BRITISH CATHOLIC EMANCIPATION MOBILIZATION, PROTOTYPE OF REFORM?

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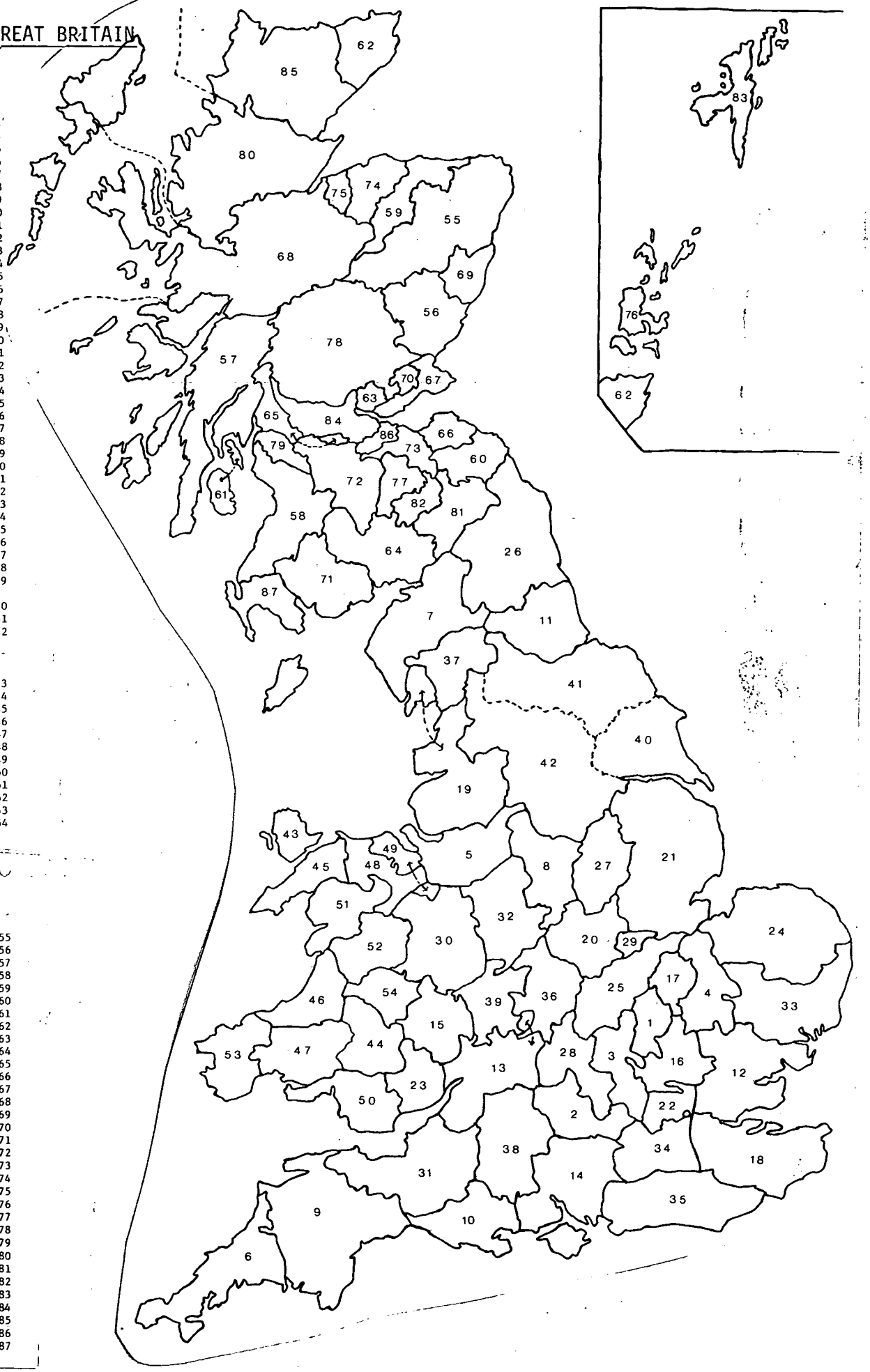
FIGURE 1
THE COUNTIES OF GREAT BRITAIN



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GREAT BRITAIN STUDY BRIEFING PAPERS

1. "Great Britain, 1828-1834: Historiography and Selected Bibiliography," by Michael Pearlman, June 1977: issued as CRSO Working Paper #159.

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12. "British Catholic Emancipation Mobilization, Prototype of Reform?" by R.A. Schweitzer, December 1980: issues as CRSO Working Paper #220.

BRITISH CATHOLIC EMANCIPATION MOBILIZATION, PROTOTYPE OF REFORM?

GREAT BRITAIN STUDY
Briefing Paper #11

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*I am grateful to Keith Clarke and Raul Onoro, for their assistance in preparing the computer graphics for this paper, to Sheila Wilder and Debby Snovak for their typing and editing help, Dr. Charles Tilly for his encouragement and editorial comments, and all the GBS staff members who worked to prepare the data. The National Science Foundation supports the research herein described.

Sylvanus Urban's Gentleman's Magazine, a purveyor of news for Britain's Gentry of the early nineteenth century, notes in its September 1828 issue that "It seems to be felt unanimously that the time has at length arrived when the Protestants of England should stand forth in defense of the Constitution of 1688."[1]

The defense summoned was to prevent the political emancipation of Roman Catholics. In the autumn of 1828 this issue stood alone as the single most discussed political subject on this isle. Since the passage in Parliament that spring of a bill removing the restrictions on Protestant dissenters, [the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts] a growing sentiment had again arisen for allowing Catholics equal political rights. Pushed by Daniel O'Connell and the Irish Catholic Association, Parliament had been besieged by petitions requesting the equalization of rights.* In the autumn, a counter-force sprang up to challenge the Catholics. English and Irish Protestants, led by the Earl of Winchester and Edward Knatchbull, began organizing Brunswick constitutional clubs with the hope of halting the spread of constitutional rivisionism. The Duke of Newcastle, acting as a spokesman wrote to Lord Kenyon:

> ". . . an appeal to the nation is our only resource; it must be made; and the voice of the nation must decide whether Protestantism or Popery shall prevail;"[2]

Three months later the Morning Chronicle in an article entitled "The Opinion of Welshmen on Catholic Emancipation" wrote "This country is in a ferment. Every sect and denomination of Christian - all classes and orders of men are petitioning the King and Parliament . . ."[3]

This petitioning reflects a real change in ways in which people made known their positions on specific issues. A transformation was occurring

*The Association was begun in 1823 in Dublin, it was supported by weekly contributions (an extra legal tax) from Catholic Church members. In 1828, Daniel O'Connell was the leading spokesman for the Association.

in the nature of expression of public opinion. This alteration was a reflection of the growing importance of national issues in people's lives. Of "the agencies of this great change . . . the most important . . . was the system of petitioning Parliament that grew up in this period. This system came to involve public meetings on a national scale, the collaboration of Parlimentary leaders with outside bodies of opinion . . ."[4]

In the previous century, the county meeting, or in London, the Common Council meeting were the only legitimate forms of expressing public opinion. These were the only meetings that could petition government. The Wilkes movement in the 1760's began the breakdown of the prohibition on public petitioning. The King was petitioned in 1769 by Middlesex county inhabitants to dissolve Parliament and allow Wilkes to take his seat in the Commons. When the ban on reporting of Parliamentary debates was removed in 1771, public interest was heightened and the respectability of petitioning began to be established.[5] But it was not until the middle classes began to be more strongly involved in the political arena ca. 1810 that petitioning became a recognized means of expressing public opinion.[6] The April 1828 Gentleman's Magazine stated that "In the House of Commons . . . the number (of petitions) presented against the Catholic claims were 2,013, while those in favor were only 955. In the House of Lords there were 2,531 petitions against the bill and 1,014 in its favor."[7] The Duke of Newcastle's appeal to hear the voice of the nation seems to have had the desired effect. Englishmen, Welshmen and Scotsmen all across Great Britain gathered and made known their sentiments on the Catholic question.

As of the hundred and fifty year anniversary of the passage of the Emancipation Bill much had been written on the topic. But the course of the work has tended to be in only two directions; political, (The Catholic Question

in English Politics 1820 to 1830, by G.I.T. Machin) and religious (Religious Toleration in England 1787-1833, by Ursula Henriques). An area yet untouched by historians is that of mass mobilization; some works have touched upon the topic but there has been no attempt to place the collective actions of Britons into historical perspective with regard to the Catholic Bill of 1828. What seems to have been overlooked is that the Duke of Newcastle's appeal for action was heard throughout the land, and that the Catholic Emancipation issue became part of a major transition from the elite politics of pre-1830 to the mass politics of the reform era.

It is generally considered that the first mass mobilization of public opinion and public action in Britain for this period was centered around the reform of Parliament movement of early 1831 and 1832. ". . . the full force of popular agitation was felt only when Gray and his cabinet were locked in conflict with the House of Lords. It was during that tense and protracted struggle that the mass organizations came into their own."[8] Other scholars have suggested that Daniel O'Connell's Catholic Emancipation campaign provided a precedent and model for the reform mobilization that followed. "The country was divided over the Catholic issues. There was Daniel O'Connell's Catholic Association in Ireland, a prototype of nineteenth-century extra-parliamentary pressure groups."[9] Of course there was also the anti-Catholic or Brunswick movement that copied the Irish Catholic Association and, even though it ultimately failed, served as another model for future mobilization movements.

These pre-reform mobilization efforts provided a number of items; tactical models, legal precedents, interpersonal connections and pools of personnel that lasted into the reform era.

The literature on this period is unclear about the exact presence of a widespread popular agitation in the 1828 and 1829 period. This paper will

attempt to examine the Test & Corporation Acts repeal campaign and the two stages of the Catholic Emancipation struggle to locate the seeds (forms of action, groups, and areas of involvement) of mass mobilization that began to grow and flower prior to the autumn of 1830.

The stage can be set by looking at the Test and Corporation Acts repeal campaign in the spring of 1828. The Corporation Act of 1661 and the Test Act of 1673 barred from political, military, executive and administrative offices under the Crown all non-members of the Church of England, dissenters did have the right to sit in Parliament.[10] The time period for Test and Corporation ran from February 21st when Lord John Russell gave notice of a motion to repeal the Acts to May 9 when the repeal bill received the royal assent. During that period, a substantial movement of Protestant dissenters evolved. Two kinds of evidence provide an indication of the intensity of that campaign. These dissenters organized around their local churches, gathered and drew up petitions to Parliament requesting the repeal. In that session of Parliament from February to July they presented 1234 petitions or over 26% of all the petitions presented that year. This is in contrast to the campaign waged by Friendly and Benefit societies to defeat a bill designed to alter their organizations. That campaign accounted for less than 6% of the total petitions presented.

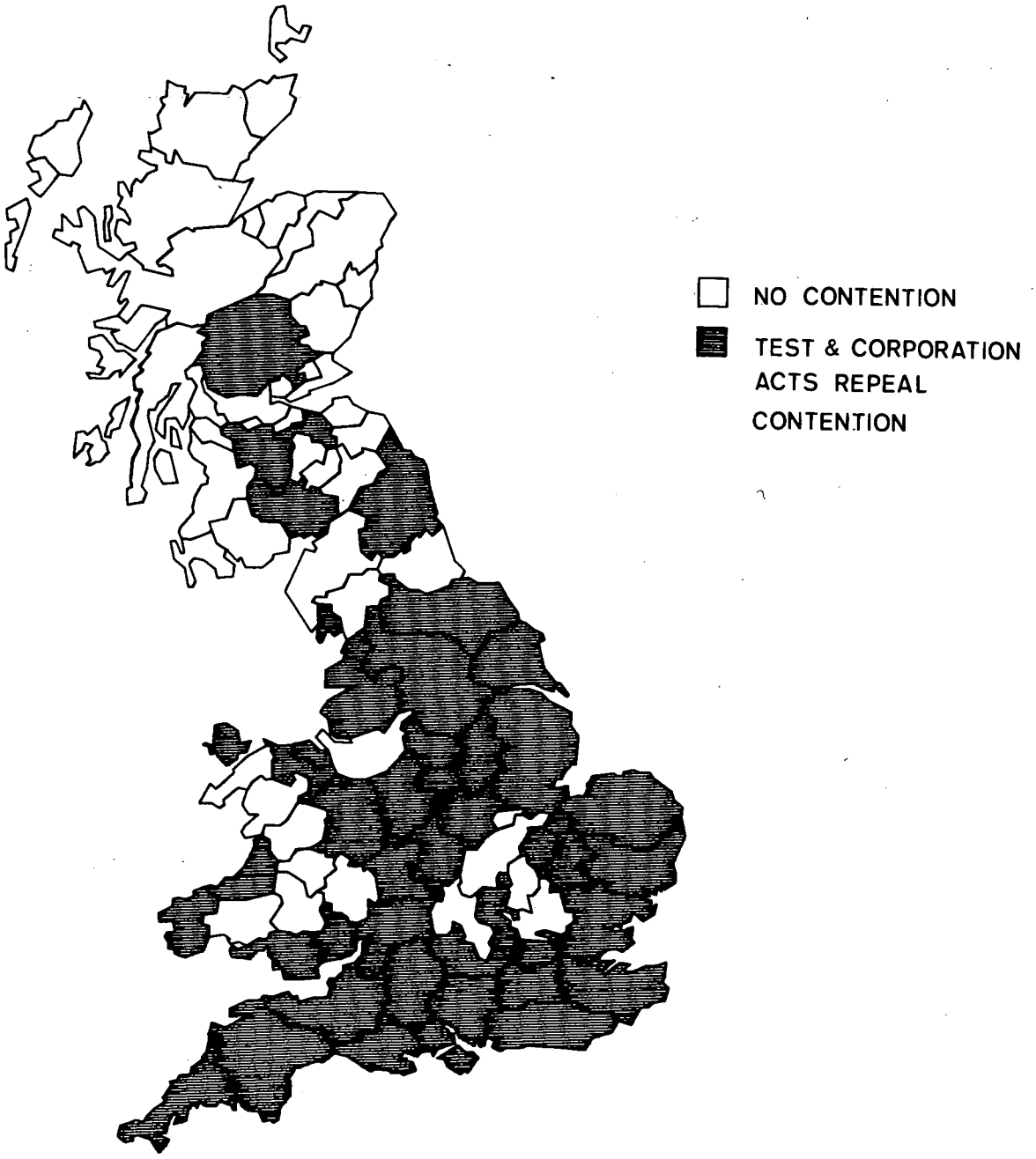
Another gauge of the importance of the Test and Corporation mobilization is the amount of collective action that it generated. "With the removal of the long-standing and stubborn objection of the middle classes to reform, and their increasing participation in public meetings and petitioning, the politics of the 1820's assumed a character that was as liberal and popular as that of the decades after the Reform Act."[11] Test and Corporation was a step toward this character by a small, localized segment of the population. The data on

collective action that is presented hereafter is derived from a study of British contention currently underway at the University of Michigan under the direction of Dr. Charles Tilly.[12] We enumerate from a diligent reading of seven periodical sources for the period 1828-34, a list of collective actions we call "contentious gatherings" involving ten or more persons who made a claim. For 1828 there were enumerated 595 gatherings of which 183 or 31% were concerned with the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. These gatherings took place in 43 of the 87 countries in Great Britain or not quite half of the country [see map 1]. The counties of Middlesex, (33 gatherings), West Yorkshire (11), Essex (12), and Dorset, Wiltshire, Pembroke with 8 gatherings each provided a substantial part of the contention. The organizations that made the claims in these gatherings were localized dissenting religious groups. There seemed to be no regional or national organization overseeing the collective action in the Test and Corporation Acts repeal campaign. In Middlesex, the largest county, the lack of extent of mass mobilization over the Test and Corporation repeal can be seen by noting that only 15% of the total gatherings in the county were concerned with that issue while in other large counties such as Yorkshire the total was 38% and Lancashire 23%. These figures provide the conclusion that while the Test Repeal Bill was a major issue in the spring of 1828, it was not an overwhelming issue. The amount of petitioning in Parliament was significant but not staggering. The amounts of contention were noticeable, in some counties the only contention for the year was over the repeal, but it was not massive. Finally the groups involved in the contention were for the most part localized and not interconnected.

This picture of mobilization, contention and group interaction continues when we look at the early stages of the Catholic emancipation agitation. Closely following the dissenters seeking equal rights were the Catholics.

MAP 1

TEST AND CORPORATION ACTS CONTENTION 1828



G.I.T. Machin in his book on the Catholic question in English politics has done justice to the political side of the movement. All that needs be noted here is the fact that both Irish and English Catholics were eager for a reform of the restrictions on their liberties. When they saw the opportunity for the dissenters to secure a measure of relief they likewise began a petition campaign to Parliament. Lord John Russell rejoiced in the success at the repeal motion because it not only destroyed the Anglican constitution but shattered the main line of defense of a Protestant constitution as well.[13] "The Pro-Catholics were encouraged by the large majority in favor of the dissenters, and they awaited the ultimate decision on the repeal before introducing their own motion on 8 May. Sir Francis Burdett then moved a resolution for a committee of the whole to review the restrictive laws."[14] Thus, ensued a massive mobilization in Ireland, with meetings and petitions to Parliament.[15] But even with the Irish Catholic association leading the way the pro-Catholic claim petitions to Parliament in 1828 amounted to only 732 or 16% of the total for the year. The collective action amounted to even a less impressive figure of only 43 gatherings out of a total of 595 (7%). Of the groups making the claims in these gatherings, 35 of the 43 were strictly localized groups such as clergy, freeholders, and inhabitants. County distribution of contention also showed its minor status. Only 19 of the 87 counties had gatherings regarding the Catholic issue and of these only Middlesex, with eight, had a noticeable number of gatherings. Just like the Test and Corporation Acts repeal, the issue was important but not yet national. There was contention in small amounts but it was localized, for the most part, and was only found in a small number of counties.

On closer examination, however, we can see the beginnings of a larger movement. A few of the groups making claims are of the type that could be classified as a more nationally-oriented organization than local. Such groups

as the British Catholic Association and the various anti-Catholic Brunswick Constitutional Clubs began to appear. These groups move to the forefront of the action in 1829 and act as magnets to draw support for their specific stance. The size of some of the gatherings also points toward a larger national interest in the Catholic crises. Meetings of 4000 in Leeds and 5000 in Newton Abbot plus the famous Penenden Heath Rally of 20,000+ prefigured the larger reform meetings of 1831. "The opponents of Catholic Emancipation in England. . .thought it right to call for a public expression of the opinion of Great Britain. . . the example was set by the county of Kent. In pursuance of a requisition signed by many persons of influence in the county, a meeting of the freeholders and yeomanry was held on Pennendon Heath, on the 24th of October. It was the most numerous public meeting that had assembled in England for many years: twenty thousand persons were said to have been present."[16] Interest in the Catholic question was on the rise, but it wasn't until the 1829 session of Parliament that its presence was forcefully felt.

The flowering of the Catholic emancipation mobilization began in the spring of 1829 with a massive petition drive by the anti-Catholic forces. Prior to this time the petitions in Commons had been running in favor of the Catholics. In the 1828 Parliamentary session there were 732 pro-Catholic petitions and 254 anti-petitions. With the organization of more and more Brunswick clubs the anti-movement grew in strength.

"Northumberland, Worcester, Caernarvon and Essex, have to be added to the list of English districts which have on are about to follow the example of Kent . . . since the Brunswick club of Kent was formed, six and thirty places and bodies have publicly declared themselves against the conceding of political power to the adherents of the Pope."[17] "Brunswick clubs-A meeting is to be held at Leeds, on Monday, for the formation of one of these associations. Clubs

are forming at Honiton, Newton Bushel, and other parts of Devonshire: and a Protestant declaration is in the course of signature in the Hundred of Ottery."[18]

These constitutional clubs formed a network of anti-Catholic cells. From these clubs, statements, addresses, petitions and calls to actions were produced. One such call, a broadside, dated 2 April 1829 called upon "Protestants" and "Englishmen" to petition that the Duke of Wellington, Robert Peel, the Lord Chancellor and the Solicitor-General be impeached for forcing an unconstitutional Roman Catholic Emancipation measure upon the country. The poster continues "your case is not desperate - only be firm - be united - be instant."[19] United they were. Parliament's tables groaned under the weight of petitions in the session of February to June; some 4,542 petitions were presented to Commons, almost 70% dealing with the Catholic question. (See figure 1). Members of Parliament were becoming aware of the importance of petitioning as a vechicle for public opinion. On February 26, 1829 member John O'Neill, M.P. from Hull, spoke to the House on the subject of the Catholic petitions. He noted surprise in the changed attitudes of the distinguished men in both houses over the issue. He saw the huge volume of petitions daily heaped on the legislative tables. With that in mind "he wished a reference should in future be made, by weekly returns to the House, of the number of petitions presented. . . so as to enable the House to collect, as from a balance-sheet, the real sentiments of the nation upon this very important subject."[20]

If we compare the 1829 Parliamentary session with the previous year and look at major issues and numbers of petitions presented on those issues (see figure 2) we can clearly see the gravity of the Catholic issue in the minds of the petitioners. The bar representing Catholic claims petitions far out distances all the others in the period. It more than doubles the Test and Corporation Acts repeal petitions. Even when we include a combined category

for all other petitions presented (bar labeled "other") it is barely half the size of the Catholic petitioning. Massive lists of signatures accompanied these petitions. "One from Leicestershire was said to have 17,935 signatures: one from Glasgow, 36,796: from Bristol 38,000; and from Kent 81,400."[21] From this one would conclude that in petition mobilization the Catholic issue was dominant and more massive than anything previous to it.

In the area of collective action there is likewise a large increase in activity. Of 641 noted events throughout Great Britain for that year, 261 dealt with the Catholic issue. Of all collective actions in our sample, 41% related to the Catholic emancipation bill. That is a dramatic increase over the seven percent the issue held in 1828.

The number of counties that had collective actions regarding Catholic emancipation in them in 1829 also increased. (See map 2). In 1828 there were 19 counties with Catholic contention and in 1829 that figure is more than two and a half times greater with 49 counties. This is even more pronounced when we note that of the 87 counties, only 58 had any noted contention at all in our sample, so that 85% of all counties that had contention had some contention regarding Catholic claims. Below is a rank order of counties in order of magnitude of Catholic emancipation contention.

County	Catholic Issue Gatherings- 1829
Middlesex	40
Kent	19
Lancashire	18
Cornwall	12
Surrey	10
Devon	8
Sussex	8

In some of these counties the Catholic issue was the dominant issue in

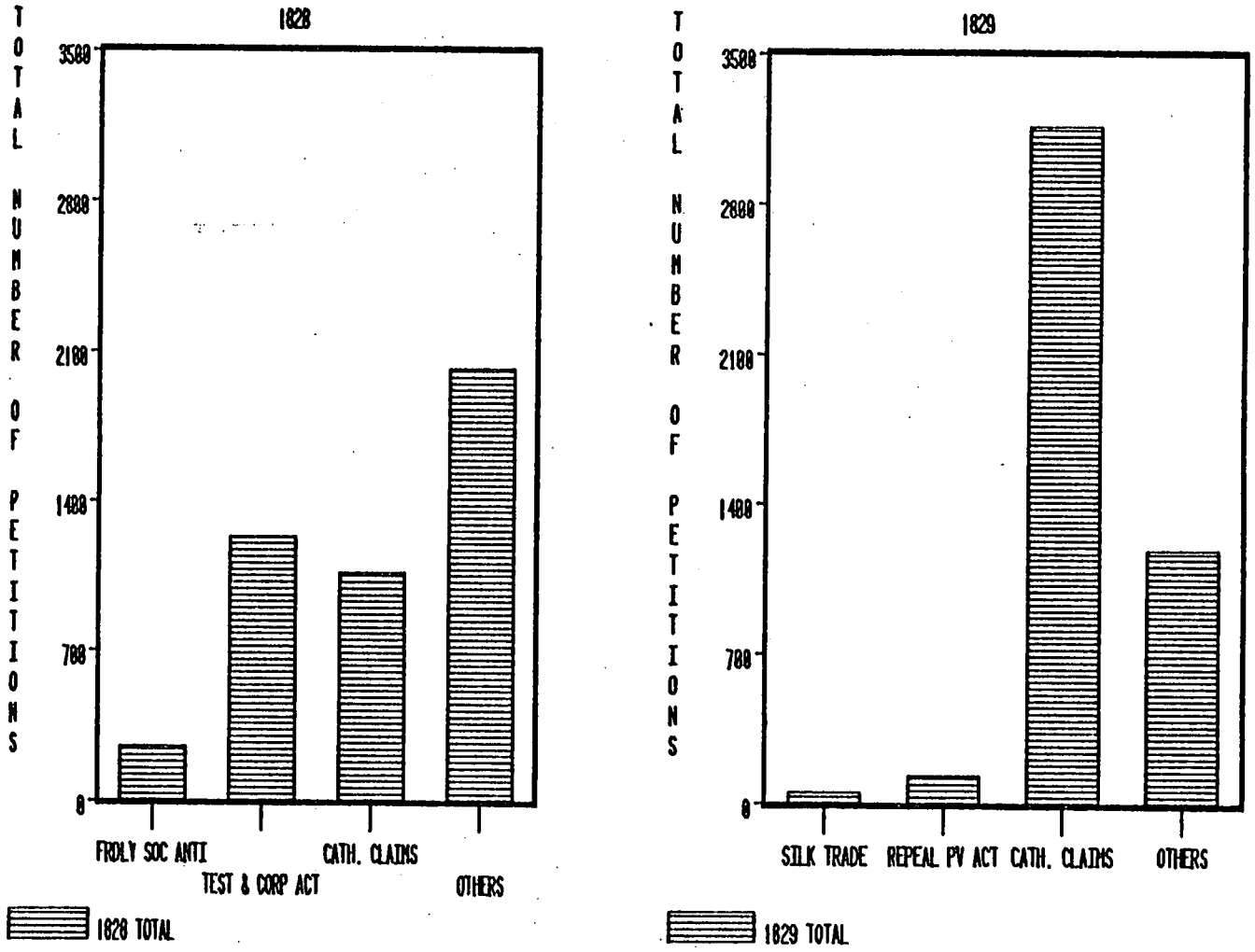
Figure 1

1829 Votes & Proceedings: Total Petitioning

Month	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Total	%
Catholic Claims Anti	593	1,574	2	0	0	2,169	47.8
Catholic Claims Pro	243	747	11	0	0	1,001	22.1
Parish Vestries Act, Repeal	39	52	4	21	17	133	2.9
Silk Trade: Against Imports of Foreign Silks	3	8	27	14	1	53	1.2
East India Co.: Charter Renewal Anti	0	0	1	27	6	34	.7
Corn Law Repeal	0	0	1	22	1	24	.5
Hindoo Widows to Prohibit Burning	1	0	1	0	8	10	.2
Other	174	374	158	289	123	1,118	24.6
Total	1,053	2,755	205	373	156	4,542	100

Figure 2

PETITIONS PRESENTED TO PARLIAMENT: MAJOR ISSUES



Catholic Emancipation Contention

MAP 2

1828

□ none
■ catholic claims

1829

□ none
▤ other contention
■ catholic claims

contention for that year; Cornwall 92% of all gatherings concerned the emancipation, Devon 89%, and Kent 66%.

One of the important questions often asked in the press in early 1829 was if the dissenters would take up the Catholic's banner for emancipation once they had secured their own rights, or whether they would revive old anti-papist prejudices. What actually happened was a bit of both. "The more sophisticated leaders of dissent petitioned for Catholic emancipation, while their trinitarian troops marched in the opposite direction."[22] A review of the Votes and Proceedings of the House of Commons or Hansard's reveals that indeed dissenting religious groups took up on both sides of the controversy. This trend continued in the area of collective action. An analysis of groups making claims in 1829 gatherings reveals 69 religious groups made anti-claims, while 59 religious groups came out in favor of the Catholics. On both sides there were groups identifying themselves as "Protestant Dissenters." Even though the issue was one to interest religious organizations and groups, many associations of citizens also participated in the process of making public opinion known. A count of inhabitant groups making claims in 1829 contentious gatherings shows 73 citizen groups. Many of these were area wide collections of citizens such as town, or town and environs, or county meetings. Over all the trend was to have more wider-interest groups making claims in 1829 Catholic related gatherings than in 1828 or in Test and Corporation gatherings:

Issue	% of localized groups participating	% of wider interest groups participating
Test & Corporation	96	4
Catholic claims 1828	81	19
Catholic claims 1829	47	53

It is generally conceded that the reform bill of 1832 and the popular movements surrounding it were the beginning of British mass politics. But

in the period just prior to reform ". . . there was clearly a progression in both the scale and the power of popular agitations. . . culminating in the final gigantic reform agitation. . ."[23] It is in the months just prior to the first reform push on the issue of Catholic emancipation, that the prototype for the reform agitation is set. In the increase in petitioning, on the Catholic issue, which became the dominant topic of the period, we can see a precursor of the petitioning on reform. In the amounts of collective action and its distribution throughout Britain we can see the beginnings of a nationwide mobilization of public opinion. In the groups making the claims in these gatherings we can see a progression to a wider interest and affiliation of the members, similar to the reform era. In the organizational efforts of both the Brunswick clubs, British Catholic Association and the Irish Catholic Association we can see the organizational forerunners of such reform organizations as the Birmingham Political Union.

The Catholic Emancipation era, then, can be seen as a type of milestone along the trek to the time of the massive reform agitations. At least this period acts as the developmental prototype for the actions, group alliances, and affected areas of the reform era. At best it is its own massive mobilization, complete with large organizations, massive petitioning and countywide activity and interest. Historians generally agree that the reform period fostered the development of British mass politics. As Michael Brock writes regarding the May 1831 reform activities, "Nonetheless this was the most intense burst of agitation which anyone observing it had ever known."[24] As we can see from the data presented, reform was not the first issue to activate the forces of popular agitation on a large scale. It was, in fact, the struggle of Roman Catholics to gain equal political rights that produced the major elements that most historians agree are the foundations of the reform era reputation.

FOOTNOTES

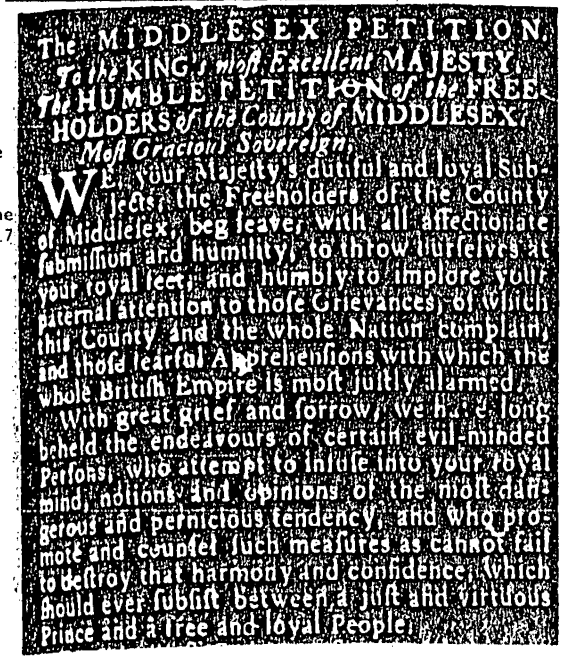
[1] Gentleman's Magazine, September 1828, p. 264 "Domestic Occurrences"

[2] Gentleman's Magazine, September, 1828.

[3] December 2, 1828, P. 4.

[4] "Public Petitioning and Parliament Before 1832," Peter Fraser in History, Vol. XLVI, No. 158, October 1961, p. 200.

[5] Parliamentary debates had always been kept secret. In the seventeenth century, the House resolved that no member should set forth in print anything he should speak without the leave of the House. This resolution was set forth in July of 1641. In 1738 the House declared that the publishing of its debates was a breach of privilege. These attempts did not stop journalists such as Dr. Johnson from masking their reporting of the debates in periodicals such as the Gentleman's Magazine in the form of articles entitled "Proceedings of the Senate of Lippiput". The House repeated its resolution again in 1753 and in 1762. But the end of the struggle came in 1771 when the City of London, with the help of its Lord Mayor backed the defiance of a printer arrested for publishing the House proceedings. The court decision was framed in such a way that the House, while not recinding its orders of 1753 and 62 did not try to stop the publication of information regarding its proceedings again. Josef Redlich, The Procedure of the House of Commons, Archibald Constable & Co., 1908, p. 38.



THE MIDDLESEX PETITION.

To the KING's most Excellent MAJESTY.

The HUMBLE PETITION of the FREE-HOLDERS of the County of MIDDLESEX,

Most Gracious Sovereign,

WE, your Majesty's dutiful and loyal Subjects, the Freeholders of the County of Middlesex, beg leave, with all affectionate submission and humility, to throw ourselves at your royal feet, and humbly to implore your paternal attention to those Grievances, of which this County, and the whole Nation complain, and those fearful Apprehensions with which the whole British Empire is most justly alarmed.

With great grief and sorrow, we have long beheld the endeavours of certain evil-minded Persons, who attempt to infuse into your royal mind, notions and opinions of the most dangerous and pernicious tendency, and who promote and countenance such measures as cannot fail to destroy that harmony and confidence, which should ever subsist between a just and virtuous Prince and a free and loyal People.

Wilkes petition of 1769 from the London Chronicle May 30 to June 1, 1769 p. 517

[6] Fraser p. 204. Also see Colin Leys "Petitioning in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries" Political Studies, V. 3, 1955, p. 46-64.

[7] Gentleman's Magazine, April 1829, p. 362.

[8] John W. Derry, Reaction and Reform, Blandford Press, London, 1963, p. 103.

[9] Alexander Llewellyn, The Decade of Reform, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1971, p. 27.

[10] "The Strategy of 'Dissent' in the Repeal Campaign, 1820-1828" by R.W. Davis, in Modern History V. 38, No. 4, December 1966, p. 374.

[11] Fraser p. 205

[12] See "Enumerating and Coding Contentious Gatherings in Nineteenth Century Britain" by Charles Tilly and R.A. Schweitzer February 1980, CRSO Working Paper #210, and "The Texture of Contention in Britain, 1828-29" by R.A. Schweitzer, Charles Tilly and John Boyd. April 1980, CRSO Working Paper #211.

[13] "Dissent in the Repeal Campaign", R.W. Davis, p. 377.

[14] The Catholic Question in English Politics 1820 to 1830, G.I.T. Machin, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1964, p. 115.

[15] See The Catholic Emancipation Crisis in Ireland, 1823-1829, by James A. Reynolds, Yale University Press, New Haven, Conn. 1954,

[16] Annual Register V. 70, 1828, p. 144.

[17] Spectator, Nov. 22, 1828.

[18] Spectator November 8, 1828

[19] Public Record Office, Home Office 40/23 #133.

[20] Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 2nd series, Vol 20, 26 February 1829, p. 598.

[21] "The No-Popery Movement in Britain in 1828-29" G.I.T. Machin in The Historical Journal V-VI No. 2 1963, p. 205.

[22] Ursua Henriques, Religious Toleration in England 1787-1833, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1961, p. 147.

[23] Fraser p. 199

[24] Michael Brock, The Great Reform Act, Hutchinson University Library, London, 1973, p. 296.

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