

Police and Public Order in Eighteenth-Century Dublin

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I

IN RECENT YEARS A NUMBER OF HISTORIANS have been at pains to point out that the patterns and nature of public disorders in eighteenth-century Ireland are largely comparable with those that existed elsewhere in contemporary Western Europe. Irish riots and popular protests, it has been suggested, saw ‘a controlled and discriminating use of violence’, and were characterised by their ‘defensive, ritualised’ nature.¹ Loss of life rarely resulted from such disturbances, neither through the actions of the rioters, nor through those of the authorities.² In short, public order in Ireland, at least for the first three-quarters of the century, can be seen as fitting neatly into the wider pre-industrial European perspective.³ In the specific case of Dublin too, examples can be cited that conform to this model. For example, perceived shortages of food, be it bread, potatoes or oatmeal, led to riots aimed specifically at preventing exports and lowering prices.⁴ Tradesmen and artisans protested about cheap imported cloth by destroying clothes and occasionally looting shops, rather than by direct attacks on merchants or their customers. In any case, such actions were effectively being sanctioned by the rhetoric of the political classes, as Swift called for the burning of everything English, and scarves of Irish linen were ostentatiously handed out to the mourners at the funeral of a

¹ S.J. Connolly, ‘Violence and order in the eighteenth century’ in P. O’Flanagan, P. Ferguson and K. Whelan, eds, *Rural Ireland, 1600–1900: modernisation and change* (Cork, 1985), p. 53; S.J. Connolly, *Religion, law and power: the making of Protestant Ireland, 1660–1760* (Oxford, 1992), p. 270.

² T. Bartlett, ‘An end to moral economy: the Irish militia disturbances of 1793’, *Past and Present*, 99 (1983), 41–2.

³ C. Tilly, ‘Collective violence in a European perspective’ in H.D. Graham and T.R. Gurr, eds, *Violence in America: historical and comparative perspectives* (London, 1979), pp. 83–118.

⁴ *Dublin Intelligence*, 18 Mar 1729 and 9, 14, 16 June 1731; *Faulkner’s Dublin Journal*, 31 May–3 Jun 1740; Boulter to Newcastle, 13 Mar 1728, in G. Faulkner, ed., *Letters written by his Excellency Hugh Boulter DD, Lord Primate of all Ireland, to several ministers of state in England, and some others* (Dublin, 1769–70), vol. II, p. 287.

former Patriot politician.⁵ Political riots themselves, such as those occasioned by the Pretender's birthday, which invariably saw 'the popish rabble come down to fight the Whig mob', were essentially a series of 'ritualised clashes'.⁶ Even when loss of life did occur at the hands of rioters, such as in the case of the Dublin thief-taker Paul Farrell, it was the result of a highly focused outburst of violence, accompanied by a carnivalesque travesty of the trappings of the criminal-justice system.⁷ Reports were even made of regular recreational riots, in which large numbers of young men engaged in sword-play and thuggery, though with little lasting harm. They were, one observer suggested, like 'a rubber at whist play'd for amusement'.⁸

At the same time, the authorities seem to have displayed little concern about the situation. Fining and imprisonment were 'the usual punishment for riots' inflicted by the courts, though whipping or a spell in the pillory could be ordered for particularly heinous offenders.⁹ On occasion rioters might be required to provide a surety for their good behaviour or face transportation, and from 1760 a change in recruiting policy in Ireland meant that even Catholics might be placed into the armed forces as a punishment.¹⁰ But, as no public-order offence was defined as a felony, offenders were not liable to execution.¹¹

In fact it was not until 1787 that Ireland gained a Riot Act, and even then the situation in Dublin played little part in its introduction. The act was rather a response to growing agrarian agitation in Munster than urban disorder. Neither of the two members for the city of Dublin even contributed to the debate on the bill.¹² Earlier attempts to introduce a general riot bill had failed in 1715 and 1719.¹³ In September 1729, the lord lieutenant's speech at the opening of the Dublin parliament included the observation that various measures, including a riot act, might be necessary 'to provide for the

⁵ *Pue's Occurrences*, 21–25 and 25–28 May 1734; *Dublin Journal*, 14–18 May 1734; *Dublin Evening Post*, 14–18 May 1734; Connolly, *Religion, law and power*, p. 93.

⁶ Boulter to Newcastle, 11 Jun 1726, in G. Faulkner, ed., *Letters*, II, p. 81; T.C. Barnard, 'The uses of 23 October 1641 and Irish Protestant celebrations', *English Historical Review*, 106 (1991), 914.

⁷ N. Garnham, 'The short career of Paul Farrell: a brief consideration of law enforcement in eighteenth-century Dublin', *Eighteenth Century Ireland*, 11 (1996), 46–52; *Dublin Journal*, 20–24 Aug 1734.

⁸ Bracegirdle to Abercorn, 18 Dec 1753 (PRONI, Abercorn papers, T/2541/IA/2/176); *Faulkner's Dublin Journal*, 22–25 Mar 1740 and 8–11 Mar 1746.

⁹ Causes wherein whipping is appointed by act of parliament [c.1737] (Dublin City Archives, Robinson MSS, 35.39–43); *Dublin Intelligence*, 23 Dec 1734.

¹⁰ For example, *Dublin Gazette*, 12 Jan 1760; T. Bartlett, 'A weapon of war yet untried: Irish Catholics and the armed forces of the Crown, 1760–1830' in T.G. Fraser and K. Jeffery, eds, *Men, women and war: Historical Studies XVII* (Dublin, 1993), pp. 65–83.

¹¹ E. Bullingbroke, *The duty and authority of justices of the peace and parish officers in Ireland* (Dublin, 1766), p. 623; M. Travers, *The justice of the peace for Ireland* (Dublin, 1750), p. 444.

¹² G. O'Brien, 'An account of a debate in the Irish Parliament, 1787', *Analecta Hibernica*, 33 (1986), 127–98; *The parliamentary register: or, a history of the proceedings and debates of the House of Commons of Ireland*, vol. VII (Dublin, 1787), pp. 180–201, 205–32, 234.

¹³ *HCJI*, vol. III, pp. 35 and 196.

peace of this large and populous city'. Despite this, a general riot bill again failed to make any progress.¹⁴ In 1730 however, a specific Dublin riot bill was introduced into the Irish Lords. On reaching the lower house though, it was rejected on what were apparently purely political grounds. Archbishop Boulter of Armagh, one of the main promoters of the bill, said it was thrown out simply because it was a product of the privy council. Sir Marmaduke Coghill, a member of the Commons, agreed; but added that some members of the house had specifically taken umbrage at the fact that Boulter and the lord chancellor, the administration's primary political managers, had promoted it so vigorously.¹⁵

Such cavalier attitudes triumphed despite the fact that a scandal was emerging, in which various officers in the capital were revealed to be profiting from rewards paid for apprehending rioters. A number of magistrates and constables in Dublin were eventually dismissed for allegedly instigating riots simply in order to claim such rewards.¹⁶ Even a later claim by the master of the rolls that he was 'ramming a riot act down [the] throats' of Irish politicians came to naught.¹⁷ In fact, it was Cork in 1771, whose population was said to be notoriously 'riotous' and to combine 'the boorishness and brutality of a seaport' with 'the rigid bigotry of a low Irish papist', which acquired the first riot act in Ireland, rather than Dublin.¹⁸

It should be noted however, that disorders in Dublin were both regular and comparatively frequent during the first half of the eighteenth century. A survey of the surviving newspaper sources suggests that, over the twelve years from 1724 to 1735 there were, on average, half a dozen 'popular disturbances' annually. This figure is probably at best a minimum estimate, yet it still suggests that Dublin was a rather more disordered city than the far more populous London of the late eighteenth century.¹⁹

Official attitudes towards disorder in Dublin seem to have changed sharply in the 1780s though. Two years prior to the passing of what was 'to all intents and purposes a Riot Act', Dublin had witnessed a major reform of its policing arrangements. At the opening of the century the Irish capital was policed by a mixed force of watchmen and constables, whose positions had been established under medieval legislation.²⁰ In 1715 the Dublin watch had been reformed. The new watch was to be purely Protestant, and to operate on 365 days each year, rather than just during the winter months. They were

¹⁴ *HCI*, vol. III, pp. 579, 585.

¹⁵ *HCI*, vol. III, p. 638; Boulter to Newcastle, 19 Mar 1730, in Faulkner, ed., *Letters*, vol. II, pp. 358–9; Coghill to Southwell, 18 Apr 1730 (BL, Add. MS 21123, fo. 1).

¹⁶ *HCI*, vol. III, Appx CCCXCI.

¹⁷ Rigby to Wilmot, 26 Dec 1759 (PRONI, Wilmot papers, T/3019/3970).

¹⁸ 11, 12 Geo. III c. 18; J. Kelly, ed., *The letters of Lord Chief Baron Willes to the Earl of Warwick* (Aberystwyth, 1990), pp. 47–8.

¹⁹ D.F. Clifford, 'Popular disturbances in early eighteenth-century Dublin' (MA thesis, University of Ulster, 1994), pp. 18–20; J. Stevenson, *Popular disturbances in England, 1700–1870* (London, 1979), table 14.2, p. 306.

²⁰ *Parliamentary register*, vol. VII, p. 189, for the quotation; J.P. Starr, 'The enforcing of law and order in eighteenth-century Ireland' (PhD thesis, Trinity College Dublin, 1968).

to be equipped with lamps, staffs and halberds, which were to be paid for by a levy of 3d. 'watch money' on each household in the city. The watch were to be supervised by the mayor and aldermen of the city, as opposed to coming under the control of the city's constables.²¹ While the precise origins of the act are obscure, given the political climate of the day, it was probably as much an attempt to deter political dissent and reinforce the emergent Whig hegemony as to control crime. The 1713 election in Dublin had been noted for its riotous conduct. At least two deaths had occurred, and one leading Whig politician had declared that he had genuinely been in fear of his life.²² The 1715 act not only removed politically suspect Catholics from the watch, but also vested its control in the solidly Whig corporation.

Further reforms followed in 1723. With respect to the watch, control was now removed from the city elders and given over to a number of supervisors within each parish. These were to be selected by the various vestries. The level of 'watch money' was doubled, but those paying were henceforth excused watch duty. In the case of the city's constables, provision was made for nominated men to employ substitutes, though all innkeepers and Catholics were totally barred from service. Appointments were to be made by the vestries, and constables were to oversee the activities of the watch.²³ Again the origins and specific intent of the act remain obscure, but it was perhaps most important in that it excluded Catholics from the office of constable; a precaution that had lapsed in the provinces since 1719. In fact, outside Dublin it was probably the case that most parish constables, whose duties were onerous and unpaid, were Catholics. The heads of a bill specifically intended to prevent Catholics holding the offices of high or petty constables were introduced into the Irish Commons in 1739, but failed to make any progress, and were never revived.²⁴

The next major development in Dublin's policing came more than half a century later. In 1778 legislation was passed which established a system of dual control over the capital's police. Watchmen and constables were now to be appointed and overseen by parish 'watch committees' elected by the vestries, but chaired by members of the Dublin corporation.²⁵

In short, over the first eight decades of the eighteenth century, Dublin's policing arrangements underwent a series of relatively minor reforms. These can be seen as reflecting the growth of the city as an urban centre, but they also recognised the

²¹ 2 Geo. I c. 10.

²² *A true account of the riot committed at the Tholsel on Friday 6 November 1713* (Dublin, 1713); *Sir William Fownes and Tucker's friend's vindication, or a truer account of the bloody and barbarous murder committed at the Tholsel on Friday 6 of this inst November 1713* (Dublin, 1713); Alan Brodrick to Thomas Brodrick, 7 Nov 1713 (Guildford Muniment Room, Midleton MS 1248/3, fo. 132).

²³ 10 Geo. I c. 3.

²⁴ Power to —, 22 Feb 1722, printed in W.P. Burke, *The Irish priests in penal times (1660–1760)* (Waterford, 1914), p. 423; Robert Ward to Michael Ward, 14 Apr 1744 (PRONI, Castleward papers, D/2092/1/6/83); *HCJI*, vol. iv, p. 308.

²⁵ 17, 18 Geo. III c. 43.

importance of politico-religious considerations in policing the capital. Catholics were barred from participation in the system, and its control was to be retained in the hands of the politically dependable. Police reforms were not, at least after 1715, direct responses to public disorder. In fact, those of 1723 and 1778 actually preceded periods of disturbance, as first Wood's halfpence and then the issue of free trade sparked disorders in the capital.²⁶

II

In 1786 however, Dublin saw the embodiment of the first 'recognisably modern police system' in the British Isles. It was to be armed and employ over 450 men, some of whom were to be mounted. It was headed by a number of commissioners and magistrates, selected by the lord lieutenant from the city's corporation, and operated on a city-wide basis. The parliamentary act which established this force was, in most of its particulars, a copy of the unsuccessful London police bill of the previous year.²⁷ Given the controversy the Irish act aroused, and the levels of expenditure it entailed, it is extremely unlikely it was enacted solely in mimicry of the imperial capital. Rather, a number of specific developments had necessitated the move.

Although it has been suggested that there was a general 'backdrop of rising crime' at this time, even if true, this was probably of little relevance.²⁸ The failed London bill has invariably been seen as a 'direct response' to the Gordon riots of 1780, and fundamentally 'a crowd control rather than a crime control measure'.²⁹ The implication therefore is that the Dublin act too was inspired by public disorder, and designed to combat it. Exactly why the new police were thought to be necessary at this particular juncture is open to debate. S. H. Palmer has suggested that crucial factors were 'the political excitement and violence' of the period, and cites in particular the invasion of parliament by a hostile crowd in April 1784 as the prime catalyst for the act.³⁰ We should remember however, that a rather more violent and sustained disturbance, which also resulted in an invasion of parliament, had occurred in 1759, without such consequences.³¹ During the 1740s Charles Lucas, the

²⁶ P. McNally, 'Wood's halfpence, Carteret and the government of Ireland', *Irish Historical Studies*, 30 (1997), 354–76; *Belfast Newsletter*, 16–19 Nov 1779; *Saunders's Newsletter*, 16 Nov 1779.

²⁷ K. Boyle, 'Police in Ireland before the Union: III', *Irish Jurist*, new ser., 8 (1973), 62.

²⁸ B. Henry, *Dublin hanged: crime, law enforcement and punishment in late eighteenth-century Dublin* (Dublin, 1994), p. 14.

²⁹ R. Volger, *Reading the Riot Act: the magistracy, the police and the army in civil disorder* (Milton Keynes, 1991), pp. 17–18; D. Philips, "'A New Engine of Power and Authority": the institutionalisation of law-enforcement in England, 1780–1830', in V.A.C. Gattrel, D. Lenman and C. Parker, eds, *Crime and the law: the social history of crime in Western Europe since 1500* (London, 1980), pp. 164–5.

³⁰ S.H. Palmer, *Police and protest in England and Ireland, 1780–1850* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 92–3.

³¹ S. Murphy, 'The Dublin anti-Union riot of 3 December 1759' in G. O'Brien, ed., *Parliament, politics and people: essays in the history of eighteenth-century Ireland* (Dublin, 1989), pp. 49–68.

Dublin radical, had also created a great deal of ‘political excitement’, but again there were no comparable reforms.³²

In the 1780s, however, there were a number of other contributory factors. In the first place, the frequency of disorders in Dublin seems to have increased markedly at this time. Gangs of tradesmen and artisans wandered the city during the summer months of 1784 tarring and feathering importers of foreign goods, workers prepared to undercut the wage rates of their fellows, and those who informed on the actions of these vigilantes.³³ At the same time, the usual agencies of crowd control were proving rather inadequate. The army committed a number of *faux pas*, including shooting dead five men when a crowd attempted to rescue a man being whipped around the city. Additionally a group of officers from the city’s garrison became involved in a celebrated brawl in a Dublin inn.³⁴ Relations between Dublin’s civilian population and the military had been less than harmonious before, but now the hostility seems to have reached new levels.³⁵

Meanwhile, the Volunteers—the unofficial Protestant militia—who had become very active in policing the capital, seem to have now abrogated these duties. Instances even occurred where Volunteers sided with the crowd against the lawful authorities. The general mark of men involved in Volunteering had fallen, so that both the leaders of the administration and the Patriot opposition alike could condemn them as ‘the dregs of the people’.³⁶ The proposition that Catholics be admitted to the Volunteers’ ranks may have given the situation an added piquancy. The apparent growing radicalism of elements within the Dublin Corporation must also have excited concern.³⁷ After all, these men had a crucial role in managing the city’s civil police. In essence, the whole situation was chaotic, and the central administration was genuinely in danger of losing control of the capital.³⁸ The economic situation of Ireland could only serve to aggravate the situation; and the rapidly expanding population of the metropolis, and its probable shift from a Protestant to a Catholic majority, may have further exacerbated the position.³⁹

In short, it seems that the public-order situation in Dublin reached something of a hiatus in the mid-1780s. Disorders became more frequent, and were perceived as more of a threat owing to the pre-existing conditions of political uncertainty, demographic

³² S. Murphy, ‘Charles Lucas and the Dublin election of 1748–9’, *Parliamentary History*, 2 (1983), 3–32.

³³ *Belfast Newsletter*, 16–20 Jul 1784; *Saunders’s Newsletter*, 13–17 Aug 1784.

³⁴ *Belfast Newsletter*, 24–27 Aug 1784.

³⁵ S.J. Connolly, ‘The defence of Protestant Ireland, 1660–1760’ in T. Bartlett and K. Jeffrey, eds, *A military history of Ireland* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 245–6.

³⁶ P. O’Snodaigh, ‘Some police and military aspects of the Irish Volunteers’, *Irish Sword*, 13 (1979), 217–29; *Parliamentary register*, iv, pp. 227, 238.

³⁷ J. Hill, ‘The politics of Dublin Corporation: 1760–92’ in D. Dickson, D. Keogh and K. Whelan, eds, *The United Irishmen: republicanism and rebellion* (Dublin, 1990), pp. 88–101.

³⁸ J. Kelly, *Prelude to Union: Anglo-Irish politics in the 1780s* (Cork, 1992), pp. 80–1.

³⁹ D. Dickson, ‘“Centres of Motion”: Irish cities and the origins of popular politics’ in L. Bergeron and L.M. Cullen, eds, *Culture et pratiques politiques en France et en Irlande, XVII^e–XVIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1991), p. 107.

change and social dislocation. One response of the Dublin administration was the 1786 reform of the police. This established a new means of exerting social control, and undercut the power and influence of the increasingly suspect Volunteers and corporation.

The next major development in Dublin's policing occurred in 1795, when the 1786 act was superseded by new legislation. This new act split the responsibility for policing the city between the parishes, the corporation and the Castle. A total force of more than 600 constables and watchmen was to be in part supervised by magistrates appointed by the lord mayor and common council of the corporation, but also by parish directors. Senior appointments were subject to the veto of the lord lieutenant. The arms issued to the previous force were withdrawn, and replaced by the more familiar staffs and rattles.⁴⁰ This development was facilitated by several factors, not least of which was the emergence of the Dublin Corporation as an inherently conservative, not to say reactionary body.⁴¹ Simultaneously, an Irish militia force had finally been embodied, and the Dublin garrison continued to supply troops for contingency purposes.⁴² Thus the political threat from within the city's own administration had passed, and the availability of ancillary policing agencies had been restored.

Exactly how effective the old police had proved during their nine-year existence is uncertain. Certainly they did, on occasion, fail in their duties—including an incident in 1789, when a party of policemen had to be rescued from an angry crowd by the military.⁴³ However, to suggest that the police had been wholly inefficient 'as an instrument of social control' is to ignore the fact that invasions of parliament, such as those that had taken place in 1759, 1779 and 1784, had no counterpart in the years 1786–95.⁴⁴

The three years following 1795 saw neither the levels of violence nor the frequency of disorders that had occurred in the early 1780s. In fact, the city was notably subdued. Even the election of 1797 was quiet. This was in stark contrast to that in 1790, when two men had been killed and the army had been called onto the streets.⁴⁵ This apparent lull in public disorder probably resulted from a number of considerations. While there was now an Irish Riot Act in place, in truth it probably had little effect on the overall situation. More importantly, these years saw a transformation of Dublin's popular movements. For Smyth, these years saw the final move from 'pre-industrial crowd to revolutionary underground'.⁴⁶ The United Irish organisation had, from 1794, become a secret, oath-bound, revolutionary organisation; while the erstwhile agrarian

⁴⁰ Palmer, *Police and protest*, pp. 134–6.

⁴¹ J. Hill, *From patriots to unionists: Dublin civic politics and Irish Protestant patriotism, 1660–1840* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 238–53.

⁴² H. McAnally, *The Irish militia, 1793–1816: a social and military study* (Dublin, 1949), pp. 1–17.

⁴³ *Saunders's Newsletter*, 2 May 1789.

⁴⁴ J. Smyth, *The men of no property: Irish radicals and popular politics in the late eighteenth century* (Dublin, 1992), p. 39.

⁴⁵ *Dublin Evening Post*, 13 May 1790.

⁴⁶ Smyth, *Men of no property*, pp. 121–56.

movement, the Defenders, had begun to infiltrate the city.⁴⁷ Opposition to the central authorities in Dublin was taking on a new form. Equally important was the fact that the government had adopted a concerted policy of aggressive policing. Utilising the city's garrison, militiamen, and, from 1796, the new yeomanry force, the Castle moved successfully against possible leaders of disorders. It also deployed the military rapidly against those incidents which did occur.

The outcome of the situation was that in 1798 Dublin, 'the key to the planned insurrection', failed to turn. Apart from a few skirmishes on the city's outskirts, the capital was quiet.⁴⁸ Neither the political rebellion of Ulster nor the series of pogroms of Wexford was recreated in Dublin. The failure of the Dublin United Irishmen effectively to reorganise on military lines, the arrests of the revolutionary leadership by the military, and the pre-emptive exertions of an 'aggressive Yeomanry', had undermined the potential for disorder.⁴⁹ A decade later the negligible contribution made by Dublin's civil police during the crisis was noted by one contemporary.⁵⁰

In the year following the rebellion, further police reforms were undertaken. Legislation was passed enabling the lord lieutenant to appoint a chief magistrate for the city, who would in turn appoint and oversee a force of about 500 men. Some initial successes were quickly countered by financial and administrative problems.⁵¹ Yet it was this centrally controlled but unarmed force which was policing Ireland's capital when the country entered the United Kingdom.

III

In conclusion, it seems that early eighteenth-century Dublin probably witnessed regular incidents of public disorder. However, even despite the reservations of at least one contemporary, neither their nature nor frequency excited any particular concern from the authorities.⁵² This attitude began to change from the mid-1780s, though. The resultant developments mark out Dublin as possibly a unique case in the British Isles. The Irish capital's situation became fundamentally different from both that in its own rural hinterland, and in the imperial capital of London, from which examples were so readily sought.

⁴⁷ T. Bartlett, 'Defenders and Defenderism', *Irish Historical Studies*, 24 (1984–5), 392; Geo. Devenish to —, 6 Aug 1796 (NAI, Rebellion papers, 620/22/27).

⁴⁸ T. Graham, 'Dublin in 1798: the key to the planned insurrection' in D. Keogh and N. Furlong, eds, *The mighty wave: the 1798 rebellion in Wexford* (Dublin, 1996), pp. 65–78.

⁴⁹ N.J. Curtin, *The United Irishmen: popular politics in Ulster and Dublin, 1791–1798* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 258–9.

⁵⁰ Long to Duke of Richmond, 8 Aug 1807 (NLI, Richmond MSS, MS 59, fo. 190).

⁵¹ Palmer, *Police and protest*, pp. 148–50.

⁵² For reservations see [G.E. Howard], *Some hints for the better promoting of the due execution of the laws in this kingdom . . .* (Dublin, 1766), pp. 10–11.

When comparing Dublin to London, perhaps most important is the fact that in the 1780s the political disposition in Dublin was sufficiently different to that in London, that legislation could actually be enacted to establish a city-wide police force there. Whereas at Westminster the opposition of the City of London itself effectively blocked the intended reforms, at College Green Dublin's representatives largely acquiesced in the measure. Palmer's suggestion that this simply reflected the Castle's domination of the Irish parliament is unrealistic. Simultaneously with the success of the police act other important government measures failed: notably the militia bill.⁵³ It is perhaps indicative of the nature of the prevailing attitudes in the Dublin parliament that, while initially opposition to the new police in Dublin—as in London—had centred on the issue of the inherent threat to the constitution, later objections in Dublin shifted to stress the cost of the force, rather than its political implications.⁵⁴ The impression is that the Irish parliament seems to have been rather more perturbed by the threat of public disorder in Dublin, than by the threat that might be posed by any police force. Such attitudes can be seen emerging again in 1795. The disbanding of the police force in this year was followed by what seems to have been a conscious delegation of power to the military. The prominent role played by the city's yeomanry, formed from the capital's trusted Protestant inhabitants, probably assuaged many fears about threats to the constitution, but the fact remained that local, civil policing was playing a very subordinate role in the maintenance of public order.

In comparison with Ireland at large, Dublin can also be seen as a distinct entity. Most importantly, as an urban centre that was not totally dependent upon the land for its economic well-being, Dublin lacked an overwhelming interest in the issue that lay at the heart of popular disorders elsewhere in the country.⁵⁵ Rural conflicts over tenures, rents and tithes were replaced by something perhaps more sinister: an explicit politicisation. It had been above all the political threat posed by the Volunteers and the Dublin radicals that had prompted the creation of the 'new police' in 1786. It was then the political threat of the United Irishmen and their supporters which necessitated the preemptive military actions of the following years. Exactly when the process of politicisation began is uncertain. Claims that the campaigns of Charles Lucas and the parliamentary disputes of the 1750s had 'thoroughly politicised the Dublin mob and fostered nationalistic mistrust of British rule' seem rather anachronistic.⁵⁶ Foster's comment that the later anti-Union riot demonstrated, at best, 'politicisation at a fairly basic level' is more circumspect.⁵⁷ Even the emergence of the free trade movement in the late

⁵³ Palmer, *Police and protest*, p. 100; *Parliamentary register*, vol. vi, pp. 398–9.

⁵⁴ *HCJJ*, vol. xii, pp. 344–5, 368, 398.

⁵⁵ M. Beames, *Peasants and power: the Whiteboy movements and their control in pre-famine Ireland* (Brighton, 1983), *passim*.

⁵⁶ S. Murphy, 'Municipal politics and popular disturbances, 1660–1880' in A. Cosgrove, ed., *Dublin through the ages* (Dublin, 1988), p. 87.

⁵⁷ R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600–1972* (London, 1988), p. 239.

1770s, with its limited mobilisation of the Dublin crowds, still saw the political initiative firmly in the hands of the parliamentarians.⁵⁸ However, the emergence of the Volunteers as a popular paramilitary body, prepared to intervene in matters political, probably marked out a coincidence of popular political awareness and militant potential that inspired in the authorities entirely new feelings of unease.⁵⁹

The differing material conditions in the Irish capital, including a comparatively complex system of poor relief, and highly regulated markets, the more sophisticated nature of Dublin's disorders, and the greater attention paid by the authorities to the means of their suppression, may together have had profound repercussions. The key events that have been seen as marking 'an end to moral economy' in Ireland were, in fact, little noticed in Dublin. The militia riots of 1793, cited by Bartlett as being remarkable both for the levels of violence employed by both sides and their widespread nature, made little impression in Dublin.⁶⁰ The Insurrection Act of 1796, whose draconian measures Palmer sees as marking the turning point, seems to have been employed most widely in Ulster, and dealt retrospectively primarily with military actions in Connaught.⁶¹ The situation in Dublin may thus have remained conventionally balanced, even in times of extreme tension. In 1795 the arrival of a new lord lieutenant, deemed hostile to expected reforms, resulted in widespread rioting in Dublin. There was however, 'little damage' to either 'persons or property'.⁶² In January of the following year, in the face of escalating food prices, a crowd of more than 2000 'working manufacturers and trades people' assembled on the city quays with the intention of seizing the cargoes of the potato boats moored there. In the end the situation was defused by the lord mayor, who 'prevail[ed] on the boat-owners to retail their potatoes at the former price' and 'waited to see the vessells opened and the poor served'.⁶³

In the opening months of 1799, as the mopping-up operations following the rebellion continued in Ireland, Dublin rioters, such as Edward Keogh, known as 'the Attorney General of the Four Courts Marshalsea', could still adopt appellations that echoed the important legitimising notions of their predecessors.⁶⁴ Simultaneously, with the serious threat to the state now passed, the authorities were still capable of upholding their side of the bargain. 'A desperate riot' in the city centre in 1799 could still be dispersed by the city's constables, without recourse to the military. Even at the height of the Rebellion in 1798, executions in Dublin may have tended to be strategic and

⁵⁸ M. O'Connell, *Irish politics and social conflict in the age of the American revolution* (Philadelphia, 1965), pp. 129–67.

⁵⁹ P.D.H. Smyth, 'The Volunteers and parliament, 1779–84' in T. Bartlett and D. Hayton, eds, *Penal era and golden age: essays in Irish history, 1690–1800* (Belfast, 1979), pp. 113–36.

⁶⁰ Bartlett, 'End to moral economy', pp. 41–3.

⁶¹ Palmer, *Police and protest*, p. 63; Curtin, *United Irishmen*, pp. 71–4, 153–5.

⁶² A. Knox, *Essays on the political circumstances of Ireland, written during the administration of the Earl of Camden* (Dublin, 1798), p. 2.

⁶³ *Freeman's Journal*, 12 Jan 1796.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 29 Jan 1799.

exemplary, rather than wholesale slaughters.⁶⁵ It appears that by the time of the Union, Dublin may have been treading a middle path. The nature and forms of its disorders remained comparable to those in London rather than those in the rest of Ireland. However, this situation had been made possible by a policing regime that had employed the very un-English institutions of a professional police force, and then sustained military coercion. In essence, it had been possible for the situation in Dublin to remain similar to that in London, because Dublin was in Ireland, and not in England.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 9 Mar 1799; Smyth, *Men of no property*, p. 178.

List of Abbreviations

<i>APC</i>	<i>Acts of the Privy Council</i>
BL	British Library
<i>CARD</i>	<i>Calendar of the Ancient Records of Dublin</i> , ed. J.T. and R.M. Gilbert, 19 vols (Dublin, 1889–1944)
CLRO	Corporation of London Record Office
<i>CJ</i>	<i>House of Common Journals, England</i>
<i>CSP</i>	<i>Calendar of State Papers</i>
<i>Ec.HR</i>	<i>Economic History Review</i>
<i>HCJI</i>	<i>Journals of the House of Commons of the Kingdom of Ireland</i>
GL	Guildhall Library
<i>HMC</i>	<i>Historical Manuscripts Commission</i>
Lambeth PL	Lambeth Palace Library
LMA	London Metropolitan Archives
NAI	National Archives of Ireland
NLI	National Library of Ireland
PP	Parliamentary Papers
PRO	Public Record Office, Kew
PRONI	Public Record Office, Northern Ireland
RCB	Representative Church Body Library, Dublin
RIA	Royal Irish Academy
WAC	Westminster Archives Centre