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## Ripensare la geopolitica delle rivoluzioni

a cura di Pierre Serna e Paolo Conte

**COSME-MIC**



# *Ripensare la geopolitica delle rivoluzioni*

a cura di

Pierre Serna e Paolo Conte

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*A workers' international behind the Irish Rising of 1798? James Coigly, the Irish, Scottish and English popular movements and the Republican Federation project (1797-1798)*

Mathieu FERRADOU  
TEMOS (UMR 9016), Le Mans Université  
[ferradou.mathieu@wanadoo.fr](mailto:ferradou.mathieu@wanadoo.fr)

Timothy MURTAGH  
Trinity College, Dublin  
[murtagti@tcd.ie](mailto:murtagti@tcd.ie)

## **Introduction**

On 7 June 1998, 200 years to the day after his execution, *Cumann Seanchais Ard Mhacha* (the Armagh Diocesan Historical Society) erected a plaque in Armagh cemetery, the first memorial to the memory of James Coigly (1761-1798), who had been hanged for high treason at Pennington Heath, Maidstone, Kent in England<sup>124</sup>. On 10 October 2010, another memorial, in the form of a Celtic cross, was erected in the new cemetery in Coigly's native parish of Kilmore, Armagh. The ceremony, conducted after Sunday mass, was attended by 200 people<sup>125</sup>. These memorials were the first ones erected in Ireland to James Coigly as previous attempts in England on the occasion of the centenary of his

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<sup>124</sup> James Coigly's name was also spelled «Coigley» or «Quigley» (all these variants sometimes with a preceding «O», which Coigly refuted in an address to the court which judged him). He himself preferred and used the form «Coigly», closest to its Irish original *Ó Coighligh*, and sometimes humorously signed Fivey (from *chúig*, «five», in Irish).

<sup>125</sup> B. FEARON, *Unveiling of memorial cross to Fr. James Coigly, 10 October 2010*, in «Seanchas Ardmhacha: Journal of the Armagh Diocesan Historical Society», 2011, vol. 23, n. 2, 2011, pp. 303-308.

execution had failed to raise interest in Ulster<sup>126</sup>. Only with the Bicentenary of the 1798 Irish «Rebellion» and its aftermath did the memory of Coigly resurface in Ireland, and yet only at the local scale. This late and localised memorial resurgence is, at first glance, baffling, as it contradicts what Theobald Wolfe Tone (1763-1798), who himself was erected as a central figure in the memory of Irish nationalism, had written about Coigly in his journal when he read the news of his execution: «If ever I reach Ireland and that we establish our liberty, I will be the first to propose a monument to his memory»<sup>127</sup>. An explanation is to be found however in the confusion surrounding Coigly's memory as testified by what Benedict Fearon, chairman of the memorial committee, said during the ceremony: «Today we have reversed a crime committed 212 years ago when an innocent man was so unjustly condemned»<sup>128</sup>.

This declaration of innocence echoes the claims made by Coigly himself in his autobiography which was published by his friend, relative and fellow United Irishman, Valentine Derry from Louth. It was a sentiment also expressed by Coigly's friend John Fenwick, a member of the London Corresponding Society and editor of the pro-Irish *Courier* newspaper whose London offices were a meeting place of radicals and republican revolutionaries before and after the «Rebellion»<sup>129</sup>. Fenwick published his own observations on the trial<sup>130</sup>. Both books were written

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<sup>126</sup> G. BEINER, *Forgetful Remembrance: Social Forgetting and Vernacular Historiography of a Rebellion in Ulster*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 265.

<sup>127</sup> Entry of 20 June 1798 in *The Writings of Theobald Wolfe Tone, 1763-1798*, edited by Th.W. MOODY-R.B. MCDOWELL-Ch.J. WOODS, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2007, vol. 3, p. 308 (hereafter referenced as Tone, *Writings*).

<sup>128</sup> B. FEARON, *Unveiling*, cit., p. 307.

<sup>129</sup> *The Life of the Rev. James Coigly, an Address Written by Himself during his Confinement in Maidstone Gaol*, London, 1798 (a new edition was supervised by D. KEOGH, *A Patriot Priest. The Life of Father James Coigly, 1761-1798*, Cork, Cork University Press, 1998). On the *Courier* and its radical connexions see below.

<sup>130</sup> J. FENWICK, *Observations on the Trial of James Coigly, for High-treason, Together with an Account of His Death, Including his Address to the Spectators, To which is Added an Appendix, Containing an Interesting Correspondence, Relative to the Trial, Between Mr. Coigly's Solicitor and the Duke of Portland, &c., And also Letters Written By Mr Coigly to the Attorney-General and the Duke of Portland; and Other Documents Connected to the Trial*, London, John Fenwick, 1798.

in an apologetic mode, claiming the innocence of Coigly as he had done himself in his final declarations before the court, denying that he had been the bearer of a treasonous address to the French Directory which had been found on his coat pocket during his arrest and had served as the decisive evidence of his treason. Coigly's (and his friends') intent was to follow in the traditions of Catholic martyrs, innocents unjustly condemned, and going through their ordeal and death with dignity. He also tapped into the very popular memory of the "martyr" William Orr, the United Irishman sentenced to death in 1797 (another instance of "social forgetting" since then)<sup>131</sup>. In doing so, with a book that ran through three editions and 40,000 copies, Coigly blurred his own memory which was soon covered by the atrocities of the "rebellion" and its repression. For Coigly was indeed guilty of high treason: in the months and even years previous to his trial, he had actively worked to bring forth a union between Irish, Scottish and English disaffected workers, expanding the United Irishmen/ Defenders organisation in the Three Kingdoms, and securing ties with the French Republic. As this republican conspiracy failed, both in Ireland and in England, its actors, the memory of the revolutionary Coigly as well as their radical political ideals, were consigned to oblivion.

The aim of this article is therefore to unearth the layers of forgetfulness and the memorial screens that have prevented a more accurate picture of James Coigly, and more importantly of the significance of the republican conspiracy he spearheaded, from emerging. While this episode, from late 1796 to early 1798, has already been examined by historians, a greater attention to the social networks that Coigly used and their transnational dimension warrants a re-examination in order to uncover. Behind Coigly's actions was an attempt to forge what must be called a workers' international between Ireland, Scotland, England and France. In essence, Coigly hoped to revolutionize the Three Kingdoms and establish a federation of

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<sup>131</sup> G. BEINER, *Forgetting to Remember Orr: Death and Ambiguous Remembrance in Modern Ireland*, in *Death and Dying in Ireland, Britain, and Europe: Historical Perspectives*, edited by J. KELLY-M.A. LYONS, Dublin, Irish Academic Press, 2013, pp. 171-202.

European republics<sup>132</sup>. Unearthing this extraordinary project from British, Irish and French archives sheds new light on the events behind the rising of 1798 and on the debates about the social dimension of the United Irish desired independent Irish republic in relation with the French Revolution.

**«He certainly was then not a friend to the French Revolution»?  
Coigly's role as a mediator between Catholics and Protestants,  
between France and Ireland (1785-1795)**

To understand Coigly's commitment to social equality and the revolutionary project, we need to examine the context of his background and his surroundings. Coigly grew up in the north of Ireland, in county Armagh to be exact. This fact is significant. At the end of the eighteenth century, Armagh was a place where one could most clearly see the changes affecting Irish society, most notably in terms of demography. The second half of the eighteenth century had seen the population of Ireland almost double in size, growing from 2.5 million people in 1750 to near 5 million by 1800. This demographic growth, unparalleled in Western Europe, had produced a new set of social pressures and tensions, many of which were extremely visible in Armagh, which by 1780 was one of the most densely populated counties in the country<sup>133</sup>. Closely related to this population growth was Armagh's central role in the Irish linen industry. A cottage industry that could often be carried out alongside small farming, the manufacture of linen had produced a remarkable economic upswing in Ulster and in

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<sup>132</sup> On previous studies of Coigly, see: M. ELLIOTT, *Partners in Revolution*, New Haven & London, Yale University Press, 1982, pp. 174-189; R.Ó MUIRÍ, *Father James Coigly, in Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter. The Clergy and 1798*, edited by L. SWORDS, Dublin, The Columba Press, 1997; D. KEOGH, *Coigly (Coigley, Quigley, O'Coigley), James*, in *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, edited by J. MCGUIRE-J. QUINN, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, <http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a1814> (hereafter cited as *DIB*); D. KEOGH, *An Unfortunate Man*, in *History Ireland*, vol. 6, Issue 2, 1998, <https://www.historyireland.com/18th-19th-century-history/an-unfortunate-man/>

<sup>133</sup> L. KENNEDY-L.A. CLARKSON, *Irish Population History, 1700-1921*, in *An Historical Geography of Ireland*, edited by B.J. GRAHAM-L.G. PROUDFOOT, Academic Press, 1993, pp.160-161.



Armagh in particular. Yet the success of domestic manufacturing produced additional tensions, exacerbating religious divides. Armagh, significantly, was a religiously mixed county, being stratified into three distinct but overlapping zones: the north-east which was largely Anglican, a middle region that was predominantly Presbyterian, and a third lower sub-region that was home to a population that was not only strongly Catholic, but largely Irish speaking. As Armagh experienced a demographic boom, the result was a frontier region in which long standing patterns of settlement between the different religious sects were being disrupted<sup>134</sup>.

Part of this process was the destabilising effect of new laws which repealed earlier restrictions on Irish Catholics, with Relief Acts in 1782 and 1792 allowing Catholics to purchase land (which they had previously only been able to rent), as well as granting them the parliamentary vote. The ability to purchase land was particularly contentious in Armagh, as it led to a dramatic rise in prices and competition for land, with younger Protestant farmers resentful at the prospect of being outbid by their Catholic counterparts. Meanwhile, the extension of even limited political rights to Catholics damaged a traditional sense of superiority that even the humblest Protestant could feel over his Catholic neighbours. Exacerbating this was the fact that employment in the linen trade allowed young men to achieve economic independence from their parents at an earlier age than before, as the inheritance of farmland was no longer so important. This loss of parental control resulted in a breakdown of social order in which neither fathers nor landlords could exert control over unruly and feuding young people<sup>135</sup>. The result was an escalating series of brawls, faction fights and riots between young Catholics and Protestants during the 1780s. Often referred to as the «Armagh Troubles» or the «Armagh Disturbances», this conflict eventually resulted in two opposing and clandestine groups, the Protestant «Peep O'Day Boys», and the Catholic «Defenders».

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<sup>134</sup> *Ulster Since 1600: Politics, Economy and Society*, edited by L. KENNEDY-P. OLLERENSHAW, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 25, 96, 178.

<sup>135</sup> D. MILLER, *Armagh Troubles 1784-95*, in *Irish Peasants violence and political unrest 1780-1914*, edited by S. CLARKE-J. DONNELLY, Manchester, 1983, pp. 155-191.

The Defenders were to emerge as a significant group and one which Coigly was to have extensive dealings with. The Defenders displayed some common features with earlier Irish agrarian movements, such as pursuing pragmatic grievances like regulation of rents, tithes and wages. Yet Defenderism represented a new phenomenon in the history of Ireland's secret societies. While religious and agrarian concerns may have often been motivators for Defender activity, the key issues around which agitation centred in the 1790s were issues connected to the State: possession of arms, the franchise, militia schemes and the rule of law, particularly martial law. Their aspirations to social and political revolution also marked out the Defenders as something new. While it is difficult – but not impossible – to discern a clear Defender “ideology”, it is nonetheless obvious that they differed from earlier agrarian redresser groups. Admittedly, some of these previous groups had invoked “Jacobite” symbols, professing loyalty to the deposed Catholic kings, the Stuarts. However, the Defender symbolism constituted a powerful (if not always coherent) mix of traditional Jacobite themes with the new doctrines of the American and French revolutions. Defenderism mixed the language of natural rights and democracy with a Gaelic literary tradition that emphasised themes of dispossession, deliverance and religious antagonism. Common to both this Gaelic tradition and the new republicanism of the 1790s was the idea of France as a source of liberation: either as a base for a Stuart (and Catholic) restoration or as a source of Revolutionary aid. Similarly, elements of a new political language of “equality” and universal rights blended into older motifs from Jacobite traditions, the idea of dispossession by foreign conquerors and a biblical trope of «the first shall be last»<sup>136</sup>. In

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<sup>136</sup> B. Ó BUACHALLA, *Jacobite to Jacobin, in 1798: Bicentenary Perspective*, edited by Th. BARTLETT et al., Dublin, Four Courts, 2003, pp 75-97. For an overview of the controversy about the significance of the discontentment of the eighteenth-century agrarian protest movements, see J.J. DONNELLY-J.S. DONNELLY, *The Righthoy Movement 1785-8*, in «Studia Hibernica», n. 17-18, 1977, pp. 120–202; J.S. DONNELLY, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, vol. 83C, 1983, p. 293–331. S.J. CONNOLLY-V. MORLEY have entered into a long debate, with the latter challenging the assertion of the former, found in S.J. CONNOLLY, *Eighteenth century Ireland. Colony or Ancien Régime?*, in *The Making of Modern Irish History. Revisionism and the Revisionist Controversy*, edited by D.G. BOYCE-A. O'DAY, New York, Routledge, 1996, pp. 15-33, that Irish popular

a recent study of the Irish “popular mind”, Vincent Morley has argued that republican and Jacobite ideas often co-existed easily. Morley argues that the long tradition of Irish Jacobitism had served to undermine the legitimacy of the Hanoverian state, opening up an oppositional space in which republican doctrines could take advantage. But how to meld republicanism with a worldview based around long standing religious antagonism?<sup>137</sup>

Into this situation, Coigly emerged as a mediator, attempting to diffuse the tensions between Protestants and Catholics but also to connect France and Ireland from 1785 to 1792. Three seminal moments in Coigly’s role as a cultural, political and spatial mediator can be briefly retraced before the crucial year of 1797-1798. First, Coigly, immediately after his ordination in Dungannon (that centre of Volunteer activity), in 1785 (at 24) was sent to Paris to receive his education in theology in the *Collège des Lombards*, as was usual for Catholic priests because of the «penal laws» forbidding the existence of Catholic schools and seminaries in Ireland. Paris was then the main training place for Irish Catholic priests among the numerous Irish colleges on the Continent: in 1788, 478 clerics in Ireland had been trained abroad, among whom 348 in France and 180 in Paris (including fifteen of the 26 Irish bishops). The Irish College in Paris was a dual structure: the *Collège des Lombards* (rue des Carmes) trained already-ordained priests since the seventeenth century while the new *Collège des Irlandais*, which opened in 1775 on the rue du Cheval Vert (today rue des Irlandais), near the Sainte-Geneviève church (the future Panthéon), housed younger pupils (starting at 12 or

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discontentment was largely apolitical. See V. MORLEY, “*Tá an cruatan ar Sheoirse*”: *Folklore or Politics?*, in *Eighteenth-Century Ireland / Iris an dá chultúr*, vol. 13, 1998, pp. 112-120; V. MORLEY, *George III, Queen Sadbh and the Historians*, in *Eighteenth-Century Ireland / Iris an dá chultúr*, vol. 17, 2002, pp. 112-120. S. J. CONNOLLY responded with *Jacobites, Whiteboys and Republicans: Varieties of Disaffection in Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, in *Eighteenth-Century Ireland / Iris an dá chultúr*, vol. 18, 2003, pp. 63-79, to which Morley responded with an important article, *The Continuity of Disaffection in Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, in *Eighteenth-Century Ireland / Iris an dá chultúr*, vol. 22, 2007, pp. 189-205, and two important books: V. MORLEY, *Irish Opinion and the American Revolution, 1760-1783*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015, and *The Popular Mind in Eighteenth-century Ireland*, Cork, Cambridge university press, 2017.

<sup>137</sup> V. MORLEY, *The Popular Mind in Eighteenth-century Ireland*, pp. 230-242, 244-249, 254.

13 years of age) who attended the different colleges of the University of Paris, sent over by their families to be trained before entering priesthood, the army or pursuing medical studies – all three main careers opened to Catholics<sup>138</sup>. There, students were in contact with the current trends and debates within Catholic thought, and it is probable that Coigly imbibed the teachings of teachers like Irish theologian Luke Joseph Hooke (1714-1796), a representative of the “Catholicism of the Enlightenment”. Hooke considered that *religio*, as a theology and a practice, was what unifies and links individuals to form a community, and that laws (*jus*) had to be designed in order to enable individuals to conform, through their free will, to the natural rights (*lex*), given by God to men. Laws, in other words, should enable men to live in a just society, a republic. Republic and religion were one and the same<sup>139</sup>. What exact influence this ideology may have had on Coigly is unknown, but it is certain that two years after arriving in Paris, Coigly entered into a protracted conflict with the newly appointed superior of the *Collège des Lombards*, the Abbé Jean-Baptiste Walsh. In 1787, Coigly demanded the benefice of a *bourse* financed through the Maginn foundation, a family to which Coigly belonged through his mother who was a direct descendant of the co-founder of the *collège*. Walsh refused, supporting the claims of two other Ulster priests on this bourse, John MacAllister and Edward MacMullin. A two-years lawsuit ensued, one during which Coigly was threatened with a *lettre de cachet* which would have seen him imprisoned in the Bastille. In 1788, the royal justice gave satisfaction to

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<sup>138</sup> P. O’CONNOR, *The Irish College in Paris, from penal days seminary to Irish cultural centre, in Franco-Irish connections. Essay, Memoirs and Poems in Honour of Pierre Joannon*, edited by J. CONROY, Dublin, Four Courts, 2009, pp. 258-268; L. SWORDS, *The Green cockade: the Irish in the French Revolution, 1789-1815*, Dublin, Glendale, 1989, pp. 13-20. For a comparative and a *longue durée* perspectives, see L. CHAMBERS, *Introduction*, Th. O’CONNOR, *The Domestic and International Roles of Irish Overseas Colleges, 1590-1800, in College Communities Abroad: Education, Migration and Catholicism in Early Modern Europe*, edited by L. CHAMBERS-Th. O’CONNOR, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2017, pp. 1-33, 90-114.

<sup>139</sup> Th. O’CONNOR, *An Irish Theologian in Enlightenment France, Luke Joseph Hooke, 1714-96*, Dublin, Four Courts, 1995; B. PLONGERON, *Théologie et Politique au Siècle des Lumières, 1770-1820*, Paris, Droz, 1973.

Coigly, who was awarded 200 *livres* a year for the rest of his studies<sup>140</sup>. He then went after Walsh himself, contesting his appointment as superior obtained through the support of the archbishop of Paris, Antoine Leclerc de Juigné, and of his cousin, the count Antoine-Joseph-Philippe Walsh de Serrant, whereas, Coigly argued, the *Collège des Lombards* should have four superiors, one for each Irish province, elected by the students. He also denounced Walsh's corruption and prevarications<sup>141</sup>. Framing his conflict with Walsh as one against tyranny, Coigly presented himself and his fellow students as a victim of Walsh and his powerful network. This new conflict was cut short however by the French Revolution, and Coigly left France for Ireland, explaining that «having run many risks and narrowly avoided being lanternised», he, «with great difficulty, made [his] escape from Paris on the 12th of October 1789»<sup>142</sup>. Despite his departure, however, other students took up the mantle of the fight of the students against the “despotism” of their superiors in both colleges, as the attempt of the former to oust the latter and seize control of their college, in October 1792, in the context of the advent of the republic in France would later show<sup>143</sup>.

Coigly's explanation on his sudden departure from France must be taken with a grain of salt, however, as he wrote his autobiography while in prison awaiting execution, and framed it as an apologist narrative of a persecuted Catholic. It is doubtful that he was threatened with hanging *à la lanterne*, as in 1789 the divide between the Catholics and the Revolution – caused by the Civil Constitution of the Clergy – did not

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<sup>140</sup> L. CHAMBERS, *Irish Foundations and Boursiers in Early Modern Paris, 1682-1793*, in «Irish Economic and Social History», vol. 35, 2008, pp. 1-11. L. SWORDS, *History of the Irish College, Paris, 1578-1800. Calendar of the Papers of the Irish College, Paris*, in «Archivium Hibernicum», vol. 35, 1980, pp. 3-233, (pp. 173-174). For Coigly's own narrative on these events: *A Patriot Priest, The Life of Father James Coigly, 1761-1798*, edited by D. KEOGH, Cork, Cork University Press, 1998, pp. 29-32.

<sup>141</sup> L. SWORDS, *The Green Cockade*, cit., p. 18. The regulations concerning the election of students is an *arrêt* of the royal council of 1728, a copy of which is conserved in the Dublin Diocesan Archives [hereafter DDA] 121/9.

<sup>142</sup> *A Patriot Priest*, cit., p. 32.

<sup>143</sup> On this extraordinary event, see M. FERRADOU, “*La République au collège*”, Paris, 29 octobre 1792: catholicisme, radicalisme et républicanisme entre France et Irlande pendant la Révolution française (1792-1795), in «Études irlandaises», n. 41-2, 2016, pp. 119-133.

yet exist. To the contrary, it is highly probable that Coigly's personal experience of the French Revolution convinced him to go back to Ireland to transpose it to his native country, much like Theobald Wolfe Tone's identification of the French Revolution as the «morning star of liberty to Ireland»<sup>144</sup>. By recovering their liberty, the French, long associated with despotism, had proven that Catholics were *capaces libertatis* and could now demand equality in Ireland. Contemporaries and later historians have noted that many Irish who came back to Ireland after having studied in Paris brought with them a radical conception of religion and politics. Indeed, Irish informer Leonard McNally even considered these French-trained priests responsible for the Irish Rising in 1798<sup>145</sup>. There is evidence linking Coigly to the efforts of certain radicals who attempted to form a union of Catholics and Protestants in 1791-1793, such as Theobald Wolfe Tone and John Keogh in County Down and Napper Tandy in County Louth<sup>146</sup>. Yet, Coigly's role in these attempts did not mean he was estranged or opposed to the Defenders, quite the contrary. Not only was Coigly almost certainly a member of the Defenders, but he was linked through kinship to several families which were Defender leaders. While local or lower-ranking Defender leaders were often «alehouse keepers, artisans, low schoolmasters and a

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<sup>144</sup> Tone to Russell, 9 July 1791, in *The Writings of Theobald Wolfe Tone, 1763-1798*, edited by Th.W. MOODY-R.B. MCDOWELL-Ch.J. WOODS, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1998, vol. I, p. 105. See also Tone's pamphlet: Northern Whig [Th. W. TONE], *An Argument on Behalf of the Catholics of Ireland, in which the Present Political State of that Country, and the Necessity of a Parliamentary Reform, are Considered. Addressed to the People and more particularly to the Protestants of Ireland*, Dublin, P. Byrne, 1791, in *The Writings of Theobald Wolfe Tone*, vol. I, pp. 108-128.

<sup>145</sup> [MacNally] to \_\_\_, 6 June 1798, National Archives of Ireland (hereafter NAI), Rebellion Papers [hereafter RP], 620/10/121/111. For historical discussions on these aspects, see: W.E.H. Lecky, *History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*, London, Longman, Green & co., 1903, vol. 3, pp. 354-356; Th. O'CONNOR, *An Irish Theologian*, cit., p. 10-11; L. CHAMBERS, *A Displaced Intelligentsia: Aspects of Irish Catholic Thought in Ancien Régime France*, in *The Irish in Europe, 1580-1815*, edited by Th. O'CONNOR, Dublin, Fourt Courts, 2001, pp. 158-174.

<sup>146</sup> *The Writings of Theobald Wolfe Tone*, cit., vol. I, p. 206-275.

few middling farmers»<sup>147</sup>, above this was a further leadership composed of families that had traditionally provided community leadership: families such as the Teelings, Coyles, McCanns, Magennises or McArdles. These were the “underground gentry” of the province: the descendants of earlier seventeenth century proprietors who still retained significant influence among the Catholic inhabitants of their former estates. Several members of these families held leadership positions in the Defenders while also having a close acquaintance with Dublin and Belfast reformers, as a result of Catholic reform campaigns during 1792-1793. Members of these families acted as intermediaries, helping to integrate Defender lodges into the United Irish structure<sup>148</sup>. As an early biographer of the United Irishmen would recount, Coigly was identified by the United Irishmen as a «person who had great influence over the Defenders and was supposed to have been connected with them, was early sought after to promote the views of the Northern United Irishmen»<sup>149</sup>. Also, as Louis Cullen has argued, Coigly was probably behind the publication of a very influential pamphlet in 1792 in the context of the Catholic campaign for emancipation, as well as responsible for formalizing and for introducing references to revolutionary France in the oaths and catechisms of the Defenders<sup>150</sup>. One of these catechisms ran thus:

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<sup>147</sup> Second Digest on Defenderism, in PRO-HO 100/58/344-50, quoted in Th. BARTLETT, *Defenders and Defenderism in 1795. Select Documents XXXVIII*, in «Irish Historical Studies», vol. 24, n. 95, 1985, p. 394.

<sup>148</sup> C.J. WOODS, *A Gallant, Intrepid, Unfortunate Officer: Bartholomew Teeling*, in *Victory or Glorious Defeat: Biographies of participants in the Mayo Rebellion of 1798*, edited by Sh. MULLOY, Westport, 2010, pp 167-171. The most extensive attempt to try and discern these early links is still: J. SMYTH, *Men of No Property*, London, Macmillan, 1992, pp. 66-70,152.

<sup>149</sup> R.R. MADDEN, *The United Irishmen; their lives and times*, vol. II, 1846, p.2.

<sup>150</sup> L.M. CULLEN, *Late-Eighteenth Century Politicisation in Ireland: Problems in its Study and its French Links*, in *Culture et pratiques politiques en France et en Irlande, XVIe-XVIIIe siècle, Actes du colloque de Marseille, 28 septembre-2 octobre 1988*, edited by L.M. CULLEN - J.-L. BERGERON, Paris, Publications du CRH, 1991, pp. 137-157; L.M. CULLEN, *The Political Structures of the Defenders*, in *Ireland and the French Revolution*, edited by H. GOUGH-D. DICKSON, Dublin, Irish Academic Press, 1990, pp. 117-138.

Where did you get your commands from? First from Orleans castle we first got our commands to plant the Tree of Liberty in the Irish lands; The French Defenders will uphold the cause and Irish Defenders will pull down the British<sup>151</sup>.

Another oath, which can be dated from the winter of 1792-1793, made explicit references to the French Convention:

Are you consecrated? I am.

To what? To the National Convention – to quell all nations – to dethrone all Kings, and plant the Tree of Liberty in our Irish lands – whilst the French Defenders will protect our cause, and the Irish Defenders pull down British laws<sup>152</sup>.

The sense of shared destiny and solidarity with the newly established French Convention, with the sans-culottes identified as Defenders, when read in perspective with the probability that Coigly may have been one of the mediators between the two countries, belies Marianne Elliott's interpretation that the Defenders did not understand the exact meaning of their oaths. Or to put it differently, "defenderism" was a complex, hybrid and autonomous synthesis of different influences, a powerful vector of popular politicisation, one that cannot be interpreted as a mere downgraded version of French revolutionary ideology. Another tract found in Cavan (Co. Cavan) reproduced an oath by which the would-be member of the Defenders gave his allegiance to an imaginary and desired state:

Now you A. B. voluntarily declare to be true to the present United States of France and Ireland and of every combined ~~kingdom~~ state in Christianity that is now or hereafter may be for the welfare of our United Brethern; that you aid them as far as in your power lies without hurting your soul or body as long as they to you prove loyal<sup>153</sup>.

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<sup>151</sup> Th. BARTLETT, *Defenders and Defenderism*, cit., p. 389. The reference to Orléans is very puzzling. It might be an implicit reference to Lord Edward FitzGerald who married Pamela, the putative daughter of the Duke of Orléans.

<sup>152</sup> Quoted in M. ELLIOTT, *Partners in Revolution*, cit., p. 42.

<sup>153</sup> *IBIDEM*. The original of this oath, wherein the word kingdom is very tellingly struck, is in NAI, RP 620/22/19. The version found in the compilation, made by



The United Irishmen were eager to establish a junction with the Defenders because of the astonishing growth of that movement, as it secretly spread as a system of federated “lodges”, giving the group a scope and coherence that earlier such movement had lacked. The years 1791-1793 were thus crucial for the development of the Defenders who expanded thanks to the Catholic campaign in 1792 and the 1793 anti-militia riots that spread to almost all of Ireland<sup>154</sup>. In parallel, the Defenders established links with revolutionary France, arming themselves and planning a general insurrection, which was thwarted by the English government<sup>155</sup>. Coigly was very certainly at the heart of both dynamics.

By 1796 there was a Defender network that spanned nearly the entire island<sup>156</sup>. Moreover, it proved that it was not an exclusively rural or peasant movement, as it successfully recruited from among the artisans of towns and cities. One government report described how «the Defenders in the country had the greatest wish to spread Defenderism in Dublin because they thought if they became strong enough in Dublin to rise, it would be better than all they could do in the country». When a sizeable group of Defenders were arrested in Dublin in 1795, several newspapers noted how «they are all apprentices and journeymen of different trades». If reports were to be believed, by this stage the Defenders could boast a membership of four thousand people in

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Lord-Lieutenant Camden in 1795, of documents concerning the Defenders, and sent to London does not include the erasure: HO 100/ 58 ff 178-210, 345-350.

<sup>154</sup> On these aspects, see L.M. CULLEN, *Political Structures of the Defenders, in Ireland and the French Revolution*, cit., pp. 117-138.

<sup>155</sup> M. FERRADOU, *The Rising that Might Have Been: The Atlantic Republic Project, Ireland and the French Wars*, in «Annales historiques de la Révolution française», n. 397, 2019, pp. 127-149.

<sup>156</sup> D. MILLER, *The Armagh troubles, 1784-95*, in *Irish Peasants. Violence and Political Unrest, 1780–1914*, edited by S. CLARK-J.S. CONNELLY, Manchester, 1983, pp. 155-91; Th. BARTLETT, *Defenders and Defenderism in 1795*, cit., pp. 373-394; J. SMYTH, *The Men of No Property*, cit., pp. 45-51; L.M. CULLEN, *The Political Troubles in County Armagh: A Comment*, in *Eighteenth Century Ireland*, n. 23, 1996, pp.18-23; M.J. POWELL, *Popular Disturbances in Late Eighteenth-Century Ireland: The Origins of the “Peep of Day” Boys*”, in «Irish Historical Studies», vol. 34, n. 135, 2005, pp. 249-265.

Dublin<sup>157</sup>. Could the United Irishmen have claimed the same? Certainly, there were some renegade United Irishmen, who had made overtures to the city's workers, but they were the exception. Indeed, the leadership of the Dublin United Irish was particularly wary of inviting the participation of working men in the first half of the 1790s. After 1795, however, the United Irishmen now shared the explicitly revolutionary aspirations of the Defenders. They were also eager to graft the United Irish organization onto the radical underworld of artisan radical clubs that had sprung up among Dublin's journeymen. However, several of these artisan clubs had already been infiltrated or taken over by the Defenders. As the United Irishmen began to recruit from the same clubs, these groups of Dublin artisans provided a United Irish-Defender alliance by proxy<sup>158</sup>.

Coigly was not necessarily active in this process of recruiting Dublin workers, but he was nonetheless active in Dublin radical circles. It is likely that he was sworn into the United Irishmen by Valentine Lawless in Dublin at some point in late 1795 or 1796. In 1795, during the «Armagh outrages», Coigly's family home was attacked and burned by a «King and Church» mob, destroying in the process his entire library, including his notes for a history of seventeenth-century Ireland (and perhaps of the 1641 Rebellion). While Coigly continued to live in Dundalk, most accounts have him travelling frequently to Dublin and Belfast throughout 1796 and early 1797<sup>159</sup>. Several sources link Coigly with Defender activity in relation with the French expedition of December 1796-January 1797 and with the naval mutinies in the Royal

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<sup>157</sup> List of names titled *Dublin United Irishmen* (NAI RP620/52/183); *Faulkner's Dublin Journal* 1 September, 1795; *Dublin Evening Post* 1 September, 1795; *Hibernian Journal* 31 August, 1795.

<sup>158</sup> K. WHELAN, *The Tree of Liberty*, Cork, Cork University Press, 1996, p. 79; J. SMYTH, *Men of No Property. Irish Radicals and Popular Politics in the late Eighteenth Century*, New York and Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1992, pp. 147-149, 152-154.

<sup>159</sup> J. COIGLY, *The Life of the Rev. James Coigly: An Address to the People of Ireland*, London, 1798, pp. 21-25; D. KEOGH, *The French Disease. The Catholic Church and French Radicalism, 1790-1800*, Dublin, Four Courts, 1993, p. 188. See the Information of Charles McFillin of the parish of Artray in the County of Londonderry, Farmer, nd., NA PC 1/41/136 for confirmation that Coigly was organising the Defenders as a delegate from Co. Louth in preparation for the French invasion as soon as June 1796.

Navy in April-June 1797. Coigly continued to have links to the Defenders through his brother (first name unknown), who lived in Armagh, and another Quigley (a publican in Armagh), probably a relative. Coigly was in contact, through another Armagh publican named Robert Campbell with the Defenders-United Irishmen clubs of Dublin such as the *Spread Club*, which was the reformation of the *Telegraph* (or *Telegraphic*) *Club* in Pill Lane, which merged with the *Philanthropic Club* of John Daly Burk, a key-actor of the reformed United Irishmen-Defenders merge in 1794-1795. This club was the center of activities of the Defenders in the larger Dublin area, with one of the most prominent leaders, Peter Carey acting in liaison with several Irish-French agents such as William Duckett in 1794-5 and Richard O'Shee<sup>160</sup>.

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<sup>160</sup> [Thomas Boyle] to [Alexander Worthington?], nd. [Aug. 1796], nd. [after Aug. 1796?], 17 August [1796], 25 August [1796], nd [1796], NA RP 620/18/3/86, 68, 77, 78, 87; [Thomas Boyle] to Alexander Worthington, nd. [August-September 1796], NA RP 620/52/212; Thomas Boyle to Edward Cooke, 8 Oct. [1796], NA RP 620/18/82. These letters from the informer Thomas Boyle, who frequented the Defenders, have sometimes been misdated from 1797 but internal elements refer to contemporary events that happened in 1796 (such as preparations for the French expedition in Brittany). See also F[rancis] H[iggins] to [Edward Cooke], 19 Aug. 1796, quoted in *Revolutionary Dublin, 1795-1801, The Letters of Francis Higgins to Dublin Castle*, edited by Th. BARTLETT, Dublin, Four Courts, 2004, pp. 95-97. On this dazzling and complex set of activities, see: M. DUREY, *Transatlantic Radicals and the Early American Republic*, Lawrence, University Press of Kansas, 1997, pp. 112-118; R.B. MCDOWELL, *Ireland in the Age of Empire and Revolution*, Oxford Clarendon Press, 1979, p. 475 ; T. GRAHAM, *The Transformation of the Dublin Society of United Irishmen into a mass-based revolutionary organization, 1791-6, in 1798*, edited by Th. BARTLETT et al., pp. 136-146; On Peter Carey, see Downshire to \_\_\_, [c. November 1797] in C.J. WOODS, *Samuel Turner's Information on the United Irishmen, 1797-8*, in «Analecta Hibernica», n. 42, 2011, pp. 181-227 (pp. 188-199); D. KEOGH, *The French Disease*. pp. 127-129, 131; M. ELLIOTT, *Partners in Revolution*, cit., p. 140; R. WELLS, *Insurrection. The British Experience, 1795-1803*, London, Breviary Stuff Publications, 2013, p. 109. Both Marianne Elliott and Roger Wells (the later using the former) mistakenly calls Carey Christopher when his first name is Peter as proven by the examination of Murphy who was his companion on board the Anacreon during one of the French expeditions, led by James Napper Tandy, in 1798: Murphy's examination, taken by Richard Ford, 2 Nov. 1799, NA HO 100/87 ff. 334-335.

Coigly's Irish period can be thus described as one during which he acted as a key cultural and political go-between between different religious and discontent groups as well as different spaces. In this sense, he was instrumental in linking the Defenders with the United Irishmen and in linking the Defenders with revolutionary France. In many ways, the Defenders preceded the United Irishmen when it came to graft their fight with the larger Atlantic revolutionary and republican fight, belying the idea that they were characterized by their «parochial outlook», «vulgar democratic republicanism» and «gut Catholic nationalism»<sup>161</sup>.

### **Coigly and the Irish, English and Scottish workers' international (June 1797)**

These activities took place against the backdrop of a ruthless government programme of repression and counter-insurgency, as the authorities targeted the United Irish network in Ulster. In the early months of 1797, the authorities were closing in on Coigly and his circle of friends, with a warrant issued for his arrest in the spring of 1797. Like many of his associates, Coigly fled to England, travelling through Liverpool, Manchester and eventually London<sup>162</sup>. Coigly's flight from Ireland for England in June 1797 took place in the midst of an upheaval in the United Irishmen organisation. The French-Irish expedition of December 1796-January 1797, led by General Hoche, despite its failure, had renewed Irish expectations, and the United Irishmen, now fully merged with the Defenders, experienced their greatest growth: from 38.000 members in October 1796, the United Irishmen's ranks amount to 70.000 in February 1797 and almost 118.000 in May<sup>163</sup>. The frightened Anglo-Irish government of Dublin Castle decided to launch a series of repression to contain the threat: a first wave of arrests took place in October 1796, followed by a second one in February, alongside the campaign of "terror" led by General Lake in Ulster. The effect of this repression was to demoralize much of the North's United Irish

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<sup>161</sup> N.J. CURTIN, *The United Irishmen. Popular Politics in Ulster and Dublin, 1791-1798*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1998 [1994], pp. 65, 159; J. SMYTH, *The Men of No Property*, cit. p. 183.

<sup>162</sup> J. COIGLY, *The Life of the Rev. James Coigly*, cit., pp. 21-25.

<sup>163</sup> N.J. CURTIN, *The United Irishmen*, cit., p. 69.

rank-and-file, but also to provoke the Northern leaders to push for an immediate uprising in 1797<sup>164</sup>. The United Irishmen leaders were torn apart: on the one hand, they encouraged recruitment and to prepare for a rising; on the other hand, they had to save their strength for when the French would come again. Two emissaries were sent to France to re-establish communication with the French Directory: Edward Joseph Lewines in February and William James MacNeven in June. The Ulster directory was growing impatient and bold and was in favour of an immediate rising while the Leinster directory was more cautious and urged to wait for the French. A violent meeting of the National Directory of the United Irishmen took place in Dublin during the first week of June during which the two sides clashed and afterwards «a coolness took place between the Ulster and Leinster delegates»<sup>165</sup>. As a result, there was an exodus of United Irishmen from the north to England, hoping to flee repression at home and also hoping to precipitate the rebellion that they had been refused by their Dublin counterparts. James Coigly, the Rev. Arthur MacMahon and Samuel Turner (a young member of the Ulster Directory who was turning informer for the English government) were targeted by the authorities and had to flee to escape arrest, leaving Ireland.

As he travelled through Britain, Coigly moved among the communities of Irish workers present in various English cities. Much like the workers he would have encountered in Dublin or Armagh, Coigly found these Irish migrants to be highly receptive to republicanism and the revolutionary message. It is important to emphasise this, as Irish workers are too often depicted as being

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<sup>164</sup> *Report Comm. of Sec.*, 1798, pp. 18-19; A report from McNally in the beginning of the year had confirmed that the dominant plan among leaders was for an uprising in the North which would then march on Dublin. J.W.? [Leonard McNally] to Cooke, 2 January 1797, NAI RP 620/10/121/42.

<sup>165</sup> Account of Richardson [Samuel Turner], TNA, PRO HO 100/70/339-342; *Report Comm. of Sec.*, 1798, pp. 18-19; Downshire, to \_\_\_, [c. Nov. 1797], in Ch. J. WOODS, *Samuel Turner's Information on the United Irishmen*, cit., pp. 188-199. The main source on this clash is Samuel Turner, who exaggerated the division between the Leinster and Ulster United Irishmen in order to ingratiate himself with Charles-Frédéric Reinhard, the French ambassador in Hambourg, and it has been taken at face value by the subsequent historiography.

estranged from the English radical movement, and alienated from their English workmates more generally. Indeed, it is not an exaggeration to say that the story of Irish migration to Britain is frequently depicted as having certain eternal characteristics: that the Irish always gravitated to low-skilled and low-paid employment, that they undercut English labour and stood apart from local trade unions. In this view, the Irish were a reserve army of labour, depressing the living standards of English workers; that they were more concerned with Catholic issues in their native Ireland than any wider British reform programme. This is an image found in the works of Thomas Carlyle, or in the British Parliamentary enquiries that proliferated after 1830. It is a depiction of the Irish in Britain as «an example of a less civilized population spreading themselves, as a kind of substratum, beneath a more civilized community»<sup>166</sup>. The communist Frederick Engels, in his 1844 *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, described Manchester's «Little Ireland» district as the home to crowded masses of desperately poor Irish migrants, «often packed like cattle, [and who] insinuate themselves everywhere». Arguing that the Irish would accept a very low standard of living, Engels warned that «the Irish have discovered the minimum of the necessities of life, and are now making the English workers acquainted with it»<sup>167</sup>.

While certain aspects of these descriptions might ring true for the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, they are wholly inaccurate for the 1790s. At this stage, Irish immigration was still relatively small in relation to the population of the British towns affected. Moreover, these early migrants tended to be skilled artisans and weavers. In these early decades the Irish were often integrated into communities of English workers, with little segregation either occupationally or residentially. In the manufacturing towns of Lancashire, the Irish moved with relative ease into highly-paid weaving and textile printing jobs during the 1790s and 1800s<sup>168</sup>. Indeed,

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<sup>166</sup> British Parliamentary Papers, *Royal Commission on the Condition of the Poorer Classes in Ireland, Appendix G., Report into the State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain* (1836), p. IV.

<sup>167</sup> F. ENGELS, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, Oxford World Classics, 1999, pp.101-105.

<sup>168</sup> R. GLEN, *Urban Workers in the Early Industrial Revolution*, London, Crook Helm, 1984, pp. 21-2; M. BUSTEED – R. HODGSON, *Irish Migrant Responses to Urban Life in Early Nineteenth Century Manchester*, in «Geographical Journal», n. 162, 1996, pp. 139-

there is ample evidence that, in the opening decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Irish workers were at the forefront of trade unions and labour agitation in towns such as Bolton, Manchester and Stockport. It was alleged that after 1808 Irish immigrants played a part in virtually every major strike in the Lancashire cotton industry. In the 1830s, Manchester employers complained of a long history of strikes which were «almost entirely organized by the Irish»<sup>169</sup>. The prominence of Irish workers in British labour agitation was also facilitated by pre-existing links between illegal trade societies in both countries. There were well-developed networks between journeyman «combinations» that crossed the Irish Sea and which dated from at least the mid-eighteenth century, and resembled the French system of «compagnons du devoir». This system enabled artisans to go «on the tramp» in both Britain and Ireland, with a regular correspondence existing between curriers, hatters, iron moulders and foundry men in both countries<sup>170</sup>. In a parliamentary enquiry in 1824, evidence was provided of long-standing links between British and Irish journeymen societies in several trades, including a system of lending each other money that went back to the 1770s<sup>171</sup>.

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52. In Liverpool it seems that the Irish, even when poor, were not initially segregated from the English or other migrant groups. P. LAXTON, *Liverpool in 1801*, in «Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire», n. 130, 1981, pp. 73-84. See also T. CROWLEY, *Scouse: A Social and Cultural History*, Liverpool, 2012, pp. 9, 19-21.

<sup>169</sup> Report of Col Fletcher, no date 1808, TNA PRO HO 42/95/ 5; Ralph Wright to Home Office, 25 May 1808, TNA PRO HO 42/95/ 288-90; R.A. Farington to Hawkesbury 4 June 1808 in A. ASPINALL, *The Early English Trade Unions*, Batchworth Press, London, 1949, p. 99; J. H. TREBLE, *The attitude of the Roman Catholic Church towards trade unionism in the north of England, 1833-42*, in «Northern History», n. 5, 1970; *Parliamentary Papers, Report into the State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain*, 1836, pp. 28, 62.

<sup>170</sup> For a recent study of tramping networks, see D. FINKELSTEIN, *Nineteenth-Century Print on the Move: A Perilous Study of Translocal Migration and Print Skills Transfer*, in *Theory and Practice in Book, Print and Publishing History*, edited by J. MCELLIGOTT-E. PATTEN, Basingstoke, 2014, pp. 150-166. For a classic study of the 'tramp' see E.J. HOBSBAWN, *The Tramping Artisan*, in «The Economic History Review», New Series, vol. 3, n. 3, 1951, pp. 299-320. For confirmation of tramping links that extended across the Irish Sea, see R.A. LEESON, *Travelling Brothers*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1979.

<sup>171</sup> PP, *First Report from the select Committee on Artisans and Machinery*, H.C. 1824, n. 51, pp. 289, 292, 307, 426, 456, 461-2; see also J.W. BOYLE, *The Irish Labor Movement in*

Irish participation in English labour organisation was important. British journeymen's combinations and «friendly societies» provided the bedrock for building a revolutionary movement in the 1790s. While the nature of industrial dispute and its political overtones in these years is controversial, the very confusion over these links underscored the chameleon-like character of workers' combinations<sup>172</sup>. It is useful to recall Edward Thompson's observation that «any organized movement is likely to have fallen upon a minority of active spirits» and those with the courage and ability to organize a strike were likely to have been «no strangers to the rights of man»<sup>173</sup>. There were also longstanding links between working-class radicals in Ireland and England, as during the 1790s the United Irishmen had been critical to building a revolutionary underground in Britain. Indeed, the United Irishmen have even been credited with enlarging the programme of British radicals to include total revolution by physical force. In the years 1796-1799, Irish agitators had been active not only in London, but throughout towns in Lancashire, Yorkshire and Lanarkshire. These Irish emissaries had included near legendary figures like Roger O'Connor and William Putnam McCabe (later described as a sort of «Emerald Pimpernel»)<sup>174</sup>. But also critical to this process was James Coigly.

By early 1797, United Irishmen, mostly from the more radical Ulster faction of the movement, were increasingly active on the British mainland. Coigly arrived in Manchester bearing an official address from Ulster's United Irish leaders, promising imminent aid from France. He was assisted by fellow Ulstermen like James Dixon, a Belfast man now

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*the Nineteenth Century*, Washington D.C., Catholic University of America Press, 1988, p. 14; J.D. CLARKSON, *Labour and Nationalism in Ireland*, New York, 1925, pp 116-119.

<sup>172</sup> For adequate summaries of the various arguments about the conjuncture of radicalism and organized labour, see M. CHASE, *Early Trade Unionism*, London, 2000, pp 73-83; J. Rule, *Trade Unions, the government and the French Revolution 1789-1802*, in *Protest and Survival: Essays for E.P. Thompson*, London, 1993.

<sup>173</sup> E.P. THOMPSON, *The Making of the English Working Class*, London, Gollancz, 1963, p. 546.

<sup>174</sup> M. ELLIOTT, *The "Despard Conspiracy" reconsidered*, in «Past and Present», n. 75, 1977, pp. 46-61; K. WHELAN, *Fellowship of Freedom: The United Irishmen and 1798*, Cork, Cork University Press, 1998, p. 33.



working as a manufacture in Manchester. Dixon had sworn the United Irishmen's oath in November 1796. In January 1797, he was appointed as delegate to Belfast to discover information to discover information on the French negotiations and to bring back copies of United oaths and tests, consolidating the links between Manchester and Belfast. In May 1797, reports sent to Whitehall claimed that 900 people in Manchester had taken the United Irishmen's oath. Coigley found ample support among local British radicals, including those who in the Manchester Corresponding Society would join the clandestine and explicitly republic «United Englishmen». He was assisted by Isaac Perrins, an innkeeper of the public house *The Engine*, at Ancoats Lane in Angel Meadows, Engels's «Little Ireland». Perrins was also otherwise employed by the firm Bolton & Watt as engineer. William Cheetham, a local employer, organised the followers into divisions, took care of finances, and raised a subscription to purchase arms for the United Irishmen, and to assist Coigley's journey to France (the remainder was paid by the London Corresponding Society). Another supporter was David Law, who kept «an ale house»<sup>175</sup>. At the same time, in early 1797, the Scottish democrats were organizing along the structural lines of the United Irishmen, forming the United Scotsmen. Much like what happened in Ireland in 1793, the resentment and riots against the new Scottish Militia Act contributed to the spread of the United Scotsmen<sup>176</sup>. One Waltern Brown from Cupar, in the Shire of Fife in Scotland, declared in October 1797 that societies in England and Scotland were organised «with a view to overthrow the present established Government & to seize all officers and magistrates». His declaration offers a window into a tight network of societies in which public houses are places where contacts were made and where the

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<sup>175</sup> Deposition of Robert Gray by T. Bayley, 23 Mar. 1798, NA PC 1/43/136; M. ELLIOTT, *Partners in Revolution*, cit., pp. 145-150.

<sup>176</sup> R. WELLS, *Insurrection: The British Experience 1795-1803*, London, Breviary Stuff Publications, 2013 [1983], p. 94-96. D. KEOGH, *An Unfortunate Man: James Coigley, 1761-98*, in «History Ireland», n. 2, Vol. 6, 1998, pp. 27-32; B. MCEVOY, *Father James Quigley, priest of Armagh and United Irishman*, in «Seanchas Ardmhacha», n. 2, 1970, pp. 247-259. On the 1793 anti-Militia riots in Ireland: Th. BARTLETT, *An End to Moral Economy: The Irish Militia Disturbances of 1793*, in «Past & Present», n. 99, 1983, pp. 41-64.

organisation spread. «This Society», he added, «extends over all Great Britain & Ireland & keeps up a communication both there & with France. [...] They [...] told the declarant that their intention was to form a Republic & that there were a hundred thousand people in the Army & in the Militia in England who had been sworn with the society & got a sign or mark by which they could make themselves known to one another»<sup>177</sup>. Delegates were sent between societies and they recruited within the local regiment of the Windsor Forrester Cavalry stationed in the town, the tradesmen of Cupar as well as the workers in W. Geddis Factory. In the north of England and in the midlands, the same developments were compared by the *Nottingham Journal* with Defenderism, and indeed the strategy were the same: organisation in tight cells, infiltration of the military, drillings to prepare for an armed insurrection<sup>178</sup>.

The picture that emerged is thus one of working-class politicisation and revolutionary commitment to the point that Marianne Elliott writes that Coigly «was introduced into working-class reform circles with an ease which suggests that the United system had already taken a firm hold»<sup>179</sup>. She interprets these Irish-English links as a manoeuvre from the Ulster leaders of the United Irishmen «to fortify their position by pressure from the outside», further concluding that militant English republicanism corresponded to a violent and largely foreign tradition (one brought over from Ireland), and that the English movement would only be a decoy to maintain troops in England in case of an Irish insurrection<sup>180</sup>. To the contrary, Coigly's actions show that he was instrumental in fortifying the transnational (Irish, English and Scottish) character of the republican movement by synchronizing the different cells and branches whose delegates attended the meetings organised at the occasion of his being in Manchester. He also bridged the gap between the plebeian and gentlemen components of the movements, securing the trans-class character of the United Irishmen-Defenders

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<sup>177</sup> Declaration of Walter Brown, Cupar, Shire of Fife, [Scotland], 9 Oct. 1797, NA PC 1/40/A. 132. For similar developments in Perth, see Copy of Declaration of Robert Sands, 1797, NA PC 1/40/A. 132.

<sup>178</sup> R. WELLS, *Insurrection*, cit., pp. 101-102.

<sup>179</sup> M. ELLIOTT, *Partners in Revolution*, cit., pp. 145-146,

<sup>180</sup> *IVI*, p. 150.

organisation by grafting it to the working classes of tradesmen of the industrial north of England and Scottish Lowlands. In other words, Coigly was aware of the necessity of a popular, working-class movement<sup>181</sup>.

The London government was dimly aware of these developments from 1798 (after Coigly's arrest), as report sent to the Privy Council shows: «The Combinations amongst Workmen, as well Manufacturing as others, have of late years advanced step by step to a System which calls for the timely aid of the Legislature»<sup>182</sup>. The report continues thus:

If Bricklayers – Carpenters – Clothdressers – Weavers – Shoemakers – Tailors – Cabinet Makers Labourers – Chuse to require an advance of Wages – an Accession of perquisite or to reduce the hours of Labour – Notice is given to the respective Masters that on such a day the required regulation must take place<sup>183</sup>.

The report then describes the projected mode of action: a general strike, which would be supported by a «general purse» and noted the influence of the Irish tradesmen «associated under the denomination of Ticket Men» who protest violently against «new machinery» in the «West of England, Lancashire, Yorkshire», where «the destruction of the work by a mob» was observed. They also organised a «general sick club»<sup>184</sup>. This report can be dated from 1798, given the place it occupies with other documents of the same year. It was arranged in a bundle to be examined before the Privy Council in preparation of the *Report of the Committee of the Secrecy of the House of Commons*, which surveyed the activities of republican and democrat secret societies in the Three Kingdoms, their overall organisation and links with revolutionary France through Hamburg. Published in March 1799, which resulted in the anti-combinations law of the same year. This report was contained in the same files as evidence concerning James Coigly, prepared by the government officials William Wickham, Richard Ford and William

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<sup>181</sup> See also R. WELLS, *Insurrection*, cit., pp. 99-100.

<sup>182</sup> Observations respecting the combinations of workmen (copy), nd., NA PC 1/43/152.

<sup>183</sup> *IBIDEM*.

<sup>184</sup> *IBIDEM*.

King. These officials were working in the context of the British Alien Office, preparing material for examination for the Privy Council. This fact demonstrates that the British government took seriously the renewed threat of a revolutionary “Jacobin” and working-class movement, especially given its links with Republican France<sup>185</sup>.

This attention to the necessity of a transnational and trans-class movement was due to Coigly’s own philosophy and outlook, which has been described as «closer to the egalitarianism of the Defenders than to the bourgeois radicalism of the United Irishmen»<sup>186</sup>. This raises some interesting questions about the merger of the Defenders and the United Irishmen. But it also raises questions about the nature of Irish radicalism. For instance: to what degree did United Irish rhetoric (and the ambiguities within it) successfully appeal to urban workers and to what degree was this a cynical ploy by the United Irishmen? Certainly, as the United Irishmen expanded their popular base, the more socially radical their rhetoric had become. Several historians, notably Marianne Elliott and Nancy Curtin, have argued that, despite the addition of a populist dimension, the United Irishmen remained conventional in their views on economic rights and social reform<sup>187</sup>. Elliott in particular is sceptical of the United Irishmen’s potential as social reformers, arguing that despite the «republicanisation of their political aims there was no corresponding extension of their social programme. By all accounts, therefore, the Irish people might have considered the changes involved in a United Irish republic as little more than a palace revolution»<sup>188</sup>. In response, both Jim Smyth and James Quinn have argued that, while the United Irishmen’s social beliefs could be characterised as «unformed and contradictory», their focus on political reform did not preclude

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<sup>185</sup> On the Alien Office as a counter-insurrection secret service and Wickham’s central role, see: E. SPARROW, *The Alien Office, 1792-1806*, in «The Historical Journal», vol. 33, 1990, pp. 361-384; M. DUREY, *William Wickham, the Christ Church Connection and the Rise and Fall of the Security Service in Britain, 1793-1801*, in «The English Historical Review», vol. 121, n. 492, 2006, pp. 714-745; M. DUREY, *William Wickham, Master Spy: The Secret War against the French Revolution*, Cambridge, Routledge, 2009.

<sup>186</sup> D. KEOGH, *An Unfortunate Man: James Coigly, 1761-98*, in «History Ireland», n. 2, vol. 6, 1998, p. 30.

<sup>187</sup> M. ELLIOTT *Partners in Revolution*, cit. p. 29.

<sup>188</sup> *IVI*, p. 228.

serious concern for social amelioration<sup>189</sup>. Indeed, the two were seen as inseparable. Several United Irishmen believed that the economic grievances of the poor were created by the political system and could only be rectified by a reform of that system.

Moreover, such a large and heterogeneous revolutionary movement as the United Irishmen was bound to contain internal tensions, but these were more potential than actual. The ambiguities in eighteenth-century radicalism, particularly in the writings of someone like Thomas Paine, were sufficiently broad to mask conflicts of interest between different social groups. Both Quinn and Smyth have pointed out how economic liberalism and collectivist social policies could be reconciled in 1790s radical thought<sup>190</sup>. Certainly some members of the United Irishmen did espouse a genuine sympathy for the economic plight of workers. For instance, Thomas Russell (a figure who in many ways resembled Coigly) is an example of a United Irishman who championed the rights of journeymen to form trade unions and to strike. Unlike many of his colleagues, Russell also foresaw some of the potential shortcomings of industrial growth, including the detrimental side-effects of factory work. In his journals, Russell denounced laws made by the rich that valued property more than human welfare and the common good, declaring that «property must be altered in some measure»<sup>191</sup>. Why should the views of someone like Coigly or Russell be considered less representative of the United Irishmen than its more socially conservative members?

In any case, few within the United Irish leadership foresaw how the unrestricted operation of the free market would not bring about a harmonious society of independent producers, but lead to wider

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<sup>189</sup> J. SMYTH, *Men of No Property*, cit., p. 165.

<sup>190</sup> *IVI*, p. 166; J. Quinn, *The United Irishmen and Social Reform*, in «Irish Historical Studies», 1998, p. 200.

<sup>191</sup> For Russells' advocacy of journeymen combinations see *Northern Star* 14 November 1793; for essay on industrial effects on the family see 'Draft essay by Russel' (TCD Sirr MSS 868/1 f.323); Russell's *Journals*, p.83 (9 July 1793). For a discussion of his views on these matters see J. QUINN, *Soul on Fire: A Life of Thomas Russell*, Dublin, Irish Academic Press, 2002, pp. 83-94.

inequalities<sup>192</sup>. Moreover, the economic individualism that characterised Painite radicalism appealed not only to middle-class entrepreneurs, but to journeymen too. The thought of both middle-class and lower-class radicals was essentially *pre-industrial* in more than just a technological sense. British and Irish artisans were still immersed in the dying culture of the guilds and craft manufacture. While they recognised the power of collective action, they could not yet view the world as starkly divided between labour and capital. The tradesmen and labourers who were radicalized in the 1790s did not yet have a concept of themselves as a unitary «class». However, the ideas embodied in artisan radicalism would nonetheless help produce a working-class discourse. Yet it is important not to mistake the popular radicalism of the 1790s as a form of “proto-socialism”. Instead, the radicals of the 1790s occupy a transitional position: they displayed an embryonic economic liberalism, but one complicated by a number of proposals for altering property relations.

### **«The British Islands shall form distinct republicks»: Coigly and the federation project (summer 1797-February 1798)**

After leaving Manchester, Coigly was instrumental in convincing a significant number of London Corresponding Society members to fully commit to pursuing a domestic revolution to establish a republic, in conjunction with a greater revolutionary conspiracy involving Ireland. This alliance between the United Irishmen and the militant wing of the LCS was perhaps the most significant achievement of Coigly’s time in England, linking the Irish, North English and Scottish movement with the English metropolis. Moreover, this movement spreading throughout the Three Kingdoms was to be allied with revolutionary France.

When arriving in London, Coigly took part in the process of the radicalisation of the LCS, aided by the brothers John and Benjamin Binns as well as the most militant members of the society like Joseph Stuckey, John Bone, Thomas Evans, Robert Watson, Alexander

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<sup>192</sup> Arthur O’Connor in particular placed a great emphasis on the ability of a free market to encourage both virtue and individual independence. A. O’CONNOR, *The State of Ireland*, edited with an introduction by J. LIVESEY, Dublin, Four Courts, 1998, pp. 14-17, 62-66.

Galloway, Richard Hodgson, Dr. Thomas Crossfield, and Col. Edward Despard. Coigly arrived and offered an alliance with the UI. The Binns brothers had been tailor's apprentices in Dublin before coming to London in April 1794. They were key-actors into representing and helping the popular component of the LCS win control of the society over the more bourgeois or "respectable" element<sup>193</sup>. Coigly had met Benjamin Binns in 1796. Together, they penned a very important «Memoir on the state of England, on insurrection in the Three Kingdoms and founding of republicks» that Coigly carried to France. This memoir, in the handwriting of Benjamin Binns, has often been cited but never truly quoted and analysed.

The memoir begins with a direct rebuttal of the myth of the "freeborn Englishman": «The English nation has been for many Years past cajoled by an imaginary freedom», blaming the «security given to Property» for this «tyranny under a mask», for which both the government and the so-called opposition who claimed «that no Nation on the Earth was so prosperous, so free as England» are responsible. Reaching back to the American war of Independence as «one of the first experiments of this system», identified as «war of the King and his Ministers against Liberty and [...] accordingly reprobated by every honest man», it was also responsible for leaving «the country involv'd in an immense debt and saddl'd with a vast standing army» – these two banes of republican liberty. The memoir continues with an examination of the state of the army, the Navy and the finances of the country, all three identified as instruments to further the despotism of the government, as the «middling class is nearly extinct» because of exorbitant taxes. To correct these wrongs, the memoir explains finally, societies were formed for the purpose of «reformation of the representative body», but since their members were «arrest'd, prosecut'd, imprison'd & ruin'd», 'an immense Armed force [...] constantly kept up against them, [...] watch'd by spies», the prospect of armed insurrection in conjunction with a French landing is wished for.

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<sup>193</sup> For the schism within the popular, Painite part and the "aristocratic" reformist part of the society, and the role played by the Binns brothers, see E.P. THOMPSON, *The Making of the English Working Class*, cit., pp. 153, 182-191; R. WELLS, *Insurrection*, cit., pp. 91-92, 157-167.

Only «a few opulent Individuals enrich'd by the spoils of their country may [...] dread its effect as it would let loose popular anger against them». The memoir finishes with a lucid and bold

conjecture [that] the French would on a [landing] publish a proclamation containing [the] following articles, which would inevitably insure success –

- 1.st – That the British Islands shall form distinct republicks
2. That these Republicks shall chuse their own form of Government
3. That Those who will join the Invaders shall have Arms provid'd
4. That no contribution shall be exacted, except the actual expenses of the Invasion<sup>194</sup>.

Proposing a plan for a general insurrection which, aided by the French, would result in the formation of independent and sovereign republics in England, Scotland and Ireland, this memoir was brought forth to France by Coigly. Leaving London for Cuxhaven with the Rev. Arthur MacMahon, Coigly stayed in the Texel where the Dutch fleet was preparing for an invasion of England and Scotland<sup>195</sup>. They continued to Paris where they arrived in September, delivering an address directly inspired by Binns's memoir. This address, signed by both the Catholic priest Coigly and Presbyterian Reverend MacMahon as «United Irishmen», cast their fight in a transnational light, asserting that they are in contact with the «revolutionary committee of England» who transmit the above message (points 1, 2 and 4). It also stresses that they are joined in their endeavours by the United Scotsmen<sup>196</sup>.

However, a bitter rivalry broke out in Paris within the United Irishmen: the newly arrived refugees, among whom was Coigly but also the experienced French-Irish bureaucrat Nicolas Madgett, led by the veteran militant James Napper Tandy, freshly arrived from an American

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<sup>194</sup> Paper carried by Coigly to Paris, in Binns' handwriting, Memoir on the state of England, on insurrection and founding of republics, NA PC 1/43/152.

<sup>195</sup> *Report of the Committee of Secrecy of the House of Commons*, London, John Stockdale, 1799, p. 24. On the Dutch invasion project see C.J. WOODS, *A Plan for a Dutch Invasion of Scotland, 1797*, in «The Scottish Historical Review», vol. 53, n. 155, 1974, pp. 108-114.

<sup>196</sup> James Coigly and Arthur MacMahon to the Executive Directory of the French Republic or the Minister for Foreign Affairs, 13 vendémiaire [sic] 6 Year of the Republic (4 October 1797), AD CPA 592, f. 43.



exile, urged for immediate action. Meanwhile the older emissaries like Theobald Wolfe Tone and Edward Joseph Lewines were more cautious, enjoying the confidence of some of the officials within the Directory. This rivalry has often been seen as a conflict between inflated egos, an interpretation reinforced by common stereotypes towards Irishmen, shared by the contemporaries, including Napoléon Bonaparte, then appointed as general-in-chief for the future invasion of England. Historians, dependent on the sources, have also contributed to this interpretation<sup>197</sup>. Yet, behind this somewhat lazy historical analysis, a deeper conflict is perceptible: Tandy and his associates believed that the key to success laid in the internal insurrection in the Three Kingdoms and that the French invasion was the necessary spark for this general uprising while Tone and Lewines were eager to secure French help as a mean to insure that the popular uprising would remain as limited and contained as possible. In the end, Tone and Lewines defeated Tandy and Coigly's attempt at replacing them as interlocutors with the French Directory, a failure that convinced Coigly of two necessities: one, he had to go back to England and Ireland to consolidate the United movement in the Three Kingdom and prepare for a general insurrection, a revolution from within and not imported from without; two, Lewines should be replaced as the official representative of the United Irishmen to the Directory. This split was a prolongment of the conflict that had emerged within the United Irish leadership that Spring, which was continuing: Edward FitzGerald and Arthur O'Connor, faced with the ruthless repression of the government, urged for an immediate rising,

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<sup>197</sup> The two main sources for this conflict are Theobald Wolfe Tone's journal entries of 25 November 1797 and of 3 March 1798, reporting a dinner that took place in the preceding autumn (Tone, *Writings*, vol. III, p. 178, pp. 197-199, 210-211) and the information by Samuel Turner (Downshire to \_\_, [c. November 1797], Richardson [Turner] to Downshire, Hamburg, 19 November 1797, in C.J. WOODS, *Samuel Turner's Information on the United Irishmen, 1797-1798*, p. 193, 203-204). Both M. ELLIOTT, *Partners in Revolution*, cit., pp. 170-171, *Theobald Wolfe Tone*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2012, pp. 354-355; P. WEBER, *On the Road to Rebellion. The United Irishmen and Hamburg, 1796-1803*, Dublin, Four Courts, 1997, pp. 92-93 have used indiscriminately these sources without questioning them when the first (Tone) is clearly deeply jealous of his access to the halls of French power and the second (Turner) is an informer who delights in clearing his own name by incriminating and ridiculing his former associates.

which would prompt the French to come to help, and would also secure their position as natural leaders of the newly freed Ireland. In contrast, the rest of the United Irishmen's Directory, led by Thomas Addis Emmet, refused to act before the French invasion<sup>198</sup>. This division confirms that FitzGerald and O'Connor were confident in the numbers of the United Irishmen and of the support of their brethren in Britain: to them the popular support of the peoples of Ireland, Scotland and England would ensure success. Yet, disowned by the central committee, they renounced their scheme in order to assuage the split within the United Irishmen and maintain unity based on the project of the establishment of establishing in Ireland «a free and independent republic»<sup>199</sup>. The arrival of Coigly in Dublin at this time revived the scheme of an immediate, popular insurrection.

Coigly had left Paris on 16 November 1797 for Hamburg where he may have had contact with William Duckett, who had resided there since the summer<sup>200</sup>. He reached London just before Christmas 1797.

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<sup>198</sup> The second conclusion can be deduced from Turner to Downshire, 17 November 1797 and J. B. Thompson [Bartholomew Teeling] to William Thompson [Arthur O'Connor], 23 October 1797, quoted in C.J. WOODS, *Samuel Turner's Information on the United Irishmen, 1797-1798*, pp. 199-201. On the Dublin split, see R. WELLS, *Insurrection*, cit., p. 157; M. ELLIOTT, *Partners in Revolution*, cit., pp. 172-173. Both rely on the information of government spy L. MACNALLY, J.W. [MacNally] to John Pollock, 17 Dec. 1797, J.W. [MacNally] to \_\_, 26 December 1797, NA RP 620/11/121/85 and 86.

<sup>199</sup> J. W. [MacNally] to \_\_, 29 December 1797, 2 Jan. 1798, NAI RP 620/11/121/87 and 88.

<sup>200</sup> Coigly's and Duckett's presence and meeting in Hamburg may be inferred from Turner's information, who was also there at this time: William Wickham to Edward Cooke, 16 March 1798, NAI RP 620/18A/11/3 (with a copy of the French passport of Coigly); Samuel Turner, 'List of patriots Emigrants at Paris', May 1798, in *Samuel Turner's Information on the United Irishmen, 1797-8*, edited by C.J. WOODS, pp. 216-220; P. WEBER, *On The Road to Rebellion*, cit., pp. 93-94; M. ELLIOTT, *Partners in Revolution*, cit., p. 145; R. Ó MUIRI, *Father James Coigly*, cit., pp. 139-145. The last two commit an error of reference and of datation concerning Turner's information, dating them of December 1797. The return of Turner to Hamburg can be asserted from Reinhard to Talleyrand, 30 brumaire an VI [20 Nov. 1797], AD CPH 112 f° 120. Interestingly, it is precisely at this moment, when Coigly passed through Hamburg, that Duckett's correspondence with the French government began anew and in which he detailed to the French minister of Foreign Affairs (Delacroix and then Talleyrand) the

There, he attended the meetings and contributed to the founding of the central revolutionary committee of the United Britons at the *Furnival's Inn* in Holborn, the centre of LCS revolutionary activity since Coigly's last visit, with Edward Despard, Edmund O'Finn (a Corkman and *protégé* of Arthur O'Connor), William Hamilton (a law student from Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh, and close friend to Benjamin Binns), John and Benjamin Binns, Joseph Stockey and William Bailey (from Co. Down in Ulster and a member of the LCS since its founding in 1792) with Thomas Crossfield acting as secretary<sup>201</sup>. The composition of the committee shows that the central elements of the United Britons were Irishmen and even Ulstermen and yet, as Benjamin Binns later testified, were appointed by delegates from the United English, Scotch, and Irish<sup>202</sup>. The Committee met first on 3 January and then officially for the first time on 5 January 1798. However, Coigly, Benjamin Binns and Bailey had already left for Dublin as «deputies to the national Irish committee». Before leaving, Coigly and Arthur O'Connor, who had arrived in London shortly after Christmas, sent O'Finn and John Murphy (from Co. Armagh) to France through separate ways to bear there the news of the founding of the United Britons. Richard Watson, a former member of the LCS who broke away in June 1797 when the society refused to fully commit itself to supporting the naval mutinies, sent Henry Hastings, a LCS member who had recruited soldiers, to inform Léonard Bourdon, French emissary in Hamburg, and his secretary William Duckett, that secret societies were organised in England and Scotland and could summon 50.000 armed men in case of a French invasion among the 200.000 sympathizers of the cause of liberty<sup>203</sup>. He also had to convey the insurance that a French invasion

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organization of the United Englishmen and Scotsmen and their links with the United Irishmen, mentioning also for the first time Edward Despard: Duckett to [Delacroix], 8 brumaire and VI [29 October 1797], Duckett to Talleyrand, 19 brumaire an VI [9 November 1797], AD CPA 592 ff 80-1, 84-5.

<sup>201</sup> Extract from a report on the United Britons, enclosed in John King to Edward Cooke, 12 January 1798, NAI RP 620/18A/14/1.

<sup>202</sup> Benjamin Binns's statement in answer to Madden's queries, 1843, TCD, Ms. 873, Madden Papers, 451.

<sup>203</sup> On Léonard Bourdon's mission to Hamburg, see: M.J. SYNDENHAM, *Léonard Bourdon. The Career of a Revolutionary, 1754-1807*, Waterloo, Wilfried Laurier University

would instantly provoke a rising in Ireland and Scotland<sup>204</sup>. Coigly also worked with Valentine Lawless, Binns and James Powell, a former secretary of the LCS (and also a secret informer to the government), visiting the office of the *Courier* to supervise the printing of oaths and addresses<sup>205</sup>.

Coigly, Binns and Bailey brought with them to Ireland information in the form of letters, including one from James Napper Tandy to his son announcing the imminent French invasion<sup>206</sup>. Coigly also carried an address, written by LCS member and future Spencean Thomas Evans (with whom Coigly had sojourned while in London), from the United Britons to the United Irishmen. This address assured the United Irishmen of the desire to form a union with them to obtain the «emancipation of both countries»<sup>207</sup>. Coigly also brought with him a

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Press, 1999, pp. 244-284; P. WEBER, *On the Road to Rebellion*, cit., p. 88-100. The significance of Bourdon's and Duckett's mission in Hamburg calls for a reassessment.

<sup>204</sup> Bourdon [Duckett] to the Directory, Hamburg, 9 ventôse an VI [27 February 1798], AN AF III 57 doss. 225, p. 3; Bourdon [Duckett], 'Mémoire sur l'Irlande envoyé au ministre de la Police', 1 floréal an VI [20 April 1798], AN F7 6151 pl. 9, p. 47; Murphy's examination, taken by R. FORD, 2 November 1799, NA HO 100/87 f. 334-5; List of suspects (in French), NA FO 33/15 f. 172; Fourth examination of Henry Hastings, NA PC 1/43/152; [Edmund O'Fin], « Lettre sur la descente en Irlande », [14 octobre 1798], AN AF IV 1671 plaq. I p. 33. Marianne Elliott, *Partners in Revolution*, p. 176, asserts that Murphy's journey took place after O'Fin's, which is not the case.

<sup>205</sup> James Powell is an informer for the government since 1796: NA HO 42/44, PC 1/23/38.

<sup>206</sup> J. W. [Leonard MacNally] to \_\_, 2 January 1798, J. W. [Leonard MacNally] to \_\_, 3 Jan. 1798, NAI RP 620/11/121/88; J. W. [Leonard MacNally] to \_\_, 6 February [1799 *recte* 1798], NA RP 620/7/74/7. A comparison between these three letters enables to date without any doubt the third one from 1798 and not 1799 as an archivist seems to have believed, adding the date in pencil. Moreover, it allows to identify Coigly as «the Person» who brought the letter from Tandy, and who «came directly from Paris to Hamburg to London to Dublin». Cf. M. ELLIOTT, *Partners in Revolution*, cit., p. 174; R. WELLS, *Insurrection*, cit., p. 160 who mistakenly believed that Coigly was present at the first meeting of the central committee of the United Britons when MacNally informs of his arrival in Dublin as soon as 2 January.

<sup>207</sup> *United Britons to the United Irishmen*, 5 January 1798, in *Report from the Committee of Secrecy of the House of Commons*, Dublin, 1798, appendix XIV, p. 148-151. The date of 5 January indicates that Coigly, Binns and Bailey were sent over to Ireland even

potent symbol of revolution and insurrection: the new seal of the United Irishmen which serves as a passport to the French Directory: «the seal is a long oval Device, Britannia stealing the Crown from the Harp & cutting the strings whilst the Irish Mastiffs are sleeping»<sup>208</sup>. This description omits the revolutionary and republican dagger, which shows that the alliance between Britannia and the harp of Erin was to lead to the destitution of royalty (the crown) through the republican conspiracy



**Fig. 1:** *Seal of a certificate of membership in the society of the United Irishmen of London, (found during the arrests of 18 and 19 April 1798, NA PC 1/44/158)*

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before the address had been formally approved by the central committee of the United Britons. Another address of the LCS «to the Irish Nation» exists, signed by R. T. Crossfield, president, and Thomas Evans, secretary, dated 30 Jan. 1798, NA PC 1/43/A. 155.

<sup>208</sup> Extract from a report on the United Britons, enclosed in John King to Edward Cooke, 12 January 1798, NAI RP 620/18A/14/1. See also William Wickham to Edward Cooke, Whitehall, 7 March 1798 NAI RP 620/18a/11/2.

The imagery clearly reinforces the idea of the transnational revolutionary project: it is Britannia who removes the crown of royalty and colonial dependence from Ireland and thus makes her republican through insurrection (the dagger).

While Arthur O'Connor planned to print the United Britons' address in his newspaper *The Press* through the intermediary of his associate William Dowdall. Dowdall would receive a copy from Edward and Pamela FitzGerald, Binns and Coigly. After meeting with such United Irishmen leaders as Edward FitzGerald and Henry Jackson, they brought the news to the rest of Ireland, respectively to Cork and Belfast<sup>209</sup>. In the first week of February, Coigly left Ireland again for Manchester where he organised the working classes into the United Britons, promising them that the next time he would come, it would be to see «the tree of liberty planted in Manchester»<sup>210</sup>. Back to London on 11 February, Coigly joined with Arthur O'Connor. Both planned to leave England for France bearing an address of the «secret Committee of England» to the French Directory and to replace Lewins whom they suspected of betrayal<sup>211</sup>.

The address of the United Britons is signed by Thomas Crossfield, President, and Thomas Evans, secretary, and dated «6 Pluviôse A[année] R[épublicaine] P[remière] [of] G[rande] B[retagne]» (first republican year of Great Britain). It urges France to invade England:

Affairs are now drawing to a great and awful Crisis; Tyranny, shaken to its Basis, seems about to be buried in its own Ruins. With the Tyranny of England, that of all Europe must fall. Haste then, Great Nation! Pour forth thy gigantic Force! Let the base Despot feel thy avenging Stroke, and let One

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<sup>209</sup> Arthur O'Connor to Edward FitzGerald, nd [February 1798] (enclosing two copies); O'Connor to Dowdall, nd [February 1798] (sending instructions and money for the Press: «I sent a copy of a pamphlet to Pamela. She will give it to you»), PC 1/43/153.

<sup>210</sup> M. ELLIOTT, *Partners in Revolution*, cit., p. 179-180; R. WELLS, *Insurrection*, cit., p. 157-167.

<sup>211</sup> Benjamin Binns's statement in answer to Madden queries [1843?], TCD Madden Papers MS. 873/451: «What was his object then in purposing to go to France? To displace Lewins. He was commissioned by the Executive to supersede Lewins in Paris; whom they had good reason to believe were betraying the interests of Ireland into that of the British».

oppressed Nation carol forth the Praises of France at the Altar of Liberty. We saw with Rapture your Proclamations, they met our warmest Wishes, and removed Doubts from the Minds of Millions. Go on! Englishmen will be ready to second your Efforts. [...]

Already have the English fraternized with the Irish and Scots, and a Delegate from each now fits with us. The sacred Flame of Liberty is rekindled, the holy Obligation of Brotherhood is received with Enthusiasm; even in the Fleets and the Armies it makes some Progress – Disaffection prevails in both, and united Britain burns to break her Chains.

Fortunately, we have no Leader; Avarice and Cowardice have pervaded the rich, but we are not therefore the less united. Some few of the opulent have indeed, by Speeches, professed themselves the Friends of Democracy, but they have not acted; they have considered themselves as distinct from the People, and the People will, in its Turn, consider their Claims to its Favour as unjust and frivolous. They wish, perhaps, to place us in the Front of the Battle, that, unsupported by the Wealth they enjoy, we may perish, when they may hope to rise upon our Ruin. But let them be told, though we may fall through their criminal Neglect, they can never hope to rule, and that Englishmen, once free, will not submit to a few political Impostors. United as we are, we now only wait with Impatience to see the Hero of Italy, and the brave Veterans of the great Nation. Myriads will hail their Arrival with Shouts of Joy; they will soon finish the glorious Campaign! Tyranny will vanish from the Face of the Earth, and, crowned with Laurel, the invincible Army of France will return to its native Country, there long to enjoy the well earned Praise of a grateful World, whose Freedom they have purchased with their Blood<sup>212</sup>.

The rhetoric deployed here might seem at first glance pompous and empty, a «high sounding nothing»<sup>213</sup>. However, its four-fold argumentation – the appeal to the French as the “Great Nation” fighting against despots, the trust they command through their proclamations, the fraternization between the three nations of England, Scotland, and Ireland, and the class struggle against the oppressing rich – is not only significant in what it tells us of how the popular movement conceived

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<sup>212</sup> Letter from the Secret Committee of England to the Executive Directory of France, 6 Pluviose [Year 6 – 25 January 1798], NA PC 1/42/143. The address is printed in the *Report of the Committee of the Secrecy of the House of Commons*, London, 1799, appendix X, pp. 73-74.

<sup>213</sup> M. ELLIOTT, *Partners in Revolution*, cit., p. 181.

itself (and indeed, a working class fighting for its emancipation), but it must also be taken seriously when considering its appeal to an international brotherhood fighting for liberty against tyranny.

This is exactly what the British government feared. For this reason, O'Connor and Coigly were watched while in London. William Pitt was especially eager to incriminate O'Connor in order to compromise the Whig opposition and their leader, Charles James Fox. On 27 February, O'Connor, Coigly, Arthur O'Leary (O'Connor servant), John Allen (a *protégé* of Edward FitzGerald), and John Binns were arrested at the *King's Head*, a tavern in Margate, Kent, en route to France. O'Leary managed to get rid of several compromising papers, including the certificates of the United Britons and their seal, but the Bow Street runners found the address in Coigly's coat. In the wake of this arrest a wave of arrests swept through the popular societies throughout England and Ireland, most notably in several public houses in London on the 18 and 19 April as several delegates of the LCS and of the United Britons were meeting to discuss a merger<sup>214</sup>. The ensuing trial at Maidstone was framed by the government as an ideological one: lacking evidence against O'Connor, the government is anxious to use the trial as a powerful propaganda tool, framing the conspiracy as a Catholic, plebeian, brutal plot which would have threatened the existing order (of course) and civilisation itself. The message is clear: the Irish and the Catholic are inimical to society. In a letter to under-secretary Edward Cooke, William Wickham explained that the desire to put forward Coigly's identity as a Catholic Irish priest came explicitly from George III<sup>215</sup>.

The trial is therefore a turning point, one when the imagery of the Irish took on a new form which is perhaps best encapsulated by genius

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<sup>214</sup> Delegates of the Lond[on] Corresponding Society apprehended in a Committee at Crave, House, Drury Lane, 19 April 1798; United Englishmen taken at a Meeting at the George in Compton Str., Clerkenwell; United Men taken at meetings at Manchester, March 1798, NA PC 1/44/158; M. ELLIOTT, *Partners in Revolution*, cit., pp. 182-189.

<sup>215</sup> William Wickham to Edward Cooke, Whitehall, 7 March 1798 NAI RP 620/18a/11/2. See NA TS 11/689 and Th. B. HOWELL-Th. J. HOWELL, *A Complete Collection of State Trials and Proceedings for High Treason*, London T. C. Hansard, 1819, vol. XXVI, pp. 1191-1432; vol. XXVII, pp. 1-255.



satirist James Gillray's powerful caricature of the arrests published on the following day .



**Fig. 2:** James Gillray, *London Corresponding Society alarm'd, - vide guilty conscience*, hand-coloured etching and aquatint, London, Hannah Humphrey, 20 April 1798, National Portrait Gallery D12634.

Six republicans are seated around a table, listening with anxiety as the president reads from the newspapers about the arrests of O'Connor,

Binns, Evans and Coigly. The president, with the liberty cap, is immediately identified as a «jacobin». At the foot of his seat, the open book is the «Proceedings of the LCS», listing «T. Firebrand, secretary. Delegates: Forging Sam, Barber Joe, Dick Butcher, Filching Ned, Dissenting Nick, Sheepiness Will, Seamping Jack, Cut down Liam», all of them identified by the tools of their trade («Joe» with a barber plate and scissors, and a comb behind his ear; next to him «Dick» with a knife at his belt, etc.). It's a potent counterrevolutionary vision of a proletariat of republican tradesmen who meet in dim candlelight in back rooms or cellars (a reference to the meetings at the *Furnival's Inn*) and who play the part of revolutionaries, adoring such figures as Thomas Paine and John Horne Tooke (whose portraits are on the wall). This working-class underworld is literally monstrous: the features of the conspirators are vulgar, and their faces have a clear racial undertone. To our knowledge, this is the first time that Gillray used these features to depict popular classes and which he then will systematically use to represent Irishmen (especially during the Irish Rising in the following summer of 1798)<sup>216</sup>. Their full lips and swarthy complexions are a conscious attempt at assimilating the working classes with Irish and the Irish with African slaves. The workers are tainted by their association with Irishmen. Just as the slaves in Haiti rose up for their liberty, sending waves of panic and provoking frightened stories of pillage and massacres throughout the Atlantic world, the «Irishicised» working tradesmen are therefore racialised for conspiring in conjunction with the United Irishmen. Gillray transforms a political assimilation (the struggle for liberty) into a racial one. In this sense, Gillray is a precursor of that enduring 19th-century imagery of ape-like Irishmen, assimilated with African slaves. The presence of Coigly in this caricature is essential: Catholicism («popery»), as a religion of slaves in the Protestant mindset, is used to bridge the gap between Irish and Africans as both are essentially slaves<sup>217</sup>.

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<sup>216</sup> J. GILLRAY, *United Irishmen upon Duty' and United Irishmen in Training*, London, Hannah Humphrey, 12-13 June 1798.

<sup>217</sup> On the images of the Haitian revolution: A. E. GÓMEZ, *Images de l'apocalypse des planteurs*, in «L'Ordinaire des Amériques», n. 215, 2013, on-line: <http://journals.openedition.org/orca/665>; R. HÖRMANN, *Thinking the "Unthinkable"? Representations of the Haitian Revolution in British Discourse*, in *Human*

## Conclusion

On 7 June 1798, James Coigly was hanged at Pennington Heath, near Maidstone, Kent, the only one sentenced to death during the Margate arrests trial. Before his execution, he wrote seven letters, composed as seven epistles in which he endorsed the accusation against him as a Catholic priest and presented himself as an innocent religious man who always had worked for peace and understanding between factions and peoples (which is, in a sense, true), and denying that he was the bearer of the incriminating address to the French Directory (which may also be technically true). In the aftermath of his execution, Coigly was revered as a martyr both of religion and of liberty, uniting again in his person Catholicism and republicanism. The «Patriot Priest» was remembered alongside other martyrs such as William Orr<sup>218</sup>. Yet, after the bitter failure of the 1798 Rising, and despite occasional resurgences, his memory soon faded as it offered too great an evidence for accusations levelled with the likes of ultra-Protestant Sir Richard Musgrave. Musgrave framed the «Rebellion» as a «papist» plot in league with France while the Irish Catholic hierarchy, who had found a

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*Bondage in the Culture Contact Zone. Transdisciplinary Perspectives on Slavery and its Discourses*, edited by R. HÖRMANN-G. MACKENTHUN, Berlin, Waxmann, 2010, pp. 137-170. On the invention of an «iconoirlogie» in these crucial years of the «scientific» racial turn: P. SERNA, *Tenir les Noirs à l'oeil. Hypothèse pour une "iconoirlogie"*, in «Annales historiques de la Révolution française», n. 395, 2019, pp. 171-191. On how the Irish were associated with African slaves in the 19<sup>th</sup> century: N. IGNATIEV, *How the Irish Became White*, New York, Routledge, 1995; G. K. PEATLING, *The Whiteness of Ireland under and after the Union*, in «Journal of British Studies», vol. 44, n. 1, 2005, pp. 115-133.

<sup>218</sup> For an example of a popular song, see *The Patriot Remembered*, NA PC 1/43/152. This song was printed in November 1798 in London and was supposed to be brought forth to rebel leader Joseph Holt in the Wicklow mountains by smuggler Michael Doyle (who was arrested). The song finishes with: « But while the Nations around admire/ And wonder at the fight/ With anguish keen, my Souls on fire/ for MARTYR'D COIGLY's fate/ Oppressed with grief Dame Nature sate/ And wept o'er him she trained/ Whom as the form'd a HERO GREAT/ The Die she ne'er retained.

«Thou friend of Man, and foe to strife/ By *Perjury* base, consigned/ To Yield thy spotless, Virtuous life/ Thus manly and resigned/ Thy Godlike deeds, shall far ouvie/ All Tyrant's baneful Charter/ Let Erin ne'er forget the Day/ That Coigley died a Martyr».

compromise with the government, excommunicated rebel priests as «drunkards» and the «dejections» of the Church<sup>219</sup>. In the 1810s and 1820s, in the context of the post-Union Ireland and of the Catholic campaign led by Daniel O’Connell, the participation of Catholics in the Rising was downplayed in order to stress their loyalty and compatibility with the British imperial project<sup>220</sup>.

With this forgetfulness, the developments in which Coigly had been instrumental were also forgotten: the United Irishmen-Defenders merging in 1795-1796, the creation of the United Englishmen and United Scotsmen in 1797, merged into the United Britons in 1797-1798. Indeed, all these developments were structures designed to forge a transnational and popular movement, tying together the working tradesmen in Ireland, Scotland and England, creating a tight network of interconnected cities with Dublin, Belfast, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Manchester and London acting as nodes with their surrounding hinterlands. This transnational, popular organisation was allied with the French Republic in the hope of transforming it into an international federation of independent republics. Finally, Coigly also crucially bridged the gap between Catholics and Protestants. From this picture it is possible to assert that Coigly was a key-actor in the making not of an «English» working class, but of a transnational working-class consciousness, along original lines, blending republicanism with Catholicism and class awareness and with revolutionary activism. In this sense, it is certainly not a coincidence that where he planted the «tree of liberty», that this tree sprouted, with William Duckett as soon as 1792 in Paris, or the many working men and women who drove the creation of the workers movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in cities like Manchester.

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<sup>219</sup> R. MUSGRAVE, *Memoirs of the Different Rebellions in Ireland, from the Arrival of the English: Also, a Particular Detail of that which Broke out the XXIIID of May, MDCCXCXVIII; with the History of the Conspiracy which Preceded it*, Dublin, 1801; K. WHELAN, *98 after ‘98: the Politics of Memory*, in ID., *The Tree of Liberty*, cit., pp. 133-175.

<sup>220</sup> L. COLANTONIO, *L’impossible rencontre : nationalistes irlandais et républicains français dans la première moitié du XIXe siècle*, in «La Révolution française», n. 11, 2016, on-line: <http://lrf.revues.org/1683>.