THE MORAL ECONOMY OF THE ENGLISH CROWD IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY*

He that withholdeth Corn, the People shall curse him: but Blessing shall be upon the Head of him that selleth it.

Proverbs xi. 26.

I

WE HAVE BEEN WARNED IN RECENT YEARS, BY GEORGE RUDÉ AND OTHERS, against the loose employment of the term "mob". I wish in this article to extend the warning to the term "riot", especially where the food riot in eighteenth-century England is concerned.

This simple four-letter word can conceal what may be described as a spasmodic view of popular history. According to this view the common people can scarcely be taken as historical agents before the French Revolution. Before this period they intrude occasionally and spasmodically upon the historical canvas, in periods of sudden social disturbance. These intrusions are compulsive, rather than self-conscious or self-activating: they are simple responses to economic stimuli. It is sufficient to mention a bad harvest or a down-turn in trade, and all requirements of historical explanation are satisfied.

Unfortunately, even among those few British historians who have added to our knowledge of such popular actions, several have lent support to the spasmodic view. They have reflected in only a cursory way upon the materials which they themselves disclose. Thus Beloff comments on the food riots of the early eighteenth century: "this resentment, when unemployment and high prices combined to make conditions unendurable, vented itself in attacks upon corn-dealers and millers, attacks which often must have degenerated into mere excuses for crime".[1] But we search his pages in vain for evidence as to the frequency of this "degeneration". Wearmouth, in his useful chronicle of disturbance, allows himself one

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[1] M. Beloff, *Public Order and Popular Disturbances, 1660-1714* (Oxford, 1938), p. 75.

explanatory category: "distress".[2] Ashton, in his study of food riots among the colliers, brings the support of the paternalist: "the turbulence of the colliers is, of course, to be accounted for by something more elementary than politics: it was the instinctive reaction of virility to hunger".[3] The riots were "rebellions of the belly", and there is a suggestion that this is somehow a comforting explanation. The line of analysis runs: elementary — instinctive — hunger. Charles Wilson continues the tradition: "Spasmodic rises in food prices provoked keelmen on the Tyne to riot in 1709, tin miners to plunder granaries at Falmouth in 1727". One spasm led on to another: the outcome was "plunder".[4]

For decades systematic social history has lagged in the rear of economic history, until the present day, when a qualification in the second discipline is assumed to confer, automatically, proficiency in the first. One cannot therefore complain that recent scholarship has tended to sophisticate and quantify evidence which is only imperfectly understood. The dean of the spasmodic school is of course Rostow, whose crude "social tension chart" was first put forward in 1948.[5] According to this, we need only bring together an index of unemployment and one of high food prices to be able to chart the course of social disturbance. This contains a self-evident truth (people protest when they are hungry): and in much the same way a "sexual tension chart" would show that the onset of sexual maturity can be correlated with a greater frequency of sexual activity. The objection is that such a chart, if used unwisely, may conclude investigation at the exact point at which it becomes of serious sociological or cultural interest: being hungry (or being sexy), what do people do? How is

[2] R. F. Wearmouth, *Methodism and the Common People of the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1945), esp. chaps. 1 and 2.

[3] T. S. Ashton and J. Sykes, *The Coal Industry of the Eighteenth Century* (Manchester, 1929), p. 131.

[4] Charles Wilson, *England's Apprenticeship, 1603-1763* (London, 1965), p. 345. It is true that the Falmouth magistrates reported to the duke of Newcastle (16 Nov. 1727) that "the unruly tinners" had "broke open and plundered several cellars and granaries of corn". Their report concludes with a comment which suggests that they were no more able than some modern historians to understand the rationale of the direct action of the tinners: "the occasion of these outrages was pretended by the rioters to be a scarcity of corn in the county, but this suggestion is probably false, as most of those who carried off the corn gave it away or sold it at quarter price". Public Record Office (hereafter P.R.O.), S.P., 36/4/22.

[5] W. W. Rostow, *British Economy in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1948), esp. pp. 122-5. Among the more interesting studies which correlate prices, harvests, and popular disturbance are: E. J. Hobsbawm, "Economic Fluctuations and Some Social Movements", in *Labouring Men* (London, 1964) and T. S. Ashton, *Economic Fluctuations in England, 1700-1800* (Oxford, 1959).

their behaviour modified by custom, culture, and reason? And (having granted that the primary stimulus of "distress" is present) does their behaviour contribute towards any more complex, culturally-mediated function, which cannot be reduced — however long it is stewed over the fires of statistical analysis — back to stimulus once again?

Too many of our growth historians are guilty of a crass economic reductionism, obliterating the complexities of motive, behaviour, and function, which, if they noted it in the work of their marxist analogues, would make them protest. The weakness which these explanations share is an abbreviated view of economic man. What is perhaps an occasion for surprise is the schizoid intellectual climate, which permits this quantitative historiography to co-exist (in the same places and sometimes in the same minds) with a social anthropology which derives from Durkheim, Weber, or Malinowski. We know all about the delicate tissue of social norms and reciprocities which regulates the life of Trobriand islanders, and the psychic energies involved in the cargo cults of Melanesia; but at some point this infinitely-complex social creature, Melanesian man, becomes (in our histories) the eighteenth-century English collier who claps his hand spasmodically upon his stomach, and responds to elementary economic stimuli.

To the spasmodic I will oppose my own view.[6] It is possible to detect in almost every eighteenth-century crowd action some legitimizing notion. By the notion of legitimation I mean that the men and women in the crowd were informed by the belief that they were defending traditional rights or customs; and, in general, that they were supported by the wider consensus of the community. On occasion this popular consensus was endorsed by some measure of licence afforded by the authorities. More commonly, the consensus was so strong that it overrode motives of fear or deference.

The food riot in eighteenth-century England was a highly-complex form of direct popular action, disciplined and with clear objectives. How far these objectives were achieved — that is, how far the food riot was a "successful" form of action — is too intricate a question to tackle within the limits of an article; but the question can at least be posed (rather than, as is customary, being dismissed unexamined with a negative), and this cannot be done until the crowd's own objectives are identified. It is of course true that riots were triggered off by soaring prices, by malpractices among dealers, or by hunger. But

[6] I have found most helpful the pioneering study by R. B. Rose, "Eighteenth Century Price Riots and Public Policy in England", *International Review of Social History*, vi (1961); and G. Rudé, *The Crowd in History* (New York, 1964).

these grievances operated within a popular consensus as to what were legitimate and what were illegitimate practices in marketing, milling, baking, etc. This in its turn was grounded upon a consistent traditional view of social norms and obligations, of the proper economic functions of several parties within the community, which, taken together, can be said to constitute the moral economy of the poor. An outrage to these moral assumptions, quite as much as actual deprivation, was the usual occasion for direct action.

While this moral economy cannot be described as "political" in any advanced sense, nevertheless it cannot be described as unpolitical either, since it supposed definite, and passionately held, notions of the common weal — notions which, indeed, found some support in the paternalist tradition of the authorities; notions which the people re-echoed so loudly in their turn that the authorities were, in some measure, the prisoners of the people. Hence this moral economy impinged very generally upon eighteenth-century government and thought, and did not only intrude at moments of disturbance. The word "riot" is too small to encompass all this.

II

As we speak of the cash-nexus which merged through the industrial revolution, so there is a sense in which we can speak of the eighteenth-century bread-nexus. The conflict between the countryside and the town was mediated by the price of bread. The conflict between traditionalism and the new political economy turned upon the Corn Laws. Economic class-conflict in nineteenth-century England found its characteristic expression in the matter of wages; in eighteenth-century England the working people were most quickly inflamed to action by rising prices.

This highly-sensitive consumer-consciousness co-existed with the great age of agricultural improvement, in the corn belt of the East and South. Those years which brought English agriculture to a new pitch of excellence were punctuated by the riots — or, as contemporaries often described them, the "insurrections" or "risings of the poor" — of 1709, 1740, 1756-7, 1766-7, 1773, 1782, and, above all, 1795 and 1800-1. This buoyant capitalist industry floated upon an irascible market which might at any time dissolve into marauding bands, who scoured the countryside with bludgeons, or rose in the market-place to "set the price" of provisions at the popular level. The fortunes of those most vigorous capitalist classes rested, in the final analysis, upon the sale of cereals, meat, wool; and the first two

must be sold, with little intermediary processing, to the millions who were the consumers. Hence the friction of the market-place takes us into a central area of the nation's life.

The labouring people in the eighteenth century did not live by bread alone, but (as the budgets collected by Eden and David Davies show) many of them lived very largely on bread. This bread was not altogether wheaten, although wheaten bread gained ground steadily over other varieties until the early 1790s. In the 1760s Charles Smith estimated that of a supposed population of about six millions in England and Wales, 3,750,000 were wheat-eaters, 888,000 ate rye, 739,000 ate barley, and 623,000 oats.[7] By 1790 we may judge that at least two-thirds of the population were eating wheat.[8] The pattern of consumption reflected, in part, comparative degrees of poverty, and, in part, ecological conditions. Districts with poor soils and upland districts (like the Pennines) where wheat will not ripen, were the strongholds of other cereals. Still, in the 1790s, the Cornish tinners subsisted largely on barley bread. Much oatmeal was consumed in Lancashire and Yorkshire — and not only by the poor.[9] Accounts from Northumberland conflict, but it would seem that Newcastle and many of the surrounding pit villages had by then gone over to wheat, while the countryside and smaller towns subsisted on oatmeal, rye bread, maslin,[10] or a mixture of barley and "gray pease".[11]

Through the century, again, white bread was gaining upon darker wholemeal varieties. This was partly a matter of status-values which became attached to white bread, but by no means wholly so. The problem is most complex, but several aspects may be briefly mentioned. It was to the advantage of bakers and of millers to sell white bread or fine flour, since the profit which might be gained from such sales was, in general, larger. (Ironically, this was in part a consequence of paternalist consumer-protection, since the Assize of Bread was intended to prevent the bakers from taking their profit from the bread

[7] C. Smith, *Three Tracts on the Corn-Trade and Corn-Laws*, 2nd edn. (London, 1766), pp. 140, 182-5.

[8] See Fitzjohn Brand, *A Determination of the Average Depression of Wheat in War below that of the Preceding Peace etc.* (London, 1800), pp. 62-3, 96.

[9] These generalizations are supported by "replies from towns as to bread in use", returned to the Privy Council in 1796 in P.R.O., P.C.1/33/A.87 and A.88.

[10] For maslin (a mixed bread of several cereals) see Sir William Ashley, *The Bread of our Forefathers* (Oxford, 1928), pp. 16-19.

[11] See C. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 194 (for 1765). But the mayor of Newcastle reported (4 May 1796) that rye bread was "much used by the workmen employed in the Coal Trade", and a reporter from Hexham Abbey said that barley, barley and gray pease, or beans, "is the only bread of the labouring poor and farmers' servants and even of many farmers", with rye or maslin in the towns: P.R.O., P.C.1/33/A.88.

of the poor; hence it was in the baker's interest to make as little "household" bread as possible, and that little nasty.[12]) In the cities, which were alert to the dangers of adulteration, dark bread was suspect as offering easy concealment for noxious additives. In the last decades of the century many millers adapted their machinery and bolting-cloths, so that they were not in fact able to dress the flour for the intermediary "household" loaf, producing only the finer qualities for the white loaf and the "offal" for a brown loaf which one observer found "so musty, griping, and pernicious as to endanger the constitution".[13] The attempts of the authorities, in times of scarcity, to impose the manufacture of coarser grades (or, as in 1795, the general use of the "household" loaf), were attended by many difficulties, and often resistance by both millers and bakers.[14]

By the end of the century feelings of status were profoundly involved wherever wheaten bread prevailed, and was threatened by a coarser mixture. There is a suggestion that labourers accustomed to wheaten bread actually could not work — suffered from weakness, indigestion, or nausea — if forced to change to rougher mixtures.[15] Even in the face of the outrageous prices of 1795 and 1800-1, the resistance of many of the working people was impermeable.[16] The Guild Stewards of Calne informed the Privy Council in 1796 that "creditable" people were using the barley-and-wheat mixture

[12] Nathaniel Forster, *An Enquiry into the Cause of the High Price of Provisions* (London, 1767), pp. 144-7.

[13] J. S. Girdler, *Observations on the Pernicious Consequences of Forestalling, Regrating and Ingrossing* (London, 1800), p. 88.

[14] The problem was discussed lucidly in [Governor] Pownall, *Considerations on the Scarcity and High Prices of Bread-corn and Bread* (Cambridge, 1795), esp. pp. 25-7. See also Lord John Sheffield, *Remarks on the Deficiency of Grain occasioned by the bad Harvest of 1799* (London, 1800), esp. pp. 105-6 for the evidence that (1795) "there is no household bread made in London". A Honiton correspondent in 1766 described household bread as "a base mixture of fermented Bran ground down and bolted, to which is added the worst kind of meal not rang'd": *Hist. MSS. Comm., City of Exeter*, series lxxiii, p. 255. On this very complex question see further S. and B. Webb, "The Assize of Bread", *Economic Jl.*, xiv (1904), esp. pp. 203-6.

[15] See e.g. Lord Hawkesbury to the duke of Portland, 19 May 1797, in P.R.O., H.O. 42/34.

[16] See R. N. Salaman, *The History and Social Influence of the Potato* (Cambridge, 1949), esp. pp. 493-517. Resistance extended from the wheat-eating south and midlands to the oatmeal-eating north; a correspondent from Stockport in 1795 noted that "a very liberal subscription has been entered into for the purpose of distributing oatmeal & other provisions among the poor at reduced prices — This measure, I am sorry to say, gives little satisfaction to the common people, who are still clamorous & insist on having wheaten bread": P.R.O., W.O.1/1094. See also J. L. and B. Hammond, *The Village Labourer* (London, 1966 edn.), pp. 119-23.

required by authority, and that the manufacturing and labouring poor with large families

> have in general used barley bread alone. The rest, making perhaps something about one-third of the poor manufacturers and others, with smaller families (saying they could get nothing *but bread*) have, as before the scarcity, eat nothing but baker's bread, made of wheatmeal called seconds.[17]

The Bailiff of Reigate reported in similar terms:

> ... as to the poor labourers who have scarce any sustenance but bread, & from the custom of the neighbourhood have always eaten bread made of wheat only; amongst these I have neither urged nor wished a mixture of bread, least they should not be nourished sufficiently to support their labour.

Those few labourers who had tried a mixture "found themselves feeble, hot, & unable to labour with any degree of vigor".[18] When, in December 1800, the government introduced an Act (popularly known as the Brown Bread Act or "Poison Act") which prohibited millers from making any other than wholemeal flour, the response of the people was immediate. At Horsham (Sussex),

> A number of women ... proceeded to Gosden wind-mill, where, abusing the miller for having served them with brown flour, they seized on the cloth with which he was then dressing meal according to the directions of the Bread Act, and cut it into a thousand pieces; threatening at the same time to serve all similar utensils he might in future attempt to use in the same manner. The amazonian leader of this petticoated cavalcade afterwards regaled her associates with a guinea's worth of liquor at the Crab Tree public-house.

As a result of such actions, the Act was repealed in less than two months.[19]

When prices were high, more than one-half of the weekly budget of a labourer's family might be spent on bread.[20] How did these cereals pass, from the crops growing in the field, to the labourers' homes? At first sight it appears simple. There is the corn: it is harvested, threshed, taken to market, ground at the mill, baked, and

[17] P.R.O., P.C.1/33/A.88. Compare the return from J. Boucher, vicar of Epsom, 8 Nov. 1800, in H.O. 42/54: "Our Poor live not only on the finest wheaten bread, but almost on bread alone".

[18] P.R.O., P.C.1/33/A.88.

[19] P.R.O., P.C.1/33/A.88; *Reading Mercury*, 16 Feb. 1801. Hostility to these changes in milling, which were imposed by an Act of 1800 (41 Geo. III, *c.*16) was especially strong in Surrey and Sussex. Complainants produced samples of the new bread to a Surrey J.P.: "They represented it as disagreeable to the taste (as indeed it was), as utterly incompetent to support them under their daily labour, & as productive of bowelly complaints to them and to their children in particular": Thomas Turton to Portland, 7 Feb. 1801, H.O. 42/61. The Act was repealed in 1801: 41 Geo. III, *c.*2.

[20] See especially the budgets in D. Davies, *The Case of Labourers in Husbandry* (Bath, 1795); and in Sir Frederick Eden, *The State of the Poor* (London, 1797). Also D. J. V. Jones, "The Corn Riots in Wales, 1793-1801", *Welsh Hist. Rev.*, ii (4)(1965), App. 1, p. 347.

eaten. But at every point within this process there are radiating complexities, opportunities for extortion, flash-points around which riots could arise. And it is scarcely possible to proceed further without sketching out, in a schematic way, the paternalist model of the marketing and manufacturing process — the traditional platonic ideal appealed to in Statute, pamphlet, or protest movement — against which the awkward realities of commerce and consumption were in friction.

The paternalist model existed in an eroded body of Statute law, as well as common law and custom. It was the model which, very often, informed the actions of Government in times of emergency until the 1770s; and to which many local magistrates continued to appeal. In this model, marketing should be, so far as possible, *direct*, from the farmer to the consumer. The farmers should bring their corn in bulk to the local pitching market; they should not sell it while standing in the field, nor should they withhold it in the hope of rising prices. The markets should be controlled; no sales should be made before stated times, when a bell would ring; the poor should have the opportunity to buy grain, flour, or meal first, in small parcels, with duly-supervised weights and measures. At a certain hour, when their needs were satisfied, a second bell would ring, and larger dealers (duly licensed) might make their purchases. Dealers were hedged around with many restrictions, inscribed upon the musty parchments of the laws against forestalling, regrating and engrossing, codified in the reign of Edward VI. They must not buy (and farmers must not sell) by sample. They must not buy standing crops, nor might they purchase to sell again (within three months) in the same market at a profit, or in neighbouring markets, and so on. Indeed, for most of the eighteenth century the middleman remained legally suspect, and his operations were, in theory, severely restricted.[21]

From market-supervision we pass to consumer-protection. Millers and — to a greater degree — bakers were considered as servants of the community, working not for a profit but for a fair allowance. Many

[21] The best general study of eighteenth-century corn marketing remains R. B. Westerfield, *Middlemen in English Business, 1660-1760* (New Haven, 1915), ch. 2. Also see N. S. B. Gras, *The Evolution of the English Corn Market from the Twelfth to the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass., 1915); D. G. Barnes, *A History of the English Corn Laws* (London, 1930); C. R. Fay, *The Corn Laws and Social England* (Cambridge, 1932); E. Lipson, *Economic History of England*, 6th edn. (London, 1956), ii, pp. 419-48; L. W. Moffitt, *England on the Eve of the Industrial Revolution* (London, 1925), ch. 3; G. E. Fussell and C. Goodmen, "Traffic in Farm Produce in Eighteenth Century England", *Agricultural History*, xii (2)(1938); Janet Blackman, "The Food Supply of an Industrial Town (Sheffield)", *Business History* v (1963).

of the poor would buy their grain direct in the market (or obtain it as supplement to wages or in gleaning); they would take it to the mill to be ground, where the miller might exact a customary toll, and then would bake their own bread. In London and those large towns where this had long ceased to be the rule, the baker's allowance or profit was calculated strictly according to the Assize of Bread, whereby either the price or the weight of the loaf was ordered in relation to the ruling price of wheat.[22]

This model, of course, parts company at many points with eighteenth-century realities. What is more surprising is to note how far parts of it were still operative. Thus Aikin in 1795 is able to describe the orderly regulation of Preston market:

> The weekly markets . . . are extremely well regulated to prevent forestalling and regrating. None but the town's-people are permitted to buy during the first hour, which is from eight to nine in the morning: at nine others may purchase: but nothing unsold must be withdrawn from the market till one o'clock, fish excepted . . . .[23]

In the same year in the South-West (another area noted for traditionalism) the city authorities at Exeter attempted to control "hucksters, higlers, and retailers" by excluding them from the market between 8 a.m. and noon, at which hours the Guildhall bell would be rung.[24] The Assize of Bread was still effective throughout the eighteenth century in London and in many market towns.[25] If we follow through the case of sale by sample we may observe how dangerous it is to assume prematurely the dissolution of the customary restrictions.

It is often supposed that sale of corn by sample was general by the

[22] S. and B. Webb, "The Assize of Bread", *Economic Jl.*, xiv, (1904).

[23] J. Aikin, *A Description of the Country from thirty to forty Miles round Manchester* (London, 1795), p. 286. One of the best surviving records of a well-regulated manorial market in the eighteenth century is that of Manchester. Here market lookers for fish and flech, for corn weights and measures, for white meats, for the Assize of Bread, aletasters, and officers to prevent "engrossing, forestalling and regretting" were appointed throughout the century, and fines for short weight and measure, unmarketable meat, etc. were frequent until the 1750s; supervision thereafter was somewhat more perfunctory (although continuing) with a revival of vigilance in the 1790s. Fines were imposed for selling loads of grain before the market bell in 1734, 1737, and 1748 (when William Wyat was fined 20s "for selling before the Bell rung and declaring he would sell at any Time of the Day in Spite of either Lord of the Mannor or any person else"), and again in 1766. *The Court Leet Records of the Manor of Manchester*, ed. J. P. Earwaker (Manchester, 1888/9), vols. vii, viii and ix, *passim*. For the regulation of forestalling at Manchester, see note 64 below.

[24] Proclamation by Exeter Town Clerk, 28 March 1795, in P.R.O., H.O. 42/34.

[25] See S. and B. Webb, *op. cit.*, *passim*; and J. Burnett, "The Baking Industry in the Nineteenth Century", *Business History*, v (1963), pp. 98-9.

middle of the seventeenth century, when Best describes the practice in East Yorkshire,[26] and certainly by 1725, when Defoe gave his famous account of the corn trade.[27] But, while many large farmers were no doubt selling by sample in most counties by this date, the old pitching markets were still common, and even survived in the environs of London. In 1718 a pamphleteer described the decline of country markets as having taken place only in recent years:

> One can see little else besides toy-shops and stalls for bawbles and knick-knacks . . . . The tolls are sunk to nothing; and where, in the memory of many inhabitants, there us'd to come to town upon a day, one, two, perhaps three, and in some boroughs, four hundred loads of corn, now grass grows in the market-place.

The farmers (he complained) had come to shun the market and to deal with jobbers and other "interlopers" at their doors. Other farmers still brought to market a single load "to make a show of a market, and to have a Price set", but the main business was done in "parcels of corn in a bag or handkerchief which are called *samples*".[28]

This was, indeed, the drift of things. But many smaller farmers continued to pitch their grain in the market as before; and the old model remained in men's minds as a source of resentment. Again and again the new marketing procedures were contested. In 1710 a petition on behalf of the poor people of Stony Stratford (Bucks.) complains that the farmers and dealers were "buying and selling in the farmyards and att their Barne Doores soo that now the poor Inhabitants cannot have a Grist at reasonable rates for our money which is a Great Calamity".[29] In 1733 several boroughs petitioned the house of commons against the practice: Haslemere (Surrey) complained of millers and mealmen engrossing the trade — they "secretly bought great quantities of corn by small samples, refusing to buy such as hath been pitch'd in open market".[30] There is a suggestion of something underhand in the practice, and of a loss of transparency in the marketing procedure.

As the century advances the complaints do not die down, although they tend to move northwards and westwards. In the dearth of 1756 the Privy Council, in addition to setting in motion the old laws

[26] *Rural Economy in Yorkshire in 1641* (Surtees Society, xxxiii, 1857), pp. 99-105.

[27] *The Complete English Tradesman* (London, 1727), ii, part 2.

[28] Anon., *An Essay to prove that Regrators, Engrossers, Forestallers, Hawkers, and Jobbers of Corn, Cattle, and other Marketable Goods are Destructive of Trade, Oppressors to the Poor, and a Common Nuisance to the Kingdom in General* (London, 1718), pp. 13, 18-20.

[29] Bucks. Rec. Off., Q.Sessions, Michaelmas.

[30] *Commons Journals*, 2 March 1733.

against forestalling, issued a proclamation enjoining "all farmers, under severe penalties, to bring their corn to open market, and not to sell by sample at their own dwellings".[31] But the authorities did not like to be pressed on the point too closely: in 1766 (another year of scarcity) the Surrey magistrates enquired whether buying by sample in fact remained a punishable offence, and received a portentously evasive reply — H.M.'s Secretary is not by his office entitled to give interpretation to the Laws.[32]

Two letters give some insight into the spread of new practices towards the West. A correspondent writing to Lord Shelburne in 1766 accused the dealers and millers at Chippenham of "confederacy":

> He himself sent to market for a quarter of wheat, and though there were many loads there, and it was soon after the market bell rang, wherever his agent applied, the answer was "'Tis sold". So that, though ... to avoid the penalty of the law, they bring it to market, yet the bargain is made before, and the market is but a farce ....[33]

(Such practices could be the actual occasion of riot: in June 1757 it was reported that "the population rose at Oxford and in a few minutes seized and divided a load of corn that was suspected to have been bought by sample, and only brought to the market to save appearances".[34]) The second letter, from a correspondent in Dorchester in 1772, describes a different practice of market-fixing: he claimed that the great farmers got together to fix the price before the market,

> and many of these men won't sell less than forty bushels, which the poor can't purchase. Therefore the miller, who is no enemy to the farmer, gives the price he asks and the poor must come to his terms.[35]

Paternalists and the poor continued to complain at the extension of market practices which we, looking back, tend to assume as inevitable and "natural".[36] But what may now appear as inevitable was not, in the eighteenth century, necessarily a matter for approval. A characteristic pamphlet (of 1768) exclaimed indignantly against the supposed liberty of every farmer to do as he likes with his own. This would be a "natural", not a "civil" liberty:

> It cannot then be said to be the liberty of a citizen, or of one who lives under the protection of any community; it is rather the liberty of a savage; therefore he who avails himself thereof, deserves not that protection, the power of Society affords.

[31] P.R.O., P.C. 1/6/63.
[32] *Calendar of Home Office Papers* (London, 1879), 1766, pp. 92-4.
[33] *Ibid.*, pp. 91-2.
[34] *Gentleman's Magazine*, xxvii (1757), p. 286.
[35] Anonymous letter in P.R.O., S.P. 37/9.
[36] Examples, from an abundant literature, will be found in: *Gentleman's Magazine*, xxvi (1756), p. 534; Anon. [Ralph Courteville], *The Cries of the Public* (London, 1758), p. 25; Anon. ["C.L."], *A Letter to a Member of Parliament proposing Amendments to the Laws against Forestallers, Ingrossers, and Regraters* (London, 1757), pp. 5-8; *Museum Rusticum et Commerciale*, iv (1765), p. 199; Forster, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

Attendance of the farmer at market is "a material part of his duty; he should not be suffered to secret or to dispose of his goods elsewhere".[37] But after the 1760s the pitching markets performed so little function in most parts of the South and the Midlands that, in these districts, the complaint against sample-sale is less often heard, although the complaint that the poor cannot buy in small parcels is still being made at the end of the century.[38] In parts of the North it was a different matter. A petition of Leeds labourers in 1795 complains of the "corn factors and the millers and a set of peopul which we call hucksters and mealmen who have got the corn into thare hands that they may hold it up and sell it at thare owne price or they will not sell it". "The farmers carry no corn to markit but what they carre in thare pockit for thare sample ... which cause the poore to groane very much".[39] So long it took for a process, which is often dated from at least one hundred years earlier, to work its way out.

This example has been followed to illustrate the density and particularity of the detail, the diversity of local practices, and the way in which popular resentment could arise as old market practices changed. The same density, the same diversity, exists throughout the scarcely-charted area of marketing. The paternalist model was, of course, breaking down at many other points. The Assize of Bread, although effective in checking the profits of bakers, simply reflected the ruling price of wheat or flour, and could in no way influence these. The millers were now, in Hertfordshire and the Thames Valley, very substantial entrepreneurs, and sometimes dealers in grain or malt as well as large-scale manufacturers of flour.[40] Outside the main corn-growing districts, urban markets simply could not be supplied without the operation of factors whose activities would have been nullified if legislation against forestallers had been strictly enforced.

How far did the authorities recognize that their model was drifting apart from reality? The answer must change with the authorities

[37] Anon., *An Enquiry into the Price of Wheat, Malt, etc.* (London, 1768), pp. 119-23.
[38] See e.g. Davies (below p. 101). It was reported from Cornwall in 1795 that "many farmers refuse to sell [barley] in small quantities to the poor, which causes a great murmuring": P.R.O., H.O. 42/34; and from Essex in 1800 that "in some places no sale takes place excepting at the ordinaries, where buyers and sellers (chiefly Millers and Factors) dine together ... the benefit of the Market is almost lost to the neighbourhood"; such practices are mentioned "with great indignation by the lower orders": P.R.O., H.O. 42/54.
[39] P.R.O., H.O. 42/35.
[40] See F. J. Fisher, "The Development of the London Food Market, 1540-1640", *Econ. Hist. Review*, v (1934-5).

concerned and with the advance of the century. But a general answer can be offered: the paternalists did, in their normal practice, recognize much of the change, but they referred back to this model whenever emergency arose. In this they were in part the prisoners of the people, who adopted parts of the model as their right and heritage. There is even an impression that ambiguity was actually welcomed. It gave magistrates in disturbed districts, in time of dearth, some room for manœuvre, and some endorsement to their attempts to reduce prices by suasion. When the Privy Council authorized (as it did in 1709, 1740, 1756 and 1766) the posting of proclamations in unreadable Gothic type threatening dire penalties against forestallers, badgers, laders, broggers, hucksters, etc., it helped the magistrates to put the fear of God into local millers and dealers. It is true that the legislation against forestallers was repealed in 1772; but the repealing Act was not well drawn, and during the next major scarcity of 1795 Lord Kenyon, the chief justice, took it upon himself to announce that forestalling remained an indictable offence at common law, "though the act of Edward VI be repealed (whether wisely or unwisely I take not upon me to say) yet it still remains an offence at common law, co-eval with the constitution . . .".[41] The trickle of prosecutions which can be observed throughout the century — usually for petty offences and only in years of scarcity — did not dry up: indeed, there were probably more in 1795 and 1800-1 than at any time in the previous twenty-five years.[42] But it is clear that they were designed for symbolic effect, as demonstrations to the poor that the authorities were acting vigilantly in their interests.

Hence the paternalist model had an ideal existence, and also a fragmentary real existence. In years of good harvests and moderate prices, the authorities lapsed into forgetfulness. But if prices rose and the poor became turbulent, it was revived, at least for symbolic effect.

[41] Lord Kenyon's charge to the Grand Jury at Shropshire Assizes, *Annals of Agriculture*, xxv (1795), pp. 110-11. But he was not proclaiming a new view of the law: the 1780 edition of Burn's *Justice*, ii, pp. 213-4 had already stressed that (despite the Acts of 1663 and 1772) "at the common law, all endeavours whatsoever to enhance the common price of any merchandize . . . whether by spreading false rumours, or by buying things in a market before the accustomed hour, or by buying and selling again the same thing in the same market" remained offences.

[42] Girdler, *op. cit.*, pp. 212-60, lists a number of convictions in 1795 and 1800. Private associations were established in several counties to prosecute forestallers: see the Rev. J. Malham, *The Scarcity of Grain Considered* (Salisbury, 1800), pp. 35-44. Forestalling etc. remained offences at common law until 1844: W. Holdsworth, *History of English Law* (London, 1938 edn.), xi, p. 472. See also below, note 64.

III

Few intellectual victories have been more overwhelming than that which the proponents of the new political economy won in the matter of the regulation of the internal corn trade. Indeed, so absolute has the victory seemed to some historians that they can scarcely conceal their impatience with the defeated party.[43] The model of the new political economy may, with convenience, be taken as that of Adam Smith, although *The Wealth of Nations* may be seen not only as a point of departure but also as a grand central terminus to which many important lines of discussion in the middle of the eighteenth century (some of them, like Charles Smith's lucid *Tracts on the Corn Trade* (1758-9), specifically concerned to demolish the old paternalist market regulation) all run. The debate between 1767 and 1772 which culminated in the repeal of legislation against forestalling, signalled a victory, in this area, for *laisser-faire* four years before Adam Smith's work was published.

This signified less a new model than an anti-model — a direct negative to the disintegrating Tudor policies of "provision". "Let every act that regards the corn laws be repealed", wrote Arbuthnot in 1773; "Let corn flow like water, and it will find its level".[44] The "unlimited, unrestrained freedom of the corn trade" was also the demand of Adam Smith.[45] The new economy entailed a de-moralizing of the theory of trade and consumption no less far-reaching than the more widely-debated dissolution of restrictions upon usury.[46] By "de-moralizing" it is not suggested that Smith and his colleagues were immoral[47] or were unconcerned for the public good.[48] It is

[43] See e.g. Gras, *op. cit.*, p. 241 ("... as Adam Smith has shown ..."); M. Olson, *Economics of the Wartime Shortage* (North Carolina, 1963), p. 53 ("People were quick to find a scapegoat").

[44] J. Arbuthnot ("A Farmer"), *An Inquiry into the Connection between the Present Price of Provisions and the Size of Farms* (London, 1773), p. 88.

[45] Adam Smith's "digression concerning the Corn Trade and Corn Laws" is in Book IV, chapter 5 of *The Wealth of Nations*.

[46] R. H. Tawney takes in the question in *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (London, 1926), but it is not central to his argument.

[47] The suggestion was made, however, by some of Smith's opponents. One pamphleteer, who claimed to have known him well, alleged that Adam Smith had said to him that "the Christian Religion debased the human mind", and that "Sodomy was a thing in itself indifferent". No wonder that he held heartless views on the corn trade: Anon., *Thoughts of an Old Man of Independent Mind though Dependent Fortune on the Present High Prices of Corn* (London, 1800), p. 4.

[48] On the level of *intention* I see no reason to disagree with Professor A. W. Coats, "The Classical Economists and the Labourer", in *Land, Labour and Population*, ed. E. L. Jones and G. E. Mingay (London, 1967). But intention is a bad measure of ideological interest and of historical consequences.

meant, rather, that the new political economy was disinfested of intrusive moral imperatives. The old pamphleteers were moralists first and economists second. In the new economic theory questions as to the moral polity of marketing do not enter, unless as preamble and peroration.

In practical terms, the new model worked in this way. The natural operation of supply and demand in the free market would maximize the satisfaction of all parties and establish the common good. The market was never better regulated than when it was left to regulate itself. In the course of a normal year, the price of corn would adjust itself through the market mechanism. Soon after harvest the small farmers, and all those with harvest wages and Michaelmas rents to pay, would thresh out their corn and bring it to market, or release what they had pre-contracted to sell. From September to Christmas low prices might be expected. The middling farmers would hold their corn, in the hope of a rising market, until the early spring; while the most opulent farmers and farming gentry would hold some of theirs until still later — from May to August — in expectation of catching the market at the top. In this way the nation's corn reserves were conveniently rationed, by the price mechanism, over fifty-two weeks, without any intervention by the State. Insofar as middlemen intervened and contracted for the farmers' crops in advance, they performed this service of rationing even more efficiently. In years of dearth the price of grain might advance to uncomfortable heights; but this was providential, since (apart from providing an incentive to the importer) it was again an effective form of rationing, without which all stocks would be consumed in the first nine months of the year, and in the remaining three months dearth would be exchanged for actual famine.

The only way in which this self-adjusting economy might break down was through the meddlesome interference of the State and of popular prejudice.[49] Corn must be left to flow freely from areas of surplus to areas of scarcity. Hence the middleman played a necessary, productive, and laudable rôle. The prejudices against forestallers Smith dismissed curtly as superstitions on a level with witchcraft. Interference with the natural pattern of trade might induce local famines or discourage farmers from increasing their output. If premature sales were forced, or prices restrained in times of dearth,

[49] Smith saw the two as going together: "The laws concerning corn may everywhere be compared to the laws concerning religion. The people feel themselves so much interested in what relates either to their subsistence in this life, or to their happiness in a life to come, that government must yield to their prejudices . . .".

excessive stocks might be consumed. If farmers did hold back their grain too long, they would be likely to suffer when prices broke. As for the other popular culprits — millers, mealmen, dealers, bakers — much the same logic applied. Their trades were competitive. At the most they could only distort prices from their natural level over short periods, and often to their ultimate discomfiture. When prices began to soar at the end of the century, the remedy was seen not in a return to the regulation of trade, but in more enclosure, tillage of waste lands, improvement.

It should not be necessary to argue that the model of a natural and self-adjusting economy, working providentially for the best good of all, is as much a superstition as the notions which upheld the paternalist model — although, curiously, it is a superstition which some economic historians have been the last to abandon. In some respects Smith's model conformed more closely to eighteenth-century realities than did the paternalist; and in symmetry and scope of intellectual construction it was superior. But one should not overlook the specious air of empirical validation which the model carries. Whereas the first appeals to a moral norm — what *ought* to be men's reciprocal duties — the second appears to say: "this is the way things work, or would work if the State did not interfere". And yet if one considers these sections of *The Wealth of Nations* they impress less as an essay in empirical enquiry than as a superb, self-validating essay in logic.

When we consider the actual organization of the eighteenth-century corn trade, empirical verification of neither model is to hand. There has been little detailed investigation of marketing;[50] no major study of that key figure, the miller.[51] Even the first letter of Smith's alphabet — the assumption that high prices were an effective form of rationing — remains no more than an assertion. It is notorious that the demand for corn, or bread, is highly inelastic. When bread is costly, the poor (as one highly-placed observer was once reminded) do not go over to cake. In the view of some observers, when prices rose labourers might eat the same quantity of bread, but cut out other items in their budgets; they might even eat *more* bread to compensate for the loss of other items. Out of one shilling, in a normal year, 6d.

[50] See, however, A. Everitt, "The Marketing of Agricultural Produce", in *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, vol. iv, *1500-1640*, ed. Joan Thirsk (Cambridge, 1967) and D. Baker, "The Marketing of Corn in the first half of the Eighteenth Century: North-east Kent", *Agric. Hist. Rev.*, xviii, (1970).

[51] There is some useful information in R. Bennett and J. Elton, *History of Corn Milling* (Liverpool, 1898), 4 vols.

might go on bread, 6d. on "coarse meat and plenty of garden stuff"; but in a high-price year the whole shilling would go on bread.[52]

In any event, it is well known that the price movements of grain cannot be accounted for by simple supply-and-demand price mechanisms; and the bounty paid to encourage corn exports distorted matters further. Next to air and water, corn was a prime necessity of life, abnormally sensitive to any deficiency in supply. In 1796 Arthur Young calculated that the overall crop deficiency in wheat was less than 25 per cent; but the price advance was 81 per cent: giving (by his calculation) a profit to the agricultural community of £20 millions over a normal year.[53] Traditionalist writers complained that the farmers and dealers acted from the strength of "monopoly"; they were rebutted in pamphlet after pamphlet, as "too absurd to be seriously treated: what! more than two hundred thousand people . . . !".[54] The point at issue, however, was not whether this farmer or that dealer could act as a "monopolist", but whether the

[52] Emanuel Collins, *Lying Detected* (Bristol, 1758), pp. 66-7. This seems to be confirmed by the budgets of Davies and Eden (see note 20 above), and of nineteenth-century observers: see *The Unknown Mayhew*, ed. E. P. Thompson and E. Yeo (London, 1971), App. II. E. H. Phelps Brown and S. V. Hopkins, "Seven Centuries of the Prices of Consumables compared with Builders' Wage rates", *Economica*, xxii (1956), pp. 297-8 allow only 20% of the total household budget on farinaceous food, although the budgets of Davies and of Eden (taken in high price years) show an average of 53%. This again suggests that in such years bread consumption remained stable, but other items were cut out altogether. In London there may already have been a greater diversification of diet by the 1790s. P. Colquhoun wrote to Portland, 9 July 1795, that there was abundance of vegetables at Spitalfields market, expecially potatoes, "that great substitute for Bread", carrots and turnips: P.R.O., P.C.1/27/A.54.

[53] *Annals of Agriculture*, xxvi (1796), pp. 470, 473. Davenant had estimated in 1699 that a deficiency in the harvest of one-tenth raised the price by three-tenths: Sir C. Whitworth, *The Political and Commercial Works of Charles Davenant* (London, 1771), ii, p. 224. The problem is discussed in W. M. Stern, "The Bread Crisis in Britain, 1795-6", *Economica*, new ser., xxxi (1964), and J. D. Gould, "Agricultural Fluctuations and the English Economy in the Eighteenth Century", *Jl. Econ. Hist.*, xxii (1962). Dr. Gould puts weight on a point often mentioned in contemporary apologetics for high prices (e.g. *Farmer's Magazine*, ii, 1801, p. 81) that the small growers, in a year of scarcity, required their entire crop for seed and for their own consumption: in such factors as this he finds the "chief theoretical explanation of the extreme volatility of grain prices in the early modern period". One would require more investigation of the actual operation of the market before such explanations carry conviction.

[54] Anon., ["A Country Farmer"], *Three Letters to a Member of the House of Commons . . . concerning the Prices of Provisions* (London, 1766), pp. 18-19. For other examples see Lord John Sheffield, *Observations on the Corn Bill* (London, 1791), p. 43; Anon., *Inquiry into the Causes and Remedies of the late and present Scarcity and high Price of Provisions* (London, 1800), p. 33; J. S. Fry, *Letters on the Corn-Trade* (Bristol, 1816), pp. 10-11.

producing and trading interests as a whole were able, with a long-continuing train of favourable circumstances, to take advantage of their command of a prime necessity of life and to enhance the price to the consumer, in much the same way as the advanced industrialized nations today have been able to enhance the price of certain manufactured goods to the less advanced nations.

As the century advanced marketing procedures became less transparent, as the corn passed through the hands of a more complex network of intermediaries. Farmers were selling, not in an open competitive market (which, in a local and regional sense, was the aim of the paternalist rather than the *laisser-faire* model), but to dealers or millers who were in a better position to hold stocks and keep the market high. In the last decades of the century, as population rose, so consumption pressed continually upon production, and the producers could more generally command a seller's market. Wartime conditions, while not in fact inhibiting greatly the import of grain during conditions of scarcity, nevertheless accentuated psychological tensions in such years.[55] What mattered in setting the post-harvest price, was the expectation of the harvest yield: and there is evidence in the last decades of the century of the growth of a farming lobby, well aware of the psychological factors involved in post-harvest price levels, assiduously fostering an expectation of shortage.[56] Notoriously, in years of dearth the farmers' faces were wreathed in smiles,[57] while in years of abundant harvest Dame Nature's inconsiderate bounty called forth agricultural cries of "distress". And no matter how bountiful the yield might appear to the eye of the townsman, every harvest was accompanied by talk of mildew, floods, blighted ears which crumbled to powder when threshing commenced.

The free market model supposes a sequence of small to large farmers, bringing their corn to market over the year; but at the end of the century, as high-price year succeeded upon high-price year, so more small farmers were able to hold back supply until the market rose to their satisfaction. (It was, after all, for them not a matter of routine marketing but of intense, consuming interest: their profit for the year might depend very largely upon the price which three or

[55] See Olson, *Economics of the Wartime Shortage*, ch. 3; W. F. Galpin, *The Grain Supply of England during the Napoleonic Period* (New York, 1925).

[56] See e.g. Anon., ["A West Country Maltster"], *Considerations on the present High Prices of Provisions, and the Necessities of Life* (London, 1764), p. 10.

[57] "I hope", a Yorkshire land-owner wrote in 1708, "the dearth of corn which is likely to continue for several years to come will make husbandry very profitable to us, in breaking up and improving all our new land": cited by Beloff, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

four corn-stacks might fetch). If rents had to be paid, the growth in country banking made it easier for the farmer to be accommodated.[58] The September or October riot was often precipitated by the failure of prices to fall after a seemingly plentiful harvest, and indicated a conscious confrontation between reluctant producer and angry consumer.

These comments are offered, not in refutation of Adam Smith, but simply to indicate places where caution should be exercised until our knowledge is greater. We need only say of the *laisser-faire* model that it is empirically unproven; inherently unlikely; and that there is some evidence on the other side. We have recently been reminded that "merchants made money in the eighteenth century", and that grain merchants may have made it "by operating the market".[59] Such operations are occasionally recorded, although rarely as frankly as was noted by a Whittlesford (Cambs.) farmer and corn merchant in his diary in 1802:

> I bought Rey this Time Twelve Month at 50s per Qr. I could have sold it 122s per Qr. The poor had their flower, good rey, for 2s 6d per peck. Parish paid the difference to me, which was 1s 9d per peck. It was a Blessing to the Poor and good to me. I bought 320 Quarters.[60]

The profit on this transaction was above £1,000.

IV

If one can reconstruct clear alternative models behind the policies of traditionalists and of political economists, can one construct the same for the moral economy of the crowd? This is less easy. One is confronted by a complex of rational analysis, prejudice, and traditional patterns of response to dearth. Nor is it possible, at any given moment, clearly to identify the groups which endorsed the theories of the crowd. They comprise articulate and inarticulate, and include men of education and address. After 1750 each year of scarcity was accompanied by a spate of pamphlets and letters to the press, of unequal value. It was a common complaint of the

[58] The point is noted in Anon., *A Letter to the Rt. Hon. William Pitt . . . on the Causes of the High Price of Provisions* (Hereford, 1795), p. 9; Anon., ["A Society of Practical Farmers"], *A Letter to the Rt. Hon. Lord Somerville* (London, 1800), p. 49. Cf. L. S. Pressnell, *Country Banking in the Industrial Revolution* (Oxford, 1956), pp. 346-8.

[59] C. W. J. Grainger and C. M. Elliott, "A Fresh Look at Wheat Prices and Markets in the Eighteenth Century", *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 2nd ser., xx, (1967), p. 262.

[60] E. M. Hampson, *The Treatment of Poverty in Cambridgeshire, 1597-1834* (Cambridge, 1934), p. 211.

protagonists of free trade in corn that misguided gentry added fuel to the flames of mob discontent.

There is truth in this. The crowd derived its sense of legitimation, in fact, from the paternalist model. Many gentlemen still resented the middleman as an interloper. Where lords of the manor retained market rights they resented the loss (through sample-sales etc.) of their market tolls. If they were landlord-farmers, who witnessed meat or flour being marketed at prices disproportionately high in relation to their own receipts from the dealers, they resented the profits of these common tradesmen the more. The essayist of 1718 has a title which is a précis of his matter: *An Essay to prove that Regrators, Engrossers, Forestallers, Hawkers and Jobbers of Corn, Cattle, and other Marketable Goods . . . are Destructive of Trade, Oppressors to the Poor, and a Common Nuisance to the Kingdom in General.* All dealers (unless simple drovers or carters, moving provisions from one point to the next) appeared to this not unobservant writer as a "vile and pernicious set of men"; and, in the classic terms of reproval adopted by men of settled estate to the bourgeois,

> they are a vagabond sort of people . . . . They carry their all about them, and their . . . stock is no more than a plain riding habit, a good horse, a list of the fairs and markets, and a prodigious quantity of impudence. They have the mark of Cain, and like him wander from place to place, driving an interloping trade between the fair dealer and the honest consumer.[61]

This hostility to the dealer existed even among many country magistrates, some of whom were noted to be inactive when popular disturbances swept through the areas under their jurisdiction. They were not displeased by attacks on dissenting or Quaker corn factors. A Bristol pamphleteer, who is clearly a corn factor, complained bitterly in 1758 to the J.P.s of "your law-giving mob", which prevented, in the previous year, the export of corn from the Severn and Wye valleys, and of "many fruitless applications to several Justices of the Peace".[62] Indeed, the conviction grows that a popular hubbub

[61] Adam Smith noted nearly sixty years later that the "popular odium . . . which attends the corn trade in years of scarcity, the only years in which it can be very profitable, renders people of character and fortune averse to enter into it. It is abandoned to an inferior set of dealers". Twenty-five years later again Earl Fitzwilliam was writing: "Dealers in corn are withdrawing from the trade, afraid to traffic in an article trafficking in which had render'd them liable to so much obloquy & calumny, and to be run at by an ignorant populace, without confidence in protection from those who ought to be more enlighten'd": Fitzwilliam to Portland, 3 Sept. 1800, P.R.O., H.O. 42/51. But an examination of the fortunes of such families as the Howards, Frys and Gurneys might call in question such literary evidence.

[62] Emanuel Collins, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-74. In 1756 several Quaker meeting-houses were attacked during food riots in the Midlands: *Gentleman's Magazine*, xxvi (1756), p. 408.

against forestallers was not unwelcome to some in authority. It distracted attention from the farmers and rentiers; while vague Quarter Sessional threats against forestallers gave to the poor a notion that the authorities were attending to their interests. The old laws against forestallers, a dealer complained in 1766,

> are printed in every newspaper, and stuck up in every corner, by order of the justices, to intimidate the engrossers, against whom many murmurings are propagated. The common people are taught to entertain a very high opinion and reverence for these laws ....

Indeed, he accused the justices of encouraging "the extraordinary pretence, that the power and spirit of the mob is necessary to enforce the laws".[63] But if the laws were actually set in motion, they were directed almost without exception against petty culprits — local wide-boys or market-men, who pocketed small profits on trivial transactions — while the large dealers and millers were unaffected.[64]

[63] Anon., *Reflections on the present High Price of Provisions, and the Complaints and Disturbances arising therefrom* (London, 1766), pp. 26-7, 31.

[64] Contrary to the common assumption, the forestalling legislation had not fallen into desuetude in the first half of the eighteenth century. Prosecutions were infrequent, but sufficiently evident to suggest that they had some effect upon regulating petty dealing in the open market. At Manchester (see note 23 above) fines for forestalling or regrating took place sometimes annually, sometimes every two or three years, from 1731 to 1759 (seven fines). Commodities involved included butter, cheese, milk, oysters, fish, meat, carrots, pease, potatoes, turnips, cucumbers, apples, beans, gooseberries, currants, cherries, pigeons, fowls, but very rarely oats and wheat. Fines are less frequent after 1760 but include 1766 (wheat and butter), 1780 (oats and eels), 1785 (meat), and 1796, 1797 and 1799 (all potatoes). Symbolically, the Court Leet officers to prevent forestalling jumped from 3 or 4 appointed annually (1730-1795) to 7 in 1795, 15 in 1796, 16 in 1797. In addition offenders were prosecuted on occasion (as in 1757) at Quarter Sessions. See Earwaker, *Court Leet Records* (cited note 23 above), vols. vii, viii, and ix and *Constables' Accounts* (note 68 below), ii, p. 94. For other examples of offences, see Essex Quarter Sessions, indictments, 2 Sept. 1709, 9 July 1711 (engrossing oats), and also 1711 for cases involving forestalling of fish, wheat, rye, butter, and, again, 13 Jan. 1729/30: Essex Rec. Off., Calendar and Indictments, Q/SR 541, Q/SR 548, Q/SPb 3/7, Q/SPb b 3; Constables' presentments for forestalling hogs, Oct. 1735 and Oct. 1746: Bury St. Edmunds and West Suffolk Rec. Off., DB/1/8 (5); ditto for forestalling of butter, Nottingham, 6 Jan. 1745/6, *Records of the Borough of Nottingham* (Nottingham, 1914), vi, p. 209; conviction for forestalling of fowls (fine 13s. 4d.) at Atherstone Court Leet and Court Baron, 18 Oct. 1748: Warwicks. Rec. Off., L2/24 23; cautions against the forestalling of butter etc., Woodbridge market, 30 Aug. 1756: Ipswich and East Suffolk Rec. Off., V 5/9/6-3. In most Quarter-Sessional or market records the odd prosecution is to be found, before 1757. The author of *Reflections* (cited note 63 above), writing in 1766, says these "almost-forgotten and disregarded statutes" were employed for the prosecution of "some submissive hucksters and indigent or terrified jobbers", and implies that the "principal factors" have despised "these menaces", believing them to be bad law (p. 37). For 1795 and 1800 see note 42 above: the most important cases of the prosecution of large dealers, were those of Rusby, for regrating oats (1799): see Barnes, *op. cit.*, pp. 81-3; and of Waddington, convicted of forestalling hops at Worcester Assizes: see *Times*, 4 Aug. 1800 and (for conviction upheld on appeal) 1 East 143 in *English Law Reports* (London, 1910), vol. cii, pp. 56-68.

Thus, to take a late example, an old-fashioned and crusty Middlesex J.P., J. S. Girdler, instituted a general campaign of prosecutions against such offenders in 1796 and 1800, with handbills offering rewards for information, letters to the press, etc. Convictions were upheld at several Quarter Sessions, but the amount gained by the speculators amounted only to ten or fifteen shillings. We can guess at the kind of offender whom his prosecutions touched by the literary style of an anonymous letter which he received:

> We no you are an enemy to Farmers, Millers, Mealmen and Bakers and our Trade if it had not bene for me and another you you son of a bitch you wold have bene murdurd long ago by offering your blasted rewards and persecuting Our Trade God dam you and blast you you shall never live to see another harvest ....[65]

Compassionate traditionalists like Girdler were joined by townsmen of various ranks. Most Londoners suspected everyone who had any part in handling grain, flour or bread of every kind of extortion. The urban lobby was, of course, especially powerful in the middle years of the century, pressing for an end to the export bounty, or for the prohibition of all exports in time of dearth. But London and the larger towns harboured inexhaustible reserves of resentment, and some of the wildest accusations came from this milieu. A certain Dr. Manning, in the 1750s, published allegations that bread was adulterated not only with alum, chalk, whiting and beanmeal, but also with slaked lime and white lead. Most sensational was his claim that millers turned into their flour "sacks of old ground bones": "the charnel houses of the dead are raked, to add filthiness to the food of the living", or, as another pamphleteer commented, "the present age [is] making hearty meals on the bones of the last".

Manning's accusations went far beyond the bounds of credibility. (A critic computed that if lime was being used on the scale of his allegations, more would be consumed in the London baking than building industry).[66] Apart from alum, which was widely used to whiten bread, the commonest form of adulteration was probably the admixture of old, spoiled flour with new flour.[67] But the urban population was quick to believe that far more noxious adulterations were practised, and such belief contributed to the "Shude-hill Fight" at Manchester in 1757, where one of the mills attacked was believed to mix "Accorns, Beans, Bones, Whiting, Chopt Straw, and

[65] Girdler, *op. cit.*, pp. 295-6.

[66] Emanuel Collins, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-37; P. Markham, *Syhoroc* (London, 1758), i, pp. 11-31; *Poison Detected: or Frightful Truths ... in a Treatise on Bread* (London, 1757), esp. pp. 16-38.

[67] See e.g. John Smith, *An Impartial Relation of Facts Concerning the Malepractices of Bakers* (London, n.d., 1740?).

even dried Horse Dung" with its flour, while at another mill the presence of suspicious adulterants near the hoppers (discovered by the crowd) led to the burning of bolters and sieves, and the destruction of mill-stones and wheels.[68]

There were other, equally sensitive, areas where the complaints of the crowd were fed by the complaints of traditionalists or by those of urban professional people. Indeed, one may suggest that if the rioting or price-setting crowd acted according to any consistent theoretical model, then this model was a selective reconstruction of the paternalist one, taking from it all those features which most favoured the poor and which offered a prospect of cheap corn. It was, however, less generalized than the outlook of the paternalists. The records of the poor show more particularity: it is this miller, this dealer, those farmers hoarding grain, who provoke indignation and action. This particularity was, however, informed by general notions of rights which disclose themselves most clearly only when one examines the crowd in action. For in one respect the moral economy of the crowd broke decisively with that of the paternalists: for the popular ethic sanctioned direct action by the crowd, whereas the values of order underpinning the paternalist model emphatically did not.

The economy of the poor was still local and regional, derivative from a subsistence-economy. Corn should be consumed in the region in which it was grown, especially in times of scarcity. Profound feeling was aroused, and over several centuries, by export in times of dearth. Of an export riot in Suffolk in 1631 a magistrate wrote: "to see their bread thus taken from them and sent to strangers has turned the impatience of the poor into licentious fury and desperation".[69] In a graphic account of a riot in the same county seventy-eight years later (1709), a dealer described how "the Mobb rose, he thinks several hundreds, and said that the corn should not be carryed out of town": "of the Mobb some had halberds, some quarter staffs, and some clubbs . . .". When travelling to Norwich, at several places on the way:

> the Mobb hearing that he was to goe through with corn, told him that it should not go through the Towne, for that he was a Rogue, and Corn-Jobber, and some cry'd out Stone him, some Pull him off his horse, some Knock him down, and be sure you strike sure; that he . . . questioned them what made them rise in such an inhuman manner to the prejudice of themselves and the countrey, but that they still cryed out that he was a Rogue & was going to carry the corn into France . . . .[70]

[68] See J. P. Earwaker, *The Constables' Accounts of the Manor of Manchester* (Manchester, 1891), iii, pp. 359-61; F. Nicholson and E. Axon, "The Hatfield Family of Manchester, and the Food Riots of 1757 and 1812", *Trans. Lancs. and Chesh. Antiq. Soc.*, xxviii (1910/11), pp. 83-90.

[69] *Calendar State Papers, Domestic*, 1631, p. 545.

Except in Westminster, in the mountains, or in the great sheep-grazing districts, men were never far from the sight of corn. Manufacturing industry was dispersed in the countryside: the colliers went to their labour by the side of cornfields; domestic workers left their looms and workshops for the harvest. Sensitivity was not confined to overseas export. Marginal exporting areas were especially sensitive, where little corn was exported in normal years, but where, in times of scarcity, dealers could hope for a windfall price in London, thereby aggravating local dearth.[71] The colliers — Kingswood, the Forest of Dean, Shropshire, the North East — were especially prone to action at such times. Notoriously the Cornish tinners had an irascible consumer-consciousness, and a readiness to turn out in force. "We had the devil and all of a riot at Padstow", wrote a Bodmin gentleman in 1773, with scarcely-concealed admiration:

> Some of the people have run to too great lengths in exporting of corn . . . . Seven or eight hundred tinners went thither, who first offered the cornfactors seventeen shillings for 24 gallons of wheat; but being told they should have none, they immediately broke open the cellar doors, and took away all in the place without money or price.[72]

The worst resentment was provoked in the middle years of the century, by foreign exports upon which bounty was paid. The foreigner was seen as receiving corn at prices sometimes below those of the English market, with the aid of a bounty paid out of English taxes. Hence the extreme bitterness sometimes visited upon the exporter, who was seen as a man seeking private, and dishonourable, gain at the expense of his own people. A North Yorkshire factor, who was given a ducking in the river in 1740, was told that he was "no better than a rebel".[73] In 1783 a notice was affixed to the market-cross in Carlisle, commencing:

> Peter Clemeseson & Moses Luthart this is to give you Warning that you must Quit your unlawfull Dealing or Die and be Damed your buying the Corn to starve the Poor Inhabitants of the City and Soborbs of Carlisle to send to France and get the Bounty Given by the Law for taking the Corn out of the Country but by the Lord God Amighty we will give you Bounty at the Expence of your Lives you Damed Roagues . . . .

"And if Eany Publick House in Carlisle [the notice continued] Lets you or Luthart put up . . . Corn at their Houses they shall suffer for it".[74] This feeling revived in the last years of the century, notably

[70] P.R.O., P.C.1/2/165.

[71] See D. G. D. Isaac, "A Study of Popular Disturbance in Britain, 1714-54" (Edinburgh Univ. Ph.D. thesis, 1953), ch. 1.

[72] *Calendar of Home Office Papers*, 1773, p. 30.

[73] P.R.O., S.P. 36/50.

[74] *London Gazette*, March 1783, no. 12422.

in 1795, when rumours flew around the country as to secret exports to France. Moreover, 1795 and 1800 saw the efflorescence of a regional consciousness once more, as vivid as that of one hundred years before. Roads were blockaded to prevent export from the parish. Waggons were intercepted and unloaded in the towns through which they passed. The movement of grain by night-convoy assumed the proportions of a military operation:

> Deep groan the waggons with their pond'rous loads,
> As their dark course they bend along the roads;
> Wheel following wheel, in dread procession slow,
> With half a harvest, to their points they go . . .
> The secret expedition, like the night
> That covers its intents, still shuns the light . . .
> While the poor ploughman, when he leaves his bed,
> Sees the huge barn as empty as his shed.[75]

Threats were made to destroy the canals.[76] Ships were stormed at the ports. The miners at Nook Colliery near Haverfordwest threatened to close the estuary at a narrow point. Even lighters on the Severn and Wye were not immune from attack.[77]

Indignation might also be inflamed against a dealer whose commitment to an outside market disrupted the customary supplies of the local community. A substantial farmer and publican near Tiverton complained to the War Office in 1795 of riotous assemblies "threatening to pull down or fire his house because he takes in Butter of the neighbouring Farmers & Dairymen, to forward it by the common road waggon, that passes by his door to . . . London".[78] In Chudleigh (Devon) in the same year the crowd destroyed the machinery of a miller who had ceased to supply the local community with flour since he was under contract to the Victualling Department of the Navy for ship's biscuits: this had given rise (he says in a revealing phrase) "to an Idea that ive done much infimy to the Community".[79] Thirty years before a group of London merchants had found it necessary to seek the protection of the military for their cheese-warehouses along the river Trent:

> The warehouses . . . in danger from the riotous colliers are not the property of any monopolizers, but of a numerous body of cheesemongers, and absolutely necessary for the reception of their cheese, for the conveyance to Hull, there to be ship'd for London.[80]

[75] S. J. Pratt, *Sympathy and Other Poems* (London, 1807), pp. 222-3.

[76] Some years before Wedgwood had heard it "threatened . . . to destroy our canals and let out the water", because provisions were passing through Staffordshire to Manchester from East Anglia: J. Wedgwood, *Address to the Young Inhabitants of the Pottery* (Newcastle, 1783).

[77] P.R.O., P.C.1/27/A.54; A.55-7; H.O. 42/34; 42/35; 42/36; 42/37; see also Stern, *op. cit.*, and E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Penguin edn., 1968), pp. 70-3.

[78] P.R.O., W.O. 1/1082, John Ashley, 24 June 1795.

[79] P.R.O., H.O. 42/34.

These grievances are related to the complaint, already noted, of the withdrawal of goods from the open market. As the dealers moved further from London and attended more frequently at provincial markets, so they were able to offer prices and buy in quantities which made the farmers impatient to serve the small orders of the poor. "Now it is out of the course of business", wrote Davies in 1795, "for the farmer to retail corn by the bushel to this or that poor man; except in some particular places, as a matter of favour, to his own labourers". And where the poor shifted their demand from grain to flour, the story was much the same:

> Neither the miller nor the mealman will sell the labourer a less quantity than a *sack* of flour *under* the retail price at shops; and the poor man's pocket will seldom allow of his buying a whole sack at once.[81]

Hence the labourer was driven to the petty retail shop, at which prices were enhanced.[82] The old markets declined, or, where they were kept up, they changed their functions. If a customer attempted to buy a single cheese or half flitch of bacon, Girdler wrote in 1800, "he is sure to be answered by an insult, and he is told that the whole lot has been bought up by some London contractor".[83]

We may take as expressive of these grievances, which sometimes occasioned riot, an anonymous letter dropped in 1795 by the door of the Mayor of Salisbury:

> Gentlemen of the Corperation I pray you put a stop to that practice which is made use of in our Markits by Rook and other carriers in your giving them the Liberty to Scower the Market of every thing so as the Inhabitance cannot buy a singel Artickel without going to the Dealers for it and Pay what Extortionat price they think proper and even Domineer over the Peopel as thow they was not Whorthy to Look on them. But their time will soon be at an End as soon as the Solders ear gon out of town.

The Corporation is asked to order carriers out of the market until the townspeople have been served, "and stop all the Butchers from sending the meat away by a Carces at a time But make them cut it up in the Markit and sarve the Town first". The letter informs the Mayor that upwards of three hundred citizens have "posetively swor to be trow to each other for the Distruction of the Carriers".[84]

[80] P.R.O., W.O. 1/986 fo. 69.

[81] Davies, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-4.

[82] "The first principle laid down by a baker, when he comes into a parish, is, to get all the poor in his debt; he then makes their bread of what weight or goodness he pleases . . .": *Gentleman's Magazine*, xxvi (1756), p. 557.

[83] Girdler, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

[84] P.R.O., H.O. 42/34.

Where the working people could buy cereals in small parcels intense feeling could arise over weights and measures. We are exhorted in Luke: "Give, and it shall be given unto you, good measure pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give unto your bosom". This was not, alas, the practice of all farmers and dealers in protestant England. An enactment of Charles II had even given the poor the right to *shake* the measure, so valuable was the poor man's corn that a looseness in the measure might make the difference to him of a day without a loaf. The same Act had attempted, with total lack of success, to enforce the Winchester measure as the national standard. A great variety of measures, varying even within county boundaries from one market-town to the next, gave abundant opportunities for petty profiteering. The old measures were generally larger — sometimes very much larger — than the Winchester; sometimes they were favoured by farmers or dealers, more often they were favoured by the customers. One observer remarked that "the lower orders of people detest it [the Winchester measure], from the smallness of its contents, and the dealers . . . instigate them to this, it being their interest to retain every uncertainty in weights and measures".[85]

Attempts to change the measure often encountered resistance, occasionally riot. A letter from a Clee Hill (Salop.) miner to a "Brother Sufferer" declared:

> The Parliament for our relief to help to Clem [starve] us Thay are going to lesson our Measure and Wait [weight] to the Lower Standard. We are about Ten Thousand sworn and ready at any time And we wou'd have you get Arms and Cutlasses and swear one another to be true . . . . We have but one Life to Loose and we will not clem . . . .[86]

Letters to farmers in Northiam (Sussex) warned:

> Gentlemen all ie hope you whill take this as a wharning to you all for you to put the little Bushels bie and take the oald measher [measure] again for if you dont there whill be a large company that shall borne [burn] the little measher when you are all abade and asleep and your cornehouses and corn-stacks and you along with them . . . .[87]

A Hampshire contributor to the *Annals of Agriculture* explained in 1795 that the poor "have erroneously conceived an idea that the price of grain is increased by the late alteration from a nine-gallon bushel to

[85] *Annals of Agriculture*, xxvi (1796), p. 327; *Museum Rusticum et Commerciale*, iv (1765), p. 198. The difference in bushels could be very considerable: as against the Winchester bushel of 8 gallons, the Stamford had 16 gallons, the Carlisle 24, and the Chester 32: see J. Houghton, *A Collection for Improvement of Husbandry and Trade* (London, 1727), no. xlvi, 23 June 1693.

[86] *London Gazette*, March 1767, no. 10710.

[87] November 1793, in P.R.O., H.O. 42/27. The measures concerned were for malt.

the Winchester, from its happening to take place at a moment of a rising market, by which, the same money was paid for eight as used to be paid for nine gallons". "I confess", he continues,

> I have a decided predeliction for the nine-gallon measure, for the reason that it is the measure which nearest yields a bushel of flour; whence, the poor man is enabled to judge of what he ought to pay for a bushel of flour, which, in the present measure, requires more arithmetic than comes to his share to ascertain.[88]

Even so, the arithmetical notions of the poor may not have been so erroneous. Changes in measures, like changes to decimal currency, tend by some magic to disadvantage the consumer.

If less corn was being bought (at the end of the century) in the open market by the poor, this also indicated the rise to greater importance of the miller. The miller occupies a place in popular folk-lore, over many centuries, which is both enviable and unenviable. On one hand he was noted as a fabulously successful lecher, whose prowess is still perhaps perpetuated in a vernacular meaning of the word "grinding". Perhaps the convenience of the village mill, tucked around a secluded corner of the stream, to which the village wives and maidens brought their corn for grinding; perhaps also his command over the means of life; perhaps his status in the village, which made him an eligible match — all may have contributed to the legend:

> A brisk young lass so brisk and gay
> She went unto the mill one day . . .
> There's a peck of corn all for to grind
> I can but stay a little time.
>
> Come sit you down my sweet pretty dear
> I cannot grind your corn I fear
> My stones is high and my water low
> I cannot grind for the mill won't go.
>
> Then she sat down all on a sack
> They talked of this and they talked of that
> They talked of love, of love proved kind
> She soon found out the mill would grind . . . .[89]

On the other hand, the miller's repute was less enviable. "*Loving!*", exclaims Nellie Dean in *Wuthering Heights*: "*Loving!* Did anybody ever hear the like? I might as well talk of loving the miller who comes once a year to buy our corn". If we are to believe all that was written

[88] *Annals of Agriculture*, xxiv (1795), pp. 51-2.

[89] James Reeves, *The Idiom of the People* (London, 1958), p. 156. See also British Museum, Place MSS., Add. MS. 27825 for "A pretty maid she to the miller would go", verse 2:

> Then the miller he laid her against the mill hopper
> Merry a soul so wantonly
> He pulled up her cloaths, and he put in the stopper
> For says she I'll have my corn ground small and free.

about him in these years, the miller's story had changed little since Chaucer's Reeve's Tale. But where the small country miller was accused of quaintly medieval customs — over-size toll dishes, flour concealed in the casing of the stones, etc. — his larger counterpart was accused of adding new, and greatly more enterprising, peculations:

> For ther-biforn he stal but curteisly,
> But now he was a thief outrageously.

At one extreme we still have the little country mill, exacting toll according to its own custom. The toll might be taken in flour (always from "the best of the meal and from the finer flour that is in the centre of the hopper"); and since the proportion remained the same with whatever fluctuation in price, it was to the miller's advantage if prices were high. Around the small toll-mills (even where toll had been commuted for money payments) grievances multiplied, and there were fitful attempts at their regulation.[90] Since the millers entered increasingly into dealing, and into grinding corn on their own account for the bakers, they had little time for the petty customers (with a sack or two of gleaned corn); hence endless delay; hence also, when the flour was returned it might be the product of other, inferior, grain. (It was complained that some millers purchased at half-price damaged corn which they then mixed with the corn of their customers.[91]) As the century wore on, the translation of many mills to industrial purposes gave to the surviving petty corn-mills a more advantageous position. In 1796 these grievances were sufficiently felt to enable Sir Francis Bassett to carry the Miller's Toll Bill, intended to regulate their practices, weights and measures, more strictly.[92]

But these petty millers were, of course, the small fry of the eighteenth century. The great millers of the Thames Valley and of the large towns were a different order of entrepreneurs, who traded extensively in flour and malt. Millers were quite outside the Assize of Bread, and they could immediately pass on any increase in the price of corn to the consumer. England also had its unsung *banalités* in the eighteenth century, including those extraordinary survivals, the soke-mills, which exercised an absolute monopoly of the grinding of grain (and the sale of flour) in substantial manufacturing

[90] See P. Markham, *Syhoroc* (London, 1758), ii, p. 15; Bennett and Elton, *op. cit.*, iii, pp. 150-65; information of John Spyry against the Miller of Millbrig Mill, 1740, for taking sometimes ⅛th., sometimes ⅙th., and sometimes ¼th part as mulcture: West Riding Sessions papers, County Hall, Wakefield.

[91] See e.g. Girdler, *op. cit.*, pp. 102-6, 212.

[92] *Annals of Agriculture*, xxiii (1795), pp. 179-91; Bennett and Elton, *op. cit.*, iii, p. 166; 36 Geo. III, *c.* 85.

centres, among them Manchester, Bradford, Leeds.[93] In most cases the feoffees who owned the soke-rights sold or leased these to private speculators. Most stormy was the history of the School Mills at Manchester, whose soke-rights were intended as a charitable endowment to support the grammar school. Two unpopular lessees of the rights inspired, in 1737, Dr. Byrom's rhyme:

> *Bone and Skin*, two millers thin,
> Would starve the town, or near it;
> But be it known, to *Skin and Bone*,
> That Flesh and Blood can't bear it.

When, in 1757, new lessees sought to prohibit the importation of flour to the growing town, while at the same time managing their mills (it was alleged) with extortion and delay, flesh and blood could indeed bear it no longer. In the famous "Shude-hill Fight" of that year at least four men were killed by musketry, but the soke-rights were finally broken.[94] But even where no actual soke-right obtained, one mill might command a populous community, and could provoke the people to fury by a sudden advance in the price of flour or an evident deterioration in its quality. Mills were the visible, tangible targets of some of the most serious urban riots of the century. The Albion Mills at Blackfriars Bridge (London's first steam mills) were governed by a quasi-philanthropic syndicate; yet when they burned down in 1791 Londoners danced and sang ballads of rejoicing in the streets.[95] The first steam mill at Birmingham (Snow Hill) fared little better, being the target of a massive attack in 1795.

It may appear at first sight as curious that both dealers and millers should continue to be among the objectives of riot at the end of the century, by which time in many parts of the Midlands and South (and certainly in urban areas) working people had become accustomed to buying bread at the bakers' shops rather than grain or flour in the market-place. We do not know enough to chart the change-over with accuracy, and certainly much home-baking survived.[96] But even

[93] See Bennett and Elton, *op. cit.*, iii, pp. 204 ff; W. Cudworth, "The Bradford Soke", *The Bradford Antiquary* (Bradford, 1888), i, pp. 74 ff.

[94] See note 68 above and Bennett and Elton, *op. cit.*, iii, pp. 274 ff.

[95] *Ibid.*, iii, pp. 204-6.

[96] Replies from towns to Privy Council enquiry, 1796, in P.R.O., P.C.1/33/A.88: e.g. mayor of York, 16 April 1796, "the poor here can get their bread baked at common ovens ..."; mayor of Lancaster, 10 April, "each family buys their own flour and makes their own bread"; mayor of Leeds, 4 April, it is the custom "to buy corn or meal, and to mix up their own bread, and to bake it themselves or to get it baked for hire". A survey of bakers in the hundred of Corby (Northants.) in 1757 shows that out of 31 parishes, one parish (Wilbarston) had four bakers, one had three, three had two, eight had one, and fourteen had no resident baker (four gave no return): Northants. Rec. Off., H (K) 170.

where the change-over was complete, one should not underestimate the sophistication of the situation and of the crowd's objectives. There were, of course, scores of petty riots outside bread shops, and the crowd very often "set the price" of bread. But the baker (whose trade in times of high prices can scarcely have been an enviable one) was, alone of all those who dealt in the people's necessities (landlord, farmer, factor, carrier, miller), in daily contact with the consumer; and he was, more than any of the others, protected by the visible paraphernalia of paternalism. The Assize of Bread clearly and publicly limited their lawful profits (thereby also tending to leave the baking trade in the hands of numerous small traders with little capital), and thus protected them, to some degree, from popular wrath. Even Charles Smith, the able exponent of free trade, thought the continuation of the Assize to be expedient: "in large Towns and Cities it will always be necessary to set the Assize, in order to satisfy the people that the price which the Bakers demand is no more than what is thought reasonable by the Magistrates".[97]

The psychological effect of the Assize was, therefore, considerable. The baker could hope to enhance his profit beyond the allowance calculated in the Assize only by small stratagems, some of which — short-weight bread, adulteration, the mixing in of cheap and spoiled flour — were subject either to legal redress or to instant crowd retaliation. Indeed, the baker had sometimes to attend to his own public relations, even to the extent of enlisting the crowd on his side: when Hannah Pain of Kettering complained to the justices of short-weight bread, the baker "raised a mob upon her . . . and said she deserved to be whipped, there were enough of such scambling scum of the earth".[98] Many corporations, throughout the century, made a great show of supervising weights and measures, and of punishing offenders.[99] Ben Jonson's "Justice Overdo" was still busy in the streets of Reading, Coventry, or London:

[97] C. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

[98] Examination of Hannah Pain, 12 Aug. 1757, Northants. Rec. Off., H (K) 167 (1).

[99] It is notable that punishments for these offences were most frequent in years of dearth, and doubtless these were intended to have symbolic force: thus 6 presentments for false or short weight at Bury St. Edmunds sessions, May 1740: Bury St. Edmunds and West Suffolk Rec. Off., D8/1/8(5); 6 fined for deficient weight in Maidenhead, October 1766: Berkshire Rec. Off., M/JM1. At Reading, however, surveillance appears to be fairly constant, in good years as well as bad: Central Public Library, Reading, R/MJ Acc. 167, Court Leet and View of Frankpledge. At Manchester the market officials were vigilant until the 1750s, more casual thereafter, but very active in April 1796: Earwaker, *Court Leet Records*, ix, pp. 113-4.

> Marry, go you into every alehouse, and down into every cellar; measure the length of puddings . . . weigh the loaves of bread on his middle finger . . . give the puddings to the poor, the bread to the hungry, the custards to his children . . .

In this tradition we find a London magistrate in 1795 who, coming on the scene of a riot in Seven Dials where the crowd was already in the act of demolishing the shop of a baker accused of selling light-weight bread, intervened, seized the baker's stock, weighed the loaves, and finding them indeed deficient, distributed the loaves among the crowd.[100]

No doubt the bakers, who knew their customers, sometimes complained of their powerlessness to reduce prices, and diverted the crowd to the mill or the corn-market. "After ransacking many bakers' shops", the miller of Snow Hill, Birmingham, related of the 1795 attack, "they came in great numbers against us . . ."[101] But in many cases the crowd clearly selected its own targets, deliberately by-passing the bakers. Thus in 1740 at Norwich the people "went to every Baker in the City, and affix'd a Note on his Door in these words, Wheat at *Sixteen Shillings a Comb*". In the same year at Wisbeach they obliged "the Merchants to sell Wheat at 4d per Bushel . . . not only to them, but also to the Bakers, where they regulated the Weight & Price of Bread".[102]

But it is clear at this point that we are dealing with a far more complex pattern of action than one which can be satisfactorily explained by a face-to-face encounter between the populace and particular millers, dealers or bakers. It is necessary to take a larger view of the actions of the crowd.

V

It has been suggested that the term "riot" is a blunt tool of analysis for so many particular grievances and occasions. It is also an imprecise term for describing popular actions. If we are looking for the characteristic form of direct action, we should take, not squabbles outside London bakeries, nor even the great affrays provoked by

[100] *Gentleman's Magazine*, lxv (1795), p. 697.

[101] MS. notebook of Edward Pickering, Birmingham City Ref. Lib., M 22.

[102] *Ipswich Journal*, 12 and 26 July 1740. (I am indebted to Dr. R. M. Malcolmson of Queen's University, Ontario, for these references). The crowd by no means mistook the bakers for their main opponents, and forms of pressure were often of considerable complexity: thus "incendiary" papers set up around Tenterden (1768) incited people to rise and force the farmers to sell their wheat to the millers or the poor at £10 a load, and threatened to destroy the mills of those millers who gave to the farmers a higher price: Shelburne, 25 May 1768, P.R.O., S.P. 44/199.

discontent with the large millers, but the "risings of the people" (most notably in 1740, 1756, 1766, 1795 and 1800) in which colliers, tinners, weavers and hosiery workers were prominent. What is remarkable about these "insurrections" is, first, their discipline, and, second, the fact that they exhibit a pattern of behaviour for whose origin we must look back several hundreds of years: which becomes more, rather than less, sophisticated in the eighteenth century; which repeats itself, seemingly spontaneously, in different parts of the country and after the passage of many quiet years. The central action in this pattern is not the sack of granaries and the pilfering of grain or flour but the action of "setting the price".

What is extraordinary about this pattern is that it reproduces, sometimes with great precision, the emergency measures in time of scarcity whose operation, in the years between 1580 and 1630, were codified in the *Book of Orders*. These emergency measures were employed in times of scarcity in the last years of Elizabeth, and put into effect, in a somewhat revised form, in the reign of Charles I, in 1630. In Elizabeth's reign the magistrates were required to attend the local markets,

> and where you shall fynde that there is insufficiente quantities broughte to fill and serve the said marketts and speciallie the poorer sorte, you shall thereupon resorte to the houses of the Farmers and others using tyllage ... and viewe what store and provision of graine theye have remayninge either thrashed or unthrashed ....

They might then order the farmers to send "convenient quantities" to market to be sold "and that at reasonable price". The justices were further empowered to "sett downe a certen price upon the bushell of everye kynde of graine".[103] The queen and her Council opined that high prices were in part due to engrossers, in part to the "greedie desier" of corn-growers who "bee not content w^th^ anie moderate gayne, but seeke & devise waies to kepe up the prices to the manifest oppression of the poorer sort". The Orders were to be enforced "w^th^out all parciality in sparing anie man".[104]

In essence, then, the *Book of Orders* empowered magistrates (with the aid of local juries) to survey the corn stocks in barns and granaries;[105] to order quantities to be sent to market; and to enforce

[103] "A Coppie of the Councells her[e] for graine delyv^rd^ at Bodmyn the xith of May 1586": Bodleian Library, Rawlinson MS. B 285, fos. 66-7.

[104] There is some account of the operation of the *Book of Orders* in E. M. Leonard, *Early History of English Poor Relief* (Cambridge, 1900); Gras, *op. cit.*, pp. 236-42; Lipson, *op. cit.*, iii, pp. 440-50; B. E. Supple, *Commercial Crisis and Change in England, 1600-42* (Cambridge, 1964), p. 117. Papers illustrative of their operation are in *Official Papers of Nathaniel Bacon of Stiffkey, Norfolk* (Camden Society, 3rd ser., xxvi, 1915), pp. 130-57.

[105] For an example, see *Victoria County History, Oxfordshire*, ii, ed. W. Page (London, 1907), pp. 193-4.

with severity every part of the marketing, licensing and forestalling legislation. No corn was to be sold except in open market, "unlesse the same be to some pore handicrafts Men, or Day-Labourers within the parish wherein you doe dwell, that cannot conveniently come to the Market Townes". The Orders of 1630 did not explicitly empower justices to set the price, but ordered them to attend the market and ensure that the poor were "provided of necessary Corne ... with as much favour in the Prices, as by the earnest Perswasion of the Justices can be obtained". The power to set a price upon grain or flour rested, in emergency, half-way between enforcement and persuasion.[106]

This emergency legislation was falling into disrepair during the Civil Wars.[107] But the popular memory, especially in a pre-literate society, is extraordinarily long. There can be little doubt that a direct tradition extends from the *Book of Orders* of 1630 to the actions of clothing workers in East Anglia and the West in the eighteenth century. (The literate had long memories also: the *Book of Orders* itself was republished, unofficially, in 1662, and again in 1758, with a prefatory address to the reader referring to the present "wicked combination to make scarcity".)[108]

[106] By an Act of 1534 (25 Henry VIII, *c.* 2) the Privy Council had the power to set prices on corn in emergency. In a somewhat misleading note, Gras (*op. cit.*, pp. 132-3) opines that after 1550 the power was never used. It was in any case not forgotten: a proclamation of 1603 appears to set prices (Seligman Collection, Columbia Univ. Lib., Proclamations, James I, 1603); the *Book of Orders* of 1630 concludes with the warning that "if the Corne-masters and other Owners of Victuall ... shall not willingly performe these Orders", His Majesty will "give Order that reasonable Prices shall be set"; the Privy Council attempted to restrain prices by Proclamation in 1709, Liverpool Papers, Brit. Mus., Add. MS. 38353, fo. 195; and the matter was actively canvassed in 1757 — see Smith, *Three Tracts on the Corn Trade*, pp. 29, 35. And (apart from the Assize of Bread) other price-fixing powers lingered on. In 1681 at Oxford market (controlled by the University) prices were set for butter, cheese, poultry, meat, bacon, candles, oats, and beans: "The Oxford Market", *Collectanea*, 2nd ser. (Oxford, 1890), pp. 127-8. It seems that the Assize of Ale lapsed in Middlesex in 1692 (Lipson, *op. cit.*, ii, p. 501), and in 1762 brewers were authorized (by 2 Geo III, *c.* 14) to raise the price in a reasonable manner; but when in 1773 it was proposed to raise the price by ½d. a quart Sir John Fielding wrote to the earl of Suffolk that the increase "cannot be thought reasonable; nor will the subject submit to it": *Calendar of Home Office Papers*, 1773, pp. 9-14; P. Mathias, *The Brewing Industry in England, 1700-1830* (Cambridge, 1959), p. 360.

[107] See G. D. Ramsay, "Industrial *Laisser-Faire* and the Policy of Cromwell", *Econ. Hist. Rev.* 1st ser., xvi (1946), esp. pp. 103-4; M. James, *Social Problems and Policy during the Puritan Revolution* (London, 1930), pp. 264-71.

[108] *Seasonable Orders Offered from former Precedents Whereby the Price of Corn ... may be much abated* (London, 1662) — a reprint of the Elizabethan Orders; J. Massie, *Orders Appointed by His Majestie King Charles I* (London, 1758).

The Orders were themselves in part a response to the pressure of the poor:

> The Corne is so dear
> I dout mani will starve this yeare —

So ran a doggerel notice affixed in the church porch in the parish of Wye (Kent) in 1630:

> If you see not to this
> Sum of you will speed amis.
> Our souls they are dear,
> For our bodys have sume ceare
> Before we arise
> Less will safise . . . .
> You that are set in place
> See that youre profesion you
> doe not disgrace . . . .[109]

One hundred and thirty years later (1768) incendiary papers were once again being nailed to church doors (as well as to inn-signs) in parishes within the same lathe of Scray in Kent, inciting the poor to rise.[110] Many similar continuities can be observed, although undoubtedly the pattern of direct action spread to new districts in the eighteenth century. In many actions, especially in the old manufacturing regions of the East and West, the crowd claimed that since the authorities refused to enforce "the laws" they must enforce them for themselves. In 1693 at Banbury and Chipping Norton the crowd "took away the corne by force out of the waggons, as it was carrying away by the ingrossers, saying that they were resolved to put the law in execution, since the magistrates neglected it".[111] During the extensive disorders in the West in 1766 the sheriff of Gloucestershire, a gentleman clothier, could not disguise his respect for the rioters who

> went . . . to a farmhouse and civilly desired that they wou'd thresh out and bring to market their wheat and sell it for five shillings per bushel, which being promised, and some provisions given them unasked for, they departed without the least violence or offence.

If we follow other passages of the sheriff's accounts we may encounter most of the features found in these actions:

> On Friday last a Mobb was rais'd in these parts by the blowing of Horns &c consisting entirely of the lowest of the people such as weavers, mecanicks, labourers, prentices, and boys, &c . . .

"They proceeded to a gristmill near the town . . . cutting open Baggs of Flower and giving & carrying it away & destroying corn &c". They then attended at the main markets, setting the price of grain. Three days later he sent a further report:

[109] *Calendar State Papers (Domestic)*, 1630, p. 387.
[110] *Calendar of Home Office Papers*, 1768, p. 342.
[111] Westerfield, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

> They visited Farmers, Millers, Bakers and Hucksters shops, selling corn, flower, bread, cheese, butter, and bacon, at their own prices. They returned in general the produce [i.e. the money] to the proprietors or in their absence left the money for them; and behaved with great regularity and decency where they were not opposed, with outrage and violence where they was: but pilferd very little, which to prevent, they will not now suffer Women and boys to go with them.

After visiting the mills and markets around Gloucester, Stroud and Cirencester, they divided into parties of fifty and a hundred and visited the villages and farms, requesting that corn be brought at fair prices to market, and breaking in on granaries. A large party of them attended on the sheriff himself, downed their cudgels while he addressed them on their misdemeanours, listened with patience, "chearfully shouted God Save the King", and then picked up their cudgels and resumed the good work of setting the price. The movement partook of the character of a general strike of the whole clothing district: "the rioters come into our workshops . . . and force out all the men willing or unwilling to join them".[112]

This was an unusually large-scale and disciplined action. But the account directs us to features repeatedly encountered. Thus the movement of the crowd from the market-place outwards to the mills and thence (as in the *Book of Orders*) to farms, where stocks were inspected and the farmers ordered to send grain to market at the price dictated by the crowd — all this is commonly found. This was sometimes accompanied by the traditional round of visits to the houses of the great, for contributions, forced or voluntary. At Norwich in 1740 the crowd, after forcing down prices in the city, and seizing a keel loaded with wheat and rye on the river, solicited contributions from the rich of the city:

> Early on Thursday Morning, by Sound of Horns, they met again; and after a short Confabulation, divided into Parties, and march'd out of Town at different Gates, with a long Streamer carried before them, purposing to visit the Gentlemen and Farmers in the neighbouring Villages, in order to extort Money, Strong Ale, &c. from them. At many places, where the Generosity of People answer'd not their Expectation, 'tis said they shew'd their Resentment by treading down the Corn in the Fields . . . .

Perambulating crowds were active in this year, notably in Durham and Northumberland, the West Riding, and several parts of North Wales. Anti-export demonstrators, commencing at Dewsbury (April 1740) were led by a drummer and "a sort of ensign or colours"; they performed a regular circuit of the local mills, destroying machinery, cutting sacks, and carrying away grain and meal. In 1766

[112] Letters of W. Dalloway, Brimscomb, 17 and 20 September 1766, in P.R.O., P.C.1/8/41.

a perambulating crowd in the Thames valley called themselves "the Regulators"; a terrified farmer allowed them to sleep in the straw in his yard, and "could hear from his Chamber that they were telling one another whom they had most frightened, & where they had the best success". The pattern continues in the 1790s: at Ellesmere (Salop.) the crowd stopping the corn as it goes to the mills and threatening the farmers individually; in the Forest of Dean the miners visiting mills and farmers' houses, and exacting money "from persons they meet in the road"; in West Cornwall the tinners visiting farms with a noose in one hand and an agreement to bring corn at reduced prices to market in the other.[113]

It is the restraint, rather than the disorder, which is remarkable; and there can be no doubt that the actions were approved by an overwhelming popular consensus. There is a deeply-felt conviction that prices *ought*, in times of dearth, to be regulated, and that the profiteer put himself outside of society. On occasion the crowd attempted to enlist, by suasion or force, a magistrate, parish constable, or some figure of authority to preside over the *taxation populaire*. In 1766 at Drayton (Oxon.) members of the crowd went to John Lyford's house "and asked him if he were a Constable — upon his saying 'yes' Cheer said he sho'd go with them to the Cross & receive the money for 3 sacks of flour which they had taken from one Betty Smith and which they w'd sell for 5s a Bushel"; the same crowd enlisted the constable of Abingdon for the same service. The constable of Handborough (also in Oxfordshire) was enlisted in a similar way, in 1795; the crowd set a price — and a substantial one — of 40s a sack upon a waggon of flour which had been intercepted, and the money for no fewer than fifteen sacks was paid into his hands. In the Isle of Ely, in the same year, "the mob insisted upon buying meat at 4d per lb, & desired Mr Gardner a Magistrate to superintend the sale, as the Mayor had done at Cambridge on Saturday sennight". Again in 1795 there were a number of occasions when militia or regular troops supervised forced sales, sometimes at bayonet-point, their officers looking steadfastly the other way. A combined operation of soldiery and crowd forced the mayor of Chichester to accede in

[113] Norwich, 1740 — *Ipswich Journal*, 26 July 1740; Dewsbury, 1740 — J. L. Kaye and five magistrates, Wakefield, 30 Apr. 1740, in P.R.O., S.P. 36/50; Thames Valley, 1766 — testimony of Bartholomew Freeman of Bisham Farm, 2 Oct. 1766, in P.R.O., T.S.11/995/3707; Ellesmere, 1795 — P.R.O., W.O. 1/1089 fo. 359; Forest of Dean — John Turner, Mayor of Gloucester, 24 June 1795, P.R.O., W.O.1/1087; Cornwall — see John G. Rule, "Some Social Aspects of the Cornish Industrial Revolution", *Industry and Society in the South-West*, ed. Roger Burt (University of Exeter, 1970), pp. 90-1.

setting the price of bread. At Wells men of the 122nd Regiment began

> by hooting those they term'd forestallers or jobbers of butter, who they hunted in different parts of the town — seized the butter — collected it together — placed sentinels over it — then threw it, & mix't it together in a tub — & afterwards retail'd the same, weighing it in scales, selling it after the rate of 8d per lb . . . though the common price given by the jobbers was rather more than 10d.[114]

It would be foolish to suggest that, when so large a breach was made in the outworks of deference, many did not take the opportunity to carry off goods without payment. But there is abundant evidence the other way, and some of it is striking. There are the Honiton lace-workers, in 1766, who, having taken corn from the farmers and sold it at the popular price in the market, brought back to the farmers not only the money but also the sacks; the Oldham crowd, in 1800, which rationed each purchaser to two pecks a head; and the many occasions when carts were stopped on the roads, their contents sold, and the money entrusted to the carter.[115]

Moreover, in those cases where goods were taken without payment, or where violence was committed, it is wise to enquire whether any particular aggravation of circumstances enters into the case. The distinction is made in an account of an action in Portsea (Hants.) in 1795. The bakers and butchers were first offered by the crowd the popular price: "those that complied in those demands were paid with exactness". But those who refused had their shops rifled, "without receiving any more money than the mob chose to leave". Again, the quarrymen at Port Isaac (Cornwall) in the same year seized barley warehoused for export, paying the reasonably high price of 11s. a bushel, at the same time warning the owner that "if he offer'd to ship the Remainder they would come & take it without making him any recompence". Very often the motive of punishment or revenge comes in. The great riot in Newcastle in 1740, when pitmen and keelmen swept into the Guildhall, destroyed the town books and shared out the town's hutch, and pelted aldermen with mud and

[114] Drayton, Oxon — brief against Wm Denley and three others, in P.R.O., T.S. 11/995/3707; Handborough — information of Robert Prior, constable, 6 Aug. 1795, P.R.O., Assizes 5/116; Isle of Ely — Lord Hardwicke, Wimpole, 27 July 1795, P.R.O., H.O. 42/35 and H. Gunning, *Reminiscences of Cambridge* (London, 1854), ii, pp. 5-7; Chichester — duke of Richmond, Goodwood, 13 Apr. 1795, P.R.O., W.O. 1/1092; Wells — "Verax", 28 Apr. 1795, P.R.O., W.O. 1/1082 and the Rev. J. Turner, 28 Apr., H.O. 42/34. For an example of a constable who was executed for his part in a tinners' riot in St. Austell, 1729, see Rule, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

[115] See R. B. Rose, *op cit.*, p. 435; Edwin Butterworth, *Historical Sketches of Oldham* (Oldham, 1856), pp. 137-9, 144-5.

stones, came only after two phases of aggravation: first, when an agreement between the pitmen's leaders and the merchants (with an alderman acting as arbitrator) setting the prices of grain had been broken; second, when panicky authorities had fired into the crowd from the Guildhall steps. At one house in Gloucestershire in 1766 shots were fired at the crowd which (writes the sheriff) —

> they highly resented by forceing into the house, and destroying all the furniture, windows, &c and partly untiled it; they have given out since that they greatly repented of this act because 'twas not the master of the house (he being from home) that fired upon them.

In 1795 the tinners mounted an attack upon a Penryn (Cornwall) merchant who was contracted to send them barley, but who had sent them spoiled and sprouting grain. ⟨When mills were attacked, and their machinery damaged, it was often in furtherance of a long-standing warning, or as punishment for some notorious practice.[116]⟩

Indeed, ⟨if we wish to call in question the unilinear and spasmodic view of food riots, we need only point to this continuing motif of popular intimidation, when men and women near to starvation nevertheless attacked mills and granaries, not to steal the food, but to punish the proprietors.⟩ Repeatedly corn or flour was strewn along the roads and hedges; dumped into the river; mill machinery was damaged and mill-dams let off. To examples of such behaviour the authorities reacted both with indignation and astonishment. It was symptomatic (as it seemed to them) of the "frantic" and distempered humours of a people whose brain was inflamed by hunger. In 1795 both the Lord Chief Justice and Arthur Young delivered lectures to the poor, pointing out that the destruction of grain was not the best way to improve the supply of bread. Hannah More added a Half-penny Homily. An anonymous versifier of 1800 gives us a rather more lively example of these admonitions to the lower orders:

> When with your country Friends your hours you pass,
> And take, as oft you're wont, the copious glass,
> When all grow mellow, if perchance you hear
> "That 'tis th' Engrossers make the corn so dear;
> "They must and will have bread: they've had enough
> "Of Rice and Soup, and all such *squashy* stuff:
> "They'll help themselves: and strive by might and main
> "To be reveng'd on all such rogues in grain":
> John swears he'll fight as long as he has breath,
> " 'Twere better to be hang'd than starv'd to death:

[116] Portsea — *Gentleman's Magazine*, lxv (1795), p. 343; Port Isaac — Sir W. Molesworth, 23 March 1795, P.R.O., H.O. 42/34; Newcastle — *Gentleman's Magazine*, x (1740), p. 355, and various sources in P.R.O., S.P. 36/51, in Northumberland Rec. Off. and Newcastle City Archives Off.; Gloucestershire, 1766 — P.R.O., P.C. 1/8/41; Penryn, 1795 — P.R.O., H.O. 42/34.

> "He'll burn Squire Hoardum's garner, so he will,
> "Tuck up old Filchbag, and pull down his mill".
> Now when the Prong and Pitchfork they prepare
> And all the implements of rustick war . . .
> Tell them what ills unlawful deeds attend,
> Deeds, which in wrath begun, and sorrow end,
> That burning barns, and pulling down a mill,
> Will neither corn produce, nor bellies fill.[117]

But were the poor really so silly? One suspects that the millers and dealers, who kept one wary eye on the people and the other on the maximization of their profits, knew better than the poetasters at their *escritoires*. ⟨For the poor had their own sources of information. They worked on the docks. They moved the barges on the canals. They drove the carts and manned the toll-gates. They worked in the granaries and the mills. They often knew the local facts far better than the gentry; in many actions they went unerringly to hidden supplies of grain whose existence the J.P.s, in good faith, denied. If rumours often grew beyond all bounds, they were always rooted in at least some shallow soil of fact. The poor knew that the one way to make the rich yield was to twist their arms.⟩

VI

⟨Initiators of the riots were, very often, the women.⟩ In 1693 we learn of a great number of women going to Northampton market, "with knives stuck in their girdles to force corn at their own rates". In an export riot in 1737 at Poole (Dorset) it was reported: "The Numbers consist in so many Women, & the Men supporting them, & Swear, if any one offers to molest any of the Women in their Proceedings they will raise a Great Number of Men & destroy both Ships & Cargoes". The mob was raised in Stockton (Durham) in 1740 by a "Lady with a stick and a horn". At Haverfordwest (Pembroke) in 1795 an old-fashioned J.P. who attempted, with the help of his curate, to do battle with the colliers, complained that "the women were putting the Men on, & were perfect furies. I had some strokes from some of them on my Back . . .". A Birmingham paper described the Snow Hill riots as the work of "a rabble, urged on by furious women". In dozens of cases it is the same — the women pelting an unpopular dealer with his own potatoes, or cunningly combining fury with the calculation that they had slightly greater immunity than the men from the retaliation of the authorities: "the women told the common men", the Haverfordwest magistrate said of

[117] Anon., *Contentment: or Hints to Servants, on the Present Scarcity* (broadsheet, 1800).

the soldiers, "that they knew they were in their Hearts for them & would do them no hurt".[118]

These women appear to have belonged to some pre-history of their sex before its Fall, and to have been unaware that they should have waited for some two hundred years for their Liberation. (Southey could write as a commonplace, in 1807: "Women are more disposed to be mutinous; they stand less in fear of law, partly from ignorance, partly because they presume upon the privilege of their sex, and therefore in all public tumults they are foremost in violence and ferocity".)[119] They were also, of course, those most involved in face-to-face marketing, most sensitive to price significancies, most experienced in detecting short-weight or inferior quality. It is probable that the women most frequently precipitated the spontaneous actions. But other actions were more carefully prepared. Sometimes notices were nailed to church or inn doors. In 1740 "a Mach of Futtball was Cried at Ketring of five Hundred Men of a side, but the desighn was to Pull Down Lady Betey Jesmaine's Mills". At the end of the century the distribution of hand-written notices may have become more common. From Wakefield (Yorks.), 1795:

> To Give Notice
> To all Women & inhabitance of Wakefield they are desired to meet at the New Church . . . on Friday next at Nine O'Clock . . . to state the price of corn . . .
>
> By desire of the inhabitants of Halifax
> Who will meet them there

From Stratton (Cornwall), 1801:

> To all the labouring Men and Tradesmen in the Hundred of Stratton that are willing to save their Wifes and Children from the Dreadfull condition of being STARVED to DEATH by the unfeeling and Griping Farmer . . . . Assemble all emeadiately and march in Dreadfull Array to the Habitations

[118] Northampton — *Calendar State Papers, Domestic*, 1693, p. 397; Poole — memorial of Chitty and Lefebare, merchants, enclosed in Holles Newcastle, 26 May 1737, P.R.O., S.P. 41/10; Stockton — Edward Goddard, 24 May 1740, P.R.O., S.P. 36/50 ("We met a Lady with a Stick and a horn going towards Norton to raise the people . . . took the horn from her, She using very ill language all the while and followed into the Town, raising all the People she could . . . Ordered the Woman to be taken up . . . She all the way Crying out, Damn you all, Will You See me Suffer, or be sent to Gaol"?); Haverfordwest — P.R.O., H.O. 42/35; Birmingham — J. A. Langford, *A Century of Birmingham Life* (Birmingham, 1868), ii, p. 52.

[119] *Letters from England* (London, 1814 edn.), ii, p. 47. The women had other resources than ferocity: a colonel of Volunteers lamented that "the Devil in the shape of Women is now using all his influence to induce the Privates to brake their attachments to their Officers": Lt.-Col. J. Entwisle, Rochdale, 5 Aug. 1795, P.R.O., W.O. 1/1086.

> of the Griping Farmer, and Compell them to sell their Corn in the [illegible], at a fair and reasonable Price . . . .

The small-scale, spontaneous action might develop from a kind of ritualized hooting or groaning outside retailers' shops;[121] from the interception of a waggon of grain or flour passing through a populous centre; or from the mere gathering of a menacing crowd. Very quickly a bargaining-situation would develop: the owner of the provisions knew very well that if he did not comply voluntarily with the price imposed by the crowd (and his compliance made any subsequent prosecution very difficult) he stood in danger of losing his stock altogether. When a waggon with sacks of wheat and flour was intercepted at Handborough (Oxon.) in 1795, some women climbed aboard and pitched the sacks on the roadside. "Some of the persons assembled said they would give Forty Shillings a Sack for the Flour, and they would have it at that, and would not give more, and if that would not do, they would have it by force". The owner (a "yeoman") at length agreed: "If that must be the price, it must be the price". The procedure of forced bargaining can be seen equally clearly in the deposition of Thomas Smith, a baker, who rode into Hadstock (Essex) with bread on his panniers (1795). He was stopped in the village street by forty or more women and children. One of the women (a labourer's wife) held his horse

> and having asked whether he had fallen in his price of Bread, he told her, he had no Orders to fall from the Millers, & she then said, "By God if you don't fall you shall not leave any Bread in the Town" . . . .

Several in the crowd then offered 9d. a quartern loaf, while he demanded 19d. They then "swore that if he would not let them have it at 9d a Loaf, they would take it away, & before he could give any other Answer, several Persons then about him took several of the Loaves off his Pads . . .". Only at this point did Smith agree to the sale at 9d. the loaf. The bargaining was well understood on both sides; and retailers, who had to hold on to their customers in the fat years as well as the lean, often capitulated at the first sign of crowd turbulence.[122]

[120] Kettering — P.R.O., S.P. 36/50: for other examples of the use of football to assemble a crowd, see R. M. Malcolmson, "Popular Recreations in English Society, 1700-1850", (Warwick Univ. Ph.D. thesis, 1970), pp. 89-90; Wakefield — P.R.O., H.O. 42/35; Stratton — handwritten notice, dated 8 April and signed "Cato", in P.R.O., H.O. 42/61 fo. 718.

[121] A correspondent from Rosemary Lane (London), 2 July 1795, complained of being awoken at 5 a.m. "by a most dreadful Groaning (as the Mob call it) but what I should call Squealing": P.R.O., W.O. 1/1089 fo. 719.

[122] Handborough — informations of J. Townsend, Thomas Higgins, and Robert Prior in P.R.O., Assizes 5/116; Hadstock — information of Thomas Smith, 18 Nov. 1795, Essex Rec. Off., Q/SB b 362/84.

In larger-scale disturbances, once the nucleus of a crowd had been formed, the remainder was often raised by horn or drums. "On Monday last", a letter from a Shropshire magistrate commences in 1756, "the colliers from Broseley &c assembled with horns blowing, & proceeded to Wenlock Market . . .". What was critical was the gathering of the determined nucleus. Not only the "virility" of the colliers, and their particular exposure to consumer-exploitation, explain their prominent rôle, but also their numbers and the natural discipline of the mining community. "On Thursday morning", John Todd, a pitman at Heaton Colliery, Gateshead, deposed (1740), "at the time of the night shift going on", his fellow pitmen, "about 60 or 80 in number stopped the gin at the pit . . . and it was proposed to come to Newcastle to settle the prices of corn . . .". When they came from Nook Colliery into Haverfordwest in 1795 (the magistrate relates that his curate said: "Doctor, here are the colliers coming . . . I looked up & saw a great crowd of men women & children with oaken bludgeons coming down the street bawling out, 'One & all — one & all' ") the colliers explained later that they had come at the request of the poor townspeople, who had not the morale to set the price on their own.[123]

The occupational make-up of the crowd provides few surprises. It was (it seems) fairly representative of the occupations of the "lower orders" in the rioting areas. At Witney (Oxon.) we find informations against a blanket-weaver, a tailor, the wife of a victualler, and a servant; at Saffron Walden (Essex) indictments against two collar-makers, a cordwainer, a bricklayer, a carpenter, a sawyer, a worsted-maker, and nine labourers; in several Devonshire villages (Sampford Peverell, Burlescomb, Culmstock) we find a spinster, two weavers, a woolcomber, a cordwainer, a thatcher, and ten labourers indicted; in the Handborough affair a carpenter, a mason, a sawyer, and seven labourers were mentioned in one information.[124] There were fewer

[123] Broseley — T. Whitmore, 11 Nov. 1756, P.R.O., S.P. 36/136; Gateshead — information of John Todd in Newcastle City Archives; Haverfordwest — P.R.O., H.O. 42/35.

[124] Witney — information of Thomas Hudson, 10 Aug. 1795, P.R.O., Assizes 5/116; Saffron Walden — indictments for offences on 27 July 1795, P.R.O., Assizes 35/236; Devonshire — calendar of Summer Circuit, 1795, P.R.O., Assizes 24/43; Handborough — information of James Stevens, tything-man, 6 Aug. 1795, P.R.O., Assizes 5/116. All 13 of the Berkshire rioters of 1766 tried by Special Commission were described as "labourers"; of 66 persons brought before the Special Commission at Gloucester in 1766, 51 were described as "labourers", 10 were wives of "labourers", 3 were spinsters: the descriptions reveal little: *G. B. Deputy Keeper of Public Records, 5th Report* (1844), App. ii, pp. 198-9, 202-4. For Wales, 1793-1801 see Jones, "Corn Riots in Wales", *op. cit.*, App. III, p. 350. For Dundee, 1772, see S. G. E. Lythe, "The Tayside Meal Mobs", *Scot. Hist. Rev.*, xlvi (1967), p. 34: a porter, a quarryman, three weavers, and a sailor were indicted.

accusations as to the alleged incitement of persons in a superior station in life than Rudé and others have noted in France,[125] although it was more often suggested that the labourers were encouraged by their superiors towards a tone hostile to farmers and middlemen. An observer in the South-West in 1801 argued that the riots were "certainly directed by inferior Tradesmen, Woolcombers, & Dissenters, who keep aloof but by their language & immediate influence govern the lower classes".[126] Occasionally, large employers of labourers were alleged to have encouraged their own workers to act.[127]

Another important difference, as compared with France, was the relative inactivity of farm labourers in England as contrasted with the activity of the *vignerons* and petty peasantry. Many cereal farmers, of course, continued the custom of selling cheap grain to their own labourers. But this applied only to regular, annually-hired labourers, and to certain districts. Rural labourers elsewhere did participate in riots, when some other group (like colliers) formed the original nucleus, or where some activity brought them together in sufficient numbers. When a large band of labourers toured the Thames Valley in 1766, the action had commenced with gangs at work on a turnpike-road, who said "with one Voice, Come one & all to Newbury in a Body to Make the Bread cheaper". Once in town, they raised further support by parading in the town square and giving three huzzas. In East Anglia in 1795 a similar nucleus was found from among the "bankers" (gangs "employed in cleansing out Drains & in embanking"). The bankers also were less subject to instant identification and punishment, or to the revenges of village paternalism, than were field labourers, being "for the most part strangers from different countries [who] are not so easily quieted as those who live on the spot".[128]

In truth, the food riot did not require a high degree of organization. It required a consensus of support in the community, and an inherited pattern of action with its own objectives and restraints. And the persistence of this form of action raises an interesting question: how far was it, in any sense, successful? Would it have continued, over so many scores, indeed hundreds, of years, if it had consistently failed

[125] See Rudé, *The Crowd in History*, p. 38.

[126] Lt.-Gen. J. G. Simcoe, 27 Mar. 1801, P.R.O., H.O. 42/61.

[127] Thus in an export riot in Flint (1740) there were allegations that the steward of Sir Thomas Mostyn had found arms for his own colliers: various depositions in P.R.O., S.P. 36/51.

[128] Newbury — brief in P.R.O., T.S. 11/995/3707; East Anglia — B. Clayton, Boston, 11 Aug. 1795, P.R.O., H.O. 42/35.

to achieve its objectives, and had left nothing but a few ruined mills and victims on the gallows? It is a question peculiarly difficult to answer; but one which must be asked.

VII

In the short-term it would seem probable that riot and price-setting defeated their own objects. Farmers were sometimes intimidated so far that they refused afterwards, for several weeks, to bring goods to market. The interdiction of the movement of grain within the country was likely only to aggravate shortage in other regions. Although instances can be found where riot appeared to result in a fall in prices, and instances can be found of the opposite, and, further, instances can be found where there appears to be little difference in the movement of prices in riot and non-riot markets, none of these instances — however aggregated or averaged — need necessarily disclose the effect of the *expectation* of riot upon the total market-situation.[129]

We may take an analogy from war. The actual immediate benefits of war are rarely significant, either to victor or defeated. But the benefits which may be gained by the *threat* of war may be considerable: and yet the threat carries no terrors if the sanction of war is never used. If the market-place was as much an arena of class war as the factory and mine became in the industrial revolution, then the threat of riot would affect the entire marketing situation, not only in years of dearth but also in years of moderate harvest, not only in towns notorious for their susceptibility to riot but also in towns where the authorities wished to preserve a tradition of peace. However carefully we quantify the available data these cannot show us to what level prices would have risen if the threat of riot had been altogether removed.

The authorities in riot-prone areas were often cool and competent in handling disturbance. This allows one sometimes to forget that riot was a calamity, often resulting in a profound dislocation of social relations in the community, whose results could linger on for years. The provincial magistracy were often in extreme isolation. Troops, if they were sent for, might take two, three or more days to arrive,

[129] Undoubtedly detailed investigation of short-term price-movements in relation to riot, which several scholars are now attempting with the aid of computers, will help to refine the question; but the variables are many, and evidence as to some (*anticipation* of riot, persuasion brought to bear on tenants, dealers, etc., charitable subscriptions, application of poor rates, etc.) is often elusive and difficult to quantify.

and the crowd knew this very well. The sheriff of Gloucestershire could do nothing in the first days of the "rising" of 1766 but attend at Stroud market with his "javelin men". A Suffolk magistrate in 1709 refrained from imprisoning the leaders of the crowd because "the Mobb threatened to pull both his house and the Bridewell down if he punished any of their fellows". Another magistrate who led a ragged and unmartial *posse commitatus* through North Yorkshire to Durham in 1740, capturing prisoners on the way, was dismayed to find the citizens of Durham turn out and release two of his prisoners at the gate of the gaol. (Such rescues were common.) A Flint grain exporter had an even more unpleasant experience in the same year. Rioters entered his house, drank the beer and wine in his vaults, and stood —

> with a Drawn Sword pointed upon my Daughter in Laws breast .... They have a great many Fire Arms, Pikes and Broadswords. Five of the Pikes they declare that four of them shall do to Carry my Four Quarters and the other my head in triumph about with them ....[130]

The question of order was by no means simple. The inadequacy of civil forces was combined with a reluctance to employ military force. The officers themselves had sufficient humanity, and were surrounded by sufficient ambiguity as to their powers in civil affrays, to show a marked lack of enthusiasm for employment in this "Odious Service".[131] If local magistrates called in the troops, or authorized the use of fire-arms, they had to go on living in the district after the troops had left, incurring the odium of the local population, perhaps receiving threatening letters, and being the victims of broken windows or even arson. Troops billeted in a town quickly became unpopular, even with those who had first called them in. With uncanny regularity requests for the aid of troops are followed, in Home Office or War Office papers, after an interval of five or six weeks, by petitions for their removal. A pitiful petition from the inhabitants of Sunderland in 1800, headed by their Rector, asked for the withdrawal of the 68th Regiment:

> Their principal aim is robbery. Several have been knocked down and plundered of their watches, but always it has been done in the most violent and brutal manner.

One young man had had his skull fractured, another his upper lip cut off. Inhabitants of Wantage, Farringdon and Abingdon petitioned

[130] Gloucester — W. Dalloway, 20 Sept. 1766, P.R.O., P.C. 1/8/41; Suffolk — letter of 29 May 1709, P.C. 1/2/165; Durham — J. Williamson, 15 June 1740, S.P. 36/51; Flint — G. Colley, 25 May 1740, S.P. 36/50.

[131] "... a most Odious Service which nothing but Necessity can justify", Viscount Barrington to Weymouth, 18 Apr. 1768, P.R.O., W.O. 4/83, fos. 316-7.

> in the name of God . . . remove the part of Lord Landaff's regiment from this place, or else Murder must be the consequence, for such a sett of Villains never entered this Town before.

A local magistrate, supporting the petition, added that the "savage behaviour of the military . . . exasperates the populace to the highest degree. The usual intercourse of the husbandmen at fairs and markets is much interrupted".[132]

Riot was a calamity. The "order" which might follow after riot could be an even greater calamity. Hence the anxiety of authorities, either to anticipate the event, or to cut it short in its early stages, by personal presence, by exhortation and concession. In a letter of 1773 the mayor of Penryn, besieged by angry tinners, writes that the town was visited by three hundred "of those Banditti, with whom we were forced to beat a Parley and come to an agreement to let them have the Corn for one-third less than the Prime Cost to the Proprietors". Such parleys, more or less reluctant, were common. An experienced Warwickshire magistrate, Sir Richard Newdigate, noted in his diary on 27 September 1766:

> At 11 rode to Nuneaton . . . and with the principal people of the town met the Bedworth colliers and mob who came hallowing and armed with sticks, demanded what they wanted, promised to satisfy all their reasonable demands if they would be peacable and throw away their sticks which all of them then did into the Meadow, then walked with them to all the houses which they expected had engrossed and let 5 or 6 go in to search and persuaded the owners to sell what was found of cheese . . . .

The colliers then left the town quietly, after Sir Richard Newdigate and two others had each given them half a guinea. They had, in effect, acted according to the *Book of Orders*.[133]

This kind of bargaining, in the first commencement of riot, often secured concessions for the crowd. But we should also note the exertions by magistrates and landowners in anticipation of riot. Thus a Shropshire magistrate in 1756 describes how the colliers "say if the farmers do not bring their corn to the markets, they will go to their houses & thresh for themselves":

> I have sent to my Tenants to order them to take each of them some corn to the market on Saturday as the only means I can think of to prevent greater outrages.

In the same year we may observe magistrates in Devon exerting themselves in a similar way. Riots had occurred at Ottery, farmers'

[132] Sunderland — petition in P.R.O., W.O. 40/17; Wantage and Abingdon — petition to Sir G. Yonge, and C. Dundas, 6 Apr. 1795, *ibid.*

[133] Penryn — P.R.O., W.O. 40/17; Warwickshire — H. C. Wood, "The Diaries of Sir Richard Newdigate, 1751-1806", *Trans. Birmingham Archaeological Soc.*, lxxviii (1962), p. 43.

corn seized and sold off at 5s. a bushel, and several mills attacked. Sir George Yonge sent his servant to affix an admonitory and conciliatory paper in the market-place:

> The mob gather'd, insulted my Servant, and intimidated the Cryer . . . . On reading [the paper] they declared It would not do, the Gentlemen need not trouble themselves, for *They* would fix the Price at 4s 9d next Market Day: upon this I rode into the Town yesterday, and told both the Common people and the better sort, that if things were not quiet the military must be sent for . . . .

He and two neighbouring gentry had then sent their own corn into the local markets:

> I have ordered mine to be sold at 5s 3d and 5s 6d per bushell to the poorer sort, as we have resolved to keep rather above the Price dictated by the Mob. I shall send to the Millers to know if they can part with any Flour . . . .

The mayor of Exeter replied to Yonge that the city authorities had ordered corn to be sold at 5s. 6d.: "Everything was quiet immediately the farmers fell the price . . .". Similar measures were still being taken in Devon in 1801, "some Gentlemen of the most respectable characters in the neighbourhood of Exeter . . . directing . . . their Tenantry to bring Corn to the Market, under the penalty of not having their leases renewed". In 1795 and 1800-1 such orders by traditionalist landowners to their farming tenants were frequent in other counties. The earl of Warwick (an arch-paternalist and an advocate of the legislation against forestallers in its fullest rigour) rode in person around his estates giving such directions to his tenants.[134]

Such pressures as these, in anticipation of riot, may have been more effective than has been supposed: in getting corn to market; in restraining rising prices; and in intimidating certain kinds of profiteering. Moreover, a disposition to riot was certainly effective as a signal to the rich to put the machinery of parish relief and of charity — subsidized corn and bread for the poor — into good repair. In January 1757 Reading Corporation agreed:

> that a Subscription be set on foot for Raising money to Buy Bread to be Distributed to the Poor . . . at a Price to be fixed much below the present price of Bread . . . .

The Corporation itself donated £21.[135] Such measures were very commonly followed, the initiative coming sometimes from a corpora-

[134] Shropshire — T. Whitmore, 11 Nov. 1756, P.R.O., S.P. 36/136; Devon — *Hist. Manuscripts Comm., City of Exeter*, Series lxxiii (London, 1916), pp. 255-7; Devon, 1801 — Lt.-Gen. J. G. Simcoe, 27 Mar. 1801, P.R.O., H.O. 42/61; Warwick — T. W. Whitley, *The Parliamentary Representation of the City of Coventry* (Coventry, 1894), p. 214.

[135] MS. diary of Reading Corporation, Central Public Library, Reading: entry for 24 January 1757. £30 was disbursed "towards reducing the present high price of Bread" on 12 July 1795.

tion, sometimes from individual gentry, sometimes from Quarter Sessions, sometimes from parish authorities, sometimes from employers — especially those who employed a substantial labour-force (such as lead-miners) in isolated districts.

The measures taken in 1795 were especially extensive, various and well-documented. They ranged from direct subscriptions to reduce the price of bread (the parishes sometimes sending their own agents direct to the ports to purchase imported grain), through subsidies from the poor rates, to the Speenhamland system. The examination of such measures would take us too far into the history of the Poor Laws than we intend to go.[136] But the effects were sometimes curious. Subscriptions, while quieting one area, might provoke riot in an adjacent one, through arousing a sharp sense of inequality. An agreement in Newcastle in 1740 to reduce prices, reached between merchants and a deputation of demonstrating pitmen (with aldermen mediating), resulted in "country people" from outlying villages flooding into the city; an unsuccessful attempt was made to limit the sale to persons with a written certificate from "a Fitter, Staithman, Ton Tail Man, or Churchwarden". Participation by soldiers in price-setting riots in 1795 was explained, by the duke of Richmond, as arising from a similar inequality: it was alleged by the soldiers "that while the Country People are relieved by their Parishes and Subscriptions, the Soldiers receive no such Benefit". Moreover, such subscriptions, while being intended to buy off riot (actual or potential), might often have the effect of *raising* the price of bread to those outside the benefit of subscription.[137] In South Devon, where the authorities were still acting in 1801 in the tradition of 1757, the process can be seen. The Exeter crowd demonstrated in the market for wheat at 10s. a bushel:

> The Gentlemen and Farmers met, & the People waited their decision .... They were informed that no Price they shou'd name or fix would be agreed to, & principally because the principle of fixing a Price wou'd be resisted. The Farmers then agreed at 12s and every Inhabitant to have it in proportion to their Families ....
>
> The Arguments of the discontented at Exmouth are very cogent. "Give us whatever *quantity* the Stock in Hand will afford, & at a price by which we can attain it, & we shall be satisfied; we will not accept any Subscription from the Gentry because it enhances the Price, & is a hardship on them".[138]

[136] Especially useful are replies from correspondents in *Annals of Agriculture*, vols. xxiv and xxv (1795). See also S. and B. Webb, "The Assize of Bread", *op. cit.*, pp. 208-9; J. L. and B. Hammond, *op. cit.*, ch. vi; W. M. Stern, *op. cit.*, pp. 181-6.

[137] A point to be watched in any quantified analysis: the price officially returned from a market in the aftermath of riot might *rise*, although, as a consequence of riot or threat of riot, the poor might be receiving corn at subsidized rates.

The point here is not just that prices, in time of scarcity, were determined by many other factors than mere market-forces: anyone with even a scanty knowledge of much-maligned "literary" sources must be aware of that. It is more important to note the total socio-economic context within which the market operated, and the logic of crowd pressure. One other example, this time from a hitherto riot-free market, may show this logic at work. The account is that of a substantial farmer, John Toogood, in Sherborne (Dorset). 1757 commenced with "general complaint" at high prices, and frequent accounts of riots elsewhere:

> On the 30th of April, being Market-Day, many of our idle and insolent Poor Men and Women assembled and begun a Riot in the Market House, went to Oborn Mill and brought off several Bags of Flour and divided the Spoil here in Triumph.

On the next Monday an anonymous letter, directed to Toogood's brother (who had just sold 10 bushels of wheat at 14s. 10d. — "a great price indeed" — to a miller), was found in the abbey: "Sir, If you do not bring your Wheat into the Market, and sell it at a reasonable price, your Barns shall be pulled down . . .".

> As Rioting is quite a new Thing in Sherborne . . . and as the neighbouring Parishes seemed ripe for joining in this Sport, I thought there was no Time to be lost, and that it was proper to crush this Evil in it's Bud, in Order to which we took the following Measures.
>
> Having called a Meeting at the Almshouse, it was agreed that Mr. Jeffrey and I should take a Survey of all the most necessitous Families in the Town, this done, We raised about £100 by Subscriptions, and before the next Market Day, our Justice of the Peace and some of the principal Inhabitants made a Procession throughout the Town and published by the Cryer of the Town the following Notice.
>
> "That the Poor Families of this Town will be supplied with a Quantity of Wheat sufficient for their Support every Week 'till Harvest at the Rate of 8s p. Bushel and that if any person whatsoever after this public Notice shall use any threatening Expressions, or commit any Riot or Disorder in this Town, the Offender shall be forthwith committed to Prison".

They then contracted for wheat, at 10s. and 12s. the bushel, supplying it to a "List of the Poor" at 8s. until harvest. (60 bushels weekly over this period will have involved a subsidy of between £100 and £200.) "By these Means we restored Peace, and disappointed many loose, disorderly Fellows of the Neighbouring Parishes, who appeared in the Market with their empty Bags, expecting to have had Corn without

[138] Newcastle — advertisement 24 June 1740 in City Archives Off.; Duke of Richmond, 13 Apr. 1795, P.R.O., W.O. 1/1092; Devon — James Coleridge, 29 Mar. 1801, H.O. 42/61.

Money". John Toogood, setting down this account for the guidance of his sons, concluded it with the advice:

> If the like Circumstances happen hereafter in your Time and either of you are engaged in Farmering Business, let not a covetous Eye tempt you to be foremost in advancing the Price of Corn, but rather let your Behaviour shew some Compassion and Charity towards the Condition of the Poor . . . .[139]

It is within such a context as this that the function of riot may be disclosed. Riot may have been, in the short term, counter-productive, although this has not yet been proved. But, once again, riot was a social calamity, and one to be avoided, even at a high cost. The cost might be to achieve some medium, between a soaring "economic" price in the market, and a traditional "moral" price set by the crowd. That medium might be found by the intervention of paternalists, by the prudential self-restraint of farmers and dealers, or by buying-off a portion of the crowd through charities and subsidies. As Hannah More carolled, in the persona of the sententious Jack Anvil, when dissuading Tom Hod from riot:

> So I'll work the whole day, and on Sundays I'll seek
> At Church how to bear all the wants of the week.
> The gentlefolks, too, will afford us supplies,
> They'll subscribe — and they'll give up their puddings and pies.
> *Derry down.*[140]

Derry down, indeed, and even Tra-la-dee-bum-deeay! However, the nature of gentlefolks being what it is, a thundering good riot in the next parish was more likely to oil the wheels of charity than the sight of Jack Anvil on his knees in church. As the doggerel on the *outside* of the church door in Kent had put it succinctly in 1630:

> Before we arise
> Less will safise.

VIII

We have been examining a pattern of social protest which derives from a consensus as to the moral economy of the commonweal in times of dearth. It is not usually helpful to examine it for overt, articulate political intentions, although these sometimes arose through chance coincidence. Rebellious phrases can often be found, usually (one suspects) to chill the blood of the rich with their theatrical effect. It was said that the Newcastle pitmen, flushed with the success of their capture of the Guildhall, "were for putting in practice the old levelling principles"; they did at least tear down the portraits

[139] MS. diary of John Toogood, Dorset Rec. Off., D 170/1.
[140] "The Riot: or, half a loaf is better than no bread, &c", 1795, in Hannah More, *Works* (London, 1830), ii, pp. 86-8.

of Charles II and James II and smash their frames. By contrast, bargees at Henley (Oxon.) in 1743 called out "Long Live the Pretender"; and someone in Woodbridge (Suffolk) in 1766 nailed up a notice in the market-place which the local magistrate found to be "peculiarly bold and seditious and of high and delicate import": "We are wishing [it said] that our exiled King could come over or send some Officers". Perhaps the same menace was intended, in the South-West in 1753, by threats that "the French w'd be here soon".[141]

Most common are general "levelling" threats, imprecations against the rich. A letter at Witney (1767) assured the Bailiffs of the town that the people would not suffer "such damned wheesing fat guted Rogues to Starve the Poor by such Hellish Ways on purpose that they may follow hunting horse-racing etc. and to maintain their familys in Pride and extravagance". A letter on the Gold Cross at Birmingham's Snow Hill (1766), signed "Kidderminster & Stourbridge", was perhaps in the mode of rhyming doggerel —

> . . . there is a small Army of us upwards of three thousand all ready to fight
> & I'll be dam'd if we don't make the King's Army to shite
> If so be the King & Parliment don't order better
> we will turn England into a Litter
> & if so be as things don't get cheaper
> I'll be damd if we don't burn down the Parliament House & make all better . . . .

A letter in Colchester in 1772 addressed to all farmers, millers, butchers, shopkeepers and corn merchants, warned all the "damd Rogues" to take care,

> for this is november and we have about two or three hundred bum shells a getting in Readiness for the Mellers [millers] and all no king no parliment nothing but a powder plot all over the nation.

The gentlemen of Fareham (Hants.) were warned in 1766 to prepare "for a Mob or Sivel war", which would "pull George from his throne beat down the house of rougs [rougues] and destroy the Sets [seats] of the Law makers". "Tis better to Undergo a forrieghn Yoke than to be used thus", wrote a villager near Hereford in the next year. And so on, and from most parts of Britain. It is, in the main, rhetoric, although rhetoric which qualifies in a devastating way the

[141] Newcastle — MS. account of riots in City Archives; Henley — D. G. D. Isaac, *op. cit.*, p. 186; Woodbridge — P.R.O., W.O. 1/873: 1753 — Newcastle MSS., Brit. Mus., Add. MS. 32732, fo. 343. Earl Poulet, Lord Lieutenant of Somerset, reported in another letter to the duke of Newcastle that some of the mob "came to talk a Levelling language, viz. they did not see why some sh'd be rich & others poor": *ibid.*, fos. 214-5.

rhetoric of historians as to the deference and social solidarities of Georgian England.[142]

Only in 1795 and 1800-1, when a Jacobin tinge is frequent in such letters and handbills, do we have the impression of a genuine undercurrent of articulate political motivation. A trenchant example of these is some doggerel addressed to "the Broth Makers & Flower Risers" which gave a Maldon (Essex) magistrate cause for alarm:

> On Swill & Grains you wish the poor to be fed
> And underneath the Gullintine we could wish to see your heads
> For I think it is a great shame to serve the poor so —
> And I think a few of your heads will make a pretty show.

Scores upon scores of such letters circulated in these years. From Uley (Glos.), "no King but a Constitution down down down O fatall down high caps and proud hats forever down down . . .". At Lewes (Sussex), after several militiamen had been executed for their part in price-setting, a notice was posted: "Soldiers to Arms"!

> Arise and revenge your cause
> On those bloody numskulls, Pitt and George,
> For since they no longer can send you to France
> To be murdered like Swine, or pierc'd by the Lance,
> You are sent for by Express to make a speedy Return
> To be shot like a Crow, or hang'd in your Turn . . . .

At Ramsbury (Wilts.) in 1800 a notice was affixed to a tree:

> Downe with Your Luxzuaras Government both spirital & temperal Or you starve with Hunger. they have stripp you of bread Chees Meate &c &c &c &c &c. Nay even your Lives have they Taken thousands on their Expeditions let the Burbon Family defend their owne Cause and let us true Britons look to Our Selves let us banish Some to Hanover where they came from Downe with your Constitution Arect a republick Or you and your offsprings are to starve the Remainder of our Days dear Brothers will you lay down and die under Man eaters and Lave your oppspring under that Burden that Blackguard Government which is now eatain you up.
> God Save the Poor & down with George III.[143]

But these crisis years of the wars (1800-1) would demand separate treatment. We are coming to the end of one tradition, and the new tradition has scarcely emerged. In these years the alternative form of economic pressure — pressure upon wages — is becoming more vigorous; there is also something more than rhetoric behind the language of sedition — underground union organization, oaths, the shadowy "United Englishmen". In 1812 traditional food riots

[142] Witney — *London Gazette*, Nov. 1767, no. 10779; Birmingham — P.R.O., W.O. 1/873; Colchester — *London Gazette*, Nov. 1772, no. 11304; Fareham — *ibid.*, Jan. 1767, no. 10690; Hereford — *ibid.*, Apr. 1767, no. 10717.

[143] Maldon — P.R.O., W.O. 40/17; Uley — W. G. Baker, Oct. 1795, H.O. 42/36; Lewes — H.O. 42/35; Ramsbury — enclosure in the Rev. E. Meyrick, 12 June 1800, H.O. 42/50.

overlap with Luddism. In 1816 the East Anglian labourers do not only set the prices, they also demand a minimum wage and an end to Speenhamland relief. They look forward to the very different revolt of labourers in 1830. The older form of action lingers on into the 1840s and even later: it was especially deeply rooted in the South-West.[144] But in the new territories of the industrial revolution it passed by stages into other forms of action. The break in wheat prices after the wars eased the transition. In the northern towns the fight against the corn jobbers gave way to the fight against the Corn Laws.

There was another reason why 1795 and 1800-1 bring us into different historical territory. The forms of action which we have been examining depended upon a particular set of social relations, a particular equilibrium between paternalist authority and the crowd. This equilibrium was dislodged in the wars, for two reasons. First, the acute anti-Jacobinism of the gentry led to a new fear of any form of popular self-activity; magistrates were willing to see signs of sedition in price-setting actions even where no such sedition existed; the fear of invasion raised the Volunteers, and thus gave to the civil powers much more immediate means for meeting the crowd, not with parley and concession, but with repression.[145] Second, such repression was legitimized, in the minds of central and of many local authorities, by the triumph of the new ideology of political economy.

Of this celestial triumph, the Home Secretary, the duke of Portland, served as Temporal Deputy. He displayed, in 1800-1, a quite new firmness, not only in handling disturbance, but in overruling and remonstrating with those local authorities who still espoused the old paternalism. In September 1800 a significant episode occurred in Oxford. There had been some affair of setting the price of butter in the market, and cavalry appeared in the town (at the request — as it transpired — of the Vice-Chancellor). The Town Clerk, on the direction of the mayor and magistrates, wrote to the Secretary at War, expressing their "surprise that a military body of horse soldiers should have made their appearance early this morning":

> It is with great pleasure I inform you that the people of Oxford have hitherto shewn no disposition to be riotous except the bringing into the market [of]

[144] See A. Rowe, "The Food Riots of the Forties in Cornwall", *Report of Royal Cornwall Polytechnic Society*, 1942, pp. 51-67. There were food riots in the Scottish Highlands in 1847; in Teignmouth and Exeter in November 1867; and in Norwich a curious episode (the "Battle of Ham Run") as late as 1886.

[145] See J. R. Western, "The Volunteer Movement as an Anti-Revolutionary Force, 1793-1801", *Eng. Hist. Rev.*, lxxi (1956).

some hampers of butter and selling it at a shilling a pound and accounting for the money to the owner of the butter be reckoned of that description . . . .

"Notwithstanding the extreme pressure of the times", the City authorities were of "the decided opinion" that there was "no occasion in this City for the presence of a regular Soldiery", especially since the magistrates were being most active in suppressing "what they conceive to be one of the principal causes of the dearness, the offences of forestalling, ingrossing, and regrating . . .".

The Town Clerk's letter was passed over to the duke of Portland, and drew from him a weighty reproof:

His Grace . . . desires you to inform the Mayor and Magistrates, that as his official situation enables him in a more particular manner to appreciate the extent of the publick mischief which must inevitably ensue from a continuance of the riotous proceedings which have taken place in several parts of the Kingdom in consequence of the present scarcity of Provisions, so he considers himself to be more immediately called upon to exercise his own judgement and discretion in directing adequate measures to be taken for the immediate and effectual suppression of such dangerous proceedings. For greatly as His Grace laments the cause of these Riots, nothing is more certain than that they can be productive of no other effect than to increase the evil beyond all power of calculation. ⟨His Grace, therefore, cannot allow himself to pass over in silence that part of your letter which states "that the People of Oxford have hitherto shewn no disposition to be riotous, except the bringing into Market some Hampers of Butter, and selling it at a Shilling a pound, and accounting for the money to the Owner of the Butter, can be reckoned of that description". So far from considering this circumstance, in the trivial light in which it is represented in your letter (even supposing it to stand unconnected with others of a similar and a still more dangerous nature, which it is to be feared is not the case) His Grace sees it in the view of a violent and unjustifiable attack on property pregnant with the most fatal consequences to the City of Oxford and to it's Inhabitants of every description;⟩ and which His Grace takes it for granted the Mayor and Magistrates must have thought it their bounden duty to suppress and punish by the immediate apprehension and committal of the Offenders.[146]

⟨Throughout 1800 and 1801 the duke of Portland busied himself enforcing the same doctrines. The remedy for disturbance was the military or Volunteers; even liberal subscriptions for cheap corn were to be discouraged, as exhausting stocks; persuasion upon farmers or dealers to lower prices was an offence against political economy.⟩ In April 1801 he wrote to Earl Mount Edgcumbe,

Your Lordship must excuse the liberty I take in not passing unnoticed the agreement you mention to have been voluntarily entered into by the Farmers in Cornwall to supply the Markets with Corn and other Articles of Provision at reduced Prices . . . .

[146] W. Taunton, 6 Sept. 1800; I. King to Taunton, 7 Sept. 1800: P.R.O., W.O. 40/17 and H.O. 43/12. In private letters Portland exerted himself even more forcefully, writing to Dr. Hughes of Jesus College, Oxford (12 Sept.) of the "unjust & injudicious proceedings of your foolish Corporation": Univ. of Nottingham, Portland MSS., PwV 111.

The duke had information that the farmers had been subjected to pressure by the county authorities:

. . . the experience I have . . . calls upon me to say that every undertaking of the kind cannot in the nature of things be justified and must unavoidably and shortly add to and aggravate the distress which it pretends to alleviate, and I will venture also to assert that the more general it could be rendered the more injurious must be the consequences by which it could not fail to be attended because it necessarily prevents the Employment of Capital in the Farming Line . . . .[147]

⟨The "nature of things" which had once made imperative, in times of dearth, at least some symbolic solidarity between the rulers and the poor, now dictated solidarity between the rulers and "the Employment of Capital".⟩ It is, perhaps, appropriate that it was the ideologist who synthesized an hysteric anti-jacobinism with the new political economy who signed the death-warrant of that paternalism of which, in his more specious passages of rhetoric, he was the celebrant. "The Labouring *Poor*", exclaimed Burke: "Let compassion be shewn in action",

. . . but let there be no lamentation of their condition. It is no relief to their miserable circumstances; it is only an insult to their miserable understandings . . . . Patience, labour, sobriety, frugality, and religion, should be recommended to them; all the rest is downright *fraud*[148]

Against that tone the notice at Ramsbury was the only possible reply.

IX

I hope that a somewhat different picture has emerged from this account than the customary one. I have tried to describe, not an involuntary spasm, but a pattern of behaviour of which a Trobriand islander need not have been ashamed.

⟨It is difficult to re-imagine the moral assumptions of another social configuration. It is not easy for us to conceive that there may have been a time, within a smaller and more integrated community, when it appeared to be "unnatural" that any man should profit from the necessities of others, and when it was assumed that, in time of dearth,

[147] Portland, 25 Apr. 1801, P.R.O., H.O. 43/13, pp. 24-7. On 4 October 1800 Portland wrote to the Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University (Dr. Marlow) as to the dangers of the people "giving way to the notion of their difficulties being imputable to the avarice and rapacity of those, who instead of being denominated Engrossers are correctly speaking the purveyors and provident Stewards of the Public": Univ. of Nottingham Portland MSS., PwV 111.

[148] E. Burke, *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity, originally presented to the Rt. Hon. William Pitt in . . . November, 1795* (London, 1800), p. 4. Undoubtedly this pamphlet was influential with both Pitt and Portland, and may have contributed to the tougher policies of 1800.

prices of "necessities" should remain at a customary level, even though there might be less all round.

"The economy of the mediaeval borough", wrote R. H. Tawney, "was one in which consumption held somewhat the same primacy in the public mind, as the undisputed arbiter of economic effort, as the nineteenth century attached to profits".[148] These assumptions were under strong challenge, of course, long before the eighteenth century. But too often in our histories we foreshorten the great transitions. We leave forestalling and the doctrine of a fair price in the seventeenth century. We take up the story of the free market economy in the nineteenth. But the death of the old moral economy of provision was as long-drawn-out as the death of paternalist intervention in industry and trade. The consumer defended his old notions of right as stubbornly as (perhaps the same man in another rôle) he defended his craft status as an artisan.

These notions of right were clearly articulated. They carried for a long time the church's imprimatur. The *Book of Orders* of 1630 envisaged moral precept and example as an integral part of emergency measures:

> That all good Means and Perswasions bee used by the Justices in their severall Divisions, and by Admonitions and Exhortations in Sermons in the Churches ... that the Poore may bee served of Corne at convenient and charitable Prices. And to the furtherance thereof, that the richer Sort bee earnestly mooved by Christian Charitie, to cause their Graine to be sold under the common Prices of the Market to the poorer sort: A deed of mercy, that will doubtlesse be rewarded of Almighty God.

At least one such sermon, delivered at Bodmin and Fowey (Cornwall) (before the Sessions) in 1630 by the Rev. Charles Fitz-Geffrey, was still known to eighteenth-century readers. Hoarders of corn were denounced as

> these Man-haters, opposite to the Common good, as if the world were made onely for them, would appropriate the earth, and the fruits thereof, wholly to themselves .... As Quailes grow fat with Hemlocke, which is poison to other creatures, so these grow full by Dearth ....

They are "enemies both to God and man, opposite both to Grace and Nature". As for the dealer, exporting corn in time of scarcity, "the savour of lucre is sweet to him, though raked out of the puddle of the most filthy profession in Europe ...".[150]

As the seventeenth century drew on, this kind of exhortation became muted, especially among the Puritans. With Baxter one part of moral precept is diluted with one part of casuistry and one

[148] R. H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (London, 1926), p. 33.
[150] C. Fitz-Geffrey, *God's Blessing upon the Providers of Corne: and God's Curse upon the Hoarders* (London, 1631; repr. 1648), pp. 7, 8, 13.

part of business prudence: "charity must be exercised as well as justice", and, while goods might be withheld in the expectation of rising prices, this must not be done "to the hurt of the Commonwealth, as if ... keeping it in be the cause of the dearth".[151] The old moral teaching became, increasingly, divided between the paternalist gentry on one hand, and the rebellious plebs on the other. There is an epitaph in the church at Stoneleigh (Warwicks.) to Humphrey How, the porter to Lady Leigh, who died in 1688:

> Here Lyes a Faithful Friend unto the Poore
> Who dealt Large Almes out of his Lordps Store
> Weepe Not Poore People Tho' Ye Servat's Dead
> The Lord him selfe Will Give You Dayly Breade
> If Markets Rise Raile Not Against Theire Rates
> The Price is Stil the Same at Stone Leigh Gates[152]

The old precepts resounded throughout the eighteenth century. Occasionally they might still be heard from the pulpit:

> Exaction of any kind is base; but this in the Matter of Corn is of the basest Kind. It falls heaviest upon the Poor, It is robbing them because they are so .... It is murdering *them* outright whom they find half dead, and plundering the wreck'd Vessel .... These are the Murderers accused by the Son of *Sirach*, where he saith, *The Bread of the Needy is their Life: he that defraudeth them thereof is a Man of Blood* .... Justly may such Oppressors be called *Men of Blood*; and surely will the Blood of those, who thus perish by their means, be required at their Hands.[153]

More often they were heard in pamphlet or newspaper:

> To keep up the Price of the very Staff of Life at such an extravagent Sale, as that the Poor ... cannot purchase it, is the greatest Iniquity any Man can be guilty of; it is no less than Murder, nay, the most cruel Murder.[154]

Sometimes in broadsheet and ballad:

> Go now you hard-hearted rich men,
> In your miseries weep and howl,
> Your canker'd gold will rise against you,
> And Witness be against your souls ....[155]

and frequently in anonymous letters. "Donte make a god of your mony", the gentlemen of Newbury were warned in 1772:

> but think of the por you great men do you think of gohing to heaven or hell. think of the Sarmon wich preach on 15 of March for dam we if we dont make you do you think to starve the pore quite you dam sons of wors [whores] ....[156]

[151] Tawney, *op. cit.*, p. 222. See also C. Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (London, 1964), esp. pp. 277-8.
[152] I am indebted to Professor David Montgomery for this evidence.
[153] Anon. ["A Clergyman in the Country"], *Artificial Dearth: or, the Iniquity and Danger of Withholding Corn* (London, 1756), pp. 20-1.
[154] Letter to *Sherborne Mercury*, 5 Sept. 1757.
[155] "A Serious Call to the Gentlemen Farmers, on the present exorbitant Prices of Provisions", broadside, n.d., in Seligman Collection (Broadsides — Prices), Columbia Univ.
[156] *London Gazette*, Mar. 1772, no. 11233.

"Averishes Woman!", a corn-hoarder in Cornwall was addressed in 1795 by Cornish tinners: "We are . . . determined to assemble and immediately to march till we come to your Idol, or your God or your Mows [Moses?], whome you esteem as such and pull it down and likewise your House . . .".[157]

Today we shrug off the extortionate mechanisms of an unregulated market economy because it causes most of us only inconvenience, unostentatious hardships. In the eighteenth century this was not the case. Dearths were real dearths. High prices meant swollen bellies and sick children whose food was coarse bread made up from stale flour. No evidence has yet been published to show anything like a classic *crise des subsistances* in England in the eighteenth century:[158] the mortality of 1795 certainly did not approach that in France in the same year. But there was what the gentry described as a distress that was "truly painful": rising prices (wrote one) "have stript the cloaths from their backs, torn the shoes and stockings from their feet, and snatched the food from their mouths".[159] The risings of the Cornish tinners were preceded by harrowing scenes: men fainted at their work and had to be carried home by their fellows in scarcely better state. The dearth was accompanied by an epidemic described as "Yellow Fever", very possibly the jaundice associated with near-starvation.[160] In such a year Wordsworth's "pedlar" wandered among the cottages and saw

> The hardships of that season; many rich
> Sank down as in a dream among the poor,
> And of the poor did many cease to be,
> And their place knew them not . . . .[161]

But if the market was the point at which working people most often felt their exposure to exploitation, it was also the point — especially in rural or dispersed manufacturing districts — at which they could most easily become organized. Marketing (or "shopping") becomes in mature industrial society increasingly impersonal. In

[157] Letter from "Captins Audacious, Fortitude, Presumption and dread not", dated 28 Dec. 1795, "Polgooth and other mines", and addressed to Mrs. Herring, *ibid.*, 1796, p. 45.

[158] This is *not* to argue that such evidence may not be soon forthcoming as to local or regional demographic crisis; one awaits with interest the results of research being pursued nationally (from Cambridge), in Warwickshire (1727-9) by Dr. A. Gooder, and in Cornish mining villages (1795) by Mr. John G. Rule.

[159] *Annals of Agriculture*, xxiv (1795), p. 159 (evidence from Dunmow, Essex).

[160] Letter of 24 June 1795 in P.R.O., P.C.1/27/A.54; various letters, esp. 29 Mar. 1795, H.O. 42/34.

[161] W. Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*, ed. E. de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire (Oxford, 1959), v, p. 391.

eighteenth-century Britain or France (and in parts of Southern Italy or Haiti or rural India or Africa today) the market remained a social as well as an economic nexus. It was the place where one-hundred-and-one social and personal transactions went on; where news was passed, rumour and gossip flew around, politics was (if ever) discussed in the inns or wine-shops round the market-square. The market was the place where the people, because they were numerous, felt for a moment that they were strong.[162]

The confrontations of the market in a "pre-industrial" society are of course more universal than any national experience. And the elementary moral precepts of the "reasonable price" are equally universal. Indeed, one may suggest in Britain the survival of a pagan imagery which reaches to levels more obscure than Christian symbolism. Few folk rituals survived with such vigour to the end of the eighteenth century as all the paraphernalia of the harvest-home, with its charms and suppers, its fairs and festivals. Even in manufacturing areas the year still turned to the rhythm of the seasons and not to that of the banks. Dearth always comes to such communities as a profound psychic shock. When it is accompanied by the knowledge of inequalities, and the suspicion of manipulated scarcity, shock passes into fury.

One is struck, as the new century opens, by the growing symbolism of blood, and by its assimilation to the demand for bread. In Nottingham in 1812 the women paraded with a loaf upon a pole, streaked with red and tied with black crepe, emblematic of "bleeding famine decked in Sackecloth". At Yeovil (Somerset) in 1816 there was an anonymous letter, "Blood and Blood and Blood, a General Revolution their mus be . . .", the letter signed with a crude heart dripping blood. In the East Anglian riots of the same year such phrases as, "We will have blood before dinner". In Plymouth "a *Loaf* which had been *dipped in blood*, with a heart by it, was found in the streets". In the great Merthyr riots of 1831 a calf was sacrificed and a loaf soaked in its blood, impaled on a flagpole, served as emblem of revolt.[163]

This fury for corn is a curious culmination of the age of agricultural

[162] See Sidney Mintz, "Internal Market Systems as Mechanisms of Social Articulation", *Intermediate Societies, Social Mobility and Communication* (American Ethnological Society, 1959); and the same author's "Peasant Markets", *Scientific American*, cciii (1960), pp. 112-22.

[163] Nottingham — J. F. Sutton, *The Date-book of Nottingham* (Nottingham, 1880 edn.), p. 286; Yeovil — P.R.O., H.O. 42/150; East Anglia — A. J. Peacock, *Bread or Blood* (London, 1965), *passim*; Merthyr — G. A. Williams, "The Insurrection at Merthyr Tydfil in 1831", *Trans. Hon. Soc. of Cymmrodorion*, Session 1965, 2, pp. 227-8.

improvement. In the 1790s the gentry themselves were somewhat perplexed. Sometimes crippled by an excess of rich food,[164] the magistrates from time to time put aside their industrious compilation of archives for the disciples of Sir Lewis Namier, and peered down from their parklands at the corn-fields in which their labourers hungered. (More than one magistrate wrote in to the Home Office, at this critical juncture, describing the measures which he would take against the rioters if only he were not confined to his house by gout). The county will not be secure at harvest, wrote the Lord Lieutenant of Cambridgeshire, "without some soldiers, as he had heard that the People intended to help themselves when the Corn was ripe". He found this "a very serious apprehension indeed" and "in this open country most likely to be effected, at least by stealth".[165]

"Thout shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn". The breakthrough of the new political economy of the free market was also the breakdown of the old moral economy of provision. After the wars all that was left of it was charity — and Speenhamland. The moral economy of the crowd took longer to die: it is picked up by the early co-operative flour mills, by some Owenite socialists, and it lingered on for years somewhere in the bowels of the Co-operative Wholesale Society. One symptom of its final demise is that we have been able to accept for so long an abbreviated and "economistic" picture of the food riot, as a direct, spasmodic, irrational response to hunger — a picture which is itself a product of a political economy which diminished human reciprocities to the wages-nexus. More generous, but also more authoritative, was the assessment of the sheriff of Gloucestershire in 1766. The mobs of that year (he wrote) had committed many acts of violence,

> some of wantoness and excess; and in other instances some acts of courage, prudence, justice, and a consistency towards that which they profess to obtain.[166]

E. P. Thompson

[164] In 1795, when subsidized brown bread was being given to the poor of his own parish, Parson Woodforde did not flinch before his continuing duty to his own dinner: March 6th, "... for Dinner a Couple of boiled Chicken and Pigs Face, very good Peas Soup, a boiled Rump of Beef very fine, a prodigious fine, large and very fat Cock-Turkey rosted, Maccaroni, Batter Custard Pudding", etc.: James Woodforde, *Diary of a Country Parson*, ed. J. Beresford (World's Classics edn., London, 1963), pp. 483, 485.

[165] Lord Hardwicke, 27 July 1795, P.R.O., H.O. 42/35.

[166] W. Dalloway, 20 Sept. 1766, P.R.O., P.C. 1/8/41.

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