Ireland in the Age of Revolution, 1760–1805

1791-1797

Edited by
Harry T. Dickinson

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IRELAND IN THE AGE OF REVOLUTION, 1760–1805

CONTENTS OF THE EDITION

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PREFACE

Ireland in the Age of the French Revolution experienced in just over a decade some of the most dramatic developments in its long history. The 1790s witnessed a major war, deepening sectarian tensions, the appearance of a radical political movement which eventually enlisted massive popular support, a bloody revolution and a French invasion. These developments resulted in an Act of Union, which destroyed the centuries-old Irish Parliament, reversed all the constitutional gains made during the American Revolution, and incorporated the Irish legislature into the Westminster Parliament, thus creating the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Despite the great hopes vested in this major constitutional revolution, the Union was fatally flawed from the start because of the failure to allow any of the Catholic majority in Ireland to elect representatives to the Westminster Parliament or to serve in any high office in the state. The Catholic problem developed into the Irish problem as a religious injustice became a national grievance. The consequences remain with Great Britain and Ireland to the present day. The selections reproduced in the following volumes illuminate and explicate all of these dramatic developments in Irish politics during the era of the French Revolution. The editorial apparatus in the Introduction to Part II, the headnotes and the editorial notes make it easier for any reader to fully understand the arguments and significance of the texts included.

The editorial apparatus points to biographies of all the main personages who wrote or who appear in these texts. Some of the more famous have attracted major modern biographies. Biographical details of the rest can be found in three major sources. Most of the leading figures have biographies in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 60 vols (2004) (hereafter *ODNB*), available in hard copy and online (at www.oxforddnb.com). There are brief political biographies of all Irish MPs in the *History of the Irish Parliament 1692–1800: Commons, Constituencies and Statutes*, ed. M. Johnston-Liik, 6 vols (2002) (hereafter *HoIP 1692–1800*). This material is also available online (at www.historyoftheirishparliament.com). There are brief biographies of every British MP during these years in *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1754–1790*, ed. L. B. Namier and J. Brooke, 3 vols (1964) and, in the same series, *The House of Com-*

mons 1790–1820, ed. R. G. Thorne, 5 vols (1986). The material in these volumes is also available online (at www.historyofparliamentonline.org/research).

Work on these volumes has taken me longer than I had expected. It would have taken even longer, but for the help offered and kindness shown by a number of friends, colleagues and fellow scholars. I wish to thank, in alphabetical order: Pascal Dupuy, Pawel Hanczewski, Alvin Jackson, Irene Lowe, Shin Matsuzono, Yvan Nadeau, Qian Cheng-dan and Bill Speck. I owe a particular debt to Frances Dow CBE, who offered much expert advice and assistance with all parts of the editorial work.

Harry T. Dickinson
University of Edinburgh

INTRODUCTION TO PART II

Irish Politics in the Age of the French Revolution

The American Revolution raised profound ideological issues which inspired Irish Patriots to demand from Britain major constitutional changes and significant commercial concessions that attracted widespread support across the country. The American War of Independence placed such enormous burdens on the British government that it could not afford to alienate powerful interests in Ireland and risk a second war of independence. These pressures persuaded the British government and Parliament to concede in the early 1780s a large measure of legislative independence to the Irish Parliament and to grant important commercial concessions to strengthen the Irish economy. Most of the political elite in Ireland, and not just the Irish Patriots (who had led the campaign for these concessions), were ready to welcome these changes. As men of property they were gratified by economic improvements which saw an increase in Ireland's overseas trade, a growth in the country's manufactures (particularly linen and other textiles) and rises in agrarian production and rental income. They appreciated the increase in their own political status and influence because the Irish Parliament could now initiate its own legislation and the British Privy Council was not disposed to advise the King to veto measures supported by a majority in both Houses of the Dublin Parliament. Only four Irish bills out of over one thousand that were forwarded to Britain before the Irish Parliament ceased to exist at the end of 1800 were not approved when they reached Britain. Over 90 per cent of all Irish laws were now initiated in the Dublin House of Commons and the Irish Parliament was much more active in passing laws after 1782 than it had ever been before. An average of sixty public and private bills were passed in each session up to 1800 and, in order to cope with such a legislative burden, the Irish Parliament began to meet annually from 1785.[1] What gradually became apparent to the Irish Patriots, however, was the recognition that the Lord Lieutenant, the head of the Irish executive, was a British minister rather than an Irish minister. He was invariably a British and not an Irish peer and he was very conscious of the need to satisfy the government at Westminster rather than the

Parliament or people of Ireland. He was appointed and removed by decisions taken in Britain and the Executive he headed was expected to put the wider strategic and economic interests of Britain ahead of those of Ireland. He and his leading ministers were accountable to whatever government was in power at Westminster. Moreover, because of his high status and the very extensive crown patronage at his disposal, the Lord Lieutenant could continue to exercise considerable influence over the political behaviour of a majority of members of both Houses of the Irish Parliament. The Irish Parliament was not as independent after 1782 as the leading Patriots had expected it to be.[2]

Disputes and tensions between the Irish Executive and the Irish Parliament remained common after 1782 and these inhibited the growth of political stability. These difficulties were exacerbated by major internal and external problems that were not satisfactorily addressed. Irish politics remained dangerously disturbed by three major problems that were not solved by the constitutional and commercial gains achieved by the Irish Patriots in the early 1780s. First, the achievement of legislative independence did nothing to prevent the deep socio-economic problems and sharp ethnic divisions in Irish society from continuing to foment sectarian violence with political overtones. Second, although the penal code had been partly dismantled between 1778 and 1782, the Catholic question remained a source of deep bitterness because a substantial majority of the Irish population was still denied equal civil liberties and political rights no matter how wealthy they might be. Third, the failure to follow up legislative independence with parliamentary reform left the Irish Parliament representing only a tiny minority of the Anglo-Irish propertied elite in communion with the established Protestant Church of Ireland. Most seats in the Irish House of Commons were held by Protestant men elected by a miniscule number of electors in the many small rotten boroughs, which, in turn, were controlled by a small number of very prosperous landowners. Both Houses of the Irish Parliament were therefore controlled by crown patronage or by the patronage wielded by a small number of wealthy landowners. These three major issues – bitter sectarian strife, the exclusion of Catholics from the political life of the nation and the grossly unrepresentative nature of the Irish Parliament – made it extremely difficult to achieve social harmony and political stability. Efforts to solve these problems proved enormously contentious; unresolved, they left Ireland unstable and open to deep political dissatisfaction and endemic rural violence. What made the situation worse was the subordination of Irish interests to the economic and strategic needs of her much more powerful sister kingdom, Great Britain. Relations between Ireland and Britain were always likely to be strained. What made them so very fraught in the 1790s was the outbreak of a dramatic revolution in France in 1789, followed quite soon thereafter by a major war, which threatened Britain with terrible consequences. The inspiration provided by the spread of

radical French principles to Ireland, and the opportunities to undermine British power and influence that French military successes provided, exacerbated the three profound internal problems facing Ireland to such an extent that the country exploded into a bitter and bloody rebellion in 1798. Thereafter, it was the determination of British ministers to prevent the French taking advantage of the disturbed situation in Ireland that led to the decisions to end the separate existence of the Irish Parliament in Dublin and to press for an incorporating union of Great Britain and Ireland. This constitutional change, achieved by the end of 1800 largely by British efforts, destroyed the legislative independence so recently gained by the Irish Parliament and brought Ireland more firmly than ever under British control. When the new Imperial Parliament failed, in its turn, to address the three profound internal problems disrupting Irish life, the Union proved no more effective than the reforms of the early 1780s in bringing political stability to Ireland.

I.

Sectarian Tensions

The Irish economy, though it remained underdeveloped in comparison with the British economy, did show signs of improvement in the late eighteenth century. These benefits, however, were not equally shared by the three major social groups in Ireland: the Anglo-Irish members of the Church of Ireland, the Scots-Irish Presbyterians and the Gaelic Catholic majority. A tiny minority of the population – less than 1 per cent – made up the ruling class and dominated the Irish economy, especially Irish agriculture. The Irish middle classes, making up around 12 per cent of the population, were far smaller than the middle classes in Britain. Close to 90 per cent of the population remained poor and the overwhelming majority of these were Catholics. Even when the relaxation of the penal laws enabled Catholics to purchase or rent more land, they could still face difficulties with absentee landlords, rapacious middlemen and competition from more successful Protestants. Even resident Protestant Anglo-Irish landowners might show little sympathy for the poor Catholic masses, who surrounded them, while absentee landlords (living in Britain or spending much of their time in Dublin), were content to let middlemen rent their lands and then sub-let them to small Catholic farmers who might be denied security of tenure. Catholic farmers, merchants and manufacturers who were successful could find that their achievements provoked the resentment of Protestant competitors and neighbours. Even when careers in the law and the military were opened to Catholics in the early 1790s, they were denied advancement to the higher ranks of these professions. When small Catholic farmers or labourers competed for rents or employment with Protestant neighbours, they could find themselves accused of pushing up

rents or driving down wages to the disadvantage of the Protestants. A great many Irish people lived close to the margin of subsistence and it took only a single bad harvest to push many into destitution. In such a crisis the Irish poor could not count upon the kind of parish relief system that had long existed in Britain.

Agrarian discontent was widespread across Ireland, violence was endemic and secret agrarian societies were a marked feature of rural Ireland.[3] Protests were frequent and widespread against enclosures, high rents, insecure tenancies, church tithes and other church dues. Both rent levels, especially for small potato patches, and tithe rates rose sharply in the 1790s. Protests against both brought the Catholic poor in particular into conflict with the Anglo-Irish landowning elite and the clergy of the established Church of Ireland. When the landowners were absentees or the clergy were guilty of pluralism and non-residence, resentment could be greater. If the landowners or clergy were resident, but abused their powers as local magistrates, then they could become highly unpopular and the potential victims of violent reactions. The economic grievances of the poor were compounded by the taxation policies of the Irish government and Parliament. The Irish poor were eventually relieved of the hearth tax, though not until 1795, but other tax decisions affected the Catholic poor disproportionately. There was no direct tax on land or incomes and hence most of the government's revenue came from indirect taxes on such products as salt, sugar, tea, malt, leather, tobacco and alcohol, which fell disproportionately on poor consumers, particularly urban wage-earners. Several of these taxes were new in the 1790s as were the decisions to withdraw all bounties (that is, subsidies) on the inland and coastal carriage of grain to Dublin and to introduce new restrictions on the licensing of maltings.[4] These acts adversely affected Catholic grain merchants and the poor consumers of grain. The Irish poor had always resented the county cess, raised to repair roads, and they disliked new local taxes raised to meet the costs of raising the Irish militia from 1793 onwards. These taxes frequently provoked violent reactions, especially when they were accompanied by harsh, arbitrary or corrupt behaviour by local officials or by efforts to curb illicit distilling of alcohol.[5]

To add to this context, the Irish poor faced other problems which made the 1790s a difficult decade. Population grew faster than the growth in employment opportunities and several bad harvests were experienced. There was a bad harvest of both grain and potatoes in 1792, for example. More resented was the man-made distress caused by the costly war against France, which began in early 1793. The war disrupted many established trade routes and made communications with sources of imports and markets for exports much more difficult. This created some temporary business recession and reduced employment opportunities. The heavy costs of the war increased the financial needs of the Irish Treasury and the obligations of the Irish Exchequer. Urban industrial employment was badly dislocated by the recession of 1792–3. Rents and food prices

rose and wages fell in real value. By 1797, Ireland faced a severe financial crisis and it was compelled to follow Britain in ending the convertibility of bank notes into gold. This led to a rapid fall in the amount of specie in circulation and to a reduction in the volume of commercial transactions.[6]

Popular disturbances occurred in both rural and urban areas when economic difficulties, financial exactions and government policies adversely affected the poorer sectors of society. Disturbances took on a sectarian tone and then a political aspect when they led to stiff competition between Catholics and Protestants. In county Wexford, for example, sectarian tensions increased in the 1790s, when there was a rise in the socio-economic status of Catholic farmers and a decline in the status of some of their middling Protestant neighbours. These tensions were compounded when the Protestant gentry were divided in their response to these developments, with some adopting a liberal stance and others a more reactionary attitude.[7] County Wicklow had the largest Protestant community in southern Ireland and, faced with the rebellion of 1798, some of these Protestants became among the most oppressive administrators of a harsh law and order policy against their Catholic neighbours and they established the most powerful rural outpost of the Orange Order.[8] Before the Irish rebellion of 1798, the most serious sectarian disturbances in the 1790s occurred in county Armagh. This was the most densely populated county in Ireland and possessed the most complex social and economic structure. Catholics, Presbyterians and Church of Ireland Protestants were represented in the county in almost equal numbers, but they predominated in the south, centre and north of the county respectively. A number of recent developments led to increased competition between these three groups. When the Irish Catholics were enfranchised in 1793 they became more valuable to Protestant landlords as tenants and, since they were often more ready to pay a higher rent to acquire a tenancy, they were able to undercut Protestants seeking tenancies themselves. The rapid extension of the linen industry in the county, run by both Protestant and Catholic masters, provided employment for out-work, independent weavers. Young Catholic and Protestant men competed for this work, which enabled them to become more independent of both their masters and their fathers. The young men in this kind of employment and with this level of independence appear to have been more willing to engage in violence. And as rivalry grew between these young men of different religious backgrounds, the Protestants came to resent the way the formation of Volunteer corps in the 1780s and the creation of the militia from 1793 gave Catholics access to arms and training in arms, in a society that regarded the bearing of arms as a right of citizenship. As competition and rivalry grew between Catholics and Protestants, clashes occurred and violence spread. Protestant bands were formed, particularly the Peep of Day Boys (so-called because they attacked Catholics at daybreak), which sought to disarm the Catholics. In

response, the Catholics formed groups known as Defenders, who tried to gain arms legitimately through service in the Volunteers and the militia, or took to raiding Protestant households to steal arms.[9]

As large numbers were recruited into mutually hostile Peep of Day Boys and Defenders, the number and scale of disturbances increased. After a clash known as the battle of the Diamond, on 21 September 1795, the successful Peep of Day Boys set about expelling hundreds of Catholics from the region. They also established a new organization, the Orange Order (named after the Protestant hero, William III, Prince of Orange), to defend their economic status, religious superiority and political privileges. The fledgling Orange Order borrowed many masonic terms such as 'lodges', 'masters' and 'grandmaster' and masonic rituals, such as 'oaths', 'signs' and distinctive dress. Many Peep of Day Boys joined this new organization, but the Orange Order was not just the Peep of Day Boys by a different name. The membership was initially made up mainly of relatively humble men such as tailors, weavers, innkeepers and artisans of various kinds. In order to retain their dominance of local society, substantial merchants, manufacturers and landed gentry started to take a leading role in the Orange Order. They quickly recognized the potential of the Orange Order as a means of enlisting a disciplined Protestant force that would help defend the existing political, religious and social order in the county and so the movement grew quickly. On 12 July 1796 some 2,000 Orangemen took part in commemorating William of Orange's victory at the battle of the Boyne in 1690. By 1797 General Lake was reviewing a march several times as large. By 1798 the membership of Orange lodges nationwide may have totalled 80,000 and by 1800 there may have been twice as many Orangemen. The Orange lodges formed a federation under the Grand Lodge with a leading figure chosen as the Grand Master. The movement denied that it was attacking the religious beliefs of the Catholics. Rather, its members insisted that their purposes were political: to defend a Protestant monarchy, a Protestant constitution and a Protestant state church. They did, however, associate Catholicism with tyranny, slavery and disloyalty.[10] As a Catholic rising became more threatening, Orangemen were very active in disarming potential Catholic rebels. Significant numbers of Orangemen joined the newly formed Yeomanry, a largely Protestant force created in 1796 and numbering over 50,000 men by 1800. As the Irish rebellion of 1798 became increasingly sectarian, many thousands of Orangemen were active in launching sectarian attacks on any Catholic they believed to be a rebel or sympathetic towards the rebellion.

II.

The Catholic Question

The Irish Patriots and the Irish Volunteers had debated in the early 1780s how far to accept the substantial Catholic majority in Ireland as loyal subjects deserving equal civil liberties and political rights. They had supported the repeal of parts of the penal code, but they had been very divided on whether to make any political concessions to the Catholics. The Catholic elite, dominated by a handful of substantial landowners and the Catholic bishops, were convinced that the best means of campaigning for further relief measures was by discreet lobbying of leading Irish ministers and by stressing how loyal and peaceful the Catholic population was prepared to be. They did this through the Catholic Committee, which met intermittently throughout the 1780s. This state of affairs was transformed by the intense political excitement generated by the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789. The French Revolution was seen as a triumph for enlightened views, which promoted religious toleration, anti-clericalism and secular solutions to social problems. Early in the revolution the wealth and power of the Catholic Church, the influence of the clergy and the authority of the Pope were all sharply curtailed, indicating that not all Catholics were permanently enslaved by their clergy. Later, French forces actually invaded the Papal States in Italy and brought back Pope Pius VI as a prisoner to France. The French Revolution had positive as well as negative consequences. It promoted a political ideology which claimed that all men had the right to be regarded as full citizens and to exercise political influence. Whereas, in the past, Protestants had associated Catholicism with tyranny and royal absolutism, it was now possible to see Catholic France as a beacon of liberty extending political rights even further than did Protestant Britain.

Early in 1791, Edward Byrne and John Keogh, middle-class men inspired by events in France, began to challenge Viscount Kenmare and Archbishop John Troy for control of the Catholic Committee in order to advance a more radical strategy to achieve political concessions for the Irish Catholics.[11] In February, they urged the election of a new and more widely-based Committee, which soon demonstrated that there was significant lay Catholic support for a more public and proactive campaign to secure Catholic relief. Meanwhile, a young Dublin lawyer, Theobald Wolfe Tone, himself a Protestant, produced an anonymous pamphlet, *An Argument on behalf of the Catholics of Ireland*, in August 1791.[12] He advanced an eloquent and powerful case urging Irish Protestants to end their distrust of Catholics and he decided the union of Irishmen of all religious denominations was the best way of securing political reforms. Influenced by the natural rights ideology of the French Revolution, Tone did not have a great deal of respect for the religious tenets or the ecclesiastical structure of the Catholic Church and he hoped to see papal authority seriously weakened. He was, in fact, opposed to all

religious enthusiasm and hoped to end all religious animosities. While prepared to give Irish Catholics the parliamentary franchise, he was willing to see the property qualification attached to it significantly increased so that only the more prosperous Catholics would be able to vote in parliamentary elections in future. Despite these reservations, Tone's pamphlet was widely read and well received. It helped secure him appointment as an assistant secretary to the Catholic Committee. Shortly after his pamphlet appeared, some of the more reform-minded Catholics, including members of the Catholic Committee, set up the Catholic Society, which caused a sensation by publishing a forthright and uncompromising demand for the speedy repeal of the surviving parts of the penal code.[13]

The Earl of Westmorland, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, and his Chief Secretary, Robert Hobart, were opposed to any further concessions to the Catholics. They hoped to exploit the divisions within the Catholic Committee by persuading a majority of its members to disavow the Catholic Society's demand for an immediate end to all surviving penal laws. The Catholic Committee refused to accept this advice and refused to adopt a submissive stance in its meetings with the Chief Secretary. Fearing an angry response from the Lord Lieutenant, Kenmare and his supporters seceded from the Catholic Committee in December 1791, leaving it more not less formidable as more radical and determined men took over control. While the Irish government continued to oppose further measures of Catholic relief, the British government was becoming more willing to make such concessions in the belief that this would actually strengthen not weaken the Protestant ascendancy in Ireland. An independent Irish MP, Hercules Langrishe, was encouraged to introduce a modest Catholic relief bill into the Irish House of Commons on 25 January 1792. This moderate measure, giving Catholics access to minor state positions, passed easily enough, but a petition in support of granting the parliamentary franchise was rejected by the House of Commons by a huge majority.

The modest gains made in early 1792 did not satisfy the leaders of the Catholic Committee. It decided to mount a more aggressive campaign to secure the parliamentary franchise for Catholics. A decision was taken to make the Catholic Committee more obviously representative of the Catholic population as a whole by promoting the election of delegates from across Ireland to a convention to meet in Dublin to devise means of promoting Catholic emancipation more effectively. Although many Protestants were alarmed, some grand juries made formal protests, and other Protestants tried to belittle the Catholic Convention by describing it as the 'Back-lane Parliament' (because of where it met in Dublin), nearly three hundred delegates were elected from most of the counties and main towns of the country. John Keogh, Thomas Braughal and Wolfe Tone toured the country encouraging popular participation in the election of these delegates. Their efforts alarmed many Protestants and provoked sectarian

disturbances in County Down. When the Convention met, in December 1792, Edward Byrne was elected its President and a decision was taken to appoint five leading delegates to take a petition[14] directly to the King, rather than have it transmitted through the Lord Lieutenant, which was the usual procedure. The King received this delegation graciously on 2 January 1793. Prime Minister William Pitt and his leading ministerial colleagues, fearing that a war with revolutionary France was imminent, were now willing to advise the Irish executive to support enfranchising Irish Catholics if the leading members of the Catholic Committee would promote internal peace and avoid any connection with any political radicals in Ireland. Such assurances were given.

Lord Westmorland and Robert Hobart in Dublin were now advised from London that they should promote a Catholic Relief Bill, which would give Irish Catholics the franchise on the same terms as Protestants. The proposed measure was also to allow Catholics to become barristers and to be educated abroad, to serve on grand and petty juries, and on borough corporations, to serve as junior army and navy officers, and to bear arms (provided they met a substantial property qualification).[15] Although there was no mention of Irish Catholics being allowed to sit in either House of Parliament or to hold high office in the Irish state, this was still a major concession. Westmorland and Hobart reluctantly supported the measure in the 1793 parliamentary session, but, to sweeten the pill for Protestants, it was also decided to approve a Militia Bill, a Gunpowder Bill and a Convention Bill,[16] which strengthened the forces of internal defence, made illicit arming more difficult and declared radical political societies, associations and conventions illegal. The last act threatened the survival of the Catholic Convention and the Catholic Committee. They were wound up, but not before they expressed their support for the Catholic Enfranchisement Bill.

Irish Catholics were undoubtedly pleased to secure the parliamentary franchise on the same terms as Protestants because this gave them considerable influence over the voting in several counties, but they were still anxious to secure further concessions. They could not regard themselves as equal citizens in the Irish state, while they were excluded from both Houses of Parliament and all senior positions in the Irish executive, judiciary and military. There was no way, however, that the Irish Parliament would be willing to promote such concessions in the present political climate. Yet, quite suddenly, the political situation changed, first in Britain and then in Ireland. Faced with threats from revolutionary France abroad and a significant radical movement in Britain, the Portland Whigs, long in opposition, agreed to form a grand coalition with William Pitt's supporters in order to combat these serious threats. The Portland Whigs had long forged close connections with leading Irish Whigs and former Irish Patriots, including Henry Grattan. Portland was made Home Secretary in Britain, a position that gave him formal responsibility for Britain's relations with Ireland,

and he pressed hard to have Earl Fitzwilliam chosen to replace Westmorland as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. Fitzwilliam was a friend of Edmund Burke, who favoured Catholic relief in Ireland, and his sister was married to George Ponsonby (the leader of the Whigs in the Irish House of Commons); he naively and optimistically believed that he could negotiate a settlement to the Catholic question in Ireland. Neither Pitt nor Portland held such ambitious views or wished to test the loyalty of the leading Irish supporters of the Protestant ascendancy. They hoped to maintain the status quo and not heighten religious tensions within Ireland, whereas Fitzwilliam hoped to end the current impasse by taking proactive steps to secure Catholic emancipation.

Fitzwilliam did hold discussions with Pitt and Portland in October and November 1794, before embarking for Ireland. These discussions failed to result in absolutely explicit instructions being given to the new Lord Lieutenant. It seems clear, at least in retrospect, that Pitt wished Fitzwilliam to make any new concessions only if it became absolutely the only way to maintain stability in Ireland. Fitzwilliam either failed to understand exactly what political strategy Pitt was advising him to pursue or he convinced himself that a proactive policy towards Catholic emancipation was, in fact, the best way of securing political stability in Ireland. When he arrived in Ireland, early in January 1795, Fitzwilliam promptly dismissed leading and effective ministers of the Irish Executive, including the Solicitor General (John Toler), the Attorney General (Arthur Wolfe), the Chief Revenue Commissioner (John Beresford), the Under-Secretary of State (Sackville Hamilton) and his able assistant (Edward Cooke). All of these men protested bitterly and John Beresford even took his complaints directly to London, where Prime Minister Pitt was a personal friend. Alarm bells began to ring in Whitehall, but Fitzwilliam still went further. He was determined that the question of Catholic emancipation should be debated in Parliament and he did nothing to deflect Catholic petitions being sent to Parliament or to oppose Henry Grattan's motion in support of a Catholic Relief Bill on 12 February 1795. Portland urged caution and delay, but Fitzwilliam demanded that a clear decision on the measure should be taken in London, but allowed no time for a considered reply before pressing on. On 20 February, he was ordered to oppose the introduction of a Catholic emancipation bill and a few days later he was ordered to resign. He was rapidly recalled from Dublin.[17]

Although all sides in this debacle denied that the Catholic question was the real cause of Fitzwilliam's recall, it seems clear that this was in fact the case. Pitt was irritated at the sudden changes made in the Irish executive, but he was more concerned at the Protestant reaction in Ireland to Fitzwilliam's drive for full Catholic emancipation. He believed it was unwise, in the midst of a major war, to risk alienating the most powerful interests in Ireland. Moreover, while resisting radical demands in Britain, it seemed perverse to support Catholic emancipation

in Ireland that would almost certainly be followed by demands for parliamentary reform to remove the many Protestant controlled rotten boroughs in Ireland. It might even prove difficult to defend the Protestant established Church of Ireland, if Catholics became a substantial force in the Irish Parliament. Indeed, the whole Protestant constitution in Ireland might be put at risk.

Without backing from the Irish Executive, the Catholic emancipation bill was defeated in the Irish House of Commons, despite Grattan's major speech in its support.[18] The Catholic middle class was now more alienated from the Irish executive and Parliament than ever before, having seen its hopes suddenly raised and as suddenly crushed. Fitzwilliam's recall was met with near despair. The Catholic Committee reassembled in Dublin in February 1795 to protest at Fitzwilliam's recall, but to no avail. A delegation from the Catholic Committee carried its protests to London, but this time its members met a cold reception from George III. When Earl Camden was appointed as the new Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, he was urged by the British government to rally support from the Protestant interest. Camden promptly reinstated many of the men whom Fitzwilliam had so recently removed from office and dismissed those few office holders who had supported the bill in support of Catholic emancipation.

The conservative Catholic bishops, ably led by John Troy, Archbishop of Dublin, let the Lord Lieutenant know that they were ready to proceed with slower and more cautious steps in promoting Catholic interests. They were able to use the argument that it was to the advantage of the Irish government to have an educated and disciplined Catholic clergy in Ireland advising their congregations to keep the peace. This allowed them to achieve a useful concession, despite the Fitzwilliam debacle. The French Revolution had resulted in the closure of many Catholic seminaries in France and the Low Countries, where so many Irish Catholic priests had been trained in the past. A seminary in Ireland was clearly needed if the supply of a well-trained priesthood was not to dry up. On 24 April 1795, within three weeks of his arrival in Dublin, the new Chief Secretary, Thomas Pelham, introduced a bill into the Irish House of Commons to establish a Catholic seminary at Maynooth. His bill received a swift and easy passage through the Irish Parliament. However, there was more opposition outside Parliament. The bill establishing St Patrick's College also pleased the Catholic hierarchy because it gave Catholic bishops and leading Catholic laymen a clear majority on the board of trustees that appointed the president and teaching staff of the college. Public funding was necessary to sustain and expand the seminary, but this money was not provided for the college by any substantial government or parliamentary endowment. Instead, the college had to approach the Irish government and Parliament on an annual basis to secure the funds to keep the seminary afloat.[19] In return for receiving these concessions, the Irish Catholic bishops, more united than ever before, offered no protests

when Camden's administration pursued harsh law-and-order policies from 1795 onwards. The Catholic hierarchy and a large majority of the Catholic priesthood proved ready to advise the Catholic population to keep the peace and to oppose the demands of radical political activists. They were not prepared to endorse the policies and actions of either the United Irishmen or the Defenders.[20] While the Catholic hierarchy succeeded in replacing the Catholic Committee as the most influential Catholic voice so far as the Irish Executive was concerned, the bishops could not entirely escape the charge that the Maynooth seminary bill was a sop accepted in place of Catholic emancipation.

III.

The United Irishmen and Political Reform

The greatest threat to political stability, one which subsumed sectarian disputes and the Catholic question, was the grossly unrepresentative nature of the electoral and parliamentary systems. The two Houses of the Irish Parliament represented the interests of only one small group of Irishmen – the propertied elite of the Anglo-Irish adherents of the established Church of Ireland. The Scots-Irish Presbyterians, strong in local politics in Ulster, had no representatives in the Irish House of Lords and only a handful of representatives in the Irish House of Commons. The Catholic majority had no representation at all in either chamber, even after they had been granted the vote on the same terms as Protestants in 1793. Because so many Irish constituencies were small boroughs with tiny electorates, a small number of borough proprietors controlled a surprising number of seats in the House of Commons. They could easily return themselves or a relative or friend to Parliament or sell a seat which they controlled to the highest bidder. Irish Patriots and those of a liberal disposition had long recognized the unjustness and inequalities of the Irish electoral system. Henry Flood had attempted in the mid-1780s to achieve a measure of parliamentary reform, but his efforts failed largely because any fair system of representation would give the Catholic Irish majority significant influence over a large number of Irish MPs. The fear then was that this electoral system would soon be followed by Catholic demands to sit in both Houses of the Irish Parliament and, most alarming of all, Catholic pressure to reverse the large-scale confiscation of Catholic lands that had occurred in the seventeenth century. It was these profound and understandable fears that made the question of parliamentary reform such a difficult problem to address. Even Henry Grattan was opposed to the principle of universal manhood suffrage. And yet, so long as no attempt was made to address this question, then so long would political stability prove elusive.

Interest in parliamentary reform received a remarkable stimulus with the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789 and the prolonged and intense

discussions of natural rights, which followed this event. Within weeks of the opening of the States-General in Paris, Irish newspapers, especially in Dublin and Belfast, showed a deep interest in the political issues and principles being discussed in France. Men previously in favour of political reform drew inspiration from the remarkable events and discussions taking place in France. Even some of the propertied elite recognized that some measure of political reform might be unavoidable. The Irish Whig party, founded in 1789 by Henry Grattan, George Ponsonby, John Forbes and the Earl of Charlemont, committed itself to a reform programme designed to strengthen the Irish Parliament and to weaken the political influence of the Irish Executive over the legislature. The Irish Whigs wished to reduce the extent of crown patronage that the Irish government could use to influence the votes of men in both Houses of the Irish Parliament, to reduce government expenditure and to disfranchise revenue officers. They founded the Friends of the Constitution as a political club for moderate reformers and debated how best to reform the electoral system.[21] In doing so, they recognized the danger to their own position that would be posed by any attempt to increase the size of the electorate or to abolish many of the small rotten boroughs. Fears of how large numbers of enfranchised Catholics might vote led them to propose reducing the number of enfranchised Catholics by increasing the qualification for the vote from the possession of a two-pounds to a twenty-pounds freehold.[22] This kind of moderation, in an era of intense debate about universal natural rights, meant that the Irish Whigs could attract little support outside Parliament. They failed to prevent a more generous electoral franchise being granted to Irish Catholics in 1793, while their own modest proposal for further parliamentary reform was defeated in 1794 by 142 to 44 votes.

Meanwhile, outside the political elite, much more radical ideas were being debated and far more support for them was being enlisted. By 1790, middle-class reformers in Belfast were celebrating the achievements of the French revolutionaries and were beginning to agitate for an extension of electoral reform that would acknowledge the political claims of the Catholic majority. Radicals such as William Drennan in Belfast and Theobald Wolfe Tone in Dublin, neither of whom showed much respect for Catholicism as a religion, were now accepting that a significant extension of the franchise would have to mean giving the vote to large numbers of Irish Catholics. Tone's famous pamphlet, *An Argument on behalf of the Catholics of Ireland* (mentioned above), helped convert many reformers to the need to enfranchise a great many Irishmen, no matter to what religious denomination they adhered. Invited to Belfast by Drennan, Tone and a handful of other radicals, including Samuel Neilson and Thomas Russell, established the Belfast Society of United Irishmen on 18 October 1791. This society called for the destruction of English influence over the Irish government, an objective, which they knew could only be achieved by a thoroughgoing reform

of the electoral system, including the enfranchisement of a great many Irish Catholics. Less than a month later, on 9 November 1791, James Napper Tandy,[23] a veteran of popular radical campaigns in the capital, persuaded a few fellow reformers to set up the Dublin Society of United Irishmen. Branches were soon set up in other large towns, but these two societies dominated the movement for radical parliamentary reform in the early 1790s.[24]

Much more specific information on the composition and activities of the Dublin Society of United Irishmen is available than for the Belfast Society.[25] In its early years it attracted about four hundred members, about half of whom were regular attenders, though many meetings had attendance figures of around one hundred. The society attracted both Protestant and Catholic members, but in its early years all the leading officers were Protestants. In these years the society was undoubtedly dominated by men from the middling ranks of society – barristers, attorneys, doctors, schoolteachers, printers, booksellers, merchants, manufacturers and owners of luxury trades – but its most prominent members were men of even higher social status, including gentlemen such as Simon Butler, Archibald Hamilton Rowan and Thomas Addis Emmet. Few if any of the members were working men and none was from the lowest ranks in society. From the outset, however, there was some tension between what might be called bourgeois reformers and artisan radicals represented by men such as Napper Tandy.[26] This was more obviously the case in Belfast. Although professional men and moderately prosperous merchants and manufacturers were prominent, the Belfast Society of United Irishmen was beginning to attract men from lower down the social scale, men such as innkeepers, shopkeepers, tradesmen with small businesses, and skilled artisans in the textile industries.[27]

Both the Dublin and the Belfast societies engaged in similar activities to the radical societies springing up in London and large provincial cities across Britain. They held regular meetings, debated political issues, corresponded with radical societies in Britain and France, drew up addresses and petitions, and drafted proposals for reform.[28] The Belfast Society established the most effective radical newspaper, the *Northern Star*, as early as 4 January 1792. Edited by Samuel Neilson, four pages in length, and initially costing two pence, it kept its readers informed about events in France and about the United Irishmen's ideas and activities. It was widely distributed, well beyond Belfast, and regularly sold about 4,000 copies. It had to struggle against the hostility of the authorities however. Its printer was arrested, put on trial, but acquitted in 1794. The first editor, Samuel Neilson, was arrested, convicted and imprisoned for seventeen months in September 1796 and his two replacement editors were arrested in February 1797. The *Northern Star* did not cease publication until May 1797, when elements of the Monaghan militia, unrestrained by their superior officers, ransacked the newspaper's offices and smashed its printing press.[29] In the capital,

William Carey publicized the ideas, aims and activities of the Dublin Society of United Irishmen in his newspaper, the *Rights of Irishmen, or National Evening Star*, from late 1791. This newspaper also ran into difficulties with the authorities when it printed the United Irishmen's 'Address to the Volunteers of Ireland', calling upon them on 18 December 1792 to arm immediately. In May 1793, the *National Evening Star* closed down.[30] The Dublin United Irishmen, by then a very different organization, had to wait until 1797 before there was another effective newspaper promoting their cause in the capital. In that year, Arthur O'Connor established the *Press* as a radical newspaper, while Watty Cox[31] published a radical news-sheet, the *Union Star*, which kept the populace aware of the names and activities of Orangemen, spies, informers and agents provocateurs. They too were soon closed down.[32]

The societies of United Irishmen alarmed the authorities at national and local levels during their early years, even though they were not numerically strong, unified or particularly radical. They failed to forge effective alliances with either the Volunteers or the Catholic Committee. They struggled to devise a reform programme, which would unite large numbers of men across socio-economic, ethnic or religious lines. Despite the intense interest, which their members showed in the French Revolution and the two volumes of Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man* (1791–2),[33] neither of the two major societies of United Irishmen clearly advocated a political programme based on French principles or a Paineite ideology. In their early years the leading members of both societies were more influenced by ideas that can be characterized as Classical Republican or Real Whig rather than by the natural rights ideology or the social welfare reforms of Paine. Members of the Dublin Society explicitly denied that they were levellers, who wished to overturn the existing social hierarchy or redistribute wealth from the rich to the poor. There are, however, some indications even in its early years that the Belfast Society showed a greater concern for the welfare of the poor. This can be noted in some of the observations made by Thomas Russell and Henry Joy McCracken. The *Northern Star* also assured its readers that it expected a reformed legislature to abolish tithes and the hearth tax, and reduce the county cess levied to repair roads.[34]

When the Dublin Society of United Irishmen discussed proposals for parliamentary reform in January 1793, it only narrowly agreed to support universal manhood suffrage and it never even considered votes for women of any social rank. No demand was made for the secret ballot. It seems clear that its Protestant members still wished to retain open voting because they recognized that this would make it easier for wealthy landowners and employers to exert pressure on how their tenants and their workers would vote. It was, of course, for this very reason that Catholics wished to see the secret ballot adopted. It was not until February 1794 that the Dublin United Irishmen published their reform pro-

gramme. This advocated universal manhood suffrage, equal sized constituencies, annual parliaments, the payment of MPs and the exclusion of government placemen and pensioners from sitting in the Irish House of Commons.[35] These aims were not particularly innovative, though they did strike fear into the propertied elite. Yet again, however, there was no demand for the secret ballot. While the existence of very large estates was criticized, no attack was made on property rights and no mention at all was made of the kind of social welfare reforms so prominent in part two of Tom Paine's *The Rights of Man*.

The United Irishmen had so far operated in the open and had advocated changes by constitutional means. This did not prevent the Irish government and Parliament from deciding that these dangerously radical societies should be suppressed. Leading individual United Irishmen were harassed, arrested, persecuted and, whenever possible, imprisoned. In March 1793, Oliver Bond and Simon Butler were sentenced to six months in prison and fined £500 for publishing radical United Irishmen addresses. Hamilton Rowan was finally brought to trial in January 1794 and was sentenced to two years imprisonment, though he escaped in May and went into exile. William Drennan was prosecuted, but acquitted in early 1794, but he was sufficiently frightened by the experience that he abandoned radical politics. When the French sent a British agent, the Reverend William Jackson, to Ireland to make contact with the United Irishmen, he was arrested on 28 April 1794, convicted of treason, but avoided a terrible execution by committing suicide in the dock. Wolfe Tone, who knew about Jackson's activities, feared that he might be charged with treason, but, in fact, he was allowed to enter into an agreement with the authorities to leave the country in return for immunity from prosecution. Before he left for exile to the United States of America, Tone and a few other United Irishmen, including Thomas Russell, Henry Joy McCracken and Samuel Neilson swore an oath to continue their radical efforts until they had ended England's pernicious influence in Ireland and had secured the country's independence. Tone did leave for the United States, in June 1795, but, by February 1796, he was in France, where he engaged in efforts to secure a French invasion of Ireland.[36]

Not satisfied with prosecuting leading United Irishmen, the Irish government determined to destroy the whole movement. The Militia Act led to the disbanding of the Volunteers, whose support the United Irishmen had tried to enlist. The Convention Act of 1793[37] made it illegal to establish political associations other than Parliament itself. This made the societies of United Irishmen illegal. In May 1794, the Dublin police forcibly disbanded the Dublin Society and seized its papers. The recall of Earl Fitzwilliam in early 1795 and his replacement by Earl Camden led to determined efforts to destroy the whole United Irishmen movement by all means possible, some of them barely legal. The Irish government portrayed the United Irishmen as members of a treasonable organi-

zation, which was determined to excite a French-style violent revolution. While this was undoubtedly unjust, the United Irishmen were put in the position of abandoning all their hopes and activities or converting themselves into a secret, oath-bound, mass-based conspiracy ready to pursue its objectives by violent means and with the military assistance of the French. Those leaders still at large, especially those in Belfast, chose the latter strategy. Between 1794 and 1795 the United Irishmen were transformed from an open reform movement primarily dedicated to employing constitutional means into a mass-based, secret organization ready to resort to violent revolution.[38] With surprising rapidity, the United Irishmen managed to harness politically discontented middle-class reformers, radical tradesmen and artisans, and oppressed peasants, loosely allied with the militant Catholic Defenders, into a potentially revolutionary if never entirely coherent force. Although this revolutionary conspiracy eventually enlisted tens of thousands of supporters, sympathizers and fellow-travellers (estimates on the size of the conspiracy range from 200,000 to 500,000), it never entirely combined the political aims of the United Irishmen with the social and economic aims of the Defenders.[39] Instead, it tried to gloss over these profound differences in ideology and objectives, while uniting to overthrow the existing political system. The United Irishmen sought equal civil liberties and political rights, irrespective of a man's social status or religious affiliation. The Defenders wished to see Catholics admitted to the legislature and the government, but they were more interested in such objectives as the abolition of tithes and church dues, reduction in rents and taxes, and greater access to land ownership. Some even harboured the ultimate goal of restoring lands confiscated in the seventeenth century to their previous Catholic owners. They had long memories and harboured a deep sense of injustice. Nevertheless, although there were clear differences between the United Irishmen and the Defenders, there was also some overlap in their objectives. The Belfast United Irishmen, in particular, paid considerable attention to economic issues, such as tithes, rents and taxes. Thomas Russell not only emphasized the political rights of the common man, but also expressed concern about the exploitation of women and children in the workplace and supported the setting up of a combination of artisans in Belfast to protect their interests.[40]

Both the Dublin and the Belfast societies of United Irishmen continued to meet, sometimes under different names and now in secret. Activities were coordinated by a nationwide organization in a pyramid structure from local branches to baronial, county, provincial and then up to a national body, with delegates being sent up from one level to the next to discuss policies and coordinate activities.[41] Members were now expected to proclaim their support for 'an equal, full and adequate representation for all the people in Ireland'.[42] Emerging leaders, such as Thomas Addis Emmet, Lord Edward Fitzgerald, Arthur O'Connor and William James MacNeven, were more prepared than earlier leaders of the

United Irishmen to recruit lower-class Protestants in urban areas and commercial centres. Radical employers built up political alliances with their workers. It was generally recognized, however, that only an alliance with the far more numerous Catholic Defenders would provide the numbers and the militancy to threaten a rebellion. With such allies it seemed possible to negotiate with the French for military assistance. The United Irishmen had some misgivings about allying with the Defenders, but they were confident that they could curb the sectarian tendencies of these allies and channel their activities towards the achievement of their own political objectives. The Defenders, in turn, appear to have accepted the need for United Irishmen leadership because of their superior social status and expertise, and their established links with the French.

The alliance of the United Irishmen and the Defenders was undoubtedly assisted and promoted by the actions of the Irish government, the armed forces and the Orangemen. The Irish government enlisted spies, informers and agents provocateurs to infiltrate both movements.[43] Earl Camden sent Lord Carhampton and the army into Connacht in 1795, with unlimited authority.[44] Hundreds of small farmers and agricultural labourers suspected of being Defenders were arrested and, without being brought to trial, were sent to serve in the Royal Navy. This flagrant violation of due legal process caused intense and widespread resentment, but Camden responded by securing an indemnity act in early 1796 to protect Carhampton from any criminal charge. In Ulster, sectarian warfare spread as the newly created Orange Order launched a series of vicious attacks on the Catholic peasantry in the counties of Armagh and Down. Over one thousand Catholics were driven out of Armagh alone. When the authorities turned a blind eye to such conduct, it is hardly surprising that Orangeism helped to strengthen the emerging alliance between the Defenders and the United Irishmen. In 1796, Camden secured legislation to create a new armed defence force, the Irish yeomanry, a largely Protestant force, that could be trusted to be more ruthless towards the United Irishmen and the Defenders than the militia, which included far more Catholics and which had been infiltrated by both United Irishmen and Defenders. Both United Irishmen and Defenders responded to attacks on them by seeking arms and responded in kind against Orangemen, yeomanry troops and active magistrates.

The Irish authorities were soon alarmed at the astonishing growth, at least in nominal membership, of both the United Irishmen and the Defenders. Their alarm approached panic as they discovered the extent of the connections between the United Irishmen and the French. They soon discovered that the United Irishmen had agents such as Wolfe Tone in France and that they sent several others across to France to encourage French interest in an invasion of Ireland. Despite this information, there was astonishment when the French actually attempted a major invasion of Ireland at the end of 1796. A large French

fleet, with nearly 15,000 troops led by General Lazare Hoche set out for Ireland. With insufficient defence forces to cope with such a force, the Irish authorities were fortunate that a winter storm scattered this fleet. When about a third of this force landed at Bantry Bay in late December 1796, they were disillusioned to find that no rebellion had actually broken out in Ireland and no rebel force was there to welcome these French troops. They were glad to retreat to France.[45]

The near panic created by this attempted French invasion provoked an even harsher response from the Irish government, its armed forces and militant Orangemen. In early 1797 General Lake, with a mixed force of militia, yeomanry and fencibles, was given orders to pacify Ulster by disarming all potential rebels, using all methods necessary. The Lord Lieutenant and Irish Privy Council issued a Proclamation in May 1797, directing the military to act without waiting for the authority or sanction of a civil magistrate. Lake accomplished his task with ruthless efficiency, resorting to unrestrained attacks on persons and property. Little effort was made to keep his troops under firm control, with small units unaccompanied by officers allowed to take the law into their own hands. Many innocent people suffered in the process, but large quantities of arms were seized and destroyed, and serious damage was done to the preparations being made by the United Irishmen for a mass, coordinated rebellion. Lake's actions led to protests from moderate voices, such as those of Lord Moira, who raised his complaints in both England and Ireland.[46]

When General Ralph Abercromby, who had previously spent some years serving in Ireland, was appointed Commander-in-Chief in Ireland in late 1797, he felt compelled to indicate firm disapproval of the policy being pursued by the Irish government. He was shocked by the ill-discipline of the troops under his command and lamented the myriad injustices, which they had perpetrated. On 26 February 1798, he issued a general order condemning the behaviour of the country's armed forces, particularly the militia. He condemned the irregular behaviour of the troops, which 'unfortunately proved the army to be in a state of licentiousness which must render it formidable to everyone but the enemy'. This action angered leading members of the Protestant ascendancy, including John Foster, Speaker of the Irish House of Commons. Protests were made to the Lord Lieutenant and to the British government. Camden ordered the arrest of known leaders of the United Irishmen in Leinster and directed Abercromby to disarm the disaffected counties around Dublin. Abercromby obeyed instructions, but kept his troops on a tight rein. He decided, however, that his position had become intolerable and untenable. His decision to resign was reinforced by another Proclamation from the Lord Lieutenant and Irish Privy Council on 30 March 1798, authorizing the military throughout the kingdom to act independently of the civil power and to treat any disturbance as an act of rebellion. Abercromby resigned on 2 April 1798 and tried to restrain his troops during

his last days in command. General Lake succeeded him on 25 April, in time to respond to the rebellion, which broke out a month later. His appointment marked the triumph of the hardliners in the Irish government and Parliament. These hardliners were actually relieved that the boil had burst when the rebellion broke out in late May. They believed that it made it easier to respond to the challenge with unrestrained force.[47]

IV.

The Irish Rebellion of 1798

The leaders of the United Irishmen had been planning a rebellion ever since the abortive French invasion of December 1796 because they recognized that another French attempt would not be made until a serious rising had first broken out in Ireland.[48] They had supporters in France, such as Wolfe Tone, and leading United Irishmen, such as Arthur O'Connor, William James MacNeven and Thomas Addis Emmet, visited France in 1796 and 1797. Unfortunately for the United Irishmen, the Irish authorities acted with determination and ruthlessness to ensure a rebellion was very difficult to organize. Troops were given free rein to terrorize and disarm large numbers of potential rebels, especially in Ulster. Martial law was proclaimed and habeas corpus was suspended, allowing imprisonment without trial. Thomas Russell was arrested in Belfast as early as September 1796 and remained in prison until 1802. Samuel Neilson was arrested the same month and spent seventeen months in prison without being brought to trial. The Irish government also employed spies and informers, who effectively infiltrated both the United Irishmen and the Defenders. The United Irishmen had hoped to create a mass-based yet secret organization, but this proved impossible despite the sophisticated cell-like structure that was adopted by the movement. The more recruits were enlisted the more difficult it was to hide from the authorities what the United Irishmen were planning. The information gained by the authorities from spies and informers allowed them to disrupt the plans of the United Irishmen before they could be brought to fruition. William Orr was executed as early as October 1797. Arthur O'Connor, John Binns and James Coigley were arrested in England, while on their way to France, in February 1798. Charged with treason, O'Connor was acquitted, but was still sent back to Ireland to face trial and imprisonment there.[49] Firmer evidence of plotting was found in Coigley's possession and this Catholic priest was executed for treason.[50] On 12 March 1798, the authorities seriously disrupted the United Irishmen's plans for a rebellion by arresting many members of the Leinster Directory (including Emmet and MacNeven) at Oliver Bond's house in Dublin. The authorities had acted on information supplied by Thomas Reynolds, one of their most valuable informers. Lord Edward Fitzgerald evaded capture on that occasion, but he was hunted down and arrested on 19 May; mortally wounded, he

died in captivity. The brothers, John and Henry Sheares, were arrested on 21 May, charged with treason and executed on 14 July. Fearing an imminent rising, the authorities flooded Dublin with troops, arresting Samuel Neilson again on 23 May, the very day that the rebellion was planned to start.

The United Irishmen had planned a rising for 23 May. The plan involved seizing control of important buildings in Dublin and, as a signal to supporters outside the capital, stopping mail coaches leaving the city for the provinces. This was to be the signal for rebels to rise up in the surrounding counties, and then the rebellion was planned to radiate north to Ulster and south to Wexford. A French invasion force was then expected to arrive to prevent any successful government counterattack. In the event, the rebellion lacked focus and coordination, and proved disorganized and incoherent, though for a time it proved alarmingly dangerous. The rebels lacked the strength and organization to seize control of the centre of Dublin, as planned, and the rebels in the capital soon faded away, but not before preventing some mail coaches leaving the capital and thus indicating to other rebels that the planned rising had begun. Some rebels mobilized in the crescent of counties around Dublin, but they were relatively quickly dispersed though not eliminated. Guerrilla warfare continued in the mountains of Kildare and Wicklow for some time. The most serious risings took place further away from Dublin. Many thousands of United Irishmen and Defenders (with Father John Murphy of Boolavogue prominent among them)[51] took up arms (mainly the pike) in County Wexford. The rebels defeated the Cork militia at Oulart Hill on 27 May and went on to capture Enniscorthy on 29 May and Wexford the next day. A kind of provisional government was set up in Wexford town. The rebels appeared disciplined at first and appear to have massacred their enemies at Scullabogue and on Wexford bridge only after terrible loyalist vengeance had been inflicted upon them. Repulsed in their efforts to capture New Ross on 5 June and at Arklow on 19 June, the Wexford rebels were heavily defeated by a superior force under General Lake at Vinegar Hill (near Enniscorthy) on 21 June and lost control of Wexford by the next day. Thereafter, the Wexford rebels resorted to small-scale banditry and guerrilla warfare for a few more months.[52] Meanwhile, rebellion had broken out in Ulster. On 7 June Henry Joy McCracken raised several thousand United Irishmen in County Antrim and established a base at Ballymena. He was repulsed trying to capture Antrim town on 7–8 June, however, and his forces quickly melted away. McCracken himself was arrested and executed in July. Despite this reverse, a rising began in County Down on 9 June. After initial success this rebel force was defeated by General Nugent's troops at Ballynahinch on 13 June.[53] The rebellion, as a serious threat to the survival of the Irish government, had all but collapsed by the end of June, though vicious small-scale encounters continued to occur and savage brutality was meted out indiscriminately by both scattered rebel bands and enraged regular and irregular loyalist forces.

The start of the Irish rebellion took the French by surprise and it found them unprepared to intervene swiftly. Far too late to save the rebels from defeat, small expeditionary forces left France for Ireland. The main force under General Humbert, with just over one thousand men, arrived on 22 August in County Mayo, on the west coast of Ireland and far away from any important rebel area. Although Humbert was joined by some local rebels and he enjoyed initial success, his force was soon surrounded in County Longford by a vastly superior force commanded by Charles Cornwalllis, the recently appointed Lord Lieutenant and Commander-in-Chief. After a short engagement, Humbert wisely surrendered at Ballinamuck on 8 September.[54] This reverse did not prevent James Napper Tandy arriving off the coast of Donegal on 16 September. Realizing that nothing could now be done, he wisely retreated back to France. Despite these failures, Wolfe Tone still arrived in Ireland in October with a tiny force that was soon attacked and defeated at Lough Swilly. Tone was captured, convicted of treason and, when denied execution by firing squad, he committed suicide.

The rebellion of 1798 resulted in a very large number of casualties and vast material damage. Estimate casualty figures vary between 10,000 to 30,000, with the overwhelming majority being suffered by the defeated rebels or by those simply suspected of being rebels.[55] Cornwallis offered a general pardon to those rebels who would surrender and who had not committed deliberate murder.[56] Large numbers of rebels did surrender and significant numbers of them were acquitted, pardoned or simply released. Cornwallis also tried to keep a tight rein on the troops under his direct command, but was scathing in his criticism of the indiscipline of the Yeomanry. His criticisms and efforts at leniency, however, were much resented by terrified and enraged loyalists and he could not prevent numerous acts of terrible vengeance and murderous reprisals being inflicted on rebels or suspected rebels. Even Cornwallis had to put about 1,500 rebels on trial. Close to a third of these was executed and over six hundred were transported. Vast amounts of material damage were done to churches, chapels, public buildings and private property during the rebellion. Large numbers of claims for compensation flooded into the Irish government. The leading United Irishmen, who had been arrested before the rebellion broke out, were still aware that they faced possible execution for treason, especially after the execution of the Sheares brothers on 16 July. In order to save the lives of other leading United Irishmen, including Arthur O'Connor, Thomas Addis Emmet and William James MacNeven, it was agreed between them that they would reveal details of the activities of United Irishmen before the outbreak of the rebellion, including contacts with the French, provided they were not required to incriminate anyone by name. The authorities welcomed this approach, in order to discover more about the conspiracy without having to rely solely on some of their unreliable and discredited spies and informers. A treaty signed with the leading United

Irishmen in Kilmainham gaol[57] provided the committees of secrecy established by both Houses of the Irish Parliament with a wealth of useful evidence to justify in retrospect the harsh government repression before and during the rebellion.[58] Aware that this might be a government motive, in their detailed *Memoir*, O'Connor, Emmet and MacNeven, stressed that the violence provoked by the military, the Orange Order and the Catholic Defenders had spiralled out of the control which the United Irishmen had hoped to exercise over the rebels. They stressed that the United Irishmen had been reasonable reformers caught in the crossfire between an intransigent government, a lawless military, and an enraged peasantry. They themselves had been drawn into rebellion as the reluctant leaders of reluctant rebels. This claim actually suited the government as it could be used in future to dissuade staunch Protestant radicals from combining with aggrieved and ignorant Catholic peasants. Having acquired valuable evidence which it could put to use, the Irish government agreed to spare the lives of several dozen leading United Irishmen, who had not taken part in armed rebellion. They were, however, imprisoned, mainly in Fort George in Scotland, until the war with revolutionary France ended in 1802. They were then released, but banished from the British Isles.

The question that has puzzled historians ever since the 1798 rebellion is whether it should best be described as an agrarian revolt by an oppressed peasantry, a sectarian conflict between Catholic rebels and Protestant loyalists, or a political revolution largely planned, led and conducted by educated, democratic and non-sectarian United Irishmen.[59] There is still no agreement on what caused the rebellion, what it set out to achieve, and how it was conducted. Some scholars – starting with J. A. Froude and William Lecky in the nineteenth century – have stressed the deep structural fissures in Irish society that had existed for many decades.[60] They have concluded that the deep divisions and severe tensions in Irish society, as well as the entrenched attitudes of the governing elites in Britain and Ireland, made armed rebellion very likely, even inevitable. Other scholars, such as J. C. Beckett and R. B. McDowell believe that there were important positive developments in eighteenth-century Ireland, such as demographic changes, economic progress, cultural improvements, more enlightened religious attitudes, and the beginnings of political reforms, that might have healed the deep divisions in Irish society had the French Revolution and the French war not re-opened these wounds and poisoned the political, religious and social climate in Ireland.[61] Other historians believe that these developments were merely papering over the deep fissures in Irish society, while the dramatic events in France in the 1790s succeeded in tearing away this thin façade.[62]

One of the most substantial modern studies of the Irish rebellion – Thomas Pakenham's *The Year of Liberty* (first published in 1969 and often reissued since) – lays considerable stress on the agrarian aspects of the Irish rebellion. Pakenham

describes the rebellion as 'the old agrarian war under a new name' and 'a noisy jacquerie of the local peasantry'. He refers to the rebels 'as a half disciplined mob with little idea beyond plunder' and as 'the primitive force of the countryside'. He claims that 'the disaffected had no serious political aims' and were 'aimless and leaderless men'.[63] Even before this, McDowell had claimed that 'the great bulk of the people were restricted by poverty and persecution to political speculations of the simplest kind'.[64] Later, he insisted that the Defenders, who were so active in the rebellion, were 'rural rioters', whose 'aims were agrarian' and he has described the rebellion in Wexford as 'a rural riot on an enormous scale'.[65] There are obvious reasons why these and other historians have interpreted the 1798 rebellion as an agrarian revolt. A large proportion of the population were poor Catholics living near the margin of subsistence and it did not take much to plunge them into abject destitution. A sudden collapse in grain prices in 1797 devastated Wexford farming and provided the sudden depressed economic circumstances that could have provoked the desperate into an armed rebellion.[66] Moreover, given that Ireland, and especially County Wexford, was largely rural, it was inevitable that any large-scale rebellion would draw in a high preponderance of peasants and agricultural labourers.

While there were certainly agrarian aspects to the rebellion of 1798, no recent historian of the rising (and there are many of them) has fully endorsed Pakenham's view that it was *essentially* a peasants' revolt. There are strong grounds for rejecting his interpretation of the 1798 rebellion. Many of the leaders of the United Irishmen and of the armed rebels were not peasants and there is clear evidence that the rebellion was a planned rising and not a spontaneous eruption. Moreover, all recent research on the Catholic Defenders, who were so active in the rebellion, has stressed that they were not simply members of a peasant secret society interested solely in agrarian issues. Many of the Defenders were neither farmers nor agricultural workers, but were publicans, shopkeepers, schoolteachers, blacksmiths, transport workers, and artisans in a wide range of textile industries. While many Defenders protested against tithes and rents, others opposed a whole range of innovations and defended many customary rights. While never entirely absorbed into the ranks of the United Irishmen, they did adopt some of the latter's political aims. They shared with the United Irishmen bitter resentment against the draconian tactics of the Irish authorities and they also opposed British interference in Irish affairs.

The main locations of rebel activity also suggest that the rebellion was not primarily an agrarian revolt. The rebellion occurred very largely in the eastern counties of Ireland, which were the most economically advanced, outward-looking and Anglophone areas, where there were many small towns and where most of Ireland's commerce and manufacturing were based. There was very little rebel activity in the west and south, where the most agrarian and backward counties

were located. Tipperary was perhaps the most class-ridden county in Ireland and it had experienced more agrarian disturbances than any other county before 1798, but it remained quiet throughout the rebellion. Wexford had experienced few agrarian outrages before 1798, but it put more rebels into the field than any other county in Ireland.[67]

There is stronger evidence for regarding the Irish rebellion as a sectarian conflict between Protestants and Catholics. William Lecky did not dismiss the political aims of the United Irishmen to end religious divisions, but he still regarded the rebellion in Wexford as largely a Catholic rising.[68] He believed that the Catholic rebels there had been provoked into armed resistance by the efforts of ill-disciplined troops to disarm them. In sharp contrast, however, many recent studies of the rebellion have denied that it was essentially or mainly a religious conflict. While these studies have accepted that the catastrophe of 1798 was provoked to some extent by the oppressive policies of the Irish authorities, aided by vindictive Orangemen and terrified Protestant loyalists, their authors have been reluctant to go further than this and they have endeavoured to play down the sectarian nature of the 1798 rebellion. They have stressed that the rebels did not take up arms solely or even mainly in pursuit of religious objectives or to wreck sectarian revenge on Protestants, but to support a revolutionary political campaign led by United Irishmen, many of whose leaders were Protestants. Recent research has much reduced the role of Catholic priests in the rebellion. It has been claimed, for example, that, while eleven Catholic priests – most notably John Murphy, Philip Roche and Mogus Kearns – were involved in the Wexford rebellion, none was an accredited parish priest and six of these priests had been suspended or were unemployed at the this time.[69] James Caulfield, the Catholic Bishop of Ferns, who was in Wexford town throughout the rebellion, was bitterly critical of those Catholic priests who joined the rebels.[70] Moreover, these eleven priests were a small minority of the 85 Catholic priests in the county.[71] In County Mayo, only sixteen out of 314 Catholic priests supported the rebellion when the French landed.[72] In Ireland as a whole there were about 1,800 Catholic priests, but only about seventy had any connection with the rebellion and many of these were related to United Irishmen.[73] On 24 May, John Troy, the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, denounced the rebellion in a pastoral letter sent to every Catholic priest.[74]

Much resent research has emphasized the involvement of both Protestants and Catholics in the rebellion. A significant number of the leading United Irishmen involved in some way with the rebellion were Protestants and the movement was explicitly non-sectarian. In preparing for the rebellion in Dublin, however, seven of the active conspirators were Catholics.[75] In Ulster some seventy-one Presbyterian ministers, six Church of Ireland ministers, and twelve Catholic priests were involved with the United Irishmen prior to the outbreak of the rebellion.[76] When the rebellion in Ulster did occur, it was primarily, though not

exclusively, a Presbyterian rising.[77] Even in Wexford, where the Catholics were in a clear majority, many Protestants played a significant part in the rebellion. The Wexford provisional council, which sought to control the rebellion in that area, was made up of four Protestants and four Catholics. Beauchamp Bagenal Harvey, a member of the council and the rebel commander in the attack on New Ross on 5 June, was a member of the established Church of Ireland. Matthew Keugh, the governor of Wexford town during the rebellion, was another Protestant. There were only a few rebel attacks on Protestant churches in Wexford and, when sectarian outrages did occur, the rebel leadership never sanctioned and sometimes condemned these attacks on Protestants. Several Catholic priests tried to prevent the murder of Protestant prisoners in Wexford.[78] There was no rebellion in south Ulster or North Leinster where sectarian divisions were as great as in Wexford. Armagh witnessed the worst sectarian clashes prior to the rebellion, but remained quiet during it. The most heavily Catholic counties in Ireland lay in the province of Munster and yet the rebellion did not spread there. Finally, it must not be forgotten that large numbers of Catholics served with the government forces, especially the militia, and helped suppress the rebellion. Catholics and Protestants fought heroically on both sides in the clashes at Oulart Hill and at New Ross. In the battle of Ballynahinch on 13 June many Catholics served in the loyal Monaghan militia, while most of the rebels were Protestants.[79]

These examples must not be taken too far however. Religious tensions had existed for over two hundred years in Ireland and sectarian violence had occurred in many areas of the country prior to the rebellion. It is hardly surprising that the chaotic circumstances created by the rebellion allowed oppressed religious groups to settle longstanding grievances. The leaders of the United Irishmen may have been explicitly non-sectarian, but many of these men had been arrested prior to the rebellion or were in exile. They were in no position to ensure that sectarian hatred never raised its ugly head. Ireland remained a deeply divided sectarian state in the 1790s. The Protestant minority still regarded itself as a beleaguered minority and its members made determined efforts to retain their ascendancy. The North Cork militia, led by Lord Kingsborough, marched into Wexford in April 1798 and used very violent methods to disarm potential rebels.[80] On 24 May, more than thirty Catholic yeomen were summarily executed in Dunlavin, in west Wicklow, by regular British troops convinced that they were United Irishmen. The next day some twenty-eight prisoners, suspected of being rebels, were shot on the Wexford-Wicklow border. Such events undoubtedly helped to spark off a sectarian response from the majority Catholic population, especially once the rebellion began to fail. The sectarian desire for revenge led to the murder of 300–400 Protestants in the rebel camp at Vinegar Hill, the burning to death of over one hundred Protestants in a barn at Scullabogue, and the piking to death of Protestant prisoners on Wexford Bridge on 20 June. Sectarian revenge was exacted by both sides in a chaotic and terrifying situation. It was probably not the initial objective of many rebels at the outset of the rebellion.[81]

While many Protestant contemporaries sought to make political capital by denouncing the 1798 rebellion as a Catholic revolt against a beleaguered state, others believed that the rebellion was essentially a political revolt. Lord Lieutenant Cornwallis informed the British Home Secretary in London of 'the folly which has been too prevalent in this quarter of substituting the word Catholicism for Jacobinism as the foundation of the present rebellion'.[82] Lord Castlereagh, his Chief Secretary, claimed that the rebellion was a 'jacobinical' or French-inspired rising, pursuing its political objectives with 'Popish instruments'.[83] The imprisoned leaders of the United Irishmen confessed through the Kilmainham treaty that their objectives in planning a rebellion and in seeking French support had been political, not agrarian or sectarian. Over recent years a growing number of historians has stressed the role played by the United Irishmen in planning and conducting the rebellion. Throughout their existence the United Irishmen had tried to unite men of all religious denominations and had tried to politicize the Irish people by printed propaganda, debates, addresses, ceremonies, rituals, and festivities. By 1795 they had begun to aim at severing the connection with Britain and about the same time they had begun serious negotiations to encourage a French invasion in order to create an independent Irish republic. Many active rebels fought to achieve these objectives in the 1798 rebellion. Their efforts have inspired much recent research on the rebellion. Nevertheless, it seems clear that the United Irishmen were never in full control of the rebellion and it is not at all clear how many of the rank-and-file rebels had fully absorbed the political ideology, which the leading United Irishmen had sought to propagate. Were all the rebels or even a clear majority of them willing to risk their lives to effect the political changes, which the United Irishmen wished to accomplish? The Defenders undoubtedly had their own organization and their own objectives. They were never fully absorbed into the United Irishmen movement. In the rebellion in County Down, for example, the Presbyterian United Irishmen did not share the same aims as the Catholic Defenders and these differences weakened the effectiveness of their military alliance.[84] Even the United Irishmen were not all in full agreement about what objectives they wished to accomplish. Some had wider social and economic objectives than others. The more prosperous, better-educated and highly-politicized leaders had different objectives from many of their more humble followers. The United Irishmen were in disarray through arrests and disarming campaigns before the rebellion began in late May 1798. The rebellion lacked cohesion and direction. With dozens of engagements by different groups across several counties, and with no reliable communications between them, discipline broke down and objectives became blurred. The Irish rebellion may largely have been planned as a political revolution, but it is difficult to see it in *exclusively* political terms. It is going too far to assert the absolute primacy of the political dimensions of the 1798 rebellion.

V.

The Road to Union

The Irish rebellion of 1798 was crushed within six months, although widespread disturbances continued long after that. It had resulted in a shocking level of casualties and material damage. It had created great alarm across Ireland and in Britain too. The extent and severity of the violence were clear proof to many that Ireland was a dysfunctional society that seemed entirely unable to produce a stable system of government and reasonably harmonious social relations. The rebellion had actually intensified the major problems, which had long disturbed Ireland. Sectarian relations were worse after 1798 than before because of the terrible and unrestrained violence inflicted by Protestants upon Catholics and vice-versa. The first major study of the rebellion – Sir Richard Musgrave's *Memoirs of the Different Rebellions in Ireland* (Dublin, 1801)[85] – paid far more attention to the rebellion in Wexford than to the rebellion in Ulster and hence wrote far more about the violence initiated by Catholic rebels. His account of events in Wexford had a clear polemical purpose. He dwelled on the most murderous incidents, stressed the leadership role of Catholic priests, and insisted that Irish Catholics could never be loyal subjects of a Protestant king and a Protestant Parliament because they owed a higher allegiance to the pope. He linked the events of 1798 to the earlier Catholic risings of 1641 and 1689. In his view, the Irish Catholics in 1798 had engaged in a popish plot to extirpate or expel the Protestant Irish, to take control of the whole country for themselves, and to sever all political links with Britain. The Irish Catholics were the enemies of the Irish state from within, while French Catholics were the enemy from without.[86] An alternative narrative of the events of 1798, written by Bishop Stock, a liberal Protestant clergyman, perhaps inadvertently stoked up sectarian hatred by maintaining a very different point of view, that the rebellion had been provoked by the unjust sectarian attacks on the Catholics launched by ill-disciplined troops and militant Orangemen.[87]

The rebellion undoubtedly increased the determination of many Irish Protestants to maintain their ascendancy and to resist any further political concessions to the Catholics. If the Irish Parliament was to be left to decide the issue, then Catholic emancipation was further away than ever. Parliamentary reform was also much harder to justify to most Protestants, when, so they claimed, the enfranchisement of Catholics in 1793 had not prevented a bloody rebellion in 1798. Since it was believed that the Catholics would never be satisfied until they had reversed the land settlements made in the seventeenth century, it seemed reasonable to prevent them sitting in the legislature or occupying high office in the executive. Since the Irish Protestants were in a clear minority, the Protestant ascendancy, in terms of political power, social status and economic strength, could be maintained only by excluding Irish Catholics from the legislature and

the government of Ireland. Thus, the belief in the need to maintain and even strengthen the Protestant ascendancy was stronger after 1798 than before.

Irish politics had therefore reached an impasse. The Catholic majority desperately desired economic improvements, political emancipation and parliamentary reform. Protestant loyalists were more resistant to offering these concessions than before. The Protestants were also better armed and better organized than before through their strength in the Yeomanry and the Orange lodges. Liberal-minded Irish politicians, such as Henry Grattan and other Irish Whigs, were put on the defensive and held fewer parliamentary seats than before because they were tainted by previously showing some sympathy for the United Irishmen and for Catholic emancipation. Henry Grattan had actually withdrawn from the Irish House of Commons, in May 1797, because of his despair at shifting the attitudes of the government and the legislature on the questions of Catholic emancipation and moderate parliamentary reform. He was then subjected to many attacks, accusing him of being too sympathetic to those who then became involved in the rebellion of 1798.[88] A harsher attitude undoubtedly prevailed among the supporters of the Protestant ascendancy after 1798. British ministers, faced with a continuing war with France, feared that the Catholic majority in Ireland would not remain peaceful for long under such a regime.

The British Prime Minister, William Pitt, recognized the intractability of the present political system in Ireland and wished to do something to alleviate the situation. Since 1793 he had been leading an administration fighting a difficult war with France. To strengthen the country in this immense struggle, he acknowledged the need to bring the combined resources of the whole of the British Iseles to bear against France. He had tried and failed in 1785 to bring about closer commercial links with Ireland. In 1793 he had pressed the Irish government to promote the enfranchisement of Catholics so that they would more willingly enlist in the regular forces and the new Irish militia. By 1797–8, the war was going badly, peace negotiations had failed, and Britain itself was facing a serious financial crisis. The last thing Pitt needed in 1798 was an Irish rebellion and a French landing in that country, which had forced him to send reinforcements to Ireland. He was well aware that Britain's strategic needs required a stable internal situation in Ireland and greater British control over Irish affairs. Every effort needed to be taken to prevent Ireland becoming a potential backdoor for a French invasion force that could lead to Britain facing attacks by French forces from both the west and south-east. Pitt was not prepared to back radical reform in Ireland, when he had recently done so much to suppress political radicalism in Britain, and he feared another political rebellion in Ireland based on French principles. In the present situation, he knew that the Irish Parliament could not be persuaded to support Catholic emancipation, which might give the Irish Catholics a majority in the Irish legislature. He believed that there was

only one solution that would allow the Catholics to enjoy political emancipation, while preventing them ever becoming a majority in the Irish Parliament or government. That solution was to abolish the separate Irish Parliament, give the Irish representation in the Westminster Parliament, and then grant the Irish Catholics political emancipation. This could be safely granted after Union between Great Britain and Ireland, because, whereas the Catholics were clearly in a majority within Ireland, they would become a minority within the population of the whole United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and could not secure a majority in the new Imperial Parliament. Pitt hoped therefore that Union would ease Protestant fears of Catholic emancipation, while pleasing the Catholic majority by granting them this desired concession. He would not need to pressurize the Irish Parliament into granting Catholic emancipation. Instead, he could wait until Union was achieved and could then be much more confident of persuading the Imperial Parliament to grant Catholic emancipation because anti-Catholic prejudices were weaker in Britain than in Ireland.

It was not, however, going to be easy to persuade the Irish Parliament to vote itself out of existence, when riots had occurred in Dublin in December 1759 at the mere rumours of a possible Union and a major campaign had been waged in Ireland in the early 1780s to secure the legislative independence of the Irish Parliament.[89] When Pitt had tried to persuade the Irish Parliament to accept his Commercial Propositions in 1785, Henry Grattan had characterized his proposals as 'an incipient and creeping union'[90] and they had been rejected. Despite this response, Pitt and his two closest colleagues in the British government, Henry Dundas and William Grenville, decided that the outbreak of the Irish rebellion had made it necessary to propose Union again once order had been restored. Efforts were made to persuade some leading Irish political figures, including John FitzGibbon, John Beresford, John Toler, Isaac Corry and Barry Yelverton, to support Union, but they were not informed that Pitt and his British colleagues hoped that Union would soon be followed by Catholic emancipation. When Cornwallis assumed office as Lord Lieutenant in June 1798 it was on the understanding that, once he had subdued the rebellion, Union would be promoted in the Irish Parliament. Cornwallis approved of such a strategy.[91]

The Irish debate on Union began as early as 1 December 1798, when Edward Cooke, the able and experienced Under-Secretary of State in the civil division of the Irish government, published anonymously his *Arguments For and Against an Union, between Great Britain and Ireland, Considered*.[92] Adopting an apparently non-partisan stance, Cooke actually advanced arguments agreed in advance with Cornwallis and Castlereagh. He was undoubtedly expressing the Irish government's official views on Union. His authorship was soon discovered and his arguments produced many critical responses by men committed to the idea of retaining the Irish constitutional settlement of 1782. Cooke's crit-

ics[93] stressed that Ireland had always been a separate kingdom and not simply a province. It had long possessed a separate executive and a separate legislature and the commercial and constitutional gains made in the early 1780s had proved both popular and effective. Some critics insisted that Scotland had not benefited from its Union with England and that Ireland too would suffer adversely from any Union with Britain. Ireland would be bound to end up with a smaller number of MPs and peers in a United Parliament than England would retain and, hence, Irish interests would always be sacrificed in any conflict with English interests. Ireland would be dragged into any war initiated by England or England's enemies and, to meet any challenge posed, Ireland would have to contribute higher taxes and raise more recruits for the armed forces. In addition to these general fears, particular groups in Ireland were concerned about the impact of Union on their vested interests. Dublin corporation and the capital's freeholders and freemen were very worried at the consequences for the city's economy when there was no longer an Irish Parliament.[94] The city's economy undoubtedly benefited from attracting many prosperous MPs and peers to live there for several months each year while the Irish Parliament was in session. If Union were agreed, then they would spend their money in Britain instead. Absentee landowners had always been a problem for the Irish economy. Many more prosperous Irishmen would become absentees if they wished to pursue a political career at Westminster. This would impact adversely on Dublin shopkeepers, tradesmen, innkeepers, etc. Irish manufactures and artisans, especially in the textile industries, also feared that the economic and commercial consequences of Union would be adverse because they might face higher taxes and would certainly face tougher competition from the more technologically advanced and more heavily capitalized British industries. Lawyers also feared the loss of the employment and the fees that parliamentary business brought them.[95] Irish critics of Union did not advocate a total breach with Britain because, as members of the Protestant ascendancy, they knew how much they depended on British power to protect them from both internal and external enemies. They did not argue that they were ethnically distinct from the British. Their arguments were based on history, precedent, politics and economic considerations, not on racial or nationalist grounds.

The Irish administration grossly underestimated the force and influence of the arguments quickly produced against Union. It did not therefore take enough care to put its case before the Irish MPs, whom they believed would naturally follow the government's lead. To Castlereagh's shock and surprise, the Union ran into difficulties as soon as the subject was broached in the Irish House of Commons. On 25 January 1799, the anti-unionists narrowly won a vote, by 111 to 106, to remove a clause on the subject of Union from the address of the House of Commons to the throne. This technical victory was received with enthusiasm in Dublin, which was illuminated in celebration. A crestfallen Castlereagh

informed the house that Union would not in fact be debated in that parliamentary session. He knew that much greater efforts would be needed to manage opinion in and out of the Irish Parliament. He recognized that he would have to take note of Edward Cooke's observation, that Union would be passed only if it were 'written up, spoken up, intrigued up, drunk up, sung up, and bribed up'.[96]

It took a year in fact to ensure victory in the Irish Parliament. The Irish government engaged in a major propaganda war with the anti-unionists, stressing the security benefits from closer union with Britain and the commercial benefits from freer trade with Britain and the British Empire. The patronage system was used to its maximum effect in order to dismiss the irreconcilable, to frighten potential anti-unionists with the loss of posts and honours, and to recruit waverers. Critics of the Union, who held office, including Sir John Parnell, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and James Fitzgerald, the Prime Sergeant, were dismissed, and others were threatened with the same fate. Forty promotions or new creations in the peerage were made at once or promised very quickly if Union was passed. Twenty-seven MPs received small sinecures and others received various honours. Some MPs were offered inducements to resign their seats or were compelled by their patrons to do so, and pro-Unionists were selected to fill the vacancies. Castlereagh persuaded some sixty Irish MPs to retire before the 1800 parliamentary session and sought out pro-Unionists to replace them. In the event, some eighty-eight new MPs sat in the Irish House of Commons in its last session in 1800. About £30,000 of secret service money was used in a highly unusual way to induce men to change their views on Union.[97] Most lavish of all was the decision to offer substantial compensation to borough patrons whose rotten boroughs would be abolished if Union was in fact agreed. Borough proprietors were promised £15,000 per borough seat abolished after the Irish House of Commons was dissolved. The Marquess of Downshire, for example, received compensation totalling £52,000. John Foster, the Speaker of the Irish House of Commons, who was one of the fiercest critics of Union, received £7,500 compensation for his half-share in the borough of Dunleer and John Parnell, the dismissed Chancellor of the Exchequer, received the same for his half-share of Maryborough. The total amount paid in compensation reached a staggering £1,260,000.[98]

Determined efforts were also made by the Irish government to win over Irish opinion outside Parliament. In 1799, Lord Cornwallis made tours of both Munster and Ulster in an effort to enlist support for Union and he met with some success. While Dublin remained adamantly opposed to Union, other large towns remained neutral and Cork even voiced some support for Union. Public opinion on the Union was clearly divided, but anti-union sentiment was not sufficiently strong to persuade pro-unionists or neutrals to join the opposition to Union.[99] Particular efforts were made by the government to win over Catholic opinion.[100] Even though they had no direct representation in the Irish

Parliament, the Catholics were very useful allies if they supported Union and significant opponents if they turned strongly against it because of the number of Catholic voters in the counties and their substantial numerical majority in the population at large. Fortunately for the Irish government, some fierce critics of the Union, such as Speaker John Foster and George Ogle, were also fierce opponents of Catholic emancipation and could not easily forge an alliance with the Catholics. Some leading members of both the British and Irish governments, on the other hand, were clearly sympathetic to Catholic emancipation. They were prepared to offer strong hints, but not firm promises, to influential Catholics that Union might well lead to Catholic emancipation. Firm or open promises would have turned supporters of Union, such as John FitzGibbon, the Lord Chancellor, into a strong opponents. At first, leading clerical and lay Catholics adopted a neutral stance, but they gradually moved in the direction of supporting Union as the best security for Ireland's Catholic population. When petitions on the Union flooded into the Irish Parliament during 1799, Catholics were shown to be much more disposed to support those in favour of Union.[101] There was certainly no coordinated Catholic effort to defeat Union. Nor was there a surviving radical movement strong enough to oppose Union effectively. The debates on the Union in early 1800 showed how successful the Irish government's efforts had been over the past year. Although Henry Grattan returned to the House of Commons at the beginning of 1800 and he and others, such as John Foster, spoke out forcefully and eloquently against Union, they could not garner sufficient support to kill the Bill.[102] When the final reading of the Bill took place, on 7 June 1800, two-thirds of the opposition MPs walked out of the chamber. The Bill was finally passed by 158 to 115 votes in the Irish House of Commons and by 53 to 19 votes in the Irish House of Lords. Cornwallis announced the royal assent on 1August.

The Union, not surprisingly, had an easier passage through the British Parliament. Between them, Pitt, Dundas and Grenville combined in managing the Bill through the two chambers. Pitt's administration had a very large majority in both chambers, and the opposition Foxite Whigs had not yet all abandoned their decision of 1797 to secede from the House of Commons. It was easy to persuade a majority in both houses of the benefits of Union for Britain. Union would end disputes between the two parliaments. It would increase the population under Parliament's control, it would strengthen Britain's finances and economy, and it would unite both Britain and Ireland more effectively in the war against France. It was also argued that Union would benefit Ireland. It would reduce sectarian tensions, end disputes between the Irish Executive and the Irish Parliament, and give Ireland greater markets for its products, There was also the suggestion that Ireland would benefit from British investments into its manufacturing industries. With the war continuing to go badly, there were strong grounds for wishing to see a sin-

gle strategic policy adopted for the whole of the British Isles. Outside Parliament, most printed propaganda supported the government's stance on Union. Even newspapers generally critical of Union admitted that Ireland was badly governed and the political situation there needed to be addressed. There was considerable criticism of the Protestant ascendancy and the Orange Order.[103]

The Act of Union had very little impact on the British constitution or on its executive and legislative procedures. Ireland's political position was subjected to very considerable change. The Irish Parliament was abolished and a new Imperial Parliament was established from 1 January 1801, the first day of the nineteenth century. Ireland was granted one hundred seats (out of 658) in the new Imperial Parliament: two for each of the country's thirty-two counties, two for Dublin City and two for Cork City, one for Trinity College Dublin, and one for each of the thirty-one most important boroughs (based on the taxes contributed, not on size of population). Although the number of Ireland's parliamentary seats was severely cut from three hundred to one hundred, the Union did produce a certain measure of parliamentary reform. The vast majority of seats that were abolished were small rotten boroughs, which had been controlled by a very small number of rich and powerful landowners. The number of voters in most boroughs increased and hence the Irish Catholics were better represented in both the counties and the boroughs than ever before. The Irish lay peers were to be represented by twenty-eight of their number and these men were to be elected for life not for a single parliament as with the sixteen Scottish representative peers. Those peers not elected to the House of Lords were permitted to stand as candidates in British (not Irish) constituencies and so seek election to the House of Commons. One archbishop and three bishops of the established Church of Ireland were to be chosen, by rotation, to sit in the House of Lords for a single parliament. The Church of Ireland was to remain as the state church and it was to be united with the Church of England, but no new institutional links were in fact forged and hence no significant changes occurred. The economic and financial terms in the Act of Union were extremely complex. In general, the commercial objective was to create complete freedom of trade throughout the new United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. All customs duties between the two countries were abolished except for the bounties on the export of Irish grain to Britain (a decision which benefited both countries), Each country was to service its present National Debt, but new revenue raised by taxes passed by the new Imperial Parliament was to be divided in the proportion of fifteen units from Britain to two from Ireland. Ireland was to retain its own exchequer until 1816 and was to retain its own separate executive and legal system. Thus, a Lord Lieutenant, Chief Secretary, Lord Chancellor, Attorney General, Solicitor General, Chief Justices, Master of the Rolls, etc. were still appointed to serve in Ireland. Dublin Castle retained its complex machinery of patronage, which could continue to be used to influence Irish MPs and peers at Westminster.

VI.

Aftermath

For those, like Pitt, who had supported Union between Ireland and Great Britain, the major constitutional changes proposed promised much. Unfortunately, the Union was fatally flawed from the start. The key leading members of both the British and the Irish governments had pinned their hopes on achieving Catholic emancipation very soon after the Union had begun. Cornwallis and Castlereagh in Dublin and Pitt, Dundas, and Grenville in London all believed that Catholic emancipation was essential if the Union was to bring political stability to Ireland. These ministers had advanced this objective together in private and informal discussions and had hinted to leading Irish Catholics that it was their ambition to achieve this change. No firm promise or public declaration had been made, however, because these ministers knew that some of their closest colleagues in Dublin and London were not in favour of Catholic emancipation. In Ireland, the Lord Chancellor, John FitzGibbon, had been persuaded to support Union because he understood that it would not be followed by Catholic emancipation. When, in January 1801, he discovered that he had been misled, he felt betrayed and may well have expressed his dismay in person to the king. In Britain, Lord Chancellor Loughborough and Home Secretary Portland had long expressed opposition to emancipation and the former may well have indicated to George III that he had sworn an oath at his coronation to uphold the country's Protestant constitution. Neither Pitt nor Cornwallis had kept the king informed of their firm conviction that Catholic emancipation was an essential follow-up to Union. No doubt they hoped that the king would bow to what they regarded as the wisest policy and the inevitable outcome of Union. Instead, when the British cabinet met to discuss recommending Catholic emancipation, in January 1801, some British and some Irish ministers opposed the suggestion. As soon as George III heard that Catholic emancipation was the preferred policy of some of his principal ministers in both countries, he reacted with fury. Believing that he had been kept in the dark about the clear intention of some of his leading ministers, he expressed his outright opposition to the policy. He informed Henry Dundas, 'I will tell you, that I shall look on every man as my personal enemy who proposes that question to me'.[104] When the king almost immediately fell ill, reviving the fears that had so alarmed his ministers during the Regency crisis of 1788–9, Prime Minister Pitt pledged never to raise the Catholic question again. Despite giving this assurance, Pitt recognized that his position had become untenable and he resigned.[105] His decision was endorsed by Dundas, Grenville, Cornwallis and Castlereagh; they all resigned office. The new ministry, led by Henry Addington, was adamantly opposed to Catholic emancipation. The opponents of Catholic emancipation had triumphed.

From the outset, therefore, the Union was incomplete and fatally flawed. The large Catholic majority in Ireland understandably felt betrayed and their hostility to Union grew the longer emancipation was delayed. Moderate Catholics, such as Theobald McKenna,[106] kept up the demand for emancipation with reasoned arguments and several early-nineteenth-century Lords Lieutenant of Ireland came to the conclusion that emancipation was necessary to placate Catholic anger, but without being able to persuade the Imperial Parliament to pass this reform. It took until 1829 before the reform was conceded under heavy pressure from a very well-organized Catholic campaign throughout Ireland. By then, however, Catholic opinion was becoming strongly opposed to continuing the Union. Without any Catholic representation at Westminster all future legislation directly affecting the Catholic population in Ireland could be regarded as lacking any legitimacy. This applied particularly to the repressive legislation that often had to be passed at Westminster in order to try to maintain law and order in Ireland. The Union also failed to bring several other benefits that its most committed supporters had expected. The Protestant ascendancy, including many Orangemen, remained firmly in control not only of Irish representation at Westminster, but also of the civil, judicial and military administrations that remained in Ireland. A very narrow elite still dominated the internal affairs of Ireland and sectarian divisions remained entrenched.[107] Committed radicals, such as Robert Emmet, remained convinced that political change could only be achieved by violent revolution. His attempted rising in 1803 proved abortive, but his execution and his emotional defence of his principles produced another Irish martyr to be added to an increasing roll of radicals, who had sacrificed much to reform Irish politics and to reduce British influence in Ireland.[108] Other benefits that some of its supporters had expected from Union also failed to materialize. The Protestant Church of Ireland still collected tithes and church dues from Catholics and Presbyterians. Land was still overwhelmingly in the hands of Protestant owners, more of whom became absentee landlords after Union, and the tenancies of many Catholic farmers often remained insecure. The Irish economy did not immediately improve because its manufacturers (except those producing linen) could not easily compete with the more advanced producers in Britain. The renewal of an even more expensive war with Napoleonic France put heavy strains on the Irish economy and increased government taxation and recruitment drives. Sectarian tensions and poverty remained widespread across much of Ireland, and agrarian secret societies continued to attract many recruits. By 1815 Ireland was a by-word for lawlessness with large numbers of poor Catholics deeply hostile to the narrow Protestant elite, which governed so many aspects of their lives.[109]

A very different future awaited some of the fiercest Protestant critics of Union after 1800. John Foster, the Speaker of the Irish House of Commons, who had spoken out against it to the bitter end of the debates on Union received £7,500