

POPULAR POLITICS IN IRELAND AND THE ACT OF UNION

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THE most striking features of the popular political response in Ireland to the attempts between mid-1798 and mid-1800 to bring about the legislative union of Britain and Ireland are its comparative uneventfulness and traditional character. On first encounter, this observation may appear provocative since it is still commonly perceived, the work of G.C. Bolton notwithstanding,¹ that the Act of Union was imposed upon a reluctant parliament and an antipathetic people. Moreover, it does not sit easily with what we know of popular anti-unionism in eighteenth-century Ireland, the most celebrated manifestation of which was the anti-union riot of 3 December 1759 when the Dublin mob invaded both houses of parliament and assaulted a number of leading officeholders arising out of a rumour that a legislative union was intended.² Arising out of such manifestations of popular attachment to a domestic Irish parliament, and the high level of political, social and criminal violence during the 1790s, it is hardly surprising that leading figures in the Irish administration anticipated that serious public disorder would be a feature of the opposition to a union in 1798–1800. In point of fact, the decisive defeat of the 1798 rebellion and the strenuous efforts of United Irish leaders to minimise the extent of their revolutionary involvement thereafter ensured that there was no overt popular resistance from a quarter which, during the 1790s, treated every reference to a union with disdain.³ As a consequence, Lord Castlereagh noted with satisfaction in January 1799 that ‘the lower orders are naturally indifferent to the question’. Whether a populace, the extent of whose politicisation, it is now commonly argued, increased greatly in the 1790s, were quite as disinterested as he and Lord Cornwallis, who was

¹ G.C. Bolton, *The passing of the Irish Act of Union* (Oxford, 1966).

² Sean Murphy, ‘The Dublin anti-union riot of 3 December 1759’ in G. O’Brien, ed., *Parliament, politics and people* (Dublin, 1989), pp. 49–68; James Kelly, *Henry Flood: patriots and politics in eighteenth-century Ireland* (Dublin, 1998), pp. 72–4.

³ Marianne Elliott, *Partners in Revolution: the United Irishmen and France* (London, 1982), chapter eight; for United Irish opposition to the idea of a union see, *inter alia*, *The Beauties of the Press* (London, 1800), pp. 340–45.

equally persuaded that 'the people neither think or care about the matter', averred is contestable.⁴ James Woodford, a percipient military officer who saw service in Ireland in the late 1790s, suggested that 'the people' scarce gave 'the question of union' any thought because they had another agenda; they were 'persuaded . . . of the French making another and successful invasion'.⁵ The pervasiveness of this conviction remains to be established, but there is no gainsaying that the failure of the rebellion, by enfeebling radicalism and discrediting the republican ideology it presented, ensured there was no popular resistance to a union from that quarter in the late 1790s.

Nor were radicals the only political interest with a diminished capacity to generate a vigorous popular response to the proposal to abolish the Irish parliament. The credibility of the whig-patriots was weakened by the withdrawal from the House of Commons in 1797 of a number of their most eminent voices, as well as by revelations of their contacts with leading United Irishmen. As a result, the patriots were ill-positioned organisationally and politically to spearhead a successful campaign to ensure the survival of the parliament whose legislative authority they had done so much to increase. This was true also of the Catholic interest had they been so-minded. The potential political influence of Catholics was greatly augmented by the extension to them of the franchise in 1793 and by the emergence subsequently of what was termed 'Catholic emancipation' as a political aspiration. However, the dissolution of the Catholic Committee and the question marks posed against Catholic loyalty as a consequence of the 1798 Rebellion put the Catholic leadership so firmly on the defensive they did not even consider recreating the popular ferment that had proved so advantageous in 1792–3, to extract concessions as part of a union settlement.⁶

The cumulative effect of recent events, therefore, was either to negate or to confine the capacity of radicals, whig-patriots and Catholics to orchestrate a popular response to the proposal to unite the British and Irish parliaments. Of the three interests, the whig-patriots were possessed of the greatest room to manoeuvre because of the continuing appeal of their arguments in favour of Irish parliamentary government. However, they were obliged to contend for the political limelight with ideological conservatives, whose political star was in the ascendant in

⁴Marquess of Londonderry, ed., *Memoirs and correspondence of Viscount Castlereagh* (4 vols., London, 1848–54), II, 81; Sir Charles Ross, ed., *Correspondence of Charles, first Marquis Cornwallis* (3 vols., London, 1859), III, 93. For the issue of popular politicisation see Kevin Whelan, *The tree of liberty* (Cork, 1996).

⁵Woodford to Portland, 22 Sept. 1799 (National Library of Scotland (henceforth NLS), Minto papers, Ms. 11195 ff. 13–14).

⁶The fullest account of Catholic politics in the 1790s is contained in T. Bartlett, *The fall and rise of the Irish nation: the Catholic question 1690–1830* (Dublin, 1992).

the late 1790s, and whose grounds for opposing a union differed from theirs in several fundamental respects. If, as a result, popular opposition to a union lacked ideological coherence, it also meant that it followed a familiar eighteenth-century pattern, and that it is to the *ancien régime* world of aggregate meetings, resolutions, petitions and addresses rather than to the revolutionary world of mass protests, public disorder and political intrigue that one must look to establish the impact on popular politics of the implementation of the Act of Union.

I

When the idea of a legislative union was floated by William Pitt following the outbreak of rebellion in late May 1798, he was assured of a positive response from the 'leading people' in Ireland, many of whom had concluded in 1792–3, when the question of Catholic enfranchisement was at issue, that this offered the best long-term security for the Irish 'Protestant interest'.⁷ This was not, as Pitt acknowledged at the time, sufficient to neutralise the formidable opposition to any such initiative that would ensue from the anticipated coalition of metropolitan, popular and parliamentary interests that would gather to defend their historical right to make law for Ireland, who continued to argue during the early and mid-1790s that a union was not in Ireland's strategic, political or economic interest.⁸ At the same time, he and other proponents of a legislative union could take comfort from the fact that the heightened revolutionary activity in Ireland from 1795 increased the parliamentary appeal of a union above the figure of eighty MPs claimed following Lord Fitzwilliam's dramatic recall in February 1795.⁹ Despite this, Pitt would not have contemplated terminating his policy of governing Ireland by 'expedients' in favour of a union but for the outbreak of rebellion on 23 May 1798. Convinced that a union alone provided the basis for a 'permanent settlement, which may provide for the internal peace of the country and secure its

⁷James Kelly, 'Public and political opinion in Ireland and the idea of an Anglo-Irish union 1650–1800' in D. George Boyce and R.R. Eccleshall, eds, *Political discourse in early modern Ireland* (forthcoming); Westmorland to Pitt, 28 Nov. 1792 (National Library of Ireland (henceforth NLI), Union correspondence, Ms. 886 ff. 17–26); A.C. Kavanaugh, *John Fitzgibbon, Earl of Clare* (Dublin, 1997), p. 256.

⁸Westmorland to Pitt, 28 Nov. 1792 (N.L.I., Union correspondence, Ms. 886 ff. 17–26); *Dublin Evening Post* (henceforth *DEP*) 21 Apr., 30 May 1795, 3 May 1796; [Lord Cloncurry], *Thoughts on the projected union between Great Britain and Ireland* (Dublin, 1797), pp. 33–42; Drennan to McTier, 26 Mar. [1793] in D.A. Chart. ed., *The Drennan letters* (Belfast, 1931), p.145; *The Beauties of the Press*, pp. 340–45

⁹*DEP*, 18 Apr. 1795; Clare to Mornington, 20 Apr. 1797 (British Library, Wellesley papers, Add. Ms. 37308 f. 34).

connection with Great Britain', he promptly set matters in train to make his decision reality.¹⁰ Significantly, his decisiveness was not mirrored by public and political opinion in Ireland. There, the rebellion dominated the political horizon, and with 'extermination' and 'disqualification' foremost on the minds of a majority of Protestants, there was no groundswell of public support for a union though it was favoured by what the Rev. Charles Warburton termed 'the sensible party' as the means most likely to ensure long term 'peace and security'.¹¹

As this suggests, the most significant short-term effect of the rebellion upon Protestant political opinion in Ireland was to strengthen its already powerful conservative strand. Sensitised by the regular recollection of the events of 1641, reports from Counties Wicklow and Wexford of 'massacres' perpetrated upon Protestants by rebels, fixed Protestant perceptions of the rebellion as a sectarian effusion inspired by an unholy combination of Catholic thirst for 'heretic blood' and 'the adoption of French principles'.¹² Arising out of this, it took no great leap of imagination to present the rebellion as 'a monstrous combination of anarchy and religious bigotry' and to conclude that events vindicated conservatives like the MP for Dublin city, John Claudius Beresford, who maintained that it was 'folly' either 'to temporise or to maintain a war of half measures with conspirators'. By extension, most felt reflexively that condign punishment should, as a matter of justice, be meted out to those responsible.¹³ They also found ideological comfort in substantial numbers in conservatism, as manifested by the detectable increase in support, most observable in Dublin, during the summer of 1798 for the rhetoric of Protestant ascendancy.

Throughout the eighteenth century, Irish Protestants of all political hues demonstrated a near-pavlovian eagerness to express their commitment to uphold the 'Protestant constitution in church and state'. Such professions attained heightened ideological potency as a result of the elaboration of the language of 'Protestant ascendancy' in the mid-

¹⁰ F. Bickley, ed., *The diary of Sylvester Douglas* (2 vols., London, 1928), 1, 35; Pitt to Camden, 28 May, 11 Jun. (Kent Archives Office (henceforth KAO), Camden papers, U840/0190A/6, 79); Pitt to Auckland, 4 June 1798 in Bishop of Bath and Wells, ed., *The correspondence of William Eden, first Lord Auckland* (4 vols., London, 1861–2), iv, 2.

¹¹ Warburton to Bentinck, 11 July 1798 in [A.P.W. Malcomson, ed.], *Eighteenth-Century Irish official papers in Great Britain, I* (Belfast, [1973]), p. 188; Cornwallis to Pitt, 20 July 1798 (Public Record Office, 30/8/327 ff. 183–4); Castlereagh to Camden, 9 July 1798 (K.A.O., Camden papers, U840/C98/2).

¹² See James Kelly, 'We were all to have been massacred: Irish Protestants and the experience of rebellion' in David Dickson *et al* eds, *The 1798 Rebellion* (forthcoming, 2000); *Freeman's Journal* (henceforth *FJ*), 22, 26, 29, 31 May, 2, 7, 12 June, 10 July 1798, 16 Nov. 1799.

¹³ *FJ*, 24, 29 May, 21 June, 10 July; Cornwallis to Ross, 8, 24 July 1798 in *Cornwallis Correspondence*, II, 358, 369.

1780s. This became so well-established during the 1790s that it had many adherents in the summer of 1798.¹⁴ In one aspect, it is identifiable in the preparedness of bodies like Dublin Corporation and the Aldermen of Skinner's Alley to honour known conservatives with complimentary addresses and approbatory resolutions.¹⁵ Another, more significant, manifestation central to an understanding of the antipathy with which many conservatives regarded a union is detectable in their readiness to profess their commitment to the maintenance intact of the Protestant constitution. This was defined as their object by the Orangemen of Dublin when, towards the end of June, they called upon all 'loyal subjects' to 'rally round the constitution'.¹⁶ As the timing and content of this pronouncement emphasise, the horizon of those who shared this outlook was dominated by the desire to restore to Protestants the rights afforded them by their 'inestimable constitution'. In other words, they assumed that the defeat of the rebellion was about maintaining the *status quo*. Indeed, in so far as the future of the Irish parliament was even contemplated, the impression generated by conservative champions such as George Ogle and John Claudius Beresford was that 'a Protestant House of Commons' was as intrinsic to the maintenance of their 'happy establishment in Church and State' as a Protestant monarchy.¹⁷ Some, the Protestant inhabitants of Bandon most notably, went a step further and pronounced explicitly against 'the fatal love of innovation'. They justified this stand by reference to the desolation revolutionaries had brought to the continent of Europe and 'traitors' to the Irish countryside. And it was a short step from there to the conclusion that since they possessed a constitution that approached 'perfection', it was incumbent upon them, as the corporation of Dublin pronounced, to ensure its 'preservation and protection'.¹⁸ The strength of this conviction was affirmed by the conclusion of the parliamentary committees of inquiry into the rebellion that the United Irishmen had aspired to the subversion of 'the existing establishments in church and state', and by continuing disorder in the countryside.¹⁹ As far as popular Protestant opinion, as expressed in the summer and autumn of 1798, was concerned, Irish Protestants had by their recent actions demonstrated their commitment to the preservation of the constitution and

¹⁴See, *inter alia*, James Kelly, 'The genesis of Protestant ascendancy' in O'Brien, ed., *Parliament, politics and people*, pp. 85–129; 'The development of political parading' in T.G. Fraser, ed., *Political parading in Ireland* (London, 2000); W.J. McCormack, *The Dublin paper war of 1786–1788* (Dublin, 1993).

¹⁵Lady Gilbert, ed., *Calendar of Ancient Records of Dublin*, xv (Dublin, 1911), pp. 52–3, 55–6; *FJ*, 12 July 1798.

¹⁶*FJ*, 23 June, 12 July, 2 Aug. 1798; Gilbert, ed., *Ancient records of Dublin*, xv, 54–5.

¹⁷*FJ*, 2 Aug., 28 Aug. 1798.

¹⁸*DEP*, 13 Oct.; *FJ*, 22 Sept. 1798; Gilbert, ed., *Ancient Record of Dublin*, xv, 64.

¹⁹*FJ*, 6, 8 Sept. 1798

the British connection,²⁰ and priority must be given to penalising those who threatened them. This certainly was the view of Dublin Corporation, which responded to the evidence in the report of the Commons' committee that Henry Grattan was *au fait* with United Irish plans by disfranchising him and others implicated in 'the late horrid rebellion'. This punitive disposition was further demonstrated during the exceptionally animated celebration of the anniversary of William of Orange's birthday on 4 November, when the sole piece of green silk in evidence among the profusion of orange ribbons decorating the statue of King William on College Green was placed under the feet of his mount in a symbolic affirmation by loyal Protestants of their continuing commitment to their 'unrivalled constitution'.²¹

By the time this demonstration of loyalism took place, reports that a union was in contemplation were the subject of 'general conversation'.²² Anticipating 'considerable opposition' the Irish administration aspired both to discourage public debate and to wrong foot their political opponents by declining to comment while the details of the measure were worked out and officeholders and likely supporters were briefed.²³ This did not deceive Lord Charlemont, a veteran of many patriot campaigns, who interpreted the chief secretary's silence, when he enquired on 16 October if a union was intended, as an admission that this was indeed the case. Charlemont wasted no time circulating this information with a view to galvanising resistance among like minded peers and commoners. Despite this, the administration's reserve generated enough uncertainty during the months of October and November to cause some elements of the popular press and a number of leading patriot MPs, Lawrence Parsons notably, to conclude optimistically that the scheme had been abandoned. More consequentially, it inhibited the emergence within the depleted, disorganised and demoralised ranks of the whig-patriots of a coherent plan of opposition.²⁴

The consensus among commentators was that public opinion was 'generally against' a union and that this posed a major question as to 'whether the measure can be carried in Ireland'. Edward Cooke, the

²⁰ As they observed routinely in complimentary addresses to vacating officeholders and others in the late autumn (*FJ*, 13 Oct. (Corporation of Shoemakers), 27 Oct. (Corporation of barbers, surgeons etc), 8 Nov. 1798 (Loyal Dublin Cavalry)).

²¹ Gilbert, ed., *Ancient record of Dublin*, xv, 66–7; *DEP*, 6 Nov., *FJ*, 6 Nov. 1798.

²² *DEP*, 13 Oct.; Patrick to James Clancy, 31 Oct. 1798 (NLI, Clancy papers, Ms. 20626).

²³ Cornwallis to Pitt, 1 Nov. 1798 in *Cornwallis Corres.*, II, 427; *FJ*, 8 Nov., 1 Dec.; *DEP*, 17 Nov.; Tighe to Ponsonby, Nov. in E.M. Bell, *The Hamwood papers* (London, 1930), p. 304; Cooke to Castlereagh, 9 Nov. in *Castlereagh Corres.*, I, 432.

²⁴ Charlemont to Parsons, 16 Oct. (NLI, Rosse papers, Ms. 13840/4); Parsons to Charlemont, 5 Nov., Hardy to Charlemont, 6 Nov., Stewart to Charlemont, 12 Dec. 1798 in H.M.C., *Charlemont*, II, 337–8, 338–9, 342; *DEP*, 28 Nov. 1799.

experienced under-secretary, contended that union legislation would only be ratified if it were 'written up, spoken up, intrigued up, drunk up, sung-up and bribed up'.²⁵ This was a formidable agenda, but it applied equally to the opponents as well as to the proponents of a union if they were intent on victory and each side exaggerated the preparations of the other. The perception of Lord Castlereagh in mid-November was that 'the opponents of the union' were prepared and laying in wait for the administration. In practice, matters were not so clear cut. William Conyngham Plunket, the MP for Charlemont, did seek to inaugurate a display of public opposition by encouraging a meeting of the bar in late October, but despite the expected hostility of a majority of its members to the idea of a union, there was little sense of urgency, and reports that strong resistance could be anticipated from that quarter were vitiated by reports that Cork was 'strongly for' and Ulster apathetic.²⁶

Matters had become clearer by the end of November when Castlereagh informed Cornwallis that 'the principal opposition' was to be anticipated from Dublin.²⁷ The city's legal establishment expectedly was to the fore. Spurred on by William Saurin, captain of the Lawyers' Corps of Yeomanry, who sought initially, and inappropriately, to persuade the corps to address the matter, a meeting of the full bar was called on 9 December. It amply fulfilled the hopes of anti-unionists in the city by pronouncing that 'the measure of a LEGISLATIVE UNION of this KINGDOM and GREAT BRITAIN is an INNOVATION, which it would be HIGHLY DANGEROUS and IMPROPER to propose at the present juncture'. Moreover, the majority in favour of the existing constitution was so decisive and the language and arguments appealed to in its defence derived from familiar patriot and corporate concerns, it was warmly welcomed in the city at large.²⁸ The fact that that venerable political club, the Aldermen of Skinner's Alley pronounced against a union on the same day provided its opponents with further encouragement and prompted expectations that 'the rest of the kingdom will follow this example'. This certainly was the wish of the liberal press. The *Dublin*

²⁵ Cooke to Castlereagh, 9 Nov. in *Castlereagh Corres.*, I, 432; Patrick to James Clancy, 21 Oct., 24 Nov. 1798 (NLI, Clancy papers, Ms. 20626); Elliot to Elliot, 19 Nov. in Countess of Minto, ed., *Life and letters of Sir Gilbert Elliot, Earl of Minto* (3 vols., London, 1874), III, 27–8; Cooke to Auckland, 27, 30 Oct. 1798 (Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (henceforth PRONI), Sneyd papers, T3229/2/27, 40).

²⁶ Cooke to Auckland, 30 Oct. 1798 (PRONI, Sneyd papers, T3229/2/40); Castlereagh to Wickham, 19 Nov., Castlereagh to Beresford, 24 Nov., in *Castlereagh Corres.*, II, 8–9, 16–7; Castlereagh to Wickham, 23 Nov. in *Cornwallis Corres.*, II, 443–4.

²⁷ Castlereagh to Cornwallis, [late] Nov. 1798 in *Castlereagh Corres.*, II, 26–7.

²⁸ Castlereagh to Portland, 30 Nov., 5 Dec. in *Cornwallis Corres.*, II, 453–4, III, 5–6; *FJ*, I, 6, 13 Dec.; *DEP*, I, 6, 11 Dec.; McClelland to Corry, 9 Dec., Cooke to Castlereagh, 10 Sept (recte Dec.) 1798 in *Castlereagh Corres.*, II, 37–9, I, 343–4.

Evening Post urged freeholders and freemen to prepare addresses to their representatives instructing them not to sanction a ‘dangerous experiment’ that must ultimately bring about ‘the final separation of the two countries’.²⁹ As this suggests, though they existed in largely separate liberal and conservative camps, the opponents of a union had reason to feel optimistic in early December. They had grasped the initiative in the battle for public opinion, and their advantage in the public sphere was enhanced when they also claimed the initiative in the ‘paper war’ inaugurated by the publication late in November of Edward Cooke’s pamphlet, *Arguments for and against an Union*. Cooke’s tactic was to persuade the public of the logic of a union by presenting the arguments for and against in a manner than demonstrated the validity of the former over the latter. Though ostensibly impartial, his style and approach was too transparent to achieve its aim and his intervention was effectively neutralised by a salvo of replies and rebuttals that served merely to consolidate the anti-unionist argument in the public mind’s eye within weeks of its appearance.³⁰

While this debate was taking place, public opposition intensified, particularly in Dublin. At its most basic level, it was manifested in the appearance of anti-union ballads and emblematic ribbons bearing the slogan ‘no union, freedom and independence to Ireland’.³¹ Of greater import were gatherings of metropolitan interests to formulate anti-union resolutions. These, inevitably, reflected the prevailing conservative and patriot ideology of their membership. Following on the bar, the first notable body to assemble were the bankers and merchants, and their resolution of 18 December that a union was not in the commercial or legislative interest of the kingdom of Ireland because the country had enjoyed enviable prosperity since the concession of legislative independence in 1782, represented a firm endorsement of the patriots’ position. Though the administration would have preferred it if they had followed the example of the Orange Order and declined to offer an opinion, the resolution of this body did not discommode them

²⁹ Patrick to James Clancy, 11 Dec. 1798 (N.L.I., Clancy papers, Ms. 20626); *DEP*, 4 Dec. 1798; *F7*, 10 Jan. 1799; Beresford to Castlereagh, 19 Dec. 1798 in *Castlereagh Corres.*, ii, 50.

³⁰ [Edward Cooke], *Arguments for an against an union between Great Britain and Ireland considered* (Dublin, 1798). For a selection of responses to Cooke see *DEP*, 6, 13, 22, 29 Dec. 1798, 12 Jan. 1799; [John Humphrey], *Strictures on a pamphlet entitled arguments for an against an union* (Dublin, 1798); Joshua Spencer, *Thoughts on an union* (Dublin, 1798); *An address to the people of Ireland against an union* (Dublin, 1798); *Reasons against the Union* (Dublin, 1798); *A reply to a pamphlet entitled Arguments for and against an union* (Dublin, 1798); *Observations on a pamphlet supposed to be written by an Englishman entitled arguments for an against an union* (Dublin, 1799).

³¹ Patrick to James Clancy, 11 Dec. 1798 (N.L.I., Clancy papers, Ms. 20626).

greatly.³² The Corporation of Dublin was a quite different proposition, particularly when it opted for the more stridently ideological stand, at a post assembly on 17 December, of linking its opposition to a union to its defence of the constitution when the county was in rebellion:

Resolved unanimously, that having boldly defended the constitution in King, Lords and Commons, against the open and secret abettors of Rebellion, we are determined steadily to oppose any attempt that may be made to surrender the free legislation of this kingdom by uniting it with the legislature of Great Britain.³³

The ‘manly and spirited’ stand taken by the conservatives who dominated Dublin Corporation mirrored the prevailing mood of the city, as a host of metropolitan bodies demonstrated by following its lead in the winter of 1798–9.³⁴ The language and tone of their addresses and resolutions did not replicate those of the Corporation in all instances. But there is a striking ideological symmetry in the tone and content of the sentiments ratified by interests as diverse as the attorneys who determined on 27 December that a legislative union would be ‘an innovation ... dangerous to the kingdom’; the feltmakers company which decreed that advocates of a union should be ‘treated as rebels to the constitution’; and the guild of tallow chandlers, which vowed to defend the

constitution and oppose by every legal means the destruction thereof, whether attempted by internal rebellion, foreign foes, or those domestic traitors who would surrender the free legislation of this kingdom by uniting it with the legislature of any other country.³⁵

Across the municipal spectrum, equivalently defiant pronouncements were offered by trade guilds, notably the merchants, cutlers, cooks, hosiers, butchers, weavers and dyers, reprobating a union as subversive of the constitution, as well as destructive of trade, and condemning anyone who took a contrary view as ‘an enemy’ to the constitution and

³² Cornwallis to Portland, 15 Dec., in *Cornwallis Corres.*, III, 18–9; Cooke to Castlereagh enclosing resolutions, 18 Dec., in *Castlereagh Corres.*, II, 47–8; *DEP*, 18, 20 Dec., *FJ*, 20 Dec. 1798.

³³ Gilbert, ed., *Ancient records of Dublin*, xv, 80–81. This argument had been articulated by ‘a country yeoman’ earlier in the month (*DEP*, 8 Dec. 1798) when it had elicited a concerned reaction by Cornwallis (*Cornwallis Corres.*, III, 5–6).

³⁴ *DEP*, 22, 24 Dec. 1798. The tide of opposition to a union was running so strong in the city of Dublin by the middle of December 1798 that, Patrick Duigenan reported, ‘some of the first and most popular characters who are perfectly convinced of the ... necessity of the measure’ declined ‘to proclaim their opinions’ (Duigenan to Castlereagh, 20 Dec. 1798 in *Castlereagh Corres.*, II, 52–3).

³⁵ *DEP*, 27 Dec., 1798, 8 Jan. 1799; H.F. Berry, ‘The records of the feltmakers company of Dublin 1687–1841’, *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 41 (1911), p. 28.

the country.³⁶ Moreover, such sentiments were not the exclusive preserve of metropolitan commercial interests eager to reinforce their quotidian commercial anxieties with a constitutional imperative. Meetings of the freeholders of county Dublin, of the freeholders and freemen of Dublin city, the County Dublin grand jury, the quarter assembly of Dublin Corporation and the electors of the boroughs of Swords and Trinity College resolved against the idea of a union in only marginally less forceful terms as hostile to 'the rights, liberties and interests of Ireland'.³⁷

The collective thrust of these anti-union pronouncements offered a clear statement of what John Claudius Beresford described as 'the universal disgust' abroad in Dublin 'at the idea of a union' in the winter of 1798–9.³⁸ The problem for anti-unionists was that public opinion elsewhere was not equally aroused. This was due in part at least to the fact that commercial interests outside the capital did not identify their continuing commercial prosperity as intimately with the presence of a national parliamentary assembly. Equally importantly, they did not possess the organisational infrastructure that gave ideological conservatives such a powerful voice in the capital. As a result, popular opposition to a union elsewhere was more likely to be stoked by patriot interests and to be expressed in the language of patriotism at aggregate meetings of freeholders. The comparative lethargy of patriots when compared with the alertness of commercial bodies in the metropolis in the winter of 1798–9 was a source of such anxiety to supporters of the anti-union cause that the *Dublin Evening Post* chided the public outside Dublin for their inactivity and exhorted freeholders to assemble to instruct their representatives to vote against any such proposal in parliament.³⁹ Such exhortations were not without effect, but the response was decidedly spotty. In County Louth, the public opposition of John Foster, the most eminent local politician, ensured a meeting of local freeholders in mid-January at which it was resolved that 'an independent Irish legislature is as necessary as [the] British connexion to the prosperity of Ireland'. Significantly, Foster was not content with this. He observed in his reply that as well as many substantive economic reasons for opposing a union, the example of France 'teach[es] us the danger of innovating on the established constitution'. The responses of the local MPs, John Ball and Edward Hardman, to the request of the freemen and freeholders of Drogheda to oppose a union were less assertive. But their readiness to comply

³⁶ *DEP*, 8, 12, 17, 19, 22 Jan.; *FJ*, 10, 17 Jan. 1798; W.J. Battersby, *The Repealer's manual* (Dublin, 1837), pp. 331–2, 333–4.

³⁷ *DEP*, 1, 5, 10, 12, 19, 22 Jan.; *FJ*, 5, 10, 12, 19 Jan. 1799; Battersby, *Repealer's manual*, p. 332; Gilbert, ed., *Ancient records of Dublin*, xv, 81–2.

³⁸ Beresford to Castlereagh, 19 Dec. 1798 in *Castlereagh Corres.*, II, 51.

³⁹ *DEP*, 1, 17, 19 Jan. 1799.

ensured that, after Dublin, County Louth was one of the main popular bastions of anti-unionism.⁴⁰ There were few others. The high profile anti-unionism of patriots such as Lawrence Parsons in Kings' and Sir John Parnell in Queen's County ensured the approval of resolutions at meetings of freeholders that condemned a union as 'highly dangerous' and 'a virtual surrender of our constitution'. The freeholders of Meath, Westmeath, Carlow, Monaghan and the freeholders and inhabitants of Galway city likewise focussed on the implications of a union for the 'constitution of 1782', though the Galway meeting was also attracted by the argument, expressed in some quarters in Dublin, that MPs did not possess the power 'to vote away their independence'.⁴¹ It was a modest list, all things considered, which accurately reflected the lack of enthusiasm throughout much of the country for the anti-unionist campaign in the early months of 1799.

Popular opposition to a union was at its weakest in Munster. In Cork, the Corporation fulfilled expectations by determining on 5 January that 'an union ... grounded upon just and equitable terms, will be the most effectual and decisive means of establishing and preserving the peace and prosperity of this kingdom'. Further expressions linking their support for a union to 'the unprovoked rebellion, which has lately disgraced certain quarters of this kingdom, and the treachery, which invited a foreign enemy to its shore' underlined the appeal of political integration in this quarter. But optimistic expectations in official circles that Waterford and Limerick would emulate Cork proved misplaced.⁴² Despite this, the absence of overt opposition caused the administration to conclude, somewhat rhapsodically, that the whole province was 'well disposed' when the reality was less certain.

Matters were certainly less than clear cut in Ulster which was, Cornwallis maintained on 21 January, 'in a state of neutrality'. It is true that attempts by anti-unionists in several Ulster counties, Armagh and Cavan notably, to orchestrate addresses calling upon representatives to oppose a union did not bear fruit, but there was little evidence of strong unionist sentiment either. The fact that a number of MPs from the province declared publicly their intention to oppose a union registered less with the administration than the information that 'all the thinking people' and the linen trade were well-inclined and that the influential Orange Order in the province was content to follow the

⁴⁰ *DEP*, 8, 17, 19 Jan.; *FJ*, 19 Jan.; Hudson to Charlemont, 21 Jan. 1799 in H.M.C., *Charlemont*, II, 343-4.

⁴¹ *DEP*, 8, 10, 15, 17, 19, 22, 24 Jan.; *FJ*, 17 Jan. 1799.

⁴² Richard Caulfeild, *The council book of the Corporation of Cork* (Guilford, 1876), p. 1131; *FJ*, 13, 18 Dec., 1798, 17, 19 Jan.; Castlereagh to Portland, 9 Jan. 1799 in *Castlereagh Correspondence*, II, 85-6.

example of the Dublin lodges and refrain from expressing an opinion.⁴³

The preparedness of the leaders of Catholic opinion to do likewise was also interpreted positively by the administration arising from their anxiety that the failure to include a provision to allow Catholics the right to parliamentary representation as part of the union settlement might generate resistance from that quarter. In truth, the Catholic leadership had not recovered from the fright of the rebellion and, like the Orange Order, was anxious to avoid the embarrassment of exposing the different attitudes within the Catholic communion on the issue of a union. For these reasons, a meeting of Catholic leaders determined prudently in December that they did 'not wish the question of the Catholics being admitted into the representation to be agitated at this time', and that they 'judged it inexpedient to publish any resolution or declaration'.⁴⁴

The sharp variation in public attitudes towards a legislative union – ranging regionally from support in the south, to disinterest in the north and hostility, to hostility in Dublin, Galway and the midlands – suggested that the administration stood an excellent chance of securing parliamentary approval for a union at the first time of asking because it meant that only a minority of MPs were under intense public pressure to oppose from within their constituencies. By the administration's calculations, the opposition was unlikely to muster much more than one hundred, but both Cornwallis and Castlereagh acknowledged that the impact of public 'clamour' in Dublin and the self-interest of borough proprietors meant they could not be certain.⁴⁵ As is well known, though their assays of the likely size of the opposition were not substantially in error, the administration failed to convince enough of the two-thirds of MPs not committed to opposition to join with them. In two divisions, on 23 and 25 January, appertaining to the inclusion of a reference to a union in the address to the king, the united opposition first pushed the administration to within two votes and then defeated them, 111 to 106, thereby preventing the advancement of union legislation at this time. It was an embarrassing outcome for Castlereagh who admitted that he had not anticipated that 'the question would have been fought on the

⁴³ Cornwallis to Ross, 21 Jan. in *Cornwallis Corres.*, III, 40; DEP, 3, 15, 17, 22, 24 Jan.; Castlereagh to Portland, 2 Jan., Alexander to Knox, 17 Jan., Lyle to Castlereagh, 23 Jan., Castlereagh to Portland, 21 Jan. 1799 in *Castlereagh Corres.*, II, 80, 123–4, 127–8, 128.

⁴⁴ Cornwallis to Ross, 8 Dec., Cornwallis to Portland, 24 Dec 1798, 2 Jan. 1799. in *Cornwallis Corres.*, III, 9, 22, 28–9; Cooke to Castlereagh, 17 Dec., Troy to Castlereagh, 24 Dec., in *Castlereagh Corres.*, II, 46–7, 61; Lord to Lady Minto, 10 Dec. 1798 in *Life and letters of Minto*, III, 35.

⁴⁵ Cooke to Auckland, 12 Dec., Castlereagh to Auckland, 13 Dec. 1798 (PRONI, Sneyd papers, T3229/2/44, 45); Cornwallis to Portland, 11 Jan., Castlereagh to Portland, 21 Jan. 1799 in *Castlereagh Corres.*, II, 89–90, 126; Castlereagh to Portland, 5 Jan., Cornwallis to Ross, 21 Jan. 1799 in *Cornwallis Corres.*, III, 30–32, 40.

address'.⁴⁶ By contrast, the opponents of the measure were delighted, and the celebrations that followed on the streets of Dublin indicated that as far as the populace of the city was concerned it was a victory for public opinion.

The assessment by Lord Camden on 8 February that the 'agitation is so great at Dublin and in various part of Ireland' that consideration of a legislative union should be postponed to a future session suggests that the decision not to press forward at this time was influenced by public disorder on the streets of the capital.⁴⁷ This was not the case; there was little disorder of any consequence. The debate in the House of Commons on 22 January did provoke some 'hissing, ... groaning, and clapping' from the public gallery. But this only became a matter of controversy subsequently because of an unsubstantiated report in the London *Sun* that 'above a dozen members' who supported a union had 'quitted the house in disgust'.⁴⁸ Similarly, the public's response to the divisions of 23 and 25 January was exuberant celebration rather than riotous discontent, as a brief account will bear out. It began in the afternoon of 23 January when Speaker Foster, who was widely applauded by the public for his opposition to a union, was accorded the traditional honour of having his carriage unhorsed and being drawn by a number of 'respectable' citizens from College Green to his home in Molesworth Street. When darkness fell, the citizens further manifested their pleasure at events by organising a general illumination that was the occasion of some anti-social behaviour when a mob broke the windows of anti-unionists who declined to join in the euphoria of the moment. Matters only became serious when an attempt was made to force an entry into the house of a prominent unionist, which obliged him and his family to quit for a time, but no great damage resulted. However, when a further illumination was called two days later to celebrate the vote of 25 January the authorities took immediate steps to ensure that they and not the mob gained control of the streets. Once again, they could not prevent darkened windows being broken, but they did ensure there was no sustained disorder by calling out the military who demonstrated their intent by firing on and killing two people when a mob threatened to get out of control.⁴⁹

The rapture of the Dublin populace that fuelled such demonstrations

⁴⁶ Bolton, *The passing of the Irish Act of Union*, chapter four, provides a full account; Cornwallis to Portland, 30 Jan. in *Cornwallis Corres.*, III, 58–9; Castlereagh to Portland, 28 Jan. 1799 in *Castlereagh Corres.*, II, 142.

⁴⁷ Camden to Clare, 8 Feb. 1799 (PRONI, Camden papers, T2627/4/226).

⁴⁸ This account is based on a report of a debate on the matter in the House of Commons on 8 February (*F7*, 12 Feb. 1799).

⁴⁹ *DEP*, 24, 26 Jan.; *F7*, 26 Jan.; Cornwallis to Portland, 25 Jan. 1799 in *Cornwallis Corres.*, III, 51.

mirrored the delight of more mainstream opposition interests, such as the bar, which met on 24 January to applaud the stand of anti-union MPs. The patriots had, in similar circumstances in 1785 rallied the public to frustrate William Pitt's plan for a commercial union.⁵⁰ Eager to replicate this success they conceived that they could best insure against the introduction of union legislation by affirming the strength of public opposition through public votes of thanks to 'the glorious and virtuous' one hundred and eleven MPs who had represented their position on 25 January. It was a strategy that paid some dividends. Many of the bodies that met in the spring of 1799 to approve resolutions and addresses either to prominent members of the opposition such as John Foster, Sir John Parnell and James Fitzgerald or to the full complement of MPs that had carried the day on 25 January had previously expressed anti-union views, but for many more it was the first time and the process did provide an opportunity for a broader demonstration of popular anti-unionism.⁵¹

However, it was not long before the energy that characterised the popular response to the union in the winter of 1798–9 began to dissipate. Extensive reports of proceedings at Westminster where William Pitt advanced what even some of its opponents accepted was an impressive case in favour of a legislative union, and the failure of repeated attempts by anti-unionists 'to consolidate their party' and present a united front in the House of Commons were manifestations of the lack of coherence and purpose within their ranks which not even the realisation that the administration was intent on reintroducing the union could redress.⁵² Lord Charlemont was one of the first on the anti-union side to recognise that the victory registered in January 'though glorious' was 'not decisive', and convinced that the country had to be *seen* to pronounce against a union in order to dissuade the government from taking up the measure once again, he redoubled his efforts to promote an anti-union address in his home county of Armagh and to encourage friends and allies to do likewise elsewhere.⁵³ The response initially was encouraging. Reports from Ulster suggested that the apathy that had prevailed in the province earlier in the winter had evaporated, while resolutions against a union were secured from, among other places, the city of Cork. However, it was apparent before the end of February that the momentum was fast draining from the opposition's campaign. This was highlighted by the fact that various initiatives, such as the suggestion that a 'public

⁵⁰ James Kelly, *Prelude to Union: Anglo-Irish politics in the 1780s* (Cork, 1992), pp. 210–21.

⁵¹ *DEP*, 26, 29, 31 Jan., 2, 7, 9, 12, 16, 19, 26 Feb., 5, 16, 28 Mar.; *FJ*, 29, 31 Jan. 1799.

⁵² *FJ*, Jan.–Feb. passim; *DEP*, 4 Feb.; Cornwallis to Ross, 28 Jan., Cornwallis to Portland, 28 Feb. in *Cornwallis Corres.*, III, 56, 68–9; Troy to Coxle Hipplesley, 9 Feb., Castlereagh to Portland, 9 Feb. 1799 in *Castlereagh Corres.*, II, 170–71, 172.

⁵³ Charlemont to Haliday, 2 Feb. 1799 in H.M.C., *Charlemont*, II, 345.

memorial' should be erected to the peers and commoners who had opposed a union in January, failed to elicit the requisite support and that the flow of anti-union resolutions slowed appreciably.⁵⁴ The anti-union cause was given a welcome, but short-lived, boost in April when John Foster delivered his long anticipated reply to Pitt's argument in favour of a union. The response across the anti-union spectrum was enthusiastic, which enhanced further the Speaker's reputation in that quarter and reinforced committed opponents to the measure in their positions. Supporters of a union were palpably less complimentary. But of greater consequence that the *ad hominem* disparagement of Foster that many indulged was the realisation that for all the passion of his rhetoric and the logic of his argument the Speaker did not, Bishop Euseby Cleaver noted approvingly, leave 'the cause of the union weaker in the House of Commons than he found it'.⁵⁵ This was critical because in the country there were already signs that the public attitude to the union was beginning to soften and that the combined forces of popular conservatism and patriotism that had ignited and sustained public opposition to an act of union in the winter of 1798/99 would have to compete for support if it was to retain its dominance in the public arena.

II

In mid-February, at the height of the anti-unionist campaign to obtain addresses congratulating the 111 MPs who had voted against a union, the second Earl of Shannon advised a worried Earl Camden not to be too impressed by the number of anti-union statements that were forthcoming because many of them were trumped up or procured by dubious means.⁵⁶ There is little evidence to sustain this, but the implication that the unlikely combination of conservatives and patriots that orchestrated the popular campaign against a union did not fully represent public opinion was correct. One small pointer to this, from which unionists took considerable comfort, was provided by the re-election in February of the newly appointed chancellor of the exchequer, Isaac Corry, and prime serjeant, St George Daly, for the 'populous'

⁵⁴Hudson to Charlemont, 3 Feb, 9 Mar., Boyd to Charlemont, 20 Feb., in H.M.C., *Charlemont*, II, 345–6, 347; *DEP*, 23 Feb., 2 Mar. 1799.

⁵⁵*Speech of the rt hon John Foster ... delivered in committee on Thursday 11 April 1799* (Dublin, 1799); Buckingham to Grenville, 12 Apr. in H.M.C., *Fortescue*, v, 10–11; Haliday to Charlemont, 15 Apr., Charlemont to Haliday, 19 Apr., Hudson to Charlemont, 1 May in H.M.C., *Charlemont*, II, 349–50; Cornwallis to Ross, 15 Apr. in *Cornwallis Corres.*, III, 89; Cleaver to Egremont, 17, 29 Apr. 1799 (Petworth House, Egremont Papers).

⁵⁶Shannon to [Camden], 17 Feb. 1799 (KAO, Camden papers, U840/081/7).

and 'independent' boroughs of Newry and Galway respectively.⁵⁷ Another, more reliable index, was provided by the preparedness of discrete bodies of unionists in a variety of jurisdictions to publish pro-union addresses. The decision of thirty-six eminent freeholders in County Antrim, who were alarmed by a sudden rise in disorder locally, to call on their MPs to request that the question of a legislative union 'be fairly investigated . . . as the best means of securing the country from . . . threatened ruin' represented an early tentative step.⁵⁸ Others followed. Before the end of February, a group of forty-one freeholders from County Galway, headed by the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Tuam and Ardagh, William Beresford, dissatisfied with the anti-union address sanctioned at a meeting of freeholders at Loughrea, pronounced that

a legislative union with Great Britain, established on terms of perfect equality, would invigorate the resources, encrease the wealth and add materially to the security of both countries, enabling them to oppose their common enemy with encreased strength and power – and most effectually to defeat their object of dividing the empire, for the purpose of subsuming it.⁵⁹

The logic of this argument was compelling to many within the Protestant community, and the town of Galway and the grand juries of both Cork county and city had pronounced in favour of a union on similar grounds by the beginning of April. The most impressive demonstration of support in the country for a union came from County Cork where the success of the anti-unionist camp in securing an address to which some seven hundred names were appended, was countered by a pro-union address with five hundred and sixty signatories headed by most of the main noblemen and gentlemen of the county.⁶⁰

The ability of unionist interests in Cork, Galway and Antrim to secure addresses signed by sizeable numbers of freeholders with substantial property interests allied to the inability of the anti-union cause to capitalise on the assizes to secure additional declarations in favour of their position was a source of encouragement to Castlereagh, Cornwallis and other unionists who observed 'the change of feeling in regard to the Union' that took place throughout the country in the late

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*; Pelham to Minto, 22 Feb. 1799 (NLS, Minto papers, Ms. 11195 f. 3).

⁵⁸ *DEP*, 16 Feb. 1799. Somewhat earlier a number of unionists in County Monaghan had made known their discontent with an address congratulating the majority of 25 January (*DEP*, 9 Mar. 1799).

⁵⁹ *DEP*, 7 Mar. 1799.

⁶⁰ *DEP*, 2, 16, 18 Apr.; Garde to Devonshire, 20 Mar. 1799 (PRONI, Chatsworth papers, T3158/1788); public addresses and declarations in favour of union, 2 Apr. 1800 (Public Record Office (henceforth PRO), Chatham papers, 30/8/327). I wish to thank Dr P.J. Jupp. for the latter reference.

spring and early summer with unalloyed pleasure.⁶¹ The administration did not have enough parliamentary or popular support to risk reintroducing the measure into the Irish parliament during the 1799 session, not least because there were no defections, a worried Lord Charlemont observed with some relief, from the anti-union side. This was due, among other reasons to the impact of the distribution of Foster's speech in pamphlet form, but there was no masking the drift among the doubtful and undecided in parliament and in society at large towards a union.⁶² The appeal of union was enhanced by alterations to its terms that won over nervous parliamentary interests, by the continuing extensive reportage of proceedings at Westminster and by the impact of pro-union propaganda subsidised or paid for with money illegally secured from the British secret service list.⁶³ The publication that best served the union cause in the summer of 1799 was the speech by Lord Minto in the British House of Lords on 11 April. Prepared for the presses with the aid and advice of William Woodfall, who had also overseen the publication of William Pitt's speech of 31 January, the balanced manner in which Minto addressed the subject 'produced more effect and impression than any publication ... yet ... circulated', as even anti-unionists conceded. Minto's speech was particularly suited to mass circulation in Ireland because it endorsed the principal of 'political equality' for Catholics in a manner that did not alarm Protestants, and the Irish administration got a good return for sponsoring an edition of 5,000 copies 'for general circulation throughout the kingdom'.⁶⁴

The slowly growing momentum supportive of a union to which this

⁶¹ *F7*, 14, 23 Mar.; Garde to Devonshire, 20 Mar. (PRONI, Chatsworth papers, T3158/1788); Castlereagh to Portland, 27 Mar., Alexander to Castlereagh, 28 Mar. in *Castlereagh Corres.*, II, 240, 242; Cornwallis to Dundas, 14 Mar., Cornwallis to Ross, 20, 28 Mar., Cornwallis to Portland, 29 Mar. in *Cornwallis Corres.*, III, 77, 80–81 83; Shannon to Boyle, 10 Apr. in E. Hewitt, ed., *Lord Shannon's letters* (Belfast, 1983), p. 188; Woodford to Minto, 29 April., Elliot to Minto, 23 May (NLS, Minto papers, Ms. 11195 ff. 9–10, 11229 ff. 152–3); Cooke to Camden, 7 May (KAO, Camden papers, U840/081/3); Hill to Barnard, 22 May 1799 in A. Powell, ed., *Barnard letters 1778–1824* (London, 1928), p. 107.

⁶² Shannon to Boyle, [post 10 Apr.] in Hewitt, ed., *Shannon's letters*, p. 188; Cornwallis to Portland, 29 Mar. in *Cornwallis Corres.*, III, 82–3; Cooke to Camden, 7 May (KAO, Camden papers, U840/081/3); Charlemont to Haliday, 10, 14 May. 1799 in H.M.C., *Charlemont*, II, 351–2.

⁶³ Cornwallis to Portland, 27 Mar., Cornwallis to Ross, 28 Mar. in *Cornwallis Corres.*, III, 80–81; Cleaver to Egremont, 9 Apr. 1799 (Petworth House, Egremont papers); David Wilkinson, 'How did they pass the Union: secret service expenditure in Ireland 1799–1804', *History*, 80 (1997).

⁶⁴ Woodfall to Minto, 12 Apr. Elliot to Minto, 23 May, Day to Douglas, 28 May, Douglas to Minto, 17 Sept., 1799, 5 Jan. [1800] (NLS, Minto papers, Ms. 11195 ff. 5–6, 11129 f. 152, 11130 ff. 92, 98, 113); Shannon to Boyle, 9 July in Hewitt, ed., *Shannon's letters*, p. 200; Cornwallis to Portland, 20 July 1799 in *Castlereagh Corres.*, II, 353.

contributed took tangible form in the shape of further pro-union addresses during the summer months. The administration was not overwhelmed by the number presented. But the impact of the changing mood and the success of Cornwallis's policy of 'earnestly' recommending 'to the friends of government' that they should 'exert themselves during the summer in their several counties' to obtain declarations 'similar to those of Cork and Galway in favour of the measure' allowed them to seize the initiative in the battle for public opinion.⁶⁵ Proceeding by 'private application rather than by public meeting', unionists in counties Meath, Kerry, Kings', Mayo and the town of Ballyshannon, had come forward by the first week of July with a variety of addresses, declarations and statements professing their conviction that a union must help 'remove every cause of distrust and jealousy between the two countries', secure the Anglo-Irish connection, reduce sectarian animosity, promote economic growth and 'consolidate the power and resources of the empire'. The number of signatories to these documents was sometimes not large but, as Justice Robert Day boasted of the Kerry declaration, they represented 'the weight of property of the ... county'.⁶⁶ More importantly, as far as the administration was concerned, they helped increase the number of unionists in the House of Commons to an estimated 165 by 22 June and boosted their confidence and that of their supporters by declaring they would triumph when the measure was presented again in 1800.⁶⁷

Though he was encouraged by these developments, by the anticipation of further declarations from counties Clare, Derry, Tipperary, Waterford and Wexford, and by the prospect of declarations from counties Antrim, Armagh, Donegal, Down, Kilkenny, Leitrim, Longford, Monaghan, Meath, Queen's, Roscommon, Sligo, Tyrone and Westmeath, Lord Cornwallis could not claim with any confidence that public opinion was on his side. He noted with satisfaction that it was now 'impossible to excite any popular commotion against the Union in any part of the Kingdom except in Dublin', and eager to improve his position with public opinion still further, he undertook a three-week tour of the 'south' in late July 'for the purpose of obtaining declarations, &c, in favour of the Union'.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Cornwallis to Portland, 22 June 1799 in *Castlereagh Corres.*, II, 368–9.

⁶⁶ Knowlton to Heaton, 10 July (PRONI, Chatsworth papers, T3158/1791); O'Beirne to Castlereagh and enclosure, 14 May, Altamont to [], 5 June, Cornwallis to Portland, 22 June, Castlereagh to Portland, 6 July in *Castlereagh Corres.*, II, 309–10, 327–9, 336–9; Shannon to Boyle, 5 July in Hewitt, ed., *Shannon's letters*, p. 199; *DEP*, II, 14 May, 6, 9 July; Day to Douglas, 28 May 1799 (NLS, Minto papers, Ms. 11130 ff. 92–3).

⁶⁷ Cornwallis to Ross, 19 June, Cornwallis to Portland, 22 June in *Cornwallis Corres.*, III, 103–4; Moore to Castlereagh, 22 June, Abercorn to Castlereagh, 2 July in *Castlereagh Corres.*, II, 343–4; Shannon to Boyle, 22, 23 July 1799 in Hewitt, ed., *Shannon's letters*, p. 207.

⁶⁸ Cornwallis to Ross, 2, 21 July in *Cornwallis Corres.*, III, 111, 118; Cornwallis to Portland, 22 June, 20 July 1799 in *Castlereagh Corres.*, II, 338–9, 352.

Cornwallis' tour of Munster had a galvanic effect on the popular pro-unionist campaign. At every location the lord lieutenant visited, local unionists ensured that as well as the warm welcome normally accorded a personage of his eminence he was presented with addresses supportive of the principle of a legislative union. The tone and content of a majority of the addresses did not differ greatly from location to location. Most pronounced that a union 'founded on equal and liberal principles' would ease domestic tensions and benefit the empire commercially and politically. However, a number from locations in County Cork, reflecting deep-seated conservative concerns, dwelled with more deliberation upon the security a union would provide against 'the fatal effects of anarchy'; whilst those from the clergy of the Church of Ireland in particular expressed a wish that the Protestant 'constitution in Church and state' would be preserved intact.⁶⁹ Significantly, Cornwallis did not encourage such declarations. Quite the contrary; everywhere he went 'he paid equal attention to the papists as to the protestants', and the result was better than he could have hoped for. Not alone did 'the people of the south seem to wish more for a union' on his departure for Dublin in mid-August, he had addresses from a variety of interests in most major towns (Kilkenny, Waterford, Cork, Youghal, Bandon, Carrick-on-Suir, Tipperary, Cahir and Limerick) to prove it. No less consequently, his avowed determination to treat Catholics fairly persuaded members of that communion throughout the province of Munster to accept the advice of Archbishops Troy and Bray and come forward in large numbers with addresses professing their enthusiasm for a union.⁷⁰

The momentum Cornwallis' tour of Munster gave the unionist cause at popular level was sustained following his return to Dublin, as the number of supportive public addresses continued to appreciate through August and September. In tone and content, they bear close comparison with a majority of the addresses presented to the Lord Lieutenant from Munster, but they emanated from a wider geographical catchment. Thus, there were addresses from Catholics (frequently chaired by the local bishop) as well as Protestants from counties Wexford, Tipperary, Kerry, Galway, Leitrim, Longford and Clare, the baronies of Tyrarrow and Tyrenagh in the Catholic diocese of Killala and the towns of Galway, Athlone, Monasterevin and Dundalk. With 'the Union ...

⁶⁹Shannon to Boyle, ca 18 July in Hewitt, ed., *Shannon's letters*, p. 205; *DEP*, 25, 30 July, 3, 8, 13, 15, 20 Aug.; *FJ*, 8, 10, 13 Aug.; Troy to Marshall, 6, 13 July, Bray to Troy, 1 July 1799 in *Castlereagh Corres.*, II, 344–5, 349.

⁷⁰Knowlton to Heaton, 11 Aug. (PRONI, Chatsworth papers, T3158/1794); Cornwallis to Portland, 13 Aug. in *Castlereagh Corres.*, II, 372–4; *DEP*, 8, 10 Aug.; *FJ*, 10 Aug. 1799; Public addresses and declarations in favour of a union, 2 Apr. 1800 (PRO, Chatham papers, 30/8/327).

daily gaining ground', expectations rose accordingly that it would become law when the Irish parliament reconvened. According to Edward Cooke, this was a commonly expressed opinion in Dublin's coffee houses before the end of September.⁷¹

His success in Munster confirmed, Cornwallis turned his attention to Ulster from where few pro-union addresses had originated during the summer of 1799. While he was in Munster, Lord Castlereagh had visited Ulster with the dual purpose of discouraging anti-union declarations in County Down, and of encouraging positive pronouncements elsewhere.⁷² His presence at the County Down assizes was not without impact, but it took until the end of September for addresses to arrive in any number. Guided by John Beresford, the Grand Jury of County Londonderry set the trend. The freemen and freeholders of the city and county followed suit within days, and County Antrim joined them before the end of the month. The language of the declarations in each case was reasoned and moderately turned, but the most striking feature was the number of freeholders prepared to append their names. Though on record as preferring 'in general, resolutions of the men of property' to the pronouncements of 'county meetings', it was impossible for Cornwallis and others not to be impressed by the numbers of signatures, amounting respectively to over 2230 and 1600, included with the addresses forthcoming from Counties Londonderry and Antrim.⁷³ They certainly provided Cornwallis with good reason to believe that a trip to Ulster would achieve an equally positive result as his tour of Munster when he set out in early October. The response was encouraging. Following a visit to Belfast that elicited an address from the sovereign and burgesses of the corporation stating that 'a legislative union with Great Britain founded upon equal and liberal principles will be productive of interior concord and tranquillity to this nation and of general power, happiness and consequence to the empire', he was presented with equally welcome addresses elsewhere. Among those forthcoming were the clergy and people of Armagh, the clergy of the diocese of Dromore, the burgesses and principal inhabitants of Limavady, the electors and principal inhabitants of the borough of Antrim, the mayor, noblemen, clergy, freemen, freeholders and inhabitants of Londonderry, the mayor aldermen and burgesses of Coleraine, the corporation and inhabitants of Lifford, the merchants and inhab-

⁷¹ *DEP*, 8, 13, 15, 20 Aug., 7, 10, 12, 19 Sept.; *FJ*, 13, 17 Aug., 7, 10, 26, 28 Sept., 3, 10 Oct.; Cornwallis to Ross, 22 Sept. in *Cornwallis Corres.*, III, 133; Cooke to Castlereagh, 18 Sept., Dillon to Troy, 1 Sept. in *Castlereagh Corres.*, II, 403, 386–7; Douglas to Minto, 15 Sept. 1799 (NLS, Minto Papers, Ms. 11130 f. 97).

⁷² Castlereagh to Portland, 5 Aug. 1799 in *Castlereagh Corres.*, II, 367–69.

⁷³ Cornwallis to Ross, 4 Sept. in *Cornwallis Corres.*, III, 129; *FJ*, 19, 21 Sept.; *DEP*, 24, 26 Sept., 10 Oct.; Marsden to Castlereagh, 28 Sept. 1799 in *Castlereagh Corres.*, II, 406.

itants of Castlefin and the provost, burgesses and inhabitants of Strabane. In addition, addresses were received subsequently from the grand jury of Monaghan and, with more than 3,000 signatories in each case, from Counties Tyrone and Donegal.⁷⁴

These were impressive demonstrations of popular as well as propertied support for a union, and they ensured that Cornwallis's initial assessment that there was 'reason to entertain very sanguine hopes of the good disposition of the people' of Ulster towards a union understated the reality. Moreover, the example set provided a stimulus to others, and further addresses or supplementary lists of signatures were forthcoming from the towns of New Ross and Kinsale and from 3000 Catholics, headed by Bishop Caulfield, from County Wexford and 1,386 Catholics from County Leitrim.⁷⁵

III

Based upon the ample evidence with which he was provided that the Catholics were 'decidedly' pro-union, Lord Cornwallis was prepared to venture that the union 'cannot fail of success' by the beginning of winter.⁷⁶ By contrast, the mood in the anti-union camp was downbeat. Unlike the administration, their cause had atrophied during the summer of 1799. A number of diehard opponents – Jonah Barrington, Thomas Osborne and Capel Molyneux – kept the press supplied with a thin corpus of anti-union commentary but it was poor compensation for a vigorous popular campaign. Moreover, the death of Charlemont in August weakened the patriot wing of the anti-unionist cause, and there was little occasional articles in the press could do to mask the dramatic downturn in public support. This was highlighted when the corporation of Dublin was unable, on 17 July, to agree an address to William Saurin because of his opposition to the union.⁷⁷

In the absence of a visible anti-union movement, the popular press sought to impugn the legitimacy of the pro-union declarations of their

⁷⁴ Littlehales to Castlereagh, 9, 18 Oct. in *Castlereagh Corres.*, II, 414–5, 430; Cornwallis to Portland, 22 Oct. in *Cornwallis Corres.*, III, 138–40; E.M. Boyle, *Records of the town of Limavady* (Londonderry, 1912), pp. 115–6; *DEP.*, 5, 10, 17, 19 Oct., 16 Nov., 3, 26 Dec; *FJ.*, 12, 15, 17, 19, 22 Oct., 5, 17 Dec. 1799.

⁷⁵ *DEP.*, 31 Oct. *FJ.*, 12, 22, 31 Oct., 12, 19 Nov.; Cornwallis to Portland, 22 Oct., Cornwallis to Ross, 24 Oct. in *Cornwallis Corres.*, III, 138, 141; Elliot to Castlereagh, 19 Oct. 1799 in *Castlereagh Corres.*, II, 431–2.

⁷⁶ Cornwallis to Ross, 7 Nov. in *Cornwallis Corres.*, III, 143; see also Musgrave to Cooke, 1 Nov. in *ibid.*, 143–4.

⁷⁷ *FJ.*, 15 Jun., 20 July; *DEP.*, 15 Jun, 4, 6, 16 Jul., 13 Aug., 5 Sept., 1, 3 Oct.; Gilbert, ed., *Ancient records of Dublin*, xv, 115; Castlereagh to Portland, 20 July 1799 in *Castlereagh Corres.*, II, 353–4.

opponents. It accused them of having recourse to ‘forgery’ and undue influence, alleged that they were the work of the ‘dependent and self-interested’, and gleefully highlighted any evidence of impropriety that came its way.⁷⁸ The anti-union cause was not without popular support, of course, but compared with its opponents the few public declarations it elicited during the later months of 1799 from Dublin Corporation, the Grand Jury of County Dublin, the Grand Jury of the City of Dublin and the freeholders of County Roscommon merely served to emphasise its current problems.⁷⁹ This was not lost on the anti-union movement,⁸⁰ but they had little success in generating renewed momentum behind their campaign until January 1800. Their cause was helped by the launch on 9 December 1799 of a newspaper entitled *The Constitution, or Anti-Union* dedicated to the elaboration of the anti-union case. With space to fill, the *Anti-Union* provided critics of a legislative union with an opportunity to make their case at length. However, since most of the relevant issues had been debated thoroughly already, and most people had already determined where they stood on the larger question, its impact was modest. To compound matters, its editorial direction lacked flair and imagination. As a result, though a wider range of issues were dealt with in the newspaper than in the mainstream press, the influence of the *Anti-Union* was less than the anti-union cause required. This was a relief to the Irish administration, as Edward’s Lees made clear when he observed on 20 December that ‘scarcely anything has appeared deserving notice in the anti-union newspaper that has not been refuted’.⁸¹

The administration could not afford to take public opinion for granted at the same time. With the *Anti-Union* on the streets, the volume of anti-union propaganda abroad increased manifold. So too did the number of voices calling upon freeholders across the country ‘to arouse from their criminal supineness’ and emulate the example of County Roscommon and come out against a union.⁸² The response was markedly less than it had been the previous winter. But the efforts of committed anti-unionists, and unease ‘among the middling and lower order people’ enabled them to generate further addresses, petitions and other declarations hostile to a union from counties Limerick, Galway, Roscommon, Leitrim and Westmeath, and from a faction of liberal middle-class Catholics in Dublin in the run-up to the opening of

⁷⁸ *DEP*, 3, 8, 27 Aug., 14 Sept., 10, 29 Oct. 1799.

⁷⁹ Elliot to Castlereagh, 19 Oct. in *Castlereagh Corres.*, II, 431–2; *DEP*, 14, 30 Nov., 14 Dec.; *FJ*, 19 Dec. 1799.

⁸⁰ See *DEP*, 12, 14 Nov., 14 Dec. 1799.

⁸¹ *Constitution or Anti-Union*, 9 Dec. 1799–30 Jan. 1800; Lees to Auckland, 20 Dec. 1799 in A.P.W. Malcomson, ed., *Eighteenth-century Irish official papers*, II (Belfast, 1992), p. 303.

⁸² *DEP*, 24 Jan. 1800; *Constitution or Anti-Union*, 7, 11 Jan. 1800.

parliament on 15 January.⁸³ Pro-union interests also sought actively at this time to sustain the public momentum in their favour. They remained confident that they would be victorious, and their expectations were buoyed by the presentation of three addresses from County Roscommon that enabled them to counteract the emphasis currently being attached to anti-union declarations from the same quarter. It particularly gratified the administration that the addresses crossed the denominational divide. Two – one from the bishop and ten parish priests attached to the diocese of Elphin, the other organised and presented by Myles Keon which came with 1500 signatures – were from Catholics, while, the third featured most of the major Protestant property owners in the county. In addition, further addresses or additional signatures were presented from the freeholders of County Wexford, from the mayor, burgesses and freemen of Wexford town, and from a thousand plus noblemen, gentlemen, clergy, merchants and freeholders in County Armagh.⁸⁴

With this evidence of public support for a union, the administration had little reason to apprehend the presentation of union legislation to the House of Commons though the re-election of Henry Grattan increased the expectations in patriot ranks that ‘the father of the constitution’ of 1782 might yet provide them with a trump card. It did not prove to be so. The administration’s comfortable numerical preponderance in the debate on the address to the king in which mention of a union was made suggested that the die was cast for the session if the opponents of a union could not generate a public outcry of sufficient scale to cause a substantial number of MPs to alter their vote.⁸⁵ With this in mind, the leaders of the parliamentary opposition prepared a circular for distribution to people of influence throughout the country urging them to get up petitions for presentation to the House of Commons. Their goal was to procure moderate anti-union declarations from more than the eighteen or nineteen counties Castlereagh claimed had pronounced in favour of a union, and they urged their supporters to take advantage of the early session recess to set this process in train.⁸⁶

⁸³ *Constitution or Anti-Union*, 7, 11, 16, 21 Jan. 1800; *DEP*, 31 Dec. 1799, 2, 7, 14, 16 Jan.; Hamilton to Abercorn, 5 Jan. in J.H. Gebbie, ed., *The Abercorn letters* (Omagh, 1972), p. 210; Bradshaw to Castlereagh, 13 Jan. 1800 in *Castlereagh Corres.*, III, 224–5; Battersby, *Repealer’s manuel*, pp. 352–3.

⁸⁴ Cornwallis to Ross, 4 Jan. in *Cornwallis Corres.*, III, 157; Keon to Castlereagh, 8 Jan. in *Castlereagh Corres.*, III, 222–3; *FJ*, 2 7, 30 Jan.; *DEP*, 9, 14, 25 Jan. 1800.

⁸⁵ *Constitution or Anti-Union*, 14, 16, 18 Jan.; Bolton, *The passing of the Union*, pp. 185–6; Cornwallis to Portland, 16 Jan., Cornwallis to Ross, 21 Jan. in *Cornwallis Corres.*, III, 163–5, 167–8; Agar to Townshend, 21 Jan. 1800 (Beinecke Library, Townshend papers, Box 8).

⁸⁶ Copies of printed circular and petition, 20, 29 Jan., Cooke to Auckland, 20 Jan. ,

With the active support of the popular press, which needed no convincing that the existence of the Irish parliament depended on the public's response, the getting up of petitions commenced. As the bastion of popular anti-unionism, Dublin was held up as 'the patriotic example'. The moderate tone of the declarations forthcoming from that quarter, when compared with those approved in 1798–9, indicates that anti-union interests there were as anxious as their parliamentary leaders to maximise support for their cause. Dublin Corporation set the tone with a series of resolutions (agreed on 17 January) and a petition (agreed on 31 January) in which it singled out its 'abhorrence of the indirect modes which have been adopted to carry into effect the measure of a legislative union', and drew attention to the impoverishment, the loss of 'chartered rights and the 'surrender of the birthright of Irishmen' it must of necessity involve.⁸⁷ The city's guilds were no less eager that this should not come to pass, and they came forward in even greater numbers than they had the previous winter to profess their opposition. John Beresford described the resolutions approved by the guild of merchants on 15 January as 'very strong', and while this is a fair assessment in this instance, the resolutions originating with the guilds reflected more traditional patriot and corporate concerns than had been the case the previous year. They were not without impact for all that, and the strength of the opposition they articulated was given added weight by separate pronouncements by the grand jury, and by the freemen and freeholders of the city that a union could not possibly advantage the kingdom.⁸⁸

Public endorsement for this position was less forthcoming from outside Dublin.⁸⁹ This did not inhibit anti-unionists for when parliamentary business resumed on 3 February they had successfully 'raised a powerful clamour against the measure in many parts of the kingdom

Castlereagh to Auckland, 25 Jan. (PRONI, Sneyd papers, T3229/2/55, 56, 52, 54); Castlereagh to Portland, 20, 27 Jan., Castlereagh to King, 25 Jan. in *Cornwallis Corres.*, III, 166–7, 170–71, 173

⁸⁷ *DEP*, 23 Jan.; Cornwallis to Lichfield, 24 Jan. in *Cornwallis Corres.*, III, 169; Gilbert, ed., *Ancient records of Dublin*, xv, 127–8, 135–9.

⁸⁸ The resolutions of the various guilds and corporations (merchants, cutlers and stationers, chandlers, barbers and surgeons, goldsmiths, hosiers, tailors, butchers, joiners, weavers, carpenters, saddlers and upholsterers, shoemakers, bricklayers and plasterers, smiths, coopers) are conveniently printed in Battersby, *Repealer's manuel*, pp. 334–50; see also Berry, 'Records of the feltmaker's company', p. 28; Beresford to Auckland, 20 Jan. (PRONI, Sneyd papers, T3229/2/53); Cornwallis to Portland, 21 Jan. 1800 in *Cornwallis Corres.*, III, 168; J.R. Hill, *From patriots to unionists* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 260–61; *FJ*, 18, 30 Jan. 1800.

⁸⁹ One noteworthy exception is the Roman Catholics of Limerick who resolved at a general meeting on 23 January that a union must bring 'ruin and degradation to a country, which since the glorious epoch of 1782 has been rapidly improving in commerce, manufacturers, industry and population' (*DEP*, 28 Jan. 1800).

and put the capital in an uproar'. Optimists within their ranks were hopeful they could yet overturn the administration's majority in the Commons. The administration, by contrast, was worried that the 'clamour against the union' might escalate into violence.⁹⁰

The prospect of the campaign against the union turning violent was greater in early February 1800 than at any other time because of the palpable increase in the political temperature in the latter part of January. The mood of the public was manifestly more volatile on the resumption of the House of Commons on 3 February than it was on the opening day of the session when the large crowds that filled 'the streets about the houses of parliament' had observed 'good order'. The administration apprehended tumult, and their worst fears seemed about to be realised when supporters of a union were attacked leaving the precincts of parliament on Thursday, 5 February, and attempts were made to throw a number of carriages into the river Liffey. The timely intervention of the town major prevented any escalation in the disturbance on this occasion, and there were no further incidents of this kind while the union was being debated.⁹¹

This was a great relief to the administration as some MPs showed signs of weakening in the face of public pressure, but once they had steadied their nerve and secured a few Commons' victories they made rapid progress. Unable to make an impression in the division lobbies, and aware, as Edward Cooke observed, that 'any attempt to move government without a general cry of popular discontent is folly' the only tactic left to the opponents of a union was 'to bring forward the mass of the people'.⁹² The preparedness of substantial numbers of Catholics in counties Longford and Louth to endorse the controversial anti-union stand urged by Daniel O'Connell in Dublin in December, and the unwillingness of many lodges, who rejected the directive of the Grand Lodge of Ireland that the Orange Order should 'continue silent', to do as requested suggested this was still possible.⁹³ This prospect was improved by reports from around the country that anti-union interests were busy organising petitions for presentation to parliament and that twenty-five counties and eighteen corporate and commercial interests had done precisely this by the end of February.⁹⁴ However, for all their

⁹⁰ Cornwallis to Ross, 31 Jan, 4 Feb. in *Cornwallis Corres.*, III, 175, 177; *DEP*, 25 Jan. 1800.

⁹¹ Cornwallis to Portland, 18 Jan. in *Cornwallis Corres.*, III, 165; Cooke to Auckland, 18 Jan. in Malcomson, ed., *Eighteenth-century Irish official papers*, II, 304; *FJ*, 16 Jan., 15 Feb.; Cooke to Grenville, 14 Feb. 1800 in H.M.C., *Fortescue*, VI, 128.

⁹² Cooke to Grenville, 22, 25, 29 Feb. 1800 in H.M.C., *Fortescue*, VI, 139, 145, 149.

⁹³ *DEP*, 25 Jan., I, 4, 6, 11, 13, 25, 27 Feb., 4, 8, 20 Mar., 3, 19 Apr. 1800.

⁹⁴ *DEP*, I, 4, 6, 13, 15, 18, 20, 22, 27 Feb. By 7 March, the number of county petitions had risen to 26 (*Cornwallis Corres.*, III, 205).

success in this sphere, the campaign against the union in the spring of 1800 proved disappointing because, Dublin perhaps excepted, it failed to generate a sufficient popular outcry against a union to cause MPs to consider changing their vote. Indeed, the fact that the administration received addresses from the gentlemen and freeholders of counties Meath, Westmeath, Down and Mayo, from the Catholic and Protestant freeholders of County Kilkenny, and professions of support from sundry MPs during the early spring indicated that the opposition had failed even to eclipse the support for a union in the country at large.⁹⁵

Arising out of the failure of their petitioning campaign to provide them with the decisive momentum they needed, the opposition in the House of Commons contrived in March 'to fix upon the most unpopular points of the measure' in the hope that they could thereby 'inflamm the country'. The tactic proved only modestly successful, not least because of disunity within their ranks on specific points. Further, defeats on the articles of the union convinced them that there was no advantage to be obtained pressing every aspect of the measure to a division and they effectively gave up the contest on the union resolutions in the Commons.⁹⁶

With no prospect of success in the Lords, there seemed few options available to the opponents of a union. They resolved to soldier on, however, and perceiving that the spring assizes provided them with their last opportunity to rally public opinion they determined to petition the king directly. This troubled Pitt, who instructed the Irish administration to secure 'counter-declarations' in order to demonstrate that the people of Ireland were not solidly 'against the measure' lest it should devalue the decision of parliament.⁹⁷ Precipitated, as a result, into a further test of public opinion on an act of union, the opponents and proponents each contrived to rally support. Not surprisingly, given the course of the parliamentary session, this was a contest for which unionists no longer had much enthusiasm. The anti-unionists, by contrast, saw it as their last chance and the motivational advantage this provided enabled them to secure a substantially larger number of petitions than their opponents. In some instances, Cork being the most notable, the success of the local popular anti-unionists in securing the support for a petition to the king of five thousand freemen, freeholders, merchants, traders and manufacturers, was impressive. However, neither this nor the petitions from counties Sligo, Fermanagh, Kings, Cavan, Roscommon, Longford, Dublin or elsewhere influenced

⁹⁵ *DEP*, I, 6, 15, 22, Feb.; *FJ*, 8 Mar. 1800.

⁹⁶ Cornwallis to Portland, 11, 12, 22 Mar. in *Cornwallis Corres.*, III, 210–11, 214–5; Cooke to Grenville, 5, 10, 22 Mar. in *H.M.C.*, *Fortescue*, VI, 152, 159–60, 172.

⁹⁷ Cornwallis to Portland, 22 Mar. in *Cornwallis Corres.*, III, 217; Cooke to Castlereagh, 5 Apr. 1800 in *Castlereagh Corres.*, III, 261.

Cornwallis who observed that in so far as the public mind had shifted it was to favour the measure.⁹⁸ The balance of evidence certainly suggests that by now there were established pro- and anti-union interests in every part of the country and that as in Dublin, where John Giffard's defence of a union on 16 April was more remarked upon than the Corporation's contrary pronouncement, dissenting opinions sometimes had a greater impact.⁹⁹ At the same time, the campaign energised the anti-union cause once more, which excited alarm in some that 'there will be some violent attempt by a general rising or some other means' to prevent the union becoming law. There was little prospect of this, or of the union being lost, as more experienced politicians appreciated.¹⁰⁰ Nonetheless, the intensification of popular anti-union sentiment encouraged the parliamentary opponents of a union to make a final stand against the union bill in the House of Commons. It was not the most refined of parliamentary engagements, and it was never destined to succeed. Moreover, its chances were diminished by the sudden and unexpected outburst of loyalism that erupted in late May–early June following an attempt to assassinate George III.¹⁰¹ This served both to ease the final passage of the act of union and to facilitate its acceptance. The result of a by-election in County Londonderry, when a pro-union candidate triumphed over the anti-union nominee of the Ponsonbys, suggested this was likely in any event. But of equal significance are the statements of opponents of the union who observed as soon as its enactment was secured that they not alone accepted the decision they would encourage others to do likewise.¹⁰² Given this context, it is not surprising perhaps that Lord Cornwallis should observe of the Act of Union following its final ratification by the Irish parliament that it was 'received throughout the nation, and even in the metropolis, with less ill-humour than could have been expected'.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ *DEP*, 3, 10, 15, 17, 19, 29 April, 3, 13, 15, 22 May; F.H. Tuckey, *The County and City of Cork Remembrancer* (Cork, 1837), pp. 213–4; Cornwallis to Ross, 22 Apr. 1800 in *Cornwallis Corres.*, III, 229–30.

⁹⁹ For Dublin, and John Giffard's celebrated stand in favour of a union, see Gilbert, *Ancient Records of Dublin*, xv, 143–4; J.R. Hill, 'Religion, trade and politics in Dublin' in L.M. Cullen and P. Butel, eds, *Cities and merchants* (Dublin, 1986), pp. 248–9; *FJ*, 17 Apr. 1800.

¹⁰⁰ Garde to Heaton, 23 Apr. (PRONI, Chatsworth papers, T3158/1801); Lees to Townshend, 22 Apr. (Beinecke Library, Townshend papers, Box 6); Shannon to Boyle, 3 May 1800 in Hewitt, ed., *Shannon's letters*, p. 215.

¹⁰¹ Cornwallis to Portland, 20 May in *Cornwallis Corres.*, III, 236; Gilbert, ed., *Ancient records of Dublin*, xv, 159; *DEP*, 10, 12, 17, 21, 28 June 1800.

¹⁰² *FJ*, 31 May–5 June; Cornwallis to Portland, 9 June in *Cornwallis Corres.*, III, 251; Barnard to Barnard, 12 June in Powell, ed., *Barnard letters*, p. 122; *FJ*, 19 June 1800.

¹⁰³ Cornwallis to Portland, 17 June in *Cornwallis Corres.*, III, 262.

IV

Though it cannot be said that the fate of the act of union was determined at the level of popular politics, the struggle for public opinion was a major feature of the history of its enactment. Aided by the lack of preparation of the Irish administration, the anti-unionist interest capitalised on the disposition of Protestant conservatives to maintain existing political structures and the well-established devotion of the whig-patriots to self-government to generate a vocal popular campaign against a union in the winter of 1798–9 that helped to ensure that it did not become law in 1799. The strength of the popular campaign against a union was sustained during the early spring of 1799 with the result that the slight possibility that the Irish administration might have sought approval for a union towards the end of the 1799 session came to nothing. However, as the momentum of the opposition's campaign decreased in the late spring and summer of 1799, the unionist cause demonstrated that it was not without public support. Appeals to concerns for the future security of Protestants as well as to the prospect of a more generous and inclusive style of government struck a cord with a substantial section of the public, and elicited supportive declarations that enabled the advocates of a union to gain the initiative with public opinion by the autumn of 1799.

The contribution major figures in local and national politics, in civil and religious life, in the Catholic as well as the Protestant establishments, made to this was enormous. Throughout the country, peers such as Lord Shannon, Protestant churchmen like Archbishop William Beresford, Catholic churchmen such as Archbishop Bray and eminent commoners like John Beresford played a critical part in convincing others of lesser stature to stand forward and pronounce their support for a union. The preference of the Irish administration was for the support of property rather than democracy, but the unionist cause did not only attract support among the propertied. Some addresses were signed by thousands of freeholders. Consequently, when a legislative union came to be considered by the Irish parliament for a second time in 1800, the supporters of a union could claim that they were as representative of public opinion as their opponents. This was a contestable claim, but it did ensure that public opinion did not determine the outcome. The Act of Union was carried because Dublin Castle had the numbers to ensure it victory in all the divisions that mattered. Its opponents were still capable of generating an impressive display of opposition as their petitioning campaign in the spring of 1800 attests, but they could no longer summon up public emotion. Bishop Barnard's observation in March that 'Dublin streets are much quieter than ever I remember to

have seen them in ... peaceable times' is revealing in this respect.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, it is a measure of how resigned the public had become to the idea of a legislative union that 'there was not a murmur in the street, nor ... an expression of ill-humour throughout the whole of the city of Dublin' on 1 August when Cornwallis gave the act the royal assent, or when the legislative union came into being five months later.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Barnard to Barnard, 24 Mar. 1800 in Powell, ed., *Barnard letters*, p. 117.

¹⁰⁵ Cornwallis to Ross, 2 Aug. 1800 in *Cornwallis Corres.*, III, 285; Cornwallis to Castlereagh, 2 Jan., Cooke to Castlereagh, 2 Jan. 1801 in *Castlereagh Corres.*, IV, 13, 14.