Edmund Burke: Establishment and dissent

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INTRODUCTION

The question of consistency has always been one of the main points of discussion in any treatment of the political career of Edmund Burke. Burke's parliamentary career spanned three decades of great political ferment and he involved himself deeply in several areas of consequence to the British Empire. Burke's consistency has been called into question most notably because of the difference in his response to the two greatest events of his era, the revolt of the American colonies and the French Revolution. His change from a liberal position in the one crisis to a conservative position in the other seems to demonstrate a major alteration in his political principles.

Burke's change of attitude on the issue of relief for Protestant Dissenters was, to a degree, related to his reaction to the French Revolution. In 1772, and 1773, he firmly supported relief measures; in 1787, and 1789, he withheld his support from measures that would have repealed the Test and Corporation Acts, and in 1790, he vigorously opposed an attempt to repeal the Test and Corporations Acts. This shift in approach did not simply follow the beginning of the French Revolution, but reflected a change in the English political scene. Burke's attitudes towards Protestant Dissent and the Establishment, while apparently only peripheral political concerns, were closely related both to the fortunes of his political party, and to the constitutional problems which so vitally concerned him during his parliamentary career.
In the later part of the eighteenth century, Protestant Dissenters in England made up a good proportion of the middle class. They constituted a vocal and well-educated minority, confined by law to the status of second-class citizens. The legislation, known as the Clarendon Code, which determined the status of Dissenters had been enacted by the Cavalier Parliament, during the anti-Puritan reaction following the Stuart Restoration, and was later modified as political circumstances made a government policy of religious toleration more profitable. The Act of Uniformity of 1662, made adherence to the Anglican Prayer Book a requirement for holding clerical benefices, and the Conventicle Act of 1664, imposed penalties of imprisonment and transportation for engaging in Dissenting worship. The Toleration Act of 1689, part of the Revolutionary Settlement, extended freedom of worship, technically to Presbyterians, but in practice to all Protestant nonconformists. According to the letter of the law, Dissenting ministers were still required to subscribe to most of the Thirty-nine Articles, excepting those concerning church government.

Although Dissenters could serve as members of Parliament, the Test Act of 1673, and the Corporations Act of 1661, excluded them from offices of trust under the Crown and from municipal offices. The Test Act covered all positions in the Bank of England and membership in the great trading companies, thereby laying a heavy burden on the many Dissenters engaged in commercial activities. The Test Act was originally directed against Roman Catholics, but it applied to Protestant Dissenters as well. The penalties were seldom enforced, and were generally nullified by annual indemnity acts and by the widespread practice of occasional conformity, but the profane nature of the Test, in making the taking of the sacrament
the means by which a man qualified for office, made it repugnant to
religious men, no matter what church they claimed.

During the latter half of the eighteenth century, for a variety of
reasons, large numbers of Dissenters found themselves increasingly at odds
with the prevailing policies of the government. The history of Dissent
in England demonstrates both a strong predilection for liberty and a marked
interest in politics and political theory. The ties between the Dissenters
of England and the North American colonies with their strong Puritan heri-
tage remained strong, and as revolt stirred in the colonies, the Dissenters
tended to sympathize with the American cause. As government repeatedly
refused to repeal laws which penalized nonconformity, Protestant Dissenters
became increasingly alienated from a system which gave distinct preference
in almost every field of endeavor to members of the established church.

During the first two decades of the reign of George III, this
alienation found expression in the Dissenting interest's support of the
parliamentary opposition, an opposition which was frequently dominated by
the Rockingham Whigs. The problems of the American colonies dominated
politics during these years, and, provoked by the legal battles of John
Wilkes, the issues of royal interference in politics and the corruption
of Parliament contributed to the tension of the political situation. In
these areas, the Rockingham Whigs, with Edmund Burke as their principal
spokesman, and the Dissenting interest took similar positions and formed
a natural working alliance. As their sense of alienation from the system
grew, many Dissenters, especially that group known as the Rational Dissen-
ters, came to believe that a change of administration was not sufficient,
that the system itself needed to be reformed and modernized.
The different positions Burke took in approaching the problems presented by the existence of Protestant Dissent fall into three distinct periods in his public life. He regarded the Dissenters with favor and actively served their interests during the early part of his parliamentary career. Between 1782 and 1789, there occurred a falling out between the Dissenting interest and the remnants of the Rockingham Whigs, now under the leadership of Charles James Fox and the Duke of Portland. In 1790, when Fox renewed the alliance between the Dissenting interest and the Rockingham Whigs, Burke refused to support Fox's policy and opposed him in this matter in the House of Commons. Shortly thereafter, he broke with Fox and the party over the issue of the French Revolution. From 1790 until the end of his life, Burke continued in his distrust of Protestant Dissent and in his resistance to any measures which would have altered the penal statutes which concerned them. The reasons for this change in attitude were complex and involved several aspects of Burke's philosophy and political life.

The purpose of this thesis will be to present the principles which Burke expressed concerning the relationship between Establishment and Dissent, and to describe the tangled pattern of events which influenced his application of the principles which he held with perhaps too great a consistency throughout his public life.
CHAPTER I

TOLERATION AS A PART OF ESTABLISHMENT

Edmund Burke, by family background and education, was inclined naturally in the direction of religious toleration. Born in Ireland, of an Anglican father and a Catholic mother, he was, as the custom of the times dictated, reared in his father's faith. Burke spent most of his early years with his mother's family, the Nagles, who were Catholics. This early influence undoubtedly contributed to his lifelong interest in Catholic relief.

He received his early education at Ballitore School, conducted by a Quaker, Abraham Shackleton, for whom Burke had great respect and affection. Burke's friendship with Richard Shackleton, Abraham's son, provided a stabilizing influence for Burke throughout his life, and was one of the few islands of quiet to which he could escape from his stormy political career. Some years later, on the occasion of the Gordon Riots, 

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1Arthur P. I. Samuels (ed.), The Early Life, Correspondence and Writings of the Rt. Hon. Edmund Burke LL.D. (Cambridge: University Press, 1923), (Hereinafter referred to as Samuels [ed.], Early Writings.), 8; Carl B. Cone, Burke and the Nature of Politics (2 vols.; Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1957, 1964), (Hereinafter referred to as Cone, Burke.), I, 1-2; Thomas Henry David Mahoney, Edmund Burke and Ireland (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960), (Hereinafter referred to as Mahoney, Burke and Ireland.), 316.

2Mahoney, Burke and Ireland, 25, 315.

3Samuels (ed.), Early Writings, 10-14. See also Letter to Richard Shackleton, 19 April 1770, Letter from Richard Shackleton to Edmund Burke, 28 April 1770, and Letter to Richard Shackleton, 6 May 1770, Edmund Burke,
he described his religious education, and the process of his intellectual adherence to the Anglican Church:

He had been educated, he said, as a Protestant of the church of England by a dissenter; he read the Bible there morning, noon, and night, and was the happier and better man for such reading; he had afterwards turned his attention to the reading of all the theological publications, on all sides...; at last he thought such studies tended to confound and bewilder, and he dropped them, embracing and holding fast the Church of England. 4

Burke's earliest writings show his concern with questions of religious toleration, church unity, and the challenge presented to Christianity by free thought. While he was a student at Trinity College, Dublin, he corresponded frequently with Richard Shackleton, and occasionally discussed religious topics. In these letters Burke expressed clearly the belief that religious sincerity was of more significance than the particular denomination to which a man belonged. These letters also reflect his concern for the splintering of Christianity and his dislike for sectaries who separated from the church for what appeared to be matters of small importance. 5

During his college years, Burke wrote and published a short-lived newsletter, The Reformer, in which he commented on a variety of current topics, including religion. The young man of nineteen had already settled on a medium between the extremes of indifference and fanaticism:

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5Letters to Richard Shackleton, 15 October 1744, 1 November 1744, and [post 19]. April 1763, Burke, Correspondence, I, 32-33, 35, 167.
The two greatest Enemies of Religion are the above-mentioned Infidelity and Blind Zeal, the former attacks it like an open Enemy, and the latter like an indiscreet Friend, does it more Harm than Good; the first gives rise to the Free Thinkers, the latter to our Sectaries, a truly religious Life has the same Efficacy to the prevention of both.⁶

He also devoted some serious thought, in his early years, to the problems of the relationship of church and state. In a brief essay on the subject, he discussed the benefits the operation of religion could bestow on civil society and the consequent danger that religion might be used as a tool of the state, regarded as valuable only because it provided a moral basis for civil obedience. He concluded that religion, if subordinated to political ends, would be rendered ineffective for the accomplishment of its own purposes, as well as those of the state. He argued that when it became evident that "all Eternity" had been used to serve the purposes of the moment, "The Springs are seen; we value ourselves on the Discovery; we cast religion to the Vulgar and lose all restraint."⁷

Burke's first major work, A Vindication of Natural Society (1756), indicated his developing interest in the relationship of religion to society. In the book, Burke tried to suggest, through the use of extended irony, some of the problems that could arise should the rationalist critics of religion turn their attention to the foundations of government. Burke made clear his purpose in the preface to the second edition, and asked the question that reveals the keystone of his philosophy:

⁶The Reformer, # 11, April 7, 1748, Samuels (ed.), Early Writings, 324.

Even in matters which are, as it were, just within our reach, what would become of the world, if the practice of all moral duties, and the foundations of society, rested upon having their reasons made clear and demonstrative to every individual?8

Throughout his life, Burke insisted on the importance of tradition, of prejudice, of other than rational justification for man's behavior in his relationships with God, with other men, and with institutions. It became the basic element in his defense of the Christian social order in Europe when that order was challenged by the French Revolution.

It is evident from these early writings that Burke had already formed many of his basic ideas regarding religion in relation to society, and about Christianity and its divisions, by the time he entered politics. His thinking on these subjects developed and expanded as he related them to specific problems arising from the coexistence of the establishment and Protestant Dissent.

Edmund Burke's attitudes regarding religious toleration were highly complex, but generally consistent. While he expressed concern for the unity of Christendom, and deplored the splintering of the church and the diversities of sects, he was very much aware of the necessity of freedom of conscience. His experience and his understanding of human nature convinced him that attempts to exert pressure in this matter were both unjust and impolitic.9

Burke generally reserved his respect for the principal divisions of Christianity:

9"Tracts Relative to the Laws against Popery in Ireland," Burke, Works, VI, 32.
All the principal religions in Europe stand upon one common bottom. The support that the whole, or the favoured parts, may have in the secret dispensations of Providence, it is impossible to tell; but humanly speaking they are all prescriptive religions... The people who compose the four grand divisions of Christianity have now their religion as a habit, and upon authority, and not upon disputation; as all men, who have their religion derived from their parents, and the fruits of education, must have it.10

The value that Burke placed on positive codes and prescriptive religion influenced many phases of his thinking: it played a part in his attitude in the questions relating to Dissenters, and it was a significant element in his resistance to what he called Protestantism undefined.11 Burke thought that the purely negative aspect of Protestantism, if uncontrolled, would be a serious detriment to Christianity itself, and would lead to indifference and atheism.12

While Burke's approach to the question of toleration for Dissenters varied according to circumstances, he maintained an interest in Catholic relief in Ireland throughout his political career.13 Recognizing the complexity and seriousness of the Irish situation, he advocated both parliamentary and economic reforms, a reversal of his English policy in some respects, and he expended considerable energy in resisting efforts of the Protestant Ascendency to maintain and exploit Catholic

10Letter to William Smith, 29 January 1795, Burke, Works, VI, 52-53.


12Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe, Burke, Works, III, 313.

13Ursula Henriques, Religious Tolerance in England, 1787-1833 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), (Hereinafter referred to as Henriques, Tolerance.), 104.
disabilities. Burke's work behind the scenes in the interests of Catholic relief in England made him a prime target for the Gordon rioters in 1780, and was definitely one of the causes for the loss of his seat for Bristol in the same year.

In a letter to William Burgh, Burke revealed the breadth of his concept of toleration. He discussed the problem of dissent on purely religious grounds, and expressed his belief that religious toleration was fully in accord with the demands of a church establishment. He described his concept of toleration as "... full civil protection, ... an immunity, from all disturbance of their publick religious worship, and a power of teaching in schools, as well as Temples ... " and this he wished to extend to all religions, especially those of long standing, among which he included Judaism and Mohammedanism. Especially he included all the Christian sects, and expressed the belief that this general concern for all religion would promote not indifference, but true Christian zeal and fervor. Again referring to the validity of establishment, he added: "But toleration does not exclude national preference, ... and

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14 Letter to Richard Burke, Burke, Works, VI, 74; "Speech at Bristol, Previous to the Election" (1780), Burke, Works, II, 164-165; Mahoney, Burke and Ireland, 23, 40. On this subject see especially "Tracts relative to the Laws against Popery in Ireland" (written about 1761), Burke, Works, VI, and the two Letters to Sir Hercules Langrishe, written in 1792, and 1795, Burke, Works, III and IV.

15 Letter to Job Watts, 10 August 1780, Burke, Correspondence, IV, 261; Letter to John Noble, 11 August 1780, Burke, Correspondence, IV, 263; Cone, Burke, I, 384; Ernest Barker, Burke and Bristol (Bristol: J. W. Arrowsmith Ltd., 1931), (Hereinafter referred to as Barker, Burke and Bristol.), 92.
all the lawful and honest means which may be used for the support of that preference.\footnote{16}

On two occasions in particular, Burke showed his concern for the extension of tolerance to non-Christian peoples. During hostilities with the Dutch Republic, British forces captured the West Indian island of St. Eustatius and confiscated large amounts of property, especially that of the Jews living on the island. Burke gave vent to his outraged humanity in the debate of May 14, 1781, when he protested the policy of confiscation. He expressed his concern for the Jews, "... whom of all others it ought to be the care and the wish of humane nations to protect ... Their abandoned state and their defenseless situation call most forcibly for the protection of civilized nations."\footnote{17}

He demonstrated courtesy and respect for the religious beliefs of alien peoples especially on one occasion when he welcomed into his home the Maratha agents, Indians who came to London to carry out some business with the East India Company. When the Company left them to their own resources, Burke discovered them and took them into his home, provided them with accommodations for their religious services, and with expenses for their journey home.\footnote{18} In a letter which accompanied the agents on their way, Burke expressed his admiration for one of the men as "... a person so faithfully strictly observant as he was, of all

\footnote{16}{Letter to William Burgh, 3 September 1775, Burke, Correspondence, III, 111-112. On this subject see also Letter to Edmund Sexton Pery, 16 June 1778, Burke, Correspondence, III, 458.}

\footnote{17}{Burke, Speeches, II, 250-253; Mahoney, Burke and Ireland, III.}

\footnote{18}{Cone, Burke, I, 331; Burke, Correspondence, IV, 368.}
the rules and ceremonies of the religion, to which he was born, and to which he strictly conformed often at the manifest hazard of his Life. 19

Significantly, Burke by no means extended this attitude of toleration and broadmindedness to atheism. From 1773, when he visited France, and became personally acquainted with the intellectual currents in that country, he came to have a horror of atheism and he described for the benefit of his colleagues and contemporaries the danger to every phase of European society should these ideas become dominant. 20

Edmund Burke made his first major speech on the establishment on the occasion of the "Clerical Petition for Relief from Subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles," or the so-called Feathers Tavern Petition of February, 1772. 21 As it stood, the law required subscription to the Articles not only of Anglican clergymen but also of candidates for university degrees. As far as the petition related strictly to churchmen, it reflected the increase of Unitarianism within the body of the Anglican clergy as well as a renewed emphasis in the universities on the study of the Bible. 22

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19 Letter to Ragunath Rao, [August, 1781], Burke, Correspondence, IV, 368.

20 Cone, Burke, I, 226.


22 S. Maccoby, English Radicalism (6 vols.; London: Allen and Unwin, 1955), (Hereinafter referred to as Maccoby, Radicalism.), I, 177-178; Sykes, Church and State, 381; Cone, Burke, I, 219.
The petitioners based their arguments on the principle that subscription to the Articles was in opposition to the "Protestant privilege to question every human doctrine," and the right of private judgment. The House of Commons probably would have considered the repeal of the university test with more favor, but the issue of clerical subscription obscured the lesser question and led to the energetic rejection of the petition. The minority voting list included many members of Burke's party and the importance of the issue in his mind can be gauged by the fact that he found himself voting with Lord North and his colleagues, and in opposition to his own party. In answering a letter from the Countess of Huntingdon, he commented on this and explained the reason for his opposition:

I am happy in coinciding with your Ladyship in attachment for the Established Church. I wish to see her walls raised on the foundation laid in the volume of divine truth, that she may crush the conspiracy of Atheism, and those principles which will not leave to religion even a toleration.

In his speech Burke took care not to base his argument on superficial objections, some of which he took time to refute at the

\[\text{23}^\text{Hansard, \emph{Parliamentary History}, XVII, 252, 256; Maccoby, \emph{Radicalism}, I, 178.}\]
\[\text{24}^\text{Cone, \emph{Burke}, I, 219. The bill was defeated, 217 to 71.}\]
\[\text{25}^\text{Hansard, \emph{Parliamentary History}, XVII, 97; Sir Philip Magnus, \emph{Edmund Burke} (London: J. Murray, 1939), (Hereinafter referred to as Magnus, \emph{Burke}), 70.}\]
\[\text{26}^\text{Letter to the Countess of Huntingdon, \emph{[ante 6 February 1772]}, \emph{Burke, Correspondence}, II, 298-299.}\]
\[\text{27}^\text{Burke's speech on this occasion is printed in \emph{Burke, Speeches}, I, 95-100, and in Hansard, \emph{Parliamentary History}, XVII, 275-288. His notes from the speech were found among his papers after his death, and were published in \emph{Burke, Works}, VI, as well as in Hansard, \emph{Parliamentary History}, and \emph{Burke, Speeches}, as a footnote. The three versions of the speech are substantially the same.}\]
beginning of his debate. He rejected attempts to undermine the character
corporations, as being beside the point. The opponents of the
petition had argued that any alteration of the church establishment would
alter the identity of the church or would nullify the Act of Union. 28
Burke responded to these arguments by saying that it had never been
intended that the laws governing the church be beyond alteration. But,
although such a change was not impossible, it should none the less be
undertaken only with great caution. He felt that unless the majority
of the people concurred in the opinion that the requirement of subscription
abused the right of private judgment, and there had been no evidence
presented to that effect, alteration in the present arrangement was dan-
gerous: "If you make this a season for religious alterations, depend
upon it you will soon find it a season of religious tumults and religious
wars." 29

The obligation to teach publicly the doctrines of the established
church while receiving support from the state did not seem to Burke to
be any grievous imposition, nor did it impinge on the right of freedom
of conscience. The issue was not the right of private conscience, but
"... the propriety of the terms ... proposed by law as a title to
public emoluments." Defining the nature of the establishment, Burke said,

A church, in any legal sense, is only a certain system of religious
doctrines and practices, fixed and ascertained by some law; by the
difference of which laws, different churches (as different common-
wealths) are made in various parts of the world; and the establish-
ment is a tax laid by the same sovereign authority for payment of
those who so teach and so practise. For no legislature was ever
so absurd as to tax its people to support men for teaching and
acting as they please; but by some prescribed rule ... .

28 The Act of Union with Scotland (1707) left the religious
establishments of both countries separate and intact.

29 Burke, Works, VI, 99. See also Letter to John Cruger, 30 June
1772, Burke, Correspondence, II, 309-310.
For the sake of peace clergymen of the established church should accede to the established doctrines or leave the church: "Dissent, not satisfied with toleration, is not conscience, but ambition."^30

The significance of Burke's speech on this occasion lay in the attitude he expressed toward the established Church of England. In the future the importance of this approach would become evident as Dissenters would question the validity of the Anglican establishment. Burke described the Church of England as "one of the capital pillars of the state." The establishment was intended to protect and encourage religion, and to ensure that it would be practiced and taught publicly. The use of public monies for this purpose required as a concomitant feature, the right of the public, through Parliament, to determine what religion would be encouraged. His emphasis on subscription as necessary for public peace reflected his awareness of the religious controversy and fanaticism which had plagued the previous century as well as his own indifference to the minor points of theological disputation. He would prefer a permanent system of religious laws, in the same way that he preferred a fixed civil constitution, for religious change was identified in his mind with a fanaticism that imposed religious tyranny, just as political change was to become in his mind identified with the tyranny of political fanatics.

That Burke's defense of the establishment did not preclude a toleration of dissent outside the Church of England was made evident shortly thereafter. Two months after the defeat of the Feathers Tavern Petition, a committee of London Dissenters made a hastily organized attempt

^30Burke, Works, VI, 95-97.
to obtain relief from their obligation to subscribe to the Anglican Articles. Burke had defended the Dissenters in his speech on the Acts of Uniformity, and he took part in this debate also. Burke maintained, sarcastically, that the Dissenters were not dangerous to the state since the heads of state were not concerned enough to be present, and insisted that they were not a danger to the church either. He commented that to require the signing of those articles of religion common to the Anglican and Presbyterian churches in effect established, not the doctrines of the Church of England, but those of Calvin. The crux of the issue lay in the limitations of the petition: "The dissenters do not desire to partake of the emoluments of the Church. Their sole aim is to procure liberty of conscience.

The motion, which encountered little resistance in the Commons, passed with only two opposing votes. In spite of the fact that it suffered defeat in the House of Lords, Burke remained optimistic about its eventual passage and the gradual death of the spirit of intolerance. This brief and relatively light debate was but the prelude to his greatest speech on the subject of religious toleration, on the relief petition.

31 Anthony Lincoln, Some Political and Social Ideas of English Dissent, 1763-1800 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938), (Hereinafter referred to as Lincoln, Dissent.), 227-228; Maccoby, Radicalism, I, 179.

32 Burke, Works, VI, 92.

33 Burke's speech of 3 April 1772, is printed in Hansard, Parliamentary History, XVII, 435-437, and Burke, Speeches, I, 117-119.

34 Burke, Speeches, I, 119.

35 Hansard, Parliamentary History, XVII, 437.

36 Letter to John Cruger, 30 June 1772, Burke, Correspondence, II, 310.
brought before Parliament in March of 1773. In his first speech on relief in 1772, Burke described the nature of religious tolerance:

"... the very principle of toleration is that you will tolerate, not those who agree with you in opinion, but those whose religious notions are totally different. For what merit is there, I beseech you, in tolerating your own doctrines? None at all. Christian charity consists in allowing others a latitude of opinion, in putting a restraint upon your own mind, and in not suffering the zeal of the Lord's house absolutely to eat you up."

He went much further in his second speech on the subject, covering completely the principles involved in the issue of toleration. He indicated his attitude toward atheism, as well as his concern for religious belief itself, and most important, he delineated what for him would be the limits of religious toleration.

The success in the Commons of the petition of 1772 raised hopes among Dissenters that a more carefully planned attempt would be completely successful. The Dissenters of London initiated and directed both campaigns, both times without consulting the country Dissenters. As a result, some of the more conservative elements of the Dissenting interest, predominantly Presbyterians, organized a counter-petition opposing the motion for relief. This opposition indicated the inroads that anti-Trinitarianism had made in what had been largely a Calvinistic group at the beginning of the century.

The Marquis of Rockingham and his party took a definite interest in the petition of the Dissenters, an interest with which Burke heartily

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37 Burke, Speeches, I, 118-119.
38 Lincoln, Dissent, 230-233.
39 Ibid., 213-215.
concurred. Burke returned to London from France in time to take part in the debate in defense of the petition, and his recent experiences in the Paris salons accounted for much of the urgency with which he spoke. He was inspired with a real concern for the future of Christian Europe and this gave his debate an emotional intensity and spiritual depth that set it apart from his previous speeches. The specter of France had begun to cast a shadow over his mind.

Burke chose as his two principal points of attack the arguments that the establishing of toleration by law would be an attack on Christianity and that the Dissenters already enjoyed a degree of liberty "under a connivance." Dealing first with the problem of the security of the church and Christianity, Burke discussed the relationship that should exist between the establishment and other religions. He expressed the belief that the Anglican Church found its truest bulwarks in the soundness of its doctrine and the piety and learning of its professors. Appalled at the idea that persecution should be necessary for the preservation of Christianity, Burke declared that toleration itself would become a safeguard of the church. Christianity itself had developed in spite of persecution; the greatest threat to the church lay in the subversion of its own principles.

40 Letter from the Marquess of Rockingham to Edmund Burke, 9 February 1773, and Letter from Edmund Burke to William Burke, 14 February 1773, Burke, Correspondence, II, 423, 424.

41 Burke's speech of March 7, 1773, is printed in Hansard, Parliamentary History, XVII, 770-782, and Burke, Speeches, I, 151-164. Burke's notes for the speech are printed as a footnote in both these sources and also in Burke, Works, VI, 103-113. The three versions of the speech are substantially the same.
I know nothing but the supposed necessity of persecution that can make an establishment disgusting. I would have toleration a part of establishment, as a principle favourable to Christianity, and as a part of Christianity.\(^{42}\)

Burke then turned to the matter of "liberty under a connivance." He attacked the very idea that such a thing could be: "Connivance is a relaxation from slavery, not a definition of liberty."\(^{43}\) Remarking that general agreement existed that the law itself should not be executed, he posed the question of whether it was wise to retain laws which ought not to be enforced. After exploring the possible uses of such laws, he concluded that they would be made the instruments of arbitrary power, on the part of the Crown and the magistrates, or the tools of private malice.

Remarking that the bill had received opposition from within the ranks of the Dissenters themselves, he said that it was the reasonableness of the request that should engage the interest of the House. Expressing his indignation at the counter-petition of the Presbyterians opposing relief, he asked,

Judge which of these descriptions of men comes with a fair request--that which says, Sir, I desire liberty for my own, because I trespass on no man's conscience;--or the other, which says, I desire that these men should not be suffered to act according to their consciences, though I am tolerated to act according to mine . . . . Tolerance is good for all or it is good for none.\(^{44}\)

The only possible grounds upon which a magistrate could in justice restrain religious freedom would be in the case of a person dissenting not because of delicacy of conscience, but in order to raise a faction in the state,

\(^{42}\)Burke, Works, VI, 103-104.

\(^{43}\)Ibid., 103.

\(^{44}\)Ibid., 106-107.
and to destroy the peace of his country. It is worth bearing in mind that Burke made this distinction as early as 1773, when he actively supported the Dissenters. Burke's consistency on the issue of toleration for Dissenters could be easily questioned, and the change of heart he later experienced could be attributed purely to political motives and personal resentment had he not made it clear at this point that there was a basis upon which he would assume a more cautious approach.

Turning from the Dissenters, Burke declared that the greatest danger to church and state was to be feared not from those who disagreed with the establishment for religious reasons, but from the Epicureans, the atheists and free thinkers, "those great dangerous animals" who had no conscience, no scruples in matters of religion. The laws should be directed against atheism, if it were possible, since the greatest threat to civil society arose from this source. Intolerance in itself constituted a threat to the state: "Nothing has driven people more into that house of seduction [atheism] than the mutual hatred of Christian congregations." In the struggle against the forces that threatened society, all true religion deserved toleration and respect. The encouragement of every serious religion would lead to the formation of an alliance against atheism. "The cause of the Church of England is included in that of religion, not that of religion in the Church of England."45

This speech is valuable not only for the point of view it presented at the time he gave it, but also for the indications it gave of what was stirring in Burke's mind. Sixteen years before the French Revolution,

Burke was disturbed by the threat posed by the free thinkers and the philosophers of France to the culture of Christian Europe. "Under the systematic attacks of these people I see some of the props of good government already begin to fail; I see propagated principles, which will not leave to religion even a toleration." Already he was making the connections which influenced his attitude toward the French Revolution, and which he developed fully in his greatest work, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*.

The Dissenters' second relief petition met the same fate as the first one. It passed the House of Commons on March 25, 1773, by a vote of sixty-five to fourteen and suffered defeat in the House of Lords. The natural effect of the rejection of this second attempt was to accelerate the growing alienation of the Dissenting interest from the Crown and, over a period of years, to replace the plea for toleration with a demand for a natural right and for the secularization of the state.

Joseph Priestley, one of the most prominent of the Dissenting ministers, in his *Letter of Advice*, wrote in 1773,

> As a Christian only, . . . I acknowledge I ought to be content with the bare toleration of my religion and be thankful for it . . . but when the Christian is satisfied I cannot forget that I am likewise a man.  

This was the last major speech that Burke made in the House of Commons in favor of relief for Protestant Dissent, although on one subsequent occasion he made an attempt to secure the passage of the repeal of the Test in Ireland.

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47 *Burke, Speeches*, I, 151.

48 Cited in Lincoln, *Dissent*, 218.
Burke, during his term as M. P. for Bristol, worked in close collaboration with a group of Dissenters for an extended period. Richard Champion, a Quaker merchant, approached Burke, in 1774, and sought to interest him in becoming a candidate for the Bristol seat. Champion told Burke that he could count on the warm support of "the graver Sort among the Dissenters." Burke's brother, Richard, who acted as his campaign manager in the election, attributed Burke's strength to the support of the Quakers. Burke's reputation for personal integrity, his support of relief for Dissenters, and his support of the American cause, made him attractive to the businessmen of Bristol, many of whom were Dissenters engaged in trade with America. Burke continued for many years to correspond with Richard Champion, and maintained some of the friendships he formed in Bristol long past the time when such contacts were of political value.

Although Burke noted a number of Dissenters among his friends, his primary interest in the Dissenters was initially, and continued to be, a political one. Because of the opposition of Whigs to the oppressive American policy of the government, and to the war itself, the Dissenting interest provided a large part of the Whig electorate. In Burke's

49 Letter from Richard Champion to Edmund Burke, 1 October 1774, 
Burke, Correspondence, III, 47.

50 Letter from Richard Burke, Sr. to Richard Shackleton, 11 October 1774, Burke, Correspondence, III, 65.

51 Letter from Richard Champion to Edmund Burke, 1 October 1774, and Letter from Richard Burke, Sr. to Richard Shackleton, 11 October 1774, Burke, Correspondence, III, 47, 65. See also Barker, Burke and Bristol, 25, 124.


53 Lincoln, Dissent, 24-25.
correspondence with the heads of his party, he referred occasionally to
the degree of political support the Whigs could expect from them. In
September of 1775, he reported to the Marquis of Rockingham on the
strength of Dissenter support to be expected on the American question,
and again, in a letter to Charles James Fox, written in 1777, he de-
cribed the Dissenting interest as "... the main effective part of
the Whig strength."\(^54\)

In 1778, following the passage of Sir George Savile's Catholic
Relief Act, a bill which Burke actively supported, Luke Gardiner, M. P.
for Dublin County, introduced in the Irish House of Commons, proposals
for a bill for the relief of Irish Catholics. After the proposed bill
passed in the Irish House of Commons it was necessary that the Privy
Council in England approve it. This task was complicated by the addition
of a clause repealing the sacramental test for Protestant Dissenters, an
addition which Burke believed to be an attempt to sabotage the success
of the original bill.\(^55\) Sir Edward Newenham, author of the Test clause,
was sincerely interested in the cause of relief for Protestant Dissenters.
However, several opponents of Catholic relief supported his amendment,
hoping to accomplish the defeat of the entire bill.\(^56\) Burke undertook
the difficult task of obtaining the approval of the Privy Council, and
in his correspondence with Edmund Sexton Pery, Speaker of the Irish House
of Commons, Burke gave a detailed account of the affair.

\(^54\) Letter to the Marquess of Rockingham, 14 September 1775, and
Letter to Charles James Fox, 8 October 1777, Burke, Correspondence, III,
208, 383.

\(^55\) Letter to Edmund Sexton Pery, 25 June 1778, Burke, Correspondence,
III, 461.

\(^56\) Maurice R. O'Connell, Irish Politics and Social Conflict in the
Age of the American Revolution (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania
Press, 1965), (Hereinafter referred to as O'Connell, Irish Politics.),
115-117.
Burke's attitude on the issue of Dissenter relief at this time was basically the same as it had been in 1773, but his primary concern had become the enactment of Catholic relief. As it stood, the proposed bill mixed the cause of property with a concern for place, and was an attempt to implement as a "rider" a cause which would surely be rejected by the English government. Burke accepted the repeal of the Test in theory, but felt that its introduction at this time was "... impracticable ... and ill intended too."  

In his conversations with the ministers regarding the bill, Burke at first tried to persuade them to accept the bill as a whole, directing most of his arguments toward an acceptance of the clause relating to Dissenters. Finally, he sought to persuade Lord North that the whole of the bill ought not to be rejected on the basis of this clause. It is important to note that at this point Burke affirmed that should the question of the Test be brought before the English Parliament he himself would vote for repeal. The bill was returned to the Irish Parliament with the Dissenters' clause deleted and was eventually passed. Writing in August to Luke Gardiner, Burke indicated his regret that the legislation had not been passed in its entirety, despite the difficulty of the scheme. He continued,

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57 Letter to Edmund Sexton Pery, 26 June 1778, Burke, Correspondence, III, 464.
58 Letter to Edmund Sexton Pery, 18 July 1778, Burke, Correspondence, IV, 5-8.
59 Ibid., 7.
60 Burke, Correspondence, III, 465; Mahoney, Burke and Ireland, 71. Sir Edward Nevenham introduced a measure for the repeal of the Test in Ireland again in 1779. It was accepted by the English Privy Council and passed in the spring of 1780. (O'Connell, Irish Politics, 206-208.)
I am persuaded, that until Something of this Kind is done with regard to the Protestant Dissenters, the Scheme of toleration can never be completed up to the Standard of Your equitable and Liberal Ideas. When Catholicks are tolerated, Dissenters will never be satisfied with a meer toleration. Those who are long used to power over others, will consider a condition of equality as a State of Degradation. There is every reason in the world for putting the Dissenters into good humour at this time. It is very well worth labouring for, even though the price to be paid for it were something of much more value than the Sacramental Test; which, as it is employed, seems more dishonourable to our general Christianity, than serviceable to the particular Mode of it that we profess. 61

The following year saw the passage in England of a bill (19 Geo. III, c. 44) allowing Dissenting ministers to substitute for subscription to the greater part of the Anglican articles, a declaration of being a Christian, a Protestant, and a believer in the Old and New Testaments. 62

In a letter to Dr. John Erskine, a Scottish Presbyterian minister, Burke praised the measure as a victory "... not over our Enemies, but over our own passions and prejudices ... " and congratulated his correspondent, with some bitterness, on the anti-popery riots in Scotland, as "... a great victory over those who differ from you in opinion." 63

Burke's attitude toward the repeal of the Test in this period of his life was fairly open and evident both from the speeches he gave before the House of Commons and from his private and political correspondence. He took the view that the matter should be dealt with simply and straightforwardly, as a question of religious toleration. Toleration was a part of Christian charity, a 'victory over passion and prejudice.' Burke's


62Maccoby, Radicalism, I, 284; Henriques, Toleration, 56; Lincoln, Dissent, 26-27.

63Letter to Dr. John Erskine, 12 June 1779, Burke, Correspondence, IV, 87.
efforts in behalf of the Dissenting interest were motivated both by reasons of principle and by politics; the Rockingham Connection drew much of its support from the Dissenters and Burke himself depended heavily on their support for his own seat in Bristol.  

The next decade was to see a radical change in Burke's attitude toward dissent. The fortunes of his party and changes in national and international politics were to alter the terms of the debate. Between 1780, and 1790, the question, for Edmund Burke, changed from one of religious tolerance to the safety of the British Constitution.

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64 Letter to the Duke of Portland, 3 September 1780, Burke, Correspondence, IV, 270.
CHAPTER II

BURKE AND THE DISSENTERS PART COMPANY

The unsuccessful and lengthy prosecution of the war against the American colonies brought on an extended diplomatic, economic, and constitutional crisis which convulsed English political life between 1780 and 1784. During the closing years of Lord North's ministry, Britain found herself without an ally, fighting not only the American colonies, but France, Spain, and Holland as well. Higher taxes and displacement of trade resulted from the war, and tended to precipitate a demand for economic reform. General dissatisfaction with the management of public affairs led to a revival of demands for parliamentary reform, beginning among the radicals of Middlesex [London] and extending to the provinces, particularly Yorkshire, where the cause attracted the support of many respectable country gentlemen. There, under the guidance of Christopher Wyvill, the movement found its organization and technique in the county associations and their committees of correspondence.


In early 1780, the demand for change resulted in a flood of petitions to Parliament, demanding economic reform. The Rockingham Whigs chose this time to introduce in Parliament their program of economic reform, hoping to utilize the pressure out-of-doors in their favor. The Rockingham program consisted of Burke's establishment bill for the reform of the civil list, Clerk's contractors' bill, prohibiting members of Parliament from accepting government contracts, and Crewe's bill, depriving revenue officers of the franchise. By enacting their program of economic reform, the Rockinghamites proposed to achieve great economies in government through the elimination of unnecessary offices and the curtailment of patronage at the disposal of the crown. By such action they hoped to limit the means by which the King could exercise undue influence on Parliament.

The narrow defeat of Burke's bill served only to stimulate pressure for reform, culminating in the passage in the House of Commons

3The Rockingham Connection was the larger and more cohesive of the two principal factions in opposition at this time; it had a party program (basically the principles and program expressed by Burke in 1770, in his Thoughts on the Causes of the Present Discontents), and it had withstood the attrition of long years out of office. The other important opposition group was the Shelburne Connection, formerly the followers of William Pitt, Earl of Chatham, who had died in 1778. Although the two groups coalesced in 1780, for the purposes of opposing North, the alliance was an uneasy one; the two groups differed on vital issues of constitutional and diplomatic policy, and the leaders seldom worked well together. See J. Holland Rose, William Pitt and National Revival (London: G. Bell and Sons, Ltd., 1912), (Hereinafter referred to as Rose, Pitt.), 79-82; Butlerfield, George III and People, 168; Albemarle (ed.), Rockingham, I, 230-232.

4Watson, George III, 246-247; Burke, Correspondence, IV, 218-219n; Christie, Reform, 98.

5"Speech on Economical Reform," (11 February 1780), Burke, Works, II, 55; Cone, Burke, I, 363.
of the famous Dunning resolution of April 6, 1780, "... that the influence of the crown has increased, is increasing, and ought to be diminished. ..." However, the opposition failed to take advantage of the situation in the Commons, and the intense pressure for economic reform declined after this point. The occurrence of the Gordon Riots in June of that year hastened its demise. The riots, which were a national traumatic experience, served to reinforce the conservative, propertied classes in the expectation that reform would open the floodgates to revolution. Burke, who was himself menaced by the rioters and who remained in the midst of the action during the riots, was undoubtedly influenced in this direction by his very personal acquaintance with the "democracy" at work. The King behaved with courage and firmness throughout the crisis and as a result experienced a revival in personal prestige. At the general election in September, the "King's Friends" were returned by a healthy majority, which effectively shored

6 Butterfield, George III and People, 315; Watson, George III, 231-233.

7 Donald Grove Barnes, George III and William Pitt, 1783-1806 (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1939), (Hereinafter referred to as Barnes, George III and Pitt.), 17; Watson, George III, 234.

8 Annual Register of World Events (London: Longmans, Green, 1758--), (Hereinafter referred to as Annual Register.), 1781, Historical Article, 137; Christie, Reform, 115; Christopher Hibbert, King Mob (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1959), 140, 146; Butterfield, George III and People, 374; Watson, George III, 239.

9 Letter to Richard Shackleton, 13 June 1780, Burke, Correspondence, IV, 246-247; Cone, Burke, I, 352. In his subsequent writings Burke frequently referred to the common man en masse in the most unflattering terms.

10 Butterfield, George III and People, 380.

11 Robertson describes the new Toryism of the "Kings Friends": "The new Toryism identified the interest of the truly national state
up Lord North's government and determined that the status quo would be maintained for the time being. In fact, the political situation remained virtually unchanged until the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown precipitated a new crisis for the government, early in 1782.

The events of 1780, brought out many of the difficulties which confronted the Rockingham Whigs in their attempt to defeat North's government. They were severely handicapped by the fact that their real opponent was not Lord North, but the King. They attacked in essence, not the policies of a ministry, but the policies of George III, and the King was determined that those policies should prevail. Public sentiment condemned them for a variety of reasons; the Rockingham connection opposed the American war, which was regarded as treasonable in itself by many. Strong sentiment against any attempt to limit the royal prerogative generally prevailed; public opinion tended to be suspicious of parties and politicians, regarding the independent

with the legal authority of an ideally intelligent and patriotic kingship, freed from caste selfishness and the bigotry of faction, blending all parties into one great union to achieve national ends by national means." Sir Charles Grant Robertson, *England Under the Hanoverians* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1930), (Hereinafter referred to as Robertson, Hanoverians.), 164. See also 222.


15 Parties as such did not exist in anything like their present form. The only comparable structure was the "connection" which was based largely on family alliances. Namier estimates that less than half the House of Commons acted and thought in party terms. Sir Lewis Namier, *Crossroads of Power* (2 vols.; London: H. Hamilton, 1962), (Hereinafter referred to as Namier, Crossroads.), II, 127-128, 231;
country gentlemen who disavowed party as constituting the most "virtuous" part of the House of Commons.16

Burke played an important and, at some stages, a leading role in the affairs of his party during the constitutional crisis of 1780-84. He acted as an advisor to the leaders of his party, although his advice was not always acted upon; and he wrote, or helped to write, major pieces of legislation for his party when it was in office.17 He did not attain office of the first rank, a fact which excited considerable comment.18 Nevertheless, the political philosophy for which Burke was largely responsible determined in great measure the shape that events took in the confrontation between George III and the Rockingham Whigs.

Burke regarded the independence and the supremacy of Parliament as a primary objective to be secured, and, following traditional Whig teaching, he considered this state of things a natural outgrowth of the Revolution of 1688.19 George III had encroached on the independence of


16Namier, Crossroads, II, 30-31, 45; Pares, George III and Politicians, 43; Butterfield, George III and People, 13. The independent country gentlemen served in a particularly valuable capacity in that they tended most to reflect the tendency of public opinion.

17Cone, Burke, II, 14-15, 22; Butterfield, George III and People, 15-16.


19At the time of the French Revolution, Burke changed his defensive posture somewhat, in the light of what he regarded as a threat to
Parliament and had effectively taken the reins of government into his own hands, directing policy, managing elections, administering patronage, and appointing his own ministers. In order to curtail the growth of the influence of the crown, Burke and the Rockingham Whigs offered as an alternative the system of party government; instead of the departmental system under which each department head had direct access and was immediately responsible to the King, they proposed the system of a cabinet, jointly responsible to Parliament, taking office and resigning together. By this program of responsible party government Burke hoped to modify the relationship between the King and Parliament. But the crisis of 1782, revived the demand for changes which would make Parliament itself more responsive to public opinion.

Burke's reaction to the issue of parliamentary reform stemmed from his concept of parliamentary independence. He felt that as it was constituted at the time, Parliament admirably represented the most politically responsible class, the landed aristocracy. These were men educated to rule and wealthy enough to be independent of less responsible influence, arising from either the crown or the democracy. Any measure monarch itself. Believing that the independence of Parliament was no longer under fire, but that the very existence of the constitutional monarchy was at stake, Burke turned his guns on different targets, a fact which led to charges of inconsistency in his conduct. See his Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs, 1791.

20 Robertson, Hanoverians, 190; Barnes, George III and Pitt, 24.

21 Cone, Burke, II, 9, 13; Barnes, George III and Pitt, 25; Butterfield, George III and People, 12. Under the departmental system during the administration of Lord North, the Crown was the connecting link and motor force in policy. Each department head had equal control of patronage and policy within his own department, under the general direction of the King. Robertson, Hanoverians, 187; Rose, Pitt, 79.

22 Cone, Burke, II, 46-47; Butterfield, George III and People, 15.
that would change the parliamentary system itself should be undertaken only with the utmost caution. More frequent elections, for example, would tend to increase, not diminish, corruption, and would enable the crown to "...wear out all opposition in elections ..." Any broadening of the representation, he felt, would endanger the delicate balance of the constitution which, as it stood, permitted the propertied interests, through Parliament, to exercise a restraint upon the crown. Burke regarded the schemes for parliamentary reform as little more than innovation and idle speculation. Indeed, he saw them as irresponsible tampering with a constitution which had developed in accord with the needs of the nation over a long period of time. He did not regard the reform agitation as reflecting a general demand for change by the nation as a whole. Rather, he thought the agitation was due to the efforts of certain groups seeking to discredit the House of Commons by persuading the public that the House, as then constituted, did not represent the people "either actually or virtually."

23 "Letter to the Chairman of the Buckinghamshire Meeting (April 13, 1780) on the Duration of Parliaments and a more equal Representation of the People," Burke, Works, VI, 2.

24 "Speech on a Bill for Shortening the Duration of Parliaments," Burke, Works, VI, 133-134. See also Letter to Sir Gilbert Elliot, 3 September 1788, Burke, Correspondence, V, 413-414.

25 Cone, Burke, II, 362.


27 Letter to Joseph Harford, 27 September 1780, Burke, Correspondence, IV, 228. See also Letter to the Chairman of the Buckinghamshire Meeting, 12 April 1780, Burke, Correspondence, IV, 228.

Events of the period 1780 to 1785 tended to bear out Burke's contention that the pressures for reform did not come from the nation at large.29 The demand for economy in government arose from a fairly broad segment of the population, the freeholders, who protested against increases in taxes and misuse of public money.30 The demand for parliamentary reform attracted a more limited support, and in addition, the advocates of parliamentary reform suffered from a lack of agreement on measures.31 The reform cause attracted able leadership and debating talent; many of the important figures of Parliament paid at least lip service to the cause, but it failed to attract the interest of the majority either of the House of Commons or of the politically significant classes.32 The period 1780 to 1785 saw several reform measures introduced and some of them sparked brilliant debate, but except for the economic reform measures enacted during the second Rockingham administration, none of them passed.

Organized backing for the cause of reform came principally from the association movement, which developed as a result of the demand for reform in 1780.33 Originating in Yorkshire, the association movement spread to other counties and attracted the support of men of property and substance, a factor which distinguished it from the Wilkite agitation

29 Christie, Reform, 120.

30 Butterfield, George III and People, 193.

31 Butterfield, George III and People, 295-296; Barnes, George III and Pitt, 15.

32 Christie, Reform, 120.

33 Butterfield, George III and People, 200. See Christie, Reform for complete history.
of the sixties.\textsuperscript{34} Christopher Wyvill, who organized and led the movement in Yorkshire, suspected parties and politicians; and, although he sought to work with the Rockingham connection toward common goals, he steadily resisted efforts of the Whig politicians to take over the direction of the movement.\textsuperscript{35} When the center of interest moved from economic to parliamentary reform, the associators aimed at increasing the political weight of the freeholders and of the independents.\textsuperscript{36} After much dispute, they adopted a program which included economic reform, more frequent parliaments, and the addition of one hundred county members to the House of Commons.\textsuperscript{37} The Rockingham connection refused to accept a program which went beyond economic reform and as a consequence the reformers failed to present a united front in Parliament, a factor which severely limited any hope of a successful campaign.\textsuperscript{38}

The Dissenting interest provided a constant source of support for reform groups, although the Dissenters did not work as a body in the cause of reform.\textsuperscript{39} They became involved basically because their

\textsuperscript{34}Watson, George III, 228-230; Butterfield, George III and People, 282. The Wilkites were agitators for parliamentary reform, active 1763-69, in the London and Middlesex areas. Inspired by the notorious John Wilkes, they tended to be lower middle-class tradesmen and craftsmen.

\textsuperscript{35}Christie, Reform, 75, 93; Butterfield, George III and People, 220-221; Watson, George III, 230.

\textsuperscript{36}Butterfield, George III and People, 283.

\textsuperscript{37}Christie, Reform, 92; Watson, George III, 230.

\textsuperscript{38}Christie, Reform, 94-95; Watson, George III, 230.

\textsuperscript{39}Carl B. Cone, Torchbearer of Freedom (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1952), (Hereinafter referred to as Cone, Price.), 15; Lincoln, Dissent, 17; Christie, Reform, 229; Pares, George III and Politicians, 24n; Butterfield, George III and People, 198; Watson, George III, 230.
second-class citizenship forced on them an interest in a broader civil liberty. They constituted a considerable part of the commercial middle class which was beginning to challenge the traditional domination of the landed aristocracy. The Dissenter academies provided a forum for free discussion of politics and political systems; and, because they controlled many of the leading literary journals, Dissenters exerted a considerable influence on public opinion. The Dissenting interest lacked cohesion and unity, but it carried weight in the world of eighteenth century politics. The Rockingham connection depended heavily on the support of the Dissenters; they could jeopardize that support only at their peril.

The issue of parliamentary reform which strained relations between the Rockingham Whigs and the Dissenters, also acted as a divisive force within the party itself. Burke, in 1780, was already aware that the issue was to be a disruptive influence. After the loss of his

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41 Lincoln, Dissent, 13-14; Butterfield, George III and People, 182-184.

42 The Test laws forbade the granting of university degrees to Dissenters; as a consequence the Dissenters developed their own form of higher education, in the Dissenter academies. They provided a broad education, including modern languages and natural sciences in their curriculum, as well as political science.


44 Robertson, Hanoverians, 161-162; Lincoln, Dissent, 60-62; Christie, Reform, 191-194; Alan Valentine, Lord North (2 vols; Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), (Hereinafter referred to as Valentine, North.), II, 368.
Bristol seat in the summer of that year, he expressed a definite reluctance to return to Parliament, based largely on his awareness of the opposition between his personal views in the matter and those of some leading men in the connection. Sir George Savile was prominent in the activities of the Yorkshire Association; the Duke of Richmond supported some of the more radical reform measures, and his nephew, Charles James Fox became very active in the Westminster Association, and committed himself publicly to work for parliamentary reform.

The Marquis of Rockingham took a more conservative position, conceding the value of triennial parliaments, but opposing changes in the electoral system, as well as the much discussed idea of instructions to members of Parliament by their constituents. Burke probably reinforced Rockingham's opinions in this matter. The Marquis sounds very much like Burke when he writes of "... well meaning men ... running wild in

45Burke lost his Bristol seat for a number of reasons. He failed to properly cultivate his constituents after he was elected; he went against their wishes in supporting trade concessions to Ireland, and he supported Catholic relief. The intolerance of many of the Dissenters on this issue surprised him since they had praised him for his tolerance at the time of his election in 1774. See Two Letters from Mr. Burke to Gentlemen of Bristol, Burke, Works, I; Burke, Correspondence, IV, 261, Letter to Job Watts, 10 August 1780, and 263, Letter to John Noble, 11 August 1780; Cone, Burke, I, 338, 344, 384; Barker, Burke and Bristol, 92.

46Letter to Joseph Harford, 27 September 1780, Burke, Correspondence, IV, 296.

47Butterfield, George III and People, 222, 225-27, 312; Russell (ed.), Fox, I, 247.

adoption speculative propositions as remedies, and which are by no means certain in their effects. . . . \( ^{49} \)

The surrender of General Cornwallis and his army at Yorktown, in October, 1781, revived the political crisis which had been interrupted by the Gordon Riots of 1780; national dissatisfaction over the North administration's handling of the war grew until, in March, 1782, Lord North conceded defeat and resigned. \( ^{50} \) Unwilling to accept as ministers the Whig aristocrats with whom he had contended for so many years, George III tried every possible alternative, but circumstances forced him to accept the Marquis of Rockingham as the head of what turned out to be a broadly based ministry. \( ^{51} \) Rockingham stipulated royal assent to American independence and the economic reform program as conditions of his acceptance of office. \( ^{52} \) The Earl of Shelburne conducted the negotiations between the King and the Marquis of Rockingham, and when the administration was set up, Shelburne took office as Home Secretary, with Charles James Fox as Foreign Secretary. \( ^{53} \) Burke took the secondary,


\[ \text{50 Watson, George III, 242; Cone, Burke, I, 394.} \]

\[ \text{51 The Rockingham cabinet included Rockingham (Treasury), Lord John Cavendish (Exchequer), Fox (Foreign Secretary), Shelburne (Home Secretary), Keppel (Admiralty), Richmond (Ordnance), Grafton (Privy Seal), Camden (Lord President), Conway (Commander in Chief), Thurlow (Lord Chancellor), Dunning (Chancellor of Duchy of Lancaster). See Maccoby, Radicalism, I, 372.} \]

\[ \text{52 Albemarle (ed.), Rockingham, II, 451-453; Maccoby, Radicalism, I, 370.} \]

\[ \text{53 Russell (ed.), Fox, I, 290-293, 307; Albemarle (ed.), Rockingham, II, 463-465; Rose, Pitt, 104.} \]
but, until then, very lucrative post of Paymaster of the Forces, an office which he proceeded to reform with great vigor.  

From the outset, division plagued the Rockingham cabinet. Shelburne openly enjoyed the greater confidence of the King, and failed to sympathize with the determination of the Rockingham connection to limit the royal influence and prerogative. Conflict and competition developed between Fox and Shelburne who shared the responsibility for conducting the peace negotiations. Fox maintained that American independence should be conceded as a prelude to negotiations, and Shelburne refused to give up what he regarded as an important bargaining advantage. Disagreements between Shelburne and the Rockinghamites were augmented by mutual distrust; the Rockingham connection, indeed most of political England, suspected Shelburne's motives and actions, and that gentleman did little to allay their suspicions.

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54 Barnes, George III and Pitt, 19; Cone, Burke, II, 27-28; Watson, George III, 247. The Paymaster of the Forces previously kept large sums of government money in his own hands, investing it and keeping the profits. Burke's bill reforming the pay office required that money drawn from the Exchequer be deposited in the Bank of England, and also that the new paymaster assume at once his predecessor's accounts and balances.

55 Russell (ed.), Fox, I, 314-315, Letters to Mr. Fitzpatrick, 12 April 1782, and 15 April 1782; Cone, Burke, II, 37; Rose, Pitt, 103; Watson, George III, 251; Christie, "Rockingham," 390.


57 Watson, George III, 249; Sir John Fortescue (ed.), The Correspondence of King George the Third (6 vols.; London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1927-28), (Hereinafter referred to as Fortescue [ed.], Correspondence of George III.), VI, 44, No. 3777, Letter from Lord Shelburne to the King, 25 May 1782, and 81, No. 3841, Letter from the King to Lord Shelburne, 11 July 1782.

58 Russell (ed.), Fox, I, 316-317, Letters to Fitzpatrick, 28 April 1782, and 1 May 1782; Cone, Burke, II, 38-39; Watson, George III, 245.
In spite of the open dislike of the King and the conflicts within the cabinet, the Rockingham administration made rapid progress in implementing their program of economic reform. Burke's bill for civil list reform met with considerable opposition from Shelburne and Lord Chancellor Thurlow within the cabinet, but it passed in modified form in both Houses, along with the revenue officers bill and the contractors bill. William Pitt introduced a motion for a committee on the state of the representation, a measure which sorely divided the Rockingham connection, and which failed to pass in the House of Commons.

The divisions in the cabinet came to a head on June 30, when Fox, upon being outvoted at a cabinet meeting, on the question of American independence, announced his intention of resigning, without specifying a date. On July 1, Lord Rockingham, who had been gravely ill for some time, died, leaving both the administration and his party without a head. The King immediately offered the post of First Lord of the Treasury to Shelburne, who accepted.

Fox assumed effective leadership of the Rockingham Whigs at this time, with the Duke of Portland as titular head of the party.

59 Albemarle (ed.), Rockingham, II, 466; Russell (ed.), Fox, I, 318.
60 See above, Ch. II, 28.
61 Pares, George III and Politicians, 164-165n; Rose, Pitt, 110; Cone, Burke, II, 42.
63 Ibid., I, 386-387, 453; Cone, Burke, II, 60.
64 Russell (ed.), Fox, II, 1.
65 Fortescue (ed.), Correspondence of George III, VI, 70-71, No. 3825 and No. 3827, Letters from the King to Lord Shelburne, 1 July 1782.
66 Watson, George III, 243; Rose, Pitt, 111; Russell (ed.), Fox, I, 448. Portland, head of one of the old Whig families, held the position
When Shelburne took over the government, Fox resigned, along with Lord John Cavendish (Exchequer), Edmund Burke, and other lesser officials, claiming that the King should have appointed Portland as head of the cabinet. Fox's resignation further divided the party, since Richmond (Ordnance), and Keppel (Admiralty) declined to follow Fox into opposition. William Pitt took office in Shelburne's government as Chancellor of the Exchequer and undertook the management of the Commons. Parliament adjourned shortly after Shelburne took over the Treasury, and during the rest of the summer and fall of 1782, Shelburne concentrated primarily on negotiating the terms of peace with the American colonies, France, Spain, and Holland. When Parliament reconvened in December, Shelburne announced that the treaty preliminaries had been settled, but refused to indicate what the provisions were. When Shelburne announced the terms of the peace in February, 1783, he was of Lord Lieutenant of Ireland during the Rockingham administration; he had neither the reputation nor the ability of Lord Rockingham.

67 Russell (ed.), Fox, I, 467-468.

68 Fortescue (ed.), Correspondence of George III, VI, 75, No. 3833, Letter from Lord Shelburne to the King, 4 July 1782; Russell (ed.), Fox, I, 468.

69 The Rockingham Whigs made no effort, though they had opportunity, to attract the support of William Pitt, who though young, already enjoyed a considerable reputation in the House of Commons. Lord Shelburne and the King took advantage of Rockingham's failure in this regard. Pitt refused to take a non-cabinet post in Rockingham's administration, but readily accepted the Exchequer in Shelburne's. Albermarle (ed.), Rockingham, II, 422-423, Letter from William Pitt to Rockingham, 19 July 1779, and Letter from Rockingham to William Pitt, 7 August 1779; Russell (ed.), Fox, I, 262, 311; Rose, Pitt, III; Fortescue (ed.), Correspondence of George III, VI, 37, 39, No. 3765, Letter from Lord Shelburne to the King, 20 May 1782, and 39, No. 3768, Letter from the King to Lord Shelburne, 21 May 1782; Barnes, George III and Pitt, 50-51, 107.

70 MacCoby, Radicalism, I, 379.
confronted by a coalition between Fox and Lord North, who allied in an attack on the terms of the treaty.\textsuperscript{71} Shelburne, unable to command a majority in the House of Commons, resigned, February 24.\textsuperscript{72}

Although it was severely criticized, the Fox-North Coalition was in many respects a logical solution to a difficult situation.\textsuperscript{73} In 1783, three men, North, Fox, and Shelburne, controlled substantial parts of the House of Commons; coalition between any two factions could provide a sound political basis for a viable government.\textsuperscript{74} During the months following Rockingham's death, Shelburne made overtures to both Fox and North, and was rejected.\textsuperscript{75} Fox and North had fought each other during the years of the American war, but both of these men kept their political enmities separate from their personal feelings; Shelburne, on the other hand, aroused personal distrust in most of the men he worked with.\textsuperscript{76} Fox and North were able to resolve their political differences,

\begin{footnotes}
\item Annual Register, 1783, Historical Article, 148-167; Maccoby, Radicalism, I, 384-385; Fortescue (ed.), Correspondence of George III, VI, 244, No. 4124, Letter from Mr. Townshend to the King, 22 February 1783.
\item Fortescue (ed.), Correspondence of George III, VI, 321, No. 4268, Memorandum by the King, 30 March 1783.
\item Russell (ed.), Fox, II, 18-19.
\item Watson, George III, 250. An estimate of July, 1782, assigned Shelburne, 140; Fox, 90; and North, 120 followers with more than 100 independents.
\item Fortescue (ed.), Correspondence of George III, VI, 236, No. 4109, Letter from Lord Shelburne to the King, [10 February 1783]; Watson, George III, 258-259; Barnes, George III and Pitt, 53.
\item Watson, George III, 257; Robertson, Hanoverians, 296.
\end{footnotes}
but public opinion recalled the political conflicts between them, and with the King, denounced the unprincipled and "unnatural" alliance. 77

The substance of the agreement between the two men was this: "... that nothing more was required to be done in reducing the influence of the Crown by economical reform, and that on parliamentary reform every man should follow his own opinion. ..." Fox insisted that the King should not be allowed to be his own minister, and North agreed that government responsibility should lie with the cabinet or with a prime minister, rather than having the departments directly responsible to the King, the system which had prevailed in North's administration. "The King," said Lord North, "ought to be treated with all sort of respect and attention, but the appearance of power is all that a king of this country can have." 78

Both Fox and North were condemned as having compromised on matters of principle, the one by reformers and the other by devotees of the royal prerogative. Concerning Fox, it should be remembered that the Rockingham connection's program of economic reform had been enacted during Rockingham's administration. Fox was not at liberty to commit his party on the issue of parliamentary reform since the party itself failed to agree on the matter. 79 Fox especially came under attack for resisting a treaty of peace which he had demanded for so long. Fox

77 Fortescue (ed.), Correspondence of George III, VI, 245, No. 4125, Letter from the King to Mr. Townshend, 22 February 1783; Rose, Pitt, 118-119.


79 Cone, Burke, II, 89; Watson comments on this matter: "... it was impossible to drive on with reform regardless of the conservative feelings of the squires, when the object of reform was to make squires count for more." Watson, George III, 259.
justified his resistance to the treaty by claiming that the terms of
the treaty were a humiliation for the country in the light of British
victories. North emphasized the inadequacy of the provisions for the
loyalists of the former British colonies. Both men justified the
Coalition on the grounds that the cause of their differences, the
American war, no longer existed, and that it was now necessary to
give the nation a strong, broadly based government in order to deal
adequately with the problems which had arisen as a result of the war. 80

Burke was not too comfortable with the arrangement, although
he supported Fox. He wrote to Richard Shackleton in March, happy
over the defeat of Shelburne, but full of forebodings for the future
of his party:

This wicked man, and no less weak and stupid than false and
hypocritical, has contrived to break to pieces the body of
men, whose integrity, wisdom, and union, were alone capable
of giving consistency to public measures, and recovering this
Kingdom from the miserable state into which it is fallen. 82

His apprehension over the conflict within his party was joined to a fear
of "the madness of the people," a fear not without justification. 83

The King declared his determination not to offer the control of
the government to the head of a party, asserting that it had been his
purpose since the day he ascended the throne, to disband parties and to

80 Annual Register, 1783, Historical Article, 156-165; Maccoby,
Radicalism, I, 382-384.

81 Cone, Burke, II, 76, 84-85. According to Cone, Burke took no
part in the arrangements for the Coalition; he acquiesced to the
Coalition, supporting it publicly for the sake of appearances.

82 Letter to Richard Shackleton, 3 March 1783, Burke, Correspond-
dence, V, 72.

83 Ibid.
make use of the best talent in the kingdom without granting a monopoly of office to any one faction. 84 He made every effort to secure an alternative government, addressing himself to William Pitt, Lord North, and Earl Gower, all of whom declined. 85 On March 12, 1783, the King began negotiations with the Duke of Portland, through the agency of Lord North; disputes arose over cabinet members, over the King's refusal to meet with the Duke of Portland personally, and over Portland's refusal to show the King a complete list of the arrangements for the new government, until the King finally broke off negotiations on March 23. 86 The King again approached William Pitt and his cousin, Thomas Pitt, and then seriously considered abdicating in favor of his son. 87 Finally, faced with the prospect of the decline of the national credit, the King capitulated to Fox and Portland, on April 1, 1783. 88

84 Robertson, Hanoverians, 190; Butterfield, George III and People, 4; Fortescue (ed.), Correspondence of George III, VI, 248, No. 4131, Letter from the King to Lord Shelburne, 22 February 1783, and 288, No. 4213, Letter from the King to Lord North, 18 March 1783. It is evident from the royal correspondence that the King blamed the politicians who opposed him for the loss of the American colonies and the humiliations of the peace; e.g., VI, 147, No. 3962, Letter from the King to Lord Grantham, 21 October 1782.

85 Fortescue (ed.), Correspondence of George III, VI, 321-323, No. 4268, Memorandum by the King, 30 March 1783; Barnes, George III and Pitt, 58, 67.

86 Fortescue (ed.), Correspondence of George III, VI, 280, and 285, No. 4197, and 4209, Letters from Lord North to the King, 15 March 1783, and 17 March 1783; 298, No. 4233, Letter from the King to Lord North, 23 March 1783; 301, No. 4238, Letter from the King to Lord North and the Duke of Portland, 23 March 1783.

87 Ibid., VI, 310, No. 4247, Letter from the King to Lord Weymouth, 25 March 1783; 311, No. 4249, Letter from Mr. Pitt to the King, 25 March 1783; 316-317, No. 4260, Draft of a Message from the King to Parliament, [228 March 1783].

88 Ibid., VI, 328, No. 4271, Memorandum by the King, 1 April 1783. The Coalition cabinet included the Duke of Portland (Treasury), Lord John
enough, on the same day he wrote to Lord Temple, begging for sympathy in his "thraldom," and expressing the wish that within a few months "the Grenvilles and the Pitts and other men of abilities and character" would relieve him from the situation. 89

Fox correctly assessed the situation when he declared that only success could justify the Coalition. 90 Given those conditions, Fox failed to take the necessary steps to consolidate the position of his government, and instead proceeded to alienate much of the support he already had. 91 By the act of coalescing with Lord North, whom public opinion connected with resistance to change and with the shame of a losing war, Fox incurred the suspicions of reform-minded men of all descriptions. 92 The Dissenters regarded North with particular enmity, since, during his years in office, he had successfully resisted any change in the laws governing the religious establishment, and reformers in general suspected Fox of selling out to the enemy in the matter of parliamentary reform. 93 When William Pitt introduced, in May, 1783,

Cavendish (Exchequer), Lord North (Home Secretary), Charles Fox (Foreign Secretary), Keppel (Admiralty), Viscount Stormont (President of the Council), Earl of Carlisle (Privy Seal). Fortescue (ed.), Correspondence of George III, VI, 307, No. 4241.

89Ibid., VI, 329-330, No. 4272, Letter from the King to Lord Temple, 1 April 1783. William Pitt was the son of the first Earl of Chatham and Hester Grenville, sister of Earl Temple.

90Russell (ed.), Fox, II, 87.

91Barnes, George III and Pitt, 20.


93Christie, Reform, 196, 209; Henriques, Toleration, 57-58.
proposals for reform of the representation and for the prevention of bribery in elections, the defeat of his resolutions aroused considerable comment; although Fox supported Pitt's resolutions, North's followers defeated them by a substantial margin.\textsuperscript{94} William Pitt, by the fact that he introduced the resolutions, assumed the leadership of the reform movement in Parliament that Fox had apparently laid aside.\textsuperscript{95}

The King, already hostile to the Coalition, had made it clear that the Coalition government could expect no royal favors, of any kind; Fox and North faced a problem of spreading a very limited patronage among the adherents of the two factions.\textsuperscript{96} Already having forced themselves upon the King, the Coalition government gave him additional incentive to rid himself of a distasteful administration when, in June, the arrangements for the establishment of the Prince of Wales became matter for dispute. Part of the King's personal hostility to Fox stemmed from the fact that Fox, well known for his reckless gambling and dissolute life, had befriended the Prince of Wales and was educating the young man in his own mode of living.\textsuperscript{97} Portland and Fox suggested one hundred thousand pounds per annum, in addition to the revenues of the Duchy of Cornwall, as an appropriate amount to allow the Prince for the purposes of setting up a separate establishment and for the payment of

\textsuperscript{94}Annual Register, 1783, Historical Article, 176; Maccoby, Radicalism, I, 396-397; Christie, Reform, 145, 180-81.

\textsuperscript{95}Christie, Reform, 148-149.

\textsuperscript{96}Russell (ed.), Fox, I, 309, and II, 95; Barnes, George III and Pitt, 58; John Norris, Shelburne and Reform (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1963), (Hereinafter referred to as Norris, Shelburne), 273.

\textsuperscript{97}Russell (ed.), Fox, II, 45-46.
his already large debts. The wrathful father answered, along with the frustrated king; expressing his "utter indignation and astonishment" at the proposal, the King accused Portland of neglecting the interests of an already heavily taxed public, "... to gratify the passions of an ill advised Young Man..." Both sides compromised on the settlement, and the Coalition government survived the unpleasant and unsavory incident, with its reputation badly tarnished.

In September, 1783, Fox announced the signing of the peace treaties. He devoted most of his energies during his period in office to ending England's diplomatic isolation and to securing improved terms in the peace negotiations with the American colonies, France, Spain, and Holland. Fox failed to improve significantly on the terms secured by Shelburne; his diplomatic efforts, given time to mature, might have borne more fruit, but Fox's successor, William Pitt did not continue Fox's policy.

The enemies of the Coalition gained another ally in the East India Company and the commercial interest, with the introduction, in November, 1783, of Fox's India bill. It had been evident for some time that changes in the constitution of the East India Company were

98 Ibid., 112-113; Barnes, George III and Pitt, 61-62.
99 Fortescue (ed.), Correspondence of George III, VI, 399-401; No. 4384, Letter from the King to the Duke of Portland, 16 June 1783.
100 Russell (ed.), Fox, II, 118; Barnes, George III and Pitt, 62-63; Rose, Pitt, 132-133.
101 Russell (ed.), Fox, II, 119; Fortescue (ed.), Correspondence of George III, VI, 442, No. 4467, Letter from Mr. Fox to the King, 7 September 1783.
102 Rose, Pitt, 136.
103 Barnes, George III and Pitt, 66; Cone, Burke, II, 129.
necessary. Financial difficulties in the Company and the abuse of authority by Company servants had brought the situation to a point of crisis. Fox's India bill, by which he hoped to remedy the situation and reorganize the administration, was largely the work of Edmund Burke who for some time had been the party's India expert. Fox's (or Burke's) India bill suffered from severe inadequacies, mostly because of Burke's lack of practical administrative experience. In making up the bill he intended primarily to curtail abuses, and only secondarily to set up a functioning administrative system. In doing so, he failed to take into consideration many of the problems of administering a distant dependency in an era of slow transportation and communication.

Politically, Fox and Burke opened themselves to considerable criticism, both because of their disregard for the vested interests of the then controlling members of East India House and because of the commission designed to take over control of the Company. The India bill established a commission of seven members, named in the bill, to exercise complete administrative control. The original commissioners were to hold office for a period of four years, subject to recall by the crown.


105 Sutherland, *East India Company*, 397; Burke, *Correspondence*, V, xiv; Russell (ed.), *Fox*, II, 100-101. Cone indicated that Burke strongly influenced the substance of the bill, although others probably wrote it up. Cone, *Burke*, II, 125-126.

106 Sutherland, *East India Company*, 401.

their successors were to be appointed by the crown. The commissioners
named in the bill, all prominent adherents of Fox and North, would also
possess complete control of Indian patronage. East India House
advertised the commission set up by the bill as a remedy for the patronage
famine suffered by the Coalition, one which offered the commissioners
control over almost unlimited patronage; supposedly this would enhance
their political power to the extent that they could possibly establish
a permanent dictatorship.

The India bill became the occasion not only of much adverse
publicity for the Coalition and for Fox and Burke individually, but
also the means by which the King determined to rid himself of a ministry
which was personally repugnant to him. The bill passed the Commons
by a comfortable majority. When it came up for consideration in the
Lords, the King made it known publicly that whoever voted for it would
be regarded by the King not only not his friends but his enemies
... " The House of Commons loudly condemned this undisguised
and unprecedented use of the royal authority to influence the decision
of Parliament, but the King accomplished his purpose. The bill was
defeated on its second reading in the Lords, December 15, 1783, by a vote

108 Annual Register, 1784-85, Historical Article, 59-61, 68;
Sutherland, East India Company, 400; Maccoby, Radicalism, I, 400; Edward
Lascelles, The Life of Charles James Fox (London: Oxford University
Press, 1936), (Hereinafter referred to as Lascelles, Fox.), 129.
109 Rose, Pitt, 145-146.
110 Sutherland, East India Company, 400; Maccoby, Radicalism, I,
400-401; George, "Fox's Martyrs," 241-244; Cone, Burke, II, 131.
111 Watson, George III, 265.
112 Annual Register, 1784-85, Historical Article, 69; Maccoby,
Radicalism, I, 402.
113 Russell (ed.), Fox, II, 221, 227-228; George, "Fox's Martyrs,"
240.
of 87 to 79, and on the third reading, December 17, by a division of 95 to 76. At midnight, December 18, the King ordered Fox and Lord North to surrender their seals of office by messenger, and on the following day dismissed the remaining cabinet members. William Pitt agreed to head the new ministry. Parliament adjourned until after the holidays, and when it reconvened, the young prime minister found himself in the difficult position of dealing with an obstructionist majority.

Pitt immediately attempted to negotiate an understanding with Fox, but, as Fox controlled a strong majority in the Commons, he felt that he did not need to make concessions to Pitt. Fox and Portland insisted on Pitt's resignation as a condition for coalition, and required that all parties should form a government on an equal basis. As the Fox-North majority in Parliament steadily declined, and as strong signs of popular support for Pitt began to show, the possibilities for an arrangement evaporated. Finally on March 25, the King dissolved Parliament and called for a general election.

114 Annual Register, 1784-85, Historical Article, 69-71; Maccoby, Radicalism, I, 402-404.
115 Fortescue (ed.), Correspondence of George III, VI, 476, No. 4546, Letter from the King to Lord North, 18 December 1783.
116 Annual Register, 1784-85, Historical Article, 71-72; Lascelles, Fox, 133-135; Maccoby, Radicalism, I, 404; Barnes, George III and Pitt, 67-68.
118 Rose, Pitt, 164; Barnes, George III and Pitt, 71-72, 81-85.
119 Maccoby, Radicalism, I, 418-422; George, "Fox's Martyrs," 249; Russell (ed.), Fox, II, 231, 245; Namier, Crossroads, II, 45; Barnes, George III and Pitt, 79-94.
120 Maccoby, Radicalism, I, 428; Barnes, George III and Pitt, 100.
The election in the spring of 1784 was a notable victory for Pitt and a disastrous defeat for the Coalition, which lost about one hundred sixty seats. The list of "Fox's Martyrs" included many of the leading members of his party. Fox managed to hold his seat for Westminster in a close, hard-fought, and contested election. Several factors caused the loss of the election, among them, the avid opposition of the East India Company proprietors, whose influence was quite wide, the loss of support from the reformers and the Dissenters, a general distaste for the Coalition itself, and a nation-wide sentiment which supported the right of the King to choose his own ministers. Public opinion expressed itself to the fullest extent allowed it in the eighteenth century political structure, against the Coalition and in favor of William Pitt; national constitutional issues dominated the contest, and national sentiment decided against the Rockingham Whigs.

Burke reacted to the defeat of 1784, with a bitterness which can be understood in the light of the effect it had for his own personal

121 Annual Register, 1784-85, Historical Article, 147; Lascelles, Fox, 157.
122 Maccoby, Radicalism, I, 431-433; Annual Register, 1784-85, Historical Article, 174-180; Lascelles, Fox, 154. Burke's own seat was not endangered since he was returned from Walton, one of the "rotten boroughs" owned by Lord Fitzwilliam, Rockingham's nephew. The famous Westminster scrutiny of 1784, supported by Pitt, kept Fox from taking his seat as M.P. for Westminster, for nine months. The Commons voted 162-124 to allow Fox to take his seat, and in effect convicted Pitt of "... ungenerous and personal intrigue against an opponent ...." Watson, George III, 275.
123 Annual Register, 1784-85, Historical Article, 147; Lascelles, Fox, 147; Cone, Burke, II, 292; Maccoby, Radicalism, I, 420; Watson, George III, 271-272; Barnes, George III and Pitt, 101, 108. Mrs. George places particular emphasis on the loss to the Whigs of their two traditional supports, the commercial interest and the Dissenters. George, "Fox's Martyrs," 241.
124 George, "Fox's Martyrs," 239, 253-259.
ambitions and his hopes for his party. After almost twenty years in opposition his party had, after a long and painful struggle, finally achieved office, and very shortly thereafter had lost it. Pitt, because of the magnitude of his victory, and because of the firm support of the King, was assured of control for some years to come. The political chaos of the last few years had come to an end and the remnant of the Rockingham connection had been left impotent.

For Burke personally, the second Rockingham administration had been the achievement and the vindication of his political career. The death of Rockingham marked the end, to a great extent, of that large measure of influence which he had exercised over his party. The election of 1784 was the culmination of a series of defeats which destroyed his hopes of attaining any significant political power. He channeled his energies into other areas from this point forward, but after 1784, his hopes of achieving any lasting monument lay not in the political arena, but in personal endeavor of the kind involved in the impeachment of Warren Hastings.

125Burke tried, unsuccessfully, to make an official protest to the King over the way the situation was handled; see "A Representation to His Majesty moved in the House of Commons, June 14, 1784," Burke, Works, II, 249-276.

126Although Pitt headed the government for many years, his dependence of the King severely limited his opportunity to enact his own legislative program. In the year after he took office, for example, he suffered defeat on a number of important measures, including parliametary reform; he thereafter refrained from initiating any major changes. Barnes, George III and Pitt, 112; Watson, George III, 302; Rose, Pitt, 202-208.

127Copeland, Burke, 74-76; Cone, Burke, II, 145.

128Letter to William Baker, 22 June 1784, Burke, Correspondence, V, 154; Cone, Burke, II, 148-149.

129Warren Hastings (1732-1818), Governor General of Bengal, 1774-1785.
Highly sensitive to criticism from friends and associates, Burke regarded those who turned against him with a personal enmity of unusual intensity. Always the butt of the political cartoonists and party organs, he experienced particularly heavy fire in this election campaign which utilized political propaganda to an unusual extent, and with great effect. He came under considerable personal attack both by the propagandists of the East India Company and by the Dissenters who, in addition to their own votes, exercised a large measure of influence through the press. His bitter response to both these interests is to be noted in his correspondence and other works for several years afterward.

Burke drew from the election the conclusion that:

... all the Tyranny, robbery, and destruction of mankind practised by the Company and their servants in the East, is popular and pleasing in this Country; and that the Court and Ministry who evidently abet that iniquitous System, are somewhat the better liked on that account.

He regarded the election as a punishment of the former House of Commons for its independence; it had been "... equally an Enemy to indefinite prerogative, and to wild unprincipled Liberty. ..." and had been

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130 Copeland, *Burke*, 41, 43; George, "Fox's Martyrs," 239.

131 Sutherland, *East India Company*, 411; Magnus, *Burke*, 190.


133 Letter to William Baker, 22 June 1784, Burke, *Correspondence*, V, 155. Sutherland, *East India Company*, 410, 413, contains a good analysis of the validity of Burke's charges that the East India Company was responsible for large-scale corruption leading to the results of the election.

134 Letter to Sir William Lee, 6 May 1784, Burke, *Correspondence*, V, 143.
placed by a "wretched Gang of a Parliament" as a result of "the public delinquency." The event increased his disillusionment with the electorate; he spoke of "... the humour (for I must not call it madness) of the people..." as an element much to be feared. He steadfastly refused to view the opponents of his party as any other than the minions of the East India Company and the crown.

The only valid issue in his eyes was the independence of Parliament which had without question been violated by the King's action on the India bill, and the subsequent dissolution of Parliament. From Burke's point of view the people had rejected the "... Spirit of that Constitution which had governed since the revolution..." and the nation had, constitutionally, reverted to "... just where we were at the End of the Reign of Charles the second..." The death of his political hopes was complete: "It is not wise, nor honest, nor manly to engage others in a party whose very principle casts its roots in despair."

In the course of events, Burke eventually forgave the new House of Commons and Pitt, though he never condoned Pitt's actions during and

135 Letter to Sir Gilbert Elliot, 3 August 1784, Burke, Correspondence, V, 166. See also Annual Register, 1784-85, Historical Article, 148-49. Burke was editor-in-chief of the Annual Register during this period.
136 Letter to William Eden, 17 May 1784, Burke, Correspondence, V, 150.
138 Letter to Henry Homer, November, 1786, Burke, Correspondence, V, 294-295.
139 Ibid., 294.
after the fall of the Coalition, but he did not forgive the East India Company and he did not forget that the Dissenters had turned against his party. His attitude toward the East India Company can be judged from the tenacity and vigor with which he carried out the impeachment of Warren Hastings, an action which took the greater part of his time and energies from 1783-84 until his retirement from Parliament.

Burke's attitude toward the Dissenters subsequent to the election can be judged from a variety of comments he made regarding the election in his later correspondence and occasionally in his speeches. It is too much to say that Burke turned against the Dissenters because they opposed him and his party; that is an over-simplification of a very complex situation and one which does serious injustice to Burke. It is not too much to say, however, that Burke felt that the Dissenters, who had been an important element in the Whig strength, turned against himself and his party, without justification, and at a vital point in the Whig struggle for power and for the independence of the House of Commons.

The permanence of this sense of grievance was directly related to his sense of the finality, the fatality of the defeat of 1784.

In a letter to Richard Bright of Bristol, Burke expressed the attitude toward the Dissenters that he held as a result of the disaster. Burke wrote to Bright in 1789, in response to a request for his support.

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141 Lord John Russell commented that the publicity which the Hastings impeachment gave to the problems of India accomplished the purpose which Fox had intended to achieve by his India bill, the reform of Indian administration. "Mr. Hastings was acquitted, but tyranny, deceit, and injustice were condemned." Russell (ed.), Fox, II, 256-257.
for repeal of the Test laws, and commented extensively on the election of 1784, which he called the "general Massacre." With great bitterness he spoke of the Dissenters who had been at one time "... indulgent enough to me [Burke], to think, that, (according to my scanty power of obliging) they had some sort of obligation to me." He discussed the great amount of abuse to which he personally had been subjected by the Dissenters during the election campaign:

It is not their fault that I am in a situation to be asked by them or by anybody else, for my poor Vote; or that I have even one of the old friends of my principles and my heart, to assist me, amidst the Slaughter which they have made of the most honourable and Virtuous Men in the Kingdom.

He continued on this theme, claiming that though he himself had not been excluded from the public service, his critics constantly forced him to defend his former conduct and hindered his "services to the cause of humanity," deprived as he was of the assistance of many of his former colleagues. "Stripped of them I am nothing; and they [the Dissenters] can expect but little service from those to whom they have left little Ability."

When the repeal of the Test and Corporations Acts became an issue, Burke was already deeply involved in the Hastings impeachment, a task to which he devoted the greater part of his energies, as manager and prime mover. In 1787, Henry Beaufoy, a member of Parliament

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142 Letter to Richard Bright, 8-9 May 1789, Burke, Correspondence, V, 470.
143 Ibid., 471.
144 Ibid.
145 Ibid.
sympathetic to the cause of the Dissenters, brought a bill for the repeal of the Test and Corporations Acts, on the grounds that these acts were an unwarranted oppression. He spoke in defense of the bill, declaring that repeal of the acts in question would harm neither the church nor the state, but would add to the security of both by removing the sense of grievance which had united the Dissenters. The bill was supported by Fox, and opposed by Pitt. Pitt, in the debate, insisted on the existence of a distinction between the right to liberty of conscience and the right to participate in offices of state. He hesitated to grant the latter to the Dissenters, lest they should endanger the church establishment. The bill was defeated by a division of 176 to 96.

Pitt's unexpected opposition to the bill was a significant factor in the loss of Dissenter support for his administration, as was his failure to continue to press for parliamentary reform after the defeat of his 1785 reform bill.

Richard Bright wrote to Burke in March, 1787, requesting his support in the effort for the repeal of the Test. There is no mention in Burke's correspondence of Beaufoy's motion for repeal in 1787, and Bright's application of that year is missing. At that point, Burke was very much involved in securing a vote from the House of Commons for the

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147 Hansard, Parliamentary History, XXVI, 789; Lincoln, Dissent, 238-239; Maccoby, Radicalism, II, 20-21.
148 Hansard, Parliamentary History, XXVI, 825-826; Lincoln, Dissent, 246; Maccoby, Radicalism, II, 21.
149 Hansard, Parliamentary History, XXVI, 832.
150 Henriques, Toleration, 57, 60, 108; Barnes, George III and Pitt, 180-181.
151 Burke, Correspondence, V, 469.
impeachment of Hastings and his attention in all probability could not be spared for other matters.

Two years later, in May of 1789, Beaufoy brought another bill for repeal of the Test and Corporations Acts and again Bright applied to Burke for his support. The Hastings impeachment had reached a critical stage, and, in a letter to Bright on May 8-9, Burke cited this and poor health as reasons for his refusal to become involved in the repeal effort. He remarked that there seemed to be little sympathy among the Dissenters in Europe for the "real grievances" of the "twenty Millions of Dissenters from the Church of England, in Asia." He contrasted the importance of the two issues and said that if he should be able to attend the House he would vote for the bill "... in conformity to my known principles ...", but that he felt that the more important, if less politically profitable work, demanded his attention.

Beaufoy's motion was defeated a second time, by a relatively close division of 122 to 102. Again Fox supported the motion and Pitt opposed it.

In another letter to Bright, in 1790, again on the occasion of legislation for the repeal of the Test laws, Burke commented on Fox's part in the business:

152Letter from Richard Bright to Edmund Burke, 5 May 1789, Burke, Correspondence, V, 469.
153Letter to Richard Bright, 8-9 May 1789, Burke, Correspondence, V, 470. See above,
154Ibid.
155Ibid.
156Hansard, Parliamentary History, XXVIII, 27-38.
I am not surprised that he adheres to the Sentiments he has once declared, . . . . But I was, and am surprised and concerned, that he should take the lead and management of the Business; Because it furnishes in my humble opinion a very bad example, and of a most immoral tendency, to the world; in teaching Men that they may persecute and calumniate their true friend, and endeavour, by undermining his reputation, and battering down his consequence, to put it out of his power to be serviceable to his Country, and yet that they may, (even whilst they are continuing these practices) make use of his abilities for the service of their party.\(^{157}\)

His belief in the validity of tolerance had not changed, but to principles had been added bitter experience, and Burke was not about to lick the boots that kicked him.

Burke, in 1790, in a speech on the subject, mentioned his absence on the two previous votings on repeal, and attributed it to an inability to make up his mind in the matter.\(^{158}\) This is in contrast to the excuses he offered in his letter to Bright, and is probably a more accurate description of his reasons. Had he been as concerned in 1789, as he was in 1773, the pressure of affairs would not have kept him away.

Burke continued, however, in his awareness of the political power of the Dissenters. In September, 1789, he wrote to Charles Fox in behalf of Joseph Priestley,\(^{159}\) who wished to dedicate one of his scientific works to the Prince of Wales.\(^{160}\) Burke asked Fox, a close

\(^{157}\)Letter to Richard Bright, 18 February 1790, Burke, Correspondence, VI, 84.

\(^{158}\)"Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts," 2 March 1790, Burke, Speeches, III, 473.

\(^{159}\)Joseph Priestley (1733-1804), influential Dissenting minister and scientist. Burke and Priestley were casual acquaintances from about 1770, enjoying common interests in politics and science. Burke, Correspondence, V, 53-54n.

\(^{160}\)Letter to Charles James Fox, 9 September 1789, Burke, Correspondence, VI, 14-15.
friend of the Prince, to interest himself in the matter, describing Priestley as, "... a very considerable Leader among a Set of Men powerful enough in many things, but most of all in Elections. ..."

I am quite sure that the good or ill humour of these men will be sensibly felt at the General Election. It would be material to you to gain entirely some of these dissenters, who are already, I fancy, inclined to come over to you. ... it would be something to neutralize the acid of that sharp and eager description of men.161

Burke did not leave the arrangements for the dedication to Fox, but pressed the matter himself through Captain John Willett Payne, a friend of the Prince, and carried it to a successful conclusion. 162

The events of the eighties undoubtedly altered Burke's sentiments toward the Dissenters, even as these events affected the attitudes of many Dissenters. Denied political equality in the interests of the Anglican establishment, the Dissenters increased their opposition to that establishment and the parliamentary system which seemingly guaranteed continued control of the state by privilege, ecclesiastical and secular.

Edmund Burke was undecided about the relationship of Protestant Dissent to the established church and the state, in 1789. It cannot be said that his principles regarding toleration had changed. The circumstances surrounding the issue were changing. Burke was generally considered a liberal in the seventies, and in 1790, he was to write the book which was to make his reputation as a conservative. Unsuspecting prophet, he had described the terms of his dilemma in 1773; commenting

161Ibid., 15.

162Letters to Captain John Willett Payne, 24 September 1789, and 1 October 1789, Burke, Correspondence, VI, 24, 28.
on the views of his opponent in debate, he said,

He thinks connivance consistent, but legal toleration inconsistent, with the interests of Christianity. Perhaps I would go as far as that honourable gentleman, if I thought toleration inconsistent with those interests. God forbid! I may be mistaken, but I take toleration to be a part of religion. I do not know which I would sacrifice; I would keep them both; it is not necessary I should sacrifice either.163

But God did not forbid, and under the pressure of the nineties, he had to decide.

163Burke, Speeches, I, 160.
CHAPTER III

THE ENGLISH JACOBINS

Edmund Burke had, previous to the French Revolution, personal and political reasons for his dislike of Dissenters, who were by 1789-90 trying to renew their traditional alliance with the Whigs.\(^1\) They had turned against the Foxite Whigs in the crucial election of 1784; they had persisted in allying themselves with the forces pressing for parliamentary reform. Toward the end of 1789, Burke became increasingly aware of the fact of the Dissenters' continued distaste and disdain for Fox, both through conversations with individual Dissenters and through conversations with members of his party.\(^2\) He grew even more suspicious of the political principles of the Dissenters as he became aware of their reaction to the rapidly developing French Revolution. When Burke read Dr. Richard Price's *Discourse on the Love of Our Country*, he was shocked into an awareness of the degree to which the Dissenters were alienated from the English constitution as he understood it.

Dr. Price gave his famous sermon on November 4, 1789, at a meeting of the Revolution Society, a society composed mainly, although not exclusively, of Dissenters, which annually celebrated the anniversary of the Glorious Revolution of 1688.\(^3\) Published as a pamphlet, the *Discourse on*

\(^1\)Letter to William Weddell, 31 January 1792, Burke, *Correspondence* (1844 ed.), III, 396-397. See also Henriques, *Toleration*, 62; *Annual Register*, 1790, Historical Article, 72.


\(^3\)Lincoln, *Dissent*, 39; Cone, *Price*, 179.
the Love of Our Country received wide publicity and provoked considerable discussion. The succinct description of principles, the stirring expression, and the fame (or notoriety) which the sermon gained, made it the manifesto of the liberal Dissenters, interpreting for them the meaning of the French Revolution for Englishmen. 4

Price began his sermon by describing the nation which deserved the love of its citizens as one in which "... truth, virtue and liberty ..." prevailed. In order that his own country should meet these requirements he recommended first, the disestablishment of the Anglican Church and the removal of the religious and political disabilities which had been imposed on those subjects who did not conform to the Anglican religion. He then described the monarch of a nation as "... the first servant of the public, created by it, maintained by it, and responsible to it ..." and lauded the English king as "... almost the only lawful king in the world, because the only one who owes his crown to the choice of his people." 5 Thanking God for the Revolution of 1688, he set down as the basic principles established by that Revolution:

First: The right to liberty of conscience in religious matters. Secondly: The right to resist power when abused. And, Thirdly: The right to choose our own governors; to cashier them for misconduct; and to frame a government for ourselves. 6

Price described the work of the Revolution as still incomplete, citing the Test legislation as examples of state supported religious intolerance. He suggested inequality of representation and corruption in government as constitutional defects which yet required a remedy. Rejoicing at the events in France, he uttered his nunc dimittus:

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I have lived to see Thirty Millions of people, indignant and resolute, spurning at slavery and demanding liberty with an irresistible voice; their king led in triumph, and an arbitrary monarch surrendering himself to his subjects.7

He held that not only could one see this ardor for liberty widespread in France, but it was spreading to other nations; the times appeared auspicious for reform. Concluding with a warning to the oppressors of the world, Price commanded them to restore rights and correct abuses, "... before they and you are destroyed together."8

At a dinner later in the evening of the day of the sermon, the Revolutionary Society sent a congratulatory address, moved by Dr. Price, to the French National Assembly.9 The address expressed the congratulations of the Society on the successful revolution in France and on the prospect of England and France enjoying "... a common participation in the blessings of civil and religious liberty." They expressed satisfaction over the fact that the example of France tended to encourage other nations to assert the rights of man and to introduce a general reformation in the governments of Europe.

Nothing could have been better calculated than this sermon and the accompanying address to excite Edmund Burke, unless it should happen that Englishmen and Frenchmen would take it seriously. Other corresponding societies followed the precedent set by the Revolutionary Society and sent congratulatory addresses to France.10 When a young Frenchman,

7Ibid., 64.
8Ibid.
9Cone, Price, 183. The text of the address is cited in Cone, Price, 183-184.
10Brown, Revolution, 30.
Charles-Jean-François Depont, an acquaintance of Burke's, wrote to him mentioning the "authority" of the Revolutionary Society's approval and inquiring about Edmund Burke's reaction to the events in France, Burke determined to publish his answer to young Depont and to Richard Price with whom he had had previous encounters.¹¹

Burke's first dispute with Richard Price had occurred in 1776, when Price published his Observations on Civil Liberty, in support of the American cause. While Burke, like Price, opposed British military activities in the American colonies, he did so on the grounds that the colonists had been provoked to revolution by imprudent policy on the part of the British government. Dr. Price chose to support the cause of the Americans on philosophical grounds, stressing the sovereignty of the people as a proper rationale for revolution.¹²

In his Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol, published in 1777, Burke disagreed completely with the notion of basing policy on abstract ideas of right and liberty. Social and civil freedom could be enjoyed in a variety of degrees and in a diversity of forms. The extreme of liberty, which was its abstract perfection, could be found nowhere; and in its extreme it would be destructive of virtue and the enjoyment of the satisfactions of life. Liberty was "... the vital spring and energy of the state itself..." and the source of its life and vigor, but it must be limited to be possessed.¹³ This initial controversy with

¹¹Cone, Burke, II, 301; Letter from Charles-Jean-François Depont to Edmund Burke, 29 December 1789, Burke, Correspondence, VI, 59; Reflections on the Revolution in France (Hereinafter referred to as Reflections.), Burke, Works, II, 278.

¹²Cone, Price, 76, 86.

¹³Burke, Works, II, 30-31.
Price indicated the lines along which they were to differ at a later date.

Burke regarded Price's Discourse as a significant indication of the attitude of Dissenters in general. The Discourse probably had a catalytic effect on his views regarding the Dissenters and their political activities. By March of 1790, he had decided that it was not wise to entrust them with public office, and it is safe to assume that Price's sermon played some considerable part in that decision. Burke concluded from Price's sermon and from other sources, that the campaign to repeal the Test and Corporations Acts was only a first step in a program aimed at disestablishing the Church of England.

The agitation for parliamentary reform, the claims based on abstract and speculative rights, and the demands for "civil and religious liberty" became firmly connected in Burke's mind with the upheavals caused by the French Revolution. Not just the French government, but the English constitution was under attack. Thus, his book, Reflections on the Revolution in France, while concerned theoretically with France, was primarily a defense of England from the French madness. Accused by a close friend, Sir Philip Francis, of engaging unwisely in a "... war of Pamphlets with Dr. Price, ..." Burke defended himself, saying that he intended no controversy with Price, or Shelburne, or others of their like.

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14 See below, 76-77.
15 Cone, Burke, II, 300, 302.
16 Observations on the Conduct of the Minority, Burke, Works, III, 502; Brown, Revolution, 77; Henriches, Toleration, 112.
17 Letter to Edmund Burke, 19 February 1790, Burke, Correspondence, VI, 86.
I mean to set in a full View the danger from their wicked principles and their black hearts; I intend to state the true principles of our constitution in church and state—upon Grounds opposite to theirs, . . . I mean to do my best to expose them to the hatred, ridicule, and contempt of the whole world. 18

In the book itself, he expressed his fear of the effects Price's Discourse might have in England:

The whole of that publication, with the manifest design of connecting the affairs of France with those of England by drawing us into an imitation of the conduct of the National Assembly, gave me a considerable degree of uneasiness. . . . Whenever our neighbor's house is on fire, it cannot be amiss for the engines to play a little on our own. 19

Burke began the Reflections with an analysis of the principles expressed in Price's Discourse and contrasted them with what he regarded as the true principles of the British constitution. His main points of defense were the hereditary nature of the monarchy, the rights of privilege and property, and the church establishment. With considerable force he defended the validity of tradition, and of what he called "just prejudice," as a guide for political and social behavior, and vigorously attacked the metaphysical speculations of the Enlightenment, especially the code known as the "Rights of Man."

In denying their false claims of right, I do not mean to injure those which are real, and are such as their pretended rights would totally destroy. If civil society be made for the advantage of man, all the advantages for which it is made become his right. . . .

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

Men cannot enjoy the rights of an uncivil and of a civil state together. That he may obtain justice, he gives up his right of determining what it is in points the most essential to him. That he may secure some liberty he makes a surrender in trust of the whole of it. 20

18 Letter to Philip Francis, 20 February [1790], Burke, Correspondence, VI, 91-92.


20 Ibid., 332.
He offered, altogether, a classic statement of conservative political theory.

Burke made very clear the purpose for which he wrote the Reflections when he discussed the dangers to Great Britain inherent in the Revolutionary Society, and in "political preachers" like Price. 21 Lest the British people be misled by such false prophets he proceeded to analyse at great length the works and the mistakes of the French National Assembly. His discussion of the prospects of the new order was highly prophetic and while he has been accused of gross inaccuracies and prejudice in his defense of the Old Regime in France, his assessment of the hopes of the new was disconcertingly accurate. 22

In the Reflections Burke defended the church establishment by carefully analyzing its purpose and its relationship to civil society. In this passage one finds much of the reason for his continued opposition to the Dissenters and for his struggle against the spirit of the French Revolution. The basis of his theory was the premise that: "We know, and what is better, we feel inwardly, that religion is the basis of civil society and the source of all good and of all comfort." By his nature man was a "religious animal"; atheism could not prevail for long because it opposed both reason and instinct. Should the Christian religion be given up, a void would be created, which would be filled, possibly by some gross superstition. Therefore the English people were determined to retain an established church. 23

21 Ibid., 326-329, 337-338.
22 Cobban, Debate, 9, 30.
The commonwealth and its officials were consecrated by "... the first of our prejudices. ...," the established church. Burke expounded at length on the meaning and the benefits of this consecration and the holiness which it imparted to the social contract. This particular doctrine is the core and the heart of his political theory, the source of that peculiar reverence with which he regarded the constitution, the social contract, and the state. The consecration of the state operated on its officials to make them aware, standing "... in the person of God himself ...," of the nobility of their function, that they should exercise it worthily. The consecration of the state by a religious establishment acted also on its free citizens, who, to secure their freedom, had to exercise some degree of power. Burke expounded on the evils of a democracy in which the citizens enjoyed power, but failed to consider themselves as acting in trust, and accountable to their Maker for their acts as a body: "A perfect democracy is ... the most shameless thing in the world. ... No man apprehends in his person that he can be made subject to punishment." Only religion could impress upon the people that their general will was not the standard of right and wrong.24 That thing which Burke regarded as the crime of the French revolutionaries was that they, "... the temporary possessors and life renters ..." of the commonwealth acted as if they were the complete masters, destroying "... the whole original fabric of their society ...," with no sense of responsibility either to the ancestors who had painfully amassed the inheritance, or to their posterity, who would come into possession of "... a ruin instead of a habitation." To prevent

24Ibid., 364-366.
this disaster "... we have consecrated the state that no man should approach to look into its defects or corruptions but with due caution, that he should never dream of beginning its reformation by its subversion."  

But the holiness of the social contract sprang from deeper sources than this, partaking of the destination of mankind ordained by Divine Providence. It served not merely the animal needs of man; "It is a partnership in all science ... all art ... every virtue ... all perfection." Its ends surpassed the capabilities of many generations so that it became a partnership between the living, the dead, and future generations. The constitution of each particular state was "... but a clause in the great primeval contract of eternal society ... sanctioned by the inviolable oath which holds all physical and all moral natures, each in their appointed place." No one society was morally free to reduce itself to elementary chaos; only supreme and self-evident necessity could justify a resort to anarchy. Those who disregarded this inviolable oath, this supreme moral obligation, condemned themselves to exile, "... into the antagonistic world of madness, discord, vice, confusion, and unavailing sorrow."  

Those who accepted Burke's concept of the state believed it wise, not only in their individual, but also in their corporate character, to offer homage to God, "... the institutor and author and protector of civil society."

\[25\text{Ibid.}, 367-368.\]

\[26\text{Ibid.}, 368-369.\]
They conceive that He who gave our nature to be perfected by our virtue willed also the necessary means of its perfection: He willed therefore the state—He willed its connection with the source and original archetype of all perfection.27

The majority of Englishmen regarded the religious establishment, which served as the public consolation and the public hope, not as a convenience, but as the foundation of their whole constitution. Because of its importance the people of England thought it unwise to entrust the church to the unreliable support of individuals; neither would they reduce the clergy to "ecclesiastical pensioners of state." Because they must serve the rich and poor alike, and command their respect, the clergy should be provided with sufficient permanent means to place them on a par with those whom they served. For these reasons the British people would never seek to enrich themselves by confiscating the estates of the church. They took warning from the fate of the church in France: "At home we behold similar beginnings. We are on our guard against similar conclusions."28

The approach Burke took in dealing with the French Revolution surprised those who had but a cursory knowledge of his political principles. He had, for example, an acquaintance with Thomas Paine and the two had corresponded occasionally since their introduction in 1787.29 Paine wrote to Burke from Paris, in January, 1790, giving the news of current affairs, and discussing issues, obviously with the expectation that Burke

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27 Ibid., 370.

28 Ibid., 370-377. For an earlier comment on this, see Burke's speech on the "Church Nullum Tempus Bill" (17 February 1772), Burke, Speeches, I, 114.

29 Cone, Burke, II, 293; Letter to Sir Gilbert Elliot, 3 September 1788, Burke, Correspondence, V, 415; Letter to Dr. French Lawrence, 18 August 1788, Burke, Correspondence, V, 412.
would regard the events of the Revolution as he did.\textsuperscript{30} Charles Depont, the young man to whom Burke addressed the \textit{Reflections}, had also written to Burke in the expectation that he would approve of the French Revolution.\textsuperscript{31} That Burke did not approve first became public knowledge when he spoke during the Army Estimates debate in February. During the debate, he denounced the French Revolution as the work of anarchy and atheism, and the "Rights of Man" as "... a sort of institute and digest of anarchy..." He ominously declared his readiness to "... abandon his best friends and join with his worst enemies..." to resist any attempt in England to imitate the French spirit of reform.\textsuperscript{32}

This turn of events was highly significant, as it became apparent that by coming out in opposition to the French Revolution, Burke was parting company with many of his own party, particularly Charles James Fox.

From the early stages of his concern with the French Revolution, Burke regarded the Dissenters as the main body, although not the whole, of pro-Revolutionary opinion in England. That belief became evident to every observer when Fox led the fight for repeal of the Test and Corporations Acts in March, 1790. During the 1790 repeal campaign, Richard Bright approached Burke and requested his support.\textsuperscript{33} Burke's response indicated very definitely the impact made by recent events on his attitude toward the issue of repeal. Burke stated again the principle underlying

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\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{30} Letter from Thomas Paine to Edmund Burke, 17 January 1790, Burke, \textit{Correspondence}, VI, 67-75.
\item \textsuperscript{31} Letter from Charles-Jean-Francois Depont to Edmund Burke, Burke, \textit{Correspondence}, IV, 9.
\item \textsuperscript{32} "Substance of the Speech on the Army Estimates," Burke, \textit{Works}, III, 273-275.
\item \textsuperscript{33} See above, Chapter II, 59-60.
\end{enumerate}
his approach to the problem, signifying his willingness to give "... security, that they are not engaged in a faction against any of its legal establishments." He then made it quite clear that the most active and leading of the dissenters appeared to him to be engaged in just such a faction:

Extraordinary things have happened in France; extraordinary things have been said and done here, and published with great ostentation, in order to draw us into a connexion and concurrence with that nation upon the principles of its proceedings, and lead us to an imitation of them. I think such designs, as far as they go, highly dangerous to the constitution and the prosperity of this Country.34

He mentioned, as he was to do in his speech in Parliament, the political catechisms which had recently come into his hands, and which left in him no doubt "... that a considerable party is formed, and is proceeding systematically to the destruction of this Constitution in some of its essential parts." He criticised the Dissenters for using religious assemblies for the development of a party leaning more toward "contention and power" than to "piety" as an object. From this letter it is quite clear that Burke had completely changed his mind, not on the question of religious toleration, but on the basic argument for repeal, that Dissenters in office could be trusted not to endanger the English constitution or the political system.35

The campaign for repeal of the Test and Corporations Acts, in 1790, coincided with a general election, a fact which the Dissenters

34 Letter to Richard Bright, 18 February, 1790, Burke, Correspondence, VI, 83.
35 Ibid., 82-84.
hoped to use to their advantage, by influencing the selection of Members of Parliament.\textsuperscript{36} Although they conducted a vigorous propaganda campaign, they were handicapped by the open hostility to the establishment expressed by their own radicals. The vigor of the Dissenter efforts also sparked a similar activity among their opponents.\textsuperscript{37} When the Dissenters' petition came up for debate on March 2, 1790, Fox had already committed himself in favor of the French Revolution, and this, together with the known approval of the Revolution by important men among the Dissenters acted as a severe handicap; the alliance between Fox and the Dissenters served to give both parties an appearance of radicalism.\textsuperscript{38}

Aside from presenting the philosophical justification for religious toleration, Fox's arguments in favor of the petition were not such as would appease the opponents of repeal. He defended the Dissenters warmly, vigorously asserting that the church was in no danger from them and then proceeded to criticize the Anglican clergy for "supine indolence" in contrast with the zeal of the Dissenters. He also accused the clergy of interfering in politics and ascribed the sufferings of the French church to divine retribution for past intolerance.\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{36}Pitt's failure to support the previous repeal efforts caused the Dissenters to return their allegiance to the Foxite-Portland Whigs, in spite of their distaste for Fox. Fox undertook to present the Dissenters' petition in an effort to cement the alliance. (Magnus, Burke, 190-191.)

\textsuperscript{37}Annual Register, 1790, Historical Article, 72; Henriques, Toleration, 66; Cobban, Debate, 419-421.

\textsuperscript{38}Henriques, Toleration, 65; Annual Register, 1790, Historical Article, 72.

\textsuperscript{39}Annual Register, 1790, Historical Article, 73-74; Hansard, Parliamentary History, XXVIII, 401, 395-396.
Pitt's speech on the subject brought out some of the weaknesses of Fox's arguments. He supported the Test legislation as necessary for the security of the established church, advancing the argument that the annual indemnity laws exhibited sufficient forbearance on the part of the government. He described as absurd the concept that capacity for office was a civil right; on the contrary, offices were held for the benefit of the public, not for the benefit of the office holder. Pitt reminded the Commons that the Dissenters had already set the pattern of clerical interference in the election by their political activities. Pitt also subscribed to the belief that any Dissenter in public office would feel morally obliged to subvert the established church. 40

Burke's speech was an even more effective answer to Fox; it had considerable influence on the fate of the petition and undoubtedly contributed to the thoroughness of its defeat. 41 Indicating that, previous to this point, he had been undecided on the issue, Burke said that he had come to a decision based on information which had recently come to him. In answer to the general principles of toleration brought out by Fox, Burke disavowed the policy of legislating on abstract principles of natural right, claiming that such rights had been superceded by the development of society, to the great advantage of the human race. He then turned to the established church and, expressing fears for its safety, charged the Dissenters with "... asserting doctrines which threatened imminent danger to the future safety and even the very being of the church." To support these charges he brought several proofs,

40Hansard, Parliamentary History, XXVIII, 405-406; Annual Register, 1790, Historical Article, 75-76.

41Maccoby, Radicalism, II, 444.
including two political catechisms highly critical of the established church; a letter from a Dissenter, Mr. Fletcher, a letter from Joseph Priestley, and Price's sermon.\(^{42}\)

Burke called the attention of the Commons to the unhappy fate of the established church in France and noted that the enemies of the Church of England could likewise deprive her of her revenues and demolish her structure. He expressed the belief that the agitation for the repeal of the Test Acts marked only the first step in a campaign against the establishment, and concluded from the evidence which he had presented, .. . that the leading preachers among the dissenters were avowed enemies to the church of England; that they acknowledged their intentions, and that hence our establishment appeared to be in much more serious danger than the church of France was in a year or two ago.\(^{43}\)

He replied to Fox's argument that the French government had been punished for its sins of intolerance with a question: "Was it consistent with the justice of Providence to punish Louis XVI for the crime of Louis XIV?"

Praising William Pitt for his defense of the establishment, Burke warned the House that it was their duty to do likewise.\(^{44}\)

Remarking that had anyone brought forward the question of repeal ten years earlier, it would have had his support, Burke offered, instead of outright defeat of repeal, an alternative measure which would have done away with the most obnoxious aspects of the Test, and would have at the same time provided a security for the establishment. He was anxious to provide an outlet for those who differed in conscience, and described

\(^{42}\)Burke, Speeches, III, 475-479. Ursula Henriques gives some additional information on Burke's proofs.

\(^{43}\)Burke, Speeches, III, 480.

\(^{44}\)Ibid., 478-480.
himself "... ready to grant relief from oppression to all men, but 
unwilling to grant power ...", thereby distinguishing, as had Pitt, 
between religious freedom and the capacity for office. He suggested the 
appointment of a committee to enquire into the conduct of the Dissenters 
and the evidence which he had presented, and urged the substitution of 
a declaration which he proposed, to replace the sacramental test. He 
maintained, however, that he would abide by the will of the House, should 
they merely wish to vote on Fox's motion as it stood, and concluded on 
an ominous note:

Mr. Burke, to provoke the caution of the House, instanced 
Lord George Gordon's mob, in the year 1780, and the dangers 
which were then likely to have ensued under a blind idea that 
they were acting in support of the established religion, when 
they were endeavouring to enforce the most intolerant perse­ 
cution, and had nearly levelled the constitution in church and 
state.

The speech was important for a variety of reasons. It gave 
evidence of how far Burke had come in his change of attitude toward the 
Dissenters. Formerly, he had merely refrained from supporting repeal 
of the Test, but now he opposed it, and with great influence. It is 
important to note that he was still making an effort to treat the matter 
fairly. He asked the House to set up a committee to review his findings, 
before which the Dissenters might defend themselves against his charges, 
and he suggested an alternative to the sacramental test.

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45 Ibid., 481.

46 The substance of Burke's proposed test was a declaration that 
a religious establishment was not contrary to any law of God, nor 
unlawful in any way, and that the declarer would in no way attempt to 
subvert the established church and would content himself with his private 
liberty of conscience. (Burke, Speeches, III, 482.)

47 Burke, Speeches, III, 483.
As far as his political life was concerned, the debate was significant because of the evidence it gave of the widening breach with Fox. Fox replied to Burke's speech, attributing his friend's altered opinion to a change from his former principles, and again pressed for repeal in order to separate the reasonable Dissenters from those who sought to alter the state, by acceding to their reasonable demands. 48

The measure was soundly defeated, in a division of 294 to 105, a defeat so complete as to eliminate the question of repeal of the Test laws as a political issue for several years. 49 To a friend, Burke described the feeling of Parliament as being very much against any alteration in the arrangement: • • • i f e v e r t h e re  w a s  a t i m e, peculiarly unfavourable, to any alteration, in any thing which touches Church or State, it is this moment. 50 Fox had succeeded in his attempt to renew the old alliance of Whig and Dissenter, but in view of the feeling of the country, it was perhaps more of a liability than an asset. 51

Writing to John Noble of Bristol, less than two weeks after the repeal debate, Burke reaffirmed his basic good intentions toward the Dissenters, together with the hope that, ultimately, some means better than the sacramental test could be found to provide security for the

49 Ibid., 452; Maccoby, Radicalism, II, 444. The Test and Corporations Acts were not repealed until 1828.
50 Letter to John Noble, 14 March 1790, Burke, Correspondence, VI, 101.
establishment and at the same time provide Dissenters a reasonable opportunity to hold public office. At the same time he listed the reasons why he would not support any change in the establishment for the time being. The Dissenters chose to claim capacity for office as a right:

This high claim of Right, leaves with Parliament no discretionary power whatsoever concerning almost any part of Legislation; which is almost all of it, conversant in qualifying, and limiting some Right or other of mans original Nature.\(^\text{52}\)

The Dissenters showed "... not a cool, temperate, conscientious dissent, but a warm, animated and acrimonious Hostility against the church establishment." In the election then pending, the Dissenters "... made subservience to their Views and purposes the sole condition, by which (to their power) any Member could sit in Parliament." Finally, they showed themselves "... disposed to connect themselves in Sentiment and by imitation ..." with what was happening in France.

That peoples ... great Object seemed to me to be, to destroy their Church—that is, to plunder it but to effect this, they did not scruple to destroy all the other powers, and all the other Interests, in their country.\(^\text{53}\)

It is important to note that Burke's zeal for the established Church of England was not sectarian fanaticism. He was personally attached to the Anglican Church, but even more he was concerned for the interests of "Christianity at large."\(^\text{54}\) The Anglican Church seemed to him to harmonize peculiarly with English society and the temper of the

\(^{52}\)Letter to John Noble, 14 March 1790, Burke, Correspondence, VI, 102.

\(^{53}\)Ibid., 102-104.

\(^{54}\)Letter to Unknown, 26 January 1791, Burke, Correspondence, VI, 215.
English people. While he remained sympathetic to the plight of the Irish Catholics, he supported the establishment in Ireland as a means of maintaining the connection between religion and the state.

With the publication of *Reflections on the Revolution in France* in November, 1790, Burke ceased to be merely a politician and became the spokesman for anti-revolutionary sentiment in England. The book did not so much mold public opinion as it clarified the issue. After the publication of *Reflections*, public opinion was clearly divided, a division which the excesses of the progressing revolution intensified. The book sparked considerable controversy; thirty-eight publications appeared in reply to the *Reflections*, most significant among them being Thomas Paine’s *Rights of Man*.

As important as the *Reflections* was for Burke’s reputation, it bore bitter fruit when, largely because of it, the great theorist and advocate of party government was forced to separate from the party which he had served with great loyalty through most of the trying years of its existence. It is clear that his services had been less in demand during the years after Rockingham’s death and that Fox had replaced him as the

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55 Ibid.

56 Letter to Richard Burke, Burke, Works, VI, 71-72.


59 Burke explained the painful circumstances leading up to the separation in a letter to Earl Fitzwilliam, 5 June 1791; see Burke, *Correspondence*, VI, 273-274.
principle orator of the party. In the heat of debate, Burke now seemed to be more of a liability than an asset because of the violence of his temper and the occasional vulgarity of his language. 60

His lack of rapport with the younger members of the party was emphasized by his dispute with Fox over the French Revolution. Commenting later on his differences with the party, Burke said:

At first I had no idea that this base contagion had gained any considerable ground in the party. Those who were the first and most active in spreading it were their mortal and declared enemies; I mean the leading dissenters. They had long shown themselves wholly adverse to, and unalliable with, the party. They had shown it, as you know, signally, in 1784. 61

Finally on the occasion of the debate over the Quebec Act, May 6, 1791, Burke felt obliged to answer Fox's panegyrics on the subject of the Revolution, in such a manner as to separate himself both from Fox and the majority of the Whigs. Despite efforts to effect a reconciliation between Fox and Burke, the separation was permanent. 62

Burke's warning of the possibilities of mob violence in his speech on repeal of the Test, in March, proved all too accurate when riots broke out in Birmingham on July 14, 1791, on the occasion of the anniversary dinner of the "Friends of Freedom." The mob attack was aimed at the Dissenters, especially the Unitarians; Unitarian meeting houses were burned, and the homes of several Dissenters were attacked. The home of Joseph Priestley received special attention; his house, including his laboratory equipment and his library were destroyed. 63

60 Copeland, Burke, 73-75.
61 Letter to William Weddell, 31 January 1792, Burke, Correspondence (1844 ed.), III, 394.
62 Copeland, Burke, 76-77; Russell (ed.), Fox, III, 11.
63 Brown, Revolution, 79.
Birmingham authorities provided no protection for the Dissenters; there was considerable evidence that both the magistrates and the local Anglican clergy not only condoned the actions of the mob, but actually instigated them, possibly in some cases providing direction for the activities of the rioters. The bigotry and intolerance of many Anglican clergymen provoked the riot, and many among the clergy and the upper classes expressed their satisfaction with the attack on the Dissenters. Priestley attributed the hostility to himself, not to his political activities, but to his "... open hostility to the doctrines of the established church, and more especially to all civil establishments of religion whatever."

Burke, who had suffered from mob violence himself in 1780, condemned the riot. He regarded mob action as a breakdown of civil order, and directed his efforts to impressing upon influential citizens the need for controlling the activities of "factious federations" in order to prevent further excesses. Determined to do all in his power to resist the continued encroachment of French ideas, he published again, concentrating this time not on affairs in France, but on British subjects

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64 Annual Register, 1792, Historical Article, 166; Brown, Revolution, 79-80.
66 Priestley, Memoirs, 121.
67 Letter to Richard Burke, Sr. [24 July 1791], Burke, Correspondence, VI, 306-307.
68 See Letter to Earl Fitzwilliam, 5 June 1791, Burke, Correspondence, VI, 273-274.
who condoned the activities of the French National Assembly. Burke had made his explanation of his break with Fox privately, in his correspondence to those friends whose opinion he valued. But his integrity had been questioned publicly and to the public he made his explanation and his defense in his *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*, which appeared in August, 1791.

Burke began with a defense of his own conduct, and dealt with the various charges of inconsistency which had been made against him. He then described the doctrines of the "Old Whigs" as presented in the impeachment proceedings against Dr. Henry Sacheverell in 1719, and the doctrines of the "New Whigs," taken largely from Paine's *Rights of Man*. He proceeded with a further exposition of the political philosophy which he had presented in the *Reflections*.

One continuous thread runs throughout the *Appeal*, and that is the belief that there was a faction in England which was openly and decisively seeking to subvert the whole of the constitution and overthrow it "... in favor of the new constitution and of the modern usages of the French nation." Burke expressed also, the belief that the French Revolution was not a struggle for liberty but a deliberate persecution of religion, an opinion which was reiterated frequently in his writings and correspondence. He also emphasized the existence of a connection

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69 Dr. Henry Sacheverell (1674-1724), High Church cleric and Tory. In 1709, he delivered two sermons attacking the Whigs, toleration of Dissenters, and, in effect, the Revolution of 1688. He was impeached for high crimes and misdemeanors and his trial (February-March, 1710) became a test of strength between Whig and Tory.


between the French National Assembly and the "factious" in England; the New Whigs did not merely condone the revolution in France; they were acting as a kind of fifth column (to use a modern phrase) in England, and as such were a serious threat to the country.  

Burke also made it clear that he believed that the Dissenters made up a considerable proportion of these "revolution makers." He described Dissenting pulpits and federation societies as disseminators of "... new principles of 'Whiggism,' imported from France." The New Whigs in Parliament were guilty as well, because they failed to condemn the new principles. Burke would not underestimate the threat posed by such a faction; should an unforeseen crisis occur in England, discontent sown by factions could result in the rejection of the constitution:

Then will be felt, and too late will be acknowledged, the ruin which follows the disjoining of religion from the state, the separation of morality from policy, and the giving conscience no concern and no coactive or coercive force in the most material of all the social ties, the principle of our obligations to government.

Burke completed his defense with a firm and unbending declaration of faith in the validity of his own principles. Describing his book [Reflections] as a medium between extremes both of liberty and of tyranny, he concluded that "Those who are not with that book are with its opposite, for there is no medium besides the medium itself."

Burke carried on his campaign against the New Whigs with all the resources at his disposal. Although in the political wasteland, being

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72 Ibid., 10-11.  
73 Ibid., 40-41, 44.  
74 Ibid., 105-106.  
75 Ibid., 109-110.
neither a member of government nor of the organized opposition, he made
use of what connections he had in both camps.

In the government his principal connection was Henry Dundas, who
represented the government in the committee engaged in conducting the
proceedings against Warren Hastings. In late September, Burke wrote to
Dundas, describing the threat presented by the "French faction" and
their activities. The greatest danger appeared to him to come from

... the Phalanx of Party which exists in the body of the
dissenters, who are, at the very least, nine tenths of them
entirely devoted, some with greater some with less zeal, to
the principles of the French Revolution. 76

These, together with the Republicans, formed, by Burke's estimate,
"... a party, of at least seven hundred thousand Souls ...," a
formidable threat indeed.

A foreign factious connexion is the very essence of their
politticks. Their Object is avowedly to abolish all national
distinctions and local interests and prejudices, and to merge
them all in one Interest and one Cause, which they call the
rights of man. They wish to break down all Barriers which
tend to separate them from the Counsels, designs, and assistance,
of the republican, atheistical, faction of Fanaticks in France. 77

France would not be a threat without this connection in England, but
with it, the country could not rest secure. Little could be done to
curb the situation within the limits of the British system of laws. The
only alternative would be "... to deprive mischievous factions of their
foreign alliances." "The British Constitution will be fought for, and
conquered, not here but in France." Europe was at peace for the moment
but the powers of Europe, dissatisfied with the French system, were
potential allies in a struggle against an insidious enemy. 78

76 Letter to Henry Dundas, 30 September 1791, Burke, Correspondence,
VI, 420.
77 Ibid., 421. 78 Ibid., 419-422.
Burke had shifted his ground, broadened his horizons. The Appeal was his last attempt to prevail merely on a party, or public opinion. He was determined to influence, as far as he could, the foreign policy of the government, towards direct action against France. In his Thoughts on French Affairs, published in December, 1791, Burke stressed the aggressive nature of the French Revolution, describing it as a threat to all of Europe. He wrote especially of the threat in England, again describing the adherents to the French system as being most of the Dissenters:

... to these are readily aggregated all who are dissenters in character, temper, and disposition, though not belonging to any of their congregations ... all the Atheists, Deists, and Socians; --- all those who hate the clergy, and envy the nobility.

He discussed the dangers that would result from the presence of a French embassy on English soil, emphasizing the encouragement such an arrangement would give to the Anglo-Gallican clubs. Burke was exerting the formidable influence of his pen on public opinion, European as well as domestic. Before he was through he had extended his efforts to personal diplomacy on a European scale.

In March, 1792, Fox presented another petition in the House of Commons from a group of Dissenters, this time from the Unitarians, asking for the repeal of "... certain Penal Statutes respecting Religious Opinions." The petition concerned primarily the law of blasphemy which was aimed particularly at curbing anti-Trinitarian speaking and writing.

79 Thoughts on French Affairs, Burke, Works, III, 354.
80 Burke, Speeches, IV, 50; Hansard, Parliamentary History, XXIX, 1372.
81 Maccoby, Radicalism, II, 443. The Blasphemy Act of 1697, imposed civil disabilities for first offenses and imprisonment for second offense on those impugning the doctrine of the Trinity.
The petition was to be debated on May 11, and was the cause of some soul searching by Burke. Writing to his son in March, he declared himself unwilling to have to deal with the issue at this time. He regarded the more obnoxious of the Dissenters as unrepentant and, fortified by their sense of martyrdom after the Birmingham Riots, more of a threat than ever.

In short the Unitarian Society, from whence all these things originate, are as zealous as their brethren at Constantinople; and if care is not taken, I should think it very probable that you may live to see Christianity as effectively extirpated out of this country as it is out of France. 82

However, he had almost decided not to debate the issue when it came up, fearing to separate the conscientious and responsible Dissenters from the French faction. 83 For some reason, Burke changed his mind and, when the subject came up for debate, he made a major speech, his last in Parliament on a question involving religious toleration.

Fox defended the petition on general principles, arguing that toleration should not be regarded as a convenience but "... as a thing in itself essentially right and just." The principles of toleration were founded on the rights of man and should not be subjected to considerations of expediency. He also brought up the subject of the Birmingham Riots, attributing them to religious bigotry. 84

Burke responded by asserting that the question was not one of theology, nor of abstract right, but "... a question of legislative prudence upon a point of policy." Always when the government legislated

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82 Letter to Richard Burke, Jr., March 23, 1792, Burke, Correspondence (1844 ed.), III, 454-455.
83 Ibid., 454-455.
84 Hansard, Parliamentary History, XXIX, 1373, 1378.
on matters of religion it had done so in the light of circumstances and events, and always in regard to a specific sect. In this case it was necessary to examine the principles of the Unitarians to see if they were deserving of the grace and favor of the House. He then charged the Unitarians as being avowed enemies of the church and described their petition as being "... against the general principles of the Christian religion, as connected with the state." To prove his point, he read excerpts from publications, quoted bumper toasts and resolutions, and discussed the now notorious doctrines of Paine. Asserting that the Unitarians were connected with the Revolution Society in England and the Jacobin Club in Paris, he concluded that "... such people were not fit men for relief or encouragement from their sentiments and connections."\(^{85}\)

Repying to Fox on the subject of the riots, he asserted that the riots had proceeded not from religious but from political prejudices. He sincerely regretted what had happened at Birmingham, but noted that, while England had not the laws to prevent such riots, unlike France, she had "... law and justice enough to compensate the sufferers."\(^{86}\)

Burke's notes for the speech go into more detail on what he felt were the principles involved in government restriction of opinions and on his sentiments regarding the Dissenters and toleration. His fundamental principle was:

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\text{... that government, representing the society, has a general superintending control over all the actions, and over all the publicly propagated doctrines, of men, without which it never could provide adequately for all the wants of society.}^{87}\]

\(^{85}\)Burke, Speeches, IV, 50, 52-54.

\(^{86}\)Ibid., 53-54.

\(^{87}\)Burke, Works, VI, 114.
Dissent for religious reasons, between God and the individual, was not a proper area for the exercise of human authority, but when dissent became involved in a political faction, associated for the express purpose of proselytism, then it became the lawful concern of government. 88

Burke described the nature of Unitarian dissent as, not conscientious dissent as a matter of religious scruple, but fundamental, "... not upon this rite ... or that school opinion, but upon this one question of an establishment as unchristian, unlawful, contrary to the gospel and to natural right." 89 Again, Burke asserted that he was not implacable in his opposition to repeal of the offending statutes: should the Unitarians disband as a faction and act as individuals, asking only to enjoy liberty of conscience, he would willingly vote for their relief. 90

Other members took up the debate. Those who opposed Fox's motion did so on the grounds that the time was not right. William Smith spoke in defense of Priestley in connection with the riots. North, surprisingly, sided with Fox on the matter, proposing that if the laws were too bad to be put into practice, they should certainly be repealed. 91

In spite of the obvious logic of this argument, the House sided with Burke; Fox's motion was defeated by a vote of 142 to 63. Truly the times were unpropitious for the Unitarians. Conservatism had become the

88 Ibid., 118-119.
89 Ibid., 125.
90 Ibid., 123.
91 Hansard, Parliamentary History, XXIX, 1395-1403.
order of the day and official as well as popular opinion supported
repression, not relief.  

It seemed to Burke that the sentiments of the times would be
essentially transitory. In his "First Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe,"
published in this same year, he discussed the issue of the Test and
Corporations Acts, which he regarded as being little more than a dead
letter. He expressed the opinion that, whenever the Dissenters ceased
their alarming activities, the Test would very likely be removed or
modified to allow some participation in office. In the meantime,
Burke's attention was turned from the domestic to the international
scene, and to controlling the "French malady" by quarantine, and if
possible, by more direct action against France.

During his last year in Parliament, Burke directed his efforts
towards alarming the government about the dangers presented by both
France and the "English Jacobins"; advising the Allies on the conduct
of the campaign against France, and detaching the Portland Whigs from
Fox, and his policy of neutrality toward France. Repeatedly he
emphasized that what was at stake was the Christian social order in
Europe. He did not discontinue his efforts to influence public and

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92 Brown, Revolution, 99.

93 Burke, Works, III, 314.

94 Letter to Lord Grenville, August 18, 1792, Edmund Burke, The
Speeches of the Right Honorable Edmund Burke On the Impeachment of Warren
Hastings (2 vols.; London: G. Bell and Sons, 1875), II, 482; Letter to
Lord Grenville, September 19, 1792, Burke, Correspondence (1844 ed.),
IV, 7. See also Remarks on the Policy of the Allies, Burke, Works, III;
Observations on the Conduct of the Minority, Burke, Works, III; Russell

95 Letter to the Comte de Mercy, August, 1793, Burke, Corresponden-
dence (1844 ed.), IV, 138; Cobban, Debate, 8; Remarks on the Policy of
the Allies, Burke, Works, III, 110.
government opinion with his retirement in 1794. His last years were made bitter by the death of his beloved only son, and by the successes of France. His correspondence reflected his hopelessness, as did his Letters on a Regicide Peace; everything he wrote showed his total concern for the domestic and international situation.

In Letters on a Regicide Peace (1796-97), Burke again expressed his fears of the English Jacobins in alliance with France. He estimated them to comprise about one-fifth of the politically active British subjects, and because of their activity and unity of purpose, he regarded them as great and formidable, far more so than their mere numbers would indicate. He discussed the beginnings of the "speculative faction"

which now posed such a threat:

The French Revolution did not cause it; it only discovered it, increased, and gave fresh vigour to its operations. I have reason to be persuaded that it was in this country, and from English writers and English caballers, that France herself was instituted in this revolutionary fury.97

He criticized Fox for ignoring the threats to England, internally from the English Jacobins and externally from the French, and now for pressing for peace. He reiterated his belief that the Christian religion could not exist in England should it come under the domination of the English and French Jacobins. "On that religion, according to our need, all our laws and institutions stand as upon their base." Should religion be done away with, everything else would change with it. "Thus religion

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96 See especially Letter to William Elliot, Esq., May 26, 1795, Burke, Works, V, 67, 82.

97 Letters on a Regicide Peace, Burke, Works, V, 190-192.
perishing, and with it this constitution, it is a matter of endless meditation what order of things would follow it."

It is safe to assume that some such meditations darkened Edmund Burke's last days. As he lay on his deathbed, Fox paid him a visit, hoping to be reconciled with him at the last. Burke refused to see him.

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An evaluation of the validity of Edmund Burke's approach to the problematical relationship between Dissent and the establishment in late eighteenth century England, must deal with several questions. Burke believed that the Dissenters, at least large numbers of them, posed a real and significant threat to the "constitution in church and state" (a phrase that he used many times). The existence of religious non-conformity in itself did not disturb him, but Dissenters he knew of, and whose works he read, disturbed him greatly. Did Burke assess the danger correctly, or was he an eighteenth century Joseph McCarthy, engaged in a Jacobin witch hunt? It seems safe to assume that Burke greatly overestimated the numbers of Dissenters wholeheartedly devoted to Jacobin principles and that he often assigned to the Dissenter interest a coherence and unity of action which, given the very nature of religious non-conformity in England, it could not possibly achieve.

Because the Dissenters tended to support parliamentary reform and openly resisted a church establishment, they supported the cause that Burke most adamantly rejected, and rejected that part of the constitution

98 Ibid., 396-397, 418-419, 433.

which, in Burke's mind, was the foundation for the entire structure. It is that aspect of civil society which is least understood, which is most difficult to pin down, that most concerned Burke. The mental attitude of the citizen toward government; the conviction that it is morally good to obey the law; that governors are deserving of respect, more because of the office they hold, than because of personal qualities; that laws should be responsibly made; that the citizen and the official will be held responsible for his actions by some authority higher than his own will, or the police power of the state: these are the intangible elements of patriotism, as Burke understood it, that make up the relationship of the citizen to the state, and in the end, make the system work.

The Christian religion was "... the grand prejudice, and that which holds all the other prejudices together..."¹⁰⁰ This was for Burke the great value of the establishment, that definite and adequate provision was made to ensure that these attitudes would be developed, and tied to the highest and most important part of man's life, his religion. He viewed society in the light of what he considered its ultimate purpose, the total development of the human race according to the mind of Divine Providence. That purpose was connected with the spiritual as well as the secular needs of man. Because these needs were connected in the overall pattern of man's life, the agencies by which they were fulfilled, church and state, should be connected for mutual support and development.

¹⁰⁰ Letter to William Smith, 29 January 1795, Burke, Works, VI, 52.
Burke was never able to harmonize his grand vision of society with the existence of legitimate dissent, and, to a certain extent, with the feibles of human nature. Certainly he was one of the most humane men of his era. Nothing disgusted him more than religious bigotry; he was by nature and education a tolerant man. Philosophically, he was driven by his personal experience of the conflict between liberty and order into decisions he did not wish to make. Circumstances prepared him to believe ill of the Dissenters. The events surrounding the French Revolution offered him frequent occasion for alarm. During the last decade of his life, the politician became submerged in the philosopher. The practically possible was obscured by Burke's vision of a Utopia he had thought almost in his possession, and which he saw about to be snatched from his hand. The Dissenters, who in his mind became the English Jacobins, did not accept their assigned parts. They had a Utopia of their own, and this was the source of the conflict.

Was Burke consistent with his own principles in this phase of his public life? How much of his change of heart regarding the Dissenters can be attributed to the bitterness and frustration of a reactionary old man? Burke, the watch dog of the constitution, was definitely not barking at shadows. The demands for parliamentary reform were a threat to the system as he understood it, and he was probably correct in assuming that those who pursued that goal did so without fully understanding the implications of what they were demanding. However, it is probable that in spite of his thorough understanding of the workings of the British constitution of his day, he failed to appreciate the flexibility of that instrument, and the changes which were occurring in British society.
To the degree that the Dissenters allied themselves with the French Revolutionaries, Burke regarded them as traitors to their country and their constitution. To the degree that they had the power of attracting others to the same alliance, he considered them a subversive influence in Britain, and as such to be neither encouraged, nor tolerated. In this respect Burke overestimated the degree of their attachment, as a group, to the principles of the French Revolution, and the degree of their influence on the common people, a habit which seems to have become almost an obsession as he grew older. Sir Philip Magnus argues that Burke failed to perceive the great attraction that Wesley and Methodism would have for the British working classes.\(^{101}\) The Rational Dissenters, a group composed mainly of Unitarians, were, and remained a small group, with little popular appeal. Burke's own political experience failed to teach him that determination alone is not sufficient for the acquisition of power. He saw only that many Dissenters desired the disestablishment of the Church of England, and the reformation of the British governmental system; he overestimated their ability to accomplish those goals.

It is relatively easy to draw the conclusion that Burke overreacted to a threat which existed, but which was not so great as it seemed to him. France never invaded England, to take advantage of the ground prepared by the political clubs and the corresponding societies. The margin of safety, however, may not have seemed quite so wide to the British when Bonaparte was making preparations for crossing the Channel.

Was Burke true to his own principles? It appears from a complete analysis of his speeches and writings that he was as concerned for the

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\(^{101}\) Magnus, Burke, 193.
preservation of the integrity of the establishment when he voted against the Feathers Tavern petition in 1772, as when he spoke against repeal of the Test and Corporations Acts in 1790. In the view of modern liberals accustomed to a reasonably comfortable coexistence between divergent religious groups, he may seem wrong, bullheaded, reactionary; but he was not inconsistent. Burke altered his approach to the question of the repeal of the Test and Corporations Acts because it seemed to him that the circumstances surrounding the issue had changed. In 1773, he asserted that government interference with religious liberty could be justified only if those who dissented, did so to promote a faction in the state and to disturb the public peace. After 1790, it is quite evident that Burke believed that Dissenters, particularly the Unitarians, were intent on doing that very thing. Burke may have erred in his assessment of the situation, but based on the beliefs which he clearly and repeatedly expressed, he reacted, with characteristic thoroughness, in a manner completely consistent with his avowed principles. He lacked a sense of proportion in his later years which might have enabled him to take a more balanced view.

In what way does a study of Burke's changing attitude toward Protestant Dissenters lead toward an understanding of Burke's life and work as a whole? It is one of the lesser areas of his endeavour; Burke wrote and spoke much more on the American war, the problems of India, the French Revolution, than he ever did on the Dissenters, or the establishment.

102 See above, Chapter I, 19-20.
103 See above, Chapter III, 74, 85, 90.
104 It is worth noting that Lord North, in 1792, used against him the same argument that Burke had used himself in 1773, that laws which were too bad to put into practice should be repealed. See above, Chapter I, 19-20 and Chapter III, 90.
The key to an understanding of Burke's reaction to the French Revolution lies in the fact that he feared that it would spread to the British Isles. His opposition to the Dissenters stemmed from the fact that he regarded them as the "English Jacobins," the proselytizers of the new religion of the "Rights of Man."105

It is part of the enigma of Edmund Burke that he understood more, and at the same time less, of what was happening to Western culture during the French Revolution, than most of his contemporaries. The Reflections, written in the form of a letter to a young Frenchman, closed with a comment which reveals much about this great Englishman and philosopher:

I have told you candidly my sentiments. I think they are not likely to alter yours. I do not know that they ought. You are young; you cannot guide but must follow the fortune of your country. But hereafter they may be of some use to you, in some future form which your commonwealth may take. In the present it can hardly remain; but before its final settlement it may be obliged to pass, as one of our poets says, 'through great varieties of untried being,' and in all its transmigrations to be purified by fire and blood.106

105Letter to Richard Burke, Esq., Burke, Works, VI, 70; Remarks on the Policy of the Allies, Burke, Works, III, 442.

106Reflections, Burke, Works, II, 517.
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A. PRIMARY MATERIALS


Miscellaneous correspondence and memoirs, arranged chronologically. Strongly favors Rockingham and his associates, biased against George III.

Annual Register of World Events: A Review of the Year. London: J. Dodsley, 1758---.

Basic source for general history of period. Burke was general editor during much of this period and his influence is often very obvious.


Current edition, indexed. Footnotes very helpful.


Contains the entire text of Priestley's "Memoirs" and the "Continuation" by his son Joseph. Leaves out the appendices contained in the 1806 edition by Thomas Cooper.


Also includes some correspondence on miscellaneous topics.


This is cited as an excellent paperback edition of Burke's most important work. The introduction provides much helpful background and the analysis supplies a basis for organization which the book lacks in the standard edition.

Six volumes of a projected eight volume work currently available; this is the definitive edition of Burke's correspondence. Includes much material only recently become available. Very thorough notes.


Well organized, but no notes.


Introduction provides extensive background for the election campaign of 1790.


Spotty. Some correspondence by, to, or about Fox, some journals. Relies heavily on Walpole's Journals in some spots. Numerous comments and interpretations by editor.


Good biography of Burke's early years. Early writings, including correspondence with Richard Shackleton, reprints of all editions of the *Reformer*, and early pamphlets attributed to Burke.


Series of short pieces written by Edmund and William Burke (his kinsman) from 1750 to 1756, Burke's early and obscure years in England.
B. SECONDARY MATERIALS


Brief but lively study of the differences that arose between Burke and his constituents. Some character analysis of Burke.


Study of events which brought George III and Pitt into alliance, and an analysis of the working relationship between them.


Gives especially valuable material on Burke's Reflections and the response of public opinion.


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Based on the Fitzwilliam papers, only recently available to scholars. Emphasizes Rockingham's personal integrity and loyalty to party.

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Excellent work. Complete discussion of the movements for parliamentary reform up to 1785.


Lengthy introduction by Cobban, followed by excerpts from contemporary works with special emphasis on the Reflections and the response to it.

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Especially valuable for understanding of Burke's activities and attitudes concerning Roman Catholics.


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Good general background, with perceptive comments.


The best biography of Pitt now available.


Series of essays by prominent Burke scholars. Section on Burke and the French Revolution very helpful.


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