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Abstract

The economic problems of the 1690s spurred an extraordinary surge in politicised debates and complaints about commercial, financial and other material affairs. This article begins by examining the magnitude of the shift in economic fortunes between the reigns of James II (1685-88) and William III (1689-1702), highlighting the main sources of concern: wartime disruption to trade, rising taxes, the currency crisis associated with the recoinage of 1696, and the high food prices of 1693-9. More significantly, it assesses the nature and extent of the public response. Trade, finance and fiscal impositions became increasingly pervasive topics of public conversation and printed debate, as evidenced both in anecdotal reports and in a crude but telling analysis of published titles. Moreover, national political divisions – between Williamites and Jacobites, Whigs and Tories, Court and Country, anti-French and anti-Dutch – were absolutely central to this economic discourse. Perceptions of the monarch and parliamentary leaders were directly linked to how people interpreted the hardships of this decade. This manifested itself in innumerable short tracts, broadside ballads, seditious conversations, riotous protests and many other modes of public communication. Finally, through comparisons with earlier and later periods such as the 1540s, 1590s, 1640s and the early eighteenth century, this article demonstrates that the tumult of the 1690s had a long-term impact and has been unjustly neglected in the historiography of economic crisis and political conflict.

The Politics of Economic Distress in the Aftermath of the Glorious Revolution, 1689-1702

For many people, the Revolution of 1688 that brought William III and Mary II to the throne seemed to coincide with a sharp reversal in the nation's economic fortunes. The reign of James II was a period of relative plenty and prosperity, but the 1690s were a decade in which England faced an unhappy conjunction of war, hunger, currency failure and financial dislocation.

A conversation in a shop on London Bridge on 6 June 1696 offers an initial glimpse of how people interpreted the distressing conditions of the time. A man named Robert Morgan came in to buy a handkerchief and fell to talking with Edmund Baker, the shopkeeper's apprentice. Morgan was apparently angry about the current scarcity of lawful money – he had only old clipped shillings – and also questioned the official account of a recent assassination attempt against the king. In his eyes, England was a nation in decline:

‘Was not the trading better when King James was here then now?’, asked Morgan.

‘[T]hen our Lives must have paid for it’, Baker replied.

‘[O]ur Livelyhoods & Lives goes now’, countered Morgan.

Here we have the views of both opponents and supporters of the Revolution neatly encapsulated. From the perspective of Morgan and many other dissidents, the consequences of 1688 were currency shortages, commercial ‘decay’ and the spread of economic misery. In contrast, Baker – like most loyal Williamites – saw any material hardships as the necessary price paid for securing the nation against James's bloody tyranny. Yet opponents of the revolution thought this naïve. From their standpoint, the new government not only ruined trade but also undermined Englishmen's liberties through secret schemes to stifle opposition. For Morgan, the currency crisis and the assassination scare were both part of a nefarious ‘State plott’ to oppress the ‘Livelyhoods & Lives’ of the English people.¹ Although the polarised interpretations expressed by Baker and Morgan were hardly the only opinions one might encounter on the streets at this time, they epitomise the extent to which political and economic concerns became increasingly intermixed in the aftermath of the Revolution.

The apparent conjunction of rapid political and economic change has long preoccupied historians of the period. This was, after all, an age that witnessed the ‘financial revolution’, the birth of ‘credible commitment’ and the rise of the ‘fiscal-military state’, all of which have been dated to 1688-9.² Since these terms were first coined, much subsequent research has provided a more nuanced picture that rightly emphasises long-term change rather than

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¹ L[ondon] M[etropolitan] A[rchives], CLA/047/LJ/13/1696, unfol. (information of Edmund Baker, 4 Jun 1696). A rough transcription and facsimile image are also available at *London Lives, 1690-1800* (www.londonlives.org), LMSLPS150070143-LMSLPS150070144.

² P.G.M. Dickson, *The Financial Revolution in England: a Study in the Development of Public Credit, 1688-1756* (London, 1967); D.C. North and B.R. Weingast, ‘Constitutions and Commitment: The Evolution of Institutions Governing Public Choice in Seventeenth-Century England’, *Journal of Economic History*, 49:4 (1989); J. Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688-1783* (London, 1989). For other early work that emphasised the economic importance of 1688, see C.R. Roberts, ‘The Constitutional Significance of the Financial Settlement of 1690’, *Historical Journal*, 20:1 (1977); J.O. Appleby, *Economic Thought and Ideology in Seventeenth-Century England* (Princeton, 1978), ch. 7-9, pp. 261-71.

focusing primarily on the ‘Glorious Revolution’ itself.³ Yet, the ‘genuinely revolutionary’ nature of the period has recently been reasserted.⁴ Political historians such as Tim Harris and Steve Pincus have shown that the events of 1688-9 were not the tame, bloodless ‘victory for moderation’ presented by Macaulay and Trevelyan – instead they were ‘a messy, violent affair’ that ‘effected a very fundamental transformation of the British polity’.⁵ Pincus has gone so far as to claim that England’s political economy experienced a revolutionary realignment at this time, whilst economic historians have reiterated the commercial and financial impact of the new constitutional balance that emerged in the 1690s.⁶ Some scholars have applauded the revolutionaries for laying a foundation for ‘economic growth and political freedom’ whereas others have seen them as inaugurating an era of ‘rent-seeking’ and escalated slave trading, but nearly all now seem to agree that the revolution did more than merely exchange one king for another.⁷

However, only a few historians have looked directly at the economic turmoil that erupted in the early years of the new revolutionary regime, and fewer still have examined the political implications of that turmoil. Even Pincus, who has offered a lengthy chapter on the ‘revolution in political economy’, includes only a few paragraphs on the material distress that soon followed in the wake of 1688.⁸ So, although recent historians have very effectively reasserted the importance of the Revolution, the challenges that confronted the economy in the 1690s have barely featured in their narratives. The most notable exception is the

³ H. Roseveare, *The Financial Revolution, 1660-1760* (London, 1991); M. Braddick, *The Nerves of State: Taxation and the Financing of the English State, 1558-1714* (Manchester, 1996) P. Gauci, *The Politics of Trade: The Overseas Merchant in State and Society, 1660-1720* (Oxford, 2001), esp. p. 233; P.K. O’Brien, ‘Fiscal Exceptionalism: Great Britain and its European Rivals from Civil War to Triumph at Trafalgar and Waterloo’ in D.N. Winch and P.K. O’Brien, eds., *The Political Economy of British Historical Experience, 1688-1914* (Oxford, 2002); D. Stasavage, *Public Debt and the Birth of the Democratic State: France and Great Britain, 1688-1789* (Cambridge, 2003); A. Murphy, *The Origins of English Financial Markets: Investment and Speculation before the South Sea Bubble* (Cambridge, 2009), esp. pp. 4-5, 11-19; C. Wennerlind, *Casualties of Credit: the English Financial Revolution, 1620-1720* (Cambridge, MA, 2011), ch. 3-4; D. Coffman and L. Neal, ‘Introduction’, in D. Coffman, A. Leonard and L. Neal, eds., *Questioning Credible Commitment: Perspectives on the Rise of Financial Capitalism* (Cambridge, 2013).

⁴ T. Harris, *Revolution: The Great Crisis of the British Monarchy, 1685-1720* (London, 2006), p. 15.

⁵ Harris, *Revolution*, pp. 489, 514; S. Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution* (New Haven, 2009), p. 25 (quotation of Trevelyan). For other examples, see T. Claydon, *William III and the Godly Revolution* (Cambridge, 1996), esp. pp. 232-7; W.A. Speck, ‘Some Consequences of the Glorious Revolution’ and J.G.A. Pocock, ‘Standing Army and Public Credit: The Institutions of Leviathan’, both in D. Hoak and M. Feingold, eds., *The World of William and Mary: Anglo-Dutch Perspectives on the Revolution of 1688-89* (Stanford, 1996); E. Vallance, *The Glorious Revolution, 1688: Britain’s Fight for Liberty* (London, 2006), pp. 16-20. For a recent nuanced appraisal of the ‘revolutionary’ nature of 1688-9, see L. Glassy, ‘In Search of the Mot Juste: Characterizations of the Revolution of 1688-1689’ in T. Harris and S. Taylor, eds., *The Final Crisis of the Stuart Monarchy: The Revolutions of 1688-91 in their British, Atlantic and European Contexts* (Cambridge, 2013).

⁶ Pincus, *1688*, ch. 12; B. Carruthers, *City of Capital: Politics and Markets in the English Financial Revolution* (Princeton, 1996); S. Quinn, ‘The Glorious Revolution’s Effect on English Private Finance: a Microhistory, 1680-1705’, *Journal of Economic History*, 61:1 (2001); S.R. Epstein, *Freedom and Growth: The Rise of States and Markets in Europe, 1300-1750* (London, 2000), ch. 2; J. Wells and D. Wills, ‘Revolution, Restoration, and Debt Repudiation: the Jacobite Threat to England’s Institutions and Economic Growth’, *Journal of Economic History*, 60:2 (2000); Stasavage, *Public Debt*, ch. 4-5; D. Ormrod, *The Rise of Commercial Empires: England and the Netherlands in the Age of Mercantilism, 1650-1770* (Cambridge, 2003), esp. pp. 43-59; W.A. Pettigrew, ‘Free to Enslave: Politics and the Escalation of Britain’s Transatlantic Slave Trade, 1688-1714’, *William and Mary Quarterly*, 64:1 (2007); N. Zahedieh, ‘Regulation, Rent-seeking, and the Glorious Revolution in the English Atlantic Economy’, *Economic History Review*, 63:1 (2010).

⁷ North and Weingast, ‘Constitutions’, p. 831; Zahedieh, ‘Regulation’; Pettigrew, ‘Free’.

⁸ Pincus, *1688*, pp. 449-50, 458-9. Moreover, as several reviewers have noted, Pincus’s model of a ‘revolution in political economy’ is problematic: S. Sowerby, ‘Pantomime History’, *Parliamentary History*, pp. 241-4, 253; D. Coffman, ‘Review’ (2011) <http://eh.net/book_reviews/1688-the-first-modern-revolution>.

painstaking work of D.W. Jones in reconstructing the impact of the Nine Years War. He has very carefully assessed the economic damage caused by the conflict, though he has little to say about how this related to national politics.⁹ For this, one must turn to the valuable but fragmentary insights offered by Henry Horwitz and more recent scholars of the ‘country party’ in the 1690s, all of whom include brief discussions of this issue within much broader analysis of the political history of the period.¹⁰

This article is thus an examination of the politicised responses to the difficult conditions that unsettled the economy in the years that followed the Revolution. Rather than focusing on the well-known stories of the Bank of England or the East India Company, it addresses the consequences of less-studied causes of public discontent and partisan conflict such as the wartime breakdown of maritime trade and the recurrent food scarcities of 1693-9.¹¹ It also stretches beyond the ‘high politics’ of parliamentary quarrels and partisan tracts to analyse the ‘popular politics’ of seditious complaints and grain riots.¹² By exploring how the difficult conditions of these ‘ill years’ were experienced, interpreted and politicised, this article contributes directly to the wider scholarly conversation about political volatility and economic distress. Indeed, part of the argument advanced here is that the perilous situation that confronted William’s government can be fruitfully compared to earlier and later episodes that have received much more attention. As with the ‘commotion times’ of the late 1540s, the tumultuous conditions of the 1590s, the revolutionary upheavals of the 1640s, the Wilkite unrest of the 1760s and the Jacobin agitation of 1800-1, it is clear that England in the 1690s suffered from a disorder that afflicted both her polity and her economy.¹³ Yet, whereas many previous studies have discussed the other major crises that repeatedly struck England from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, the crisis of the 1690s has been relegated to the margins of the historiography.

⁹ D.W. Jones, *War and Economy in the Age of William III and Marlborough* (Oxford, 1988), esp. pp. 20-6, 145-61, 245-7; D.W. Jones, ‘Defending the Revolution: the Economics, Logistics, and Finance of England’s War Effort, 1688-1712’ in Hoak and Feingold, eds., *World of William and Mary*. See also L. Davidson, T. Hitchcock, T. Keirn and R. Shoemaker, eds., *Stilling the Grumbling Hive: The Response to Social and Economic Problems in England, 1689-1750* (Stroud, 1992).

¹⁰ H. Horwitz, *Parliament, Policy and Politics in the Reign of William III* (Manchester, 1977), esp. pp. 116-18, 125-6, 159-68, 179-82. See also G.S. De Krey, *A Fractured Society: The Politics of London in the First Age of Party, 1688-1715* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 26, 192-4; P. Gauci, *Politics and Society in Great Yarmouth, 1660-1722* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 185-91; Claydon, *Godly Revolution*, pp. 123-5; C. Rose, *England in the 1690s: Revolution, Religion and War* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 28-37, 55, 86-7, 116-22, 126-8; M. Knights, *Representation and Misrepresentation in Later Stuart Britain: Partisanship and Political Culture* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 313-15, 362-5; M. Goldie and C. Jackson, ‘Williamite Tyranny and the Whig Jacobites’ in E. Mijers and D. Onnekink, eds., *Redefining William III: The Impact of the King-Stadholder in International Context* (Aldershot, 2007), pp. 184-5; M. Knights, ‘Regulation and Rival Interests in the 1690s’ in P. Gauci, ed., *Regulating the British Economy, 1660-1850* (Farnham, 2011), pp. 75-6.

¹¹ Political debates about the Bank of England and the East India Company have been most recently examined by Pincus, but he builds on scholarship that stretches back about four decades: Pincus, *1688*, ch. 12; W.A. Speck, ‘Conflict in Society’ in G. Holmes, ed., *Britain after the Glorious Revolution, 1689-1714* (London, 1969); D. Rubini, ‘Politics and the Battle for the Banks, 1688-1697’, *English Historical Review*, 85 (1970).

¹² It should be noted, however, that this article is focused on national politics and largely excludes the local politics of urban and parish government, which I intend to examine in a later publication.

¹³ For a few outstanding studies from a vast literature on previous and subsequent events, see A. Wood, *The 1549 Rebellions and the Making of Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2007); J.A. Sharpe, ‘Social Strain and Social Dislocation’ in J. Guy, ed., *The Reign of Elizabeth I: Court and Culture in the Last Decade* (Cambridge, 1995), esp. pp. 197-200; J. Walter, *Understanding Popular Violence in the English Revolution: the Colchester Plunderers* (Cambridge, 1999), esp. ch. 7; S. Hindle, ‘Dearth and the English revolution: the Harvest Crisis of 1647-50’, *Economic History Review*, 61:S1 (2008); N. Rogers, *Crowds, Culture, and Politics in Georgian Britain* (Oxford, 1998), ch. 3, 6; R. Wells, *Wretched Faces: Famine in Wartime England, 1793-1801* (Gloucester, 1988), esp. ch. 9, 14, 18.

The problems of William's reign are here considered from four angles. The first section very briefly assesses the magnitude of the shift in economic fortunes experienced by those who lived through the revolution and its aftermath. The second surveys the increasing pervasiveness of trade, finance and social distress as topics of public conversation and printed debate. The third section demonstrates the centrality of national political divisions in these discussions, showing how contemporaries understood and explained the hardships of the era in often explicitly partisan terms. The fourth examines how this politicisation of economic issues manifested itself in the responses of rioting crowds and of the state itself, including both the royal court and parliament. Finally, the article concludes with a brief consideration of the long-term impact of these events, for their imprint could still be seen in the contentious debates and violent confrontations of the eighteenth century.

* * * * *

For much of the population, life under William III was strikingly different from the circumstances they had previously enjoyed. Economic conditions under Charles II and James II were far from perfect, but their reigns still stand out as an era of exceptional wealth and comfort when compared to much of the rest of the early modern period. By late 1688, for example, England had enjoyed many years of peace with her European neighbours. Since the end of the Anglo-Dutch wars in 1674, no major international conflicts had curtailed trade or pushed up the level of taxation. Instead, commerce was growing steadily and labouring people saw their wages rise significantly.¹⁴ In addition, no financial crisis had shaken the City since the Stop of the Exchequer in 1672, thanks partly to the crown gaining an increasingly secure financial position through ever-rising customs revenues.¹⁵ Perhaps most importantly of all, several decades of relatively good harvests had allowed people to become accustomed to cheap provisions. W.G. Hoskins characterised the 1680s as a time of 'marvellous bounty' and calculated that there was not a single 'deficient harvest' over the whole decade.¹⁶ In fact, the late 1680s witnessed some of the most plentiful years on record which gave wage-earners the opportunity to devote more of their income to 'petty luxuries'.¹⁷ As a result, according to the

¹⁴ W.E. Minchinton, ed., *The Growth of British Overseas Trade in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (London, 1969), pp. 11-12, 93; E.A. Wrigley and R. Schofield, *The Population History of England, 1541-1871: a Reconstruction* (London, 1981), p. 643; G. Clark, 'Farm Wages and Living Standards in the Industrial Revolution: England, 1670-1869', *Economic History Review*, 54:3 (2001), p. 502; G. Clark, 'The Condition of the Working Class in England, 1209-2004', *Journal of Political Economy*, 113:6 (2005), p. 1324; N. Zahedieh, *The Capital and the Colonies: London and the Atlantic Economy 1660-1700* (Cambridge, 2010), ch. 4-6; Hindle, 'The Growth of Social Stability in Restoration England', *The European Legacy*, 5:4 (2000), pp. 564-6; K. Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities: Economic Lives in Early Modern Britain* (London, 2002), pp. 228-31, 316-17; P. Slack, 'Material Progress and the Challenge of Affluence in Seventeenth-Century England', *Economic History Review*, 62:3 (2009), pp. 577-8; Pincus, *1688*, ch. 3. See also the sources cited in n. 16 below.

¹⁵ *Parliamentary Papers 1868-69* (366), XXXV, p. 444.

¹⁶ W.G. Hoskins, 'Harvest Fluctuations and English Economic History, 1620-1759', *Agricultural History Review*, pp. 17, 22; P.J. Bowden, 'Appendix II: Statistics' in J. Thirsk, ed., *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, vol. 5: 1640-1750* (Cambridge, 1985), part 2, pp. 829, 851. For the effect on 'real wages', see Wrigley and Schofield, *Population History*, p. 643; Clark, 'Farm wages', p. 502; Clark, 'Condition', p. 1324.

¹⁷ Precisely dating the emergence of 'a consumer society' is impossible, but for general patterns see J. Thirsk, *Economic Policy and Projects: the Development of a Consumer Society in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1978); L. Weatherill, *Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture in Britain, 1660-1760* (London, 1988); M. Overton et al., *Production and Consumption in English Households, 1600-1750* (London, 2004); P. Slack, 'The Politics of Consumption and England's Happiness in the Later Seventeenth Century', *English Historical Review*,

Tory economic thinker Charles Davenant, under James II there was ‘no country in the world where the inferior rank of men were . . . more at their ease’.¹⁸

The problems were often thought to have begun on 17 May 1689, when William III and Mary II declared war on France merely a month after they had been crowned and six months after William had landed with his army at Torbay. The conflict with Europe’s greatest military power brought swarms of hostile warships and privateers that heavily damaged English maritime trade. Reports from the coasts related that ‘not a Ship can Stir’ and the losses ‘put a great Stop to Trade’.¹⁹ Indeed, the impact of war can be roughly measured: shipping figures indicate a 50 or 60 per cent drop in foreign trade by the early 1690s and coastwise traffic suffered too.²⁰ At the same time, the Williamite state had to extract ever more revenue to pay for its military commitments, leading to a doubling of the tax burden through new or higher duties on imports, exports, land, salt, beer, malt, stamps, births, burials, marriages and much else besides.²¹ Alongside depressed trade and increased fiscal pressure, the war also provoked a major currency crisis. The physical state of English coinage had long been poor, but from 1689 it began to be degraded at an even more alarming rate through illicit ‘clipping’ and ‘coining’ spurred primarily by the demand for bullion for remittances to fund the war effort on the continent. This dangerous situation led the government to try a radical remedy – it attempted to re-mint the nation’s entire stock of silver coins over the course of merely a few months.²² However, the government failed spectacularly to produce enough new coin to replace the old before the statutory deadline of 4 May 1696. Vast sums of money suddenly became unusable and within days there was a run on the recently founded Bank of England. The lack of useable cash and the unreliability of paper notes created a liquidity crisis. Buying and selling became unmanageable, payment of wages became impossible, and much domestic commerce essentially seized up.²³

122:497 (2007); C. Muldrew, *Food, Energy and the Creation of Industriousness: Work and Material Culture in Agrarian England, 1550-1780* (Cambridge, 2011), esp. p. 184 (Table 4.7).

¹⁸ Quoted in Slack, ‘Material Progress’, p. 580.

¹⁹ Bodl[eian Library], Carte MS. 76, fo. 389; M. Hunter and A. Gregory, eds., *An Astrological Diary of the Seventeenth Century: Samuel Jeake of Rye, 1652-1699* (Oxford, 1988), p. 222. Dozens of additional examples could be cited such as the frequent mentions of losses in N. Luttrell, *A Brief Historical Relation of State Affairs from September 1678 to April 1714* (Oxford, 6 vols., 1857), III. 117, 120, 122, 125, 145, 147, 157, and passim.

²⁰ For national figures, see *Parliamentary Papers 1868-69* (366), XXXV, pp. 4-66, 444-5; R. Davis, *The Rise of the English Shipping Industry in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (London, 1962), p. 26; Jones, *War*, pp. 127-31, 145-61; Minchinton, ed., *Growth*, pp. 12-15, 93. For local figures, see King’s Lynn Borough Archives, KL/C 44/55 (town dues, 1682-99); J.H. Andrews, ‘Geographical Aspects of the Maritime Trade of Kent and Sussex, 1650-1750’ (London PhD thesis, 1954), pp. 170 (Table 18), 192 (Table 23). The contemporary calculations of Gregory King similarly suggest declines in the number of seamen employed in trade, the value of the coal trade, and the total ‘income of the nation’: G. King, ‘LLC Burns Journal’ in P. Laslett, ed., *The Earliest Classics: John Graunt and Gregory King* (Farnborough, 1973), pp. 209, 225-7.

²¹ P.K. O’Brien, ‘The Political Economy of British taxation, 1660-1815’, *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 41 (1988), p. 3; Brewer, *Sinews*, ch. 4.

²² Several historians have discussed the intellectual debates around the re-coinage whereas the direct consequences have been less thoroughly examined, though see Jones, *War*, pp. 20-6, 245-7; Horwitz, *Parliament*, pp. 179-81; Rose, *1690s*, pp. 137-42; Wennerlind, *Casualties*, pp. 152-4; M. Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 191-7.

²³ Bodl., Carte MS. 130, fo. 263; T[he] N[at]ional A[rchives], SP 32/6/31, SP 32/6/91, SP 44/100, p. 250, SP 44/274, pp. 155, 159-61, 166, 169, 188; B[ritish] L[ibrary], Add. MS 6668, fos. 210-11, Add. MS 72535, fo. 209; N[orfolk] R[ecord] O[ffice], NCR Case 16a/26, fo. 20; S[omerset] A[rchives] and L[ocal] S[tudies], DD\SF/7/1/31/92, /96-97, /100, DD\SF/7/1/74, n.p. (4 Nov 1696, 25 Nov 1696); A. Pryme, *The Diary of Abraham de la Pryme, the Yorkshire Antiquary*, Charles Jackson, ed. (Durham, 1870) pp. 93, 113, 116; J. Evelyn, *The Diary of John Evelyn*, E.S. de Beer, ed. (Oxford, 2000), V, pp. 242, 245-6; *H[istorical] M[anuscripts] C[ommission]: [Report on the Manuscripts of the Marquis of] Downshire* (London, 4 vols., 1924-1940), I, pt. ii. 705; Rose, *1690s*, pp. 141-2; Knights, ‘Regulation’, p. 75; S. Hindle, ‘Work, Reward and

Increasing commercial and monetary troubles were accompanied by a brutal spike in the price of necessities, especially food and fuel. All across the kingdom, the price of wheat began to climb in the very year that William and Mary took the throne and it continued to mount until it reached levels not seen in decades, where it stayed through most of the 1690s.²⁴ The figures from specific towns show this pattern unmistakably. In Cambridge's marketplace, for example, wheat was cheap in the late 1680s, with a low of only 18s per quarter in November 1688, the very month of William's 'providential' arrival in England. Yet it rose thereafter so that by February 1694 it had climbed to 60s, well over three times the rate at the Revolution, and the price reached a still higher peak of 64s in July 1698.²⁵ For less affluent men and women, this sharp inflation was more than noteworthy – it was potentially deadly. In the harsh winter of 1693-4, for instance, 'all things [were] so deare and scarce for the belly' at Oxford 'that 30 honest dwellers in S. Marie's parish crave almes and weekly sustenance'. The poor, it was said, 'eat turnips instead of bread'.²⁶

The impact of these problems was, of course, not spread evenly. Those who suffered most were the 'poorer sort' who spent a larger share of their income on food, especially town-dwellers and rural textile workers.²⁷ Likewise, the many traders and manufacturers whose income came from overseas trade were disproportionately afflicted, whereas those involved in supplying the military tended to advance their fortunes. There were also regional contrasts. London and the south east saw the largest increases in wheat price in 1693-94, whereas Exeter, Cambridge, Lincoln and York experienced the peaks in 1696-99 and northern England was also more affected by the peak in the cost of oats and rye in 1698-99.²⁸ Finally, it must also be acknowledged that the problems associated with the recoinage were concentrated in the middle of the decade and seem to have been most severe in western and northern counties. But despite this variation, it is clear that people in every corner of the country felt the pinch of hardship for much of William III's reign.

The high prices and commercial turmoil had a potentially disastrous effect on household budgets and no one who lived through these years could have missed the contrast with previous decades. Indeed, the combined human impact of these repeated economic shocks can be heard clearly in the words of Richard Newnam, a tradesman from the cloth-making

Labour Discipline in Late Seventeenth-Century England' in S. Hindle, A. Shepard and J. Walter, eds., *Remaking English Society: Social Relations and Social Change in Early Modern England* (Woodbridge, 2013), pp. 267-8.

²⁴ Bowden, 'Appendix II: Statistics', pp. 829-30, 851. Hoskins has labelled this decade 'the worst' since the 1630s and characterised it as a return 'to the bad old days': Hoskins, 'Harvest Fluctuations', pp. 18, 22. See also the useful comparative discussion in A.B. Appleby, 'Grain Prices and Subsistence Crises in England and France, 1590-1740', *Journal of Economic History*, 39 (1979). For higher coal prices from 1689, see W.H. Beveridge, *Prices and Wages in England from the Twelfth to the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1939), pp. 434, 577 (I am grateful to William Cavert for this reference).

²⁵ Cambridge University Archives, T.VII.2. For other locales showing similar patterns, see the figures from Coventry, York, Eton, Winchester, Exeter, Lincoln and London: Coventry History Centre, BA/H/C/17/2-3; Y[ork] C[ity] A[rchives], E113; B.R. Mitchell, *British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 754; F. Hill, *Tudor and Stuart Lincoln* (Cambridge, 1956), pp. 225-6; J. Boulton, 'Food Prices and the Standard of Living in London in the "Century of Revolution", 1580-1700', *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 53:3 (2000), pp. 482-3.

²⁶ A. Wood, *The Life and Times of Anthony Wood, Antiquary, of Oxford, 1632-95*, A. Clark, ed. (Oxford, 1881-1900), p. 437. For further discussion of 'famine food' in early modern England, see J. Walter, *Crowds and Popular Politics in Early Modern England* (Manchester, 2007), pp. 136-7.

²⁷ Note that townspeople and rural industrial workers, the groups most vulnerable to a rise in prices, were a larger proportion of the population in the 1690s than during earlier dearths: Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities*, pp. 241, 316, 332.

²⁸ See n. 25 above.

town of Tiverton in Devon, who published an obscure pamphlet entitled *The Complaint of English Subjects* in 1699.²⁹ He recounted in great detail how ‘necessary Provisions were then extream Dear’ at the very moment when ‘the scarcity of Money’ was at its worst:

O! were not those Times meer Starving Time? yes, they were, and I believe that then at that time, many Hundreds, if not Thousand, throughout England, gradually were then nearly Starved to Death; for with my own Eyes did I then see, in our said Town of Tiverton in Devonshire, many Poor, Weak, Languishing Creatures, then walking up and down the Street, and many of them in a short time after that Dyed, whose Distempers originally, (I believe) first proceeded from no other Causes than from the want of Necessary Food.³⁰

Newman’s vision of the 1690s as ‘Starving Times’ ‘throughout England’ was mistaken: there was no national or even regional ‘subsistence crisis’ at this time.³¹ However, the evidence presented above, both statistical and anecdotal, suggest that the cloth-workers of Tiverton were not the only people to experience a visible decline in living standards in the aftermath of the Revolution.³² The records of this era show an unmistakable awareness of the fact that these were years when economic conditions had suddenly changed for the worse.

* * * * *

The Complaint of English Subjects epitomized many of the broader changes in the way contemporaries interpreted and discussed economic concerns. The pamphlet was the product of a decade in which debates about commercial, financial and fiscal problems became more direct and more public than ever before. Rather than remaining a manuscript privately circulated amongst a small network of acquaintances or quietly dispatched to a royal official, it was printed and sold in London in at least two editions and was undoubtedly designed for a wider readership.³³ Newnam’s *Complaint* exemplifies the way economic distress emerged as a central topic of public discussion after the Revolution. Whether expressed in speech, manuscript or print, everyone seemed to have an opinion.

²⁹ R. Newnam, *The Complaint of English subjects* (1699; 2nd edn, 1700). This was an octavo pamphlet of around 120 pages, divided into three main parts: the first part on the economic complaints ‘of the poor, middle and meanest sorts of subjects’; the second part on ‘the true Christians complaint against vice and wickedness’; the third part on the causes of the ‘unfruitful’ weather. It concludes with a four-page summary in ‘plain, low stile’ verse, dated 6 June 1698, which is probably when most of the work was written.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

³¹ Appleby, ‘Subsistence Crises’; Wrigley and Schofield, *Population History*, pp. 649-56, 660-1, 667; R.B. Outhwaite, *Dearth, Public Policy, and Social Disturbance in England, 1550-1800* (Cambridge, 1991), ch. 2.

³² In addition to the other material cited throughout this section, the particularly miserable situation in the textile districts of the South West is evident in the correspondence of Edward and Elizabeth Clarke at Chipley, less than ten miles from Taunton: SALS, DD\SF/7/1. See also the magistracy’s complaints about vagrants in Somerset and the rapidly rising cost of poor relief in Taunton at this time: SALS, Q\SO/8, fos. 328, 402; D\P\TAU.JA/13/2/1. Note that a workhouse was established at Tiverton in 1698: J. Raithby, ed., *Statutes of the Realm* (London, 11 vols., 1810-1812), VII. 449-51.

³³ Compare Newnam’s pamphlet to, for example, Sir Edward Hext’s oft-quoted letter to Lord Burghley in 1596 or the manuscript reports of the ‘decay of trade’ in the early seventeenth century: R. H. Tawney and Eileen Power, eds. *Tudor Economic Documents* (London, 3 vols., 1924), II. 339-46; J. Thirsk, ed., *Seventeenth-Century Economic Documents* (Oxford, 1974), pp. 12-15, 24-5, 32-3, 34-5, 38-9, 224-32.

The debates of the 1690s arose in the context of increasingly open and critical discussion of political and economic issues.³⁴ Political argument became ever more frequent and wide-ranging over the course of the seventeenth century through repeated waves of printing mania during the Civil Wars, the Interregnum and the Exclusion Crisis. This culminated in a permanent shift towards openly partisan discussions of state policy after the Revolution of 1688 and the lapse of the Licencing Act in 1695. As a result, ‘paper warfare’ between political antagonists entered the nation’s cultural mainstream in the 1690s.³⁵ Whilst much of this concerned long-established issues such as religious minorities or constitutional powers, an increasing share of commentary and complaint focused on economic affairs.

Obviously previous eras had seen occasionally intense arguments about commercial policy and related issues. During the tumultuous years of the late 1540s, for example, heated discussions of dearth and enclosure can be found amongst gentlemen in parliament, preachers in pulpits and commoners in alehouses.³⁶ This pattern was repeated during the hard times of the 1590s, perhaps accentuated by the government’s very public campaigns for intensified market regulation and poor relief.³⁷ When England was again afflicted by widespread economic dislocation in the unsettled 1640s, complaints and proposals circulated even more widely through pamphlets, newsbooks and petitions. As early as February 1642, for example, 1,500 London porters and ‘many hundreds’ of ‘distressed women’ petitioned the House of Commons about the great ‘necessity’ afflicting them during the commercial slump – what’s more, both petitions were published and thus may have reached broad audience.³⁸ Indeed, one can find moments throughout the early modern period when economic concerns sparked widespread discussion and mobilisation.³⁹ Yet, in the final decade of the seventeenth century the surge of public debate about economic conditions rapidly matched and then exceeded the levels reached by the previous crises. Moreover, as will be seen later, such arguments seem to have been more overtly politicised than ever before.

The contributions of certain economic thinkers are well-known, exemplified in Gregory King and Charles Davenant’s use of ‘political arithmetick’ to calculate the financing of the war as well as in John Locke and Isaac Newton’s debates about resolving the currency crisis.⁴⁰ Such

³⁴ For the expansion of such discussion in Stuart England, see D. Zaret, *Origins of Democratic Culture: Printing, Petitions, and the Public Sphere in Early-Modern England* (Princeton, NJ, 2000); Knights, *Representation*; J. Raymond, *The Invention of the Newspaper* (Oxford, 2005); J. Raymond, *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge, 2006); P. Lake and S. Pincus, eds., *The Politics of the Public Sphere in Early Modern England* (Manchester, 2007); P. Withington, *Society in Early Modern England: The Vernacular Origins of Some Powerful Ideas* (Cambridge, 2009).

³⁵ Knights, *Representation*, pp.15-17.

³⁶ Wood, *1549*, ch. 3.

³⁷ J. Walter, ‘A "Rising of the People"? The Oxfordshire Rising of 1596’, *Past and Present*, 107 (1985), pp. 90-143; S. Hindle, ‘Dearth, Fasting and Alms: The Campaign for General Hospitality in Late Elizabethan England’, *Past and Present*, 172 (2001), pp. 44-86; R.B. Outhwaite, ‘Dearth and Government Intervention in English Grain Markets, 1590-1700’, *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser, 34 (1981), pp. 393-5.

³⁸ K. Lindley, *Popular Politics and Religion in Civil War London* (Aldershot, 1997), pp. 134-5. See also Hindle, ‘Dearth and the English Revolution’, pp. 1, 6-8, 15-28.

³⁹ See, for example, Appleby, *Economic Thought*, ch. 2-6; Thirsk, *Economic Policy*; S. Pincus, *Protestantism and Patriotism: Ideologies and the Making of English Foreign Policy, 1650-1668* (Cambridge, 1996); P. Slack, *From Reformation to Improvement: Public Welfare in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1999), ch. 1-4; D. Pennington, ‘Beyond the Moral Economy: Economic Change, Ideology and the 1621 House of Commons’, *Parliamentary History*, 25:2 (2006); T. Leng, *Benjamin Worsley (1618-1677): Trade, Interest and the Spirit in Revolutionary England* (Woodbridge, 2008).

⁴⁰ Appleby, *Economic Thought*, ch. 8; C. Brooks, ‘Projecting, Political Arithmetic and the Act of 1695’, *English Historical Review*, 97 (1982); J.R.N. Stone, *Some British Empiricists in the Social Sciences, 1650-1900*

learned discourse nonetheless represents only a few voices in a cacophony of contending opinions on ‘the state and condition of England’ at this time. Of course many people continued to express themselves on such matters without resorting to the printing press. As early as December of 1689, for instance, Anthony Wood remarked that, with ‘Money dead’ and ‘no trading’, ‘all complaine for these three months last past; occasioned by taxes, [and] warrs’.⁴¹ The ‘general complaints’ continued into the early 1690s, when ‘the heaviness of taxes’ ensured that ‘everybody was anxious about affairs of state’, according to another observer.⁴² By the middle of the decade currency problems had come to the fore, providing an apparently limitless source of public debate. Edward Clarke, writing from London, confirmed to his wife Elizabeth in Somerset that ‘your conversation in the country is much on the same subject with us here; the businesse of money being here, as with you, the beginning or end of all discourses whatsoever, and is the comon subject of all conversation’.⁴³ Alongside conversations in alehouses and coffeehouses, opinions on economic policy also spread through ballads sung ‘To the Tune of *Let Mary live long*’ and through seditious libels anonymously copied by hand because ‘he that writ this durst not owne it’.⁴⁴ People even found non-verbal ways of expressing their discontent. On the third anniversary of William and Mary’s inauguration, for example, Oxford witnessed ‘ringing of bells and some illuminations in the High Street, etc. Not so much as formerly; people discontented at paying many taxes.’⁴⁵ Nonetheless, it was the output of London’s printers that showed most clearly the new prominence of commerce and finance as subjects of heated discussion.

Printed media took many forms at this time, ranging from regular newspapers and ephemeral broadsheets to lengthy pamphlets and weighty tomes, all of which included information and arguments about economic affairs. Such themes were, for example, a major part of the revival of the periodical press in the 1690s. Of course, these issues still featured frequently in the long-established medium of manuscript newsletters circulated amongst educated gentlemen in the metropolis and the counties.⁴⁶ However, news and commentary on the state of the economy also reached a much wider audience through John Houghton’s weekly *Collection for the Improvement of Husbandry and Trade* (1692-1703), the first ever periodical to focus exclusively on this subject, and the expanding number of other printed newspapers that mentioned merchant shipping, joint-stock subscriptions, grain prices, the state of the coinage and even the paying of naval arrears.⁴⁷ Likewise, single-sheet publications commonly

(Cambridge, 1998), ch. 2-3; P. Laslett, ‘John Locke, the Great Recoinage, and the Origins of the Board of Trade, 1695-1698’, *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 14 (1957).

⁴¹ Wood, *Life*, II. 319.

⁴² Pryme, *Diary*, p. 64. See also the coffeehouse discussion of the loss of the Turkey Fleet in 1694: Wood, *Life*, III. 448.

⁴³ B. Clarke, ed., ‘The Complete Life and Correspondence of Edward Clarke 1650-1710’ (online at <http://www.nynehead.org>, 2007), II. 138-9. Note that these volumes include only a selection of the correspondence held at SALS, so the originals are cited elsewhere in the article.

⁴⁴ *The Poor Man’s Complaint: Or, The Sorrowful Lamentation of Poor Plain-Dealing* (c.1692-3); TNA, PL 27/2, part 1, unfol. (‘Lebell per Saxon’, c.1696). The contents of both of these texts are discussed below. For the relationship between oral, scribal and print communication, see A. Fox, *Oral and literate culture in England, 1500-1700* (Oxford, 2001).

⁴⁵ Wood, *Life*, III. 415.

⁴⁶ See, for example, the newsletters addressed to the Earl of Huntingdon in Bodl., Carte MS 76, cited above. Much of the economic news reported in Luttrell’s *Brief Relation* came from such sources.

⁴⁷ Amongst others, the *Flying Post* or *The Post Master* (1695-1731) often included such news. For Houghton’s *Collection* and economic discussion in other periodicals, see N. Glaisyer, ‘Readers, Correspondence and Communities: John Houghton’s *A Collection for Improvement of Husbandry and Trade* (1692-1703)’ in A. Shepard and P. Withington, eds., *Communities in Early Modern England: Networks, Place, Rhetoric* (Manchester, 2000); N. Glaisyer, *The Culture of Commerce in England, 1660-1720* (Woodbridge, 2006), ch. 4; Murphy, *Origins*, ch. 4.

addressed economic concerns. This was a recurrent subject in the era's broadside ballads and in many short printed 'proposals' for state-sponsored projects to raise funds or improve trading.⁴⁸ Merchants, manufacturers and other groups also took advantage of the presses to amplify their voices when they appealed to Parliament to redress their economic grievances. The vast expansion in the number of petitions about mercantile issues received by the House of Commons after 1688 attests to the importance of this mode of communication – whereas there were only 100 in the three decades after the Restoration, this figure rose to nearly 600 from 1690 to 1702.⁴⁹ Furthermore, whilst many petitions remained manuscripts read only in Westminster, others were published and thus often received a wider circulation.⁵⁰ The expansion of print also enabled critics of the regime to reach many more readers than they would have if they had relied solely on scribal transmission. Hence, in London, 'great numbers of scandalous papers reflecting on the miscarriages of the Turkey fleet ... were thrown about the streets' in September 1693, and 'a libell [was] flung up and down the streets' in response to the royal proclamation on the recoinage in December 1695.⁵¹ It seems that the economy featured more prominently in practically every type of publication in the aftermath of the Revolution.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]

A crude quantitative analysis supports this impression. The frequent occurrence of 'trade', 'money' and 'tax' amongst the titles of texts published in the 1690s suggests that such issues had become a central topic of reading and conversation for the literate gentlemen and townsmen who comprised 'the public' in early modern England.⁵² Nearly 800 titles included at least one of these keywords in this decade, together amounting to four per cent of all publications, a figure far higher than almost every other decade in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Figure 1).⁵³ Compared to the 1680s, mentions of 'trade' and 'money' increased by more than threefold whilst 'tax' leapt to almost five times its previous proportion. Moreover, the suddenly increased interest in these sorts of economic issues largely continued, at a lower rate, throughout the early eighteenth century. Although 'money' soon lost much of its prominence, 'tax' and 'trade' continued to be mentioned quite regularly, which suggests that William III's reign was a key phase in a longer transition as well as a period of acute concern in itself. Of course quantitative analysis of publication titles can provide only a very rough measure of public interest in a topic. Phil Withington, from whom this method derives, has demonstrated its value and discussed its limitations at much greater

⁴⁸ For exemplary ballads from the 1690s, see *English Broadside Ballad Archive* (<http://ebba.english.ucsb.edu>), nos. 20701, 20710, 20711, 21969, 21995, 21998, 22000, 22245, 22365. For one of many single-sheet proposals, see W. Woodford, *A proposal, for paying national debts easily, by improvement of any good fund* (1690).

⁴⁹ Gauci, *Politics of Trade*, p. 212. The figure was roughly similar under Anne. For the importance of petitioning about domestic (rather than overseas) trade, see Knights, 'Regulating', pp. 68-71.

⁵⁰ Amongst dozens of examples, see *The case of the fishermen in Kent* (1694); *The case of the fann-makers* (1695); *The case of the Company of Glass-sellers in London* (1697?).

⁵¹ Luttrell, *Relation*, III. 176; Pryme, *Diary*, pp. 77-8.

⁵² This paragraph is based on an analysis of the results of searches for 'money', 'trade' and 'tax*' in titles recorded in the electronic *English Short Title Catalogue* (<http://estc.bl.uk>).

⁵³ Specifically 795 items included any one of the keywords, thus comprising 3.99 per cent of the 19,939 items that dated from 1690 to 1699. The trends in the use of these keywords titles roughly accords with the trends in their use in the c.40,000 transcribed texts in EBBO-TCP corpus: *Early Modern Print: Text Mining Early Printed English* <<http://earlyprint.wustl.edu/tooleebospellingbrowser.html>> (accessed 19 Aug. 2014). See also the spike in publications about 'commercial knowledge' in the 1690s in Joseph Massie's collection: J. Hoppit, 'The Contexts and Contours of British Economic Literature 1660-1760', *Historical Journal* (2006), pp. 84-6.

length than possible here.⁵⁴ Ultimately, these figures offer a useful preliminary sketch of the changing resonance of specific issues, but the newfound significance of economic conditions in public debate after the Revolution only becomes clear through an analysis of the texts themselves and of the wider discussions in which they featured.

* * * * *

Interpreting the ‘hard times’ of the 1690s came easily to contemporaries. They had a multitude of explanations for such events, including many that had been used by their predecessors decades or even centuries earlier.⁵⁵ Yet, a significant number of people offered explanations that made sense only in the context of the Revolution of 1688. For them, the causes were political rather than natural or divine. In some cases, polemicists addressed the economic situation with such aggressive rhetoric and brazen partisanship that they seemed to threaten the very stability of the state. As a result, just as in 1540s and 1640s, this was a moment when economic and political debate became tightly entangled.

In most earlier moments of severe economic strain, public commentary tended to avoid discussing the role of the political regime in Westminster. During the dearth and dislocation in the latter part of Elizabeth’s reign, there were a few isolated claims that the poor might be better under a Spanish king and enclosure was apparently a factor in an election at Leicester in 1597, but most complaints were more in keeping with ‘the politics of Cockayne’ than the politics of court faction or royal succession.⁵⁶ Similarly non-partisan reactions greeted the ‘depression’ of the early 1620s and the more minor problems of the mid 1670s.⁵⁷ However, there were important exceptions, namely the 1540s and 1640s. Under Edward VI, the legitimacy of Protector Somerset’s government was intimately tied to its handling of the economic problems of the time, with outspoken ‘commonwealthmen’, well-organised ‘camps’ of commoners and Somerset’s aristocratic opponents all contributing to a climate of open political contention about the harsh conditions faced by the peasantry.⁵⁸ A century later, this dangerous convergence was repeated. Many people interpreted the material problems of the 1640s – including disrupted trade, new taxes and high prices – through an explicitly

⁵⁴ Withington, *Society*, esp. pp. 7-9. The potential weaknesses of this method are discussed in various reviews of this book, especially that of Tim Hitchcock in *Economic History Review*, 64:3 (2011), pp. 1026-7.

⁵⁵ For examples of people blaming traditional targets such as middlemen, immigrants and sinners, see Essex Record Office, T/A 465/268, unfol. (28 Apr 1693), T/A 156/1, unfol. (18 May 1693), D/DBm Z10, p. 2; TNA, CO 388/3, fos. 165-6 (1694); CO 388/5/57-58, /63-64; CO 391/7, pp. 264-5 (1694); SALS, Q/SO/8, fo. 248; YCA, F.10, p. 56; LMA, COL/CA/01/01/102, pp. 273-8; NRO, NCR Case 16a/25, fo. 322; Bodl., MS. Eng. Hist. b.209, fo. 25; Luttrell, *Relation*, III. 233, 282; Wood, *Life*, III. 434, 488; D. Statt, *Foreigners and Englishmen: The Controversy over Immigration and Population, 1660-1760* (Newark, DE, 1995), pp. 96-7, 114-19, 180-2, 184; Newnam, *Complaint*, pp. 22, 65-6; R. Dunning, *Bread for the Poor* (1693), p. 4; Claydon, *Godly Revolution*, esp. pp. 130-1; Rose, *1690s*, pp. 196-7; B. Waddell, *God, Duty and Community in English Economic Life* (Woodbridge, 2012), pp. 31, 34, 57-8, 61-2, 66-8, 112, 121-2, 128, 136-7, 157, 167, 214-5, 220, 233.

⁵⁶ Sharpe, ‘Social strain’, pp. 199-200; Walter, ‘Rising’, pp. 100, 108, 135. See also the politically ambiguous threats against the Lord Mayor of London: I. Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability: Social Relations in Elizabethan London* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 1-2, 5-6.

⁵⁷ B. Supple, *Commercial Crisis and Change in England, 1660-1642: A Study in the Instability of a Mercantile Economy* (Cambridge, 1959), pp. 58-64, 198-221; J. Spurr, *England in the 1670s: ‘This Masquerading Age’* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 119-126; Waddell, *God, Duty and Community*, p. 34, 220.

⁵⁸ Wood, *1549*, ch. 1, 3-4; E. Shagan, ‘Protector Somerset and the 1549 Rebellions: New Sources and New Perspectives’, *English Historical Review* 144:455 (1999), pp. 34-63.

partisan lens. At the beginning of the decade, agitators were already claiming that the scheming of prelates and papists was the cause of the decay of trade. Indeed, the two petitions of 1642 cited earlier both blamed the ‘adverse malignant-blood-sucking rebellious popish party’ for the heightened distress of the poor.⁵⁹ Likewise, later in the decade, the new excise was condemned as oppressive and tyrannical by both Levellers and royalists, whilst dearth reportedly led the poor ‘to crye up a Kingly government’.⁶⁰ Yet, even in the midst of the most rancorous conflict in England’s history, economic problems were not invariably politicised. The famous excise riot at Smithfield in 1647 was, according to Mike Braddick, distinctly non-partisan, with radicals failing to exploit the issue as much as might be expected, and the same was true of the dearth at this time. Instead, ‘conservative’ and ‘traditional’ reactions probably predominated.⁶¹

Like its Elizabethan and early Stuart predecessors, the Williamite court and its allies often endorsed traditional interpretations that placed responsibility for the ‘hard times’ on greedy middlemen or pervasive immorality. Indeed, the regime stressed these possibilities in its official pronouncements, allowing it to redirect the concerns of its subjects towards conventional targets who could be disciplined through long-established legal measures.⁶² However, Williamites also addressed the political implications of the economic situation much more directly and distinctively. An anonymous pamphlet entitled *The Pretences of the French Invasion Examined*, which was conspicuously licenced by the secretary of state and usually attributed to the prominent Bishop of St Asaph, William Lloyd, illustrates a common approach. It was James II, not the new monarchs, who ‘hath intangled us in a War with the worst Enemy in Europe’, claimed the author. By joining with the French in an attempt to reverse the Revolution, James had made the military spending ‘absolutely necessary to our Safety’ and, in any case,

what Grievances are these Taxes, in comparison of what is laid on the French Slaves, into whose Condition we were intended to be brought? There is a vast difference between losing our Property for ever, and paying some part of our Profits to secure the rest, and our Inheritances to our Posterity as well as our Selves.

Furthermore, according to the pamphlet, the decay of trade actually began under James and commerce had only remained ‘at a low Ebb’ due to the repeated military assaults launched against the new regime from Europe. It was apparently plain that

the late King feared and hated the increase of Trade, which made him use all means to hinder it; and all the World sees, that no Absolute Monarch (as he affects to be,) likes that his Subjects should grow rich by Trade. But our present King so soon as he can have Peace, will make it his first Care to promote Trade here, as he did in the Country he came from; and even in the difficult times he had, Trade hath been a great part of his and his Parliaments Care.⁶³

⁵⁹ Lindley, *Popular Politics*, p. 135. See also Walter, *Understanding Popular Violence*, pp. 309-14.

⁶⁰ M. Braddick, ‘Popular Politics and Public Policy: The Excise Riot at Smithfield in February 1647 and its Aftermath’, *Historical Journal*, 34 (1991), pp. 618-23; D. Coffman, *Excise Taxation and the Origins of Public Debt* (Basingstoke, 2013), pp. 55-8; Hindle, ‘Dearth and the English Revolution’, p. 4.

⁶¹ Braddick, ‘Excise’, p. 618; Hindle, ‘Dearth and the English Revolution’, p. 31.

⁶² See, for examples, the dearth proclamations of this decade, both of which targeted forestallers for their ‘great Oppression of the Poor’: *By the King and Queen, a proclamation, for preventing the exportation of corn to France* (19 Oct 1693); *By the Lords Justices, a proclamation for putting the laws in execution against forestalling, regrating and ingrossing of corn* (13 Oct 1698).

⁶³ [W. Lloyd?], *The pretences of the French invasion examined* (1692), pp. 6-8. See also the arguments of Court supporters in Parliament, such as Thomas Littleton in 1693: A. Grey, ed., *Debates in the House of Commons* (1769), X, pp. 341-2. For evidence of commercial problems in the 1680s that could be attributed to royal policy,

Here, the Catholic absolutism of James II and Louis XIV was portrayed both as the cause of England's current economic hardship and as a threat to her future prosperity.⁶⁴ Other Williamite loyalists placed the blame on domestic, rather than foreign, Jacobitism. During the re-coinage, for example, one frustrated government supporter responded to a seditious manuscript with a note claiming that 'our Coyne it is defast / By Jacobitish knaves', and a ballad writer described the disruptive practice of weighing old money as a 'Plot' by a 'Jacobitish Crew' of 'sneaking Rebels'.⁶⁵ These authors saw the maladies afflicting the economy as disorders inflicted by opponents of the regime, suggesting that the pain of high taxes and commercial disruption were part of a grand strategy for seizing power and reducing the country to a slave of popish absolutism.

Supporters of the revolution did not limit themselves to blaming Jacobitism for their misfortunes. They also emphasised seemingly positive aspects of the new economic climate and depicted their opponents as partisan propagandists. The Prince of Orange himself, in a speech to local gentlemen only a few days after his landing in November 1688, declared that his purpose was to rescue England's Protestants 'by Restoring them to their Rights and Properties Established by Law, and by Promoting of Peace and Trade, which is the Soul of Government, and the very Life-Blood of a Nation'.⁶⁶ At the beginning of William's reign, many thought the end of James's rule would bring a new era of liberty and prosperity. 'The Nation', wrote the merchant James Whiston in 1689, has been 'redrest and secured against Tyranny and Oppression', which will 'greatly improve our Riches, increase the Inhabitants, and thereby much lessen the burthen of Taxes'.⁶⁷ Even the rapid arrival of war and its immediate impact on trade could be seen as a potential blessing. In one of his later pamphlets, Whiston claimed that, if properly managed, 'War must be more Beneficial to us than Peace', because it upturned the previously injurious balance of trade with France, halted the import of 'Trifles in Lieu of vast sums of sterling', and encouraged advantageous trading with England's allies on the continent.⁶⁸ Other observers agreed, arguing that the conflict had

see M. Knights, 'A City Revolution: The Remodelling of the London Livery Companies in the 1680s', *English Historical Review*, 112:449 (1997), pp. 1155-69, 1173-5

⁶⁴ For other examples, see *Mercurius Reformatus or The New Observer*, 8 Oct. 1690, Issue 13; J. Dunton, *Englands Alarum* (1693), p. 19; J. Whiston, *A Discourse of the decay of trade* (1693), pp. 7-9; Anon., *Awake Sampson, the Philistines are upon thee* (1696), pp. 8, 13-15, 18. Similarly, a diarist in Lincolnshire recorded verses by a neighbouring minister that described James's reign as a tyranny in which freemen lost their land, misers their gold, merchants their trade, and seamen their employment: Pryme, *Diary*, p. 179n. The same diarist believed that the disruption caused by the recoinage 'was most certainly a French trick' to – in the supposed words of Louis XIV – 'set the English doggs together by the ears': Pryme, *Diary*, pp. 136-7. See also the allegations of a French plot to undermine the lustring trade: TNA, CO 388/5/55-57, /81-83, /87, /89 (1695-6).

⁶⁵ TNA, PL 27/2, part 1, unfol. ('Lebell per Saxon', c.1696); *Conscience by Scruples, And Money by Ounces* (1697). Interestingly, the ballad also blamed the Welsh ('Taffys tribe') and the Quakers, denouncing both as 'Rebels', which fit with the reputations of these groups for Jacobite sympathies: C. Wood, 'The Welsh Response to the Glorious Revolution of 1688', *Journal of Welsh Religious History*, new ser., 1 (2001); P.K. Monod, *Jacobitism and the English People, 1688-1788* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 155-8. Likewise, Edward Clarke, the Whig M.P., lamented 'all the difficulties that the enemies to the king and government have wilfully and maliciously brought upon the nation in reforming the coin' and one of his correspondents believed that local Catholics had encouraged coin clipping: SALS, DD\SF/7/1/53, unfol. (Bridgwater, Somerset, 17 Aug 1696), DD\SF/7/1/73 (16 Dec 1696). See also HMC: *Downshire*, I, pt. ii. 713; Pincus, 1688, pp. 458-9; Knights, *Representation*, p. 315.

⁶⁶ *The speech of the Prince of Orange, to some principle gentlemen of Somersetshire and Dorsetshire* (Exeter, 1688).

⁶⁷ J. Whiston, *To the Honourable the Commons ... A short account of one of the grand grievances of the nation* (1689), p. 1. See also the pamphlets claiming that, despite the war, 'there is little sign of Poverty' and 'the body of the Nation ... never lived so great as now': W. Gallaway, *Reflections upon Mr. Johnson's notes* (1694), pp. 40-1; *Awake Sampson*, pp. 14-15; *A vindication of the proceedings of the late Parliament* (1690), pp. 5-6.

⁶⁸ Whiston, *Discourse*, p. 10.

brought technological discoveries sparked by ‘necessitous ingenuity’ and the establishment of new ‘manufactorys’, all of which lead ‘to the enriching of this nation’.⁶⁹ Even the government’s handling of the coinage problems occasionally received praise. One ballad, for example, noted the multitude of problems caused by the poor state of the currency, but then announced that ‘good King William’ was now taking care to reform the coin, which would bring ‘satisfaction all over the Land’ for soon ‘Trade will flourish a[g]ain’.⁷⁰

Yet, many of the texts that optimistically lauded the advantages of William’s rule or condemned the economic dangers of Catholic absolutism were merely reacting to more pessimistic interpretations of material conditions that were circulating at this time. Hence, more than one of the apologists for the Williamite regime attempted to discredit critical views as fabrications propagated by the nation’s enemies for political gain. *The Pretences of the French Invasion Examined* again provides an outstanding example:

the late Reign is magnified by the Jesuits and their Tools, and this blackned: Freedom from Taxes then is made a rare Instance of his Gentleness, and the present Impositions heightned with all the Rhetorick imaginable, to represent this King as an Oppressor. The flourishing of Trade then is extolled, the decay of it now odiously insinuated, and great hopes are given of Golden Days, upon the Return of James the Just; he is to make us all happy.⁷¹

Nor was this the only pamphlet devoted to refuting the complaints of the ‘disaffected’. One loyal satirist poked fun at the ‘very shrew’d Politicians’ who spent all their time bewailing how ‘our Trade [is] lost, Taxes increas’d, [and] the Nation impoverished’. The author disparaged such men for stirring up disloyalty through their ‘unreasonable murmerings’ and ‘Fallacious Sophisms of Argument’.⁷² Sir Richard Cocks, a Whig MP, spoke in very similar terms in his charges to the Gloucestershire grand jury in 1694. He condemned those who undermined the king ‘by their telling false news’ and ‘by their rejoicing at misfortunes’, singling out individuals who complained of taxes when ‘we live thanks be to god in plenty’ or who ‘pretend their majesties have an inclination to the stranger’ when William cared for his English subjects with the same tenderness as ‘the good Samaritan’.⁷³ For proponents of the new regime, any grumbling about the state of the economy was regarded with suspicion as it might be a ploy to spread discontent or outright sedition.

Not all critical interpretations of the country’s changing economic circumstances were disloyal or even partisan. Many regarded the king as entirely faultless and instead blamed current afflictions on corruption and mismanagement amongst high-ranking officials within

⁶⁹ Bodl., Eng. Hist. MS. b.209, fo. 90 (Sir Richard Cocks, ‘Of the poor’, n.d.); J. D. Marshall, ed., *The Autobiography of William Stout of Lancaster, 1665-1752* (Manchester, 1967), p. 94.

⁷⁰ T. Joy, *The New and True Touch of the Times* (n.d.), probably printed shortly after the royal proclamation of 19 Dec. 1695. For retrospective praise of the government’s currency policy, see Pryme, *Diary*, p. 122 (15 Jan 1697); Marshall, ed., *Autobiography of Stout*, p. 115.

⁷¹ [Lloyd?], *Pretences*, p. 5.

⁷² *The Present State of England* (1692), pp. 12, 19, 21. See also the argument that ‘our noisy French Schreech-Owls are whining, *Poverty, Poverty*’ and ‘*the Taxes, the Taxes*’ to undermine the king: Gallaway, *Reflections*, pp. 40-1; *Vindication*, pp. 5-6.

⁷³ Bodl., Eng. Hist. MS. b.209, fo. 27-30. The first charge was ‘partly to answer a speech ... made by Sir J[ohn] K[nigh]t in Parliament’, which is discussed below. Similar sentiments about the rumours spread by ‘disaffected’ political opponents were expressed more privately by Whigs such as Edward and Elizabeth Clarke: SALS, DD/SF/7/1/31/82, /98. Note that calls to prosecute utterers of ‘scandalous and reflecting words’ were taken very seriously by both local informers and judicial officials: the cases of seditious speech cited below are the result. For surveys of other types of seditious speech against William III, see Monod, *Jacobitism*, ch. 8; D. Cressy, *Dangerous Talk: Scandalous, Seditious, and Treasonable Speech in Pre-Modern England* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 227-30.

the rapidly expanding institutions of the fiscal-military state.⁷⁴ Particularly hated were the ‘new men’ who seemed to grow rich by redirecting into their own pockets the millions of pounds appropriated to the Navy after the Revolution. For example, Robert Crosfeild and William Hodges together published at least twenty pamphlets denouncing ‘a certain Cabal of Men’ who ‘have made a prey of the publick all this War’ and ‘desired to turn the War into a Trade, and to squeeze out even the very Marrow of the People to Inrich themselves’.⁷⁵ They claimed that the extortions and oppressions of men in the Navy Board and the Admiralty had led to the decay of maritime commerce, the financial ruin of tens of thousands of naval seamen, the rise in pauperism and poor rates, and a multitude of other miseries.⁷⁶ Another group deemed guilty of growing rich through the country’s misfortunates were the well-connected agents who ran England’s growing fiscal apparatus. One anonymous broadsheet alleged that the most ‘great and successful Plotters against our Trade and Credit’ were ‘the Men in great Places’, especially post-holders in the Treasury, the Customs House, the Excise Office and the Bank of England.⁷⁷ Richard Newnam’s *Complaint* offered a similar diagnosis. He saw the king and his subjects robbed by a criminal alliance of ‘great Monyed-Men’ – including tax commissioners, bankers, merchants and coiners – who impoverished ‘the middle and poorer sort of People’ by manipulating the currency during the recoinage.⁷⁸ Here, the economic weakness that followed the Revolution was caused by a conspiracy amongst powerful officeholders and financiers. Furthermore, although all these ‘rich, topping, towering Men’ had all taken the Oaths of Allegiance and Supremacy, their nefarious acts would ‘pull down true Religion, and overthrow the King, and ruin our Country’.⁷⁹ In contrast, Newnam believed that his own role was to protect the political gains of 1688. He dedicated the pamphlet to King William and ‘the most Honourable Parliament’, describing himself as a ‘true Loyal Subject’ and ‘devoted Servant’ of ‘my King and Country’. Indeed, he apologetically declared that he only wrote about the kingdom’s economic afflictions because they meant that ‘all your Majesty’s faithful Subjects’ were ‘now much more liable to the malice of Enemies’.⁸⁰ In the rough ‘verses’ at the end of his tract, Newnam warned that the government’s foes could take advantage of these ‘hard times’, because

pinching, pineing, starving, Misery,

⁷⁴ The criticisms discussed below resemble, in some ways, those levelled at patentees and monopolists in the economically difficult final years of Elizabeth I: Thirsk, *Economic Policy*, ch. 3; D.H. Sacks, ‘The Countervailing of Benefits: Monopoly, Liberty and Benevolence in Elizabethan England’, in D. Hoak, ed., *Tudor Political Culture* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 272-91. For a later example, see A. Graham, ‘Auditing Leviathan: Corruption and State Formation in Early Eighteenth-century Britain’, *English Historical Review*, 128:533 (2013).

⁷⁵ R. Crosfeild, *Brief observations upon the present distresses of the publick* (1696), p. 1. The twelve relevant titles by Crosfeild (fl. 1693-1703) and ten by Hodges (fl. 1693-99) are listed in the ESTC. Only an illustrative selection is cited below. Note that this Hodges is not Sir William Hodges, MP: *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (online, 2004). For a detailed analysis of Crosfield and his campaign, see M. Knights, ‘Parliament, Print and Corruption in Later Stuart Britain’, *Parliamentary History*, 26:1 (2007).

⁷⁶ W. Hodges, *Great Britain’s Groans* (1695), p. 6 (trade); R. Crosfeild, *Justice the best support to government* (1697), pp. 17-18 (trade); W. Hodges, *Ruin to ruin, after misery to misery* (1699), p. 3 (sailors); Crosfeild, *Observations*, p. 2 (sailors); W. Hodges, *Humble proposals for the relief ... of the loyal, couragious seamen* (1695), p. 33 (pauperism).

⁷⁷ J.W., *A Letter from a Citizen of London to his Friend in the Country* (1696?). The author decries the Assassination Plot as ‘unnatural’ and never criticises William himself, but clearly opposes the current ministry.

⁷⁸ Newnam, *Complaint*, pp. 3-6, 11-15, 23-5. See also the complaints of another West Country clothier, George Wansey, about the effects of the coinage legislation, which hurt ‘Ordinary People’ rather than ‘Great men’: J. de L. Mann, ‘A Wiltshire Family of Clothiers: George and Hester Wansey, 1683-1714’, *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 9:2 (1956), p. 250.

⁷⁹ Newnam, *Complaint*, p. 26.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, unpaginated ‘Epistle Dedicatory’.

Hereafter (may) drive, some, from Loyalty.⁸¹

His poetry might have been dreadful, but his concern was well-founded. Many men and women seem to have turned against their new rulers at least partly because of the deteriorating economic conditions in the wake of the Revolution. Moreover, just as he and other Williamites had predicted, many opponents of the new political establishment, including disgruntled Tories and overt Jacobites, did not hesitate to cite the spread of 'Misery' as an indictment of the regime. Unlike Newnam, they explicitly criticised England's rulers for seemingly bringing the country to the brink of ruin.

The constitutional shifts that followed William's arrival in 1688 placed Parliament at the absolute centre of the national political scene, substantially heightening the public scrutiny of both the institution as a whole and its individual members. Thus, as the economic climate worsened, some contemporaries traced the cause to the incompetence or malevolence of their representatives in Westminster. The Acts passed in 1695 and 1696 'for remedying the Ill State of the Coin' drew extraordinary attention to Parliament's role in commercial and monetary affairs, which in turn led to widespread criticism.⁸² 'Most people' were reportedly 'mightily dissatisiied' when the shortage of currency became acute in the summer of 1696 – they loved the king, but 'they curse this parliament ... for their ill management'.⁸³ The extent of popular anger can be seen in the sad tale of a 'carefull honest pedlar woman' from a village near Hull. Over years of trading she had gathered a decent sum of money, so when the Recoinage Act decreed that her old clipped coin was no longer legal tender she cut her throat in despair. Her neighbours, though, questioned 'whether this woman be guilty of her death or no' and suggested that she had actually been murdered by 'the parlament men'.⁸⁴ The clergyman Hugh Todd, writing from London at almost the same time, provided a succinct assessment of the critical view: 'The scarcity of Money is the great News & some say we want *Politicks as much as Coin*'.⁸⁵

His words hint at the wave of partisanship that swiftly flooded into economic debates under William III, for Todd was a steadfast Tory. As such, he doubtlessly believed that the blame lay especially heavily on one particular group of 'Politicks', namely the Whigs who dominated government at this time.⁸⁶ Another example of partisan reasoning come in a letter sent to the Tory M.P. Sir Joseph Williamson from one of his constituents in the borough of Rochester on 23 November 1696. He spoke vividly of the 'Complaints & Outcryes of the People' against the 'Cruel Hardships' occasioned by the recoinage, particularly condemning Parliament's adoption of the measures proposed by the radical Whig John Locke. The letter concluded with the hope that the electorate would be 'more Cautious for the future in the Choyce of their Representatives', because 'if others had made so Wise a Choyce as Wee of this City have done the Nation would not have been reduced to this Miserable Condition'.⁸⁷

⁸¹ Ibid, p. 106. Parenthesis in original.

⁸² *Statutes of the Realm*, VII. 1-4, 162-4, 297-8.

⁸³ Pryme, *Diary*, p. 97. See also Evelyn, *Diary*, V, pp. 245-6; *The Diary and Autobiography of Edmund Bohun*, S. Wilton Rix, ed. (Beccles, 1853), p. 139.

⁸⁴ Pryme, *Diary*, p. 98.

⁸⁵ Bodl., Ballard MS. 18, fo. 15 (emphasis added). A 'politick' was common term for a politician: *Oxford English Dictionary* (online, 2008), s.v. 'politic', definition 2b.

⁸⁶ For the prevalence of the idea of 'the grasping and unscrupulous Whig financier', see Claydon, *Godly Revolution*, pp. 219-21; Knights, *Representation*, pp. 310-13.

⁸⁷ TNA, SP 32/6/91. Note that although Williamson was a Tory, he was a reliable supporter of the Court – a useful reminder of the complexity of partisanship in later Stuart England: S. Handley, 'Williamson, Sir Joseph', in D. Hayton, E. Cruickshanks, S. Handley, eds., [*The*] *H[istory] o[f] P[arliament: the House of Commons 1690-1715]* (online, 2002). For another critic who blamed Locke and his allies in Parliament, see, *A Letter*

Likewise, partisan opponents of Edward Clarke, the Whig M.P. and vocal supporter of Locke's monetary views, faulted him both for the currency problems and for new fiscal impositions such as the malt tax.⁸⁸ In the minds of many Tories, the economic troubles that had sprung up in England since the Revolution had their roots in the political philosophy and financial policy of the Whigs.

Relatedly, some critics focused their censure on a particular breed of government supporter in Parliament – the placeman. Because of the potentially lucrative state offices that they held, these men seemingly had every incentive to support policies that would protect their own positions rather than promote the common good. Their detractors, sometimes grouped under the label of the 'Country' party, thought that it was this pernicious practice which had allowed so many economic maladies to spread.⁸⁹ This view is exemplified in an anonymous *Letter to a Country-Gentleman* published soon after the end of the war with France. The author complained that whilst the king had been risking his own safety fighting for liberty on the continent, the grievances of his subjects had been neglected by a corrupt and idle parliament. Under the eyes of the placemen, trade was utterly ruined, sailors barbarously oppressed, smuggling actively encouraged and even the royal mint criminally subverted, all of which ought to show the English people

the absolute necessity there is of Chusing Gentlemen of good Estates to be their Representatives, as have not been in any (or long since declin'd) Publick Employment, during the late War, there being no other means possible, whereby to make them sensible of these past Miscarriages, or we to have such Members as will be able to rectify them, and do the King and Kingdom Justice, Publick Leaks being not to be stopt by the hands that made them.⁹⁰

A broadside ballad printed during the war told much the same story, recounting the spread of poverty across the land through burdensome taxes, dead trading, high prices and needy immigrants. It too claimed that the pitiable multitudes complained 'in vain' because 'E'ery Time-serving Elf, / Builds a Nest for himself' by 'pinching the Poor' and 'increasing his Store'.⁹¹ Such a cynical view of parliamentarians often, but not always, overlapped with the anti-Whig predispositions that had led Hugh Todd to conclude that England lacked true-

Humbly offered to the Consideration of all Gentlemen ... That Have Right to Elect Members to serve in Parliament (1696), pp. 3-6. For Locke's role in the recoinage, see Laslett, 'Locke'; Ming-Hsun Li, *The Great Recoinage of 1696-9* (London, 1963), ch. 6; L. Davison and T. Keirn, 'John Locke, Edward Clarke and the 1696 Guineas Legislation', *Parliamentary History*, 7 (1988).

⁸⁸ SALS, DD(SF/7/1/31/71 (6 Sept 1696); Clarke, ed., *Life*, III. 66 (1 May 1697). For Clarke's political position, see M. Knights, 'Clarke, Edward I', *HoP*.

⁸⁹ The literature on the 'country' party in the 1690s is too vast to cite here, but especially important pieces include J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, NJ, 1975), ch. 12-13; A. Downie, 'The Commission of Public Accounts and the Formation of the Country Party', *English Historical Review*, 91 (1976); J.G.A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce and History. Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1985); D.W. Hayton, 'The "Country" Interest and the Party System 1689-c.1720', in C. Jones, ed., *Party and Management in Parliament, c.1688-1720* (New York, 1984); C. Brooks, 'The Country Persuasion and Political Responsibility in England in the 1690s', *Parliaments, Estates and Representation* (1984), pp. 135-46; D.W. Hayton, 'The Politics of the House', *HoP*.

⁹⁰ G. W., *Letter to a Country-Gentleman* (1698), pp. 2-10, 14. Complaints about placemen also frequently featured in the anti-Dutch pamphlets such as *The copy of a letter from a gentleman in Dort to a member of the House of Commons in London translated out of Dutch* (?1693), p. 10; *Remarks upon the present confederacy, and late revolution in England, &c.* (1693), pp. 43-5; *The dear bargain. Or, A true representation of the state of the English nation under the Dutch* (1689), pp. 1-2, 5-6; *The people of England's grievances offered to be enquired into, and redress'd* (1693), pp. 3-4. For the broader campaigns against placemen, see Horwitz, *Parliament*, index s.v. 'placemen'.

⁹¹ *Poor Man's Complaint*.

hearted ‘Politicks’, and from this emerged a broad antipathy to Williamite Westminster shared by a diverse range of Jacobites, Tories and Country stalwarts.

However, much criticism of the government came from within Westminster itself. One failing in particular received harsh words from politicians and pamphleteers alike: the regime’s unmistakable *foreignness*. As early as 1689, Sir Edward Seymour, a prominent Tory, claimed ‘in open parliament ... “that all our trade and riches were carried to Amsterdam”’ and accusations of Dutch enrichment at the expense of loyal Englishmen recurred frequently in the years that followed.⁹² A striking example of this came early in 1694, when food prices were rising to rates that had not been reached in decades. In January of that year, Sir John Knight, the fiery Tory MP for Bristol, made a speech in the House of Commons against a bill for naturalising foreign Protestants that focused squarely on current economic conditions. According to Knight, war and high taxes had left ‘poor English Manufactures’ unemployed and ‘starving’ whilst ‘all provisions are become excessive dear by the great quantities exported to Holland’. Naturalising immigrants would merely worsen the already precarious lives of ‘our Country men’ who would then face ‘the Choice of starving at home, or to turn Soldiers, and be sent to Flanders, and starve there for want of their pay’.⁹³ Moreover, Knight’s claims were merely the extreme end of a broad spectrum of opinion in Parliament sceptical about its continental allies. In 1695, the House of Commons itself voted to present an address to the King which implicitly critiqued the supposedly excessive burden placed upon England, when compared to the Dutch, ‘in bearing the Charge in the present War’.⁹⁴ Of course, such views were not confined to gentlemanly debates in Westminster. Knight’s speech, after all, was significant not only because of its unmistakably partisan interpretation of the country’s hardships but also because it was immediately published as a short tract that soon achieved ‘wide circulation’ far outside the halls of parliament.⁹⁵

Allegations of Dutch scheming, or at the very least complicity, featured prominently in public discussions of the apparently worsening economic situation. For example, as the House of Commons suggested in its 1695 address to the King, the nation’s wartime burdens seemed to be disproportionate to its minor stake in the struggle between France and the United Provinces. An oppositional ballad against the new Land Tax made the same point much more bluntly:

To pay our just Taxes was once thought too much,
But now extraordinary Charity is such
We Bankrupt our selves for Maintaining the Dutch
Which no body can deny.⁹⁶

Another anonymous author surveyed in morbid detail ‘the dreadful Necessity’ that had befallen ‘the Commons of England’ since the onset of war and concluded by lamenting that

⁹² Wood, *Life*, III. 316. See also Christopher Musgrave’s claim in 1693 that the new taxes ‘ruin England to preserve Flanders’: Grey, ed., *Debates*, X, p. 340.

⁹³ J. Knight, *The following speech being spoke off hand upon the debates in the House of Commons* (1694), pp. 5-6. Knight in fact had a tendency ‘to dabble in Jacobite schemes and politics’, but his public face was that of a loyal Tory: A. Hanham, ‘Knight, Sir John’, *HoP*.

⁹⁴ *Journal of the House of Commons* (London, 1803), XI. 309.

⁹⁵ Hanham, ‘Knight’. Ultimately, Knight disowned the pamphlet version after it was condemned as a scandalous libel and ordered to be burnt.

⁹⁶ The Huntington Library, Ellesmere MSS 8827 (‘Ballad, On the Poll Act’, c.1691-3). I am grateful to Mark Hailwood for a transcription. Note that a copy is also listed as held at the University of Nottingham Library, Pw V 47/120, ff. 176r-176v, and it was later printed in *Poems on affairs of state, from the reign of K. James the first, to this present year 1703* (1703), II. 400-1.

they suffered ‘all this to defend the Country of Strangers, not their own’.⁹⁷ However, such complaints were mild compared to the numerous direct allegations of Dutch malevolence that circulated after the Revolution. One fictional Hollander wrote of how his compatriots used ‘our Arts and Industry to ingross all the Trade into our hands’ and ‘utterly defeated all your Laws of Navigation’, even whilst encouraging the English to spend more money on the war effort.⁹⁸ Particularly galling was the volume of bullion sent to the continent to pay for William’s campaigns. The Dutch had supposedly received so much silver and gold by 1691 that some traders in England were already reduced to bartering in commodities, and by 1695 a Jacobite could claim that such ‘villainous Depradation of theirs upon us’ would soon exhaust the kingdom’s coin causing ‘our utter Impoverishment and Ruin’.⁹⁹ The shortage of cash, insinuated a seditious ballader in Lancashire, was probably a royal plot:

Some Say the King contrived this Thing
His duchmen For to Cherish
For they will be Sure for to Indure
When we poor English Perish.¹⁰⁰

In addition to bullion, England’s food supply was also seemingly being usurped by Holland. It was repeatedly reported that ‘Dutch factors continue to buy up great quantities of corn, which make it bear a great rate here’.¹⁰¹ Thus, the English apparently lost their trade, money and food to their long-time rivals even whilst sacrificing blood and treasure to defend the forts and towns of their abusers. Samuel Grascome, the non-juror clergyman and controversialist, published a short tract during the dearth of 1698-9 that brought together all these worries and drew the obvious conclusion. The ‘Hogen Mogens’, he said, ‘engross our trade’, ‘buy the Estates of our impoverished Gentry’, and ‘fetch away our Corn’ – yet, they did not strip the land of wealth and commodities ‘for any Want, but with design to compleat our Ruin’. Their ultimate plan was ‘to thin our Country, in hopes in time to be absolute Masters of it’ and turn free-born Englishmen into ‘Dutch Slaves’.¹⁰²

Fear of enslavement to Dutch overlords fuelled the hellish visions of political and economic oppression expounded by Jacobites. Whereas proponents of the Revolution saw France and

⁹⁷ *The poor man’s petition* (1693), pp. 2, 6.

⁹⁸ *The copy of a letter from a gentleman in Dort*, p. 10. See also *Letter to a member of the Committee of Grievances* (1690); *The State-Prodigal his return* (1689), p. 3; [R. Ferguson?], *A letter to Mr. Secretary Trenchard discovering a conspiracy* (1694), p. 27-8; *Dear Bargain*, pp. 3-5; *Letter from a Citizen of London*; J. Israel, ‘England, the Dutch, and the Struggle for Mastery of World Trade in the Age of the Glorious Revolution (1682-1702)’ in Hoak and Feingold, eds., *The World of William and Mary*, pp. 78-86; Claydon, *Godly Revolution*, pp. 123-5. For role of economics in previous anti-Dutch sentiment, see S. Pincus, ‘Popery, Trade and Universal Monarchy: The Ideological Context of the Outbreak of the Second Anglo-Dutch War’, *English Historical Review*, 107 (1992), pp. 22-6; S. Pincus, ‘From Butterboxes to Wooden Shoes: The Shift in English Popular Sentiment from anti-Dutch to anti-French in the 1670s’, *Historical Journal*, 38:2 (1995), pp. 336-40.

⁹⁹ *The Loyal Martyr vindicated* (1691), p. 34; [R. Ferguson], *A brief account of some of the late incroachments and depredations of the Dutch* (1695), p. 34. See also *Present confederacy*, p. 31; *His Majesties most gracious speech ... with additions and explications* (1692), p.4; *The people of England’s grievances*, p. 2; Clarke, ed., *Life*, II. 137-9; Pryme, *Diary*, p. 64; Evelyn, *Diary*, V. 245; Pincus, *1688*, p. 449.

¹⁰⁰ TNA, PL 27/2, part 1, unfol. (‘Lebell per Saxon’, c.1696). It also cited the many new taxes.

¹⁰¹ Luttrell, *Relation*, III. 20, 38, 205. See also *The Price of the Abdication* (1693), p. 9; Knight, *Speech*, pp. 4-5; *The copy of a letter from a gentleman in Dort*, p. 10; *The Present State of England* (1694), pp. 2-5; *A supplement to His Majesties most gracious speech* (1695), pp. 12-13.

¹⁰² S. Grascome, *An appeal to all true English-men (if there be any such left), or, A cry for bread* (1699), pp. 3, 5, 6. ‘Hogen Mogen’ was an epithet for a Dutchman: *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. ‘hogen mogen’, definition 3. For similar allegations of a Dutch plot, see *Loyal Martyr*, p. 29; *Present confederacy*, p. 45; *Dear Bargain*, p. 5, 10; *The copy of a letter from Min Heer T.V.L. to Min Heer H.V.C.* (1690); *Min Heer T. van C’s answer* (1691), pp. 1-3; *A supplement to His Majesties most gracious speech* (1695), pp. 17-21; [Ferguson], *Account*, pp. 6, 40.

popery as the chief threat to liberty, their enemies believed that the true danger came from the Prince of Orange and his mercantile allies in Holland.¹⁰³ Seen from this perspective, new fiscal impositions were not the unfortunate side effect of a virtuous war but rather the devious attempt of a foreign power to extract the nation's riches. Hence, a Lancashire watchmaker named David Lenke pledged a toast to 'King Williams Confusion', decrying the window tax and other novel levies after hearing 'that the King was building a great Palace in Holland which he said would be a Ruin to England'.¹⁰⁴ Likewise, the quartering of soldiers, which could cause real hardship to overburdened localities, might be seen as more than merely an unpleasant but necessary responsibility – it could instead be interpreted as a direct attack on English rights and property. William Smart of Hertford, a weaver, denounced the practice and 'Swore Damn King William and A Pox take him for he and his Souldiers oppressed the Country more then ever King James did'.¹⁰⁵ Although such explicit accusations of Williamite despotism were too dangerous to be a common public occurrence, they still circulated both in print and in conversation.

At the heart of the most aggressive denunciations of the new government lay the idea of conspiracy. The nation's apparent impoverishment was caused not by sly middlemen, nor by official bumbling, nor even by greedy office-holders. Instead, it was caused by a tyrannical alien ruler who hoped to enfeeble his newly acquired subjects so as to more easily subjugate them to his will. This perception was what stirred Samuel Grascome to speak of the 'design' of the invaders to become 'absolute Masters' and what drove Robert Morgan to deplore the 'State plott' against the kingdom's coinage.¹⁰⁶ It also led many anonymous critics to warn their compatriots of 'the tyrannous Project and Designs' by which 'William intends to bring us first to Beggary, and then into Thraldom'.¹⁰⁷ A pamphlet published in 1694 laid out the Jacobite interpretation concisely. Under William's rule, the people of England watched

our Money given to the Confederates, our Ships to the French, our Trade to the Dutch, our Youth to the Slaughter, our Corn sent to Foreign Store-houses, and Foreigners in vast Numbers daily brought in upon us, who eat up our Bread, whilst our Poor are ready to starve.

¹⁰³ For this aspect of opposition to the regime, see P.K. Monod, 'Jacobitism and Country Principles in the Reign of William III', *Historical Journal*, 30 (1987), pp. 297-301, 309-10; Monod, *Jacobitism*, pp. 23-7, 56-7, 146; Goldie and Jackson, 'Williamite Tyranny'; M. Knights, 'Uncovering a Jacobite Whig? The Commonwealth Principles of Henry Booth, 1st Earl of Warrington', *Parliamentary History*, 28:1(2009).

¹⁰⁴ TNA, PL 27/2, part 1, unfol. (information of Richard Bassford, 23 Mar 1698/9). See also the claims that 'all that [William] cared for was to please his people [viz. the Dutch] & to gett mony together': *ibid.* (examination and information of David Smith, 23 May 1700). Several years earlier, the fictional Hollander mentioned above had similarly claimed that much of the English government's revenues were being spent on 'magnificent Buildings here at the Loo, where our Statholder is building a Palace to equal Versailles': *The copy of a letter from a gentleman in Dort*, p. 12. It is entirely possible that Lenke 'heard' of the supposed palace from this pamphlet. For another seditious complaint about taxes, see Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, A1/110/1697/T/46 (information of Richard Benson, Jun 1697).

¹⁰⁵ Hertfordshire Archives, QSR 21/1689/221 (informations of William Gillham, Benjamin Pattmow and John Gillham, 3 Sep 1689). For less seditious complaints about quartering soldiers, see J. Childs, *The British Army in the Age of William III, 1689-1702* (Manchester, 1987), pp. 90-8, 118.

¹⁰⁶ See nn. 1 and 102 above.

¹⁰⁷ [Ferguson], *Account*, p. 41. For other claims of a 'Conspiracy' of 'the Usurper ... with the High and Mighty at the Hague, to reduce these Kingdoms to a Feebleness and Indigency', and of 'the P. of O's certain Design to betray our Trade to the Dutch' turning 'Our Liberties into Slavery, Our Property into Beggary', see [?Ferguson], *Whether the preserving the Protestant religion was the motive unto ... the late revolution* (1695), p. 36; *Present confederacy*, pp. 44-5; *Dear Bargain*, p. 24; *A letter from the King of Great Britain to the Earl of Portland* (1691), pp. 6-7; *Price of Abdication*, pp. 8, 19.

Even worse, the rising misery was ‘not so much the hard Fate of the Times, as *the Design of the State*, who think they shall want no Souldiers if they can make Beggars enough’.¹⁰⁸ Here, then, was an explanation which precisely inverted the Williamite view – a foreign-backed despot still threatened the nation with poverty and slavery, but the monster had been transformed from James into William.

Each group of partisans thus traced the causes of current economic troubles to the malice of their political enemies. The result was a very public melee fought out in print and in speech between mutually exclusive interpretations of ‘the present state of England’. Yet, as has been seen, the debate involved more than merely two polarised opinions – a diverse range of causes were claimed by an equally diverse range of observers. Although some attitudes were rather conventional and apparently apolitical, a substantial number of people interpreted the nation’s afflictions in ways that had unavoidable political implications.

* * * * *

The intertwining of political and economic debates transformed the way many groups responded to the mounting hardships. As the new king’s enemies sought to capitalise on social discontent and as local disorders took on much wider implications, the potential for political instability rose. Soon even hungry crowds sometimes associated their plight with ‘affairs of state’. The changes wrought by the Revolution also shaped the responses of the state itself, as the king and his parliaments adjusted to the new political environment. They rightly believed that government missteps might put the whole regime at risk.

The danger of a Jacobite restoration was real. News of planned invasions and plots against the government circulated widely throughout the 1690s and, on more than one occasion, such schemes seemed to have a real chance of success.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, opponents of the Williamite regime justifiably believed that the spread of economic hardship significantly heightened the possibility that the Revolution of 1688 could be completely reversed. Thus, when French and Jacobite forces prepared to invade in the summer of 1690, they reportedly sought to turn the English people against the new monarchs by printing and dispersing a declaration which claimed that ‘the great taxes and the decay of trade shal soon be remedied’.¹¹⁰ Other seditious pamphlets suggested similar remedies, arguing that ordinary citizens should ‘be their own Physicians, and prevent their Ruine’ by overthrowing the Dutch tyrant and restoring King James.¹¹¹ Meanwhile, William’s supporters openly worried that such a scenario might soon come to pass. When a major conspiracy to assassinate the king was revealed in spring of 1696, Abraham Pryme assumed that the plot had been launched in response of the disruption caused by the Recoinage Act.¹¹² Indeed, more than one observer thought the government’s

¹⁰⁸ *Present State* (1694), pp. 2, 4 (emphasis added).

¹⁰⁹ J. Garrett, *The Triumphs of Providence: The Assassination Plot, 1696* (Cambridge, 1980).

¹¹⁰ Luttrell, *Relation*, II. 65 (26 June 1690). James made similar promises during his invasion preparations in 1692 that he would ‘restore Trade’, re-establish the Navigation Act against the ‘favour of Strangers’ [i.e. the Dutch] and return ‘Wealth and Bullion into the Kingdom’: *His Majesties most gracious declaration to all his loving subjects* (20 Apr 1692). A year later, he promised to rescind the Hearth Tax and to not send any money to France: *His Majesties most gracious declaration to all his loving subjects* (17 Apr 1693).

¹¹¹ *Present State* (1694), p. 7. The same conclusion is implied by most of the Jacobite texts cited above.

¹¹² Pryme, *Diary*, p. 84. At around the same time, Evelyn was worried about the threat of French invasion ‘whilst we were already much confused, & discontented upon the greatnesse of the Taxes, and corruption of the mony &c’: Evelyn, *Diary*, V, p. 233. On the plot itself, see Garrett, *Triumphs*.

currency policy might drive the poor to join with the French if they landed or would ‘open up a floodgate and let in King James and his bloody crew’.¹¹³ This suggests that the politicisation of economic conditions had made it significantly more likely that widespread resentment of the material hardships of the decade would spill over into a direct threat to the state itself.

The spectre of popular rebellion which haunted Pryme and many of his compatriots did not materialise on the scale that they had feared, but it was not merely a figment of gentry paranoia either. There were, in fact, dozens of riots and tumultuous protests in response to the harsh economic conditions of the 1690s, some of which had conspicuous political implications. The sheer number of times that ‘the mob’ rose up in towns and villages across the country during William’s reign suggests that propertied observers had good reason to worry about the spread of disorder. The period witnessed at least forty food riots, eight recoinage disturbances and several excise riots as well as threatening ‘clamours’ from unpaid sailors, disbanded soldiers, and underemployed weavers.¹¹⁴ Most incidents seem, in retrospect, to have been localised protests that sought only official action against middlemen or special distributions of relief, thus obeying the conventions of the paternalist ‘moral economy’.¹¹⁵ Nonetheless, the extent of disorder at time led some observers to believe that the country would soon be torn apart by ‘Intestine Confusions’ and ‘great disturbances’, just as it had been ‘at the beginning of the greate Rebellion’ in the 1640s.¹¹⁶ A few individuals aimed at exactly that. At Norwich in 1691, for example, a man appears to have threatened a tax collector with a paper inscribed with ‘an act for a new Rebellion’, and in 1696 another man complained about ‘the diffiency of the Coyne’, saying ‘it would never be better till we goe together with our hats and our Clubbs’ to ‘get rid of ... all the Kings’.¹¹⁷ Such cases were rare, but they must have magnified the sense of unease amongst propertied gentlemen worried about the weakness of the state’s authority in the face of increasingly grim economic conditions.

In addition, some of the popular unrest of the 1690s had an overtly political component. As material hardship came to be seen through an ever-more partisan lens, previously innocuous instances of minor disorder could take on a seditious appearance. As such, the oft-repeated claim that the country’s rulers encouraged the export of grain to Holland, despite shortages at

¹¹³ SALS, DD\SF/7/1/31/98 (28 Nov. 1696); *HMC: Downshire*, pt. 2, p. 713. See also the claims that ‘disaffected’ agitators sought to use the recoinage to spark popular revolt: BL, Add. MS 28924, fo. 103 (13 Dec. 1695); *HMC: Downshire*, pt. 2, pp. 668-9.

¹¹⁴ A full list and analysis of the incidents cannot be provided here, but most are mentioned at least briefly in M. Beloff, *Public Order and Popular Disturbances, 1660-1714* (London, 1938), pp. 60-6, 83-6, 89-90, 97-105, 112-14, 127; A. Charlesworth, ed., *An Atlas of Rural Protest in Britain, 1548-1900* (London, 1983), pp. 41-4, 80-2; Rose, *1690s*, pp. 139-40; J. Bohstedt, *The Politics of Provisions: Food Riots, Moral Economy, and Market Transition in England, c. 1550-1850* (Farnham, 2010), pp. 96-102. Likewise, on a smaller scale, recognisances for riots in Middlesex more than doubled from 1680s to 1690s: R. Shoemaker, *The London Mob: Violence and Disorder in Eighteenth-Century London* (London, 2004), p. 112.

¹¹⁵ For the ‘moral economy’ model of protest, see E.P. Thompson, ‘The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century’, *Past and Present*, 50 (1971) and, most recently, Bohstedt, *Politics*. For an especially telling example, see the submissive and ‘loyal’ crowd that petitioned Sir John Brownlow, a Tory MP, at his Lincolnshire home during the currency shortage: Pryme, *Diary*, pp. 95-6.

¹¹⁶ Bodl., Ballard MS 18, fos. 16-17 (10 June 1696); BL, Add. MS 28924, fo. 105 (7 Jan. 1696); Evelyn, *Diary*, V, p. 263. Evelyn was likely referring to the tumultuous crowds of thousands of weavers that earlier that month had attempted to push Parliament to adopt import restrictions and attacked the East India House: Luttrell, *Relation*, IV, pp. 167, 172, 174-5, 177, 179.

¹¹⁷ NRO, NCR Case 12b/box 1, parcel 2, unfol. (information of Edmond Watson, 26 Mar. 1691); TNA, ASSI 45/17/2/17, /19.

home, seems likely to have motivated at least a few of the food riots that erupted during the decade, though the evidence is not conclusive. For example, the ‘mutiny’ against Dutch corn merchants at Colchester in November 1692 may have been linked to political animus against the king’s countrymen.¹¹⁸ Likewise, a local MP was accused of exporting corn from Norwich only a few months before ‘a Great Tumult of people’ riotously seized and destroyed a load of grain there in February 1699 – it would be surprising if these two outbursts were not linked.¹¹⁹ Over the summer of 1696, a whole series of events offer evidence that politicised interpretations of the coinage crisis drove people to collective action. In Newcastle, Derbyshire, Lancashire and Westmorland, crowds numbered in hundreds threatened ‘the Ministers of State & their [parliamentary] Representatives’, including Sir John Lowther, a prominent government spokesman in the Commons.¹²⁰ The menace of popular violence also hung over Edward Clarke, the Whig MP, and his family in Somerset, where talk of a plot to raise ‘the mob’ to burn down his house and tear him ‘in pieces’ convinced a cousin to withdraw to a safer residence.¹²¹ Taken together, these events indicate that the growing importance of party politics in economic affairs could manifest itself in direct, physical threats against the regime and its representatives.

The response of the state to these disorders was also affected by the changing political environment. The anti-absolutist rhetoric adopted by the Revolution’s defenders seems to have pushed the government away from dramatic acts of royal paternalism. Gone were the wide-ranging ‘books of orders’ issued by Tudor and early Stuart monarchs, despite the severity of the dearth that lingered through most of the 1690s. Instead, the new executive merely issued a few proclamations that reiterated old statutes and, on occasion, publically encouraged special collections for the poor of London during particularly hard seasons.¹²² William and Mary also launched a campaign for ‘the Reformation of Manners’ which would, according to some of its supporters, help to reduce poverty by suppressing idleness and promoting industry, but it was neither managed by the court nor directly focused on the most

¹¹⁸ Luttrell, *Relation*, II. 629. Other food riots of this decade also targeted exporters, but the intended destination of the grain is usually unstated.

¹¹⁹ NRO, NCR Case 12b/box 1, parcel 2, unfol. (information of Zachery Iverson, 8 Aug. 1698; information of Henry Thirkettle, 7 Mar. 1699). The Norwich case is complicated by the fact that an alderman was also accused of exporting corn and that the mayor may have connived at the riot: *ibid.* (information of Samuel Woodcocke, 21 Feb. 1699; information of Ann Smith, 25 Feb. 1699). For early concerns that local magistrates were implicated in the manipulation of grain markets, see Hindle, ‘Dearth and the English Revolution’, pp. 16, 25-27, 30.

¹²⁰ Bodl., Ballard MS. 18, fo. 16; Pryme, *Diary*, p. 95. A suspected Jacobite conspirator named ‘Duranee’ or ‘Durant’ was detained at Newcastle, but it was later revealed to be a mistaken identification: TNA, SP 44/100, p. 250. Note that Newcastle’s MPs were William Blackett and William Carr who ‘started their political careers as Tories, [but] by 1698 they had drifted towards support of the Court and ultimately became Whigs’: *HoP*. The protest at Rochdale (Lancs.) may have been targeting Sir Ralph Assheton of Middleton (which adjoined Rochdale parish), who was the MP for Lancashire and supporter of the Whig ministry: *HoP*.

¹²¹ SALS, DD/SF/7/1/31/65-66 (18 Aug. 1696), /71 (6 Sep. 1696); Knights, *Representation*, p. 191. See also the threats about taxes and trade against the house and family of the Whig Speaker of the House of Commons in Hereford in May 1697: *HMC: Downshire*, I, pt. ii. 743-4.

¹²² S. Macfarlane, ‘Social Policy and the Poor in the Later Seventeenth Century’ in A.L. Beier and R. Finlay, eds., *London 1500-1700: The Making of the Metropolis* (London, 1986), pp. 259-60; TNA, SP 44/163, pp. 51-2, 82-4 (Dec. 1693, Nov. 1696). For excellent broader discussions of the shift in food policy, which briefly note constitutional changes but do not mention the partisan political context after 1689, see Outhwaite, ‘Dearth’, esp. pp. 392, 396, 406; Outhwaite, *Dearth*, ch. 3; P. Slack, ‘Dearth and social policy in Early Modern England’, *Social History of Medicine*, 5 (1992), pp. 15-17; Slack, *Reformation*, pp. 65-6, 88, 145. For an interesting but presumably fictional instance of royal paternalism highlighted in a broadside ballad, see *The Bedfordshire Widow; Or, The Poor in Distress Reliev'd* (1694). Note that county magistrates do seem to have responded to the royal proclamations with more stringent policing of the markets, for example of which see the archival material cited in n. 50 above.

immediate economic problems of the era.¹²³ Overall, partly because of the changed political culture in the wake of the Revolution, ostentatious royal intervention was minimal.

The contrast with the manic activity in Parliament at this time is striking. Its expanded fiscal powers and regular meetings meant that it handled much more business than its predecessors, whilst frequent elections ensured that parliamentary debates became more partisan, even in the case of economic affairs. Hence, the 'hard times' of this decade were extensively discussed and many remedies were proposed. Yet the passing of statutes in response was usually slow and inconsistent.¹²⁴ The erratic outcomes were not for lack of trying. For example, Jack Howe, a notoriously bold Tory M.P., infuriated 'the Court party' in 1695 when he asserted that Parliament – rather than the King - should control the proposed council on trade, because 'we might be without a King, but not without a trade'. He claimed, in essence, that the parliamentary supremacy established in 1689 ought to be extended to fully encompass finance and foreign commerce. Howe's brazenly irreverent attack on royal prerogative was soon defeated but it led one observer to suggest that 'there was never such speeches in the House in any Parliament since that of '41'.¹²⁵ Less dramatically, both Commons and Lords launched enquiries into naval and commercial 'miscarriages at sea', including the notorious loss of the Turkey Fleet, which uncovered some corruption and embarrassed a few important officer-holders without actually offering any useful new policies.¹²⁶ In both cases, the shift in political culture encouraged parliamentarians to seek solutions to the material hardships of their constituents, yet the process of law-making remained prone to partisan disruption and legislative inertia. For instance, although most members of Parliament were well-aware of the rising food prices and two bills to reform the 'assize of bread' nearly passed, the proposals ultimately failed and the Commons only proved able to belatedly pass measures to temporarily prohibit the export or distillation of corn in 1699.¹²⁷ That said, despite the friction caused by partisan quarrels, two initiatives long associated with Whiggism – the 'improvement' of the poor and the 'protection' of domestic manufacturing – both received substantial parliamentary support after the Revolution.¹²⁸ The new statutes for poor relief and protectionism probably provided no immediate respite for those suffering through the hard times of the 1690s, but their long-term effects were more consequential.

To contemporaries, the concurrence of sudden political and economic change was very worrying indeed. Partisans blamed each other for the harsh conditions, adding considerably to risk of disorder and probably limiting the ability of the authorities to respond effectively. As crowds threatened to plunder the houses of unpopular parliament men and the government

¹²³ Claydon, *Godly Revolution*, ch. 1-3; Rose, *1690s*, ch 6; R. Shoemaker, 'Reforming the City: The Reformation of Manners Campaign in London, 1690-1738' in Lee et al., eds., *Stilling the Grumbling Hive*.

¹²⁴ For the high proportion of unsuccessful financial and economic bills in this period, see J. Hoppit, 'Patterns of Parliamentary Legislation 1660-1800', *Historical Journal*, 39 (1996), pp. 119-20.

¹²⁵ *HMC: Downshire*, I, pt. ii. 597-8. For another argument that only 'our noble Parliament' could reverse England's ruin and deliver 'us from lawless Rule', see *The Sea Martyrs* (1691).

¹²⁶ Grey, *Debates*, X, pp. 311ff.; *Journal of the House of Commons*, XI, index, s.v. 'fleet'; *HMC: The Manuscripts of the House of Lords, New Series* (London, 11 vols., 1900-62), I. 93-298; *ibid.*, II. 64-117; Rose, *1690s*, pp. 86-7; Horwitz, *Parliament*, pp. 116-18, 125-6.

¹²⁷ *Journal of the House of Commons*, XI. 302; *ibid.*, XII. 283; *Statutes of the Realm*, VII. 454-60. See also Outhwaite, 'Dearth'; Outhwaite, *Dearth*, ch. 3.

¹²⁸ Slack, *Reformation*, ch. 5; S. Hindle, *On the Parish? The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England, c. 1550-1750* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 186-7, 426-7, 433-4, 436-45; Macfarlane, 'Social Policy' in Beier and Finlay, eds., *London; Ormrod, Rise*, esp. pp. 43-59; Pincus, *1688*, pp. 369-72, 383-9.

failed to provide any suitable redress, the danger of another ‘Great Rebellion’ must have seemed very near.

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The barrage of economic shocks that struck England so soon after the Revolution of 1688 had a profound impact on society during William III’s reign. They threatened the livelihoods of millions of people who had only very recently been enjoying an era notable for its relative peace and prosperity. In response, both supporters and opponents of the new regime promptly began to interpret the changing economic situation in political terms. Even more importantly, they often did so publicly and explicitly, feeding the hungry printing presses with reams of blatantly partisan accounts of the nation’s trade, taxes, money and food supplies.

The evidence presented here of a fundamental shift in the nature and extent of economic discussion reinforces the conclusions of Tim Harris, Steve Pincus and others who have emphasised the ‘genuinely revolutionary’ effect of the events of 1688 on English society.¹²⁹ Both the direct political consequences of the Revolution and the wider changes in public discourse were felt far beyond the confines of Westminster. This helps us to understand the extraordinary public response to the severe material hardship that arrived in the 1690s. As Pincus notes, economic concerns ‘were front and centre in the partisan debates of 1695-96’, and he is right to emphasise the influence of party strife on arguments about political economy during this decade more generally.¹³⁰ Yet Pincus’s claim that such discussion can be reduced to a ‘struggle between two competing modern economic programs’ is belied by diversity of the polemics and complaints recounted above.¹³¹ The revolution certainly produced some ideologically coherent Whigs and Tories who loudly partook in the debates about England’s economic challenges, but even more striking is the sheer cacophony of voices that emerged in the 1690s. Many of those who blamed the hardships of the 1690s on ‘moneyed men’ or ‘parliament men’ were neither Tories nor Jacobites.¹³² Likewise, it was not only radical Whigs who saw French tyranny or popish conspiracy as the cause of commercial problems.¹³³ In short, economic complaints were notably more *politicised* after 1688, but not systematically *polarised*. Still, historians such as Pincus rightly insist that debates about the material impact of the revolution were widespread and often viciously polemical. The resulting anxiety and disorder reminded more than one witness of the anarchic 1640s.

Such comparisons were apt, for the imprint of the events of William’s reign visibly reshaped public life long after the immediate effects had faded from view. Although the threatened rebellion failed to materialise in the 1690s, there was nonetheless a significant shift in the way people responded to economic problems – a shift that appears to have revived and extended the politicised arguments that had briefly proliferated during the civil wars and interregnum. Debates about the role of the state in commercial and financial affairs exploded as more people than ever before joined the conversation as readers, writers, petitioners and protesters. The sheer volume of printed commentary on such topics grew considerably after

¹²⁹ See nn. 4-5 above.

¹³⁰ Pincus, *1688*, p. 459.

¹³¹ Pincus, *1688*, p. 399.

¹³² See nn. 78 and 84 above.

¹³³ See n. 64 above.

1688 and the totals tended to remain at levels much higher than typical of the seventeenth century throughout the Hanoverian era.¹³⁴ In fact, this decade left a powerful legacy to the eighteenth century.

The conjunction of political and economic debates after the Revolution of 1688 was by no means entirely novel, but does seem to have been transformed from an occasional coincidence into an enduring concurrence. It was the heady arguments of the 1690s that germinated the popular, politically inflected commentary on economic problems produced by Daniel Defoe, Jonathan Swift and their many successors.¹³⁵ In addition, the rapid emergence of this strain of controversy in print soon spread to parliamentary deliberations and elections. From this point onwards, trade and taxation were central to political allegiances, lobbying, campaigning and voting.¹³⁶ For example, during the ferocious controversy over the French Commercial Bill of 1713, the potential threat to the nation's trade was relentlessly repeated in party polemic and on the hustings.¹³⁷ Likewise, the bursting of the South Sea Bubble in 1720 and the panic that ensued was very quickly turned into a weapon, first by the Tories and then, much more successfully, by Robert Walpole in his efforts to marginalise his enemies both within and without the new Whig regime.¹³⁸ Meanwhile, in the same year, Parliament was pushed into passing a law against East Indian textile imports through a noisy, violent campaign of petitioning, pamphleteering and rioting by the London silkweavers, whose public spokesmen claimed that their hardship was a conspiracy hatched by 'the *Disaffected Party*'.¹³⁹ In the next decade, the emergent 'patriot' opposition turned the Excise Bill of 1733 into a full-scale political crisis through their extensive extra-parliamentary mobilisation against the proposed extension of the tax.¹⁴⁰ Moreover, according to Kathleen Wilson, during the co-ordinated anti-government mobilisations preceding and during the War of Jenkins' Ear in 1738-42, the opposition 'deliberately incorporated commercial and expansionist grievances into patriot ideology and the case against Court Whiggery, thus further enlarging its support out of doors'.¹⁴¹ Even food rioters – the most notoriously 'conservative' of protesters – can sometimes be found shouting revolutionary slogans in the eighteenth century.¹⁴² In all of these cases, it is not difficult to trace the roots of the rhetoric and social reach of these clashes to their precursors in the 1690s. The political discord that appeared in economic discussion

¹³⁴ See above, Figure 1.

¹³⁵ Defoe, in fact, published his first substantial works under William III about the contested topics of 'new contrivances, engines, and projects to get money' and of foreign office-holders and immigrants: *An Essay Upon Projects* (1697); *The True-Born Englishman* (1701). For eighteenth-century economic debates, see Dickson, *Financial Revolution*, ch. 2, esp. pp. 17-23; T. Hutchison, *Before Adam Smith: The Emergence of Political Economy, 1662-1776* (Oxford, 1988); J. Hoppit, 'Political Arithmetic in Eighteenth-Century England', *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 49 (1996); Hoppit, 'Contexts'; J. Innes, *Inferior Politics: Social Problems and Social Policies in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2009), esp. ch. 4.

¹³⁶ For example, as noted above, petitions to the House of Commons about 'mercantile issues' increased more six-fold in the 1690s and remained similarly high throughout Anne's reign: Gauci, *Politics of Trade*, p. 212.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, ch. 6.

¹³⁸ L. Colley, *In Defiance of Oligarchy: The Tory Party, 1714-60* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 195-6; J. Hoppit, *A Land of Liberty? England, 1689-1727* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 405-7.

¹³⁹ Waddell, *God, Duty and Community*, pp. 174, 215-16.

¹⁴⁰ P. Langford, *The Excise Crisis: Society and Politics in the Age of Walpole* (Oxford, 1975), esp. ch. 4; Colley, *Defiance*, pp. 173-4, 214-15; F. Azfar, 'Sturdy Beggars and Political Crisis in 1730s England', *Historical Reflections / Réflexions historiques*, 37:1 (2011), pp. 107-30.

¹⁴¹ K. Wilson, 'Empire, Trade and Popular Politics in mid-Hanoverian Britain: the Case of Admiral Vernon', *Past and Present*, 121 (1988), p. 96. See also P. Woodfine, *Britannia's Glories: The Walpole Ministry and the War with Spain* (Woodbridge, 1998), esp. ch. 4.

¹⁴² Thompson, 'Moral Economy', pp. 126-8.

after 1688 unsettled contemporaries, but even the putative ‘growth of political stability’ in the early eighteenth century could not substantially reverse it.¹⁴³

Throughout most of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, periods of widespread economic distress tended to be attributed to providential punishment for sin, profiteering by greedy middlemen or mismanagement by local authorities. Such interpretations remained common long after the Glorious Revolution, but they were increasingly joined by explanations that focused directly on the national political scene. Jacobite conspiracies, French absolutism, the moneyed interest, parliamentary corruption and even the new Dutch king were all presented as possible reasons for the distresses of the 1690s. Furthermore, as has been seen, these allegations were often made in public – circulated through alehouse conversations, manuscript libels and rapidly proliferating sheaves of printed polemic. Previous waves of politicised economic debate and public protest had swept through early modern England, but the wave that arose after 1688 crested higher than its precursors and only partly ebbed away in the years that followed. Open argument about the government’s success or failure in defending the livelihoods of its people was no longer unusual – it had become a permanent part of English society.

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¹⁴³ J.H. Plumb, *The Growth of Political Stability* (London, 1967); G. Holmes, ‘The Achievement of Stability: the Social Context of Politics from the 1680s to the Age of Walpole’ in J.A. Cannon, ed., *The Whig Ascendancy: Colloquies on Hanoverian England* (London, 1981).

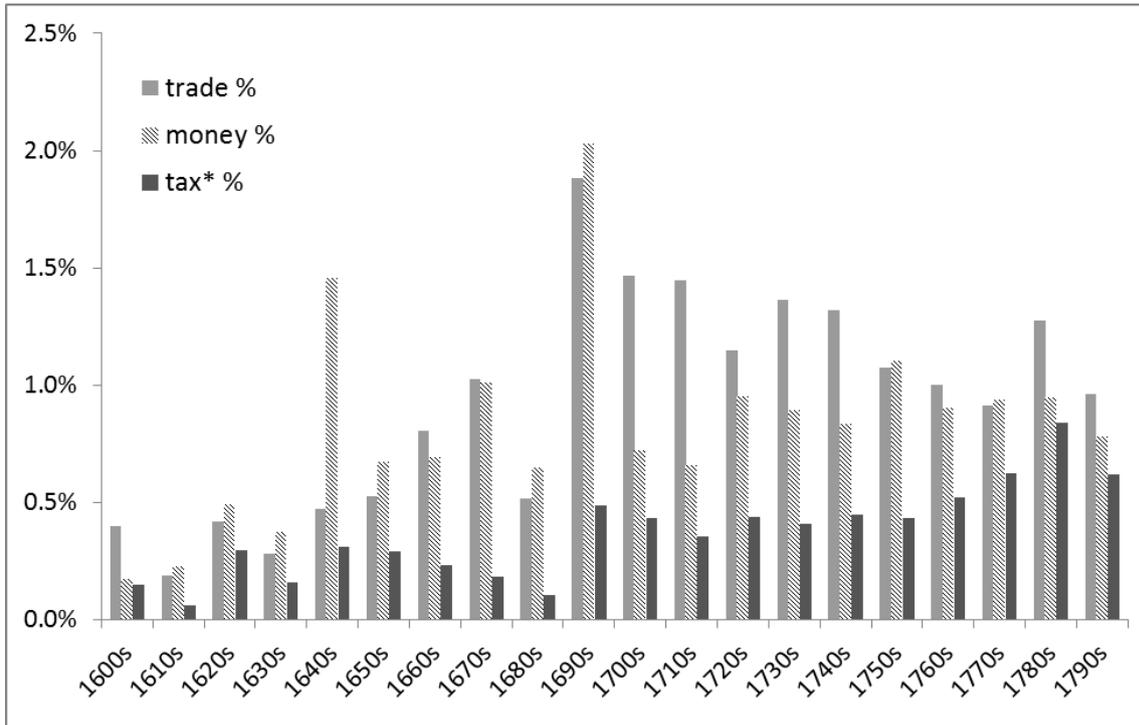


Figure 1: Percentage of titles per decade containing the terms 'trade', 'money' or 'tax'.