ENGLISH XENOPHOBIA IN THE 18TH CENTURY: THE CASE OF LORD BUTE

No figure of Hanoverian politics - not even Walpole - was so generally disliked, distrusted and abused by contemporaries as John Stuart, 3rd. Earl of Bute, political adviser to George III, Secretary of State from 1761 to May 1762 and Head of the Treasury from May 1762 to April 1763, the first Scotsman ever to attain this eminent position. Controversy hounded Bute whatever his pursuits: “whether in office or out,” to quote one author: “he was attacked by the mob, threatened with assassination, vilified in pamphlets, prints, newspapers, songs, plays, handbills and effectively rejected as a potential ally by all the leading politicians of the day.

The bulk of this criticism was levelled in the 1760s but even after 1770, the so called “Northern Machiavel” was under withering if increasingly sporadic fire and as late as the 1780s, vestigial elements of the old hostility remained.” Historians seeking a high level political explanation of Bute’s extraordinary unpopularity have commonly cited constitutional factors - issues centred on the belief, nearly universal at the time, that Bute was in the fullest sense the “favourite,” a man without true
credentials for office, his position and status solely dependent upon royal support, corruption and the illicit expansion of monarchical power by unconstitutional means. The covert manipulator, in other words, of the political strings chiefly responsible for the difficulties which marked the opening years of George III’s reign. Comprising what John Brewer has called the “whig case” against Bute, these allegations no doubt contributed importantly to the latter’s rejection by the nation’s political leaders and thanks to the influence of opposition writers - polemicists like John Almon, Walpole and Burke - by a whole tradition of Whig Historiography enduring well into the 20th. century.

Such abstract considerations, however, had little if any bearing on Bute’s equally marked unpopularity with the nation at large - and with the city of London in particular. In the capital, as Brewer has shown, Bute was a focus of discontent - political, social, economic - by radical and moderate opinion alike, yet what ultimately became perhaps the major ground of attack, enabling the opposition press to mobilize public opinion against him with incredible effectiveness, was his nationality. Indeed, Bute’s Scothood was a rallying cry as powerful as that of “favourite” and both epithets worked in tandem: Bute’s policies were used to confirm popular conceptions of the Scots while the prevailing view of the Scots was used to malign Bute. The reason for this lies in the intensity of anti-Scottish prejudice pervading English society during most of the 18th. century - what one historian has called the English tendency at this time
“to savage national antipathies”\textsuperscript{6} xenophobic animosities directed towards all those manifestly “unEnglish” - the French (prime exponents of autocracy and Catholicism), the Spaniards or Papists, the Irish and especially the Scots. These feelings could easily be manipulated in a partisan cause.

Though the Act of Union, passed in 1707, not as the culmination of crowning friendship between the two nations but through political expediency - as an alternative to war - merged the two kingdoms of England and Scotland into that larger entity - the new kingdom of Great Britain - mutual antagonism engendered by centuries of conflict lingered on.

To people who gloried in their distinctive English nationality and achievements, the Scot was an alien entity, an outsider - at best only a “North Briton”, at worst a creature of contempt renowned for tenacity, penury, unintelligibility and greed - all of which made him intensely disliked. Scottish Presbyterians were regarded as enemies to the English church, Scottish Episcopalians as enemies of the State, while two rebellions had confirmed the sympathy of both with the Stuart cause. According to Junius, every Scotsman was by nature a traitor and Shelburne reflected a wide body of opinion within English society when he wrote in 1756 “that all Scotland was enthusiastically devoted to the exiled family with very few exceptions”\textsuperscript{7} (although only a minority of Scots rebelled for the Stuarts in 1715 and 1745). Other current notions inciting hostility to the Scots were that they supported standing armies,
were pro-Catholic and hence pro-Jacobite, and advocated
connexions with France - were, in short, a subversive
element, a danger to “Liberty and the Constitution”. In
the words of one contemporary, “Scotch tenets and
doctrines ... are diametrically opposed to the spirit of
our constitution.” Such beliefs explain why the Militia
Act of 1757 applied to England only: ministers, as
Carlyle’s editor Hill Burton put it “were afraid to arm the
people among whom the insurrection of 1745 had
occurred.” This stigma on Scottish loyalty subsequently
prompted the founding of the Poker Club in Edinburgh
(so called because it was to poke up feeling) which had
Carlyle, Hume and Adam Ferguson among its members:
“zealous friends to a Scotch militia and warm in their
resentment on its being refused to us and an indivi- 
duous line drawn between Scotland and England.”

But what more than anything fanned the flames of
anti-Scottish prejudice, radiating from government circles
outwards, was the post-union influx of needy Scots in
search of fortune and promotion. While their remark- 
able success in securing posts of profit and prestige, par-
cularly in the army and the diplomatic corps, was due to
factors not necessarily related to patronage or favour-
itism (the Scottish phalanx was in fact established well
before Bute’s advent to power nor was there a marked
reduction after his retreat from office), contemporaries
preferred another explanation. They saw it as part of a
clandestine conspiracy organized by Bute - and minions
- to exclude honest Englishmen from lucrative appoint-
ments and replace them with greedy place hunters from
the North. This naturally led to much hostile comment - as for instance, Dr. Johnson’s facetious remark “that the noblest prospect a Scotsman ever sees is the high road that leads him to England” - and later provided much useful ammunition for Wilkes and the opposition press who “hammered away week after week at the interchangeable depravity of the Scots nation and the King’s favourite.”

Bitter satire at the expense of Scottish characteristics and institutions abounded also in English poems, songs, pamphlets, journals and even dramatic literature. When in 1759, Charles Macklin, a now forgotten playwright produced his *Love a la Mode* at Drury Lane Theatre, London society flocked to laugh at his derisive portrait of the cantankerous Sir Archy McSarcasm. So popular was the play - George II is said to have had the play’s manuscript read to him privately - that several years later, Macklin authored another piece entitled *The Man of the World* in which “the born Scotsman” as symbolized by the hero, Sir Pertinax MacSycophant, was a model of meanness, hypocrisy and pertinacity. According to Walpole, there was little merit in the play, except the resemblance of Sir Pertinax to 20,000 Scotsmen - which undoubtedly accounts for the fact that it was a huge success. To an equal degree, Scotsmen, particularly writers and intellectuals imbued with fierce pride in the distinctive features of Scottish life, returned the hostility of “these factious barbarians” as Hume frequently referred to the English, with literary reprisals - prose and verse - explicitly designed to intensify...
patriotism by highlighting Scotland’s substantial contributions to intellectual and cultural life. As Hume boasted to Gilbert Elliot: “is it not strange … that we should really be the People most distinguished for literature in Europe.”

Because chauvinism - or hostility to foreigners - was especially prominent in the capital, if properly manipulated, it frequently provoked what Rudé has characterized as “political convergence” - an instance where certain political leaders (either at the national or local level) would ally themselves with extra parliamentary groups to form a temporary alliance with a common objective. What made this possible was London’s peculiar municipal organization. At this time Europe’s largest urban community - about 1/6 of the population spent their working lives there - the “city” had its own distinctive political tradition as well as its own political representation in the House of Commons, with 4 M.P.’s elected by the Liveried freemen in Common Hall. It possessed, moreover, a remarkably democratic municipal government composed of smaller merchants, shopkeepers and tradesmen who, as freemen of the Livery Companies, made up the Court of Common Hall and enjoyed substantial representation in the Court of the Common Council. One result of this system, comparatively democratic by contemporary standards, was that for the greater part of the 18th century, the “city”, as represented by its corporate officials, waged an almost constant opposition to the governments of the day and would frequently, in order to endow this opposition with
added numerical and vocal weight, appeal to opinion “without doors”, to the political public beyond parliament, the great majority who had no vote.

Independent of court and the dominant aristocratic factions in power, the “City of London” was a “natural rallying point” for broader appeals to the populace and a nucleus in and around which dissident elements could congregate, identify and organize. In this way, radicalism as it emerged in the 1760s “acquired a popular base, for the unenfranchized elements, vulgarly known as the mob, were drawn into political activity as the junior partners of the city and its leaders.” So it was during the Excise crisis in 1733, and again in 1757, when the Common Council, using both the press and the mob, engineered Pitt’s return to power despite the opposition of George II and his advisors. And it was the same militant chauvinism which had procured the repeal of the Jew Bill in 1755 and was again active during the Gordon riots of 1780 which fired popular hostility to Bute (and his countrymen) during the turbulent weeks following Pitt’s resignation in October 1761.

Initially, after his acceptance of a pension became known, Pitt found himself exposed to a torrent of literary and popular disapprobation, sinecures and pensions being considered incompatible with the “patriot” image, the basis of Pitt’s political credit and appeal. But this was only temporary. As the tide of invective increased, Pitt decided to clarify matters and defend himself by means of a letter to his longtime city supporter, Alderman William Beckford, explaining the reasons for
his resignation and emphasizing that the pension was “unmerited” and “unsolicited”. A copy of this letter was given to W. Bristow of the Public Ledger and its subsequent publication - there and in other papers - readily restored Pitt’s alliance with the city and brought back his “mad, noisy city friends”, as Newcastle put it.25

The Common Council of London took the lead by presenting Pitt with an address of thanks, a measure soon imitated by other cities, notably Dublin, Bath, York and Exeter, while within days, different pamphlets and prints appeared, justifying Pitt’s acceptance of the pension and approving his resignation, Pitt was obviously regaining his popularity but the “city” by now in ferment, swiftly redirected its attention to the man to whose machinations they attributed their idol’s fall from power - the haughty favourite Lord Bute.26

On November 9, 1761, on his way to the Lord Mayor’s banquet, he nearly lost his life. Amidst shouts of “no Scotch rogues”, “no Bute’s” and “Pitt forever”, the mob, evidently recruited by the pro-Pittite faction in the Common Council, rushed his coach; his guard of “butchers and bruisers” whom Bute had hired in anticipation of an attack, fought back vigorously, but were soon driven back and only the last minute intervention of a party of constables and peace officers saved him from annihilation.27 Even once inside the Guildhall, Bute and the Royal Family were coldly ignored while Pitt and Temple, having ridden triumphantly through the London streets, remained the centre of attention and popular acclaim.28 Where the mob could not vent its wrath
against Bute in person, it obtained vicarious satisfaction by burning or insulting his effigy and from this time lasting intermittently for many years, the popular emblems of Bute and the Queen Mother, Princess Augusta (between whom an adulterous connexion was supposed to exist) “a jackboot and pettycoat” could be seen paraded about the streets followed by hooting crowds who eventually burned them amid ribald jokes and other vociferous obscenities.

As late as 1771, effigies of Bute and the Princess Dowager were taken with pomp and ceremony to Tower Hill and there decapitated and burned by a London chimney sweep dressed in clerical garb. Such displays were as common in the counties as in London and evidenced even across the Atlantic - Bute’s effigy replete with Jackboot and thistle - being hissed, pelted, burned or put on a gibbet in New York, in Philadelphia in 1763, Boston in 1766 and Plymouth in 1769.

Given the increasing importance of propaganda - both literary and visual - as potent forces in political life, it was inevitable that antipathy to Bute would also find expression in the media. Indeed, in the months following Pitt’s resignation, there appeared an incessant stream of hostile political pamphlets, seditious newspaper articles, satirical prints and cartoons, all hitting out at the “insolent despotic Scot”, the “Thane at court” and his equally despised countrymen. Aversion to “pettycoat government” and the Scots is clearly expressed, for instance, in a contemporary print entitled “the Loyal Beast or Visionary addresses: A Dream.”
George III is a “youthful lion” receiving homage. To his right is “a most dreadful Scottish bison” and behind that, a tigress - a clear reference to the King’s mother, also a favourite target of the gutter press.

The famous road to England is the scene of another interesting print, “We are all a coming or Scotch coal forever.”31 Ragged Scottish immigrants are piled into a public coach, driven by Bute, while others are on horseback or plod on foot, each suffering from that characteristically “Scottish disease”, the scabies or itch. In “The Jack-Boot exalted”, a further popular cartoon of the day, Bute stands in a giant jack-boot “with glittering Star and Garter grac’d”, casting coins to an eager mob of Scots, while Pitt and the Duke of Newcastle retire in disgust. So numerous and popular were these prints, songs and poems devoted to the vilification of Bute and Scotland, that enterprising editors soon published entire collections, such as the *Political and Satirical History* which, in 1762, took the new subtitle *Displaying the Unhappy Influence of Scotch Prevalency* followed later by the *British Antidote to Caledonian Poison* and a supplement called the *Butiad.*32 Although less numerous than prints, the pamphlets too made notable contributions to the literature critical of Bute with attacks on him as Scotsman, monopolizing royal favourite and alleged defender of Jacobite interests - contributions which proved widely influential: pirated by printers and publishers, summarized in newspapers and magazines, they were read by high and low alike.33 As this press activity increased in intensity if not scurrility, Bute at
length decided to retaliate in kind, engaging a number of political writers to mobilize and manipulate national opinion on his behalf. Dr. John Campbell, an old friend, defended his policies in the *London Chronicle* with articles designed to counteract “the factious dialect in the city”, while William Guthrie, Hugh Baillie and James Ralph wrote for him in the *Gazetteer*. There were others such as E. Richardson (who wrote under the nom-de-plume of inquisitor), Roger Flaxman (clergyman and historian) and Dr. Francis (Fox’s protege) with the result that by 1762, Bute had assembled a modest but vigorous force of publicists, determined to promote their patron’s cause.

However, all these efforts were of little avail against the unrelenting press attacks unleashed by Wilkes and the opposition throughout the summer of 1762 - attacks which increased in vehemence after Bute became 1st. Lord of the Treasury, Newcastle having resigned on May 26. “The new administration begins tempestuously” wrote Horace Walpole on June 20, 1762; “my father was not more abused after 20 years than Lord Bute after 20 days. Weekly papers swarm and like other swarms of insects, sting. By September, he had seen “satiric prints enough to tapestry Westminster Hall”. Nearly every paper, with the exception of the *London Chronicle*, and most of the pamphlet literature, was dominated by opposition to the “Scottish upstart”, “le parvenu Montagnard”, as one pamphleteer called him, while the caricatures and cartoons - tireless in reiterating the linked themes of conspiracy, subversion and
corruption - reinforced Bute’s villainous image in the public eye; being easily and widely circulated. In fact, within two months, as M.D. George has estimated, Bute was lampooned in over 400 prints, many with anti-Scottish themes and some, like B. Wilson’s “The Repeal or Funereal Procession of Miss America-Stamp”, selling 16,000 copies alone. Against this pictorial satire, Bute was largely helpless because, other than Hogarth - engaged in 1762 to justify the government’s peace negotiations with France - he was unable to recruit additional etchers prepared to act in his administration’s defense.

He did, however, after some delay, establish a ministerial paper, with Tobias Smollett, the novelist, as editor - a devoted writer, but one, as has been noted, “who was fundamentally apolitical.” The first Briton, as the weekly was called, appeared on May 29, 1762, promising to “oppose and expose” the Monitor, then the leading opposition paper, backed by the powerful West Indian interests in the City. Attracting immediate attention, the Briton was promptly countered by another paper - the North Briton - planned and executed by John Wilkes, while on June 12, 1762, Arthur Murphy the playwright brought out the Auditor, to reinforce the efforts of Smollett. Wilkes also continued to write for the Monitor, providing in an ongoing series on favourites and Scotsmen, its distinctive contribution to the attacks on Bute.

The result was an unprecedentedly bitter literary strife, the so-called “battle of the weeklies” which pushed
political tensions to new heights, becoming the focal point and incendiary of anti-Bute feelings in London and outside. Both Smollett and Murphy worked with energy and dedication, but proved no match for the journalistic skills, wit and daring of Wilkes (or his co-author, the profligate poet Charles Churchill) who, like all accomplished propagandists, understood crowd psychology and so with great effect, played upon those prejudices to which the nation would respond: hatred of Scots in general, “the Scottish Favourite” in particular. With total absence of scruple and good taste, they exploited the current gossip about Bute’s supposed relationship with the Dowager Princess, they produced scathing essays on past favourites, comparing Bute to Mortimer, the Earl of Marr, Wolsey and other notorious figures of history, but most important, in virtually every article, emphasizing the apparent similarities between Bute and the popular conception of the Scots. His surname, Stuart, was used to imply his support for the Jacobite cause and by association, “Popery” or Catholicism, as well as empathy with the political interests of France.

One issue of the *North Briton* consists entirely of an imaginary letter supposedly addressed to Bute by James III, the old Pretender. It begins “Dear Cousin” and ends “given under our sign manual and privy signet of the Thistle, at our court at Rome, the second day of January in the 63rd. of our reign. J.R. countersigned James Murray.” It congratulates Bute on his promotion of Jacobite interests.
Everything, through your benign influence now wears the most pleasing aspect. Where you tread, the Thistle again rises under your feet. The sons of Scotland and the friends of that great line, the Stuarts, no longer mourn.46

Bute’s much exaggerated patronage of his fellow countrymen produced the celebrated announcement that “John Bull was dead, choked by inadvertently swallowing a thistle”, while in “The Prophecy of Famine”, Churchill, with withering sarcasm depicted the barren waste whose voracious inhabitants “strong in their pauper pride and native insolence”, mostly Jacobite at heart, had emerged to fatten on England’s public revenue.47 Everything associated with Scotland was now mercilessly satirized - the tartan, the kilt, the bagpipes - even haggis - and of course, the famous “itch”, while doggerel rhymes about the Scots were chanted in the pubs and coffee houses. Within weeks, anti-Caledonian clubs appeared all over London and the Scots were mocked and jeered at every opportunity - in private, at dinner parties or in public - at the theatre, in taverns, at official functions. Such manifestations of hostility were as keen in the provinces as in London and, as Brewer has shown, were not always confined to the mob. “Gentlemen fought duels over what were known as ‘national distinctions’, a respectable Anglican parson sent Pitt a draft plan for the dissolution of the Union and many members of the landed classes delighted in making insidious remarks against the Scots nation and its minions.”48
Anti-Scottish phobia also motivated much of the opposition to the peace negotiations with France, conducted by Bute's administration throughout the summer and fall of 1762. While the Preliminaries (signed on November 3, 1762), according to one historian, “secured the original objects of the war”, the terms being equal “to the expectations of moderate men,” the treaty (or rather its author) still came under immediate fire - not in Parliament where it encountered relatively little opposition - but again, in the press. That much, if not most, of this antagonism derived from personal and nationalist prejudices rather than issues of policy was clearly recognized by Henry Fox who wrote that:

The press with more vehemence than I ever knew set to work against Lord Bute. And it would be very surprising to see how quickly and fiercely the fire spreads but for the consideration that it is fed with great industry and blown by national prejudice which is inveterate and universal. Every man has at some time or other found a Scotsman in his way and everybody has therefore damned the Scotch: and this hatred their excessive nationality has continually inflamed. A peace is thought necessary to Lord Bute, therefore a peace on any supposed terms is exclaimed against. But the true objections, his being a Scotchman and a Favourite are avowed and on those articles is he most scurrilously accused.
The London mob was again active and on November 25, 1762 while on his way to the House of Lords, Bute was hissed, insulted and pelted, and on his return, despite attempts to conceal himself by taking an ordinary hackney-chair, he was discovered and pursued by the mob, who, to quote one observer “broke the glass of his chair and in short by threats and menaces put him very reasonably in great fear. If they had once overturned the chair he might very soon have been demolished”.51 Indeed, so vicious was the attack this time, that Bute not only talked of resigning but the King actually offered to recall Pitt if it would calm popular clamour.52 Hence, it is scarcely surprising that by March 1763, Bute, having successfully defended the Peace of Paris in Parliament, sought a return to private life. Walpole’s opinion that Bute was driven to resign by popular outcry against the Cider Bill seems incorrect, seeing that the unpopular Earl had been planning his retreat for months. Yet there can be little doubt, that apart from his ill health and his “abhorrence of ministerial office”, the major contributory cause of his final decision was the barrage of slander, obscenity and public insult that he had been forced to endure. And so, regardless of the strength or validity of the “whig case” levelled against Bute by the political leaders of the day, what more than anything enabled them “… to adopt the traditional whig posture of guardians of politically responsible government”53 was the more indiscriminate but nevertheless persistent hostility to Bute, displayed by the nation at large; and though much of this hostility
stemmed from a variety of causes - economic, social as well as political - in the final analysis, it was Bute's nationality with all its contemporary implications and associations, which formed the common denominator.

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**Endnotes**

10. Ibid., p. 439.
19. A term used by contemporaries in both the sense of an economic centre and a civic entity.
21. Ibid., pp. xii-xiii.
22. P. Langford, “William Pitt and Public Opinion in 1757”, English Historical Review, LXXXVIII (1973), in pp. 54-
79.
26. Marie Peter, Pitt and Popularity: The Patriot Minister and London Opinion During the Seven Years War (1980), Ch VIII.
31. Ibid., no. 3823.
35. Ralph to Bute, Sept. 11, Oct. 6, Oct. 28, 1761. Bute MSS.


46. *North Briton,* July 3, 1762.

47. W.L. Mathieson, *The Awakening of Scotland* (Glasgow, 1910), pp. 42-44.


52. Bute to Fox, Nov. 27, 1762. B.L. Add. MSS. 51379, ff116-117.