BRITAIN'S EVERYDAY CONFLICTS IN AN AGE OF INEQUALITY

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This paper draws extensively on "The Texture of Contention in Britain, 1828-1829, by R.A. Schweitzer, Charles Tilly, and John Boyd, which appeared in April 1980 as Working Paper no. 211, Center for Research on Social Organization, University of Michigan. The working paper includes far more information on sources and methods, as well as a wider variety of evidence on contention in 1828 and 1829.

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BRITAIN STRUGGLES OVER INEQUALITY

"It was because England had a bloody revolution in the seventeenth century," Keith Thomas has written,

> that she escaped one in the nineteenth. It is true that in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the classes in possession of political power always managed to yield before it was too late. But sometimes they cut it very fine. Much evidence can be accumulated to show the intensity of democratic agitation and revolutionary feeling in working-class England, especially between 1790 and 1822. These were years of underground conspiracy, harsh political repression, the suspension of many civil rights, and much popular demonstration. Although most working-class reformers saw themselves as reasserting traditional liberties in the face of upper-class reaction, there was also a small nucleus of revolutionaries who hoped for a coup d' etat and a proletarian insurrection. The years 1831-1832, when the Reform Bills were at stake, can be plausibly regarded as a revolutionary crisis, held in check by the "constitutional" element among the reformers and averted in the nick of time by the surrender of the king and lords to extraparliamentary pressure. "We were within a moment of general rebellion," wrote Francis Place, the organizer of reform (Thomas 1978: 70).

The period around 1830, then, brought a crest of conflict and of demands for change in Britain. Keith Thomas is far from alone in thinking so.

After the French Revolution of July, 1830, Francis Place himself spoke the language of revolution -- at least when it served his purpose. At the start of November 1830, he wrote to Joseph Hume:

> There must be a radical change, not a sham reform but a radical change

> from the top to the bottom, and this you may if you please call a Revolution. The whole scheme of our Government is essentially corrupt, and no corrupt system ever yet reformed itself. Our System could not reform itself if it would. Take away the corruption and nothing remains. His Dukeship and his coadjutors know this as well as I do, but they think they can continue to cajole the people. Catholic Emancipation was to appease them. Repeal of Taxes on Beer and on Leather was to satisfy them . . . But we are told; if all concession be refused the people will become outrageous, and no one can tell what may follow. Yes, I think any one can tell. There will be much grumbling and meeting and petitioning will follow. They will become more and more dissatisfied, and in time they will use force and after a while they will triumph. This is inevitable (British Library, ADD. MS. 35148, Place Papers, vol. LXXIX, Place to Hume, 1 Nov 30).

Although Francis Place was eventually to take his distance from the Mob and its methods, in 1830 he knew what he was talking about. Over the next two years of agitation for reform, he was to show himself a skilled broker and manipulator of popular demands for change. And for the last few decades, he had been a close observer, and sometime organizer, of popular contention. He knew that the ordinary people of Britain readily took up the cudgels for their own rights and interests.

They did. Well outside the arenas of Reform and national politics, the British people of the 1820s and 1830s kept up a continuous cadence of demands, protests, and struggles for advantage. It is illuminating to place the great national contests over Reform, Catholic Emancipation and other issues in the context of everyday contention. It is illuminating because the juxtaposition of the mundane and the extraordinary struggles of the time demonstrates a

certain order in the events which authorities, like subsequent historians, were inclined to dismiss as "riot". It is illuminating because the juxtaposition reveals continuity between great events and small. It is illuminating, finally, because the close study of everyday conflicts provides a means of tracing the rise and fall of issues which exercised ordinary people, but which did not always find pamphleteers and memorialists to articulate what was at stake.

Inequality was an issue. To be more exact, demands to reduce flagrant inequalities of rewards and rights -- especially those provided or guaranteed by the national government -- figured prominently in the conflicts of the time. Reform is the obvious case: the advocates of parliamentary reform called both for broadening of the suffrage within counties and boroughs and for the equalization of representation across counties and boroughs. The problem was not simply that a privileged elite monopolized the right to elect members to Parliament. It was also that representation ran the whole range from a pocket borough in which a handful of powerful men chose their own M.P., to a whole county such as Yorkshire which sent a mere four members to Parliament.

Electoral reform, however, was by no means the only issue involving inequality. Removing the political disabilities of Jews, Catholics, and Protestant Dissenters came to be an important demand of the 1820s. Whether owners and workers would have equal opportunities to organize around their interests was at stake in the struggles over the legalization of trade unions and the regulation of friendly societies. Who should run parish affairs -- a propertied elite or the mass of the ratepayers -- excited bitter arguments. Even such apparently unpolitical matters as hunting pitted a few rich people, with their closed and patrolled grounds, against large numbers of poor "poachers" who sometimes claimed the <u>right</u> to take the game they killed.

Demands for the reduction of inequality, if not for the institution of absolute equality, informed a wide range of pressing issues in Reform-era Britain.

Harold Perkin has portrayed the century after 1780 in England as the great transition from a social structure based on property and patronage to a social structure based on class -- a shift from vertical to horizontal solidarities. He makes the early decades of the nineteenth century critical:

> . . . one of the distinguishing features of the new society, by contrast with the localism of the old, was the nationwide character of the classes, in appeal if not always in strength. At some point between the French Revolution and the Great Reform Act, the vertical antagonism and horizontal solidarities of class emerged on a national scale from and overlay the vertical bonds and horizontal rivalries of connection and interest. That moment . . . saw the birth of class (Perkin 1969: 177).

While operating with a rather different notion of class, E.P. Thompson likewise locates the "making" of the English working class in those years before Reform. The shift from property and patronage to class had its impact on politics, popular ideology, and collective action: demands for the representation of individuals rather than established interests, spreading beliefs in popular sovereignty instead of a compact between the elite and their clients, shifts toward acts directly stating claims on authorities based on numbers and determination in place of older forms of mutiny, mockery, and supplication. All these changes gave increasing attention to inequality among individuals as a wrong, and to the reduction of inequality as a right. They occurred, however, in the face of the increasing inequality of income and wealth wrought by the concentration of capital. Facts of inequality, demands for equality.

Because many struggles of the time involved an underprivileged population's pressing of its rights against a visibly privileged minority, actors pursuing a wide variety of ends could adopt broadly similar means of collective action. For example, they could all attempt to mobilize and display a visible and committed following by such means as demonstrations, parades, and mass meetings. By analogy and by direct communication, supporters of one cause adopted the innovations of another. Other factors, to be sure, also promoted a certain standardization of the forms of collective action: the presence of common targets of demands, especailly Parliament; the fact that authorities policed collective action, tolerating a few preferred means such as orderly petitioning, while punishing a great variety of other means; the shared memory of successes and failures by groups which tried one means or another; the existence of common trends in the organization of work and routine social life in the base populations from which collective actors arose. But the salience of inequality as an issue surely reinforced the tendency for a limited number of forms to dominate the collective action of the time.

In this report, we make no effort to frame a sustained argument about inequality and its consequences. Instead, we describe the predominant forms of public, discontinuous, larger-scale contention in Britain just before the Reform mobilization of the early 1830s. By doing so, however, we hope to give a sense of the context of that great struggle over inequality, and of the concrete ways in which the abstract problem became a political reality. The report concentrates on the conflicts of 1828 and 1829, drawing on a systematic effort to catalog relevant events from the whole of Britain: England, Wales and Scotland.

There is no page 9.

BRITAIN IN 1828 AND 1829

At the end of the 1820s, Great Britain was a nation (some would say three nations, or more) of 16 million people. The number was growing fast: up from 10.5 million in 1801, on its way to 20.8 million in 1851. Of 1831's total of 16.3 million, Wales had some 800 thousand people, Scotland about 2.4 million, and England the great majority: 13.1 million. Those people were already disproportionately concentrated in the London region and in the industrial areas of Lancashire, Yorkshire and Scotland. We say "already" because as of 1828 and 1829 the great nineteenth-century movement of urban-industrial concentration still had far to go. In 1801, about one person in six (16.5 percent) had lived in a city of 20,000 or more; in 1831, the figure was one in four (24.6 percent); in 1851, one in three (34.0 percent).

As of 1828, then, more than three quarters of the population of Great Britain lived in the countryside or im smaller towns. At that point in time, Britain's families split about evenly among three broad economic categories: 1) agriculture, 2) trade and manufacturing, 3) services; at the census of 1831, the figures were a million families in agriculture, 1.4 million in trade, manufactures and handicraft, another million in "other industries", which were chiefly services. The agricultural sector was leveling off while the manufacturing and service sectors were growing rapidly. Factories were shooting up, manufacturing was moving into the cities from the hamlets and small towns where it had thrived in the eighteenth century, and a disciplined, fragmented sort of work was displacing the artisanal and domestic forms of production which had prevailed until then. By the standards of the time, Great Britain was the world's leading example of urbanization and industrialization.

This fast-changing country was much divided by class, region and faith. E.P. Thompson's The Making of the English Working Class portrays a division between workers and authorities which, at the end of the 1820s, was growing ever wider and deeper. Even if we exclude turbulent Ireland (a difficult thing to do in the Great Britain of the 1820s), the extent of cleavage by region and tongue was remarkable for so small a space. The regional and linguistic segregation of Great Britain, moreover, overlapped to some extent with its segregation by religion. Large communities of Anglicans, Dissenters and Catholics confronted each other in the presence of many smaller religious groupings. Britain fragmented in other ways as well.

As it happens, the chief divisions which had been visible in the national politics of the years leading up to 1828 and 1829, aside from party factions within the privileged classes, followed the lines of religion and social class. The "Irish Question" gained some of its acuteness from hostility between British and Irish workers within Great Britain, and acquired much of its immediacy from the massive mobilization of the Irish in Ireland behind such leaders as Daniel O'Connell. Yet in the British national politics of the 1820s the major question at issue was neither the ethnic competition for jobs nor the separation of Ireland from Britain. The national debate concerned political representation of Roman Catholics within Great Britain.

That issue almost inevitably raised other pressing issues. The possible admission of Catholics to public office challenged a structure which legally excluded not only Catholics but Protestant Dissenters, Jews, and other faiths. (That the legal principle had frequently been compromised by ad hoc legislation and administrative arrangement did not diminish its salience in the politics of the time.) Thus, more generally, the political inequality of religious groups became the pivot of a significant struggle.

At the same time, workers wer pressing for the right to organize around work-related issues, and to exert political pressure, as varying coalitions of middle-class reformers and artisans agitated to broaden the suffrage, reform Parliament, and introduce greater popular representation into other levels of government. The big manufacturers, increasingly aware of the effects of high food prices on their labor costs, pressed for the importation of continental grain. By that pressure they set themselves against large landlords and the landlords' farmers, who profited from their protected position in the domestic grain market.

As the year 1828 opened, the Duke of Wellington became Prime Minister. During the year, Wellington was preoccupied with British rule in Ireland, but had plenty of political business at home. As Robert Peel said in his memoirs, the ministry formed with forebodings of deep division:

> I had no desire whatever to resume office, and I foresaw great difficulty in the conduct of public affairs, on account of the state of parties and the position of public men in reference to the state of Ireland and the Catholic question. It appeared to me on the one hand that the attempt to form an united Government on the principle of resistance to the claims of the Roman Catholics was perfectly hopeless. In the preceding year the measure of concession had been negatived in the House of Commons by a majority of four votes only in a very full House, the numbers being 276 to 272. On the other hand it was very doubtful whether, after the events which had succeeded the retirement of Lord Liverpool -- the schism among the members of his administration -- the adherence of some to Mr. Canning -- the separation of others -- they could now be reunited in office (Peel, Jan, 1828: 13).

In Parliament, Wellington, a Tory, faced a formidable Whig opposition. From the beginning, the Duke found himself trying to check, preempt or outflank demands for reform: for repeal of the Corn Laws which protected the big grain producers against lower-priced foreign grain; for Catholic Emancipation; for repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts; for reform of parish government; for Reform in general. In other words: for free trade and the manufacturing interest, for the political rights of religious minorities, for the right of the citizens of local communities to govern their own affairs, for the broadening and equalization of parliamentary representation -- in general, standard demands of nineteenth-century liberals.

Much of the parliamentary maneuvering of 1828 and 1829 consisted of Wellington's feints, jabs and timely retreats on these and related issues. Test Act repeal came in May of 1828, a compromise Corn Law in July 1828, Catholic Emancipation in March and April 1829. The law permitting Catholics to sit in Parliament only passed after great organizing efforts of O'Connell and his Catholic Association in Ireland, after the crisis precipitated by the partly fortuitous election of O'Connell to Parliament from County Clare, after a wide mobilization and counter-mobilization around the Catholic Question in England, and after prolonged maneuvering in and around Parlaiment. The same set of issues, as we shall see, recurred in the public discussion and popular political action of the time. In fact, there was a surprising correspondence between the general themes of popular contention and of contention in Parliament.

The historian who cares to practice a little "adumbrationism" can easily see in the struggles of 1828 and 1829 foreshadowings of the great movements

soon to come: the industrial conflicts and agrarian rebellions of 1830, the great mobilization for Reform in 1831 and 1832, the pressure for factory legislation and revision of the Poor Law, perhaps even Chartism. Robert Peel's organization of the Metropolitan Police in 1829, for example, opened a new era in governmental control of public order just as working-class challenges to that order were reviving. The broad, effective organization of the Catholic Association in Ireland (and the British government's yielding to its implicit threat of Irish rebellion) provided a model for Reform agitation. As Michael Brock reports,

> O'Connell's success in enforcing his demands led to the founding in July 1829 of the London Radical Reform Association. It was to imitate his 'catholic rent' of a penny. At the Leicester Reform dinner in August 1829 one of the city's Members, Robert Otway Cave, recommended 'the establishment of a club or committee, resembling the Catholic Association, to take advantage of every favourable opportunity for working Reform' (Brock 1973: 58).

The most influential Reform version of the Catholic Association was Thomas Attwood's Birmingham Political Union, founded at the tail end of our period: December, 1829 and January 1830 (see Flick 1978).

Although the class conflict and class rhetoric of later years did not yet pervade the public life of 1828 and 1829, a careful reader can again find adumbrations of struggles to come in the pamphlets and papers of the time. In 1828 and 1829, this was the tone of the Cooperator:

> The capitalists produce nothing themselves; they are fed, clothed and lodged by the working classes . . . In the present form of society, the workmen are entirely in the power of the capitalists, who are incessantly playing at what is called profit and loss -- and the workmen are the

> counters, which are pitched backwards and forwards with this unfortunate difference -- that the counters do not eat and drink as workmen do, and therefore don't mind being thrown aside at the end of the game. The game could not be played without the counters; and capitalists could not play at profit and loss without the workmen. But the workmen are as much in the power of the capitalists, as the counters are in that of the players; and if the capitalists do not want them, they must go to the wall . . . We claim for the workman the rights of a rational and moral agent . . . the being whose exertions produce all the wealth of the world -- we claim for him the rights of a man, and deprecate the philosophy which would make him an article of merchandize, to be bought and sold, multiplied or diminished, by no other rules than those which serve to decide the manufacture of a hat (Hollis 1973: 50-51).

Thus, in the Britain of 1828 and 1829, the language of class conflict was available, if not dominant. It was a language stressing inequality, injustice, the deprivation of human rights.

In everyday struggles as well as in pamphlets and speeches, the language of rights and justice resounds. That is one of the more surprising results of looking closely at conflict on the small scale: the events that authorities, and later historians, dismiss as "riots", "disturbances" and "disorders" often turn out to articulate clear principles of justice. In Great Britain at the end of the 1820s, indeed, those principles often correspond closely to the principles currently under debate in Parliament, and among national leaders. Although for a few events the word "brawl" or "affray" best describes what went on, small-scale conflicts generally follow one of a limited number of standard forms -- a meeting, a procession, a demonstration, a turnout, and

so on -- each of which has a distinct place in British political life. The flow of small-scale conflicts therefore provides valuable evidence concerning the involvement of the population at large in pressing issues.

With that thought in mind, our research group is cataloging and describing a wide variety of events -- small-scale and large -- which occurred in Great Britain in the 1820s and 1830s. Let us save the details for later. In quick summary: we search for events which qualify as "contentious gatherings" -- in essence, occasions on which a number of people gather publicly and articulate demands on or grievances against other people. We scan a series of sources for any possible mentions of contentious gatherings, collate the mentions that refer to the same event, sort out those events meeting an exacting set of standards, then produce a standardized machine-readable description of the qualifying events. In the late 1820s and early 1830s, our procedures pick out hundreds of qualifying contentious gatherings each year. The numbers make it feasible to produce maps, graphs, and quantitative summaries of variations in British contention during that turbulent period.

Later in the paper, we shall offer a sampling of the maps, graphs, and quantitative summaries. Before going to the aggregates, however, it would be useful to examine a few events one by one. The individual examples give a sense of the range and texture of day-to-day-contention in Britain.

Here is our plan. First we describe a few small and ordinary contentious gatherings which occurred in 1828 and 1829. Some of those events involved demands and grievances that were quite local in scope, quite momentary, or both. Then we move on to larger events and series of events involving issues which excited contention in many different times and places. A comparison of the small scale and the large will reveal some characteristic differences in the timing and outcome of the collective action in question, but will also

show us a good deal of overlap in the actual forms of action employed by Britons who pursued different demands and grievances.

After examining these various individual events and clusters of events, we turn to the overall patterns of contention in the Britain of 1828 and 1829: sketching our sources and methods, laying out quantitative summaries of all the contentious gatherings we have identified, comparing the two years, and examining the fine timing of events within the two-year span.

By no means all the events under review featured challenges to inequality. Nevertheless, our review of a wide range of events clarifies the place of inequality in the British struggles of the late 1820s. For it shows us the increasing importance of collective action in the national arena as a means of redressing -- or at least of checking -- inequalities experienced in all spheres of British life.

THE FINE GRAIN OF BRITISH CONTENTION

Some long-forgotten events of January 1828 illustrate what one can learn about the small-scale contention of the time. The Grantham Bankers' Brawl, for example. In its time, the brawl stirred up a section of Lincolnshire, and even attracted the attention of England's national newspapers. The "bankers" were not financiers, but laborers who worked on the banks, levees and dykes of the Ancholme River; they also went by the name of "dykers". They were a mobile lot, with a reputation for drinking, brawling and thievery.

A little over 150 years ago, a large group of bankers gathered at Grantham, near Lincoln, for the funeral of a fellow-worker. It was Friday, the 18th of January 1828. Four days before, on Monday the 14th, two of their number had been committed to Kirton Gaol for a riot at the Crown Inn. Word had been going round that the dykers were planning to revenge themselves on the local constables for the two arrests. No doubt the perfidy of the con-

stables was one of the main topics of conversation during, and especially after, the funeral, when the workers went to drink away their grief. Worried about what was to come, the Grantham constable called up the town's special constables -- the farmers deputized for just such occasions -- and lodged them in private rooms of the pub where the dykers were drinking.

Not long after, according to the Morning Chronicle of 26 January, the workmen staged a sham fight, then turned it into an attack on the constables. "Hedge-stakes, rails, and iron-bars, torn from the windows," reports the Chronicle,

> were hurled with the most dreadful imprecations upon the heads and persons of the constables; they, in return, repelled the riotous assailants for an hour with their staves only, but as the night grew very dark, the horrid yells and overpowering numbers of the bankers so intimidated some of the defendants, that it became necessary to fire a pistol over their heads, in the hope that the certain knowledge of fire-arms being possessed would check their fury. The cry of 'Murder the constables, they have only powder,' and an immediate violent rush inside and outside the house, obliged someone to load his pistol and defend his person. A small slug entered the side of one man, whose unfortunate situation immediately engaged the attention of his rioting companions; and from that time, with the exception of a few random blows with cudgels, the tumult subsided.

Mr. Gunning, the local surgeon, took over the care of the black-and-blue citizen-policemen, as "nearly fifty" of the dykers fled the area. Next morning the magistrates sent to Brigg for a detachment of troops, whose arrival put Grantham back under control of the authorities (Morning Chronicle 24 Jan. 1828, 26 Jan. 1828; Times [of London] 26 Jan. 1828; Annual Register 1828:9).

Measured against national politics or the history of the working class, the affray of Grantham was a trivial affair. Yet it tells us something about the small-scale conflicts of the time: the prominence of the pub, the importance to workmen of ceremonies such as the funeral (not to mention the collective drinking which so regularly followed the ceremonies), the involvement of nonprofessional civilian forces in the maintenance of public order, and so on through the details of the story. The little event in Grantham gives us an impression of the day-to-day contention of the time.

Consider another example. Three days after the bankers' brawl, citizens of the fishing towns of Chatham, Rochester and vicinity, in Kent, gathered in the large room of the Sun Tavern, Chatham, to discuss the distress of their neighbors in Queenborough. The mayor and council of Queenborough were enforcing an 1820 by-law so rigorously -- "arbitrarily", said several of the speakers at the meeting -- that the local oystermen were out of work and on their way to starvation. Witness after witness testified to the self-seeking cruelty of Queenborough's Mayor Greet in this and other regards. "I speak here," said Queenborough fisherman Edward Skey,

> Where the nature of oyster fisheries is well known and the advantage of their management for the common good is felt. I ask you how your fishery could go on if you had anyone over you who had the power or inclination to say to you, 'You shall only put your nets over in such a manner, and at such times as I please'? How could your commerce go on if any man was over you who would say to the captains whose ships frequent your waters, 'You shall not anchor here, unless you employ the men I please to point out to you. You shall not be freighted here unless I permit you; only such vessels as I please shall carry your goods to town.' (Hear, Hear.) Not only on board we hear this, but

> on shore. What can be done in a town where a man can say, 'Your house is an eye-sore to me; I will not give it a licence,' and shut it up? Which of you would advance your capital there? (Hear.) There are individuals who would advance their principal there, but they are afraid. What we seek is not charity, but work (Times, 24 January 1828).

The discussion and testimony continued in this vein. Considering the bitterness of the indictment against the municipal officers of Queenborough, the outcome was mild: a resolution calling for aid to the poor residents of the parish, and a subscription opened in their behalf (see also Morning Chronicle 24 January 1828).

The indignant meeting in Chatham adds something to our understanding of nineteenth-century British contention. In the 1820s, an extremely common way of organizing around a public concern -- probably more common, relative to other means of action, than today -- was to announce an open meeting of all citizens interested in the problem, to hear a series of informed speakers, to debate the possible means of action, to pass a resolution giving the sense of the meeting, then to undertake some action agreeable to most people present. A subscription was only one possible action; other possibilities included the framing of a petition to the authorities, the sending of a delegation, the mounting of a new association, the initiation of a lawsuit, and so on through a whole repertoire of actions. That is what Francis Place meant by "grumbling, meeting, and petitioning".

In the case of Chatham and Rochester, the proceedings were angry but decorous. The decorum distinguished the meeting at Chatham's Sun Tavern from the earlier set-to at Grantham's Crown Tavern. Other meetings ended up looking more like brawls, especially when a group of opponents arrived to interrupt the movement toward a resolution or a petition. Nevertheless, the

participants typically did what they could to silence or expel the malcontents, and then to get on with the main business of the meeting. They knew their agenda.

Not that every angry gathering involved a well-defined body of citizens, or an agenda set in advance. A few weeks after the Grantham and Chatham affairs, a crowd assembled at Union Hall, London, to await the hearing of some tavernkeepers who were being prosecuted for serving drink illegally. The crowd was sympathetic with the "licensed victuallers" and hostile to Johnson, the informer who had sworn out the complaints. In those days, informers and spies did a significant part of police work, but the public gave them little sympathy.

In fact, Johnson had failed to appear at an earlier meeting out of fear "of personal violence towards him by the mob that assembled in front of the office on that occasion" (Morning Chronicle, 14 February 1828). He was right to be afraid; this time when he arrived late, "apparently labouring under great agitation and alarm,"

> He said, that he had been shamefully treated by the mob. 'I was thrown down (said he) into the mud, and when down, was kicked in a most cowardly manner; my clothes are covered with mire, and in fact my life has been placed in jeopardy.' Johnson added, that he had subsequently found his witness, but when he ventured to approach the office, he met with a reception, that was quite enough to deter even a bolder and stronger man than he pretended to be, to encounter it a second time (Morning Chronicle, 14 February 1828).

London crowds knew how to direct action in support of their sympathies. Yet they took action, for the most part, in the context of well-defined issues, rules, and grievances.

The issues, rules, and grievances sometimes recalled the eighteenth century's predominant forms of collective action. The 12 January 1829 edition of the Times, for example, reports a strike-related incident in Norwich:

> A large body of weavers paraded the streets on Monday, with three persons tied into a donkey-cart, with a label purporting them to have taken work under price. They were continually hooted, and all kinds of filth thrown at them by the persons who accompanied the cart. We understand another person was taken out of his loom in his shirt-sleeves, and carried some distance. -- Norwich Mercury.

That forced journey by donkey-cart was known, of course, as "donkeying". It was an old, established version of Rough Music, the set of collective actions in which public ridicule, sometimes coupled with physical abuse, chastised individuals who had somehow offended the community (see Thompson 1972). Earlier, offenses punishable by Rough Music had tended to be of a sexual or marital nature -- adultery, a September-May marriage, and so on. The central issue in the Norwich weavers' parade was clearly a labor dispute, the offenders clearly workers who had undercut the weavers' collective decision on a proper price. The implicit analogy between sexual offenses and strikebreaking had a nice logic to it. But its use shows us the Norwich weavers taking a step away from the older forms of collective action, and moving toward more recent forms, such as the strike and the demonstration, in which the concerted show of strength vis à vis employers played an even more prominent part.

The dykers, oystermen, tavernkeepers, street crowds, and weavers we have met so far all belonged to relatively unprivileged segments of the population. Relatively comfortable people also contended, when their interests were at stake. On 10 January 1829, for example, the Times reported that at Cheltenham in

Gloucester, the Assembly Rooms were "numerously and respectably" filled by inhabitants to consider petitioning Parliament for repeal of House and Window Duties. The chairman -- "T. Gray, Esq." -- stated that the people gathered did not wish to stop bearing their full share of paying for the administration of government, but they thought it time that "some mitigation of taxation . . . be considered." The speaker went on to say that " . . . we cannot help thinking that after fourteen years of peace, and now when returns of the revenue again exhibit so gratifying a result, we have a reasonable ground to claim some exemption from those dead weights upon our property of which we now complain." A speaker proposed and read a petition expressing "surprise and regret" over the continuing duties on windows. After other speeches, the chairman proposed the adoption of the petition; agreement was unanimous. He then ordered the petition to lie on the table in the Assembly Hall for signatures until the opening of the next session of Parliament.

LARGE SCALE MOBILIZATION

The mention of Parliament brings us decisively into the arena of national politics. There, more visibly than on the local scale, our inventory of contentious gatherings shows us the clustering of events into connected sequences and campaigns. It shows us the remarkable interaction between popular collective action and the action of the state. It shows us a considerable correspondence between the issues exercising the ruling class and those motivating the gatherings of ordinary citizens. The Test and Corporation Acts, Catholic Emancipation, and the great struggles of owners and workers simultaneously stimulated parliamentary debates and popular collective action. Widespread popular mobilization accompanied the rise of each of these issues. And each of the issues involved demands for the reduction of inequality.

On 21 February 1828, Lord John Russell brought forward a motion in Parliament to repeat the Test & Corporation Acts. These acts had, over the years, compounded to bar religious dissenters from enjoying equal rights within the eyes of the law. On 26 February a Parliamentary Committee of the Whole formed to consider the repeal. The final bill, with amendments, passed Commons on 2 May and received royal assent on 9 May.

Beginning in the early days of February, and continuing throughout the debate on the proposed repeal in March and April, Parliament was inundated by a steady stream of petitions requesting repeal. During this time, numerous meetings convened throughout Britain for the purpose of drafting petitions to Lords and Commons. The counties with the highest numbers of reported meetings were Middlesex, with 33, and the West Riding of Yorkshire, with 11.[1]

A majority of British counties participated in the petition-meeting movement. Most of the meetings were organized by various Protestant dissenting groups, obviously motivated to secure repeal. An example of such a meeting is one held at the King's Head Tavern in the Poultry, London, on 4 February 1828. The participants were members of the "Committee appointed to conduct the application to Parliament for the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts". The committee consisted of "deputies" from several congregations of Presbyterian, Independent, and Baptist dissenters, along with a deputation of dissenting ministers and others representing various interested groups. The committee

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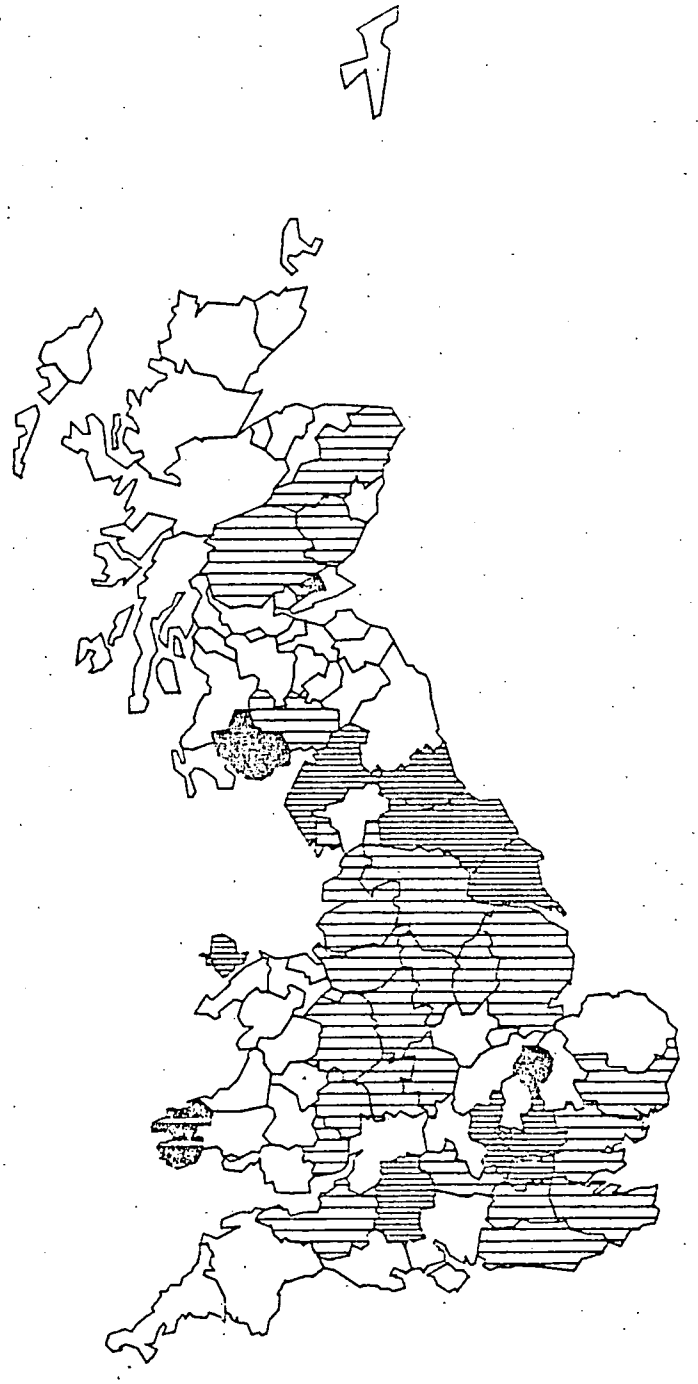
1. To some degree, our sources over-reported events in the London area. Nevertheless, in this case and many others, the frequency of meetings does seem to have been substantially greater in the metropolis than elsewhere.

MAP 1

Test & Corporation Acts Contention : (1828)



passed the following resolution:

> That we hail with high gratification the nearly unanimous determination of the Corporation of the City of London, founded upon their resolutions of May last, to petition both Houses of Parliament for the Repeal of the Corporation and Text acts, which are at the same time an unnecessary and impolite restriction both upon the prerogative of the Crown and the privileges of corporate bodies, and an intolerable grievance, and an unmerited stigma on Protestant Dissenters. Morning Chronicle, 6 February 1828.

Like the participants in hundreds of other gatherings elsewhere in Britain, the committee took care to publicize their support for repeal.

In Britain as a whole, the repeal issue was quite important. Nearly 29 percent of all gatherings we have recorded for the year 1828 were related to the Test and Corporation Acts. Similarly, if we look at the total number of petitions presented to Parliament for the year (session February through July) we see that of 4,579, 26 percent concerned the Repeal.

By the same standard, the Catholic Emancipation debate of the following year was even more important. Almost exactly the same number of petitions -- 4,542 -- came to Parliament in 1829, but the percentage of Catholic-related petitions was close to 70. Most of the petitions ran against, rather than for, concessions to the Catholics; within Britain, the counter-mobilization against the campaign for Emancipation was quite extensive. Likewise, we find some 260 contentious gatherings concerned with Catholic Emancipation, the majority of them stating some opposition to concessions, in 1829. In framing

and passing its Emancipation bill, Parliament clearly did not listen to domestic petitions and resolutions alone.

The Catholic crisis intensified with the election of Daniel O'Connell to an Irish seat in Parliament. O'Connell was Catholic, and therefore unable to hold office under current law. Prime Minister Wellington saw the gravity of the crisis, foreseeing the harsh reaction of the Irish if O'Connell was not allowed to take his seat in Commons. The King was persuaded to allow discussion of the issue within the cabinet. They drafted Robert Peel to bring up the bill in Commons. With a great deal of favorable petitioning coming from Ireland, however, some British Protestants began a movement based on the model of the highly-organized Irish Catholic Association. Their idea was to organize, meet and petition against the bill. At the head of this movement were the infamous Brunswick Clubs. Their largest gathering occurred in October of 1828, in Kent, on the heath near Maidstone. Accounts differ, but it is estimated that over 20,000 persons attended. While there was some opposition from radical Catholics and from reformers William Cobbett and Henry Hunt, an anti-Catholic petition was agreed to, and presented to Parliament.

The anti-Catholic meeting on the heath, however, was atypical of the majority. One staged at Sheffield on 18 February 1829, on the other hand, illustrates both the more common characteristics and the emotions of the townspeople during this turbulent time. The Morning Chronicle of 20 February reports that:

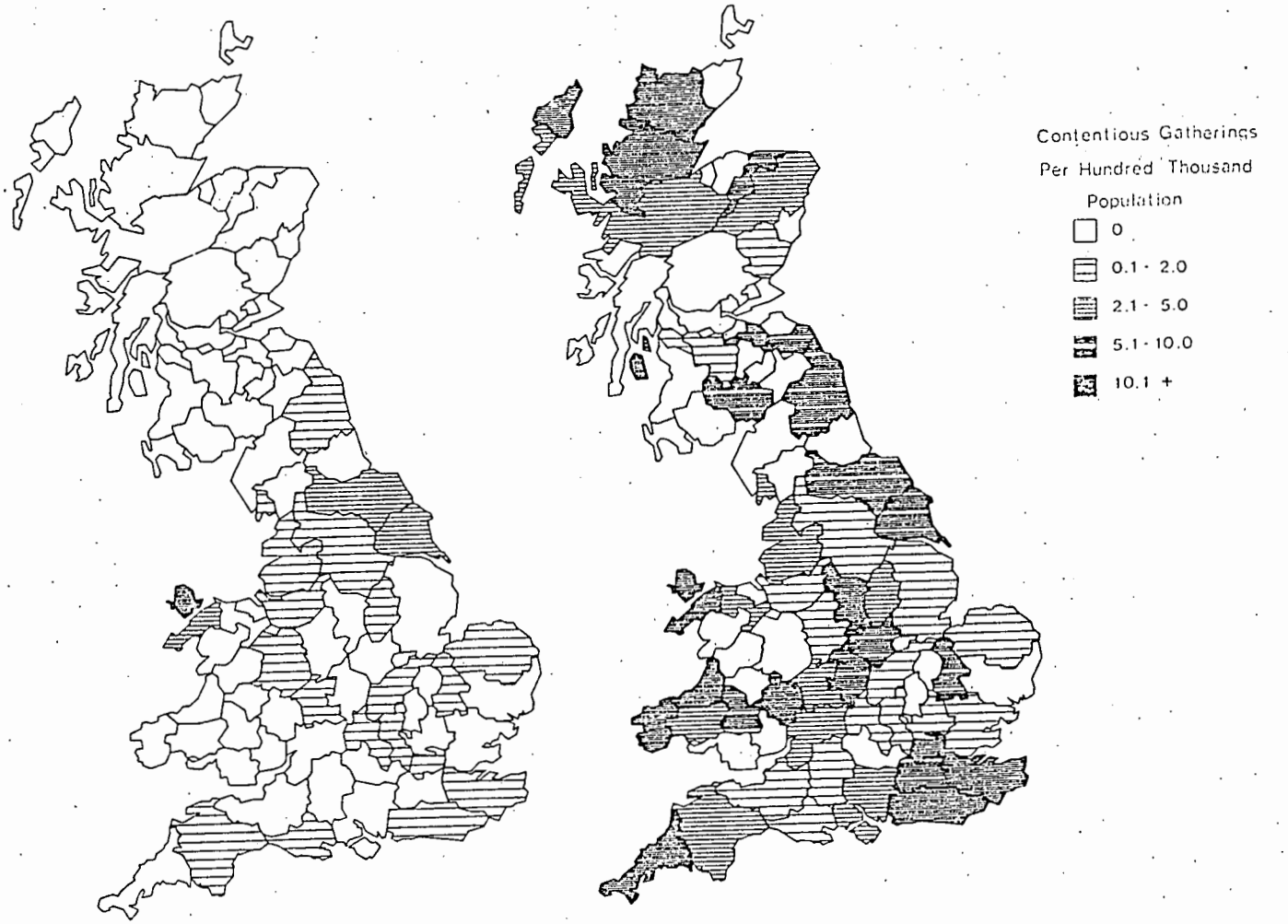
> Wednesday, a Meeting of the Inhabitants of Sheffield took place at the Sessions House, for the purpose of Petitioning his Majesty and both Houses of Parliament against the admission of Catholics to legislative and political power. The Meeting caused much commotion

> in the town, as the majority of the inhabitants were on the liberal side of the question: they had convened a Meeting in favour of civil and religious liberty on the same day, but the collision of the conflicting parties, it was supposed, might cause a disturbance, and the Protestant Meeting was, therefore, postponed till Friday. The Rev. G. Chandler took the Chair.

Common Britons, as the article shows, were sharply divided. They were also getting used to mobilizing over national issues. If nothing else, the organizational efforts around Test & Corporation and Catholic Emancipation gave people a model on which to build when the issue of parliamentary reform arose -- or, rather, re-emerged -- late in 1830.

Britain also experienced serious conflicts which did not involve Parliament so directly. Labor struggles accounted for a significant number of gatherings during 1829. One illlustration of labor-related collective action is the wage dispute between journeymen weavers and manufacturers in the Coventry area.

Catholic Emancipation Contention



Coventry weavers had long been noted for their expertise in ribbon-weaving. A large number of manufacturers has established shops in towns, and employed journeymen both from Coventry and from the smaller neighboring villages. In spite of their reputations for producing excellent cloth, in the late 1820's local manufacturers were finding it difficult to compete with imported merchandise. The foreign goods could be sold cheaply due to low labor costs abroad. Another economic factor was the engine-loom, a recent development in weaving. It was a device on which four or five ribbons could be woven at once. Engine-loom operators received twice the normal wage for producing four times as much as could hand-loom operators. Thus, the demand for labor was greatly reduced while the stockpile of surplus merchandise grew steadily higher.

Manufacturers attempted to recover their losses by subjecting their employees to a series of wage reductions. Economic hardship among the weavers reached a crisis during the early months of 1829, when journeyman weavers petitioned Parliament for control of imported goods. In May, weavers began to organize, and resolved not to accept the offered wage, to collect a strike fund, and to inform others in the area of their actions and ask for support.

The summer months passed calmly. However after the second wage reduction in six weeks, the weavers turned out in protest on September 15th. They drew up their own price list and many manufacturers agreed to it. One who didn't had his country house attacked by an angry group of workers.

> "... the country residence of Mr. R. Woodcock, situate at the bottom of Hershallcommon, one mile a half from Coventry; hither they repaired; but that gentlemen not appearing, they commenced operations on his garden, destroying the trees, overturned a beehive, threw about the fruit, and then smashed the windows in the house." Times 09-09-1829 p.2.

Other workers took control of the bridges leading into the town and halted any

weavers bringing in work under price. The violence escalated. Strike-breakers were "donkeyed" and shop windows were broken.

> On Monday, several hundred persons assembled on the road leading from Bedworth to Coventry, with a flag, carried by two men, bearing the following incription, "Jackass them that works" a donkey was led by the side of their standard bearers, who carried the decree on their flag into effect, both on men and women. Tickets for bread were distributed at differ (sic) houses, for persons in distress. Morning Chronicle 10-03-1829: P.1

Yet another turnout occurred in Coventry on September 29, after certain masters refused to abide by a price list agreed on during the preceeding week. Following a meeting at which they resolved on a general strike, weavers demonstrated in the streets. Constables arrived and seized placards from a few boys. The local magistrates dispersed the mob. On the following day, at an illegal meeting, the strikers appointed a committee to negotiate a new, price list with the manufacturers. They also resolved to ask the mayor and magistrates to convene a meeting. The desired meeting took place on the same day. Deputations of weavers from Coventry and the surrounding area reached an agreement with the manufacturers. Work resumed. The next day, the committee published a vote of thanks to the mayor for his assistance in negotiations. They also resolved that there would be no further wage reductions. Once begun, negotiations had been concluded with surprising speed and efficiency. Mobilization of the weavers through strikes, meetings, and street demonstrations, had yielded successful results.

Coventry was not alone. In the North, the London area, and Last Anglia, during the fall of 1829, industrial conflict became more intense than it had been for some time. In Norwich and vicinity, for example, journeymen and master weavers struggled over the price the masters should pay for woven silk. The organized workers kept their weaker brethren in line by entering the weavers' cottages and cutting under-priced work from the looms. On the ninth of September 1829, the Morning Chronicle relayed a report from the Essex Herald:

> NORWICH WEAVERS. -- On Tuesday last, parties of weavers assembled at the entrances of Norwich, and examined the carriers' carts, in search of pieces of goods manufactured in the country for Norwich masters, with the avowed intention of destroying them. A numerous body of operatives took a case of silk from a constable, which had been marked at the under price, and destroyed it. Men in disguise have, during the week, entered houses in Norwich and its neighbourhood, and cut work from the looms, on pretence of its being taken under the scale agreed to. (Morning Chronicle, 9 Sept. 1829, p.1)

"Tuesday last" was the first of September. The Magistrates had, the following day, issued an order in this form:

> WHEREAS
>
> Tyrrell King, one of the Constables of this City, was on Tuesday evening last, between 4 and 6 o'clock attacked by a numerous body of persons riotously assembled, and a cane of Silk intended to be wrought into a Bombazine taken from him and destroyed by them.
>
> THIS IS TO GIVE NOTICE,
>
> that the Magistrates are determined to put the Laws for the protection of persons and their property into execution and do hereby offer a REWARD OF
>
> FIVE POUNDS

to any person, Constable, or otherwise, who shall apprehend any offenders guilty of such outrages, to be paid on conviction (P.R.O., H.O. 52: 5 [Public Record Office, London; Home Office Papers, series 52, no. 5]).

In a time when police worked mainly for fees rather than salaries, the reward poster stating the Magistrates' order was a standard sequel to such a violent encounter, just as it was to a robbery or a murder in which the perpetrator had gotten away.

In the case at hand, someone from Norwich (very likely a master weaver or merchant) complained to the Home Secretary, Robert Peel, that the police had not done their duty. The mayor's reply to the accusation denied the charge. It also gave an illuminating glimpse of the continuous interaction between the weavers and the local authorities out of which the attack on the constable had emerged. On the sixth of October, 1829, mayor J. D. Springfield wrote to Peel that

> Since my entry into Office on the 16th of June only one case of a Tumultuous assembly have come to my knowledge, viz. on the evening of the first of Septr. and immediately on receiving information of which I set off and arrived on the spot <u>within ten minutes</u>, and by taking into custody <u>with my own hand</u> two young fellows who refused to depart and speaking a few words to the others, they quietly dispersed and in one or two hours the street was perfectly <u>clear and quiet</u>. On the following day we issued the enclosed Bill no. 1 [the notice quoted above] from the public office. On the morning of the 5th ult. I received information that some works had been destroyed on the Looms. I immediately went to the spot with my informant about 7 o'clock in the morning to receive informations, and the same morning issued my warrant

> for the apprehension of two suspected persons who when before us clearly proved an Alibi to the satisfaction of a very full Bench of Magistrates. This is the only case in which a Deposition have been made before me of Work being cut, But I have heard of three or four others and believe in all five or six cases of the kind may have taken place; when they have occurred however in all cases, it has been before the nightly watch were on duty, and suddenly, without previous Riot or Tumult, so that no Police can detect it, unless we could obtain Depositions and identify the offenders. The Weavers have for a considerable time held monthly meetings, but in no instance have the smallest disorder arisen at them. Nevertheless, as the cutting of four looms in one cottage occurred on the Friday previous to the usual monthly meeting, after consulting with my Brother Magistrates on the Saturday, I requested that the meeting might not take place. The Weavers in ready obedience immediately issued the enclosed Bill No. 2 [announcing that "the Meeting at the Pantheon will be postponed until further notice"] and effectively prevented it (P.R.O., H.O. 52:5).

Two weeks later, continued the mayor, the weavers applied for permission to meet. They received permission, and deliberated peacefully with the mayor and a sheriff waiting outside. The mayor conceded that he had not made a show of force with his police "for the obvious reason, that a Police form'd wholly from a Manufacturing Population if paraded, is much more likely to increase than allay an excitement on manufacturing prices, but I have privately on two or three occasions, selected a few of the best officers, and in the evening patroled the suspected points."

The mayor's response to an anonymous criticism reveals the continuous tactical maneuvering which surrounded the worker-master conflicts of 1829.

It places the search and seizure of September first into its context of negotiation and mutual surveillance. Without that context, the news account alone could easily give the impression of an isolated, impulsive action. With the context, we still do not know the states of mind of the assembled weavers, but we do know that the attack on Constable King formed part of an organized struggle to sustain the price of the weaver's work.

In cases where the mayors, magistrates or merchants involved did not unburden themselves in writing -- or at least in writing that has survived in today's archives -- the clustering of newsworthy events sometimes provides a similar sense of the context. Consider, for example, this list of work-related "contentious gatherings" in the vicinity of Manchester reported in the press from July through December 1829.

DATE	PLACE	ACTION OR ISSUE
6 July	Barnsley	meeting for relief of linen weavers
8 July	Leeds	meeting supporting the working classes
24 July	Manchester	attacks on machines
25 August	Manchester	opposition to knobsticks
31 August	Manchester	attack by weavers
1 Sept	Manchester	seizure of goods
3 Sept	Manchester	wages meeting
5 Sept	Manchester	strike
9 Sept	Barnsley	action against scabs
10 Sept	Barnsley	action against scabs
14 Sept	Manchester	action against knobsticks
14 Sept	Barnsley	meeting about workers' distress
18 Sept	Manchester	turnout

21 Sept	Barnsley	meeting against wage cuts
24 Sept	Barnsley	meeting to support weavers
30 Sept	Manchester	meeting to form a union
1 Oct	Dodworth	action against working weavers
3 Oct	Manchester	meeting about wages
9 Oct	Barnsley	meeting against wage reduction
10 Oct	Barnsley	action against working weavers
10 Oct	Barnsley	meeting against return to work
15 Oct	Barnsley	meeting for striking weavers
14 Nov	Oldham	turnout
16 Nov	Manchester	meeting in favor of wage strike
25 Nov	Oldham	action against knobsticks

("Knobstick" was, of course, a contemporary word for "scab".) Even these laconic summaries make it clear that sustained struggles between workers and employers were occurring in Manchester and Barnsley, and that from late August to mid-October the region was locked in conflict.

In fact, major strikes were going on in Manchester, Barnsley, Oldham, and elsewhere in the region from early in 1829. If we search London's Times and Morning Chronicle not only for news of those events which qualify as "contentious gatherings" but also for other mentions of industrial conflict in the North, we find almost daily reports -- for instance, thirty-odd reports from Manchester alone. Cumulatively, the news accounts portray a continuous series of struggles in which the region's masters sought to cut wages, break the newly-forming unions and employ knobsticks as the region's spinners tried to fight the wage reductions and maintain a united front against the masters. In that context, the "contentious gatherings" are but the visible peaks of a mountain range.

When local conflicts clustered like those in the region of Manchester they became, perforce, national events. The national press kept them in the public eye, Parliament discussed them, and the government's agents did what they could to contain them. The correspondence of local magistrates with the Home Secretary weighed the possibilities of repression and mediation. From Stockport, for example, Justice of the Peace S.P. Hunphreys wrote that:

> In consequence of some disturbances which have occurred lately in the Town of Stockport I am induced to submit to your consideration the almost absolute necessity that exists of enlarging the Barracks situated about 1/2 a mile from the Town. At the moment two thirds of the working classes have struck work. Six companies of the 87th foot are quartered at the Barracks & in the Town. The barracks will only contain two companies & seven officers & the other four companies are billeted at the Ale Houses & Inns & are frequently brought into contact with the very Persons from whom they ought to be separated . . . (P.R.O. H.O. 40:23, 10 February 1829).

A month later, that same magistrate and two of his colleagues were transmitting a memorial of the cotton manufacturers and master spinners against a "general combination entered into by the operatives to control the masters in the management of their establishments" -- the journeymen had struck against the reduction in wages agreed upon by the same manufacturers and masters. In Stockport, by contrast with the apparently conciliatory approach of Norwich's mayor, the magistrates seem to have aligned themselves with the manufacturers and to have applied the full force of the law against workers.

Although the record has breaks in it, the accumulation of evidence from periodicals and archives suffices to portray the continual play of threat, negotiation, mediation, repression, and direct action which produced the

clusters of "contentious gatherings" involving workers and their employers. It suffices to reveal variations in the repressive strategies of different authorities. It suffices, finally, to show us the national connections of local events -- not only in the reporting by national newspapers, not only in the frequent addressing of demands to Parliament, but also in the anxious consultation between the Home Secretary and local officials.

STUDYING THE CONTENTION OF 1828 AND 1829

All of the events we have just reviewed, plus hundreds of others that orbit around the major political issues of the day, such as Test & Corporation acts and Catholic emanicipation, brought groups of British citizens into the tavern and streets to voice their opinions, grievances and demands. In small ways and large, these gatherings were an essential part of the day-to-day political process in Great Britain.

We are studying a great many such gatherings in order to improve our understanding of that day-to-day British political process, and to increase our comprehension of collective action and contention in general . By closely examining numerous individual events, we hope to keep contact with the striving of everyday life, and yet to work toward the identification of the general patterns which sum up and constrain the everyday striving.

Following these dual concerns -- with nineteenth-century Britain and with contention in general -- we are undertaking the uniform enumeration, description, and analysis of a very large series of contentious gatherings which took place from 1828 through 1834. A "contentious gathering", in the finicky definition adopted for this purpose, is any occasion on which ten or more persons outside the government gather in the same publicly-accessible place and make a visible claim which would, if realized, affect the interests

of some specific person(s) or group(s) outside their own number. The contentious gatherings in the sample are all events meeting the definition which:

a. occurred in England, Wales, or Scotland;

b. began on some day from 1 January 1828 through 31 December 1834;

c. were mentioned in one or more of the following seven periodicals: the Morning Chronicle, the Times of London, the Annual Register, Gentleman's Magazine, Mirror of Parliament, Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, and Votes and Proceedings of the House of Commons.

A set of events identified by means of such sources is bound to emphasize matters of concern to Parliament, and likely to overrepresent the affairs of London. With allowances for those biases, however, the sample permits us to make intelligible comparisons among places, times and groups. As we saw earlier, plenty of the events reported involved non-Parliamentary conflicts, and places far-removed from London.

When the sample is complete, it will probably include about 12,000 contentious gatherings, distributed quite unevenly over the seven years. It looks as though some 5,000 events will turn up in the two turbulent years of 1830 and 1831 alone. By contrast, 1828 and 1829 were calm years, together yielding little more than a thousand events which meet our criteria for contentious gatherings.

Once we have abstracted from our seven periodicals the vast amount of material mentioning possible contentious gatherings, collated references to the same events, and determined which of the events actually conform to our definition, we create a detailed machine-readable description of each qualifying event. Rather than a conventional reduction to numerical codes, the machine record incorporates alphabetic transcriptions, paraphrases and summaries of the information in our sources, plus ordinary-language comments on special features of the event, on decisions we have made in creating the record, and on links to other events. The record for an individual event includes these elements:

1. a general description of the contentious gathering (CG);

2. descriptions of one or more places in which the action of the CG occurred;

3. descriptions of two or more formations (minimum: one formation making a claim, another the object of that claim) of people participating in the CG;

4. descriptions of three or more action-phases (minimum: beginning, internal action, end) within the event -- a new phase beginning, roughly speaking, whenever any formation changed its location, its composition, its action, or its relationship to claims being made by other formations;

5. identifications of one or more sources drawn on in the descriptions listed above;

6. comments on any of these matters, as well as on the context of the CG and its links to other events.

We store these machine-readable records on magnetic tapes and disks, organize and modify them by means of a large data-base management system, and use a wide variety of programs and machines to draw information from the files. (For details, see especially the papers by Schweitzer, by Schweitzer and Simmons, and by Tilly and Schweitzer listed in the bibliography.) From this point on, the descriptions of contention in 1828 and 1829 come from those machine-readable files.

THE EVENTS OF 1828 AND 1829

In order to better understand the character of contentnion in 1828 and 1829, let us examine the types of gatherings that occurred, and the number of times each type appeared. Our total enumeration of events amounts to 593 for the year 1828 and 640 for 1829. Listed below are fourteen rough categories of events, with an illustration for each type. (The total number of such events in 1828 and 1829 appears in parenthesis.)

1. Conflicts of Poachers and Gameskeepers (32). G.H. Crutchley's game preserves were invaded by a gang of 15 hunters on the night of 6 January 1828. Gameskeeper Godfrey and his assistants came upon the group, who were firing at some birds. The poachers, in turn, fired at the keepers, injuring one and driving off some of the others. Of those keepers who stayed to fight, one was severely beaten with a gun. The poachers escaped.

2. Fights Between Smugglers and Customs Officers (8). During the night of 4 January 1828, on the Sussex coast, a "company" or land gang rushed onto the beach to receive their cargo of spirits, but were intercepted by the Coast Blockade. "A desperate fight took place." Four men were killed and many wounded, as the Coast Blockade was repulsed and the smugglers made off with their goods.

3. Brawls in Drinking Places (12). On Christmas Day 1828, in Portsmouth, a fight took place between soldiers and sailors. One soldier was killed, and several sailors were wounded.

4. Other Violent Gatherings (148). At St. Martin's Parish, London, in April 1828, the Select Vestry held a closed meeting to nominate parish officials. A number of Open Vestry men, attempting to disrupt the meeting, clashed with beadles and constables. A "general rush took place", and "sundry blows fell upon the heads of the besieging party."

5. Attacks on Blacklegs and Other Unplanned Gatherings (3). On Saturday 5 September 1829 an assemblage of striking spinners appeared at the mills of Messrs. Standford and Green in Manchester. Their purpose was to intimidate those spinners who were still working. The "knobsticks" (blacklegs, or strike-breakers) left work an hour early that day to avoid the "turnouts". However, the striking spinners had set up a watch and quickly assembled to attack the knobsticks, in their Hackney coaches, and their police escort. Stones and other missiles were thrown. Many coach windows were broken. As the coaches sped off, the crowd followed, hooting and throwing stones.

6. Unplanned Market Gatherings (0). An example is the common food riot, in which groups of market-goers seize items and sell them at a forced reduced price -- e.g. taking bread from a baker's shop and distributing it to the crowd at less than the baker's asking price. Considering their prevalence during the eigheenth century, it is remarkable that our sources report no market conflicts at all during 1828 and 1829. We include the category here because some contentious gatherings of this type did occur during the difficult year 1830.

7. Other Unplanned Gatherings (43). A crowd collected around a member of the New Police in Holborn, London, on the night of 3 November 1829, and taunted him because he had recently been charged with stealing some mutton. The crowd grew to great numbers and called out, "How did you like the mutton yesterday?" The chief offender was taken into custody.

8. Authorized Celebrations (10). The day of 10 November 1828, Lord Mayor's Day, included processions, speeches, and a gala dinner at the Guildhall. The festivities were accompanied by cheering crowds.

9. Delegations (7). Certain gentlemen and merchants interested in the West Indian islands waited upon the Duke of Wellington on 12 March, 1828, to discuss the country's colonial policy.

10. Parades, Demonstrations, and Rallies (64). A rally was held for the Duke of Sussex at Trinity College, Cambridge. The Senate house was crowded, and the Duke received with loud cheers.

11. Strikes and Turnouts (6). Sixteen prisoners at the House of Correction refused to work on the treadmill. After one ringleader was flogged and others kept in solitary confinement, they "came to their senses".

12. Pre-Planned Meetings of Named Associations (439). The British Catholic Association met on 22 January 1828 in Bloomsbury, to petition Parliament for Catholic rights.

13. Pre-Planned Meetings of Public Assemblies (172). A pre-announced meeting took place on 2 August 1828 in Leeds, Yorkshire, regarding the wool trade. It was decided to oppose any additional duty on imports of foreign wool.

14. Other Pre-Planned Meetings (289). One such meeting was noted in a petition presented by Mr. Calcraft, M.P.: the inhabitants of Dorchester voiced their support for Catholic Emancipation.

The categories are crude. One of the aims of our analysis is to regroup the events into types corresponding to the real alternative forms of action available to nineteenth-century Scots, Welsh, and English. Nevertheless, even the crude categories show that the great bulk of the occasions on which larger numbers of people got together and broadcast their claims on other people were regularly-convened meetings and similar orderly events. The distribution of contentious gatherings among the categories also suggests that by 1828 the forms of action which had been common during the eighteenth century -- not only food riots, but also ritual mockery, direct attacks on the persons and premises of moral offenders, the conversion of authorized public ceremonies into expressions of opinion, and so on -- were on their way out. It would, to be sure, take more than two years' experience to be convincing evidence of a trend. Yet the mix of events in 1828 and 1829 conveys to us a world of collective action similar to our own, in which organizing, meeting, and making public announcements of demands and grievances dominate the means available to the population at large.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND TEMPORAL DISTRIBUTION OF EVENTS

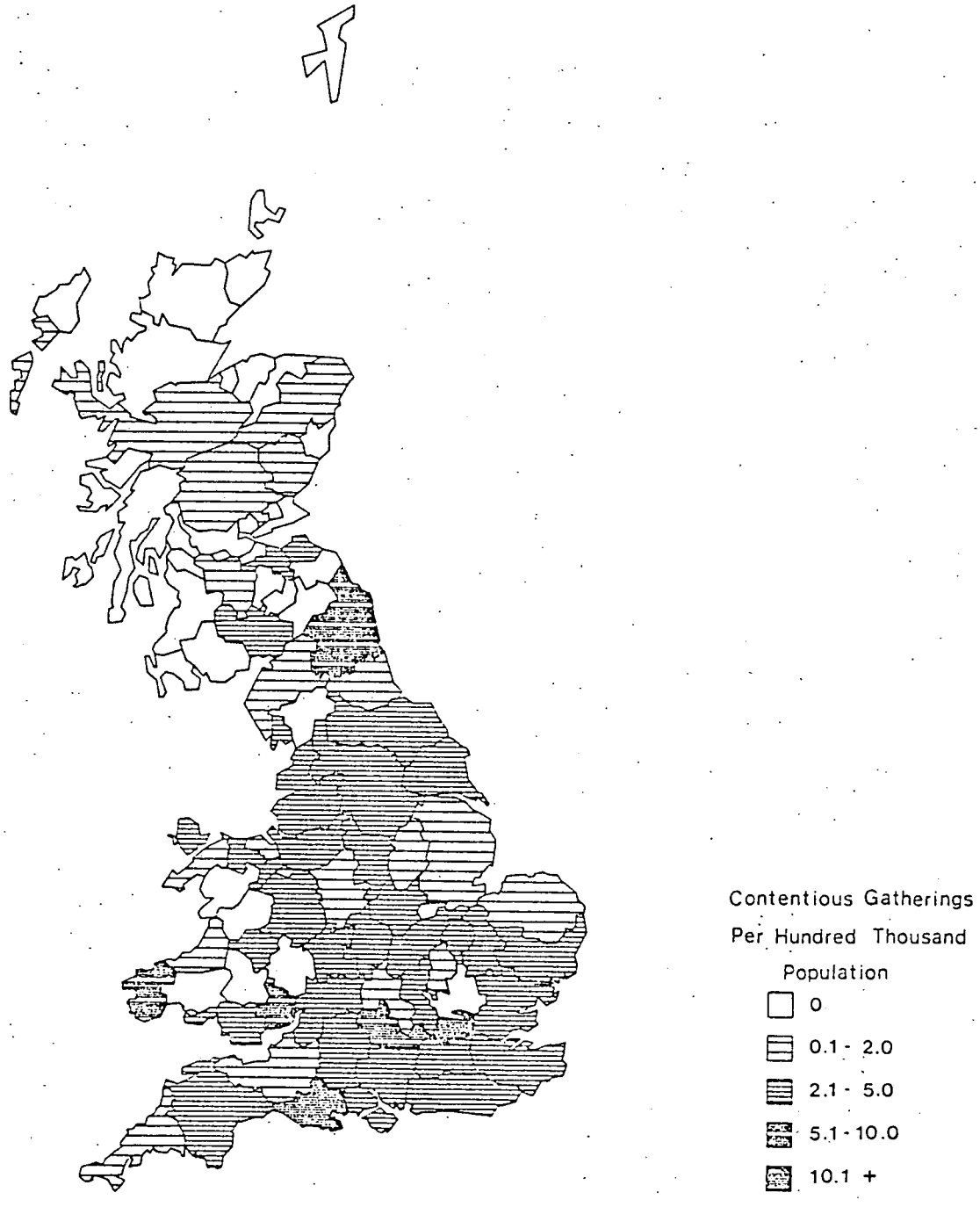
The distribution of contentious gatherings by year and geographic area,

displayed in tables 1 and 2, offers qualifications to those general impressions, but basically confirms them. The broad geography of contention did not change from 1828 to 1829. Middlesex -- the county containing the major part of the London area -- led all counties of Great Britain, by far, in both years. Nearby Kent and distant Lancashire (the center of Britain's large-scale industrialization) followed at a distance. In sheer numbers of events, no other counties rivaled Middlesex, Kent, and Lancashire. When we convert to rates (contentious gatheings per 100,000 population, as shown in Maps 3 and 4), the picture alters: Middlesex still leads, and Kent still ranks high in both years, but with allowances for its large population Lancashire drops down the list, with allowances for its small population Pembroke (Wales) looks more contentious, and with allowances for its large population the whole south of England takes on a calmer face.

The biggest change from 1828 to 1829 was the rising involvement of southern Scotland -- especially Bute, Lanark, and Midlothian -- in contention. In Scotland as a whole, the number of contentious gatherings entering our tally rises from 19 in 1828 to 52 in 1829. Some of the increased conflict in 1829 consists of popular protests surrounding the trial of Hare, an infamous Edinburgh body-snatcher: he exhumed corpses for sale to medical researchers; six of the 52 contentious gatherings connected with the trial. But the change resulted mainly from the increasing salience of Catholic Emancipation as an issue. In all of Scotland, 32 of the 52 events concerned Catholic Emancipation: 10 events involving support of the reform, and a full 22 involving opposition to Catholic claims. Scotland's expanded number of "other violent gatherings" (up from 3 in 1828 to 9 in 1829) registers a series of popular attacks on the body-snatchers, while the growing number of meetings (14 in 1828, 41 in 1829) signals the occasions on which Scots gathered without violence to state their sentiments for or, more often, against the expansion of Catholic political rights.

MAP 3

Contentious Gatherings Per Hundred Thousand (1828)



MAP 4

Contentious Gatherings Per Hundred Thousand (1829)

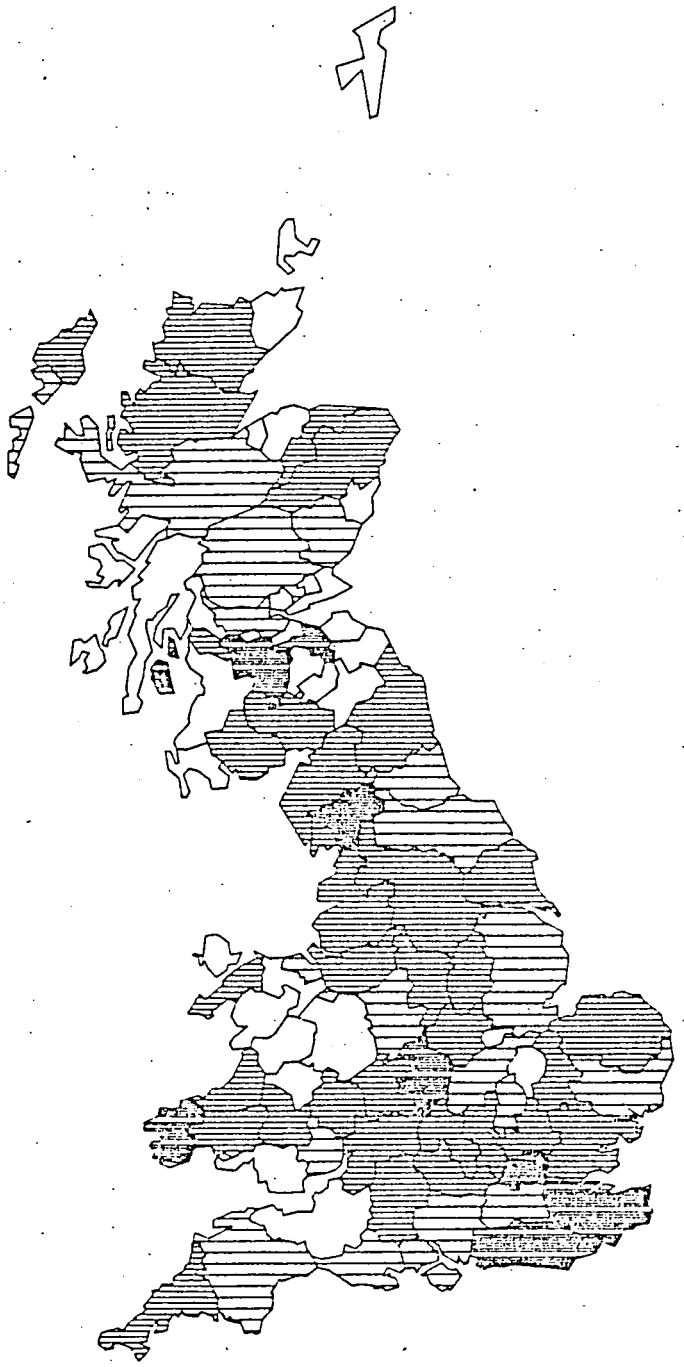


Table1

CONTENTIOUS GATHERINGS, PERCENT DISTRIBUTION, LISTED BY EVENT TYPES IN EIGHT GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS FOR 1828

Type of Gathering	Middlesex	Dorset	Hampshire	Kent	Lancashire	Other England	Wales	Scotland	Total	N
Poachers vs. Gameskeepers	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	7.3	0.0	0.0	3.0	18
Smugglers vs. Customs	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.4	4.8	0.0	0.5	3
Brawls in Drinking Places	1.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.8	0.0	0.0	1.0	6
Other Violent Gatherings	9.7	0.0	7.7	4.2	7.7	6.9	0.0	15.8	7.8	46
Attacks on Blacklegs and Other Unplanned Gatherings	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.2	1
Market Conflicts	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0
Other Unplanned Gatherings	0.0	0.0	0.0	8.3	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.5	3
Authorized Celebrations	1.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5	3
Delegations	1.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.8	5
Parades, Demonstrations, Rallies	6.9	43.8	0.0	8.3	10.3	4.9	9.5	10.5	7.4	44
Strikes, Turnouts	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3	2
Pre-Planned Meetings of Named Associations	41.2	25.0	69.2	29.2	38.5	58.4	76.2	36.8	48.9	290
Pre-Planned Meetings of Public Assemblies	14.4	6.3	7.7	12.5	2.6	2.4	0.0	5.3	7.4	44
Other Pre-Planned Meetings	22.2	25.0	15.4	37.5	38.5	17.1	9.5	31.6	21.6	128
TOTAL	100.1	100.1	100.0	100.0	100.2	99.8	100.0	100.0	99.9	-
N	216	16	13	24	39	245	21	19	593	593

Table 2

CONTENTIOUS GATHERINGS, PERCENT DISTRIBUTION, LISTED BY EVENT TYPES IN EIGHT GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS FOR 1829

Type of Event	Middlesex	Dorset	Hampshire	Kent	Lancashire	Other England	Wales	Scotland	Total	N
Poachers vs. Gameskeepers	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.9	4.8	0.0	0.0	2.2	14
Smugglers vs. Customs	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.5	0.0	0.0	0.8	5
Brawls in Drinking Places	1.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.8	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.9	6
Other Violent Gatherings	15.8	33.3	0.0	7.1	19.2	16.7	6.3	17.3	16.0	102
Attacks on Blacklegs and Other Unplanned Gatherings	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.9	0.0	1.9	0.0	0.3	2
Market Conflicts	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0
Other Unplanned Gatherings	8.4	0.0	0.0	7.1	11.5	4.8	0.0	1.9	6.3	40
Authorized Celebrations	0.9	0.0	0.0	3.6	0.0	1.5	0.0	0.0	1.1	7
Delegations	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3	2
Parades, Demonstrations, Rallies	4.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.9	3.7	0.0	0.0	3.1	20
Strikes, Turnouts	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.9	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.6	4
Pre-Planned Meetings of Named Associations	22.8	0.0	60.0	32.1	30.8	18.2	31.3	34.6	23.3	149
Pre-Planned Meetings of Public Assemblies	28.8	0.0	0.0	21.4	9.6	15.6	25.0	17.3	20.0	128
Other Pre-Planned Meetings	16.3	66.7	40.0	28.6	15.4	32.0	37.5	26.9	25.2	161
Total	100.1	100.0	100.0	99.9	99.8	99.9	100.1	99.9	100.1	–
N	215	3	5	28	52	269	16	52	640	640

Overall, the frequency of contentious gatherings rose rather little from 1828 to 1829: from 593 to 640, an increase of 8 percent. In both years, furthermore, pre-planned meetings predominated: 78 percent of all contentious gatherings in 1828, 68 percent in 1829. Within the category of pre-planned meetings, the drift away from "named associations" to "public assemblies" corresponds to the activity of friendly societies in 1828 (when Parliament debated a bill which would have imposed greater restrictions and surveillance upon them), and to the importance of town and area meetings in the Catholic Emancipation campaigns -- pro and con -- of 1829. Unplanned gatherings became more frequent, and parades, demonstrations, and rallies less so, likewise as functions of alterations in the range of issues bringing people into action.

The most dramatic change, however, occurred in the category we have labeled "other violent gatherings" -- interrupted meetings, attacks on informers, and the like. This type of event became considerably more frequent, especially in Middlesex, Lancashire, and Other England. For all of Britain, their rise from 46 to 102 events represented an increase from 8 percent to 16 percent of the total. In this case, violence surrounding industrial disputes -- the cutting of cloth from working looms, the breaking of the looms themselves, the intimidation of workers accepting low wages, and so on -- played the largest part in the increase. The silk weavers of London's Spitalfields, the cotton spinners of Lancashire, and a variety of workers elsewhere in England all had their share in the violence. In addition, resistance to the operation of Robert Peel's New Police and conflicts growing out of meetings about Catholic Emancipation contributed their own small clusters of violent events to 1829's increased total.

Our broad types of events, while convenient for an initial sorting of the evidence, do not communicate the character of the action very clearly. The records of the events, however, contain some useful detail in that

regard. We have divided each event into a series of "action phases" -- a new phase beginning, in essence, at a significant change in behavior by any of the actors involved. Where our sources use a particular verb to describe that behavior, we transcribe the verb itself; where it is clear that a change in behavior occurred, but no verb appears explicitly in the account(s), we supply a verb, and label it as our own attribution. (In the list which follows, asterisks identify our attributions.) For the year 1828, the action-verbs appearing in our records ten times or more are:

*meet (423)	attack (27)	threaten (13)
*end (410)	adjourn (27)	retreat (12)
*petition (307)	leave (22)	disperse (12)
*hear petition (183)	ask support (21)	announce (11)
thank (87)	fight (18)	beat (11)
*resolve (85)	proceed (18)	propose (11)
*hear (85)	break up (18)	*support (11)
*cheer (70)	resolve (16)	arrest (10)
assemble (54)	call (16)	take (10)
separate (47)	cheer (14)	nominate (10)
*announce (38)	*arrive (14)	applaud (10)
enter (35)	address (14)	return (10)
arrive (29)	*attack (14)	dine (10)
*oppose (28)	open (14)	send to (10)

These 42 verbs comprised 71 percent of the roughly 3,200 action-verbs (5.4 per event, on the average) included in our descriptions. The apparatus of the formal meeting and the associated work of petitioning clearly dominate the year's action. But the action-verbs also record violence and confrontation: attack, fight, break up, threaten, retreat, disperse, beat, arrest. A broad

correspondence between our crude typing of events and the distribution of actions within those events provides some assurance that the crude types are not fundamentally misleading.

If we undertake the same sort of listing for 1829, the result looks like this:

*end (445)	beg (26)	*leave (14)
*meet (324)	applaud (25)	seize (14)
*petition (259)	requisition (25)	dine (14)
*hear petition (211)	collect (25)	dissolve (13)
assemble (118)	*support (25)	break up (13)
*cheer (116)	*advertise (25)	demand (12)
thank (114)	*address (25)	*hiss (12)
*oppose (106)	follow (24)	propose (11)
*resolve (84)	resolve (23)	return (11)
enter (46)	*arrive (23)	*attack (11)
proceed (45)	refuse (20)	strike (11)
adjourn (40)	destroy (19)	wound (11)
meet (39)	*chair (18)	*threaten (11)
disperse (38)	*try (18)	*cry out (11)
separate (36)	parade (17)	call (10)
arrive (34)	leave (17)	take (10)
*arrest (34)	move (16)	order (10)
stone (31)	retire (16)	surround (10)
*gather (31)	attempt (15)	*refuse (10)
attack (29)	threaten (15)	assist (10)
address (26)	cheer (14)	

In this case, 62 action-verbs account for 71 percent of the roughly 4,100 actions enumerated (approximately 6.4 action-verbs per event). Another 441 verbs shared the remaining 29 percent of the actions. In 1829, as in 1828,

verbs strongly associated with meeting and petitioning outweigh the rest. Yet the actions of 1829 communicate a more belligerent year: hiss and dissolve show up among the meeting-verbs, while stone, refuse, destroy, try, seize, strike, wound and cry out take their places on the high-frequency list. The increasing popularity of arrest, attack, threaten, demand, and surround, furthermore, more than compensate for the decline of fight, break up, and beat. Both the overall increase in the events we have specifically labeled as violent and the net shift in the character of action within events -- violent and non-violent -- bespeak an increasing pace of open conflict in 1829.

THE ISSUES

What were they fighting about? For the most part, the great national issues of the day: the Test and Corporation Acts, Catholic Emancipation, the regulation of Friendly Societies, the relative power of masters and workers, and so on. The word "fighting", to be sure, is a bit strong; most of these contentious gatherings took the form of orderly meetings in which citizens decorously stated their demands and grievances, passed resolutions, and sent petitions off to the authorities. The likelihood of an open fight, furthermore, varied greatly with the actors and the issues: few of the congregations voicing their opinions on the Test Act did so with violence, while industrial conflicts often involved some breaking of machinery or intimidation of knobsticks. Some issues -- hunting on posted land is a prime example -- could hardly come up without someone's attacking someone else. Nevertheless, the bulk of the events in our catalog a) consisted of peaceful assemblies in which people stated their claims in a public but orderly way; b) concerned the major questions which the press, Parliament, and political leaders were currently debating.

In 1828, the issues on which nine or more contentious gatherings centered were Catholic Emancipation (13 events), elections (29 events), the Friendly Society Bill (50 events), general support of government officials (20 events), poaching (17 events), wardmotes (another 17 events), and the proposed repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts (182 events). Most of these issues involved challenges to existing inequalities, although the Friendly Society Bill, if passed, would have increased the inequality of workers and capitalists by imposing tighter controls over authorized workers' associations. In 1829, Catholic Emancipation became the most frequent issue: 232 of the year's 640 events dealt with the Catholic claims. The other prominent issues of that year were general support of government (56 events), poaching (14 events), select vestry (14 events), wardmotes (18 events), and wage disputes (25 events).

Figures 1 and 2 present a breakdown of the major issues in the contentious gatherings of 1828 and 1829 which occurred in Middlesex (the county including the major part of London) and Lancashire (the great area of factory production). In 1828, the distributions did not differ greatly. A somewhat higher proportion -- about a quarter -- of Lancashire's contentious gatherings concerned the Test and Corporation repeal. Local government, in the guise of disputes over wardmotes, vestries, and elections, attracted more attention in London. But the issues of Test and Corporation, Catholic Emancipation, and Friendly Societies remained prominent in both counties. (The exotic "wife burning" refers to a local campaign protesting, of all things, the immolation of widows in India.) Both counties differed dramatically from Dissenting Protestant Wales, where a full three quarters of 1828's contentious gatherings involved support for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, and Scotland, where the stamp duty became an important ground for contention.

In 1829, Middlesex and Lancashire moved farther apart. Although in both counties Catholic Emancipation figured in about two-fifths of all contentious gatherings, almost all of Lancashire's gatherings on the subject expressed support for Emancipation; in Middlesex (that is, essentially, London), the anti-Catholic forces came onto the scene much more frequently. Both Lancashire and Middlesex had their shares of industrial conflict, but in Lancashire workers tended to take off after knobsticks, while in London offending looms, and the silk in the looms, drew the weavers' direct action. London also witnessed conflict about an issue which still lay in Lancashire's future: resistance to the New Police organized by Robert Peel. If violent events became more frequent in both counties, then, the manifest issues on which the events turned differed as a function of local problems.

FIGURE 1

MAJOR ISSUES BY REGION, 1828

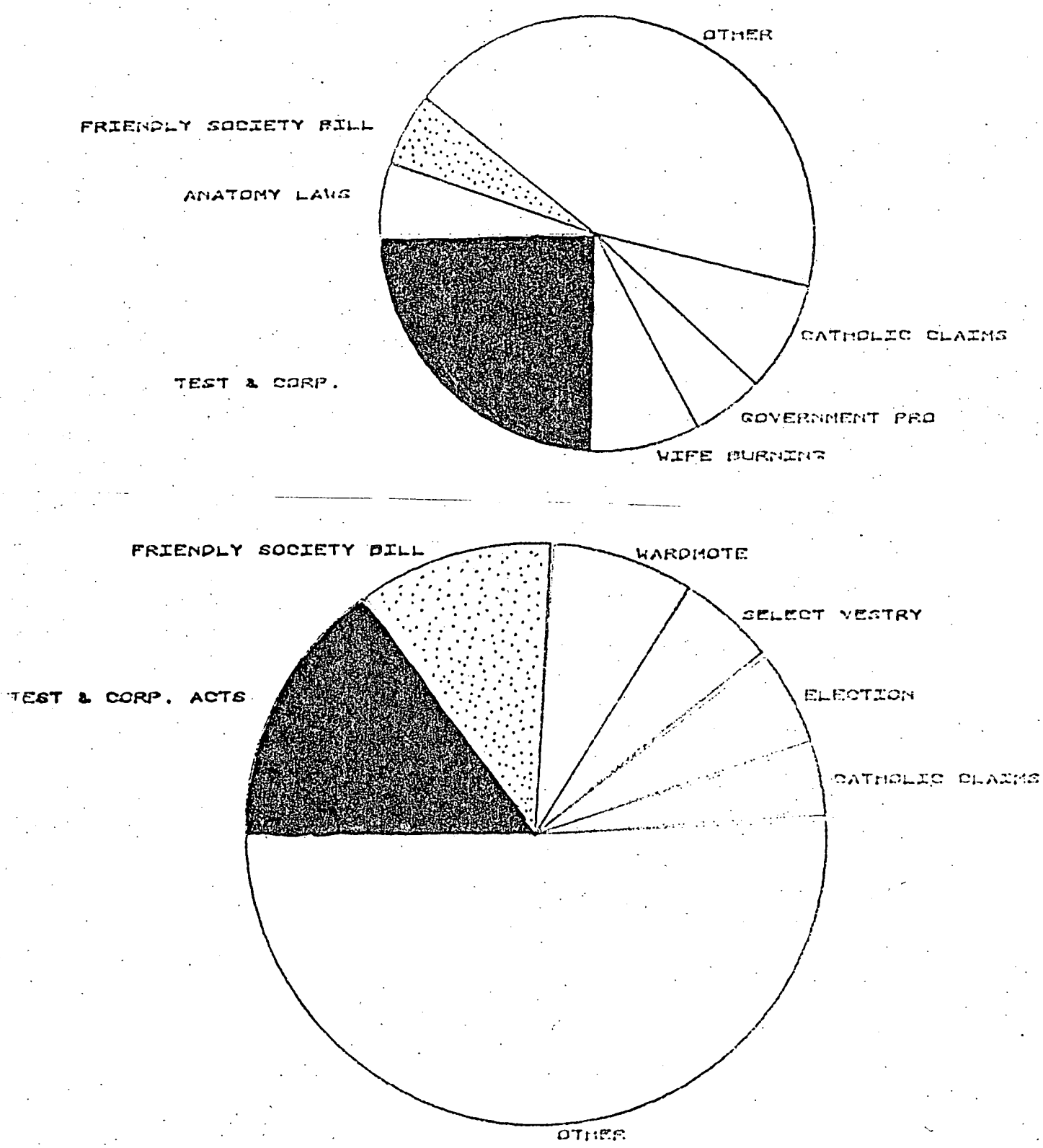
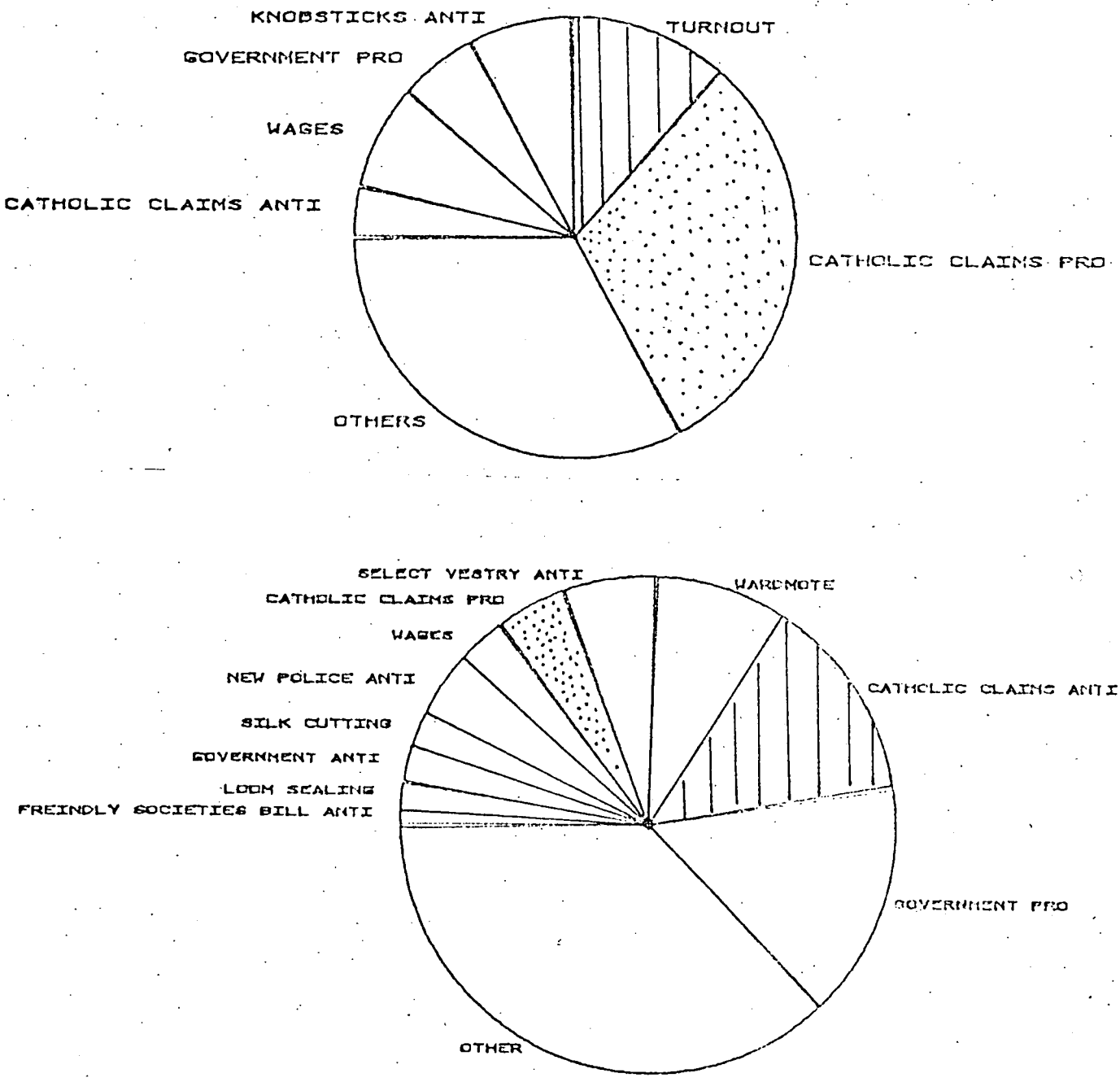


FIGURE 2

MAJOR ISSUES BY REGION, 1829



Nevertheless, the chief impression given by our evidence on issues is not localism, but nationalism: the bulk of the contentious gatherings in the catalogs for 1828 and 1829 involved questions of national scope.

TIMING

The timing of events confirms the correspondence between local action and national questions. To a surprising degree, contentious gatherings clustered at the moments of national attention -- and, especially, Parliamentary attention -- to the issues at hand. If we consolidate the contentious gatherings of 1828 and 1829 into three broad categories -- meetings of named associations, other meetings, and all other CG's -- the impact of national politics on the rhythm of contention becomes obvious. Figure 3 displays the flow of the three classes of events over the twenty-four months of 1828 and 1829. For comparison, it also shows the duration of the two sessions of Parliament. Two linked facts immediately strike the eye:

1. The number of meetings of named associations which qualify as contentious gatherings varies enormously from month to month; in our sample, that fluctuation accounts for most of the month-to-month variation in the total number of CGs'

2. Those meetings are heavily concentrated in the periods when Parliament was in session.

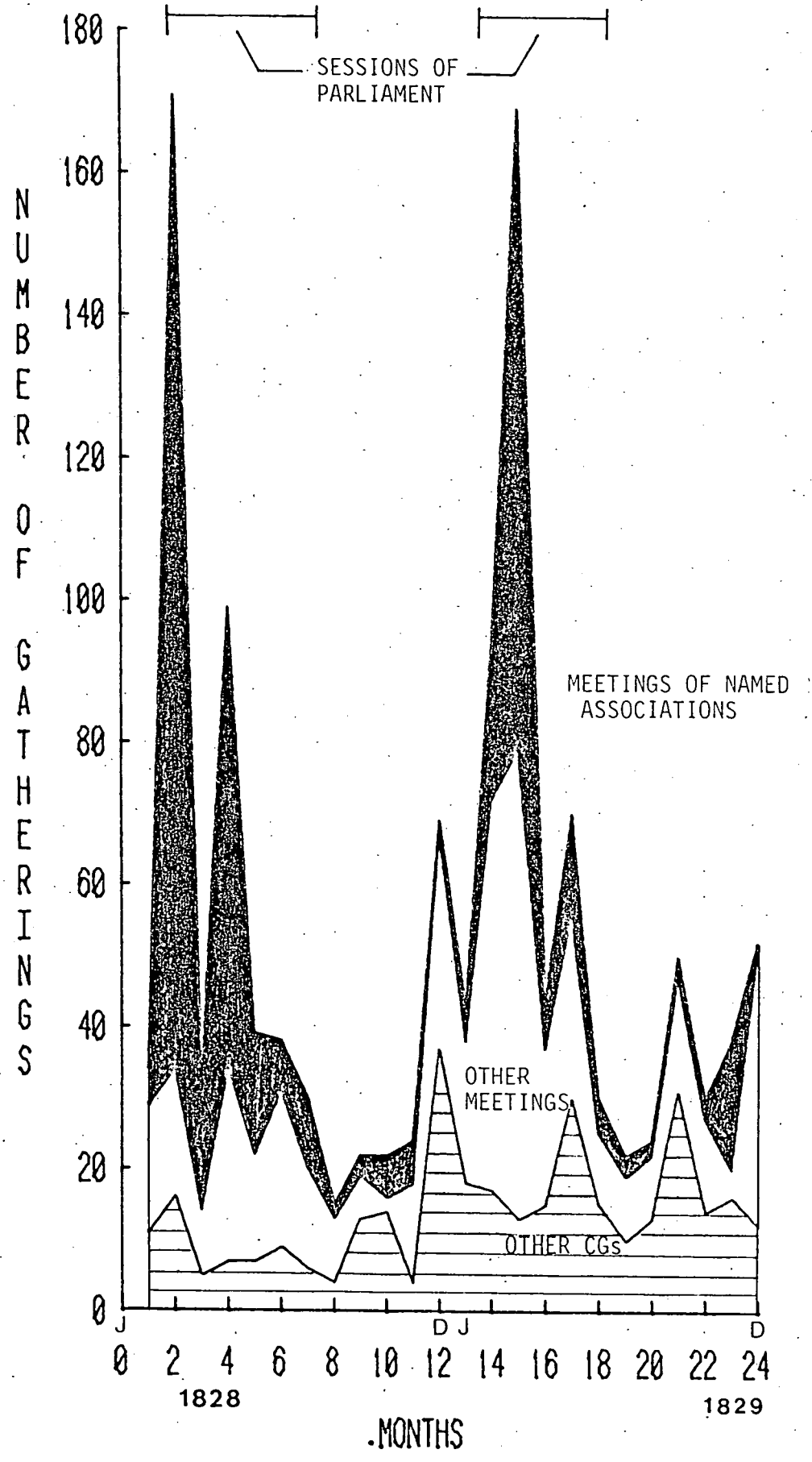
The three peaks of CGs correspond to the major parliamentary debates over the Test and Corporation Act repeal (February 1828) and Catholic Emancipation (April 1828 and May 1829). In fact, a large share of all the meetings concerned those very issues. Over the two years as a whole, we classified Test and Corporation as the "major issue" of 182 events, and Catholic Emancipation as the major issue of a full 245 events. Many of these events came to our attention, indeed, because the meeting sent a petition to Parliament stating a position on one issue or the other.

As a result of these connections, the tempo of petitioning and the overall

tempo of contention showed a remarkable correspondence to each other. Figure 4 presents the day-by-day fluctuations in the number of petitions registered by Parliament during its sessions of 1828 and 1829; the numbers include all petitions, regardless of whether they came from meetings which qualify as contentious gatherings, and regardless of the topic they concerned. The same three peaks of activity appear clearly; they center on February 1828, April 1828, and March 1829. Nor is that a coincidence: the petitions arriving in February 1828 dealt especially with the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, and were mainly favorable; the petitions arriving in April 1828 dealt chiefly with Catholic Emancipation, and were preponderantly favorable; those arriving in March 1829 likewise tended to concern Catholic Emancipation, but were now largely unfavorable. During the many months that Parliament was avoiding the issue, Brunswick Clubs and other anti-Catholic groups were organizing campaigns accelerated as Parliament moved toward a decision -- in the event, a reluctant decision in favor of seating Catholics while disbanding the Catholic Association. The tempos of national issues dominated petitions to Parliament as they dominated the overall ups and downs of contentious gatherings.

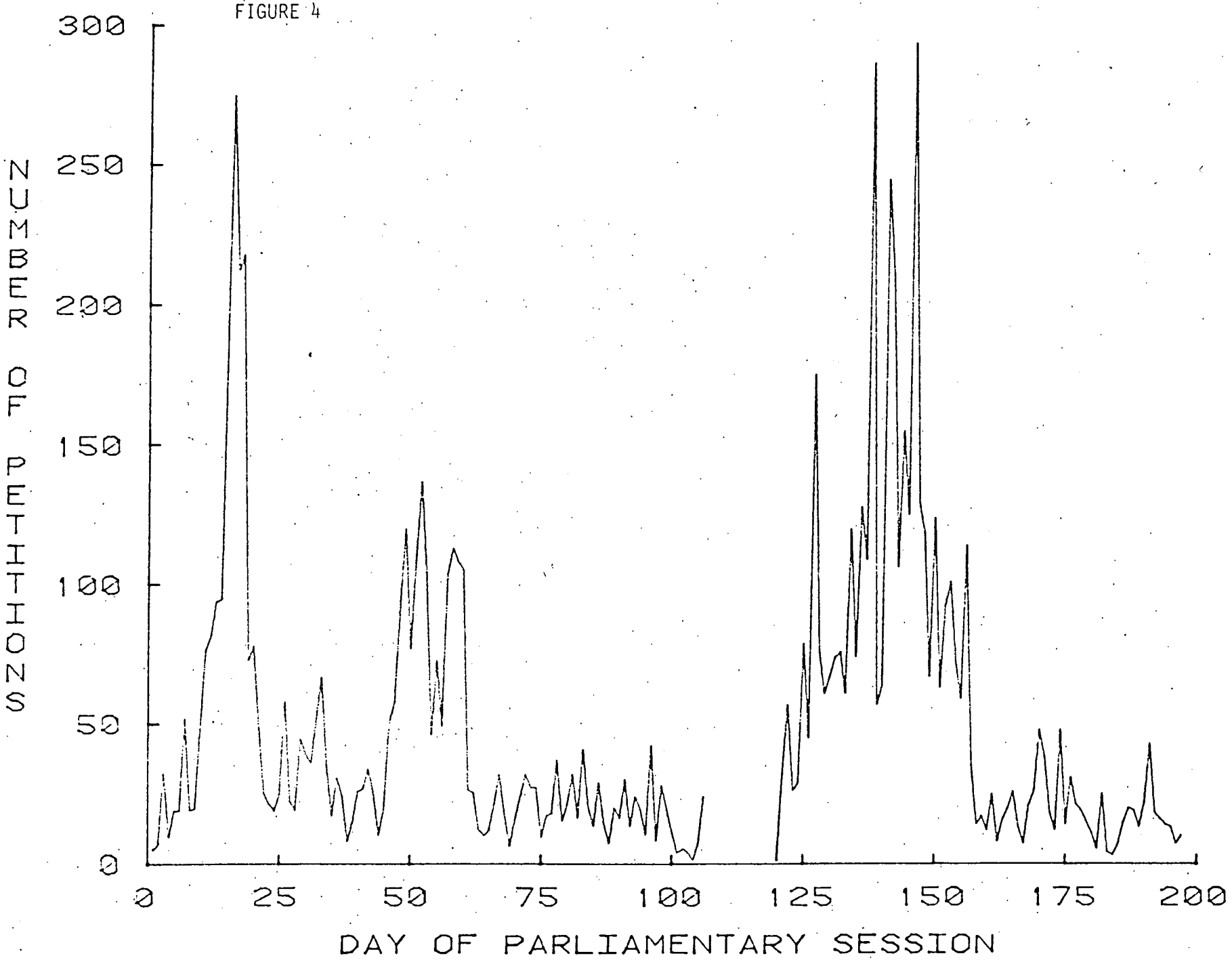
Nonetheless, other sorts of contentious gatherings varied in partial independence of national politics. The three largest clusters of "other CGs" were the 37 of December 1828, the 31 of May 1829 and the 31 of September 1829. In December 1828, a combination of frequent encounters between hunters and game wardens with parades, rallies and similar events in the course of local elections brought the totals up. In May 1829, a surge of strikes and other workers' actions throughout England produced an unusual number of contentious gatherings. In September of the same year, industrial conflict played an even more important part than in May. Poaching incidents, local elections and worker-owner struggles sometimes responded to national politics and sometimes became issues for national politics, but they also had their own rhythms.

FIGURE 3 TYPES OF CONTENTIOUS GATHERINGS BY MONTH, 1828-1829



TOTAL PETITIONS PRESENTED, 1828 & 1829

FIGURE 4



CONCLUSION

Both at the national scale and at the local scale, the theme of contention which overlay all others was inequality. As material inequalities increased in Britain, demands to redress the balance arose. As power and politics nationalized, demands for equal -- or, at least, less unequal -- access to the national political arena became more insistent. To some extent, popular collective action had an effect. In the two years we have examined closely in this paper, the outcomes of the campaigns over the Test and Corporation Acts, Catholic Emancipation and several other issues reduced political inequality. The campaign for Reform resumed in 1830, and helped produce the partial equalization of 1832's Reform bill. In all these cases, as we have seen, the defenders of existing inequalities also had a say. Sometimes they won. The 1830s were not, for example, a great moment for workers' rights or their capacity to hold off wage cuts, speedups, or scabs. The campaign for the People's Charter began in the 1830s, but had no great successes to report in the decade. The strongly political demands of the Chartists, nevertheless, point to a significant trend: increasingly the excluded and exploited people of Great Britain were turning to the state and to national politics as the means of making themselves heard. They relied less and less on patrons and local authorities, more and more on direct, unmediated involvement in national political struggles. They sought increasingly to redress through collective action in the national arena the inequalities they suffered in other spheres of British life.

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