feeling that Europe was closing in on the Revolution, tended to heighten the awareness of the hitherto inarticulate groups of the population. To them the Revolution of August 10th. had been an act in which they had demonstrated their force. The continued existence of the king, even as a closely-guarded prisoner in the Temple, seemed a reproach to those who had perpetrated the second revolution. Robespierre was later to ask whether the people or the king were on trial. Casting doubts on the justifiability of August 10th. seemed to some men a foolhardy and dangerous act. If Louis were not

tried then there could be no proper basis for their actions and they, the very men who had saved France, stood condemned.

With his clear grasp of issues, Robespierre early put the problem in its basic form. It seemed to him that the deputies were unwilling to face the logic behind the overthrow of the king - "Citoyens, voulez-vous une révolution sans révolution?" The fact was that the Convention as a body had no clear idea of what type of system would be instituted after the second revolution. The Brissotins merely felt that as far as reliance on popular support and the introduction of the people in political life was concerned, the revolution had gone far enough. The Montagnards were only beginning to formulate their views on the pre-requisites of successful republican government and these took the form of abstract theorizing rather than a carefully expounded programme. Probably the majority of the Convention had no real perception of anything other than the increasing chaos of their situation until they came under the influence of Barère's eloquence and clarity of thought. The trial of the king served as a forceful reminder that further evasion of questions left unanswered after August 10th. would jeopardize the attainment of every principle for which the revolutionaries had fought and suffered since the summer of 1789. It was not, however, only a question of principles, theories and

rights. To their developing ideology, Robespierre's supporters added a firm grasp of political realities. They knew that it was vitally necessary, for the survival of France in Europe as well as their own position in the Convention that questions of monarchy and republicanism, treason and liberty, should be focused on the king's trial and speedily decided, so that the damaging effects of indecision might be lessened.

These were the issues at the root of what might almost be termed France's moral agony after August 10th. The trial of Louis XVI also raised other more immediate problems which were to intensify the differences between the opposing groups in the Convention. Initially a majority of members were uncertain of whether the king could be judged formally, how he should be charged, what provisions should be made for his defence and what body should actually judge him. There were disputes over Louis' inviolability, supposedly contained within the second article of the third chapter of the 1791 constitution, and about whether he should be charged as citizen or as King of the French. These various uncertainties were listed by the deputy Mailhe in the report which the Comité de Legislation presented on November 7th. - "Louis XVI est-il jugeable pour les crimes qu'on lui impute d'avoir commis sur le trône constitutionnel? Par qui doit-il être jugé? Sera-t-il traduit devant les tribunaux ordinaires, comme tout autre citoyen accusé des crimes d'Etat.

Déléguez-vous le droit de le juger à un tribunal
 formé par les assemblées électorales des 83 départe-
 ments. N'est-il plus naturel que la Convention
 nationale le juge elle-même? Est-il nécessaire ou
 convenable de soumettre le jugement à la ratification
 de tous les membres de la république, réunis en assemblées
 de communes ou en assemblées primaires?"⁽¹⁾ Most people
 agreed that no existing tribunal was adequate to the
 gravity of the situation. There was no precedent for
 trying a monarch in France and the trial of Charles I
 seventeenth-century England did not seem particularly
 instructive. The committee of twenty-four had been
 gathering and processing information, denunciations
 and other evidence relative to the trial since September,
 but the Committee, headed by Barbaroux, was largely
 composed of men of Brissot's acquaintance and seems to
 have shrunk from ^{the} overall implications of its task when
 it came to presenting a report on findings and pro-
 cedure to the Convention. Valazé's report was an in-
 conclusive document which did further damage to the
 reputation of the loose-knit Brissotin group. There
 was genuine uncertainty among some deputies many of
 whom were acutely conscious of the great and irrevers-
 ible decisions which they would be called upon to make.
 Doubts were raised whether the Convention as a body
 or the individual deputies possessed the responsibility
 to try the king. From this there arose general dis-

(1) Mailhe's report, November 7th, Le Moniteur, vol. 14,
 p. 414.

putes over the functions of the Convention and the duties of the representative which revealed some very deep differences of opinion and contributed towards the more explicit formulation of certain aspects of the Montagnard platform. From these discussions Brissot and his colleagues formed in their turn, a counter-argument on the relationship between the sovereignty of the people and the powers of the representative which was to lead to much discussions as to whether Louis's sentence and judgement should be referred to the people for ratification. The appeal to the people was not suggested until December 27th., but it produced the most highly-developed arguments of the entire period of the trial and thus provides many insights into beliefs of the Convention's most prominent men.

However important the issues, one should not lose sight of the men who principally participated in the debates and whose developing views were influenced by the protracted nature of the trial and the spectacle of shouting and abuse in the Convention which became so common. In the controversy over the emergence of "party" in these months, the individual approach of the men who made major speeches can become submerged. The Brissotins held certain ideas in common, but did not act with any co-ordination. Robespierre's associates often used the Jacobin's club as a sounding-board for development of a united front, but the

speeches on the king's judgement and fate were made by the deputies as individuals.

The one person easily overlooked amidst the turmoil of the trial is the king himself, perhaps in part because some of the deputies, notably St. Just and Robespierre, wished to remove the focus of attention from the king himself to the idea of kingship as such. In the uncertain state of public opinion in the provinces it was obviously unwise to conduct the trial with more emphasis on Louis than on his crime. The king only appeared twice at the bar of the Convention during his trial, on December 11th. to hear his indictment, and on December 26th. to be cross-examined after his defence had been read. On both these occasions but especially the latter, the deputies and other observers in the Convention were afforded ample proof of the king's inability to answer questions with much conviction, but of the effectiveness of his general deportment. Louis, as a form of defence, had retreated into something approaching divine inscrutability. He either refused to answer questions, or cited the 1791 constitution as proof of his inviolability. Further, he challenged the legality of the Convention to try him at all. He had not been outside the Temple since his imprisonment in August and the sight of the assembled deputies seems only to have increased his determination to demonstrate that he was superior to the manoeuvres of a body of misguided men. He

indignantly denied the last of the charges against him, that he had caused the blood of Frenchmen to flow, yet this was merely a summing-up of the contents of the document of accusation which had been brought against him. The charges sought to demonstrate his continuing and cumulative perfidy. They began with his actions in relation to the estates general, the Bastille and continued on to the Champs de Mars and the flight to Varennes. In appointing untrustworthy ministers Louis had sabotaged the functioning of government and undermined the defences of France. His actions, it was contended, had only intensified the spirit of uncertainty and ferment in France. (1)

Louis XVI reacted to this recital of his sins with very little emotion. Nothing demonstrated to him that he had behaved in a manner detrimental to his country's overall interests or in a spirit which was unequal to the great responsibilities which he believed he held. His two appearances in the Convention, contrasted with the general feelings of tumult, doubt and hatred seem almost irrelevant. Rather like Charles I, Louis XVI knew instinctively what kind of dignity was expected of him and maintained it until the end.

Louis stood accused by men of varying temperaments,

(1) The Indictment of Louis XVI, p.p. 386-391, in J.H. Stewart, A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution. New York, 1951

but among the most consistent and convinced of his opponents were Robespierre and his associates. Of these, Robespierre himself and Saint-Just were the main exponents. The Brissotins suffered greatly in comparison with this small group of men, whose perception of the overall dilemma of the Convention and the Revolution far outmatched Brissot's increasingly contradictory and vacillating positions. But it was not merely a question of realization of the defensiveness of the Brissotin attitude which enhanced the significance of the Robespierrist contribution to the king's trial. Early in the discussions of the form of accusation and judgement, in mid-November, there emerged one of the most remarkable of the Revolution's figures. Antoine de Saint-Just was the youngest deputy elected to the Convention, being then just a few months over 25 years old. The undirected indolence of this young man, endowed with unusual intellectual gifts, had given way in the first years of the Revolution to a fierce belief in the necessity and justification of the Revolution, and an interest in developing his own political philosophy. He was an early admirer of Robespierre and one of his dearest wishes had been fulfilled when he entered the Convention. The first months of feuding and indecision had powerfully affected him. Although he entered politics with his own views on the most beneficial arrangements for man in society, partially developed, his application of

St Just,

theory to the future shape of the Revolution seems to have crystallized as he observed the heat of discussion and the intrusion of self-interest obscure the working of the Convention and threaten the survival of the Revolution in France. (1)

In the speeches of late 1792 and early 1793 he demonstrated how his views were forming in response to the political situation of the country. The spectacle of disunity appalled him. He did not believe that any durable basis or framework for republican government could be laid down until the disorders which plagued the Convention and divided France were overcome. The fabric of a new type of society, inhabited by a new type of man, consumed his interests. The wranglings over the king's trial seemed mere preliminaries. The republic could not be achieved without unity and without strong laws. There was no hope for the attainment of either of these goals while the king lived; he was a focus of discontent, the epitome of the counter-revolution. The habits of thought of the ancien regime still lingered on as a great barrier to justice - "Les mêmes hommes qui vont juger Louis ont une république à fonder: ceux qui attachent quelque importance au juste châtement d'un

(1) To understand St. Just's background and the development of his ideas it is necessary to look at "L'esprit de la Révolution" (1791); and "De la nature....." a fragment probably written before August, 1792.

roi ne fonderont jamais une république. Parmi nous, la finesse des esprits et des caractères est un grand obstacle à la liberté....."(1) It was this kind of thinking which lay behind Saint-Just's ruthlessly logical approach to the problems of the trial and judgement of the king. There are perhaps two general points worth noting, the first being that Saint-Just continued to re-iterate his views on the need for unity and strong laws as a necessary framework for a viable republican form until Thermidor, 1794 and the second being that he died without any such system being satisfactorily put into practice.

Saint-Just was anxious, when he made his first carefully prepared speech, on November 13th, to make a lasting impression and to clear the air of many problems raised in the first weeks of November which he considered to be imaginary.(2) The first reports had dwelt in some length on the point of whether Louis should be judged as a citizen. Saint-Just held that the only category Louis XVI legitimately filled was that of enemy. He followed this statement with some detailed argument on the nature of the social compact. He believed that Louis could not be judged as a citizen because he was outside the pact, an agreement which

(1) Speech on the judgement of the king, November 13th.
Le Moniteur, 14²⁵, p. 466.

(2) Brissot commented favourably on the speech in
Le Patriote français.

Saint-Just believed was made only by the citizens between themselves - "Le pacte est un contrat entre les citoyens, et non point avec le gouvernement: on n'est pour rien dans un contrat où l'on ne s'est point obligé. Conséquemment, Louis, qui ne s'était pas obligé, ne peut pas être jugé civilement."⁽¹⁾

Having disposed of this difficulty, Saint-Just went on to give his definition of the powers and duties of the representative of the people in such a case. His own views contrasted very strongly with those expressed by some of the Brissotins, and, in particular, those expressed by Vergniaud.

The question of obligations of the representative was intimately connected with the sensitive issue of sovereignty of the people. It was one of the more curious anomalies of the trial of Louis XVI that the Brissotins, in their attempts to ensure personal survival, managed to invest the concept of popular sovereignty with a more immediate and apparently more democratic interpretation than did the Montagnards. Saint-Just had early realized that the more hesitant or more opportunistic members of the Convention would find the implications of the judgement a useful ploy. He believed, however, that the issue was essentially one of common sense and that the folly of revealing to the people the uncertainty of their own represent-

(1) Speech on the judgement of the king, November 13th.

Le Moniteur, 15, p. 466.

atives over constitutional procedure might well be irreparable - "On vous dira que le jugement sera ratifié par le peuple. Mais si le peuple ratifie le jugement, pourquoi ne jugerait-il pas? Si nous ne septions point tous le faible de ces idées, quelque forme de gouvernement que nous adoptassions, nous serions esclaves; le souverain n'y serait jamais à sa place, ni le magistrat à la sienne, et le peuple serait sans garantie contre l'oppression." As far as Saint-Just was concerned the Convention was not only able but obliged to judge Louis. In addressing his colleagues he produced an interesting progression of ideas - "Citoyens, le tribunal qui doit juger Louis n'est point un tribunal judiciaire: c'est un conseil, c'est le peuple, c'est vous." (1)

Saint-Just's arguments were rebutted towards the end of December by Vergniaud. His own views were, at first sight, equally straight-forward and logical, but they never came near to answering some of the difficulties raised by Saint-Just. Vergniaud was at pains to connect the king's trial with public tranquillity and national glory; the Brissotins were always more mindful of overseas reaction to the king's fate than the Robespierrists. He continued by allowing to the people a much greater practical and immediate participation in the actual processes of government

(1) *ibid.*

than was ever admitted by the Montagnards, who believed that the application of such ideas would lead to complete disruption. To deny this right, Vergniaud asserted, would be a criminal usurpation. The difficulty of explaining why every single measure was not referred to the people was explained through the somewhat arbitrary distinction made between constitutional and legislative acts, the latter being only tacitly ratified by the people.

Vergniaud's arguments left ample scope for criticism. The Brissotins were not noted for their faith in the people as a separate entity and had backed away from the spectacle of this entity thinking and acting for itself. They seemed to be indulging in abstractions as a means of gaining favour. It was Marat, the Friend of the People himself, who pointed out the dangers behind referring the last word on judgement and sentence to France as a whole. "Non seulement l'appel au peuple est une mesure impolitique, ridicule, insensée, elle n'est pas moins perfide, funeste et désastreuse. De quels dangers, de quels orages, de quels malheurs ne serait-elle pas suivie, aujourd'hui que la nation, si peu instruite encore, et si peu regenerée est remplie de suppôts de l'ancien régime, livrée aux entreprises des ennemis de la liberté et en proie aux fureurs des prêtres fanatiques; aujourd'hui que l'opinion publique, travaillée en tout sens, par des écrits serviles, est complètement

égaree....."(1) The people, in other words, were still not sufficiently educated in the ways of republicanism to exercise their rights fully.

Between the early discussions there was a gap while the charges against Louis were drawn up, questions of subsistances were discussed and the Brissotins continued in their delaying tactics. (2) During these inconclusive first weeks of December the French newspapers began to refer more and more frequently to the increase in British naval preparations. The trial proper began at Christmas. In the speeches made after Louis' defence was read on December 26th. there were revealed further contrasts between leading members of the Convention. These were especially noticeable in the contributions of Robespierre and Gensonne.

Robespierre had spoken at length on the king's trial early in December in the Jacobins. Like Saint-Just he treated the trial as an event which was, at base, unnecessary. There seemed, to him, to have arisen a basic misunderstanding of the unique situation of France - "vous confondez encore la situation d'un

(1) Marat's speech on the king's judgement, B.N. 8° L 6 38

(2) In mid-December the Brissotins had introduced a diversionary attack on Philippe Egalite, the former duc d'Orleans, in an attempt to discredit the Montagnards, among whose ranks Egalite sat, by accusing them of royalism.

peuple en révolution avec celle d'un peuple dont le gouvernement est affermi; vous confondez une nation qui punit un fonctionnaire public, en conservant la forme du gouvernement et celle qui détruit le gouvernement lui-même."⁽¹⁾ Like Saint-Just, too, Robespierre felt that in the present disastrous state of France, the realization of the hopes with which the republic was born was quite unattainable. The great barrier was the king and in the arguments over his fate there had developed dissensions which threatened to split the country into civil war -- "vous avez proclamé la république, mais nous l'avez-vous donnée? Nous n'avons point encore fait une seule loi qui justifie ce nom; nous n'avons pas encore réformé une seule loi qui justifie ce nom; nous n'avons pas encore réformé un seul abus de despotisme." Otez les noms; nous avons encore la tyrannie toute entière, et, de plus, des factions plus viles, et des charlatans plus immoraux, avec de nouveaux serments de troubles et de guerre civile. La République! et Louis vit encore. Et vous placez encore la personne du roi entre nous et la liberté."⁽²⁾

Robespierre's views on these points were representative of those of a number of his colleagues. He

(1) Robespierre's speech to the Jacobins, December 5th.
AN. AD. 1/104

(2) Robespierre's speech to the Jacobins, December 5th.
AN. AD. 1/104

differed most fundamentally from the Brissotins, and particularly Gensonne on the question of the appeal to the people. This suggestion had become inextricably connected with certain other issues which had long been troubling the Convention. The Montagnards attacked it as being potentially divisive, playing into the hands of royalists and being subversive of national unity. The Brissotins replied that the people was fully justified in expecting to ratify such a momentous decision and that failure to take such a step would further illustrate the almost tyrannical pre-eminence of Paris. Robespierre's arguments to prove the futility of the appeal tended to follow the lines of the modern concept of the silent majority. The mass of the people did indeed want Louis' death and had demonstrated this on August 10th. Beyond this, however, they lacked the sophistication and the education - both practical and political - to give expression to such feelings. In any event, they had more pressing responsibilities. They were good citizens and expected their representatives to carry out their will - "Cette majorité a exprimé son vœu au moment où elle secoua le joug de votre ci-devant roi; elle a commencé, elle a soutenu la révolution; elle a des mœurs; cette majorité, elle a du courage, mais elle a ni finesse, ni éloquence, elle foudroie des tyrans; mais elle est souvent la dupe des frippons. Cette majorité ne doit point être fatiguée par des assemblées

continuelles, ou une minorité intrigante domine trop souvent. Elle ne peut être dans vos assemblées politiques quand elle est dans ses ateliers; elle ne peut juger Louis XVI quand elle nourrit à la sueur de son front les robustes citoyens qu'elle donne à la patrie."⁽¹⁾ This kind of argument, if generally applied,

would have supposed that the people took no direct part in any of the major controversies of the Revolution. In fact, the sections in Paris and the corresponding societies throughout France were having so much to say on the implications and the importance of the trial of Louis XVI that they were demonstrating how significant public opinion could be at the very time that Robespierre was assuring the Brissotins that the people were too occupied to participate in debate.

Gensonne's speech was not only an attack on the bases of the Montagnard position, but a revealing explanation, in some parts, of the sense of grievance, even intellectual isolation of a talented provincial lawyer who was increasingly unable to adapt himself to the direction which the Revolution appeared to be taking. There was more to Gensonne's speech than a justification of a manoeuvre inspired in part by

(1) Robespierre's speech to the Convention, December 27th. dubious political motives. Gensonne argued essentially

(1) Robespierre's speech to the Convention, December 27th.

that the appeal to the people of France was destructive of faction and the most sure way of preventing civil war. He violently attacked the view that by considering the opinions of the provinces his fellow-sympathizers were attempting to belittle the Convention in the eyes of the rest of France or to remove it outside Paris -

"Vous savez bien que ce système de fédéralisme que vous attribuez aux députés de départements veut une république unique, mais qu'il veut que la volonté générale y fasse la loi, et que votre faction ne s'en rende pas l'unique interprète."⁽¹⁾ So-called lovers of liberty, who were really nothing more than political opportunists, could be easily recognized. Gensonné's description of such men was perhaps revealing of the defensiveness of the Brissotin outlook by the turn of the year 1792-1793 - "On les reconnaît à leur haine pour la philosophie et les lumières, à leur adresse à caresser les préjugés et les passions du peuple qu'ils veulent tromper. Ils se vantent avec effronterie, e/ ils parlent sans cesse de leur zèle.... L'un se proclame l'ami du peuple, l'autre le défenseur incorruptible des droits...." Many people might say, who were these self-seeking hypocrites, what were their methods, where lay their strength - "Leurs moyens, c'est l'opinion, et c'est par elle qu'on peut avoir et l'armée et le

(1) Gensonné's speech to the Convention, December 28th.

peuple lui-même." Already they had sent agents into the departments and the armies - "pour assurer la liberte aux autres, vous voulez établir votre despotisme." Gensonne finished by reminding his audience that until a new constitution was promulgated, all powers were provisional - "il n'existe plus d'autre autorité que celle du peuple.... que veut-on donc en parlant sans cesse d'insurrection, de révolution nouvelle? Contre qui peut-elle être dirigée, si ce n'est pas contre la nation elle-même." (1)

In some senses, Gensonne's appeal for caution in the face of the Revolution's passing into rival and more extreme hands was the cry of the Brissotin group. These men were unhappy about the trial of the king and the kind of arguments which their opponents were using. They had hoped to enlist the support of the still undecided majority of the Convention in defeating their opponents, but had exhibited only desperation and political naïveté. This was especially remarkable in Brissot himself. Brissot suggested that the neutral powers would be less likely to declare war on France if the king's death was seen to be the sentence of the entire French nation, an attitude which, if he genuinely believed it, serves only to illustrate more fully his total lack of understanding of foreign affairs and his desperate search for a way out of the dilemma. (2)

(1) *ibid.*

(2) Brissot's speech to the Convention, December 28th.

There is a marked difference between Brissot's attitude late^o in December and his bellicose speeches of January 12th. and February 1st. He subsequently explained this as being a distinction between personal opinion and that of the Comité Diplomatique. However obscure the workings of the Comité and the outlook of its members in the last days of January, 1793, it is difficult to believe that Brissot was not acquainted with the general tone of reports coming in from Britain, both as politician and journalist. The Foreign Ministry knew of the domestic repression of Pitt's government and the press carried information on armament and on parliamentary proceedings. If Brissot genuinely believed, despite reports of the British attitude towards France, that the results of the appeal to the people would influence foreign reaction, he was demonstrating very clearly the desperation of the Brissotins' search for a way out of the dilemma and the psychological chasm which now separated men of government in France and Britain.

Nevertheless, Brissot had introduced a consideration which was exercising the minds of his own countrymen. It would be unrealistic to suggest that all the deputies who voted the king's death did so without having searched for alternatives. The case of Danton, who had passed during the last months of 1792 into more open support of Robespierre's group, demonstrates the hesitancy of one of the Revolution's

leading figures at this time. Few would challenge the invaluable effect of Danton's courageous personification of French defiance of the invader in the autumn of 1792. Yet this same man, who seems to have continued to exercise considerable influence over France's diplomatic relations with Europe even after he resigned from the Conseil Executif was uneasy at the thought of killing the king. The obscure episode of Danton's supposed demand for two million livres from Pitt's government in return for his undertaking to ensure the passage of a decree which would have saved Louis, but banished all the Bourbons, has never been satisfactorily explained. Théodore de Lameth's account asserted that Danton had expressed a willingness to spare the king at the end of October, but not at the risk of his own ruin. It has also been suggested that Danton tried to make some accommodation with the Brissotin leaders as late as November 30th., an interview at which he prophesied their downfall. His connection with the attempt to interest the British in contributing to Louis' freedom is complicated by the schemes for bribery which the Spanish attempted to put into practice at the end of 1792. The Spanish ambassador in Paris, Ocariz, apparently had a sum in excess of two million livres at his disposal, but achieved no concrete result. The agent Talon, examined by the Consulate nearly ten years after the events of this chapter, implicated Danton in moves which were

made to obtain the assistance of British ministers. The request for 2 million livres almost certainly never went beyond the ubiquitous W.A. Miles. Pitt did not deny the request, it never reached him. It is quite possible, however, that Danton had set a monetary price on his efforts. (1)

While Danton and others wrestled with their consciences and the difficulties of the ever-changing political situation, a provincial deputy without any definite loyalties to any group of the Convention was working towards the formulation of his ideas relating to the king's trial and its place in the Revolution. His exposition of these ideas at the beginning of 1793 was to prove a turning point, since it convinced the large majority of puzzled and uncertain men of the Plain, the middle group of the Convention, that the Brissotins' delaying tactics were damaging and undermining the state. Bertrand Barère emerged during the months of November 1792 - February 1793 as the spokesman for the majority of uncommitted deputies. The vacillation of the Brissotins had finally convinced him of the need for the Convention to take a final and swift decision on the fate of the king. Early in November he had remarked on the necessity of recog-

(1) Albert Mathiez, "Danton et la mort du roi, d'après un document inédit." Annales Révolutionnaires, 1922. See also A. Soboul, Le Procès de Louis XVI, op. cit. p.p. 24-25, 198-204.

nizing that revolutionary France was being observed by the rest of Europe in an attempt to remind the deputies that total mental isolation could be damaging. Barere had become convinced, by January 1793, that there was a dangerous body of counter-revolution both outside and within France and that to weaken the constituted powers of the Convention by abdicating the decisive role he felt it should take in issues such as Louis' trial would be to play into the hands of men who were bent on the destruction of the republic. His arguments were powerful enough to strike home to numerous deputies who had found little to impress them in the abusive exchanges of the Montagnards and Brissotins. Barere was adamant that the idea of consulting the people in such a case was subversive of the fabric of government -- "Renvoyer au peuple le jugement d'une affaire particulière, c'est détruire la nature du corps constituant; c'est altérer les principes du gouvernement représentatif, c'est reporter au souverain ce que le souverain vous a chargés de faire.... oui, d'après votre caractère conventionnel je soutiens que le renvoi à la ratification du peuple est un tatonnement dangereux, c'est une provocation pusillanime, c'est un dépouillement infidèle, c'est un affaiblissement de votre mission." (1) It should be

(1) Barere's speech to the Convention, January 4th, 1793, Le Moniteur, 15, p.53.

remembered, when assessing the overall effect of Barere's speech in the protracted discussions over Louis' judgement that by early January 1793 there was growing tension in Paris, that the system of government had reached such a height of uncertainty that it was about to be bolstered up by the Comite de Defense Generale⁽¹⁾ and that Dumouriez had returned to Paris breathing recrimination against the Convention and reminding many people of France's increasing difficulties in her relations with the neutral powers of Europe.⁽²⁾ Indeed, however important it may be to attempt to grasp the issues which were at the heart of the king's trial and the divisions and personalities within the Convention, the episode only acquires proper significance when viewed within the context of the general situation of France and particularly the state of public opinion in the country.

(1) The Comite de Defense Generale, which was announced on January 1st. in Kersaint's speech to the Convention, first met on January 5th.

(2) Kersaint's speech, mentioned in the footnote above, had been a reminder of the deterioration of relations with England - Dumouriez's presence in Paris angered many Robespierrists who suspected him of trying to sway the Conseil Executif to restrain the Convention over the king's trial.

It is by no means easy, however, to assess the state of public opinion throughout the provinces of France. To do so would require much research in local archives. It would seem probable, however, judging by the pamphlet literature which abounded at the time, that there was considerable uncertainty throughout France. The Brissotins had an active system of communications with their departments and sent information back to their constituencies; this presented the Montagnards in a very unfavourable light and only blurred the issues which were most closely connected with the trial of Louis XVI. There was talk of sending armed battalions to Paris to free the Convention from the despotism of a minority. Royalist counter-revolutionary agents capitalized on the general atmosphere of insecurity and many pamphlets were published in Louis' defence. The Brissotins attempted to focus departmental attention on their political opponents. Their language became much more extreme as the trial progressed into its final phase, with hints of desperation. In mid-January Salle wrote to his friends in the Meurthe - "Vous dormez et la chose publique est en peril, et sittous les départements ne se lèvent à la fois, elle est perdue. Vigilance! il est temps!"⁽¹⁾

The letter provides evidence of the unwillingness, or

(1) Salle to the departement of the Meurthe, January 15th, quoted in A. Soboul, ed., Le Proces de Louis XVI, p.174.

failure, of the provinces to take any direct action in influencing affairs in Paris. When they examined their consciences many men may have felt that Louis XVI had done wrong and should be punished, even if they were not prepared to say how.

In marked contrast to the provinces' apparent reluctance to take any positive part in the trial of the king was the growing radicalism of expression and outlook in the French capital. The Convention's daily meetings took place against the background of a rising clamour of anti-monarchical sentiment in the section meetings and the publications of the press. However abstract some of the theorizing on the sovereignty of the people may have been, here was a simultaneous indication of the potential forces of the people when they believed that their interests were tied to a specific event or cause. In the first two months of the Convention there was, even within Paris, a significant amount of undecided opinion in the more conservative areas. As the autumn progressed, shortage of food and rising unemployment became more and more connected in the popular mind with the king's trial. There were obvious spurs towards this development. The relative weakness of the Convention enhanced the importance of the discussions in the sectional groups, where increasing numbers of ordinary men, despite Robespierre's explanations, were, in fact, making their opinions felt. The more articulate members of these

assemblies, perhaps influenced by what they had heard from the priest, Jacques Roux, and read, in the Père Duchesne, believed that all the evils would continue while the king, the living symbol of the corruption of the ancien régime survived. This was a more direct interpretation than similar statements by Saint-Just, for these men, though committed to a republican and democratic system, were also intent on keeping staple foods in good supply at reasonable prices, safeguarding their threatened wages and simply being recognized as the possessors of basic human rights. The fate of the king had very immediate implications for them since they suffered while there was general uncertainty in the entire political fabric of France. In the writings of anonymous sans-culottes pamphleteers one can detect claims that were voiced more loudly in 1793-4 and which were, at this earlier stage, entirely unacceptable to the Montagnards. (1) The realization that the Parisian populace might be swayed by agitators toward more extreme expression of their discontent appalled the Brissotins. Again and again they warned the provinces of discontent in Paris and though Santerre, commandant of the national guard, frequently informed the Convention that Paris was tranquil, this was not a feeling which communicated itself with any

(1) Adresse des braves Sans-Culottes à la Convention Nationale, 28 novembre, 1792. 8° L 6⁴¹, 203 (B.N.)

degree of assurance. So great was the problem of tension in the city that the Conseil Executif was instructed to present a report on the state of Paris on January 5th, 1793.

By mid-November, 1792, it was evident that the problem of subsistances, and the Convention's consistent inability to deal with this question in a manner satisfactory to the inhabitants of Paris, was becoming a source of dangerous division. On 16th. November, 36 of the 48 sections presented a petition for urgent measures to be taken over subsistances. The sans-culottes' hatred and fear of hoarders was very strong and would intensify with time. The Parisians were only too ready to remind the deputies of the unhappy precedents of the situation of the capital - "On vous dit que Paris n'a pas de provisions pour un mois, et vous rester dans l'inaction. Qui avez vous charger de pouvoir à la subsistance de cette grande ville, des boulangers, des misérables qui, conjointement avec Necker ont suscité une famine épouvantable en 1789 dont nous n'avons jamais trouvé d'exemple dans l'histoire d'aucun peuple."⁽¹⁾ This pamphlet, a forthright demand for strong action was written at the end of November, 1792. At the beginning of December, Jacques Roux, speaking to the section de l'Observatoire, placed Louis XVI's judgement in the context of the

(1) Adresse des Braves Sans-Culottes, op. cit.

general economic and political crisis. To him, the moment was one of inescapable importance - "il est temps d'apprendre aux peuples de la terre que les nations ne sont plus la propriété des rois, que la vertu seule rend l'homme inviolable et que le crime conduits les tyrans à l'échafaud. La liberté ne sera qu'un vain fantôme, lorsque nous ne ferez pas éclater la foudre de l'égalité sur un monstre détroné."⁽¹⁾

Roux was convinced that the only way to stifle the conspiracy which then threatened France was to remove the king, the figure-head of the counter-revolution. The following day, as if to underline Roux's pleadings, delegates from all 48 sections of Paris came to the Convention to petition for action to be taken over the king's trial - "Dépositaires de la vengeance nationale, que tarde encore votre bras?" To end the inefficiency and uncertainty of the Convention's proceedings the sections proposed a simple solution - "de poser la question comme elle le devrait être. Louis, ci-devant roi des Français, est-il digne de mort? Est-il avant-
ageux à la République de le faire périr sur l'échafaud?"

This, it was suggested, would be the sole topic for discussions in four afternoon sessions per week. The petition ended with the solemn warning - "Souvenez-vous que c'est par le peuple et par le peuple seul que

(1) Jacques Roux to the section de l'Observatoire, 1st December, quoted in Soboul, op. cit. p.p. 88-90.

vous êtes appelés concentrez-vous dans votre mission; l'oeil du maître est sur toute vos actions, et il les pèse au poids de son utilité." (1)

Sectional feeling in Paris grew throughout the month of December. The continued indecision of the Convention in the face of reiterated sans-culottes appeals for definite legislation to ease the economic situation to put a swift end to doubts over the king's judgement and sentence seemed likely to end in a serious crisis. At the end of December the sections of Marseille and Luxembourg had declared themselves to be in a state of insurrection. This was defined as - "un état continuel de défiance utile d'activité, de surveillance, de sollicitude patriotique." (2) Some sections were also trying to arm, an action which Pache, the War Minister, did not view unfavourably. There were continued rumours of the raising of armed forces in the provinces. On January, 11th. Couthon remarked "Ce qui est étonnant, c'est que les directoires des départements se soient crus autorisés d'arrêter la levée d'une force armée. Celui qui a dit que les directoires de départements deviendraient, par l'autorité immense dont ils étaient revêtus, les ennemis dangereux de la liberté, celui-là a dit une grande vérité." (3) Such developments explain the

(1) Petition of the 48 sections, December 2nd, Soboul, op.cit. p.p. 87-88.

(2) Soboul, op. cit. p.p. 191-193.

(3) Couthon to the Convention, January 11th, Le Moniteur, vol. 15, p. 112.

growing panic of the Brissotins, but it should be recognized that Montagnard standing was also threatened by the emergence of strong popular feeling, a feeling which connected hardship with the hesitation of the people's representatives and the continued existence of Louis XVI.

We need to have in mind the pressure of these circumstances in order to grasp the atmosphere which prevailed in the Convention and the streets of Paris. Discussions on the judgement of the king were eventually re-opened on January 14th. From January 15th-19th, with breaks caused only by the need to rest, the deputies discussed the wording of the various questions which they would be required to answer publicly, on the judgement, the appeal to the people, the sentence and the reprieve.

The English government and people, pre-occupied with perfecting their military arrangements had no comprehension of the atmosphere in France at this time. (1) Their only direct source of information was Michael Somers, an Irish priest, whose own situation was extremely difficult. Somers was known to Burke and also to Monro. It was Somers who had prevailed upon the British agent to leave Paris in mid-December.

(1) By the end of December Britain had retreated into a growing defensiveness and isolation, evident in the debates on the Aliens Bill. See below, Chapter 10.

Monro's departure, coinciding with the last days of Louis XVI's trial came at a crucial point for British intelligence, and Somers took it upon himself to fill in the gap. Writing some of his letters in French and others in English, the priest was at pains, initially, to demonstrate his willingness to provide information. Before long, however, he was asking for money to cover his efforts, continuing his reports into the first months of 1793.⁽¹⁾ The British parliament had succeeded in convincing themselves of French iniquity. Their counterparts in France were about to undergo a thoroughly unnerving and dramatic experience in which personal political survival and the future of the Revolution were intertwined.

The solution to the Convention's impasse had been suggested on December 27th, when Saint-Just proposed that each member should mount the tribune and publicly declare his opinion on Louis' guilt. This system was finally adopted on January 14th. The votes were recorded with as much thoroughness as possible, indeed, the burden on the secretaries was very great. A number of deputies, who had seldom, if ever, spoken in debates, now found themselves required to make important pronouncements in front of the assembled Convention and audience of citizens. On the first question, "Louis Capet, ci-devant roi des Français, est-il coupable de conspiration contre la liberté et

(1) Somers to Burges, January and February, 1793, F.O. 27/43

d'attentat contre la sûreté générale de l'État?"

638 deputies voted "yes" out of a total of 720. (1)

The second question dealt with the much-discussed question of popular ratification. Voting on this question was 425 against and 286 for, with nine abstentions. The voting on the penalty began on January 16th, and continued for 24 hours. 387 deputies voted for death, but of these, 26 declared that they supported Mailhe's motion which would have provided for examination of the question of a reprieve. Those voting against death numbered 334. There were 721 members present. The possibility of a reprieve caused uproar amongst the Montagnards, who were sternly reproved by LaFevellière-Lepaux, who had voted Louis' death but did not like the unseemly haste of some deputies when the President declared the session closed, several hundred members stayed behind to protest until Legendre, pointing out that the citizen spectators must be alarmed at such disorder, brought about an adjournment. Voting the next day on the reprieve produced a total of 380 against and 310 for.

Santerre continued to report, as did other observers in Paris, that the town was calm. After the judgement and sentence had been formally pronounced the capital awaited the execution quietly, though the

(1) The voting figures are in M.J. Sydenham, The Girondins, (London, 1960) p.p. 229-230.

assassination of the jacobin Lepelletier St. Fargeau outraged Montagnard opinion and seemed evidence of dark royalist plots. The manner in which Louis died, his last words muffled by the beating drums, would seem to suggest an undercurrent of anxiety on the part of the authorities. What is more certain is that the death of the king appears to have marked an end to restraint. Crime figures for Paris rose markedly in the weeks following Louis' death. The economic situation of Paris worsened until March, 1793, when there was rioting in the streets and much ill-feeling against the Convention. By this time, however, France had other great problems to face. The execution of the king may have been a necessary process for the safety and unity of the republic but within a fortnight the French found themselves contemplating open warfare with England.

Feb.

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Chapter 10.

Great Britain Mobilizes.

"I am strongly inclined to believe that it is the present intention of the prevailing party in France to respect the rights of this country and of the republic..."

Grenville to Auckland, November 23rd. 1792.

"In addition to all this we have seen a code of laws adopted in France, hostile to every other government, a system of anarchy and ambition, setting at defiance all regular authority and treating as unlawful everything which has been sanctioned by the Laws."

William Pitt in the House of Commons, December 21st. 1792.

The developments of the month of December, 1792 in Great Britain were in strong contrast to those of France. While it is perhaps an over-statement to say that by the end of the month Pitt's administration were fully prepared for war, there was a general consensus of opinion, both within and outside Parliament, that war between England and France was an eventuality which would come sooner rather than later. The degree of mobilization seems to have been greater in the psychological sphere than in the military. Indeed, there are certain inconsistencies and hesitations evident in the approach of the British government even as late as February 1st., 1793. But a study of the last two months of peace will reveal that it is idle to suppose that Pitt and his colleagues were upright innocents unjustly set upon by the revolutionaries. Pitt and

Grenville were, in fact, to demonstrate considerable skill in the manipulation of that double-edged weapon, public opinion. There may even have been an element of self-persuasion in the line that they began to adopt towards France. As their tone hardened, so their vision apparently narrowed, until, in the specific instance of the advantages of gaining the French West Indies, traditional concepts of an 18th. century struggle between France and England returned to occupy an important place in British considerations. The French, unlike the British, had some glimmerings of the enormity of the approaching war; such lessons Britain learned only over a period of years. The British approach to war, which begins in December, is a striking mixture of the haphazard and the calculated. The developments of December can best be seen by examining a number of inter-related aspects of domestic and European pre-occupations: the exchanges between British and French diplomats and ministers, Britain's views towards Holland and the West Indies, and the two prongs of mobilization, of opinion in Parliament and of arms in the forces.

In the sphere of Anglo-French relations the month produced some interesting differences in outlook, above all, in the attitudes expressed by some of the French diplomats in Britain. The hardening of the British line seems at last to have convinced them of the reality of the situation. The British, however, obsessed by

the end of the month with the fear that all kinds of contact with France were potentially disruptive of national equilibrium, drew back from exchanges which had apparently held the promise of greater understanding between the two countries. A closer look at the interview which particularly misled them will demonstrate the extent to which French optimism was ill-founded.

The vigour with which Pitt's administration had countered the threat of the supposed menace to law and order was not paralleled immediately in the foreign *part of* sphere. On December 1st. the king had called out the militia and summoned Parliament to meet on the 13th., but on December 2nd., in an uncharacteristic move, Pitt agreed to have an interview with the French agent, Maret. The mere fact that such an interview did take place was a considerable personal triumph for Maret; Chauvelin, the ambassador, had only succeeded, and that with some difficulty, in seeing Grenville.

The exchanges and discussions which formed the background to the Pitt-Maret conference are by no means clear, since they involved individuals on the fringes of politics and diplomacy, whose activities are not directly relevant to the wider sweep of Anglo-French relations. Maret was thoroughly questioned by the radical member of Parliament William Smith, an acquaintance of both Pitt and the Frenchman, before the

interview was permitted. (1) It is impossible to say whether the hope of an interview with Pitt had always been in the back of Maret's mind. On his way to England from Paris, Maret had consulted Dumouriez in Belgium; what passed between them is not known. All that can be stated with certainty is that during the third week of November Maret had succeeded in persuading Madame de Sillery and her pupil, Mademoiselle d'Orleans to go back to France. (2)

At the same time, another Englishman, who also knew Maret but who had not apparently considered him as an ideal choice for an interview with Pitt, was attempting to arrange a meeting for the minister with Scipion Morgue, under-secretary to the French legation in London. The Englishman, William Augustus Miles, had been employed with Hugh Elliot on intelligence activities in Paris in 1790 at the time of the Nootka Sound Crisis. (3) Miles was a man of great self-importance and ill-judgement. Believing that his influence greater than it actually was, Miles probably was not in the confidence of Pitt or his close advisers and so would not have known of the administration's reasons for accepting the idea of an informal exchange of views.

(1) Maret to Lebrun, December 2nd., 1792, A.A.E., C.P. Angleterre 584.

(2) See above, Chapter 7.

(3) See above, Chapter 1.

views. (1)

The most plausible explanation for why Pitt chose to see Maret was one that could not have been known to the French either. Maret's proposals came at an opportune time. Despite their professions of reluctance to make any move which would appear to acknowledge the possibility of official links between the French republic and Britain, Pitt's government had considered the possibility of sending a man to Paris to assess the situation there at first hand. Rumours to this effect were circulating in the radical press in the last week of November and even reached the United Provinces though they were strongly denied by Grenville. (2)

(1) Miles revealed his absence of understanding in the choice of the unreliable Morgue for the projected interview. Morgue's personal reports to Lebrun (A.A.E., C.P. Angleterre, Supplément 29) are full of bias and inaccuracy. Miles does, however, seem to have been genuinely alarmed at the collapse of society which he considered inevitable should England and France go to war. He continued to bombard Pitt with notes and advice until he was forbidden to correspond further in 1795. (P.R.O. 30/8/159)

(2) The rumours appeared in the Morning Chronicle and were repeated in Le Moniteur. It was on November 26th. that Grenville informed Auckland that such rumours were untrue. See F.O. 37/41.

The Foreign Secretary may well have been annoyed by this type of speculation at a time when he was preparing to see the French ambassador. The man who might have gone was Edward Long, a Treasury under-secretary. (1) A detailed set of instructions intended for Long were written some time at the end of November. These reveal especially British interest in the stability of the régime in Paris and in the French economy and French military preparations. (2) The possibility of Pitt himself representing the British viewpoint and sounding out a French diplomat seemed to obviate Long's mission. The British government was always very sensitive to the possibility of compromising itself. Maret's presence in England provided them with a convenient alternative. (3) But Maret, though a

(1) Edward Long, Lord Farnborough, - Closely connected with the administration at this time he was already involved with the Foreign Office Under-Secretary, James Bland Burges, in the financial backing of the government newspaper, The Sun. See A. Aspinall, Politics and the Press, p. 78

(2) The instructions are in F.O. 27/40.

(3) George III in particular was aware of this, "it keeps the staff in our hands instead of (in) a degree placing it in their hands." George III to Lord Grenville, December 3rd., 1792, H.M.C. Fortescue MS, op. cit. ii, p. 351.

senior official in the Ministère des Affaires Etrangères had been out of France for some time, and since the ostensible purpose of his mission was to return Mademoiselle d'Orleans to France, he may not have been entirely certain of the French government's viewpoint. Consequently there was a certain vagueness in his statements. The main points of the conversation dwelt on the possibility of future exchanges and on the chief grievances of the British government, Holland and the 19th. November decree. Pitt was firm and throughout the interview Maret found himself on the defensive. Pitt made it clear that the declaration to open the Scheldt was seen as a serious infraction on the rights of Holland - "we were fully determined, if the case arose, to give our utmost support to our ally." Maret sought to be re-assuring - "it was very much the wish of the French government to be on good terms with this country; that these were the sentiments of M. Le Brun when he left Paris about three weeks ago; that he believed they continued to be those of General Dumouriez; and that from the despatches of Monsieur Chauvelin..... he believed they continued to be those of the Conseil Executif."⁽¹⁾ Maret tried to present the situation as one of mutual misunderstanding, but he had to admit that public opinion at home now

(1) The text of the discussion is in the Auckland Papers, B M Add MSS 34,445.

so sensitive of national pride, might preclude unofficial talks.

Pitt's emphasis, however, was on one particular item - "Maret," he said, "must have seen the impression made here by the decree in France avowing a design of endeavouring to extend their principles of government by raising disturbances in other countries, that while this was professed or attempted and till we had full security on this point, no explanation could answer its purpose and that such a conduct must be considered as an act of hostility to neutral nations." Maret's response was interesting - "He answered that he..... had seen the decree I mentioned with consternation; that he believed it passed only in a moment of fermentation and went beyond what was intended..... that he believed it was not conformable to the sentiments of the Conseil executif and that they might possibly find means to revise it." Such a statement, if made with genuine conviction reveals that Maret was strikingly out of touch with the general temper of France. Pitt made no comment as to his own opinion of what had passed between himself and the Frenchman. British ignorance of what was actually going on in France was hardly lifted; Pitt seems to have been less concerned with probing than with making his own government's position abundantly clear. He had evidently not yet decided to abandon neutrality, but the fierce anti-French tone, which characterized many of the speeches

after the meeting of Parliament was more likely to have an effect on him than the basic inconclusiveness of his interview with Maret. The meeting was virtually passed over in British diplomatic correspondence.

The recall of Parliament undoubtedly strengthened Pitt's hands, but it caused consternation among French diplomats in Britain. The fact that Maret had succeeded in stealing a march on every one else caused Noël to sulk when he got back from Belgium; Chauvelin managed more restraint than might have been expected. He, like most of his compatriots, seems to have been jolted into a sudden awareness of the overall implications of the situation. The mere circumstance that in so short a time the government had seemingly managed an awesome control of public opinion awakened Chauvelin to the nearness of war. "Tout se tait," he wrote on December 7th., "les assemblées délibérantes refuge des seuls hommes libres de l'Angleterre sont être successivement fermées..... L'Argus seule feuille publique indépendante et vraiment courageuse ne paraît plus..... en un mot, le gouvernement règne non seulement sans résistance mais sans contradiction."⁽¹⁾ The decree of 19th. November, he concluded, had done the French cause in England immense harm.

The French ministry, however, did not immediately grasp the importance of British conduct. Lebrun

(1) Chauvelin to Lebrun, December 7th. 1792, C.P.

persisted in believing that England's concern about her internal situation would act in France's favour. Greater communication between the two countries would clear up most outstanding difficulties. It was only after digesting his diplomats' reports and George III's speech to the opening session of Parliament on December 13th. that Lebrun became convinced of the significant change in British outlook. On December 19th. at a time when the Convention was awaiting the preparation of Louis XVI's defence, he made a report to the Convention which brought the deputies up to date with the current situation of relations between England and France. (1) Both in the presentation of his speech and the comment on it which he subsequently made in the diplomatic correspondence, Lebrun seems to have felt that by mid-December it was impossible to write dispassionately about foreign affairs. He adopted the kind of approach which he believed the public temper required of him. On 20th. December he wrote to Noël - "Je vous envoie ci-joint copie d'un rapport que j'ai fait hier à la Convention nationale. Cette pièce vous mettra au courant des idées de ce pays-ci et vous fera voir que je ne suis presque plus le maître de l'affaire, la nation s'en est en quelque sort emparée par la

(1) Report by the Ministre des Affaires Etrangères to the Convention, December 19th. Reproduced in Le Journal des Debats and Le Moniteur, vol. 15, p. 496

grande approbation donnée à ce rapport et son envoi aux 83 départements." (1) Here the minister was admitting that he had been obliged to write in the rhetorical tone of the Revolution and that in this respect his freedom was circumscribed by public opinion. Lebrun as a former journalist was very sensitive to such difficulties. The report was well-received because it represented the British government as frightened for no good reason; any similar speech would have been well-received by men whose basic pre-occupation at that time lay with the convulsions of their own country. Yet while Lebrun's report may have passed over the heads of most of the deputies it caused extreme irritation in England. Speakers in Parliament cited it as further proof of the arrogance and irresponsibility of the French government. They particularly disliked the sentence which warned that if it was the British government's intention to force France to a rupture, then France would issue a separate appeal to the British nation, whose interests surely lay elsewhere.

The French minister, despite the somewhat intimidating tone of his report, still saw no immediate threat of war. The French in England were much more aware of the reality of the situation and began to proffer opinions. As early as December 16th., two days after

(1) Lebrun to Noël, December 20th. A.A.E.

C.P. Angleterre, 584.

a second and extremely chilly interview with Pitt, Maret was suggesting that the Convention should revoke the decree opening the Scheldt. (1) Chauvelin and Noël also put forward their views on the means left of averting war. The ambassador claimed that the king's trial was damaging the French cause in England. He was afraid that Louis' execution would be used as the signal for an organized outcry against France. He also felt that to undo the damage of the 19th. November decree it might be salutary to make speeches in the Convention stressing that the measure had not been aimed at Britain. Beyond this Chauvelin realized that at this critical point some kind of contact must be maintained - "Enfin, citoyen, il me semble que si le Conseil exécutif juge à propos de faire aucune tentative de négociation, ce serait bien plutôt en Hollande qu'en Angleterre qu'il serait facile et profitable d'en engager une." The Dutch government, he thought, was more flexible than the British - "et l'on m'assure de plus que Lord Auckland..... qui a la plus grande influence sur le cabinet hollandais est entièrement contre la guerre et n'a cessé de' en détourner M. Pitt." (2) Here Chauvelin, formerly so proud of his position as ambassador to England, was virtually suggesting that

(1) Maret to Lebrun, December 16th., A.A.E.

C.P. Angleterre, 584.

(2) Chauvelin to Lebrun, 18th December, A.A.E.,

C.P. Angleterre, 584.

someone else would have to take on the task of averting war. His views were almost prophetic, for it was in Holland that the negotiation between Dumouriez and Auckland foundered in February, 1793.⁽¹⁾ The advice, although intelligent, was not calculated to comfort Lebrun, who had been trying since late October to remove de Maulde from the Hague. He had ordered Noël, on December 7th., to take up the position of charge d'affaires in the United Provinces, but it was another month before Noël arrived there.

Noël, too, had his views on the deterioration of the Anglo-French relationship. The great change in the atmosphere of Britain was especially obvious to him when he returned from his visit to Belgium. It was, he said, futile to expect any kind of revolt against the administration. In these circumstances France should proceed with extreme circumspection. From mid-December on he was urging the minister to increase French naval preparations but he seems to have regarded this as a sensible measure rather than an aggressive one. The prospect of British involvement in the war was one of the utmost gravity for France - "Elle (la guerre) nous coûte déjà immensément et c'est une question de savoir si nos finances pourraient se relever du coup que cette accession d'un ennemi formidable lui porterait."⁽²⁾

(1) See below, Chapter 11.

(2) Noël to Lebrun, December 14th., A.A.E.

The French diplomats in England were in a position of bewilderment and embarrassment. The slowness of communication and the overall uncertainty of their own government's policy produced confusion. The irony of their dilemma lay in the fact that they had realized the gravity of the deterioration of relations between England and France, but having abandoned pettiness for a number of frank and constructive suggestions, found that they were caught in the cross-currents of political and public pressure in both countries. Any doubts about the direction in which Britain was moving disappeared with the introduction of the Aliens Bill. In the discussions over the bill and its general application to all foreign residents, the French ambassador was treated with a flat insensitivity which must have seemed to him like calculated rudeness. His initial reactions were two-fold. Firstly, he wrote to his government on December 24th, suggesting that they threaten to terminate the 1786 treaty.⁽¹⁾ Secondly, he wrote to Pitt on December 26th, asking for an interview. His language betrayed his uneasiness of spirit. He would, he said, have awaited more precise instructions from his minister, "mais le temps s'écoule et se perd pour les deux pays en les laissant à l'égard, l'un de l'autre dans une position douteuse, pénible et indigne de tous les deux!" France detested the idea of war

(1) Chauvelin to Lebrun, December 24th., A.A.E., C.P. Angleterre, 584.

with Great Britain and would only accept it with the deepest regret after she had exhausted all honourable means to avoid it. (1)

French diplomats may have been acute in their assessment of what they considered to be the growing intractability of Great Britain. It is true that throughout December there was an increase in anti-French sentiment, particularly in Parliament, but the government had yet to come down squarely on the side of war. They had ample reason for restraint. Awareness of the insufficiency and almost incredible slowness of Dutch preparations seems to have caught even Auckland by surprise. For some weeks, too, there lingered plans for mediation and an end to the war in Europe before its scope was widened. These ideas were formulated in a discussion between the British and Russian governments. (2) The British, however, were always tempted to allow traditional concepts of Anglo-French warfare to intrude on their considerations.

In no respect was this more evident than in a renewed interest in the French West Indies which appeared at the beginning of December. A number of the Caribbean islands had shown signs of hostility to the republic and St. Domingo had been in revolt since the end of 1791. In October of 1792, a number of soldiers and representatives sent by the Convention were fired

(1) Chauvelin to Lebrun, December 26th., A.A.E.

C.P. Angleterre, 584.

(2) See below,

on when their ships attempted to land on Martinique and Guadeloupe and were forced to accept the protection of British vessels, who escorted them to the nearby island of St. Christopher. (1) The British were interested in the islands because of their resources and their strategic importance. At the beginning of December a possibility was held out to them that they might be able to deprive the French of their naval significance in this area by lending support to the counter-revolution on the islands. On December 5th., Lord Hawkesbury, President of the Board of Trade, had an interview with an official named de Curt from the island of Guadeloupe. (2) Hawkesbury suspected that de Curt was as much interested in money as in safeguarding his island, but a memoir that de Curt wrote around this time reveals that he may have had other motives:—"le système républicain est de dissoudre le système colonial, c'est à dire de chasser ou massacrer les blancs pour mettre en place leurs usurpateurs et leurs bourreaux." (3) The administration appear to have become steadily more interested in the West Indies in January. Pitt spoke of them to Malmesbury as an

(1) The incident is reported in C.O. 152/72 (Leeward Is.) See also letter from St. Lucia, 3rd November A.N. DXXV, 118.

(2) Hawkesbury's Memoir, December 5th, F.O. 27/41.

(3) Undated Memoir in F.O. 95/632.

advantage which would be derived from the war.⁽¹⁾

The London Times at the end of January thundered loud on the benefits of possessing the French West Indies. Only the Earl of Wycombe, in Parliament, raised a dissident voice - "What could we gain by possessing ourselves of any of their West India islands? On the contrary, he rather thought it would be advantageous to this country if our own West India islands were independent of it."⁽²⁾ Wycombe considered the cost great and the rising racial discontent dangerous, but his views were not shared by the majority of his contemporaries in government and the significance of this area of French influence grew rather than diminished in British minds.

The West Indies were a possible bonus in the minds of some politicians weighing the advantages and disadvantages of war. But there was another area, of more immediate importance to the British, which could not be overlooked and which did not provide tranquil musings. The inherent weakness of the Anglo-Dutch connexion was a fact slowly and grudgingly realized by the British government, yet if war with France was to be seriously contemplated there would inevitably come a point in which a difference in outlook would manifest

(1) See below, Chapter 11,

(2) Wycombe in the House of Commons during the debate on the Aliens Bill, Cobbett, Parliamentary History, December, 1792.

itself. Throughout the autumn of 1792 the Dutch administration had lived in continual fear of being over-run, as the Austrian Netherlands had been. Lord Auckland was a conscientious and hard-working ambassador, who had co-operated closely with Van de Spiegel, the Grand Pensionary, in the protracted negotiations with de Maulde and Dumouriez. But even Auckland had become aware that his experience and standing at the Hague did not enable him to read the minds of Dutch ministers. Auckland's superiors in Whitehall were concerned about Holland on three main points. Firstly, that adequate defensive preparations, if such could be achieved at all, would take many months. Secondly, and perhaps even more revealingly, Grenville began to harbor suspicions that the Dutch ministers were following an independent line of policy with regard to France, and were not to be trusted. Lastly, the British government seem to have taken seriously the threat posed by the Dutch Patriots.

At the beginning of December, Grenville first began to press Auckland for information on Dutch military affairs. Recent French actions seemed to him to imply a threat to the Dutch - "in these circumstances Great Britain must be informed of Dutch naval and military preparations."⁽¹⁾ Replying to this despatch a week later,

Auckland did not seem unduly alarmed. He wrote that

(1) Grenville to Auckland, December 4th., F.O. 37/41.

the United Provinces were quiet and preparations were going ahead. The pressure from the Foreign Office, however, caused him to make rather more searching enquiries which revealed the true readiness of the Dutch. Orders for the equipping of a fleet had to go out to the requisite naval council, or admiralties, as they were called, in each Dutch province. There was no national system for fitting out a navy -

"The proposition is made for the augmentations mentioned in my last dispatches, but it must be referred to all the Provinces, before it can be carried into execution and I am assured that this must be the case even if, the enemy were within the frontiers."⁽¹⁾ It is ⁱⁿ⁻conceivable that the British government should have been ignorant of one of the most important aspects of the Dutch constitution; they had simply overlooked its effects in a crisis. Grenville's tone became more firm but there was little which could be done at so late a stage. On December 18th. he wrote to Auckland that the only possible means of deterring France would be considerable and swift mobilization. He accompanied his official despatch with a private letter stressing that Dutch preparations should be kept up, if only in appearance. The land forces of the republic were, he thought, "most miserably deficient."⁽²⁾ Almost at

(1) Auckland to Grenville, 2nd January, F.O. 37/43.

(2) Grenville to Auckland, December 18th., H.M.C. report, Fortescue MSS, op. cit., ii, p.p. 359 - 60

once, Auckland pressed for a small force to be sent to cruise off Flushing, as he had first done on November 20th., adding the disquieting news that the Pensionary believed that Zealand would fall if attacked at that moment.⁽¹⁾ Finally, on December 29th., the Foreign Office relented and allowed a very small force of frigates, commanded by Commodore Murray, to cruise off Flushing and patrol the coast. Grenville made it clear that despite the unsatisfactory situation in Holland, the expedition would be a short one -

"I am very uneasy about the Republic, from the impression that I have received of its want of preparation; especially when I see the time which preparation requires here, where we are in the habit of it. With respect to our frigates sent to Flushing, I may say to you, in confidence, that we cannot press so effectually as we ought until they return, and that a press may become absolutely necessary within ten days or a fortnight."⁽²⁾ Murray's expedition only served to reinforce impressions of Dutch inefficiency.⁽³⁾

This lamentable lack of defence would have been serious enough in itself, but Grenville believed he had other grounds for complaint - "From some means of

(1) Auckland to Grenville, December 20th., F.O. 37/42.

(2) Grenville to Auckland, December 29th., H.M.C.

Fortescue MSS, op. cit. ii, p. 361.

(3) See Murray's letter of January 10th., 1793, in F.O. 37/43.

information I suspect that it enters into the head of some of the Dutch ministers that England can be made the principal in this war and Holland the ally, furnishing her contingent and carrying on her commerce with France. The extravagance of such an idea can only be equalled by its want of all good faith.... the government here could not stand the reproach of such duperly; if there is such an idea, the sooner we wash our hands of it the better; and Holland will then last as a country about three weeks more." (1) Grenville's claim was an overstatement of the Dutch viewpoint and is striking evidence of British insensitivity to the perilous position of a small nation which could foresee only annihilation as the result of an open conflict between France and Great Britain. A further element, which both British and Dutch governments perhaps invested with more importance than was actually justifiable, was the threat of disorder or insurrection posed by the Dutch patriots. On December 4th. the Foreign Office, using military men as secret agents as it so often did, sent a Captain Kempthorne to infiltrate the patriots. (2) His findings do not seem to have given rise to undue alarm. In fact, the Patriots were in a difficult position.

(1) Grenville to Auckland, December 29th. H.M.C.

Fortescue MSS, ii, p. 361.

(2) Aust to Auckland, December 4th., F.O. 37/42.

Their sole reliance was placed on Dumouriez as the man who would save Holland, as he had saved Belgium. They were strong in the ports, particularly Amsterdam, but did not have the strength to do anything other than harass the government.⁽¹⁾ Dumouriez was doing little more than play games with them; he scarcely knew his own mind at this point and was uncertain whether his army could last the winter in Belgium.

British suspicions and alarms about the Dutch at the end of December reflect the overall inconsistencies of the government's approach and outlook. Unsure whether aggression was indeed the best means of defence or justified now as the most realistic way to approach the state of Anglo-French relations, the British ministers were still toying with the hope that a last-minute plan of mediation by the neutral powers would avert total war. The plan was drawn up after a discussion between Grenville and Vorontsov, the Russian

(1) The Patriots seem to have become increasingly aware that despite the apparent paralysis of the Orange administration, they were not in themselves a strong enough force to overthrow it. Dumouriez's reluctance to give assistance was matched by that of the French embassy in the Hague; de Maulde, as early as October 29th, evidently became afraid that the Patriots were getting out of hand. See A.A.E., C.P. Hollande, 584.

ambassador, in London, on December 29th. The meeting had ranged over a number of points relative to any proposed peace plan and arrangements which might be made if war became unavoidable. The memorandum produced revealed with great clarity the restricted understanding of two great neutral powers of the temper and circumstances of the French Revolution at the turn of the year 1792-3.⁽¹⁾ Further, it raises points about the aims of Catherine II herself at this time. The British government was still standing by the cardinal points of its policy of neutrality; it would anticipate interference in French affairs for security when its political interests were endangered but it would not become involved in any attempt to establish deliberately a specific form of government in France. Grenville, in writing to Auckland, repeated what he had said to the Russian ambassador. If a binding agreement could be reached there were two main points to be explored, - "the line of conduct to be followed previous to the commencement of hostilities and with a view, if possible, to avert them, and the nature and amount of the forces which the powers engaged in this concert might be enabled to use, supposing such extremities unavoidable." The terms of peace, it was suggested, should include the following points: - French arms should be withdrawn into French territory,

(1) The memorandum is in F.O. 65/23, Grenville to Whitworth, December 29th.

conquests should be abandoned, acts injurious to the sovereignty of other nations rescinded and a pledge made not to foment trouble against other government. In return for these concessions from the French, the hostile powers must abandon all interference in French domestic affairs. On January 6th., Grenville sent a copy similarly worded to the British representative in Sardinia, commenting that should France accept such terms, it might be possible "to establish in the usual mode a correspondence and intercourse with such power in France with whom they might conclude such an agreement...." But he immediately negatived this apparently reasonable proposal by adding in cypher - "I think it proper to mention to you that the situation of affairs between this country and France is such as may not improbably lead to the breaking out of immediate hostilities before any plan of concert..... can be established."(1)

In fact, the government were cautious lest the Russian initiative might be nothing more than a manoeuvre. It was widely suspected that Catherine II had designs on Poland and that English involvement in the European war would leave her entirely free to do as she pleased with the unfortunate Poles. The Empress had reacted almost hysterically to the French Revolution. Her life's work of building up the Russian monarchy

(1) Grenville to Trevor, January 10th., Add MSS 34,446

inspired her detestation of revolutionary ideas. She saw the war in Europe as a diversion beneficial to her own plans. Both British and French representatives at the Court of St. Petersburg had reported that communications between west and eastern Europe were so slow that Russian knowledge of affairs was often backward and scanty.⁽¹⁾ Charles Whitworth the capable British envoy, believed that there was a further explanation for the Russian outlook. Catherine II's court and ministers were, he said, in general ignorant about the west and sometimes not particularly interested in it. Grenville knew enough of the Russians to be only warily optimistic about their proposals.

The uncertainties of the war in Europe and the variety of British pre-occupations in foreign relations contributed towards the somewhat disordered pragmatism of the administration's approach to war and mediation in December. One should be wary, however, of overstressing this curiously inconclusive period in foreign affairs. Pitt was an experienced, if not brilliant, politician. Such arrangements for the initial defence of the realm as were thought advisable had been going forward since mid-November. Yet Pitt was already, and probably despite himself, becoming a man of the

(1) Report on the state of Russia from Montanier, November 1st., A.A.E. C.P. Russie, 136 and Whitworth to Grenville, 12th.-23rd. November, F.O. 65/23.

revolutionary era. The strange and unpredictable phenomenon, public opinion, figured in his considerations as well as those of the men who were soon to become his adversaries. The scare in November had been a valuable object lesson but for all its very evident success the government remained a little uneasy as to whether the flood of loyalism would prove of lasting efficacy. Any doubts which Pitt and his ministers may have had about the renewed vigour of outlook of the group in the country on which they placed their greatest reliance for support, the landed gentry, were dispelled during the new session of parliament. The determination of members of Parliament to make Britain safe against the French menace, even if it meant war, seems to have fed on itself. Gone were the accents of bewilderment of November. War even began to assume the proportions of a Holy Crusade. In these circumstances the frequently ridiculous remarks which were made about France and the Revolution drowned the voices of the handful of moderates, some of whom perhaps did not understand the Revolution itself but certainly had a vivid awareness of the horrors of war. In defence of the form of their society and government the parliamentary majority were prepared to sacrifice some of the most dearly-held precepts of the constitution. There was some truth in the Opposition's assertion that the Aliens Bill was an anticipation of the suspension of the Habeas Corpus

Act. But the Opposition itself provided Pitt with further cause for satisfaction. The split which had developed in mid-November was unbridgeable a month later. A small group of about fifty men were left supporting Fox. Burke, Windham, Elliot and Malmesbury, supported the government's measures. Portland, nominally head of the Whigs, wavered, but his personal attachment to Fox proved too strong at this point.⁽¹⁾ Supporting the Aliens Bill Burke made one of his most theatrical speeches; opposing it Fox one of his most eloquent and well-argued, yet both of these men were outside the mainstream of parliamentary sentiment, which put the defence of the status quo in England above all else. The government found that Parliament was not merely supporting them, but propelling them.

The government found it necessary to make a lengthy, if none too specific, justification for the steps they had recently taken. In the King's speech, and increasingly during the course of debate, they drew a parallel between trouble in England and the menace of the Revolution. England could not rest secure unless the French influence was combatted,

(1) On the state of the Whig Party at this point see H. Butterfield, "Charles James Fox and the Whig Opposition in 1792," Cambridge Historical Journal IX, 1949, p.p. 292 - 330, and F. O'Gorman, The Whig Party and the French Revolution, Manchester, 1967, Chapter iii, pt. 2, p.p. 90 - 122.

with whatever means might be necessary. The King's speech issued a sombre warning to the French government - "I have carefully observed a strict neutrality in the present war on the continent and have uniformly abstained from any interference with respect to the internal affairs of France; but it is impossible for me to see without the most serious uneasiness, the strong and increasing indications which have appeared there of an intention to excite disturbances in other countries, to disregard the rights of neutral nations and to pursue views of conquest and aggrandizement... Under all these circumstances I have felt it my indispensable duty to have recourse to those means of prevention and internal defence with which I am entrusted by law...."(1) This statement, and particularly the reference to the state of the country, was enlarged upon in Dundas' speech to the House of Commons justifying government steps. He was the first of many speakers to assume without any body of evidence that the addresses of congratulation sent by the L.C.S. and similar groups to the Convention constituted a treasonable connection between certain people in England and the French Revolution - "He would first call their attention to our situation at home, where there was clearly a systematical design to overturn the Constitution.

(1) Speech of George III at the opening session of Parliament, re-printed in the Morning Chronicle for December 13th.

The proceedings of different societies afforded full proof of this.... the example of France had been held out for imitation, not only with regard to their object but likewise with regard to the means of attaining that object. An example had thus been held out of breaking down all distinctions and giving a blow which should at once prove fatal to the Monarchy and aristocracy of this country."⁽¹⁾ Seldom had the fears of the ruling class in late 1792 been so clearly formulated. The government managed to smooth over the doubts about the illegality of their summoning out the militia and re-assembling parliament. No-one was very interested in whether the letter of the law had been observed or not. The thunder of approval and the overwhelming defeat of measures suggested by Fox, such as the sending of an ambassador to Paris, further strengthened the administration's conviction that more direct measures would be acceptable. The Opposition, speaking firmly, but more and more aware that they were voices crying in the wilderness, did not oppose the increased armament discussed on December 20th. Secure in the spate of anti-Gallicanism, the government did not need to specify whether they intended war or not. Pitt himself said, "On the question, whether peace would or would not be preserved, he would not

(1) Dundas in the debates on the King's speech, Cobbett, Parliamentary History, December 13th - 20th. 1792.

give an opinion, but if it could be preserved consistently with national honour, consistently with good faith, consistently with our own internal security and consistently with the safety and interest of all Europe, it would not be broken."⁽¹⁾

The administration was, in fact, primarily concerned with getting Parliamentary agreement to a measure which epitomized its outlook on the connection between domestic and foreign politics. This was the Aliens Bill, first introduced by Grenville into the House of Lords on December 19th. The ideas behind the Aliens Bill were not new; they had first entered Dundas' head in September with the influx of French after August 10th.⁽²⁾ Events of November and the fear inspired by the spread of French principles had fixed the idea in the government mind. Grenville was firm on the justification for the bill - "the safety of the state was not to be sacrificed to hospitality; and whatever was necessary for that safety was not to be blamed."⁽³⁾ The bill put considerable restrictions on the daily life of a foreign arrival or resident.

(1) Pitt in the debates on the increase in armament, December 20th., 1792, Cobbett, op. cit.

(2) See Chapter 5.

(3) Grenville in the debates on the Alien Bill, December 29th., 1792. Cobbett, op. cit.

The names and descriptions of all newcomers were noted on arrival and their arms or ammunition confiscated. They were not permitted to leave their port of arrival until a chief magistrate or two Justices of The Peace had issued them with a passport, specifying the name of the town of their destination. For altering a passport or obtaining it under a false name a person could be banished. Any alien already suspect could be immediately deported. Finally, all foreigners who had arrived since January, 1792, apart from merchants and their servants, might be required to live in areas designated by the crown, to report to the chief magistrate in their locality, and surrender all weapons. The act spread alarm among the foreign community. Few could readily understand the precise effects of the act and were uncertain about their position under it. To meet the flood of enquiries, the government opened a new sub-department, the Aliens Office, in mid-January. William Huskisson⁽¹⁾ was named as senior official.

(1) Huskisson, William, 1770-1830. Protected by his great uncle, physician to British Embassy in Paris. Lived in France. Became Lord Gower's private secretary. Returned to England, after August 10th., 1792. January, 1793 became advisor to French emigrés. 1795 under-secretary-at-war. Resigned with Pitt, 1801, but remained in post by request of Lord Hobart. His support of Canning held back his career. 1822 President of Board of Trade. Killed in train accident, 1830.

The bill met with general support, even from government opponents like Portland. The speeches of approval revealed how completely the government's interpretation of the dangerous conjuncture of foreign and domestic difficulties was shared by others. The men who spoke were less concerned with restricting the freedom of movement of foreign residents than with stifling seditious writings and the seditious spirit recently so obvious in England. The spectre of Paine appeared once more. Attacking the Society for Constitutional Information for recommending the second part of the Rights of Man to its members, Robert Jenkinson, the future Lord Liverpool, said "Those..... who circulated such a book could not have any wish for a reformation, but must aim at an overthrow of our constitution." He lamented the effect such writing must have on the lower orders of society, who became disaffected by the promise of a more equable life and lacked the education to see the flaw in Painite arguments. In particular, the book aimed at "persons, who from not having property or stake in the country, were, or would be eager in adventure and had nothing to check their rage of experiment and innovation..... He thought that any step that tended to the diminution of French influence in this country was prudent." Fox was to scorn the steps which the administration had taken to dispel sedition - "Could not ministers have prosecuted Paine without an army?" Pitt, when he spoke in

defence of the bill was adamant that the French threat was now omnipresent. He gave a short resume of recent events which led him to make a direct onslaught on the republican regime. "We have seen a code of laws adopted in France, hostile to every other government, a system of anarchy and ambition, setting at defiance all regular authority and treating as unlawful everything which has been sanctioned by the laws of other countries.... as their ambition was unbounded so the anarchy, which they hoped to establish was universal. When there were men in this country connected with people actuated by such principles it surely became a matter of the most serious consideration." His concluding words are vital to our understanding of the mentality of the British government at the end of 1792 - "It was not till lately that the danger had been brought near to this country and its allies. It was only the retreat of the Duke of Brunswick and the success of the French arms, with the consequences which had followed events so rapid and unexpected which it was impossible to foresee and which defied even the smallest conjecture, which rendered the danger so imminent and the necessity of preparations so urgent on the part of this country."⁽¹⁾ The mood of Parliament had materially contributed towards the preparations then proceeding in other, more practical spheres, Psychologically, Britain was far

(1) Pitt in the debates on the Aliens Bill, Cobbett op. cit.

on the road to mobilization when she entered the year 1793.

The government, however, was only too aware that determination to resist France could not alone be considered as an adequate preparation for war. It is important to trace the development and degree of actual mobilization in England in the months immediately before the outbreak of war, since illumination of this aspect contributes towards a greater understanding of the spirit in which Britain entered the war and even the indecisiveness of the earlier months of the conflict. Mobilization, consistent with the general picture of British policy towards France, which emerges in December as a mixture of the belligerent and the uncertain, was a surprisingly disorganized affair. Strengthening of the fleet, always the most important service, began as a defensive measure; on 15th. November, Pitt wrote to Dundas - "Besides augmentation on land I much fear that unless the affairs of the continent speedily take a more favourable turn, we must also add to our naval force, as the only way to ensure respect to ourselves and still more to our allies, the Dutch....."(1) This essentially negative outlook did not provide admiralty, captains, crew or ship-builders with any clear lead. On November 3rd.,

(1) Pitt to Dundas, November 15th., Pitt Papers, vol ii, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Nelson had written to his patron the Duke of Clarence, sounding him out on the possibility of being given a ship; but this was a lean period for Nelson, who had fallen out with Admiral Hood, and he spent most of his letter lamenting the seditious atmosphere which prevailed in Norfolk.⁽¹⁾ Nelson might have taken some professional comfort from the fact that there was a marked increase in the attempts at recruitment, in the orders issued to captains to join their ships and the work being carried on in the dockyards, especially from late November onwards.⁽²⁾ But the government was coping with a number of difficulties. Many ships of the line which constituted the backbone of the fighting force of the navy, were in other parts of the world, the West Indies, the Mediterranean or the Indian Ocean.⁽³⁾ The number of ships mustered in home waters builds considerably in the last months of 1792. On November 26th, 1792 the total number was 42; by January 7th. it had risen to 71, and by February 11th. it was 105.⁽⁴⁾ Then too, before a really effective programme of mobilization could be put into practice, the government

(1) Nelson to the Duke of Clarence, November 3rd.

Nelson's Despatches, ed. Sir N.H. Nicolas, vol 1, p.p. 292-3.

(2) See A D M.6/24, warrants and commissions.

(3) A D M.2/123.

(4) A D M. 7/455-457.

needed the monetary supplies which parliament alone could vote. Increases in the navy estimates were not voted till December 20th. The confidence which Pitt had shown in January, 1792, when the estimates for both army and navy were out back, must now have seemed misplaced. Lastly, a familiar problem, to which force was the only solution, began to show itself once more. Although bounties to enlisting seamen were first offered on December 1st., and a large recruiting centre under the direction of a Captain Harmood set up in London, the response in the capital and in the provinces was light.⁽¹⁾ It became obvious that a press would be necessary; but resistance to the press was increasingly organized and articulate, especially in the troublesome north-eastern ports.⁽²⁾

The problems of fleet mobilization were not merely domestic. The government was naturally extremely interested in having some means of knowing the present naval strength of its rival and the extent of the preparations which were going on in the French ports. British naval intelligence would appear to have been far from satisfactory. As early as December 5th., orders were sent to Plymouth to observe and procure good information concerning the numbers, force and fitness for the sea of the French ships equipped, equipping or under

(1) Orders to Capt. Harry Harmood, 5th. December, Adm. 2/123.

(2) Letters of late January and early February in H.O. 42/24.

orders to be equipped at that port. (Brest)" (1)

Any squadron putting to sea was to be followed.

Similar orders were sent to Portsmouth to observe Le Havre and Cherbourg. Towards the end of the month,

two lieutenants were ordered to take cutters across the Channel and make their own reports. (2) The

British had earlier asked for assistance in gathering naval intelligence from the Dutch but it is clear that they found it difficult to gain an overall picture of

what was going on in French ports which seemed realistic to them. On December 26th., however, they

received a report of a rather different kind. An

anonymous Frenchman, probably an emigré, submitted his observations under the heading "de l'état actuel de

la marine française." This provides a picture which

should have encouraged the British government, though their reactions are hard to assess. The writer may

have over-stated the dubious condition of the French

navy in order to induce the British to fight, but there

were important elements of accuracy in his assessment. (3)

The French did not have as many ships of the line as

the British and a considerable number of them were

unseaworthy. Numerous officers had emigrated and the

(1) A D M. 2/1344.

(2) The instructions were given by the Home Office under-secretary, Evan Nepean in H.O. 42/23. The reports are in W.O. 1/395.

(3) Report in W.O. 1/395.

remaining crews were often unruly and untrained.⁽¹⁾

Despite such occasional information the British government could not base its own mobilization of the fleet on any reliable estimate of French naval strength. The French government, however, were in an apparently much stronger position. Chauvelin continued to supply them with detailed information through his agent Vital, who worked under the Duke of Richmond. Vital was employed in the office whence originated the orders for provisions and armament, both of the navy and army. He was one of the least known but most important agents then employed in London.⁽²⁾

Although the government placed so much faith in the importance of the fleet, they could not afford to overlook the other branch of the service, the army. Here the situation was far from promising. In August, 1792, the regular army consisted of 13,701 men. A considerable number of army battalions were currently serving in the West Indies or India so that home defence was insubstantial.⁽³⁾ The militia were expected to

(1) On the state of the French navy at the beginning of the war, see the opening chapters of Hampson, N.

La Marine de l'An II, Paris, 1959.

(2) See Letters exchanged between Chauvelin and Lebrun, 7th. and 16th. November, A.A.E. C.P. Angleterre, 585 (Supple. 1792.)

(3) Figures in Holland Rose, William Pitt and the Great War, p. 124.

supplement this gap but could not be relied upon.⁽¹⁾ Doubts were also raised as to disaffection in the army itself.⁽²⁾ An increase in the army estimates was voted December 9th. but though bounties were offered to new recruits, the response was uneven. Just before Christmas the quartermaster of the Coldstream guards reported that the increase in the number of soldiers was so rapid that he could not find sufficient bedding.⁽³⁾ Yet on December 27th. the Secretary at War wrote that the infantry was recruiting too slowly, a situation which the colonels must remedy as soon as possible.⁽⁴⁾ At the beginning of the New Year the king issued orders to bring the infantry up to full strength.

The developments of the month of December provide little evidence that the British government had long concealed bellicose sentiments against France, but they do show an increase in tension, a growth in physical preparations which was expanding from week to week, and the absolute conviction, in the minds of the vast majority of the ruling class, that the French Revolution was a total threat which must be met by total resistance.

(1) See Chapter 9.

(2) See letters in H.O. 42/22 and 23, written in late November and early December to Evan Nepean.

(3) W.O. 4/145.

(4) Secretary at War to Lord Adam Gordon, December 27th. W.O. 4/145. The War Office at this time was a lesser government department partly under the guidance of the Home Office.

Chapter 11

The Outbreak of War.

"Depuis votre départ de Paris les choses ont bien change de face." Lebrun to Maret, February 2nd. 1793.

The year 1793 opened on a Europe full of contradictory emotions. The suspension of campaigning in the war which Prussia and Austria were waging against France had produced an uneasy calm, which politicians knew was only a lull. The people of both France and Great Britain instinctively sensed the tempo of affairs and their realization itself acquired a force. Government awareness of public opinion had added a new dimension to European politics in 1792. The continent was witnessing a strange drama in which two neighbouring countries were acknowledging the very great differences in outlook which had developed between them.

These differences had at first been dimly perceived, and for some while were to remain intermingled with the long-standing rivalry between France and Britain when

both had been great colonial powers. Interest and motivation did not change overnight; the French, enmeshed in the rhetoric of new-found nationhood, tended

to overstress the uniqueness of their position. Most of the revolutionary leaders at the beginning of 1793 were men whose inability to break with the political modes of practice of the ancien regime was to destroy

them within a year.⁽¹⁾ The British, still uncomfortable in the vocabulary and outlook of the new era, were lured into a false sense of security by the sudden vision of a time-honoured clash with France. Yet the very fact that, for Britain, a necessary prelude to war had been a conscious defining of the values of British society indicated that this was to be something more than a conflict for territorial pre-eminence.

Looking back on the year 1792, the states of western Europe, whose futures were now inextricably connected, could have found little that would point them with certainty towards a comprehension of the pattern of recent events. France had won great and unexpected victories in the Austrian Netherlands, but had swiftly discovered the many administrative and financial problems involved in the government of their new ally. The extension of French influence and the advance of the revolutionary armies was in extreme contrast with the deep pre-occupations of domestic

(1) Despite the resonance of their oratory and writing, this was particularly true of Brissot, Lebrun and other men of their outlook. They were used to power and intrigue in politics but did not share the far greater degree of ideological consciousness which characterized the Montagnards' opposition at this time. The sphere of diplomacy was also significantly influenced by ancien regime procedure and patterns of behaviour.

politics at the turn of the year. Personal rivalries, developing differences in ideology, the confusion of the Revolution of August 10th. had impeded the Convention from successfully performing almost all of the necessary functions of government. The trial of the king and the future shape of the republic remained fundamental issues which were still without solution at this point. Austria and Prussia had suffered humiliating defeat and had fallen out amongst themselves, but were still deeply committed to war. The United Provinces, caught between the French forces in Belgium and the pull exerted by their British partners in neutrality, viewed the prospect of hostilities between France and Britain with grave concern. The British government itself had been secure and reasonably prosperous twelve months earlier; both mentally and physically it had felt the shock of an inability to keep pace with events in Europe since the suspension of Louis XVI. Its overwhelming response to developments precipitated by the intensification of revolutionary activity had been negative; by January 1793, Pitt's administration had convinced themselves that aggression was the best means of defence and insulation.

The sense of crisis is not, however, a sufficiently clear explanation of the ultimate developments which culminated in the outbreak of war. There is a large body of information and evidence, yet most of it is indirect. In the last month of peace the wider

considerations imposed on governments by the state of their countries and the trend of European politics were factors of great importance; here some issues, the king's trial in France and the spread of disaffection in Britain, were already reasonably well-defined. On a more immediate level, the part played by politicians themselves, in government, in committee, in diplomacy, remains significant. It is only by sifting through a tissue of mutual distrust and hesitancy that we can attempt to get behind the official pronouncements of policy to a concept of what was actually taking place. This chapter will attempt to cast light on the final moves towards war by approaching them through the interplay of problems and personalities in France, in Britain and in Holland.

Almost until the last week of January the French government remained firm in its intention of convincing the British that if they would only exhibit a willingness to listen and to communicate there was still genuine hope of a settlement. This delusion had not, however, gone so far as to deprive the French administration of any realistic assessment of their position in Europe. After the developments of November they were bound to admit that the trend of Anglo-French relations pointed towards war rather than continued peace. Accepting this fact, the French turned away from Europe altogether in their search for an ally who would stand by them and render material, if not direct

assistance in the event of war. In the first weeks of December G[^]enet had been sent to the United States with a detailed set of instructions which provide insights on how the revolutionaries viewed the development of Franco-American relations, especially in view of the prospect of hostilities with Britain and Spain. The basis of G[^]enet's instructions was the negotiation of a new commercial treaty with the Americans, but this, too, had wider political implications. The pact, it was suggested, might be extended by freeing Louisiana from Spain and opening up the navigation of the Mississippi to the inhabitants of Kentucky. There was even talk of joining Canada to the United States.⁽¹⁾ The French government were never entirely sure of the degree of goodwill and gratitude which the Americans felt for them; they were afraid that the U.S.A. was still very much dominated by Great Britain. Consequently, G[^]enet had been told to make certain that the Americans stood by the terms of the treaty of 1778, particularly those relative to commerce and shipping, however much disinclination they might display. This was the price of French aid in their independence. The U.S. was to be discouraged strongly from arming or supplying foreign vessels in her ports. Already one of the most crucial aspects of French policy towards the conduct

(1) Instructions to G[^]enet, December 1792, A.A.E., C.P. États-Unis, 36.

of war was beginning to form - "Ces articles sont d'autant plus importance dans les conjonctures actuelles que le grand éloignement où se trouveraient les corsaires anglais de leurs ports et l'embaras d'approvisionnements rendraient leurs expéditions plus dispendieuse, le renvoi et le vente des prises plus précaires, tandis que nos bâtiments usant du droit de représailles auraient à leur disposition tous les ports des États-Unis et les provisions dont ils abondent."⁽¹⁾ Almost totally isolated in Europe, France was obliged to court a far from enthusiastic associate across the Atlantic. Lebrun apparently had not observed Vergennes realistic assessment ten years earlier - "We have never based our policy toward the United States upon their gratitude. That sentiment is infinitely rare between sovereigns, and republics know it not."

Despite such initial probings by the Foreign Ministry, the compelling interest of the majority of the deputies and also of the populace lay with the problems of French government in January 1793. Emotionally many politicians were preparing themselves for the testing-time of the final stages of the king's trial, but, more immediately, the necessity for taking steps to overhaul the administration of French government was inescapable. It was in these circumstances that men broadly favourable to Brissot's views made their last attempt to avert their own ruin by re-organizing the functioning of French government and injecting new life into it. The decision was precipitated by relentless criticism of Roland, who was still

(1) Supplément aux instructions, A.A.E., C.P. États-Unis, 36.

regarded as the evil genius of the Conseil Exécutif, and by the Conseil's inability to establish itself as an effective force to balance the turbulence of the Convention. (1) Although the Conseil continued to meet and function, it was overshadowed as an executive organ after January 5th. 1793, by the creation of the Comité de Défense Générale. It was no accident that the proposition for the creation of this new committee coincided with a more intransigent tone adopted by Kersaint and other Brissotin sympathizers in their references to Anglo-French relations. As its name implied, the committee was set up to co-ordinate action in the face of an international crisis and the malfunctioning of the experimental stage of republican government in France. Its own ineffectiveness was almost inevitable, given the state of rivalry in the Convention; although dominated by Brissotins immediately after its inception, the Robespierrists were soon able to assail it.

The creation of the Comité de Défense Générale was an admission of a belief on the part of the Convention that its tensions had contributed towards the

(1) The onslaught on Roland, led in vigorous abuse by Hébert in 'Le Père Duchesne' was refuted at length by the minister himself in a series of pamphlets and articles. His position became so invidious that he resigned on January 22nd., 1793.

inefficiency of administration in France and that the present structure was not equal to coping with the strains which would result from a broadening of French involvement in the war. A further factor may also have been a possible breakdown of law and order after the execution of the king, since nobody could predict the national reverberations of this event.⁽¹⁾ A number of French politicians whose influence on affairs spanned both domestic and foreign policy were acutely aware of the many problems facing France and it is their response to these difficulties, varying and sometimes unpredictable, which constitutes a further important element of the moves made in France on the eve of war. There were three individuals whose powers of decision-making were vital at this point.

These were Dumouriez, Lebrun and Brissot. All were acquainted, but none was necessarily committed to the views of the others. Dumouriez, who had returned to Paris from Brussels in the first week of January, was a key figure. His discontent was well-known by the turn of the year and had earned him the suspicion of more radical members of the Convention. His dispute with Pache, minister for war, over the organization of contracts to supply the army in Belgium, had undercut much of the initial success of the conquest. The Commission sent by the Convention had found ample evidence to support the

(1) See Epilogue.

general's contention that his army was on the verge of complete collapse, but this did not necessarily absolve him of all blame.⁽¹⁾ It is clear that Dumouriez still felt absolutely assured of his rectitude and that he considered the financial losses which he had himself endured as a kind of sacrifice - "Je serais dans le cas de beaucoup d'autres réclamations vis-à-vis du ministre de la guerre, je n'ose pas jeter les yeux sur mes affaires, personnelles, j'ai vendu, j'ai emprunté, je suis en dette et ruiné, mais ce n'est pas le cas de me plaindre, et ce n'est pas à ce ministre que je peux m'adresser."⁽²⁾

Dumouriez's main interests in returning to Paris were not, however, primarily financial. Despite the dread in which he was held by the Dutch government and his own bravado on the subject of an invasion of the United Provinces, it is clear that he had determined to use his own influence in Paris in a last-minute

(1) The commissioners did not receive much assistance in the enquiries which they made from Dumouriez himself.

See A.N. D 2, 1 and D 2/4, Mission de Danton etc. en Belgique.

(2) Dumouriez to Lebrun, Paris, 2nd. January, 1793.

A.N. DXVIII, 1, The general justified himself at length later in a letter to Danton, January 20th., 1793, quoted in A. Mathiez, Autour de Danton, Paris, 1926, p.182.

attempt to avert an extension of the war. Convinced that the execution of Louis XVI would annihilate the slender hopes of a reconciliation with Great Britain he also tried to bring pressure to bear so that the king's life might be saved. De Maulde had accompanied him to Paris and the Grand Pensionary of Holland was kept informed through de Maulde's confidant, Joubert, of their combined efforts to avoid war and to bring the Conseil Exécutif and Lebrun in particular round to their way of thinking. Joubert's letters to Van de Spiegel at the Hague were soothing, probably deceptively so. On January 19th. he wrote - "Je vous assure que vous n'aurez point la guerre. Dumouriez s'y oppose fermement. D'après les propositions à lui faites et les offres intéressantes qui n'ont pas manqué de le cajoler, il avait donné sa parole d'honneur de faire une visite à la Hollande pour définition de conquête et de campagne, mais actuellement il ne songe plus qu'à aider Maulde..... Tous les membres (of the Conseil Exécutif) ont été de son avis et veulent décidément conserver la paix avec l'Angleterre et la Hollande afin d'écraser l'Allemagne et la Prusse qui se fortifient tous les jours. Nos armées sont devenues à rien, le trouble s'y mêle, les généraux se déchirent, elles manquent de tout, alors, je peux affirmativement dire: ça n'ira pas." (1)

(1) Joubert to Van de Spiegel, 19th January,

Gedenstukken de Algruene Geschiedenis, op. cit. p.p. 258-9.

Joubert's letters also told of discussions and meetings between Dumouriez and members of the Conseil Executif. Officially, the general was examined by both the Comite de Defense Generale and the Conseil Executif. Joubert asserted that he was receiving substantial support for his point of view in further, unofficial meetings, an assertion which is not adequately confirmed by subsequent developments.

When he realized that the king's execution was inevitable, and that it would be highly impolitic to oppose it publicly, Dumouriez embarked on another course which was, in fact, an off-shoot of the November exchanges between Auckland, de Maulde and Van de Spiegel in the United Provinces. The plan was complex and never came to fruition, but the attitudes displayed by the various participants contribute to an understanding of the considerations weighing in French, British and Dutch politics at this point. Dumouriez hoped that his own presence in England, in a last-minute discussion with Pitt and Grenville, might be sufficient to keep both countries back from the brink of hostilities. Both Dumouriez and Lebrun, whose official blessing on the scheme was necessary, appear to have believed that the British government would be impressed by France's sincerity in the sending of the Revolution's most illustrious general on such a mission. Dumouriez, however, did not wish to go to England without some assurance that he would be received on his

arrival. Consequently, Maret was sent back across the Channel to test the political wind in Britain and Chauvelin was recalled. These last decisions coincided exactly with the execution of Louis XVI. The general explained the decisions which had been reached in a letter to his subordinate, the south-American born General Miranda. His version took some liberties with the truth, but is an illuminating statement of his own feelings at the time. He began his letter by saying that he agreed that the plan of an attack on Zeland should be abolished and replaced by an invasion via Maestricht, Venloo and Nimwegen. This was all the more important considering recent developments in Paris - "Le catastrophe du vingt-et-un (the execution of the king) nous donne vraisemblablement pour ennemis tous les peuples de l'Europe. Voici ce qui vient d'être décidé à cet égard au Conseil Exécutif. Nous sommes encore incertains sur le parti que prendra l'Angleterre et c'est ce parti qui déterminera notre conduite pour la Hollande. Le conseil d'après le désir des anglais et des hollandais a jette les yeux sur moi pour aller en Angleterre en ambassade extraordinaire afin de faire décider cette nation catégoriquement, pour la paix ou pour la guerre. En conséquence on a donné ordre à notre ambassadeur Chauvelin de revenir. On envoie demain un agent secret

fort connu de M. Pitt et de M. Faux (sic.) pour demander aux deux parties.... un sauf conduit pour moi....

cette mission ne durera plus que 8 jours. Je pars

demain la nuit pour Dunkerque d'ou je passerai à

Ostende.... on envoie une personne de confiance à la

Haye pour prevenir Milord Auckland et le Grand

Pensionnaire Van de Spiegel pour venir s'aboucher

avec moi selon leur propre demande...."(1) The last

sentences referred to the second aspect of Dumouriez's

plan, which was for him to hold discussions with Lord

Auckland so that both men could act as spokesmen for

their respective governments.

Though couching his actions in the guise of a representative of the French nation, Dumouriez's schemes were largely his own. The Foreign Minister who had acquiesced in the framework of proposed arrangements at the time, carried the responsibility of dealing with the broader problems of French foreign policy and was inevitably restricted by the need to maintain a dignified legitimate approach which had been a major feature of French policy in the autumn of 1792.

Lebrun was now in a difficult position. Though still in control of all the diplomatic correspondence some of his area of initiative had been removed by the creation of the Comité de Defense Generale, which was naturally occupying itself with the examination of

(1) Dumouriez to Miranda, 23rd. January, A.N. F7, 4688.

the possibility of an Anglo-French war; the tone being adopted by Brissot in the Convention was further undermining Lebrun's independent position. It is doubtful, too, whether Lebrun could have shared even the cautious optimism still left in Dumouriez's approach. The autumn for him had been a time of growing tribulation. The Conseil Executif's early unwise decision to send numbers of secret agents to England had been an unmitigated disaster. He did not have the full support of a number of French diplomatic representatives, having clashed with Bourgoing in Madrid⁽¹⁾ and de Maulde at the Hague; despite his polite re-assurances he had never entirely trusted Chauvelin. The Conseil Executif had continued to stand fast by its rebuttal of British grievances on the Scheldt and the 19th. November decree. The argument and phraseology of the explanation sent to Chauvelin on January 8th. were little different from their original justification of the natural boundaries philosophy in the case of the Scheldt and the outright denial of any intention of fomenting discontent in Britain in the case of the 19th. November decree.⁽²⁾

Yet Lebrun must have been aware that this approach,

(1) Lebrun to Bourgoing, 13th. November, 1792. A.A.E., C.P. Espagne, 634.

(2) Lebrun to Chauvelin, 8th. January, 1793, A.A.E., C.P. Angleterre, 586.

however justifiable, was having no positive effect whatsoever on relations with Britain.

Since the beginning of January Lebrun had received a steady volume of information from his sources in England, to the effect that the government's attitude there was hardening almost daily and that the only sensible course left for France was to make adequate preparation in the little time of peace that must surely be left.⁽¹⁾ At a time when Dumouriez's associates were assuring the Grand Pensionary in Holland that the Conseil Executif would do everything in its power to avoid war, Lebrun himself was adopting a far from conciliatory tone in his official correspondence with Chauvelin - "nous sommes tres pressés ici d'avoir définitivement une réponse de la cour de Londres sur ses dispositions, soit pour la paix, soit pour la guerre. Nous ne pouvons pas rester plus longtemps dans ce^s état d'incertitude et nous vous recommandons expressement de nous mander, dans le délai de huit jours au plus tard, quelle est la dernière résolution de cette cour. La saison où les hostilités

(1) Particularly forthright was the comment of the agent Pereyra, "Je pense que la révolution n'aura pas encore d'effet. Il y a bien de la fermentation, mais il n'y a pas de genie révolutionnaire." Pereyra to Lebrun, January 1st. 1793, A.A.E., C.P. Angleterre, Supplement 30.

commencent approche insensiblement et il serait aussi imprudent qu'impolitique d'attendre qu'elle fût arrivée pour prendre nos mesures de précautions."⁽¹⁾ This note was intended as a stiff and formal communication on the part of the French government, but it later becomes clear, especially in the despatches to diplomats after war had been declared, that Lebrun and his associates had decided that British refusal to make any definite public commitment on the issue of war was a policy deliberately designed to deceive France.⁽²⁾

Chauvelin himself seems to have been determined to labour under his difficulties until the end. At the beginning of January he had ignored a thinly-veiled suggestion from the Foreign Ministry that he should return home: "Vous devez à la dignité du caractère dont vous êtes revêtu de ne point compromettre votre personne et nous vous autorisons à retourner en France, aussitôt que vous croirez que la prudence exigera votre retraite."⁽³⁾

Like de Maulde, Chauvelin was probably anxious about the reception he would face in Paris, since he realized that he had been under constant scrutiny during his London mission. It was probably good for his temporary peace of mind that he

(1) Lebrun to Chauvelin, 10th. January, A.A.E. C.P. Angleterre, 586.

(2) Lebrun to Gênet, February 3rd. 1793, A.A.E. C.P. États-Unis, 37, and Lebrun to Bourgoing, February 2nd. 1793, A.A.E. C.P. Espagne, 635.

(3) Lebrun to Chauvelin, January 1st. 1793, C.P. Angleterre. ?

was ordered to leave Britain before Maret arrived bringing his papers of recall. The Conseil Exécutif, through Lebrun, were still attempting to use the channels of legitimate diplomatic approach even after the execution of Louis XVI. It was not, however, merely the restrictions of British outlook at this stage which defeated their efforts. In France itself a third force had developed in the area of foreign affairs which was to play into the hands of Pitt's administration and thus defeat both Dumouriez and the Conseil Exécutif.

The creation of the Comité de Défense Générale had thrust Brissot back into the limelight of foreign relations. During October, 1792, he had spoken on the issues of Geneva and Savoy, but apart from that his major contributions to the debates in the Convention had been concerned with the king's trial and the appeal to the people on the king's sentence. On January 12th. he presented a report on behalf of the new committee on the crisis which was considered to have developed in Anglo-French relations. The speech was perhaps less impassioned than some of Brissot's oratory in 1791 and 1792 but it was, nevertheless, scarcely calculated to produce a mellowing effect on the British government. Although part of Brissot's assessment of the cause of British sensitivity was perhaps more accurate than he realized, his penchant for rhetorical flourishes as a necessary part of any pronouncement in which French

glory was concerned led him into some dangerous misrepresentations. He began by defining reaction in Great Britain to the Revolution in France, and in particular, to the Revolution of August 10th. There had, he said, been three types of response; that of the nation, which was positive and laudatory, that of Parliament, which was dubious and rather anxious, and that of the Court, which was violently against the republic. It is hard to credit that Brissot could himself have believed these arbitrary and inaccurate distinctions. The Foreign Ministry was now well-supplied with information from a number of sources which categorically stated that the British population could not be considered as a separate, revolutionary force. The move on February 1st. to annex an address to the British people to the declaration of war was opposed by Billaud-Varenne and Marat as futile.⁽¹⁾ The arrogance and hostility of such a contention only increased the feeling of the British government that French professions on the decree of November 19th. could not be believed.

From this unpromising beginning, Brissot went on to explore the development of tension between the two countries and to dismiss every British grievance. The recall of Lord Gower was not, he claimed, an act consistent with neutrality, as had been explained at

(1) Speeches in Le Moniteur, February 1st. vol. xvi.

the time. The opening of the River Scheldt and the decree offering fraternity and assistance were not as had been amply demonstrated, aggressive acts against the British government; there could be no realistic grounds for complaint here. Why, then, had the British government taken the extraordinary measures of repression and preparation at the end of November? He suggested that their main fear was of Thomas Paine, not France. The government had played on traditional emotions evoked by the concept of defence of the constitution as a rallying point. The Revolution had been consistently misrepresented in England as a menacing and evil force. From this sweeping criticism of the obstructiveness of British policy-makers, Brissot directed his attention to the state of the country itself. Though frequently considered a buoyant and prosperous nation, British economy was not as strong as the rest of the world thought. Taxation was heavy and a cause of discontent. Much of Britain's economic strength depended on her overseas empire and especially on India, where her rule was tyrannical and potentially insecure. Having developed these underlying weaknesses at some length, Brissot finished by asserting that France had one great strength over Britain which, he hinted, might be crucial in the event of war. The Revolution had produced an unrivalled supply of manpower, eager to serve in furthering the cause of liberty. (1)

(1) Brissot's speech to the National Convention, January 12th. Le Moniteur, vol. xvi.

The aggressive tone of Brissot's speech can best be explained by his desire to cut a convincing figure in the Convention at a time when his stock was very low. Given the tensions in Paris in mid-January it would have been foolhardy to appear meek and apologetic. On a more general level, Brissot's approach reveals the lack of co-ordination between the various elements most immediately concerned with taking decisions affecting external relations. The French were incapable of appreciating that while Maret was shortly to be sent on a final attempt to avert hostilities and Dumouriez was contacting Auckland in the United Provinces, Brissot's inflammatory style was calculated to render all such efforts unavailing.

The Britain at which Brissot's eloquence had been aimed was advancing daily in its expectation of the outbreak of war. The first two weeks of the month passed in suspense and uncertainty. The Aliens Act received the royal assent on January 8th., but despite French threats of ending the treaty of 1786, few political commentators were quite willing to commit themselves solidly to the inevitability of war. The funds remained variable, a reflection of the general feeling in the country. (1) Resistance to the press and the recurrence of strikes and social disturbances in Scotland and elsewhere brought home to the government

(1) Morning Chronicle, January 15th.

the precariousness of the triumph of Loyalism.

"If we were to desist now," wrote Grenville to Auckland, on Jan. 15th.

"without providing some effectual security for the future I would not answer for raising again the same spirit which has enabled us to act so effectually. (1)

The main question now was how to absolve the government of any blame when war did break out. The government's public record of correctness in its official dealings with Chauvelin was beyond reproach, but what was needed was something more positive, which would represent France as a dangerous aggressor beyond all reasonable doubt. Pitt's administration had earlier thought to use details of the de Maulde-Dumouriez exchanges as evidence of the intrinsic unreliability of French protestations, (2) but now they had a more effective weapon - "Brissot's report seems well enough calculated for our purposes. The thing must now come to its point in a few days and we shall, I trust, have appeared to the public here to have put the French completely dans leur tort." (3) Pitt's mind was working on the same lines, though embracing broader considerations of policy. The Earl of Malmesbury noted in his diary on January 20th. Lord Loughborough's

(1) Grenville to Auckland, January 15th. ^{H.A.C.} Fortescue MSS,
op. cit. p.p. 366-367.

(2) Grenville to Auckland, December 29th, F.O. 37/42.

(3) Grenville to Buckingham, January 19th.

Buckingham, op. cit., ii, p. 237.

account of a conversation with Pitt - "He told me war was a decided measure; that Pitt saw it was inevitable and that the sooner it was begun the better. That we might possess ourselves of the French islands; that the nation now was disposed for war, which might not be the case six weeks hence. That we were in much greater forwardness than the French.... that he had £2 million ready and that he trusted the surplus of the permanent revenue would be £600,000 a year. That the Dutch were quite right and in earnest; that Russia was willing to go to all lengths....."(1)

While using the belligerence of French oratory as an eloquent witness of Gallic malevolence, the British government was also, though less publicly, demonstrating an interest in undermining the flimsy economic foundations of France. An anonymous expert submitted a highly secret report to Pitt in January on the ways of dealing blows at the French economy by various methods of manipulating the rate of exchange.(2) Secret as the paper was, the French were early on their guard against it, Noël warning Lebrun, en "Jan: 24th. "Carra n'a pas tout à fait tort quand il peint à la Convention les banquiers étrangers comme les instruments les plus

(1) Malmesbury, January 20th. in Malmesbury, Diaries and Correspondence, vol. ii, p. p. 501-502.

(2) Report in P.R.O. 30/8/334, Chatham Papers, Public Record Office.

actives, les plus dangereuses de nos ennemis."⁽¹⁾

The British government were naturally attracted to a method of combatting France without recourse to arms. The interest which they exhibited in an underground economic attack is an important revelation of their belief that revolutionary France was on the very brink of collapse at the beginning of 1793.

A more immediate impetus towards a complete break occurred on January 21st. Pitt, in the House of Commons referred to the king's death as "that dreadful outrage against every principle of religion, of justice and of humanity, which has created one general sentiment of indignation and abhorrence in every part of this island."⁽²⁾ Lebrun had sent Maret from Paris two days after the execution of Louis XVI, but the news of Louis' death arrived late on the evening of the 23rd. January in London, several days in advance of Maret himself. The French politicians were evidently not prepared for the manner and extent of British

(1) Noël to Lebrun, 24th. January, A.A.E. C.P. Hollande 585. Bankers remained suspect in France throughout the Terror. A notable example is the Swiss banker Perregaux, an acquaintance of Lord Auckland and of Danton, who managed to persuade the Robespierrists that he had not indulged in financial intrigue of a traitorous nature.

(2) William Pitt in the House of Commons, February 1st. 1793. Cobbett, Parliamentary History.

reaction. The theatres stopped playing and the court immediately assumed mourning. This much was predictable; the king's death undoubtedly outraged many persons at court and in government, but it was far from unexpected. The immediate reaction of the administration was to expel Chauvelin. Maret had been given a number of alternative courses to follow on his arrival in England, depending on his assessment of the situation there, but it seems that the actual dismissal of the ambassador was not thought a serious possibility. The British government, however, intended the dismissal of Chauvelin as more than a mere matter of diplomatic form - "The business is now brought to its crisis and I imagine that the next despatch to you or the next but one will announce the commencement of hostilities..... I do not see how we can remain any longer les bras croisés with a great force ready for action and that force avowedly meant against France.. (1) ... There was also a revealing sentence in one of the few remaining letters written by Pitt at this time, "I rather think you ought to propose to the king to put off the Drawing Room and to have a council at the Queen's House for the purpose of making the order for Chauvelin's departure. The King told me yesterday that he would be ready to have the Council whenever the news came."

(1) Grenville to Auckland, 24th January, ^{H.M.C.} Fortescue MS
op. cit. ii, p.373.

The search for relieving the British government of the doubtful merit of appearing positively to desire war was thus easily answered by the arrival of word of Louis XVI's execution. Chauvelin outwardly took the embarrassment of his expulsion surprisingly well. He had organized his affairs and left the country before Maret even landed at Dover.

Maret's mission, though closely connected in its inception with French ministerial outlook at the time of the king's death and with Dumouriez's negotiations in the United Provinces is perhaps most interesting in what it reveals of British reaction to French overtures at a time when the outbreak of war was expected almost daily. Aware of the delicate nature of Maret's task, Lebrun in his final despatch to Chauvelin had made every effort to appear reasonable and conciliatory. The ambassador was to leave a note for Grenville, assuring him of the attachment of the French nation to England, but saying that he felt he was no longer serving a useful purpose in England - "Vous ferez sentir que si le Ministère Britanique rendu à des sentiments plus convenables desirait se rapprocher de nous il nous trouverait encore disposés à faire tout ce que permettrait la dignité nationale, tout ce que commanderait le désir de voir la bonne intelligence rétablie entre les deux nations et la volonté dont nous avons donné des preuves et où nous avons toujours été de maintenir l'harmonie qui regnait entre elles et de

conserver la paix."⁽¹⁾ The British administration were both irritated and embarrassed by such professions of rationality and goodwill, which seemed so much at odds with the belligerence of Brissot's oratory in the Convention. It is hardly surprising that Pitt and Grenville wondered at French inconsistency.

Maret did not arrive in Britain until January 28th. His coming caused confusion in government circles; no sooner had the administration finally rid themselves of Chauvelin than another Frenchman arrived on a mysterious and ill-defined mission. There were rumours that the new arrival was Marat, an alarming confusion in spelling.⁽²⁾ Maret did not wish to invest himself with any particular function or office until he received a new set of instructions from Lebrun. He felt that vagueness left him the maximum room for manoeuvre. Soon after his arrival in London he saw Miles, who foolishly encouraged in him an over-optimistic estimate of probable ministerial response. He also saw Lord Lansdowne but apart from this remained virtually incommunicado. Grenville, writing to Auckland, expressed forcibly the government's disapprobation of Maret's mission, referring to "the inconvenience which arose from the speculations in our public funds occasioned by the equivocal situation and conduct of M. Maret...."⁽³⁾

(1) Lebrun to Chauvelin, January 22nd. A.A.E.

C.P. Angleterre, 586.

(2) Maret to Lebrun, January 31st. A.N. F 7, 4398.

(3) Grenville to Auckland, February 4th. F.O. 37/44.

The Frenchman himself, unwilling to make any definite moves in the changed circumstances of England, had to rely on information received from friends as to the general outlook of Britain - "La mort du roi a produit l'effet que nous avons prévu; la haine que le gouvernement avait cherché avec tant de soin à inspirer aux Anglais contre le nom Français est maintenant portée à son comble. La partie du Peuple qui n'est ni commercante ni propriétaire, désire et demande la guerre. Le deuil ordonné par la cour a été pris d'une manière générale et à Londres tout homme qui avait ou qui a pu se procurer un habit noir s'en est revêtu. Cette circonstance m'oblige à ne voir personne car je ne serais reçu nulle part, et me force même à ne pas sortir de chez moi....."(1)

Maret's indetermination was resolved at the beginning of February by a note from Grenville ordering both himself and Scipion Morgue, who had remained in a secretarial post at the embassy, to leave the country at once.

Hopes of averting war by an exchange of viewpoints had still not been defeated finally. At the beginning of February, before the declaration of war by France was known in England, the centre of attention shifted back once more to the Hague. The last, ultimately unsuccessful phase of the proposed Auckland-Dumouriez talks is extremely valuable for our understanding of Dutch and British politics in the last

(1) Maret to Lehrun, January 31st. A.N. F7, 4398.

days of peace. It is perhaps ironic that the emotions of three major political figures, Lord Auckland, Dumouriez and Lord Grenville were briefly concentrated on a small country painfully aware that it was being used as a pawn in the developing Anglo-French struggle. At the end of January, replying to a memoir from Auckland on the purpose and justification of British armament, Van de Spiegel made his own feelings quite clear.... "j'ai eu l'honneur d'observer à Votre Excellence que jusqu'à présent il n'a été question dans toutes les communications réciproques entre l'Angleterre et cette république que d'un système de neutralité et des moyens de ce mettre en mesure, pour maintenir ce système avec efficace, mais que le contenu de votre mémoire présente une question toute différente en ce que l'Angleterre ayant armé une flotte formidable et se montrant disposée à opposer d'une manière digne d'elle une forte barrière contre la propagation des principes français, et les vues d'aggrandizement de cette nation, semble désirer que la république prenne un part active à ces mesures....." The Republic, pointed out the Pensionary, could not be expected to prepare with the speed and strength of Great Britain and had doubts as to the advisability of the new British approach - "il me paraît qu'une déclaration publique et prémature de notre concurrence à toutes les mesures d'Angleterre servirait à provoquer une attaque avant que nous soyons en état de nous défendre." The immediate loser in

such a situation would be not Great Britain, but the United Provinces. The conditions which Britain required of France for peace would doubtless be refused, thus leading to war - "une guerre dont les premiers coups retomberent sur notre République, tandis que le gouvernement n'a aucune assurance expresse et déterminée des secours qu'il aurait à attendre de ses alliés, ni vers quels temps ces secours pourraient arriver, ni de quelle manière ils seraient autoriser à agir pour la défense de la République."⁽¹⁾

The state of Dutch defence and their very evident disenchantment at the hardening of the British line was a factor in the minds of Lord Auckland and of Grenville in their dealings with Dumouriez, though the instructions eventually sent to Auckland from Whitehall ranged over the entire British viewpoint on relations with France. Auckland, Dumouriez and de Maulde, who were most directly involved in the negotiations, became almost obsessed by the gravity of the situation. Grenville and Lebrun, who were on the periphery, remained much more suspicious. The final round of this protracted series of meetings and discussions began when Joubert, de Maulde's confidant, arrived back at the Hague to apprise Lord Auckland of de Maulde's imminent arrival. De Maulde naturally

(1) Memoir by Van de Spiegel enclosed in Auckland's despatch of January 29th., F.O. 37/44.

gloried in his revived importance. Noël was informed of his arrival on January 23rd., but otherwise was not taken into anyone's confidence. (1) Initially, de Maulde found Auckland suspicious. Louis XVI's execution had, the ambassador said, ended all possibility of contact, and, furthermore, he did not believe that Dumouriez was master of his own situation. De Maulde then asked if the ambassador was categorically refusing to meet the general. Auckland replied that he could not make such a refusal on his own authority, but that he would write to England for instructions. Although Auckland admitted that he felt there was "a want of discretion and requisite caution in the whole history of such an overture...." he was evidently growing more and more sensitive to the importance of the present proceedings. (2) De Maulde had told the Pensionary that if all negotiations were rejected it would not be choice but necessity which would compel Dumouriez to attack Holland. Auckland was clearly afraid that his own government would put an abrupt end to the very slim chances of peace which remained - "I look with concern and solicitude to the rejection

(1) Noël, offended and bewildered, stressed to Lebrun the adverse effect de Maulde's re-appearance had had on the morale and trust of the Dutch patriots. Noël to Lebrun, February 6th, Gedenstukken^{der Algemeene} op. cit. p.p. 270-272.

(2) Auckland to Grenville, January 29th F.O. 37/44

on our part, because the mind and imagination cannot fix points to the possible consequences of that rejection, if it should hereafter be ascertained that we had the means of stopping the torrent of calamity which is rushing forwards." He suggested a sum of around £25,000 would be appropriate recompense for Dumouriez, whose main aim was to regain a firm hold on his army and use it to restore order to government in Paris. (1)

The British government were not greatly impressed by the details of diplomatic intrigue in the United Provinces, but, acutely aware of the state of Dutch preparations, they did not wish to lose the possible advantage of the slight delay which might elapse while the talks went ahead. Consequently, Auckland was authorized to meet Dumouriez, though with so many restrictions on his freedom of initiative that it is hard to believe that any positive developments could have arisen had the talks taken place. In the instructions and commentary sent to Auckland in the two despatches of February 4th. there is the fullest expression, both official and unofficial, of British government policy immediately before the French declaration of war was known. (2)

(1) Auckland to Grenville, January 29th. F.O. 37/44.

(2) Two despatches of Grenville to Auckland, February 4th.

F.O. 37/44.

At the beginning of the first despatch Grenville explained the reluctance of the British government to put much reliance on any assurances coming from France at that time. Not only were they sceptical of the French government's good faith, but they were extremely uncertain "whether in the present state of France, any set of men, even if they should be desirous to conclude a peace on reasonable terms and to maintain it with good faith, could in the smallest degree answer for the future conduct of that country." No satisfactory explanation had been offered to the British government on any of "the numerous grounds which have arisen of jealousy and complaint." The French must not expect that discussions would in any way impede the progress of the armament which was going forward. Nevertheless, it was felt advisable to authorize Auckland to meet the French general. This would not involve the government in any reception of a public official, but on the other hand it was felt that Dumouriez was a person who carried considerable influence. Such a misapprehension was a further sign of the government's ignorance of the complexity of French politics. The general must be informed, however, that the British government could not consider maintaining any link until the embargo on British vessels in French harbours had been lifted.

After these preliminaries, Auckland was instructed to present a viewpoint which was the sum of British

grievances against France. The republic was spreading anarchy in other countries while simultaneously exhibiting greed for territorial aggrandizement. Every move taken by France might be seen as just cause for complaint but overall the picture of French aggression was formidable. Auckland was to express a genuine desire for conciliation, while making it very clear that his government believed there were many serious obstacles in the way of any settlement. The British administration aimed particularly at the measures it considered most disruptive of domestic and European peace - "if in the course of the conversation circumstances should lead to a discussion of particular terms, you are at liberty to express your own opinion that nothing will be considered as satisfactory here short of an express disavowal of the offensive decrees." It was also suggested that Auckland might throw in as topics for discussion the safety of Marie Antoinette and the position of the emigrés. His basic purpose, however, was to listen rather than propose.

This official despatch for the ambassador's use as reference was long and bears marks of having been written in some haste, since it ranges over a great many points without much recognizable shape in its construction. Its contents contained no surprises and were quite comprehensible in terms of the outlook of the British government which had been developed since

mid-November. The French Revolution was disruptive of peace and stability. If war was to be avoided the onus fell squarely on the French but in the range of considerations which might be touched upon even at this preliminary stage, the November decrees, the position of the queen and royal family, confiscation of émigré lands, Pitt's administration seem to have expected that the Revolution could not merely be halted, but undone. (1)

Accompanying this statement of government policy was a secret letter which revealed a great deal more about the real value which Pitt and Grenville hoped to derive from the postponed meeting. Their interest lay in a temporary respite which might permit the United Provinces to reach a greater degree of preparation for war. Auckland was categorically told that British land forces were not sufficient to render any assistance to the Dutch. If he could hold off Dumouriez's forces, vital improvements might be made - "as the delay which can be obtained by this discussion, supposing it not to lead to real measures of peace, cannot be expected to be of long duration it becomes every day more and more urgent that nothing should be omitted which can

(1) An interesting contrast to the Grenville memoranda are a series of notes possibly drawn up by the Dutch government under the heading "Projet pour la conférence avec Dumouriez." There is, in particular, greater flexibility on France's internal freedom of action after peace. Gedenstukken op. cit. p.p. 272-274.

contribute to an effectual defence of the Republic."

It was thought prudent to point out to Auckland that he should not make it too apparent that his government were more interested in delaying tactics than in conciliation.

Before Auckland received his instructions it became clear that a substantial difference in outlook was developing between him and his superiors. He continued to think it unlikely that his meeting with Dumouriez would ever take place, mainly because of the dangers to the general himself; the temper of his troops was ugly. This did not prevent the ambassador from delivering a thinly-veiled attack on Foreign Office procrastination and suspicion. Auckland felt that Dumouriez's attempts at contact were genuine - "In the meantime I have every reason to believe that he is sincere in the propositions nor can I attribute to it any notion of finesse or deceit for the purpose of gaining time to prepare his attack on these provinces..... the advantage of General Dumouriez (and I know that he was fully aware of it) would have been better secured by arriving suddenly with his reinforcements at Antwerp and by marching forward immediately. I have thought proper to make this remark because I believe it to be solid and unanswerable and it seems to have escaped the attention of many intelligent persons, who repeat that General Dumouriez's propositions are mere finesse for purposes of delay."⁽¹⁾ Auckland

(1) Auckland to Grenville, February 5th., F.O. 37/44.

was not a diplomat who minced words, nor was he afraid of putting his own views on record. He had learnt much during his time at the Hague, particularly in his judgement of men. He now had to admit a certain respect for de Maulde's consistency in a dangerous situation. His fears of the spread of revolutionary ideas and discontent in England were just as marked as those of his contemporaries but his acute awareness of the benefits of peace was perhaps even more developed because of the experience of his years on the continent of Europe.

Though a meeting at sea off the Dutch coast was fixed for February 15th. all the efforts of Auckland, Dumouriez and de Maulde were shattered by the French declaration of war. The reasons behind this decision, taken in the ten days after the execution of the king, have been obscured by the inconsistencies of French politics. The Conseil Executif maintained a stubborn belief, until the expulsion of Chauvelin, that something might still be done to avert war. The banishment of the ambassador was an insult to French national pride at a very sensitive point in the Revolution. Yet balancing this continued optimism was an evident, if reluctant acceptance of the fact that Britain was already committed to war. Such a realization was surfacing even in December in the instructions given to Gênet. Lack of cohesion in the direction of foreign affairs, particularly obvious in the earlier part of

January, only contributed to the confusion. On the day of the king's execution, the Comité de Défense Générale, was considering the type of war which might most favourably be waged in present circumstances. It is perhaps no coincidence that the tone of Lebrun's despatches became firmer as soon as Dumouriez had left Paris for the Belgian front. Chauvelin's sudden re-appearance in Paris confirmed thoughts which had for some weeks been at the back of the minds of French politicians. There could be no compromise with the British government, who were completely untrustworthy. Pitt and Grenville were using the last vestiges of French good-will to delay the commencement of war to the maximum British advantage. The French government appear to have decided to call the British bluff and to derive some benefit from the element of surprise. Aware that their own military preparations and strength could not match those of Britain, the French were compelled to resort to unorthodox means of combat, concentrating especially on fitting out privateers to prey on British commerce. (1)

The formal announcement was not made until February 1st. when Brissot informed the deputies of the Convention that they were at war with Great Britain and the United Provinces. The decision had actually been made several days beforehand. Lebrun, in a post-script to Bourgoing, the ambassador to Madrid, wrote on January 29th. "Dans le moment où je faisais former

(1) Aulard, ed. Receuil des Actes du Comité de Salut Public, vol. i, p. 499.

cette lettre, on est venu m'annoncer l'arrivée du citoyen Chauvelin, notre ministre à Londres; vous saurez apprécier le motif de ce départ et juger actuellement de notre position vis-à-vis l'Angleterre. La guerre est sûre."⁽¹⁾ The formal announcements of the outbreak of war sent by Lebrun to overseas members of the diplomatic staff read very much the same, but there was greater detail and more justification in the notices sent to the powers remaining neutral, Spain and the United States. The neutrality of Spain was evidently still regarded as a matter of importance, and one for which the French government were prepared to make a significant concession - "Dans cette position, le Ministère espagnol ne sera sans doute pas étonné que nous lui demander une réponse catégorique et très prompte sur la neutralité et le désarmement.... pour ne pas arrêter la négociation par des considérations incidentes, vous n'insisterez pas non plus sur la reconnaissance formelle de la République française, parce que le moment ne parait pas très favorable."⁽²⁾ Génét, in the United States, was given express instructions to combat the kind of propaganda which the British were likely to spread around in the American press - "Vous avez pu connaître par vous-mêmes les démarches

(1) Lebrun to Bourgoing, January 29th. A.A.E.

C.P. Espagne, 635.

(2) Lebrun to Bourgoing, February 2nd. A.A.E., idem.

conciliantes qui ont été faites de notre part pour prévenir toute mésintelligence entre deux peuples que des intérêts analogues paraissaient devoir réunir. Mais cette cour perfide après avoir secrètement excité toute l'Europe contre nous et après avoir empoisonné la nation anglaise..... a enfin cru devoir lever le masque..... ses préjugés, ses calomnies, elle ne marquera pas de les répandre par ses fidèles partisans qu'elle a conservés dans les États-Unis....."(1)

Nowhere was French indignation more forthrightly expressed than in Lebrun's explanation to Dumouriez of the outbreak of war and the abandonment of the proposed meeting with Auckland. The letter is very similar in its mixture of pride and regret, to the curious message which the Foreign Minister had sent off almost simultaneously in the hands of the Welsh philosopher David Williams, to be carried back to Grenville in London. (2) In apprizing the general of recent decisions, Lebrun was scathing in his criticism of British insincerity - "Vous ne sauriez regretter plus sincèrement que nous que les dédains et les insultes du ministère anglais nous aient forcés a

(1) Lebrun to Gênet, February 3rd. A.A.E., C.P. États-Unis 37.

(2) On the mission of David Williams, and the even more curious episode involving James Tilly Matthews, see D. Williams, "The Mission of David Williams and James Tilly Matthews," E.H.R., 1938.

déclarer la guerre à une nation que nous n'avons
 jamais cessé d'estimer. Mais après tous les procédés
 outrageans que c'est permis à notre égard le cabinet
 de Saint-James après la connaissance certaine que nous
 avions des traités d'alliance qu'il a conclus avec
 les cours de Berlin, de Vienne et de Petersbourg,
 après toutes ses intrigues pour exciter l'Espagne à
 se déclarer contre nous, intrigues qui paraissent
 aujourd'hui avoir complètement réussi, après le renvoi
 insultant de ministre de la République, pouvons-nous
 avoir assez de confiance dans la bonne foi du roi
 Georges pour le croire disposé à prêter l'oreille à des
 ouvertures pacifiques. La correspondance de Chauvelin
 qu'il a eu l'impudence de communiquer à son parlement
 et aux États-Generaux ne prouve-t-elle pas jusqu'à
 la dernière évidence que, malgré toutes nos remon-
 strances, malgré toute notre modération, il était
 décidé pour la guerre, décidé de rompre avec la France
 à quelque prix et sous quelque prétexte que ce soit.

Pouvez vous craindre après cela qu'on ait été trop vite
 en France? Sans doute on a été trop vite pour la poli-
 tique astucieuse et perfide du Lord Auckland et de son
 maître....." (1)

The declaration of war by France left Dumouriez
 with no choice other than to prepare for an offensive
 against Holland when the opportunity seemed right,

(1) Lebrun to Dumouriez, February 6th. A.N. F7, 4688

though there was to be no immediate invasion, as the Dutch had feared. De Maulde returned to Antwerp and thence to Paris, where he delivered a lengthy condemnation of Lebrun's handling of the proposed negotiation to the Convention, in March 1793.⁽¹⁾ He was arrested after Dumouriez's defection and thereafter fades from sight.⁽²⁾ The final step taken by France on February 1st. was also to contribute to the increasing difficulties of Lebrun and of Brissot and his circle, all of whom found themselves progressively isolated and unpopular in the period between February and June 1793. These men were associated with a move which was later represented as not merely ill-judged but deliberately designed to imperil France.⁽³⁾ Moreover, the declaration of war did nothing to distract attention from the rising clamour of the populace of Paris, whose economic position was rapidly worsening in the opening months of 1793.⁽⁴⁾ From what one can judge the French government may have viewed the onset of hostilities

(1) De Maulde in the Convention, 16th March 1793. der Algemeene, Gedenstukken op. cit. p.p. 220-223.

(2) Except for a curious report in H.O. 1/1 that he had been spotted in London, where he was living with his wife and several violin-playing daughters.

(3) A point hammered home in the trials of both Brissot and Lebrun, A.N. W.292 and W.305.

(4) See Below.

with reluctance and misgivings but the declaration seemed to them justified and unavoidable. They could not understand the passions brought into play in Britain since November. Pitt's government appeared not just unwilling; they were incapable of listening. Rather as Pitt had inherited the standard 18th. century concept of the shape and interests of Anglo-French warfare, the revolutionaries had inherited a healthy Gallic distrust of "perfidious Albion." It is by no means apparent how the French government believed the conflict would develop. Their main resources were manpower and the small element of surprise in the actual timing of the declaration. They might possibly inflict considerable damage on British trade through the activity of their privateers, but for several months after the outbreak of war, while French politics entered a new phase of intensity, the government hoped that a negotiated settlement might still be achieved. (1)

Reaction in Britain to the news of the declaration was predictable - "The confirmation of the step taken by the faction that governs France of jointly declaring war against this kingdom and the Dutch Republic is highly agreeable to me, as the mode adopted seems well calculated to rouse such a spirit in this country that I trust will curb the insolence of those despots and be a means of restoring some degree of order to

(1). See Below.

that unprincipled country, whose aim at present is to destroy the foundations of every civilized state.⁽¹⁾ George III's succinct assessment reflected the feelings of his ministers. Lord Auckland was told by a correspondent in the middle of the month, "All ranks of people see the necessity of the war....."⁽²⁾ In reality, this was a far from accurate estimate of the mood of the country and the problems which the outbreak of war had created in certain areas. The movement against impressment was more vigorous than ever in the north east, where it was reported that "even now we frequently hear from the crowd - 'No King, Tom Paine for ever!'"⁽³⁾ From Wales and from Scotland, information continued to arrive of social discontent and wage strikes.⁽⁴⁾ East coast merchants early felt the economic bite of the French embargo.⁽⁵⁾ Other areas

(1) George III to Grenville, February 9th. ^{H.A.C.} Fortescue
MSS op. cit. P. 378.

(2) Anthony Storer to Auckland, February Auckland,
Diaries and Correspondence, ii.

(3) Reports from South Shields and Sunderland, February 22nd. H.O. 42/24.

(4) February 6th., 19th., and 28th. report from Wales H.O. 42/24. Reports from Robert Dundas for Scotland in January and February in H.O. 106/7

(5) Faversham oyster-fishers to Dundas, February 19th. H.O. 42/24.

of the east coast were alarmed at their defencelessness against possible French attack.⁽¹⁾ These problems made for some anxiety in the first months of war but the government's overall position in parliament and in the country as a whole was strengthened rather than weakened by the French declaration of war, an act which provided the focus for British public opinion which Pitt's administration had been seeking.

British objectives had been made more explicit than the French before February 1st. The government believed that any semblance of central authority in France had broken down. Alarmed as they were by the extent to which French ideas, so damaging to orderly society, had spread to the rest of Europe, it seemed inconceivable at the beginning of 1793 that France could survive to pose a long-term military threat. To Britain as to the rest of Europe, France appeared weak, divided and economically unsound. Despite realization that British mobilization had not reached its full effectiveness, and despite the burden of having to act as protector of the United Provinces, Pitt's administration believed that the war would be short, would bring considerable territorial gains and that victory would stifle permanently the undercurrent of disaffection in Britain which had been subdued but not finally silenced. Such views would have been partic-

(1) Mayor of Hull to Dundas, February 7th. H.O. 42/24.

ularly in keeping with Pitt's own outlook. He had painstakingly built up British prestige and prosperity over the last decade, which a prolonged war would jeopardize. . . Such a confrontation would threaten all his achievements as well as thrusting him into an arena in which he was inexperienced.

A few men in Britain had some glimmerings of a development beyond the general frame of reference of politicians. Burke himself had said that the Revolution bore no relation to any preceding event. This opinion was widely accepted; but it also indicated that it could be unwise to predict the course of events in France. . . The resilience of the spirit of the people and the emergency government of the year II were factors never seriously considered by Britain in February 1793. . . Only time was to show that French misgivings on the gravity of a conflict begun in some haste and brought about by fear and introversion, rather than greed and hate, were thoroughly justified.

Epilogue

The First Months of a Twenty Years' War.

"They were outlaws of humanity, an uncommunicable people....." Burke in the debate on the King's Message respecting the Declaration of War with France, February 1793.

"Tout est extrême en Angleterre. Les vertus y semblent plus belles que partout ailleurs. Mais aussi voit-on avec douleur que dans leur lotterie humaine, la proportion entre la vertu et le vice soit la même qu'entre le guine et le billet blanc." Report of Scipion Morgue (1791 or 1792) in A.A.E., Memoires et Documents, Fonds Divers, Angleterre 53, (1743-1813).

The French declaration of war upon Great Britain on February 1st. 1793, marked the end of a six month period in which the never solid basis of relations between the two countries had disintegrated in a mixture of fear, prejudice, and ignorance. One of the main failures which was to contribute to the onset of the last and fiercest confrontation of these long-standing rivals lay not in mutual lack of knowledge of the other's politics and internal affairs, but in a more fundamental inability to understand the forces which moved the two societies. There was certainly a great want of information on the level of diplomatic intelligence, but this provides only a partial explanation; we must search for more revealing indications beyond even the unparalleled situation of the Revolution.

The politicians of the ancien regime were accustomed to thinking of public affairs in abstractions. The balance of power, the strategic importance of the Mediterranean, the necessity of establishing manipulative influence in small states, were all weighty considerations. They seldom attempted to understand the reality of political arrangements in other countries, perhaps because then, as now, this did not seem immediately relevant to wider considerations. These restrictions of outlook could lead to lamentable misunderstandings, such as were revealed in Great Britain's dealings with the Dutch in the autumn of 1792. It is hardly surprising, then, that in the fast changing events of this period, the French and British could not preserve a peace which had been built on two negative factors, British indifference to the early stages of the Revolution and French pre-occupation with internal struggle. The intrusion of a new and formidable weapon, French ideas, into the tense European continent was an aggravation almost more potent than the unexpected success of the French armies. At a time of such turmoil, the realization that there were a significant number of discontented men in Britain triggered off a sudden and firm reaction by Pitt's administration and its supporters. The French were locked in a turbulent struggle for political domination, connected with different and developing interpretations of the best political, economic and

social structure for their new republic. Caught up in so much emotion they had no time to assess the state of Great Britain and the actions of its government. The French entered the war with some misgivings as to its general effect but the conviction that the British were totally unreasonable and must be forestalled in their aggression if France was to be safe. The British harboured similar feelings, though they were probably less afraid of the likelihood of a direct attack by France than of the persistent signs of dissidence at home.

The months immediately following the outbreak of war saw the hardening of the British attitude and the heightening of discord in the French Convention which culminated in the Montagnard coup of 31st. May-2nd June, 1793. Until the Brissotins were removed as a threat to national unity the fate of revolutionary France remained undecided. A serious revolt broke out in the Vendée early in 1793. In April General Dumouriez defected to the Austrians after the defeat of his army at the battle of Neerwinden. In Paris itself February and March were troubled months, with threatened insurrections caused by the high cost of living. The Dantonist Committee of Public Safety was created in April, further diminishing the waning powers of the Conseil Exécutif. Yet throughout this period there were no important engagements between French and British forces and for a while the French remained

hopeful that there was still ground for peace negotiations.

On this score they were mistaken. The implacability of the British Parliament did not subside in the relative inactivity of the early months of the war. Fox's minority persisted in opposing ministerial action, but they were more concerned with criticizing Pitt than with supporting the French. The only issue discussed at some length in Parliament which was of little immediate relevance to the war was the renewal of the East India Company's charter. In all other respects signs of anti-Gallicanism increased. Pitt showered an effusion of praise on Britain in his speech on the budget increases for 1793.

"France had repaid our scrupulous neutrality with insult and outrage; she had presumed to interfere in the internal concerns of England; she had threatened to pull down our darling constitution under which we had so long flourished and been happy, and to force upon us her own principles of anarchy and confusion....
... she had endeavoured to separate the parliament from the nation and raise the people against their representatives and legislators; she had dared to receive from this country ambassadors of treason and sedition; and she had left nothing undone to overthrow the whole government of Great Britain."⁽¹⁾ Here was writing

(1) Pitt's budget speech, March 11th. 1793. Hansard vol. 30.

reminiscent of John Reeves' Association for the Preservation of Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers.

There were still those who had either not detected the collective political mood of the ruling class or who were undeterred by it. Two petitions for parliamentary reform, from Nottingham and from Sheffield, were introduced at this time. The Sheffield petition was especially forthright in its language and went far beyond the demands of the moderate reformers - "Your petitioners are lovers of peace, of liberty and justice. They are in general tradesmen and artificers, unpossessed of freehold land and consequently have no voice in choosing members to sit in parliament; but thought they may not be freeholders they are men and do not think themselves fairly used, in being excluded the rights of citizens..... they think men are objects of representation and not the land of a freeholder....."(1) The member who introduced the petition observed that these were only manufacturers who were unfamiliar with the style and language customarily used in addressing the House. It was not the vocabulary, but the concepts which were expressed that the House of Commons found so offensive. Fox was swift to point out that he was no believer in

(1) The Sheffield petition for Parliamentary reform, April 25th. 1793. *ibid.*

universal representation. The general opinion in the House appeared to be that a country at war with a foe such as France could not endanger its security by making any alterations in its political system.

The execution of Louis XVI had done nothing to lessen the intensity of disagreement in the French Convention. The controversy was given renewed edge by a Parisian street insurrection on February 25th. which seems to have shaken the députies considerably. From mid-February the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was receiving detailed reports on the state of Paris, which noted ominously that unrest in the capital was no longer confined to specific issues.⁽¹⁾ Barère, now beginning to move towards the Montagnards, spoke forcibly in response to the new troubles saying that the instigators of insurrection must be found before they tore the country apart.⁽²⁾ Still the mood of the Convention remained volatile and its grip over the rest of the country seemed to be crumbling finally as reports of counter-revolution came in from Lyon and the south-west. At the end of March, Danton and Robespierre made impassioned pleas, in their different styles for the revival of revolutionary fervour, what Robespierre called

(1) A.A.E., Mémoires et Documents France, 322. Report on Paris by an anonymous correspondent, 19th February, 1793.

(2) Barère to the Convention, February 26th, 1793,

Moniteur, op. cit. vol. 15, p. 568.

"l'energie du patriotisme." (1)

At the same point in time that it was becoming vital for the executive functions of French government to be strengthened by a body chosen from within the Convention which could supersede the discredited Conseil Executif, the legislators received the blow of the news of Dumouriez's defection. Despite increasing doubts on the general's ardour in the revolutionary cause, few people seem to have anticipated his actions. As late as March 12th. Robespierre asserted that it was not in Dumouriez's personal interest to betray the republic. (2) The loss of the battle of Neerwinden on March 18th. forced Dumouriez's decision. He could not count on his ill-equipped army, outnumbered in Belgium by the Austrians. To return to Paris was to court death, (3) In November, 1792, his hopes had been

(1) Danton and Robespierre to the Convention, March 27th. 1793, *ibid*, le Moniteur, 15, pp. 807, 811.

(2) Robespierre to the Convention, March 12th. 1793 *ibid*. Similar sentiments were expressed in reports to the bureau de surveillance de la Police - "les defiances sur le compte de Dumouriez commencent à se dissiper; on observe que quand même il en aurait le dessein, il lui serait actuellement impossible de trahir la nation." Report made 21st. February, 1793, A.N., A.F. iv, 1470.

(3) He was, in fact, commanded to return to appear at the bar of the Convention. Dumouriez retained the commissioners sent to accompany him back to Paris and handed them over as hostages to the Austrians.

great; four months later they were shattered, leaving him with the grim prospect of a future in exile amongst the suspicious and resentful allies. Dumouriez's action may have saved his own life, but it jeopardized others. The friends of Brissot, some of whom had probably scarcely spoken to Dumouriez, were implicated in his treason.⁽¹⁾ Dumouriez's actions were a severe embarrassment to Brissot's group, seeming to incriminate them further in the counter-revolution; yet those who had been close to Dumouriez were not in immediate danger of their lives. De Maulde was imprisoned sometime in the summer of 1793, well after he had made a scathing attack on Lebrun's handling of the secret Auckland-Dumouriez talks at the bar of the Convention⁽²⁾ General Miranda, though called before the revolutionary tribunal, was not convicted of treason.⁽³⁾

(1) At his trial, Gensonne noted, "Je n'ai vu cet homme qu'une seule fois dans ma vie.... je ne lui ai jamais écrit." A.N., W. 292, Affaire des Girondins.

(2) De Maulde appeared before the Convention on March 16th 1793. The date of his imprisonment is not known. From his prison he continued to write letters pleading for release in the style which had characterized his diplomatic despatches. Since there is no record of his execution he may possibly have been released.

(3) Miranda was questioned on April 8th. by the Comité de la Guerre on opinions which Dumouriez had expressed on the merits and activities of the Convention. A.N. W.271, Trial of Miranda.

In response to the unremitting urgency of the crisis the Committee of Public Safety was inaugurated on April 16th. Initially it was composed of nine deputies who were to deliberate in secret. Its powers exceeded those of the Conseil Executif and it was required to take steps for both external and internal defence. The Committee was never intended to be the dictatorial body of historical myth. Members served only one month before being subjected to re-election and weekly reports were to be given to the Convention. The first committee, in which Danton's influence was paramount, could nevertheless do little to stabilize the Convention, or alter the effect, its protracted quarrels were having on France. Throughout May, the Convention discussed the Constitution which Condorcet's committee had been preparing since October, 1792. There were debates about property and about division of France territorially or by inhabitants for representation purposes. The debates were, however, only an excuse for further recriminations to be exchanged between deputies on either side of the Convention. On May 14th. there was uproar when a deputation from Bordeaux accused the Montagnards and the city of Paris of being the authors of France's present troubles. The tension was evidently moving towards a climax and on May 31st. the Commune again proved itself to be a formidable influence. For three days the deputies were barricaded in their meeting place by a sans-culottes

army. The popular revolution necessitated Robespierriest action and on June 2nd., twenty-two so-called Girondin deputies were proscribed, and Claviere and Lebrun also arrested. During the summer and early autumn the Committee of Public Safety developed into the most powerful governmental organ of the Revolution and the key to French survival.

The British mood on the unavoidability of war and the iniquities of the French is evident in the tone and matter of parliamentary debate in the spring of 1793. The French, however, had not entirely abandoned hopes of a settlement. Their approach to the problems of an early conciliation was opportunistic rather than organized and deliberate and some of the advice received by Lebrun continued in the more realistic vein of appraisal of British intentions first noticeable after December, 1792. The Convention, as during the autumn, did not concern itself greatly with foreign affairs in this most intense phase of its political battle. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and even the Council still played a significant role in the direction of foreign relations. The French received an early blow to their hopes when the Council allowed itself to be misled by a Welshman with delusions of grandeur. James Tilly Matthews had apparently cherished hopes of making himself instrumental in negotiating an end to misunderstandings. The French believed that he was a secret emissary despatched by Whitehall and gave some attention to

their response to what seemed to be a set of British proposals as a groundwork for peace-talks. In fact, Matthews had only ever seen Pitt once, and that was before the outbreak of war. When the French found their move rebuffed firmly by Grenville their conviction of British duplicity was naturally increased. (1)

In the same month as Matthews' behaviour further retarded French hopes for peace, the Foreign Affairs Ministry received a memoir dealing with France's situation in the European conflict. The section on England was extremely pessimistic - *On ne peut pas le dissimuler, nous nous sommes fait illusion sur le véritable caractère du peuple anglais. Superstitieuse-ment attaché à sa constitution, à sa religion, il n'a jamais aimé et il ne peut aimer les principes français.* "il ne faut pas des hommes qui l'année dernière ont le plus insidieusement fait illusion sur une guerre avec l'Angleterre se sont fait illusion". (2)

Nevertheless, the French government was still hopeful that if it could not make peace directly it could at least learn more about British intentions and perhaps profit from differences within the coalition.

(1) The most detailed study of the strange events surrounding the Matthews debacle is in D. Williams, "The Missions of David Williams and James Tilly Matthews to England (1793)", English Historical Review, 53, 1938. p.p. 651 - 668.

(2) "Situation politique de la République française à l'égard des puissances étrangères." A.A.E. Mémoires et documents, France 65. B3 159-162.

Shortly after the Jacobin coup the ministry gave instructions to two negotiators who were to have talks with General Murray on the possibility of an exchange of prisoners of war. The men were to attempt to determine the British attitude to France and to appear conciliatory. They should also watch out for signs of a serious split between Britain and Prussia. The French were still attempting a degree of flexibility but they no longer anticipated any real prospect of an immediate end to the war - "il n'est aucunement question de faire, du moins dans le moment-ci, à l'Angleterre, des propositions sérieuses."⁽¹⁾ By June, 1793, the French had begun to accustom themselves to the idea of a prolonged European conflict.

(1) "Mémoire pour servir d'instructions aux citoyens Forster et Coquebert, nommés par le Conseil Exécutif provisoire pour négocier avec le general Murray un cartel d'échange pour les prisonniers de guerre."

18th. June, 1793, A.A.E., C.P. Angleterre, Supplément 15.

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