THE DUBLIN SOCIETY OF UNITED IRISHMEN AND THE POLITICS OF THE CAREY–DRENNAN DISPUTE, 1792–1794*

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ABSTRACT. This article is concerned with political divisions within the Dublin Society of United Irishmen in a period, 1792–1794, which historians, accepting the contemporary argument of its leaders, have generally agreed demonstrated the society’s unity of purpose. It is argued that ideological tensions existed between the middle-class leadership and the middling-class rank and file which reflected the existence of two different conceptions of radicalism, one ‘Jacobin’ and one ‘sans-culotte’. These tensions are brought to light through an examination of the dispute between William Paulet Carey and William Drennan, which culminated in the latter’s trial in 1794, and the career of the former until he exiled himself from Ireland after the 1798 rebellion. It is further argued that, because these ideological differences have been ignored, historians have wrongly assumed that Carey was a political turncoat. In reality, he remained true to the sans-culotte principles of direct democracy and rotation of office, even after his ostracism. Carey’s deep suspicion of the motivation of the United Irish leaders came to be accepted by Drennan in retrospect.

I

In June 1794 the Dublin catholic printer and satirist William Paulet Carey was the star crown witness at the trial in Dublin of William Drennan, the Ulster-born presbyterian radical physician who had been accused of writing the seditious ‘Address of the United Irishmen of Dublin to the Volunteers’ in November 1792. According to conventional accounts, Carey, a one-time member of the Dublin Society of United Irishmen, was pressured by the Irish government to inform on the author and to act as a crown witness, under the threat of prosecution for publishing the ‘Address’ in his newspaper, The Rights of Irishmen, or, National Evening Star. At Drennan’s trial, Carey’s evidence was discredited by the florid and bullying forensic skills of John Philpott Curren, defence counsel and opposition whig M.P. Drennan was acquitted, although the government gained its primary objective, in that the strain of the trial persuaded Drennan to withdraw from partisan politics. He played no further part in the events leading up to the 1798 Rebellion. Carey was effectively ruined, both financially and in character. After struggling unsuccessfully to renew his newspaper business, and repeatedly appealing to

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the government for financial assistance, he emigrated to London in 1799, where he became a respected critic and patron of the arts. He died in 1839.\footnote{\textit{Dictionary of National Biography} [hereafter \textit{D.N.B.}], William Paulet Carey.}

Although Carey’s role in Irish politics began in the early 1780s and was, at times, of some significance, he is mentioned by historians almost exclusively for his part in the trial of Drennan. He has been the victim of what A. J. Youngson has called ‘the side-road assassination technique’, whereby relatively minor characters with whom the historian does not sympathise are taken into a short paragraph where they are made to look wicked or ridiculous or very very small in a couple of sentences, almost in a couple of words; and done away with. There is no argument, no balancing of good and bad, no fuss. It is casual, almost off-stage. The victims have been shot down before you notice. Falsehood is not required, for a partial truth will do.\footnote{A. J. Youngson, \textit{The prince and the pretender: a study in the writing of history} (Beckenham, 1985), p. 23.}

R. R. Madden, the great nineteenth-century historian of the United Irishmen, in fact does not mention Carey at all in the various editions of his multi-volumed work, even though there remains a draft biography of him in the Madden papers, in which he admires Carey’s ‘most valuable’ account of the United Irish society and admits that his quarrel with the United Irishmen ‘was one of the greatest injuries [the U.I. society] had yet received’.\footnote{Trinity College Dublin [hereafter T.C.D.], Madden papers, MS 873, ‘Memoir of William Paulet Carey, brother of the author of \textit{Vindiciae Hibernicae}’.} Rosamond Jacob, in her fiercely nationalist and pro-catholic \textit{The rise of the United Irishmen} (1937), disposes of Carey, himself a catholic, in one sentence (which perfectly fits Youngson’s argument): ‘The chief witness against [Drennan] was Carey, the expelled United Irishman, who was made to perjure himself more than once by Curran in cross-examination’.\footnote{Rosamond Jacob, \textit{The rise of the United Irishmen} (London, 1937), p. 191. Jacob fails to mention why Carey had been expelled, thus giving the erroneous impression that it was because of his activities as a witness. Nor does she offer evidence that he perjured himself.}

More recently, in two separate but lengthy accounts of the United Irishmen, R. B. McDowell also mentions Carey primarily in the context of the Drennan trial. In one, claiming that Carey was ‘pulverized’ under cross-examination, he quotes him as gasping, ‘I have been so baited with questions that I have been put beyond myself, I never was in court before but once and then only as a listener’. The relevant footnote, referring to the source of the quotation, also gives a potted history of Carey’s life, in which the money paid to him by government subsequent to the trial is heavily emphasized and his occupation in London in the nineteenth century incorrectly stated.\footnote{R. B. McDowell, \textit{Ireland in the age of imperialism and revolution, 1760–1801}, (Oxford, 1979), p. 440.} In his second account, McDowell refers twice to Carey, once to say that his views on the United Irishmen, because he had quarrelled with them, ‘cannot be taken very seriously’, and once, in the context of his success in the world of art
criticism in London, to describe him as ‘a sometime United Irishman and crown witness’.  

In the latest and deservedly widely acclaimed general history of modern Ireland, R. F. Foster manages to find something different to say about Carey. He notes that the catholic printer adopted a masthead on his newspaper which reflected a desire for religious unity in Ireland. But he too cannot prevent himself from falling into the Youngson Trap. He continues ‘(He later turned informer, and died a respectable citizen).’

Finally, John Larkin’s introduction to a modern reprinting of Drennan’s trial needs to be considered. In some respects, Larkin is considerably fairer to Carey than other historians; he accepts Carey’s honesty as a crown witness and attempts to give the broad outlines of the circumstances which led to him standing in the witness box. Unfortunately, he fails to examine the U.I. society’s treatment of the catholic printer from November 1792 and thus unwittingly undermines Carey’s justification for his actions. Moreover, Larkin has no knowledge of Carey’s earlier career and thus not only sees his later life as an art critic as ‘bizarre’, but also finds his open criticism of the lawyers in the U.I. society ‘strange’. No attempt, apparently, has been made to read any of Carey’s publications except his Appeal.

It is clear, therefore, that when considering the Drennan trial, historians have almost unanimously displayed sympathy for the accused, accepting contemporary United Irish opinion, especially from The Drennan letters, that Carey was a suborned renegade. Yet one consequence of this implicit partiality has been the failure to recognize that within the membership of the Dublin Society of United Irishmen in its open phase (1791-4) there existed serious political tensions, the result of fundamental ideological differences between the leadership cadre (represented by Drennan) and the rank and file (represented by Carey). If recognized at all, these tensions have usually been interpreted in religious terms. In reality, however, rumblings of discontent within the society can best be interpreted as evidence of the interplay between two different conceptions of radicalism; one, adhered to by the ‘Jacobin’ professional-class leaders, emphasizing the virtues of representative democracy and a ‘natural’ leadership, the other, accepted by the ‘sans-culotte’ middling-

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7 R. F. Foster, Modern Ireland, 1600–1972 (London, 1988), p. 262. The only dispassionate and sympathetic account of Carey’s dilemma in 1794 comes from Brian Inglis in his The freedom of the press in Ireland (London, 1954), pp. 64–8, in which Carey’s role as a newspaper editor and proprietor is examined. Inglis, who himself was to become a famous journalist in Britain, appreciated the skills of Carey as well as the enormous pressure he faced. The most recent thesis on the United Irishmen, Nancy Curtin’s ‘The origins of Irish republicanism: the United Irishmen in Dublin and Ulster, 1791–8’ (unpublished PhD dissertation, 2 vols., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1988), mentions Carey only briefly, and is inaccurate in detail (Carey ‘seems’ to have been an informer and emigrated to America in 1795, etc [vol. 1, pp. 291–2]).

8 The trial of William Drennan on a trial for sedition, in the year 1794…, ed. John Francis Larkin (Dublin, 1991), pp. 7–34.

9 The Drennan letters, ed. D. A. Chart (Belfast, 1931).
class shopkeepers and small masters, stressing the necessity of direct democracy and rotation of office. An examination of the internal workings of the Dublin Society of United Irishmen, therefore, uncovers evidence of incipient class conflict within the radical movement in the capital, at the same time as similar conflicts begin to wrack the republican movement in France. It is in this context that the struggle between Carey and Drennan can best be viewed, for rather than the Drennan trial reflecting little more than the consequences of personal rivalry and dislike, and evidence of government determination to destroy Irish radicalism, it actually represents the culmination of rivalry between two distinct conceptions of what radicalism represented in Ireland in its so-called pre-revolutionary phase, as this article will attempt to demonstrate.

II

William Paulet Carey was born in 1759, the third of five sons of Christopher Carey, a prosperous catholic Dublin baker. It was a talented family; three of the five brothers are the subjects of entries in the Dictionary of National Biography. The eldest brother, John (1756–1826), became a famous classical scholar in London; Mathew (1760–1839) became the largest bookseller in Philadelphia and a prominent political economist and protectionist, being rewarded on his death with the second largest funeral procession ever seen in Philadelphia. William Paulet gained recognition for his art criticism in London after he had left Ireland permanently. Of the other two, little is known of Thomas, but James (1762?–1801), the black sheep of the family, became a fervent Jeffersonian newspaper editor in Philadelphia in the 1790s.10

As catholics, of course, the brothers were subject to the penal laws, which in their youth had still not been amended. ‘Born a catholic, my slavery commenced with my existence’, William Paulet wrote later; I had to ‘drink by stealth from the fountain of learning’.11 It would be a mistake, however, to assume from this that the Careys were totally downtrodden catholics. Many of the penal laws had fallen into disuse and others began to be rescinded after 1778. Moreover, Christopher Carey’s bakery business was very successful (he had a contract with the Royal Navy during the American war). He was, in fact, part of a growing catholic middle class which had begun to emerge in Irish towns from mid-century.12 William Paulet’s early life, therefore, although severely circumscribed in numerous ways because of his religious affiliation, cannot realistically be described as a form of slavery, although the humiliation

of institutionalized social inferiority understandably was deeply felt by the brothers. His catholicism, for example, did not prevent William Paulet winning, as a boy, two prizes for his paintings at the Dublin Academy.13

Four of the five brothers were to be involved in the dangerous business of publishing and editing opposition newspapers in Dublin. The first to gain notoriety was Mathew, who in 1779 was forced to withdraw to France – where he worked on Benjamin Franklin’s printing press at Plassy – for having advertised a pamphlet which sought the immediate emancipation of all catholics in Ireland (a call which irritated the conservative and deferential catholic leaders as much as the Ascendancy). Returning to Dublin, Mathew established the Volunteer’s Journal in 1783, in which he promoted the political programme of the radical Volunteers, reiterated his support for catholic emancipation, argued the case for the complete independence of Ireland and published several libels against government leaders. Shortly after transferring ownership of the newspaper to his brother Thomas, Mathew was arrested, but he escaped, and dressed in women’s clothes fled to the United States. Thomas continued the Journal for a while, but was also arrested. Having reached some form of accommodation with the government, he was acquitted at his trial. By the late 1780s not only the Careys’ newspaper but all the other Dublin opposition prints had disappeared.14

What role, if any, William Paulet played in the brief but contentious history of the Volunteer’s Journal is unknown, but he almost certainly wrote paragraphs for it, as he did for the General Evening Post and the Dublin Evening Packet. Several of these pieces were subsequently published as pamphlets. By the late 1780s Carey was known to the citizens of Dublin for his engravings, some of which reflected his heartfelt commitment to the union of all Irish religious denominations ‘at the altar of peace’.15 His reputation was further enhanced by his portrait painting and his satirical verse, published under the pseudonym Scriblerius Murtough O’Pindar, which took aim at the Irish Ascendancy and Lord-Lieutenant Buckingham.16

Long before the outbreak of the French revolution, therefore, Carey was known not just for his patriotic views but for his adherence to the political programme of the Volunteers of 1784–5, that is, parliamentary reform and catholic emancipation. He was also, like his brother Mathew, virulently anti-English:

For my politics, I must confess myself to be of the old-fashioned party, who love Ireland dearly, and as cordially hate the country which has oppressed her for ages, and which constantly adds insults to injuries, by reproaching our people with that poverty – which is the consequence of their oppression.17

13 Carey, Appeal, p. 48.
16 [William Paulet Carey], The nettle, an Irish bouquet, to tickle the nose of an English Viceroy: being a collection of political songs and parodies, dedicated to the Marquis Grimbaldo, Governor of Baratario (Dublin, 1789). Much of this collection satirizes the Irish government’s panic during the Regency crisis of 1788.
17 Carey, The nettle, p. ii.
'My political opinions', he wrote in 1793, 'have ever been founded on this simple principle, “that OPPRESSION ought to be resisted; that loyalty is due ONLY to PROTECTION”.'

The 'old-fashioned party' to which Carey referred was not so much the Volunteer movement of 1778–85 as the patriotic group centred on the Dublin common council, which was led in the 1780s by James Napper Tandy and 'Long John' Binns. This organization, which through Tandy manipulated the Dublin 'mob' for political purposes, represented the interests of the city's middling groups of artisans, small manufacturers and shopkeepers. In this 'sans-culotte' environment Carey had been raised; its influence, particularly its emphasis on a mixture of personal independence and localized communitarianism, which was such a feature of late eighteenth-century urban life in Britain, France and America, and which Thomas Paine caught so accurately in Rights of Man, coloured his political views throughout his political life in Ireland. It was his sympathy for, and understanding of, the mentalité of these middling groups which was to distinguish his politics from that of the United Irish leadership. It also gave him a social conscience, which was reflected in his concern for the wretched conditions of the weavers in Dublin’s liberties. Although, like many contemporary Paineites, he could not accept the validity of workers’ combinations or strikes — for they fractured the homogeneity of the community — he nevertheless interpreted them sympathetically within a framework of oppressive class antagonisms. ‘Of all combinations,’ he wrote during a strike of journeymen in 1792, ‘the combination of the rich against the poor, of the employer against the industrious workman, is the most dangerous, and should most readily meet with redress.’

Above all, however, Carey drew from his ‘sans-culotte’ milieu suspicions of ‘aristocratic leaders’, whether they were upper-class Volunteer whigs, such as Lord Charlemont, who by their withdrawal in 1784 had wrecked the hopes of parliamentary reform and catholic emancipation, or aristocratic representatives of the Catholic Committee, like Lord Kenmare and his cousin, Lord Fingal, who by their fears of upsetting the British government had hindered the cause of emancipation. For those like Carey who were deeply committed to commonwealth ideology, with its accent on the corrupting effect of power, all leaders had to be closely watched. ‘IT IS THE DANGEROUS QUALITY OF POWER’, he wrote, ‘to a greater or lesser degree, TO CORRUPT

18 Carey, Appeal, pp. 2–3.
20 For Carey’s views on Paine’s ‘extraordinary book’ [Rights of man, part 2], see NEX, 28 Feb. 1792.
THOSE WHO POSSESS IT', a statement which would have been unexceptionable both to the radical whigs of Britain and America and to the sans-culottes of Paris. But it is in this profoundly suspicious view of power and leadership, through which shone a fierce pride and independence, that the origins of the Carey–Drennan débâcle of 1794 can be found.

III

The Dublin Society of United Irishmen was established in November 1791, a month after a similar society had been formed in Belfast, then the centre of radical enthusiasm in Ireland. Membership of the Dublin society was open to all who were nominated by two members, acceptable to eighty per cent of the membership in a secret ballot, and prepared to take the test. In December 1791 there were 56 names on the membership roll; by the end of 1792 there were 240. At its peak, in March 1793, the society had at least 350 members, and possibly as many as 400, although by no means all regularly attended meetings. The 150 or so consistently active members comprised nearly equal numbers of protestants and catholics. In social composition, the Dublin society was heavily weighted in favour of mainly protestant professional groups (lawyers, barristers, doctors, teachers, students, booksellers) and those involved in the cloth trade (cloth merchants, textile manufacturers). Marxist-inspired historians of the French revolution would have no difficulty recognizing the Dublin Society of United Irishmen; it was obviously a club led by ‘bourgeois’ Jacobins. This perception would be strengthened by the fact that soon after its formation the society came under the control of an unofficial ‘interior circle’, composed almost exclusively of aspiring protestant professionals and the high-born.

One member who played an active part in the society, and the inner circle, from its inception, including drafting its original test, was Dr William Drennan, an Edinburgh-trained doctor from Belfast who had left his practice in Newry to seek fame and fortune as an accoucheur in Dublin in December 1789. An ardent student patriot during the American war, Drennan had achieved literary prominence late in 1784 when he published Orellana, or the Letters of an Irish Helot, in which he promoted the radicals’ cause and an Irish national identity based on the Gaelic tradition. At the same time, with the imminent collapse of the Volunteer movement, he had begun privately to speculate on the formation of a radical secret society:

I would much like to see the institution of a society as secret as the Freemasons, whose object might be by every practicable means to put into execution plans for the complete

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22 Carey, Appeal, p. i.
24 D. A. Chart, in his introduction to The Drennan letters, p. viii, says that Drennan moved to Dublin in 1791, but his letter to his brother-in-law, Samuel McTier, dated 22 Dec. 1789, makes it clear that he had settled in Dublin by then (Drennan letters, p. 50).
liberation of the country. The secrecy would surround the proceedings of such a society with a certain awe and majesty, and the oath of admission would inspire enthusiasm into its members. Patriotism is too general and on that account weak. We want to be condensed into the fervent enthusiasm of sectaries, and a few active spirits could, I should hope, in this manner greatly multiply their power for promoting public good. In a later letter he stated that ‘Ten or 12 conspirators for constitutional freedom would do more in a day than [an open reform club] would do in ten’. Drennan’s romantic daydreams came to nothing in the 1780s, but they resurfaced once more in his correspondence in 1791, where they jostled with extreme radical ideas on Irish independence and the possibility of violent revolution. Others thinking along similar lines put their ideas into practice at the same time as they established the United Irish societies, for in both Belfast and Dublin the open societies were manipulated by clandestine committees. In Belfast, Drennan’s brother-in-law Samuel McTier was one of a small number of Volunteers who were instrumental in forming the first U.I. society, but who also continued to meet secretly to direct its policies. In Dublin, the U.I. society was initially ‘composed of the Tandean party in the city’, but the social cream soon rose to the top, establishing a clandestine committee which worked behind the scenes, confining to its members the strategic positions of president and secretary. What at first probably was a loosely organized inner circle in Dublin, based on professional connections and ties of friendship (in its eighteenth-century sense), became towards the end of 1792 – if Drennan is to be credited – a secret society within an open society, with catholics deliberately excluded. ‘Tell Sam [McTier] not to tell anyone, even his interior’, wrote Drennan to his sister, ‘that we are to form one of our own, Protestant but National. The Catholic cause is selfish, compared to ours, and they will make use of every means for success.’

The purpose of these ‘inner Societies’ (as Drennan called them) in both Dublin and Belfast was surreptitiously to promote an agenda which went beyond the open platform of catholic emancipation and a radical reform of parliament towards republicanism and complete Irish independence. Some secret and central manipulation was thought necessary by the advanced radicals because many of the society’s rank and file – especially the catholics – were thought to be concerned only with emancipation or a combination of emancipation and moderate political reform. As many of the

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29 Drennan to McTier, c. Nov. 1791, Drennan letters, p. 63.

catholic members were of lowly status and all suffered from acute political and social discrimination, the seemingly paradoxical situation arose of the society’s elite being the more extreme in aims and approach, if at the same time much less egalitarian.

From an elite protestant viewpoint, there were good reasons for this. For example, catholics were less inspired than the protestant professional and high-born elite by the example of the French revolution, because they had seen their religion and the priesthood come under increasing assault by the revolutionaries in Paris. Moreover, British government policy, when faced with the prospect of a dangerous alliance between catholics and protestants (especially presbyterians in the north), was to tempt the former away with the prospect of gradual abolition of most of the remaining penal laws. There is no doubt of this policy’s effectiveness; catholics were reluctant to commit themselves fully to the radical alliance while the government carrot remained in suspension before them. Finally, many of the U.I. rank and file – middling-class protestants as well as catholics – were part of Napper Tandy’s organization, which in the 1790 election campaign had worked with Henry Gratton’s whig parliamentary opposition. Although Tandy was more radical than the whigs, he was at root a popular demagogue, ready to respond to the exigencies of the moment. All of these factors tended to suggest to the U.I. elite that the rank and file needed to be guided, willing or not, towards the goals of independence and republicanism. In the meantime they were not fully trustworthy; catholics especially were likely to be bought off by government blandishments.

Compounding the social strains within the Dublin U.I. society was the elite’s sense of natural superiority, which unconsciously encouraged them to expect a deferential acceptance of their leadership. They would have regarded it as perfectly natural when at the inaugural meeting of the Dublin U.I. Tandy proposed Simon Butler, K.C., the brother of Lord Mountgarret, as chairman for the evening. Whatever they thought in theory of equality for all Irishmen, in practice they could not escape their class assumptions. Tandy’s pretensions to gentility were regarded with derision, especially when his attempt to call out solicitor general John Toler for referring cruelly to his bloated features in a parliamentary debate forced him into hiding to avoid a charge of breach of privilege. The catholics too were viewed with a mixture of pity, contempt and, perhaps, fear.

Revolutionary the United Irish elite may have been, but they had no desire to foment a social revolution (although their later strategy of joining with the Defenders would have made this an inevitable consequence of a successful

31 Drennan to McTier, 21 Jan. 1794, Drennan letters, p. 182.
revolt). Thomas Addis Emmet, a lawyer of impeccable social background and prominent member of the U.I. society’s inner committee in Dublin from 1792, made this clear at his examination before the secret committee of the house of lords in August 1798. He claimed that the Dublin leaders wanted the revolution to be ‘conducted by moderate men, of good moral characters, liberal education, and some talents, rather than by intemperate men of bad characters, ignorant and foolish’. When asked a few days later by a committee of the house of commons how the United Irishmen would have kept the people in order once ‘the reins of government were loosened’, he replied:

By other equally powerful reins. It was for this purpose that I considered the promoting of organization to be a moral duty...I saw in the organization the only way of preventing it being such as would give the nation lasting causes of grief and shame. [Organized revolution] will, I hope, prevent [the people] from committing those acts of outrage and cruelty which may be expected from a justly irritated, but ignorant and uncontrolled populace.

The essential elements of the U.I. elite’s social pretensions also emerge clearly in the attitudes of William Drennan. Although a son of the manse, Drennan had ‘the instincts and education of a gentleman’ and aspired to landed gentility. He confessed himself to be an ‘aristocratical democrat’. Unfortunately, his hopes of rising in Dublin society through his medical practice were to be thwarted, partly in consequence of his unpopular political opinions, but also perhaps because he had too stiff a manner to gain the confidence of middle-class matrons, whose favourable opinion was so necessary for a successful accoucheur. He had all the hauteur and insouciance of the aristocrat, but betrayed his middle-class presbyterian origins by his fascination with, and his snobbery towards, the catholics. Of the ‘vulgar’ U.I. rank and file he wrote in December 1792 that they were ‘a ragged set, as melancholy a motley as a beggerman’s coat’. He was disappointed that the test, which he had drafted, had dissuaded some lawyers from joining, ‘leaving the Society not so genteel as it might be..., chiefly composed of Catholics...’. At a particularly unguarded moment he admitted to his brother-in-law that the catholics ‘suspect me as an incendiary, and I, many of them as cunning, uncandid, close, plotting and circumventing, between ourselves’. Although intellectually he remained convinced of the catholics’ right, as Irishmen, to the elective franchise, his contact with them in Dublin gave him pause for thought. ‘I do not say that the Protestant voter is better than the Catholic’, he confessed, ‘but I should think perfect and complete equality at once and immediately is impracticable, and therefore inexpedient.’

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34 ‘Substance of Thomas Addis Emmet’s examination, before the secret committee of the House of Lords, August 10th, 1798’, in MacNeven, Pieces, p. 262.
35 ‘The examination of Thomas Addis Emmet, before the secret committee of the House of Commons, August 14, 1798’, in MacNeven, Pieces, p. 269.
36 McDowell, Age of imperialism, p. 45. 37 Quoted in Foster, Modern Ireland, p. 260.
39 Drennan to McTier, Feb. 1792, Drennan letters, p. 78.
As with the catholics, so with Tandy and his plebeian followers. Drennan had initially some sympathy (and fellow feeling?) for the socially displaced demagogue, who, as a result of his bungling the Toler affair of honour, had ‘after 18 years struggle, against his own interest, in the public cause…nearly lost his reputation as a gentleman in a quarter of an hour’. But he was an unreliable ally, with interests not always compatible with the U.I. elite’s. Tandy’s unsatisfactory plan of parliamentary reform in the winter of 1791–2, which was due to be debated at the society, was thought to have resulted from his connections with Grattan and the whigs: ‘the sketch…will be communicated from high, but concealed, authority’. ‘I believe’, Drennan wrote, ‘Tandy acts as [Grattan’s] lieutenant.’ Eventually, he concluded that Tandy was ‘besotten’, ‘a great coward and the curse of Ireland’. He was always running to the catholics to give his point of view.40

Thus the Dublin Society of United Irishmen was from the outset a potentially unstable alliance of protestant middle-class professionals and scions of the aristocracy—the most active of whom worked behind the scenes to advance republican ideas; middling- and middle-class catholics whose commitment to emancipation was stronger than their desire for political reform; and the Tandean party, strongly plebeian in membership, which wanted reform and emancipation, but was susceptible to the circumstances of the moment.41 Internal conflict over the aims and methods of the society was almost inevitable. The origins of the Carey–Drennan dispute should be understood in this context, for Carey understood the implications of these divisions better than most.

IV

In August 1791 William Paulet Carey issued, with his brother James’s assistance, a prospectus for a newspaper in Dublin, to be called The Rights of Irishmen, or National Evening Star. Taking advantage of the renewed interest in the patriot cause, Carey hoped to press home his long-held message of the need for religious unity in Ireland. ‘THE UNION OF THE PUBLIC VOICE ONLY IS NECESSARY FOR THE PUBLIC FREEDOM’ was his clarion call, claiming from the outset that emancipation, by uniting talents and virtue, would be ‘the great preliminary step’ to political reform.42 The best way to achieve unity was through a newspaper, for ‘the press is the organ most capable [of spreading knowledge]. It is the peaceable artillery by which a breach in the citadel of corruption is soonest made.’43

41 These potential divisions in the Dublin United Irishmen have not been emphasized by historians, most of whom are content to see the society as ‘middle class’, i.e. they see the organization from the perspective of the leadership cadre. A partial exception to this is Nancy Curtin, who recognizes divisions and tensions within the Dublin society, but implies that these were unimportant before 1794. See Nancy J. Curtin, ‘The transformation of the Society of United Irishmen into a mass-based revolutionary organisation, 1794–6’, Irish Historical Studies, xxiv (1985), 463–92.
42 Carey, Appeal, pp. 3–4; NES, 29 Mar. 1792.
43 Carey, Appeal, p. vi.
Carey intended his newspaper to represent the interests of the patriotic men from ‘behind the counter, and from the compting-house’, whose major spokesman was Napper Tandy. These men of middling station were, in Carey’s words, ‘the truly honorable class of society, whose wealth and industry are the real props of the state’.⁴⁴ Among them were those whom Edmund Burke called ‘a new race of catholics’, who ‘have risen by their industry, their abilities and their good fortune to considerable opulence and of course to an independent spirit’.⁴⁵ Carey was financially independent of these patriots, but he used his newspaper to promote their causes.

The new ‘race of catholics’ was highly critical of the old-guard catholic leaders, a clique of sixty-eight, comprising three peers, higher clergy and country gentlemen. Carey’s first task was to destroy their influence amongst catholics and to promote the cause of the Catholic Society of Dublin, which had been formed in October 1791 by about forty radicals on the Catholic Committee.⁴⁶ In January 1792 he wrote:

The crisis now advances, when all is to be gained, or sacrificed; the catholics intending to petition the legislature, should beware of quitting the direct road, for any bye-ways of castle agency or influence. The committee [purged of the old-guard], the real delegates of the people, know too well the importance of the trust reposed in them, to surrender their powers of treating with parliament into the hands of any man, or set of men. The moment any individual becomes possessed of the power of leading a public body, so as to avail himself of the prejudice in his favour, and to form in himself a voice equal to the decisions of the majority, the independence of the body is at an end; and their objects, however great, noble, virtuous, or attainable, become liable to be defeated, as it is easy to cajole or buy off an individual, where means may be wanting to corrupt the integrity of numbers. The fault of the Irish catholics, the fault of the Irish protestants, and of the Irish presbyterians, has ever been, the weakness of pinning public faith upon the private sleeve of imaginary patriotism. This has ever rendered their best plans abortive, while these bodies have formed so many passive instruments, wielded at will by aristocratic parties, or the heads of parties, who, when most formidable to government, were most busy in betraying the interests which they affected to serve.⁴⁷

It is Carey’s deep suspicion of leaders, of representatives of the people (formally chosen or not), which comes out most clearly in his argument. He was later to argue that the Dublin U.I. society should have allowed its official positions to be rotated throughout the membership (a view widely held in the Paris sections of the time). ‘It may be remarked’, he continued, that by this mode, men of little note, or abilities, would come into office, and in consequence reflect little honour on the association. To this I answer, that any man who is worthy to be a member is also worthy to preside in the chair, or to act as secretary, and if his station of life does not reflect honour on the office, it is to be hoped

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⁴⁵ Carey, Appeal, pp. 4–5; McDowell, Age of imperialism, pp. 396–7.  
⁴⁷ NES, 7 Jan. 1792. See also 5 and 5 Jan. 1792.
that the office, if it be honourable, will reflect honour on him; if it be not, it is less matter who sits in it.\textsuperscript{48}

Failure to allow rotation of office plays into the hands of the ambitious, who fool the members into accepting them as ‘political idols’.

Carey’s distrust of leaders can be seen as a reflection of a more general fear of conspiracies which pervaded late-eighteenth-century popular politics in the Western world. Some historians have called this mass paranoia, but Gordon S. Wood has argued that ‘conspiratorial interpretations of the age’ were the logical consequence of reason – defined in Enlightenment, secular terms – being used to try to explain why political aims were rarely achieved in practice. In a rational world, moral consequences ought to result from moral actions; when they do not, the only explanation, now that God’s inscrutable will is no longer an acceptable excuse, must lie with the malevolent activities of wicked conspirators.\textsuperscript{49} For Carey, and for many others, the wicked did not have to be open supporters of government; they could also be working from within to undermine the patriot movement (and were thereby all the more dangerous).\textsuperscript{50}

This suspicion of potential leaders was in the forefront of Thomas Hardy’s mind when he helped to establish the London Corresponding Society in 1792. No person, high or low, was to be denied membership, so long as he paid the tiny duties, but Hardy, like Carey, was suspicious of possible elite pretensions: ‘The higher class as they are called have at all times made use of the middling and lower orders as a ladder to raise themselves into power, then kick it away’. He refused to accept the suggestion that the radical Lord Daer should be elected chairman when he joined; it would ‘discourage the people exerting themselves in their own cause’, and lead to their ‘dependence on the mere ipse dixit of some nobleman or great man without the least trouble of examining for themselves’.\textsuperscript{51}

Such a mentality was equally common in France, for the Parisian sans-culottes shared their English-speaking counterparts’ morbid suspicion of those who claimed to be their representatives. Sans-culottism was premised on an egalitarianism, common amongst the newly articulate and politicized artisans and small tradesmen, and on a commitment to popular sovereignty, which included a preference for direct democracy and a reluctance even temporarily

\textsuperscript{48} Carey, \textit{Appeal}, pp. iv–v.


\textsuperscript{50} For another British example see Michael Durey, ‘With the hammer of truth’: \textit{James Thomson Callender and America’s early national heroes} (Charlottesville, 1990), pp. 67–8.

to depute authority to representatives. It was a mentality which the United Irish leaders, although themselves prone to conspiracy theories, were unable to understand, but for Carey, brought up in a middling-class environment, suspicion of the socially superior and the personally ambitious was natural.

Carey’s conspiratorial mentality ensured that his relations with the Dublin Society of United Irishmen were always ambiguous. Conscious that outwardly they appeared to be seeking the same objectives as himself, he remained ever vigilant, watching to see if they conformed to their rhetoric. From the beginning his suspicions were aroused. Having taken the risk of establishing a patriotic newspaper, in which, incidentally, he published gratis circulars from the Dublin U.I. Society, he was distressed when they decided to set up their own newspaper, to be called The National Journal. It was, he felt, ‘in some measure’ established to compete against The National Evening Star. In the event, Carey had little need to worry; the new fonts, the best newsprint and subscriptions from the U.I. leaders could not overcome the editorial inexperience of the enthusiastic amateurs who conducted the National Journal. It collapsed after three months in June 1792, the result, thought Drennan, of the editors’ unpopularity amongst catholics. Carey drew another lesson from this fiasco: ‘what is everyone’s business is no man’s business’. The U.I. should have subsidized a well-established newspaper under the control of one experienced editor. As a result of the National Journal’s failure, the Society gave Carey ‘a temporary assistance ... I had the honest satisfaction of beholding the real party of the people attach itself to me’. Carey’s vigilance naturally extended to the U.I. leaders’ treatment of catholics and their spokesmen. On the surface, relations appeared close. Catholic leaders such as Dr William James MacNeven and Dr Theobold McKenna, both physicians from genteel families and members of the Catholic Committee, mixed easily with the U.I. elite. In reality, however, this closeness reflected the recognition of equal social status and professional clannishness more than protestant–catholic harmony (MacNeven, for instance, held his catholicism rather lightly). Catholics of lower social rank fared less well in the Dublin society. Patrick Byrne, for instance, a very respectable bookseller and printer, was almost drummed out of the society in 1792 on the motion – subsequently withdrawn – of the wealthy landowner Archibald Hamilton Rowan, for publishing Edmund Burke’s first Letter to Sir...

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53 McDowell, Age of imperialism, p. 385.

54 NES, 7 Jan. 1792; Carey, Appeal, pp. x–xi, 6.

55 For the amazement of one of MacNeven’s friends at seeing him constantly attending church after emigrating to the United States, see George Cuming to Robert Simms, 10 May 1806, P.R.O.N.I., D1759/38/6/32. By late 1792 the catholic bishops were becoming increasingly worried by the rise of anticlericalism amongst catholics in Ireland. Flaherty, ‘Ireland and French revolution’, p. 62.
Hercules Langrishe, which supported catholic emancipation but criticized the radicals’ demand for parliamentary reform. Byrne, like Carey a man of business, saw a market for Burke’s work; he could not afford to allow his political principles completely to outweigh his private interests.

That Byrne’s case was more than a trivial incident is suggested by the experience of Carey a few months later, when his reluctant candidacy for membership of the society was initially blackballed on account of a dispute between McKenna and the Catholic Committee, in which Carey publicly supported the latter. More than a quarter of the U.I. society, however, obviously sided with the physician against Carey, although McKenna’s own political views were not so very different from Edmund Burke’s, in that he favoured emancipation but was hostile to parliamentary reform. McKenna, the very conservative but socially prominent professional man, could apparently avoid censure for holding views, the mere publication of which threatened the position of a more socially obscure member.

Although Carey was later elected to the society following his initial rejection, his need to retain some independence and latitude as a journalist, as well as his suspicions of some of the leaders, ensured that his activities in the meetings were muted. But he continued to use his newspaper as a vehicle for the United Irishmen, by printing their notices and reprinting paragraphs from the society’s Ulster newspaper, The Northern Star. By so doing, he came into headlong conflict with the authorities.

In the last few months of 1792 the authorities and the propertied classes in both Britain and Ireland began to display signs of panic; France became a republic and spiralled into a frenzy of expansionism, war loomed and the radical popular societies in England and Scotland became increasingly

57 Byrne, like other United Irishmen of his middling rank, such as the Dublin printer John Chambers, lost most of his possessions – and in Byrne’s case his wife – when imprisoned in 1798. The professional men, at least those who under the Banishment Act went to the United States after 1798, seem to have fared somewhat better. At least forty-five members of the Dublin society went bankrupt between 1788 and 1803 (excluding Carey). McDowell, ‘Personnel of the Dublin U.I.’, p. 18. Samuel Neilson, Belfast’s most committed United Irishman, lost a fortune in the cause. Many of those who turned informer, for example Thomas Collins and John Hughes, did so only after bankruptcy.
58 The dispute between Carey and McKenna is confusing. It apparently resulted from the publication of a pamphlet satirizing the society and the Catholic Committee, the author having used Carey’s pseudonym of ‘Junius Hibernicus’. Carey was naturally thought to be the author; he seems to have thought, probably erroneously, that it came from the pen either of McKenna or of MacNeven. Carey, Appeal, pp. 8–10; Collins’ Report of 6 July 1792, Irish State Paper Office [hereafter I.S.P.O.], Official Papers, 2nd ser., OP 13/35. For McKenna’s political views see McDowell, Public opinion, pp. 167–8. McKenna agreed with Burke on the French revolution; he was also an exponent of Adam Smith’s political economy. He eventually left the Dublin U.I., of his own volition, in April 1793.
59 The surviving minutes of the society fail to say when his election took place. Carey, Appeal, p. 8, only says the election was ‘later’, when the vote was 43 to 10.
militant. In Ireland, the Volunteers revived and a new National Guard was set up in Dublin, organized by Tandy along revolutionary French lines (with 'sans-culotte' trousers and with the crown on their buttons replaced by a cap of liberty). In both London and Dublin, fears of insurrection increased. The British and Irish governments considered a crackdown, the latter initially to concentrate, in Dublin, on militants associated with the Catholic Convention which was due to meet in early December. As Drennan correctly surmised, a primary objective of the government was to prevent the opposition from spreading its doctrines; 'our press is to be put under lock and key'. Carey, as an open supporter of the militant catholics, was to be one of the first victims of the counterattack.

On 3 November Carey reprinted verbatim from the *Northern Star* a paragraph on the public rejoicing in Belfast at news of the French republic's victory over the army of the duke of Brunswick. On 7 November attorney-general Arthur Wolfe informed him he would be prosecuted for seditious libel. Carey immediately sought the advice and assistance of the I.U. society. At their meeting of 23 November, with Drennan in the president’s chair, it was unanimously agreed that 'Carey do receive such support as said committee [of Constitution] may think he stands in need of, as the cause of his prosecution is that of the people and of this society in particular'. In practice, the support given was minimal, being no more than some sloppy legal advice from Simon Butler which left Carey with a writ of Capias (the first stage of outlawry) hanging over his head until Drennan’s trial in 1794.

Worse was to follow. On 9 December the privy council in Dublin issued a proclamation banning all Volunteer organizations assembling in arms, a direct response to the new battalion’s decision to assemble in the capital. A few days later, after the Volunteers had reluctantly obeyed the proclamation, Drennan read out to the Dublin U.I. society an Address to the Volunteers of Ireland, in which they were called upon to arm immediately. It was agreed to publish the ‘Address’ in selected newspapers and as a handbill. Carey, who

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60 Carey joined the National Battalion and was, he claimed, part of a committee which succeeded in abolishing the ‘mischievous’ button with the cap of liberty motif. Carey, *Appeal*, p. 51.


64 Carey, *Appeal*, pp. 14–15; McDowell, ‘Proceedings’, p. 40. Assuming the society’s lawyers would defend him, Carey did not employ counsel, a mistake he later regretted when he was abandoned.

65 As a further, if minor, example of the way historians (unwittingly?) give only half a story, the case of what happened after the proclamation was issued is instructive. Most of the new battalion decided not to wear their uniforms that day, but a handful did so. Historians always mention one by name: Archibald Hamilton Rowan. No one has ever mentioned that Carey, too, deliberately paraded Dublin in his green uniform on that day (he wanted to show that his buttons did not proclaim ‘Liberty and Equality, and No King’, as rumour suggested). Carey himself would not have been surprised by these historians. Carey *Appeal*, pp. 85–6.
The Carey–Drennan dispute had attended the meeting, was asked at the adjournment by Drennan to publish it in his *National Evening Star*, copying it from Thomas McDonnell’s *Hibernian Journal*, as the original was needed for Randal McAllister to print the handbill. This Carey did on 18 December.66

However one interprets the law of the time, the ‘Address’ was a gross seditious libel, reflecting the inflamed passions and heightened sensitivities of the reformers. At least five people in Dublin were eventually to be indicted as a consequence of its publication, the first being Hamilton Rowan, who, for distributing copies of the ‘Address’, was arrested on the 21st, although his trial did not occur until January 1794, when he was imprisoned for two years. Warrants were issued for the three printers in Dublin, but strangely Drennan was left untouched. Larkin has suggested that John Pollock, a lawyer working for the government and a former neighbour of Drennan’s when he lived in Newry, may have protected the doctor in the hope of using him to obtain more evidence on the society’s leaders.67 This is feasible, but it is unlikely that the government would have allowed the author of the ‘Address’ to remain free, if they had known his identity. Quite possibly, however, of this they were uncertain. Their informer, Thomas Collins, had muddled up his doctors; his report of the meeting named ‘Doctor Bourke’ rather than Drennan as the reader. And Bourke was only small-fry (‘please to observe that Bourke is only the puppet of Simon Butler…’).68 Whatever the reason for Drennan’s good fortune in December 1792, the government remained committed to prosecuting the author, if and when information became available.69

The two indictments facing Carey were disastrous for his business; as soon as they were common knowledge, his creditors called in his debts. Advertisements in his newspaper declined sharply. He soon had to sell his newspaper, unfortunately to Randall McAllister (the printer of the ‘Address’ in handbill form), who failed to pay Carey before being imprisoned for seditious libel, following which he emigrated to America. In May 1793 the *National Evening Star* closed down.70

Early in 1793 Carey was forced to flee Dublin and change his name, as he was convinced that the secret committee of the house of lords wanted him to testify about the U.I. society’s activities. On his return, his friends urged the society to open a subscription for him, which, however, raised the miserable sum of just eight guineas.71 For Carey, this was an insult which only served to show that the ‘Resolution Mongers’ of the society, otherwise known as ‘Law,
Physic and Co’, had no interest in defending their less well-connected members. And he had a strong case. Not only were the society’s printers left in prison without financial support, but also, when Simon Butler and Oliver Bond were sent to Newgate for offences committed while they were president and secretary of the society, very large sums were raised on their behalf. Indeed, the affair became a scandal. Seventy-one members of the society subscribed a guinea for the prisoners and, in rotation, each gave a dinner for eight (costing another guinea) ‘in their rooms at the jail’. In addition, £350 was collected towards their fines. But keeping the dignity of the society’s officers became a source of discord even amongst the elite. As Drennan’s sister reported to her husband, ‘They are playing the deuce at Newgate in regard to expense which is to come off the Society and, therefore, [is] mean and unworthy conduct in them’. One account included £12 for fruit and £100 for wine. A comparison of the subscription raised on his behalf with the money spent on the society’s leaders could only confirm Carey’s long-held suspicions that a class barrier existed in the society. As he wrote later when discussing how the society dealt with the two printers arrested in December 1792 compared with its treatment of Rowan and Tandy:

On what this evident and unjustifiable partiality is grounded, we are left to guess. Whether it was deemed that suffering in the public cause was meritorious only in men of a certain privileged [sic] order, such as LAW, PHYSIC, and their adherents of a particular rank; or, that it was deemed the vulgar names of men from behind their counters, might reflect dishonour on prosecution, and that therefore they ought to be kept in the back ground; or that prosecution could reflect no honour on such men: or that the stock of honour to be gained by the prosecutions in question, was only just sufficient to grace the two names in the resolution; or that these two names only could reflect honour upon the public case; it has not yet been avowed by the parties.

Carey’s anger at his own treatment can be accepted as one motivation for his assault on the society, without denying his perceptive analysis of the general malaise within the Dublin radical movement, which was based on a recognition that the U.I. leaders were as ‘aristocratic’ as the government party.

By the time Carey felt it safe to return to Dublin, where he remained closeted at home, he was contemplating quitting the country. Before finalizing his decision, however, he decided once more to appeal to the U.I. society for their promised assistance. Slipping out of his house to the U.I. meeting in Back Lane on 23 March, Carey gave notice of his intention to put his case before the next weekly meeting. There, on the 29th, it was decided that the Committee of the Constitution should make recommendations on his case. Unknown to him, however, the informer Collins had told the authorities of his movements. As Carey left the meeting, he was arrested and taken to the local

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72 Carey, Appeal, p. 28.
73 Mrs McTier to Samuel McTier (c. Apr. 1793); Drennan to Samuel McTier, (c. Apr.–May 1793), Drennan letters, pp. 155, 160. Collins later claimed that the final wine bill was £2,000. McDowell, ‘Proceedings’, p. 85 (16 Aug. 1793).
74 Carey, Appeal, p. 21.
He was followed by a number of society members, who milled about in the station until the policeman asked all those not intending to stand bail for Carey to leave. Perhaps unsurprisingly, all – including Drennan who, reading the warrant, knew Carey had been arrested for printing his ‘Address’ – swiftly departed, leaving Carey to spend a night in the cells before finding bail the next day.76

His arrest put Carey’s plans for expatriation in doubt. If he fled precipitately while still on bail, his sureties, Thomas Wright the surgeon and Constantine Mathews the catholic distiller (both United Irishmen), would lose their money. Accordingly, Carey attended the next meeting of the society, where he put forward his plan for emigrating if the society would take over bail provisions from his sureties (i.e. if the society would guarantee paying £200 on his departure). His request was passed on to the Committee of Correspondence.77 Whether the committee indeed reported back and the society voted to support Carey are matters of dispute. Carey claimed that at the 19 April meeting a motion for his support was passed unanimously, but there seems to be no way of confirming this, for Collins’ reports fail to mention it.78

What appears to have happened is that Carey’s case was brought up at a time when the society was under enormous pressure, both financially and from the authorities. Numerous pleas for assistance had been put forward; faced with the costs of supporting their leaders in prison (the secret committee of the house of lords imprisoned Dr James Reynolds as well as Butler and Bond), the menu peuple were abandoned. Possibly, the Committee of Correspondence, at a time when the society seemed to be falling apart and membership was diminishing, simply forgot to make a recommendation on Carey’s case. Alternatively, initial acceptance of responsibility for Carey may have suddenly evaporated once he was arrested.

The latter seems more likely, for collective amnesia cannot explain or justify the long catalogue of disappointments Carey suffered between June and October 1793, as each of the U.I. leaders he approached – the Sheares brothers, Emmet, Leonard McNally (the informer) and Rowan – fobbed him off with one excuse or another. Rowan candidly told him that his case could not be considered because funds had been exhausted: ‘I could not have expected that these men would have abandoned the press and the printer, for the wine cask, and the vintner’, was Carey’s caustic response.79

Finally, at a U.I. meeting on 11 October, a motion, properly proposed and seconded, for the society to take responsibility for paying Carey’s securities led to heated debate, in which McNally the spy appeared deliberately to foment discord; Simon Butler the president repeatedly refused to take a vote; the

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76 Carey, Appeal, p. 56; [W. P. Carey], ‘To the members of the Society of United Irishmen of Dublin’, Dublin Evening Post [hereafter DEP], 15 Apr. 1794.
77 McDowell, ‘Proceedings’, p. 73.
78 Carey, Appeal, pp. 58–9. Carey later claimed that the leaf of the journal confirming the society’s support had been torn out. This cannot be verified.
79 Carey, Appeal, pp. 61–86, quotation at p. 84.
solemn vows of Wright and Mathews that Carey had been arrested for publishing the 'Address' were ignored; and Drennan sat silent and unmoved. Eventually, the issue was sent to a committee, consisting of Wright, Rowan and McNally. Carey and his supporters knew that the issue was lost. The denouement was relatively swift. Under the pseudonym 'William Tell', Carey attacked the society in the *Morning Post*. Summoned to explain himself before the society, he mischievously 'complained of the society erecting itself into a court of inquisition and following the practice of the secret committee of the House of Lords, and threatened to publish the whole of the examination'. He was expelled and his name erased from the membership roll.

VI

In his sympathetic snapshot, Brian Inglis writes that Carey 'provides a good example of the fate of an able and intelligent journalist, who is persuaded to sacrifice his integrity'. In fact, a good case can be made for claiming that Carey neither lost his integrity nor abandoned his long-held principles. For months after his expulsion from the U.I. society he vainly tried to obtain members' support by taking his case to the public. Twice he warned the society, and Drennan in particular, that he would have to give up the author of the 'Address' to government if his demands were not met, justifying himself on the impeccable Lockean grounds of self-preservation. Eventually, in May 1794 Carey succumbed to government blandishments, fully seven months after the Castle's agents had first courted him. Informer he became, but only on one issue, that of the author of the 'Address'.

By April 1795, nearly a year after Drennan's trial, during which time he had been unable to walk the streets of Dublin without being jeered at and, on one occasion, assaulted, Carey's views on the leaders of the Irish radicals had remained unchanged. 'Our Democracy here is unworthy of the name,' he wrote to his brother Mathew in Philadelphia, 'it is nothing but a contemptible aristocracy in disguise', with 'no interest in the common man.' He still insisted that his objective had always been to help those whom the United Irishmen had neglected. Purely altruistic Carey was not, but his experiences had apparently failed to diminish his commitment to the people. 'Friends encourage me', he continued, 'to re-establish [my] paper and embark in politics and become a partisan of that cause to which I have ever been attached and to which I was so near a victim.'

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81 The committee reported that they were unable to discover why Carey had been arrested. *DEP*, 15 Apr. 1794.
82 McDowell, 'Proceedings', pp. 92–3 (8 Nov. 1793).
83 Inglis, *Freedom of the press*, p. 68.
84 'I am a man, and self-preservation is the first law of nature.' *DEP*, 14 Apr. 1794.
86 Ironically, Drennan escaped punishment mainly because Carey's testimony at the trial was no more and no less what he believed to be true. He neither embellished nor lied.
87 W. P. Carey to Mathew Carey, 1 Apr. 1793, Lea and Febiger Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
His friends were too sanguine and naïve. Carey’s new newspaper, begun in September 1795, was kept afloat only by subsidies from the government, although no attempt was made to ensure it followed the Castle’s political line. Perhaps there was no need; according to Francis Higgins, editor of the *Freeman’s Journal* and a government informer, by 1797 fewer than twenty copies of each edition of Carey’s newspaper circulated.88 This is probably an underestimate, but certainly Carey was losing considerable sums each week. A policy of intimidation by the United Irishmen ensured that no ‘man from behind the counter’ dared place advertisements. Coffee houses and inns which took his newspaper lost their customers; newsmen selling it on street corners were beaten up.89

One might understand if Carey, faced with the United Irishmen’s determination to ensure he never again made a living in Ireland, had given up his political principles. That he did so might be inferred from his joining the government-sponsored yeomanry after the abortive descent on Bantry Bay by a French fleet in December 1796. But according to Higgins, he was ‘not an attached loyal subject… he is known to be an avowed republican in principle’. If by republican Higgins was referring to the now-underground coalition of United Irishmen and Defenders, he was wrong about Carey. He had never favoured revolution as an option; petition and remonstrance, ‘steadily supported… by the courage and perseverance of the great body of the people’, were the only means to obtain political reform. Nor did he approve of secrecy in political movements; it ‘is the mother and nurse of crimes… patriotic virtue is a plant which becomes barren, and engenders rottenness and worms in darkness and obscurity’.90 Such views, however, by 1796 were almost totally out of step with the realities of Irish politics.

Nevertheless, Higgins was right to be suspicious of Carey, for his allegiance remained with the *menu peuple* rather than with the authorities, as was shown by his activities in the yeomanry. Each company had elected a standing committee, which met once or twice a week to establish rules and regulations by which men in the ranks were to be governed. This form of democracy Carey obviously relished, for he was accused of ‘exciting’ the men and ‘haranguing ag[ain]st the officers’. When two sergeants were court-martialled for abandoning their exercises without permission, Carey drew up a protest against the court’s authority, which was sent to the commander-in-chief. Needless to say, he was expelled from the yeomanry, but his actions, once again in support of the oppressed little people, had been in harmony with his earlier-expressed opinions.91

Such consistency cut no ice with the increasingly revolutionary United Irishmen. Carey was proscribed by name in the *Union Star*, the violent U.I.

news-sheet. He was 'one who ought to be avoided and discountenanced, and whom it would be an act of virtue to assassinate'. Rightly fearful for his safety, he withdrew to England in June 1798, as the rebellion broke out in full force. Returning to Ireland a few months later, he was again subjected to threats and intimidation. Eventually he was forced to settle permanently in England.

VII

The Drennan trial of 1794 was more significant than most historians have suggested, for it represented the culmination of a simmering conflict within Dublin radicalism which set aspiring middle-class professionals against middling-class master artisans and small shopkeepers. This conflict never burst into open flame, but remained muted, a nagging rumbling to which only Carey persistently referred. There are a number of reasons for this. Most important is the fact that the major ideological difference between the factions – representative versus direct democracy – in the political circumstances of the time remained of only abstract concern. Before 1795, the United Irish radicals of both hues had a common enemy, the Castle, and common aims, parliamentary reform and full catholic emancipation. The issue of a 'natural' leadership was limited to the running of the U.I. society itself, not to the organization of a possible new government, although the more astute among the society's less prominent members may have made the theoretical connection.

Moreover, those who shared the concerns of Carey were the least socially experienced of the society's members and the least likely to become involved in debates, even if they were so encouraged, which appears unlikely. McDowell has suggested that 'interminable political theorizing' in the society 'may have bored a good many members'. More likely, the very significant decline in attendances in 1793 was evidence that the commercial and industrial classes, who made up two-thirds of the membership and who were the source of Carey's support, had become disillusioned with the monopolistic stranglehold which the professionals kept on the organization. By the time that Carey had to defend himself in the society, active membership had already declined precipitately. Instead of trying to wrest the initiative from the professionals, the disillusioned had just melted away.

The exact extent to which Carey's analysis of the Dublin society reflected a groundswell of egalitarian opinion frustrated by the monopolizing tendencies of the United Irish leaders thus remains uncertain, although it seems probable that a significant minority of the members shared his views. Undoubtedly, Carey had pinpointed a major weakness in the Dublin U.I. society, one which,

92 Carey to Hardwicke, 30 Mar. 1801, I.S.P.O. 620/49/94.
93 McDowell, Age of imperialism, p. 388.
95 The disillusionment of some members may have been combined with dismay at the failure of the parliamentary reform bill in 1793 and growing Castle intimidation to persuade them to leave the society.
ironically, Drennan himself later acknowledged. In 1802 Drennan confessed to his sister what Carey had known for ten years, that the United Irish leaders’ aims had not been consistent with those of the men behind the counters: ‘I always liked the persons of our leading democrats much less than their professed principles, tho’ I saw in most of them aristocracy in a shabby coat, aristocratic self-sufficiency, aristocratic vengeance, aristocratic intolerance under a Maratism of manners and of language.’96 Carey, busily resurrecting his career in Britain, would have concurred.