INTELLIGENCE AND ESPIONAGE IN THE REIGN OF CHARLES II, 1660–1685

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Introduction

I

In his secret paper, 'A Brief Discourse Concerning the Nature and Reason of Intelligence', written during the course of the reign of William III, Sir Samuel Morland, who had served the regimes of both Oliver Cromwell and Charles II in the secret dealings of government, attempted to capture the rationale and philosophy behind the Restoration regime's intelligence system. The foundation of the philosophy which Morland outlined was clarity itself. His view was that all mankind possessed a fallen nature and thus was unable to be held to anything in political life if his vital interests, his survival and need for power, were threatened, Morland's political man was 'governed wholly by politick maxims'[1] and while this was most visible in the relations between nation-states such tendencies were equally visible in the relationship between government and people. In such relationships the sanctions laid down by religion had little effect, for men merely paid lip service to keeping the 'most sacred promise[s] & solemn agreements', which were as 'easily broke[n] as Sampson's cords'.[2] In such a philosophy nothing could be ruled out that gave an advantage to 'political man'. As the ruler mistrusted his neighbour in international politics so he should also mistrust his own people. Given this situation it was beholden upon the ruler to discover and assess the 'tempers of his own subjects' as well as 'the first ferments of all factions; in order to manage the 'lopping men of so many different parties & the Heroes of the populace'.[3] This was particularly true of England, for the English, according to Morland, were an especially difficult people, being 'untam'd horses [who] have thrown their unskilful riders many times within these fifty years'.[4] The key to controlling and governing an essentially anarchical world, or so Morland

[1] BL Add. MSS 47133, fos. 8–13. Compare these views with those of Dudley Bradstreet in Chapter 5.

[2] BL Add. MSS 47133, fos. 8–13. Morland's view of mankind is similar to that expressed by Machiavelli. See N. Machievelli, *The Prince* (Oxford, 1984), p. 56.

[3] BL Add. MSS 47133, fos. 8–13. [4] *ibid.*

believed, lay in intelligence and espionage activities directed so as to prevent any problems. Good intelligence, as another contemporary put it, was often 'the mother of prevention'.[5] The unsavoury activities intelligence work involved on the early modern scene were thus seen as vital to the arts of government. A neglect of them could lead 'a Prince [to] lose his Crown or life'.[6] In spite of the obvious importance Morland laid upon them the intelligence and espionage activities of the Caroline regime during the period 1660–85 have been somewhat neglected by most historians and it is the purpose of the present work to examine in detail the mechanics of the Restoration regime's intelligence system, its concerns, both domestic and foreign, as well as the philosophy which lay behind it. In short this book is an attempt to throw some light on the darker areas of Restoration politics.[7]

Until comparatively recently the subject of intelligence itself had undoubtedly suffered from neglect by academic historians. In the political history of most periods it has usually been the 'missing dimension'.[8] It was missing because of the alleged difficulties imposed by the sources, or the claim that such secret activities lacked a real historical record. The non-availability of a historical record was thought only to be matched by the large degree of myth-making which went on in the popular historical works on the subject. And indeed the popular history of intelligence has had a strong tendency to regurgitate old myths, invariably ignoring the more interesting reality which lies beyond them, and in so doing has done the subject something of a disservice.[9] In the early modern period at least, the archives can produce a wealth of illuminating evidence about the dark underbelly of the politics of the period. Moreover the historian does not suffer from the same restrictions which are forced upon his colleagues studying in the modern era.[10] Naturally enough these documents, as with

5 Durham University Library MSS, Cosin Letter Books, 1 (b), 132, I. Basire to Sir P. Musgrave, 17 May 1665. See also D. Defoe, *A Dialogue Betwixt Whig and Tory, alias Williamite and Jacobite* (1693), p. xi; G. Monck, *Observations on Military and Political Affairs* (1796), p. 61.

6 BL Add. MSS 47133, fos. 8–13.

7 Previous work on this subject is now rather dated; see P. M. Fraser, *The Intelligence of the Secretaries of State 1660–1688* (Cambridge, 1956), which is mainly concerned with the newsletter system and was in any case never intended to be comprehensive. See also J. Walker, 'The Secret Service Under Charles II and James II', *TRHS*, 4th series, 15, 1932, pp. 211–35, an article derived from his original Ph.D thesis 'The Republican Party in England From the Restoration to the Revolution (1660–1688)' University of Manchester, 1930–1.

8 C. Andrew and D. Dilks, eds., *The Missing Dimension: Governments and Intelligence Communities in the Twentieth Century* (1985), p. 2.

9 Examples of this abound; see R. Deacon, *A History of the British Secret Service* (1982) as one example.

10 Restrictions on access to documents are the major problem here. Of the plethora of works on the modern period few can be highly recommended, one of the exceptions being C. Andrew, *Secret Service: The Making of the British Intelligence Community* (1986).

all historical records, have their problems. There are many of what S. R. Gardiner once labelled the 'ragged ends'[11] of history in the stories which emerge from the archives, but once the popular misconceptions have been scraped away, this area of government can provide a valuable insight into both the psychology as well as some of the methods of early modern government. At the least it provides an understanding of the means by which the regime of Charles II operated in the murky underworld of the political history of the period.

Intelligence, of course, can simply mean 'evaluated information' and in our period this use of the term was common enough, but it also denoted a wide variety of covert government activities related to the security of the Stuart regime. In essence there were, and still are to some extent, two sides to this aspect of intelligence. The first of these related to the gathering of information by a variety of means, some legal, others less so. The second was what we might term a 'police and security' dimension which could have either defensive or offensive capacities. In order to function as a government the Stuart regime needed to gather information which enabled it to take the actual decisions of government at its highest levels. From this basic requirement it logically followed that information not easily obtainable had to be obtained covertly. Hence the development of the regime's espionage activities. It was a development common to most governments of the period.

In the case of England such activities had and always have lacked a certain degree of continuity. In the English nation-state much seems to have depended upon the presence of the dynamic individual in government who came to see it as his duty to provide such services. This was true from the sixteenth century and was to remain so until at least the beginning of the twentieth century. The role of the individual in such obscure and often inglorious areas of government was therefore a significant one and it will be seen most obviously in the prominent figure of Sir Joseph Williamson. Having said this it is also possible to perceive from the late sixteenth century onwards a bureaucracy growing up to deal with the problem in the shadows of the nation-state. Intelligence work was always linked to diplomacy and this as well as the problem of domestic dissent came under the auspices of the office of the Secretary of State. This office in particular took a leading role in intelligence work. The reasoning behind this is dealt with

One of the most disappointing is B. Porter, *Plots and Paranoia: A History of Political Espionage in Britain, 1790–1988* (1989). While Porter has interesting and important things to say, the numerous attempts to be 'amusing', whether deliberate or not, ultimately tend to become merely irritating and to devalue the book as a whole.

[11] See S. R. Gardiner, *What the Gunpowder Plot Was* (1897) for more on this.

more fully below,[12] but the major figures in the English intelligence world of the early modern period, including Francis Walsingham, Robert Cecil, John Thurloe, Sir Henry Bennet, Earl of Arlington, Joseph Williamson, and Robert Harley, invariably seem to have held this office or to have been associated with it. Yet as has already been noted there was never a great deal of continuity in intelligence and espionage matters from one reign to another and lessons learned in one reign frequently had to be relearned at a later date.[13] Only in the 1660s with the establishment of the English Republic did espionage begin to be taken more seriously by the state. It became regarded as something not merely to be provided only by the personally inspired minister, but as an accepted part of state business. That this should take place in the somewhat innovative 1650s is natural enough perhaps, for the main factor which led to this development was a growing concern over security and, as fear of domestic dissent and internal rebellion were to plague the majority of the post-Civil War regimes until well into the early nineteenth century, there was a corresponding growth in covert intelligence gathering. Information and security became the mainsprings during the 1650s in pushing forward the development of intelligence activities in an English context and this was carried forward into the reign of Charles II.

The tools used by the government in either of these capacities will become clear as the present work unfolds. On the espionage front, however, it might be said that six main sources of gathering covert information existed in this period. The first, and most notorious, of these was the spy. The spy was an individual who was recruited, authorised, or instructed to obtain information for intelligence purposes, or to act against the regime's enemies. An informer on the other hand could be distinguished from a spy by the fact that he or she was normally connected with the legal system and had personally initiated his or her investigations and accusations, usually for financial gain. Informers might later come under

[12] See Chapter 1.

[13] The exception, as always, remained English activities in Ireland. Anglo-Irish relations in this area are, as yet, only unevenly covered by historians and concentration has remained largely in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Hardly anything at all has been undertaken on this subject by historians of the Stuart period. Indeed little is said on the Irish side of such affairs in what follows. It remains a large task and would necessitate another equally large book. An interesting comparison with the period with which this book deals is the England of the 1790s. See H. T. Dickinson, *British Radicalism and the French Revolution 1789–1815* (1985); R. Wells, *Insurrection: The British Experience, 1795–1803* (Gloucester, 1973); W. J. Fitzpatrick, *Secret Service Under Pitt* (1892); C. Emsley, 'The Home Office and Its Sources of Information and Investigation, 1791–1801', *EHR*, 94, 1979, pp. 532–61; M. Hutt, 'Spies in France, 1793–1808', *History Today*, 12, 1962, pp. 158–67; J. L. Baxter and F. K. Donnelly, 'The Revolutionary "Underground" in the West Riding: Myth or Reality?', *PP* 64, pp. 124–32.

the control of the government but invariably initiated their careers by themselves. Hence the regime usually acted in a passive rather than active capacity in the case of such people. A further source was that of unsolicited information. This emerged from a general pool of undirected or casual sources. Many old scores were paid off by this means and such information was more often than not untrustworthy, but still taken seriously. On the local level the newly installed regime had access to the work of the county and parish officers. These ranged from Lords Lieutenant, to militia officers, justices of the peace and down to the humble parish constable. To supplement this there was the interception of correspondence through the Post Office; a longstanding means by which early modern governments could gather information and keep a wary eye on the opinions of their people. Finally the diplomatic corps provided an international dimension to the Stuart regime's intelligence activities. Diplomacy and war brought with them endless opportunities for gathering illicit information. In the seventeenth century in particular diplomacy was merely warfare by other means and espionage remained its cutting edge.

This book therefore examines not only the inheritance left to the Caroline regime in this area by the Republic, but the work of the regime through the use of such sources. The first chapter deals with the central control and development of the English intelligence system from 1660 to 1685, especially the major role played by the office of the Secretary of State. Chapter 2 examines the use made by the Caroline regime of the Post Office for intelligence purposes as well as the use of codes and ciphers. In Chapter 3 there is an examination of intelligence activities on the local scene, particularly in the north of England during the early 1660s. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 examine the world of the spies on the ground, their recruitment, numbers and instructions, as well as individual case studies of some of the spies who found themselves employed by the Stuart regime. Chapter 7 examines English 'secret services' in the context of the foreign and diplomatic scene, while the final chapter deals with the problem of assassination in an English context.

II

John Morrill has noted that the 'Revolution proved [to be] a curious kind of Cheshire cat, it vanished leaving only a scowl behind.'[14] How significant, frightening, or dangerous this scowl was is a contentious element in Restoration historiography and historians of the period have usually

[14] J. Morrill, Introduction to *Revolution and Restoration, England in the 1650s* (1992), p. 14.

divided into two camps over this question. There are those who believe that the threat from conspiracy and plots was in reality negligible and has been overrated, and there are those who claim the restored regime faced a very serious threat from day one of its existence. Understanding the reality of the threat the regime faced is crucial in many respects, as part of the justification for the creation of the regime's intelligence system in the 1660s was to counter this threat and to maintain the Stuart regime's security against its radical enemies. Clearly then this problem of the 'radical underground', as one historian has labelled part of the opposition to the regime, is an important one.[15]

Even by European standards early modern England had a notorious reputation for violence, instability and rebellion. In 1660 foreign observers of the English scene were quickly assessing the chances of the new royal regime surviving on the 'merry-go-round' of English politics. Two decades of political instability and the effects of civil war could not be lightly shaken off. While the return of the king in May 1660 was greeted with noisy and drunken protestations of loyalty, the celebrations of May 1660 concealed a troubled nation, uncertain and traumatised by its experiences. The continuity of the 1650s with the post-1660 situation has until recently been underestimated. There were many political, religious and social problems to deal with and clearly not everyone could be satisfied. Many were soon to feel as alienated from the untrustworthy group of politicians who now ran the country as they had once been from the generals of the 1650s. For amongst certain elements of the population Charles II and his new regime were also unpopular. Benefit of hindsight has tended to obscure this point. The king himself did not help his cause. He was a man who had spent most of his adult life in foreign parts, to whom English ways were somewhat alien, and who was rumoured to be a Roman Catholic, or at least of doubtful religious persuasion. Charles, it should be recalled, was also the king who had been stigmatised by republican propagandists as a 'young Tarquin' and with his somewhat chaotic lifestyle and cynical personality the new king certainly tried to live up to that character's vices. Moreover the complex and secretive nature of his character set the tone for the regime. Morally bankrupt himself, Charles II had a talent for obscuring his motives which was matched only by his servants' greed for power and position. Indeed the king's ministers themselves were men of contradictory loyalties. While some had served him in exile, others had served the Lord Protector, but for the most part after 1660 they worked hard at serving themselves. To add to this impression there remained deep-rooted political and religious problems in the country. The arrival of the monarchy had

[15] So labelled by Richard Greaves; for more on his work see below.

certainly not solved these and Restoration England therefore was a country living under the shadow of the past. While the newly launched ship of state might look secure on the surface, underneath it was threatened with the barnacles of the previous twenty years and, some thought, with a crew who were soon navigating it towards the rocks.

The undercurrent of criticism of the restored monarchy came to the ears of the new regime in a number of ways. One of the means by which the regime gained a first impression of its relationship with the people was through the numbers of prosecutions for seditious words.[16] It is clear that indictments for seditious words can be variously read; they tell us as much about those who brought the prosecutions to show their loyalty as those who expressed the opinions which got them into trouble. Indictments invariably rose and fell with the political circumstances, the level of interest and the concern over security on a national and local level. In any case by 1660 political comments had become commonplace in English alehouses and taverns and such comments could not be easily suppressed. The failure of censorship during the wars, as well as the freedom of speech that had so characterised the previous eleven years, left as a legacy at the Restoration the view that it was part of the Englishman's birthright to grumble about the times. Certainly in the Restoration period there were at least two major phases of hostility which can be traced in such indictments; 1660–5 and 1679–85.[17] In the first phase those who were self-conscious supporters of the collapsed republican regime became mixed with those who related salacious gossip about the new king and his family. It has reasonably been argued that the latter elements sprang from a long tradition of anti-popery and xenophobia which were in part a critique of the failure of reform of both the church and state. They were linked to the longstanding fear of the subversion of the protestant state by a pro-Catholic monarch and his 'corrupt' court. As the various political and diplomatic crises broke over the state these were also added to the mix, with more general complaints about government policy and even some nostalgia for the past strengths of the Cromwellian regime, which with its demise began to take on the usual mythological overtones of a 'golden age' and not just amongst its previous supporters.[18] There were also tinges of millennarianism in this period, indeed the millennarian element tended to take comfort from the disasters

[16] For some work on seditious words see P. K. Monod, *Jacobitism and the English People, 1688–1788* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 233–66.

[17] Much of the following is based on B. Sharp, 'Popular Political Opinion in England 1660–1685', *History of European Ideas*, 10, 1989, pp. 13–29; also T. Harris, *London Crowds in the Reign of Charles II: Propaganda and Politics from the Restoration until the Exclusion Crisis* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 50–1 *et passim*.

[18] See the comments of Pepys, *Diary*, IV, p. 367; VIII, pp. 249, 322.

of the early 1660s, contemplating them with some satisfaction. Many of the complaints about the king reflected not only a suspicion of his religion, but also his sexuality, his unfathomable motivation and the corrupt nature of the court he ruled. The latter was a recurrent problem of the Stuart dynasty's occupation of the throne and stemmed from underlying fears of popery and arbitrary government. One individual, for example, expressed the view that Charles II would undoubtedly bring in 'superstition and popery and that we must fall down againe [to] worshipp stocks and images' while another hoped 'before ... three years goe about [to] see [further] alteration in government'.[19] Fears of popery and, by implication, arbitrary government, were thus deeply embedded in the English psyche and, as the Venetian ambassador noted, there was no lack of 'evil humours' in the nation to 'rekindle civil strife'.[20] While most of what we may term the 'good old cause' critique had begun to fade by the 1670s, only to be adopted in some later Whig propaganda, the anti-popish rhetoric swiftly replaced it and was to find another target in the converted Catholic James, Duke of York.

What is clear is that viewing the Restoration from the back alleyways of its political life provides further evidence that 1660 was never such a watershed as was once claimed. The state lived under the shadow of the events of the 1640s and 1650s and the politicians within it were operating with all the mental baggage of that period. This undoubtedly shaped their responses to criticism, as well as to the practical problems of government. The fear of the 'fanaticks' return was initially strong upon them and mixed with the problems of the church settlement and dissent. They were a generation of politicians who were riven with faction, hostility, the rhetoric of anti-popery and hatred of the 'fanaticks' and who worked in a morally bankrupt court. They came to expect hostility from their political rivals and naturally expected it from their old enemies. The exiles amongst them also had first-hand experience of attempting to overthrow governments through conspiracy and rebellion. They had suffered, fought and plotted their way through the 1650s and Charles and his key ministers brought all of these experiences into government with them. In any case the royalists and Cromwellians who made up the government were used to plots as a part of political life. They expected trouble and were not about to be caught out, by rebels, dissenters or 'fanaticks'.

One of the most crucial questions faced by the regime, of course, was the form a religious settlement should take, and on the religious problems of

[19] J. Raine, *Depositions From the Castle of York Relating to Offences Committed in the Northern Counties in the Seventeenth Century*, Surtees Society, 40 (1861), pp. 83, 93.
[20] *CSPV*, 1661–4, p. 40.

the country much has been written.[21] In many senses the religious problem began with Charles himself who, for a variety of motives, favoured toleration.[22] Liberty of conscience, however, was not something sought by others, particularly the newly restored Anglican bishops, and it was a concept cluttered with the burden of the past, as well as the practicalities of government in both church and state. In short it would be difficult to achieve. The re-emergence of the Anglican church and the loyalty in parliament which it invoked, the fear that liberal ideas in religion could bring only trouble in their wake and the belief that every dissenter was a potential regicide was matched with a singular inability, common in the seventeenth century as a whole, to see the other person's point of view. The result was the imposition of strict penal laws and the view that a nation weighed under the sins of the 1640s and 1650s should be purged of dissent. Persecution and repression naturally followed in the early 1660s. It was the insurrection of January 1661 by the Fifth Monarchists which provided another impetus to this. Again the impact of this event has often been underestimated. Thomas Venner and his men disrupted the streets of London for three days and created a situation in which all dissenters were linked to insurrection and plotting whether they liked it or not. In the aftermath of the rising the regime was flooded with accusations and rumours of plots. This general fear of dissent was something no amount of mutilation to the corpses of Cromwell, Ireton and Bradshaw on 30 January 1661, a mere twenty-four days after Venner's rising, could calm. As Pepys saw it, and his opinion was not uncommon in the government, it appeared that 'their work will be carried on, though they do die'.[23] One result of the rising was the creation of a new army; another effect was the stimulus it gave to the emergence of an effective intelligence system.

Venner's rising also increased the persecution of religious dissenters. A royal proclamation of 10 January 1661 banned all meetings of Baptists, Quakers and Fifth Monarchists in the wake of the rising and within weeks some 4,230 Quakers alone were languishing in gaol; other dissenters were harried and often incarcerated in vile conditions.[24] This persecution was not continuous and often hampered by the reluctance of local authorities to persecute neighbours, but it could be severe. The dissenters' response could take a number of forms including either continuing in their beliefs,

[21] See J. Spurr, *The Restoration Church of England, 1646–1689* (New Haven, 1991); I. M. Green, *The Re-Establishment of the Church of England 1660–1663* (Oxford, 1978); M. Watts, *The Dissenters From the Restoration to the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1985).

[22] Hutton, *Charles II*, pp. 182–4; J. Miller, *Charles II* (1991) p. 54.

[23] For the rising and a contemporary opinion see Pepys, *Diary*, II, pp. 7–8, 11; also C. Burrage, 'The Fifth Monarchy Insurrections', *EHR* 25, 1910, pp. 722–47.

[24] See G. R. Cragg, *Puritanism in The Period of the Great Persecution 1660–1688* (Cambridge, 1957), pp. 38–43.

as did the Quakers, and remaining defiant in the face of persecution or, they could compromise. The first choice meant persecution and hardship, while the second a sense of betrayal.[25] Another alternative was to take their religion underground, which is what occurred in many cases.[26] Dissent often entered a semi-twilight world of private meetings, in private houses or secret meetings in secluded places. Some Presbyterians even concealed their services under the guise of feasts, while other nonconformists took to holding services in places obscure enough to elude discovery. Meetings could be held at night, in concealed rooms or in the countryside. In the face of penal laws such as the Five Mile Act of 1665 some ministers were forced into using disguises, or into seeking protection from their congregations. Many historians of the period have seen such actions as unheroic, but effective in that religious dissent survived. But in contemporary terms these actions could also be taken another way. Such secret meetings could only mean one thing to a worried government and its supporters: treason and rebellion. In fact such secretive activities often rebounded on the religious dissenters, as they showed all the traditional signs of the plot. The problem for the dissenters was further compounded by an active hard core of troublemakers in whom the Stuart regime was particularly interested. It was these men, ex-soldiers, ex-ministers and ex-politicians, true rebels in word and deed, who were the real problem for the regime and, it might be said, for their fellow co-religionists, for the regime was consistently unable to distinguish between the vast majority of nonconformists who wanted freedom from persecution and a quiet life and the more dangerous radical element. These rebels were difficult to track down as they inhabited the twilight and shadows of London's meanest streets and alleys, or moved further afield in Ireland, the north of England and the Low Countries. These were the men who lived in the dark underbelly of Restoration politics, haunting coffee houses and taverns, scheming and plotting their days away. Despite their lack of numbers some of them were actually very dangerous and did represent a threat to the regime.

Within this context therefore we can now examine the problem of how far the plots faced by the regime were real or merely products of the Caroline regime's overheated imagination. It is of course essential to note that the mid-to-late seventeenth century was the era *par excellence* of plots, whether real or imagined, and some of the evidence of the many schemes which emerged into the public world was tainted not only by lies, but also

[25] See C. Hill, *A Turbulent, Seditious, and Factious People: John Bunyan and His Church* (Oxford, 1989), p. 119.
[26] Cragg, *Puritanism*, pp. 42–3.

malice and paranoia. Given the circumstances, the nation expected plots and as a result plots were uncovered. Furthermore the plots of the early 1660s should also be seen in the context of the wealth of lies which successfully struck at English political life in the period 1678–83. In this light the reality of the earlier conspiracies becomes an even more pertinent question. An examination of the period 1678–83 teaches above all that not all plots were real, nor all plotters genuine and a nation which was to credulously believe the lies of a Titus Oates would be more than willing to accept the lies of many of his lesser precursors during the troubled and equally unstable 1660s.

Hence the historical arguments over whether the plots of the 1660s were real or feigned has been a long-running and occasionally contentious one. To the politically prejudiced Whig and Tory historians of the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries such issues were often matters of simple black and white. Most Whig historians were positive that these plots were mere shams, designed mainly to persecute the politically unorthodox, whom a vicious government wished to destroy, or at least stifle. Thus the men caught up in them were no real threat, merely pawns in the 'real' plot of the period: the Caroline regime's attempt to stifle English liberties and establish popery and arbitrary government. Amongst the nonconformist community the 'plots' were similarly seen as schemes to persecute the righteous; or if they did exist, the righteous were not really involved, only reluctantly caught up in their wake. Tory historians obviously took a different viewpoint. They never really doubted the reality of the plots, but claimed that behind the lesser fry whom the government so often arrested were men who had been intent on destroying the monarchy since at least May 1660 if not before. They were the same radical, fanatic individuals who had executed the 'martyr king' Charles I, and were also intent upon murdering his son and heir in order to turn the country over to republicanism or anarchy; which to some amounted to the same thing. At the least they would have brought renewed civil war. It was thus beholden on the regime to use all the tools at its disposal to uncover their 'foul and secretive' dealings. In Bishop Parker's *History, or the Tories Chronicle*, a classic example of this view, it was claimed that there were four factions of opposition after the Restoration: the broken officers of Cromwell's army, the 'fighting little preachers' of the Gospel, the parliamentmen of the late republican state and all sacrilegious persons who had allowed the Restoration to occur and then resented it. Having included in his scheme just about everyone who could oppose the regime, Parker then went on to claim that they were allies in a widespread conspiracy and had possessed a secret general assembly of representatives, alongside a smaller council of six, drawn from the Presbyterians, the Independents, the Anabaptists, the Fifth Monarchists, as well

as the Levellers.[27] To hunt such men down and execute justice upon them was therefore a legitimate act of government for they posed a terrible threat to the state itself. At the opposite extreme of the political perspective a republican radical such as Edmund Ludlow saw most of the plots of the 1660s as bogus, for according to him such schemes were part of the time of trial for the saints, who were suffering under a tyrannical and bloodthirsty regime for the sins of the 1650s. To Ludlow and his compatriots the Caroline regime was capable of anything, from torture to coercion, in order to achieve its aims.[28]

A division existed therefore between the believers and the non-believers and modern historians faced with this problem have also divided amongst themselves.[29] The most prominent historian on this question has been Richard L. Greaves. His trilogy on radicalism underground spans the years 1660–89 and performs a sterling service in detailing the various plots, real or imagined, in this period.[30] There are, however, some flaws in his work. The first two volumes with their largely narrative structure certainly left little time for reflection, and a useful dose of scepticism on occasion would have been helpful. To answer this criticism Greaves did produce a rather limited and somewhat tetchy footnote in his third volume. In this he claimed that he had attempted in the first two volumes to 'provide the reader with a clear sense of the extent to which the government faced an incessant stream of allegations ... [and] Any suggestion that my discussion of such reports automatically attributes validity to the charges they encompassed is, of course, absurd'.[31] But this was never explicitly stated in the first two works and readers were left, if they could do so, to draw such a conclusion themselves. Some of the factual errors in the three works are

[27] *Bishop Parker's History, or The Tories Chronicle, from the Restauration of King Charles II 1660, to the year 1680* (1730), p. 37 *et passim*. See also Clarendon, *Life*, I, 285–6; II, pp. 42–3.

[28] Ludlow, *Voyce*, pp. 279, 291. As a Whig view see T. Rapin de Thoyras, *The History of England, Written in French by M. Rapin de Thoyras* (2 vols., 1732–3), I, p. 627; also L. Echard, *The History of England* (3 vols., 1718), II, p. 65.

[29] See as a starting point Walker, 'The Republican Party in England'; J. Walker, 'The Yorkshire Plot', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 31, 1934, pp. 348–59; Abbott, 'English Conspiracy'; W. G. Johnson, 'Post Restoration Non-Conformity and Plotting, 1660–1675', unpublished MA thesis, University of Manchester, 1967; M. Goldie, 'Danby, the Bishops and the Whigs', in T. Harris, *et al.*, eds., *The Politics of Religion in Restoration England* (1990), pp. 75–105; N. H. Keeble, Rewriting the Restoration, *HJ*, 35, 1992, pp. 233–5. Ashcraft, *Revolutionary Politics*.

[30] See Greaves, *Deliver Us From Evil*; *Enemies Under His Feet*; *Secrets of the Kingdom*. Of the trilogy the last work is undoubtedly the best. It provides, for example, a generally sober and judicious view of the Rye House Plot schemes, although the section on the death of the Earl of Essex seems a rather dubious tale. As a counter to this see M. Macdonald, 'The Death of the Earl of Essex, 1683', *History Today*, 41, November 1991, pp. 13–18.

[31] See Greaves, *Secrets of the Kingdom*, p. 427.

noted below, but the general theme also bears examination. Greaves' main thesis revolves around the question of the radical nature of the men whose activities he is describing and how widespread the threat was to the regime. While one cannot help feeling that in his view the agenda was already set and that it all must inevitably end in 1776 and another, but more long-lasting, 'glorious revolution', this discussion must be seen in light of the major debate over the concept of radicalism in the period as a whole.[32] In some instances Greaves' presentation of the radicals *is* sustained by a reading of the evidence and there were undoubted continuities between the radical ideas of the 1640s and 1650s and those from 1660 to 1689, although I am more inclined to think that on the ground, as opposed to the intellectuals, these links were neither as sustained or as unbroken as both he and Christopher Hill on occasion have attempted to make out, Greaves' concept of a 'radical underground' in particular appears to imply much more unity amongst these people than there was in reality. While it seems to him at least that the broad spectrum of overall dissent is not in doubt, stretching from republican assassins at one extreme to religious pacifists at the other, such a view must be qualified for there are considerable doubts not only over the actual numbers of individuals involved in conspiracy but also as to whether their political philosophy, at least until the 1680s, was as developed as he makes out. We may also argue that their efforts in the 1660s were not as widely supported as both he and Christopher Hill have suggested.[33] It is clear that there was a considerable amount of grumbling, but it is also possible to argue that the actual numbers involved in plotting may well have been much smaller and more atypical in their viewpoint than has been previously suggested. It is equally likely that the frequent claims by the dissenters that the majority of nonconformists were not involved in such violent schemes were indeed true. In fact the term 'radical' in both Greaves' work and elsewhere, often becomes so broad as to make it more than a little dubious as a label, or even as a self-consciously anachronistic term, for it not only seems to include the majority of dissenters of all types but becomes, as Jonathan Clark puts it, a 'holdall for ... ahistorical assumptions' as well as a rather romanticised refusal to understand the period in its own terms. Indeed there are some implicitly 'Whiggish' views

[32] In particular the shrewd comments made on this subject by J. C. D. Clark, *Revolution and Rebellion, State and Society in England in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 97–103.

[33] Hill suggests this in *Bunyan* pp. 115–16. The obvious exception to this lies in Ireland. Inevitably different conditions prevailed in that country and there was a clear threat to the regime at various times. In particular the Dublin Plot of 1663 represented a real danger which could have gained widespread support from the disaffected elements in Ireland. For a discussion of this plot see S. J. Connolly, *Religion, Law and Power. The Making of Protestant Ireland 1660–1760* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 24–32.