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POLITICAL IDEAS IN THE NORTH BRITON, 1762-1763:

A 'Whig-country' View of the English Constitution.

Dissertation presented in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in
History at the University of Waikato.

Anthony Wallace Knight

1972

For Lene and Julian.

ABSTRACT.

This dissertation examines the constitutional ideas and attitudes which emerge from the North Briton's view of the state of English politics in 1762-3. The object of the study has been to determine the nature of these ideas and attitudes, and their place in the stream of political and constitutional ideas that grew into what historians have described as eighteenth century 'radicalism'.

An examination of later seventeenth and eighteenth century political thought reveals that the constitutional concerns of the North Briton were entirely unoriginal. Its view of the constitution has been labelled 'Whig-country' because it is from both Whiggish ideas and attitudes, and from the long tradition of 'country' ideas and opposition to government, that the North Briton draws its own constitutional outlook.

Like almost all politically aware Englishmen in the eighteenth century, the authors of the North Briton held that the constitution was balanced, and the liberty of the subject thereby guaranteed, by the equipoise of the constitution's three components - king, lords and commons. However, this idea was capable of different interpretations depending upon the political ends for which it was utilized.

Almost all agreed the constitutional balance was in danger of upset, but men in opposition invariably disagreed with those in power as to the source of the danger.

The North Briton, in opposition to the ministry of Lord Bute, clearly echoes the obsessive 'country' fear of the corrupting influence of power in its charges that the administration is working in its own interests rather than in those of the people, and is thereby upsetting the balance of the constitution. The people are regarded as legitimate critics and even supervisors of government by the North Briton; their role being to restore the constitutional balance by ensuring that parliament properly represents the people.

The North Briton's political solution to present problems is to get men they believe can be trusted to look after the people's interests back into power. Such men, it argues, are the Whigs (specifically Lord Temple) and William Pitt, whose ability and public esteem had previously been so amply demonstrated.

The authors of the North Briton have no intention of upsetting the balance of the constitution in favour of the democratic element. Nevertheless, their emphasis on the role of the people has within it a potential for the development of later 'radical' ideas that came to view the people as an entity separate from the traditional parts of the constitution.

Although the North Briton is on the verge of interpreting 'the people' as a separate entity, its retention of the Whig solution counters the 'radical' potential of its 'country' views. Thus in 1762-3 the North Briton continues to voice non-'radical' 'Whig-country' attitudes.

By 1768 the Whigs and Pitt had demonstrated that they were incapable of providing a viable solution to contemporary problems. "The Continuation" of the North Briton, no longer inhibited by trust in a Whiggish solution, discards its conservative Whiggism, becomes wholly 'country' oriented, and by 1771 appears to be well and truly 'radical' in its demands for proportional representation and in its hints at support for a democratic franchise.

PREFACE.

Herbert Butterfield attacks Sir Lewis Namier's contention that the troubles of the early years of George III's reign were due to little things, to muddles and jealousies, and to ludicrous ironies of circumstance.¹ Butterfield objects to the Namierite tendency to drain the intellectual content out of the things that politicians do, and to view history as being woven out of the chances and ironies of circumstance. He insists that the story gains meaning only through that framework of ideas and purposes within which men act even when they seem only to be responding casually to circumstances.² The validity of Butterfield's regard for the importance of the ideas and conscious purposes of historical personages is strongly supported by the more recent works of Bernard Bailyn, J.G.A. Pocock, J.R. Pole and Caroline Robbins.³ These

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1. Herbert Butterfield, "George III and the Constitution", History, Vol.XLIII, No.147 (February, 1958), p.20.
 2. Butterfield, ibid, p.19; George III and the Historians (London, 1957), pp.211-214.
 3. Bernard Bailyn, The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1967). J.G.A. Pocock, "Machiavelli, Harrington and English Political Ideologies in the Eighteenth Century", William and Mary Quarterly, Third Series, Vol.XXII, No.4 (October, 1965). J.R. Pole, Political Representation in England and the Origins of the American Republic (London, 1966). Caroline Robbins, The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1961).

writers have all helped to cast new light upon seventeenth and eighteenth century political ideas and have done much to show the importance of well-established streams of political thought in the constitutional development of England and America in the eighteenth century.

To date little specialised research has been carried out on the propaganda press of the 1760's with a view to discovering the origins and import of the constitutional ideas contained in these organs of political acrimony and debate. George Nobbe's useful examination of the North Briton Nos.1-45⁴ concentrates on elucidating the immediate partisan questions raised therein, rather than on analysing the North Briton's constitutional attitudes in order to determine their antecedents and significance. However, an important contribution to the understanding of eighteenth century political ideas and their application has very recently been made by Mrs Marie Peters in her study of the Monitor.⁵ By applying the approach of Pocock, Robbins and others to her examination of the Monitor, Mrs Peters has shown that not only does the political press of the 1750's and 1760's base much of its propaganda on traditional attitudes reaching back to, and beyond, the seventeenth

4. George Nobbe, The North Briton: A Study in Political Propaganda (New York, 1939, reprinted 1966).

5. Marie Peters, "The Monitor on the constitution, 1755-1765: new light on the ideological origins of English radicalism", English Historical Review, Vol.LXXXVI, No. 341 (October, 1971).

century, but also that in these attitudes and in the language of political controversy lie the roots of eighteenth century English 'radicalism'. Following the lead of Mrs Peters' pioneering study of the Monitor, this dissertation examines the North Briton with the intention of adding further to the understanding of eighteenth century political and constitutional ideas.

That this dissertation owes a great deal to Mrs Marie Peters will be obvious to those who have read her article, "The Monitor on the constitution, 1755-1765". My gratitude is due to Mrs Peters for her generosity in allowing me to read her article before it was published, and for her wise counsel in the initial stages of the preparation of this dissertation.

I should like to acknowledge a particular debt to Miss Margaret Avery, Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Waikato, who supervised this dissertation and without whose patience, forbearance and generous help it could not have been written.

Among other scholars at the University of Waikato whose advice I have sought and whose assistance has been readily offered, I should like to thank Professor J.H. Jensen for his guidance on points of technique; Mr Peter Gibbons for his painstaking checking of the final draft; Dr Lewis Fretz for his companionship in the wee small hours; and Mr Dov Bing for his unfailing optimism.

In a more general way my thanks go to those historians, past and present, of the University of Waikato, who helped bring me to the point of writing this dissertation. In particular, I thank Professors J.H.M. Salmon and J.H. Jensen, and Mr Colin Davis, all of whom have demonstrated to me the real meaning of scholarship.

University of Waikato,
February, 1972.

A.W. Knight

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Acknowledgement: The reproduction of page one of the North Briton No.1 is from an undated bound edition of miscellaneous numbers of the North Briton held in the library of the University of Waikato. The portraits of Wilkes and Churchill and Hogarth's caricature of Wilkes are reproduced from plates in William Purdie Treloar, Wilkes and the City (London, 1917).

And now, Sir, indulge me with an apostrophe, for I cannot help crying out, Ye worthy citizens of London, see! a foul-mouthed ruffian, with the spirit of a parricide and the inquisition, with the infernal rage of a fiend broke loose from the regions of darkness, attack your favourite goddess LIBERTY on her throne, surrounded by you her most zealous votaries; rend her sacred vestments, besmear her with dirt, squirt his venomous excrements in her face, lash her with keen whips of reproach, and at last, to complete his malice, with the frantic fury of a Clement, a Ravillac, or a Damien, rush forward to plunge a dagger in her heart! O execrable parricide!

- The North Briton, No.19
on the Earl of Bute.

But the sly rogue squints so violently and looks so many different ways at once; that it is hard to tell what he could be at...can he pass the Treasury without a cast in his eye?

- The Auditor, No.2
on John Wilkes.

I. METROPOLITAN POLITICAL ACTIVITY CIRCA 1760.

FREEDOM came next, but scarce was seen,
When the sky, which appear'd serene
And gay before, was overcast;
Horror bestrode a foreign blast,
And from the prison of the North,
To FREEDOM deadly, Storms burst forth.

Charles Churchill, The Ghost, 1763

Book IV, lxxiv, 1685-1690

English political activity both within and outside parliament assumed a new vigour in the first decade of George III's reign. In part this was little more than an intensification of the struggle for office which resulted from the accession of a young and active monarch. It was not only this, however, for it tended to become detached from parliamentary oppositionism and to become a movement with genuine roots in opinion outside parliament. In the political discontent of the 1760's it is possible to detect a consistent and fairly coherent stream of criticism aimed against the corruption, mismanagement and intimidation exercised by successive governments. Many of these critics drew heavily upon traditional attitudes which appear to have formed the

'radical'¹ political ideas that began to emerge at the end of the decade. Most of the leading critics were drawn from the City of London and this new and distinctive phase in the long tradition of City opposition to the national government has been recognised as the beginning of modern British radicalism.²

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1. The term 'radical' in the context of eighteenth century British politics is often applied with varying connotations by historians of the period. Mrs Marie Peters distinguishes two overlapping senses in the use of the term. She finds historians "call demands for parliamentary reform 'radical' even if the nature and the arguments supporting them would not have been given this name in the nineteenth century....More widely, the term is used to denote a fundamental discontent with the current state of the constitution and politics distinct from opposition to particular ministries or policies, a discontent which leads to demands for change even if the demands are disguised by the arguments used." Marie Peters, "The Monitor on the constitution, 1755-1765: new light on the ideological origins of English radicalism", English Historical Review, Vol.LXXXVI, No.341 (October, 1971), p.706. The term is used here in this manner, that is, as a combination of its "two overlapping senses". In no sense was the 'radicalism' of the 1760's and 1770's a desire for immediate action to change the foundations of an existing social and political system and to establish a new system upon essentially new foundations, as we might define radicalism today.
 2. L.S. Sutherland, The City of London and the Opposition Government, 1768-1774 (London, 1959), pp.5, 7-9, 12.

Outbursts of extra-parliamentary political criticism had emanated from the city in the eighteenth century before 1760.³ They came particularly from 'middling' men, the smaller merchants, tradesmen and master-craftsmen of the Common Council who elected London's four members of parliament and who, in the Common Hall as well, took part in the election of City officers including the Mayor. These men were hostile to wealthy financiers, merchants and manufacturers, the rich 'monied interest' of the City who comprised the Court of Aldermen, who forged close links with government before 1760 and who were consistent supporters of successive ministries. 'Middling' men bitterly resented them for the financial favours - contracts, loans, sinecures - they received from government, and for the influence they were thought to exert in policy-making. It is not surprising, therefore, that this hostility toward the 'monied interest' was reflected in national politics by almost constant 'middling' opposition to government.

3. George Rudé, Wilkes and Liberty (London, 1962), pp.15-16: "the City settled down to steady opposition to Walpole's administration...it headed the campaign against the Excise Bill of 1733, both in and outside parliament.... When the minister was finally driven out of office, the City celebrated the victory over 'corruption' by urging parliament to promote a Place Bill and a Pensions Bill and to repeal the Septennial Act."

Many of their most persistent demands were for restoration of the 'constitutional balance'. 'Middling' City men sought to alter the system of representation in parliament to give more equal weight to what they regarded as a vastly under-represented section of the population.⁴ In 1756 the City was vocal in events leading up to the Seven Years' War. Popular opinion became attached to William Pitt, and although Pitt was not an organiser of political support he maintained his City connexion through William Beckford, an absentee West Indian planter and later 'radical'.⁵ When Pitt resigned in 1761 his supporters believed that he had been forced from office, that they now had no voice in the conduct of the war and that with Pitt would go their hoped-for gains.⁶ The rise of the Earl of Bute with its attendant rumours of royal 'favouritism' and sinister ministerial design intensified public feeling against the ministry. When George Grenville

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4. I.R. Christie, Wilkes, Wyvill and Reform (London, 1962), pp.1-6. The metropolitan area contained possibly 850,000 people - one tenth of the population of England - yet the City of London returned only four members and the metropolis as a whole only eight.
 5. William Beckford (1709-1770) was also the brother and political associate of Richard Beckford, founder of the Monitor. William was an M.P. for the City of London, and Lord Mayor in 1762 and 1769.
 6. Christie, op. cit., p.10.

succeeded Bute in April 1763 controversy became centred upon the issues of 'general warrants', freedom of the press and parliamentary privilege raised by the arrest and trial of John Wilkes. After 1763 bad harvests, high prices, labour unrest and dislocation of the American trade bred further metropolitan discontent. Thus by the late 1760's there had formed a considerable body of political dissatisfaction which was not necessarily tied to any particular group in parliament.

As social, political and economic discontent spread in the capital in the 1760's voices began to call for more specific reforms. Between 1755 and 1765 the Monitor had inveighed against the growth of ministerial power and had supported constituents instructing members, more 'equal' parliamentary representation and the abolition of rotten boroughs. In the winter of 1767-8 pamphlets appeared advocating elections by secret ballot to end coercion of voters. In the March 1768 issue of the Political Register, John Almon supported a reshaping of the representative system to reduce the weight of the nobility, increase the influence of manufacturing and commercial interests, alter the franchise and method of voting and to shorten parliaments. Although no 'radical' platform was used in the 1768 General Election it is clear that discontent and reform ideas existed, and that the independent forces which were to

gather around John Wilkes after the elections had an ideological as well as a circumstantial basis for their 'radicalism'.

Eighteenth century 'radicalism' was concerned with political rather than social issues. Like earlier oppositionism, its basic aim continued to be adjustment of the constitutional balance. It had its roots in the idea of a constitutional balance in mixed government embodying king, lords and commons - in classical terms monarchy, aristocracy and democracy. The maintenance of the balance depended upon both the independence and the interdependence of each part acting as a check and a balance against any one part becoming dominant. In the eighteenth century, while many agreed that the constitutional balance was in danger of upset, there was wide disagreement as to the source of the threat. Whereas Whigs in power in the reigns of George I and II saw themselves as preserving the balance, their 'country' opponents saw the main danger coming from ministerial encroachment upon the independence of parliament and the liberties of the subject. Mrs Peters has suggested that it was an extension of the 'country' emphasis on popular supervision of government to counter this encroachment that led to the 'radical' view of the people supervising the balance of king, lords and commons from outside the framework of mixed government.

That is, as an entity separate from the parts of the mixed constitution.⁷

Several other more immediately obvious factors distinguished this 'radicalism' from earlier eighteenth century political ideas and activity. Criticism previously directed at particular measures and men broadened into a more direct concern for the proper functioning of the constitution. It was 'radical' not only in its expanded view of the people's role in supervising government, but also in its new emphasis on improving the operation of the constitution by innovation rather than restoration and in the establishment of extra-parliamentary political organisations. Nevertheless, it retained direct links with, and was clearly built upon earlier non-'radical' ideas concerning the constitution and the state of politics.

The North Briton is most widely known for its vituperative attack on George III and his ministers in No.45. But closer examination of issues of the North Briton published in 1762-3 reveals a wealth of the non-'radical' political ideas that immediately preceded the emergence of eighteenth century 'radicalism'. Its 'Whig-country' attitudes link two chains of political thinking back to and beyond the seventeenth century. And its ideas, and the actions of one of its

7. Peters, *op. cit.*, pp.724, 726 (my italics).

authors, John Wilkes, provided an issue which focussed the general discontent of many 'middling' men in the metropolis against those in power and prompted circumstances which actually crystallized incipient 'radicalism'.⁸

The North Briton is not 'radical'. Its bogeys are the various means by which the executive branch of government is believed to be extending its power over the legislative. Its concern is for constitutional restoration, though it contains no proposals for specific reform legislation. To support its attacks on the Bute administration the North Briton draws upon well-established 'country' opposition ideas. At the same time the authors are heavily biased in favour of William Pitt and the Temple faction of the Whig opposition. Although in the middle of the eighteenth century proponents of the 'country' tradition were variously labelled Republican, Tory, Jacobite and 'Old' or 'Real Whig', the North Briton's predilection for Whiggism, or a branch of it, is revealed both in Whiggish 'principles' and in consistent arguments for a return to Whig rule. It portrays the Bute administration as a Tory ministry imbued with Jacobite principles bent on the overthrow of the constitution and the imposition of arbitrary government. On these grounds it seems quite justifiable to apply the label 'Whig-country' to the constitutional attitudes expressed in the North Briton.

8. See S. Maccoby (editor), The English Radical Tradition, 1763-1914 (London, 1952), pp.19-20; G.S. Veitch, The Genesis of Parliamentary Reform (London, 1913), reprinted 1964, pp.25-26.

These attitudes reflect the circumstances of the North Briton's origin. It was born of the political conflict which followed the final collapse of the Newcastle-Pitt ministry in May 1762 that ended the forty-five year rule of the great Whig governing connexion built up by Robert Walpole and continued by Henry Pelham and his brother, the Duke of Newcastle. To shatter further the ranks of the already divided Whigs and to counter opposition criticism from the Monitor,⁹ the new ministry retained Tobias Smollett, the novelist and critic. Smollett's answer to the Monitor was the Briton which first appeared on 29 May 1762 determined "to pluck the mask of patriotism from the front of faction, and the torch of discord from the hand of sedition".¹⁰ The Briton in turn prompted Lord Temple, who had resigned at the same time as Pitt, to suggest that John Wilkes found a new opposition journal for which Temple would provide the necessary backing. Wilkes enlisted the editorial services of Charles Churchill and together they rushed to the defence of liberty with the North Briton. During its first eleven months of publication Wilkes

9. The Monitor was edited by Arthur Beardmore, who was known to his contemporaries as 'Lord Temple's man'. Weatherly, op. cit., p.xii. Most of the information herein concerning the Monitor and its ideas is drawn from Peters, op. cit., pp.706-727.

10. The Briton, No.1, Saturday 29 May 1762.

and Churchill carried the main burden of writing the weekly articles, though they were cautious enough not to admit authorship openly. From time to time they called upon the services of other writers who seem not to have regarded such prudence as necessary.¹¹

John Wilkes¹² was born on 17 October 1725, the son of a prosperous distiller and a dissenting mother. At twenty he

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11. Nobbe, op. cit., p.266 writes: "We can be reasonably certain of the authorship of thirty-five of the forty-five papers. Of these thirty-five Wilkes wrote Nos.1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 9, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 23, 25, 28, 29, 32, 37, 38, 40, 43, 44 and 45 - twenty-six in all. Churchill was responsible for Nos.7, 8, 10, 27 and 42 - five in all. Nos. 22 and 26 were made up largely of verses by Robert Lloyd, No.19 was written by William Temple of Trowbridge, while No.13 was a pastiche made from the work of James Howell. The ten other numbers - 4, 24, 30, 31, 33, 34, 35, 36, 39 and 41 [plus No.46] remain for the time being anonymous, though it is likely that Wilkes wrote most of them....In general, the practice the collaborators followed was to have Churchill look over and revise the copy which Wilkes provided."
12. For the life of John Wilkes see H. Bleackley, Life of John Wilkes (London, 1917); R. Postgate, That Devil Wilkes (London, 1930, reprinted 1956); O.A. Sherrard, A Life of John Wilkes (London, 1930); W.P. Treloar, Wilkes and the City (London, 1917). For an excellent brief account of Wilkes' career and character, see Peter Quennell, Four Portraits: Studies of the Eighteenth Century (London, 1945, reprinted 1946). More recent works on Wilkes and 'radicalism' include George Rudé, "John Wilkes and the Re-birth of British Radicalism", Political Science, Victoria University of Wellington, Vol.14 (September 1962), No.2; George Rudé, Wilkes and Liberty (London, 1962); Ian R. Christie, Wilkes, Wyvill and Reform (London, 1962).

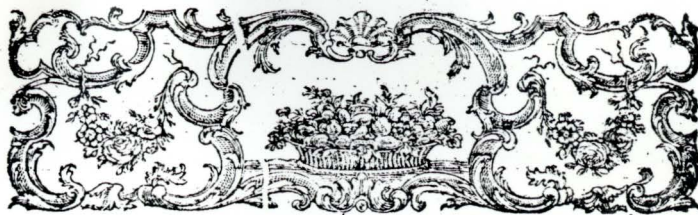
married well and when the union dissolved retained the manor at Aylesbury where he became a member of the county bench. Wilkes' political career began when a friend presented him to Earl Temple, his brother George Grenville, and his future brother-in-law William Pitt. With Grenville's support he was appointed High Sheriff of Buckingham County for 1754, but his new friends were unable to prevent a costly defeat at Berwick in the General Election of that year. By arrangement with William Pitt, Wilkes was able to stand for Aylesbury in 1757 and entered parliament at a cost of some £7000.¹³ In the House of Commons he voted consistently in the Newcastle-Pitt favour. Wilkes owed his position to connexions with the Grenville family and Pitt, and when Pitt and Temple and the Duke of Newcastle resigned or were edged out of office after George III's accession he had little hesitation in accepting Temple's suggestion that he found a political journal and in venting his frustration in bitter diatribes against the successors to Pitt and the Whigs through the pages of the North Briton. These were to culminate in Wilkes' arrest for seditious libel and in his trial, flight abroad, and return four years later to become the figurehead of the new 'radicalism'.

13. Rudé, John Wilkes and the Re-birth of British Radicalism, op. cit., p.12; and Quennell, op. cit., p.194.

Precisely when Charles Churchill¹⁴ became Wilkes' friend is not clear.¹⁵ However their friendship grew very close and was sound enough in 1762 for Wilkes and Churchill to combine their talents in journalistic opposition to Lord Bute's ministry. Churchill was by then recognized as the deadliest satirist of the age.¹⁶

The eldest son of a Church of England cleric, Charles Churchill was born in February 1731. In 1754 he was ordained deacon and licenced as a curate in Somerset, and when his father died four years later he returned to London to become lecturer of St. John the Evangelist, Westminster. Separated from his wife in 1761 he took up the pen and with

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14. The only 'life' of Churchill in English appears to be the critical biography: W.C. Brown, Charles Churchill: Poet, Rake and Rebel (Lawrence, Kansas, 1953). Nobbe, op. cit., pp.51-63, has a good chapter on Churchill. Brief accounts of Churchill's life and work may be found in: D. Grant (editor), Poetical Works of Charles Churchill (London, 1956); and E.H. Weatherly (editor), The Correspondence of John Wilkes and Charles Churchill (New York, 1954).
15. Brown, op. cit., p.66 suggests Churchill did not know Wilkes well until the winter of 1761. Quennell, op. cit., p.194 writes that among other members of the Hell Fire Club, which Wilkes joined in 1759, was Churchill, "at that period and later Wilkes' closest friend". Nobbe, op. cit., pp.13-14 says it is likely that Churchill's friendship with Wilkes dated from 1759 when Wilkes was a churchwarden of St. John the Evangelist, Westminster, and Churchill was curate and lecturer there.
16. Weatherly, op. cit., p.xiii.



for THE *Deighton's*
NORTH BRITON.

N U M B E R I.

To be continued every SATURDAY. Price Two Pence Halfpenny.

SEJANUS, WOLSEY, *but not honest* FLEURY,
But well may put some Statesmen in a fury.

POPE.

SATURDAY, JUNE the 5th, 1762.



THE liberty of the press is the birth-right of a BRITON, and has by the wisest men in all ages been thought the firmest bulwark of the liberties of this country. It has ever been the terror of bad ministers, whose dark and dangerous designs, or whose weakness, inability, or duplicity, have been detected and shewn to the public in too strong colours for them long to bear up against the general odium. No wonder then that such various and infinite arts have been employed, at one time entirely to suppress it, at another to take off the force and blunt the edge of this most sacred weapon, left for the defence of truth and liberty. A wicked and corrupt administration must ever dread this

A

appeal

PLATE I.

Page one of the North Briton No.1. This reproduction has been reduced to about two-thirds of the size of the original. "Jos. Deighton's" is hand-written in ink above the title.

two poems, The Rosciad and The Apology, is said to have realised £2000 in two months from their sale. Churchill's bitter mud-slinging affray with his Grub Street critics (including Arthur Murphy and Tobias Smollett) provided a firm grounding in literary invective that was to be turned to political ends a year later in the North Briton.

The first issue of the North Briton appeared on Saturday 5 June 1762 - ten days after the Earl of Bute became First Lord of the Treasury. The political weekly continued through forty-five issues to 23 April 1763, fifteen days after Bute's resignation; with No.46 appearing on 12 November 1763 as the last issue in the first series.¹⁷ Originally only three issues of the North Briton were intended, the aim being to counter the ministry's propaganda press - Smollett's Briton

17. I refer to the North Briton Nos.1-46 (1762-1763) as the first series. Most historians consider only the first forty-five numbers. George Nobbe, The North Briton: A Study in Political Propaganda (New York, 1939, reprinted 1966); makes a brief reference (p.217) to the Fragment that was to have been issue No.46 for 30 April 1763, but makes no mention of No.46 of 12 November 1763. The North Briton Nos.47-218 (10 May 1768 to 11 May 1771) are designated "the Continuation" by the publisher, W. Bingley.

Quotations are given as they appear in the North Briton, with the original spelling, punctuation and use of capitals, except in that I have not reproduced italicizations.

and soon after Arthur Murphy's Auditor. But its popularity¹⁸ encouraged the authors to continue publication and their main concern became to discredit Lord Bute's ministry.

The North Briton's principal objects of attack were Bute himself and the ministry's negotiations with France to end the Seven Years' War. Scots, Tories and ministry propagandists are mercilessly ridiculed and blame for the sorry state of the nation is directed at ambitious and inept ministers. George III is portrayed as a well-intentioned but naive monarch in the hands of an arrogant and scheming minister. The North Briton exhibits some development in ideological content while its style remains harshly vituperative throughout. In the first eighteen issues it attacks in generalized arguments based on broad constitutional attitudes and principles in the 'country' and Whig traditions. Although the 'country' view of English politics was always more a critical attitude than a body of political philosophy, by No.19 the obsessive 'country' distrust of power has emerged from its

18. The North Briton's continued popularity is alluded to by James Boswell. Boswell read the paper each week, discussed it at Child's coffee-house and passed his copy to his friend West Digges. On 9 February 1763 Boswell wrote: "I have it now sent to me regularly by the Penny Post, and read it with vast relish. There is a poignant acrimony in it that is very relishing." F.A. Pottle (editor), Boswell's London Journal, 1762-1763 (London, 1950, reprinted 1951), p.187 (also pp.76, 189, 227-8). Weatherly, op. cit., pp.xiv-xv, states that "in contrast to the North Briton, which was widely sold and read, only 250 copies of each issue of the Briton were published, and not all of them were sold".

supportive role to become a major source of appeal against the ministry. The supposed effect of the North Briton's adversaries on the constitution becomes a more dominant concern and a fairly coherent and complete set of political attitudes and ideas is revealed. Wilkes' own later role as the figurehead of eighteenth century 'radicalism' reinforces the importance of these attitudes and ideas in the early statement and development of English radical political theory.

II. THE NORTH BRITON
AND THE ENGLISH CONSTITUTION.

Is this the Land, where, in some Tyrant's reign,
When a weak, wicked Ministerial train,
The tools of pow'r, the slaves of int'rest, plann'd
Their Country's ruin, and with bribes unman'd
Those wretches, who, ordain'd in Freedom's cause,
Gave up our liberties, and sold our laws;
When Pow'r was taught by Meanness where to go,
Nor dar'd to love the Virtue of a foe;
When, like a lep'rous plague, from the foul head
To the foul heart her sores Corruption spread,
Her iron arm when stern Oppression rear'd,
And Virtue, from her broad base shaken, fear'd
The scourge of Vice; when, impotent and vain,
Poor Freedom bow'd the neck to Slav'ry's chain;

Charles Churchill, The Author, 1763
v, 73-86

The North Briton is firmly within the eighteenth century framework of belief that the balanced constitution was the guarantee of English liberties. What is significant about the North Briton is the way in which it interprets the balanced constitution, because it is within changing interpretations, most often tacit, that the origins of eighteenth century 'radicalism' can be seen to lie.

The idea of a mixed, balanced constitution protecting liberty was generally accepted in eighteenth century England and the authors of the North Briton probably regarded its

almost universal acceptance as precluding any necessity for them to deal with it explicitly. Their only specific reference to its form is in support of the doctrine condemned by the University of Oxford Convocation in 1683, that "the sovereignty of England is in the three estates, viz. king, lords and commons".¹ Nevertheless, concern for Englishmen's liberty, that is, maintenance of a balance in the constitution favourable to 'the people', is the major 'ideological' preoccupation of Wilkes and Churchill.

The authors of the North Briton stress that "Government is a just execution of the laws, which were instituted by the

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1. North Briton No.32, 8 January 1763 referring to "The judgement and decree of the University of Oxford, passed in the Convocation, July 21, 1683 which is full of maxims which overturn the first principles of all free government".

Corinne Comstock Weston, English Constitutional Theory and the House of Lords 1556-1832 (London, 1965), pp.111-2, writes of the decree: "Oxford University in full convocation with no dissenting voices, condemned certain pernicious books and 'damnable' doctrines as destructive of the sacred persons of princes, their state and government, and all human society." The books allegedly containing these doctrines were publicly burned. They were Hunton's Treatise of Monarchie (1643), A Political Catechism (1643), Samuel Rutherford's Lex, Rex (1644) and Baxter's Holy Commonwealth (1659).

people for their preservation."² They believe, like most of their contemporaries, that government has a legitimate base in contract - in the original compact by which individuals surrendered power to a king in the interests of the peace and security of society as a whole. Although the North Briton nowhere dwells at length on the theory of contract, it declares that among "the first principles of all free governments, and of all civil liberty" is the notion that "there is a mutual contract, tacit or express, between a prince and his subjects".³ The Tory doctrine that there is a "divine, hereditary, indefeasible right in any family" is dismissed as "absurd".⁴

The principles which established the Glorious Revolution and which were confirmed by it - contract, mixed government, the right of resistance - guarantee the continuance of liberty. The North Briton briefly refers to pre-Revolution principles, but makes no direct appeal to ideas of natural rights and fundamental law such as were characteristic of some adherents

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2. North Briton No.19, 16 October 1762.
 3. North Briton No.32, 8 January 1763.
 4. North Briton Nos.32, 36, 38.

to the 'country' view of the eighteenth century English constitution. Preservation of liberty is synonymous with adherence to the principles of the Revolution. Liberty is attacked when these principles are denied, in the North Briton's view by the unconstitutional exercise of ministerial power. Constitutional redress of the imbalance implicit in governmental encroachment upon freedom may be found in a progression of means, the most extreme of which is contained in the doctrine of resistance. It behoves the people to maintain a close watch on the growth of arbitrary power. When discontent reaches proportions where "the spirit of discord should go forth in the land", then the people must act.

The authors of the North Briton claim that the administration of the Earl of Bute is a Tory faction unconstitutionally exercising its power and encroaching upon the people's liberties by imposing Tory principles and by stifling objection and opposition. Their method of attacking the problem of diminishing liberty is to expose the agencies of ministerial encroachment through the pages of the North Briton. Their solution is to persuade the people that redress of the nation's ills is to be discovered in a return to government controlled by "the Whigs, those old and firm friends of the constitution and of the present family on the throne".⁵

5. North Briton No.45, 23 April 1763.

In their generalities, most of the North Briton's ideas were commonplace eighteenth century opposition tenets. To discover the precise nature of the North Briton's ideas and their place in the oppositionism that led into eighteenth century 'radicalism' it is necessary to examine the way in which the North Briton views the different elements of the constitutional framework and the relationships between them. Since the North Briton emphasises the role of the people as critics of ministerial influence believed to be undermining the mixed government balance of king, lords and commons, it is appropriate to make this examination in the divisions of king, parliament and people.

The North Briton recognises the role of the king as being crucial to the operation of the constitution. The king "is only the first magistrate of this country: but is invested, by the law, with the whole executive power. He is, however, responsible to his people for the due execution of the royal function in the choice of ministers, etc. equally with the meanest of his subjects in his particular duty".⁶ The authors' technique is to declare ostensibly their complete faith in George III while attacking his ministers, decrying ministerial influence on the king and warning George by historical example of the consequences of becoming the tool of evil advisers. It remained prudent for Wilkes and Churchill

6. North Briton No.23, 6 November 1762.



R. Pine pinxt.

JOHN WILKES

J. Watson fecit.

PLATE II.

John Wilkes, principal author of the North Briton
in 1762-3. This portrait was possibly painted
when Wilkes was Chamberlain, 1779-1797.

overtly to declare their happiness with, and loyalty to George III. Thus England is satirically "blessed with a king, who, born an Englishman, glories in the name, who considers the interests of the people as his own, who, possessed of their love, esteems it the brightest jewel in his crown, who approves himself the guardian and not the invader of their liberties".⁷

However, the North Briton's attacks on the king are scarcely veiled by praise of the king's qualities. Although prefixed by the assurance that "The personal character of our present sovereign makes us easy and happy, that so great a power is lodged in such hands",⁸ Wilkes is bold enough to directly assail the king in No.45 with the statement that: "the favourite has given too just cause for him [George III] to escape the general odium".⁹ George, by instituting proceedings against Wilkes for seditious libel in No.45, demonstrated that he was not fooled by the North Briton's shallow commendations. In his defence of Wilkes, Serjeant John Glynn claimed there was no slight on the king in No.45. The ministry, a majority of the House of Commons and George III himself thought otherwise.

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7. North Briton No.45, 23 April 1763.
 8. ibid.
 9. North Briton No.20, 16 October 1762.

For the authors of the North Briton good government is dependent upon a king who, recognizing the basis of his sovereignty in Revolution principles, will choose ministers whose interests are those of the people. These ministers will be, of course, Whigs like those who formed the last ministry which "had the full approbation of their country, and was founded in the love and confidence of their people".¹⁰ Moreover, "It is but justice to declare, that the House of Burnswick owe their firm establishment on the throne of these kingdoms to the steady zeal and intrepidity of the Whigs".¹¹ Unfortunately the king has forgotten the origins of his sovereignty, appointed Bute as First Lord of the Treasury and thereby brought upon himself and the country a "wicked and corrupt administration". This in itself is forgivable as "The sovereign may be a TRAJAN, or a TITUS, the delight of mankind; and his only fault, in his people's eyes, may be an unbounded confidence in an insolent, weak, and treacherous minister".¹²

10. ibid.

11. North Briton No.1, 5 June 1762.

12. North Briton No.20, 16 October 1762.

As long as the ministers appointed by the king have the approval of the people, the legality of their appointment by the king is not questioned. But the North Briton does query "the prudence and fitness of the choice".¹³ It will not be long, suggests the North Briton hopefully, before the "dark and dangerous designs, or their weakness, inability and duplicity" will become as clear to the king as it is to the people. It is the North Briton's self-appointed task to awaken the people and the king in order to speed that process of the constitution whereby the removal of bad ministers is ensured. The authors assert that the people "will not suffer their rights to be trampled on for any length of time....A minister is the servant of the public and accountable to them. Our constitution is so happily tempered, that it is not in the power of a sovereign to secure a bad minister, and of this we may be certain that it can never be in the inclination of the best of sovereigns to protect the worst of ministers".¹⁴

Nevertheless, Wilkes and Churchill are anxious to convince the king of the dangers of retaining a non-Whig ministry. They cite the "noble and manly conduct of Edward III" in

13. North Briton No.1, 5 June 1762.

14. North Briton No.44, 2 April 1763.

rescuing the people from the "tyrannous slavery of a court minion [Mortimer]"¹⁵ Concerning Tories, they warn the monarch "how dreadful ought their new-revived power to appear, not only to the people, but also to the sovereign".¹⁶ It is the despotic Tory ministers, endeavouring to dazzle their prince with high-flown ideas of the prerogative and honour, that have brought the honour of the crown "sunk even to prostitution".¹⁷ Englishmen, the authors imply, have the task of restoring the royal prerogative to its correct function. "The prerogative of the crown is to exert the constitutional powers entrusted to it in a way, not of blind favour and partiality, but of wisdom and judgement. This is the spirit of our constitution."¹⁸

The North Briton has no intention of denying the royal prerogative or the proper constitutional role of the king. But by constantly harping on the responsibility of ministers to the public it emphasises that the king's control over the executive is limited by the ultimate sovereignty of the people.

15. North Briton No.5, 3 July 1762.

16. North Briton No.33, 15 January 1763.

17. North Briton No.45, 23 April 1763.

18. ibid.

In mixed government theory the aristocratic and democratic parts of the constitution were embodied in Lords and Commons. While the North Briton pays scant attention to the precise position of parliament in these theoretical terms, its views concerning the everyday constitutional role of parliament are unreserved. "Parliaments are, by the constitution of our government the guardians of liberty. Before them it is the duty of our people to lay their grievances, and it then equally becomes the duty of our representatives to redress them."¹⁹ Past parliaments are praised for "the glorious stands...they often made for liberty"; for resolutely resisting and successfully baffling "the daring attempts of arbitrary monsters"; and for their readiness "to support the dignity and prerogative of the crown in its due extent".²⁰ "The very calling of a parliament is in itself a symptom of sanity in our state. It implies either that there are no just grounds of complaints, or that, if there are, the prince is ready to hear and to redress them".²¹

The House of Lords is held in so little esteem by Wilkes and Churchill that it barely rates a mention, and then only

19. North Briton No.46, 12 November 1763.

20. North Briton No.23, 6 November 1762.

21. ibid.

in tones that appear to be contemptuous. Replying to an "extravagant encomium" in the Auditor Wilkes writes: "I wonder not that the House of Lords is of so very little consequence in this nation; I rather think it ought to be of none at all, and must sink into contempt".²² The reference is slight and it is unclear here whether the North Briton is regretting the decline of the House of Lords and implicitly seeking a restoration of its proper role in mixed government, or whether it views this development with complacency. This uncertainty is an example of the North Briton's ambiguous position in the emergence of 'radicalism'.

The House of Commons is clearly regarded as the principal legislative body in the constitutional structure. But while apparently dismissing the House of Lords as all but defunct, the North Briton is aware of the possibility of a like fate befalling the Commons. If the House of Commons becomes 'corrupted' by ministerial influence, loses its independency and devolves into a mere rubber-stamp for their arbitrary measures, then it can in no way fulfill its representative role. This danger can be averted by the vigilance of the people and Whig rule. Ideally, "A British House of Commons

22. North Briton No.20, 16 October 1762.

will ever be faithful to the great and important trust reposed in them by the collective body of the people; and when the sense of the nation is so clearly known, there ought surely to be no hesitation in any administration to conform to it."²³

Parliament, or more specifically, the House of Commons, is not seen historically in a role of resistance to the crown, although it has, in the past, been the bane of despotic ministers. Rather, a wise monarch will gauge the temper of the people through their representatives and be guided to act in the people's interests. An arbitrary executive is the product of ministers acting against the sense of the nation and misleading the monarch. Correct functioning of the constitution will ensure this state of affairs does not arise or will be quickly put to rights. This in turn is dependent upon the people recognising the origins of their grievances (in the North Briton's view the ousting of Newcastle's Whigs and Pitt and the machinations of Lord Bute) and the King directing his ministers to act upon the people's parliamentary representations.

The North Briton lays considerable emphasis on the traditional 'country' insistence on an independent House of Commons. In the 'country' view an independent parliament, and more particularly a 'free' House of Commons, meant freedom

23. North Briton No.46, 12 November 1763.

from the influence of king and ministers - specifically by such measures as regulation of places and pensions, electoral reform and annual or triennial parliaments. The North Briton, while not advocating such direct safeguarding reforms, is, nevertheless, greatly concerned with the issue of parliamentary independence. The authors regard Englishmen's liberties - the right to representation including presentation and redress of grievances - as synonymous with a parliament free from the corrupting influence of 'bought' Members.

The authors' view of the correct constitutional function of members is contained in a lament which indicates that all is not well in government. "We were indeed promised, that in this parliament, under the halcyon reign of a British monarch, every man might vote according to his conscience, without fear of losing the protection he is most ambitious of".²⁴ On the other hand, they recognise that "a minister, for the support of his power, must have all his measures approved, and his security established by a majority".²⁵ The implication is that Whigs, by their regard for Revolution principles, their honest connexions and the esteem in which they are held by the people, are naturally able to command this majority. Tory ministers, however, because they lack

24. North Briton No.30, 25 December 1762.

25. ibid. (My italics).

the support of the nation, can only gain a majority by influencing members with sinecures, places and pensions.

The North Briton's solutions to the problem of re-establishing and maintaining parliamentary independence are less sophisticated and far more partisan than those of the 'country' opposition to government under the first two Georges. Specific constitutional reforms are not advocated. A return to Whig rule will solve present problems. But it is essential that the people, alerted by the North Briton, act to preserve their liberties by making their demands known.

Whatever their shortcomings as political theorists, Wilkes and Churchill make clear and repeated references to the role of 'the people' in their view of the constitutional framework. Herein lies the North Briton's greatest potential for the development of a genuine 'radicalism' stemming from the basis of mixed government theory. They do not advocate a broader electorate, or even constituents instructing members, but are rather concerned to point out 'people's rights' and to persuade people of the necessity to exercise them. Parliamentary representation does not preclude the more basic right to freely express opinions and to interfere in government if necessary. When ministerial measures sow discord among the people, they have the right and the duty to form an opposition. Every true Briton has a duty to constantly watch over the state of the balance of the constitution. Under the terms of the

Lockean contract the people have entrusted their power to the king who is free to appoint ministers acceptable to them. When the people observe the trust they have imparted being abused, they equally have the right to resist measures and ministers they deem harmful to the nation - that is, to the equipoise of the constitution.

Wilkes and Churchill are not entirely clear as to who, exactly, they regard as 'the people' whose rights and liberties they are at such pains to secure. There is no doubt that the North Briton regards the Whig nobility (and Pitt) as best suited to represent the people. But the paper's attitude toward the body of the people who are qualified to express opinions, while neither democratic nor radical in 1762-3, appears to be more comprehensive than that of the Whig apologist Edmund Burke, whose 'people' are clearly defined in terms of wealth and interest. Writing in 1770, Burke describes the people, whose task it is to "interpose, to rescue their prince, themselves and their posterity" from arbitrary government, as "the natural strength of the kingdom, the great peers, the leading landed gentlemen, the opulent merchants and manufacturers, the substantial yeomanry".²⁶

26. Edmund Burke, "Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents", (1770), in F.G. Selby (editor), Burke's The Present Discontents (London, 1902, reprinted 1951), p.37.

The North Briton's "good people of England" are a more representative cross-section of the populace than Burke's Whig stalwarts. A letter, praised "because it glows throughout with the true spirit of liberty", helps to illustrate the North Briton's attitude. Defended against the Briton's charge of being a seditious rabble are "the nobility, gentry, merchants, tradesmen, yeomen and all the commonalty".²⁷ Wilkes' own actions in 1763 and 1768-9 in playing to the accolades of the London 'mob',²⁸ lend further credibility to the view that his concern for 'people's liberties' reached classes further down the social scale than did Burke's. Certainly by 1776 Wilkes' view of the people in terms of who had 'rights' had broadened considerably. In his famous speech to the House of Commons in favour of parliamentary reform, Wilkes stated:

I wish, Sir, an English parliament to speak the free, unbiassed sense of the body of the English people.... The meanest mechanic, the poorest peasant and day labourer, has important rights respecting his personal

27. North Briton No.19, 9 October 1762.

28. The London mob was not necessarily made up of criminals, prostitutes, unemployed and riff-raff. George Rudé, Paris and London in the Eighteenth Century (London, 1970), pp.298-302, suggests it was principally comprised of what John Wilkes termed 'the inferior set'. That is, wage-earners (journeymen, apprentices, labourers and 'servants') and craftsmen, shopkeepers and small tradesmen.

liberty, that of his wife and children, his property, however inconsiderable, his wages, his earnings, the very price and value of each day's hard labour, which are in many trades and manufactures regulated by the power of parliament.²⁹

In 1762-3 the North Briton is concerned with a broadening base of political interest and potential pro-Whig opposition in the nation and particularly in the metropolis. Its remedy for the nation's ills still remains the accession of the Whigs, but its appeal on behalf of the Whigs aims at the consciousness of a wider social spectrum. Most significant in this respect is the North Briton's emphasis on the role of the City in the political nation. Traditionally, the City of London had played an important, if intermittent, role in national politics due to its size, proximity to the centre of government and to its power as a corporation. In the 18th century it began to play a much more continuous part in national politics - that is, a part not wholly restricted to times of crisis.

The North Briton, in its condemnation of ministerial encroachment upon the liberties of the subject and its praise of City politicians and the 'middling' men of the metropolis, is making its appeal to these men in the language of opposition

29. John Wilkes, "Speech in favour of Parliamentary Reform", House of Commons proceedings, 21 March 1776, in E.N. Williams (editor), The Eighteenth Century Constitution (London, 1960), p.215.

There is some dispute as to the sincerity of Wilkes' statement, since it is pointed out that he made no effort to follow up his speech and never again expounded such democratic ideas.

to government that they themselves had been using for forty years.

William Temple in the North Briton is unequivocal in his praise of the constitutional role of London merchants; "the merchants of London, in their collective capacity, possess more honest, useful, political knowledge, and understand more of the true interest of their country, than all the ministers of state ever discovered, or were masters of....They have made tyrants humble on their thrones, and dyed the scaffold with the blood of pernicious, wicked counsellors".³⁰ Wilkes slates the Auditor for "a great deal of low abuse on the City of London",³¹ and praises William Beckford, Lord Mayor of London, for interfering in national affairs by attempting to halt ministerial negotiations aiming to end the Seven Years' War.³²

The theme of the North Briton - that Englishmen's liberties are in danger - is supported by the authors' claims that

30. North Briton No.19, 9 October 1762. The body of this issue is comprised of a letter by William Temple of Trowbridge. Comments introducing the letter indicate that Wilkes and Churchill entirely support its sentiments. Nobbe, op. cit., pp.105-7, describes Temple's comments as "sweet flattery to the London merchant class which was opposing the peace policy of the administration.... The popularity Wilkes enjoyed in the City throughout his life is easy to understand when one reads such passages as this one."

31. North Briton No.20, 16 October 1762.

32. North Briton No.39, 26 February 1763.

popular discontent is a sure sign of arbitrary government. The authors write of a spirit of discord presently at large in the nation. The Briton is accused of abusing "the city of London, its first magistrate, and the people of England. This was the first wretch hired to ring the alarum bell of discord and sedition".³³ They attack the Earl of Bute and his minions, who, by their personal and political conduct, have struck "at the liberty of the subject [and] have weaned the affections of the people from those few members in the administration in whom they had reposed some little confidence....Under these circumstances, we cannot be surprised that the spirit of discord should go forth in the land, and the voice of opposition be strong in the streets".³⁴ George III, in his speech at the close of the parliamentary session in April 1763, referred to a spirit of concord and obedience to the laws as being essential to good order. In the North Briton's view this spirit of concord does not exist. Rather the ministry has alienated the people. The spirit of concord is in reality a spirit of subservience which "will never be extinguished but by the extinction of their power".³⁵

33. North Briton No.30, 25 December 1762.

34. North Briton No.44, 2 April 1763.

35. North Briton No.45, 23 April 1763.

Fortunately, Englishmen possess an "uncontroulable spirit of liberty, which the English dare to claim as their birthright, and in every age endeavour to make their first distinguishing characteristic".³⁶ "The genius of the people, and the form of the government"³⁷ remain to foil arbitrary monsters. The exercise of an Englishman's right to maintain "An opposition...to measures evidently calculated...to depress the noble spirit of freedom, by inculcating the meanest doctrines of the uncontroulable power, and independency of any single part of the British legislature, becomes the duty of every honest man, and every sincere lover of his country."³⁸ In the last resort, resistance, in Lockean terms,³⁹ is justified.

36. North Briton No.38, 19 February 1763.

37. North Briton No.39, 26 February 1763.

38. North Briton No.30, 25 December 1762.

39. The Lockean 'doctrine of resistance' appears in John Locke's Second Treatise of Civil Government (c.1690). Locke maintains that political power is only legitimate when exercised with the consent of the governed. The legislative is only a fiduciary power to act for the ends it was instituted to serve, and there remains in the people a supreme power to remove or alter the legislative when it acts contrary to the trust reposed in it. However, Locke is careful to say that even in the case of such resistance, the person and authority of the king are still secured. Thus ministers may be removed while the head of state remains in power. Peter Laslett, John Locke: Two Treatises of Government (London, 1960), pp. 285-446.

if the people's implements, to whom they have trusted the execution of those laws, or any power for their preservation, should convert such execution to their destruction, have [the people] not a right to intermeddle? Nay, have they not a right to resume the power they have delegated, and to punish their servants who have abused it? If our king can do no wrong, his ministers may, and are accountable to the people for their conduct. This is the voice of Locke, the voice of our laws, the voice of reason;⁴⁰

Thus the North Briton believes a spirit of liberty ought to arise in proportion to the weight of the grievance Englishmen feel. "Every legal attempt of a contrary tendency to the spirit of concord will be deemed justifiable resistance, warranted by the spirit of the English constitution."⁴¹ But the North Briton does not advocate rebellion as a practical solution to present problems. Instead it emphasises the necessity for constant and unimpeded popular criticism of ministers thought to be undermining the balance of the constitution and destroying English liberties.

Central to the freedom of expression which the North Briton regards as an Englishman's basic right is "The liberty of the press [which] is the birthright of a BRITON, and has by the wisest men in all ages been thought the firmest bulwark of the liberties of this country".⁴² Press criticism of ministers is not seditious libel, that is, an attack upon the constitution of the throne, but merely exercises the citizen's right

40. North Briton No.19, 9 October 1762.

41. North Briton No.45, 23 April 1763.

42. North Briton No.1, 5 June 1762.



CHARLES CHURCHILL

By Francis Cotes, as "he appeared in blue coat with metal buttons and gold lace on his hat and waistcoat." (See D.N.B.)

From a painting in the possession of John Lane

PLATE III.

Charles Churchill, editor and co-author of
the North Briton in 1762-3.

and duty to freely voice his opinions. "A wicked and corrupt administration must naturally dread this appeal to the world; and will be for keeping all the means of information equally from the prince, parliament and people."⁴³

Not only will wicked ministers set up their own propaganda press, but also they will attempt to muzzle the 'free' press. In aiming to conceal their evil machinations in this way, they in fact reveal to the populace that something sinister is afoot.

Charles Churchill voices this notion when he writes:

"The liberty of the press, that great bulwark of the liberties of the people, is so deservedly esteemed, that every attack made on it is productive of danger."⁴⁴ Wilkes and Churchill obviously felt that this incriminatory factor in ministerial repression of the press rendered them immune from direct governmental action. Wilkes also had great faith in the law to protect him and allow him to churn out his virulent attacks with impunity. "The laws of my country are my protection; my only patron is the PUBLIC, to which I will ever make my appeal, and hold it sacred."⁴⁵ Wilkes' unbounded confidence in the law

43. ibid.

44. North Briton No.27, 4 December 1762.

45. North Briton No.20, 16 October 1762.

protecting him unquestionably made the ministry reluctant to move against him.⁴⁶ When the ministry finally did act against Wilkes on the pretext of a seditious libel in the North Briton No.45, it must have confirmed for many North Briton aficionados the validity of the authors' claims that Englishmen's liberties and the English constitution were indeed in danger.

The North Briton clearly still sees the balanced constitution as the foundation of English liberties. Great emphasis is placed upon the people, but their role is to bring back both king and members of parliament to a proper sense of their duties and responsibilities within the existing constitutional structure, not to attempt to change that structure.

46. Nobbe., op. cit., p.109.

III. THE NORTH BRITON
AND THE WHIG TRADITION.

Canst Thou dismiss the hard unfeeling Dun
Barely by saying, Thou art Virtue's Son?
Or by base blund'ring Statesmen sent to jail,
Will MANSFIELD take this Virtue for thy bail?
Believe it not, the Name is in disgrace,
Virtue and TEMPLE now are out of place.

Charles Churchill, The Conference, 1763
iii, 37-42

In its constitutional concerns, arguments and remedies the North Briton is entirely backward-looking. It offers no original panacea for the ills it considers are besetting the constitution. Historical analogy is repeatedly used to describe present dangers from particular men and their measures. Arguments from history and tradition support its call to the people to restore the constitution to its former 'ideal' state. The people's right to do this is not based on precepts involving a fundamental alteration in the constitution by a 'radical' extension of their role in supervising government. Rather, it is based upon notions concerning the contractual origin of sovereignty believed to have been restated in the principles of the Revolution. The North Briton's 'people' encompass a broader social range than just 'men of property', but its political theory, with very slight modifications, still rests firmly

in the established constitutional argument of the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Two threads of political principle or attitude which comprise a substantial portion of this constitutional debate merge in the pages of the North Briton. The first of these can be called Whig, although its appropriateness as a term is often a matter of opinion. In light of the Namierite view of eighteenth century politics it might seem completely irrelevant to speak of Whig principles at all in the period from the Revolution to the first years of George III's reign. But there were 'parties' in England - connexions, interests and groups of many kinds. While these were, more often than not, held together by personal interest, family ties or political expediency rather than principle, the terms Whig and Tory had not lost all meaning. Principles often became confused, and at times the Tories seemed the popular and the Whigs the authoritarian faction.¹ But many men still thought

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1. Caroline Robbins, "Discordant Parties: A Study of the Acceptance of Party by Englishmen", Political Science Quarterly, Vol.73, No.4 (December, 1958), pp.520-521.

On 'party' see also - Ian R. Christie, "Was There a 'New Toryism' in the Earlier Part of George III's Reign?", Journal of British Studies, V, 1 (1956), pp.60-76; K.G. Feiling, The Second Tory Party 1714-1832 (London, 1959), Chapters I-VI; G.H. Guttridge, English Whiggism and the American Revolution (Berkeley, 1942, reprinted 1966), pp. 1-19; J.H. Plumb, The Growth of Political Stability in England 1675-1725 (London, 1967); Caroline Robbins, The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1961), pp.271-322; Basil Williams, The Whig Supremacy 1714-1760 (London, 1939, second (revised) edition 1962); and, of course, Sir Lewis Namier, The Structure of Politics At the Accession of George III (London, 1929, second edition 1957, reprinted 1968).

of themselves as Whigs or Tories and often used the opposing label to denigrate their opponents.

In the simplest terms the North Briton is Whiggish because it declares itself to be so, in its attitudes, language and solutions to contemporary problems. Its nostalgia for the government of the Whig connexion of the Pelhams, its clarion appeals on behalf of the Temple faction and Pitt and its bitter denunciation of Tories clearly colour it Whig.

In more theoretical terms it is Whiggish in its recourse to Revolution principles rather than to an imagined 'ancient' constitution. The North Briton believes the Revolution settlement of 1688-9 to have instituted a perfect constitutional form which needs no improvement, but to which present problems demand a return. It praises the Hanoverian succession and declares the Whigs to be ever the friends of the Brunswick family. Together with William Pitt, the Whig aristocracy rather than independent gentlemen are claimed to be best suited to hold the reins of power. And the North Briton supports the idea of Whig government by connexion to maintain the balance of the constitution against encroachment by Tory faction.

The Revolution of 1688-9 was a Whig victory although they were forced to make some concessions to the Tories. The sovereignty of parliament was vindicated and the constitu-

tion was seen to rest firmly on the balance of king, lords and commons. The events which followed up to the accession of George I in 1714 drove Whiggism away from theories of contractual resistance to the justification of parliamentary supremacy.² The Revolution was turned to partisan ends by Whigs who emphasized the role of parliament and particularly of the aristocratic element in it, and laid the foundations of government by 'management'. Having to live under a settlement which they could not justify in their traditional theoretical terms, many Tories came to terms with the Revolution. Nevertheless, the polemics of party distinction, modified from time to time to meet the needs of the day, remained and serve to some extent to elucidate the 'government' Whig principles to which the North Briton subscribes.

During the reigns of William and Anne, recent writers have argued, distinctions between Whig and Tory were still deeply felt and bitterly fought, though with altered emphases, both in parliament and the country.³ J.H. Plumb suggests that party division along traditional lines - the Whigs

2. Guttridge, op. cit., p.7.

3. eg: Geoffrey Holmes, British Politics in the Age of Anne (London, 1967); J.H. Plumb, The Growth of Political Stability in England 1675-1725 (London, 1967), Chapters III, IV, V.

standing for limited monarchy and toleration, the Tories for divine right and the Established church - was transformed by an increasing concern with political power. By about the mid-1690's the growing economic gulf between the great land-owning aristocracy and the gentry; new methods of constituency management necessitated by a burgeoning electorate; and the importance of patronage brought about by proliferation of offices in the government bureaucracy had all helped transform the Whigs into the party of the court and of management.

The failure of the Jacobite rebellion, when a few Tory leaders gambled on the futile hope of a Stuart restoration, ended hopes of political office for men like Bolingbroke and any politicians who still clung to the Tory appellation. All those who were in office, or had any chance of placement between 1715 and 1760 called themselves Whigs. The political giants of the age - Robert Walpole; James Stanhope; Charles Townshend; John, Lord Carteret; the Pelham brothers, Henry and the Duke of Newcastle; George Grenville and his brother Richard, Earl Temple; and even to some extent William Pitt, all professed support for Whig 'principles'. All were committed to the Hanoverian succession. After the accession of George II in 1727 this meant little, though in the first decade of the dynasty Jacobite activity had made it a principle of some importance. Tories who still sought to partake of royal patronage simply abandoned their old party tenets and

began calling themselves Whigs.⁴ Party labels lost definite meaning although the predilections of individuals could still distinguish Whigs from Tories. Even following the decline of Jacobitism after 1725, adherence to Hanover could still be a mark of distinction. Squire Western could retort to his Whiggish sister, "I had rather be anything than a courtier, and a presbyterian, and a Hanoverian too, as some people, I believe, are."⁵ Thus the rump of the Tories - principally independents with no desire for office - retained their identity; their politics, as exemplified by Squire Western, largely indistinguishable from those of independent 'country' Whigs. After 1715, however, most men of property saw the Revolution settlement as the great bastion of their liberties. With the exception of 'country' Whigs and die-hard Tories, all agreed that liberty and property had been secured by the balanced constitution established in 1689 and that this balance must be preserved come what may.

For 'government' Whigs entrenched in power during the reigns of George I and II maintenance of the constitutional balance was ensured by their continued supremacy. Any threat of upset to the balance would come from the king

4. John B. Owen, The Pattern of Politics in Eighteenth Century England (London, 1962, reprinted 1963), p.15.

5. Henry Fielding, Tom Jones (1749) (London, 1909, reprinted 1964), p.209.

The North Briton appears to make a more generous definition of 'the people' and returns to the Lockean notion of a remedy for bad government in the hands of the people. However, the North Briton in 1762-3 baulks at an outright advocacy of rebellion. Its solution is to have the people pressure the ministry and the king. The people have a right to form an opposition to government and may intermeddle in it and resist it. In the last resort they have the right to resume the power they have delegated to ministers, but not to openly revolt against the crown. It would appear that the authors of the North Briton read their Second Treatise on Civil Government more carefully than Whigs who used it to justify the Revolution after 1690.

The old distinction between Tories as the party of prerogative and Whigs as supporters of the liberties of the subject virtually disappeared after 1715 when the Whigs in power had no need of it. It too, is disinterred by the North Briton, to be reused against 'Tories' in the cause of out-of-office Whigs. Bute's ministry is declared a Tory faction and the authors are most explicit as to what they mean by Tory in their efforts to discredit the administration and scare readers into opposition.

A Tory in the true and original meaning of the word...was a maintainer of the infernal doctrine of arbitrary power and indefeasible right on the part of the sovereign, and of passive obedience and non-resistance on the part of the subject; ...the Tory maintained, that the King held his crown of none but

God; that he could not, by the most flagrant violation of the laws, by the most tyrannical exercise of his power, forfeit his right; that the people were made entirely for him, and that he had a right to dispose of their fortunes, lives, and liberties, in defence of his coronation oath, and the eternal laws of reason, without the subject having any right to demand redress of their grievances, or, if their demand was denied, to seek it in themselves.⁸

"Does not the Jacobite", asks the North Briton, "hold these very tenets?...Can we see these persons [the Bute ministry] preferred without uneasiness? Can we weight their principles, and not suspect their actions?...Can we without concern behold the danger of the constitution, and must we not tremble with apprehensions both for our sovereign and ourselves?"⁹

In 1688 the division of outlook between Whig and Tory on religious issues had been extreme. Many Whigs had hoped for a comprehensive church including most dissenters. This had not been realised. The religious settlement, although it granted toleration to dissenters, kept the confines of the Church of England as narrow as ever. Religion remained a bitterly fought issue in the reign of Anne and was still important in the first Hanoverian years - in fact it never became completely irrelevant. In 1762-3 the North Briton was able to resurrect Whig antagonism toward the old Church-

8. North Briton No.33, 15 January 1763

9. ibid.

Tory connexion as a weapon against the ministry. Of ecclesiastics it reminds readers: "History will supply us with numberless instances of their capacity for mischief, and their success in it. Most of the revolutions in Europe have been chiefly owing to the intrigues of churchmen,"¹⁰ Clerics are brought to preach the Tory doctrine of non-resistance. Equally dangerous is the use of church patronage as an instrument of corruption. In a satirical letter, signed "PRESBYTER", the North Briton advocates a presbyterian take-over of the Episcopacy, so that with "the terrors of the church co-operating with the secular arm [Bute's Scots], our power would be universal, absolute and perpetual."¹¹

In general terms the North Briton's praise of Whigs and damnation of Tories is unreserved. Whigs are stated to be "ever steadily attached to the cause of liberty, and to revolution principles."¹² But with the Whigs out of office, the authors ask: "On whom are we to depend? On those old enemies of liberty, those abettors of arbitrary power, those sworn foes of our constitution, the Tories?"¹³

10. North Briton No.10, 7 August 1762.

11. ibid.

12. North Briton No.20, 16 October 1762.

13. North Briton No.23, 6 November 1762.

Wilkes and Churchill are more specific in their praise of particular Whig leaders. The Duke of Newcastle, that "old, faithful servant of the crown"¹⁴...whose integrity was never yet called in question...[is] justly entitled to those marks of preference which he afterwards received".¹⁵ "The Duke of Devonshire has likewise nobly disdained...to be ranked among those of a faction, whose first view seems to establish the despotism his family has ever steadily and strenuously opposed."¹⁶ Mr Townshend's "superior abilities, and extensive knowledge, have been the admiration of mankind".¹⁷ "Lord Temple is a nobleman of fine parts and unsullied honour, who has shewn a thorough disinterestedness, a great love of liberty, and a steady attachment to the public, in every part of his conduct through life."¹⁸

The North Briton's most glowing tributes, however, are showered on William Pitt and his policies. The authors mention Pitt by name or defend and support his policies in at least fourteen numbers.¹⁹ The majority of these are

14. North Briton No.30, 25 December 1762.

15. North Briton No.8, 24 July 1762.

16. North Briton No.39, 25 December 1762.

17. ibid.

18. North Briton No.17, 25 September 1762.

19. North Briton Nos.1, 3, 6, 8, 9, 11, 14, 17, 18, 24, 25, 28, 30, 31.

concerned with the Bute ministry's negotiations to end the Seven Years' War. Pitt is praised for his single-minded pursuit of England's interests and his steadfast refusal to grant concessions to the French. Bute is damned for giving up what the 'patriot minister' and Englishmen have fought so long and hard to gain. The North Briton defends Pitt against attacks on him by ministry propagandists - principally Hogarth's cartoon The Times and the Briton's assertions that Pitt exercised a factious control in the last ministry. The North Briton No.25 denies Pitt's "desertion of the public at the most crucial period" while the war was in progress. Pitt's political style is also alluded to. "Merit alone", the reader is assured, "brought him into the ministry; merit alone kept him there....He was never afraid to bring the voice of the people to the ear of his Sovereign...he was such a bigot to the interests of the public, that no private connections whatever could induce him to prefer an undeserving person."²⁰ The North Briton No.31, published on 1 January 1763, contrasts Pitt's services to the nation against those of Rigby²¹ and further illustrates the authors' view of Pitt's

20. North Briton No.8, 24 July 1762.

21. Nobbe, op. cit., p.146, writes: "Critics unfriendly to Wilkes have suggested that he wrote this mischievous paper on Rigby because his hopes of preference had been disappointed by this henchman of the Duke of Bedford."

political stance. "Mr Pitt, almost alone in his age, seems to have possessed that great political virtue, the art of governing kingdoms to their own satisfaction...the palm of virtue and ability was readily yielded to him by every man of every party".²²

The North Briton's admiration for William Pitt and his policies introduces an apparent exception to the thread of Whig principle and the praise of Whiggism and Whig leaders in its pages. The authors' ultimate solution to contemporary problems rests with Pitt and Lord Temple, not just with any or all Whigs. The Duke of Newcastle and other Whigs are lauded for past services to the nation, but the main Whig groupings - the Newcastle faction (later Rockinghamites), the Bedfords, and the Grenvilles - are ignored as ministerial possibilities. Pitt cannot be called a 'government Whig' since he eschewed connexion and, before he 'came in' in December 1756, had spent most of his political career in opposition. Nevertheless, the North Briton's solution remains Whiggish because Temple was of Whig persuasion and Pitt, by association, can be regarded as being nominally so²³ from June 1757 even though the North Briton acknowledges his non-party posture.

22. North Briton No.31, 1 January 1763.

23. Guttridge, op. cit., p.15.

The most obvious reason for the North Briton's specific support of Temple and Pitt is that Wilkes sought preferment for himself on the coat-tails of his patron and his idol. Temple had seized on Wilkes as a protégé as early as 1754. Pitt's leaving Oakhampton for Bath in favour of Thomas Potter had left Wilkes free to stand for, and win, Aylesbury in 1757. With Pitt Secretary of State for the Southern Department and Temple Lord Privy Seal, Wilkes might well hope for advancement. He appears to have made a good job of organising and training the Buckinghamshire militia and it was not unreasonable that he should expect preferment as a consequence.²⁴ However, he was unsuccessful in his applications to Pitt for membership of the Board of Trade and the ambassadorship at Constantinople in 1760. When Pitt was forced out of office a year later by the opposition to his demand for an immediate declaration of war against Spain, and Temple resigned at the same time, Wilkes must have realised that all hope of the lucrative sinecure he so desperately needed was gone.

The North Briton's support of William Pitt raises the interesting question as to what extent the Great Commoner's own political convictions affected the authors' constitutional attitudes. References to Pitt's political 'ideology' are too scant and too generalised to be of much help. But there is mention of his lack of interest in control by influence,

24. Nobbe, op. cit., p.14.

his rejection of party connexion, his disinterested concern for the liberties of the subject and his single-minded desire to serve the nation first. And there is any amount of support for Pitt's 'patriotic' foreign policy.

Pitt, like Bolingbroke had been, was primarily a man of the 'Patriot' opposition. The basis of his political ideas extended back beyond the Revolution to the traditions of the seventeenth century 'classical republicans'. He took his stand on natural rights - liberty and justice for him were not the results of the Revolution settlement, but of older constitutional principles. Pitt's concern for the liberty of the subject manifested itself in his advocacy of what was, for that time, substantial constitutional change. He supported a partial rationalisation of the old parliamentary franchise, reforms in the law of seditious libel and greater freedom for dissenters. Yet it is hard to find in Pitt a consistent and coherent political policy or set of principles. He was never a party leader and he liked to appear as a man without any political connexion, in the sense of preferring measures to men and of eschewing 'influence' with personal objectives. In fact, of course, Pitt could not have moved in eighteenth century politics without the aid of some family or political grouping.²⁵

25. Peter Brown, The Chathamites: A Study in the Relationship Between Personalities and Ideas in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century (London, 1967), p.24.

Pitt entered parliament in 1735 for his brother's constituency, and his most consistent associates were the Grenville family, headed by the first Earl Temple.

Perhaps the best way to view Pitt is as a 'Patriot' or 'commonwealthman' forced out of his chosen mould by the exigencies of political reality. As such, he forms an intriguing link between the Whig and 'country' attitudes that meld in the North Briton.

The North Briton is 'Whiggish' in 1762-3 because the Whigs it admired most were out of office and because Pitt had been a member of the Whig ministry which had lost power shortly after George III's accession. But more basically, the North Briton reflects many of those 'country' attitudes which Pitt had shared during his long years in opposition to the 'Whig connexion'.

IV. THE NORTH BRITON
AND THE 'COUNTRY' TRADITION: ANTECEDENTS.

Tho' Scandal would OUR PATRIOT'S name impeach,
And rails at virtues which she cannot reach,
What honest man but would with joy submit
To bleed with CATO, and retire with PITT?

Charles Churchill, Night, 1761
xxxiv, 367-370

The second strand of constitutional thought contributing to the North Briton's political attitudes is that which was held by men who called themselves 'Real Whigs' (Caroline Robbins's 'commonwealthmen').¹ These ideas were also held by men variously described by themselves and others as 'Patriots', 'Old' or 'True Whigs' and sometimes

1. See Caroline Robbins, The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman, op. cit., pp.3-16.

"A real whig," said Lord Molesworth in 1705, "is one who is exactly for keeping up to the strictness of the true old Gothic constitution, under the three estates of king (or queen), lords and commons; the legislature being seated in all three together, the executive entrusted with the first, but accountable to the whole body of the people, in case of mal-administration." The Principles of a Real Whig (reprinted; London, 1775) p.6, quoted by Guttridge, op. cit., p.6.

even Tories. In recent years the concept of a 'country' view² has been used to describe this framework of constitutional attitudes characteristic of the opposition to government under the first two Georges. These attitudes had their English roots in the seventeenth century, although they developed their own special form in the eighteenth century. In the early 1760's, having previously been employed against the Walpole-Pelham connexion, they were coupled with Whig views and turned against the administration through the pages of the North Briton.

At their most superficial level 'country' views were those held by independent country gentlemen who from the late seventeenth century increasingly found themselves excluded from the exercise of political power and by 'middling' City men who sought a greater voice in national affairs. Country gentlemen and City men regarded themselves best situated to represent the national interest by virtue of their property or their interest in national affairs. They saw government becoming dominated by corrupt oligarchies

2. The term 'country' does not originate from any rural location of its supporters. 'Country' attitudes and ideas were expressed by the 'middling' citizens of London as well as by country gentlemen. (See Lucy S. Sutherland, "The City of London in Eighteenth-Century Politics", Essays Presented to Sir Lewis Namier, Richard Pares and A.J.P. Taylor (editors) (London, 1956), pp. 57-60). The term comes from the traditional notion of a fundamental dichotomy of political interest between the 'court' and the 'country' at large.

which controlled the king, 'influenced' parliament and pursued selfish, uneconomic policies at home and expensive adventures abroad for which country gentlemen had to pay through land tax and City men had to pay for through excise and disruption of trade. These were the politics of exclusion and discontent which were supported by the framework of constitutional attitudes now called the 'country' view.

The 'country' view of eighteenth century English politics shared with the Whigs the fundamental assumption that a balanced constitution or mixed government existed in three separate parts - king, lords and commons.³ But whereas for the Whigs the 'balanced constitution' became a justification for the maintenance of the status quo, in the hands of the 'Real Whigs' it came to be used as an argument for change. The equal balance preserved Englishmen's 'ancient liberties' by helping prevent encroachment by any one part upon the others - most especially encroachment by the executive, or 'court', upon the independence of the legislature which represented the country at large. A great danger in the system lay in the designs of selfish ministers and counsellors, who, in their governing capacity, were thought to be constantly seeking to extend their power. This they attempted by mis-

3. Weston, op. cit., pp.1-3, 142-3.

leading the monarch and by 'placing' their minions in positions of power; by influencing - and thus abrogating the independence of - members of the legislature; by retaining hordes of pensioners; by maintaining a standing army and a burdensome national debt; and by introducing ever-higher taxation and excise duties. By these means they were thought to be diminishing liberties enshrined in the principles of the 'ancient constitution'; countering the will of the people; and reducing the independence of men of property.

In relation to government, upholders of the 'country' view saw themselves in a supervisory rather than supportive capacity requiring ceaseless vigilance to prevent the pernicious designs of 'court faction'. Placemen and pensioners had to be kept to a minimum or abolished. Ministers and members had to avoid the coils of factious politics. Parliament had to be elected frequently by 'free' voters. A militia of independent freeholders should be maintained to counter the corrupting influence and burdensome cost of a standing army.

Recent research⁴ has shown that behind 'country'

4. eg: Bernard Bailyn, The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1967), Chapter II; J.G.A. Pocock, "Machiavelli, Harrington and English Political Ideologies in the Eighteenth Century", William and Mary Quarterly, Third Series, Vol. XXII, No. 4 (October 1965), pp. 566-570; Robbins, The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman, op. cit., Chapters II-VII; Weston, op. cit., Chapters I-IV.

attitudes supporting the politics of discontent lies a coherent, though complex body of political theory which appears in a multitude of writings in the century after the Restoration. J. G. A. Pocock shows the indigenous origins of the 'country' view to lie in the works of James Harrington (1611-1677) and the 'classical republicans', in those of the 'neo-Harringtonians' associated with the Earl of Shaftesbury, and with Bolingbroke.⁵

Niccolo Machiavelli (c.1537) had advocated a mixed government composed of the three pure forms - monarchy, aristocracy and democracy - as being least prone to degeneration.⁶ Harrington accepted Machiavelli's view of the form of mixed government, but criticized "the Prince of Politicians" for suggesting that frequent references to "first principles" rather than maintenance of the "ballance [sic] of Dominion or Propriety" was the key to governmental

5. The English 'classical republicans' (Caroline Robbins's 'Whig canon') are named by Pocock as "Milton, Andrew Marvell, Algernon Sydney, Harrington himself and a number of lesser figures [who] were impressed by the stability of Venetian constitutional forms and through them by the Greek and Renaissance Italian theorists of mixed government," Pocock, op. cit., p.551.

"The term 'neo-Harringtonians' may best be employed to denote specifically the group of intellectuals who were active around and after the year 1698. They included Henry Nevile...Andrew Fletcher...Walter Moyle...John Toland...John Trenchard...Thomas Gordon." Pocock, op. cit., p.573.

6. Niccolo Machiavelli, "The Discourses", Bernard Crick (editor), Machiavelli: The Discourses (London, 1970), p.109.

stability.⁷ The so-called 'neo-Harringtonians' seized upon Harrington's notion of an Equal Commonwealth rendered stable by independent freeholders 'balancing' the distribution of dominion (property)⁸ and carried it into the eighteenth-century in the form of the balanced constitution.⁹ Warned by Machiavelli of the corrupting tendency of power they advocated strict supervision of the 'court' by an independent parliament; an idea which is strongly expressed in the North Briton when it stresses the importance of the role of an "independent parliament where every man might vote according to his conscience" as the "guardian of liberty".

To Harrington's restatement of the idea of a balanced constitution the 'neo-Harringtonians' added the notion, which

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7. Felix Raab, The English Face of Machiavelli: A Changing Interpretation 1500-1700 (London, 1964), p.190.
 8. James Harrington, "The Commonwealth of Oceana" (1656), Charles Blitzer (editor), The Political Writings of James Harrington (Indianapolis, 1955), pp.68-72.
 9. The idea of the balanced constitution had indigenous roots. It can be traced back to the writings of Sir John Fortesque in the fifteenth century. It was subsequently much strengthened by the influence of classical and Machiavellian ideas. The 'balanced' constitution was stable in that it combined the three pure forms of government. Monarchy, aristocracy or democracy, standing alone, were thought to be all inclined toward degeneration. But together each checked the corrupting tendencies in the others. These three forms of government could be institutionalised in king, lords and commons, each embodying one of the three pure forms.

Harrington had not held, of an ancient Gothic constitution which had been subverted by absolute monarchs. One of the main means of subversion was thought to have been the standing army. Harrington's assertion of the freeholders' right to bear arms in self-defence was used to justify a militia of independent property-owners to counteract the corrupting dangers of such a force. The belief that a standing army might be used to enforce despotism appears to have quickly given way to fears of its use as an instrument of corruption.¹⁰ It is as such an instrument that the North Briton expresses its fear of a standing army. Not only does the paper voice general fears as to the corrupting influence of a standing army, but also it specifies particular contemporary instances of this happening.

The dominant suspicion of power received further emphasis in Robert Molesworth's An Account of Denmark (1694) which details the process by which free states succumb to absolutism.¹¹ However, the basis of the 'country' view opposing 'court' politics had been clearly established before the Revolution. Andrew Marvell's Growth of Popery and Arbitrary Government (1677) warns against 'court' corruption; condemns placemen, including military officers, and office-seekers for their

10. For Shaftesbury's influence in inciting a fear of standing armies, see Pocock, *op. cit.*, pp.558-564.

11. On Molesworth, see Robbins, *op. cit.*, The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman, pp.393-394.

loyalty to crown and faction rather than to parliament; praises independent country gentlemen as proof against corruption through their loyalty only to the country; and advocates short and frequent parliaments as a safeguard against faction and corruption.¹² While concern for the 'middling' men of the City has replaced praise of independent country gentlemen and the authors do not suggest specific constitutional reforms, Marvell's warning against 'court' corruption and his condemnation of placemen and faction are reiterated as a major theme in the North Briton.

The Machiavellian emphasis on constant reference to the 'first principles' of the constitution to safeguard mixed government from executive ambitions made a smooth transition to the eighteenth century insistence on the absolute independence of its parts and the strict supervision of government. The Machiavellian solution was echoed in calls by the 'Real Whigs' for a return to the pristine state of the 'ancient constitution'. In the North Briton these calls are modified to become a Whiggish appeal for a return to Revolution principles.

12. Pocock, op. cit., p.564.

By the late 1690's growth of professional royal government and a financial bureaucracy¹³ increased fears of burgeoning 'court' power. The national debt became, for the advocates of independency, the hated symbol of government by money.¹⁴ The North Briton, playing on the 'middling' City men's jealousy of great financiers and government contractors, is exploiting fears held since the 1690's of a government-monopolized financial juggernaut which excluded the smaller man from affairs.

Seventeenth century opposition to real or imagined 'court' dominance of national affairs and the concern to maintain the independence of parliament were passed to the eighteenth century bolstered by Lockean assertions of government 'in trust' from the people.¹⁵ They were truly 'country'

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13. For the growth of professional government and a financial bureaucracy; and a view of corruption in the 'public' services and the army and navy, see J.H. Plumb, The Growth of Political Stability in England 1675-1725, op. cit., pp. 112-122.
14. "...the national debt rose inexorably, from just over £3,000,000 in 1691 to £54,000,000 in 1720, so the government's dependence on the monied men of the City became more and more pronounced." Derek Jarrett, Britain 1688-1815 (London, 1965), reprinted 1967, p.33.
15. Recent views suggest that the dominance of Locke on eighteenth century political thinking has been exaggerated. eg: Pocock, op. cit., pp.580-1, and John Dunn, "Locke in England and America in the Eighteenth Century", John Locke: Problems and Perspectives, J.W. Yolton (editor) (London, 1969), p.80. However, the North Briton clearly acknowledges Locke as the author of its views on the people's right to supervise government.

ideas, for their employment as a doctrine of opposition clearly transcended 'party' lines. They were Whig in the 1670's and 1680's, Tory in the 1690's in Harley's New Country Party, and confined to neither Whig nor Tory party in Anne's reign.¹⁶ John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon - called Independent Whigs - expounded 'country' ideas in a series of essays known in their collected forms as the Independent Whig and Cato's Letters which appeared in London from 1720 to 1723 and were reprinted many times during the next twenty-five years.¹⁷ While the anticlericalism of the Independent Whig is its most striking characteristic, the chief topic of Cato's Letters is the 'country' concern with the liberty of

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16. Geoffrey Holmes, British Politics in the Age of Anne, op. cit., pp.55-63, 120, 146-7: references quoted by Peters, op. cit., p.721.
17. The following passage is particularly illustrative of the 'country' view: "Forget therefore, Gentlemen, the ...Distinction of...Whig and Tory; ...the Meaning of them is gone; ...I own myself to be one of those, whom one side in Respect, and the other in Contumely, call Whigs; and yet I never discoursed with a candid and sensible Tory, who did not concur with me in Opinion, when we explained our Intentions. We both agreed in our notions of old English Liberty....We both honoured King GEORGE...not to attempt to make him...a Patron of Parasites, and a Lord of Slaves....We wished the old Names of Distinction and Faction buried deep..." Cato's Letters: or Essays on Liberty Civil and Religious And other important Subjects (The Fourth Edition, corrected, London, 1737), Vol.III, pp.9-10.

the subject. The authors decry 'court' power, financial corruption and party. They believe government should be for the general good, and that if it becomes corrupted the people have a right to resist its enactments. Anticipating the North Briton, they hold that popular discontents arise when the people are oppressed. In the North Briton's view the necessity for the people to assert their liberties rises in proportion to the grievances they feel. Bute's ministry is oppressing the people, and therefore the people have a right and a duty to resist the impositions placed upon them.

Against the long rule of Walpole there gradually gathered an opposition group variously composed of self-avowed Tories and Jacobite sympathizers, discontented Whigs excluded from the great connexion, and 'Patriots' who rejected party, oligarchy and even the Revolution settlement. The views of this group covered a wide range of political opinion and they were united only by their common opposition to Walpole and their adherence to Leicester House, the court of the Prince of Wales. Their ammunition against Walpole and the Pelhams was drawn from traditional 'country' prejudices against corruption, faction and 'government by money'. Naturally enough, these opposition Whigs, 'Patriots' and Tories under the first two Georges argued that it was the Whig governing connexion that was controlling the king and unbalancing the constitution.

The North Briton, at the same time as it eulogizes the old Whig connexion, uses the same kind of 'country' arguments in opposition to the Bute administration that opponents had employed against the Walpole-Pelham-Newcastle ministries! Thus the North Briton stands in the curious position of supporting both viewpoints and is content to ignore this paradox in its 'Whig-country' statements.

'Country' opposition to Walpole in the decade from 1726 was exemplified by the Tory politician, writer and philosopher, Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke.¹⁸ Bolingbroke's contributions to the weekly or semi-weekly Craftsman represent the high-point of 'neo-Harringtonian' 'country' ideas. The Craftsman quotes freely from Trenchard and Gordon, decrying the corruption of the age and warning of incipient autocracy. Employing savage ridicule and satire, the Craftsman attacks both Walpole's 'rule by money' and his placemen and pensioners sitting in parliament. It refers to corrupt and scheming ministers seeking to end the independence of parliament and ruin the balance of the constitution. It points to the absence of a standing army in reigns of liberty and the association of a standing army with reigns of the spirit of faction.¹⁹ The promise of the

18. Bailyn, op. cit., p.39: For recent assertions of Bolingbroke's importance in the shaping of eighteenth century opposition 'country' attitudes, see; Isaac Kramnick, Bolingbroke and His Circle: The Politics of Nostalgia in the Age of Walpole (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1968), Chapter I; and Pocock, op. cit., pp.552, 572, 578.

19. Kramnick, op. cit., p.26

Glorious Revolution to renew and restore the constitution to its original principles of liberty, it holds not to have been fulfilled. The enemies of the constitution, it believes, now govern supreme. Bolingbroke's solution to England's problem lies not in party, but in patriots. Like Pitt he thought independent men of better parts must serve their country, opposing corruption and promoting good government. In Bolingbroke's view they should be led by the virtuous example of a Patriot King returning to the original principles of the constitution and ignoring men of private interest and gain.²⁰ The North Briton would largely agree with Bolingbroke's analysis of political evils but has little faith in Bolingbroke's solution of a 'patriot king', particularly when the king was George III, who, ironically, had pretensions of 'patriot kingship'. The North Briton supports the elevation of the 'Patriot' Pitt, but believes that it is the people and not the king who will take the initiative.

'Country' attitudes emerged from ideas into actions when metropolitan opposition to Walpole, led by Sir John Barnard, M.P., allied itself with Bolingbroke's 'Patriots' to oppose the Excise Bill in 1733, the Septennial Act in 1734 and the Gin Act of 1736. The Excise Bill was withdrawn after Walpole had been besieged at the doors of parliament by London crowds chanting "No slavery - no excise - no

20. ibid., p.34.

wooden shoes!"²¹ On the fall of Walpole in 1742 it was widely believed that sweeping constitutional changes would follow. Possible courses of action described by a contemporary observer illustrate 'country' influences in popular political thinking. "...no two men agreed upon what was necessary; - some thinking that all security lay in a good place bill...some in a pension bill. Some in triennial parliaments...some for a reduction of the Civil List."²² In 1753, two years after Bolingbroke's death, 'country' ideas were again used to rationalize anti-ministry agitation against the Jewish Nationalisation Act. The 'Jew Bill' came to be seen as a danger to the constitution. After it had been passed public outrage caused the Pelham ministry to repeal its own act.

From the mid-1750's the 'country' tradition found a sophisticated and articulate outlet in the City voice of the Monitor. The Monitor supported Pitt and his policies from 1756. In 'country' terms it appealed to 'middling' merchants and tradesmen against all ministers who succeeded Pitt. In it the people are warned of dangers to the constitution and exhorted to exercise their rights. The

21. George Rudé, Paris and London in the Eighteenth Century, op. cit., p.322.

22. Faction Detected by the Evidence of Facts, (Lord Percival, later Earl of Egmont), (1743), pp.69-70; quoted by Sutherland, The City of London in Eighteenth-Century Politics, op. cit., p.63.

Monitor advocates further regulation of places and pensions, the abolition of "small and almost extinct" boroughs, shorter parliaments and the securing of property qualifications for members. The North Briton ran concurrently with the Monitor during 1762-3, two years before the Monitor's demise. In many of their political views the two papers were complementary and mutually supportive. There is any amount of evidence of the North Briton's hatred of corruption, faction, standing armies and government by money. In the North Briton's solutions, however, unlike the Monitor, the 'radical' potential of the supervisory role of the people is barely realised.

V. THE NORTH BRITON
AND THE 'COUNTRY' TRADITION: APPLICATION.

Besieg'd by Men of deep and subtle arts,
Men void of Principle, and damn'd with parts,
Who saw his weakness, made their King their tool,
Then most a slave, when most he seem'd to rule;
Taking all public steps for private ends,
Deceiv'd by Favourites, whom he call'd friends,
He had not strength enough of soul to find
That Monarchs, meant as blessings to Mankind,
Sink their great State, and stamp their fame undone,
When, what was meant for all, they give to One;

Charles Churchill, Gotham, 1764
xxxvii, 455-464

The North Briton clearly reveals its 'country' antecedents in its obsessive fear of government power and the instruments of corruption which it employs. The North Briton reflects the 'country' emphasis on the basic conflict between governed and governors and the need for supervision by way of constant vigilance on the part of the people in order to preserve the balance of the constitution.

For Wilkes and Churchill the principal threat posed to the constitutional framework comes from the deliberate attempts of non-Whig ministers to enlarge their own power unconstitutionally. Ministerial abuse of power endangering constitutional liberties comes in several guises. The most potent, in the North Briton's view, is the corrupting use of

places and pensions to ensure parliamentary, church, and army acquiescence in the measures and principles of "self-interested, ambitious and designing ministers". Warning its readers by historical analogy, the North Briton describes how the destructive work of corruption was accomplished in Rome when "her ambitious nobles, however at times checked by the integrity and wisdom of the senate...beat down that barrier against lawless rule, to bribe, intimidate, and at last to proscribe the most spirited, experienced, and honest friends of the public".¹

Pensions themselves are not necessarily bad. But when they are used to extend ministerial and Court influence in a way that corrupts parliament and exhausts the nation's finances then they endanger the constitution. "Pension" is defined as: "a gratuity during the pleasure of a prince, for services performed, or expected to be performed, to himself or the State".² Pitt's pension, although given him not for services rendered, but "to ruin him in the opinion of mankind" is acceptable because "the grant is not during pleasure, and therefore cannot create any undue, unconstitutional influence".³ Pensions conferred for services expected to be performed, such as those given to

1. North Briton No.37, 12 February 1763.

2. North Briton No.12, 12 August 1762.

3. ibid.

"the sixteen peers, who represent the whole nobility of Scotland...as having votes in the house of Lords"⁴ are regarded with alarm. Now that the Earl of Bute heads the administration there is nothing which Scots "ought not to hope for from the favour and patronage of [their] worthy countryman".⁵

Political appointments ensure that "Religion [is] now made a political state-engine, to serve the vilest and most infamous purposes of an abandoned minister, or of a wicked and corrupt administration".⁶ Proof of this is found in the "recent" assertion of a divine who "maintained from the pulpit, that to resist the minister was to resist the king; to resist the king was to resist God, and that the consequences of such resistance must be damnation".⁷ A satirical letter advises Lord Bute: "As to the military, you are

4. ibid.

5. North Briton No.4, 26 June 1762, suggests that the appointment of Bute has opened the way for wholesale Scottish preferment to "all places of greatest honour and profit in England". This will, the authors claim, lead to an extension of Tory/Jacobite principles and the impoverishment of England as money is drained into Scotland.

6. "A FRAGMENT, which, it is said, was found in the pocket of one of the printers, who were apprehended by the king's messengers, supposed to have been intended for No.46 of THE NORTH BRITON to be published on the following Saturday, April 30, 1763." (Editor's note).

7. North Briton No.44, 2 April 1763.

desired, dear cousin, to make it as numerous as possible. There will be ample provision for your needy countrymen".⁸ In the past "Even the courts of justice have in the most dangerous way...been drawn in to second the dark views of an arbitrary ministry".⁹ Nor does the North Briton's concern for ministerial corruption abate with Bute's resignation. In an apparent fit of pique at the passing over of "Mr Pitt and of the great Whig families", the last issue denounces Grenville and his ministers for having "leagued together...for the plunder of the state, for the maintenance of their own power, and the securing to themselves, their relations, and even new-born babes, the most desirable possessions and reversions in the kingdom....Not one of these men possessed...the affections or even the good opinion of the people".¹⁰

Another method by which a minister may abuse the power entrusted to him is by influencing the king and controlling the Court to his own advantage. The chief exponent of this tactic is the 'royal favourite', against whom the North Briton warns king and people. Commenting on the fatal consequences of a prince resigning himself to the absolute direction of a

8. North Briton No.38, 19 February 1763.

9. North Briton No.1, 5 June 1762.

10. North Briton No.46, 12 November 1763.

favourite as described in the Monitor of 22 May and 12 June (1762), the North Briton affirms the "tyrannous slavery of a court minion" by showing how Mortimer - later Earl of March - "assumed the authority of the king...[and] filled all the offices of State with his creatures".¹¹ The reign of a favourite is certain to sow discord among the people, bring misfortune to the country, alienate the old nobility and pervert the honour of the crown. The implication is that this is precisely the present state of affairs. The power of the favourite (Bute) is measured by the manner in which the king was "brought to give the sanction of his sacred name to the most odious measures, and to the most unjustifiable publick declarations".¹²

Intimidation of subjects is a further manifestation of ministerial abuse of power. The North Briton is in no doubt as to the origins of the people's burdens. "When the relentless hand of power shall seem to fall too heavy on the subject, we know to whom the rigour ought to be imputed. The world will place it always...to the account of

11. North Briton No.5, 3 July 1762.

12. North Briton No.45, 23 April 1763, refers to the king's speech at the close of the session of parliament, 20 April 1763, in which George III praised the preliminary articles of peace to end the Seven Years' War and alluded to the great part played in the negotiations by his ministers.

an hot-brained and over-bearing minister."¹³ Ministries have used the courts and press licensing to quiet their opponents in the past. Now, in the case of the Monitor, some concerned persons have been confined and its printer intimidated by "a severe, private reprimand".¹⁴ The North Briton, however, will not be "intimidated by the menaces of a wicked minister", and will, "according to the old English plan of liberty...praise or censure any minister, according to their behaviour".¹⁵

Party division, or faction, is yet another means by which wicked ministers endanger the constitution. Variouslly labelled "Scottish" or "Tory faction" or "court party" in the North Briton, this evil instrument is held responsible for "sowing

13. North Briton No.37, 12 February 1763.

14. North Briton No.26, 27 November 1762. On 6 November 1762 the Earl of Halifax signed and issued a general warrant for the apprehension of Arthur Beardmore, Entinck and others concerned in the editing, publishing and printing of the Monitor. The warrant cited eight issues of the Monitor, describing them as "very seditious papers...which contain gross and scandalous reflections and invectives, upon His Majesty's government, and upon both Houses of Parliament". It must have given Wilkes pause to discover that he had written at least two numbers of the Monitor cited in the warrant. Nobbe, op. cit., pp.130-1.

15. North Briton No.26, 27 November 1762.



JOHN WILKES
Drawn from life and etched by W. Hogarth

PLATE IV.

John Wilkes in the Court of Common Pleas.

A caricature by William Hogarth, 1763.

discord, and infusing...groundless jealousies among the people".¹⁶ Faction jeopardizes the constitution by selfishly seeking to enlarge its power; by mismanaging national affairs; by dismissing good ministers; by working in opposition to the interests of the public; and by squandering public monies in its own interest.¹⁷ Faction employs "hired scribblers" to propagate its sinister doctrines. The Auditor and the Briton are accused of aiding and abetting "faction and falsehood". The North Briton is "grieved to see the genius of Hogarth... sunk to a level with the miserable tribe of party etchers... entering into the poor politics of the faction of the day".¹⁸

Whigs, because they represent the true interests of the country, cannot be deemed corrupt or factious. Accusations that "the late minister" (Pitt) was guilty of "dictating to

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16. North Briton No.30, 25 December 1762. The writer suggests that 'faction' may be defined in several ways. It may mean "nothing more than a party formed in a state without any consideration had to the principles on which it is formed, the means by which it is conducted, and the ends to which it is directed; in this sense the word is equally applicable to all parties". But 'faction' may also mean, "according to the general acceptation, a set of men formed into a party on seditious and selfish principles, and determined, at all events, to oppose the friends and sacrifice the interests of the public to their own base and private views". It is this latter definition which the North Briton applies to the "creatures" of Lord Bute.
17. North Briton No.30, 25 December 1762: and No.45, 23 April, 1763.
18. North Briton No.17, 25 September 1762.

and magisterially controlling all the other servants of the crown and all public offices",¹⁹ are dismissed. Nor did Pitt "endeavour to sow the seeds of discord, or to kindle the least spark of faction".²⁰ Unfortunately, "The friends of liberty and the Revolution have now no countenance but from the nation. The Tory faction is triumphant... the present ministry is a faction of a dangerous nature".²¹

The North Briton echoes the 'country' fear of a standing army - a permanent professional military force - controlled by the ministry rather than by parliament and used by despotic ministers, possibly to intimidate the people, but more dangerously to serve as an instrument of ministerial power through corruption. By maintaining a standing army, particularly in peace-time, ministers have an effective medium in which to extend their influence by means of sinecures, places and pensions. Their design is even more reprehensible when they conceal their perfidy under the pretence of economy. The North Briton commends the peace-time employment on half-pay of serving officers of merit as an equitable measure of economy. But the minister's design is revealed when it is discovered that "every regiment has been completed as to its complement of officers, even a few days only before it has

19. North Briton No.25, 20 November 1762.

20. ibid.

21. North Briton No.30, 25 December 1762.

been broke, and chiefly by Scotsmen. This has...put the nation to an enormous expense, without a pretence of the least service to the public".²² Mr Gilbert Elliot's ten year old son receiving a captain's commission is cited as an example of how public money is used to extend ministerial influence. The most sinister aspect of the affair is the fact that "The list of the army has been entirely printed off; but was ordered to be suppressed", not only to conceal from the public the size of the list, but also to hide "the names of several Scots [therein] who distinguished themselves under the banner of rebellion in 1745".²³ In its penultimate issue, the North Briton is scathingly direct in its attack upon corruption in Bute's army economies.

Many unnecessary expenses have been incurred, only to increase the power of the crown, that is, to create more lucrative jobs for the creatures of the minister...to give the whole power of the army to the crown, that is, to the minister. Lord Ligonier is now no longer at the head of the army; but lord B - e, in effect is: I mean, that every preferment given by the crown will be found still to be obtained by his enormous influence, and to be bestowed only on the creatures of the Scottish Faction.²⁴

22. North Briton No.42, 19 March 1763.

23. ibid. The North Briton associates Wellbore Ellis, the new Secretary at War and other member from Aylesbury, with suppression of the list of the army. Nobbe, op. cit., p.190 comments: "From the propagandists point of view the case was conclusive, for the minister's policy was an offence against the King, the public, and his own professed principles of economy."

24. North Briton No.45, 23 April 1763.

The North Briton does not make a direct plea for the establishment of an effective militia as a safeguard against the danger to the constitution implicit in the maintenance of a standing army. Nevertheless, a militia is regarded, in 'country' terms, as a constitutional safeguard. A militia "has delivered us from the ignominy of foreign hirelings, and the ridiculous fears of invasion"²⁵ - both presumably supported by the administration to extend its control over subjects. George Townshend is applauded "for his patriot labours in establishing this great plan of internal defence, a Militia...a brave and well-disciplined body of Englishmen, at all times ready and zealous for the defence of the country, and of its laws and constitution".²⁶

Ministerial corruption through want of economy and financial mismanagement are hazards to the constitutional equilibrium that extend far beyond corruption in the army. The obsessive 'country' fear of 'government by money' is reiterated by the North Briton's charges that the Bute administration is guilty of the "plunder of the nation" and "extortion on the people". For adherents to the 'country' view the national debt had become the hated symbol of mis-

25. North Briton No.17, 25 September 1762.

26. ibid.

management and financial corruption in government. The 'sinking fund' instituted by Walpole to absorb the national debt had been repeatedly ransacked over the years to finance ministerial measures and Wilkes and Churchill revive old fears of the permanency of the national debt. "The sinking fund," charges the North Briton, "is so wantonly clogged, and groans under so many anticipations, that, it is confessed, it will not produce anything to the public for above seven years".²⁷

The charge that friends of the government are receiving favourable treatment is also repeatedly made. Referring to an advance of interest in favour of subscribers to a government loan, the North Briton accuses the minister of giving "among his creatures, and the tools of his power; £350,000 which was levied on the public...to buy friends...with the nation's money....In this manner is the nation insulted by the falsest pretences to economy, and her wealth squandered among the tools of an insolent, all-grasping ministry".²⁸

In the case of an extension of the laws of excise by the imposition of a cider tax, the danger to constitutional liberties is even more explicit. The North Briton echoes the

27. North Briton No.43, 26 March 1763.

28. North Briton No.42, 19 March 1763.

fears of 1733 when it contends that "The very word [excise] is hateful to an English ear, and the new doctrines introduced by that most grievous system of laws have, in good measure, repealed the most favourite law of our constitution, which has ever been considered as the birthright of an Englishman, and the sacred palladium of liberty; I mean the trial by JURY".²⁹ The North Briton is fearful that not only will the cider tax laws diminish the right to trial by jury, but also may be used to victimize property-owners who do not support the ministry. Selfish justices or commissioners, to whom generally there is no appeal, may decide on excise cases. And an Englishman's home is no longer his castle when "an insolent exciseman...may force his way into the house of any private gentleman, or farmer or freeholder, who may have been guilty of voting contrary to a ministerial mandate".³⁰

Thus Wilkes and Churchill are convinced that "The mismanagement of the finances of this kingdom must give the deepest concern to every thinking man, who really loves his

29. North Briton No.43, 26 March 1763.

30. ibid. These were the same arguments that had been used by opponents of Walpole's Excise Bill in 1733. In that year popular agitation had succeeded in bringing about abandonment of the Bill. In March 1763 the outcry against any extension of government power by increased financial control and further proliferation of offices creating more opportunities for corruption and influence failed to stop Bute getting the Bill through both Houses. Steven Watson, The Reign of George III 1760-1815 (London, 1960), pp.90-93.

country". They charge Lord Bute with being "a most corrupt and profuse master, who must be totally ignorant of our finances...nothing could have equalled the impudent pretence the minister has made to superior ability and economy, but his ignorance, fraud and profusion, to a degree scarcely to be credited".³¹

The authors of the North Briton are in no doubt as to the origin of the present dangers to the constitution and to Englishmen's liberties. The divisive spirit which stalks the nation is entirely due to mismanagement of domestic and foreign affairs stemming from the incapacity and villainy of an insolent minister "or the foul dregs of his power, the tools of corruption and despotism".³² The North Briton's solution lies firstly, and without much conviction, in its appeal to the king, who, it is hoped, "in compliance with the wishes of a whole people, will, before it is too late deprive a set of men (unfavoured by heaven and despised on earth) of the power they have...infamously abused".³³ Its principal remedy lies in its faith in the people recognizing the source of the present unhappy state of affairs and exercising their constitutional prerogative to maintain freedom by bringing in

31. North Briton No.43, 26 March 1763.

32. North Briton No.45, 23 April 1763.

33. North Briton No.9, 31 July 1762.

"Mr Pitt and...the great Whig families, the ancient and the only real friends of the House of Brunswick".³⁴

A major omission from the 'country' view in the pages of the North Briton is the absence of 'country' solutions - place and pension bills, shorter parliaments, and other remedies to what are essentially traditional opposition problems. For the North Briton these appear to have been unnecessary because it sees present difficulties being resolved by a return to Whig rule.

In its political solution the North Briton in 1762-3 sees the role of the people as being to bring in the Whigs. Only as the decade progressed and disillusionment with the Whigs grew, did 'the people' tend to discard this Whig solution and turn their attention to their own role as an end rather than just as a means to restoring the balance of the constitution. Thus the North Briton can be seen as standing at the parting of the ways; on the one hand looking backward to a more conservative Whig solution, on the other hinting at the possibility of a more 'radical' solution to come.

34. North Briton No.46, 12 November 1763.

VI. THE 'WHIG-COUNTRY' VIEW
AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURY 'RADICALISM'.

Hail, LIBERTY! a glorious word,
In other countries scarcely heard,
Or heard but as a thing of course,
Without or Energy or Force;
Here felt, enjoy'd, ador'd, she springs,
Far, far beyond the reach of Kings,
Fresh blooming from our Mother Earth;
With Pride and Joy she owns her birth
Deriv'd from us, and in return
Bids in our breasts her Genius burn;
Bids us with all those blessings live
Which LIBERTY alone can give,
Or nobly with that Spirit die,
Which makes Death more than Victory.

Charles Churchill, The Duellist, 1764
xii, 175-188

Both Whig and 'country' political ideas emerge from bodies of constitutional attitude and opinion rather than from firm theories or ideologies. Nevertheless, it is possible to juxtapose some of the main ideas of both streams of thought in the North Briton to illustrate the way they coalesce to become a 'Whig-country' view.

Belief in a social contract as the origin of government is common to both Whig and 'country' thought and appears in the North Briton strengthened by the authority of Locke. The notion of a right of resistance to arbitrary government, based in contractual ideas, is also common to both. However,

for 'government Whigs' justifying their parliamentary supremacy under the first two Georges, this right was regarded as being held and exercised for the people by their representatives. The 'country' view adheres to the more basic form, suggesting that the people themselves have the right to oversee the government in which they have placed their trust and to act if they find the trust has been abused. The North Briton reflects this latter viewpoint.

The idea of a balanced constitution of king, lords and commons was almost universally accepted in eighteenth century England. Both the Whig and 'country' views express fears that this balance is in jeopardy, although they differ from time to time as to the source of the danger. Whigs in power accepted aristocratic 'management' of government and by way of justification held that constitutional imbalance originated in the king, as they believed it had before the Revolution. The 'country' attitude was that political power is by nature corrupting and that government by influence and connexion which excluded meritorious and disinterested men was the chief danger to the constitution. The North Briton draws from both these arguments. In the Whiggish sense the constitution is imperilled, not so much by the king himself, as by a court, or worse, a 'favourite', controlling the king. The North Briton, in opposition, also echoes the obsessive 'country' fear of the power and corrupting influence of ruling faction.

Whig and 'country' views differed as to the origins and basic nature (but not form) of the balanced constitution. 'Country' proponents believed its origins to lie in an ancient Gothic constitution based on natural rights and fundamental law. They held that the Revolution settlement had not necessarily instituted a perfect constitution and that it was capable of improvement. Hence they could appeal for a Machiavellian return to 'first principles' and were justified in proposing constitutional reform. The Whig view, to which the North Briton subscribes, was that Englishmen's liberties and constitutional perfection had been secured in 1688-9 and that a return to Revolution principles was all that was necessary.

The instruments of ministerial corruption revealed by the North Briton - standing army, navy, church, parliamentary influence, and finance; and the means of corruption - places, pensions, sinecures and financial favouritism; are clearly the bogeys of oppositionism and had been detected by 'country' men long before Wilkes and Churchill discovered them. So too had the belief that ministerial oppression caused discontent among the people. The authors of the North Briton echo Cato (and anticipate Burke) when they ask whether; "ever since the SCOT [Lord Bute] assumed the reins of government....Are we not now become an uneasy, distrustful, and divided people?"¹

1. North Briton No.30, 25 December 1762.

In its understanding of who 'the people' are, the North Briton is probably closer to the 'country' than to the narrower Whig view. In 1765 Dr John Brown wrote that the people of Britain in their collective body comprised "the landed gentry, the beneficed country clergy, many of the more considerable merchants and men in trade, the substantial and industrious freeholders or yeomen."² Five years later Burke described 'the people' in an almost identical fashion. Both omit the 'middling sort' of the metropolis to whom 'country' ideas were so important and at whom the North Briton directed its propaganda.

The North Briton draws its 'Whig-country' political principles from two streams of constitutional thought, the first essentially conservative, the second potentially 'radical'. It uses the ideas it has borrowed from the political and constitutional controversy of the past one hundred years to promote an interest which, it seems fair to suggest, at least in the case of Wilkes, was entirely personal. This does not prove, of course, that Wilkes and Churchill did not believe in the ideas they expressed through the pages of the North Briton. But the evidence of a Churchill poem, published the same month as the North Briton No.46, certainly

2. Thoughts on Civil Liberty (London, 1765), p.87; quoted in Guttridge, *op. cit.*, p.12.

suggests an element of cynicism or self-reproach on the part of its author.

To feign a red-hot zeal for freedom's cause,
 To mouth aloud for liberties and laws,
 For public good to bellow all abroad,
 Serves well the purposes of private fraud.
 Prudence, by public good intends her own;
 If You mean otherwise, You stand alone.
 What do we mean by Country and by Court,
 What is it to Oppose, what to Support?
 Mere words of course, and what is more absurd
 Than to pay homage to any empty word!
 MAJORS and MINORS differ but in name,
 Patriots and Ministers are much the same;
 The only diff'rence, after all their rout,
 Is that the One is in, the Other out.³

The sincerity of the authors of the North Briton in 1762-3 is not really at issue. It is mentioned because it touches upon an important aspect of the North Briton's relationship to the emergence of eighteenth century 'radicalism' and upon the nature of its 'Whig-country' view.

Mrs Peters describes the 'country' rhetoric of constitutional dissatisfaction as having within it a strong potential for the development of a genuine 'radicalism'.⁴ In its suspicion of government, its political language, its advocacy of popular supervision and its call on the people to redress the constitutional imbalance, the North Briton shows that it

3. Charles Churchill, "The Conference" (XIII, 153-166), November 1763; in Douglas Grant (editor), The Poetical Works of Charles Churchill (London, 1956), p.237.

This book is also the source of the portions of poems by Charles Churchill which introduce the Chapters of this dissertation.

4. Peters, op. cit., p.723.

has this potential. But even though, in time and terminology, the North Briton is on the brink of 'radicalism', it does not take the plunge. While the 'country' view was also often a purely backward-looking reaction, it seems reasonable to suggest that the North Briton's conservatism, in contrast to the incipient 'radicalism' Mrs Peters discerns in the Monitor, is a product of Whiggish influences and intentions.

The North Briton regards the Revolution as having ushered in the halcyon years of the Whig supremacy and has no reason, while it clings to Pitt and Temple, to propose specific reforms that might improve upon the settlement of 1688-9. The North Briton's appeals to the people are associated with established notions of the popular origins and ends of government. There is no suggestion that people's rights extend beyond their accepted role of ensuring parliamentary independence. The liberties that the North Briton so loudly proclaims to be in danger are nowhere supported by calls for a redistribution of seats to ensure a more equal representation. There is no suggestion that constituents should instruct or direct their members of parliament. The North Briton professes to abhor corruption, but makes no plea for shorter parliaments as a means to inhibit the spread of 'influence'. It inveighs against placemen and pensioners, yet does not call for place and pension bills. Most significant of all, it decries faction but advocates a return to Whig rule.

It seems fairly obvious, then, that there is some justification for believing that the reactionary tenor of the North Briton's political ideas, on the eve of the emergence of 'radicalism', stems from its view that the enemies of liberty are the enemies of Whiggism. And from the hope that liberty, a correct constitutional balance, and preferment, will follow Bute's departure and the accession of Pitt and Temple.

This line of argument may be further extended to suggest that the Whiggish element in its 'Whig-country' view is the factor inhibiting the emergence of a potentially more 'radical' attitude in the North Briton in 1762-3. While there remained hope that Pitt and Temple might effect a Whiggish solution there was simply no reason for the North Briton to suggest any remedy other than one based in the experience and traditions of the past seventy-five years. The validity of this contention is borne out by a brief examination of two further issues of the North Briton, the first and last numbers of "the Continuation", published in 1768 and 1771.

The North Briton No.47 bears little trace of former Whig influences and indeed shows a marked inclination toward 'radicalism'. Its 'country' views are expressed with more urgency. And its view of the role of the people and their relation to ministers shows signs of extending beyond Lockean

ideas. The almost neurotic 'country' obsession with power is forcefully restated in calls for the liberty of the press. It quotes David Hume to support the idea that the threat of popular action must be employed to check the advance of arbitrary power. "...the spirit of the people must frequently be roused, in order to curb the ambition of the court; and the dread of rousing this spirit must be employed to prevent that ambition."⁵ More important as an aspect in the growth of 'radicalism', it implies a rejection of the old Harringtonian basis of the balanced constitution. When the North Briton No.47 states that "from the people nothing is to be feared; from the ministry every thing is to be apprehended", it is tacitly abandoning the idea of mixed government comprised of three pure forms - the democratic element of which, if dominant, was formerly held just as prone to degeneration (into anarchy) as were the monarchic (into tyranny) and the aristocratic (into oligarchy). Implicit here is a basic notion distinguishing eighteenth century 'radicalism' from earlier political ideas. The people are no longer regarded simply as a balancing factor in the equipoise of the constitution, but are seen as a dominant entity separate from the parts of the mixed constitution. Likewise, the idea of 'government in trust' is extended to give the people a much clearer domi-

5. North Briton No.47, 10 May 1768.

nance over ministers. "Ministers are at best but the servants of the public...like all other servants, they are accountable to their masters".

While it might, with validity, be argued that the events of 1763 to 1768 - the affair of the North Briton No. 45 and the Wilkes election disputes which stimulated heightened metropolitan agitation against ministerial 'oppression' - prompted "the Continuation" to take a more 'radical' line, it also seems likely that growing disillusionment with the Whigs and the paper's abandonment of its former Whig solution left the way clear for this to happen. Peter Quennell quotes a contemporary journalist, writing in 1764, as saying that Wilkes flattered himself "with no foolish hopes, not even on the restoration of Mr Pitt and the Whigs."⁶ Wilkes himself observed in 1767: "You can never trust any ministers in our country. The Whigs in power turn Tories;"⁷ It can be assumed from the evidence of "the Continuation" launching into print three months after Wilkes' return from exile in February 1768 (even though he was in prison from May 1768 to April 1770),

6. Quennell, op. cit., p.214.

7. John Almon, Memoirs of an Eminent Bookseller (London, 1790), p.45; quoted in Christie, "Was There a "New Toryism" in the Earlier Part of George III's Reign?", op. cit., p.62.

and from No.47's detailed description and praise of Wilkes' actions, that the North Briton continued to reflect his ideas. Thus its rejection of a Whig solution is not to be wondered at. Wilkes spent over four years in the wilderness largely unsupported by his former political allies. He received a small allowance from Temple and although the Rockingham Whigs in 1765-6 had been willing to make Wilkes a small pension and pay his debts, they did not see fit to revoke his outlawry or in any way assist in his return. Nor did the administration of his old hero, Pitt, now Earl of Chatham, lift a finger to help Wilkes in 1766-8. Chatham's rejection of Wilkes' overtures in October 1766 led the outlaw to violently denounce his former idol, which temporarily estranged him from Temple as well. If all this did not dispose Wilkes to the expedient of seeking his rehabilitation through the people, the spectacle of Pitt entering the House of Lords, his dismal inadequacy as a government leader, and the internecine struggles within the ministry must have done so.

By 1768 it was clear that for Wilkes, the North Briton and the nation, a Pitt-Whig solution was not viable. Freed from reliance on Pitt the old 'Whig-country' view was discarded. The North Briton fell back on 'country' tenets and the path to 'radicalism' lay open.

Of the fact that this path was trod by "the Continuation" there can be no doubt. A perusal of the North Briton No.218 reveals ideas unquestionably 'radical' in the eighteenth century. Honest and independent members are no longer regarded as sufficient to ensure a complete representation of the people. Corruption is not "likely to be removed by any partial expedients of dissolution, or the adoption of triennial, or even annual elections".⁸ What is needed is a "British Parliament new-modelled" by a "more equable representation...the several counties, including the towns, returning a number of members, proportional to the number of electors". More significant than proportional representation is the democratic implication in the idea that "the heavy burden of taxes, which the labouring poor ultimately sustain in all countries, one would think also might obtain for them some consequence in the system of government".

Progressing from an advocacy of constitutional restoration to a call for a "British Parliament new-modelled", the North Briton shows it had truly overcome its 'Whig-country' ancestry to take a place in the early statement of eighteenth century English 'radicalism'. Other writers have shown that

8. North Briton No.218, 11 May 1771.

this 'radicalism' had its origins in the rhetoric of opposition to government in the century before 1762. The North Briton in 1762-3, like most of this oppositionism, shows a strong reliance both upon traditional ideas of a balanced constitution and the ideas whose development and reinterpretation created a new concept of the 'balance' which provided the foundation of early 'radicalism'. The emphasis on the role of the people was to lead to demands for a reform of the democratic part of the constitution and a wider definition of that role, which, in turn, threatened to undermine the whole classical concept of mixed government of monarchy, aristocracy and democracy. However, a study of the North Briton shows that it was not until its oppositionism could free itself from reliance on Whig interpretations and from dependence on Whig politicians that this potential could be realised.

LIST OF SOURCES.*

Arrangement.

- I. Editions of the North Briton.
- II. Other Contemporary Sources. This section includes writings on politics, poems, and letters, written in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and published then or later.
- III. Secondary Sources concerned primarily with the North Briton, its authors, and the 1760s.
- IV. Other Secondary Sources. This section contains more general works than those in Section III.

*Since this is a list of sources and not a bibliography, only works to which reference is made in footnotes are listed here.

I. EDITIONS OF THE NORTH BRITON.

"The NORTH BRITON

from No. I to No. XLVI

by John Wilkes, Esq. C. Churchill,

and other

Noble Defenders of Civil and Religious Liberty

with several

USEFUL and EXPLANATORY NOTES

to which is added, AN APPENDIX,

containing

A full and distinct account of the Prosecution
against John Wilkes, Esq., as Publisher of the
Forty-fifth Number of the NORTH BRITON

with a

Collection of all that Gentleman's Tracts and Papers
relating to the NORTH BRITON, and ESSAY ON WOMAN
From the year 1762, to the present Time

Compiled by William Bingley,

During the time of his imprisonment in the KING'S BENCH

THE SECOND EDITION

LONDON

Printed for W. Bingley, at No. XXXI, in Newgate-street

M.DCC.LXXI (1771)."

"The NORTH BRITON...to No. CCXVIII...."

Microfilm made by Hawker Siddley Electronics from unsourced
copies of the North Briton. Microfilm held in the Library
of the University of Waikato.

An undated, bound edition of miscellaneous numbers of the North Briton, held in the Library of the University of Waikato. On the front fly-leaf of this edition the following is written in ink:

"I think Mr Wilkes's Fine was -
a Thousand Pounds and Twenty two Months Imprisonment
in which is 45 letters -

or

One Thousand pounds & Twenty two months Imprisonment
in which is 45 letters -

Jos. Deighton's".

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