

E. P. THOMPSON

CUSTOMS IN COMMON



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an excess of rich food,¹ 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 country 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".²

"Thou 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 wantonness and excess; and in other instances some acts of courage, prudence, justice, and a consistency towards that which they profess to obtain.³

¹In 1795, when subsidised 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 roasted, Maccaroni, Batter Custard Pudding", etc.: James Woodforde, *Diary of a Country Parson*, ed. J. Beresford (World's Classics, 1963), pp. 483, 485.

²Lord Hardwicke, 27 July 1795, PRO, HO 42/35.

³W. Dalloway, 20 Sept. 1766, PRO, PC 1/8/41.

Chapter Five

The Moral Economy Reviewed

I

The foregoing chapter was first published as an article in *Past and Present* in 1971. I have republished it without revision. I see no reason to retreat from its findings. And it has now entered into the stream of subsequent historical scholarship — it has been criticised and extensions of its theses have been proposed. It would confuse the record if I were to alter a text upon which commentary depends.

But some comment on my commentators is required. And also upon significant work which approaches the same problems, with little or no reference to my own. This is not a simple matter. For the "market" turns out to be a junction-point between social, economic and intellectual histories, and a sensitive metaphor for many kinds of exchange. The "moral economy" leads us not into a single argument but into a concourse of arguments, and it will not be possible to do justice to every voice.

A word first about my essay. Although first published in 1971 I commenced work on it in 1963 while awaiting proofs of *The Making of the English Working Class*. The project started then, for a joint study of British and French grain riots in the 1790s, in collaboration with Richard Cobb whose fine *Terreur et Subsistances, 1793-1795* came out in 1964. He was then in Leeds and I was in Halifax and Gwyn A. Williams (then in Aberystwyth) was also enlisted as a collaborator in the project. I don't remember how or when the project fell through, except that each member of the triumvirate moved in a different direction, Richard Cobb to Oxford, Gwyn Williams to York and myself to the University

of Warwick. By 1970, when Cobb published his *The Police and the People*, our plan had certainly been dropped. There need be no regret for the failure of my part in that project to come to a conclusion, since Roger Wells has now explored every aspect of food and its mediations in England in the 1790s in copious detail in his *Wretched Faces* (1988).

But this explanation serves to place my essay, which was an enterprise not marginal but central to my research interests for nearly ten years. My files bulge with material collected on mills and marketing and meal mobs, etc., but since much of this repeats the evidence adduced in my article, it need not now be deployed. But a lot of work underlay my findings, and I may be forgiven if I am impatient with trivial objections.

II

It may be necessary to restate what my essay was about. It was not about *all* kinds of crowd, and a reader would have to be unusually thick-headed who supposed so.¹ It was about the crowd's "moral economy" in a context which the article defines. Nor was it about English and Welsh food riots in the eighteenth century — their where, why and when? — although it was certainly concerned with these. My object of analysis was the *mentalité*, or, as I would prefer, the political culture, the expectations, traditions, and, indeed, superstitions of the working population most frequently involved in actions in the market; and the relations — sometimes negotiations — between crowd and rulers which go under the unsatisfactory term of "riot". My method was to reconstruct a paternalist model of food marketing, with protective institutional expression and with emergency

¹Mark Harrison reprimands me for applying the term "crowd" to what was "a very specific category of mass formation": *Crowds and History: Mass Phenomena in English Towns, 1790-1835* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 13. I followed George Rudé and Eric Hobsbawm in preferring the term "crowd" to the pejorative "mob" which some previous historians had used. No-one ever supposed that all crowds were riotous, although Harrison's attention to their variety is helpful. Harrison also pronounces that my article "has a number of shortcomings, which will be examined more fully in chapter 6". Since chapter 6 does not mention my article, and the shortcomings are identified nowhere else in his book, I am still waiting for the blow to fall.

routines in time of dearth, which derived in part from earlier Edwardian and Tudor policies of provision and market-regulation; to contrast this with the new political economy of the free market in grain, associated above all with *The Wealth of Nations*; and to show how, in times of high prices and of hardship, the crowd might enforce, with a robust direct action, protective market-control and the regulation of prices, sometimes claiming a legitimacy derived from the paternalist model.

To understand the actions of any particular crowd may require attention to particular market-places and particular practices in dealing. But to understand the "political" space in which the crowd might act and might negotiate with the authorities must attend upon a larger analysis of the relations between the two. The findings in "The Moral Economy" cannot be taken straight across to any "peasant market" nor to all proto-industrial market-places nor to Revolutionary France in the Years II and II nor to nineteenth-century Madras. Some of the encounters between growers, dealers and consumers were markedly similar, but I have described them as they were worked out within the given field-of-force of eighteenth-century English relations.

My essay did not offer a comprehensive overview of food riots in England in that century; it did not (for example) correlate the incidence of riots with price movements, nor explain why riot was more common in some regions than in others, nor attempt to chart a dozen other variables. Abundant new evidence on such questions has been brought forward in recent years, and much of it has been helpfully brought under examination in Andrew Charlesworth's *An Atlas of Rural Protest in Britain, 1548-1900* (1983). Dr John Stevenson complains that "The Moral Economy" tells us "virtually nothing about why some places were almost perennially subject to disturbances, whilst others remained almost completely undisturbed",¹ but this was not the

¹J. Stevenson, "Food Riots in England, 1792-1818", in R. Quinault and J. Stevenson (eds.), *Popular Protest and Public Order* (London, 1974), p. 67. Also J. Stevenson, "The 'Moral Economy' of the English Crowd: Myth and Reality", in Anthony Fletcher and J. Stevenson (eds.), *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1985) — an essay which adds little to the discussion.

essay's theme. Nor is there any sense in which the findings of scholars (such as Dr Stevenson) who have been addressing such themes must necessarily contradict or compete with my own. Economic and social historians are not engaged in rival party-political performances, although one might sometimes suppose so. The study of wages and prices and the study of norms and expectations can complement each other.

There are still a few ineducable positivists lingering about who do not so much disagree with the findings of social historians as they wish to disallow their questions. They propose that only one set of directly economic explanations of food riots — questions relating to the grain trade, harvests, market prices, etc., is needed or is even proper to be asked. An odd example is a short essay published by Dale Williams in 1976 entitled "Were 'Hunger' Rioters Really Hungry?"¹ In this he described my "moral economy" as intended as "a replacement" for an economic or quantitative approach. He had somehow got it into his head that riots must *either* be about hunger *or* about "social issues involving local usages and traditional rights". But it will be recalled that I warn against precisely this confusion at the outset of my essay, using the analogy of a sexual tension chart: "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?" (p. 187). *Of course* food rioters were hungry — and on occasion coming close to starvation. But this does not tell us how their behaviour is "modified by custom, culture and reason".

Nevertheless, this illustrates one point which we take far too easily for granted. Comparative study of food riots has been, inevitably, into the history of nations which *had* riots. There has been less comparative reflection upon national histories which afford evidence — and sometimes evidence sadly plentiful — of dearth passing into famine without passing through any phase in which riots of the West-European kind have been noted. Famines have been suffered in the past (as in Ireland and in India) and are suffered today

¹ *Past and Present*, no. 71, May 1976.

in several parts of Africa, as our television screens reveal, with a fatalism sometimes mistaken for apathy or resignation. It is not only that beyond a certain point the undernourished have no physical or emotional resources for riot. (For this reason riot must take place *before* people are so weakened, and it may presuppose a watchful estimate of future supply and of market prices.) It is also that riot is a group, community, or class response to crisis; it is not within the power of a few individuals to riot. Nor need it be the only or the most obvious form of collective action — there may be alternatives such as the mass-petitioning of the authorities, fast days, sacrifices and prayer; perambulation of the houses of the rich; or the migration of whole villages.

Riot need not be favoured within the culture of the poor. It might provoke the gods (who had already sent dearth as a "Judgement"), and it could certainly alienate the governors or the rich from whom alone some small relief might come. An oncoming harvest failure would be watched with fear and awe. "Hunger employs its own outriders. Those who have already experienced it can see it announced, not only in the sky, but in the fields, scrutinized each year with increasing anxiety, week by week during the hot summer months. . ."¹ In the eighteenth century Britain was only emerging from the "demographic *ancien régime*", with its periodical visitations of famine and of plague, and dearth revived age-old memories and fears. Famine could place the whole social order on the rack, and the rulers were tested by their response to it. Indeed, by visible and well-advertised exertions the rulers might actually strengthen their authority during dearth, as John Walter and Keith Wrightson have argued from seventeenth-century examples. Central government, by issuing proclamations, invoking the successive regulations which became known as the *Book of Orders*, and proclaiming national days of fast, and the local authorities by a flurry of highly-visible activity against petty offenders ranging from badgers, forestallers and regrators to drunkards, swearers, sabbath-breakers, gamblers and rogues, might actually gain

¹ R. C. Cobb, *The Police and the People* (Oxford, 1970), p. 323. For a comparative overview, see David Arnold, *Famine: Social Crisis and Historical Change* (Oxford, 1988).

credibility among that part of the population persuaded that dearth was a judgement of God.¹ At the least, the authorities made a public display of their concern. At the best, they might restrain rising prices or persuade farmers to release stocks to the open market.

Riot may even be a signal that the *ancien régime* is ending, since there is food in barns or granaries or barges to be seized or to be got to market, and some bargaining to be done about its price. True famine (where there really is no stock of food) is not often attended with riot, since there are few rational targets for the rioters. In the pastoral North-West of England as late as the 1590s and 1620s the population appears to have suffered from famine mortality. But "the poor. . . starved to death quietly, & created no problems of order for their governors".² In the Irish famine of 1845-7 there were a few anti-export riots in the early stages,³ but the Irish people could be congratulated in the Queen's speech in 1847 for having suffered with "patience and resignation". Riot is

¹ John Walter and Keith Wrightson, "Dearth and the Social Order in Early Modern England", *Past and Present*, 71 (1976). See also (for a sharper assertion of authority) John Walter, "Grain Riots and Popular Attitudes to the Law: Maldon and the Crisis of 1629" in John Brewer and John Styles (eds.), *An Ungovernable People* (1980). For the *Book of Orders*, see A. Everitt, "The Marketing of Agricultural Produce", in J. Thirsk (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, vol. iv, 1500-1640 (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 581-6; P. Slack, "The Book of Orders: The Making of English Social Policy, 1577-1631", *TRHS*, xxx (1980); R. B. Outhwaite, "Food Crisis in Early Modern England: Patterns of Public Response", *Proceedings of the Seventh International Economic History Congress* (Edinburgh, 1978), pp. 367-74; R. B. Outhwaite, "Dearth and Government Intervention in English Grain Markets, 1590-1700", *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, xxxiii, 3 (1981); and Buchanan Sharp, "Popular Protest in 17th-Century England", in Barry Reay (ed.), *Popular Culture in 17th-Century England* (1985), esp. pp. 274-289. Sharp argues (p. 279) that seventeenth century food riots "were often attempts to enforce officially-sanctioned market regulations and can be regarded, in many instances, not as attacks upon established order but as efforts to reinforce it".

² Sharp, *op. cit.*, p. 275; A. B. Appleby, in the classic account of famine mortality in Cumberland and Westmorland in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, reports no disturbances: see *Famine in Tudor and Stuart England* (Liverpool, 1978).

³ Cecil Woodham Smith, *The Great Hunger* (1970), pp. 120-1; James S. Donnelly, Jr., *The Land and the People of Nineteenth-Century Cork* (1975), pp. 89-91.

usually a rational response, and it takes place, not among helpless or hopeless people, but among those groups who sense that they have a little power to help themselves, as prices soar, employment fails, and they can see their staple food supply being exported from the district.

The passivity of the victims of famine is noted also in Asia. Under the *ancien régime* of famine in the East (as in the terrible Orissa famine of 1770) districts were depopulated by deaths and fugitives. The ryots fled the land to which they were tied. "Day and night a torrent of famished and disease-stricken wretches poured into the great cities." Those who stayed on the land

Sold their cattle; they sold their implements of agriculture; they devoured their seed-grain; they sold their sons and daughters, till at length no buyer of children could be found; they ate the leaves of the trees and the grass of the field. . .

But they did not (in the sense that we have been using) riot. Nor did they riot in the Bengal famine of 1866, when "many a rural household starved slowly to death without uttering a complaint or making a sign", just as there are tales of the West of Ireland in 1847 where whole families walled themselves up in their cabins to die.¹

In the Bengal famine of 1873-4, the people turned to government as the only possible provider. Over 400,000 settled down along the lines of relief roads, pleading for relief and work: "they dreaded quitting the road, which they imagined to be the only place where subsistence could be obtained". At one place the line of carts bringing in the famine-struck from the villages stretched for twenty miles. At first there was screaming from the women and children, and begging for coin or grain. Later, the people were "seated on the ground, row after row, thousand upon thousand, in silence. . .".²

¹ W. H. Hunter, *The Annals of Rural Bengal* (1883), i, pp. 26-27. Many of the poor in the western counties of Ireland were overcome by fever in their own homes: see Sir W. P. MacArthur, "Medical History of the Famine", in R. D. Edwards and T. D. Williams (eds.), *The Great Famine* (Dublin, 1956), esp. pp. 270-89.

² Sir Richard Temple, Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, memorandum on the scarcity of 1873-4, *Extra Supplement of the Gazette of India*, 26 Feb. 1875, pp. 25, 56-7.

There is not one simple, "animal", response to hunger. Even in Bengal the evidence is contradictory and difficult to interpret. There is some evidence of the male heads of household abandoning their families (below p. 347), and other accounts of intense familial solidarities and of self-abnegation. A relief worker in rural Bengal in 1915 gives us a common story:

At noon I sat down at the foot of a tree to eat my bit of lunch. . . The people spotted me and long before I had finished there was a crowd of starving people around me. I did not finish it. I had a loaf of bread with me and. . . I gave the rest to the children. One little chap took his share and immediately broke it up into four pieces for his mother, two sisters and himself, leaving by far the smallest portion for himself.¹

This is a learned response to hunger, which even the small children know. Begging, in which the children again are assigned their roles, is another learned response, or strategy. So also may be threats to the wealthy, or the theft of food-stuffs.²

"Riot" — itself a clumsy term which may conceal more than it reveals — is not a "natural" or "obvious" response to hunger but a sophisticated pattern of collective behaviour, a collective alternative to individualistic and familial strategies of survival. Of course hunger rioters were hungry, but hunger does not dictate that they must riot nor does it determine riot's forms.

In 1984 Dale E. Williams launched a direct assault on "The Moral Economy" in an article in *Past and Present* under the title "Morals, Markets and the English Crowd in 1766".³ The article draws a little upon his own substantial doctoral thesis on "English Hunger Riots in 1766" presented in 1978. But its intent is mainly polemical, and it is tedious to find that, after nearly two decades, one is invited to return to square one and to argue everything through again.

Andrew Charlesworth and Adrian Randall have been kind enough to correct the record and to point out Williams's

¹ J. Mitchell, *Bankura Wesleyan College Magazine*, January 1916.

² Much curious and contradictory evidence as to responses to famine is in Robert Dirks, "Social Response during Severe Food Shortages and Famines", *Current Anthropology*, xxi (1980), pp. 21-44.

³ *Past and Present*, 104 (1984).

self-contradictions.¹ To their critique I will only add that several of his sallies appear to be directed against his own findings in his doctoral thesis. So far from refuting my account of norms and behaviour, the crowds in Williams's thesis conform to the account in "The Moral Economy". Given high prices and the advance signals of dearth, the West of England clothing workers inhibited further exports of grain from the district, regulated markets with unusual discipline, forcibly persuaded farmers to send supplies to market, made certain of the authorities — including Mr Dalloway, the High Sheriff of Gloucestershire — for a time the "prisoners" of their demands, stimulated local measures of charity and relief, and (if I read Dr Williams aright) may have prevented dearth from passing into famine. And if Dale Williams wants examples of the crowd being informed by concern for "local usages and traditional rights" he need only turn to Dale Williams's thesis where he will find sufficient examples, such as the crowd punishing millers by destroying their bolting machinery, as well as an Appendix of anonymous letters full of threats against broggers, fore-stallers, regrators, corn hoarders, sample sales, and the rest.²

Dr Williams has brought no issues of principle into debate, he is simply confused as to the questions which he is asking. There may also be a little ideological pressure behind his polemic. When I first published "The Moral Economy", "the market" was not flying as high in the ideological firmament as it is today. In the 1970s something called "modernisation theory" swept through some undefended minds in Western academies, and subsequently the celebration of "the market economy" has become triumphal and almost universal. This renewed confidence in "the market" can be found in

¹ A. Charlesworth and Adrian Randall, "Morals, Markets and the English Crowd in 1766", *Past and Present*, 114 (1987), pp. 200-13. On the 1766 riots see also A. J. Randall, "The Gloucestershire Food Riots in 1766", *Midland History*, x (1985); W. J. Shelton, *English Hunger & Industrial Disorder* (1973), and reviews of Shelton by myself in *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 2nd series, xxvii (1974), pp. 480-4 and by Peter Linebaugh in *Bull. Soc. Lab. Hist.*, 28 (1974), pp. 57-61.

² Univ. of Wales Ph.D. thesis, 1978. Dale Williams's excellent article on "Midland Hunger Riots in 1766" in *Midland History*, iii, 4 (1976), might even have been written in illustration of the moral economy thesis. What happened between 1976 and 1984 to change the events of 1766?

Dr Williams's article, where I am rebuked for failing to pay "sufficient attention to the *systems* which produce wealth". "The riot groups of 1766 were. . . all participants in a capitalist market system which, by the 1760s, was developed to a pitch of refinement unmatched elsewhere in the world." "The Moral Economy" has become suspect because it explored with sympathy alternative economic imperatives to those of the capitalist market "system". . . and offered one or two sceptical comments as to the infallibility of Adam Smith.

Similar questions worried more courteous critics shortly after "The Moral Economy" was published: Professors A. W. Coats and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese. I did not reply to either comment, since the arrows flew past my ear. Professor Coats¹ devoted his comment to rehearsing Smithian doctrine on the internal trade in grain, in terms of its logical consistency (but without recourse to empirical confirmation), and he repeated uncritically the statement that "high prices resulted mainly from physical shortages", as if this explanation of price movements suffices for all cases. But, as we shall see (pp. 283-7), it does not. Then Coats debated my notion as to the "de-moralizing of the theory of trade and consumption" implicit in the model of the new political economy. What I say (above, pp. 201-2) is this:

By 'de-moralising' it is not suggested that Smith and his colleagues were immoral or were unconcerned for the public good. It is 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.

Coats takes this to imply an acceptance on my part of the credentials of "positive" economics, as a science purged of norms, and he reminds me of the "moral background and implications of Smith's economic analysis". But I had not forgotten that Smith was also author of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). I had supposed that Coats's point had been met in a footnote (above p. 202) in which I had allowed Smith's intention to serve the public good but had added that "intention is a bad measure of ideological interest and of

¹A. W. Coats, "Contrary Moralities: Plebs, Paternalists and Political Economists", *Past and Present*, 54 (1972), pp. 130-3.

historical consequences". It is perfectly possible that *laissez-faire* doctrines as to the food trade could have been *both* normative in intent (i.e. Adam Smith believed they would encourage cheap and abundant food) *and* ideological in outcome (i.e. in the result their supposedly de-moralised scientism was used to mask and to apologise for other self-interested operations).

I would have thought that my views were commonplace. The Tudor policies of "provision" cannot be seen, in a modern sense, as an "economic" strategy only: they depended also on theories of the State, of the reciprocal obligations and duties of governors and governed in times of dearth, and of paternalist social control; they still, in the early seventeenth century, had strong religious or magical components. In the period 1700-1760, with the dominance of mercantilist theory, we are in a kind of middle passage of theory. The magical components of the Tudor theory became much weaker. And the social location of the theory became more ambiguous; while some traditionalist gentry and magistrates invoked it in times of dearth, the authority of the theory was fast eroding as any acceptable account of normal marketing practice. The paternal obligations of "provision" were at odds with the mercantilist imperative to maximise the export of grain. At the same time there was a certain migration of the theory from the rulers to the crowd.

Nevertheless, the form of much economic argument remained (on all sides) moralistic: it validated itself at most points with reference to moral imperatives (what obligations the state, or the landowners, or the dealers *ought* to obey). Such imperatives permeated economic thinking very generally, and this is familiar to any student of economic thought. One historian has written that

Economic theory owes its present development to the fact that some men, in thinking of economic phenomena, forcefully suspended all judgments of theology, morality, and justice, were willing to consider the economy as nothing more than an intricate mechanism, refraining for the while from asking whether the mechanism worked for good or evil.¹

¹W. Letwin, *The Origins of Scientific Economics* (1963), pp. 147-8. See however Joyce Appleby, *Economic Thought and Ideology in Seventeenth-Century England* (Princeton, 1978), pp. 258-9 for qualifications.

Joyce Appleby has shown the moral economy "in retreat" in the mid-seventeenth century, but the tension between norms and "mechanism" once again became marked in the eighteenth. A *locus classicus* is the scandal provoked by Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees*, which, by its equation private vices = public benefits, sought exactly to divorce moral imperatives on the one hand and economic process on the other. This was felt by some to be an outrage to official morality; by demystifying economic process it would strip authority of its paternal legitimacy; and the book was presented, in 1723, by the Grand Jury of Middlesex as a public nuisance.

Thus the notion of "economics" as a non-normative object of study, with objective mechanism independent of moral imperatives, was separating itself off from traditionalist theory during the mercantilist period, and with great difficulty: in some areas it did this with less difficulty (national book-keeping, arguments about trade and bullion), but in areas which related to internal distribution of the prime necessities of life the difficulties were immense. For if the rulers were to deny their own duties and functions in protecting the poor in time of dearth, then they might devalue the legitimacy of their rule. So tenaciously and strongly was this view held that as late as 1800 the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Kenyon, pronounced that the fact that forestalling remained an offence at Common Law "is a thing most essential to the existence of the country". "When the people knew there was a law to resort to, it composed their minds" and removed the threat of "insurrection".¹ This is an argument, not from economics and not even from law, but from the highest reasons of State.

The "morality" of Adam Smith was never the matter at issue, but — in relation to the internal trade in grain — the terms and the vocabulary, indeed the problematic of that argument. "The market economy created new moral problems", Professor Atiyah has written, and "it may not have been so obvious then, as it became later, that this was not so much to separate morality and economics, as to adopt

¹Douglas Hay, "The State and the Market: Lord Kenyon and Mr. Waddington", *Past and Present* (forthcoming).

a particular type of morality in the interests of a particular type of economy".¹ Perhaps I might have made it more clear that "preamble and peroration" had real significance in the intentions of the classical political economists: these were something more than rhetorical devices. Professor Coats's reminder that Smithian economics "were securely grounded in the liberal-moral philosophy of the eighteenth-century enlightenment" has in recent years become a centre for intense academic interest and we will return to it.

Maybe the trouble lies with the word "moral". "Moral" is a signal which brings on a rush of polemical blood to the academic head. Nothing has made my critics angrier than the notion that a food rioter might have been more "moral" than a disciple of Dr Adam Smith. But that was not my meaning (whatever the judgement might have been in the eye of God). I was discriminating between two different sets of assumptions, two differing discourses, and the evidence for the difference is abundant. I wrote of "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" (above p. 188). To this were added a dense tissue of precedents and of practices in the sequence of food marketing. I could perhaps have called this "a sociological economy", and an economy in its original meaning (*oecconomy*) as the due organisation of a household, in which each part is related to the whole and each member acknowledges her/his several duties and obligations. That, indeed, is as much, or more, "political" than is "political economy", but by usage the classical economists have carried off the term.

Elizabeth Fox-Genovese's arrow flies past my ear for much the same reason.² She finds that both traditional and classical economics can be said to be "moral" (at least in their own self-image) and also that both were "part of larger ruling class ideologies". There is not much here that conflicts with,

¹P. S. Atiyah, *The Rise and Fall of Freedom of Contract* (Oxford, 1979), p. 84.

²Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "The Many Faces of Moral Economy", *Past and Present*, 58 (1973).

or even engages with, my arguments, and perhaps Fox-Genovese's real difference of emphasis lies in her feeling that I "lean towards a romantic view of the traditionalists". My tendency "to favour the paternalists" leads me to overlook that "if the rise of a market society brought indisputable horrors, it also brought an emphasis on individual freedom of choice, the right to self-betterment, eventually the opportunity to political participation".

That is also what we are assured — or used to be assured — by the modernisation theorists. And *of course* the rioters were already deeply involved, in some part of their lives, in a market economy's exchanges of labour, services, and of goods. (I will refrain from mentioning those critics who have put up the fat-headed notion that there has been proposed an absolute segregation between a moral and a market economy, to save their blushes.¹) But before we go on to consider all these undoubted human goods we should delay with the market as dispenser of subsistence in time of dearth, which alone is relevant to my theme. For despite all the discourse that goes on about "the market" or "market relations", historiographical interest in the actual marketing of grain, flour or bread is little more evident today than it was in 1971.²

¹One is reminded of David Thorner's wise caveat: "We are sure to go astray, if we try to conceive of peasant economies as exclusively 'subsistence' oriented and to suspect capitalism wherever the peasants show evidence of being 'market' oriented. It is much sounder to take it for granted, as a starting point, that for ages peasant economies have had a double orientation towards both. In this way, much fruitless discussion about the nature of so-called 'subsistence' economies can be avoided". Would that the same warning was borne in mind in discussions of "proto-industrial" economies! See "Peasant Economy as a Category in History", in Teodor Shanin (ed.), *Peasants and Peasant Societies*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1987), p. 65.

²The outstanding exception is Wendy Thwaites, "The Marketing of Agricultural Produce in Eighteenth Century Oxfordshire" (Univ. of Birmingham Ph.D. thesis, 1980). See also the same author's "Dearth and the Marketing of Agricultural Produce: Oxfordshire, c. 1750-1800", *Agric. Hist. Rev.*, xxxiii (1985), pt. ii; John Chartres, "Markets and Marketing in Metropolitan Western England in the late Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries", in Michael Havinden (ed.), *Husbandry and Marketing in the South-West* (Exeter, 1973), pp. 63-74, and John Chartres, "The Marketing of Agricultural Produce", in Joan Thirsk (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, vol. v, pt. 2 (Cambridge, 1985), ch. 17. The silence as

Is market *a* market or is market a metaphor? Of course it can be both, but too often discourse about "the market" conveys the sense of something definite — a space or institution of exchange (perhaps London's Corn Exchange at Mark Lane?) — when in fact, sometimes unknown to the term's user, it is being employed as a metaphor of economic process, or an idealisation or abstraction from that process. Perhaps to acknowledge this second usage, Burke sometimes employed the word without the definite article:

Market is the meeting and conference of the *consumer* and *producer*, when they mutually discover each other's wants. Nobody, I believe, has observed with any reflection what market is, without being astonished at the truth, the correctness, the civility, the general equity, with which the balance of wants is settled. . . The moment that government appears at market, all the principles of market will be subverted.¹

That is loop-language: it is wholly self-fulfilling. And much the same feedback loop-language is being used today in the higher theorising of market relations. Political economy has its sophisticated intellectual genealogies, and the history of political economy is a vigorous academic discourse with its own journals and its controversies and conferences, in which changes are rung on approved themes: Pufendorf, Virtue, natural law, Pocock, Grotius, the Physiocrats, Pocock, Adam Smith. These chimes have fascination, and for the bell-ringers it is an admirable mental exercise, but the peal can become so compelling that it drowns out other sounds. Intellectual history, like economic history before it, becomes imperialist and seeks to over-run all social life. It is necessary to pause, from time to time, to recall that how people thought their times need not have been the same as how those times eventuated. And how some people thought "market" does not prove that market took place in that way. Because Adam Smith offered "a clear analytical demonstration of

to corn milling has at last broken by John Orbell, "The Corn Milling Industry, 1750-1820", in C. H. Feinstein and S. Pollard (eds.), *Studies in Capital Formation in the United Kingdom* (Oxford, 1988), which shows (p. 162) the rapidly rising rate of annual capital investment in milling, from 1761 rising to a peak in the dearth (and riot) year of 1801.

¹Edmund Burke, "Thoughts and Details on Scarcity" (1795), in *Works* (1801), vii, pp. 348-51.

how markets in subsistence goods and labour could balance themselves out in a manner consistent with strict justice and the natural law of humanity"¹ this does not show that any empirically observable market worked out in that way. Nor does it tell us how strict justice to the rights of property could balance with natural humanity to labouring people.

Messrs Hont and Ignatieff, in the course of a prestigious research project into "Political Economy and Society, 1750-1850" at King's College, Cambridge, have fallen across my "Moral Economy" article and they rebuke it for failing to conform to the parameters of Cambridge political thought:

By recovering the moral economy of the poor and the regulatory system to which they made appeal, Thompson has set the iconoclasm of the Smithian position in sharp relief, crediting him with the first theory to revoke the traditional social responsibility attached to property. Yet the antinomy — moral economy versus political economy — caricatures both positions. The one becomes a vestigial, traditional moralism, the other a science 'disinfested of intrusive moral imperatives'. To the extent that favouring an adequate subsistence for the poor can be called a moral imperative, it was one shared by paternalists and political economists alike. . . . On the other hand, to call the moral economy traditionalist is to portray it simply as a set of vestigial moral preferences innocent of substantive argument about the working of markets. In fact, so-called traditionalists were quite capable of arguing their position on the same terrain as their political economist opponents. Indeed, and this is the crucial point, debate over market or 'police' strategies for providing subsistence for the poor divided philosophers and political economists among themselves no less deeply than it divided the crowd for Smith. Indeed, it makes no sense to take Smith as typical of the range of opinion within the European Enlightenment camp. This becomes apparent if one moves beyond the English context, to which Thompson confines his discussion, and considers the debate in its full European setting. The crucial context for Smith's 'Digression on Grain' was not the encounter with the English or Scottish crowd, but the French debates over the liberalization of the internal trade in 1764-6, which occurred. . . . when Smith himself was in France.²

There are some wilful confusions here. The first point to make about this passage is that, just as much as with the ineducable positivists, it is not so much offering to debate my

¹ Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff, "Needs and Justice in *The Wealth of Nations*", in I. Hont and M. Ignatieff (eds.), *Wealth and Virtue* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 43.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

views as to disallow my questions. Hont and Ignatieff prefer to operate in a detached discipline of political ideas and rhetoric. They do not wish to know how ideas presented themselves as actors in the market-place, between producers, middlemen and consumers, and they imply that this is an improper light in which to view them. It may be "the crucial point" for Hont and Ignatieff that debate over market strategies divided philosophers among themselves no less deeply than it divided the crowd from Smith, but my essay is about the crowd and not about philosophers. Hont and Ignatieff are rebuking me for writing an essay in social history and in popular culture instead of in approved Cambridge themes. I ought to have grabbed a bell-rope and pealed out Quesnay along with Pufendorf, Pocock, Grotius, Hume and the rest.

Even so, Hont and Ignatieff's censures are sloppier than the case calls for. So far from "crediting" Adam Smith "with the first theory to revoke the traditional social responsibility attached to property" (their words, not mine) I am at pains to note the opposite, describing the *Wealth of Nations* "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. . . all run". (Above p. 201.) It is in fact Hont and Ignatieff, and not Thompson, who write that "by 1776, Smith remained the only standard-bearer for 'natural liberty' in grain",¹ a spectacular misstatement which they reach by confusing the British context with the French context in the aftermath of the *guerre des farines*. As for portraying the "moral economy" as "a set of vestigial moral preferences innocent of substantive argument about the working of markets", the trouble is, once again, the vulgarity of the crowd. They were not philosophers. They did, as my essay shows, have substantive and knowledgeable arguments about the working of markets, but about actual markets rather than theorised market relations. I am not persuaded that Hont and Ignatieff have read very far in the pamphlets and newspapers — let alone in the crowd relations — where these arguments will be found and I do not know what business they have to put me, or the crowd, down.

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

I did not, of course, take Smith as “typical of the range of opinion within the European Enlightenment camp”. I took Smith’s “Digression Concerning the Corn Trade” in Book Four, Chapter 5, of *The Wealth of Nations* as being the most lucid expression in English of the standpoint of the new political economy upon market relations in subsistence food-stuffs. As such it was profoundly influential within British governmental circles, and few chapters can have had a more palpable influence upon policies or have been used more extensively to justify policies which were already being enacted. Pitt and Grenville read it together in the 1780s and became wholly converted; when Pitt wavered in the crisis year 1800 Grenville called him back to their old faith.¹ Burke was an ardent adherent and had reached similar positions independently; he had been, in 1772, a prime mover in the repeal of the ancient forestalling legislation, and he was to moralise the “laws” of political economy and nominate them to be divine.² In the nineteenth century class after class of administrators were sent out to India, fully indoctrinated at Haileybury College in Smith’s “Digression”, and ready to respond to the vast exigencies of Indian famine by resolutely resisting any improper interventions in the free operation of the market. T. R. Malthus, appointed Professor of Political Economy at Haileybury in 1805, was an early and apt instructor.

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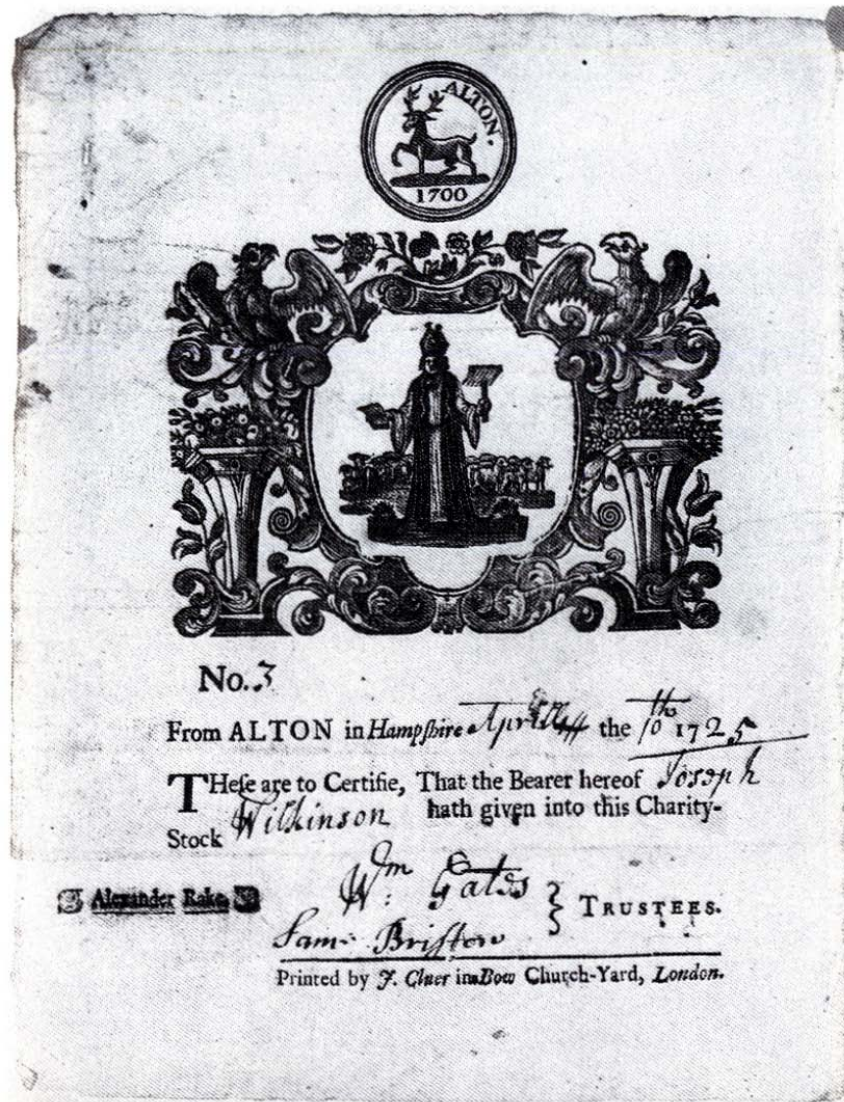


Plate 1. One of the earliest surviving trade union cards, which was filed among the Crown’s affidavits when woolcombers were prosecuted in 1725 in Alton, Hants. (See p. 59.) Note that the union (or “Charity”) has a London printer and claims to have been founded in 1700. Bishop Blaize, the patron of the woolcombers, is in the centre.

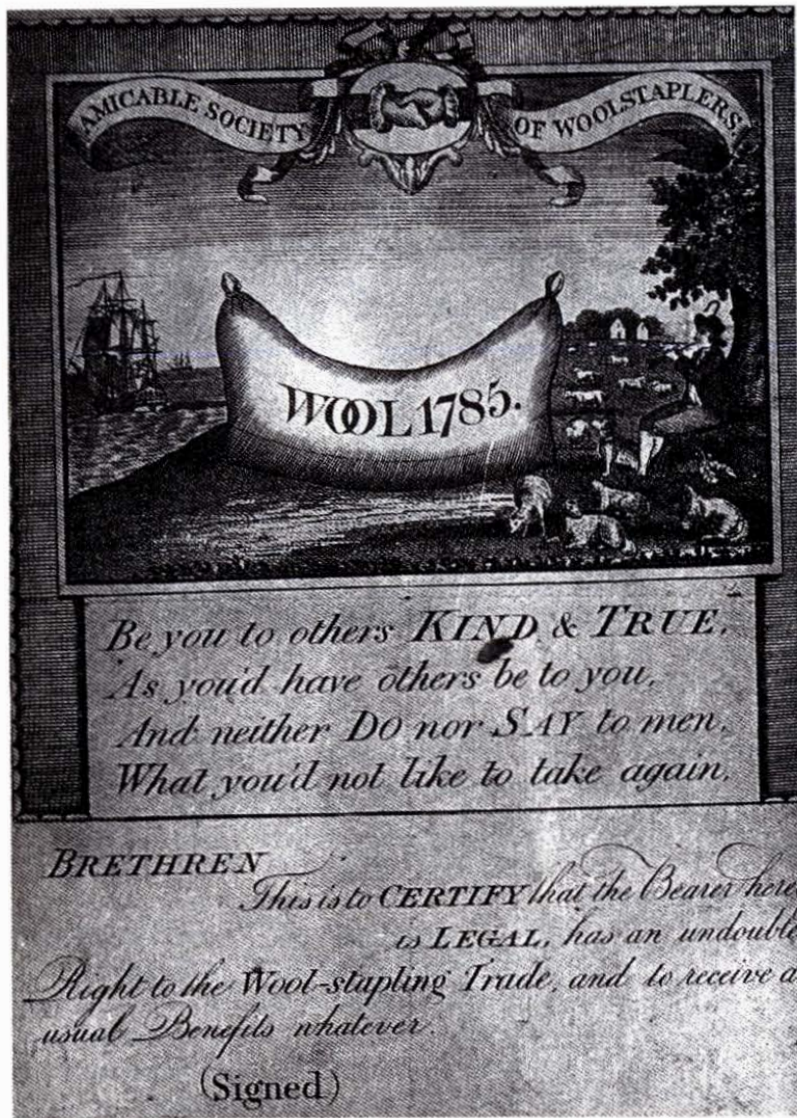


Plate II. The ticket of the Amicable Society of Woolstaplers, 1785, invokes associations with trade and with pastoral life rather than with industry.



Plate III. This woolcombers' union card of 1838 still has the figure of Bishop Blaize at top centre.

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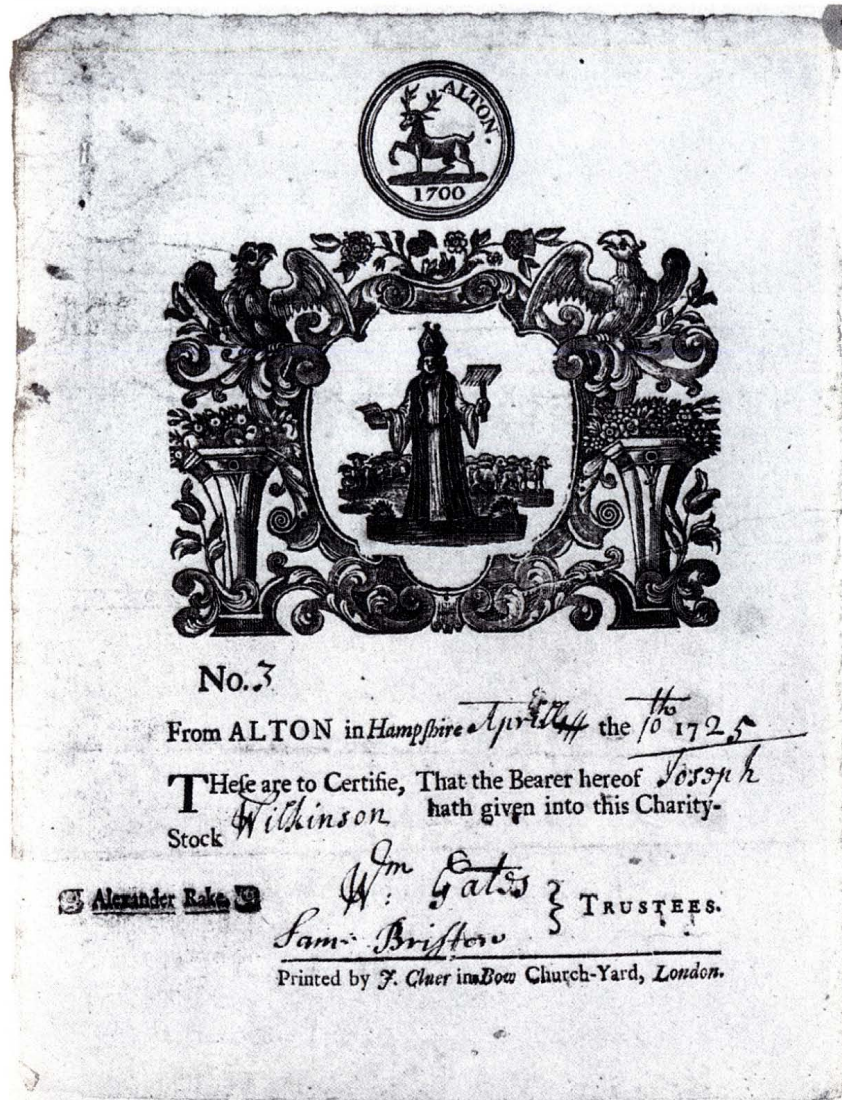


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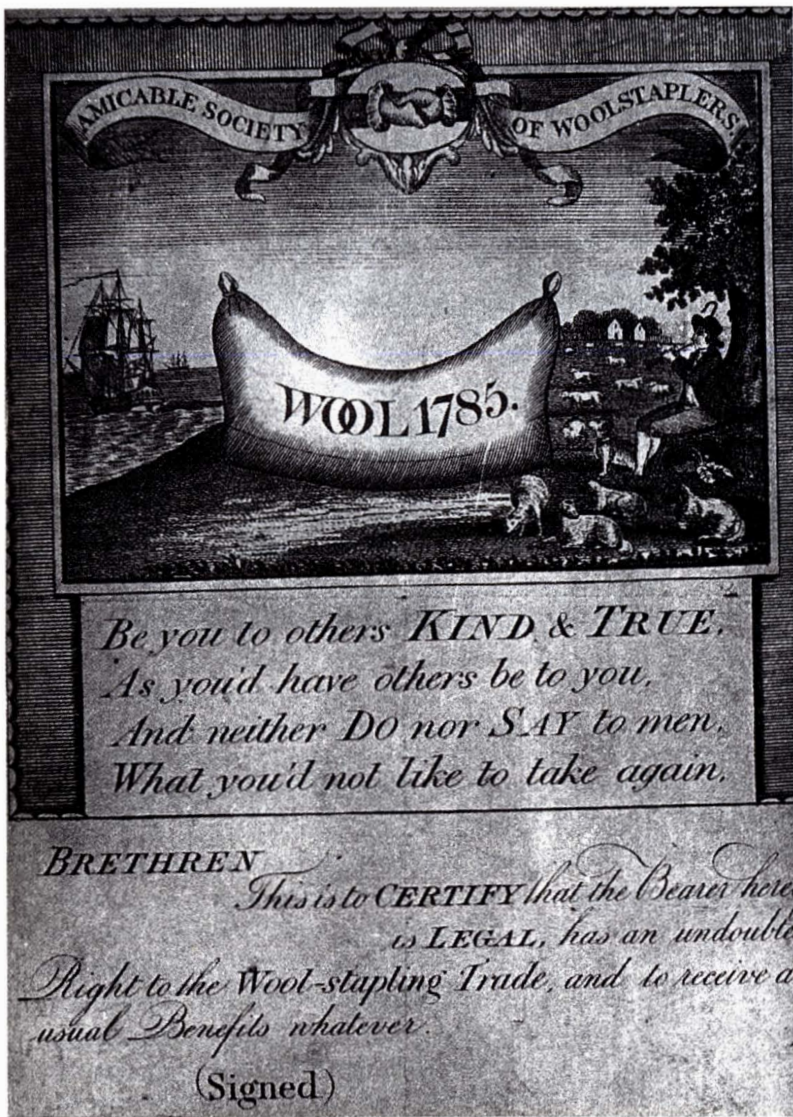
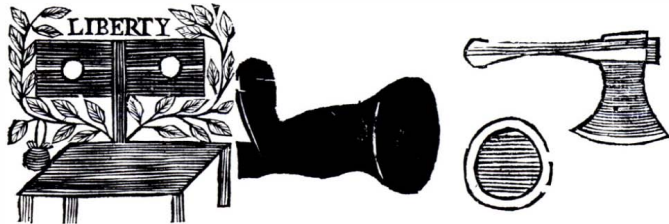


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Plate III. This woolcombers' union card of 1838 still has the figure of Bishop Blaize at top centre.

THE
PILLORY
IN ITS
GLORY,
With the Eloquent Speech it made soon after WILLIAMS had left it.
To which is added, an Antient Prophecy of MERLIN'S
On the JACK-BOOT.



We hear that WILLIAM'S Pillory (supposed to be made of the Descendants of the Oaks of Dodona, which formerly spoke Prophetic) made a Speech as soon as he had left it to the following Purport:

GENTLEMEN,
THE very favourable Treatment I have just now met with from you calls immediate Thanks. I have been accustomed to ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~Use~~ of a very different nature: for seldom have I shown my Face but Filth of every kind hath been thrown against it. -- But such is the present Occasion, and such your just Opinion of it, that now you have been pleased to decorate me with Laurels, and honour me with your Acclamations. Such universal Applause makes me something proud of myself and induces me to think I am not unworthy of having Persons of higher Rank stand upon me. Perhaps I don't may, as Matters go on; And I must own to you, I should be glad to experience your Behaviour towards me, when Criminals of a superior Station peep thro' my wooden Windows. Indeed I heartily wish they soon may: such with Gentlemen is no Libel; nor can the DOUBLE EGG Advocate by all his Art in Insendo's, make it so. Why should not great Villains stand upon me as well as little ones? If any Lawyer, in that place I now look upon, should dare to attempt to pervert the Laws of this Land, and undermine the Liberties of the People, why should not I expose him to your View and Contempt? or if any Person should take a private Bribe to betray a public Trust, why should not I lit up the Rascal to your Retentment? I would have every Man meet with his due Reward: or if he deserves Halter's of Axes let them have them: or, if any shall merit only a Post upon me, your grateful Servant is very ready to exalt them, thro' loads of Dirt and rotten Eggs, instead of Laurels and Acclamations should be my Lot."

An antient Prophecy of MERLIN'S

WHEN from the North a cruel Bird call'd ---,
Shall fly o'er ENGLAND and devour its Fruit,
Shall o'er this Land his baleful Pinions spread,
And from their Mouths shall take the Children's Bread;
Shall, Cuckoo-like, make other Nests his own,
And cast his filthy Eggs behind the ----
Then Magna Charta to Excite shall turn;
The Apple be cast off, the Merchant mourn;
Then shall pack'd Juristry the Fact alone,
And under J---- the Bench shall groan,
Then Pillories into Repute shall come,
And the Prefs, ENGLAND'S Bulwark, be struck dumb,

Plate IV. This broadside combines visual and literary forms with the old oral form of rhyming "prophecies". Williams, a bookseller, was sentenced to the pillory for republishing Wilkes's *North Briton*, no. 45. He was cheered by the crowd, which "erected a gallows of ladders, on which they hung a jack-boot [symbol of the King's favourite, the Earl of Butel], an axe and a Scotch bonnet which articles, after a while, were taken down, the top of the boot cut off with the axe, and then both boot and bonnet thrown into a large bonfire". (Thomas Wright, *Caricature History of the Georges* London, 1867, p. 300).



ANTICIPATION
OF THE
Death-bed Confession.
OF A
NOTORIOUS SINNER.

MY Father was a celebrated Cocker, my Mother the Daughter of a Fiddler, and previous to her Marriage, had employed her Charms to some advantage. By these laudible means my Parents were possessed of some wealth: no expence was spared to give me an Education, and the accomplishment of a Gentleman; but alas, my steril nature was never able to abide the first rudiments of a scholar, and all my attempts at gentility only served to make me ridiculous.

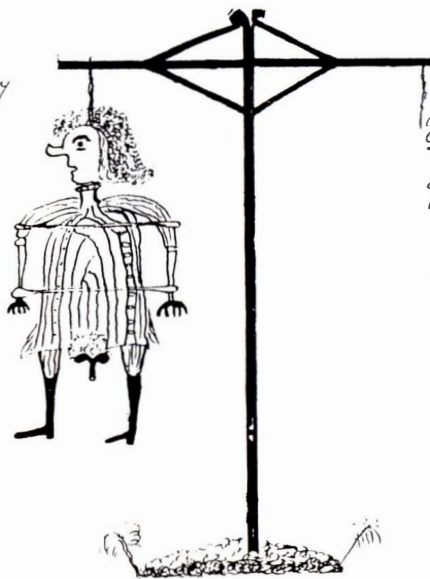
How I have fulfilled the duties of the cloth, my Charity towards the poor Cottagers will evince, and having obtained the rank of a Magistrate, I unblushingly first exercised my authority in convicting and sending to prison a poor honest man, the father of a large family, for selling ale without a licence; though all my neighbours knew it was through my influence alone that a licence had been refused him; I was induced to commit this act of meanness and wanton cruelty, only because he was the Tenant of a respectable gentleman, richer and more respectable than myself, whom I hated for obliging me strictly to observe the pious duties I had undertaken, and was amply paid for, but had no inclination to perform.

Manifold have been my Sins, and at the awful moment of dissolution their horrid deformity presents itself to my disturbed mind. I humbly ask forgiveness of the numbers I have oppressed, and hope these my last words may be published as a warning to those of mean extraction, who, like me, may become possessed of some little power, and employ it to the injury of their fellow-creatures.

A Penitent SINNER.

Plate V. A lampoon on a clerical magistrate (see p. 519). Two Staffordshire gentlemen were feuding in 1796-1800, John Gough, Esq., and the Reverend Thomas Lane, JP, Rector of Handsworth, to whom are attributed these last dying words. John Gough was trying to enlist his tenants in the feud, and skilfully combined visual lampoon with the most popular literary form, the "last dying words" of the condemned.

a Perspective
View of Hadley
Green from
the Parsonage
House



kept for Doctor
Glew. Bishop of
Deal. a resident
of ——— nearly
to the enchanted
Grove

Bretheren. Bretheren behold my exalted Station. Planted
amongst elegant trees. Shrubs and sweet flowers, but all appear
to me Bifs a beds. Nettles and Brambles. I feel the Sting of my
Conscience. Oyea I repent from ever been Patron Just Ajs and
to forth. O what a miserable Shitting. Stirking Dogmatick
Prig of an April fool I do appear, all over Filth. from
such filth of Body and Conscience Good Lord deliver
Me. and from this high Promotion I beseech thee to
encline my Heart to do Justice that I may walk in
Peace before all Men. Women and Children, Aman

Plate VI. Isaac Emmerton, a nurseryman, was prosecuted in 1800 for
such lampoons and for erecting a ten-foot-high gibbet with an effigy
ridiculing the Reverend C. J. Cottrell, JP., the Rector of Hadley,
Middlesex, the chairman of the local Commissioners of Tax
(see p. 481).



From Collier's 'The Pluralist and Old Soldier'

Price 6. plain 1. Coloured

THE PLURALIST AND OLD SOLDIER

A Soldier once and in the Beggar's list
Diddius address a well-fed Pluralist.

Soldier.

At Guardship my Leg, and Thigh I lost;
No Pension have I, tho' its right I boast:
Your Reo.^{ce} please, some Charity bestow.
Heavn will pay double, when you're there, you know.

Pluralist.

Heavn pay me double—: Vagrant; know that I
Ne'er give to Straglers, they're so apt to be:
Your Parish and some work would you become,
So haste away— or Constables your doom.

Soldier.

May it please your Reo.^{ce} hear my case, and then,
You'll say I'm poorer than the most of Men.
When Marlbro Sued Lisle I first drew breath,
And there my father met untimely Death:
My Mother follow'd of a broken heart:
So I've no friend, or Parish, for my part.

Pluralist.

I say begone— with that he loudly knocks
And Timber-twe, begun to smell the Stocks:
Aray he stumps— but in a Road or two
Thrice clear'd his Wezon, and his tho.^{se} broke thro

Soldier.

This tis to beg of thos emho (Sometimes) Preach
Up Charity, and all the Virtues teach:
But their disguise, to Common-Sense is thin.
A Pocket button'd— Hypocrite within—
Send me kind Heavn the well-turnd Cap^{ts} Face.
Who gives me Sweltempence, and a Girse with Grace:
But let me not, in House, or Lane, or Street
These Treble-pension'd Parsons ever meet:
And when I die, may I still number'd be
With the rough Soldier to eternity.

Printed according to Act of Parliament by M. Daryl, facing New Strand, Corner the Strand 1766

Plate VII. This 1766 broadside by John Collier (or "Tim Bobbin"),
the celebrated Lancashire caricaturist, combines the popular appeal
to patriotism with popular hostility to pluralist clergy.



Plate VIII. J. Penkethman, *Artachthos: Authentic Accounts of the History and Price of Wheat, Bread, Malt &c* was published in 1638 and republished in 1765. This frontispiece carries below: "From the Original Tables, formerly in the Treasury, of the King's Exchequer at Westminster and late in the Possession of the Right Honourable Edward Earl of Oxford." This shows the careful regulation of weights and measures of wheat and the punishment in the stocks of forestallers and regrators.

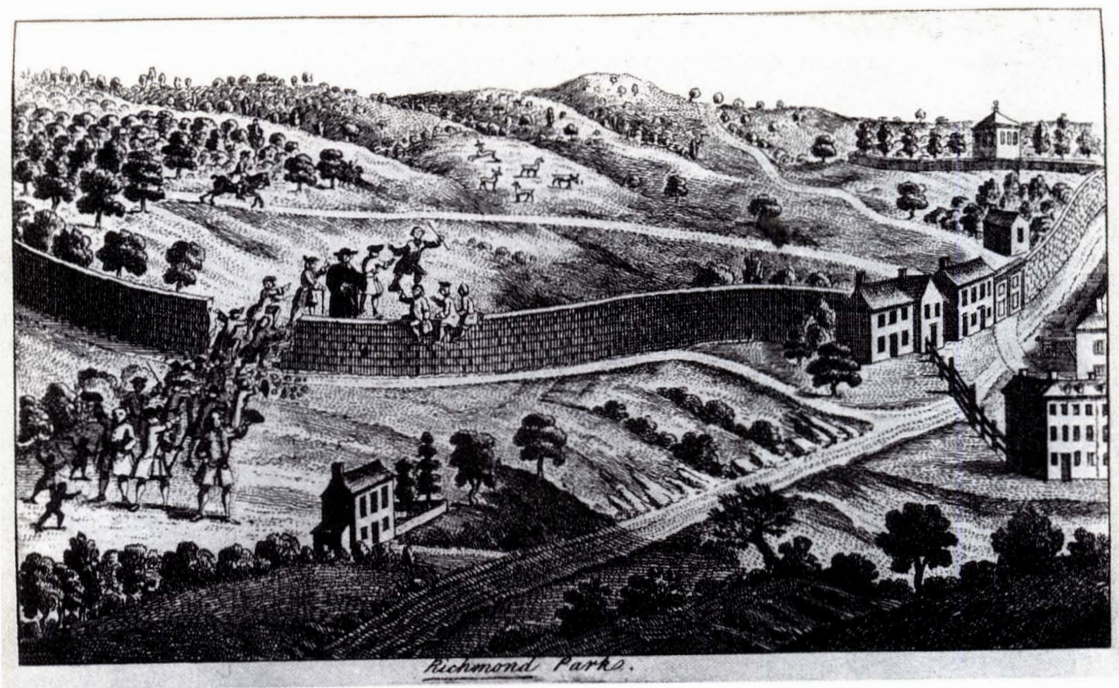


Plate IX. Parishioners, led by their vicar, beat the bounds of their parish, and assert their right of way into Richmond Park by breaking down the wall (see p. 111).



Plate X. As prices began to fall in 1801, caricaturists mocked corn hoarders who had supplies left on their hands. The agricultural labourer is shown (right) as innocent.



Plate XI. Based on an incident in Bishop's-Clyst, Devon, in August 1800. There was a long tradition in Devon of crowds scouring the countryside and visiting farmers reputed to be hoarding corn, and threatening them with rope. Women are shown to be prominent in this action.

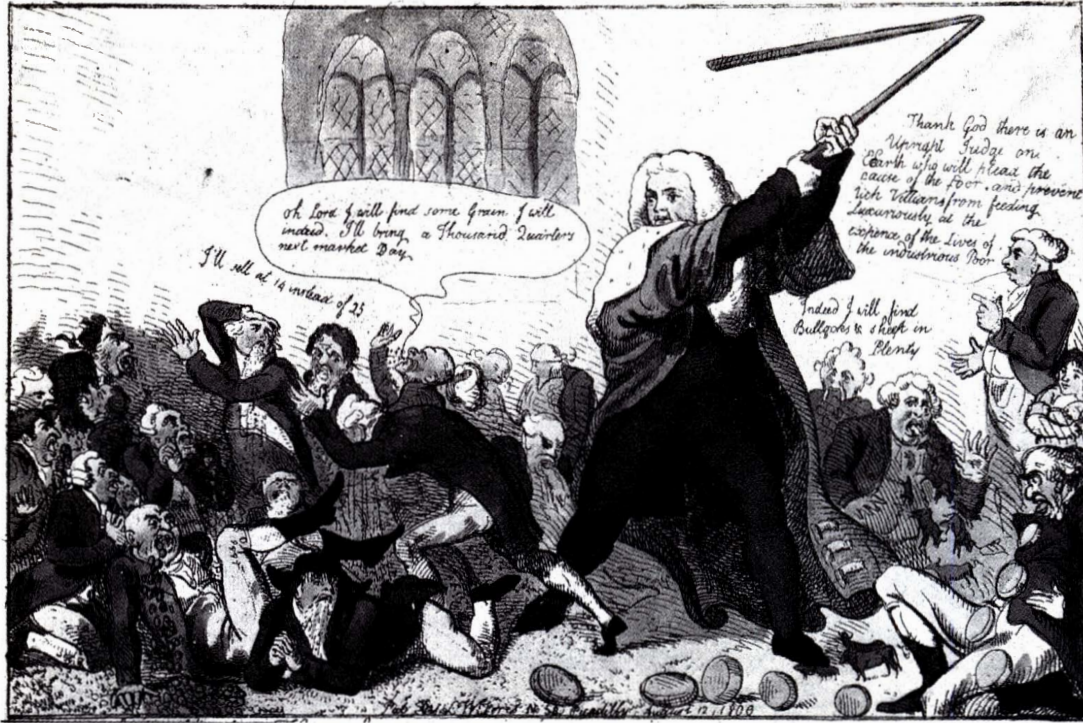


Plate XII. "A Legal Method of Threshing Out Grain" — a tribute to Lord Chief Justice Kenyon, who had presided over the trial and conviction of Rusby, a corn factor, for regrating oats (July 1800), and who sought to revive the old laws against forestalling, &c., on the grounds that — despite their repeal — they remained recognised by the common law.



Plate XIII. During the grain crisis of 1800-01 the Home Secretary, the duke of Portland, actively supported *laissez-faire*, and in March 1801 he issued a circular letter to Lords Lieutenant deploring those local authorities who had been reviving the old laws against sale by sample.

Plate XIV. An urban view of landlord and farmer conspiring with each other to raise prices during the grain crisis of 1801.



Plate XV. Monopolizers are left with unsold corn, May 1801. The Mayor is setting the Assize of Bread. The agricultural labourer looks through the window and says, "Dang I, if I did not think it would come to this at last!"



MONOPOLIZERS caught in their own TRAP or a COMPANION to the FARMERS TOAST.

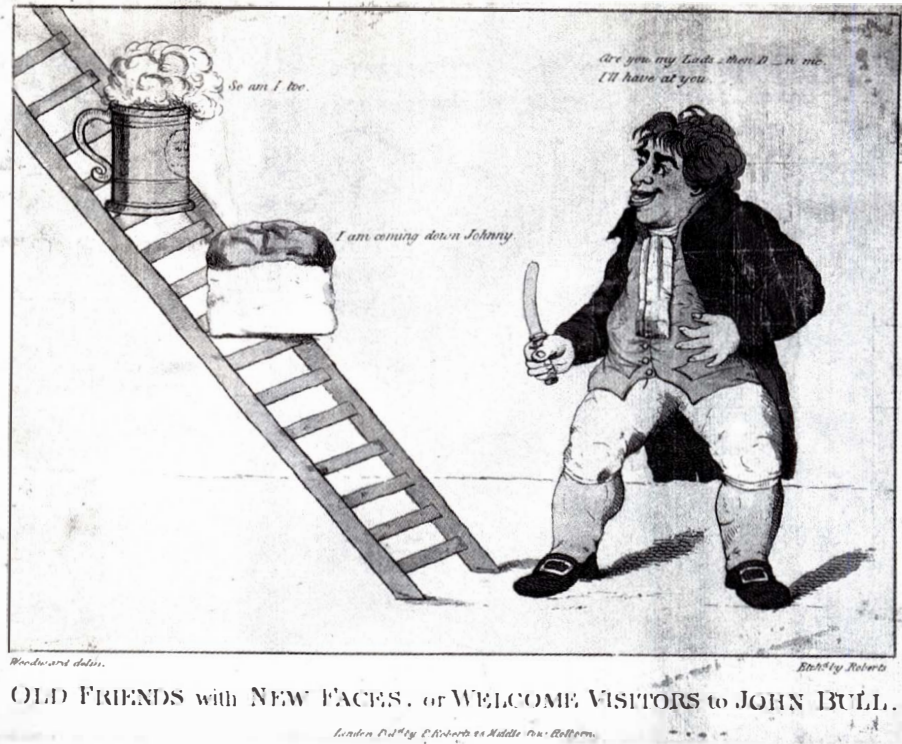


Plate XVI. Prices really do fall in the autumn of 1801.



Plate XVIIa (left). The Butter Cross at Witney, Oxon, was built in 1683 and repaired in 1811. Many market buildings were built in the seventeenth century and still provide evidence of the vigour of market controls. Plate XVIIb (right). The Corn Market at Ledbury, Herefordshire, was built shortly after 1617. Corn storage chambers were added above, some fifty years later, where any unsold grain was held until the next market day. As corn came to be sold by sample in the next century, the chambers were hired out, and a poultry and butter market continued below.



Plate XVIII. Time, work and mortality are invoked at the Neptune Yard, Walker, Newcastle-upon-Tyne.



Plate XIX. This plaster panel is in the Great Chamber at Montacute House, near Yeovil, Somerset, and dates from *circa* 1601. The husband, who had been left in charge of the baby, is surprised by his wife while he is surreptitiously drawing beer. She hits him over the head with a shoe, and this is witnessed by a neighbour (rear).



Plate XX. On the right of this Montacute panel, either the husband or a proxy is made to ride a pole. This is described often as riding Skimmington, but a "true" Skimmington has two riders, one impersonating the wife who belabours the husband, who rides facing the horse's or donkey's tail. (See Hogarth's Skimmington, plate XXII.) The Montacute riding might equally well be Riding the Stang (North of England) or cool-staffing in the West Country.



*That honest Ruffian that runs down
From all the Courts in the Town
And Staffs & Shop bounds in every Square* | *To see the Cause of hereticks
And how the Bishop's Court of Doom
Are now drawn up in service, State* | *And all the Graduates of our members
Are carbonading on the Embos
Knights Citizens and Burgesses* | *Burning the RUMPS at
TEMPLE BAR.* | *That serve to the Chancellors & Judges
To represent their personages
Each Returns is a General Pile* | *And for a Miracle we are not
Already a general Incarnate
For while we struggle here and far* | *Some on the Sign Post of an Old House
Hang in Liqueur on the Gallows
Made up of rags to persecute*

Plate XXI. Hogarth's illustration from "Hudibras" of burning the rumps at Temple Bar shows the street theatre of London politics, and the preparation of effigies for the bonfire.



*He said, they both set on, and took
 Dog too, they said the bantam crew
 With the best of the best, and still
 They approach him, he said to the
 In Hudibras, with face and hand*

*What means quoth he, he said, the
 With Men's Orthodox Profession
 In things of superstition, in
 For he said in Gospel Sun-Slave,
 It is an Antichristian Opera,*

*Of running after self-Intentions
 Of ritual and prophetic Intentions,
 To scandalize that Sex for seeking
 To whom the Saints are so beholden,
 Women that let us alone, intended
 In which the Church might be concerned*

**HUDIBRAS
 ENCOUNTERS THE
 SKIMMINGTON**

*Brought in their children's Spoons, which
 To purchase Swags, Carriage, and Wood
 Drew several good Artificers in
 That for the Bishops would have been
 Had he done the Teaching, and had
 Right, they said, 'Tis a fine thing,
 Pampers, and so, and their Zeal
 With Marrow, Puddings, mutton, and
 And crammed on till their brains did
 With Candy, Custard, and Plum-cake,
 What then, they said, it was left
 They might advance the Cause of
 And on*

*How then, at that an Egg let
 He said, do you see the Egg
 But craves to see his Neck, he
 But craves to see his Neck, he
 And straight, under with his
 In a Whiff, or the Egg, a*

Plate XXII. Hogarth's illustration from "Hudibras" of a Skimmington.



DESYNTEX WITH THE SKIMERTON RIDERS.

Plate XXIII. Rowlandson's "Skimerton" (from illustrations to "Dr. Syntax") shows all the symbolism and paraphernalia of a carnival of cuckoldry, and shows a more active participation by the women than does Hogarth.

A GENERAL SUMMONS

TO ALL THE HORNIFIED FUMBLERS,

To assemble at Horn Fair October 18,

Printed and sold by T. Batchelar, 115, Long Alley, Moorfields, London.



Plate XXIV. A summons to Horn Fair at Charlton (north of Blackheath). Claiming great antiquity, in the eighteenth century this carnival of cuckoldry was patronised by many genteel young people, masked and in drag, and with horns plentifully in evidence.

A New SUMMONS from
St Nicholas Terrible Captain General of
FORKED **ORDER.**
 17 24

Ye Hornifi'd Husbands who come once a Year,
 With Baskets, Pickaxes, & Spades to HORN-FAIR,
 To level a Path for your Wagghish-tail'd Wives,
 If e'er you expect to lead peaceable Lives,
 Make the best of your Bargain, & think it no scorn
 That Fortune has doom'd you to wearing the Horn,
 For 'twas worn by OLD NICK, before you were begot,
 And will be so, after you're all dead and rotten,
 Make him but y^e Captain to fight for your Cause,
 And then you'll have nothing to fear, my brave
Sold by the Printers &c. Price 6 Pence. Boys

Plate XXV. The printer, T. Batchelar, used these premises between 1817 and 1828 (information from Roy Palmer) so that this "Summons" extends the iconography of cuckoldry and skimmingtons well into the nineteenth century.



Plate XXVI. This diabolic mask, known as the "Ooser", was held at a farm in Melbury Osmond, Dorset, but it is now lost. The lower jaw was moveable and was worked with a string; in its last years it was supposedly used to frighten unruly children.



CHAPTER VIII.

OLD SHOPS, OLD HOUSES, AND OLD INHABITANTS.

As a picture of the past, and one that had never been altered for many long years, I shall now endeavour to bring before the eye the trades and shops, odd characters, and old houses, ancient lanes, yards, and 'twitchells,' in some such order as they stood, and with the old names by which the trades were

Plate XXVII. This reconstruction of riding the stang comes from a local history of Grimsby, published in 1857. A proxy (or neighbour?) is being ridden, in some comfort, while the victim watches apprehensively out of the window.



Plate XXVIII. The last days of rough music: a "lewelling" in a Warwickshire village (Brailes) in 1909. The band parades before the effigies of "the erring pair", which are set up in front of the woman's house. After three nights the dummies are burned. Notice that this band is wholly male, and the "historic instruments" have given way to kettles, milk churns and corrugated iron.



JOHN HOBBS, JOHN HOBBS.

Sung by Mr. LOVEGROVE, with unbounded Applause, in "Any Thing New," at the Lyceum Theatre, Strand.

A jolly shoe-maker, John Hobbs, John Hobbs,
A jolly shoe-maker, John Hobbs;
He married Jane Carter,
No damsel look'd smarter,
But he caught a Tartar,
John Hobbs, John Hobbs,
Yes, he caught a Tartar, John Hobbs.

He tied a rope to her, John Hobbs, John Hobbs,
He tied a rope to her, John Hobbs:
To 'scape from hot water
To Smithfield he brought her,
But nobody bought her,
Jane Hobbs, Jane Hobbs,
They all were afraid of Jane Hobbs.

Oh, who'll buy a wife? says Hobbs, John Hobbs,
A sweet pretty wife, says Hobbs;
But somehow they tell us,
The wife-dealing fellows
Were all of them sellers,
John Hobbs, John Hobbs,
And none of 'em wanted Jane Hobbs.

The rope it was ready, John Hobbs, John Hobbs,
Come, give me the rope, says Hobbs,
I won't stand to wrangle,
Myself I will strangle,
And hang dingle dangle,
John Hobbs, John Hobbs,
He hung dingle dangle, John Hobbs.

But down his wife cut him, John Hobbs, John Hobbs,
But down his wife cut him, John Hobbs;

With a few hubble bubbles
They settled their troubles,
Like most married couples,
John Hobbs, John Hobbs,
Oh, happy shoe-maker John Hobbs.

Plate XXIX. John Hobbs: like much standard ballad-vendor's stock, this is intended to amuse, and has no evidential value whatsoever.

A MAN SELLING HIS WIFE

In the Market-place, Thetford,

17th Feb 1839.

On Saturday last, for the sum of £5. together with a true and laughable Dialogue which took place between the man & his wife after she was sold, when she was retiring with her new husband.

London

On Saturday last the Market-place of Thetford was thrown into a state of excitement, seldom witnessed there, by a man about forty years of age, in a shabby-genteel dress; leading a smart-looking woman, with a handkerchief round her neck, and shouting with a loud voice, "who'll buy a wife?" After arriving at the centre of the Market, he mounted a chair, and offered her for sale. "She was good looking, but that was all he could say for her." A young man of plausible appearance offered 10s. for her; but he was immediately opposed by an old gentleman bidding 5s. more. Afterwards the young man became the purchaser for £5. The money was paid down, and the husband on handing over the handkerchief to the purchaser, began to dance and sing, declaring he had got rid of a troublesome noisy wife, which caused much merriment in the crowd. The young woman turned sharply round and said, you know you old rascal you are jealous—you are no man, and have no need of a young wife, and that is the reason you sold me, you useless old dog. Here the laugh was turned against him, and the women began to clap their hands at him. He then said she was a gormandizing woman, and would eat any man's substance up; and declared if he had kept her another year, she would have eaten him out of house and harbour. Here the woman looked blue, but soon turned round, nothing daunted and said, "swallow your substance indeed, that might soon be swallowed by any lady present for what there is of it. Only think, he wished half a pound of sugar and one ounce of tea to serve us both the whole blessed week; and as for dinners, fresh meat we never saw, but a half-penny worth of onions and a small quantity of bread & cheese were our dinners for days together." Here the women became uproarious, but he walked off singing, "I fairly got rid of her." The fortunate purchaser led her away in loud huzzas. The seller's name is John Simpson, of Brandenham, and the purchaser's name is John Hart, of whom he had been jealous, having lodged in his house.

You married men and women too,
Of every degree,
If you wish to live contented,
Pray be advis'd by me;
Take caution from this man and wife,
Who did in Brandenham dwell—
And what between them did take place
I unto you will tell

CHORUS.

So men look out what you are about
For your wives do all you can,
For a woman is a blessing,
And a comfort to a man.

It happened in that neighbourhood,
Upon the other day,
A man resolv'd to sell his wife,
Through jealousy they say;
To part it was agreed it seems,
To Thetford market they went.

And for five pounds he sold her,
And half-a-crown was spent,

This man was worth some money,
And a miser did appear,
He kept his wife on bread and cheese,
With allowance of small beer;
Besides he kept her from her tea,
Woman's comfort and delight,
Likewise he was so jealous,
He lay grunting every night.

Oh, jealousy is a cruel thing,
I'd have you push it out,
It is worse than Itch, Stitch, Palsy,
The Rheumatism or Gout;
So you that feel those cruel pains,
Think on this man and wife,
Be sure you have convincing proof,
Before you blame your wife.

Printed for, and Sold by Joseph Barnfyde, Thetford.

Plate XXX. This locally-printed Thetford wife sale broadside was probably based on a real incident, touched up for entertainment.

324 VENTE DE FEMMES A LONDRES.

nerai à observer qu'une coutume aussi infâme s'est conservée sans interruption, qu'elle est mise chaque jour à exécution; que si quelques magistrats des comtés, informés que de semblables marchés allaient se faire, ont cherché à les empêcher en envoyant sur les lieux des constables ou huissiers, la populace les a toujours dispersés, et qu'elle a maintenu ce qu'elle considère comme son droit.



Plate XXXI. This vignette concludes an account of the sale of wives in London in a French travel book which like many others exaggerates the prevalence of the custom ("qu'elle est mise chaque jour à exécution").



Plate XXXII. *Punch's* "physiology of courtship": it is intended to typify the English manner of courtship as conceived by the French and Germans. The scene is Smithfield market: on the right "Lord the Honourable Sir Brown (eldest son of the Lord Mayor) is making in the cold and formal fashion of his compatriots, a declaration of his sentiments to a young miss, daughter of a duke . . ." On the left "may be perceived a church dignitary in a fit of the spleen disposing of his wife, for ready cash, to a field-marshal — sad, but only too frequent Result, of our insular Incompatibility of Temper".

and Scotland also, and had become more heated at the time of the dearth of 1756-7, when many English local authorities had symbolically enforced some of the old protective legislation.¹ As it happens the only authority cited by Smith in his digression is not a French physiocrat but Charles Smith, whose *Three Tracts on the Corn Trade* date from 1758 (above p. 201). Adam Smith is likely to have been influenced in his market theories by Scottish experience as well as French, but the digression is argued almost wholly in terms of English practices and laws.²

My essay was taken by some to be derogatory both to Adam Smith and to the "free market", which is a very great personage these days. But my comments were deferential, mild and agnostic. They were offered

Not in refutation of Adam Smith, but simply to indicate places where caution should be exercised until our knowledge is greater. We need say only of the *laissez-faire* model that it is empirically unproven; inherently unlikely; and that there is some evidence on the other side (p. 207).

There is no final historical verdict after more than two hundred years, because Adam Smith theorised a state of perfect competition and the world is still waiting for this state to arrive.

But, even if we were to suppose market conditions more perfect, there are peculiarities in the market for the necessities of subsistence which raise their own theoretical

¹ Adam Smith's "real contact" with the French thinkers came during his visit to Paris, December 1765 to October 1766: see Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. R. H. Campbell and A. S. Skinner (Oxford, 1976), i, pp. 22-3, note 8. He will therefore have been absent from Britain during the height of the 1766 rioting. But Smith himself insisted that his views of *laissez-faire* were already formed in 1749: see Jacob Viner, *The Long View and the Short* (Glencoe, Illinois, 1958), p. 215.

² Even Smith's famous comparison of the popular prejudices against forestallers to belief in "witchcraft" might have been borrowed from an earlier pamphleteer: see *Reflections on the Present High Price of Provisions; and the complaints and disturbances arising therefrom* (1766), p. 39, which refers also to witchcraft and notes that in the Commission for the appointment of magistrates "inchantments, sorceries, arts of magic, forestalling, regratings, and ingrossings are ranged together, as offences of a similar nature, because they were committed by wicked persons, in a manner both amazing and unknown".

problems. The question is not whether, in the long run, it is not advantageous to all parties for communications to be improved and for national and, in the end, international markets in grain or in rice to be formed. As soon as that question is proposed the answer is self-evident. . . and we are into a feedback loop. Direct obstruction of this flow, whether by local authorities or by the crowd, could be plainly reactionary. But dearth and famine are always in the short run and not the long. And Adam Smith has only long-run remedies (such as high prices encouraging the breaking-up of more acres for grain) for short-run crisis. By 1776, when *The Wealth of Nations* was published, the desirability of a more fluent national commerce in grain had become a truism. What were disputed (in France as in England), were the measures the authorities might or should take in times of high prices and dearth. Here there were wide disagreements, not only between traditionalists (and of course the crowd) and political economists, but also — as Hont and Ignatieff very helpfully show — within the ranks of the political economists.¹

Adam Smith took a sterner and more doctrinaire position on the inviolability of *laissez-faire* even during times of dearth than did many of his colleagues. He insisted that the interests of dealers (inland) and the “great body of the people” were “exactly the same”, “*even in years of the greatest scarcity*”. “The unlimited, unrestricted freedom of the corn trade, as it is the only effectual preventive of the miseries of a famine so it is the best palliative of the inconvenience of a dearth.”² Smith was not, “the only standard-bearer for ‘natural liberty’ in grain” but he was one of the more extreme standard-bearers for this liberty to remain uncontrolled even in times of great scarcity. And he must have known very well that it was exactly this point of emergency measures in time of dearth that was most controversial. His notable forerunner in developing *Political Oeconomy*, Sir James Steuart, had refused this fence, and

¹ Hont and Ignatieff, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-19.

² These passages are selected for emphasis by Salim Rashid in “The Policy of *Laissez-faire* during Scarcities”, *Economic Journal*, 90 (1980), pp. 493-503.

was an advocate of the stockpiling of grain in public granaries for sale in time of dearth.¹ Smith’s successor and biographer, Dugald Stewart, was a true executor when he lectured in unqualified terms on the “unlimited liberty of the corn trade” right through the crisis year of 1800.² On this question Adam Smith was neither “vulgarised” nor “mis-understood”.

It is not (as some accounts imply) the total theoretical structure of *The Wealth of Nations* which is at issue, but the few pages of Smith’s digression on the corn trade in that treatise. These pages acquired oracular authority, and in each episode of scarcity — in Britain in 1795 and 1800, in Ireland, India and the Colonial Empire through much of the nineteenth century — these were the arguments which politicians and administrators rehearsed. In Britain in the 1790s both Government and Foxite opposition endorsed these arguments, and when the Home Secretary, the duke of Portland, harried traditionalist Lords Lieutenant, magistrates and local authorities with homilies on political economy and instructions to preserve the freedom of markets, he was not vulgarising the views of Dr Smith but enforcing these strictly.

Thus when the Nottingham Corporation endorsed the crowd’s imposition of price ceilings and brought pressure onto local farmers to supply the market at these rates, Portland insisted, in Smithian terms, that

Whenever any reduction in the price of a Commodity has been effected by intimidation it has never been of any duration, and besides, by having things out of their natural and orderly courses, it almost necessarily happens that the evil, instead of being remedied returns with increased violence.³

To this Portland added, but with his own special vehemence, the Smithian theme of natural justice to the rights of property: there should be a “religious observance of the respect. . . due to private property”, and the Lord

¹ Sir James Steuart, “A dissertation on the policy of grain”, in *Works* (1805; reprint 1967), v, pp. 347-77. Steuart’s proposal was first made in 1757, but was maintained in subsequent years.

² Dugald Stewart, *Lectures on Political Economy* (Edinburgh, 1855; reprint 1968), ii, p. 52.

³ Wells, *Wretched Faces*, p. 238.

Lieutenant of Oxfordshire, the duke of Marlborough — a traditionalist and paternalist — was instructed that:

If the employment of Property is not secure, if every Man does not feel that he has power to retain what he possesses so long as he pleases and dispense it at the time, in the manner and for the Price he chuses to fix upon it, there must be an end of Confidence in Industry and of all valuable and virtuous Exertions of all descriptions. . . the whole Order of things must be overturned and destroyed.

All must “maintain the Principle of perfect Freedom of Property”.¹

It was the same principle and the same authority that was appealed to during famine conditions in Western India in 1812. The judge and magistrate of Kaira had urged the government to intervene by importing grain and selling it to retailers at little over its cost price. The proposal was rejected:

The Right Honourable the Governor in Council is disposed to think. . . that those approved and recognised principles. . . which prescribe an entire and unrestricted freedom in the grain trade, as best adapted to the relief of any existing scarcity and to the prevention of famine, are particularly applicable to the dealers in grain in the province of Goozerat. . . The digression of the celebrated author of the *Wealth of Nations* concerning the Corn-Trade. . . particularly as far as respects the *inland Trader*, is forcibly and irresistibly applicable to every state of society where merchants, or dealers, in grain may be established.²

Similar homilies were expressed in orders of the Madras Government in 1833 which argued that high prices constitute the best security against famine: “The interference of Government in such emergencies. . . disturbs the natural current (by which, where trade is free, the demands of any commodity is sure to meet, as far as circumstances will allow, with a corresponding supply) and has a tendency to convert a

¹Roger Wells, “The Grain Crisis in England, 1794-96, 1799-1801” (Univ. of York Ph.D. thesis, 1978), pp. 472-3. Also Wells, *Wretched Faces*, pp. 238-9.

²Srinivasa Ambirajan, “Economic Ideas and Indian Economic Policies in the 19th Century” (Manchester Univ. Ph.D. thesis, 1964), pp. 363-4. A similar circular, quoting almost verbatim from *The Wealth of Nations*, originated from the Board of Revenue in Madras in 1811: Arnold, *Famine*, p. 113. See also Ambirajan, S., *Classical Political Economy and British Policy in India* (Cambridge, 1978).

season of scarcity into one of absolute famine”.¹

Despite the appalling example of the great Irish famine, Smithian imperatives continued to inform policies in India during the famines of the 1860s and 1870s. Baird Smith, reporting on the famine of 1860-1, applauded the non-interventionist principles of *The Wealth of Nations* and advised that the remedy for dearth be left to “the order of nature [which] if it occasionally produces dire sufferings, does also provide generally the most effective means for their mitigation”.² (In Orissa alone, in 1860, famine deaths were estimated at 1,364,529.³) It has been suggested that some administrators were fortified in policies of non-interference by literal-minded assent to Malthusian doctrines.⁴ The magistrate at Patna was advised by the Governor-General that, while it was “beyond the power. . . of the public authorities to remedy the unfortunate dearth of grain”, yet the magistrates may “effect much to soften the distress and calm the irritation of the people”:

¹*Ibid.*, p. 366. The view that famines were always the consequence of well-intentioned interventions by the authorities which disrupted the “natural” flow of trade is one of Adam Smith’s least well-supported assertions: “Whoever examines, with attention, the history of the dearths and famines which have afflicted any part of Europe during either the course of the present, or that of the two preceding centuries” will find that dearths arise in a few cases from the waste of war but in the greatest number of cases “by the fault of the seasons; and that *a famine has never arisen from any other cause but the violence of government attempting, by improper means, to remedy the inconvenience of dearth*”. (My italics.) Upon this pretence to omniscience, Smith and his disciples could denounce protective measures as iniquitous. Smith also asserted that “the drought in Bengal, a few years ago, might probably have occasioned a very great dearth. Some improper regulations, some injudicious restraints, imposed by the servants of the East India Company upon the rice trade, contributed, perhaps, to turn that dearth into a famine.” This assertion has been challenged by H. Sur, “The Bihar Famine of 1770”, *Indian Econ. & Social Hist. Review*, xiii, 4 (1976), who finds a better explanation in the collapse of the traditional Moghul administration and the ensuing vacuum.

²B. M. Bhatia, *Famines in India* (Bombay, 1967), p. 105.

³Ambirajan, thesis, p. 367.

⁴See S. Ambirajan, “Malthusian Population Theory and Indian Famine Policy in the 19th Century”, *Population Studies*, xxx, 1 (1976).

By manifesting a sympathy in their sufferings, by a humane, patient and indulgent hearing of their complaints, by encouraging them to look forward to the approaching harvest. . . they may be persuaded to bear with resignation the inevitable calamities under which they labour.¹

This throws one back, not only to Smith and to Malthus, but also to Edmund Burke's *Thoughts on Scarcity*.

What political economy forbade was any "violent interferences with the course of trade", including the prosecution of profiteers or hoarders, the fixing of maximum prices, and government intervention in grain or rice dealing.² Relief exercises must take the form of distributing a pittance of purchase money (at whatever height "the order of nature" had brought prices to) to those whose need passed the examination of labour on public relief works.³ These policies, or negatives in the place of policies, were based upon theories which — however elaborated by other authors — rested upon the few pages of Adam Smith's digression.

These pages, then, were among the most influential writings in history, with a global influence which was sometimes baneful. Their arguments discredited or disallowed traditional protective interventions in time of dearth, could be used to justify profiteering and hoarding, and could serve as apologetics to soothe the troubled consciences of the authorities by commending inactivity as correct political economy. Two Indian economists who have had the temerity to question their profession's habitual complacency about Smith's views on the grain trade receive a lofty rebuke from Hont and Ignatieff: they have "overlooked" "the traditional theory of justice framing Smith's discourse of free trade in subsistence goods during dearth and famines". And they cite this passage of the digression:

To hinder. . . the farmer from sending his goods at all times to the best market, is evidently to sacrifice the ordinary laws of justice to an idea of public utility, to a sort of reasons of state — an act of legislative

¹ Ambirajan, thesis, pp. 366-7.

² See Bhatia, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

³ The absolutes of political economy were modified by the Famine Code of 1880, although the general principle of non-intervention in the grain trade "remained inviolate until the Second World War": Arnold, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

authority which ought to be exercised only, which can be pardoned only, in cases of the most urgent necessity.

And somehow or other Hont and Ignatieff find this passage endorsement of their conclusion that "Smith's discourse was not about the conditions of actual famines, which belonged to the discourse on grave necessity which 'breaks all laws' ". But one may search in vain in the digression or anywhere in *The Wealth of Nations* for any such "discourse on grave necessity". What is pretentiously named as a "discourse" is, at most, a brief saving clause (measures "which can be pardoned only in cases of the most urgent necessity") and a prolonged silence as to what these measures might be.¹

As for "the traditional theory of justice framing Smith's discourse of free trade", the justice is to the rights of property. As Hont and Ignatieff acknowledge elsewhere, Smith "insisted on the all but absolute priority of the property rights of grain merchants and farmers over the claims of need made by poor labourers". This position was more extreme than that of many contemporary political economists and physiocrats; indeed, Diderot considered the privileging of private property above need in times of famine to be a "cannibal principle".²

My argument is not (as it happens) intended to show that Dr Adam Smith was a cannibal. Smithian advocacy of free trade in grain had evident virtues in the long run but had only negative relevance in times of crisis, since his remedies — such as increasing cereal production — were long-run remedies or — such as very high prices — were not remedies at all. Among the deficiencies of Smithian doctrine were 1) that it *was* doctrinaire and counter-empirical. It did not want to know how actual markets worked, any more than its disciples do today. As dogma it could serve as an apologia for inactivity, as exemplified in several Irish and Indian disasters. 2) It promoted the notion that high prices were a (painful) remedy for dearth, in drawing supplies to the afflicted region

¹ Hont and Ignatieff, *op. cit.*, p. 20. Adam Smith in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (Oxford, 1976), p. 27, found "violent hunger" to be an offence against "propriety". Though sometimes "unavoidable" it "is always indecent".

² *Ibid.*, p. 22.

of scarcity. But what draws supply are not high prices but people with sufficient money in their purses to pay high prices. A characteristic phenomenon in times of dearth is that it generates unemployment and empty purses; in purchasing necessities at inflated prices people cease to be able to buy inessentials, and the shoemaker, the weaver, the stockinger, the fisherman, the barber, the transport worker, and many others fall on hard times.¹ Hence the number of those able to pay the inflated prices declines in the afflicted regions, and food may be exported to neighbouring, less afflicted, regions where employment is holding up and consumers still have money with which to pay. In this sequence, high prices can actually withdraw supply from the most afflicted. A leading authority on recent famines, Dr Amartya Sen, notes that in a slump hunger and even starvation have "little market pull" and in many famines food was exported from the famine-stricken country or region. This was notoriously the case in Ireland in the 1840s and was observed in Indian famines also:

Adam Smith's proposition is, in fact, concerned with efficiency in meeting a market demand, but it says nothing on meeting a need that has not been translated into effective demand because of lack of market-based entitlement and shortage of purchasing power.²

3) The most unhappy error flows from Smith's metaphor of price as a means of rationing. Smith argues that high prices discourage consumption, putting "everybody more or less, but particularly the inferior ranks of people, upon thrift and good management". By comparing the dealer who raises prices to the "prudent master of a vessel" rationing his crew, there is a persuasive suggestion of a fair distribution of limited resources. These resources will be rationed not only between individual consumers but also over time, dividing "the inconveniences" of scarcity "as equally as possible

¹Thus in Bengal in 1873 the first to starve were "non-agricultural classes" — weavers, metal workers, carpenters, fishermen, menials. The field labourers and small cultivators followed: *Extra Supplement to the Gazette of India*, 26 Feb. 1875, p. 33.

²Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines* (Oxford, 1981), pp. 161-2. "Food being exported from famine-stricken areas may be a 'natural' characteristic of the market, which respects entitlement rather than needs."

through all the different months and weeks and days of the year.

However persuasive the metaphor, there is an elision of the real relationships assigned by price, which suggests — for the argument has been repeated ever since and may still be heard today — ideological sleight-of-mind. Rationing by price does not allocate resources equally among those in need; it reserves the supply to those who can pay the price and excludes those who can't. Perhaps one-fifth or one-quarter of the English population in the eighteenth century rubbed along on the edge of bare subsistence, and was in danger of falling below this whenever prices rose. In a recent authoritative study it is shown that

In hard years perhaps 20 per cent of the population could not, unaided, have bought sufficient bread even if they had been able to eliminate all other expenditure; and. . . in a very hard year, 45 per cent of the entire population could be thrown into such destitution.¹

What Hay finds for eighteenth-century England, Sir William Hunter and other observers found for nineteenth-century India. Even in normal years one-fifth of the population "went through life on insufficient food".² The raising of prices during dearth could "ration" them out of the market altogether.

This is something one must hold steadily in view. High prices of bread mattered little to the rich, were inconvenient to the middling sort, were painful to steadily-employed labourers, but could threaten the survival of the poor. That is why they were at once a matter of "politics". It was against this socially-unequal "rationing" by purse that the food riot was a protest and perhaps a remedy.

This may remind us that the world has not done yet with dearth or with famine. The problem occupies many able minds and, as one might expect, some of the most relevant work comes from Indian economists and historians, for whom famine is not so distant a problem and yet who share with Britain some common histories of administration, law, and ideology. One arresting approach is that of Amartya Sen,

¹Douglas Hay, "War, Dearth and Theft in the Eighteenth Century", *Past and Present*, 95 (1982), p. 132.

²See Bhatia, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

in his *Poverty and Famines* (1981), which employs "entitlement theory" and also an advanced statistical apparatus. "Entitlement" indicates all the various means by which people gain access to essential food supply, whether this is through direct subsistence farming or through the provision by an employer or master (in his household) or by purchase in the market. A famine is triggered by the breakdown of such entitlements and the merit of this approach is that it does not only tell us that there has been a decline in the amount of food available but it also examines "why some groups had to starve while others could feed themselves. . . . What allows one group rather than another to get hold of the food that is there?".¹

Dr Sen examines twentieth-century famines in Asia and Africa, for which the statistical data is more reliable than any we have for the eighteenth century, and he concludes that, in the greater number of cases examined, famine cannot be simply attributed to "food availability decline". Where there had been a crop failure, "a moderate short-fall in *production*" was "translated into an exceptional short-fall in *market release*". The market cannot be isolated and abstracted from the network of political, social and legal relations in which it is situated. Once the downward spiral of famine is entered, the process can become cumulative, and "no matter how a famine is *caused*, methods of *breaking* it call for a large supply of food in the public distribution system".²

This approach is relevant to dearth in eighteenth-century Europe also,³ and is preferable to the one most commonly adopted, which focuses on harvest failures as if these could supply not only necessary but also sufficient explanation of all that followed. Dr Sen argues that this "FAD" (food availability decline) approach

Gives little clue to the causal mechanism of starvation, since it does not go into the *relationship* of people to food. Whatever may be the

¹Sen, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

²*Ibid.*, pp. 75, 79.

³See Louise Tilly, "Food Entitlement, Famine, and Conflict", in R. I. Rotberg and Theodore K. Rabb (eds.), *Hunger and History* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 135-152.

oracular power of the FAD view, it is certainly Delphic in its reticence.¹

In general the eighteenth-century English poor were sheltered by poor laws and charity from outright starvation, but Dr Sen's argument remains valid. Smithian and Malthusian explanations of years of dearth rest heavily upon crop failures (FAD) and remain "Delphic" as to the relationship of people to food and the socially-differential entitlements that obtained.

The "relationship of people to food" involves systems of power, property and law. Conflict over entitlement to food in the market might be seen as a forum of class struggle, if most historians were not too prissy nowadays to use the term. It may also be seen as a forum for the conflict of interests, "Town" versus "Country", as manufacturing workers, woollen workers, or colliers, confronted farmers and dealers.

Both forms of conflict can be observed in England during the high-price years of the Napoleonic Wars, and as government intervened with doctrine and with armed force in support of the unfettered operation of agrarian capitalism there can be no doubt which classes and interests were winners. Professor Mingay has estimated that, in areas which he has investigated, rents rose between 40 per cent and 50 per cent between 1750 and 1790; and between 1790 and 1815 rents rose by a further 80 per cent to 90 per cent.² At the same time (as the substantial farm buildings of that period remain to witness) the middling and larger farmers were well able to pay these enhanced rentals and were rising in prosperity and in assumptions of social status. Rent was the means by which the landowners clawed back their share of farming profits. These rentals indicated a very considerable rise in the wealth of the agrarian capitalist classes (in which affluence the agricultural labourers had no share), and this was supported in its turn by the sale of food — and especially cereals — to the consumers of the "Town". The wealth of the landowners

¹See Sen, *op. cit.*, p. 154. And see A. K. Ghose, "Food Supply and Starvation: a Study of Famines with reference to the Indian Sub-Continent", *Oxford Economic Papers*, xxxiv (1982).

²G. E. Mingay, "The Course of Rents in the Age of Malthus", in Michael Turner (ed.), *Malthus in his Time* (Basingstoke, 1986), pp. 90-1

was further supported by enclosures, which reached a peak in the war years when three million acres, or 9 per cent of the land area of England, came under parliamentary enclosure, much of this coming under the plough for cereal crops.¹

This prosperity did not pass unnoticed among the woollen workers, colliers and "proto-industrial" manufacturers who lived adjacent to prospering farming areas. It is in this context that the confrontations of 1795-96 and 1800-1 must be seen. Dr Roger Wells's *Wretched Faces* (1988) is the most copiously documented study of every aspect of these years of dearth that we have or are ever likely to have, and one must express gratitude to him for his archival industry and for the illumination that flows from many of his pages. Yet certain of his conclusions seem to be to be wrong-headed and to be contradicted by his own evidence, and this may be because even Dr Wells has been unduly influenced by the seeming common-sense of the Smithian (FAD) approach.

There were of course serious harvest short-falls in these years, and the country might have faced real famine conditions if there had not been considerable foreign imports.² But when Roger Wells writes that the implementation of "the moral economy" was "a recipe for disaster"³ he is taking too narrow a view of the question. His case against "the moral economy" — a catch-all term which he uses throughout his major study to indicate *any* measures taken by the authorities or imposed by the crowd to protect the consumer, to regulate markets or to control price — is at times as alarmist as that of Edmund Burke or the duke of Portland. He argues that market disturbances "decimated

¹Michael Turner, "Corn Crises in Britain in the Age of Malthus", in Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

²Adam Smith's doctrine of non-interference in the grain trade was limited, in his digression, to the *inland* trader. Wells is mistaken when he supposes (e.g. *Wretched Faces*, p. 7) that vigorous governmental exercises in the import of corn during a time of shortage was in breach of Smithian precepts. But (in Smith's doctrine) government must not then intervene in the internal market by selling off imports beneath the self-regulating market rate, and this was generally avoided in the 1790s by selling off the cargo immediately at the port of arrival, at which sales representatives from inland towns and parishes often attended.

³Roger Wells, "The Revolt of the South-West, 1800-01", *Social History*, 6 (1977), p. 743; Wells, *Wretched Faces*, p. 230.

future supplies and then accelerated inflation", that "price controls aggravated the impact of violence", that "havoc followed where the Assize of Bread operated", and that the moral economy "directly stimulated violent populist intervention while simultaneously weakening community resolve to contain disorder".¹ And he conjures up visions of a vicious circle with "riot deterring supplies, empty markets stimulating renewed violence, and further disturbances annihilating commercial confidence":

Ultimately, from a global perspective, the entire country would be affected. In this context the 'positive' aspects of popular intervention, discouraging mercantile malpractice, militating against maximum exploitation, rivetting public attention on the poor's plight and galvanising greater relief measures, pale in significance. For these latter characteristics of protest, however important, were essentially localised. The historian's assessment of riot must also adopt governmental criteria. Macro, as opposed to micro economic examination of the grain trade reveals the dangers of protest to national subsistence in general, and the consumption centres in particular. Staving off starvation in the most vulnerable locations necessitated the speediest suppression of riot.²

The trouble is that hunger is usually "localised" (in the stomach). Deaths from starvation appear as localised micro-dots. Roger Wells has been reading too many state papers of Pitt's war administration and has been drawn into their feedback loops. Moreover in his over-coloured language ("disaster", "decimated", "violence", "violent populist intervention", "annihilating") we have moved a long way from the self-disciplined and often bloodless direct actions of the crowd, with its "protocol" and "orderly disorder"³ which recent historiography has disclosed and which Dr Wells's own researches confirm, and have moved back to the bad old school when every crowd was recorded as a violent gullible "mob".

There is something in Wells's case, and it is strongest when he cites — especially in the summer of 1795 — the widespread crowd blockades of the passage of grain by water or

¹*Ibid.*, pp. 178-181, 230-6.

²*Ibid.*, p. 181.

³John Bohstedt, *Riots and Community Politics in England and Wales, 1790-1810* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), p. 27.

by road. This embargo could have precipitated disaster in large centres of consumption such as Birmingham, Nottingham and Leicester, although it did not. In other matters Wells (uncharacteristically) offers thin and uncertain evidence. His few examples do not persuade that price regulation always "decimated" the future supply of those markets. Where towns or manufacturing districts depended upon a local food supply, the farmers also depended upon their local custom; and the crowd might visit the farmers with threats to requisition supplies. In the end the farmers must go back to the market and there was a complexity of influences upon their behaviour: relationships with the consumers, with their landlords, with their own consciences.

Roger Wells's assertion that "havoc" followed where the Assize of Bread operated" is supported by a single anecdote from Oxfordshire in 1800. But as it happens Oxford is the one centre for which we have a careful study of the operation of the Assize in the eighteenth century, and this by no means supports the ascription of "havoc". Dr Wendy Thwaites's research suggests that the operation of the Assize may have marginally raised the price of bread in Oxford in normal years but restrained the rise in years of dearth. It afforded to the market authorities, the bakers and the consumers "a sense of security in relation to each other",¹ and it should in any case be seen not in isolation but as part of a wider regulation which included weight and quality control. London also set an Assize of Bread throughout the eighteenth century, and so far from "havoc" food riots in the capital were rare.²

Roger Wells draws too one-sided a balance. It is true that Pickard, Birmingham's biggest merchant-miller, was forced out of business by the hostility of the crowd in September 1800.³ But this did not leave Birmingham provisionless. There was another steam mill, the "Union Mill", although

¹W. Thwaites, "The Assize of Bread in 18th-Century Oxfordshire", *Oxoniensia*, li (1986), pp. 171-81.

²Differing explanations for the rarity of food riots in London are to be found in George Rudé, *Paris and London in the 18th Century* (1970), pp. 55-7; John Stevenson, *Popular Disturbances in England, 1700-1870* (1979), pp. 99-100; Bohstedt, *op. cit.*, pp. 208-9. Undoubtedly securing the provisioning of London was a priority of State.

³See Wells, *Wretched Faces*, pp. 180-1.

this mainly supplied bread to its numerous tradesmen and operative subscribers, and at prime cost — perhaps a translation of "moral economy" principles into early co-operation.¹ And Pickard's mill was not closed: it was rented to a new company, as an emergency measure, to ensure the continued supply of the town. Pickard's son, Edward, recorded the erratic fluctuations in the fortunes of this emergency Company of "benevolent gentlemen":

One of the gentlemen was at Hull soon after the first term [of six month's rental] commenced, and having left Birmingham under a fearful impression that the town would be really without a supply of food, ventured to make a very large purchase of wheat. . . which had just arrived from the Baltic, and sent it to Birmingham on account of this new Company. How the wheat was paid for or by whom I know not: I presume their banker accomodated them with the money. . . Exorbitant as was the price of wheat at that time, it unexpectedly rose considerably higher: and although the Company was thus enabled to provide a large quantity of flour weekly to the poor at a lower rate than the general dealers, yet at the end of the first six months, they found their profits so large, that they feared some popular indignation on the exhibition of their accounts. They therefore applied to my father to prolong their term, which he did, to enable them, as they said, to make some diminution in their gains, and thus present to the public a more satisfactory statement. About the period of the renewal of the term, the price of wheat began to give way, and continued falling into the end of it: in consequence of which, and also from losses sustained on other large purchases again made early in their last term, these benevolent men sunk not only all their first six months profits, but also lost all the capital they had advanced.²

This story conforms to the properties of neither Smithian nor "moral economy" doctrine. It suggests that in these eccentric wartime conditions all parties in the grain market were playing blind man's buff. In any case, generalisations as to the characteristics and functions of food riots are risky if taken only from these war years, since they are a special case:

¹Anon., "A Record of the Staff of Life from 1796 to 1900: at the Old Mill of the City", *Birmingham Magazine of Arts and Industries*, iii (1899). See also J. Tann, "Co-operative Corn Milling; Self-help during the grain crises of the Napoleonic Wars", *Agric. Hist. Rev.*, 28 (1980), p. 52; the Union Mill was founded in 1796 with 1360 subscribers, principally labouring workmen.

²MS notebook of Edward Pickard, Birmingham Reference Library, MS 22/11.

both the climax and the terminus of the riot tradition, in a context of war and invasion fears, with the gentry and their retainers under arms (as Yeomanry) and in a state of anti-Jacobin panic. These last years of the eighteenth century were also a watershed in marketing constituencies and practices, mid-way between the locally-supplied markets where consumers and farmers, magistrates and dealers, all knew something of each other, might come face to face with each other, and could "negotiate" prices, even by "riot"; and the more impersonal relations of the large urban markets which farmers rarely visited, supplied by dealers who purchased in distant markets.¹ Moreover the 1790s experience is further complicated by the deep inner divisions within the ruling authorities, with central government imposing *laissez-faire* dogmas but with some local authorities and traditionalist landowners attempting to control prices by persuasion, and giving a nod and a wink to the crowd. In such confused conditions we are likely to come up with contradictory findings, and with some examples of "havoc".

It is over the long view through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that the strongest case can be made for riot's "success". Two historians of the seventeenth century conclude that riots were "invariably successful in stimulating authoritative actions to alleviate grievances".² This is true in general of the eighteenth century also. Price regulation might even succeed, and the most persuasive analysis of the crowd's success will be found in John Bohstedt's chapter on "Devon's Classic Food Riots" in his *Riots and Community Politics in England and Wales, 1790-1810* (1983). He shows the small or medium-sized market town to be the classic site of crowd direct action (supported by the visitation of farmers in the neighbourhood), and suggests that such actions were supported by both horizontal and vertical networks of relationship within communities which had their own traditions and remembered their own precedents. In the

¹These points are developed by Bohstedt, *op. cit.*, *passim*, especially in his contrast between Manchester and Devon's markets. Still in 1800 the Birmingham Union Mill normally obtained their supply in Birmingham market or within a radius of twenty miles: J. Tann, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

²Walter and Wrightson, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

vertical relationships he suggests that "social patronage" may be a more helpful term than "paternalism", a patronage which however entailed reciprocal duties and obligations. While riot, or direct action to bring down prices, was by no means legitimate, yet both the authorities and the crowd abided by a recognised "protocol". Rioters "did not challenge directly the whole system of property and power", and so long as this was so, and violence was avoided, the authorities were sometimes accomplices to price-fixing, recognising that "social peace was more important than absolute property rights or, rather, profit rights". Hence rioters "modified the property rights of farmers and food dealers. . . and their exertion of force at the margin of legitimacy and illegality was a real if limited exercise of political power". Indeed, "riots were a dynamic constituent moment in the system of property and power".¹

John Bohstedt claims with confidence the Devon rioters' success: "riot would have been neither so frequent nor so orderly had there been no payoff". Food rioting of course appears in other national histories also, first in Europe and China,² subsequently in India and elsewhere. There is some suggestion that it marks a transitional phase between the

¹Bohstedt, *op. cit.*, esp. chs. 2 and 9 and pp. 54, 202, 220-1. Cf. Thwaites, thesis, pp. 522-7, for an estimate of riot's effectiveness in prompting consumer protection.

²China provides an example of successful bureaucratic management of food supplies, during the Qing dynasty in the eighteenth century. The Chinese state undertook far-reaching measures to feed the people during times of scarcity; these included public granaries, the provision of loans, discouragement of hoarders, encouragement of circulation by canals and roads. This was supported by a "Confucian" value-system which endorsed the imperative of "benevolence", and by the popular belief that any regime which presided over disasters such as famine and flood had "lost the mandate of heaven". Hence everything to do with the distribution of food in time of scarcity was of highly-sensitive political import. The Chinese peasant did not beg for charity, he demanded relief and saw the bureaucracy as bound by its office to provide this, and the rich as bound by duty. Many actions of Chinese food rioters closely resembled European riots — blockading transport, attacking hoarders, lobbying bureaucrats and the rich — and riot was a recognised way of putting the state measures of relief in motion: Lillian M. Li, "Introduction: Food, Famine and the Chinese State"; R. Bin Wong, "Food Riots in the Qing dynasty"; Paul R. Greenough, "Comment"; all in *Journal of Asian Studies*, August 1982.

locally-based demographic *ancien régime* of absolute subsistence crises and the “modern” national “free market” regulated by price and by police alone.¹ Riot is unlikely to have had so universal an emergence if there had not been some “payoff”, some space in which direct action was a protection from the newly-liberated appetites of agrarian interests, a warning to speculators and profiteers and an alarm signal to the authorities to set emergency measures and charities into motion. Such action could (and can) take many forms, from humble petitions to threatening letters and arson,² or to blockades and attacks on mills, but it was always a profoundly political as well as economic event.

Riot, as “a dynamic constituent moment in the system of property and power”, has obviously taken different forms and significance in different national histories, and in the English case must be seen within the particular structure of patrician/plebeian relations which we have examined (chapter two), with its limits and its space for licence. But let us read back from the Indian and Irish evidence to the English. In a lucid study David Arnold has looked into the emergence of a food riot tradition in India, perhaps commencing in the Madras Presidency in 1876. Some 120 incidents swept South India in 1918-19, with similar characteristics and objectives to their counterparts in eighteenth-century England and France: the prevention of exports, forcing down of prices, and pressing local officials to take measures to ensure provision. Just as in England two centuries before, the “looting” of food shops did not result usually in the theft but in the spoiling of goods, and its intention was to humiliate dealers whom the crowd held to be guilty of profiteering and hoarding at a time of extreme hardship. Thus one function of riot was to moderate the appetite for profit unleashed by the developing “free market”, and Arnold relates its assertiveness to the

¹For the interplay of other factors in different national histories, see Charles Tilly, “Food Supply and Public Order in Modern Europe”, in C. Tilly (ed.), *The Formation of National States in Europe* (Princeton, 1975), pp. 380-455; and Louise Tilly in Rotberg and Rabb (eds.), *Hunger and History*, pp. 143-8.

²For threatening letters, see my “The Crime of Anonymity”, in Douglas Hay et. al., *Albion's Fatal Tree*, pp. 325-41. For arson, see Wells, *Wretched Faces*, pp. 165-7.

transitional moment between locally-based markets and an emergent national grain market — a transition accompanied by sudden fluctuations of price, by the export of grain from areas affected by dearth, and ruptures of the customary channels of communication. He also suggests that, at least in the short term, riot was successful, in terms of its own objectives.¹ What this may suggest is that riot is functional, and may be expected to show itself at the same transitional moment in many national histories.

Why, then, does it not assert itself in Irish history? There were severe episodes of famine in Ireland in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, long before the “Great Hunger”. But the Irish case is not as clear as it has sometimes been made to seem. It is often stated that there is not a tradition of food rioting in Ireland.² Yet during the serious famine of 1740-1, the Dublin paper, *Pue's Occurrences*, reported bakers' and mealmen's shops broken open by the Dublin mob, and the boarding of a ship on the Liffey (June 1740), an anti-export riot in Galway quelled by the army (August), anti-export and price-setting riots in Youghal and generally in Munster (December), shops in Limerick broken into (March 1741), and a boat loaded with oats for Waterford stopped on the river at Carrick-on-Suir, with troops firing on the crowd (April 1741).³ That does not sound like a nation with no food riot tradition. Women were reported as rioters in Wexford in 1757⁴ and in 1758 John Wesley found “the mob” busy in Sligo harbour, unloading a Dutch ship of corn bought up by forestallers “to starve the poor” — the mob brought it all to the market and “sold it for the owners at the common price. And this they did with all the calmness and composure imaginable, and without striking or hurting anyone”.⁵

Thus the “classical” food riot was certainly known to the

¹David Arnold, “Looting, Grain Riots and Government Policy in South India, 1918”, *Past and Present*, 84 (1979).

²See for example George Rudé, *Protest and Punishment* (Oxford, 1978), p. 57, who says that food riot “played little part” before 1829-31.

³These examples were collected in a pamphlet published by the Foreign Office and Irish Office, *Famine in Ireland, 1740-41* (1847).

⁴*Gentleman's Magazine*, May (1757).

⁵Wesley's *Journal*, 27 May 1758.

eighteenth-century Irish, and it may be under-reported in general histories. If food riot failed to prevent exports and to relieve famine (as in 1740-1) this might account for a weakening of the tradition as the century wore on.¹ And one can only speculate as to the reasons for the divergent national traditions. Perhaps food rioters had less "political" clout in Ireland, since they did not threaten in the same direct way the stability and "face" of a resident governing gentry. Nor (in the absence of poor laws) did they stimulate in the same way an apparatus of relief, nor even (despite some examples) of gentry charity.²

Thus in Ireland food riots did not "work", partly because there was no political space (as in England) within which the plebs could exert pressure on their rulers. Arguing backwards from these cases we may pass the English evidence under review once more. Twenty years ago the notion that food riots could have served any positive function could scarcely gain the attention of historians. Smithian doctrine saw them as examples of social malfunction, while also postulating harvest short-fall (FAD) as sufficient explanation for most surges in the price of grain. What one scholar has called "an anachronistic reading of early modern society as a market society marked by the triumph of economic individualism", has given credibility to "a Malthusian model of social and economic change", which proposes an unproblematic and un-mediated relationship between harvest, price, and (until the seventeenth century) mortality.³

But recent advances in historical demography are now showing us a more complex set of events. A. B. Appleby clearly identified regional famine in the north-west in 1596-7 and 1622-3, and raised in interesting ways the question as to

¹But food riots are reported in 1792, Samuel Clark and J. S. Donnelly (eds.), *Irish Peasants* (Manchester, 1983), p. 55; and in 1793, C. H. E. Philpin (ed.), *Nationalism and Popular Protest in Ireland* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 196 (counties Cork and Waterford).

²See L. M. Cullen and T. C. Smout, *Comparative Aspects of Scottish and Irish Economic and Social History* (Edinburgh, 1977), p. 10 and ch. 2.

³John Walter, "The Social Economy of Dearth in Early Modern England", in John Walter and Roger Schofield (eds.), *Famine, Disease, and the Social Order in Early Modern Society* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 82, 121.

why the rest of England had managed to escape starvation. Several cogent reasons have been proposed for the difference in the "ecology of famine" between the north-west and the south. And to these may be added the differential effectiveness of measures of relief, which ensured that what little surplus grain was available was brought to market or transferred at subsidised rates to those in most need. The *Book of Orders* may have had more than symbolic functions and (with the aid of poor relief and charities) have mitigated the effects of dearth in the south, whereas the north-western region was not only pastoral and corn-poor, it also lacked the administrative and financial structures to set the *Book of Orders* in motion.¹

Wrigley and Schofield's important *Population History of England* enables us to pursue these arguments further. While it is usually argued that the threat of famine had passed from England by 1650, a weak relation between grain prices and mortality can be shown until 1745. A weak relation (when generalised across the nation) might mask sharp local crises, or differential mortality in which the excess deaths fell chiefly among "the poor", or certain exposed groups. Moreover, the threat of famine had not moved far away. Wrigley and Schofield examine a sample of 404 parishes between 1541 and 1871 for years in which the death rate in many parishes was markedly above trend; 1727-9 and 1741-2, which are dearth and riot years, appear high on the table (with death rates from 30 to 40 per cent above trend), although other riot years — 1709, 1757, and 1795 — do not.² But these cannot be confidently identified as local subsistence crises, since epidemics may have caused the high mortality.³

These are complex questions. For the purposes of our argument it is sufficient to note that local crises persist into the eighteenth century, that harvest shortfall or high prices have a differential impact upon different (even neighbouring) communities, and that insignificant movements in national

¹John Walter and Roger Schofield, "Famine, Disease and Crisis Mortality in Early Modern Society", in *ibid.*, p. 47.

²E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, *The Population of England, 1541-1871* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), p. 653. The riot years 1766-7 show a death rate 10.4% above trend.

³See *ibid.*, pp. 668-9.

statistical series may mask very sharp local suffering. Moreover, "by far the highest overall incidence of [local] crisis mortality occurred in the south-west, in an area extending from south Gloucestershire and west Wiltshire through Dorset to Devon": i.e. precisely one of the strongest food riot areas in the eighteenth century.¹

This suggests that rioters had good reasons for concern, and for actions in self-defence. And that in high-price years they were pressed close to a margin, so that even small modifications of their market situation might make a mortal difference. There were many ways of obtaining subsistence, not all of which depended upon the market,² and in emergency "the poor" were not altogether without resources. A correspondent writing from "a manufacturing neighbourhood" in the West at a time of low employment and high prices (1741), concluded:

The poor every month grow poorer, for their clothes apparently wear into rags and they are in no capacity of buying new ones. They have sold almost all their little superfluities already, or perhaps one had a gold ring, another two or three pewter dishes, a third a brass pot or kettle; these they have been disposing of to buy bread for themselves and families. . .³

That is not (yet) a crisis of subsistence, but it is the context for chronic malnutrition.

One should not misread "entitlement theory" to conclude that there were no such things as failures of grain supply, and that every dearth is man-made. What Sen shows is that, given a shortfall in harvest, the way in which the supply is distributed between social groups is decidedly man-made, and depends upon choices between means of allocation, of which market price is only one among many. Even in times of dearth there was always some supply, and the problem was how to squeeze this surplus out of granaries and barns and

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 692.

² See John Walter, "The Social Economy of Dearth", a good deal of which still applies in the early eighteenth century.

³ "Philo-Georgius" to duke of Newcastle, 7 Dec. 1741, Brit. Lib. Add MS 32, 698, f. 496.

direct it to those in most need.¹ The measures comprised in the *Book of Orders* worked reasonably well, and it is not clear why they lapsed after 1630. In a clearly-argued essay, Dr Outhwaite has suggested that the complexity and inefficiency of their operation resulted in "disenchantment".² But interest and ideology might also be awarded a role, as the market oriented, cereal-growing landed classes became more influential in the state. For long periods after 1660 the problem was not dearth but abundant production, low prices and rent arrears, and mercantilist theory was preoccupied with cereal export (and bounties). In such conditions the Tudor measures of provision lay dormant, although they were not forgotten in high-price years. In 1693 in Oxfordshire the crowd took the corn "as it was carrying away by the ingrossers, saying they were resolved to put the law in execution since the magistrates neglected it".³ "Some of our rioters" (a dealer wrote in 1766) "have been so infatuated as to think they were only assisting the execution of wholesome laws. . ."⁴

What may have eased the abrogation of the *Book of Orders* was the growing effectiveness of the poor laws in providing an institutional safety-net for those with a settlement. The responsibility which the central authorities refused was taken back to the parish or to the urban corporation. And alongside this limited relief, in times of dearth the local traditions of charity had more vitality than they are sometimes credited with. In a sense the Tudor practices of "house-keeping" and of hospitality were extended into the eighteenth-century landed gentleman's contest, through large

¹ Professor Sen continues to lay great stress on the *political* context of famine in the twentieth century. Governments which are accountable to public opinion are more likely to exert themselves in relief measures than those which are not, and "it is hard to find a case in which a famine has occurred in a country with a free press and an active opposition within a democratic system": Amartya Sen, "Individual Freedom as a Social Commitment", *New York Review of Books*, 14 June, 1990.

² Outhwaite, "Dearth and Government Intervention", p. 404.

³ "The Life and Times of Anthony Wood, Antiquary of Oxford, 1632-95", ed. A. Clark, cited in W. Thwaites, "The Corn Market and Economic Change: Oxford in the 18th Century", *Midland History* (forthcoming).

⁴ *Reflections on the Present High Price of Provisions*, p. 27.

gestures of "liberality", for local influence.¹

In every high-price year — at least until the 1760s — substantial landowners came forward in most parts of the country, sending corn at reduced rates to market as an example to others, selling off cheap grain at their gates, ordering their tenants to supply the market at moderate rates, entering into county agreements to reduce prices and to prosecute those who sold by sample, forestallers, etc., and so on. (By the 1780s and 1790s opinion was more divided, and those — like the earl of Warwick — who continued the old charitable gestures, tended to mark themselves out as traditional "Tory" paternalists.) This tradition of highly-visible charity may in part be ascribed to humanitarian motives and to an approved self-image of the gentry as protectors of the poor against heartless employers, mean parish overseers and grasping middlemen. But it was also a calculated stance in the culturally-constructed alliance between patricians and plebs against the middling orders, and it distracted attention from the landowners' prosperity to point to prominent Dissenters and Quakers among the profiteering food dealers.²

Viewed from this aspect, poor laws and emergency charities were constituent components of the system of property and power. Indeed, subsidies and subscriptions can often be seen as direct moves to buy off riot, or even as a reward for not rioting.³ John Bohstedt has warned us:

¹Much of what John Walter writes about seventeenth-century charities in time of dearth applies equally to the first seven decades of the eighteenth century: Walter, "Social Economy of Dearth".

²So widespread was the abuse of Quaker dealers that the Friends issued a public statement in 1800: "The Society of Friends. . . having been for some time calumniated as oppressors of the laborious and indigent classes of the community, by combining to monopolize those necessary articles of life, Corn and Flour, think themselves called upon to vindicate their own innocence and integrity. . .": *Meetings for Sufferings*, xl, pp. 404-6, 6 October 1800 (Friends House Library, London). My thanks to the Librarian, Malcolm Thomas.

³In 1766 local gentry raised a subscription in Melksham "in consideration of the poor not having joined in the late riots which occurred all round the town", and beef was distributed to over 1,600 poor persons. But the beef was given in November, months after the height of the crisis had passed. Dr Randall suggests that the riotous poor of Chippenham,

It is not historically useful to separate the undoubted humanitarianism of these charities from their function in preserving class rule. Plebeian misery assaulted the conscience of the wealthy and challenged their capacity for remedy, just as it threatened to assault their property and challenge the legitimacy of their political monopoly.

In the 1790s "a waning 'paternalism'. . . was merely thinly-disguised self-preservation".¹

From the 1790s this was the case, and the supposed threat of "Jacobinism" provided an additional spur. But in earlier decades one can perceive a kind of social bargain, less calculating and more unconscious — a kind of obligatory dues paid for the everyday exercise of hegemony. It gave a character of liberality to some country gentry which allows one to forgive them other sins. "In this sense", John Walter has written, "years of dearth continued to provide an arena in which the nature of social responsibilities between the poor and their betters could be continually re-negotiated". But over the longer course, what had been once perceived as reciprocal duties (and by the labourers as rights) became re-defined as "discriminatory and discretionary charity". If "the poor" escaped "vulnerability to crises of sub-subsistence" it was at the cost of becoming "enmeshed in a web of deference and dependence".² Yet if this is true of rural England — and perhaps of some towns — the record of food riot shows an alternative.

In any case, relief measures cannot be shrugged off as only a matter of gestures or as an exercise in social control. There is reason to suppose that they may have mitigated crises of subsistence. If the margin between a poor subsistence and (for groups at risk) famine was small, then marginal

Stroud, Frome or Bradford (Wiltshire) might have done better: A. J. Randall, "Labour and the Industrial Revolution in the West of England Woollen Industry" (Univ. of Birmingham Ph.D. thesis, 1979), p. 166.

¹Bohstedt, *op. cit.*, pp. 96-7, 48. See also Peter Mandler's discussion of the conversion of the landed gentry in these years from a weak paternalism which acknowledged the customary rights of the poor to a language of the "natural order" (as defined by Smith and by Malthus) in which "the only true natural right" is that of property: "The Making of the New Poor Law *Redivivus*", *Past and Present*, 117 (November 1987).

²Walter, "Social Economy of Dearth", pp. 127-8; Walter and Schofield, "Famine, Disease and Crisis Mortality", p. 48.

redistribution to those in most need may have mattered enough to have shifted a demographic digit. Even between neighbouring towns the different profile of riot/relief might have influenced mortality. The patchwork of poor laws, charities, subsidies — even petty measures like limits upon malting, banning hair-powder, or commending austere diets to the deferential middling orders — might have added their mite to someone's survival.

This is simply to rehearse that food supply (and indeed demography) have their own kind of politics, in which riot may be seen as a rational and effective agent. If there had been no food riots then this whole elaborate patchwork of protection might never have come into being. If we say, with Roger Wells, that "staving off starvation in the most vulnerable locations necessitated the speediest suppression of riot", then we are taking a short-term view of the need, in emergency, to force the traffic in grain through a popular blockade. Over the longer-term view of two centuries and more, riot and the threat of riot may have staved off starvation, sometimes by actually forcing prices down, and more generally by forcing Government to attend to the plight of the poor, and by stimulating parish relief and local charity. The thesis then must be that the solidarities and collective actions of the urban working people, and in the manufacturing and mining districts, did something to bring the crisis of subsistence to an end. And conversely — but as a more tentative hypothesis — it might be that the comparative *absence* of riot in nineteenth-century Ireland and India was one factor (among others) which allowed dearth to pass into famine. And if this is the case, then the best thing that we, in our affluence, can do to help the hungry nations is to send them experts in the promotion of riot.¹

¹Wendy Thwaites, who kindly read these pages in manuscript, has very sensibly rebuked me for even making this joke. She points out that the resources of modernised hungry nations have advanced since the eighteenth century, and (citing Nigel Twose, *Cultivating Hunger* (Oxfam, 1984)) describes a vehicle developed to deter food rioters in the Dominican Republic of Haiti: "the AMAC-1 has nineteen weapon points, four multiple grenade launchers, a water canon, an infra-red video camera for surveillance, and its bodywork can be electrified with a 7,000 volt charge". She concludes that for riot to work there "have to be certain constraints on

I say this only partly in jest, for what are at issue are the community defences and the political influence of the working people. At the very least, rulers are likely to be more busy with the relief of the poor if they fear that otherwise their rule may be endangered by riot. I don't, of course, suppose that there was (and is) one alternative and universal set of remedies, "the moral economy", for the successful overcoming of dearth and the prevention of famine. It is exactly against such universalist dogma (the "free market") that I have been arguing. Perhaps all that can be expected in times of crisis is energetic improvisation, using whatever resources and options lie to hand. If political economy rests upon persuasive but misleading metaphors (such as "rationing"), the moral economy nourished its own irrationalisms and superstitions, such as the popular conviction that every dearth was the consequence of hoarding and speculation, "artificial scarcity", or even some malevolent *pacte de famine*.

A case can always be made on both sides of the question. The exemplary punishment of profiteers¹ or fraudulent dealers has sometimes had a beneficent effect upon prices, but the draconian imposition of price maximums has on occasion summoned forth a black market or a producers' strike (the peasants withholding supply) with consequences

how far the authorities will go in repression". I have left my jest in because it enables me also to include her thoughtful caution.

¹Adam Smith in his digression took a benign view of profiteers, since (a) the high profits of years of scarcity compensated dealers for the modest returns of normal years, and (b) the excessive profits of a few might be the inevitable price to pay for the market's functions for the general public. In any case, hoarders and profiteers (if they misjudged the market) would be caught out when prices fell. No-one has as yet succeeded in finding a way to study systematically the question of hoarding and profiteering in eighteenth-century high-price years, nor is it easy to see how it could be done. But that is no reason for the widely-held dogma that its effect (if it happened at all) was insignificant, and that no case can be made for excessive prices (in a seller's market, shored up by Corn Laws) which transferred wealth from the petty consumers to the grain-growing interests. Some scholars show great expertise in such matters as the behaviour of rats and fleas, or in the ratios of seed-corn to available harvest surplus, while stubbornly refusing to acknowledge rather large factors such as human greed.

no less baneful than those of doctrinaire *laissez-faire*. The mentality of urban revolutionaries has sometimes been profoundly hostile to the peasantry, and in the twentieth century collectivist states have precipitated famines as appalling as those presided over by complacent political economy. Some theorists today are interested in remembering the first, and in forgetting the second, which are tidied away as unmentionable in little exercises of political thought. For that reason I have redressed the account, to show that rioters had their reasons.

And (in conclusion) more caution might be proper in the use of the term, "market". I return to my earlier question: is market an actual market or is it a metaphor? One hears on every side these days talk of "a market economy". When this is contrasted with the centralised direction of old-style collectivist states one understands what is being described. And, very certainly, the "market" here is beneficial and can also be democratic, in stimulating variety and in expressing consumer choice. But I cannot clearly say what was "a market economy" in eighteenth-century England; or, rather, I cannot find a non-market-economy to contrast it with. One cannot think of an economy without a market; and even the most zealous food rioters, such as Cornish tanners or Kingswood miners or West of England clothing workers,¹ were inextricably committed to the market, both as producers and as consumers. How could they have existed for a month or a week without it? What we can find are different ways of regulating the market or of manipulating exchanges between producers and consumers, to the advantage of one party or the other. It is with the special case of the marketing of "necessities" in time of dearth that we have been concerned,

¹We are fortunate in having excellent studies of these groups of workers, both in their capacities as (hard-bargaining) producers and (riotous) consumers. Even "custom" was not pre-market or non-market but a particular community consensus as to the regulation of wages and prices. See J. G. Rule, "The Labouring Miner in Cornwall, c. 1740-1820", (Univ. of Warwick Ph.D. thesis, 1971), esp. pp. 116-80; R. W. Malcolmson, "A Set of Ungovernable People", in J. Brewer and J. Styles (eds.), *An Ungovernable People* (1980) (the mining population of Kingswood); A. J. Randall, "Labour and the Industrial Revolution in the West of England Woollen Industry" (Univ. of Birmingham Ph.D. thesis, 1979).

and the crowd's preferred model was precisely the "open market" in which the petty producers freely competed, rather than the closed market when large dealers conducted private bargains over samples in the back parlours of inns.¹

The "market economy", I suspect, is often a metaphor (or mask) for capitalist process. It may even be employed as myth. The most ideologically-compelling form of the myth lies in the notion of the market as some supposedly-neutral but (by accident) beneficent entity; or, if not an entity (since it can be found in no space but the head) then an energising spirit — of differentiation, social mobility, individualisation, innovation, growth, freedom — like a kind of postal sorting-station with magical magnifying powers, which transforms each letter into a package and each package into a parcel. This "market" may be projected as a benign consensual force, which involuntarily maximises the best interests of the nation. It may even seem that it is the "market system" which has "produced" the nation's wealth — perhaps "the market" grew all that grain?

Market is indeed a superb and mystifying metaphor for the energies released and the new needs (and choices) opened up by capitalist forms of exchange, with all conflicts and contradictions withdrawn from view. Market is (when viewed from this aspect) a mask worn by particular interests, which are not coincident with those of "the nation" or "the community", but which are interested, above all, in being mistaken to be so. Historians who suppose that such a market really could be found must show it to us in the records. A metaphor, no matter how grand its intellectual pedigree, is not enough.

III

Let us next take the question of the role of women in food riots. In 1982 Jennifer Grimmett and M. I. Thomis published a helpful chapter on the theme,² in which they raised but left

¹*Mist's Weekly Journal*, 12 March 1726 reported that the mob rose on market days in Northampton, Kettering, Oundle, Wellingborough, Stony Stratford, because farmers would not bring corn to the market-place "but kept it in the Inns". At Towcester a riot was prevented by the Cryer giving notice that corn must be brought "into open market".

²Malcolm I. Thomis and Jennifer Grimmett, *Women in Protest, 1800-1850* (1982), ch. 2. This is based on a survey of published sources and some use of newspapers in 1800 and 1812.

unanswered the question as to which sex was the more prominent. Kenneth Logue, in a study of "meal mobs" in Scotland found that women were very active, although they comprised only 28 per cent of those charged before the courts. But this was possibly because "they were less likely to be prosecuted than their male colleagues", so that, again, the question is left open.¹ In 1988 John Bohstedt sought to bring a conclusive answer in a substantial article which purports to demolish "the myth of the feminine food riot".²

Bohstedt's conclusions are as follows:

Women did not dominate food riots; food riots were not a distinctly feminine province. . . Women typically joined men in food riots. . . Women's co-operation with men is much more significant than the monopoly suggested by the older view. Women were significant partners to men as bread rioters partly because they were essential partners as bread-winners in the household economies of pre-industrial society and partly because bread riots were still effective politics in stable small-to-medium-sized traditional towns.

These conclusions are sustained in two ways. First, John Bohstedt presents what purport to be refined statistics of all riots in England and Wales between 1790 and 1810. Second, he introduces some pages of speculation as to gender roles in the proto-industrial household economy.

I have already expressed my admiration for Bohstedt's major study of riot. And there is interesting material in this new article. But the piece obscures as much as it reveals. The first difficulty is that there is no "myth of the feminine food riot" to demolish. No-one, no historian, has ever suggested that food riots were a "monopoly" of women or were predominantly feminine, and Bohstedt can show none. The best that he can do is hold up to censure Barbara and J. L. Hammond for writing (in 1911) of the crisis year of 1795 as the year of "the revolt of the housewives", because of "the conspicuous part taken by women" in the food riots.³ That

¹Kenneth J. Logue, *Popular Disturbances in Scotland, 1780-1815* (Edinburgh, 1979), pp. 199, 202-3.

²John Bohstedt, "Gender, Household and Community Politics: Women in English Riots, 1790-1810", *Past and Present*, no. 120 (August 1988), pp. 88-122. The claim to have demolished "the myth of the feminine food riot" is at pp. 90, 93.

³*Ibid.*, p. 88. J. L. and B. Hammond, *The Village Labourer* (1911; reprint 1966), pp. 116-8.

does not constitute a "myth", so that we are being led into a spurious polemic. Previous historians have, perhaps, not always given enough attention to women's part in riots, but most have agreed that women were highly visible rioters and were frequently involved. Since all historians show riots in which men also were highly visible, or in which men and women acted together, no-one has suggested that food riots were "a distinctly feminine province".

In his eagerness to drive this mythical opponent from the field, Bohstedt introduces his tables. He has with great industry assembled a "sample" of 617 riots between 1790 and 1810 and he drills this sample through various statistical manoeuvres. Now I don't know what to say to this. There are times when his figures are helpful — for example, in showing a rough division between different occasions for riot. And Bohstedt is a careful scholar who sometimes remembers the limitations of his evidence. But in general his history becomes less credible the more he surrenders to his own figures and the further he gets away from "literary" and contextual sources. This is because much of the evidence is too "soft" to be introduced to the hard definitions of a table. And when one looks at some of John Bohstedt's counting, the points at issue may seem absurd. Of his 617 riots he is able to identify 240 as food riots. These are further refined as:

A. Women dominant	B. Women and men	C. Men only	D. Gender unknown
35	42	81	82

If one deducts D, and puts A and B together, then 77 out of 158, or 49 per cent of these food riots had female participation and 51 per cent did not. So that if one wished to claim that women took part in "most" food riots, one would be at fault by 2 per cent. But, putting B and C together, one would discover that 123 out of 158, or 78 per cent had male participation — which could be a step on the way to a myth of a male food riot, to be demolished by a subsequent generation of computers.

When Bohstedt offers to drill these figures through more refined manoeuvres (such as violence and disorder quotients), he must make anyone laugh who is familiar with the source material which he is using. Let me explain some of the difficulties. There are, first of all, the difficulties in gathering

any reliable count. These are familiar, and have often been discussed.¹ Bohstedt's sample is drawn from the *Annual Register*, two London newspapers, and the in-letters to the Home Office concerning disorders (HO 42). This is a wide survey, but the provincial coverage of the London press was patchy, JPs might not always wish to report their local affairs to the central authorities, the sample tends to over-report dramatic or violent affrays and under-report quieter episodes (hence possibly under-reporting women's participation), and so on. When compared to regional studies which draw upon local sources, Bohstedt's sample shows a serious under-count. A most thorough study, by Alan Booth, of food riots in the north-west of England in the same years, lists forty-six disturbances of which only twelve are in Bohstedt's sample. Booth adds that "in most riots where sexual composition was recorded women appear to have been both more numerous and particularly active", and he goes on to cite thirteen examples. Hence Booth's examples (which he does not suggest are exhaustive) exceed the total of Bohstedt's count of food riots in all categories, which *must* undercount the feminine presence.²

Next, we must consider the nature of the evidence which is being used. How does it come about that in eighty-two cases (or more than one third of the sample) the sex of the rioters is unknown, and how hard or soft is the evidence in the eighty-one cases of men only? The evidence often comes in a sexually-indeterminate vocabulary: "rioters", "the mob", "the poor", "the inhabitants", "the populace". Let us take a letter of 12 July 1740 from Norwich, published in the *Ipswich Journal*, which describes a riot by "the common People", "the meanest of the People", "the Multitude,":

About Eight in the Evening the Mayor committed three or four disorderly Fellows to Prison; which Act so incens'd the Mob, that they broke open the Prison, releas'd their Companions, and have scarce left

¹The best comment is Roger Wells, "Counting riots in eighteenth-century England", *Bulletin of Lab. Hist. Soc.*, 37 (1978), pp. 68-72. Alan Booth discusses successive errors in estimates in his excellent and dense study, "Food Riots in the North-West of England, 1790-1801", *Past and Present*, 77 (1977), esp. pp. 89-90.

²Bohstedt, *Riots and Community Politics*, pp. 11-14, 230-1; Booth, *op. cit.*, pp. 98-9.

a Pane of Glass in the whole Prison. . . Upon this Outrage of the Mob, an unthinking Gentleman is said to have taken a Musket out of the Hands of a Dragoon, and shot a Man thro' the Head. You will imagine how this enrag'd the Populace; and the Consequence of that Evening's Work was, three Men, a Boy, and two Women, were shot. . .¹

This report commences as indeterminate (D), becomes male (C) at "disorderly Fellows", and moves sharply across to (B) — women and men — only when the dragoons, by firing point-blank into the crowd, take a random sample. Amongst all the indeterminate ("mob", "populace") and male vocabulary, the first mention of women, in a long report, is when two of them are shot. A similar sexually-indeterminate crowd, in 1757, descended on a Hereford miller, and insisted on searching his house and mill for grain. The miller refused:

Yet they persisted in having another search, saying that if he had no grain he had some money, upon which declaration there was necessity for firing on them in which four women and two men were wounded, which occasioned the rest to disperse.²

Again and again reports of "mobs" leave them sexually indeterminate until the moment of some action or arrests make individuals visible. Nor is this any indication of sexist bias in the reporter. The bias (if there is one) is more likely to be in the mind of the twentieth-century historian or reader whose expectations, when he reads of "mobs", are of crowds composed of men, and who reads the accounts accordingly. Perhaps, in the later nineteenth century, "the mob" became a male noun? But the image called to the eighteenth-century mind by these collective nouns was very different — for them a "mob" suggested women, men and (often) older children, especially boys. I think it probable that Bohstedt's table is misleading, and that many riots in column (D) (gender unknown) and some in (C) (men only) were mixed affairs.

Moreover, these figures which enter the tables, whether derived from the press or from a letter to the Home Office, normally report a particular moment of riot — perhaps its

¹*Ipswich Journal*, 26 July 1740. I am indebted to Robert Malcolmson for this.

²*Bristol Journal*, 11 June 1757, cited in Jeremy N. Caple, "Popular Protest and Public Order in 18th-century England: the Food Riots of 1756-7" (Queens Univ. Ontario, M.A. thesis, 1978), p. 102.

crisis — and they rarely describe its evolution. Yet a riot may pass through phases, for example it might commence with actions by women, be joined by men, and end with men alone. In my view there are two situations in which we may expect to find a predominantly male crowd. First, when disciplined male working groups, accustomed to acting together, spearhead the riot: such may be the case with coal miners, keelmen, Cornish tanners, and seamen. In the second case, when heavy conflict is expected with the authorities, the women sometimes seem to fall back — or perhaps are asked by the men to do so.

Yet the evidence is not as tidy as that. Miners and tanners were archetypal male rioters, yet also it is notorious that the whole communities shared in their movements. The Kingswood “mob” is usually thought of as masculine, for example in its destruction of turnpikes and toll-gates. But on occasion its resistance to authority was more like a rising of the whole district. During riots against the cider tax of 1738 the excise officers were “resisted by that savage Crew by Fire Armes”: “there are now in the Forest not less than 1000 Men, Women and Boys in Armes, destroying all before them. . .”.¹ In 1740 the Kingswood colliers marched into Bristol and demonstrated against the price of corn at the Council House, leaving behind “their usual Armour of Clubs and Staffs”, but accompanied by “some weavers, colliers’ wives and abundance of other women”.² Both the absence of “armour” and the presence of women suggests (on that occasion) a commitment to peaceable courses.

In 1740 the north-east was swept with food riots, which culminated in the sacking of the Newcastle Guildhall. (See above p. 70 & p. 231.) Pitmen and keelmen were prominent in this, and at a superficial view this might appear as a male riot. But a longer and closer view will show an alternation of male and female presence. The regional actions against export were first raised in Stockton by “a Lady with a Stick and a horn”. (See above p. 233.) Women as well as men took part in boarding vessels loaded with corn, and forcing them

¹G. Blenkinsop, 14 Oct. 1738 in PRO, T 1/299(15).

²*Northampton Mercury*, 6 Oct. 1740; R. Malcolmson in Brewer and Styles, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

to off-load to the crowd on shore.¹ When — after three weeks of popular export embargo — the Sheriff raised the *posse comitatus* against them, the people of Stockton, to the number of three thousand, “sent for the Colliers of Ederly and Caterhorn”.² Meanwhile there had been small disturbances in Newcastle-on-Tyne, involving a group of women “incited by a leader calling herself ‘General’ or Jane Bogey, ringing bells and impeding the passage of horses carrying grain through the town”.³ After five women had been committed,⁴ the troubles in Newcastle died down, only to resume on a much greater scale in mid-June, with the involvement of keelmen and pitmen (who struck their pits). In the first phase, “a body of 3 or 4 hundred men women and children” came into the city and demanded corn at a low rate; granaries were broken into, and the crowd marched about the streets in triumph, huzzaing and blowing horns. The magistrates then summoned and armed the Watch and Ward and seized some prisoners; the crowd then appears in accounts as increasingly male, with “Colliers, Wagoners, Smiths and other common workmen”, well armed with cudgels, breaking open the keep and releasing the prisoners, and marching in great discipline through the town with drum, bagpipes and mock colours.⁵

Other episodes were to follow, including the firing on the crowd and the attack on the Guildhall. My point is to illustrate the evolution of a food rioting crowd, which may now be incited by women, may then become of assorted sexes and ages, and may then (when rescue and confrontation are the object) become predominantly male. But none of this should be stereotyped. The most careful historian of the affair observes that the role of women and children was under-

¹Edward Goddard, 24 May 1740 in PRO, SP 36/50/431 and miscellaneous depositions in SP 36/51.

²J. J. Williamson, Sheriff of Durham, 10 June 1740 in PRO, SP 36/51.

³Joyce Ellis, “Urban Conflict and Popular Violence: the Guildhall Riots of 1740 in Newcastle-upon-Tyne”, *Int. Rev. Social Hist.*, xxv, 3 (1980).

⁴They were discharged at the Sessions a few days later.

⁵“Account of the Riots” by Alderman Ridley in Northumberland CRO, 2R1 27/8.

stated in subsequent investigations, and that of pitmen overstated. Women contributed to both physical and verbal episodes of violence, breaking into granaries and one woman going down on her knees in front of the magistrates and crying out "Blood for blood!".¹ The authorities came down most heavily upon the women who had unloaded wheat from a boat at Stockton,² whereas in Newcastle they selected the pitmen for indictment and passed over the women.

This shows whole communities in action, with one sex or the other coming into prominence as each assumes a different part. The episode might fall into any one of John Bohstedt's categories according to the moment at which it was reported. It also shows that the crowd might be made up of different elements, consciously playing different parts in co-operation with each other. There are other occasions when it is reported that the "people" sent for the miners to help them. In anti-export riots in St Asaph (Flint) in 1740 it was said that "men, women and boys" were joined by "Severall Colliers and Miners"; not only so, but it was alleged that the colliers "belonging" to Sir Thomas Mostyn were deliberately laid off, given cudgels, and encouraged to take part. In the event they completely dominated the affair, marching together under Mostyn colours and crying out "a Mostyn!".³ In Coventry (1756) the poor — presumably of both sexes — "patted the colliers on the back and urged them to go thro with what they had begun".⁴ And at Nottingham in the same year, the colliers negotiated an agreement with the mayor, and then, as they were leaving the town "a number of women. . . gave them money to come back, and showed them to a Windmill. . . having French stones". The colliers obligingly destroyed several mills in the vicinity.⁵ In the anti-export

¹ Ellis, *op. cit.*, pp. 341-6.

² At Durham Assizes Anne Withy, Hannah Crone and William Young were transported for seven years for taking a large quantity of wheat out of a ship at Stockton. Three more women and one man were tried and acquitted: *Newcastle Journal*, 9 Aug. 1740. My thanks to Robert Malcolmson again.

³ William Price, 13 June 1740 in PRO, SP 36/51, and various depositions in SP 36/50 and 36/51.

⁴ PRO, SP 36/135.

⁵ Caple, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

riots in Poole (Dorset) in 1737 (by contrast) the women took action, with the men supporting them and swearing that "if any one offers to molest any of the Women in their Proceedings" they would raise a great number of men and destroy both ships and cargoes" (above p. 233).¹

Two unusual examples of supportive gender actions come from Scotland. In January 1813 in Montrose the magistrates tried to bully the town carters into loading grain onto ships, and the carters reluctantly promised to do so; but (surprise!) on their return to their homes they found that they could not, because their wives had locked the stables or sent the horses away. In 1801 in Errol the Volunteers were called out for possible action against a "meal mob". "As they were going to parade, some of the women, mainly the wives and mothers of the Volunteers, took their guns from them, but immediately gave them back." The crowd then stoned an inn with impunity, and, Kenneth Logue suggests, "It may be that women simply removed part of the firing mechanisms, rendering the weapons useless and relieving the Volunteers of the unhappy task of shooting at their own townspeople".²

A more elaborate series of actions was described in Exeter in 1757:

Last Market-Day some Farmers demanded 11s. per Bushel for Wheat, and were agreeing among themselves to bring it to 15s. and then make a stand. But the Graccians (as the Inhabitants of St. Sidwell's are called) hearing of this Complot, sent their wives in great Numbers to Market, resolving to give no more than 6s. per Bushel, and, if they would not sell it at that Price, to take it by Force; and such wives, as did not stand by this Agreement, were to be well flogg'd by their Comrades. Having thus determined, they marched to the Corn-Market, and harangued the Farmers in such a Manner, that they lowered their price to 8s. 6d. The Bakers came, and would have carried off all at that Price, but the Amazonians swore, that they would carry the first man who attempted it before the Mayor, upon which the Farmers swore they would bring no more to Market; and the sanguine Females threatened the Farmers, that, if they did not, they would come and take it by Force out of their

¹ Holles Newcastle to Secretary at War, 26 May 1737, PRO, SP 41/10.

² Logue, *op. cit.*, pp. 21. 44.

Ricks. The Farmers submitted and sold it for 6s. on which the poor weavers and woolcombers were content.¹

One doubts whether the male "Graecians" could have "sent their wives" on such a skilfully exercised sequence of actions, unless they had mutually agreed upon their gender roles: which (in this case) left the action and the thinking to the women, and only the eating to the men.

A further (and insurmountable) difficulty is that evidence taken from the years 1790-1810, however skilfully it is counted, cannot support generalisations as to the feminine presence in food riots which extended over a period of well over two hundred years. After 1812 food riots in most parts of the country gave way to other kinds of (political, trade union) protest. So that John Bohstedt's quantities are taken from the last stages of the traditional riot, in which — as he himself argues — the role of women may have been changing. At the least, generalisations would have to be supported by a review of the evidence across the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.²

Instead of attempting this, John Bohstedt leaps across to another line of argument altogether. He raises doubts as to whether women had a significant place in the market at all. Indeed, pursuing the rather fashionable ploy in the Western academy of offering oneself as more-feminist-than-thou, he suggests that those who offer women as marketers are pedlars of sexist stereotypes. I am one target of his scorn, since in my essay I had, while drawing particular attention to the very active part played by women, suggested that one reason for this might be that they were "those most involved in face-to-face marketing, most sensitive to price significancies, most experienced in detecting short-weight or inferior quality" (p. 234). Bohstedt challenges this: "It is an anachronistic mistake to assume that women's role in food riots grew out of some special female role as the shopper of the family. Nowhere is there evidence for the frequent assumption that in

¹R. W. Malcolmson, *Life and Labour in England, 1700-1780* (1981), p. 118.

²Wendy Thwaites has found women present in Oxfordshire food riots in 1693, 1713, 1757, 1766 and 1795: Thwaites, thesis, table p. 472 (for 1795), pp. 485-6.

this period women were the primary shoppers. . .". "Plebeian women were income producers and earners, not unwaged housewives and shoppers confined by gender to the more modern role of 'home-making'." Indeed, he waxes indignant at the stereotype of his own invention: "Women were not simply housewife furies, drying their hands and heading off to the market or igniting there as a crowd of shoppers". He does not attempt to show who did the purchasing of provisions, or how,² but he develops instead hypotheses as to the "nearly coequal" relations between women and men in the proto-industrial household economy.

I agree that "housewives" and "shopping" are (in their current usage) anachronistic terms, although I used neither of them. I have a little difficulty, in that I don't regard skills in marketing or home-making as unimportant and inferior, although it is true that male-dominated cultures may make them seem so, and may then try to confine women to "inferior" roles. But there are really two questions here: an empirical question — who did the marketing and how? — and a theoretical question about the proto-industrial household economy, and we will take them in that order.

There is no single source to which one can go to establish gender roles in the market-place. Women were certainly present as sellers of food, although few were licensed dealers.³ One might expect to find, in a market-town, a large throng of sellers of poultry, eggs, butter, vegetables, fruit and other locally-grown produce, and most of these were women: the wives, daughters and servants of local farmers,

¹Thomas and Grimmett, *op. cit.*, p. 10, also accuse me, on the same grounds, of placing women "firmly in the market-place, if not exactly beside the kitchen sink"; and they also throw no light on how marketing was done.

²Bohstedt is strangely inconsistent. He suggests that men did the marketing (p. 116). But women (who did not normally do so and hence were confined to the household?) were nevertheless somehow knitting the networks of neighbourhood, and he commends a French study for noting that housework "overflowed into communal co-operation" in "fetching water and provisions, for example" (p. 98, my italics).

³See Wendy Thwaites' excellent study, "Women in the Market Place: Oxfordshire c. 1690-1800", *Midland History*, ix (1984), pp. 23-42, and, for the earlier tradition, Rodney Hilton, "Women Traders in Medieval England", in *Class Conflict and the Crisis of Feudalism* (1985), p. 213.

while others would be petty dealers from the labouring class. In a strictly governed market some of these might pay toll for stands — for example, at the Butter Cross (see Plate XVIIa) — but more commonly they would set out their wares on the periphery.¹ In 1816 a local historian described Bicester market —

I have heard many of the aged inhabitants say that they have formerly seen the whole market-hill covered with sacks of corn etc; the avenues leading to it crowded by the farmers' wives with their baskets of butter, eggs and poultry. . . .²

In fact the poultry, fruit and vegetable market was sometimes known as “the women’s market”. An experienced dealer, looking back to the 1760s, described the prosperous tourist market of Bath, where “the farmer, his wife, daughter, or servant”, trudged there with “the best milk butter, whey butter, cheeses. . . roasting pigs. . . fattened bacon. . . black and white pudding, abundance of lard, chitterlings nicely cleaned, and made up by the hand of a neat dairy maid; variety of poultry. . . fresh eggs. . . fruits, flowers, herbs, honey, and the honey combs, &c, &c, &c.”.³ By the 1790s this trade was being taken over by “jobbers, higlers, &c.”,⁴ and as farmers became more prosperous it was the common complaint that farmers were “purchasing piano fortes for their daughters, instead of bringing their butter and eggs to market”.⁵

It is less easy to identify the purchasers, although they were certainly of both sexes. Oxford, a well-regulated corn market

¹ In the early eighteenth century Lord of the Market of Woodbridge (Suffolk) was threatening to prosecute “persons who come to this town with fish, fowl, fruits, butter, cheese, eggs” on market days, and who carry these things from house to house, instead of taking a stand or stall in the market: Ipswich and East Suffolk CRO, V 5/9/6 - 3 (3). Perhaps similar attempts at control were behind a rash of prosecutions of petty dealers (garden stuff, fruit, fish) for regrating in Oxford in 1712: of 24 persons prosecuted, 21 were women: Thwaites, p. 30.

² J. Dunkin cited in *ibid.*, p. 29.

³ J. Mathews, *Remarks on the Cause and Progress of the Scarcity and Dearthness of Cattle*. . . (1797), pp. 9-10.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.

⁵ J. Malham (Vicar of Helton, Dorset, and Ordinary of the Wiltshire County Gaol), *The Scarcity of Grain Considered* (Salisbury, 1800), p. 43.

in the eighteenth century, has very little record of petty purchases, and the records show the main buyers to be bakers, millers and dealers. But petty purchases may have gone unrecorded. Or perhaps working people did not often buy a sack of wheat or a bushel of flour.¹ An inquest on Ruth Pierce, who died in bizarre circumstances in Devizes market in 1753, shows that she had clubbed together with three other women to buy one sack of wheat from a farmer.² Regions had differing practices, but by the mid-century in many parts of the South and Midlands working people were buying flour or bread, not wheat.³ Five cases involving Assize of Bread offences (short-weight, etc.) came up at Oxfordshire Quarter Sessions, Epiphany 1758, from Ploughley Hundred, and four of the purchasers whose oaths were taken were women.⁴ The Crown brief in 1766 against Hester Pitt and Jane Pitt shows that they stopped Mary Cooke in Ruscombe, near Stroud, as she was on horseback loaded with sixteen dozen of bread, pushed her off the horse and took the bread.⁵ This reminds us that in the second half of the century, bakers’ and hucksters’ shops were increasingly common, that bread might be brought around by horse, or horse-and-cart, and that riot could be by women against women.

The evidence suggests to me that working people were not, by the 1790s, buying wheat, flour or bread in the market on market day, but getting it elsewhere, at inns, shops, or bakeries. Catherine Phillips tells us in 1792 that “it was formerly the custom of the wives of labourers and artificers to purchase, on market days, two or three gallons of malt, which would perhaps brew tolerable good table beer for the week”, but they were now ceasing to do so since the malt tax

¹ Thwaites, thesis, i, pp. 208-21, discusses the question with care.

² “Inquisition on Ruth Pierce”, *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine*, xii (1870), pp. 256-7. My thanks to Mary Prior.

³ “A Person in Business”, *Two Letters on the Flour Trade* (London, 1757, 1766), pp. 7-8; the author is writing from Hampshire. See also Wendy Thwaites, “Dearth and the Marketing of Agricultural Produce: Oxfordshire”, *Agric. Hist. Rev.*, xxxiii (1985), p. 121.

⁴ Thwaites, “Women in the Market Place”, p. 37.

⁵ PRO, TS 11/1138/5956: Special Commission, Gloucester, 14 Nov. 1766, Crown Brief.

had raised the price too high.¹ Where people came in to the urban market from a little distance, they perhaps got hold of some transport, and women, men and older children piled on together; no doubt husband and wife often went round the market together. An observer in 1800 noted a man and wife coming to an inn to buy a peck of wheat, and "after the wheat was measured, the woman says to her husband, 'John I want some money to go to the grocer's for some tea, sugar, butter' ".² In this division of gender roles, hers was to finish off the shopping and his (no doubt) was to stay at the inn and drink.

All ages, shapes, sizes and sexes would throng together in a busy market. The genteel were falling away as the century wore on; they did not like to be squashed in the plebeian press and they sent their servants instead. (They are more likely to have sent the cook or kitchen maid to buy provisions than the footman.) The wives and daughters of cottagers might stay on to spend their small takings from selling eggs or cherries on cloth or ribbons or houseware. (Money earned from such produce belonged to "the distaff side" of the family budget.) Some farmers would stay on, get drunk, and have to be collected by their wives.³ There would be carters and ostlers, ballad-mongers, perhaps a fiddler or two, and a card-sharper. There would be wide-eyed children, hoping to scrump an apple. There would be courting couples, on the only day out when they saw each other. Bakers and millers, higglers and jobbers, market officials. And a throng of purchasers, very many of whom were women. As a rule it was the woman's role to bake, brew and cook — Mary Collier, the washer-woman, eloquently disclosed woman's dual roles as wage-earner and house-worker, in 1739⁴ — and it has long been assumed that women had the major role in purchasing provisions. The point has not been fully proven,

¹Catherine Phillips, *Considerations on the Causes of the High Price of Grain*. . . (1792), p. 7.

²William Brooks, *The True Causes of our present Distress for Provisions* (1800), pp. 29-30. My thanks to Dr Thwaites.

³F. W. Steer (ed.), "The Memoirs of James Spershott", *The Chichester Papers*, 30 (Chichester, 1962).

⁴See Mary Collier, *The Woman's Labour*, ed. Marian Sugden and E. P. Thompson (1989).

but if research is directed at it then I have little doubt as to its results.

The market was, in any case, a great occasion of sociability. Dare one suggest that market day could actually be fun? If women played so important a part in networking households into a community how could it happen that they should not take part in so important an occasion for community socialising (and gossip) as the market? Bohstedt offers us no evidence, but suggests that both the family income and necessary purchases were "probably collected by the man on the weekly trip to the warehouse and the market". He is thinking of a "proto-industrial" clothing worker or nail-maker, who works in his own household economy, but must collect raw materials and deliver the finished product to the putter-out. But the day for delivering his "piece" was not often the same as market day. And in a majority of households spinning was the mainstay of women's work until the 1790s or later, and the women (wives or spinsters) would have to visit their own putter-out, or the shopkeeper who acted as agent, as frequently. A 1741 pamphlet shows women in Hampshire, Wiltshire and Dorset coming in to market on farmers' wagons, taking their spun yarn to the clothiers: "then they get the few things they want, and return to the Inn to be carried home again". (There might be as many as three or four hundred poor people, chiefly women, in the market doing this.¹) A well-informed observer, in 1794, wrote of the dismay of a labourer, "whose wife and children return home from the next market town with the sad tidings that the Wool-man puts out no more handwork. . .".²

If women usually did the cooking in the household economy and if some (but not all) women's food riots had targets in the market-place, common-sense suggests that women knew a lot about food marketing. It often seems so from the reports. In 1740 in Newport Pagnell (at a time when the crowd was blocking exports) farmers sold two wagons of wheat to factors. The wheat was disguised by being packed

¹Alice Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century* (1919; reprint 1982), pp. 108-9.

²"A. B.", *Observations on the detriment that is supposed must arise to the family of every cottager. . . from the loss of woollen spinning. . .* (1794).

like cheese, but "some cunning old women" suspected the deception, stopped the wagons, and (joined by three hundred more women) entered into a long and successful engagement with the farmers.¹ John Bohstedt wishes to play down this female role in the market because he wants to emphasise the productive role of women in the proto-industrial household, which made them "virtually equal to men in the communal economy and polity". Women took part in riots, "not as housewives but as full-fledged contributors to the family income". "They should be seen as proto-citizens and constituents of the local polity and economy, nearly coequal to men in claiming their rights to affordable bread."

I don't wish to dispute the importance of the women's labour in the clothing or metal-working household. But there is no reason why they should not also have been the main food marketers just as the men may have dealt most often with the tools and materials of the trade. What may be misleading are the notions of "equality" and status brought to bear upon them from our own status-conscious and contractual society. These women (and these men) were for themselves and not for us: they were proto-nothing. They were not bugged by notions of equality, in a competitive sense, since they were deeply habituated to the acceptance that men's and women's roles were different, and that neither was the more nor the less for that. There were certainly places of overlap, and also occasions when each sex (the women more often than the men) would take part in the other's work. But Bohstedt goes too far, in his commendable attempt to emphasise the women's independent position, in suggesting that the roles of men and women in the household or cottage economy were almost indistinguishable.²

On the contrary, different gender roles were firmly demarked, perhaps the more firmly in that each sex's sphere of responsibility held the other's respect. One emphatically

¹ *Ipswich Journal*, 7 June 1740.

² Bohstedt may be drawing too far upon the suggestions of Hans Medick on "The proto-industrial family economy", in Peter Kriedte, H. Medick and Schlumbohm, *Industrialization before Industrialization* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 60-3.

literary source is the poem "descriptive of the manners of the clothiers" in the West Riding of Yorkshire, *circa* 1730. It is, exactly, a comedy of manners about gender roles in a "proto-industrial" household, although one of small master rather than journeyman status. In this the food is certainly cooked by the Mistress, with the help of "prentice Bess": in includes broth, oaten cakes, mutton, bread (home baked), "dumplings", and home-brewed ale. The "Maister" oversees the needs of the weaving trade; he or his sons (or apprentices) will get wool from the Wolds, take it out to the spinners, get size, dye, and so on. The Mistress must oversee getting yeast (perhaps from a neighbour), malt and hops for brewing, soap and "blue". She and Bess must also "sit at t'bobbin wheel", dye, do the washing (and washing-up), get the children to and from school, and oversee the work folk when the master is away. And a dozen other things.¹

It was exactly the extent and manifest importance of the woman's role, and her manifold responsibilities, each calling for specialised skills, which gave to her authority in the household and respect in the community. Her work was indispensable and she well knew it. It is pointless to try to grade the feminine and masculine spheres of work in terms of degrees of "near equality". Certainly in the public sphere of law and religion and property the woman was in a subject position. But in the household economy the terms which we need are "authority", "worth" and "respect": perhaps the parity and mutual interdependence of unlikes.²

If women were especially prominent in food riots in regions where the manufacturing household economy was strong, such as clothing districts, this was in part because their role in this economy gave them authority and self-confidence. But this was not because gender roles were almost indistinguishable. The female sphere of authority probably took in most marketing for provisions, and within

¹ The full text is in *Publications of the Thoresby Society*, xli, pt. 3, p. 95 (1947). Extracts are in H. Heaton, *Yorkshire Woollen and Worsted Industries* (1920), pp. 344-7; Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 300-1.

² See Dorothy Thompson, "Women, Work and Politics in Nineteenth-Century England: the Problem of Authority", in Jane Randall (ed.), *Equal or Different* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 61-3.

the household the women had responsibility for baking, brewing, and seeing that the household was fed. They were therefore especially sensitive to price and quality, and were the first to have to work out economies and strategies of survival when dearth threatened. This role made them as much guardians of the household's survival as were the men, who might earn the greater part of the family income. They would discuss their problems, anger or anxieties with other women, not only on market day but daily on their neighbourhood occasions. This favoured — Alice Clarke wrote long ago — “the formation of a feminine public opinion on current events”. Thus households would be bonded and the nucleus for direct actions prepared.¹

By downplaying this role and by fastening his analysis upon women's role as income-earners in the manufacturing household, Bohstedt — quite against his own intentions — gives an almost patronising account of women as rioters: “Women typically *joined* men in food riots” (above p. 306, my italics). The suggestion is conveyed that women expressed their solidarity *with* men, as their “near coequals”. But the evidence does not feel like that. On these matters the women were often the leaders of community opinion, and the initiators of actions; sometimes they were the sole executors of actions, and the men joined in in solidarity with them as often as they joined the men.

In 1766 and afterwards there were fewer spontaneous crowd actions in the market-place because less grain was being sold there. Sales were removing to inns, and the open market was in some places coming to an end. Working people in the south and midlands were increasingly buying bread. This might fluctuate in price, or (if the priced loaf remained steady) in weight, which was more difficult to judge. In the high-price years of the 1790s, the huge quartern or half-quartern loaves normally baked in many towns went out of reach of “the poor”, who “were obliged to buy fragments of bread, with several surfaces exposed to the sun, air, flies,

¹ Clark, *op. cit.*, p. 51. See also Maxine Berg's suggestion as to networks in *The Age of Manufactures* (1985), pp. 164-7, and the excellent survey of women's work in the family economy in Bridget Hill, *Women, Work, and Sexual Politics in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1989), chapters 3 and 4.

dust, and all the contingencies of a huckster's shop”.¹ But the end product in a huckster's shop was a futile target for those who wished to bring down the price of grain. Hence the crowd had to plan more carefully, and to select targets, often outside the market-place, such as inns, canals, wharfs, granaries, farms, mills, wagons on the road. These actions around wheat or flour must have followed upon discussions (and rumours of hoarding or speculation) within the working community.

Spontaneous actions by women in the market-place were more frequent in the first half of the century, because wheat and flour were still in the open market. Thus in Oxford in 1693 we find women in the market “pelting millers, mealmen, bakers etc with stones”;² in 1740 most of the riots were against export, but market-place riots are also reported, such as that at Peterborough where “a number of women rose in a tumultuous manner on the market day, rioted the farmers out of their sacks & strow'd their corn in the street”.³ Similar market-place actions by women are reported in 1757 in Bewdley, Worcester, Taunton, Newcastle-under-Lyme, and Salisbury, while in 1766 in Kidderminster, when some poor women were bidding in the corn market for a bag of wheat, and a baker offered more, “the people immediately became riotous”.⁴ If that sort of affair then fell away, women might (and did) still initiate spontaneous actions in the market-place about other foodstuffs, such as potatoes or meat. In Ashby-de-la-Zouche in 1766, when a farmer put up his butter by 2d. a pound, “an old woman clapped one hand around the nape of his neck and with the other smeared his face with butter”.⁵

It is not a significant matter whether women took part in

¹ Thomas Parsons, *Letters to an M.P. on the absurdity of popular prejudices*. . . (Bath, 1800).

² Thwaites, thesis, ii, pp. 468-9.

³ *Gloucester Journal*, 24 June 1740.

⁴ Bewdley — *Northampton Mercury*, 6 June 1757; Worcester — *Worcester Journal*, 19 May 1757; Taunton, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Salisbury, Kidderminster — all in R. W. Malcolmson, *Life and Labour in England, 1700-1780* (1981), pp. 117-8.

⁵ Dale E. Williams, “Midland Hunger Riots in 1766”, *Midland History*, iii, 4 (1976).

more or less than 50 per cent of the recorded riots. What remains significant — and indeed remarkable — is the extensive evidence of women's active part in food riots over a period of more than two hundred years, and in many parts of Great Britain.¹ No other issue commanded women's support so wholeheartedly and consistently, at least in England.² On a review of indictments in the Western and Oxford Assize circuits in the second half of the eighteenth century, there are a few cases of what appear to be the community's defence of trade practices (but not of formal trade unionism), of resistance to enclosures, of rough music, and of civic politics in old clothing towns, all of which appear to have significant female involvement. But food riots are the indictments where the women are most often to be found. There are some all-male indictments,³ just as there are some all-female ones.⁴ There are indictments where there seems to be the selection of a token woman,⁵ just as there seem to be token men.⁶ There are other cases where the prosecution

¹ John Walter in Charlesworth (ed.), *An Atlas of Rural Protest* (1983), shows women present in riots in Kent (1595), Essex (1596), and unloading a ship at Southampton (1608).

² In Scotland at the end of the eighteenth century, the issue which occasioned the highest participation of women in direct action "was opposition to the exercise of church patronage by lay patrons against the popular wishes of the congregation". Food riots came second. Logue, *op. cit.*, pp. 199-204.

³ PRO, Assi 24/42, Devon, Winter 1767: 21 men (17 weavers, 2 woolcombers, 2 labourers, 1 cordwainer) for attacking a boulding mill; *ibid.*, 9 men of Ottery St Mary for pulling down a water mill (and the two following cases); *ibid.*, Somerset 1766, cheese riot, Wellington (13 woolcombers, weavers, etc. indicted); *ibid.*, Somerset, Summer 1767, cheese riot, 7 labourers of Trowbridge indicted (but no true bill found); *ibid.*, Wiltshire, Winter 1767, 8 men indicted (5 broadweavers, 2 scribblers, 1 labourer).

⁴ PRO, Assi 4/22, Shropshire, Summer 1767, 5 women of Culmington, for cutting sacks and throwing grain on the floor. Assi 4/20, Worcestershire, Summer 1768, 7 women for carrying away 60 bushels of wheat. Assi 4/21, Worcestershire, Lent 1775, 7 women from Old Swinford (1 widow, 2 spinsters, 2 colliers' wives and 2 labourers' wives) for a flour riot in which 200 took part. Assi 24/43, Somerset, Lent 1801, 4 women for compelling the sale of bread under market price.

⁵ PRO, Assi 24/43, Devon, Summer 1801, 5 labourers and 1 single woman, for compelling the sale of barley under the market price.

⁶ PRO, Assi 24/42, Somerset, Summer 1767, butter riot, 5 women and 1 labourer indicted.

appears to be even-handed in serving out indictments.¹ But the indictments testify to the vigorous presence of women.

There is room for further research into this, for as yet no one appears to have interrogated the legal records systematically over a long period of time. Nor should we expect that uniform answers will be forthcoming. John Bohstedt notes that of fifty-four rioters committed for trial in Devon in 1795 and 1801, only seven were women; but that at Manchester in 1795, of twelve persons charged for food rioting, nine were women.² My own searches into Assize records show a similar discrepancy between the Western circuit (taking in Devon, Wiltshire, Dorset and Somerset riots in 1765-72) with 114 men and only fourteen women indicted; and the Oxford circuit (taking in food rioters indicted in Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Shropshire in 1767 to 1774), where there are twenty women and only five men.³ Do these figures indicate differential gender behaviour or differential practices in policing and prosecution?⁴

We do not know how far the authorities were as willing to prosecute women as men, or whether women must have committed particular "outrages" before they were indicted.⁵ There is a little evidence to suggest that in the deeply traditional West of England, where food rioting was almost a tolerated mode of "negotiation", the authorities found the indictment of female rioters to be distasteful. In 1765

¹ For a Bicester (Oxfordshire) wheat riot in 1757, 4 men and 4 women were tried, of whom 1 man and 1 woman were sentenced to 7 years transportation; for a riot involving beans, 2 men were transported, and 1 woman was branded: Thwaites, thesis, pp. 471, 473.

² Bohstedt, "Gender, Household and Community Politics", p. 120, note 116.

³ PRO, Assi 24/42, 24/43, 4/20, 4/21, 4/22. I have only counted cases of riot related explicitly to food.

⁴ Douglas Hay has found women leading food riots in Staffordshire in 1740, 1757, 1783 and 1800: "Crime, Authority and the Criminal Laws in Staffordshire 1750-1800" (Univ. of Warwick Ph.D. thesis, 1975), p. 265, and private communication.

⁵ In 1795 miners from the Forest of Dean searched a trow at Awre on the Severn. Finding wheat and flour, 100 men, women and children came down from the Forest with horses and asses and carried off 500 bushels. According to a witness "the women were more riotous than the men". But 5 miners were arrested, of whom 2 were hanged for stealing flour; PRO, Assi 5/116; *London Chronicle*, 17-19 Nov. 1795.

Tiverton was convulsed by community-and-trade riots against the Mayor and Corporation, in which (according to literary evidence) the women were most prominent, dashing in upon the Mayor through the windows of an inn, pulling off his wig and threatening to kill him if he did not sign a paper. But of twenty-six indicted for these riots, only six were women.¹ But, then, what was the function of prosecution? In the Western circuit the prosecution of food rioters seems to have been a haphazard and often a lenient process. It was often difficult to persuade the grand jury to find a true bill against food rioters, and (once found) the petty jury might not convict. For a Devon attack on a bolting-mill in 1767, twenty-one were discharged and in two cases a bill could "not be found" by the grand jury, and for another attack on a mill *all* of eighteen indicted in Ottery St Mary were "not to be found".² And so on. A little more zeal was shown in 1795 and 1800-1, but a Devon forced sale in 1801 resulted in the acquittal of five men charged and no process against the only woman, while the prosecution was abandoned of two men indicted for terrorising a farmer (with a rope about his neck) to sign a paper. On the other hand four women from Montacute (Somerset) were indicted for grand larceny for compelling Elizabeth Hopkins to sell seventy-two loaves at a lower rate than she was willing, and Mary Gard and Sarah Baker were convicted.³

In several other cases in both Western and Oxford circuits the offenders were bound over with one shilling fine, or were discharged as "paupers".⁴ This suggests that the function of prosecution was to inspire momentary terror until order could be restored, and that the accused would be brought to a due state of contrition by the anxiety and nuisance of the trial

¹PRO, Assi 24/42, Devon, Summer 1765; F. J. Snell, *The Chronicles of Twyford* (Tiverton, 1893), pp. 192-201.

²PRO, Assi 24/42. Those whose indictments were "not to be found" by the grand jury in Ottery St Mary included 4 carpenters, 4 woolcombers, 3 husbandmen, 2 tailors, 2 labourers, 2 cordwainers, 1 thatcher.

³PRO, Assi 24/43.

⁴In a Taunton cheese riot, 11 men and 6 women were indicted. All were found "paupers" and discharged. The "paupers" included 3 woolcombers, 2 serge weavers, 2 cordwainers, 2 labourers, 1 whitesmith, 1 fuller: and 3 spinsters, the wives of a cordwainer, a labourer and a serge weaver; PRO, Assi 24/42, Somerset, Winter 1767.

itself. Prosecution was attended with difficulties — the selection of offenders, the drilling of reluctant witnesses, the odium attaching to the prosecutor — and local magistrates (notoriously in the West) were reluctant to set the process in motion.¹ Since prosecution was both selective and uncertain — that is, it was undertaken to provide an "example" but had no necessary direct relation to the incidence of riot — it cannot be assumed that it was gender-blind. Except in cases where women were manifestly predominant in riots, the authorities might have found it to be more convenient to make an example of men.

There might even have been a hierarchy of levels of prosecution, with differing gender ratios at each level. At the top of the hierarchy would be the Special Commissions of Oyer and Terminer which government instituted in late 1766 with the aim of making "examples" in the disturbed districts. Those brought to trial here were predominantly male: thirteen men in Berkshire, and no women; fifteen men in Wiltshire, and four women; and in Gloucestershire fifty-four men and twelve women.² There may have been some reluctance to launch women into a process which might end in their execution,³ but once so launched it is difficult to say whether they received any preferential treatment from the courts.⁴ Of the Wiltshire women, Priscilla Jenkins was sentenced to death for stealing in a dwelling-house (commuted to life transportation), Elizabeth Moody and Mary

¹See Wells, *Wretched Faces*, ch. 16, "The Role of the Courts".

²These are the formal returns in Baga de Secretis, *G.B. Deputy Keeper of Public Records, 5th Report* (1844), Appendix 11, pp. 198-204. But some prisoners were held over for subsequent trial or their cases were dismissed. The *Gloucester Journal*, 15 Dec. 1766, reported that 96 rioters were then in prison, of whom 16 were women: see also Williams, thesis, pp. 162-3. But other records suggest that as many as 22 women were committed: cases against one or two were dropped, and another turned evidence against her fellows; crown brief, PRO, TS 11/1188/5956, and "A Calendar of the Criminal Prisoners in the Castle Gaol of Gloucester", 13 Dec. 1766 (annotated) in TS 11/995/3707.

³This is suggested by John Beattie in his authoritative article, "The Criminality of Women in Eighteenth-Century England", *Journal of Soc. Hist.*, viii, (1975), p. 113, note 57. Also Beattie, *Crime and the Courts in England, 1660-1800* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 436-9.

⁴Booth, *op. cit.*, p. 106 finds that in the courts in Lancashire 1790-1801 "no differentiation seems to have been made between the sexes".

Nash were transported for seven years for stealing to the value of 1s. 7d. in a dwelling-house, and Sarah Pane, a widow, found guilty of stealing flour to the value of 6d., was privately whipped and discharged. This seems severe enough. But these were the counts upon which juries had been willing to convict. On a closer view it seems that they had been selected for trial because all except Sarah Pane, went beyond "food riot" to theft from the homes of farmers or traders. Priscilla Jenkins was supposed to have taken off a gammon of bacon, a pair of boots, a bundle of things on her head tied up in a handkerchief. . . and a gun. Elizabeth Moody and Mary Nash were not such desperate felons, but they were accused of breaking into a house, smashing the windows and some of the furniture, and carrying off the family's clothes.¹

A little more can be worked out about the Gloucestershire accused.² The Special Commission at Gloucester was restrained by a grand jury which refused to act as a rubber-stamp and perhaps by a reluctant petty jury. Of twenty-one women who were being prepared for trial, one was not indicted, presumably as *feme covert*. More than one-half of the remainder were either acquitted (eight) or the grand jury found "ignoramus" (three). Of seventy-five male prisoners, about the same proportion got off, with eighteen acquittals and twenty "no true bills". And there is no great difference in the conviction rate: seven out of twenty-one women as against thirty-five out of seventy-five men. The marked difference is in the severity of the convictions and sentencing. Sixteen of the men were convicted of felonies, nineteen of misdemeanours, whereas only two of the women were found felons and five were found guilty of misdemeanours. Nine rioters were sentenced to death — all men, although in six cases the condemned were reprieved — and nine were

¹Crown briefs in PRO, TS 11/1116/5728. Elizabeth Moody and Mary Nash were both pregnant, giving birth immediately after their trials, Mary Nash with twins: it is not clear whether their sentences were enforced. See Williams, *op. cit.*, pp. 167, 170.

²Some of the following deductions depend upon rough annotations to the Gaol Calendar in PRO, TS 11/995/3707, but these are difficult to decipher and not always accurate. Also TS 11/1188/5956; Williams, *op. cit.*; *Gloucester Journal*, 22 Dec. 1766; Gloucester CRO, Q/SG 1767-70, Gloucester Gaol Calendar, 13 Jan. 1767.

sentenced to seven years' transportation, of whom two were women.

A closer view of the cases does not tell us much. Six of the female acquittals were for a cheese riot at Farmer Collett's, for which one man was also acquitted and one other man convicted. Mary Hillier ran after the mob in Minchinhampton and "told them Mr Butt was come home & had fired a gun and killed 2 children and desired them to come back and pull down the House". The grand jury found no true bill. Elizabeth Rackley and Elizabeth Witts, both sentenced to transportation, were convicted of stealing 10d. worth of flour, but as part of several night-time break-ins of the mill of Richard Norris. It was the night-time breaking and entering which made the offence felony.¹ The clearest case of gender discrimination concerned John Franklyn and Sarah Franklyn, his wife, jointly committed for entering a shop in Stroud and carrying off in their laps soap, glue and other things. But Sarah was not indicted, presumably because while acting with her husband she was, according to the legal doctrine of *feme covert*, not responsible for her actions. That was fortunate for her, since John Franklyn was found guilty of grand larceny and was transported for seven years.²

This suggests that the heavier exercises of the courts might fall a little less heavily on women. But the lighter exercises need not show the same gender inflection. Summary committals to Bridewells or convictions for minor public order offences were used by magistrates to cool off a crowd, without respect for differences of sex. For example, a letter from Lincolnshire in 1740 notes that "we have had a Disturbance by the Mobb at Bourn they Cutt Some Sacks of Wheat in the Boat & Obstructed its passage to Spalding for a time, but was Quel'd seasonably by the Officers of the Town & 5 Women Committed to the House of Correction".³ Such episodes are unlikely to have left traces in national records,

¹Elizabeth Rackley was later pardoned.

²Gaol Calendar in PRO, TS 11/995/3707. On *feme covert*, see Blackstone, *op. cit.*, iv, pp. 26-7 and John Beattie, *op. cit.*, p. 238, note 71.

³Letter of John Halford, 1 July 1740, in Lincs., Archives Office, 3 Anc. 7/4/14.

although after the 1760s they were more likely to be brought to Quarter Sessions.¹

John Bohstedt tells us that “repression did not know gender”, and he is right that troops were frequently ordered to fire into mixed crowds. From Anne Carter of Maldon, Essex, in 1629 to Hannah Smith of Manchester in 1812, a trickle of victims or heroines were sent to the gallows, while others were sentenced to transportation.² Yet I am undecided; it remains possible that, while “examples” were made from time to time, the examples made of women were fewer, that they sometimes enjoyed the “privilege of their sex”, and that much depended upon place, time and the temper of the authorities.

If the central authorities insisted that examples had to be made, then gender did not matter. In 1766 government and law officers were pressing hard for capital offenders to be selected, and the Treasury Solicitor regretted that “at Leicester, the Evidence is very slight, against a Woman for throwing Cheese out of a Waggon to the Mob, which if not a Highway Robbery, is not Capital”.³ (Hannah Smith was convicted of highway robbery nearly fifty years later, for selling off butter cheaply to the crowd.) In the end, no women were hanged for the riots of 1766, although Sarah Hemmings was capitally convicted for her part in a riot in Wolverhampton: the town petitioned for her life, and the sentence was commuted to life transportation.⁴ In 1800 *The Times* correspondent lamented from Nottingham and its environs that “there is not even a prospect of the riot

¹ Ann Welford and Barbara Mason were sentenced to six months hard labour at Northampton Quarter Sessions in 1796 for trying, with a great number of persons, “principally women”, to stop a market wagon: *Northampton Mercury*, 9 Apr. 1796. My thanks to Jeanette Neeson.

² For Anne Carter, see John Walter, “Grain Riots and Popular Attitudes to the Law: Maldon and the Crisis of 1629”, in Brewer and Styles (eds.), *An Ungovernable People*, pp. 47-84, an excellent study which follows the rioters back into the local records. For Hannah Smith, see Thomis and Grimmett, *op. cit.*, pp. 43-44.

³ Memorandum as to the state of evidence against food rioters (1766) from Treasury Solicitor in Shelburne Papers, Vol. 132, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; see also PRO, SP Dom 44/141.

⁴ Williams, “Midland Hunger Riots in 1766”, p. 277.

subsiding”, owing to the non-arrest of the women, who were “the principal aggressors”.¹ In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, women rioters had been liminal people with an “ambivalent legal status at the margins of the law’s competence”. They claimed, in enclosure riots, “that women were lawlesse, and not subject to the lawes of the realme as men are but might. . . offend without drede or punishment of law”.² If the sex had been disabused of that illusion in the eighteenth century, yet perhaps some notion of “privilege”, both among offenders and prosecutors, lingered on in such regions as the West.

Were there other peculiarities of the feminine input into food riots? I doubt the value of tabulating disorder and violence according to gender, partly because of the imperfect nature of the evidence, partly because all riot must involve disorder and violence of some kind. When an affair involved outright confrontation, with cudgels against fire-arms — the attack on a mill, the break-in to a keep to rescue prisoners — the predominant sex would be male. The women are more commonly reported as throwing missiles — stones or potatoes — and on one occasion, in the Midlands in 1766 “planted in rows five or six deep”, defending a bridge with stones and brickbats against horsemen.³ Whatever conclusions we reach as to the gender reciprocities and respect between women and men in these communities, it would be foolish to suppose that these dissolved sexual differences. Without doubt the physical confrontation of men and women, of soldiers and crowd, aroused sexual tensions, perhaps expressed by the women in robust ribaldry, by the male forces of “order” in a contest between the inhibition of violence and sexually-excited aggression.⁴ On occasion the military affected contempt for the women. The commander of troops sent to deal with a riot in Bromsgrove in 1795

¹ Wells, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

² John Walter in *An Ungovernable People*, p. 63; see also Roger B. Manning, *Village Revolts* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 96, 116.

³ Williams, *op. cit.*, pp. 273-4.

⁴ After “repeated solicitations” from a Captain of marines, the constable of Brentwood reluctantly arrested two women, in “The Ship” alehouse, who had been “singing a song in Brentwood Street reflecting on the military”: Essex CRO, Q/SBb 352/55 (Aug. 1793).

complained loftily that they found the cause was “a parcel of old women. . . as in all pretended riots in this part of the country”. But this parcel of women (not all of whom were old) had given a good account of themselves, some seventy of them stopping a wagon and six horses, and carrying off twenty-nine sacks of wheaten flour.¹

When women rioted they made no attempt to disguise their sex or to apologise for it. In my view there was very little cross-dressing in food riots, although once or twice there are unconfirmed reports of men in women’s clothes.² These “rites of inversion” or, maybe, simple exercises in the most available disguise, were more commonly encountered in turnpike riots, in “carnival” protests, and, later, in Luddism.³ But inversion, whether intentional or not, was exactly what the women did *not* wish to achieve. So far from wishing to present an ominous androgynous image, they sought to present their particular right, according to tradition and gender role, as guardians of the children, of the household, of the livelihood of the community. That symbolism — the blood-stained loaves on poles, the banging of kitchen ware — belonged especially to the women’s protests. They evinced what Temma Kaplan has called “female consciousness” rather than feminist, which rested upon “their acceptance of the sexual division of labor” which is one which “assigns women the responsibility of preserving life”. “Experiencing reciprocity among themselves and competence in preserving

¹PRO, WO 1/1091, 5 and 8 Aug. 1795; Assi 2/26 and 5/116.

²*Jackson’s Oxford Journal*, 28 May 1757 reports a wagon of wheat taken away in Bath by a mob in women’s clothes. I have not found any eighteenth-century indictment for such an offence in a food riot.

³See Natalie Davis, “Women on Top”, in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, 1975). I think Professor Davis overlooks the fact that a woman’s gown was the most readily-available garment to disguise a collier or a cottager. Some of the upside-down symbolic effects (which she describes so well) were consequence rather than intention. Attacks on turnpikes had more military symbolism: “Deponent saith. . . they heard the Noise of Horns blowing. . . and soon after a great Number of Persons armed with Guns & Axes, some of them disguised with black’d faces and Womens Cloathes. . .”. This was an attack on a turnpike gate in Ledbury, Herefordshire. James Baylis, labourer, who was apprehended said that he had blacked his face with a burnt cork, and that the gown, apron and straw hat which he wore were his wife’s: informations in PRO, TS 11/1122/5824, 4 Nov. 1735.

life instills women with a sense of their collective right to administer daily life, even if they must confront authority to do so.¹

Nothing pleased female rioters more than the humiliation of pompous male “aggro”. In a Tiverton riot in 1754 a certain Lieutenant Suttie attracted the crowd’s notice by his zeal; he was heard to say to a JP, “Give me leave sir, to order the men to fire, and you shall see the fellows hop like peas”. The troopers were unleashed upon the crowd and they “rode through the streets hacking with their broad-swords and stabbing with their bayonets”:

While the troopers were dashing about in the execution of their orders, some women seized Lieutenant Suttie by the collar and took away his sword, which he never recovered. This was a sore blow to his pride, and a favourite subject of banter on the part of his friends, who, very cruelly, would not allow him to forget his skirmish with the women and the inglorious loss of his weapon.²

Not for the first or last time, disarming symbolised emasculation.

Men in authority still feared the violence and the incitement of the female tongue (see below pp. 501-2), and women could sometimes attain their ends by mockery, insult, or by shaming farmers or dealers by their expostulations. Susannah Soons was convicted in Norwich in 1767 for “uttering several scandalous and inflammatory speeches”, and Mary Watts in Leicester for “assaulting” the magistrates “with indecent and opprobrious Language and Gestures”.³ In Montrose in 1812, when the Riot Act was being read and the military were deployed to disperse the crowd, Elizabeth Beattie called out, “Will no person take that paper out of his hand?” and tried to snatch the Act from the magistrate.⁴

Elizabeth Beattie knew what she was doing. But so did Anne Carter, in 1629. She clearly despised the pomp of the local authorities, calling one of Maldon’s chief magistrates in 1622 “bloud sucker and. . . many other unseemely tearmes”.

¹Temma Kaplan, “Female Consciousness and Collective Action: The Case of Barcelona, 1910-1918”, *Signs*, vii, 3 (1982), pp. 545, 560, 565.

²Snell, *The Chronicles of Twyford*, pp. 194-5. This was an election riot.

³Williams, thesis, pp. 203, note 2, and p. 279.

⁴Logue, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

When the bailiff had questioned her about her absence from church, she had answered back: "that yf he woold prouid [provide] wone to doe hir worke shee would goe". In the riots she described herself as "Captain", calling out: "Come, my brave lads of Maldon, I will be your leader for we will not starve."¹ "General Jane Bogey" in Newcastle in 1740 knew what she was doing, and so did "Lady Ludd", the title claimed by leaders of riots in 1812 in both Nottingham and Leeds.² So too did fifty-four-year-old Hannah Smith who "headed up the mob" for some days in Manchester in the same year, bringing down the prices of potatoes, butter and milk, and boasting that she could raise a crowd in a minute.³ It was lack of deference as much as rioting which got Anne Carter and Hannah Smith hanged. What clergyman was likely to give a character reference, what nobleman to intercede, on behalf of such viragos?

The women's riots may not have been precisely of the same violence quotient as the men's, but they were not shrinking, demure affairs. Frequently they came to a climax when women led off the fore-horses, climbed aboard the wagons and threw down the sacks to their fellows, sometimes took the horses out of the shafts and pulled the wagon back themselves to a place for convenient distribution of its load.⁴ In the engagement at Newport Pagnell in 1740 (above pp. 319-20), the women fought with the farmers for a considerable time, declaring that they were "unwilling that so much Wheat should go out of the Kingdom, while they wanted bread, [and] swore they would lose their lives before they would part with it". At length "with great acclamations of joy the waggons were unloaded". The reporter of the *Northampton Mercury* found that the affair merited a little comment:

¹Walter, *op. cit.*, pp. 58, 72.

²Ellis, *op. cit.*, p. 340; Thomis and Grimmett, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

³*Ibid.*, pp. 43-5.

⁴For examples, see *Derby Mercury*, 10 July 1740 (Derby 1740). Elizabeth Beer and Elizabeth Bell were each sentenced to 7 years transportation for their part in this riot. Information of Thos. Higgins against Ann Burdon, who stopped his wagon in Long Handborough in August 1795, took the horse out of the shafts, and got into the shafts to prevent the horses being put back in: PRO, Assi 5/116.

The Conquerors are now holding a Grand Council to consider what to do with it among themselves. Such uncommon Bravery and Resolution appearing in the soft & tender Sex is a Matter of Surprize to those who stile themselves their despotick Sovereigns, & the Lords of Creation.¹

Such bravery was not uncommon. Repeatedly women faced troops and were fired upon. In one of the only letters that survives from a food rioter, he wrote of a great riot in Nottingham (1800): "your hearts would have ached to have seen the women Calling for Bread and Declaring they would fight till they died Before they would be used so any longer. . . the conduct of the people. . . who stood the fire from the yeomanry with such undaunted courage that astonished the gentlemen for they poured such showers of stones on them in all directions that they could load their pieces no more after they had fired them. . .".²

Perhaps the poor of both sexes partnered each other better in bad times than we suppose. Maybe men were more prominent in food riots than women, and maybe not.³ But if one adds up all that is already known (and there is much still to find out) there were an awful lot of women involved in food riots, sometimes on their own, more often in mixed affairs in which there was a loyal gender partnership.

For two hundred and more years these food riots were the most visible and public expressions of working women's lack of deference and their contestation with authority. As such these evidences contest, in their turn, the stereotypes of feminine submission, timidity, or confinement to the private world of the household. Robert Southey (p. 234) may not have been so silly after all. Indeed, when once aroused the women may have been more passionate than men in their eloquence, less heedful of the consequences, and, in their role

¹*Northampton Mercury*, 2 June 1740; *Ipswich Journal*, 7 June 1740.

²Intercepted letter of J. and L. Golby to "Dear Brother and Sister", dated Nottingham 7 Sept. 1800, in PRO, HO 42/51. Extracts of the letter are in Quinault and Stevenson (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 58-9 and in Wells, *Wretched Faces*, pp. 120-2.

³Or maybe the answer differed according to place and time. Walter, *op. cit.*, p. 62 writes that "women were present in almost every food riot in the period [i.e. early seventeenth century] and some riots were exclusively feminine affairs".

as guardians of the family, more determined to get quick results.¹ Perhaps — as John Bohstedt suggests — many women were more immersed than were men “in the moral, less in the market, economy”, and they were among the last to give the practices of the moral economy up.²

That is not the whole truth about women and authority, but food riots provide an important and weighty chunk of evidence, which must not be tidied away. It may enlarge our sense of the possibilities of feminine “nature”. The more difficult question may be, not why women sometimes rioted, but why, in the mid nineteenth century, the tradition of public protest became so much weaker and women’s presence retreated into a serial world of private households.³ Perhaps (in contrast to what came after) a “myth of the feminine food riot” should be rehabilitated after all?

IV

I do not know how far back one must go to find the origin of the term, “moral economy”. I think that it comes from the late eighteenth century, but I cannot now find references. It

¹Tom Wedgwood wrote to his father, Josiah, describing “the mob” in the Potteries in March 1783: “The women were much worse than the men, as for example, Parson Sneyd got about 30 men to follow him. . . but a woman cried: ‘Nay, nay, that wunna do, that wunna do’, and so they turned back again, and it was agreed that the corn taken [in] the boat should be sold at a fair price”: *The Wedgwood Letters*, ed. Ann Finer and G. Savage (1965), p. 268. My thanks to Douglas Hay.

²Women and miners were prominent in traditional price-setting in south-west England in 1847, and women and fishermen in north-east Scotland: A. Rowe, “Food Riots of the Forties in Cornwall”, *Royal Cornwall Polytechnic Society* (1942); E. Richards, *The Last Scottish Food Riots, Past and Present Supplement* (1981). See also Roger E. Swift, “Food Riots in Mid-Victorian Exeter, 1847-67”, *Southern History*, 2 (1980). Robert Storch, in a most interesting study, shows how in 1867 in Devon and Oxfordshire, traditions of food riot, of rough music, and of “Guy Fawkes” carnival came together, with the women and the disguised “bonfire boys” playing the leading roles: “Popular Festivity and Consumer Protest: Food Price Disturbances in the Southwest and Oxfordshire in 1867”, *Albion*, 14, 3-4 (1982). Although women were often the most active in these events, few of the women were arrested or brought to trial. See Storch, p. 233, note 41.

³Dorothy Thompson, “Women and Nineteenth-Century Radical Politics: a Lost Dimension”, in Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley (eds.), *The Rights and Wrongs of Women* (Harmondsworth, 1976), pp. 112-138.

was certainly around in the 1830s,¹ and it was used by Bronterre O’Brien, the Chartist, in 1837 in a polemic against political economists:

True political economy is like true domestic economy; it does not consist solely in slaving and saving; there is a moral economy as well as political. . . These quacks would make wreck of the affections, in exchange for incessant production and accumulation. . . It is, indeed, the MORAL ECONOMY that they always keep out of sight. When they talk about the tendency of large masses of capital, and the division of labour, to increase production and cheapen commodities, they do not tell us of the inferior human being which a single and fixed occupation must necessarily produce.²

This directly anti-capitalist usage is close to that which I introduce into *The Making of the English Working Class*, when I referred to food riots as being “legitimized by the assumptions of an older moral economy, which taught the immorality of. . . profiteering upon the necessities of the people”. And I went on to describe the food riots of 1795 as “a last desperate effort” to re-impose the “old paternalist moral economy” as against the economy of the free market.³

I subsequently defined more carefully the term, the practices associated with it, and the contradictory components of paternalist control and crowd rebellion. The reason for this retrospective enquiry is that the theory of a moral economy has now taken off in more than one direction and in several fields of specialist study, and my essay is sometimes cited as authority. But while the term is available for every development which can be justified, my own usage has in general been confined to confrontations in the marketplace over access (or entitlement) to “necessities” — essential food. It is not only that there is an identifiable

¹Thus Robert Southey was claiming to espouse “MORAL versus political economy”, see David Eastwood, “Robert Southey and the Intellectual Origins of Romantic Conservatism”, *Eng. Hist. Rev.*, civ (1989), p. 323. The “moral economy of the factory system” was employed in a very different sense by Dr Andrew Ure in *The Philosophy of Manufactures* (1835).

²*Bronterre’s National Reformer*, 21 Jan. 1837. I am indebted to Dorothy Thompson for this reference.

³(Penguin, 1968), pp. 67-73.

bundle of beliefs, usages and forms associated with the marketing of food in time of dearth, which it is convenient to bind together in a common term, but the deep emotions stirred by dearth, the claims which the crowd made upon the authorities in such crises, and the outrage provoked by profiteering in life-threatening emergencies, imparted a particular "moral" charge to protest. All of this, taken together, is what I understand by moral economy.¹

If the term is to be extended to other contexts, then it must be redefined or there will be some loss of focus. Adrian Randall has so redefined it, in applying it to "The Industrial Moral Economy of the Gloucestershire Weavers" in the eighteenth century.² The same weaving communities that were involved in food riots (1766) were involved in industrial actions (1756); these were informed by the same values, showed the same community solidarities and sanctions (such as rough music against those who broke the norms of the trade), a similar appeal to custom and to Tudor and Stuart statute law (when this protected their own interests), and a similar insistence that, where the community's economic well-being was concerned, market forces and the profits of individuals should be subdued to custom. Moreover, Randall

¹Similar "moral economy" themes have been examined in different national histories — notably (France) Louise Tilly, "The Food Riot as a Form of Political Conflict in France", *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, i (1971), pp. 23-57, and Cynthia A. Bouton, "L' 'économie morale' et la Guerre des farines de 1775", and also the editors' "Introduction" in Florence Gauthier and Guy-Robert Ikné (eds.), *La Guerre du Blé au XVIII^e Siècle* (Paris, 1988); Laura Rodriguez, "The Spanish Riots of 1766", *Past and Present*, 59 (1973); Barbara Clark Smith, "Food Rioters in the American Revolution", in Alfred F. Young, (ed.), *Beyond the American Revolution* (Urbana, forthcoming); John Rogers, "The 1866 Grain Riots in Sri Lanka", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, xxix, 3 (1987).

²A. J. Randall in John Rule (ed.), *British Trade Unionism, 1750-1850* (1988), pp. 29-51. See also Charlesworth and Randall, "Morals, Markets and the English Crowd", pp. 206-9. Professor Charles Tilly, in a private communication, has suggested a further definition: "The term 'moral economy' makes sense when claimants to a commodity can invoke non-monetary rights to that commodity, and third parties will act to support these claims — when, for example, community membership supersedes price as a basis of entitlement. To the extent that moral economy comes merely to mean tradition, custom, or exchange outside the established market, it loses its conceptual force."

shows that the industrial crowd also would seek to press the gentry into the role of conciliators and arbitrators, so that "the moral economy was the obverse of the paternalist model".

I am more than half persuaded by this argument. In those West of England clothing towns there was a dense texture of trade rituals and customary usages, endorsed by community sanctions, which may be seen as the stubborn plebeian underside to mercantilist industry. Of course these workers were habituated to an economy with markets, but markets conducted within customary norms; in times of conflict they affirmed the priorities of "the Trade", or they elevated the defence of the interests of the working community above those of the profits of the few, and if the term "moral economy" helps us to identify these norms and practices, then let it be used. It certainly helps us to see the strongly defensive, and, in that sense, conservative nature of this plebeian culture.

But where are we to draw the line? Pirates had strongly-transmitted usages and customs: did they have a moral economy.¹ Keith Snell suggests that the poor's right to a settlement "formed a consistent part of those 'moral economy' values" which I have analysed. And he extends the list of candidates for inclusion in this moral economy to the poor laws generally, to yearly hirings and "fair wages", and even to "popular consumption, fashion [and] leisure activities". Then he turns around and gives me a dressing-down for "the amorphous character" of my moral economy.²

I admire Dr Snell's work, but on this occasion I am perplexed, because I can see little evidence that he knows much about the tensions around the nexus of food in time of dearth. What is "amorphous" is his own extension of the term's use, and this stems from the error of supposing that what are at issue are "moral economy values". But if values, on their own, make a moral *economy* then we will be turning up moral economies everywhere. My own notion of the moral

¹Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* (Cambridge, 1987), ch. 6.

²K. D. M. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 99-199, 103.

economy of the crowd in the food market includes ideal models or ideology (just as political economy does), which assigns economic roles and which endorses customary practices (an alternative "economics"), in a particular balance of class or social forces. It is by taking "values" or "moral attitudes" out of the context of a particular historical formation that Snell gets his amorphous results.

However, I have no right to patent the term. Some historians prefer a more descriptive and looser use. No other term seems to offer itself to describe the way in which, in peasant and in early industrial communities, many "economic" relations are regulated according to non-monetary norms. These exist as a tissue of customs and usages until they are threatened by monetary rationalisations and are made self-conscious as a "moral economy". In this sense, the moral economy is summoned into being in resistance to the economy of the "free market".¹ As Charlesworth and Randall have argued, "The basis of the moral economy was that very sense of community which a common experience of capitalist industry generated".² The rationalisations or "modernisations" of the capitalist market offended against community norms and continually called into being a "moral" antagonist.

This is an extension which is further generalised by William Reddy in *The Rise of Market Culture*, for whom the moral economy is "a set of values and moral standards that were violated by technical and commercial change":

Defence of such moral standards need not have been motivated by memory of the past. The inadequacy of market language was constantly being brought to the laborer's attention by the very conditions of work.

And Reddy concludes that "something like a moral economy is bound to surface anywhere that industrial capitalism

¹The great British miners' strike of 1984 was a late example of such a confrontation, although "free market" forces appeared in the guise of every resource of the State.

²Charlesworth and Randall, "Morals, Markets and the English Crowd", p. 213.

spreads".¹ This has the advantage of discarding the notion that "moral economy" must always be traditional, "backward-looking", etc.; on the contrary, it is continuously regenerating itself as anti-capitalist critique, as a resistance movement.² We are close to the language of Bronterre O'Brien. But what this gains in breadth it loses in focus, and in inexpert hands may bleed off the edge into uncontextual moralistic rhetoric.³

There is less danger of this in the alert theoretical discussions in the field of peasant studies, where a "moral economy theory" is now at the centre of controversy. This is thanks to James C. Scott whose *The Moral Economy of the Peasant* (1976) generalised an argument derived from studies in Lower Burma and Vietnam. The term is drawn from my own essay but it is now brought to bear upon "peasant conceptions of social justice, of rights and obligations, of reciprocity". But what distinguishes Scott's use is that it goes much further than descriptive accounts of "values" or "moral attitudes". Since for the peasantry, subsistence depends upon access to land, customs of land use and of entitlement to its produce are now at the centre of analysis rather than the marketing of food. And custom is seen (against a background of memories of famine) as perpetuating subsistence imperatives, and usages which insure the community against risk. These imperatives are also expressed in protective landlord-tenant (or patron-client) relations, and in resistances to technical innovations and to market rationalisations, where these might entail risks in the event of crisis. Scott analyses village redistributive institutions and religious charitable obligations, and shows that "there is good reason for viewing both the norm of reciprocity and the

¹William Reddy, *The Rise of Market Culture* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984), pp. 331-4.

²Carl Gersuny and Gladys Kaufman, "Seniority and the Moral Economy of U.S. Automobile Workers, 1934-46", *Journal of Social History*, xviii (1985), extend the notion into non-"economic" trade union defences.

³A danger which Reddy himself does not wholly avoid in his sequel, *Money and Liberty in Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1987), in which "asymmetrical monetary exchange" is made the key to all modern history, wherein "honour" and "money" enact an unequal contest.

right to subsistence as genuine moral components of the 'little tradition' . . ." — that is, in peasant culture universally. The threat to these institutions and norms associated with European expansion and with market rationalisations has often provoked the peasantry to participation in revolutionary movements.¹

There is some likeness here to the moral economy of the eighteenth-century English crowd, although Scott does not elaborate the comparison and he is in fact more interested in patron-client relations in the village rather than in those confrontations or negotiations which mark the European tradition of food riot.² Predictably his theories have been vigorously contested by protagonists of "market forces", and Samuel L. Popkin delivered a polemic against what were presented as "the moral economists" in *The Rational Peasant* (1979). This offered the characteristic peasant as a rational actor, shrewdly adjusting to the market economy in a satisfactorily self-interested and normless manner. So that the old debate between moral and political economists seemed likely to re-enact itself over the paddy fields of South-East Asia — a debate into which it would be foolish for me to enter, although my sympathies are certainly with James Scott.

However, Professor Scott has moved the debate forwards (and sideways) in his *Weapons of the Weak*, and onto territory where comparisons may be explored with advantage. This territory is not only that of the tenacious forms of resistance to power of the weak and of the poor: "in ridicule, in truculence, in irony, in petty acts of non-compliance, in dissimulation. . . in the disbelief in elite homilies, in the steady and grinding efforts to hold one's own

¹James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven, 1976). See also James M. Polachek, "The Moral Economy of the Kiangsi Soviet", *Journal of Asian Studies*, xlii, 4 (1983), p. 825.

²For constructive criticism, see David Hunt, "From the Millennium to the Everyday: James Scott's Search for the Essence of Peasant Politics", *Radical Hist. Rev.*, 42 (1988), pp. 155-72; Michael Adas, "'Moral Economy' or 'Contest State'?", *Journal of Social History*, xiii, 4 (1980).

against overwhelming odds".¹ It is also, and at the same time, into the limits which the weak can impose upon power. As Barrington Moore has argued in *Injustice*:

In any stratified society. . . there is a set of limits on what both rulers and subjects, dominant and subordinate groups can do. There is also a set of mutual obligations that bind the two together. Such limits and obligations are not set down in formal written constitutions or contracts. . .

There is (rather) "an un verbalized set of mutual understandings", and "what takes place is a continual probing on the part of rulers and subjects to find out what they can get away with, to test and *discover* the limits of obedience and disobedience". This takes us, by way of the concept of social reciprocity, or, as Moore prefers, mutual obligation ("a term that does *not* imply equality of burdens or obligations"),² back to the "moral economy", in the sense of the equilibrium or "field of force" which I examined in Chapter I and in the bargaining between unequal social forces in which the weaker still has acknowledged claims upon the greater. Of those who have recently developed these ideas I find a particular sympathy with Michael Watts, whose *Silent Violence* examines food and famine among the Hausa in northern Nigeria. He sees the norms and practices of an imperative collective subsistence ethic as permeating the peasant universe, but he sees this without sentimentality:

The moral economy was not especially moral and the Caliphate was certainly no Rousseauian universe of peasant welfare and benevolent patrons. Rather, the moral economy was necessary to the survival of ruler and ruled, and the price was paid by prevailing power blocs for the maintenance and reproduction of the social relations of production replete with its exploitative relations and class struggles.

¹James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, 1985), p. 350. See also the editors' contributions in Andrew Turton and Shigeharu Tanabe (eds.), *History and Peasant Consciousness in South East Asia* (Osaka, 1984), and the special issue of the *Journals of Peasant Studies*, xiii, 2 (1986).

²Barrington Moore Jr, *Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt* (1978), pp. 18, 506.

"There is no need to saddle the moral economy with the legacy of Durkheim, Rousseau, and Ruskin."¹

Much of the very interesting discussion which is now extending under the rubric of "moral economy" from African and Asian to Latin American² or to Irish studies has little to do with my (1971) usage but is concerned with the social dialectic of unequal mutuality (need and obligation) which lies at the centre of most societies. The term "moral economy" has won acceptance because it is less cumbersome than other terms (such as "dialectical asymmetrical reciprocity") which we might otherwise be clobbered with. When an Irish historian writes of "moral economy", he is writing of eighteenth-century paternalism, deference, and non-economic (i.e. unprofitable) "easygoing farming practices" such as low rents and tolerance of arrears.³ A scholar (Paul Greenough) writing on the Bengal famine of 1943-44 has an even more extended definition:

By 'moral economy' I mean the cluster of relations of exchange between social groups, and between persons, in which the welfare and the merit of both parties to the exchange takes precedence over other considerations such as the profit of the one or the other.⁴

These capacious definitions will certainly allow in most things we might wish to introduce, and if the term will encourage historians to discover and write about all those areas of human exchange to which orthodox economics was once blind, then this is a gain.

If we employ the terminology of class, then "moral economy" in this definition may be concerned with the way in which class relations are negotiated. It shows how

¹Michael Watts, *Silent Violence: Food, Famine and Peasantry in Northern Nigeria* (Berkeley, 1983), pp. 106, 146.

²Leslie Anderson, "From Quiescence to Rebellion: Peasant Political Activity in Costa Rica and Pre-Revolutionary Nicaragua" (Univ. of Michigan Ph.D. thesis, 1987; Erick D. Langer, "Labor Strikes and Reciprocity on Chuquisaca Haciendas", *Hispanic American History Review*, lxx, 2, 1985.

³Thomas Bartlett, "An End to Moral Economy: The Irish Militia Disturbances of 1793", in C. H. E. Philpin (ed.), *Nationalism and Popular Protest in Ireland* (Cambridge, 1987).

⁴Paul R. Greenough, "Indian Famines and Peasant Victims: The Case of Bengal in 1943-44", *Modern Asian Studies*, xiv, 2 (1980), p. 207.

hegemony is not just imposed (or contested) but is articulated in the everyday intercourse of a community, and can be sustained only by concession and patronage (in good times), by at least the gestures of protection in bad.¹ Of the two parts of the term, the "economy" can probably now look after itself, since it will be defined in each scholar's practice. It is the "moral" part which may now require more attention. One benefit that has accrued from the term's transportation into peasant studies is that it can be viewed in operation within cultures whose moral premises are not identical with those of a Judeo-Christian inheritance.²

No-one has made this more explicit than has Professor Greenough in his study of Bengal famine, and he has done this on the directly comparative ground of the crisis of subsistence. Greenough presents a conspectus of the Bengali peasants' value-system,³ and he derives this, not (as does Scott) from remembered scarcity and from risk-avoiding strategies, but, on the contrary, from a Bengal tradition of abundance. At the centre of this value-system is *Laksmi*, both a conception of order and abundance and a benevolent goddess of prosperity. Prosperity flows down from above, from *Laksmi*, or from "kings", patrons or parents. In its simplest form there are two situations only: the givers and the receivers of rice, and in time of crisis the peasant's reflex is to seek refuge in the patron-client relationship, to search for new patrons, or to wait in patience for *Laksmi's* gifts to be restored. Greenough also finds "an unyielding Bengali antipathy to individual assertion":

Temple art, learned texts, and folk apothegms reiterate that whatever success one has comes only through a superior's benevolence. . . There is no widely accepted creed of commercial accumulation.⁴

¹See Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, ch. 8 — an excellent discussion of "hegemony" in this everyday sense.

²See also Charles F. Keyes, "Economic Action and Buddhist Morality in a Thai Village", *Journal of Asian Studies*, xlii, 4 (1983).

³Paul R. Greenough, *Prosperity and Misery in Modern Bengal* (Oxford, 1982), esp. ch. 1. Greenough derives his account from Hindu cosmology and is silent as to any differences between Hindu and Moslem villagers.

⁴Paul R. Greenough, "Indulgence and Abundance as Asian Peasant Values: a Bengali Case in Point", *Journal of Asian Studies*, xlii, 4 (1983), p. 842.

This brief summary will serve if it leaves us with the expectation that “giving” and beseeching “protection” are critical to the peasantry’s discourse of crisis, rather than “duties” or “rights”. Greenough finds in this an explanation for the Bengali response to famine. In the appalling conditions of 1943-44 attacks on granaries or shops were rare. “Food of all sorts lay before their eyes”, while people were starving on the streets of Calcutta, “but no one attempted to seize it by force”. The attitude of the people was one of “complete resignation”, and “they attribute their misery to fate or *karma* alone. . .”. An English medical officer contrasted this with the Punjab or the United Provinces where “you would have had terrific riots”, and:

The husbands and brothers would have had those food shops opened, but in Bengal they died in front of bulging food shops.

Q. Bulging with grain?

A. Yes, they died in the streets in front of shops bulging with grain.

Q. Because they could not buy?

A. Yes, and it was due to the passive, fatalistic attitude of those people that there were no riots. . .¹

A leading Bengali Communist wrote with admiration of these villagers, “saturated with the love of peace and honesty”, turning away from the path of looting, and with “unbounded fortitude. . . standing in the queue of death”.² And, regarding this evidence, Greenough concludes that this behaviour represented “the continued acceptance in a crisis of the very values which hitherto had sustained the victims”:

Abandoned victims could do no more than to dramatize their helplessness in the hope of re-stimulating a flow of benevolence. Mendicancy, cries and wails, imploring gestures, the exhibition of dead or dying children — all were part of the destitutes’ attempts to evoke charity and to transfer responsibility for their nurture to new ‘destined providers’.³

Professor Greenough’s intervention is most welcome. But it does present certain difficulties. One set of difficulties arises from his interpretation of complex evidence. His reconstruction of the value-system of Bengali peasants bears

¹ Greenough, *Prosperity and Misery*, pp. 266-7.

² *Ibid.*, p. 268.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 271.

the mark of a certain school of holistic anthropology and allows no space for variety and contradiction. This is most evident in his discussion of the demoralisation induced by prolonged dearth, the break-up of families, and the abandonment of wives and children by the father. Greenough concludes that “familial disintegration did not occur randomly but seems to have been a result of the intentional exclusion of less-valued family members from domestic subsistence”. Such exclusion was “desperate but not reprehensible” and was “explicable in terms of Bengali moral conceptions”. The most favoured member of the family (in this account) is the male family head, who might — even if he should be the only survivor — reconstitute the familial lineage. So deeply are these patriarchal values internalised that the abandoned passively assent to their own abandonment.¹

This may be true, or may be part of the truth.² But Greenough hangs his interpretive apparatus upon slender evidence — a few accounts of the “banishment” of wives or desertion of families — and alternative interpretations are not tested.³ And he affirms his conclusions in increasingly confident form, as if they were incontestable findings. What were “desperate” measures on one page becomes, fifty pages

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 215-25 and “Indian Famines and Peasant Victims”, pp. 225-33.

² Megan Vaughan in “Famine Analysis and Family Relations: 1949 in Nyasaland”, *Past and Present*, 108 (1985), has similar disturbing evidence of the aged, the young and the disabled being abandoned, and of husbands abandoning their families: and M. Vaughan, *The Story of an African Famine. Gender and Famine in Twentieth-Century Malawi* (1987).

³ Some men may have left their families in the hope of finding work (and sending remittances) or in the expectation that in their absence the wife’s kin or village charities would support the family. Wives might have been encouraged to go begging as the ultimate recourse against starvation. Similarly, the sale of children may have been an ultimate strategy to secure their survival. (Greenough assumes that “the dominant motive” for selling children was to secure cash for the parents’ food, or else to “relieve themselves of the intolerable clamoring of their children for food”! *Prosperity and Misery*, p. 221.) Greenough’s account of age-differential mortality during famine (*ibid.*, ch. 6) makes no attempt to relate this to the findings of historical demography as to trends commonly encountered during subsistence crisis. Indeed his treatment of historical and demographic studies is cavalier: see David Arnold, *Famine*, pp. 89-90.

later, the sweeping assertion that "authority figures in peasant households abandoned numerous dependents deemed inessential for the reconstitution of family and society in the post-crisis period".¹ What is found in extremity is now offered as if it were the norm: "husbands and heads of families appropriated domestic assets and abandoned their spouses, and parents sold children for cash".²

We must leave these questions to specialists in Bengali culture. But they strongly influence Greenough's comparative findings as to riot:

This pattern of victimization has nothing in common with European traditions of rage and revolt. In Europe famine violence was turned 'outward' and 'upward' against offending landlords, merchants, and officials; in Bengal the tradition was to turn violence 'inward' and 'downward' against clients and dependents. This was the cold violence of abandonment, of ceasing to nourish, rather than the hot violence of bloodshed and tumult.³

The comparison would be more convincing if Greenough had not misread the European evidence in such a way as to accentuate the violence of that tradition. He prefers an excitable letter from the Abbé Raynal, in which European food rioters in the 1780s are shown as pursuing each other with daggers in their hands, "massacring each other", "tearing and devouring their own limbs", etc., to the less sensational conclusions of historians of riot.⁴ This rigging of the evidence, in which submissive sufferers are contrasted with "enraged looters", devalues his comparative study.

There remains, however, the significant interrogation of "moral" premises, in relation to subsistence, in differing cultures. In criticising *The Moral Economy of the Peasant*, Greenough argues that:

Scott's model of the moral economy. . . is essentially legal in nature. Scott says that peasants everywhere assert a *right* to subsistence, that

¹ *Prosperity and Misery*, pp. 215 and 264. Cf. Greenough, "Indulgence and Abundance", pp. 832-3: heads of households "coolly abandon" their dependents; in "an extreme realization of core patriarchal values. . . it becomes acceptable to channel threats of extinction toward less essential actors like clients, women and children".

² "Indulgence and Abundance", p. 847.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 847; *Prosperity and Misery*, pp. 270-1.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

this assertion is felt to be *just*, and that it arises from a *norm* of reciprocity; further, it is the *duty* of elites to subsidize their peasants, and any failure to do so entails a loss of their *legitimacy*. This Latinate terminology is derived from study of the numerous food riots that erupted in Western Europe in the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries; its appropriateness in explaining Bengali conditions is doubtful. Bengalis in crisis have spoken of their needs for "boons" (*bar*), "help" (*sahajya*), and "gifts" (*dan*), but rarely of their "rights"; of "indulgence" rather than "reciprocity"; of kingly *dharma*. . . but rarely of an enforceable class "duty".

This is not just "a narrow matter of terminology, but of the cognitive structures and customary paths for action that are conjured by the use of such terms".¹

This is partly an academic language-game which, unfortunately, is rigged once more in order to score points off Scott. For Greenough has confused the language (and cognitive structures) of the historical subjects and of the academic interpreter. Neither English food rioters nor Burmese peasants acted with a vocabulary of "norms", "reciprocity" or "legitimacy" on their lips, and, equally, Professor Greenough's interpretive terminology ("cosmology", "hierarchical", "anthropomorphized") can be as Latinate (or Hellenic), as Scott's and, perhaps, even less likely to be found on the lips of a Bengal peasant.

But let us forgive him his polemical zeal. For he has reminded us of two important things. The first is that even extreme hunger, and even the simplest act of preparing food, may have differential cultural expression: "to cultivate, cook, share, and eat rice in Bengal is to perform a series of rituals. . . To dissect out an area of economic activity and label it 'subsistence' is to sever the social, sacral and even cosmic links" that food preparation and commensality may represent. For these reasons Greenough suspects that "the moral economy of rice in much of Asia is more truly moral, more pregnant with implication, than economic and political historians have been ready to admit".² But there is no reason to confine these thoughts to Asia or to rice. Bread, which is "the staff of life", features in the Lord's Prayer, bread and salt are the gifts with which European peasants

¹ "Indulgence and Abundance", p. 846.

² *Ibid.*, p. 848.

once welcomed visitors, and the wafer of the sacrament of Eucharist was unleavened bread.

We are also reminded that we are always in danger of confusing the historical evidence with the terms of interpretation which we have ourselves introduced. Food rioters did sometimes appeal to justice (or “fair” prices) and they certainly protested against unfair practices; but the language of “duties”, “obligations”, “reciprocity” and even of “rights” is mostly our own. Rioters abused those accused of sharp practices in marketing as “rogues”, and, in the theatre of confrontation, anonymous letter-writers elaborated a rhetoric of threat — murder, arson, even revolt.¹ Yet if we were to find ways of interrogating the cognitive structure of food rioters, we might find certain essential premises, whether expressed in the simplest biblical terms of “love” and “charity”, or whether in terms of notions of what humans “owe” to each other in time of need, notions which may have little to do with any Christian instruction but which arise from the elementary exchanges of material life.

There was a plebeian “discourse” here, almost beneath the level of articulacy, appealing to solidarities so deeply assumed that they were almost nameless, and only occasionally finding expression in the (very imperfect) record which we have. Walter Stephens, indicted for riot before the Gloucestershire Special Commission in December 1766, was alleged to have declared that “what the Mob had done was right and justifiable, and that for all the Justices’ acting they would have it all on a Level before it were long”.² That certainly is not reputable political thought, and it will not be allowed to pass by King’s College, Cambridge. But Walter Stephens said this at a time when he stood in danger of being tried for his life for these opinions (which, at the present moment, is not

¹ See my essay, “The Crime of Anonymity”, in Hay, Linebaugh and Thompson, *Albion’s Fatal Tree*, esp. the “Sampler of Letters”, pp. 326-43. But even these letters are studied and “literary” productions.

² Crown brief in PRO, TS 11/1188/5956. I cannot find out what happened to Walter Stephens. His name does not appear on the Calendar of Prisoners in TS 11/995/3707. The case against him may have been dropped, or he might have been the Thomas Stephens committed for riot and diverse outrages and felonies, who appears in the Calendar with an annotation “acquitted”.

— so far as I know — the case with any Fellow of King’s) and his meanings deserve our respect.

Comparative enquiry into what is “the moral” (whether as norm or as cognitive structure) will help us to understand these meanings. It is an agenda for forward research. It would be a shame to leave future historians with nothing to do. In any case, if I did father the term “moral economy” upon current academic discourse, the term has long forgotten its paternity. I will not disown it, but it has come of age and I am no longer answerable for its actions. It will be interesting to see how it goes on.