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THE EARLY PARTIES AND POLITICS IN BRITAIN, 1688-1832

BRIAN HILL



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Brian Hill



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Preface

This book offers a short account of British politics in the era before the parties began to adapt themselves to the mass electorate of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Political change occurred more slowly in the less volatile society of that time, but it would be unwise to assume that the century and a half from the revolution of 1688 to the Reform Act of 1832 was uniform in character. Chapters 2–6 deal with the era in five successive periods, each with its own features. These chapters can be read separately if required, though some reference to the Introduction, Chapter 1, would be advisable for readers who are not familiar with the post-Revolution political scene. Suggestions on further reading are given throughout the book, for subjects which the reader may wish to pursue in greater detail, and full titles are given in the Select Bibliography.

I began writing about the early parties over twenty-five years ago and the work expanded into two volumes, both of which are now out of print. The present book offers a shortened treatment of the subject and has the advantage of being able to draw on much recently published research, especially on constituency politics. Where use is made of the newer studies I have given indications in the text. Material used in my two earlier volumes was given full references there, and these are not usually repeated in the present book.

BRIAN HILL

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The book is dedicated to its readers, in the hope that it will help to make an important period of the past better known.

1 Introduction: The Political Scene

General Trends

The period from the Revolution of 1688 to the Reform Act in 1832 gave the modern world an early example of parties operating in a parliamentary nation. Those parties differed considerably, however, from the ones with which we are familiar today. Not until well into the nineteenth century did the terms Liberal and Conservative replace the older Whig and Tory as official party names. The Labour party came even later, in the early twentieth century. Moreover a large number of Members of Parliament existed in the earlier period without any party ties at all. Such independent Members could be won over by a party's policy from time to time, but they preserved their basic right to differ from the instinct which led others into political groupings. Outside Parliament nationwide party organisations were not fully present in British political life in the eighteenth century or even as late as the second Reform Act in 1867. This meant that new parliamentarians' party allegiances often had to be defined by their activities *after* entering Parliament rather than in advance of their election as is the case today when candidates are chosen by a constituency party.

The political scene in the era before nineteenth-century Reform was itself very different. Before 1832 (and sometimes after) there were features such as two-member constituencies and paid posts with only nominal duties for government supporters in Parliament, creating a large pool of ministerial patronage in both Houses. Public life differed in other ways too. Most modern Civil Service institutions were either absent or at an early stage of their development. The functions of a Prime Minister and a Cabinet emerged only gradually and were not always in full operation until the late eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries. Ministerial appointments could be at the initiative of the monarch as well as a party, though royal appointments met increasing resistance. Ministries did not often change in their entirety at election times; piecemeal replacement of some ministers and the retention of others was more common. Ministers could still be dis-

missed at the monarch's personal wish as well as removed by pressure from Parliament. Such variations from the practices of today reflected the changing and ill-defined nature of the political scene for many decades after the Revolution of 1688.

Other differences from today's system will appear in this chapter and below, but two important *similarities* are also worth noting at this point, since they serve to differentiate the political scene in the eighteenth century from that which preceded it, an equally important consideration if we are to arrive at an accurate assessment of the nature of the early parties and their position in the political system. One similarity to today is that Parliament met regularly. Since 1688 it has always assembled for many months of each year, while frequent general elections have taken place regularly since the Triennial Act of 1694 which prescribed intervals of no more than three years between elections, a limit extended to seven years in 1716 and reduced again to five years in 1911. These practices are in strong contrast with Parliament's weak situation under the Stuarts. In the 1680s Parliament was twice kept in abeyance for periods of three years. Earlier in the seventeenth century the legislature had once been unsummoned for over a decade, the so-called 'Eleven Year Tyranny' of King Charles I. Before 1688 people had thought in terms not of Parliament but of *Parliaments*, each election returning new bodies which were described by a distinguishing name such as the Short Parliament or the Oxford Parliament, the latter from its unusual meeting in that university city. Such assemblies were sometimes extremely shortlived if they did not please the monarch; in the seven years before the Revolution of 1688 one Parliament lasted a week while another, James II's in 1685, sat for less than a month. The permanence of Parliament after the Revolution not only gave this body institutional continuity but had obvious possibilities for new types of political activity, including the development of permanent parties.

The second similarity to today was that the nation rejected the use of military force to solve its internal problems of government. In the Convention Parliament which assembled immediately after the Revolution of 1688 there were still Members with personal experience in the Civil Wars, and all had vivid recent recollections of James II's army encamped on Hampstead Heath to intimidate London and Westminster. Memories long remained of Cromwell's New Model Army overthrowing both King and Parliament in turn as well as of the narrow escape from bloodshed, in England if not in Scotland and Ire-

land, during the Revolution itself. Fear of the military was to remain a marked feature of parliamentary oratory and of national consciousness, finding echoes in public utterances down to the present time. From 1688 onward the British people learned to rely on the more restrained antagonisms of parliamentary conflict. Any proposal for a large professional army in peacetime was resisted by citizens and newspapers as well as by parliamentarians, for all were fearful that they might become its next victims. If memories of military domination tended to fade they could always be revived by looking no further than across the Channel to where other nations had large professional armies but were unable to obtain representative governments.

Parliament and its Constituencies

In 1688 the Parliament assembled at Westminster still served only England and Wales. Scotland had its own independent legislature in Edinburgh, while Ireland had a separate but subordinate Parliament in Dublin. The union of the English and Scottish legislatures in 1707 created a British Parliament which in 1801 further merged with the Irish Parliament. This second parliamentary union was to last until 1922, when independent Eire was created for 26 counties. The unions of 1707 and 1801 both changed the balance of British politics, the first strengthening the Whig party for much of the eighteenth century and the second changing the nature of British politics by introducing a semi-autonomous Irish element at Westminster until the early twentieth century.

The Parliament of Great Britain consisted of two houses, following the practice of the constituent English, Scottish and Irish Parliaments, with the second chamber having a largely hereditary membership. Creation of new peers was usually carefully limited to provide a stable and largely conservative House of Lords and preserve the privilege of its members. But hereditary membership, then as now, could not provide all the talent and zeal needed for efficient legislation. Landed aristocrats' attendance was notoriously poor, and some who were peers by inheritance were uninterested in politics and never came to Westminster for routine parliamentary business in their whole lifetimes. Better attenders were the appointed peers,

bishops and legal lords who sat by right of their offices, and who were joined later by the Scottish and Irish peers elected for restricted periods under the provisions of the parliamentary Unions of 1707 and 1801. No female peers were entitled to sit, and life peers are an innovation of the twentieth century. Most of the appointed or elected peers were closely subject to government patronage and found themselves more or less under the control of the ministry of the day.

The House of Lords was not entirely run by its men of business. Those hereditary peers who happened to be keen politicians were of sufficient numbers, when strongly aroused, to sway voting to the opposition side. Such a situation, if it persisted, was likely to provoke drastic reaction from aggrieved ministers lulled into a false sense of security by long periods of acquiescence from the Upper House. The device of a mass new creation of peers to redress the balance in favour of the government was successfully practised or threatened from time to time. In 1711 the creation of twelve Tory peers was needed to secure parliamentary ratification of the Treaty of Utrecht, and the Whig ministry between 1714 and 1716 more than redressed the balance to obtain a safe Whig majority. The younger Pitt's ministry and its immediate successors greatly enlarged the House of Lords, giving a strong ministerial majority, but a renewed threat of mass Whig creations in 1832 was used to force an intransigent Tory majority to pass the first Reform Bill.

Failing such drastic action, however, the Lords could usually reject, or at least severely truncate, legislation proposed by the House of Commons; they did so on a number of occasions including the most celebrated, their rejection of Fox's India Bill in 1783 at the King's behest. On the whole the Upper House adhered to a convention, already well-established by 1688, not to tamper with money bills. As a non-elective assembly the Lords had to be careful not to offend genuine national opinion as expressed in the Commons. Though they had many of the greatest landowners among their number these were a small minority of their class, as represented in the Commons, and a very small proportion indeed of the political nation as a whole. To prevent the Lords' usual power to cripple bills Tory extremists tried unsuccessfully in 1704 to 'tack' a controversial measure onto a money bill and thus to secure its passage. Such proposals were rare and aroused the ire of moderate members of the Commons. Failure by the Lords to adhere to the sensible convention of passing budgets unimpeded, during the Liberal Ministry in 1909–11, was eventually

to result in the ending of the power of the Upper House to reject any legislation passed in the Commons.

Membership of the House of Commons, wholly elective, was like that of the Upper House in being confined to the wealthy, and mainly to the landed class. But though most Members of Parliament were landowners there were always some whose main source of wealth was in commerce or finance. The 'landed interest' tried to exclude their 'monied' fellow MPs by the Property Qualification Act of 1711, which made the possession of land valued at £300 a year, or £600 in the case of Members for county seats, the necessary qualification. Nevertheless rich businessmen and industrialists gradually became more important in the Commons, easily meeting the new requirement by purchasing land to the specified amount. At the same time the increasing acquisition of commercial and government shares and stock by landowners made membership of the Commons socially more mixed, if even more wealthy. Not all the Members elected to Parliament were from the most affluent strata of society, but few were very poor and virtually none were of the labouring class. The richer MPs, particularly the legendary 'independent gentlemen', had greater scope than their less well-off fellows for political independence but many of them were among the keenest adherents of the parties whose varying fortunes are followed in these pages.

Competition for seats was fierce, with intimidation and bribery of voters very common. There were 558 seats in the Commons after the Anglo-Scottish Union of 1707, to which were added a further 100 Irish seats in 1801. Aspiring candidates often paid large sums to borough patrons or others thought able to deliver a successful election. These amounts increased as the eighteenth century passed, as did the indignation they provoked in many quarters. The electors' votes were recorded in poll books for all to see, for secret ballot was not introduced until 1872. Where bribery or other forms of blandishment were the rule the voters' support was not cheap; the increasing expenses of candidacy were a frequent cause of complaint among politicians and resulted from the restricted electorate's rising awareness of its value. The possession of the necessary qualification for a vote was an asset in both social and monetary terms.

Candidates' reaction to the high expenses of bribing or 'treating' was to hold fewer formal elections, either by making a private pre-election canvass to enable their withdrawal before likely failure or alternatively by agreement with rivals to share the return for the two-

member constituencies which were normal at the time. For such reasons most elections went *nominally* uncontested, though the results of such elections were just as decisive as contests which had to go forward formally to the polls. A famous election campaign in Norfolk in 1784 resulted in an unpolled but nevertheless strongly contested return in favour of the ministry, but the whole newspaper-reading public knew that Thomas Coke, a close friend of the Whig leader Charles James Fox, had withdrawn his candidacy only after an extensive canvass showed that he stood no chance of election because of Fox's unpopularity in the country. Such events were at least as familiar to contemporaries as those more spectacular elections at which the candidates' personal or party rivalries were brought all the way to the hustings.

Before the second Reform Act in 1867 most constituencies returned not one but two Members, and agreements between rival parties or factions to avoid electoral expense frequently resulted in the return of one Member each, an outcome which could be justified by the argument that neither side yielded the advantage to the other. In two-member constituencies each elector possessed two votes, and the candidates with the highest *and second-highest* numbers of votes were returned to Parliament. Nearly all seats in the English constituencies, and many in other areas, were of this type. Though the system was not a form of proportional representation (PR) it had some of PR's effects by sometimes allowing the return of second-placed candidates for minority interests who would not otherwise have secured a seat. The results of this situation should not, however, be exaggerated. Electoral compromises could have the effect of bypassing other candidates with strong minority support. Agreements resulting in the return of one Member each by two parties or factions could serve to swell the numbers of those parties in Parliament to the detriment of others.

There were two main types of constituency: counties and boroughs. The former, in England at least, all had thousands of voters with a standard qualification of freehold land worth forty shillings (two pounds) a year, in practice evidenced by certificates of payment of land tax. Borough constituencies varied greatly in the numbers of their voters, from fewer than ten in a handful of decayed towns to thousands in large cities. The boroughs had a variety of voting qualifications, based on ownership of houses, payment of local taxes, membership of borough corporations or possession of the title of freeman. Local

customs made for varying practices in each of these types, so that many boroughs had voting rights which were in practice unique. The nature of a constituency's franchise was often disputed by candidates and had to be decided by the House of Commons itself after a petition of protest from unsuccessful candidates who considered that 'their' voters had been disallowed and those of their successful rivals permitted by the returning officer. Such election disputes were usually determined with the utmost partiality, as in 1715 when a Whig-dominated House disallowed claims from all of 46 Tory petitioners (Chapter 2). This type of abuse of parliamentary power was largely corrected by George Grenville's Election Act of 1770 (Chapter 5).

Vested interests, both national and local, prevented the creation of new borough seats in the eighteenth century, but the glaring anomaly whereby some very large cities were without representation in Parliament was not so obvious before the Industrial Revolution. Uneven distribution of seats among the population was most visible in the Royal Duchy of Cornwall, which was grossly over-represented by its many minute boroughs. Small boroughs with their restricted electorates provided rich soil for patronage and even 'pocketing' of seats by local landowners, though famous pocket boroughs such as Old Sarum were rare and much censured. Before the mid-eighteenth century the demand for a more equal distribution of seats in the boroughs was spasmodic. Experiments to obtain a uniform system had been tried in some of the short-lived constitutions drawn up during the decade of Interregnum which followed the execution of Charles I in 1649, along with other reforms such as different electoral qualifications and the abolition of the House of Lords as a hereditary body; but the widespread conservative reaction at Charles II's Restoration in 1660 ensured that such attempts would not be repeated easily.

Calls for a larger electorate were periodic rather than continuous before the 1760s. Few wanted the radical arrangements of the 1650s Parliaments, though the notorious Last Determinations clause of 1729 which limited most seats to their existing electorates inspired periodic criticism, leading to a relaxation in 1788 of the practice of pegging a constituency's electorate to that last determined by Parliament. Nevertheless population was rising rapidly and the *proportion* of adult males entitled to vote fell steadily over the period, providing a new if little understood argument for reform.

Beginning in the 1760s a series of political movements outside Parliament called for reform of borough representation, for a larger

electorate and even for secret ballot, though none of these was obtained until well into the nineteenth century. Women mostly had to wait for parliamentary votes until 1918, though this did not prevent them from writing and campaigning in politics. Their share of these activities, never negligible, expanded greatly with the reform campaigns of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and ranged from writing treatises of political history and philosophy to the more mundane electoral tasks of election management and, in the case of two Duchesses of Devonshire, kissing voters to win votes for Fox.

Before 1688 general elections could be infrequent; the Cavalier Parliament lasted on and off from 1661 to 1678 without resort to the voters. As one of the first demands of most parliamentarians after the Revolution, the Triennial Act of 1694 required a new Parliament to be called at least every three years, a limit extended to seven years by the Septennial Act in 1716. Between 1689 and 1715 the excitement of politics was such that there were in fact elections on average every second year. In the politically more peaceful later period after 1716 Parliament often ran for a full seven years. Elections were spread over several days or even weeks, while electors came to the polls from distant areas. Polling was accompanied by boisterous scenes, which could slide into violence or even riot.

Despite its weaknesses Parliament, an almost unique survivor among medieval representative bodies in Europe, was prized at home and envied in other countries. The system worked well enough to cover a wide range of interests, though the lowest classes were not well represented and British colonists overseas had no direct voice at Westminster. In North America settlers were, however, quick to set up their own representative institutions copied from Parliament as closely as possible. Such bodies eventually blossomed into state legislatures when the colonies won their independence, accompanied by a national Congress modelled mainly on the British legislature though with significant variations. British Parliament and United States Congress became the patterns for the revived European legislatures of the nineteenth century, again with various adjustments.

From 1688 the political system became more recognisable to modern eyes. Parliaments called at the will of the monarch, who was ruler in fact as well as in theory, were replaced by regular sessions of Parliament instituted from 1689. Regularity of meeting arose out of parliamentarians' belief that only by giving themselves a permanent

forum could they obtain control of monarchy. Arthur Onslow, a popular and influential Speaker from 1728 to 1761, represented post-Revolution thought when he noted that 'if parliaments sit annually, which they may always secure to themselves now if they will, and could never depart from, it is almost impossible that any exorbitancy of power should subsist long enough to do much mischief'. Parliament's rise to a permanent presence in the constitution was deliberately obtained and carefully preserved.

In 1688 Prince William of Orange, preparing to overthrow James II, was well aware of the importance of Parliament. The Declaration William published just before setting out from Holland stated explicitly that 'this our expedition is intended for no other design, but to have a free and lawful Parliament assembled as soon as is possible'. But William did not foresee the extent to which his new subjects would bind him to his implied promise to respect the dignity and importance of this institution. At the coronation he was compelled to swear to govern according to 'the statutes in Parliament agreed on, and the laws and customs of the same'. Within a few days of the presentation of the crown an old parliamentarian, Colonel John Birch, made explicit what was implied in most men's attitudes, when he told the Commons that 'if King William should destroy the laws, foundations and liberties, I doubt not but you will do with him as you did with King James'.

Without such attitudes the Revolution itself would hardly have proved sufficient to prevent fresh royal incursions into the authority of Parliament. The Declaration of Rights, 'declaring' William and Mary to be King and Queen, contained many clauses which severely limited the powers of monarchy. This document was later enshrined in the Bill of Rights and supplemented by further laws, particularly the Act of Settlement in 1701, which listed more limitations in the light of further experience with William (Chapter 2). Half a century after the Revolution Settlement men still expressed Birch's sentiments, even if in more polished phrases. 'King William', wrote the Earl of Chesterfield in a history lesson for his son, 'would have been glad of more power than he ought to have; but his Parliaments kept him within due bounds, against his will. To this Revolution we owe our liberties.' The restriction of royal powers widely assumed to have been established after the Revolution of 1688 was not *fully* established until considerably later, and the complacency evident in Chesterfield's theme was to receive a jolt after 1760 when the young George

III sought to revive some of the Crown's former political role. But the strength of the reaction this provoked, together with the onset of parliamentary and governmental reforms in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, brought about the final demise of political monarchy by the time of Queen Victoria's accession in 1837.

The Parties

Before 1688 Parliament was often divided between Court and Country parties. These forerunners of modern parties differed from them in important ways. The Court party consisted of office holders and other supporters of royal policy in Parliament. The Country party contained members unconnected with the King and stood mainly for the national interest as perceived from the localities. Neither side had a permanently fixed membership, and individuals moved from one side to the other in accordance with their own inclinations. Court and Country groupings did not *as groupings* interchange between office and opposition, for the Court party were by definition the party of monarchical government and could not go 'into opposition' any more than the Country party, as such, could come 'into office'. For either party to have done so would have involved a contradiction in terms. When the first Whigs and Tories came on to the scene it was not just the names of the parties which changed but the nature of the political system itself. Soon after 1688 the new parties showed themselves capable of alternation in office *en masse*, the basis of modern practice. After the overwhelming triumph of the Whigs and overthrow of the Tories in 1714–15 this alternation was slowed down dramatically, but it was never forgotten, and opposition parties continued to strive for office.

The issues which divided the new parties after 1688 changed progressively in the course of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. At first they centred upon religion and the succession question. Now that Catholicism no longer seemed a major danger the Tories, in their support of the Anglican church, reserved their main antipathy for Protestant Dissent. The Whigs showed more sympathy for the Dissenters, though their main political concern was the Protestant succession, without which they saw little future for any form of Protestantism. By the middle of the eighteenth century issues began to change. Tories moved towards reconciliation with the Hanoverian

monarchy, first through Prince Frederick and then with his son King George III, while the Whigs' original pre-Revolution fear of political monarchy came alert again on that monarch's accession in 1760. By the early nineteenth century some issues had again changed; reforms of various kinds were prominent in Whig thinking, while Tories opposed reform, or accepted it only to stave off worse. Throughout the whole period the Tories remained the Church of England's main support while the Whigs, though Anglicans themselves, continued to ally with Protestant dissenters (later called Nonconformists) on most occasions. These alignments were to prove longlasting even into the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

From the beginning the new parties had effective, if by modern standards simple methods of organizing their followings. 'Party is little less than an inquisition, where men are under such a discipline in carrying on the common cause as leaves no liberty of private opinion', wrote the Marquess of Halifax, who was known as 'the Trimmer' for his centrist sympathies (Foxcroft, 1898). This was not to say that the parties possessed the sophisticated organisation of the present British party system, for until the later part of the eighteenth century few permanent forms of party institution existed even in Parliament. Attendance of Members for important debates was mainly arranged for the government side by junior Treasury commissioners, later dubbed the government Whips, while the opposition relied on unpaid organisers.

Such methods could, however, be highly effective. From surviving division lists for the House of Commons in Anne's reign, excluding the Scottish Members who entered it only halfway through, the late Geoffrey Holmes showed that 'only a small fraction, roughly one eighth, are *ever* found "cross voting" or voting "against the party line"' (Holmes, 1967). After the accession of George I in 1714 the Whigs fell into internecine quarrels, but Tory voting consistency continued and even increased. According to the official *History of Parliament* (Sedgwick, 1970, vol. 1, *Introductory Survey*) the fifteen divisions between 1715 and 1754 for which lists are known show that on eleven occasions no Tory ever voted for the government, that on a further three divisions a mere seven Tory votes in all were cast astray, and that on the fifteenth occasion only a few Tories joined the government Whigs. The absence of today's party discipline facilitated the breakdown of a clear party division in the early years of George III's reign, when some old issues were dying and new ones had not yet

come to take their place. The American and French Revolutions re-established party differences over the divided British responses to these events.

The early parties' emergence had little to suggest that their activities would result eventually in the domination of Parliament by anything like the modern party system, with its strong discipline inhibiting nearly all independent action by MPs. The words Whig and Tory were terms of abuse borrowed about 1680 from Scottish and Irish religious strife, denoting respectively the Protestant and Catholic extremists of those countries. Scottish moorlands had concealed the first 'Whiggamoors'; the name Tory Hill, near Galway, possibly indicates early use by Irish outlaws of that description. The opposition and royal parties at Westminster who burdened each other with these names, suggestive of disreputable affinities with religious extremism, became anxious at or soon after the Revolution of 1688 to change their 'image'. The Tories' failure to continue support for James II in 1688 demonstrated their unwillingness to be further associated with his Catholic policies. The decline of the Whigs' dabbling with republicanism and political extremism was well under way soon after 1688 as they adapted themselves to the opportunities and responsibilities of office under a more sympathetic monarchy.

The parties differed from today's in that they did not encompass the whole parliamentary scene. There were also independent members, though the common term 'independent gentleman' usually implied a financial independence such as Jane Austen's heroes enjoyed, or in some cases failed to. Such men were as often found *within* parties as outside, a much respected if wayward element. Tories and Whigs closely resembled each other in their social make-up; both were drawn from the more privileged classes, for Members of Parliament had ceased to be paid as such in the seventeenth century and needed a private income. The main difference from the twentieth century political scene was the absence of a party claiming specifically to represent working men and women: the advent of the Labour party had to await the enlarged electorate which came with late nineteenth-century extensions of the franchise.

The older terms Court and Country continued in currency to some extent for decades after 1688. The uses to which these terms could be put were considerable. When the Tories were in opposition alongside some dissident Whigs towards the end of William III's reign, and again at times under the first two Georges, they called themselves

'the New Country party' (as on the former occasion) or just 'the Country party', resorting naturally to a familiar term to describe their alliance. But the Court party in these cases consisted almost entirely of Whigs, while the Country party contained all the Tories together with some dissident Whigs currently in opposition. The term 'Country' to describe such combinations in opposition was a useful device in attempting to paper over the divisions which often occurred in such alliances. The use of the terms Court and Country in parallel with Whig and Tory, confusing to us, brought few problems for contemporaries. A 'Court Whig' might be last year's 'Country Whig' and a 'Court Tory' last year's 'Country Tory' but Tories usually remained Tory and Whigs remained Whig all their lives. After 1688 the use of the traditional terms Court or Country characteristically indicates not the existence of separate parties but positions in which Tories and Whigs found themselves relative to the government.

Special mention must, however, be made of the 'Court and Treasury party'. These were the government officeholders, expected by reason of their appointment to follow the government's line in Parliament on all important occasions. The Court and Treasury men were the hard core of government supporters, easily identifiable as *part of* the ministerial party along with the ministry's unpatronised supporters. Their number increased from under 100 in Anne's reign to around 180 by Walpole's fall in 1742, and 200 by 1760, but sank again to well below 50 by 1821, diminished mainly by administrative reforms brought in by the younger Pitt. Their importance to a ministry lay in their good attendance and subservience to discipline, traits not always shared by more independent members of a government party.

From the first both Whigs and Tories showed little respect for the monarchy's traditional role. The Whig ministers known as the Junto were notorious for their challenges to William III's authority, while in 1701 William's new Tory minister the Earl of Rochester 'took the liberty to tell the King that princes must not only hear good advice, but must take it'. Both parties forced themselves into office on occasion, dictated to monarchs and became the arbiters of political problems previously the task of the Crown. The traditionally royalist Tories were even more responsible than the Whigs for obtaining frequent elections, fairer treason trials and other legislation which limited the powers of post-1688 monarchs.

Monarchy at first retained some substantial powers after the Revolution, particularly the rights to conduct foreign policy, to call and

dismiss Parliament within the limitations imposed by post-Revolution statute law, and to appoint or dismiss ministers. But royal control of foreign policy, much used by William III, was swiftly curbed, resulting in later monarchs placing war, peace, treaties and other policy matters before Parliament through regular royal speeches which, from the end of William's reign onward, were written by the ministers. The royal power to summon, prorogue or dismiss Parliament, limited in general terms by the Bill of Rights and specifically by Acts determining frequency of elections, was likewise subject in practice to ministerial agreement, which usually meant according to the minister's interpretation of his followers' wishes.

The prerogative of appointment and dismissal, which became the basis of George III's reassertion of royal authority in the 1760s, was an uncertain area of constitutional practice not finally cleared up until the mid-nineteenth century when the royal role in most appointments became nominal. Until that time many ministers vied for control with their monarchs, especially William III, George II and George III, and the outcome of these struggles usually depended on the strength of the ministerial party in Parliament. Most ministers' differences with their monarchs centred on their own posts, as in Walpole's case at George II's accession, but what was ultimately at stake was national policy, as in the case of George II's choice of Carteret to extend a war and George III's appointment of Bute to end one. Out of the political tussles which went on throughout the century developed the office of a Prime Minister who could take over executive government, and who depended on the parliamentary party he headed rather than on the monarch's goodwill.

Historians have sometimes wondered whether the presence of Tory and Whig parties in the eighteenth century constituted a two-party *system*, particularly as these parties were sometimes attenuated or even, as in the 1760s, shattered into lesser groupings (Namier, 1957; Christie, 1970). But whether a two-party system has ever existed in a pure form is also questionable, even for much more recent periods. Transitory third, fourth and other parties have usually been present in greater or lesser form right down to the present. The temporary breakdown of the parties into smaller factions in the 1760s was greater than any such succeeding event but it eventually produced new or reconstructed parties, as did the lesser breakdowns of the 1840s and 1880s. The greater impact of destructive tendencies upon the eighteenth-century parties was the result of their earlier stage of

development, particularly their comparative lack of the longer traditions and institutional cement of nineteenth-century parties.

Party development in the eighteenth century was not progressive or continuous. Whig and Tory parties were at their strongest before 1715 but much weakened by the 1750s after a generation of Whig government had factionalised the Whigs themselves and subordinated the Tories. In the 1760s both parties broke down, the Tories completely, so that development of two major parties had to begin anew. The revived Whig party in opposition developed from one fragment of the former party, while a government party arose displaying strong loyalty to the Hanoverian crown but rejecting the Jacobite-tainted name of Tory. George III's ministers were usually in fact Whigs, differing from the Whig party in opposition only by personal commitment to the King. Such men came to be described by their opponents simply as Tories, with a subtle reversion in the use of that term to its pre-1688 sense of supporters of monarchy. The terminology of the party was too strongly entrenched in opposition and press usage to be destroyed when the original Tory party broke up, and the term Tory remained for many contemporaries a legitimate description for the new party of the Crown supporting King George III even though the ministers themselves as late as 1812 repudiated the description as applied to themselves. During the Regency of 1811–20 the Tory name slid quietly into general use again, no longer worth the effort of rejection when it could hardly be taken to imply that the ministry of Lord Liverpool was subservient to Prince George, either as Regent or subsequently as King George IV.

The first appearance of Tory and Whig parties just before 1688 was accompanied by fundamental changes in post-Revolution constitution and society, for the rivalry of these parties was only a small part in a far wider process. In addition to the newly permanent presence of Parliament under William and Mary a Cabinet Council emerged in Queen Anne's reign, though it did not begin to have the familiar collective identity of today's Cabinet until the time of the younger Pitt or even later. Many of the functions of a Prime Minister were developed by Godolphin, Harley and Walpole in the first decades of the eighteenth century, with the distinct promise of replacing monarchy as the active head of government sooner or later. A new system of governmental deficit finance, having its centre in the Bank of England and a funded national debt, came into existence in the 1690s. The judiciary was made fully independent by the Act of Settlement in 1701, with

virtual appointment of senior judges for life. Eighteenth-century parties were not alone as an innovative institution but were woven into the fabric of new type of government, fiscal system and judicature.

Moreover all these developments, important though they appeared, were only part of a new intellectual outlook and social scene. The Cambridge Platonists and John Locke led the way in advocating religious toleration, and persecution was gradually giving way to the doctrines of 'latitude' and Enlightenment. For the British landed class a regularly sitting Parliament offered the possibility of a permanent career for many MPs, and other types of professional occupation were also appearing, permitting the expansion of a middle class which was already beginning to demand its share in political life (Langford, 1989, 1991). The continuous presence of landed parliamentarians' families in London, together with an expansion of commercial wealth, combined to make for a wider marriage market and more closely knit middle and upper classes.

Perhaps the greatest change of all, however, was in social customs. After the traumas of the Civil War and the Revolution of 1688 violence diminished, slowly replaced by the custom of discussion on a continuous basis, as the sword was gradually replaced by the ritualised antagonisms of party politics. Though at first the party leaders were impeached in their turn, Whigs in 1701 and Tories in 1715, none was in the end punished. At the same time the old intensities of religious strife were gradually diminished and separated from politics, permitting the emergence of the milder and more beneficial evangelical zeal of Methodism and the Clapham Sect, which led in turn to social reform, the abolition of obscenities such as the slave trade in British ships, and a new reformation of manners which set the tone for Victoria's reign. The immense energies released from the politico-religious struggles of the seventeenth century became available for the further conquests of commerce, industry and Empire by a parliamentary nation.

Electorate and People

Today's national party organisations, with close co-operation between central office and constituency party, are the product of mass electorates in the nineteenth century. In the late seventeenth century the voting population was much more restricted, though already substan-

tial, and the smaller numbers involved were reached by less sophisticated means. As early as the first Whigs' election campaigns in the Exclusion Crisis central direction could be remarkably effective in many areas, and circular letters sent out by party leaders or their deputies to give their followers early warning of elections or parliamentary business supply examples of the considerable advantage which could be obtained from a minimum of institutional apparatus when the will was present.

A restricted electorate was not necessarily unrepresentative of general trends in national opinion. The leading historian of early eighteenth-century parties has estimated that the voting population in 1722 was as high as one in four adult males, concluding that the electorate could and often did adequately reflect a national will (Holmes, 1976). Contemporary politicians took the electors as representing the mood of the people reasonably well; James Craggs correctly forecast in 1710 that if a dissolution took place 'as the common people are now set' the Tories would obtain a large majority. Recent research has shown that under Walpole and the Pelhams from 1720 to 1760 both urban and rural constituencies could be islands of popular resentment returning Tory and even Jacobite Members against a monolithic and often uncaring Whig government (Rogers, 1989; Monod, 1989). Later in the eighteenth and in the early nineteenth centuries the proportion of voters to population fell substantially, as already noted, but the voters in the more open constituencies continued to provide an indication of public opinion. At election times it was not always easy to distinguish the enfranchised from those who shared their concerns and hurried them to the polling booths. A recent historian of the popular dimension of politics in this period notes: 'At the Norwich election in 1784 William Wyndham's agents distributed 7369 cockades in a constituency with about 3000 voters. Quite obviously, many non-voters were drawn by and into the political excitement generated by a hotly contested election' (Dickinson, 1995).

Members of the Commons were often assessed according to the degree with which they represented public opinion. The eighty English county Members, together with other representatives with large electorates, enjoyed the highest prestige and were considered the most in agreement with the national mood. Members for small boroughs had less prestige, but all MPs were expected to respond in some degree to public pressure which was clearly expressed through