sent writer has had the benefit of studying a commentary and notes on 'Smith's Thoughts' prepared by Professor Davis Stevens, Whitman College, for the forthcoming edition of the correspondence of Smith (Appendix B.).


24 Letter from Smith to Shelburne, 12 Feb. 1767: MS. Marquess of Lansdowne, Bowood Library; Rae, pp.235-6.


26 HPHC iii. 316; Fay, p.107.

27 HPHC i. 499-500.


30 Skinner, TI/S pp. 20-1.

31 HPHC iii. 318; when John Sinclair of Ulbster brought Smith the news of Burgoyne's surrender at Saratoga and anguished that the nation was ruined, Smith replied coolly: 'There is a great deal of ruin in a nation' (Rae, p.343.).

32 There is an anecdote that when Smith was in London in 1787 and entered Dundas's house on Wimbledon Common, the assembled company — including Pitt, Dundas, Addington, Wilberforce, and Grenville — rose from their seats to receive him. 'Be seated, gentlemen,' said Smith. 'No,' replied Pitt, 'we will stand till you are first seated, for we are all your scholars' (Rae, p.405.).

33 WN ii. 483 (V. iii).

34 MS. Auckland Papers: Rae, p.353.

35 Scottish Record Office, MS. GD51/11/355; Rae, p.355.

36 Harvard University, MS. Kress Library: Rae, p.351.

37 WN i. 437 (III. iv).

38 WN i. 490 (IV. ii).

39 WN i. 278 (I. xi).

40 This glance at Smith's moral thought is based on Andrew Skinner's useful intro. to The Wealth of Nations Books I-III (Penguin Classics: Harmondsworth, 1970); The Theory of Moral Sentiments (1790), II. iii. 3; WN i. 519 (IV. iii. b); V.I. Lenin, Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism (Foreign Languages Press: Peking, 1970). Marx was stimulated to think about alienation within the economic context by his study of the classical economists in Paris 1843-4, expressing his ideas in the 'Economic and Philosophical MSS', which formed the basis for Capital (1867): see David McLellan, Karl Marx: His Life and Thought (Macmillan paperback: London, 1973), pp.107-12.

41 Marx believed that Adam Ferguson was Smith's 'teacher' in conjunction with the concept of the division of labour: see Capital (Foreign Languages Publishing House: Moscow, n.d.), i. 123, n. 1. He was noting the priority in time of Ferguson's Essay on the History of Civil Society (1767) over the Wealth of Nations, (1776) unaware that Smith had been teaching ideas about the division of labour at Glasgow from the 1750s.

42 For a modern account of the leaders of the British Convention of Reformers at Edinburgh and Braxfield's conduct on the bench when trying some of them, see E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (Pelican paperback: Harmondsworth, 1968), pp.135-41. Professor Sheps argues persuasively that Thomp-
The reform societies, usually called Societies of the Friends of the People, which appeared in various Scottish centres in 1792 did of course pass resolutions which took notice of events in France. The Dundee Whig Club went furthest and alarmed the government most by its almost unreserved applause and by its exchanges with the French National Assembly. The Home Secretary, Henry Dundas, who based his power at Westminster on his control of Scotland's political life, kept careful watch over the developments. However, the meetings, resolutions, riots, raising of liberty trees, and organizational activity of 1792 had more complex sources than just the example of revolutionary France.

By the end of the eighteenth century Scotland had roused itself from a period of political dormancy. Advances in agriculture and industry had increased the prosperity of the country. But the benefits of those advances were distributed asymmetrically. Strikes in industries and riots in the countryside were not uncommon. Forced emigration as a result of the clearances added to popular discontent. America was often the goal of emigration, and throughout the 1790's letters from those who had resettled there praised the social and economic benefits of republican America. Meanwhile, those who remained in Scotland became impatient with existing abuses. However, efforts to ameliorate these abuses had all been frustrated by 1791. An attempt to repeal the provisions of the Test Act insofar as they applied to Scotland failed and the petition did not even have the support of conservative elements in the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. Religious discontent, as we shall see, was a factor in turning some reformers' attention to America. The Corn Act of 1791 and Parliament's rejection of petitions to abolish the slave trade and reform burgh representation all added to middle and lower class discontent. And, to signal further its hostility to reform, the Government issued its proclamation against seditious writings on May 21, 1791, thus exacerbating the discontent. The proclamation, however, was not effective in quelling the popularity of polemical literature or the energies of the Scottish reform societies. The culmination of their efforts was a gathering called the General Convention of the Delegates from the Societies of the Friends of the People throughout Scotland. It met in Edinburgh for three days in December of 1792.

This meeting, following the agitation of the whole year, frightened the Ministry into repressive action. The meeting comprised delegates from eighty societies, about half of them in and around Edinburgh and half from towns and villages in the new manufacturing districts of Scotland. Its resolutions, calling for a more equal and just representation of the Commons in Parliament, were reformist not revolutionary. But the Ministry feared the popular character of the gathering. Artisans were represented as well as members of the respectable middle classes. So a number of arrests were made, and the first months of 1793 saw a series of state trials in Edinburgh.

The Ministry chose Edinburgh as the scene of its repressive operations for two reasons. First, Scotland had gone further than England in developing a national reform association based on the participation of shopkeepers and artisans. The societies of the 1790's had a more popular character than those of the previous decade and they were regularly in touch with each other. And, secondly, convictions were more likely to be procured in Scottish courts. There had been some unsatisfactory acquittals in England. In Scotland the judges were more amenable to the government's wishes since they were subject to the patronage of Dundas' political machine, and the juries were more docile since they were virtually handpicked by the judges. Lord Cockburn in his Examination of the Trials for Sedition in Scotland (1888) has described the political background and the partiality of the proceedings in which Lord Braxfield, the Lord Justice-Clerk, played prosecutor as well as judge, joked with the jurors about hanging the defendants, and exclaimed that attention to the political views of the rabble in itself warranted conviction.  

The first few sedition trials were directed against modest merchants, booksellers and chemists, who had participated in the Convention but who were of no great political importance. The manner of obtaining their convictions held out no promise of a fair trial for subsequent defendants. So one of these intended victims, James Thomas Callender of Edinburgh, fled to the United States rather than stand what would inevitably be an unjust trial. He settled there and became a virulent pamphleteer and political journalist.  

Callender's case contains two interesting features which are germane to our concerns. The first is his flight to America. That act was very much in the well-established radical tradition of viewing America as an asylum for liberty and a refuge from British tyranny. For revolutionary America served in theory and practice as an ideological haven for reformers. From 1780 on the new republic was viewed, in the words of John Jebb, a London reformer, as an
asylum for suffering humanity”. Leading reformers such as Richard Price, the Dissenting theologian who maintained extensive political and intellectual contacts throughout Britain, predicted that “the time will probably come when a great part of Europe will be flocking to a country where un molested by spiritual and intellectual tyranny they will be able to enjoy in safety the exercise of reason and the rights of man.” These sentiments of the middle-class reformers of the 1780’s were also repeated in the 1790’s by the adherents of the popularly-based reforming movements like the Corresponding Societies in London, Sheffield and Norwich and the various societies in Scotland which had sent delegates to the Edinburgh convention. John Thelwall’s popular journal The Tribune and the tracts of the London Corresponding Society pointed out the political attractions of America and urged large scale migration to what The Tribune called “the hospitable shores of America.” At the same time Theophilus Lindsey, an English Dissenting divine and reformer with Scottish intellectual connections, revealed in his private letters projects for ministers to “transatlanticize” with their flocks out of political despair. Thomas Hardy, the founder of the London Corresponding Society, recorded in his manuscript notes about the Society that the political trials in Scotland led many reformers to contemplate or undertake emigration to America. So Callender’s flight to the refuge of American shores must be seen in the context of a tradition which persisted throughout the 1780’s and 1790’s. Of the two revolutionary republics, France and America, America was still the preferred haven of liberty.  

Similarly, another and more important victim of the political trials, Thomas Fyshe Palmer of Dundee, contemplated emigration to the American republic because of the political repression at home. However, before he could execute his design Palmer was arrested, charged with the preparation and distribution of seditious literature (in fact, requests for the reform of the Scottish burghs), and sentenced to seven years’ transportation. Palmer was “a gentleman descended from a respectable and opulent family in Bedfordshire.” He had been elected to a fellowship at Queen’s College, Cambridge, but had been converted to unitarian opinions and, in consequence, had abandoned his academic career and taken up a unitarian ministry in Dundee. Theophilus Lindsey, mentioned above, and Joseph Priestley, the scientist, philosopher, theologian and reformer, had been instrumental in his conversion. They had extensive contacts with other political and religious reformers in Scotland and also had engaged in political correspondence with Americans from the beginning of the revolutionary war. Shortly before the Scottish trials, Priestley had been the victim of anti-radical riots in Birmingham and was about to undertake his own much-publicized resettlement in the United States. Lindsey, we have already noticed, documented various projects for what I have called elsewhere “ideological emigration.” Palmer’s plan to migrate, then, like Callender’s, must be seen as part of this tradition of association between reformers and revolutionary America.  

One of the attractions of America for men like Palmer was the state of religious liberty there. The absence of religious establishments or tests was frequently cited in reformers’ discussions and descriptions of revolutionary America from 1778 on throughout the 1790’s. Religious liberty and political reform were associated goals bound together in an equation which included the example of the American republic. Richard Price, in his Observations on the Importance of the American Revolution and the Means of Making It a Benefit to Mankind (1784), along with Priestley was central in establishing the connection between religious and political liberty and the relevance and influence of revolutionary America. As we have already seen, the Scottish reform societies in a similar manner had combined political and ecclesiastical reform by petitioning, unsuccess fully, against the Test Act as well as in favour of Parliamentary reform.  

Price, Priestley and Lindsey, all prominent pro-Americans, exerted their influence on a number of Scottish fellow unitarians and other critics of the Scottish established church who were also involved in the reform agitation surrounding the Convention and trials. For instance, the Christie family of Montrose, associates of Palmer, were deeply committed to the cause of unitarianism in Scotland. One, William Christie, published a defence of ecclesiastical liberty which showed the influence of Price with whom he was closely allied. A brother, Alexander, who was censured by the Kirk session of which he was a member for unitarian sympathies, cited Price in his writings and reprinted Price’s famous Discourse on the Love of Our Country. That work had praised the French Revolution because it was the first instance of the light of liberty spreading from America to Europe. Thomas Christie, Alexander’s son and also a unitarian, wrote one of the many Scottish replies to Burke’s Reflections on the Revolution in France. Dundas’ spies thought that Christie’s work contributed in large measure to the support for reform agitation, and made the district of Montrose a centre of
democratic propaganda. Another member of this circle, William Skirving, was a Secessionist critical of the established Kirk, was active in the Edinburgh political reform societies, and was one of the chief organizers of the Convention of 1793. He too regarded America as a sort of ideal society and was moved by those considerations of religious toleration which for so long had made America attractive to radicals. So the Scottish radicals of the Convention movement and the 1790's continued to exhibit an interest in America as a model of religious as well as political liberty just as reformers had done in the 1770's and 1780's.7

Let us return to the second point which Callender's allegedly seditious pamphlet and his subsequent flight to America raises. It suggested a new kind of political concern. The argument of his *The Political Progress of Great Britain* (1792) was that the oppressive laws and taxes from which the country suffered and the expensive wars which it undertook were the result of government by a corrupt and unrepresentative Parliament. Other pamphlets of the period also manifested this kind of social concern as did the resolutions of a second convention, the British Convention of the Delegates of the People Associated to Obtain Universal Suffrage and Annual Parliaments, which met in Edinburgh in October, 1793, after the first series of treason trials. This convention was quickly broken up by the authorities and a second series of political trials began in Edinburgh. The Convention had started as a purely Scottish affair but as a result of nearly simultaneous suggestions from popular societies in Edinburgh, Norwich and London (where another series of political trials was in course), it was, while it lasted, more representative both geographically and in its social composition. The latter feature reflected the growing popular character of reform. Not surprisingly, then, the Convention cited the plight of the Spitalfield weavers as relevant and graphic testimony to the corruption and failure of the present system of government. The official goals of the Convention were a democratic franchise and annual Parliaments but empty stomachs as well as a concern for the nature of liberty entered into the endeavours of the Convention.8

The concern which the Convention exhibited with the social dimensions of reform was both a new one for radicals and a typical feature of the reforming activity of the 1790's. In earlier decades the benefits of political reform traditionally were thought of in terms of liberty, public virtue, and religious toleration. But now social justice and economic benefits were seen as a proper conse-
example which made popular participation in the Convention alarming. Certainly the Ministry saw Paine's role in this light and in the sedition trials the prosecution claimed that under Paine's influence reformers were trying to introduce American-style republicanism and thus subvert the established order in Britain. Paine's works did circulate widely in Scotland among members of the societies represented at the Convention. If we wish to understand the alarm and repression surrounding the Convention we must bear in mind the sentiments about Paine expressed by the government's agents at the various trials throughout Britain. That he was trying to spread Paine's ideas was one of the major charges laid against another victim of the trials at Edinburgh, Thomas Muir.

Muir was a wealthy young man from Glasgow, a recently admitted member of the Faculty of Advocates at Edinburgh and a leader of the Convention movement. At Muir's trial, Braxfield, the judge, was at his most vindictive. He held that none but the landed interest were fit to be part of the political nation and told the jury that Muir's differing views and the promotion of parliamentary reform were in themselves seditious. Muir's personal history is another and a curious illustration of revolutionary America's role as a refuge for the friends of liberty. When it was apparent that he was going to be arrested arrangements were made by friends for Muir to escape to America. Money, clothes and letters were sent to Philadelphia and a passport procured for him. Instead he chose to face trial. He was sentenced to fourteen years' transportation. But after one and a half years he was rescued by an American ship, the Otter, through the agency of some interested Americans.

Another of the victims of repression, Joseph Gerrard, also might have escaped trial but chose not to. Gerrard was a West Indian by birth and an Englishman by education, and he had lived in the American republic from 1784 to 1788. He was one of the leading instigators of the Convention and a delegate to it from both the Society for Constitutional Information and the more popularly-based London Corresponding Society. Gerrard was a brilliant speaker who attracted large crowds to his public addresses in Edinburgh during the Convention. At his trial his dignity, youth and eloquence made him sympathetic to observers and he is commemorated along with the other political martyrs of Scotland on a monument in Edinburgh.

Gerrard, who was one of the most important theorists and propagandists of the Convention, illustrates the point already made about the instructiveness of revolutionary America. In his A Convention the Only Means of Saving Us from Ruin (1793) he described the benefits to be expected from the political reforms that the Convention was asking for. His predictions, he claimed, were not the product of a distempered imagination but the result of observation and experience. Having lived in the United States for many years he knew that there "Life is simple, and therefore it is happy." He made the same analysis of the origins of war as Barlow had. They were caused by the ambitions of courts, kings and politicians and were not in the national interest or the interest of the common people. Republicanism and popular sovereignty removed the sources of friction. Gerrard pointed out that in America,

that happy land of freedom and an equality of rights, the blood of man is never shed to satiate the cruelty and ambition of crowned heads. America is without courts, and therefore she is without wars. Wars are even prevented by the structure of the government. If a dispute arises between two Commonwealths concerning a tract of land, or a branch of commerce, a court of commissioners, composed of two deputies from each state, is immediately convened to decide upon the merits of the business. With these enlightened republicans, reason as it is the only proper, so it is the sole arbitor of differences....

Equally, Gerrard said, social order was preserved in America because as every man had an interest in the state, so no man had an interest in disturbing it. The people were less rapacious and violent. Gerrard sketched out the kind of superior social order he thought existed in the United States which accounted for its relatively greater harmony thus:

In America, the country which God and man have concurred to render the blissful habitation of abundance and of peace, the poor are not broken down by taxes to support the luxury of an insolent nobility. No lordly peer tramples down the corn of the husbandman, and no proud prelate wrings from him the tythe of his industry. They have neither chicanery in ermine, nor hypocrisy in lawn. The community there is not divided into an oppressed peasantry and an overgrown aristocracy, the one of whom lives by the plunder of the state, while the others are compelled to be the objects of it. Plenty
THE EDINBURGH REFORM CONVENTION OF 1793

is the lot of all, superfluity of none.

Earlier radicals had attacked the influence of a corrupt court and nobility and instanced America in support of the doctrine that a country could prosper without courts, prelates and nobles. Here, however, in a defence of the Convention the attack includes an idealized description of the social benefits of political equality for the mass of common people and a threat of republicanism on the American model. 15

Gerald had another chance to repeat his message a few months later in court. At his trial he reaffirmed his belief in universal suffrage and annual parliaments. Employing arguments which went beyond Locke he reminded his audience that every man had an inalienable right to life and property which could be protected only through personal representation. There was no class of person in the community so deprived as not to have an interest and a stake in society. Gerald adduced the full panoply of radical arguments in support of his beliefs; he referred to natural rights and to supposedly lost ancient liberties. But, he said, he knew that universal suffrage was not visionary and impracticable. He had lived in America for four years and was a witness to its success. There, where every taxpayer possessed the vote, no difference of interest obtained between the electors and the elected representative. Consequently riot did not attend elections and corruption did not animate government. "What then," he concluded, "has been found by experience to be wholesome food for Americans, can never prove harmful or poisonous to Britons, the parent stock from whom Americans are descended." This argument did not bring Gerald the sympathy of Braxfield and he, too, was sentenced to Botany Bay. He lay a prisoner in the hulks for some time before his transportation and reflected upon the state of society in Britain as compared to that he had known in America. He wrote to Thomas Holcroft, the radical journalist to whom Paine had entrusted the printing of part one of The Rights of Man, that since British society "consists of only two classes, tyrants and slaves, it cannot be any degradation and consequently no punishment to cease to be a member of such a community." Less fortunate than others who were transported he died five months after his arrival in Australia. 16

Gerald's contentions about the reasons for the Convention were redolent of the new tone of social concern, examined earlier, which the two American apostles of reform, Barlow and Paine, propagated. But Gerald and other supporters of the Convention also exhibited a continuity with older concerns of reform. The traditional sentiments about political liberty and the new emphasis on social benefits were present in the arguments justifying a convention. And both these aspects of reform were justified by reference to the example of revolutionary America. So the experiences of the new republic provided a stream of continuity for the Convention reformers and were germane to its most recent concern. Indeed, the charges laid against Gerald, Muir and the other political martyrs were, as we have seen, aggravated in the eyes of the Scottish magistrates and of the Ministry, simply by their participation in a movement which, by pointing to the American example, was implicitly advocating popular sovereignty and republicanism. But, in addition, the Government's fears and repressive activity were generated by the very idea of a Convention. To comprehend the nature and source of their fear we must remember the association which Conventions bore and also the effect of two decades of discussion about their nature, discussions conducted by the immediate forebears of the organizers of the Edinburgh Convention. These radical analyses from the essential background to an understanding of the attitudes of both the members of the Convention and the Ministry. And here, too, the American Revolution figures largely.

Radical reformers, at the Convention and during the preceding fifteen years, wished for a complete participation of the people in government through universal representation. One of the questions traditionally discussed was how the people could legitimately mobilize their energy to amend the constitution and accomplish this reform. America afforded recent examples of sovereign people exercising its constitutional authority. The people did so through national associations or conventions operating outside the normal governmental framework and called together specifically to express its sovereignty. The Convention as an ultimate constitutional authority was not, of course, a new concept as the employment of the term in connection with the Parliaments of 1660 and 1689 shows. But those bodies had called themselves Parliaments as well, thus demonstrating a reluctance to consider the Convention as an anti-Parliament. The more radical notion of a Convention did, however, enjoy a certain currency and it was put into effect by the Americans very early in the revolutionary struggle. The idea of a Convention then, as the instrument of political reformation and the manifestation of popular constitu-
national authority began to figure in British radical examination of those constitutional truths which they discerned in America and held responsible for its enjoyment of the blessings of liberty.

James Burgh, for example, in his Political Disquisitions (1774) paid prominent attention to the use of extra-legislative bodies in America from the Stamp Act Congress through to the first Continental Congress. These were, in his analysis, instances of the people's directly employing its plenary constitutional power to accomplish changes which could not be brought about by mere legislative bodies. And Burgh was the first advocate in his time of a similar national association for Britain. He was ambivalent about whether such bodies, once established, would be merely pressure groups for reform or whether they would possess full constitutional authority. Hostile and conservative contemporary observers assumed the latter more radical interpretation. They claimed that the proposal for a national association was inspired by the American example of successful resistance to constituted and constitutional authority and that a convention of reformers was intended to subvert the legitimate authority of parliament. This, after all, was what the Americans had done when the committees of correspondence and provincial and continental congresses had effectively replaced the authority of the provincial governments. Another reformer, Lord Abingdon, writing in 1777, explicitly adopted this radical interpretation. The formation of their new governments by the American states, he argued, showed that special conventions of the people were necessary for the process of endowing a government with constitutional authority. Even so moderate a reformer as Christopher Wyvill, who presided over the Yorkshire Association, a large extra-parliamentary reform movement of the 1780's, occasionally hinted that the British people might copy the American example and exercise their sovereign constitutional power through a general association which would issue instructions to Parliament. One of Wyvill's agents, John Jebb, was even more enthusiastic in insisting that the revolutionary behaviour of the Americans in this regard accorded with true constitutional principle and should be emulated in Britain. Jebb, who was deeply involved in metropolitan radical organization, was an advocate of American independence because he believed that an independent American republic could teach Britain the path of political righteousness. In a public address in 1779 he argued that a national assembly of reformers, such as Burgh proposed and Wyvill was trying to organize, could act as the
centre of constitutional authority superior to Parliament if this national assembly were truly and justly representative of the people. This, he claimed, was the lesson of the Americans assembled in the Continental Congress.17

These men just cited were all writing before the 1790's and before the influence of the French Revolution could have been felt. The principle they advanced was, as they pointed out, the one upon which the Americans were acting. Paine, too, made the same point forcefully in a number of publications. Although these works appeared after the beginning of the French Revolution he always referred to the American experience which had given him his political education. For example, his "Letter Addressed to the Addressers" (1792) contended that "the right (to reform the constitution) and the exercise of that right appertains to the nation only, and the proper means is by a national convention, elected for the purpose by all the people." He quoted the preamble to the United States Constitution in order to remind his readers of the true constitutional status of a representative national convention.18

So when the meeting of reformers gathered at Edinburgh called itself the British Convention of the Delegates of the People it was surrounded by a revolutionary aura. There were associations with recent events in France, of course. But, as we have seen, for almost twenty years radicals had noticed similar American meetings and said that they were more legitimate repositories of constitutional power than the normal organs of government. The Convention at Edinburgh did not openly claim constitutional authority. Indeed, to do so would have been treasonable. But the idea was never far from the minds of either its supporters or enemies. Gerrald cited his knowledge of the United States to demonstrate that national conventions were the only legitimate as well as the only effective expressions of the sovereign power of the people. The Convention itself, in calling for a democratic franchise and annual parliaments, went so far as to remind the government that its power was not an absolute possession but a trust which could be revoked, thus suggesting that the Convention had the power to revoke that trust since it better represented the people in their constitutional authority.19

The Government's response to this threat was the state trials. The prosecutor made it clear that the very idea of a Convention at base had seditious connotations. And in a sense the Government was right. The reformers at Edinburgh implicitly challenged the entire constitutional basis of Britain by pointing to the American
example. They treated the American republic as an asylum and therefore as a model for liberty, including religious liberty. They saw the relevance and suggestiveness of the American Revolution in connection with the importance of social questions and benefits and with the possible claims of conventions. The radical practice of looking to America, established in the 1770's, was maintained at Edinburgh in the 1790's thus establishing some continuity between two generations of reformers. But the American example was not just a path to the recent past. It was also dynamic and helped the political reformers at Edinburgh to adapt to the new social and political concerns which were a feature of the 1790's. Indeed, one might ask why the reform movement which came to a head in Edinburgh in 1793 advocated only political activity and political reforms given that there were powerful social concerns as well. Part of the answer may be that the example of revolutionary America, to which radicals were accustomed to look, seemed to instruct men to seek the political kingdom of heaven first.

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2 Cockburn, Henry, Lord, An Examination of the Trials for Sedition which have hitherto occurred in Scotland, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1888), I, 76, 80-82, 86-87, 175, 182.


6 See Arthur Sheps, "Ideological Immigrants in Revolutionary America", in City and Society in the Eighteenth Century (Toronto, 1973), pp.231-46 for an analysis of the