

Straining the Law: The Creation of a British Model of Political Policing, 1881-1914

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La police est un service public et magistral qui, outre ses fonctions particulières, doit s'efforcer par des mesures irrégulières, mais justes et utiles, d'augmenter la force et les ressources du gouvernement. La publicité des procédés d'un tel pouvoir en arrête naturellement l'efficacité; on l'emploie beaucoup dans les grands objets; les autres sont perdus dans la foule, et y'échappent.

Dans l'ordre social, tout n'est pas extérieur, tout n'est pas visible. Au milieu de ce monde public, il y a un secret; le pouvoir ordinaire du gouvernement n'y pénètre point.

Joseph Fouché, *Lettre au duc de Wellington* (1817)

The Special Branch collects information on those who I think cause problems for the State.

Merlyn Rees, Home Secretary 1976-79 (1978)

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Abstract

This thesis explores the manner in which interpersonal relationships and institutional structures shaped the course and direction of early British political policing from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century. Conventional historiographical accounts of British policing have overall either chosen to sideline the issue of political policing or have maintained that it was largely a systemic adaptation to imperial malaise, an anti-liberal conspiracy by authoritarian colonials, or merely the aimless improvisations of stumbling functionaries.

Based on the study of official and private correspondence, governmental and police reports, trial proceedings, memoirs, and newspapers, this thesis proposes a more detailed and precise account of the emergence and subsequent consolidation of the late-Victorian/Edwardian British political police. It argues for a particularly British model of political policing, embodied by what a high-ranking police chief at the time termed “straining the law,” namely extra-legal (or quasi-legal) interventions by appointees of the state. It also argues that this system was heavily influenced by factors such as personal bias, cooperation between allies and friction between rivals – all of which favoured certain courses of action over others.

Finally, this thesis also seeks to illustrate how political policing impacted the relationship between Britain and foreign (particularly European) powers during the period considered here, as well as the British public’s views of their own government. As will be shown, Britain maintained a fairly strict isolationist stance in matters of policing political crime though this was rarely in order to assuage native public opinion (which was, overall, supportive of institutionalized political policing).

Résumé

L'objet de cette thèse est d'explorer la manière dont la première police politique en Grande-Bretagne, à la fin du dix-neuvième siècle et le début du vingtième, a été façonnée et conditionnée par des relations interpersonnelles et des structures institutionnelles. Les histoires conventionnelles de la police britannique ont choisi, en général, de marginaliser la question de surveillance politique ou de la traiter comme une adaptation systémique au déclin impérial, une conspiration antilibérale dirigée par des coloniaux autoritaires, ou simplement comme des improvisations aléatoires de fonctionnaires chancelants.

En utilisant des correspondances privées et officielles, des rapports policiers et gouvernementaux, des procès-verbaux, des mémoires et des journaux d'archives, cette thèse propose un récit plus précis et détaillé de l'émergence, de même que de la consolidation de la police politique britannique pendant les trois dernières décennies qui ont précédé la Première Guerre mondiale. Elle soutient l'existence d'un modèle de police politique notamment britannique, décrit par ce qu'un commissaire de haut rang à l'époque avait surnommé « grever la loi, » c'est-à-dire des interventions extra-légales (ou quasi légales) par des agents de l'État. Elle maintient aussi que ce système policier a été considérablement influencé par des facteurs comme les préjugés personnels, ainsi que la coopération entre des alliés et la friction entre des rivaux, et que tous ces facteurs ont favorisé certains plans d'action au détriment des autres.

Finalement, cette thèse cherche à établir comment les procédures de la police politique britannique ont influencé les relations entre le gouvernement du Royaume-Uni et ceux de l'étranger (particulièrement en Europe), ainsi que les opinions du public britannique concernant leur propre gouvernement. Comme on le verra au fur et à mesure, la Grande-Bretagne a maintenu une politique isolationniste plutôt stricte en ce qui concernait la police politique, mais

ce fut rarement pour apaiser l'opinion publique (qu'était surtout d'accord avec la présence d'une police politique institutionnalisée).

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I am also forever indebted to Marius Patrichi and his lovely family for generously sharing their house with me during my research trip to the UK, to my friends for throwing me a lifeline to the so-called "real" world (where thankfully the deeds and misdeeds of long-dead bureaucrats and policemen count for very little) and in particular to my mother, Mihaela, without whose encouragement, love and practical support I almost certainly would have never undertaken this project.

Glossary

AC	Assistant Commissioner
CID	Criminal Investigation Department (Scotland Yard)
DC	Detective Constable
DCI	Detective Chief Inspector
DI	Detective Inspector
DS	Detective Sergeant
HO	Home Office
IRB	Irish Republican Brotherhood
SDF	Social Democratic Federation
MEPO	Metropolitan Police (London)
ODNB	Oxford Dictionary of National Biography
PC	Police Constable
PS	Police Sergeant
RIC	Royal Irish Constabulary
TNA	The National Archives (Kew)
WFL	Women's Freedom League
WSPU	Women's Social and Political Union

INTRODUCTION

The Title of this Work – Working Definitions

Although the title of this thesis is fairly explicit, certain clarifications need to be made. “Political policing” can naturally be a somewhat confusing and ideologically charged term and it is perhaps made all the more so in this instance by the fact that this work is not, strictly speaking, a history of the British police. The focus here is rather on policing as a security-enforcing practice, planned at and enacted by several different levels of the British government. In this sense my understanding of political policing is indebted to Jean-Paul Brodeur’s notion of “high policing” which stands in contrast with the “low” policing of ordinary, non-political, crimes and which he took to mean “not only [...] a certain number of programs and operations undertaken by specialized units inside a police force [but also] a definite pattern of relations between a set of goals and the means to achieve them.”¹

More concretely, Brodeur identified four main characteristics to high policing² which I take to apply equally to political policing as understood in this work. High policing, Brodeur argued, “is first of all absorbent policing,” in that it is focused on the acquiring and control of intelligence. It is also “not uniquely bound to enforce the law and regulations as they are made by an independent legislator.” This second feature is of particular import for my research given that extra-legality (or “straining the law” – a phrase coined by Robert Anderson, head of the Criminal Investigation Department, or Scotland Yard, for much of the period discussed here) came to be one of the main features of the early political police in Britain. The third characteristic is that “protecting the community from law violators is not an end in itself for high

¹ Jean-Paul Brodeur, “High Policing and Low Policing: Remarks about the Policing of Political Activities,” *Social Problems* 30 (1983): 512.

² *Ibid.*, 513-14.

policing [as] crime control may also serve as a tool to generate information which can be used to maximize state coercion of any group or individual perceived as threatening the established order.” This in effect means that a political police is not reducible to the policing of (subversive) politics by a legally constituted government; it is also, as the German criminologist Hans von Hentig put it, “a form of political activity [for that government] through the medium of the police.”³ As my research will demonstrate, there are several examples in the British context which illustrate the validity of this claim (e.g. the British government’s controversial actions during the 1889-90 Special Commission into the political activities of Charles Stewart Parnell).

The fourth characteristic which Brodeur identifies is that “high policing not only makes extensive use of undercover agents and paid informers, [...] it also acknowledges its willingness to do so [striving] in this way both to maintain a low operational visibility and to amplify the fear of denunciation.” Amplifying the “fear of denunciation” (which can be seen as a variant of the divide-and-conquer approach) emerges as a particularly important strategy for the British political police during the period discussed here given the limitations imposed on it by the political establishment and the concerns of the public at large (the former playing a more important role in this sense than the latter). To this list I would add a fifth characteristic which, if not universally valid, applies nonetheless all too well to the British context. It is that political policing, especially in its formative stages, relies to an extraordinary extent on the (often conflicting) directive powers and visions of particular high-ranking bureaucrats and officials more so than on any methodological blueprints or foreign influences. This feature is important to stress given the recent histories of British policing which have tended to dismiss the emergence of political policing – in what could be termed a “reverse-whiggish” manner – as a mere

³ Von Hentig, quoted in Leon Radzinowicz, *A History of English Criminal Law and Its Administration from 1750, Vol. 3: Cross-currents in the movement for the reform of the police* (London: Stevens and Sons Ltd., 1948), 572.

governmental adjustment to worsening social, economic and international conditions (more on this to follow in the section on historiography).

Finally, the timeframe adopted here reflects the period over which the British political police first came into being through a series of government-mandated organizational efforts (which taken together can be said to form a cohesive British model of policing political radicalism) before drastically expanding its scope and mission in the years following 1914. Before 1881 efforts by the British government to monitor (or even suppress) the activities of native as well as foreign radicals active within its jurisdiction were of necessity quite limited given the degree of political (and arguably popular) bias against the perceived “un-British” nature of secret policing (and even detective work in general). Conversely, after the start of the First World War, the political police became to a large extent part of the war effort and was re-organized and incorporated into the government’s wider strategy for counter-espionage and domestic security. For these reasons the period from 1881 to 1914 represents the formative period of a classic British model of political policing – one less fettered by the stringencies of domestic politics (although, as we shall see, criticism of the police, in government circles and in the press, remained a constant feature throughout these decades) and untouched by those of total war.

The Literature Dealing with Britain’s Early Political Police

The body of literature dealing with the earliest British attempts to institutionalize political policing can be broadly divided into four categories: histories of the political police in Britain; histories of the British police in general; histories of political movements (such as Fenianism or anarchism) known for coming into conflict with British authorities; and works that deal with the more theoretical aspects of police methodology (insofar as they include discussions of historical

developments). In what follows I will outline and evaluate the main arguments put forth by works from all four categories.

For much of the 1970s and 1980s the historiography of the British “new police” (which came into being with the 1829 Metropolitan Police Act) was largely dominated by the debate between proponents of a whiggish/traditionalist interpretation (who have sought to explain the emergence of policing as a rational societal response to rising crime and social disorder⁴) and proponents of a Marxist, or quasi-Marxist, revisionism (who on the whole have portrayed the police as a bourgeois mechanism for stabilizing capitalist society by disciplining the industrial working classes⁵). More recently a new type of revisionist approach has emerged which seeks to reconcile some of the less naive propositions of the traditionalists (such as that the functioning of the “new police” benefited and was accepted by wide sections of society not just an authoritarian elite) with the less abrasive and doctrinaire suggestions of the early revisionists – recognizing in effect that as well as being “firmly [implanted] in national mythology,” policing is also “embedded in a social order that is riven by structured bases of conflict, not fundamental integration.”⁶

⁴ See Charles Reith, *British Police and the Democratic Ideal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1943); Leon Radzinowicz, *A History of English Criminal Law and Its Administration from 1750, Vols. 1-5* (London: Stevens and Sons Ltd., 1948-86); T. A. Critchley, *A History of Police in England and Wales, Second revised edition* (London: Constable, 1978); David Ascoli, *The Queen’s Peace: The Origins and Development of the Metropolitan Police, 1829-1979* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1979).

⁵ See Robert D. Storch, “‘The plague of blue locusts’: police reform and popular resistance in Northern England, 1840-1857,” *International Review of Social History* 20 (1975): 61-90; *ibid.*, “The policeman as domestic missionary: urban discipline and popular culture in Northern England, 1850-1880,” *Journal of Social History* 9 (1976): 481-509; Douglas Hay and Francis Snyder, eds., *Policing and Prosecution in Britain, 1750-1850* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); V. A. C. Gatrell, “Crime, authority and the policeman-state,” in F. M. L. Thompson, ed., *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750-1950, Vol. 3: Social Agencies and Institutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 243-310.

⁶ Robert Reiner, *The Politics of the Police, Fourth edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 66. See also Clive Emsley, *The English Police: A Political and Social History, Second edition* (London and New York: Longman, 1996) and for an even earlier example Victor Bailey, ed., *Policing and Punishment in Nineteenth Century Britain* (London: Croom Helm, 1981).

The intricacies and merits of this debate (which is ultimately concerned with “low policing,” in Brodeur’s terminology) have already been exhaustively discussed elsewhere,⁷ and given the scope of the present research, it is not my purpose here to add anything to it. It is nonetheless important to note that this debate has had an undeniable – and, I would argue, largely negative – impact on the historiography of the British political police. There are two reasons for this. The first is that whatever disagreements the traditionalists and the revisionists may have had regarding the origins and goals of Britain’s “new police,” both camps were implicitly agreed on the idea that the political police was not a special case which needed to be studied on its own terms. The second reason is that the language and categories generated by this debate have contaminated even those subsequent accounts which have sought to distance themselves from its simplistic dichotomies.

To illustrate what I mean we only need look at the trajectory of the scholarship dealing with the origins of the political police in Britain. Writing in the mid-1970s, Tony Bunyan first attempted to describe the formation of the British political police with what was then a fairly standard trope of Marxist historiography; the political arm of the Metropolitan Police, Bunyan argued, was merely the set of practices employed by the bourgeois state during the Chartist agitation of the 1830s and 40s “formalized and extended” as a response to Irish republican terrorism.⁸ Conversely, Philip Thurmond Smith in his quasi-traditionalist *Policing Victorian London: Political Policing, Public Order, and the London Metropolitan Police* stopped short of discussing the formation of the actual political police in the 1880s and lumped the authorities’ early efforts of containing Chartist and Fenian radicalism together with the public order and immigration policies of the 1850s and 60s – thus implicitly reaffirming the idea that the later

⁷ See Reiner, 39-78.

⁸ Tony Bunyan, *The History and Practice of the Political Police in Britain* (London: Julian Friedman Publishers, 1976), 102-4.

institutional political police was merely a curious excrescence of the mid-Victorian status quo. As Smith explained towards the end of his book, “the shortcomings that the police had” before the 1880s “were overshadowed by the enlightened vision of [its] Commissioners, implanted in the public mind, that it was possible to maintain order by use of an essentially unarmed police, acting without the authoritarian demeanor or paramilitary trappings of police forces in other countries. Most Victorians,” therefore, “would [...] have regarded inefficiency as a small price to pay to maintain what they saw as their liberties.”⁹

The first real history of early British political policing came in 1987 with Bernard Porter’s foundational monograph on the Special Branch (of the Scotland Yard) in which he argued that the nascent political policing of fin-de-siècle Britain, far from being a monolithic apparatus for counter-revolution, was in fact a tenuous negotiation between the liberal impulses of successive administrations and the requirements imposed by the tactics of various revolutionary groups. Although not lacking in descriptions of political actors and the ideological and personal conflicts they were often embroiled in, Porter nonetheless chose to localize the formative impulse for the creation of the Special Branch in the decline of an idealized, all-pervasive mid-Victorian “age of liberal innocence.”¹⁰ Thus, in an echo of the earlier revisionism, political policing is identified with a usurpation by the late-Victorian capitalist state; with, in other words, “a revolution [...] against the distinctive and anti-European liberalism of Britain’s mid-Victorian past” effected by men who, though significantly different in their respective

⁹ Philip Thurmond Smith, *Policing Victorian London: Political Policing, Public Order, and the London Metropolitan Police* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), 199.

¹⁰ Bernard Porter, *The Origins of the Vigilant State: The London Metropolitan Police Special Branch before the First World War* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1987), 192

outlooks and beliefs, were supposedly estranged “from that [liberal] ethos” by their “Irish and colonial backgrounds.”¹¹

Ironically, a healthy dose of traditionalist discourse is then added to this. Thus if for Charles Reith the British police system was one devoted to “the vision of the true democratic ideal of individual liberty,”¹² for Porter the British political police – as embodied by the Special Branch – was ultimately no match for “a society which still took great pride in its liberal openness.” This in turn suggested to him “that there were still powerful external restraints on [the Special Branch’s] development, which should consequently be regarded [...] as a reflection of contemporary society.”¹³ For this reason, Porter argued, late-Victorian British socialists completely escaped the stumpy arm of the political police,¹⁴ and if such an arm existed to begin with, it was because certain British statesmen, like Sir William Harcourt (who, as Home Secretary, was instrumental in setting up the precursor of the Special Branch) lacked the “liberal courage” to stick to the “grand [liberal] theorem” of his mid-Victorian forebears.¹⁵

In the next section of this introduction I will explain why my research tends to contradict such conclusions, but this should not detract from the fact that Porter’s *Origins of the Vigilant State* remains on the whole an evenhanded and impressively researched account of early political policing in Britain. The standard it has set has in fact remained largely unsurpassed and it is partly because of Porter’s impressive breadth of research and theoretical consistency, and partly because of the difficulties attached to researching the origins of counter-extremism in Britain (difficulties which spring from its particular nature), that most subsequent histories of late-Victorian and Edwardian policing have marginalized the topic of political policing – choosing to

¹¹ Ibid., 193-4.

¹² Reith, 6.

¹³ Porter, 192.

¹⁴ Ibid., 93.

¹⁵ Ibid., 186.

give it only a cursory treatment and to accept (either wholesale or with slight modifications) Porter's thesis. Thus, for example, in his landmark *The English Police: A Political and Social History*, Clive Emsley provides only a brief discussion of the trajectory of political policing from the 1880s into the early twentieth century and concludes that its major developments during the period "coincided not only with the threats from Fenian terrorists and international anarchists, but also with a declining confidence in Britain's international superiority which led to anxieties about the future [and] fears that the British 'race' was somehow being undermined."¹⁶

The same declinist view (which I have previously termed "reverse-whiggish" given that it exhibits all the teleology but none of the optimism of early police historians) has largely been echoed by Richard Thurlow, who describes the emergence of a so-called "secret state" in late nineteenth-century Britain as the product of tensions between liberal politicians and conservative policemen on the one hand, and the "decline of Britain as a great power and increased national rivalries" on the other.¹⁷ More recently, Haia Shpayer-Makov has argued that the formation of the Special Branch "was impelled by the cumulative effects of events in the early 1880s that shattered the feelings of sanguinity of Victorian Britain,"¹⁸ while Constance Bantman, in her study of French anarchists in fin-de-siècle London, suggested that "the British surveillance system" of the period "represented a concession to continental countries and a [...] local manifestation of a global trend towards border closure and controlled circulation."¹⁹ Shane Kenna has also argued in his 2014 study of the Fenian dynamite campaign of the mid-1880s that the experience of Fenian violence "coerced British political elites to adopt an unconstitutional

¹⁶ Emsley, 101.

¹⁷ Richard Thurlow, *The Secret State: British Internal Security in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 5 ff., 38.

¹⁸ Haia Shpayer-Makov, *The Ascent of the Detective: Police Sleuths in Victorian and Edwardian England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 52-3.

¹⁹ Constance Bantman, *The French Anarchists in London, 1880-1914: Exile and Transnationalism in the First Globalisation* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 149.

and illiberal intelligence-led policing detested in Victorian Britain [and] recognised as distinctly not British and underhand by [...] popular culture.”²⁰ As my research will show, “political elites” were not in fact “coerced” into adopting a system of intelligence-led policing, nor was this system “illiberal” or “detested” by public opinion.

Progress beyond the reverse-whiggish view has been only slowly forthcoming; mostly it has come from historians of the political movements being policed in late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain, who have tended to focus on the actions and agendas of individual legislators, bureaucrats and police officials to a much greater degree than historians of the British police (with the obvious exception of Porter). This is not as surprising as it might first appear. After all, in order to understand why a certain group of political dissidents is being suppressed by authorities, one has to first understand who is orchestrating the suppression, by what specific means, and to what specific ends. An early example of this approach can be seen in Victor Bailey's 1981 essay on the policing of “outcast London” during the 1886-7 “socialist” riots. Reacting against an earlier revisionist discourse which posited “a unified state repression” of the rioters, Bailey strove to reveal the “divisions and stresses within the [government's] policy of public order,”²¹ pointing to the irreconcilable and consequential differences between Commissioner Charles Warren and Home Secretary Henry Matthews (differences which will also be discussed in some detail in the first part of this thesis).

The best represented field as far as this approach is concerned however is probably the history of nineteenth-century Fenianism – which has been flourishing ever since the late 1960s. Thanks to pioneering efforts by Tom Corfe, Leon O’Broin and K. R. M. Short we have come to

²⁰ Shane Kenna, *War in the Shadows: The Irish-American Fenians Who Bombed Victorian Britain* (Sallins: Merrion, 2014), 331.

²¹ Victor Bailey, “The Metropolitan Police, the Home Office and the Threat of Outcast London,” in Victor Bailey, ed., *Policing and Punishment in Nineteenth Century Britain* (London: Croom Helm, 1981), 118.

possess a clearer picture not only of the goals and means of Irish republican insurrectionists, but also of the controversial strategies employed by individual British administrators bent on pacifying John Bull's other island.²² Building on their work (as well as on the wealth of governmental and police records that have since been declassified) more recent authors such as Christy Campbell, Niall Whelehan, Shane Kenna and others have been able to further flesh out the particular (and often conflicting) agendas of Britain's early political policemen.²³

We now know (better than Porter did thirty years ago) that the men in charge of setting up a counter-Fenian strategy in 1880s Britain were not mere portents of imperial "anxiety" or colonial (and anti-liberal) chickens come home to roost; they were individuals with personal foibles and prejudices who purposefully and deliberately undertook to construct and reform (even as they claimed to abhor reform) Britain's political police in their own images. Yet for all their merits, such accounts are only of limited value to the historian of the British political police. The most obvious reason for this is their exclusive focus on Fenianism, which ceased to be a determining factor in the British government's domestic policies – if not ceased to *be* altogether – after 1890. Another, less obvious, reason is that even as the scholarship they employ is often refreshing, their theoretical conclusions are somewhat less so. Kenna, as noted above, fails to challenge the aberrational view of early British political policing or take note of the importance

²² See Tom Corfe, *The Phoenix Park Murders: Conflict, Compromise and Tragedy in Ireland, 1879-1882* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1968); Leon O'Broin, *The Prime Informer: A Suppressed Scandal* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1971); K. R. M. Short, *The Dynamite War: Irish-American Bombers in Victorian Britain* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1979).

²³ See Christy Campbell, *Fenian Fire: The British Government Plot to Assassinate Queen Victoria* (London: HarperCollins, 2003); Niall Whelehan, *The Dynamiters: Irish Nationalism and Political Violence in the Wider World, 1867-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); John Gantt, *Irish Terrorism in the Atlantic Community, 1865-1922* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Seán McConville, *Irish Political Prisoners, 1848-1922: Theatres of War* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003); Joseph McKenna, *The Irish-American Dynamite Campaign: A History, 1881-1896* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2012).

of extra-legality in its operations;²⁴ Christy Campbell's *Fenian Fire* often falls into the trap of conspiracy theorizing and sensationalizing the evidence; while Niall Whelehan argues unconvincingly that it would be "misleading [...] to describe an established 'system' of political policing in Britain during the [the 1880s and 90s]," and that "the authorities" simply "stumbled through, improvising and testing different methods."²⁵

Histories of nineteenth-century anarchism have also occasionally produced valuable insights into the workings of the late-Victorian political police, especially its relationship with continental (particularly French, Italian and Russian) equivalents.²⁶ As with histories of Irish republicanism however, their usefulness is limited by their chronological focus as well as by a decontextualized preoccupation with the venality and unaccountability of (some) British law enforcers (in a way that ignores the heated debates and conflicting visions which characterized the wider hierarchy of the British political police, especially in the 1880s and 90s).²⁷ Conversely, despite a recent resurgence of interest (popular and academic) in the Edwardian suffragettes, there has been virtually no scholarship specifically on the subject of their policing – something which I shall seek to redress in the third part of this thesis.

The scholarship dealing with the evolution of police methodology has equally contributed to our understanding of early British political policing. Brodeur's theories have already been discussed above, and to this mentions of Robert Reiner's and Clifford Shearing's work must be added (the latter being especially useful in its reframing of policing as a state-directed

²⁴ "Despite this contravention of the rule of law [...] circumstances of [Special Irish Branch] illegality were more of the exception rather than the rule" (Kenna, 330).

²⁵ Whelehan, 133.

²⁶ See Constance Bantman, *The French Anarchists in London, 1880-1914: Exile and Transnationalism in the First Globalisation* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 117-156 passim.; Paolo Di Paola, *The Knights Errant of Anarchy: London and the Italian Anarchist Diaspora, 1880-1917* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 83-85, 122-156 passim.; Alex Butterworth, *The World That Never Was: A True Story of Dreamers, Schemers, Anarchists and Secret Agents* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2010), 297-99, 320-1, 329-38.

²⁷ Bantman, 124-5; 130, Di Paola, 153-5; Butterworth, 320, 330-6.

“governance of security” not the activity of a singular institution).²⁸ The only problem with these accounts is that with very rare exceptions they do not include sustained discussions of the history of British political policing. One such exception is Brodeur’s *Policing Web* (published shortly before the author’s untimely death in 2010) in which he devoted several pages to the historical development of the police in Britain and France before concluding, somewhat prematurely, that the British model of policing politics avoided as much as possible extra-legal methods while striving “to make the police accountable to the law.”²⁹

Another, more remarkable, exception is Lindsay Clutterbuck’s 2002 often-cited (at least in the sort of works mentioned above) doctoral thesis which deals specifically with the evolution of counter-terrorism methodology within the London Metropolitan Police from 1829 to 1901. Clutterbuck makes good use of archival documents (some little used before) and takes a very systematic and methodical approach (tables and figures abound throughout the work) to his topic. Despite the title he has very little to say on the 1890s and his research eschews “the evolution of bureaucratic structures”³⁰ – even though such structures were very much integral to the formation of the British political police. Nevertheless Clutterbuck correctly latches on to an arguably obvious but crucial, and previously ignored fact, namely that the individuals involved in setting up Britain’s early political police had personalities of their own and that these personalities became “linked dynamically” with the very system they were actively working

²⁸ See Robert Reiner, *The Politics of the Police, Fourth edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Les Johnston and Clifford Shearing, *Governing Security: Explorations of Policing and Justice* (London: Routledge, 2003).

²⁹ Jean-Paul Brodeur, *The Policing Web* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 78.

³⁰ Lindsay Clutterbuck, “An Accident of History? The Evolution of Counter Terrorism Methodology in the Metropolitan Police from 1829 to 1901, with Particular Reference to the Influence of Extreme Irish Nationalist Activity” (PhD diss., University of Portsmouth, 2002), 23.

towards; as Clutterbuck explains, “not only did each [of these individuals] have a different understanding of what the system was, their view also changed through time.”³¹

Finally, my understanding of late-Victorian liberalism and of the role and importance of the Home Office bureaucracy also owes something to the work of Patrick Joyce, in particular his *State of Freedom: A Social History of the British State since 1800*. As he convincingly argues in that book,

Shared outlook, social background and education united [politician and civil servant].

Therefore, in using the term “governing classes” it is these people that we should have in mind, for contrary to some understandings, and to the doctrine of separation of politics and administration, it was in both figures that the real business of government took place. The high bureaucrat, just as much as the politician, was involved in making state policy [...] These men conceived of themselves as men of the state who had a particularly close identification with and knowledge of not only the British state but British society, and this further bolstered their power, as by convincing themselves of this they seem to have been able to convince many others too, then and since.³²

While wary of notions which seek to artificially emphasize the supposed “mentality” of a group, especially an elite group collectively invested with a significant degree of power, I believe this analysis to be, in the main, correct. I also believe it has bearing on two of the issues that are at the heart of the present research, namely the role played by “high bureaucrats” in planning and implementing the British model of political policing, as well as the impact of liberalism on governmental and popular attitudes to the political police.

The Arguments Advanced in this Work

³¹ Ibid., 201.

³² Patrick Joyce, *The State of Freedom: A Social History of the British State since 1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 188.

This thesis ultimately seeks to build on the recent scholarship dealing with the policing of late-Victorian radical political movements (Irish republicanism and European anarchism in particular) but, more importantly, it seeks to construct a cohesive account of early political policing in Britain (which also includes the Edwardian period in its scope) that focuses not on the movements being policed, or on a single institution of the political police (such as the Special Branch of the Metropolitan Police) but on the network of state agents tasked with identifying and policing subversion (real or perceived), their methods and the consequences of those methods. To that end, there are several propositions which this thesis seeks to advance and over the space of the following paragraphs I will delineate and expand on each under a separate header, roughly in what I consider to be the order of their importance.

1. The Importance of Extra-Legality to the British Model of Political Policing

The main proposition which I seek to establish is that over the period considered here a distinctly British model of policing political threats to the stability of the state emerged from the discrete, and often conflicting, visions of several individual statesman, bureaucrats and police officials – and that the principal feature of this model was extra-legality. Extra-legality does not of course always imply outright illegality and it is precisely this aspect that the title of this work alludes to. “Straining the law” is a phrase coined in 1898 by Robert Anderson (at the time Assistant Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police and head of Scotland Yard) in a confidential memorandum to Home Secretary Matthew White Ridley. Anderson wrote that memo in response to the outcome of that year’s pan-European anti-anarchist conference in Rome, which had sought, among other things, to bind all twenty-one participating nation-states to a united strategy for dealing with anarchist-inspired terrorism. The British government had sent a delegation to the conference but ultimately refused to adopt any of the measures proposed by the conference's two

commissions due to a perception that such measures would prove intrusive and inimical to the spirit of British law. As Sir Phillip Currie (one of the British delegates) explained during one of the conference's plenary meetings, British laws did not admit of the existence of a separate, political category of crime, adding that "We do not prosecute opinions[;] the only question with us is, is there crime or not?"³³ The British did however promise to expand and further define existing legislation dealing with explosives and the extradition of foreign terrorists (a promise which would nonetheless never be honoured). Prompted by this situation, Anderson pointed out that,

[...] in recent years the [British] Police have succeeded only by straining the law, or, in plain English, by doing utterly unlawful things, at intervals, to check this conspiracy, and my serious fear is that if new legislation affecting it is passed, Police powers may thus be defined and our practical powers seriously impaired. [If] the actual powers of Police in this country [become public knowledge], then the methods which successive secretaries of state have sanctioned, and which have been resorted to with such excellent results will be shown to be without legal sanction, and must be abandoned.³⁴

While the wording here would seem to suggest that straining the law is in fact always synonymous with illegality, it should be pointed out that there is more than a hint of exaggeration in this passage, and, as subsequent pages will demonstrate, Anderson was throughout his career as spymaster and police official a fairly duplicitous and unreliable narrator of the activities of the political police. Despite such exaggeration, straining the law is nonetheless a highly useful concept when looking at the early history of the political police in Britain. What, then, is it? Here I argue that it is first and foremost the judicious use of legal

³³ Sir Phillip Currie to the Marquess of Salisbury, 3 December 1898, TNA HO 45/10254/X36450/79.

³⁴ Memoranda by Robert Anderson, 13 December 1898 and 14 January 1899, TNA HO 45/10254/X36450.

loopholes by the political police in a way that arguably perverts the original meaning of (or “strains”) existing legislation without necessarily veering into the egregiously illegal.

Although Anderson’s explicit identification of this practice as the established *modus operandi* of the British political police is rare, it is not, as my research will show, singular (and certainly implicit references to it are in fact quite common throughout the official correspondence). More important than such references however are the actual examples of straining the law ranging from dubious arrest practices – which James Monro, Chief Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police between 1888 and 1890, thought put police in danger of “acting in violation of the law”³⁵ – to collusion between the institutional political police (namely the Special Branch of the Scotland Yard) and representatives of the ruling Conservative government with the purpose of amassing incriminating evidence against a prominent member of Her Majesty’s Opposition (in this case the Irish leader Charles Stewart Parnell).

Extra-legality remained a feature of the British model of political policing throughout the period discussed here and arguably evolved into its central, defining tenet. The reason for this is that even though several competing methodologies of political policing were at play within the upper echelons of the late-Victorian state, they all accepted straining the law as fundamentally necessary or at least inevitable. During the 1880s Edward Jenkinson – head of Britain’s and Ireland’s anti-Fenian strategy from 1884 to 1886 – came to embody extra-legality with his extensive (and often completely unaccountable) use of double agents and agents provocateurs even as his superiors in Dublin Castle and Whitehall (especially the Home Secretary) wavered between privately supporting his methods and publicly condemning them. At the same time, Jenkinson’s professed rivals within the political police apparatus (principally James Monro and Robert Anderson) also chose to make use of extra-legal methods in dealing with perceived

³⁵ Unsigned Home Office memorandum, 28 March 1891, TNA MEPO 2/186.

political threats to the state even as they claimed (particularly in the case of Monro) to abhor such methods.

Thanks to the smoothing out of personal rivalries, straining the law came to play an even more important role for the British political police during the 1890s. Much like Jenkinson before him, Chief Inspector William Melville (superintendent of the Special Branch between 1893 and 1904) rapidly rose to be the unofficial – and, this time, virtually unchallenged – director of the institutional political police (even as the Branch continued to be under the nominal stewardship of the Home Secretary). Under Melville's leadership the political police engaged in practices which ranged from mere shadowing and infiltration of seditious groups (sometimes at the behest of foreign governments) to unwarranted house searches and the possible use of agents provocateurs. Melville himself freely (albeit secretly) colluded with representatives of continental (especially Russian) political police organizations in order to aid the latter in silencing radicals who had taken refuge in Britain. Although such practices gradually became more subdued in the first decade of the twentieth century, they did not disappear altogether and the willingness of the authorities to continue using them was made especially clear after suffragette militants began their campaign of intimidation and destruction of public and private property.

Ultimately, I trust this research will establish that regardless of whether they believed in traditional Victorian methods of policing (such as “picketing” suspected radicals in order to dissuade them from engaging in actual crime) or, conversely, they favoured covert intelligence gathering and dissimulation, the men involved in setting up Britain's early political police regarded extra-legality as inextricable to their work and strived to use it to their best advantage. In a situation in which the powers of the political police were constantly subject to review and

revision by the Home Secretary according to the political priorities of the ruling party and in which, at least initially, personal rivalries and disputes led to a significant amount of institutional friction, straining the law provided a degree of constancy which ensured that the British state would be able to meet subversive challenges as needed.

2. The Importance of Individual Actors

Although I have no interest in peddling vague and controversial phrases like “historical constructionism” or “methodological individualism” here, it is my position that history-writing is always reliant on incomplete and fragmented documents (broadly understood) and thus always in the process of being assembled, rather than revealed, by historians. Individual historical actors are of course often (if not always) nothing but collections of such incomplete and fragmented documents, but the relationships between them as individuals are greater than their separate archival afterlives; individuals after all, to paraphrase a famous if somewhat hackneyed adage, make their own history, but not as they would wish. It is that space between the individual desire and the historical event that is to me the most fascinating and the most worthy of careful investigation.

To frame this issue in the context of early British political policing, one need only ask why Britain did not evolve a more regimented and centralized – in other words more “European” – system of policing political subversion over the three decades preceding the First World War. One possible answer (and one which has proved quite popular with historians as we have already seen) is that “liberal Britain“ successfully fended off the challenge of an insidious authoritarian conspiracy thanks to the strength of its constitution and the devotion it inspired in the British public. This is, however, wholly lopsided. Granted that the prevailing political orthodoxies of the time had an overall retarding effect on the development of intelligence-based policing in Britain,

the British political police system of the late-Victorian and Edwardian periods took the shape it did, when it did, because of the impact specific individuals (and the interactions between them) had on it.

Thus, for example, the Special Irish Branch of the Scotland Yard came into being in March 1883 not as an inevitable uniform response to a terrorist threat or because of some mysterious chink in the British government's liberal armour; it came into being because Sir William Harcourt (then Home Secretary) made it his mission to create such an organization, as part of a wider, personal strategy for aggressively tackling Fenian conspiracies in Britain. If in 1884 Edward Jenkinson (then Assistant Under-Secretary for Police and Crime in Ireland) was put in charge of British anti-Fenian operations and given free hand to employ his “continental” (as one of his critics put it) counter-subversive strategies, it is again because Harcourt willed it, based on a certain set of assumptions, beliefs and negotiations. If, finally, in 1887 Jenkinson was forced to resign (with highly significant consequences for the British political police), it is because a different Home Secretary, Sir Henry Matthews, decided to side with Jenkinson's rivals within the police hierarchy for personal and ideological reasons. These and many other similar situations will be further described and dissected throughout this thesis; suffice it here to say that individual factors proved of greater significance in the development of the methodology and direction of the early British political police than any impersonal social and political processes.

3. The Structure of the Early British Political Police

As mentioned above, those authors who have focused on the political police apparatus in late-Victorian Britain (Porter and Clutterbuck most notably) have tended to conflate it with a specific police institution, namely the Special Branch of the Scotland Yard. This tends to distort the particular nature of the British model of political policing because it fails to take into account

the fluidity and ad-hocness imposed on it by extra-legality. In other words, the late-Victorian British political police was not in fact just an institutional police force; besides Special Branch detectives and the head of Scotland Yard, it effectively included the Home Secretary and several high-ranking members of the Home Office bureaucracy, the Chief Commissioner of the Metropolis, mercenary private informers, military men, and, at times, even the Prime Minister himself (most notably Lord Salisbury). On the face of it, this may seem like an argument concerned with mere semantics, but if we take into consideration the fact that some of the key decisions regarding political threats to the state were made not by police detectives or officials but by Whitehall administrators, its real importance becomes apparent. If the political police did in fact extend beyond the confines of Scotland Yard (as I argue here), then its existence can no longer be regarded as an aberration at odds with the liberal status quo.

In addition, this thesis will also strive to show that while decision-making within the political police apparatus often followed a hierarchical structure (extending downwards from the Home Secretary to police constables posted on “special duty”), the clash of individual personalities and agendas described above often led to situations in which perceived political threats were dealt with surreptitiously, outside of the proper chain of command – once again reinforcing the centrality of extra-legality and of individual agency.

4. Popular and Official Perceptions of Political Policing

One of the biggest, and least scrutinized, misconceptions to be found in the historiography dealing (directly or indirectly) with the early British political police is that political policing not only went against a supposed late-Victorian liberal status quo but that it was positively un-British to begin with. The current formulation of this hypothesis arguably originates in the work of Bernard Porter but an earlier version can be found in the work of

traditionalist police historians like Charles Reith and this in turn can be traced to mid-Victorian commentators such as Charles Dickens who in 1850 wrote that the “Detective Police system of London [...] is solely employed in bringing crime to justice,” adding that in Britain “the most rabid demagogue can say what he chooses [without] the terror of an organised spy system.”³⁶ Dickens was probably voicing a majority opinion at the time, and it certainly would not be a stretch to conclude that the years between the demise of Chartism and the beginning of the Fenian dynamite campaign were, with few exceptions, “essentially spyless.”³⁷ By the early 1880s, however, popular (though not necessarily political) prejudices against political policing were already softening quite rapidly.

As mentioned in the previous section of this introduction, the reverse-whiggish view of the origins of Britain's political police is a two-pronged one. On the one hand, it is argued, political policing was foreign and inimical to British liberalism and therefore detested by the British public at large; on the other hand, insofar as it existed, political policing was largely the work of a cabal of reactionary figures with decidedly un-British (i.e. Irish or otherwise colonial) backgrounds who only managed to get as far as they did thanks to a declining national sense of imperial self-confidence. Leaving aside the obvious internal contradiction of a Britain that is both muscularly liberal and insecure, it is my intention here to argue against both of these assertions.

What my research will demonstrate is that the early British system of political policing was in fact mostly a liberal one, and, insofar as awareness of it gradually seeped into public consciousness, that it enjoyed widespread support from most sections of British society. It was not of course liberal by any modern definition of the word, but it was liberal by late-Victorian

³⁶ *Household Words*, 21 September 1850.

³⁷ Bernard Porter, *Plots and Paranoia: A History of Political Espionage in Britain, 1790-1988* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 81.

standards in that it proved distrustful of overt government centralization and strove to use existing bureaucracies rather than create new ones; in that it resisted attempts to make legislation more authoritarian and punitive (which is what the right wing of the Conservative Party overwhelmingly preferred); and lastly, in that far from being the work of reactionary colonials, it was in fact a system designed mostly by individuals committed, at least to some extent, to the principles of the British Liberal Party. This obviously does not mean that the early British political police was invariably a liberal institution (it could not have been so given its fragmented nature and subservience to the political priorities of the Conservative Party during the latter's years in power), but it does mean that the notion that political policing was fundamentally opposed to mainstream late-Victorian liberalism simply does not hold water.

Equally unconvincing is the notion that the majority of the British public had a hostile view of political policing. Although sections of the political establishment remained seemingly attached to the mid-Victorian discourse which frowned upon secret policing as inimical to the spirit of the British constitution, the reasons for such an attitude varied according to political necessity. Conservative critics tended to object to political policing because of a general opposition to “big government;” Liberal critics mostly out of a declared attachment to freedom of opinion and personal liberty; while Irish Nationalists (as a rule) saw in it merely the tool of colonialist oppression. Whatever the declared nature of their respective oppositions, it must be noted that political policing was never discontinued as a practice either by Liberal or Conservative administrations, and it is telling that Lord Salisbury, one of the most prominent Conservative critics of a stronger police force took a very active and committed interest in the activities of the political police during his premierships. This suggests that the oppositional

discourse was, by the late-nineteenth century, largely just that – a discourse to be used as needed in political battles.

A further illustration of this duplicity comes from the way in which British authorities chose to deal with native socialist militancy in the later 1880s. Although Bernard Porter has argued that the British political police judiciously avoided infiltrating and even monitoring British socialist organizations following a series of socialist-inspired disturbances in London during 1886 and 1887, my research will show that this was not at all the case. Although initially discouraged from interfering with an otherwise anaemic British socialist agitation, the political police was nonetheless given *carte blanche* by the Home Secretary to shadow and infiltrate groups like the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) after 1887. If using the political police against native Britons constituted the ultimate sin against a fuzzily-defined liberalism, then it was a sin the British government had no qualms about committing given the strength of public opposition to socialism (manifested especially in the wake of the “Bloody Sunday” riot of 1887).

Outside of Whitehall, there was in fact little discernible opposition to the idea of a system of secret police tasked with subverting unacceptable forms of political activity. The evidence for this comes mostly from newspapers at the time, which were, with few and specific exceptions, overwhelmingly (and regardless of political line) supportive of what was then termed “the political department at Scotland Yard” even when the government appeared to be less so; it also comes, however, from the many examples of regular, everyday people providing vital information to authorities in cases of a political nature (indeed it can be argued that some of the highest-profile cases of political conspiracy during the period discussed here came about thanks to tip-offs from “concerned citizens”).

5. Britain’s Relationship with Foreign Powers in Matters of Political Policing

Britain's foreign policy in Europe during the former's so-called age of “splendid isolation” has been exhaustively documented and debated by historians but the relationship between British and continental authorities in matters of political policing over the same period has received comparatively little attention.³⁸ What my research suggests in this respect is that if Britain's isolation in diplomatic matters before 1914 is to some extent debatable, its commitment to isolation in legal matters, especially matters concerning political crime, is beyond any doubt. Examples of this policy will be discussed throughout this thesis, but here it must be noted that the reasons for Britain's isolation in matters of political policing had little if anything to do with “liberal values,” as some historians have recently suggested.³⁹ Certainly there was a lot of heated debate in Parliament on this issue throughout the period discussed here, with Liberal leaders usually favouring a “pro-European” cooperationist stance, and Conservative leaders trumpeting the virtues of an independent, uncompromisingly British legal system. In practice, however, Liberal and Conservative administrations proved equally opposed to committing Britain to any pan-European project for tackling organized sedition.

The biggest reason for this had to do with extra-legality and the need to protect it as the defining feature of British political policing. As Robert Anderson keenly observed after the 1898 anti-anarchist conference in Rome, European proposals for continent-wide efforts at clamping down on insurrectionary movements invariably involved a high degree of centralization (away from London) and indiscriminate information-sharing – both of which were inimical to straining the (British) law. Indeed, as we shall see, British authorities were quite happy to occasionally supply foreign governments with intelligence on the movements of foreign radicals exiled in

³⁸ For recent efforts in this direction see Richard Bach Jensen, *The Battle against Anarchist Terrorism: An International History, 1878–1934* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), passim. and Bantman, 127-30; 149-53.

³⁹ Jensen, 67, 118; Bantman, 148.

Britain so long as Whitehall got to control how much would be communicated, to whom, and especially to what benefit. When there was nothing to be gained from aiding a foreign government in this manner, British officials routinely ignored requests for cooperation.

If there was any genuine cooperation between Britain and Europe in matters of political policing it was usually at the level of practical police work. British detectives occasionally helped in the investigations of their foreign counterparts, with sometimes spectacular results (such as the 1892 and 1894 arrests in London of two infamous French anarchists implicated in a Parisian dynamite conspiracy), but even here the limitations imposed by the Whitehall bureaucracy could not be overridden. Because of the need to preserve extra-legality, formal cooperation between British and foreign police had to be kept at a minimum which meant that in sensitive cases that the British government had little to gain from (such as the 1897 prosecution of the Russian exile Vladimir Burtsev for inciting the murder of the Czar) coordination between British and continental detectives had to be done covertly, without the knowledge of the Home Office. Such instances of covert cooperation were however arguably rare and worked towards confirming the established British model of political policing rather than subverting it.

This does not mean that the British attitude towards cooperation with Europe was the product of some monolithic “official mind,” and, as we shall see later on, the divergence of opinion within the hierarchy of the British political police meant that some officials (especially at the Home Office) regarded “the continental system [of policing politics] as [one] which possesses very great and obvious advantages.”⁴⁰ Additionally, some of the more practical counter-terrorist measures in use on the continent (such as specially fitted bomb-defusing laboratories) were eventually at least partially adopted by British authorities. All the same, for reasons that will be discussed throughout this thesis, such exceptions to the rule did not

⁴⁰ Memorandum by Godfrey Lushington, 7 June 1886, TNA HO 144/721/110757.

ultimately lead to any concentrated attempts to bring the British model of political policing more in line with its European equivalents. While Britain's diplomatic isolation may have finally come to an end in the first few years of the twentieth century, in policing matters it continued all throughout the pre-war years (and arguably until 1928, when Britain joined, if only nominally, the Interpol organization).

6. The Efficiency of the Early British Model of Political Policing

Although my intention here is mainly to examine the workings and structure of the early British model of political policing, a few things need to be said on the issue of its efficiency (or lack thereof). It is of course an undeniable fact that the organized Fenianism of the late nineteenth century did not collapse solely because of the pressure placed on it by British counter-terrorist strategies. It is also an undeniable fact that after the collapse of Fenian terrorism in the late 1880s the British government was never again confronted with any believable insurrectionary threat until the Easter Rising of 1916 (and then only in Ireland). Political threats to national security continued to exist – anarchism in the 1890s; revolutionary socialism, anti-colonial nationalism and militant suffragism in the 1900s – but none proved to be existential threats.

The issue then arises of how we can measure the efficiency of the British political police given that after 1890 the forms of subversion it was tasked with monitoring and combating lacked genuine revolutionary potential; arguably, if there had been no political police whatsoever (as the government sometimes unconvincingly claimed), Britain's national security would not have been much affected for the worse. This may be, but one can only argue this point with the benefit of hindsight and by ignoring the weight of contemporary public opinion. As this research will show, for most Britons the political threats of the 1890s and the 1900s were in fact highly

significant ones. Although anarchist terrorists in Britain never succeeded in orchestrating the kind of bloody outrages that became routine in *Belle Époque* France, events like the 1892 trial of six Walsall anarchists for conspiracy to manufacture explosives, the 1894 explosion in Greenwich Park, as well as a string of other, less egregious incidents, convinced many Britons that anarchism was a genuine domestic threat. Similarly, while the socialist and suffragist militancy of the Edwardian years may seem quaint when compared to the revolutionary movements that emerged after 1917, to people who had yet to even experience the ferocity of the First World War it could easily appear to be “something very like revolution” (in the words of one Special Branch detective at the time).

With this in mind, the British model of political policing emerges as a moderately efficient one if only because (with a few exceptions) it was seen to be so by public opinion and radical opinion alike. In spite of a problematic structure which promoted secrecy, resistance to change, collusion with foreign agents and internal rivalries; despite several spectacular failures of intelligence and a willingness to, in some instances, use violence or the threat of violence in order to defuse perceived dangers to national safety, the political police managed to tackle subversive activity in a way that, overall, appeared to most Britons to be unobtrusive and benign. As a *Sunday Times* correspondent observed in 1897 while visiting the haunts of anarchist revolutionaries in London, “the very significance of [...] police espionage [in Britain] is that it is not assertive – is, in fact, subterranean in its character.”⁴¹

The Methodology and Sources Used

Historical facts are imperfect but they nonetheless tend to have fairly long shelf lives; historical theories, on the other hand, are very often perfectly constructed but, like the “bourgeois” relations of Marxist theory, ultimately become antiquated before they can even

⁴¹ *Sunday Times*, 15 August 1897.

ossify. For this reason I have chosen to keep overt theorizing and thematic analysis down to a minimum throughout the main body of this thesis and have focused instead on creating the sort of narrative that might allow the reader to understand not only the evolution of political policing in late-Victorian Britain but the internal ambitions and drives which formed the engine of this evolution. Whatever historical and theoretical context I have chosen to include outside of the main introduction and conclusion has been presented in the form of smaller introductions and conclusions to each of the three main parts of this work, as well as in the form of footnotes.

Although footnotes are sometimes derided as “distracting” by academic and non-academic audiences alike, here I have chosen to make extensive (although I trust not excessive) use of them, mainly for two reasons. The first is to avoid breaking the chronological thread of the narrative with tangential information (which would arguably prove the more distracting practice); the second is that I don't believe footnotes need be a dead hedge of page numbers and archival references – just as a body of text is not merely the dumping ground for information deemed sufficiently relevant. Both can, and should, be carefully constructed to provide distinct yet concurrent layers of meaning. A third, arguably less justifiable, reason is that I consider explicative footnotes to be aesthetically pleasing and conducive to a less monotonous reading experience.

The narrative proceeds in more or less chronological order and often pinpoints exact dates and locations. To some extent this is an attempt to amplify its historicity; to convey, in other words, the sense of uncertainty and confusion that historical actors would have experienced and to avoid the trap of teleological thinking. More importantly, it is an attempt to present as much of the historical evidence as possible outside of the confines of inherited academic discourses. This is not out of a naïve belief that facts can speak for themselves, but because given

the limitations of the current scholarship, the early British political police needs a new chronicle as much as it needs a new history.

The primary sources I have relied on for this research can broadly be divided into official and unofficial. The former overwhelmingly come from the archives currently held at the British National Archives at Kew and include Home Office and Foreign Office memoranda, police reports and orders, official and private correspondence, short notes, witness depositions, telegrams, trial proceedings, and annotated newspaper clippings. For relevant official correspondence which I have not been able to consult first-hand, I have relied on the research of some of the authors mentioned in the second section of this introduction (particularly Porter and Campbell) and, where available, on published anthologies.

Unofficial sources are those which are not of governmental provenance and they consist of newspaper accounts, memoirs, works of fiction and of independent journalism, and even the odd archival video recording (in the form of a 1911 Pathé newsreel). Newspaper accounts in particular have proved essential in the research of Britain's relationship with continental powers in matters of policing and the British public's perception of the national political police, and it is for this reason that I have tried to cast as wide a geographical net as possible. When discussing continental (particularly French) attitudes to British politics and policing, I have tended to rely on non-English rather than English-language accounts, not because the former are less biased but because they reveal attitudes and prejudices which are absent from the latter. Similarly, when discussing the reactions of the British press to the government's practices of political policing, I have tried to avoid reproducing the London-centric, and often *Times*-centric, approach of previous scholarship (although London is for historical reasons still very much the undisputed centre of this narrative) by sampling a wide array of titles from across the United Kingdom of

Great Britain and Ireland. To a significant extent this has only been possible thanks to my access to technologies that even two decades ago were still not widely available to scholars, namely the many online databases of digitized historical media. Such databases have also proved essential to my use of minor secondary sources that are not part of the taxonomy described in the review of literature.

The majority of official sources deployed here have to some extent been used or referenced in previous scholarly works, but I have nonetheless managed to uncover several previously overlooked documents, some of which shine new light on important aspects of early British political policing. Thus, for example, an 1894 note by Home Office Under-Secretary H. W. Primrose speaks to the then dysfunctional communication channels between the Home Secretary and the Special Branch of the Scotland Yard by instructing the Assistant Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police that “in future the [Home Secretary] desires that he may have immediate official information on all matters relating to the Anarchist movement, and not be left to obtain his news from the papers.”⁴² Similarly, official correspondence on the previously overlooked case of Alfred Oldland (a socialist sympathizer arrested in 1887 for resisting arrest and attacking police officers) reveals that the political police were in fact actively monitoring and even striving to infiltrate socialist organizations like the SDF during the late 1880s. A final example to be mentioned here is the governmental archive dealing with the South Wales labour disturbances of 1910 which, although previously known to historians, has never been (so far as I have been able to gather) adequately explored; as my research will show, documents from this archive demonstrate not only the extent to which British authorities (in London and in Wales) thought of the disturbances in the Rhondda Valley (epitomized by the Tonypany riot of November 1910) as the product of socialist sedition, but also the extent to

⁴² Note by Charles Murdoch, 24 April 1894, TNA HO 144/545/A55176/26.

which, even at this late date, extra-legality was still the dominating feature of British political policing (a fact illustrated by the way in which General Nevil Macready handled the Home Office-mandated mission of pacifying the region).

In the case of previously used archives, my research approach has been to explore the available content more deeply, following the guiding principle that individual voices, differences of opinion and unsteady compromises can all bring to light new and interesting aspects to the topic at hand. Several short and nearly illegible (yet often meaningful) notes by Home Office bureaucrats have been uncovered this way. I have also striven to avoid paraphrasing important documents (such as personal and official correspondence) whenever possible, preferring instead to render the original phrasing and authorial voice by means of (occasionally lengthy) direct quotes. Above all I have endeavoured to write a lively and enjoyable account that might allow the reader to – in the words of one of my favourite historians – “taste the flavor of the distant past.”⁴³ If I have succeeded, even partially, in this last objective then writing this thesis will not have been a waste of time.

⁴³ Robert Darnton, *Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment in France* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), viii.

PART I

'Panic and indifference'

1881-1891

Introduction

The rapid development of political policing and government surveillance in late-nineteenth-century Britain is not easily explained given its apparent contradiction of a centuries-old belief which “an extraordinarily large number of Britons seem to have [subscribed to – namely] that, under God, they were peculiarly free [and] richer in every sense than other peoples, particularly Catholic peoples, and particularly the French.”¹ This national myth of an uncomplicated Protestant liberty, infused with a disdain for the “Jesuitical” methods of continental governments permeated public life throughout the nineteenth century, from the halls of Westminster to alehouses and working men’s clubs. Yet devotion to “British liberty” was hardly the bedrock on which government policy was formed, especially where national security was at stake.

When it was set up by Act of Parliament in 1829, the London Metropolitan Police was supposed, in the wording of the act, to introduce “a new and more efficient system of police in lieu of [the] ineffective [...] establishments of nightly watch and nightly police;” its intended target was the supposed wave of “offences against property [which] have of late increased in and near the metropolis.”² Nowhere was political crime or subversion of any sort mentioned despite very recent memories of the Peterloo Massacre, the Cato Street conspiracy, and the various

¹ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 32.

² Metropolitan Police Act 1829, 10 Geo. IV, c. 44.

gagging acts passed in their aftermath. As Tony Bunyan has argued, this was likely a calculated move on the part of Sir Robert Peel, one that was meant to convince the respectable classes that “unlike the French police, whose arbitrary powers were feared, the London police did not threaten their liberty.”³

It did not, however, take long for political developments to begin changing the course of institutionalized policing in Britain. The Chartist disturbances of the 1830s “provided the government with the opportunity for legislation”⁴ and the new London system of policing was extended to the rest of the country, at first on a voluntary basis, through the Rural Constabulary Act of 1839. The limits of this cautious embracing of increased policing were highlighted in 1833 when Sergeant William Popay of the Metropolitan Police was revealed to have infiltrated a chapter of the Chartist National Political Union and to have egged on various members to commit violent outrages against established authorities. Two select committees were set up to investigate into the legality of Popay’s actions but the fact that the sergeant’s mission had been secretly planned and sanctioned by the Home Secretary allowed the two Commissioners of the Metropolis, Charles Rowan and Richard Mayne, to deny “the imputation that we could have sanctioned or allowed any such practices.”⁵ Popay was dismissed, the Commissioners were exonerated and the select committees concluded that the use of plain-clothes police was perfectly constitutional so long as it steered clear of “the Employment of Spies [...] as a practice most abhorrent to the feelings of the People, and most alien to the spirit of the Constitution.”⁶

³ Bunyan, 63.

⁴ Clive Emsley, *Crime and Society in England, 1750-1900, Fourth edition* (Harlow: Longman, 2010), 238.

⁵ Richard Mayne, quoted in James Winter, *London’s Teeming Streets, 1830-1914* (London: Routledge, 2013), 52.

⁶ *Parliamentary Papers* 1833 (627), XIII, *Report from the Select Committee on the Petition of Frederick Young and Others*, p. 3, quoted in Haia Shpayer-Makov and Clive Emsley, eds., *Police Detectives in History, 1750-1950* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 7.

In 1842 the first unit of the London Metropolitan Police dedicated specifically to the detection of crime came into being and with it the foundations for what would later become the Criminal Investigation Department (CID). Although initially numbering only two inspectors and six sergeants, the fledgling detective branch represented the British government's first real effort to set up an apparatus for "investigating crimes [...] gathering intelligence [and infiltrating] mass gatherings" that threatened public order.⁷

Yet ironically by the mid 1840s Chartism no longer posed much of a threat to national security.⁸ Furthermore this decade also saw the birth of a new, invigorated, imperial Britain which could now afford to flaunt its self-assertiveness in the face of a Europe torn between nationalist fervour and unbending reaction. As Bernard Porter has suggested, nothing epitomized this new image of Britannia triumphant better than "the tradition of [unconditional] asylum for ... [the] hundreds of fugitives from failed revolutions on the Continent," the more genteel of whom found a "warm welcome in whiggish circles."⁹ Even characters not entirely fit for polite society, such as Karl Marx, could at least count on toleration.

If British middle-class opinion had found covert policing distasteful before, due to its association with Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary France, it was now adamant that the values of "liberal England" were wholly at odds with the backhanded ways of spies and infiltrators. Charles Dickens' weekly *Household Words* described the "Detective Police system of London" as one "solely [concerned with] bringing crime to justice" not with "the terror of an organised spy system,"¹⁰ while as late as 1875 *The Times* declared Britain still "happily free from

⁷ Haia Shpayer-Makov, *The Ascent of the Detective*, 33.

⁸ For an account of the decline of Chartism in the mid-1840s see Malcolm Chase, *Chartism: A New History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 236 ff.

⁹ Porter, *Plots and Paranoia*, 76.

¹⁰ *Household Words*, 21 September 1850.

the baleful institution of a Secret Police employed in the service of Order.”¹¹ This had the effect of putting government officials in a defensive and self-censorious stance, and although the Met’s detective branch was kept in place and even expanded, its plain-clothes operations were by now strictly regulated in accordance with Charles Rowan’s orders in 1845 that “no man shall disguise himself [except in] very strong case[s] of necessity [and not] without particular orders [from his superiors].”¹² The mid-Victorian period thus ushered in what Bernard Porter has somewhat dramatically termed a “vast [...] chasm of spylesness,”¹³ although underneath this apparent calm there was still an uneasy equilibrium between the demands of opinion-makers and those of the British state.

Cracks began appearing as early as 1867, when a group of Irish-American members of the revolutionary nationalist Fenian Brotherhood blew up Clerkenwell Prison in central London, in an attempt to liberate one of their incarcerated comrades; seven people died, several dozens were injured, and more than two hundred properties were damaged as a result.¹⁴ At the time the Home Office still relied exclusively on its small, sub-institutional Secret Service bureau (set up at the time of the French Revolution) for secret intelligence on matters of national security. The intelligence however was based solely on the reports of a few scattered spies not on the accountable operations of police detectives. The Criminal Investigation Department at Scotland Yard (formed in 1878 out of the ashes of the old and terminally corrupt detective department¹⁵) did not yet have any means of assessing the strength of Fenian activity abroad or in Britain and there were no plans to expand its functions in that direction. The Clerkwenwell bombing

¹¹ *Times*, 24 August 1875.

¹² Rowan quoted in Shpayer-Makov, *The Ascent of the Detective*, 34.

¹³ Porter, *Plots and Paranoia*, 81.

¹⁴ Brian Jenkins, *The Fenian Problem: Insurgency and Terrorism in a Liberal State 1858-1874* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2008), 155.

¹⁵ Shpayer-Makov, *The Ascent of the Detective*, 38-9.

however proved to be merely the prelude to a far more destructive terroristic campaign, one that would target both official buildings (including the Scotland Yard headquarters) but also railway stations and public monuments. At last, the government could no longer afford to be seen to do nothing.



14 January 1881, Salford, Manchester

On the afternoon of 14 January 1881 a seven-year-old boy named Richard Clark and his nanny, Mary Ann Nadin, were walking along a fog-laden Tatton Street in Salford, heading towards Oldfield Road where they were supposed to meet the boy's father at his place of business. Just as they were about to pass by the Infantry Barracks however, a sharp blaze followed by an ear-splitting boom pierced through the sullen fog, sending off bits of debris in every direction; after the dirt and snow had settled, an elderly man who had also been walking in the vicinity of the Barracks prior to the explosion but had luckily escaped unscathed, could see the injured Mrs. Nadin wailing over the motionless body of her young companion; Richard had suffered a major head wound and despite the forthcoming medical efforts to save him, was about to bleed to death. A woman later recalled before the inquest into the death of the boy that shortly before the explosion "at 25 minutes past five [...] she saw two men [stopping] on the footpath next the barrack wall, and one of them struck a match. They then stood for a few minutes with their faces to the wall, and afterwards walked off [...] after [which] she saw a light against the wall, and sparks falling from it."¹⁶

The two men were never found or even properly identified (although a local publican told police he had encountered two suspicious "Yankee-Irishmen" carrying equally suspicious

¹⁶ *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 27 January 1881.

packages only hours before the explosion),¹⁷ but in Salford and Westminster alike little doubt remained as to who was responsible for the outrage. Only ten days prior the War Office had issued orders to volunteer regiments in Liverpool and Manchester to deposit their armaments in “a place of safety” as information deemed credible suggested “an organised attempt would be made by some disaffected portion of the population to seize the arms stored [...] in the district.”¹⁸ That “disaffected portion” was an equivoque for the sympathizers and agents of the umbrella organization known as the Fenians, which at the time comprised the Ireland-based Irish Republican Brotherhood, its American offshoots, viz. the Fenian Brotherhood and the Clan-na-Gael, as well as satellite groupuscles like the United Irishmen of America.

As the recently instated Home Secretary William Vernon Harcourt explained on 22 February in the House of Commons in response to a suggestion by the Nationalist MP Timothy Healy that “a groundless panic” had been created by the government around the “recent alleged” outrage at Salford:

I desire entirely to contradict that, and to say there is ground [...] for believing that a Fenian conspiracy exists – that it professes the same treasonable and unlawful objects, and pursues them by the same detestable means, as Fenian conspiracies have done in the past. [...] A paper was sent to me a few days ago, belonging to a man who is perfectly well known – a man who was a Fenian convict, but who received the mercy of the Crown by being released before the expiry of his sentence. He was subsequently elected Member for an Irish constituency; but he was unable to take his seat, being a convict felon. I refer to [Jeremiah] O'Donovan Rossa. He has a paper called *The United Irishman*, a copy of which was sent to me the other day. That paper stated that the objects which were

¹⁷ *Times*, 17 January 1881.

¹⁸ *Belfast News-Letter*, 6 January 1881.

pursued by the Party to which the editor belonged were to overthrow the English Government by the sword, and by Constitutional agitation. Then there was a speech reported in that paper by a man well known in this country, a man who certainly received the grace of the Crown – John Devoy, who was a convict, and, unfortunately, allowed to go at liberty before the expiry of his sentence¹⁹ [...] He says he will assassinate a single Minister, and then he will assassinate the whole Cabinet. That is what they desire, and then he says he and his friends intend to accomplish a conflagration of the whole of London and other cities in England. Then he used a phrase which is very remarkable [...] that he would "have recourse to modern science." I think we know what the resources of modern science are connected with the conflagration of the towns [...] If Mr. O'Donovan Rossa and Mr. Devoy, and the people whom they subsidize, collect money [for their "Skirmishing Fund"]²⁰ [...] is [it not] the duty of [the] Government [...] to protect itself against men whose principles are the principles of the Nihilists, and whose practices are the practices of the Petroleurs [?]²¹

A decade earlier, Harcourt's predecessor, Henry Austin Bruce, had been informed by Robert Anderson, the Home Office's resident expert on Fenian matters, that his (Anderson's) "American correspondent," the (in)famous Thomas Beach a.k.a. Henri Le Caron, was reporting "Fenian

¹⁹ In early 1871 several Fenians who had been imprisoned for treason in Ireland and Britain found their way to New York after being amnestied by Gladstone. Five of the exiles in particular, including Devoy and O'Donovan Rossa, were welcomed with great acclaim by the local Irish-American community, and were even received at the White House by President Grant (much to the ire of British authorities).

²⁰ Set up by O'Donovan Rossa in the mid 1870s as a means to sponsor attempts of breaking Fenian prisoners out of jail in Britain and Ireland (and even Australia, as in the case of the notorious *Catalpa* expedition of 1876), the Skirmishing Fund was quickly co-opted at the instigation of American Fenians like Patrick and Augustine Ford into the cause of "scientific," guerilla-style warfare. Following a period of internal dissent, the Fund was rechristened in the late 1870s as the National Fund (reflecting the emergence of the New Departure) forcing O'Donovan Rosa to set up a new organisation, the United Irishmen, with its own Skirmishing Fund devoted entirely to terrorist activities. See Whelehan, *The Dynamiters*, 76-84.

²¹ HC Deb, 22 February 1881, vol. 258, cols. 1553-55.

affairs [to be] dead at present,”²² a situation which largely remained unchanged throughout the 1870s thanks to the internecine squabbles that plagued the Irish republican camp on the one hand,²³ and the rise of the quasi-constitutionalist New Departure (embodied by the charismatic and resolute Nationalist MP Charles Stewart Parnell) on the other. Harcourt, however, understood that things were about to change, and it is not by accident that he chose to single out O’Donovan Rossa and Devoy in his speech before the Commons; the former, whose “particularly harsh” treatment at the hands of British jailers²⁴ had led him to advocate nothing short of “terror in England – terror in the hearts of Englishmen,”²⁵ represented the flauntingly terrorist wing of radical republicanism, while the latter, as one of the architects of the New Departure, typified the duplicitous nature of Parnellism and the Land League.

23 January – 16 March 1881, Mansion House, London

Despite being aware of the imminence of renewed violence – a report received on 2 January 1881 warned that “ample subsidies have been received from America, arms & ammunition have been imported & leaders are only awaiting the signal”²⁶ – Harcourt knew very little about the specifics, and certainly did not suspect that O’Donovan Rossa, far from merely breathing fire in the pages of his *United Irishman*, was actively organizing a campaign of terror on British shores (of which the Salford explosion was to be only the first chapter).²⁷ Writing to his Director of Criminal Investigations, Sir Howard Vincent, on 23 January, Harcourt declared himself “much disturbed at the absolute want of information in which we seem to be with regard

²² Memo by Robert Anderson, 14 December 1870, TNA HO 144/1538/6.

²³ Whelehan, 87.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 75-6.

²⁵ Jeremiah O’Donovan Rossa, *Rossa’s Recollections, 1838 to 1898* (Marine’s Harbor, NY: O’Donovan Rossa, 1898), 62.

²⁶ Report by Howard Vincent re Fenian activities, 2 January 1881, TNA HO 144/72/A19. The report was, as per Vincent’s description, based on information “from a very high & powerful element in the Irish agitation.”

²⁷ Despite O’Donovan Rossa’s reputation as a grandstanding braggart his claim of responsibility for the outrage in Salford (and others that followed) is generally taken as genuine by historians. See Whelehan; 85; McKenna, *The Irish-American Dynamite Campaign*, 15 ff; Campbell, *Fenian Fire*, 110-11.

to Fenian organisation in London,”²⁸ adding that same day in a subsequent letter to Sir Edmund Henderson (the Chief Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police) that Vincent was to “devote his exclusive attention to police supervision of suspected Fenian and Irish plots,” and that “an Irish Inspector [was to] be sent on to England to act in cooperation with Mr. Vincent [...] in order that the Police of both countries may be brought into direct communication and harmonious action.”²⁹

Harcourt was not the only one in the newly minted Liberal cabinet favouring a more proactive approach to the Irish question. Despite Gladstone’s personal preference for “giving stringency to the existing law [...] not abolishing the right to be tried before being imprisoned,”³⁰ a new Coercion policy for Ireland was now all but inevitable following the intensification of the Land League’s anti-rent agitation and the failure of the state trial against Parnell a year before,³¹ and Fenian bombs were unlikely to change that; as Hugh Childers, the Secretary for War, put it in a letter to Harcourt, “what idiots these scoundrels are to think that their outrages will make us slacker about Coercion.”³² A day later, on 24 January, William Forster, Gladstone’s Chief Secretary for Ireland, introduced the new Coercion Bill in Parliament, which, despite its liberal-sounding name (the Protection of Person and Property Act) “practically enabled the viceroy to lock up anybody he pleased, and to detain him as long as he pleased.”³³ Nationalist MPs mounted a vigorous filibuster, but after a few days, the Speaker of the House, having consulted with Gladstone,³⁴ put an end to all further discussion, and let the bill pass. The stage was now set

²⁸ Harcourt to Vincent, 23 January 1881, quoted in S. H. Jeyes, *The Life of Sir Howard Vincent* (London: George Allen & Co. Ltd., 1912), 106.

²⁹ Harcourt to Henderson, 24 January 1881, TNA MEPO 3/3070.

³⁰ William Gladstone, quoted in John Morley, *The Life of Gladstone* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1927), 390.

³¹ Margaret O’Callaghan, *British High Politics and a Nationalist Ireland: Criminality, Land and the Law under Forster and Balfour* (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 62 ff.

³² Childers to Harcourt, 23 January 1881, TNA HO 144/72/A19.

³³ Morley, 391.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

not only for the oncoming Home Rule crisis, but also for a new Liberal approach to political extremism, at once interventionist and prudently reluctant (depending on the nature of the threat), which would, over the course of the next couple of decades, become the norm for successive British governments.

While Gladstone's team of rivals³⁵ was busy coming to terms with Coercion and the terms of the nascent Second Land Act, police authorities were trying to implement the Home Secretary's directive to check the growth of Fenianism in London. Thanks to Vincent's new role as head of this operation, Scotland Yard was now host to an embryonic Irish Bureau in charge of monitoring "Fenian movements [and the] proceedings of the Irish population" in the Metropolis.³⁶ What this meant in practice was however far removed from any effective system of surveillance and intelligence gathering as several police reports from February and early March show. One, for example, detailed the patrolling of the area around Finsbury Barracks by four PCs in uniform as well as "two PCs in plain clothes on the opposite side of the road [in order] to [better] follow any person who might commit any offence,"³⁷ another described how "a PS and a PC [...] specially employed in plain clothes [...] for about 10 days to make enquiries re alleged Fenianism" failed to obtain any "information whatever on the subject,"³⁸ while yet another concluded disappointedly that "having made quiet enquiry at Public Houses in the vicinity of St. Dominic's Priory, [I] have been unable to gain information as to who posted the Placard [advertising a meeting on Ireland and the Land Question]."³⁹

³⁵ As Travis Crosby has noted, Gladstone's second ministry was characterized by "conflicting aims in policy, procedural differences of opinion, and contrasting personalities [all of which] contributed to the dysfunctional nature of the government." Travis Crosby, *The Two Mr. Gladstones: A Study in Psychology and History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 168.

³⁶ Memo by Edmund Henderson, 26 January 1881, TNA MEPO 3/3070.

³⁷ Police Report, 1 February 1881, TNA MEPO 3/3070.

³⁸ Police Report, 2 March 1881, TNA MEPO 3/3070.

³⁹ Police Report, 4 March 1881, TNA MEPO 3/3070.

Harcourt may have been bragging to Queen Victoria about his “spider’s web of Police Communication [...] woven throughout the United Kingdom [...] the centre of which is in my office,”⁴⁰ but in early 1881 valuable information on Fenian activities was still only coming in thanks to Robert Anderson’s man in America, and the news was not good. In a report dated 17 February, Henri Le Caron warned that “the whole current of opinion is that something is to be done, that the L[and] L[eague] money will not be used for bread but lead,” and that O’Donovan Rossa was actively seeking funds for “his affair of skirmishing,” boasting that with five thousand dollars he would “have England down on her knees;” Le Caron thought that “no one but a very few believe in him,”⁴¹ but as the Salford explosion had already indicated, those who did believe in Rossa’s message were fanatically devoted and eager to prove themselves.

On the night of 16 March, Simon Cowell, a City constable on the beat, discovered a partially flaming package resting in a wall recess on the left side of the Lord Mayor’s house, and having carefully smothered the flames, took what remained of it to the nearby Bow Street police station for inspection. What transpired proved quite unsettling; the package, a wooden box that had been wrapped in several layers of newspaper, contained roughly forty pounds of blasting gunpowder as well as “an old carpet bag, some brown paper, two American, one Glasgow, and one Irish newspaper of recent date, and a linen bag in which the powder had evidently been first kept.”⁴² The fuse had barely avoided ignition, and had it not been for PC Cowell’s timely intervention the resulting explosion would have likely proved disastrous not only to himself but also to the surrounding residences, none of which benefitted from the same considerable

⁴⁰ Harcourt to Queen Victoria, 24 February 1881, quoted in Porter, *Origins of the Vigilant State*, 41.

⁴¹ Report by Henri Le Caron, 17 February 1881, TNA HO 144/1538/6.

⁴² *Daily News*, 18 March 1881.

reinforcements as those in place at Mansion House (where walls were “in some places as much as 10 feet thick”⁴³).

The identity of the perpetrators became once again a matter of speculation, but the intent of the outrage appeared to be clearly political. The Lord Mayor William McArthur, although himself an Irishman of humble origins, was a loyal Liberal who had voted for Coercion (much to the displeasure of his mostly Irish constituents in Lambeth), but more significant perhaps was the fact that Mansion House – as the symbolic heart of the City of London – stood as an ideal representation of the financial and political power of the Government; the fact that an opulent banquet had been scheduled to take place that same night (which had only been hastily cancelled at the last moment) would have only increased its appeal as a target. As several newspapers observed at the time, even the exact spot where the bomb had been placed seemed pregnant with political significance, viz. “beneath the east window [of the Egyptian Hall] which curiously enough depicts the incident of William Walworth quelling a mob of insurgents by stabbing their leader Wat Tyler.”⁴⁴

The subsequent investigation into the attempted bombing did not last long; surprisingly, City police received an important lead very early on when it became apparent that three American Fenians – Thomas Mooney, Edward O’Donnell and Patrick Coleman – were very likely implicated in the plot. Catching them was however another matter. By the time the press got wind of the new developments, the three men had already successfully fled Britain – O’Donnell and Coleman back to America, and Mooney to Paris (where a secret rapprochement between IRBers and Parnellites had just taken place).⁴⁵ A group of City detectives was sent after

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.; *Birmingham Daily Post*, 18 March 1881.

⁴⁵ Whelehan, 164; McKenna, 16.

them in the hopes that “friendly authorities will not place legal difficulties in their way,”⁴⁶ but to no avail; the sense of failure was only compounded when it transpired, as *The Standard* pointed out on 28 March, that Coleman had managed to abscond on a steamer bound for New York just in the nick of time, leaving behind him a trail of tugboats filled with frustrated City policemen.⁴⁷ Meanwhile, Harcourt’s men were conspicuously absent from the investigation, and did not even seem to be aware of the City Commissioner’s (unsuccessful) efforts of having Coleman extradited to Britain on a charge of arson,⁴⁸ as a Home Office memo from late March reveals.⁴⁹ After being told by Vincent that Mooney (who was arguably the most important of the three bombers) had escaped, the choleric Harcourt exploded in an angry tirade, exclaiming that “The police are no use at all” and that he would “dismiss the whole of them to-morrow morning.”⁵⁰ The new Irish Bureau was off to a decidedly rocky start.

19 March – 25 May 1881, St. Petersburg, Berlin and London

The reason the Lord Mayor’s banquet had been cancelled a day before the Mansion House incident was as a mark of respect for the bereaved Imperial House of Russia, which was mourning the death of Czar Alexander II, assassinated on 13 March in St. Petersburg by Nihilist bombs. The Czar’s death was in fact very much on the minds of Londoners from all walks of life in the early spring of 1881, especially those with strong views on Russia’s autocratic government, and few people at the time had stronger views (on Russia and everything else) than the young German socialist Johann Most, who had been exiled in London since 1878 (following the introduction of repressive anti-socialist legislation in Germany). Out of his makeshift printing shop at 101 Great Titchfield Street, Most published and edited the weekly *Freiheit*, a publication

⁴⁶ *Standard*, 28 March 1881.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Times*, 1 April 1881; *Morning Post*, 31 March 1881.

⁴⁹ Unsigned Home Office memo, 31 March 1881, TNA MEPO 3/3070.

⁵⁰ Jeyes, 116.

which despite a tendency toward pure invective and over-the-top verbal aggression that would have impressed even O'Donovan Rossa, remained virtually unknown to everyone in Britain who was not a German émigré of decidedly left-wing sympathies.

That comfortable anonymity came to a sudden end on 19 March when Most submitted to his readers a personal interpretation of the assassination in St. Petersburg stuffed with the most inflammatory bile he seemed capable of. It began thus:

At last! [...] Triumph! Triumph! [...] One of the most abominable tyrants of Europe, to whom downfall has long since been sworn, and who therefore, in wild revenge-breathings caused innumerable heroes and heroines of the Russian people to be destroyed or imprisoned – the Emperor of Russia is no more. On Sunday last, at noon, just as the Monster was returning from one of those diversions which are wont to consist of eye-feastings on well-drilled herds of stupid blood-and-iron slaves, and which one calls Military Reviews, the Executioner of the people, who long since pronounced his death sentence, overtook and with vigorous hand settled the brute. [News of the event] penetrated into princely palaces where dwell those crime-beladen abortions of every profligacy who long since have earned a similar fate a thousandfold [and who now] tremble [...] from Constantinople to Washington, for their long since forfeited heads.

Most then went on to praise the recent failed attempts on Kaiser William – “the new Protestant Pope and soldier Emperor of Germany” – as well as the Nihilist policy of assassination (what was already termed *propagande par le fait* in France), decrying only the “rarity of so-called tyrannicide.” If only, he concluded, “a single crowned wretch were disposed of every month, in a short time it should afford no one gratification henceforward still to play the monarch.”⁵¹

⁵¹ Reg. v. Most, May 1881, p. 13, TNA HO 144/77/A3385.

Although subtlety was arguably the only victim of Most's "empty shrieking,"⁵² his hearty encouragement to would-be tyrannicides proved embarrassing and unnerving to the government: embarrassing because of the criticism routinely levelled at Britain in continental cabinets and journals for its supposed indiscriminate embracing of dangerous revolutionaries,⁵³ and because of Britain's own criticism of the US's refusal to clamp down on the activities of American Fenians; unnerving because in an age of dynamite bombs (which the new decade promised to become), seditious talk that praised the assassination of ruling sovereigns was no longer a trivial matter, and because Most, if held to account, could easily become another Simon Bernard,⁵⁴ providing an impetus to a new wave of populist outrage (and potentially endangering all of Harcourt's plans for a new system of political policing in Britain).

How exactly the authorities were made aware of Most's incendiary article is a matter of speculation (almost as it was coming off the press, British newspapers were announcing that the "social democratic organ *Freiheit* [...] appears to-day, with a red border, and contains articles exulting in the Czar's murder"⁵⁵) but within a day of its publication Queen Victoria herself was asking Gladstone (through her personal secretary Henry Ponsonby) whether a paper like *Freiheit*

⁵² Friedrich Engels to J. P. Becker, 1 April 1880, in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Correspondence 1846-1895* (London: Martin Lawrence Ltd., 1934), 380. Marx himself described Most as "of most childish vanity. Every change of the wind blows him first in one direction and then in another like a weathercock." Quoted in Franklin Folsom, *America Before Welfare* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 141.

⁵³ Bernard Porter, *The Refugee Question in Mid-Victorian Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 46 ff.

⁵⁴ Tried in 1858 for his involvement in the Orsini affair, Bernard was acquitted by an all-English jury which along with an overwhelming majority of the public had been ably persuaded by the defence counsel to regard the accused as an innocent freedom fighter hounded out by a morally bankrupt Liberal government beholden to French despotism. The effect of the trial was nothing short of monumental. It neutralized Lord Palmerston's Conspiracy-to-Murder Bill, put the fear of populist backlash back in the hearts of government ministers, and re-affirmed the sacrosanctity of political refuge on one hand, as well as the public's contempt for continental-style methods of policing dissent on the other. See Caroline Shaw, *Britannia's Embrace: Modern Humanitarianism and the Imperial Origins of Refugee Relief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 69-70.

⁵⁵ *Daily Gazette*, 19 March 1881. Although the British press' sudden interest in this obscure German-language periodical may seem strange, it is worth noting that ever since its inception in 1879 *Freiheit* had occasionally featured in the "Foreign Intelligence" column of several British newspapers due mainly to the fact that its illegal smuggling into Germany and Austria-Hungary routinely got socialists in those countries in trouble with the law.

“should be tolerated in the United Kingdom.”⁵⁶ A couple of days after, the German ambassador, Count Münster, met in private with Foreign Secretary Lord Granville to formally register his government’s displeasure (Bismarck’s own personal protestation was already in the mail) and, problematically for Her Majesty’s Government, to ask that proceedings should be taken against Most and his paper.⁵⁷

The Bernard case would have certainly been on Harcourt’s mind as he contemplated the least compromising course of action (at the time he had been one of those young Radicals who were most “energetic [in upholding Bernard’s] right of asylum”⁵⁸), but all things considered, the incentive for prosecution was proving hard to resist. On 25 March the authorities tasked one Charles Edward Marr, a German-language teacher from South Kensington who by his own admission had “lived a long time in Russia [and] Germany,” with acquiring four copies of the incriminating issue of *Freiheit* from Most’s printing shop in West London. This he promptly did, and as Marr later declared in court, “on reading the article [on tyrannicide]” he was “very much disgusted both with the tenor of it and the tendency,” and felt morally compelled to make it known to his local MP, Lord George Hamilton.⁵⁹ This somewhat tenuous ploy – Marr admitted he had had no previous knowledge of *Freiheit* and insisted he acquired the four copies merely to satisfy his own curiosity after discussions with an unnamed friend – served a very important purpose for the government: it concealed both any connection to foreign powers like Germany, as well as the existence of any endemic political police (which despite the looming Fenian threat remained a hugely contentious issue in public discourse).

⁵⁶ Ponsonby to Gladstone, 20 March 1881, quoted in Bernard Porter, “The *Freiheit* Prosecutions, 1881-1882,” *The Historical Journal* 23 (1980): 842.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ A. G. Gardiner, *The Life of Sir William Harcourt* (London: Constable & Co. Ltd., 1923), 404.

⁵⁹ *Reg. v. Most*, p. 16, TNA HO 144/77/A3385.

A day after Marr's "discovery," Harcourt wrote a short letter to his Permanent Secretary, Adolphus Liddell, in which he outlined not only his intentions regarding Most but also his future plans for dealing with the likes of Most:

Dear Liddell,

The Cabinet has decided that the Article in the Freiheit shall be prosecuted.⁶⁰ I have written to the A[ttorney] G[eneral] accordingly. Will you give directions that the copies of the Freiheit of this week published I believe yesterday should be obtained. H.

Ponsonby has written to me on the subject of a Communistic Meeting printed in the Telegraph where most atrocious doctrines were proclaimed. I have said we can do nothing as we have no authentic record but these meetings should be looked after for the future. Tell the Police to look after them. There will probably be advertisements of them in the Freiheit and other papers of the kind.

WVH.⁶¹

Its brevity notwithstanding, this letter constitutes, if any one document can be regarded as such, a foundational document of sorts for Britain's political police. By having Liddell "tell the Police to look after [the revolutionary socialists]" – who were incidentally about to become more visible than usual in the metropolis owing to the International Revolutionary Socialist Conference which was scheduled to take place there in July – Harcourt was effectively giving official expression to the as yet unexplored possibility that the operations of the inchoate Irish Bureau might be expanded to cover subversive activities of all types, not just Fenianism.

⁶⁰ Ever the politician, Harcourt conveniently brushed over the fact that having already decided in favour of prosecuting Most the day before (as he confessed to Granville), he then "induced the Cabinet to agree with him." Gardiner, 404.

⁶¹ Harcourt to Liddell, 26 March 1881, TNA HO 144/77/A3385.

The government did not succeed in obscuring the international dimension of the Most case for long. A few days after the cabinet's decision to go ahead with the prosecution, London newspapers were already reporting (based on intelligence from the continent) that "strong representations have already been made in London to the Queen's Ministers, impressing upon them the necessity of [undertaking] the prosecution of the *Freiheit*, and in Paris at least [...] it is thought impossible that the demand should be refused."⁶² For his part, Most was becoming increasingly suspicious (at his trial he would claim that he foresaw his arrest after reading *The Standard*) and must have known something was up when on 29 March a strange young man came into his shop asking for copies of the "red border" issue of *Freiheit* in accented German. There were none left in stock but Most, anticipating a swelling in demand, had had a special batch of copies made just of the tyrannicide article, of which his client – a plain-clothes Metropolitan constable – received two.⁶³

The following afternoon Most's suspicions were confirmed beyond all doubt when a group of uniformed Scotland Yard detectives headed by Inspector Charles Hagan (a native German) walked through the door at 101 Great Titchfield Street, and promptly announced to Most (in English and German) that he was being placed under arrest on account of his article on the Russian Emperor. Although the warrant issued to Hagan did not authorize him to seize any of Most's property, the inspector was under direct orders from Howard Vincent to do just that. Of particular import were Most's personal pocket books (which contained encryption codes, the names and addresses of many associates, and even photographs), the "enormous quantity" of

⁶² *Standard*, 29 March 1881.

⁶³ Reg. v. Most, pp. 18-19, TNA HO 144/77/A3385.

documents and literature present on the shop premises, and the printing type – all of which were taken immediately to Scotland Yard and “sealed up.”⁶⁴

The purpose of the raid was arguably to add to the government’s own files on London’s budding anarchist scene (which had been rapidly increasing in recent years as a consequence of the French anti-Communard and the German anti-Socialist laws), but as Vincent explained in a letter to Harcourt, the quality of the intelligence gleaned from Most’s documents made the collection a highly valuable asset to “the several countries interested” (mainly Germany and Austria).⁶⁵ That the raid was illegal was not in doubt even by the Director of Public Prosecutions, A. K. Stephenson, who on 1 April observed in a memo to the Home Office how “the police often necessarily in the proper discharge of their duties commit acts which are said to be illegal, inasmuch as there may be no statutable authority for such acts.”⁶⁶ Despite some frail opposition from unlikely quarters – Lord Randolph Churchill for example demanded to know “under what Law or Statue [Most had been] arrested, deprived of his watch, money, bank book, and letters”⁶⁷ – the controversial aspects of the *Freiheit* case (most of which were widely publicized)⁶⁸ failed however to elicit anything resembling the populist furore that the Bernard trial had inspired a generation before.

The national press was predictably divided over the need for prosecution with most Liberal and Radical newspapers (as well as the Conservative *Times* and *Globe*) being opposed to it, not so much on libertarian as on practical and patriotic grounds. A trial, *The Times* argued, would only afford a life-giving notoriety to the *Freiheit*’s “miserable trash,” and further taint Harcourt’s protestations in the House of Commons that the government was not acting at the

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 22-23.

⁶⁵ Vincent to Harcourt, 21 March 1881, TNA HO 144/77/A3385.

⁶⁶ Memo by A. K. Stephenson, 1 April 1881, TNA HO 144/77/A3385.

⁶⁷ HC Deb, 1 April 1881, vol. 260, col. 464.

⁶⁸ *Daily News*, 1 April 1881.

behest of foreign powers with the stink of *qui s'excuse s'accuse*.⁶⁹ Such arguments aside, there was virtually no sympathy for the accused himself outside of socialist and anarchist circles, and occasionally there was even open hostility, as in the case of the meeting held in Southwark on 10 April by a group of Most's comrades, all of whom had to be rescued by local police from an angry mob threatening to lynch them.⁷⁰

A month and a half later, on 25 May, Most finally stood trial at the Old Bailey on fifteen counts of libel and “encouraging [and] endeavouring to persuade [...] persons unknown [...] to murder the Sovereigns and Rulers of Europe” (with special reference to the Russian and German emperors).⁷¹ His defence counsel (and Nationalist MP for County Meath), Alexander M. Sullivan, was eloquent but inexperienced (having been called to the English bar only five years before) and plagued by ill health. His cross-examination of key witnesses (especially Charles Marr and the detectives involved in Most's arrest) proved timid and did nothing to underline the controversial (never mind illegal) aspects of the case, while his address to the jury, though pithy in its appeal to “English principles,” ultimately fell on deaf ears.

Most was found guilty on all counts and given sixteen months with hard labour. His name had barely impacted British public opinion and was thereafter all but forgotten; his arrest and prosecution however did set an important precedent, and, as we shall see later on, provided the government with a template of sorts for dealing with similar cases of politically-motivated libel. More importantly perhaps, the aftermath of the Most case marked arguably the first stage of the government's program of surveillance of non-Fenian radicals (a program that in six years' time would evolve into a separate branch of the Metropolitan Police) and entrenched Britain's approach to foreign pressure on the issue of subversion. As official correspondence from the

⁶⁹ *Times*, 1 April 1881.

⁷⁰ *Belfast News-Letter*, 11 April 1881.

⁷¹ *Reg. v. Most*, pp. 6-8, TNA HO 144/77/A3385.

Home Office file on Most reveals, *Freiheit* continued to remain under close observation until 1883 (when Most took it with him to America) even as “very little allusion [...] concerning England” appeared in its pages.⁷² At the same time, Harcourt was eager to use the intelligence extracted from Most to assuage critics of Britain’s lax immigration and free speech laws – in October of that year Viennese authorities, acting on information received from Britain, arrested fifteen people suspected of distributing *Freiheit*⁷³ – and as a means of eschewing recent continental plans for international co-operation against Nihilists and other revolutionaries. As the Home Secretary explained in a letter to the Queen, “The most effective way to avert the pressure of Foreign Govmnts [sic] to alter our laws is to demonstrate that those laws are adequate to give the protection which all Govmnts have the right to demand of their friends and neighbours.”⁷⁴ In this context, Most’s conviction was “equal to joining the Nihilist Conference.”⁷⁵

10 June 1881 – 2 May 1882, Liverpool, London, Chicago, Dublin

Harcourt may have had good reason to feel jubilant over the outcome of the Most trial (as well as the recent passing of his Irish Arms Bill, which outlawed the possession of firearms and explosives and gave Irish authorities unrestricted powers of search and seizure),⁷⁶ but for the Scotland Yard detectives working to implement the Home Secretary’s anti-Fenian strategy, the summer of 1881 proved a difficult and frustrating period. In the words of one CID inspector, “[to] state that every possible resource at the disposal of the Criminal Investigation Department was taxed to its very utmost, [would be to put], even then, the matter very mildly indeed,”⁷⁷ an

⁷² Reports on recent issues of *Freiheit* by Inspector Charles von Tornow, 28 November 1882–24 January 1883, TNA HO 144/77/A3385.

⁷³ George Strachey to Lord Granville, 22 October 1881, TNA HO 144/77/A3385; Porter, “The *Freiheit* Prosecutions,” 849.

⁷⁴ Harcourt to Queen Victoria, 9 April 1881, quoted in Porter, 848.

⁷⁵ Ponsonby to Harcourt, 30 May 1881, quoted in Porter, 848.

⁷⁶ Gardiner, 426.

⁷⁷ Maurice Moser and C. F. Rideal, *Stories from Scotland Yard* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1890), 20.

impression which was confirmed by Vincent himself who later recalled the “almost daily crop of false alarms and more or less circumstantial report of plots, all of which had to be sifted.”⁷⁸

Not all alarms proved false however. On 10 April Robert Anderson received a missive from the American consul at Philadelphia, Captain Robert Clipperton, warning of intelligence received from “different secret sources” which strongly suggested that bombings of “public buildings” in Merseyside would be attempted shortly.⁷⁹ Security at the Port of Liverpool was increased as a consequence but to little avail; in early May a gunpowder bomb rocked the Militia Barracks in Chester, and in less than a fortnight, a similar device went off in the outer doorway of a police section house in Liverpool’s Hatton Garden Street.⁸⁰ Although neither explosion succeeded in inflicting injuries or serious damage to property, they did manage to spread fear amongst the general public and cemented the notion that Rossa’s skirmishers were out to do as much damage as possible on the British mainland.

On 10 June, less than a month after the Hatton Garden St. explosion, the peace of the Prime Minister’s hometown was disturbed yet again by a bomb attack, this time aimed at the City Hall building. It too failed to do any real harm if only because of the audaciousness of three local constables (one of whom dragged the bag holding the “infernal machine” – a dynamite-charged, pipe-shaped device – into the middle of an adjacent street, where it exploded) and the incompetence of the bombers themselves, who, though armed, were easily apprehended and taken into custody following a short foot chase.⁸¹ That the latter were connected with the Fenian conspiracy was made abundantly clear when one of them, James McGrath, was found to be “the direct agent for the sale of an incendiary publication belonging to [...] O’Donovan Rossa [...]

⁷⁸ Jeyes, 118.

⁷⁹ Quoted in McKenna, 16.

⁸⁰ *Glasgow Herald*, 7 May 1881; *Daily News*, 18 May 1881.

⁸¹ *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 12 June 1881.

bundles [of which] had been left at his [i.e. McGrath's] lodgings.”⁸² Both McGrath and his accomplice (a young Ulsterman by the name of James McKeivitt) were ultimately found guilty and given harsh sentences of penal servitude for life and fifteen years respectively.

Despite the failure of this initial wave of attacks to achieve anything in the way of “bringing England to her knees,” it was becoming increasingly obvious to authorities that Rossa’s skirmishers were not about to let up in their efforts. Days after the failed attack on Liverpool City Hall, Harcourt was informed that Inspector Maurice Moser, the Scotland Yard man who had been sent on Fenian duty to the port-city earlier that spring, had recently made a startling discovery: several cement barrels that had been shipped from Boston, Massachusetts were found to each contain “a fully-charged infernal machine, fitted with the usual clockwork apparatus, provided with an eleven ounce cartridge of dynamite, quite sufficient to play very considerable havoc wherever it was destined.”⁸³ They had been consigned to a fictitious establishment in Hackins Hey St. and were only spotted after Moser noticed that “the word ‘Boston’ [...] roughly painted on each cask in black” was spelled with a telltale crossed “t” on eight of them.⁸⁴ Harcourt was dismayed, but also intrigued. Moser received instructions to bring the bombs down to London where they were privately shown to the Home Secretary and “to many members of the House of Peers,” and subsequently used by “Government experts” under the direction of Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Explosives, Colonel Vivian Majendie, in “several experiments [which] undoubtedly demonstrated that each of the machines was of the latest and most improved construction.”⁸⁵ More intriguing than the bombs themselves, however, was the possibility that they might be used as political leverage against the American

⁸² *Northampton Mercury*, 6 August 1881.

⁸³ Moser et al, 25.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.

government, especially in the context of the recent assassination of President James Garfield, an event which Harcourt believed would “considerably modify the views of Lowell⁸⁶ and Blaine⁸⁷ on the subject of political murder and O’Donovan Rossa’s proceedings [...] confirm[ing] those who think us right and confound[ing] those who have been disposed to ridicule our alarms.”⁸⁸

Lowell and Blaine did not hesitate to promise that the US Government would investigate the source of the Boston barrels⁸⁹ and “make every possible exertion to [...] bring to justice” those responsible.⁹⁰ In reality, American officials (including Lowell himself) tended to blame the excesses of the Irish agitation on Britain’s authoritarian measures in Ireland, while Congress (under the sway of a substantial Irish-American electorate) proved openly contemptuous of Britain’s Irish policy.⁹¹ Meanwhile, the Home Office was once again receiving news from Captain Clipperton that ten more bomb-carrying barrels had already been shipped to Britain and that “fifteen others [are] to be delivered to conspirators next week.”⁹² Clipperton’s informer (a double agent working for O’Donovan Rossa as an explosives expert, and, as it later turned out, an expert con man)⁹³ was even able to confirm the identity of the man responsible for shipping

⁸⁶ James R. Lowell (1819-1891), American poet and US ambassador to the Court of St. James from 1880 to 1885.

⁸⁷ James G. Blaine (1830-1893), Republican statesman and US Secretary of State from March to December 1881, and again from March 1889 to June 1892.

⁸⁸ Harcourt to Lord Granville, 3 July 1881, quoted in Gardiner, 430.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Lowell to Blaine, 30 July 1881, quoted in Jonathan Gantt, *Irish Terrorism in the Atlantic Community, 1865-1922* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 143-4.

⁹¹ Gantt, 145.

⁹² “Decypher from Consul Clipperton, Philadelphia,” 7 July 1881, TNA HO 144/72/A19.

⁹³ The informer, rarely named in official correspondence but known as James McClintock (possibly an assumed identity) approached Captain Clipperton in October 1880 offering to keep the British up-to-date with the doings of Rossa’s group in return for a not unsubstantial fee (between February and July 1881 he managed to extract at least one thousand dollars from the consul, as one of the latter’s telegrams attests). The arrangement proved short-lived however and shortly after disclosing the identity of the Boston bomb shipper and the existence of the coal torpedoes (of which he supplied Clipperton with samples, albeit fake ones), McClintock disappeared, betraying both his British and Fenian masters (the latter never actually receiving any of the promised “infernal machines”). See Mike Dash, “The Amazing (If True) Story of the Submarine Mechanic Who Blew Himself Up Then Surfaced as a Secret Agent for Queen Victoria,” *Smithsonian.com*, 30 June 2014, accessed 15 June 2015, <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/amazing-if-true-story-submarine-mechanic-who-blew-himself-then-surfaced-secret-agent-queen-victoria-180951905/>

the bombs,⁹⁴ and warned that the Fenians were now planning to use “coal torpedoes” (i.e. iron castings filled with dynamite and made to look like common lumps of coal) to sabotage British ships (information which was seemingly confirmed separately by other informers).⁹⁵

Harcourt thought the story of dynamite hidden in coal “nonsense”⁹⁶ – “[it] is a very old one,” a Home Office under-secretary noted, “well known to all the authorities [and it] never yet [...] has come to anything”⁹⁷ – but the duplicity of the American Government on the issue of Fenian agitation coupled with the Fenians’ own zeal for developing what Johann Most would have termed a “scientific” arsenal⁹⁸ (which by now included a semi-functional submarine dubbed the “Fenian Ram”⁹⁹) only further inflamed the Home Secretary’s characteristic nervousness. For the rest of the summer he would remain in “unceasing correspondence with Vincent and Scotland Yard as to the various outrages and threatened outrages,”¹⁰⁰ even as no new incidents were being reported.

Rossa’s skirmishing campaign may have suffered a temporary setback with the arrest of the Liverpool bombers and the interception of explosives coming in from America, but on the whole the mainstream of the American Fenian movement, as represented by the Clan-na-Gael, was only now just beginning to seriously entertain the notion of unleashing a concerted campaign of terror in Britain. Frustrated with the stagnancy of the New Departure and mindful of Rossa’s newfound notoriety, the movement’s leading figures came together in early August in

⁹⁴ “Decypher from Consul Clipperton, Philadelphia,” 9 July 1881, TNA HO 144/72/A19.

⁹⁵ S. Stoney, JP to Harcourt, 27 July 1881, TNA HO 144/84/A7266; “Translation of a letter received at HM’s Consulate at Leghorn, containing revelations [on] the fabrication of Infernal Machines in certain Ports of the U.S.,” 17 October 1881, TNA HO 144/84/A7266.

⁹⁶ Note by Harcourt, 6 November 1881, TNA HO 144/84/A7266.

⁹⁷ Note by Godfrey Lushington, 4 November 1881, TNA HO 144/84/A7266.

⁹⁸ Most’s ideas on the subject were published in his 1885 pamphlet *Revolutionäre Kriegswissenschaft* [lit. Revolutionary War Science] which shortly became the unofficial user’s manual for scores of politically-motivated dynamite enthusiasts.

⁹⁹ Richard Compton-Hall, *The Submarine Pioneers: The Beginnings of Underwater Warfare* (Penzance: Periscope Publishing, 2004), 55 ff.

¹⁰⁰ Gardiner, 430.

Chicago to discuss change. Also in attendance was Major Le Caron whose vivid reports to Anderson described the proceedings of this “Great Dynamite Convention” (as the master spy dubbed it) in fascinating detail; the most notable developments were on the one hand the unanimous decision to devote all future efforts to “the work of revolution,” and on the other the initiation of a new “regime” within the Clan-na-Gael, one dominated by fiery insurrectionists like Alexander Sullivan (the Clan’s new leader)¹⁰¹ and dynamite enthusiasts like Dr. Thomas Gallagher, who proved “so carried away by his subject that he expressed his willingness to personally undertake the carriage of dynamite to England and to superintend its use there” (a plan which Gallagher would indeed see through to fruition only a couple of years later).¹⁰²

Le Caron was also able to confirm the absolute failure of Coercion in deterring militant nationalists from joining the ranks of the Fenian conspiracy. As he candidly told his handler at the Home Office, “I fail to see any good resulting from action of late on your side; it has not tended to stamp out the movement [but] has increased it one hundred fold. [Timothy] Healy to me has confirmed everything I have heard and [seen] as to the ultimate object in view. He says before two years E[ngland] will be down on her knees.”¹⁰³ Healy, a pro-Fenian Parnellite, was widely known for his acerbic and bombastic manner even in the House of Commons (where he stood as the member for Wexford), but he was far from an isolated voice in his inexorable opposition to the British government. Parnell himself was now at daggers drawn with Gladstone after the passage of the latter’s Second Land Act, which promised to finally grant Irish tenants the so-called Three Fs: fixity of tenure, fair rents and free sale. Although the reasons for Parnell’s

¹⁰¹ This Alexander Sullivan (who bore no relation to Johann Most’s Irish counsel) was a forty-four-year-old Chicago lawyer and Republican machine politician with a violent past who had only joined the Clan-na-Gael in 1877. His election as leader of the so-called VC (a codename for the Clan’s supreme council) was as much a testament to his political talents as to the general sense of impatience dominating the American Fenian movement at the time.

¹⁰² Henri Le Caron, *Twenty-Five Years in The Secret Service: The Recollections of a Spy* (London: William Heinemann, 1892), 187-192.

¹⁰³ Le Caron to Robert Anderson, 12 December 1881, TNA HO 144/1538/6.

hostility had less to do with the Act itself and more with his desire to keep the nationalist agitation aflame and maintain his own revolutionary credentials,¹⁰⁴ the logic of Coercion dictated that his provocations could not go unpunished. On 12 October Gladstone met with his ministers and after five hours of discussions it was decided that Parnell would be arrested.¹⁰⁵ The following day the Irish leader was apprehended at Morrison's Hotel in Dublin and taken to the nearby Kilmainham gaol. A week afterwards the Land League was declared illegal.

Coercion however was beginning to come apart at the seams as agrarian crime in Ireland (including murder) continued to increase steadily over the winter months,¹⁰⁶ and by early spring 1882, Gladstone had turned against the policy with the same sudden zeal that he would later show towards Home Rule. After negotiating a truce with Parnell in late April which would insure that "the conspiracy which has been used to get up boycotting and outrages will now be used to put them down and that there will be a union with the Liberal Party,"¹⁰⁷ the Premier had his erstwhile nemesis released from gaol, much to the chagrin of Forster and Earl Cowper (the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland) both of whom promptly resigned. They would be replaced by Lord Frederick Cavendish and John Poyntz Spencer, the fifth Earl Spencer, respectively.

6 May – 3 August 1882, Dublin, London

Lord Cavendish, who had no special knowledge of Irish matters but was supremely well-born – being the Duke of Devonshire's youngest son as well as Gladstone's own nephew-in-law – unenthusiastically accepted his uncle's nomination and made his way over to Dublin where on the morning of 6 May he was received to some acclaim by local loyalists and sworn in as the new Chief Secretary. Later that day Cavendish decided that he would walk from Dublin Castle

¹⁰⁴ Paul Bew, *Ireland: The Politics of Enmity, 1789-2006* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 328-9.

¹⁰⁵ Morley, 394.

¹⁰⁶ Bew, 332.

¹⁰⁷ Captain William O'Shea (at the time Parnell's lieutenant) in an interview with William Forster, quoted in Bew, 333.

to the Viceregal Lodge in Phoenix Park in the company of his new permanent secretary, Thomas Burke (who had survived a number of Chief Secretaries, as well as many assassination plots, in his thirteen years of holding that office). As several accounts would later suggest, the two men were leisurely walking through the park on what was a pleasant, warm spring evening, conversing on affairs of state (in particular Forster's Coercion policy), when all of a sudden they were ambushed by a group of seven men armed with long surgical knives; Burke, whom the assassins easily recognized, fell almost immediately under a series of deadly knife blows which left him collapsed on the side of the roadway in a pool of his own blood. The horrified Cavendish (who may or may not have been known to the attackers) made a pitiable attempt at self-defense but was also soon struck down with a ferocity that nearly amputated his left arm. In a final act of murderous rage one of the killers decided to "finish off" the likely already dead Burke by slitting his throat before joining his confreres in the getaway carriage waiting nearby. Cavendish was still breathing but would die within the hour.¹⁰⁸

The impact the Phoenix Park tragedy had on Irish politics and Anglo-Irish relations is difficult to exaggerate. Almost overnight the promises of the Kilmainham Treaty were nullified and the stage for a new wave of coercive measures was set anew. Despite outspoken and unequivocal condemnations of the murders from virtually all quarters of Nationalist opinion (including Fenians on both sides of the Atlantic, with the predictable exception of O'Donovan Rossa), the palpable sense of outrage rapidly gripping British politicians and opinion-makers was not about to be so easily dispelled. "Mr. Gladstone's latest message of peace has met a prompt and terrible response," declared the *Morning Advertiser*; "the challenge of rebellion should be taken up and there must be no more faltering and paltering" warned the *Post*. Even the pro-

¹⁰⁸ Deposition by James Carey, 21 February 1883, TNA HO 144/98/A16380C; Tom Corfe, *The Phoenix Park Murders: Conflict, Compromise and Tragedy in Ireland, 1879-1882* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1968), 186-188.

government *Daily News* refused to pull any punches in calling for the extermination of “the secret assassins, the pests of society, the enemies of the human race.”¹⁰⁹

Gladstone’s opposition to Coercion did not waver, but his grip over the Party and the Cabinet was significantly loosened by the events in Dublin, and even though Forster did not return to his former duties (Cavendish being replaced by Sir George Trevelyan as Chief Secretary), coercive policies for Ireland found an ardent and unrelenting champion in none other than Sir William Harcourt, who, after his early experiments with policing Fenianism in England, was more convinced than ever that “nothing helps so much to break up gangs of conspirators as the terror of being known to meet together to plot.”¹¹⁰ On 11 May the Home Secretary introduced a new Coercion Bill – officially the Prevention of Crime (Ireland) Bill – which, its nominal toleration of habeas corpus notwithstanding, proved in some ways just as draconic as the old legislation (suspending trial by jury for a host of crimes, granting police powers of arrest without warrant or probable cause, and outlawing all, liberally defined, “unlawful associations”). Despite some frail opposition from progressive Liberals and sections of the press, the House carried the Bill by three hundred and twenty-seven votes (of which twenty-seven came from Irish members) to twenty-two.

The next day, Harcourt’s resolve was further strengthened by a new attempt to blow up the Lord Mayor’s House. By all accounts the effort had been an unusually poor one consisting as it did of a canister of gunpowder mixed in with some dynamite and carelessly placed in the most visible, “the least vulnerable and the most massive part of the building.” The fact that the fuse consisted of a simple piece of rag and that the canister was inscribed with insults addressed to the Lord Mayor and the Irish landlordry only served to “render very doubtful the whole story,” as

¹⁰⁹ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 8 May 1882.

¹¹⁰ Harcourt to Earl Spencer, 8 June 1882, quoted in Gardiner, 445.

the *Daily News* observed.¹¹¹ No one was ultimately able to deduce whether this had been one of Rossa's skirmishers rushing things through again, an ill-advised anonymous copycat, or merely a tasteless prank, but there is little doubt Harcourt and Vincent took this incident, along with the host of incoming fresh rumours "of an exceedingly grave and suspicious character,"¹¹² as powerful omens. The former confessed to Earl Spencer that he believed "the attempted explosion at the Mansion House [to be] a Fenian scare of the old clumsy kind," noting however that real terrorism "may be imported any day either from America or Ireland."¹¹³ Two days later, London itself seemed to be getting a taste of Coercion after scores of Scotland Yard detectives were seen "on the look-out for suspected persons," going so far as to break up a crowd of about three hundred men, "mostly of the labouring classes," who had assembled near the Charing Cross Underground Station to arrange a foot-race.¹¹⁴

Meanwhile in Ireland, the apparent failure of Superintendent Mallon's "army of informers"¹¹⁵ to identify the Phoenix Park assassins,¹¹⁶ coupled with what Spencer regarded as the general incompetence and venality of the Irish police spelled out a case for reform that London could no longer afford to ignore. In late May Colonel Henry Brackenbury, a Flashmanesque figure known to his superiors for his fickle egotism as much as for his

¹¹¹ *Daily News*, 15 May 1882.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Harcourt to Spencer, 14 May 1882, quoted in Gardiner, 442.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Frederick M. Bussy, *Irish Conspiracies: Recollections of John Mallon (The Great Irish Detective) and Other Reminiscences* (London: Everett & Co., 1910), 60. Mallon, who had led the Metropolitan Police's G (Detective) Division since 1874, was in charge of the city's anti-Nationalist operations (he was the one who had arrested Parnell in October 1881) and was a widely respected figure by everyone at Dublin Castle. Despite his misgivings about the Irish police, Earl Spencer thought that "were [Mallon] to die or be killed we have no one worth a row of beans." Short, *The Dynamite War*, 88.

¹¹⁶ As Mallon later recalled in his ghostwritten memoirs, a good number of the group responsible for the murders had in fact been arrested as early as May 9; they would remain in custody until September when, due to the lack of incriminating evidence against them and the lapsing of Forster's Suspects Act, they had to be released. Bussy, 80.

administrative talents,¹¹⁷ was sent over to Dublin to act as the new Under-Secretary for Police and Crime; in effect, Brackenbury would serve as Earl Spencer's Irish Vincent, and would have free rein to do all the things that Vincent could not afford to do in Liberal England.¹¹⁸ As *The Standard's* Dublin correspondent explained, this Irish CID was to fulfill two missions: the first was to assume charge of Ireland's entire police forces, making all magistrates and commissioners report to Brackenbury's Dublin Castle office on the one hand, while on the other giving Dublin detectives the power to follow "the investigation of cases into any part of Ireland" and arrest people "outside the metropolitan district without being compelled to get the permission of [local] constabulary authorities." The second mission would be to employ "men of superior education," unspoiled by the barracks mentality, who would be able to "disguise the fact that [they were] in any way connected with the police."¹¹⁹

Brackenbury, whose previous assignment had been to reorganize the colonial police in Cyprus, appeared to embrace his new duties with good grace, proposing a massive increase in funding of over £20,000. London grumbled, but Spencer was adamant that anything less than £5,000 would be self-defeating. As the Lord Lieutenant explained to Gladstone, if the Government was going to win the war against the forces of disorder it would have to face up to the fact that "the forces to which we are opposed are very powerful and supplied with large sums

¹¹⁷ Ian F. W. Beckett, "Brackenbury, Sir Henry (1837–1914)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edition [henceforth *ODNB*], accessed 29 June 2015, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/32021>.

¹¹⁸ When asked on May 12 by the Assistant Chief Constable of the Lancashire Constabulary whether local police might be given across-the-board powers to open the mail of suspected local Fenians, Harcourt replied that while a one-off might be acceptable, provided "the Post Office could arrange to have this skillfully done," it would simply be impossible to "issue a warrant giving general permission [...] to open all letters directed to these men" (Minute by Harcourt, 13 May 1882, TNA HO 144/98/A16380). The ghost of James Graham (the Home Secretary who had been politically destroyed after tampering with Mazzini's correspondence) evidently still haunted the halls of the Home Office.

¹¹⁹ *Standard*, 22 May 1882.

of money. If he succeeds the cost will be nothing compared to the work performed.”¹²⁰ Harcourt too was eager to give Spencer’s new head detective in Ireland all the support he required, going so far as to inquire into the possibility of having “the Pinkerton detective agency in the United States send over to Ireland one of their best confidential agents to communicate with [Brackenbury] on their methods of proceeding.”¹²¹

The Pinkertons, whose habit of “never sleeping”¹²² allowed them a certain degree of foresight, did not wait for any requests from London to make their views known. In early July Gladstone received a letter from Allan Pinkerton himself, in which the veteran spymaster described in fascinating detail his own theories on intelligence gathering, outlining at the same time the differences between the British and the American systems. The British detective force, Pinkerton thought, was over all made up of “first class, intelligent men;” the problem was the network of informers they relied on. As he went on to explain:

My opinion is that [informers] should be as honest as their employers, and this, I understand, is not generally the case [in Britain]. [...] Great caution should [therefore] be exercised [...] in selecting the men and women – and women are very necessary [...] – for this branch of service. In my own Agencies I employ both sexes and of almost every age [and] and it is astonishing what undeveloped talents will sometimes rise to the surface when the opportunities occur [...] As [...] the criminal may be a political malcontent or a gentlemanly assassin all grades of society must have their representatives. [Once acquired, this] well drilled force [should] scatter [...] through the larger cities of the

¹²⁰ Spencer to Gladstone, 7 June 1882, in Peter Gordon, ed., *The Red Earl: The Papers of the Fifth Earl Spencer 1835-1910* (Northampton: Northamptonshire Record Society, 1981), 205.

¹²¹ Harcourt to Spencer, 12 June 1882, quoted in Gardiner, 446.

¹²² The Pinkerton Agency’s logo, a realistic, disembodied eye ominously staring out into the distance accompanied by the legend “We Never Sleep,” was already famous on both sides of the Atlantic at the time (due in part to Allan Pinkerton’s prolific writing on his exploits) and would eventually become synonymous with the very notion of detective work (being the origin of the term “private eye”).

United States [...] [and] gain admittance to [the various American Fenian societies – the source of Britain’s Irish troubles], and by that means the hidden mysteries of these unlawful conclaves will be fully divulged.¹²³

Such a bold scheme – which eerily presaged twentieth-century political policing with its wide-reaching scope and emphasis on specialism – received a predictably unenthusiastic response from the Home Office’s experienced Fenian hunters (Anderson and Archibald¹²⁴ both thought it would be a waste of time and, more importantly, money),¹²⁵ and it seems Harcourt himself (for all his love of well-schooled and obedient informers) was not exactly brimming with enthusiasm either.¹²⁶ In any case, the government now had more pressing matters to consider than a new philosophy of snooping. A little over a month after assuming his post Brackenbury had now rashly decided to abandon it (hoping for a return to military glories), much to the chagrin of anyone who had placed any degree of trust in him.¹²⁷ Dublin Castle’s plans for reform now appeared to be faltering, police were nowhere closer to learning the identities of the Phoenix Park gang, and to make matters worse, London Fenians appeared to be once again on the move, if the recent seizure of a sizeable arms cache in Clerkenwell – “a fortunate capture [which] will make a great stir”¹²⁸ – was anything to go by.¹²⁹

¹²³ Pinkerton to Gladstone, 8 July 1882, TNA HO 144/1538/4.

¹²⁴ Edward Mortimer Archibald (1810-1884), Britain’s long-serving consul in New York, was a man well-accustomed to detectives, informers and purveyors of mischief having used throughout the 1860s and early 1870s, his “close relationship with senior figures in the [US] federal, state and municipal administrations” to keep London up-to-date with the plans of Fenian raiders (Whelehan, 121). More recently, in 1876, he had employed some of Pinkerton’s detectives to monitor a group of San Francisco “skirmishers” who were (mistakenly) thought to be planning a campaign in Britain.

¹²⁵ Anderson to Harcourt, 1 August 1882; Archibald to Anderson, 31 July 1882, TNA HO 144/1538/4.

¹²⁶ Harcourt to Spencer, 25 August 1882, TNA HO 144/1538/4.

¹²⁷ Henry Brackenbury, *Some Memories of My Spare Time* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1909), 312.

¹²⁸ Harcourt to Gladstone, 18 June 1882, quoted in Gardiner, 448.

¹²⁹ On June 17 a number of detectives uncovered and seized what was then “the largest consignment of explosives [and guns] which has ever been received at the Home Office Magazine” in a storage house in Clerkenwell. The man who was renting the premises, a thirty-year-old Irishman named Thomas Walsh thought to have “some connection

To avoid getting stuck with another mercurial soldier of fortune, Spencer decided to give Brackenbury's job to one of the most "loyal, earnest and trustworthy"¹³⁰ people he could think of: his own private secretary at Dublin Castle, Edward George Jenkinson. Jenkinson, a slender, soft-featured mandarin who had spent twenty-six, mostly uneventful, years in the Indian Civil Service, had not been in Spencer's employ for more than a couple of months but his vast administrative experience, keen interest in Irish politics, and unimpeachable pedigree (he was the nephew of Sir George Grey, the Whig Home Secretary) recommended him above all other candidates. Furthermore, despite Spencer's uneasiness with Jenkinson's low public profile, the latter proved in fact ideally obscure given the more controversial aspects of his office. Some Irish MPs grumbled that "an official who had been trained in the despotic school of Indian officialism was no proper person to be employed in a post of responsibility in a country like Ireland,"¹³¹ but Irish papers were less certain what to make of him: the Nationalist *Freeman's Journal* thought that "he is just one more Englishman added to the powers that be [and it] makes little or no matter."¹³² As subsequent events would show, Jenkinson was in fact far from a brutish *sahib* and even further from a typical Dublin Castle stick-in-the-mud.

11 November 1882 – 17 March 1883, Dublin, Glasgow, London

Although he had accepted his nomination with a sort of docile eagerness – "he is strongly in favour of working with what we have got," Spencer told Trevelyan¹³³ – Ireland's new chief law enforcer did not wait long to make his reforming zeal known. Spurred on by the slow progress of Superintendent Mallon's investigations and the evidence that new conspiracies were

with the United States," was known to police as an "extreme Nationalist" and had been "more or less watched for some months." *Belfast News-Letter*, 19 June 1882.

¹³⁰ Spencer to G. O. Trevelyan, 1 August 1882, in Gordon, *The Red Earl*, 217.

¹³¹ HC Deb, 3 August 1882, vol. 273, col. 685.

¹³² *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, 3 August 1882.

¹³³ Spencer to Trevelyan, 1 August 1882, in Gordon, *The Red Earl*, 217.

in the making,¹³⁴ Jenkinson prepared a memorandum for Spencer in late autumn 1882 in which he straightforwardly asked his boss “Are we to wait for the commission of another murder before we proceed against any of these assassins? [...] Knowing what is going on,” he went on, “are we to content ourselves with collecting information? [...] I think we are bound to take some vigorous action and if the present law fails us, we ought to apply to Parliament for powers which will enable us to destroy these assassination societies.”¹³⁵

The law did in fact already provide for “vigorous action” as Jenkinson realized shortly after writing that memorandum. His proposal was now that Dublin Castle should make good use of Section 16 of the new Crimes Bill which granted Irish magistrates the power to question under oath anyone who might be in possession of evidence pertaining to a criminal investigation.¹³⁶

The measure was adopted and shortly thereafter the conspiracy of the so-called National Invincibles (as the members of the Dublin groupuscule responsible for the Phoenix Park murders styled themselves) began to unravel. On 13 January sixteen of them were arrested in a major police raid and placed behind bars in Kilmainham Gaol. Within less than a month eight of them would be formally charged with having “feloniously, willfully, and of malice aforethought kill[ed] and murder[ed] Lord Frederick Cavendish and Thomas Henry Burke.”¹³⁷

The situation looked less encouraging in Britain where Fenian bombs were about to make a spectacular return to national headlines. The first strike came on the night of 20 January when shortly after ten o’clock at night one of the gas holders of Glasgow’s Tradeston Gasworks exploded like a Roman candle, sending off a vicious fiery cyclone through the streets of the city’s Pollockshields neighborhood and “forcing open doors, breaking windows, smashing the

¹³⁴ On 11 November Justice James Lawson, who had presided over a number of political trials during the worst phase of the agrarian agitation, narrowly escaped an attempt on his life.

¹³⁵ Quoted in Corfe, 235.

¹³⁶ Corfe, 236.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 244.

crookery, and scorching the inmates” (there were no fatalities). Three hours after, with much of south Glasgow now in total darkness, another explosion rocked the town’s northern side. The target proved inexplicably, but fortuitously, innocuous – a disused railway depot close to Buchanan Street Station that had already been condemned – and material damage amounted to only “a few pounds” with no injuries being reported.¹³⁸ A few minutes after, a third and final explosion occurred further up north when a group of young men discovered a “large travelling tin box close to the water’s edge” while crossing a bridge over the Forth and Clyde Canal.¹³⁹ Upon close inspection it exploded with a loud bang, blowing everyone to the ground and seriously cutting one of the unlucky finders (who nevertheless recovered from his wounds). All three explosions were subsequently identified as the result of dynamite bombs.

The Home Office had likely expected an outrage in the North for some time judging by the report Le Caron had sent Anderson shortly after the Phoenix Park murders in which the veteran spy had warned of a “large haul of arms in or near Glasgow,”¹⁴⁰ but as in the case of the Liverpool bombings, local authorities had found that they could do little to predict where the dynamitards would strike next. There was also somewhat less interest in the skirmishing campaign, leading Harcourt to quip that “O’Donovan Rossa has so long sworn to take my life that I have almost ceased to believe in him.”¹⁴¹ This was partly because the government’s “attitude [...] to political crime” remained to a large extent, as Anderson later noted, one which “alternated between panic and indifference,”¹⁴² and partly because of the engrossing revelations coming out of Dublin which seemed to suggest what the proponents of Coercion had believed all along, namely that the Phoenix Park assassins had more than probably been in communication (if

¹³⁸ *Glasgow Herald*, 22 January 1883.

¹³⁹ *Standard*, 22 January 1883.

¹⁴⁰ Le Caron to Anderson, 17 June 1882, TNA HO 144/1538/6.

¹⁴¹ Harcourt to Spencer, 31 January 1883, quoted in Gardiner, 473.

¹⁴² Robert Anderson, *Sidelights on the Home Rule Movement* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1906), 91.

not in cahoots) with the Land League (which had since reconstituted itself as the Irish National League).¹⁴³ Thanks to the wealth of new information supplied by conspirator-turned-Queen's-Evidence James Carey, authorities now possessed the names of two individuals that could reliably be connected to the leadership of the Invincibles. The first was Frank Byrne, Secretary of the Land League's London chapter, who had funded much of the conspiracy and whose wife had smuggled the actual murder weapons into Dublin by hiding them in her petticoats; the second man was initially described only as an anonymous stranger known to the Invincibles as "No. 1" but subsequently identified by Carey, thanks to a police photograph, as Patrick J. Tynan,¹⁴⁴ a "needy and seedy commercial traveller"¹⁴⁵ with ties to London Fenianism.

By mid-February however, when this knowledge came to light, the two supposed ringleaders had already managed to escape to France from where they would prove frustratingly difficult to extract. Given the slight evidence of their complicity in the Phoenix Park murders (which was all contingent on Carey's confession), British pleas to have the two Irishmen extradited were unceremoniously cold-shouldered by French authorities,¹⁴⁶ while an attempted kidnapping in Cannes, headed by Inspector Moser of the Yard (posing as a spendthrift Polish count), failed miserably after one of Byrne's friends recognized the detective's disguise.¹⁴⁷ Having successfully fled France, the two Invincibles immediately took refuge in America where they would continue to evade the noose of the British law for the remainder of their lives (though Tynan would briefly return to public attention in Britain in the mid 1890s, as we shall see later on).

¹⁴³ Even the Queen noted how "Mr. Gladstone [will] be dreadfully shaken by all these disclosures, as he never would believe in any connection between this Land League and the Fenians." Ponsonby to Harcourt, 20 February 1883, quoted in Gardiner, 474.

¹⁴⁴ Deposition by James Carey, 21 February 1883, p.4, TNA HO 144/98/A16380C; Corfe, 246 ff.

¹⁴⁵ Bussy, 110.

¹⁴⁶ Order for Frank Byrne's release from police custody in Paris, 8 March 1883, *Archives de la Préfecture de Police de Paris*, Carton BA 924.

¹⁴⁷ Bussy, 115.

Despite this embarrassing setback, Harcourt soon found that there was little time to be spent on the Phoenix Park conspiracy when the imperial capital itself was under attack. On 15 March shortly after nine o'clock in the evening members of Parliament heard a powerful noise, "followed by a very perceptible shaking of the building," come from the vicinity of the Square. As several MPs and peers who quickly went to investigate found out, the Local Government Board building had just been the target of a bomb attack and was now quite visibly scathed with much of the adjoining Charles Street "literally paved with plate-glass about a quarter of an inch thick."¹⁴⁸ Only a few minutes after, amid the confusion of gaping crowds, drawn-up fire engines and nervous policemen, the news came in that a similar attempt had just been made on the *Times* building in Printing House Square. No injuries or structural damage were reported (the *Times* bomb had only partially detonated) but the message was clear: the Terror had come to London and this time it appeared to be serious. As Colonel Majendie confirmed in his report on the explosions a few days later, the devices used (tin boxes filled with sawdust and nitroglycerine) were identical to those used in Glasgow only a month earlier. Even more worrisome, the charge of the *Times* bomb contained almost twice the amount of nitroglycerine – which, as Majendie didn't fail to highlight, was "not licensed for importation into or manufacture or storage in the United Kingdom" – as the ones in Glasgow.¹⁴⁹

Londoners were understandably alarmed. The press seized on what it saw as the indiscriminate and genuinely terroristic aspect of the attacks – "the Clerkenwell conspirators had at least an intelligible object" – and argued that "for the murder-clubs [only] intelligent police and incessant vigilance" would do,¹⁵⁰ a sentiment which was echoed by ordinary people, if only more

¹⁴⁸ *Glasgow Herald*, 16 March 1883.

¹⁴⁹ Vivian Majendie, "Preliminary Report on the Explosions of March 15," 19 March 1883, TNA HO 144/114/A25908.

¹⁵⁰ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 16 March 1883.

forcefully. In a letter to the Home Secretary one London “Liberal and workingman,” for example, wondered if “home rule (except on matters imperial)” would not be worth giving “the blackguards [...] rather than subject ourselves to these continual scares,” adding that “if truth be told there is too much soft soap business with these scoundrels. Hang a few of the pirates [...] and you will find that is the best kind of education.”¹⁵¹

Harcourt himself was furious, and though Home Rule could not have been further from his mind in those days, he certainly agreed that drastic measures were needed; measures which required plenty of time. The Cabinet was induced to agree to transfer some of the Home Secretary’s duties over to Charles Dilke, the recently appointed President of the besieged Local Government Board, who although not thrilled by the prospect – he thought Harcourt a Fouché wannabe who wanted “the whole police work of the country, and nothing but police”¹⁵² – eventually relented. With his more menial responsibilities out of the way, Harcourt could now concentrate on the next and most ambitious step yet: assembling a special unit of police officers wholly devoted to monitoring Irish republican activity in the capital. Although no government documents record it, 17 March is widely accepted as the most likely¹⁵³ foundational date for what shortly became known as the Special Irish Branch of the Metropolitan Police (technically Section B of the CID). It was to be comprised of twelve officers, hastily (but not haphazardly) recruited from that section of the London constabulary and the CID most familiar with Irish issues (usually by virtue of being Irish and Catholic), and take its orders from Frederick Adolphus “Dolly” Williamson, the Scotland Yard’s veteran Chief Superintendent. On 19 March an internal Police Orders circular made everything official by announcing that

¹⁵¹ J. H. Codger to Harcourt, 16 March 1883, TNA HO 144/114/A25908.

¹⁵² Dilke, quoted in Gardiner, 479.

¹⁵³ Porter, 45; Andrew Cook, *M: MI5’s First Spymaster* (Stroud: Tempus Publishing, 2006), 39; Paul Begg and Keith Skinner, *The Scotland Yard Files* (London: Headline, 1992), 89.

The following are authorized to be employed in plain clothes at the Central Office with departmental allowance, from 20th. To report themselves to Chief Supt. Williamson, at 10am on the date named:-

C [Division]. Inspector Pope

M [Division]. PC 332 Foy

D [Division]. PC 49 O'Sullivan

R [Division]. Inspector Ahern

E [Division]. PC 50 Walsh

V [Division]. PS 3 Jenkins

L [Division]. PC 224 McIntyre

Y [Division]. PC 492 Thorp

The following are also temporarily attached to the Central Office, and are to report themselves to Chief Superintendent at the same time:-

H [Division]. PC CID Enright

W [Division]. PS CID Melville

K [Division]. PC CID Enright

TA [Division]. PS CID Regan.¹⁵⁴

The "political department" (as its members often referred to it¹⁵⁵) was born.

20-28 March 1883, London, Liverpool and Cork

Besides the seemingly imminent danger posed to the population and infrastructure of British cities by dynamite bombs, there was another reason for the Irish Branch coming into being when it did. It was information, or rather the acquiring and sharing of it, provisions for

¹⁵⁴ Quoted in Begg and Skinner, 90.

¹⁵⁵ Patrick McIntyre, "Scotland Yard: Its Mysteries and Memoirs (Introduction)," in *Reynolds' Newspaper*, 3 February 1895; John Sweeney, *At Scotland Yard* (London: Grant Richards, 1904), 19.

which, under the pre-17 March status quo, appeared to be dangerously out-of-date. Just how out-of-date is illustrated by the fact that British authorities, despite being well aware since the summer of 1882 that O'Donovan Rossa was running a bona fide “dynamite college” out of Brooklyn, NY – “all men receiving instruction [there] are known” noted Captain Clipperton – had in fact no idea that two of the school’s “graduates” (one of whom was Thomas Mooney, the original Mansion House bomber) were behind the recent attacks in Glasgow and London.¹⁵⁶

In order to finally address the shortcomings of his “spider’s web” (which in early 1883 was made up of the CID’s experimental Fenian unit, Anderson’s network of informers, and sixteen RIC detectives stationed throughout Britain¹⁵⁷) Harcourt decided to call a meeting of all his chief counter-subversives – Anderson, Vincent, and Williamson – the very next day after announcing the creation of the Irish Branch. Also in attendance was Spencer’s rising new assistant, whose reforms had already produced such stellar results in the Phoenix Park case and Ireland in general.¹⁵⁸

The meeting was likely an awkward one. Anderson jealously guarded his sway over the Home Office secret service and had no intention of sharing his contacts;¹⁵⁹ Vincent, now independently wealthy, was growing altogether tired of police work and planning to resign;¹⁶⁰ Williamson, although the most senior and experienced detective in the land, abhorred disguises, informers and anything smacking of secret policing,¹⁶¹ and didn’t think the new Fenians were as

¹⁵⁶ Whelehan 159-63; John McEnnis, *The Clan-na-Gael and the Murder of Dr. Cronin* (San Francisco: G. P. Woodward, 1889), 57.

¹⁵⁷ Porter, *Origins of the Vigilant State*, 45.

¹⁵⁸ Porter, *Plots and Paranoia*, 103.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 104.

¹⁶⁰ Jeyes, 144.

¹⁶¹ Martin Fido and Keith Skinner, “Williamson, Chief Constable Frederick Adolphus (1830-1889),” in Fido et al, *The Official Encyclopedia of Scotland Yard* (London: Virgin Books, 1999), 287-88; McIntyre, “Scotland Yard,” in *Reynolds’ Newspaper*, 10 February 1895.

serious a threat as the old ones.¹⁶² For his part, Jenkinson found the CID shambolic and amateurish, writing to Spencer that “Anderson [...] at the Home Office is a poor fellow (a second class detective Sir W. [Harcourt] calls him!) and except Williamson there is not a man in Scotland Yard worth anything.”¹⁶³ Far from marking a mere professional disagreement, Jenkinson’s comment gives us a preview of the endemic internecine squabbles that would come to plague the British *haute police* throughout the rest of the 1880s (with often drastic consequences, as we shall see).

More importantly, it gives us an insight into Jenkinson’s personality in light of what had just transpired, for without Harcourt’s knowledge (but with Spencer’s support), Ireland’s new chief policeman had already begun reorganizing Britain’s counter-subversive operations in his own image well before the meeting on 20 March. As early as late 1882, Jenkinson had seized on an opportunity provided by one of his established agents in New York to recruit one James McDermott (better known as “Red Jim” on account of his ginger moustache), an old comrade of Rossa and an occasional “peddler of secrets” to Edward Archibald.¹⁶⁴ It was evident that the new spymaster of Dublin Castle wanted to have his own correspondent in America and was quite willing to pay a pretty price for him; McDermott shortly received £100 (the first of several payments), money that was partially to go into buying off the trust of the gullible Rossa.¹⁶⁵ The possibility that it might also be used to manufacture dynamite in Britain was very likely on Jenkinson’s mind, but the opportunity of securing a line of communication that reached into the very heart of the most committed section of the dynamite camp (which even Le Caron could not claim to provide) was obviously too alluring to be trumped by any ethical concerns. Less than a

¹⁶² John Littlechild, *The Reminiscences of Chief-Inspector Littlechild, Second edition* (London: The Leadenhall Press, 1894), 10.

¹⁶³ Quoted in Campbell, 125.

¹⁶⁴ Patrick McIntyre, “Scotland Yard,” in *Reynolds’ Newspaper*, 10 March 1895.

¹⁶⁵ Campbell 131; McIntyre, “Scotland Yard,” *Reynolds’ Newspaper*, 10 March 1895.

month afterwards, in late January 1883, Red Jim was going over the details of his new post with Jenkinson in a room at the Birkenhead Railway Hotel in Liverpool.¹⁶⁶ Emboldened by this latest success, it is little wonder that the latter found his counterparts in London rather moth-eaten and bureaucratic (his personal enmity towards Anderson notwithstanding).

For the moment however, peace in Whitehall was secure thanks to the heightened sense of emergency, and as news coming in from Liverpool suggested, the “force party” were already well on their way to unleashing a new spate of dynamite attacks. It was in that city – which had of late seen its fair share of Fenian conspiracies – that several arrests were made in late March in connection with a dynamite factory set up in Cork by Timothy Featherstone (Edmund O’Brien Kennedy by his real name), a veteran of the 1860s Fenian campaigns and an associate of O’Donovan Rossa. Featherstone had temporarily set up shop in Glasgow over the summer and autumn of 1882, but after manufacturing the “tin boxes” used in the Tradeston Gasworks and London outrages, he had decided to return to Ireland.¹⁶⁷ There he managed to recruit a likeminded old-school Fenian and a Rossa man to boot.

Unfortunately for Featherstone, that man was Red Jim, and it was not long after that the authorities became aware not only of the dynamite factory but also of Featherstone’s plan to smuggle the end product back into Britain (via Liverpool) through his young accomplice Denis Deasy (a plan which Red Jim likely suggested).¹⁶⁸ Deasy was summarily apprehended on 28 March shortly after disembarking and found to be in possession of a box which he claimed contained cattle food; in reality it contained ligno-dynamite, acids, chlorate of potash and

¹⁶⁶ Campbell, 131-2.

¹⁶⁷ Whelehan, 269.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 124.

“several pieces of mechanism.”¹⁶⁹ Also on his person were papers bearing the name of Patrick Flanagan (Deasy’s contact in Liverpool), who was subsequently also arrested and searched. Flanagan possessed a veritable arsenal of terroristic paraphernalia (including loaded guns, assorted chemicals and fake beards). More importantly however, he provided the local CID detectives with the missing link that led back to Ireland in the form of a letter addressed to Featherstone. News of the find was quickly telegraphed to the Cork RIC and the dynamite factory was raided; Featherstone and his men were then sent to Liverpool to await trial (presumably because a jury would prove less pliable in staunchly Nationalist Cork).

The arrest of the Featherstone gang provided Jenkinson with yet another triumph – “Jenks has done splendidly” Harcourt noted in a letter to Spencer¹⁷⁰ – confirming the indispensability of well-funded, personally loyal informers who were brave, stupid or greedy enough to push things into agent-provocateur territory (although McDermott would shortly turn out to be a bad investment).¹⁷¹ As the case concurrently unfurling in Birmingham would prove, however, genuine dynamite conspiracies could easily thrive outside the reach of the paid infiltrator.

26 March – 7 April 1883, Birmingham and London

In mid-March, Dr. Thomas Gallagher (the Clan-na-Gael’s new firebrand) had landed in Britain with the intent of finally implementing the plan he had put forth at the Dynamite

¹⁶⁹ William John Nott-Bower (Chief Constable of Liverpool City Police) to Harcourt, 29 March 1883, TNA HO 144/115/A26302; Report by J. Campbell-Brown, D. Sc. on items found in possession of Deasey, 29 March 1883, TNA HO 144/115/A26302; *Liverpool Mercury*, 30 March 1883.

¹⁷⁰ Quoted in Campbell, 127.

¹⁷¹ Shortly after his recruitment, McDermott was outed by Matthew O’Brien (the same man who had recruited him) to Michael Davitt who then published the revelations in his *Labour World* journal (Campbell, 130). That coupled with Red Jim’s over-the-top dynamitard persona and fondness for the bottle, soon made the would-be secret agent a walking target in Fenian circles. After attempting, and failing, to stir up dynamite plots in Paris and Montreal in mid-1883, and surviving an assassination attempt in New York, McDermott went into permanent hiding with the help of Jenkinson (resurfacing only briefly around the time of the Parnell Commission in the hopes of blackmailing the government). See Campbell, 132-5.

Convention in Philadelphia two years earlier. Just what that plan actually entailed he soon made clear to his associate William Norman (real name William Lynch), while the two were visiting the scene of the recent Local Government Board explosion. Asked by Norman if that was the sort of thing they would be aiming for, Gallagher supposedly replied “Yes, but it won’t be child’s play,” observing as they passed the House of Commons that “this will make a great crash when it comes down,” and further along, at Scotland Yard, that “this will come down too.”¹⁷²

Both Gallagher and Lynch were part of a team that had been assembled in America over the closing months of 1882 with the blessing of Alexander Sullivan, the Clan-na-Gael’s chief, but it was far from a Clan operation given that several of Gallagher’s men had been schooled in Brooklyn and that Rossa was bankrolling much of the expedition through his skirmishing subscription fund.¹⁷³ The centre of the operation was to be in Birmingham, where one of the conspirators, Albert Whitehead (real name John C. Murphy) had already established himself since February 1883 in an unobtrusive little shop in Leasham Street. There, under the guise of a painting-and-decorations establishment, Whitehead was patiently and meticulously applying himself to the creation of nitroglycerine.

On 28 March, just as Deasy and Flanagan were being taken into custody in Liverpool, Gallagher and Whitehead were going over the final touches of their deadly plan in Birmingham. The operation was doomed before it even started, however. Only the previous day Whitehead’s local chemist had casually let slip to his friend Richard Price, a sergeant in the Birmingham Police, that the new painter-decorator in Leasham Street seemed to him a highly suspicious character. Not only did Whitehead speak with an unmistakable Irish-American accent, he kept demanding large quantities of the purest grade glycerine available (something which no

¹⁷² Report by Chief Inspector Littlechild on the case against Dr. Thomas Gallagher, 17 May 1887, TNA HO 144/116/A26493.

¹⁷³ William Lane Booker to Earl Granville, 24 April 1883, TNA HO 144/116/A26493.

legitimate painter required) and displayed a raggedness which suggested he was constantly handling dangerous acids. Sergeant Price decided to report the lead to his superiors and was given permission to investigate.

By 4 April, the day that two of Gallagher's helpers arrived in Birmingham to fetch the stuff that was to bring down the Houses of Parliament, local police were certain beyond all doubt that dynamite-making was now one of the city's "thousand trades." As the two Fenians, now in possession of substantial batches of nitroglycerine, made their way over from Whitehead's shop to the train station, they were kept under close surveillance by Birmingham and RIC detectives. One of the dynamite runners, a twenty-three-year-old native of the Isle of Wight going by the name of Henry Wilson, managed to board a train unobserved, but the other man, William Norman, was surreptitiously followed all the way to London by three detectives (one of them RIC) who sat in the carriage next to the luggage van.

In London, detectives of the Irish Branch were engaged in tracking down new leads in connection with the 15 March explosions, and keeping watch on a certain Henry Dalton (real name John Henry O'Connor), whom Dublin Castle had identified as a member of the Featherstone gang.¹⁷⁴ On the afternoon of 4 April PCs McIntyre and Enright together with Sergeants Melville and Regan reported that

[Dalton has] left Pond Place and proceeded by Piccadilly to Brewer Street, Soho, but did not call at any house there; then to the American Reading Rooms, 14 Strand, where he left at 4.15 p.m. and then proceeded to the [...] Albert Embankment by St. Thomas' Hospital [where] he leant on the parapet of the embankment, took out a paper and

¹⁷⁴ "Information from Consul General at New York as to Gallagher, Norman, O'Connor & Lynch," 22 April 1883, TNA HO 144/116/A26493.

appeared to be surveying the Houses of Parliament at the same time making notes onto the paper.¹⁷⁵

The suspicion that Dalton was now involved in some new plot was only strengthened by the telegram received that evening from Birmingham, which warned that two young Fenians would be arriving at Euston Station that night with trunkfuls of nitroglycerine. The officer on duty at the Yard, Inspector John Langrish, immediately sent word to the Irish Branch's two most senior figures, Chief Superintendent Williamson and the recently promoted Chief Inspector John Littlechild. At Euston they were joined by the three detectives from Birmingham and together they tailed Norman out of the station. The Irish-American got in a hansom cab which remained stationary outside the station; after a few minutes, Norman got off and boarded a four-wheeled growler. One of the detectives managed to jot down the hansom's registration number but the vehicle soon disappeared "in the confusion [...] caused by the number of trains that were arriving about the same time."¹⁷⁶ The chase for Norman continued.

The growler pulled in front of De La Motts Hotel in the Strand where Gallagher had reserved Norman – his "friend who was going to study medicine" – a room.¹⁷⁷ Not wanting to inadvertently tip off anyone else who might be watching the premises, Williamson decided to wait a while before finally giving his men the go-ahead in the early hours of the morning. Up in Norman's room they found only Norman, asleep with a 200 lb rubber bag of nitroglycerine under his bed. He refused to cooperate, but the items found in his pockets – a £5 note stamped "Colgate, New York, March 10, 1883" and correspondence bearing Gallagher's nom de guerre (Fletcher) – proved telling. He was arrested and, together with his lethal luggage, taken to

¹⁷⁵ Report by William Melville, 4 April 1883, quoted in Cook, 40.

¹⁷⁶ McIntyre, "Scotland Yard," *Reynolds' Newspaper*, 24 February 1895.

¹⁷⁷ Report by John Littlechild, 17 May 1887, TNA HO 144/116/A26493.

Scotland Yard where the recent developments (especially the knowledge that at least one of Norman's London confederates remained at large) had thrown everything into "a state of chaos."¹⁷⁸

Thanks to a bit of old-fashioned detective work, however, Williamson, Littlechild and Chief Constable O'Shea of the RIC managed to quickly track down the passenger of the mysterious hansom cab to a house in Nelson Square, Blackfriars Road. There they found Wilson and Gallagher along with two rubber waders containing nearly 80 lbs of nitroglycerine, and an impressive sum of money (nearly £1,200 and \$2,400). Thereafter the rest of the gang was quickly swept up in a wave of arrests, and by 7 April eight men stood accused of unlawful possession of explosives and treason-felony. Realizing that a martyr's fate was not for him after all, William Norman decided to turn Queen's Evidence and gave a soundly incriminating testimony. Gallagher's brother, Bernard, who had been picked up in Glasgow after his name turned up in confiscated correspondence, also offered to cooperate but in the end he found he did not need to; the evidence against him was scarce. He was acquitted along with one William Ansburn whose only ostensible link to the plot had been a calling card found in his possession. Dalton was also released, then immediately re-arrested in connection with the Cork dynamite ring and sent to Liverpool to stand trial with the rest of the Featherstone gang. Dr. Gallagher, Albert Whitehead, Henry Wilson, and John Curtin would all be sentenced to penal servitude for life.

10 April – 31 October 1883, London, Liverpool and Glasgow

The outcome of the Gallagher case marked an unmitigated and widely celebrated success for the British police and the Irish Branch in particular (although the latter did not yet officially exist as far as the British public was aware), and the special rewards granted to the officers

¹⁷⁸ McIntyre, "Scotland Yard," *Reynolds' Newspaper*, 24 February 1895.

involved in cracking it were commensurate (inspectors all received £100 each).¹⁷⁹ However, the scale of the conspiracy, its serendipitous discovery, and the fact that without Norman's confession Gallagher's men would have likely walked away with only minor sentences (such as were given for illicit possession of explosives under the 1875 Explosives Act) did not sit well with Harcourt. "There can be no doubt," he wrote to Gladstone the day after the arrests, "that we are in the midst of a large and well-organized and fully equipped band who are prepared to commit outrages all other the country on an immense scale."¹⁸⁰

Three days later, on 9 April, the Home Secretary introduced another bold new piece of legislation in the House of Commons which this time aimed at strengthening the criminalization of explosives and the police's ability to stop dynamitards in their tracks before an actual outrage was committed. Thus, under the terms of the new Explosives Act, anyone found responsible for causing an illegal explosion would be virtually guaranteed life in prison, while mere ownership of explosives, "under such circumstances as to give rise to a reasonable suspicion" that an unlawful object was being entertained, would now prove sufficient grounds for sentences of up to fourteen years with hard labour.¹⁸¹ Despite some faint rumblings from opposition MPs, Harcourt's bill was quickly passed (making its way through both houses in roughly two hours) and would have likely received royal assent that same day if not for the failure of the Crown Office to promptly deliver the text to Windsor Palace.

With the new Act in effect, most of the Gallagher gang in prison, and his stewardship of the Metropolitan Police secure,¹⁸² the Home Secretary now felt confident that "the neck of the

¹⁷⁹ F. Moir Bussy to Coleridge Kennard, 6 August 1885, TNA HO 144/147/A38369C.

¹⁸⁰ Harcourt to Gladstone, 6 April 1883, quoted in Gardiner, 480.

¹⁸¹ Explosives Substances Act 1883, 46 Vict., c. 3.

¹⁸² Soon after his return from a prolonged vacation in France in the spring of 1883, Gladstone proposed a London Government Bill that would have expanded the City Corporation into an elected body responsible for the entire metropolis, and in the process, wrested away control of the Metropolitan Police from the hands of the Home Secretary. Harcourt protested vociferously and threatened to resign, a strategy that in the end served him just as well

[Fenian] business is broken so far as violence is concerned in Ireland and Great Britain. But,” he also noted, “the perpetual reserve of crime in America and the sally-port they have there prevent our eradicating the roots of the mischief.”¹⁸³ That impression was only confirmed a few days later by Anderson, who reported (based on missives from Le Caron) that the leaders of the Clanna-Gael were “more determined than ever to persevere. Already new agents are being selected and trained for another mission of outrage against this country [and] I have little doubt that after a brief lull we shall have new troubles.”¹⁸⁴

For the rest of the year Harcourt busied himself with making sure the neck of the Fenian conspiracy in Britain stayed broken. The Northern portion of his “spider’s web” was still dangerously weak as both the Featherstone and Gallagher cases had confirmed, and what was needed was “a second Jenkinson” to whip it into shape.¹⁸⁵ For the time being, Spencer felt his head of intelligence and his budding network of informers were more needed in Dublin than in London,¹⁸⁶ but luckily for Harcourt, Jenkinson had a suitable surrogate in mind: Major Nicholas Gosselin, a former Ulster militiaman and Resident Magistrate for Sligo, who “understands these Irish scoundrels, and can talk to them.”¹⁸⁷ By late May Major Gosselin was already in charge of overseeing all Fenian-related intelligence in the North of England and Glasgow. He did not yet have much to go on, but his ability to ingratiate himself with local Chief Constables, and the contacts supplied by Jenkinson constituted important first steps.¹⁸⁸

as it had the previous year during the Crimes Bill controversy. Gladstone’s bill was shelved for two years and then permanently abandoned, marking the first and last time the Home Secretary’s policing powers would seriously be questioned by a serving Prime Minister.

¹⁸³ Harcourt to Spencer, 14 June 1883, quoted in Gardiner, 481.

¹⁸⁴ Anderson to Harcourt, 20 June 1883, TNA HO 144/1537/1.

¹⁸⁵ Harcourt to Spencer, 31 March 1883, quoted in Porter, *Origins of the Vigilant State*, 46.

¹⁸⁶ Spencer to Harcourt, 20 January 1884, cited in Porter, *Origins of the Vigilant State*, 47.

¹⁸⁷ Jenkinson to Harcourt, 11 August 1883, quoted in Porter, *Origins of the Vigilant State*, 47.

¹⁸⁸ Porter, *Origins of the Vigilant State*, 47; Memorandum by Edward Jenkinson re the duties of Major Gosselin, 10 September 1883, TNA HO 144/721/110757.

In early July, an opportunity arose to finally clinch the case of the Cork-Liverpool dynamite ring when Denis Deasy's solicitor wrote to the Home Office to say that he could persuade his client to turn Queen's Evidence for the not-unreasonable sum of £100¹⁸⁹ (substantially less than the £300 paid to Norman for his confession).¹⁹⁰ Deasy refused to testify but his comrade Timothy Carmody did not, and the latter's testimony along with that of William Lamie (a paid Dublin Castle informer whose lurid tales about ribbon societies and secret oaths had already proved effective against the Invincibles)¹⁹¹ soon brought the trial to a predictable conclusion: true bills against the accused and sentences of life in prison. There remained now only the loose ends of the Glasgow and London outrages, and while the London bombers appeared to still be at large, in late August the Glasgow end of the conspiracy unexpectedly came crashing down.

As in the Gallagher case, the initial impetus for the authorities came almost by accident and from an unlikely source: a fifty-three-year-old Glasgow fruit merchant by the name of George Hughes who had since July 1882 been a member of a local ribbon society (ribbonism having by this point become a hotchpotch of "protest, sectarian solidarity and vague aspirations to an eventual war of national liberation [in Ireland]"¹⁹²). This, however, was no ordinary social club for frustrated radicals; it was in fact the same organization which had welcomed Timothy Featherstone and Henry Dalton on their arrival from America, and that had planned and carried out the three dynamite attacks that had rocked Glasgow on the night of 20 January. Furthermore, it was one of its members, a man by the name of Terence McDermott who had, along with Thomas Mooney, bombed the Local Government Board and *Times* headquarters back in March.

¹⁸⁹ Note by Harcourt, 5 July 1883, TNA HO 144/115/A26302.

¹⁹⁰ McIntyre, "Scotland Yard," *Reynolds' Newspaper*, 3 March 1895.

¹⁹¹ *Liverpool Mercury*, 9 August 1883.

¹⁹² Sean Connolly, "Patriotism and Nationalism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish History*, ed. Alvin Jackson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 39.

Hughes was not a paid infiltrator in the mould of Red Jim or a circuit stool pigeon like William Lamie, but he was a man who could hold a grudge. As he later testified in court, on 11 November 1882, a few months after joining the ribbon society, Hughes had had a minor disagreement, and then physical altercation, with a fellow ribbonman during one of the group's regular meetings on the Glasgow Green. That night, as the bloody-lipped Hughes had been making his way out of the park, he had happened to stumble into an old acquaintance of his, Constable William Porter of Glasgow City Police, to whom he quickly remarked, "If I had seen you a little earlier, I would have charged a man to the office." Porter replied that, "[...] you are not too late, come away back," but before Hughes could elaborate, an older, bewhiskered gentleman began to come up from behind, gently grabbing the constable by the shoulder and observing sardonically: "Never mind them, the one is as bad as the other. Come away, Mr. Hughes, you are as bad as the other."¹⁹³

The bearded man's name was Timothy Featherstone, as Constable Porter found out from Hughes shortly thereafter, a name which at the time raised no alarms (except to Hughes himself, who was growing increasingly uncomfortable with Featherstone's dynamite talk). Glasgow police nevertheless kept a low-level surveillance of Hughes' group all through late 1882 and early 1883 until sometime in March 1883 Porter became involved in pursuing "inquiries with reference to these men being concerned with dynamite."¹⁹⁴ Remarkably, the authorities in London do not seem to have been involved in the case at this stage (assuming they were made aware of it), and the Glasgow CID, although continuing to keep a watchful eye on the meetings of suspected Fenians,¹⁹⁵ made little progress with the investigation. In early April, however, just after Featherstone's arrest in Cork, Porter (whose idea of detection was to ask possible suspects

¹⁹³ Charles Tennant Couper, ed., *Report of the Trial of the Dynamitards [...]* (Edinburgh: William Green, 1884), 61.

¹⁹⁴ Testimony by William Porter, in Couper, 70.

¹⁹⁵ *Glasgow Herald*, 20 December 1883.

if they were involved in smuggling dynamite)¹⁹⁶ once again ran into Hughes who immediately offered to tell all he knew about “the parties [...] engaged in [the dynamite business]” so long as his name was not “[brought] to the front.”¹⁹⁷

Thanks also in part to information extracted by the Irish Branch from an ex-associate of Featherstone,¹⁹⁸ Scottish authorities knew enough about the identities and routines of the Glasgow gang by late August to be able to finally tighten the noose around the whole conspiracy. The arrests began on the last day of the month, when six Irishmen – Terence McDermott, Peter Callaghan, Thomas Derany, Patrick Macabe, and Patrick Drum – were apprehended in Glasgow’s South Side neighbourhood, and continued over the next few weeks until by early October ten men were in police custody for suspected involvement in the dynamite outrages of 20 January. Armed with the testimonies of Hughes and William Lamie (the latter of whom had no connection with the accused except by virtue of his status as archetypal Fenian) and the various pieces of incriminating evidence found during the arrests, the prosecution had a virtually airtight case. Before the end of the year, five of the accused (including McDermott, whose involvement in the London bombings was now all but proven) would be sentenced to penal servitude for life (the rest receiving lesser sentences).¹⁹⁹

All known active dynamiters, except for those who had turned Queen’s Evidence and the ever-elusive Thomas Mooney, were now in prison, but as the Glasgow case had just demonstrated, the North still lagged far behind in terms of efficient communication and

¹⁹⁶ Couper, 70.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ This was Patrick J. Kearney, one of the key organizers of the January 20 dynamite attacks and Rossa’s go-to man in Glasgow. He had fled Scotland in early April, probably tipped off through the indiscretion of local police, and was in Hull by late June. Shortly thereafter, Kearney was cornered by Irish Branch detectives, and agreed to supply information (the nature of which is unknown) about his erstwhile comrades-in-arms. He was subsequently paid and let go, whereupon he fled to America. See Máirtín Ó Catháin, *Irish Republicanism in Scotland, 1858-1916* (Dublin and Portland, OR: Irish Academic Press, 2007), 133-4.

¹⁹⁹ *Glasgow Herald*, 20 December 1883; Couper, 253-4.

intelligence-gathering even with the new leadership provided by Gosselin (who now claimed, somewhat dubiously, to have “the address of every [Fenian] Centre in Great Britain, and all the higher officers too”²⁰⁰). Not that the home counties fared much better; despite the many precautions taken in the capital since the attacks in March, which by now included “a large number of extra military guards and sentries [...] to assist the police in guarding public buildings,”²⁰¹ panic had once again begun to give way to indifference at the Home Office and “after the conviction of the dynamitards [it] was even proposed to do away altogether with the political department.”²⁰²

On the evening of 30 October, however, just as the eight o’clock train was leaving the Praed Street Station of the Metropolitan Railway for Edgware Road, an explosion tore through the side of the tunnel, severely damaging the three last carriages and injuring scores of people “more or less severely by cuts from broken glass.” Only a few minutes later, a second explosion occurred in the tunnel between the Charing Cross and Westminster stations, knocking down a few people who were waiting on the platform of the former, and sending “volumes of black dust” into all directions.²⁰³ The worst was yet to come.

15 January – 8 March 1884, London and Dublin

The Metropolitan Railway authorities had been warned by police as early as July 1883 that “information had been received from America that an outrage [on the London Underground] was contemplated,” and the company had apparently taken “special precautions” as a consequence.²⁰⁴ Just what those precautions were is not clear, but there is no indication that security was meaningfully stepped up around London railway stations before or immediately

²⁰⁰ Gosselin to Harcourt, 22 August 1883, quoted in Porter, *Origins of the Vigilant State*, 47.

²⁰¹ Jeyes, 127; TNA HO 144/115/A27928 passim.

²⁰² McIntyre, “Scotland Yard,” *Reynolds’ Newspaper*, 17 March 1895.

²⁰³ *Times*, 31 October 1883.

²⁰⁴ *Birmingham Daily Post*, 1 November 1883.

after the 30 October explosions. Indeed, only two months and a half later, on 15 January 1884, “four or five packages of dynamite” were discovered by a platelayer in the Primrose Hill tunnel, shortly before the Prince of Wales’ special train was set to depart from Euston Square; “special precautions” were once more put into place “against any [...] outrage on the Prince’s return on Friday.”²⁰⁵ A Fenian sword of Damocles continued to hang over London, however.

Harcourt now professed that “we are all of the opinion that things were never worse than they are now in respect of the anticipation of outrage and crime,”²⁰⁶ and took every possible precaution to ensure that at least the rumoured plots against the Royal Family (of which there seemed to be a fresh batch each month) would not come to pass. A letter sent to Ponsonby shortly after the Queen’s return from Balmoral illustrates the uncertainty and anxiety pervading the Home Office at the time:

I was very glad to get news this morning of H.M.’s safe arrival. I had one of the usual scares last night [when] Williamson at 12.30 a.m. came in with a letter from the U.S. describing the machine with which and the manner in which you were to be blown up on your way from Balmoral. As Hartington and the Attorney-General were sitting with me we consulted what to do on this agreeable intelligence, but as you were already supposed to be half-way through your journey it was not easy to know what course to take.

However I sent Williamson to Euston and Paddington to direct that an additional pilot engine should be run at a longer interval in front of you as soon as possible, as the intelligence pointed to bombs to be deposited *after the passage* [sic] of the ordinary pilot engine. [...] I thought if there was any danger at all it would be in the neighbourhood of Preston and of Birmingham. I had police at Euston and Birmingham to report to me all

²⁰⁵ *Morning Post*, 22 January 1884. Anderson had already warned of an impending plot against the Prince of Wales back in November 1883. Anderson to Harcourt, 11 November 1883, TNA HO 1537/1.

²⁰⁶ Quoted in Gardiner, 490.

night how you were getting on and was proportionately relieved when I heard you were safe and sound at Windsor.²⁰⁷

The incipient controversy surrounding the Third Reform Bill claimed much of the government's attention during the year's first couple of months, but at the end of February the dynamitards managed to recapture the limelight with a series of plots involving different railway stations throughout London. The first and only "successful" one materialized on the night of 26 February shortly after the arrival of the last night train at the Victoria Station terminal of the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway. At exactly 1:04 a.m., just as the night inspector and his assistants had finished checking the integrity of the station's fire hose, "a sound similar to that emitted from a small cannon [followed by] a red sort of flash" burst through the cloak room's walls, felling everything in an instant and leaving a baleful silence in its wake.²⁰⁸ The cloak room and the adjacent booking office were turned into a topsy-turvy heap of blackened shards and luggage contents (with the ticket office and ladies' lavatory also suffering extensive damage), but no injuries were recorded besides the minor scratches sustained by two station assistants.

When news of the explosion reached Windsor Palace a few hours later, the Queen cabled the Home Office to say that she was "shocked to see account of fresh explosion. Trust it was accidental and no lives lost."²⁰⁹ The notion that another outrage had been unleashed on London's hapless commuters evidently still seemed somewhat incredible, but by the end of the day Colonel Majendie felt confident of the "clear and unmistakable indication that the explosion here was occasioned by some violent explosive agent and was certainly not due to gas."²¹⁰

²⁰⁷ Harcourt to Ponsonby, 21 November 1883, quoted in Gardiner, 490.

²⁰⁸ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 26 February 1884

²⁰⁹ Telegram from Queen Victoria to the Home Office, 26 February 1884, TNA HO 144/133/A34707.

²¹⁰ Majendie to the Home Office, 26 February 1884, TNA HO 144/133/A34707.

The violent explosive agent turned up again only a day later at Charing Cross Station where the head porter, alarmed at the prospect of a dynamite campaign against the city's railways, had joined his subordinates in an "unusually careful scrutiny of all articles" deposited in the station's cloak room; no suspicious packages were detected except for a portmanteau which had not been claimed since the previous evening, and which on closer inspection was found to contain "several suspicious-looking packets wrapped up in pink coloured paper [...] a square tin case [...] an old pair of black trousers [...] in the American style [and] an old coat decidedly of an American pattern." Police were promptly informed and the portmanteau brought hastily to Woolwich Arsenal to be studied by Majendie and his assistants. When opened, the tin box revealed a gunlock and a modified alarm clock (of American provenance) which had stopped at exactly three minutes past four, while the "suspicious packets" were found to contain a substantial number of dynamite cakes. The bomb had apparently failed to detonate because of a faulty fuse which had caused the "striker [to miss] the mark by the merest fraction of space."²¹¹

The general sense of alarm was further heightened only a couple of days later by two new discoveries. Heeding the general warning issued by Scotland Yard to railway authorities, Mr. Hart, the station master at Paddington, had ordered a thorough inspection of the cloak room which on the evening of 29 February produced another small brown portmanteau of "peculiar weight [and with] a very heavy loose article within it." It too was found to contain a trigger mechanism (which had obviously malfunctioned) attached by means of a thin copper wire to twenty pounds worth of dynamite charges "packed in cream coloured paper." This time the clock itself had been responsible for the device's fortuitous failure, although as Majendie explained shortly after, "the slightest shake would have set it going, and [...] the action of the alarm would

²¹¹ *Glasgow Herald*, 29 February 1884.

have been set in motion.”²¹² The next day, an almost identical package was located in the cloak room at Ludgate Hill Station.²¹³

A look at the stations’ registry books and a series of interviews with various personnel involved in handling luggage produced the knowledge that the packages had been deposited Monday evening by up to as many as five different individuals of unknown identities and only vague descriptions. It was not much, but it was all the authorities had to go by in the absence of actual suspects,²¹⁴ and by 4 March a wanted poster could be seen plastered on walls across the capital offering a reward of £2,000 to anyone whose information might lead “to the discovery and conviction of the person or persons by whom these crimes were caused or attempted.”²¹⁵

Harcourt felt overwhelmed; writing to his son Lewis in late February he wistfully quipped that “I have sunk now into a mere head detective and go nowhere and see nothing,”²¹⁶ while in a letter to Queen Victoria he inveighed against “the assassination societies of American Fenians,” whose “devilish schemes” appeared to be publicly announced and advertised without the smallest hindrance from American authorities. “No other civilized country in the world,” Harcourt railed, “does or would tolerate the open advocacy of assassination and murder.”²¹⁷

“American indolence” appeared to be the perfect scapegoat after British “remonstrances to the [US] Government” had led to “no practical results,”²¹⁸ but what the Home Secretary could not bring himself to admit before Her Majesty was that despite his arduous efforts the British state’s counter-terrorist strategy remained very much in the embryonic stage. The Irish Branch had been gradually augmented almost from day one, but most of its constables were temporary

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ *Birmingham Daily Post*, 3 March 1884.

²¹⁴ The only known Fenian the Home Office suspected of involvement in the new dynamite attacks had escaped to France in late January. See Short, *The Dynamite War*, 177.

²¹⁵ Metropolitan Police Wanted Poster, 4 March 1884, TNA HO 144/133/A34707.

²¹⁶ William Harcourt to Lewis Harcourt, 29 February 1884, quoted in Gardiner, 503.

²¹⁷ Harcourt to Queen Victoria, 29 February 1884, quoted in Gardiner, 503.

²¹⁸ Harcourt to Queen Victoria, 7 June 1884, quoted in Gardiner, 504.

transfers who were paid less than their colleagues on permanent patrols.²¹⁹ They were also highly dependent on outside intelligence given the transatlantic nature of Fenianism, and quality intelligence was as hard to come by as ever. Only days before the attack on the Victoria Station, Anderson had assured Harcourt that the Clan-na-Gael was “played out” and that “at this moment Dublin and not London is the centre of dangerous Fenian activity.”²²⁰ Gosselin too, despite his administrative talents and unorthodox tactics (which included recruiting local boys as part-time spies),²²¹ had slowly been running out of relevant things to say since late 1883 (to the point where by January 1884 he was forced to concede to Harcourt that “I have nothing but bad news to tell [and] all my plans have failed so far”²²²).

The time for half-measures was over. On 4 March Spencer received a letter from Harcourt in which the embattled “head detective” made his case for a thorough overhaul of British anti-Fenian operations, especially the “system of search at the ports for dynamite and dynamiters.”²²³ The only man up to the job was evidently the talented Mr. Jenkinson, and to ensure that he would get him, Harcourt was willing to briefly put his not inconsiderable ego aside. “Pray don’t refuse” he cajoled Spencer, “[as] it is of most vital consequence.”²²⁴ The Red Earl (as the heavily bewhiskered Spencer was popularly known) dramatically waited a whole day before finally consenting on the 6th, even though letting Jenkinson go was not going to be much

²¹⁹ In February 1884 it was finally agreed to increase the pay of Irish Branch constables to match that of their other colleagues in the CID. Harcourt noted that while “the payment [had to] be sanctioned [...] I think some limit ought to be placed on the number of add[itiona]l constables employed in future.” Note by Harcourt, 5 February 1884, TNA HO 144/130/A34371.

²²⁰ Anderson to Harcourt, 29 January 1884; 15 February 1884, TNA HO 144/1537/1.

²²¹ Porter, *Origins of the Vigilant State*, 47; Short, 174. There were other instances of juvenile labour being used by Scotland Yard authorities. In late 1883 for example, Thomas Carter, a “destitute British boy” of sixteen whose apparent familiarity with several languages brought him to the attention of Howard Vincent, was taken out of the workhouse and “temporarily maintained” until he was eventually found a position in the Duke of Montrose’s household. Memo by Godfrey Lushington, 11 January 1884, TNA HO 144/130/A34328.

²²² Gosselin to Harcourt, 29 January 1884, quoted in Porter, *Origins of the Vigilant State*, 48.

²²³ Harcourt to Spencer, 4 March 1884, quoted in Gordon, *The Red Earl*, 266.

²²⁴ Harcourt to Spencer, 4 March 1884, quoted in Porter, *Origins of the Vigilant State*, 49.

of a sacrifice given the relatively pacific state of Ireland at the time;²²⁵ as Spencer wryly observed in a letter to G. O. Trevelyan the following day, “Jenkinson goes over tonight on Harcourt’s earnest request. [...] We can manage his work here [and he] will keep the Special or Secret Police work still in hand.”²²⁶

For his part, Jenkinson was certainly not enthused by the prospect of relocating, even if only temporarily, but his loyalty to Spencer left him no other option. He realized, however, that he could at least make a few demands of his own, and in a memorandum prepared shortly before his departure for London, he traced in broad lines his vision for the position he was to occupy at Whitehall. First of all, it had to be a real, official position in the Home Office sanctioned by, and directly under, the Home Secretary – “an extra Assistant Under Secretary [...] whose duties would not cover ground ordinarily covered by an Under Secretary but would be confined strictly to matters relating to Fenian organizations.” Secondly, Jenkinson’s duties in Dublin would have to remain firmly under his control in order to safeguard “the direction of a system which I have been carefully and laboriously building up during the last two years, and which is not by any means perfect.” Ireland and Great Britain, in fact, now had to be “treated as one” as far as counter-subversion went.

Thirdly, and most importantly, Jenkinson’s powers would have to be of such a nature as to prevent running the “risk of a change in the system or of a break in the chain of the work which would almost certainly take place on a change of Ministry.” What this meant in practice was complete control over the Irish Branch and the Home Office’s Secret Service (i.e. the small bureau nominally run by Anderson), as well as the power to “issue orders in my own name without reference to the Secretary of State,” with the caveat that “it would be my duty after

²²⁵ Bew, 337.

²²⁶ Spencer to Trevelyan, 7 March 1884, in Gordon, 266.

issuing orders in matters of urgency or of ordinary detail to lay them for information [...] before the Secretary of State.”²²⁷

This was all slightly more ambitious than what Harcourt had bargained for, and more than a little bit problematic from a legal and administrative point of view. As the Home Secretary explained in his own internal memorandum, Jenkinson could now rightly regard himself as the “single person to whom all information may be brought with the least possible delay and who will have the means of disposing of all the resources both of Ireland and of Great Britain with a view to defeat these [Fenian] conspiracies.” He could not however hope to duplicate in England, given the “difficulties which are at present insurmountable,” the sort of official czardom he enjoyed at Dublin Castle.²²⁸

On 10 March a meeting at the Home Office between Jenkinson, Harcourt and his under secretaries, and the Chiefs of the Metropolitan Police officially sealed the deal. Spencer’s spymaster was to operate in a sort of extra-legal fog out of which he would, with Harcourt’s accord, instruct police authorities on “the proper steps” to be taken in grappling “with [Fenian] conspiracies as a whole.”²²⁹ It was not a bad deal, better even than what Jenkinson had originally asked for given the complete lack of parliamentary “meddling” it came with. The only catch was that the Met’s bigwigs could not be ordered around and had to be coaxed out of their long-held beliefs and behaviours. Jenkinson realized that this would prove a herculean, and likely impossible, task – he would tell Spencer as much in only a few months time – but for the time being “Jenks” (as Harcourt nicknamed him) could at least take some small degree of comfort in

²²⁷ Memorandum by Jenkinson, 6 March 1884, TNA HO 144/721/110757.

²²⁸ Memorandum by Harcourt, 10 March 1884, TNA HO 144/721/110757.

²²⁹ Ibid.

having one of the best rooms in the Home Office building – Lord Dalhousie’s old quarters – and access to a personal telephone line.²³⁰

15 March – 1 May 1884, London, Birkenhead, Birmingham

Not only did Jenkinson’s appointment at the Home Office not remain a secret for long, it soon became the stuff of editorials on both sides of the Irish Sea. The *Freeman’s Journal*, for example, gleefully noted that “the peaceful serenity in which Scotland Yard officialdom habitually luxuriates has been rudely dispelled by the installation of Mr. Jenkinson [who] is daily expected to promulgate a scheme for the reorganisation of the detective department, and [who] it is understood [...] has been practically allowed a carte blanche in its preparation.”²³¹ The Nationalist paper pulled no punches in ridiculing the scheme, depicting Harcourt as a hysterical coward and Jenkinson as an incompetent errand boy eager to pray on his new master’s paranoia,²³² but for British newspapers the picture appeared somewhat more complicated.

The Liberal *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper* technically approved of Jenkinson serving as “a sort of Minister of Police under the Home Office,” but was somewhat uneasy with the exclusively political nature of his duties, asking facetiously why “the ordinary citizen [couldn’t] also claim the benefit of his services” given that “Mr Howard Vincent’s department has not failed more conspicuously in attacking political than in trying to capture ordinary criminals.”²³³ That unease was more forcefully iterated by the Conservative *Standard* which, while allowing for the fact that “the current arrangements [in combating politically-motivated crime] are far from satisfactory,” depicted the new appointment as a betrayal of the Metropolitan Police by Harcourt. Mr. Jenkinson had “done good service in Ireland” but his presence at the Home Office

²³⁰ Note by Charles Murdoch (Home Office clerk), 8 March 1884, TNA HO 144/115/A25928.

²³¹ *Freeman’s Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, 19 March 1884.

²³² *Ibid.*, 22 March 1884.

²³³ *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper*, 23 March 1884.

would only weaken the “authority of the Chief Commissioner” and further antagonize the provinces where “already the authority exercised by the Home Office in Police matters is regarded [...] with considerable jealousy.”²³⁴

If such criticisms appeared to echo those of the Scotland Yard leadership it is because they were very likely based on official leaks, as Jenkinson himself believed. Writing to Spencer only a day after the publication of the *Standard* piece, the Home Office’s new “head detective” warned that the press’ chatter could do “great harm” in compromising the vital secrecy on which his new duties depended, and complained of the Yard men’s inability to “hold their tongues.”²³⁵ His opinion of them would only deteriorate further over the following months but for now workplace politics would have to wait.

Given Harcourt’s emphasis on having security at ports brought up to speed as soon as possible, Jenkinson submitted one of his (by now trademark) methodical memoranda to the Home Office on 11 March, outlining the means by which port authorities throughout the realm would be able to implement the Home Secretary’s plan to have “all personal luggage of persons coming from abroad [...] strictly searched and examined for [...] explosives and apparatus connected with them.”²³⁶ It specified that seventy-eight detectives (forty-nine to be supplied by Scotland Yard and twenty-nine by Dublin Castle) would, with the assistance of local police, oversee the careful inspection by Customs officers of “all persons landing from abroad.” Gosselin and his second-in-command, Major Blair, would be in charge of Northern ports while Williamson and his men would have control over the South, and in cases of suspicious persons being uncovered, telegrams and “explanatory reports” were to be sent over to Scotland Yard and then “sent on immediately and without delay to [...] Mr. Jenkinson at the H. Office.” To the same

²³⁴ *Standard*, 11 April 1884.

²³⁵ Jenkinson to Spencer, 12 April 1884, quoted in Porter, *Origins of the Vigilant State*, 51-2.

²³⁶ Liddell to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, 7 March 1884, TNA HO 144/133/A34848B.

address would also go the reports of the five men (four Irish Branch, one RIC) stationed at major Northern European ports like Le Havre, Rotterdam, Antwerp, Bremerhaven and Hamburg.²³⁷

Problems arose almost immediately. For one, Jenkinson had to first convince Harcourt of the necessity of placing travellers from Ireland within the scope of the search-and-seizure scheme,²³⁸ and then reassure anxious Customs officials (who were certain that monitoring traffic between Ireland and England in this way would prove a logistical nightmare) that “it [is] not intended that search should be made of all the goods and baggage passing between England and Ireland [but only] on reasonable suspicion and at the request of the Police.”²³⁹ The problem with “reasonable suspicion,” however, was that it was never really defined – a circular from Chief Commissioner Henderson simply instructed detectives to consider all Irish and Irish American passengers as suspect²⁴⁰ – and could consequently be easily misinterpreted by overzealous Customs officers, or ignored by overwhelmed detectives. An illustration of this came only a couple of months later when John Small, the Nationalist MP for Wexford County, was pulled aside and searched by a junior Customs officer at Holyhead after being spotted coming from a “first-class waiting-room with a hat box in his hand and go[ing] on board the Dublin steamer.”²⁴¹ The very minor scandal that ensued led to the rules being modified so that searches could be performed only at the instruction of the police, thus shifting even more of the work onto the mere sixty or so detectives employed on port duty by that point.²⁴² Making things even worse was the fact that searches had to be haphazardly performed on board the ship as passengers were getting

²³⁷ Memorandum by Jenkinson, 11 March 1884, TNA HO 144/133/A34848B.

²³⁸ Jenkinson to Harcourt, 11 March 1884, TNA HO 144/133/A34848B.

²³⁹ Memo by Jenkinson 24 March 1884, TNA HO 144/133/A34848B/6.

²⁴⁰ Circular by Henderson, 12 March 1884, TNA HO 144/133/A34848B/a.

²⁴¹ Charles Du Cane (Chairman of the Board of Customs) to Harcourt, 28 June 1884, TNA HO 144/133/A34848B/34.

²⁴² “Estimate of the probable amount of the Pay and Allowance of Police Specially Employed at Ports in Great Britain and on the Continent from 2nd June 1884 to 1st March 1885,” 9 April 1884, TNA HO 144/133/A34848B/9a.

ready to land,²⁴³ and recommendations by Major Blair and certain Customs officers that searches be performed at “a central deposit through which all passengers and luggage must pass,”²⁴⁴ were dismissed by the Board of Customs as “difficult to carry out.”²⁴⁵ Despite this predictably rocky start, however, Jenkinson soon managed to score another great coup of the kind which had first brought him to Harcourt’s attention.

On the morning of 11 April (Good Friday) a man was arrested at the railway station in Birkenhead by a group of two Birmingham CID and two RIC detectives. Judging by his flashy suit, white felt hat and several diamond-encrusted rings, onlookers would have been justified in thinking that some procurer or pickpocket had finally gotten his comeuppance. The man in custody – a tall Irish-American in his thirties sporting a heavy black moustache and answering to the name of John Daly – was no ordinary wheeler dealer, however, as the three “infernal machines” and several bottles of acids found in his coat pockets attested. Nor was he the only culprit involved in what appeared to be a new dynamite conspiracy. Shortly after news of the arrest was telegraphed to Birmingham, James Francis Egan, Daly’s host in that city, was also apprehended at his house in Grafton Road by a contingent of no fewer than nine detectives led by Chief Constable Joseph Farndale. After a thorough search of the premises (including an excavation of the back garden), the police managed to uncover a sizeable batch of Nationalist literature and correspondence that “was considered sufficient corroboration of the suspicions already entertained of Egan’s complicity in the schemes of his lodger.”²⁴⁶

²⁴³ Years later Inspector John Sweeney of the Irish and Special Branches would recall how “I saw [the passengers’] baggage examined by the Customs officials, but the examination was done very cursorily.” Sweeney, *At Scotland Yard*, 52.

²⁴⁴ Memo by J. Blair, 28 April 1884, TNA HO 144/133/A34848B/40.

²⁴⁵ H. Muray (Secretary of the Board of Customs) to Liddell, 8 May 1884, TNA HO 144/133/A34848B/18.

²⁴⁶ *Birmingham Daily Post*, 12 April 1884.

With Daly, Egan, and a friend of the latter called William Macdonnell now in custody, authorities appeared to have an open-and-shut case on their hands, something which nonetheless did not put a stop to continued searches of the Egan residence over the following couple of weeks; a vital piece of evidence was evidently still missing. It finally turned up on 1 May when one of the labourers helping police with their excavation of Egan's yard found a brown flask hidden in some dug-up roots at the back of the house. It contained nitroglycerine "of the most dangerous character, and of sufficient quantity to make three or four of such [bombs] as those found on Daly."²⁴⁷ The prosecution could now press on with the charges.

Given the terms of the Explosives Act, the fate of the accused seemed all but obvious to anyone following the case (though in the end only Daly would receive a sentence of life in prison, of which he would serve twelve years).²⁴⁸ Less obvious were the circumstances which had led the authorities to make the fortuitous and impeccably timed discoveries in Birkenhead and Birmingham. If anyone knew most of the truth, it was certainly Jenkinson, who on 12 April wrote to Spencer to explain the previous day's arrest:

Yesterday I heard of the arrest of Daly by telegraph 'with the things on him' [...] These things are three hand bombs which came over about three days ago in the *City of Chester*. They were brought over by a fireman who managed to elude the vigilance of the customs. Our difficulty was to get the things passed to Daly and then to arrest him with the things on him, without throwing suspicion on our informant. Two plans missed fire – Daly was too suspicious – but the third plan succeeded [...] Daly intended to go up to London and

²⁴⁷ *Glasgow Herald*, 12 May 1884; *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 18 May 1884.

²⁴⁸ Egan was given twenty years while Macdonnell was let off on probation. Both Egan and Daly would eventually be amnestied during the 1890s (1891 and 1896 respectively), after which they would relocate to Limerick and enter local politics. Despite his initial claim to innocence, following his release from prison Daly never denied the charges on which he had been tried. See M. J. Kelly, *The Fenian Ideal and Irish Nationalism, 1882-1916* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2006), 78, 104 n36.

throw one of these three bombs into a nest of Cabinet ministers [...] from the gallery of the House of Commons. He was quite prepared to sacrifice his own life. All that Sir W[illia]m Harcourt knows is that Daly was being closely watched [and that] he was arrested and the things found on him [...] I hope Your Excellency will not give any of these details [away].²⁴⁹

The “third plan” was in fact Daniel “Big Dan” O’Neill, an IRB man who had been in Daly’s confidence since the summer of 1882 and in Major Gosselin’s pay since the winter of 1883.²⁵⁰ It was O’Neill whom Daly had met in Liverpool that Good Friday before trying to board the train back to Birmingham, O’Neill who had given Daly the bombs, and O’Neill who had afterwards “confessed” to Gosselin that the explosives were meant for the House of Commons. The letter is almost shocking in its casual admission of this and other less-than-legal schemes but, despite its arresting candour, it is also conveniently vague on several key points. Had Jenkinson knowingly taken advantage of the inefficiency of his own port security scheme in order to have bombs smuggled into Britain? What were the two plans that “missed fire”? Was the Clan-na-Gael (of which Daly was a member) really attempting a new scheme to blow up Parliament? How much did Gosselin know? And why did Harcourt know so little?

Equally puzzling was the mysterious flask of nitroglycerine found in Egan’s back garden. It was “generally believed to be of American make,” while the nitroglycerine it contained appeared to be “not part of that manufactured by Whitehead but [...] of a superior kind.”²⁵¹ In what manner had it been smuggled into the country, to what purpose had it been deposited at Egan’s place (which had been under heavy police surveillance since September 1883)²⁵² and by

²⁴⁹ Jenkinson to Spencer, 3 April 1884, quoted in Campbell, 144.

²⁵⁰ Short, 181; Campbell, 139.

²⁵¹ *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, 3 May 1884.

²⁵² Short, 174 ff.

whom? These were not questions anyone appeared to be publicly asking in the wake of Daly and Egan's arrest but privately even members of the police force (most notably Chief Constable Farndale) had doubts on the legitimacy of the case. It would be a couple of years, however, before these doubts would partially surface;²⁵³ for the time being the busting of yet another dynamite ring was something to be celebrated as a triumph. The Whiggish *Glasgow Herald* noted in an unusually forceful editorial that the "fresh arrests which have been made [in Birmingham] have increased the public confidence in the police as the organisation by which the nation can cope with the secret enemies of life." It also applauded the recent arrest in London of a high-ranking IRB member,²⁵⁴ which

[...] is known to be among the first fruits of an experiment in the way of reorganising the Detective Department in connection with the Home Office, which the late attempt on the cloak-rooms of the railway termini in London showed for positively the last time to be imperative. [The arrest] was effected in accordance with the instructions of Mr. E. J. [sic] Jenkinson. [...] It is the beginning, in fact of the work of the new detective army, the necessity for which has been made painfully evident by recent crimes perpetrated by men who have got off scot free, and by the special kinds of outrage against life and property

²⁵³ In an August 1885 letter to the Home Office, Jenkinson raised concerns about the "very small" rewards granted to Birmingham policemen in connection with the Daly-Egan case, and urged the importance of "[keeping the local Police in good humour and on our side." His advice went unheeded and in October 1887 Farndale's long-time grudge finally erupted when he told members of the local Watch Committee (as well as prominent local politicians) that "the conviction of Daly & Egan was secured by a 'plant' arranged by the Irish Constabulary." The case reached the ears of Home Secretary Henry Matthews, who after briefly making his own inquiries into the truth of the allegations, decided that there was no credible evidence either way. The controversy never reached an audience outside Irish and Home Rule circles. Jenkinson to Lushington, 28 August 1885, TNA HO 144/136/A35496E; note by Charles Troup, 7 October 1887, TNA HO 144/136/A35496. See also Porter, *Origins of the Vigilant State*, 74.

²⁵⁴ This was Patrick Fitzgerald who had been "regularly shadowed" by Irish detectives at Jenkinson's orders since early 1884, and who on April 10 was finally arrested while walking along Whitehall by Irish Branch detectives. Although the mandate for his arrest had to do with a crime he had committed in Ireland several years before (for which he would eventually be found not guilty), it is likely that the real object of his apprehension was the trove of documents in his possession which described in minute detail the structure and plans of the IRB in Britain and Ireland. "Extracts from 'Shadowing' Orders in 1884," February 1884, TNA PRO 30/60/7; *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, 29 November 1884. Also see Owen McGee, *The IRB: The Irish Republican Brotherhood, from the Land League to Sinn Féin* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), 121-2;

which are bred by civilisation and by science [...] Reports [are] growing in loudness and assurance to the effect that Mr. Howard Vincent [...] will shortly retire, and with him the old system and its ideas, and that Mr. Jenkinson will receive a permanent appointment as head of a new [...] Crimes Detection and Prevention Office. Something of this kind must be done.²⁵⁵

Jenkinson would have certainly been very pleased with this glowing evaluation of his budding “detective army” and prospects for future officialdom, but despite the successes of early April the future remained uncertain. It was getting increasingly hard to “[find] anyone for our work” in America, and of those who were already engaged in it, many were reporting that the Clan-na-Gael leaders were looking to “pick out & recommend [...] men able to be sent off for active work at a moments [sic] notice – a determined effort is to be made before June to leave a mark which will redound to the credit of the present administration.”²⁵⁶

30 May – 1 July 1884, London, Dundee

As spring was drawing to a close, the authorities in London were still arguing over the exact arrangements of the port protection scheme, with police inspectors and the Board of Customs alike resisting any further attempts at reform while insisting that the current arrangements appeared to be “[working] very well.”²⁵⁷ If the Daly case had not conclusively proven that those arrangements worked in fact not at all well, additional evidence came on the evening of 30 May. The first explosion hit the Junior Carlton Club (already an emblematic bastion of middle-class Toryism) at 9:18 p.m., marring its austere Renaissance facade and

²⁵⁵ *Glasgow Herald*, 14 April 1884.

²⁵⁶ Jenkinson to Spencer, 18 April 1884, in Stephen Ball, ed., *Dublin Castle and the First Home Rule Crisis: The Political Journal of Sir George Fottrell, 1884-1887* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 199. Although not reflected in its title, this volume contains several of the memoranda and letters written by Jenkinson in the early 1880s as well as a short biographical sketch of the man (pp.328-31).

²⁵⁷ Report by Inspector C. Mailer re steam launch not being necessary for special use of officers on duty at Gravesend, 30 May 1884; H. Murray (Secretary of the Board of Customs) to Liddell, 20 May 1884, TNA HO 144/133/A34848B.

shaking up some of the rooms closest to it (the kitchen and storeroom in particular). This was immediately followed by a second blast which rattled the nearby residence of Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn, sixth Baronet (and Tory MP), to similar results. When shortly after 9:30 p.m. a boy passing through Trafalgar Square discovered a small black satchel near the base of Nelson's Column, it seemed like the worst had been averted; inside the bag were more than eight pounds of dynamite hooked up to a fuse which, for reasons that would remain unknown, had not been ignited (or had failed to ignite).²⁵⁸

The great coup however had occurred roughly ten minutes before the sinister discovery in Trafalgar Square: the target nothing less than “the large building [...] in the centre of Scotland Yard occupied by the various departments of Metropolitan Police.”²⁵⁹ This was an impressive feat for the Clan-na-Gael-ers whose campaign against London railway stations earlier that year had proved mostly abortive, but its success had little to do with either skill or luck. As authorities shortly realized, the bomb that had “burst in the very headquarters of authority”²⁶⁰ had been casually placed in the gutter of a public (and poorly guarded) lavatory located on the ground floor of the Scotland Yard building.²⁶¹

The shock of this brazen and impressively timed display of Fenian pyrotechnics was lessened somewhat by the knowledge that no fatalities were registered as a result (although at least ten individuals suffered moderate to severe injuries) and that except for the “considerable

²⁵⁸ Vivian D. Majendie and A. Ford, “Report to the [...] Secretary of State [...] on the Circumstances attending three explosions which occurred in Scotland Yard and St. James' Square, on the night of the 30th May 1884, and an attempted Explosion in Trafalgar Square [...]” p. 8, TNA EF 5/10.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁶⁰ Sweeney, *At Scotland Yard*, 22.

²⁶¹ The one constable who “was specially posted on the very spot as being a dangerous place, [...] appears to have observed nothing suspicious in any of the persons who entered the urinal [and] was almost stunned by the explosion.” Report by Edmund Henderson, 31 May 1884, TNA MEPO 3/3070.

damage” done to the Scotland Yard building,²⁶² material losses proved on the whole negligible. In his official report on the explosions Colonel Majendie revealed that the dynamite used in the explosions was unmistakably the same American-made “Atlas Powder A” (ligno-dynamite) found at several London railway stations back in February, but reassuringly concluded that,

So far as buildings and property are concerned the effects of these explosions have generally been practically unimportant, and if the attempts be regarded from this point of view they must be pronounced as more or less miserable failures; while, if undertaken with the object of producing serious public alarm and panic the series has no less conspicuously failed. The net result which seems to have been achieved is that a number of [...] humble members of the working classes have been more or less cut and bruised and injured [...] On the other hand, nineteen conspirators have been sentenced to penal servitude for life or for long terms of years.²⁶³

Not everyone shared this optimistic interpretation however. For Jenkinson the explosion was simply further proof that “there is not a man [at Scotland Yard] with a head on his shoulder,” a matter made worse, as he explained in a letter to Spencer, by the fact that “they have no information and if anything happens they all lose their heads.”²⁶⁴ Ironically, some Irish Branch detectives seemed to inadvertently agree. DS Patrick McIntyre had already noticed the chaotic atmosphere at the Yard during the investigation into the Gallagher gang, an impression echoed by DS John Sweeney who in the aftermath of the 30 May bombings observed how “[this] affair caused confusion at Scotland Yard for some months [and] we could not console ourselves in the

²⁶² Letter from the Receiver of Police to the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, 2 June 1884, TNA HO 144/137/A35842.

²⁶³ Majendie and Ford, “Report,” 10.

²⁶⁴ Jenkinson to Spencer, 31 May and 2 June 1884, quoted in Porter, *Origins of the Vigilant State*, 52.

same way as the proprietor of the ‘Rising Sun’ [a nearby pub that had also been damaged during the explosion].”²⁶⁵

What did confusion at Scotland Yard mean? Just days before the Westminster explosions the Irish Branch’s leading inspector, DCI Littlechild, had been busy following up on information supplied to police by a Mr. Potter of 30 Charing Cross relating to one of his more “suspicious” lodgers. That the tip-off turned out to be bogus –the lodger was merely a small-time swindler coming and going at irregular times – and the investigation into it a waste of police effort is not necessarily surprising. What is surprising is that a month later the Irish Branch was still busy investigating Mr. Potter’s evidently baseless suspicions (a man whom he claimed to have seen jumping “on to the roofs of some buildings” turned out to be, as DI Smith confirmed in a report, “a large cat”).²⁶⁶

Even when promising leads did emerge, certain detectives’ lack of experience meant that an operation could easily be compromised, sometimes to ludicrous effects. This, for example, was the case with the four Irish Branch detectives sent to investigate the circumstances surrounding the theft of some gunpowder and dynamite from a quarry near Dundee. They failed to track down any potential suspects but ended up being shadowed by a local policeman who “to his consternation [...] found [the four] were members of the same profession.”²⁶⁷

The status quo did change somewhat, if not as a consequence of the attack on the Scotland Yard building. Increasingly convinced that his position “offered no prospect of advancement” and worried that it now offered perhaps too much excitement, Howard Vincent decided in late June to make good on his promise to retire, trading the vagaries of police work

²⁶⁵ Sweeney, 22.

²⁶⁶ Report by John Littlechild, 24 April 1884; Report by D. Smith, 25 June 1884, TNA HO 144/137/A35842.

²⁶⁷ *Dundee Courier & Argus and Northern Warder*, 1 July 1884.

for a trip around the world.²⁶⁸ Harcourt retired his post with him, choosing instead to place the Scotland Yard under the authority of a newly created Assistant Commissioner for Crime. The title may have borne a superficial similarity to that of Under-Secretary for Police and Crime but the man to get the job would not be Jenkinson (as the *Glasgow Herald* had predicted).

It would go instead to a certain James Monro, a man who at first sight might have seemed curiously very like “Jenks:” a middle-aged son of the provincial *haute bourgeoisie* who had spent the previous couple of decades upholding law and order in the more troubled regions of the Raj. He was in fact fundamentally different in at least two respects: Monro was an actual policeman (having served as Inspector General of Police in Bengal) who, despite a rather high-strung personality, knew how to command the loyalty of his officers. He was also much more typical of his class and education than Jenkinson, i.e. fundamentally conservative, religiously pious, and completely distrustful of anything smacking of “foreign methods.”²⁶⁹

Monro’s appointment went essentially unnoticed by the press (a rare, perhaps singular, mention appeared in the Saint Peter Port *Star* on 1 July²⁷⁰) but it signalled an important change of course for Britain’s political police. More specifically, it reflected Harcourt’s diminishing enthusiasm for secret policing and his changing ideas on how best to fight the Fenian conspiracy. As Jenkinson explained in a letter to his other boss (and sole confidant), Harcourt’s newest obsession was with something he called “picketing,” which, despite the militancy it implied, was in fact nothing but Victorian preventive policing at its most old-fashioned. The “pickets” were actually Scotland Yard patrols that were going to conspicuously follow around suspects identified by Jenkinson and the Irish Branch, thus (so the theory went) scaring them straight in the process. “[Harcourt] says,” Jenkinson observed, not without a hint of irony, “[that] it is the

²⁶⁸ Jeyes, 144; *Birmingham Daily Post*, 4 July 1884.

²⁶⁹ *P. I. P.: Penny Illustrated Paper and Illustrated Times*, 8 December 1888; Begg and Skinner, 168-9.

²⁷⁰ *Star*, 1 July 1884.

easiest thing in the world to do and if the men are driven abroad they should be followed and picketed there also.”²⁷¹ Naturally such an approach (which, as Major Gosselin knew, was also the favoured MO of provincial Chief Constables)²⁷² was not going to achieve anything but self-defeat. “All the picketing in the world couldn’t choke off these Dynamiters” – men who were gladly willing to martyr themselves for “the cause.”²⁷³ What was needed was information, but not just the suppositions of mercenary informers, as favoured by Harcourt.²⁷⁴ What was needed was quality intelligence, the kind provided by “reliable agents of good class”²⁷⁵ who could spy, infiltrate, and orchestrate whenever Jenkinson needed them to, and that Harcourt appeared to “[no longer] believe in.”²⁷⁶ To the Home Office’s increasingly embattled spymaster it seemed as if “Sir W. [...] blames me [for the recent explosions] and thinks that I am doing nothing and know nothing.”²⁷⁷

Part of the reason why Harcourt had decided to turn resolutely against secret policing undoubtedly had to do with the 30 May bombings and the fear that Jenkinson was perhaps losing his touch (despite his very recent successes in Liverpool and Birmingham), but just as important was the political pressure the Home Secretary was under at the time. Members of the Nationalist opposition routinely delighted in bringing up in the House the more dubious and autocratic features of Jenkinson’s administration in Ireland,²⁷⁸ and were now already beginning to inquire

²⁷¹ Jenkinson to Spencer, 3 June 1884, quoted in Porter, *Origins of the Vigilant State*, 58.

²⁷² In a letter to Harcourt, Gosselin decried the fact that “Chief Constables in Great Britain, as a rule, act in these [Fenian-related] matters with a view merely to keep their own Districts free, and let others look out for themselves.” Gosselin to Harcourt, 7 August 1883, quoted in Porter, *Origins of the Vigilant State*, 53.

²⁷³ Jenkinson to Spencer, 3 June 1884, quoted in Porter, *Origins of the Vigilant State*, 58.

²⁷⁴ In a letter to Queen Victoria, Harcourt confessed how “It is from this source alone [informers] that we can hope for success.” Harcourt to Queen Victoria, 25 June 1884, quoted in Gardiner, 504.

²⁷⁵ Jenkinson to Harcourt, 12 July 1883, quoted in Porter, *Origins of the Vigilant State*, 58.

²⁷⁶ Jenkinson to Spencer, 3 June 1884, quoted in Porter, *Origins of the Vigilant State*, 58.

²⁷⁷ Jenkinson to Spencer, 2 June 1884, quoted in Porter, *Origins of the Vigilant State*, 54.

²⁷⁸ HC Deb, 21 February 1884, vol. 284, col. 1610; 7 February 1884, vol. 284 cols. 177-8.

into the nature of his work in Britain.²⁷⁹ Should word somehow get out that Jenkinson was in fact attempting to replicate an Irish system on British soil (the papers, it seemed, already suspected as much), the government's enemies would find themselves supremely well-munitioned.

Just how uneasy Harcourt was with this issue is attested by a letter to the Queen from early June in which the Home Secretary had complained that “there is such a violent prejudice against that *espionage* which can alone remark these secret plots that the task of detection is very difficult.”²⁸⁰ That violent prejudice was not however the product of a “widespread feeling in Britain at the time of positive *pride* in [British] detectives’ lack of prowess.”²⁸¹ Most newspapers across the political spectrum (including *The Times*) had applauded (or at least not objected to) the manner in which Daly had been shadowed and apprehended, with one aptly concluding that “it is unpleasant of course to have to do such work as was done by the police at Birmingham in tracking Daly, but when it has to be done it is a satisfaction to be able to say, as in this case, that it is done well.”²⁸² If anyone was dead set against “espionage,” it was in fact the Whitehall establishment. Lord Salisbury for example had once argued that it was “worthy of the meridian of Paris and Berlin” to grant police the power to rescue street children at risk of being trafficked by criminals²⁸³ and his views of the issue had only “hardened further in the aftermath of the reform act of 1867.”²⁸⁴ It would not take much imagination to guess what he might make of police rescuing Fenian double agents from the law in order to continue using their services (as had happened with Red Jim and others).²⁸⁵

²⁷⁹ HC Deb, 4 April 1884, vol. 286, cols. 1654-5.

²⁸⁰ Harcourt to Queen Victoria, 7 June 1884, quoted in Porter, *Origins of the Vigilant State*, 63.

²⁸¹ Porter, *Origins of the Vigilant State*, 63.

²⁸² *Dundee Courier & Argus and Northern Warder*, 18 April 1884. See also *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 15 April 1884; *Cheshire Observer*, 19 April 1884; *Times*, 14 April 1884.

²⁸³ HC Deb, 4 July 1861, vol. 164, cols. 368-9.

²⁸⁴ Michael Bentley, *Lord Salisbury's World: Conservative Environments in Late Victorian Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 177.

²⁸⁵ Campbell, 134; the same was true of Patrick Kearney (see n182 above).

13 August – 2 October 1884, Whitehall

Besides the fear of political scandal, Harcourt had also to think of the need of maintaining a Liberal approach to police expenditure as embodied by Gladstone himself who, back in May, had vocally refused personal protection because he was too “ashamed of the expense he had already been [...] inflicting on his fellow ratepayers.”²⁸⁶ The expense inflicted on the ratepayer by a few policemen posted at Hawarden Castle was of course negligible but the cost of managing the Metropolitan Police increasingly was not. The planned gradual augmentation of its force by nearly one thousand new officers had by late 1883 led to “[a] large increase in Metropolitan Police Expenditure [that] renders it absolutely necessary that the cash balance should be raised above its present figure [of] £125,580.”²⁸⁷ Consequently, in mid-August the port protection scheme, despite its many shortcomings, was the first to feel the administrative knife when the Home Secretary, after consultations with his new Assistant Commissioner, decided that “steps may be taken to diminish the cost of the Police at the Ports [by] the withdrawal of 15 men.”²⁸⁸ Jenkinson raised no objections. He knew he was in no position to argue with Harcourt, and was willing to give Monroe – whom he regarded as a “good” if uninspiring individual²⁸⁹ – the benefit of the doubt; in any case, there were far more worrisome developments at play. As Jenkinson explained in a lengthy and emotional letter to Spencer on 14 September:

The work of watching the movements of [Fenians] and of obtaining information about them occupied me incessantly and is the cause of great anxiety to me. I feel that so much depends on me, and yet that I am able to accomplish so little. It is almost a single handed fight between me and a set of ruffians who now work on such a secret system that it is

²⁸⁶ Gardiner, 504.

²⁸⁷ “Memorandum on the Condition of the Metropolitan Police Fund as regards the current and ensuing financial years (1883-4 + 1884-5),” 10 September 1883, TNA HO 144/115/A25928/30.

²⁸⁸ Memo by Jenkinson, 3 September 1884; Memo by Monroe, 9 September 1884, TNA MEPO 3/3070.

²⁸⁹ Jenkinson to Spencer, 15 December 1884, quoted in Porter, *Origins of the Vigilant State*, 52.

next to impossible to find out who their agents are and what their plans are. I feel always as if I were a man beating against the air, and as if my work could not have any lasting or beneficial result. For what I am doing does not go to the root of the matter [and] our successes only exasperate them and make them more bitter against England.”²⁹⁰

In his view, the only measure capable of going to the root of the matter was in fact Home Rule, for which the people of Ireland would have to be gradually prepared, but which would have to be immediately announced as government policy if Britain was to avert a worsening of “troubles and difficulties in the future” and retain any chance of changing “the feelings of [the Irish] towards us.”²⁹¹ For Spencer and the Liberal leadership however, Home Rule was still a few good months away from being anything but “ridiculous [...] cant.”²⁹² Jenkinson would simply have to continue to find a way of staying one step ahead of the Clan-na-Gael (which was by now in complete control of the “active work” being done in Britain²⁹³) even as its leadership was now sworn to complete secrecy and silence.²⁹⁴ On 2 October a letter sent to Robert Anderson requested that “Thomas [i.e. Henri Le Caron] [should] write either direct to me or to Mr. Hoare [the new Consul General] in New York [from now on].”²⁹⁵ It was a ridiculous request – Anderson was not about to give away his only trump card to the man who had just got him fired²⁹⁶ – but it proved that Jenkinson was indeed growing increasingly anxious and desperate.

28 November – 13 December 1884, Tralee, London

²⁹⁰ Jenkinson to Spencer, 14 September 1884, in Ball, *Dublin Castle and the First Home Rule Crisis*, 207.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Spencer to Jenkinson, 28 September 1884, in Ball, *Dublin Castle and the First Home Rule Crisis*, 215.

²⁹³ Jenkinson, “Memorandum on the organization of the United Brotherhood, or Clan-na-Gael in the United States,” 22 January 1885, in Ball, *Dublin Castle and the First Home Rule Crisis*, 232.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Jenkinson to Anderson, 2 October 1884, TNA HO 144/1538/5.

²⁹⁶ At Jenkinson’s suggestion, Harcourt had relieved Anderson of his control of the Secret Service bureau in 1883 but had allowed him to linger on at the Home Office in the hopes that he might still be able to obtain valuable intelligence from America. By mid-1884 however Anderson had been entirely stripped of his official Home Office duties and for a while his only connection to the anti-Fenian operations was as Le Caron’s handler. See Porter, *Origins of the Vigilant State*, 47-8.

In late November the Tralee mansion of Samuel Hussey, one of the most prominent land agents in County Kerry, was blown up by a “tin box”-style dynamite bomb placed at the back of the house beneath a small arch. What the RIC detectives sent to investigate the incident managed to establish relatively quickly was that the persons responsible for the explosion were very likely recent arrivals of American extraction; what they had no way of knowing was that, like Hussey himself (who in the wake of the explosion immediately filed an application for £1500 in damages “for malicious injury” and left Ireland), the Yankees were now headed for London.²⁹⁷

William Mackey Lomasney, a veteran of both the Fenian Rising and the American Civil War, had never been much of a dynamite enthusiast. In March 1881 he had written to John Devoy (the IRB and Clan-na-Gael leader) from Paris to express his total opposition to O’Donovan Rossa’s campaign of terror; “[if] we try to force on a crisis unprepared,” Lomasney argued, “we will have not only the enemy to deal with, but the majority of our own people, who would in no way approve of such tactics.”²⁹⁸ By late 1884 however, his opinions had changed significantly. Lomasney, now living in London and posing as a respectable West End bookseller, was about to attempt the most daring feat of his entire military career, and it would involve a significant amount of dynamite.

On the afternoon of 13 December, exactly seventeen years (almost to the hour) after the failed raid on Clerkenwell Prison had reacquainted the English with gunpowder, treason and plot, Lomasney and two other men (one of whom was his brother) rented a small boat from a wharf at Queenhithe and headed down the Thames in the direction of London Bridge. The boatkeeper later recalled seeing a tall, bearded man place a sackcloth-wrapped package at the stern of the boat as his two companions rowed into midstream. At half past five the boat was

²⁹⁷ *Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, 29 November 1884; *Morning Post*, 6 December 1884.

²⁹⁸ Lomasney to John Devoy, 31 March 1881, quoted in Whelehan, 95.

uneasily floating in the shallow water (the tide was at its lowest in months) around the Southwark end of the Bridge, hidden from view by a thick, wet fog. As the three men reached the vicinity of the second arch, something went wrong. At twenty-minutes to six the Thames suddenly erupted in a roar of water, smoke and light, knocking over some of the people and horses who happened to be crossing the Bridge at the time, and smashing up hundreds of nearby windows. Half a mile away, at Liverpool Street Station, the explosion was heard so well that passersby suspected “a dynamite attempt had been made upon the station building itself.”²⁹⁹

The botched attack on London Bridge was materially irrelevant – “the net result [...] may be briefly summarised as a few [...] panes of glass shattered [...] and a number of timid folks temporarily frightened”³⁰⁰ – but psychologically it proved a great success. Because no one suspected the perpetrators’ gruesome end, the explosion seemed to provide “conclusive proof that the outrage [...] was planned with an amount of coolness, determination, and foresight for which the dynamite terrorists have not hitherto received credit.”³⁰¹ It also (far from eliciting a swift and concentrated response from the authorities) appeared to further deepen the cracks in the anti-Fenian camp. Only a day before the explosion, Jenkinson (still “disheartened” from recently being told by Harcourt that his “system of secret working [was] useless”³⁰²) had given Monro and Williamson a vicious dressing-down after finding that he “could not possibly hold [his] tongue any longer.”³⁰³ What exactly about is not known but it may have had something to do with the fact that a few weeks before Jenkinson had passed on reliable intelligence to the Scotland Yard indicating a forthcoming attack on a London bridge was inevitable; the only action taken in consequence had been to have “iron bars [...] put over the drain holes of London

²⁹⁹ *Glasgow Herald*, 15 December 1884; *Belfast News-Letter*, 17 December 1884.

³⁰⁰ *Glasgow Herald*, 15 December 1884.

³⁰¹ *Birmingham Daily Post*, 19 December 1884.

³⁰² Jenkinson to Spencer, 15 December 1884, quoted in Porter, *Origins of the Vigilant State*, 54.

³⁰³ Jenkinson to Spencer, 12 December 1884, quoted in Porter, *Origins of the Vigilant State*, 52.

Bridge.”³⁰⁴ To Jenkinson the explosion confirmed a growing suspicion that Monro was “rapidly becoming a real old Scotland Yardite” with no intention of “[carrying] out [any] reforms in the office and in the system of working.”³⁰⁵

On Boxing Day that year the Dublin Castle spymaster made a final attempt at patching things up with the Yard in a secret memorandum sent directly to Monro. It read:

Dear Monro,

From what I have lately heard I think there can be no doubt that both the explosions of the 30th May and at London Bridge were the work of the same society if not of the same man and this morning I have heard from a very reliable source that they intend shortly to make an attempt on the House of Commons. This is from the same sources from which I heard that attack would be made on the Bridges [...] I think that special precautions should be taken about the House both on land and on the river side, also about Westminster Bridge, but this must be done very quietly and the greatest care must be taken not to give publicity to your proceedings [...] The thing would be to station the men both in uniform and in plain clothes [so that] the dynamiters could be watched and then captured in the act. It need not be known that you have received any information or that any special precautions are being taken. The London Bridge explosion has given an excuse for more vigilance and whatever arrangements may be made can be carried out gradually [...] My own idea is that [the dynamiters] will wait a little till the excitement about the last explosion has subsided.³⁰⁶

Confusion still prevailed in the government camp however. So hopeless seemed the situation to the Home Office secretariat in fact that when on 19 December the Common Council of the City

³⁰⁴ Jenkinson to Monro, 26 December 1884, TNA MEPO 3/3070.

³⁰⁵ Jenkinson to Spencer, 15 December 1884, quoted in Porter, *Origins of the Vigilant State*, 52.

³⁰⁶ Jenkinson to Monro, 26 December 1884, TNA MEPO 3/3070.

of London put up a reward of £5,000 for any reliable information leading to the arrest of the London Bridge bombers and asked the Home Secretary to match it with a comparable sum and the promise of a free pardon to accomplices willing to cooperate with police, Harcourt refused on the grounds that such a move would prove completely useless. In a revealing memorandum sent to the City's Town Clerk on 20 December, the "S[ecretary] of S[tate]" candidly admitted that when similar rewards had been offered "of late years" (most recently in the case of the failed attacks on London railway stations), it had been "with a view of satisfying a public demand for some conspicuous action rather than from any belief [...] that the measure would have any practical effect,"³⁰⁷ given the unprecedented intensity of the new bombing campaign, such a symbolic gesture would do nothing to assuage the fears of Londoners.

As for the promise of a free pardon to any accomplice who might step forward and turn over his colleagues – that too appeared counterproductive. As Harcourt explained, "informants of the character of accomplices are sufficiently aware from the experience of past cases that they may rely on security ~~where they give trustworthy evidence~~ [sic] where such treatment is proper." More importantly, an offer extending only to accomplices would automatically exclude "the possibility of extending the same indulgence even to one or more amongst them who actually took part in the outrage [and] whose evidence is often the most conclusive."³⁰⁸

2-25 January 1885, Westminster

No such individuals were to be found however. Unlike previous conspiracies, which had been foiled by the timely contributions of an informer or a weak-willed dynamitard, the one currently holding London in its grip appeared all but impregnable to authorities, and only a couple of days into the new year, its ferocity was once again on display thanks to the explosion

³⁰⁷ Unsigned Home Office Memorandum, 20 December 1884, TNA HO 144/145/A38008.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

in the tunnel between the Gower Street and King's Cross stations of the Metropolitan Railway. As with the previous such attacks on the Underground, the damage proved slight and "altogether the explosion was of a much less serious nature than that which [had] occurred at Praed Street [two years before]."³⁰⁹ It was, however, merely a prelude to something altogether more terrible.

Despite the cold and windy weather, Parliament Square was far from deserted on the afternoon of 25 January. As they did each Saturday and Monday, provincial tourists and Londoners alike flocked to admire the still excitingly new architecture of Westminster Palace. A few minutes after two o'clock, as people were going up and down the stairs connecting St. Stephen's Hall to its ancient crypt, a young Irish woman on a visit with her sister and brother-in-law noticed a "roll of cloth lying on the steps from which a strange smell came." She quickly brought it to the attention of PC Cole who picked it up and ran with it in the direction of the main hall. He made it as far as the gates leading up the crypt steps, where, in the company of Constable Cox, Cole noticed the ominous parcel had begun to heat up and emit a strange whirring noise. He instinctively dropped it, and it exploded with a tremendous force which instantly created a crater in the pavement wide and deep enough that both officers fell through it.

Shocked into action, the officer on guard in the Commons proceeded in the direction of the crypt, followed by the more than one hundred visitors whose holidaymaking had now suddenly been brought to a horrific end. The crowd had barely reached the entrance lobby however when a second explosion tore through the Commons chamber itself, completely wrecking the benches on the Government side and tossing about the seats in the Peers' Gallery above. Nearby police stations were immediately alerted; the Home Office and Scotland Yard were telephoned; Parliament was now officially (if not effectively) on lockdown.

³⁰⁹ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 3 January 1885.

Harcourt and Williamson were the first high officials to arrive at the scene, followed by Majendie, Commissioner Henderson and all the other police chiefs. The fire in the Commons had rapidly been extinguished, and although PCs Cole and Cox had to be rushed to the hospital after being pulled out of the debris, everyone else had escaped more or less unharmed. Harcourt could nearly draw a sigh of relief as he approached the site of the first explosion, and turning to the Marquess of Hartington, he quipped about the “dust of ages” now covering the floor in a thick brown layer. Within minutes, however, rumours began to spread through the agitated crowd outside that the Tower of London had also been blown up. Harcourt asked Captain Eyre Shaw (Superintendent of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade) if the rumours were true; they were.

The explosion at the Tower (the White Tower more precisely) had occurred almost simultaneously with that in St. Stephen’s Hall but had been of considerably less intensity despite taking place in a room full of antique rifles and medieval armour. It had resulted in slight injuries to half a dozen persons, a great deal of broken glass and a small fire that was quickly extinguished even before the fire engines arrived. As the dust and smoke began to clear away, Tower officials began sealing off the exits and with the aid of incoming police, rounding up the panicked visitors for questioning. In a matter of hours “all [had] come through the ordeal successfully” – all except a “suspicious” Irish-American who “stuttered his answers” and did not appear to have a valid address.³¹⁰

The initial public reaction to the newest spate of outrages was predictably irate. “If men or women can walk into the Houses of Parliament in broad daylight,” declared *The Standard*, “with policemen on duty all round them, and deposit charges of dynamite at their leisure [...] as if they were invisible [...] a panic totally out of proportion to any mischief which has hitherto

³¹⁰ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 26 January 1885; *Daily News*, 26 January 1885; *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, 26 January 1885; *Glasgow Herald*, 26 January 1885; *Daily News*, 27 January 1885.

been accomplished [will soon follow].”³¹¹ The same opinion was expressed more forcefully by the Queen herself who shortly after the attacks suggested that precautions should be tightened to the point of barring the public from virtually any prominent building in Westminster.³¹² Harcourt declined to go that far, but ordered the deployment of eighty-eight plain-clothes detectives for “inside protection” at several London museums and government buildings (the more than a thousand officers already posted at various public buildings throughout the capital were all uniformed).³¹³ Privately, however, the Home Secretary had little hope of ever addressing the failings of the political police, noting in a letter to Spencer that “our enemies are making rapid progress in the arts of attack, we none in those of defence.”³¹⁴

For his part, Jenkinson agreed (if for different reasons), asking resignedly in his own missive to the Irish Viceroy: “What is the good of getting good information if this is all that comes of it?”³¹⁵ In light of the memorandum he had sent Monro less than a month earlier, the bombings (especially those at the House of Commons) served only to confirm beyond all doubt the venality and incompetence of the Yard elite – “in the whole of London they have not got a single informant and they do not know in the least what is going on”³¹⁶ – and the “clumsiness or the stupidity of some [of their] so-called detective[s].”³¹⁷ To add insult to injury, Jenkinson had already insisted on “the posting of men in plain clothes inside the [House of Commons]”³¹⁸ only to have Henderson assure him (in a memo dated 10 January) that “every precaution [had been] taken” in the matter of “guarding the Houses of Parliament.”³¹⁹

³¹¹ *Standard*, 26 January 1884.

³¹² Gardiner, 522.

³¹³ Memorandum by Jenkinson, 28 January 1885, TNA MEPO 3/3070.

³¹⁴ Harcourt to Spencer, 25 January 1885, quoted in Gardiner, 521.

³¹⁵ Jenkinson to Spencer, 25 January 1885, quoted in Porter, *Origins of the Vigilant State*, 52.

³¹⁶ Jenkinson to Spencer, 14 February 1885, quoted in Porter, *Origins of the Vigilant State*, 52.

³¹⁷ Jenkinson to Harcourt, 18 December 1884, quoted in Porter, *Origins of the Vigilant State*, 55.

³¹⁸ Memorandum by Jenkinson, 9 March 1886, TNA HO 144/721/110757.

³¹⁹ Henderson to Jenkinson, 10 January 1885, TNA MEPO 3/3070.

27 January – 21 May 1885, London

The day after “dynamite Saturday” (as the yellow press took to calling it) the Yard detectives finally began to understand what was going on. The fidgety Irish-American detained during the roundup at the Tower of London, did not appear to be a confused tourist after all; Chief Superintendent Williamson and Inspector Frederick Aberline were in fact certain they had come across one of the Fenians responsible for the previous day’s explosions (and probably several others). They just needed to prove it. The suspect – “an under-sized but stiffly-built young man” answering to the name of James Cunningham³²⁰ – had been living for some time at various locations in the East End under assumed names and, according to one former landlady, had recently been in possession of one suspicious-looking “American trunk” and one “black box.” Cunningham denied ever owning such luggage, but the black box was soon recovered from his residence in Scarborough Street, and thanks to a timely “public placard” describing the cases and requesting information pertaining to their location, the police were soon in possession of the trunk. A cabman named Robert Crosby had transported one very like that ascribed to Cunningham from Great Prescott Street (where Cunningham lived) to the house at 90 Turner’s Road sometime around mid-January. On 3 February Scotland Yard detectives made a second arrest.³²¹

The man now in custody alongside Cunningham was Harry Burton, a twenty-six-year-old cabinet maker who claimed to have recently arrived in Britain from the US and who, “speaking with an Irish-American accent,” declared he had never seen Cunningham or his black box before.³²² The evidence told a different tale. Guides to the Tower of London and Westminster as

³²⁰ *Daily News*, 27 January 1885.

³²¹ Report by Hamilton Cuffe (Assistant Solicitor to the Treasury), 18 June 1885, TNA HO 144/133/A34707/36; *Evening News*, 5 February 1885.

³²² *Evening News*, 5 February 1885.

well as a brown American trunk exactly like Cunningham's had already been found at Burton's house in Turner Road, and by a remarkable coincidence it soon transpired that his former residence in Mitre Square had been watched by a "man in plain clothes" since well before the explosions of 25 January; the reason: one of Burton's neighbours in that building, a City policeman, had submitted to his superior officer a report about a suspicious Irish-American who appeared to be "doing no work."³²³

The plain-clothes detective had seen Burton in the company of Cunningham as early as 18 January "and there was no doubt that the two prisoners were acquainted with each other."³²⁴ That by itself would not have sealed Burton's fate if not for two unexpected developments. The first – Cunningham's black box turned out to contain a functional detonator clumsily hidden in a sock; the second – Cunningham himself seemed to fit the description of one of three suspicious men thought to have absconded from Gower Street Station shortly after the explosion of 2 January. Two witnesses were brought forward – a police sergeant and a train guard – and presented with a lineup at the Bow Street Police Court. Although more than a month had elapsed since the Gower Street tunnel explosion, both witnesses "pointed out Cunningham as being one of the suspected men travelling in the guard's brake on the night of the explosion." Cunningham's "great uneasiness" at being scrutinized in this way only seemed to confirm his guilt.³²⁵

On 9 February Cunningham and Burton were both formally charged at Bow Street on remand with being implicated in the explosions at the Tower of London, Westminster Hall as well as "the outrage on the Metropolitan Railway on the 2nd [of January]."³²⁶ Over the course of

³²³ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 9 February 1885.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*

³²⁵ *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 8 February 1885.

³²⁶ *Daily News*, 17 February 1885.

the next three months the case against them would only thicken thanks to a parade of several other witnesses whose testimonies appeared to now implicate the two in the outrages on the London Underground of February 1884, and even the explosions of 30 May. The evidence was purely circumstantial (the tattered trousers and coat found at Charing Cross were very like those Burton had been seen wearing while the black bag of dynamite left at the base of Nelson's Column was the type Cunningham favoured) but as Justice Henry Hawkins observed while passing sentence, "the circumstances have sufficiently established on you guilt of which no human being could have any possible doubt." The jury certainly seemed convinced that at the very least the explosion at the Tower had been their handiwork, even if doubts were expressed regarding the police's extremely fortuitous finding of a fully charged detonator in Cunningham's black box. The recent explosion at the Admiralty building (initially thought to be the work of Fenians but later revealed as a disgruntled employee's botched attempt to assassinate Assistant Secretary Edwin Swainson³²⁷) would have certainly served to reinforce a sense of desperate urgency. Burton and Cunningham both received penal servitude for life, and as if to dispel any lingering doubts, a day after the sentence was passed the anonymous account of "an American informant" appeared in the British press purporting to give a detailed account of Cunningham and Burton's activities in America as "prominent members" of O'Donovan Rossa's party.³²⁸

The case was a resounding, and desperately needed, victory for the Scotland Yard (made even more poignant by the discovery on 10 February of a great quantity of dynamite in an abandoned bookshop in the West End – Mackey Lomasney's last earthly abode, as it would later transpire).³²⁹ What the officers involved did not receive in material rewards (which were paltry

³²⁷ *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 26 April 1885.

³²⁸ *Belfast News-Letter*, 19 May 1885.

³²⁹ *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 15 February 1885; *Times*, 24 April 1886.

in comparison to those dispensed after the arrest of the Gallagher gang),³³⁰ was made up for in praise from their superiors. Edmund Henderson noted that “great credit is due to Mr. Monro and the officers of the Criminal Investigation Department employed in the case for the able and persevering manner in which the evidence was collected and sifted,”³³¹ while Harcourt acclaimed, during a ceremony honouring the bravery of Constables Cox and Cole, the merits of the English police – “the friend of the people,” adding that,

It is a habit, and perhaps not a very bad habit, of the English people to disparage most of the things which belong to themselves, and I know that it is said sometimes that the English police are deficient as a “detective force.” I am not prepared myself [...] to admit that that charge is altogether well founded. It ought always to be remembered that in a free country, as England is, the police work under restrictions in the detection of crime which do not apply to the police of other nations.³³²

There was more than rule-Britannia triumphalism to this remark. Harcourt’s break with “un-English” policing was now final and Jenkinson was more aware of it than ever (only days before Harcourt’s speech he had written to Spencer to say that “things look very ugly all round just now”³³³). On 21 May the inevitable happened after Jenkinson, in an attempt to appear conciliatory, approached the Home Secretary with details about his latest scoop (probably to do with the recent rift between the Clan-na-Gael and the anti-dynamite IRB majority). Naturally Monro had been carefully kept out of the loop because “secrecy is very important and if the

³³⁰ Scotland Yard inspectors “whose services in the matter are well known to the public received [...] £20 each and £60 was split up into small sums and distributed amongst the host of other [Metropolitan Police] detectives who did good service.” City policemen received no rewards at all. F. Moir Bussy to Coleridge Kennard, 6 August 1885, TNA HO 144/147/A38369C.

³³¹ Memo by Henderson, 8 June 1885, TNA HO 144/147/A38369C.

³³² Harcourt, quoted in *The Times*, 17 March 1885.

³³³ Jenkinson to Spencer, 11 March 1885, quoted in Ball, *Dublin Castle and the First Home Rule Crisis*, 23.

Scotland Yard men get on to these men, my sources of information will be endangered.”

Harcourt flew off the handle:

It is monstrous that the London Detectives should not know of these things. For two years you [i.e. Jenkinson] have been flying in my face, spending money on getting information and doing nothing. I shall this evening write a minute ordering you to tell everything to Mr. Monro, & if you like you can take the responsibility of disobeying my orders. It is all jealousy, nothing but jealousy, you like to get information & keep it to yourself. You are like a dog with [a] bone who goes into a corner and growls at any one who comes near him.³³⁴

A few days later he reiterated the same criticisms in Monro’s presence, refusing to listen to anything Jenkinson “had to say about the necessity of protecting my informants” and insisting that “I should give all my information at once to Scotland Yard, and [...] that I should place my informants at Mr. Monro’s disposal.”³³⁵ Adding fuel to the fire was the fact that Jenkinson had recently been forced to admit to being duped by a “hoax and discreditable plant,”³³⁶ further confirming Harcourt’s fears about secret agents. The Assistant Commissioner was undoubtedly pleased to see his rival being taken down a peg, but as he would later recall in his memoirs, his feelings towards Harcourt were equally rancorous:

Sir William Harcourt nearly drove me frantic. As the enquiry [into the Cunningham-Burton case] went on day by day the copies of statements of witnesses were, under Home Office direction, sent to the Secretary of State and he and Mr. Jenkinson then proceeded to construct a case [...] [They] wanted explanation of this and that circular which did not

³³⁴ Jenkinson to Spencer, 21 May 1885, quoted in Porter, *Origins of the Vigilant State*, 55.

³³⁵ Jenkinson to Spencer, 17 June 1885, quoted in Porter, *Origins of the Vigilant State*, 56.

³³⁶ Harcourt to Jenkinson, 9 June 1885, quoted in Clutterbuck, 210.

suit their view of the facts [...] [They] had no business [attempting] to direct a police enquiry instead of letting the responsible police officers do the [sic] duty.³³⁷

9 June 1885 – 27 January 1886: “Waiting Games”

After months of infighting over Ireland, electoral reform, and an increasingly unstable foreign policy (dramatically illustrated by General Gordon’s “last stand” earlier that year) the Liberal Party was “like a man afflicted with epilepsy [whose each] fit [is] worse than the last.”³³⁸ On 9 June the government was defeated on the budget, and by 24 June Lord Salisbury had already appointed R. A. Cross (Home Secretary during Benjamin Disraeli’s second premiership) as Harcourt’s replacement at the Home Office. Despite Salisbury’s stated hostility towards increasing police powers, this was a time of “national evil” which demanded certain “political necessities,” as Cross put it.³³⁹ Some things would have to change however. For one, spending would have to be further reduced (there would be, at least in theory, no more rewards for officers “merely doing their duty”³⁴⁰). More importantly, however, Jenkinson’s nebulous role at the Home Office would have to be settled once and for all along with all “questions of difference” left over from the previous administration.

As Cross explained in a lengthy memo dated 7 July, Monro’s control over the “ordinary action of the Metropolitan Police force [and] the detective part of it in particular” was not going to be the subject of debate. Jenkinson was there “solely in consequence of [...] national danger,” and in a strict sense his office was “abnormal and [...] temporary.” For the time being, however, both he and Monro would have to learn to work together “as members of a Cabinet [would],” and to communicate to one another “all information [...] as to the matter of [...] conspiracies.”

³³⁷ Monro, Unpublished memoir (1903), p. 63, quoted in Clutterbuck, 200.

³³⁸ Harcourt to Spencer, 19 May 1885, quoted in Gordon, 285.

³³⁹ Memorandum by Cross, 7 July 1885, TNA HO 144/721/110757.

³⁴⁰ Cross to Lushington, 15 August 1885, TNA HO 144/147/A38369C.

Jenkinson would lose most of his remaining thirteen London RIC detectives (who at any rate weren't even Irish³⁴¹) as well as his ability to organize "secret watching of [...] any kind" (now the exclusive preserve of the Metropolitan Police). He would nevertheless continue to be "at liberty to communicate or not to communicate to Mr. Monro the names of his informants, similar liberty being allowed to Mr. Monro."³⁴² Cross may have thought he was splitting the difference,³⁴³ but in truth the relationship between Jenkinson (now weakened considerably) and Monro (still deprived of access to his rival's informants) was only going to get worse.

The situation in Ireland was also worsening thanks to an incipient agricultural depression and the rising fortunes of the National League (now bolstered by the vital support of the Catholic clergy) and rapidly outgrowing the tenuous status quo negotiated in the wake of the Phoenix Park murders. The new Viceroy, Earl Carnarvon, had a long and vast experience managing colonial affairs but little knowledge of Irish matters, relying heavily on information supplied by his Permanent Under-Secretary, Sir Robert Hamilton (now in charge of "ordinary" criminal investigations), and by Jenkinson (still master over "special work").³⁴⁴ The irony of a Tory Viceroy receiving advice on Ireland from two Home-Rule Liberals was not lost on the latter, and by late July Jenkinson had made his mind up: he would use the uncertainty created by the recent regime change to trade his increasingly untenable position as Assistant Under-Secretary in Ireland for a chance at staking out his claim as supreme spymaster of Britain. As he explained to Carnarvon,

³⁴¹ Of the thirteen all but three were Englishmen, something which the Commissioner believed hampered their ability to make "enquiries amongst their countrymen in various parts of London." Memo by Edmund Henderson, 22 April 1884, TNA HO 144/133/A34848B.

³⁴² Memorandum by Cross, 7 July 1885, TNA HO 144/721/110757.

³⁴³ In a letter to the new Viceroy of Ireland, the fourth Earl of Carnarvon, Cross noted with satisfaction that he had "at last been able to settle the question between the Metropolitan Police and Mr. Jenkinson entirely to the satisfaction of both parties." Cross to Carnarvon, 11 July 1885, TNA PRO 30/6/62.

³⁴⁴ Memorandum by Jenkinson, 5 August 1885, TNA PRO 30/6/62.

[All] the work of the Crime Department should be transferred to the office of the Inspector General of the RIC [...] I should still receive information from the Special Department through the Inspector General [but] I should no longer be Assistant Under-Secretary [for Police and Crime]. My position would be an imperial one. Practically my work would be very much the same as it is now but I should be relieved of some detail work, and should be able to devote my time to collecting information from all parts and weaving it into one whole.³⁴⁵

The Viceory fully embraced the idea that such a reform would ensure “the future working of the system [of political policing]” in Ireland,³⁴⁶ but Cross proved harder to convince. While not objecting to “proposals entirely [affecting] the Irish Gov. [which] are more for it to deal with,” the Home Secretary nevertheless strongly hinted that “it would not do to leave [Jenkinson] as a secret officer without any permanence or recognized position paid out of the S[ecret] S[ervice] Fund.”³⁴⁷ Carnarvon earnestly interceded on behalf of his “most valuable” advisor, highlighting in a letter to Cross the “excellent work [...] of a very anxious kind” that Jenkinson had done in the past in spite of the fact that “he is not very popular everywhere.”³⁴⁸ Jenkinson himself pleaded his case in a memorandum dated 2 September, summing up his controversial argument: “If before the close of the next session the Parnellites succeed in obtaining some form of Home Rule we should probably hear no more of Dynamite.” Failing that, he argued, it was adamant that “we must keep on collecting information and watching all National and Fenian organizations.” Yet Jenkinson could no longer pretend that this was merely a professional issue for him; he simply had to obtain some type of assistant under-secretaryship at the Home Office if

³⁴⁵ Memoranda by Jenkinson, 24 July and 5 August 1885, TNA PRO 30/6/62.

³⁴⁶ Carnarvon to Cross, 31 July 1885, TNA PRO 30/6/62.

³⁴⁷ Jenkinson to Carnarvon, 8 August 1885, TNA PRO 30/6/62.

³⁴⁸ Carnarvon to Cross, 31 August 1885, TNA PRO 30/6/62.

he was to be able to “take a house or settle down anywhere” with his wife and children. “I naturally cannot be free from anxiety,” he blurted out in a rare moment of emotional candour (which he had hitherto reserved only for his correspondence with Spencer).³⁴⁹

Cross continued to insist that there was no opening at the Home Office and no possibility to create a new office.³⁵⁰ The spymaster would have to look for other routes into officialdom, and one in particular appeared to be promising. For all his aristocratic pieties, the new Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, had already begun to develop a keen interest in Fenian informers, signing off on several reports coming in from America, courtesy of the Foreign Office.³⁵¹ If Jenkinson could convince the Tories (who were now nominally in an alliance with Parnell) of the justness of his agenda, he might be able to inch things along in the direction he sought. There were two problems with this plan however.

The first became apparent in early November when Jenkinson had one of his lengthy memoranda printed in secret (on Foreign Office presses) for the use of the Cabinet. Unlike previous such efforts this one had little to say about the state of the Fenian movement, focusing instead on what few Englishmen in government (or opposition) seemed to be willing to even conceive of at the time: an impassioned, point-by-point defence of Home Rule. Ireland, Jenkinson argued, was “passing through a revolution” and it would no longer do to pretend otherwise. The government could either choose to quash the Irish people’s demands for “legislative independence” – a “most foolish and short-sighted” course that would virtually guarantee the ascent of insurrection and a renewed wave of outrages in both Ireland and Britain – or it could choose to be on the right side of history and begin “acknowledging frankly and generously that the large majority of Irish people were in favour of Home Rule [and try] in

³⁴⁹ Memorandum by Jenkinson, 2 September 1885, TNA PRO 30/6/62.

³⁵⁰ Cross to Carnarvon, 3 September 1885, TNA PRO 30/6/62.

³⁵¹ Campbell, 176.

consultation with the leaders to find some practical solution [...] and to ascertain whether a separate Parliament could not be granted.” Parnell, he pointed out, was after all a conservative at heart and in a devolved Ireland the status quo would be “a strong Conservative party, supported by the Roman Catholic Church [...] the landlords, the newly-created peasant proprietors, the farmers, and the professional classes.”³⁵² It was no use; a few days after circulating the text Jenkinson was able to realize just how badly he had misjudged the mood of the new government during a meeting with Salisbury at the latter’s residence in London. The Prime Minister, Jenkinson explained in a letter to Carnarvon the day after, “takes a rather gloomy view of the future, and [...] thinks it must come to a head in the way we most dread [and that] Home Rule [will] not come from the Conservatives.” This the spymaster naturally thought “so terrible and so lamentable,”³⁵³ but his disastrous attempt to convert the Tory leadership to Parnellism would soon prove to be the least of his worries.

Jenkinson’s second, and by far more serious, problem was that his reputation was finally catching up with him. To his former masters, his “lack of political instinct or regard for Parliamentary opinion” had been offset by his initial effectiveness as chief policeman of Ireland and “excellent Liberal [credentials];”³⁵⁴ to his new employers, the spymaster’s oblivious audacity appeared not only presumptuous but positively dangerous. Just a couple of days after sending copies of his Home Rule “manifesto” to members of the Cabinet, Jenkinson proceeded to do the same for key members of the opposition (viz. Spencer, Lord Northbrook, G. O. Trevelyan, and Lord Rosebery), promptly informing Carnarvon that since “no telegram or letter” had arrived the day before “telling me not to send copies to the persons I [...] mentioned,” he had done precisely

³⁵² Jenkinson, “Memorandum on the present situation in Ireland, September 26, 1885; ‘Secret’; Printed for the use of the Cabinet,” 2 November 1885, TNA CAB 37/16/52.

³⁵³ Jenkinson to Carnarvon, 6 November 1885, in Ball, *Dublin Castle and the First Home Rule Crisis*, 273-4.

³⁵⁴ Spencer to Trevelyan, 21 July 1882, quoted in Gordon, 218.

that.³⁵⁵ The Viceroy was outraged³⁵⁶ but only a week later Jenkinson made his views fully known to no less a figure than William Gladstone, this time furtively and “in a private capacity.”³⁵⁷ The Grand Old Man, having just recently “decided on the approximate institutional structure” of his own Home Rule scheme,³⁵⁸ was the only one to receive the memorandum with any degree of enthusiasm, noting in his reply to Jenkinson (of whom he was only vaguely aware) that he agreed “very emphatically [with] the leading propositions of your letter,” and that he too was “enraged [by] people talking of waiting games.”³⁵⁹

The general election in December produced a hung parliament and elevated Parnell to the status of kingmaker. Salisbury did what Carnarvon had warned against only weeks prior – “nothing [while] we wait till we are turned out by a combination of Liberals and Irish”³⁶⁰ – and resolutely refused Gladstone’s offer of making Home Rule the object of a bipartisan project. The Tory cry was now Coercion for Ireland, the Union at all costs; Gladstone was returned to power with Nationalist support; the stage was set for the oncoming crisis. None of this made much immediate difference to the workings of the political police but thanks to yet another regime change the rift between Monro and Jenkinson only widened. The new Home Secretary, Hugh Childers, proved indifferent to the conspiracies of “dangerous people,”³⁶¹ but would soon be forced to take notice of the individuals tasked with suppressing them.

8 February – 9 March 1886: “The Doomed Dodo”

³⁵⁵ Jenkinson to Carnarvon, 6 November 1885, in Ball, *Dublin Castle and the First Home Rule Crisis*, 273.

³⁵⁶ Carnarvon to Jenkinson, 8 November 1885, in Ball, *Dublin Castle and the First Home Rule Crisis*, 274.

³⁵⁷ Jenkinson to Gladstone, 14 December 1885, in Ball, *Dublin Castle and the First Home Rule Crisis*, 286.

³⁵⁸ Crosby, *The Two Mr. Gladstones*, 202.

³⁵⁹ Gladstone to Jenkinson, 12 December 1885, in Ball, *Dublin Castle and the First Home Rule Crisis*, 285.

³⁶⁰ Memorandum by Carnarvon, 7 December 1885, in Ball, *Dublin Castle and the First Home Rule Crisis*, 276-80.

³⁶¹ Gardiner, 409. In a letter received by Harcourt shortly after the formation of the new cabinet, Ponsonby noted that “H. M. says it is a pity you did not go back to the H.O [...] She don’t always admire your political views, but you did your work very well there.” Gardiner, 409.

On 8 February London experienced some of the worst rioting since the Reform agitation of the 1860s after a demonstration organized by leading English socialists in support of the city's unemployed (but also as a response to the agitation of the tariff-reformist Fair Trade movement) degenerated into a window-smashing and looting spree in the West End. As scandalised commentators delighted in pointing out the following day, the socialist leaders (among them Henry Hyndman and John Burns) had brandished red flags, proclaiming that “unless we get bread, they must have lead,” while several of the looters, drunk on pilfered brandy, had stopped carriages in the road to demand money from the occupants.³⁶² There was nothing revolutionary about any of it (no government buildings were attacked or even picketed), but the scale of the destruction (worth £50,000 in total), the nature of the targets (establishment clubs as well as ordinary shops) and the ostentatiously socialist symbolism all invited comparisons with the Paris Commune in the British as well as foreign press.³⁶³ Worse than the threat of insurrection, however, was the almost comical degree of incompetence displayed by the Metropolitan Police in handling the incident. During the brunt of the West End melee hundreds of constables had been dispatched to the wrong places or not at all, and had, on a couple of occasions, even refused to engage the looters out of fear of disobeying orders.³⁶⁴ Editorialists pointed out that the Met's “military character” (a leftover from its Peelite past) was now “prejudicial to its efficiency,” and warned against turning the force's hapless superintendents into “scapegoats while those responsible for the system are exempted from its consequences.”³⁶⁵

The Home Secretary, who had assumed office just hours before the rioting commenced, understood that “the trouble of inquiry falls on me, [as] the Police are greatly discredited, [and]

³⁶² Donald C. Richter, *Riotous Victorians* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1981), 118.

³⁶³ *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, 11 February 1886; *Standard*, 10 February 1886.

³⁶⁴ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 20 February 1886.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

part of this discredit [is] reflected on the Home Office.”³⁶⁶ A committee (chaired by Childers himself) was shortly assembled and tasked with inquiring into the “socialist riots.” The resulting blue book put the blame for the fiasco resolutely on the side of the Met leadership and recommended “a thorough inquiry into the organization and administration of the Metropolitan Police Force,”³⁶⁷ but in the end the only head to roll was that of Chief Commissioner Henderson (“the Dodo” as the *Pall Mall Gazette* irreverently took to calling him³⁶⁸) whose resignation Childers accepted on 22 February.

Finding his replacement would prove tricky given that the Scotland Yard leadership was itself somewhat tainted by the events of 8 February³⁶⁹ but one name was consistently floated by several newspapers very early on, and by late February it seemed as if the rumours were beginning to materialize. “I learn to-night that Mr. Childers has decided to invite Mr. Jenkinson to accept the office [of Chief Commissioner],” declared the *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*’s London correspondent on 23 February along with those of several other newspapers.³⁷⁰ It is unlikely that such rumours were anything but the speculation of journalists or that Jenkinson was in fact “very actively intriguing for the succession to the Chief Commissionership”³⁷¹ given his recent exchanges with Cross and Carnarvon, but to the Scotland Yard leadership the prospect seemed

³⁶⁶ Hugh Childers quoted in Spencer Childers, *The Life and Correspondence of the Rt. Hon. Hugh Culling Eardley Childers, 1827-1896, Vol. II* (London: John Murray, 1901), 240.

³⁶⁷ *Daily News*, 24 February 1886.

³⁶⁸ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 17 February 1886.

³⁶⁹ Munro had been paying Childers a courtesy visit at the latter’s residence during the riots and had remained entirely aloof from the increasingly uncontrollable situation (Richter, 116). Despite having plain-clothes detectives among the crowd that day, the Scotland Yard was not able to produce much in the way of evidence during the hearings of the Childers Commission, prompting one Irish newspaper to observe candidly how “the head of the detective department has adopted the stupid course of inviting evidence by public advertisement. By this proceeding in Yankee phrase, Major Munro [sic] ‘gives himself away,’ for it shows how exceedingly meagre must be the information already in the hands of the Criminal Investigation Department.” *Freeman’s Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, 11 February 1886.

³⁷⁰ *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, 11 February 1886; *Leeds Mercury*, 23 February 1886; *Freeman’s Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, 23 February 1886.

³⁷¹ *Freeman’s Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, 23 February 1886.

very real, and frightening. An “occasional note” published in the *Pall Mall Gazette* only a couple of days later warned that,

Mr. Monroe [sic], the only efficient member of the Police Junta, would find it almost impossible to work with Mr. Jenkinson, for the friction between Scotland-yard and the Irish police authorities has been very severe. ‘If Mr. Jenkinson is appointed,’ says one who knows the force, ‘there will be a mutiny in six months.’³⁷²

The quarrel at the top of the Metropolitan Police hierarchy was now public knowledge. On 9 March Jenkinson wrote a twenty-one-point memorandum for Childers describing the nature of his position as outlined by the previous two Home Secretaries and insisting on his indispensability to the British political police. Unlike Monro, who had recently stated that there was nothing to be learned about American Fenian activity from “any Irish in London,” Jenkinson attached “great value to local information,” giving Daly’s arrest a couple of years prior as an illustration of how “most valuable clues to what is going on outside are obtained from inside.” Monro’s stance was merely the symptom of a systemic failure, however, as the “detectives in Scotland Yard are excellent at working out a case when they have got clues and after an outrage has been committed [but] they fail when anything like secret work is required or when informants have to be approached.” Some reorganization “of the staff and some change in the system of work,” the spymaster conceded, was indeed required “but what is urgently wanted, particularly in connection with this secret political work is a staff of secret watchers [and] good informants [...] selected with care and secretly organized and known only to the Head of the Department.”³⁷³ A new organization made up of “secret watchers” and “good informers” would in fact see the light of day in less than a year, but Jenkinson would not be around to see it.

³⁷² *Pall Mall Gazette*, 25 February 1886.

³⁷³ Memorandum by Jenkinson, 9 March 1886, TNA HO 144/721/110757.

12 March 1886 – 10 January 1887: “Why Mr. Jenkinson Must Go”

The *Pall Mall Gazette* had predicted that “the contest [for the Commissionership would] lie between the well-advertised Jenkinson, C.B., and one of Lord Wolseley’s generals,”³⁷⁴ and on 13 March Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Warren (recently appointed by Wolseley to the command at Suakin) was revealed as the new Chief Commissioner of the Metropolis. After Henderson’s falling on his sword, the appointment of another military man as Chief Commissioner seemed only to confirm the whitewash feared by sections of the press during the aftermath of the West End riots. All the same, Warren’s arrival was universally acclaimed by virtually everyone with an opinion on the future of the London police.³⁷⁵ A lieutenant-colonel he may have been, but Warren was no indolent fogey or jackbooted oaf. A celebrated archaeologist and orientalist, the “saviour” of Bechuanaland (having bloodlessly safeguarded it from Boer expansionism), a Radical Liberal who had run for Parliament on a platform of free elementary schooling and Home Rule, Warren was also, most crucially, a successful detective – having only four years prior located the murderers of fellow orientalist Edward Henry Palmer during an archaeological expedition in the Sinai.³⁷⁶

For all his remarkable qualities however, Warren was still a man who revered the uniform (continuing to unabashedly don his military regalia and insisting that his constables receive military-issue boots) and the proper chain of command,³⁷⁷ and one who favoured sweeping, uncomplicated solutions. He took for granted the notion that as Chief Commissioner he would receive complete independence to manage the force as he deemed fit and nothing but

³⁷⁴ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 27 February 1886.

³⁷⁵ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 13 March 1886.

³⁷⁶ Keith, Surridge, “Warren, Sir Charles (1840–1927),” *ODNB*, accessed 4 December 2015, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36753>.<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36753>.

³⁷⁷ Fido et al, “Warren, Sir Charles, GCMG, KCB, (1840-1927),” in *The Official Encyclopedia of Scotland Yard*, 277-80.

unquestioning loyalty from all his subalterns. The separateness of the Criminal Investigation Department he resented almost from the beginning but not as much as the extra-legal network of secret agents managed by someone who did not even appear to have any official rank. For his part, Jenkinson “took the earliest opportunity of speaking to him on [the] subject” of his political work and “explained to him the [...] different Fenian organizations,” placing all his “confidential papers [...] in his hands.” The spymaster even offered to “make over to him all my secret agents to be worked by him in connection with [...] Scotland Yard [and] to serve under him, so that nothing might stand in the way of harmonious and successful action against the Fenian Conspirators.”³⁷⁸ Warren did not appear to show any signs of opposition at first but he undoubtedly found the state of the political police nothing short of abominable. A few weeks after the encounter, Jenkinson’s agents in London were already being aggressively shadowed and “examined” by plain-clothes detectives, and by May Warren had complained to Childers of the spymaster’s “conduct.”³⁷⁹ Jenkinson had just made another determined enemy.

Over the course of the following month the simmering dispute between Jenkinson and Monro would explode into a wide-ranging controversy, involving a host of new characters (from Home Office under-secretaries to Lord Morley, the new Chief Secretary for Ireland) and a substantial exchange of memoranda.³⁸⁰ At the centre of it were the supposed insubordination and uncooperativeness which Monro (and now Warren) continued to vocally impute to the Home Office spymaster, but also the general incongruity of the latter’s position in Britain as well as in Ireland (the post of Assistant Under-Secretary for Police and Crime had by now been abolished). For the most part the surviving record we have of it reads simply like the chronicle of an acrimonious workplace dispute (somewhat toned down by a thin veil of late-Victorian

³⁷⁸ Memorandum by Jenkinson, 31 May 1886, TNA HO 144/721/110757.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁰ See TNA HO 144/721/110757 *passim*.

officialese) but occasionally it reveals valuable insights into how high-ranking policemen and bureaucrats understood the role and limitations of the political police in Britain.

Monro, for example, objected to Home Office plans of placing Jenkinson under the authority of the Chief Commissioner not merely on personal but also on “constitutional” grounds (“for all practical purposes [Jenkinson] would be as independent of the Police as he is now”).³⁸¹ This was in contrast to Warren, who, although convinced that the spymaster deserved summary dismissal for his “tendency [...] to create unnecessary scare and panic”, was “ready to make the experiment” of overseeing Jenkinson’s future work, since firing him “will lead subsequently to the supposition in the minds of the public that any outrages are due to [his] absence.”³⁸² More surprising than either Monro’s implacable opposition to his rival or Warren’s fear of a new public backlash, however, was the Home Office’s ambivalence, embodied by the new Permanent Under-Secretary, Godfrey Lushington. Lushington agreed that Monro was perfectly justified in demanding that all “secret watching by [...] agents of Mr. Jenkinson” cease immediately,³⁸³ while at the same time underlining (with the frankness of a liberal reformer)³⁸⁴ the inherently unstable and contradictory nature of British political policing:

[There] are good arguments in favour of a Continental system in which the Government Police as represented by Mr. Jenkinson would be supreme and have control over the Local Police – a system which possesses very great and obvious advantages. Mr. Jenkinson would then of course have all the threads in his hand, and would be able himself to follow up the trail of a conspirator wherever he might go [...] so too there would be no difficulty in Scotland Yard, Dublin and Mr. Jenkinson communicating

³⁸¹ Memorandum by Monro, 1 June 1886, TNA HO 144/721/110757.

³⁸² Memoranda by Warren, 2 June 1886, TNA HO 144/721/110757.

³⁸³ Memorandum by Lushington, 31 May 1886, TNA HO 144/721/110757.

³⁸⁴ In his youth Lushington had been a member of the Jamaica Committee, a teacher at the then newly founded Working Men’s College in London, and a participant in various projects supporting trade union rights.

which is the point made by Mr. Morley,³⁸⁵ for Mr. Jenkinson would have control over both.³⁸⁶

The point was merely theoretical. Convinced that “the day for controversy has passed,” Childers made his final decision known on 9 June: Jenkinson would relinquish all endeavours in the capital and limit himself to passing along information from outside to the Chief Commissioner.³⁸⁷ The spymaster understood he was being set up to fail – “it has been a matter of great doubt with me whether under the altered conditions I could be of any real use” – but reluctantly agreed, as did Monro.³⁸⁸

On 20 July the cabinet resigned after Gladstone’s version of Home Rule was soundly rejected by the electorate in yet another general election, bringing Lord Salisbury’s Conservatives back into power – this time with a comfortable majority (made all the more comfortable by the existence of seventy-four breakaway Liberal Unionists). The new Home Secretary, Henry Matthews (the first Catholic to serve in the cabinet since the Stuart era) received his first briefing on “this Jenkinson business” (as Salisbury had dismissively called it)³⁸⁹ the same day he took office. It was in the form of a timeline, prepared by Lushington, detailing “the relations of Mr. Jenkinson to the Metropolitan Police” and the “several phases [...] his functions in the Metropolis” had passed through. It pointed out that the spymaster, “formerly on the Irish Estimates” was “since the beginning of the present financial year [still without an] official position but [being] paid £2400 p.a. out of the English Secret Service Fund.” It concluded with the following admonition,

³⁸⁵ In a letter to Childers, Morley had expressed his “fear [...] that we may lose sight of the very great importance of co-operation between 1. Scotl[an]d Yard, 2. Dublin and 3. Jenkinson, as acquiring information from New York and other places with which neither Scotland Yard and Dublin has [sic] nothing officially to do.” Morley to Childers, 7 June 1886, TNA HO 144/721/110757.

³⁸⁶ Memorandum by Lushington, 7 June 1886, TNA HO 144/721/110757.

³⁸⁷ Memorandum by Childers, 9 June 1886, TNA HO 144/721/110757.

³⁸⁸ Jenkinson to Childers, 13 June 1886; Monro to Warren, 13 June 1886, TNA HO 144/721/110757.

³⁸⁹ Salisbury to Carnarvon, 6 January 1886, TNA PRO 30/6/62.

It is obvious that the present partnership – based on the principle of territorial division, the Commissioner taking the Metropolis and Mr. Jenkinson all outside the Metropolis – must be totally ineffective against Fenian Schemes unless thorough confidence subsists between the two partners. It is equally obvious that there is no such confidence and no hope of any. If then the State requires to be protected against Fenianism, there must be a change, or dissolution of this partnership. Were the question only between Mr. Monro and Mr. Jenkinson, I should still be decidedly in favour of keeping Mr. Monro [...] but [it] is not [...] The Chief Commissioner equally with Mr. Monro distrusts Mr. Jenkinson. This then points to the advisability of Mr. Jenkinson going as the one escape out of the difficulties.³⁹⁰

Matthews, whose rigid propriety had invited comparisons to “a French dancing master” even from members of his own party, was certainly not going to tolerate any maverick behaviour from a placeless underling, especially when that underling was an unrepentant Liberal potentially boring from within in the service of Home Rule.³⁹¹

When in early September Jenkinson sent one of his men (possibly Major Gosselin) to Stockholm to trace the steps of a Fenian who, according to one Foreign Office wire, was believed to be in town “plotting some explosion in London,”³⁹² it appeared as if the spymaster was now merely content with doing his job (or what remained of it). The problem was that Jenkinson did not think to inform either Monro or Warren, who consequently became the last to find out about the “suspicious person” in Sweden after in mid-October a memo from the British

³⁹⁰ Memorandum by Lushington, 3 August 1886, TNA HO 144/721/110757.

³⁹¹ According to Michael Davitt (as cited by Christy Campbell), leading members of the Conservative cabinet (Matthews included) had been informed as early as September 1886 by a disgruntled ex-agent of Jenkinson’s (now in the anti-Parnell camp) that the spymaster had “suppressed” documents which ostensibly showed Parnell to be in cahoots with the dynamiters (Campbell, 201). Whether such information was deemed credible, or whether such a meeting took place at all is impossible to say, but Jenkinson’s pro-Home Rule views were certainly common knowledge at the time.

³⁹² Memorandum by Monro, 12 October 1886, TNA 144/721/110757.

Legation in Stockholm was forwarded to the Scotland Yard by the Foreign Office.³⁹³ What might have passed for a mere gaffe or a simple misunderstanding in different times now looked like open insubordination; Matthews believed “this incident disturbs the hope I had formed that matters would work more satisfactorily between Mr. Jenkinson and the Met. Police.”³⁹⁴ Jenkinson’s Secret Service funds were cut pending further investigation.

On 11 December the inevitable transpired. Matthews, “after much anxious consideration” had determined to relieve the spymaster of his duties, fixing 10 January of the next year “as a convenient day” for his effective termination. The Home Secretary was to take “personal charge” of some of Jenkinson’s informants as well as “all papers containing information.”³⁹⁵ Judging by the letter he wrote to Earl Spencer that same day, the now former head of British and Irish counter-Fenianism received the news with resigned disappointment but also a tinge of relief; the “true sum” of his offence, he believed, was merely that he had served the Liberals “well and that [he] was in favour of Home Rule.”³⁹⁶ A few days later Jenkinson set off for Dublin where he was now ironically welcomed by the Nationalist press as a “thoroughgoing Home Ruler,” who, unlike the recently deposed Robert Hamilton, “has not been made to do penance for his convictions [which] for all that [...] are no secret.”³⁹⁷ From there he went on to Paris to “[wind] up some business connected with his Government work,”³⁹⁸ finally returning to London on 10 January 1887 to hand over the keys to his office (but not his papers, which Matthews would never recover).³⁹⁹

³⁹³ Ibid.

³⁹⁴ Matthews to Lushington, 15 October 1886, TNA 144/721/110757.

³⁹⁵ Matthews to Jenkinson, 11 December 1886, quoted in Campbell, 202.

³⁹⁶ Jenkinson to Spencer, 12 December 1886, quoted in Campbell, 203.

³⁹⁷ *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, 20 December 1886.

³⁹⁸ Mrs. Annabella Jenkinson to Spencer, quoted in Campbell, 204.

³⁹⁹ K. R. M. Short claims that Jenkinson in fact wilfully burned all his documents immediately before leaving the Home Office “probably in protest over the government’s running down of [the] Secret Service” (*The Dynamite War*, 266), a claim which has since been repeated by Campbell (*Fenian Fire*, 204) and Porter (*Origins of the Vigilant*

Just as it had the previous year during the search for a new Chief Commissioner, the *Pall Mall Gazette* managed to get the scoop well in advance, revealing Jenkinson's retirement on 8 January in two separate editorials. "Mr. Jenkinson," the author(s) pointed out, was "the man who has in his hands all the threads of the secret conspiracy of dynamitards [...] the soul and centre of what may be called [...] our Third Section," and the entire Castle leadership had vouched for his trustworthiness. How then could Mr. Matthews – "not exactly the most amiable and fascinating of mortals" – dispose of this loyal servant merely because of the latter's "choleric temper"? The stoppage of Fenian outrages was "not permanent, and at any moment we may be confronted with the same danger" as before. Would "the Government [be] left to face [future] conspirators against law and order without the assistance of the man who is practically the head of the Intelligence Department"? Did not the "secrecy [...] and [the] effort made to deprecate public discussion" of the spymaster's forced resignation suggest that the Home Secretary himself feared "much public evil" would be occasioned by it?

It is not clear if the Home Office did in fact attempt to suppress the news of Jenkinson's departure (quickly picked up by other newspapers)⁴⁰⁰ but the *Gazette's* rebukes were certainly not taken in jest; a day after breaking the story the newspaper received an opinion piece from an unnamed "member of the Civil Service" which appeared in print the following day. "Under the autocratic system on which English Cabinet offices are constituted," the author of the piece explained, "it is hopeless to expect that outside departments and officials will work heartily and well under the direct control of a subordinate [...] [who] did not even belong to the Office" and who had made it his signature to "pose as a Schouvaloff or a Fouché." Although the press was

State, 76). Whatever the truth of it, the conspicuous scarcity of documents authored by Jenkinson (especially those dealing with his work in Ireland) is certainly unusual in the extreme.

⁴⁰⁰ *Belfast News-Letter*, 10 January 1887; *Northern Echo*, 10 January 1887; *Huddersfield Daily Chronicle*, 11 January 1887

entitled to make pedestrian observations on matters it clearly knew all too little about, it was not, properly speaking, “within the province of Parliament or the press to blame the Minister, who rids himself of a superfluous adjunct whose presence necessarily involves friction and mischief.” “Mr. Jenkinson,” simply put, “[had] to go.”⁴⁰¹

2 February – 4 November 1887: “A long and complicated inquiry”

In March 1886, at the height of his conflict with Jenkinson, Monro had toyed with the idea of making “secret work” the province of every Metropolitan officer. As he explained in an internal memo,

I look to all the members of the force in each Division to aid in picking up information which may be useful. Every man on the beat, and every officer above him can in the performance of his daily duties, acquire much information as to residents, questionable characters – places used for meetings – lodging-houses where Irish Americans, or men likely to be dangerous may go to [...] There is a tendency to think that information on such points is to be furnished [solely] by the special men employed [...] This is not so, and I rely upon Superintendents instructing all under them to aid in the manner indicated in acquiring information [which is] to be reported to me confidentially.⁴⁰²

By the end of that year, however, the problem with this plan had already made itself plain. The entire force of the CID consisted merely of 313 officers (working an average of ten to eleven hours a day), at a time when London numbered more than four million.⁴⁰³ Out of these, fifty-eight constables, twelve sergeants and three inspectors were employed on “special duties [...] in

⁴⁰¹ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 10 January 1887. Based on the tone of the piece and the nature of the argument, it is not unlikely that the author was in fact Godfrey Lushington.

⁴⁰² Memorandum by Monro, 17 March 1886, TNA MEPO 3/3070.

⁴⁰³ “Return, showing Total Numbers of Criminal Investigation Department, March, 1886,” TNA MEPO 4/487; Memorandum by Monro, 11 November 1887, TNA HO 45/10002/A49463.

connection with Fenianism” in London and at ports,⁴⁰⁴ leading to a “perceptible weakening of the Staff at the Central Office and of the Divisions.”⁴⁰⁵ Warren had asked in December for an augmentation of the CID’s political department and by early 1887 his request was finally approved. One first-class and one second-class inspector, four sergeants and twenty constables would now join the select fold of detectives “[performing] services connected with Fenianism within the Metropolitan Police District.”⁴⁰⁶ This was no mere beefing up of the Irish Branch (or the public building protection squad); as Warren explained, the augmentation was partially “intended for the formation of a [new] Special Branch.”⁴⁰⁷ To the extent that its intended purpose was to fill up the void left by “Mr. Jenkinson’s Department” (i.e. his network of spies and informers),⁴⁰⁸ especially “other than in London,”⁴⁰⁹ the new CID Branch had to be very special indeed, which is why its initial staff consisted of only one DCI (John Littlechild) and three DIs (John Pope, William Melville and Patrick Quinn), arguably the elite of Section B.⁴¹⁰ “Under a verbal agreement between [Home Office Under-Secretary] Stuart-Wortley and [Permanent Secretary to the Treasury] Sir Reginald Welby,” the Specials were to be paid (out of Metropolitan and Special Police Vote funds)⁴¹¹ the amount of £640 (a figure arrived at by Lushington and Monro)⁴¹² over the course of the upcoming financial year – “considerably less

⁴⁰⁴ The Irish Branch numbered two inspectors, four sergeants and twenty constables. TNA HO 144/133/A34848B/62.

⁴⁰⁵ Memorandum by Warren, 2 December 1886, TNA HO 144/133/A34848B.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁸ “Special Confidential Section of the C.I.D.,” 28 July 1888, TNA HO 144/208/A48000M.

⁴⁰⁹ Charles Murdoch (Home Office clerk) to Lushington, 8 November 1888, TNA HO 144/189/A46281.

⁴¹⁰ “Return showing Pay and Allowances of each officer employed on special duty in connection with Fenian matters in the Criminal Investigation Department,” 21 December 1887, TNA MEPO 5/65.

⁴¹¹ As with all funding matters, there was some controversy surrounding this decision, made all the more confusing by the verbal nature of the agreement between Welby and the Home Office. Warren believed “the Treasury should pay the £640 out of the Special Police Vote of £37,000,” whereas Monro was convinced that Section D “may be paid half from the Special Police Vote and half from the Metropolitan Police Fund.” The latter course was adopted. Warren to Charles Stuart-Wortley, 8 November 1888; Monro to the Home Office, 20 September 1887; Note by Charles Troup, 10 October 1887, TNA HO 144/189/A46281/3.

⁴¹² Note by Warren, 19 October 1887, TNA HO 144/189/A46281.

than the cost of the one Chief Inspector and three Inspectors.”⁴¹³ The secrecy surrounding this new venture was also underlined by the fact that officially Chief Inspector Littlechild was only being transferred “from C.I.D. Special duty to C.I.D. Special clerical duty.”⁴¹⁴ Just how a nominally independent section⁴¹⁵ consisting of four poorly paid detectives was supposed to replace Jenkinson’s many-tentacled machine is not clear, but in truth, it very likely wasn’t; not really. Even though the augmentation had been demanded by Warren, the idea for a new branch was very much Monroe’s. Rather cunningly, the Assistant Commissioner had in fact convinced the Home Secretary to officially assume stewardship of his new pet project – officially called Section D (in accordance with the somewhat staid but established CID nomenclature) – in order to make sure his overbearing and heavy-handed boss would be cut out of the loop. Just as he had during his battle with Jenkinson, the Scotland Yard chief longed for a chance at playing the “secret agent” (a title he would shortly assume).

Although the Special Branch would later come to be associated with the fight against political extremism of all stripes, in 1887 it was only the experimental spearhead of the Irish Branch, which meant that it required the sort of intelligence that could not be got from attending “[a] social gathering of the Irish-speaking people in London for singing, reciting, and so forth.”⁴¹⁶ To this end, Monroe brought back Robert Anderson from his dead-end job at the Prison Commission (where he had been relegated after making an enemy of Jenkinson) and drew him “into still closer touch with Scotland Yard.”⁴¹⁷ Anderson was still arguably a “second class

⁴¹³ “Special Confidential Section of the C.I.D.,” 28 July 1888, TNA HO 144/208/A48000M.

⁴¹⁴ Warren to the Home Office, 12 January and 6 October 1888, TNA HO 144/189/A46281.

⁴¹⁵ In a December 1887 report the detectives of Section B and Section D are all listed together as officers “employed on special duty in connection with Fenian matters,” without any regard for their respective branches (see n395 above).

⁴¹⁶ Sweeney, 49. In late 1886, DS Sweeney of the Irish (and subsequently Special) Branch had been sent to infiltrate a “secret” Clan-na-Gael meeting in London which turned out to be an innocuous evening of Gaelic *seanchas*.

⁴¹⁷ Robert Anderson, *The Lighter Side of My Official Life* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1909), 123-4.

detective,”⁴¹⁸ but he was also a man after Monro’s own heart,⁴¹⁹ and, more crucially, Henri Le Caron’s only handler (which in a post-Jenkinson world⁴²⁰ meant the only link to the Clan-na-Gael inner sanctum).

On 21 April Monro met with another veteran of the anti-Fenian set: Colonel Majendie, Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Explosives, had decided to drop by and inform the Assistant Commissioner of his latest experiments with Greek (now Fenian) Fire. The report he brought with him was essentially a page and a half of instructions on how to put out a chemical fire,⁴²¹ but Monro thought it “w[oul]d be useful to send a copy to each of the Chief Constables of English & Welsh Counties & Boroughs & to each of the Chief Constables of Scotch Counties & Boroughs.” More than 360 copies of Majendie’s report were printed to this end, and even the Inspector General of the RIC was apparently “anxious to have 70 copies.”⁴²² This was the year of the Queen’s Golden Jubilee and cables from America were already announcing the existence of a fund set up by a rag-tag of disaffected Rossa-ites and Clan-na-Gaelers for “celebrating the Queen’s Jubilee in a manner becoming Irish Nationalists.”⁴²³ Despite fears that “explosives have probably already been shipped,”⁴²⁴ however, in the spring of 1887 the plan to disturb the Jubilee celebrations (insofar as there was one) remained very rudimentary. In fact, it rested on one person – General Francis Frederick Millen – re-establishing a channel of communication between Fenian exiles in France and the Clan-na-Gael leadership in New York.

⁴¹⁸ See p.17.

⁴¹⁹ Both men were devout evangelical Protestants with a zeal for proselytizing (Anderson as an amateur theologian; Monro as a missionary – a job he would return to after retiring from police work); both were conservative unionists with a deep-seated animosity towards the Irish Parliamentary Party.

⁴²⁰ Of Jenkinson’s anti-Fenian operation only Major Gosselin and his small circle of informers remained (now managed by the Home Office Secret Service bureau).

⁴²¹ Vivian Majendie, “Greek (or Fenian) Fire – Confidential,” TNA HO 144/196/A46866B.

⁴²² Memo by Majendie, 21 April 1887, TNA HO 144/196/A46866B.

⁴²³ *Evening Telegraph*, 4 May 1887.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*

The few details of Millen's life that have survived read like the fevered concoctions of a *Boy's Own* story,⁴²⁵ and they are made all the more remarkable by the skill with which the swashbuckling Irishman managed to navigate between his many separate (and all equally fallacious) identities. A soldier-of-fortune from a young age, Millen had (supposedly) fought for the British during the Crimean War, and then, during the 1860s, for a string of Latin American *caudillos*, including Rafael Carrera of Guatemala and Benito Juarez of Mexico. Around the same time the "General" (a title bestowed on him by Juarez) had also become involved with Irish republicanism, taking part in the Fenian Rising of 1865-7, and rapidly rising through the ranks of the Clan-na-Gael to reach a position on the military council in the 1870s. It is not clear to what extent Millen was actually committed to "the cause," but as early as 1866 he had begun to inform Her Majesty's Consul in New York on the doings of American Fenians. He continued to do this into the 70s and 80s, all the while posing as a committed revolutionary on the one hand, and as a respectable correspondent for *The New York Herald* on the other.

Millen's Home Office handler (assuming he had one) remains unknown, and the full extent of his double-dealing is likewise shrouded in mystery. Jenkinson likely knew him, especially after the spymaster began carefully cultivating his American network of informers in 1883, but evidence of a close relationship, while tempting, remains purely conjectural.⁴²⁶ What is certain, however, is that Henri Le Caron – the only British spy well-placed enough to know that Millen and the Clan were up to something – *did* have a handler in the person of Robert Anderson, who was now back on the Secret Service payroll thanks to his likeminded friend at the Yard. Anderson had also been, prior to his three years in the wilderness, as well positioned as

⁴²⁵ For a patchy but thrilling account of Millen's fascinating life see Christy Campbell's *Fenian Fire*, passim.

⁴²⁶ See Campbell, 210-11; 357-60 for examples.

Jenkinson had ever been to receive offers from potential double agents, something which he openly boasted about in his 1910 memoir *The Lighter Side of My Official Life*:

I was in daily communication with Dublin Castle, and I kept up a private correspondence with our consuls in New York and other American cities, as well as with Le Caron and my other American informants. And never a week passed without my having to meet London informants, sometimes at my residence, and sometimes at out-of-the-way places – for of course they never came to Whitehall.⁴²⁷

For Anderson a typical work day in the early 1880s might have easily involved meeting after hours with “one of my satellites,” who on one occasion, “had arrived to tell me that another of the [Land] League women had come from Dublin, with money from the League Treasurer to enable the fugitive criminals of the League [i.e. Frank Byrne and Patrick Tynan], who were then in France, to escape to America.”⁴²⁸ That Millen was one of those “satellites” (one who had now apparently decided to go rogue) is certainly not far-fetched, although, as in the case of theories which seek to implicate Jenkinson, there is no hard evidence one way or the other.⁴²⁹ The lack of evidence did not, however, prevent Anderson from resolutely charging his former boss and arch-nemesis with engineering the Fenian plot which now appeared to be hatching in France. As he later assured Monro, from 12 May, when Millen arrived in Paris (having landed at Le Havre a month earlier), the Scotland Yard “was kept fully informed of [Millen’s] plans & movements &

⁴²⁷ Anderson, *Lighter Side of My Official Life*, 112.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁴²⁹ The theory that Jenkinson actively encouraged Millen to organize (and then betray) an assassination plot against the Queen on the day of her Jubilee as a way to promote Home Rule (as proposed by Campbell in *Fenian Fire*) is, I believe, flimsy in the extreme. Jenkinson had very likely, as we’ve seen, used agent provocateurs on several occasions, but never in a way that would have endangered, even theoretically, the safety of a government official (never mind a ruling monarch), and only before his full conversion to Home Rule in late 1884. Jenkinson’s observation (made in an 1888 letter to Earl Spencer) that Parnell “instead of denying all knowledge of the dynamiters [...] should [...] boldly [show] his connection to them [and say] he disapproved of their methods,” reveals only a (justified) frustration with the Irish leader’s endless finessing, not a belief that “the bigger the terror threat, the better” (Campbell, 358). An illustration of Jenkinson’s genuine belief in the constitutional road to Home Rule is afforded by the fact that in 1892 the ex-spy-master ran (unsuccessfully) as a Gladstonian Liberal in the parliamentary seat of East Grinstead.

no precautions were neglected to prevent his crossing the channel unobserved.” Millen’s mission, Anderson added, was nonetheless a cause of

[...] unceasing anxiety & as the date of the Jubilee approached this anxiety was greatly intensified by discovering accidentally that before [Millen’s] schemes of outrage were proposed to his confederates in New York they had been communicated to the gentleman who preceded [Monro] in charge of the Secret Service Department & that in the event of [Millen’s] arrest & conviction he might have made statements on the subject of, at all events, a most embarrassing kind.⁴³⁰

Anderson never substantiated his claim that Jenkinson knew about (or had even colluded with) the Jubilee plotters but he happily repeated it in his tell-all memoir, noting that “the arrangement [of the conspiracy] had been made during a disastrous interval before [Monro’s] appointment; and he [i.e. Monro] had no knowledge of it until a prominent Fenian – I will here call him Jinks – arrived at Boulogne to carry out his twofold mission on behalf of the American Clan-na-Gael and the British Government.”⁴³¹ That Millen (or “Jinks” – an obvious allusion to “Jenks”⁴³²) should have been on a mission from the British government seems like an extraordinary claim to casually let slip at the end of a minor paragraph, but then that was not the first time that Anderson had manifested a penchant for making outrageous claims. In early March 1887 the Secret Service director had begun penning a series of pseudonymous articles for *The Times* under the heading “Parnellism and Crime” in which he strove to draw as explicit a link as possible between Parnell and the dynamite party by, among other things, quoting a series of forged letters

⁴³⁰ Memorandum by Anderson [signed by Monro], 4 November 1887, TNA HO 144/1537/2. The report bears Monro’s oversized signature on the last page but the handwriting is unmistakably Anderson’s – something which further cements the notion that the Secret Service czar was the only one (other than possibly Jenkinson) with any real knowledge of the facts behind the so-called Jubilee Plot.

⁴³¹ Anderson, *Lighter Side of My Official Life*, 117-8.

⁴³² In the original, serialized version of his memoir, the name does in fact appear as “Jenks”

which suggested Parnell had been in collusion with the Phoenix Park conspirators. These articles, as we shall see, would have quite momentous consequences for the government, but in April 1887 attention was still very much focused on the Jubilee and on insuring its celebration would be nothing short of a triumphal imperial pageant.

The few surviving official records that describe Millen's activities in 1887 (there are none for previous years) are vague on the extent to which Home Secretary Matthews was fully aware of all the details. For example, while Monro fully shared Anderson's theory regarding Jenkinson's involvement in the Jubilee plot, there is no mention of it in the otherwise lengthy report on Millen's activities submitted to Matthews on 14 June (the first since the turncoat Fenian had settled in Paris). Instead, the Scotland Yard chief specifies only that "Millen was deputed for 'active work' in this country by the F[enian] B[rotherhood] and some of the leaders of the C[lan] n[a] Gael," and insists that there was "no doubt that this man is an agent of the extremists of the dynamite factions."⁴³³ Monro's omission shows the extent to which he and Anderson were already a law unto themselves, attempting to control the amount of information being circulated in Whitehall in the hopes of using "Jenkinson's mistake" to their advantage. Anderson would later recall how "to have carried out the original [Jubilee] scheme, and to have seized these men and brought them to justice, letting [Millen] return to New York with his pockets lined with English gold – this would have been ostensibly a brilliant police coup, but it would have been achieved by discreditable means."⁴³⁴

The problem was not, however, the discreditable means (which Anderson would later come to see as essential to the functioning of the British political police), but the fact that the handling of the Jubilee conspiracy was now, to a large extent, in the hands of Lord Salisbury

⁴³³ Report by James Monro, 14 June 1887, TNA HO 144/275/A60551.

⁴³⁴ Anderson, *Lighter Side of My Official Life*, 119.

himself, who, once made aware of Millen's presence in Paris, insisted that the Fenian agent should be placed under surveillance by French police.⁴³⁵ In spite of previous tensions between the French and the British police over the surveillance of Irish radicals on French soil (which five years prior had led to the escape of Byrne and Tynan to America), the seriousness of this new conspiracy and the political weight behind the request from London made the *Préfecture de police de Paris* remarkably cooperative. In a coded despatch received at the Foreign Office on 15 June and forwarded to Matthews the next day, the British ambassador in Paris explained that following communications "with the Minister of the Interior & Foreign affairs," he had been assured that Millen and one of his Paris associates, an old-guard Fenian by the name of James MacAdaras, "shall be watched in the manner desired & that both at Paris & Boulogne the French police will make every effort to be of use in this matter."⁴³⁶ A day later Her Majesty's consul at Boulogne received a brief *renseignement* on Millen's movements in that city; there was little that *Inspecteur Catart* (of the railway police) could say except that the middle-aged Irishman was very good at keeping himself to himself.⁴³⁷ Inspector William Melville (of Section D) who was also in Boulogne keeping an eye on Millen for Monro was equally laconic in his despatches.⁴³⁸

If Monro and Anderson had ever planned to use Millen to score a "brilliant police coup," those plans would now have to be reassessed for several reasons. First, the Jubilee was only days away and the possibility that a Fenian double agent might be involved in an actual plot against Her Britannic Majesty loomed increasingly large (especially in an atmosphere of press-circulated

⁴³⁵ Philip Currie (Assistant Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs) to Henry Matthews, 14 June 1887, TNA HO 144/275/A60551.

⁴³⁶ "Decypher of despatch sent by Lord Lyons (HM's ambassador in Paris) to Foreign Office," 15 June 1887, TNA HO 144/275/A60551.

⁴³⁷ "Renseignement transmis á Monsieur le Consul d'Angleterre á Boulogne," 16 June 1887, TNA HO 144/275/A60551.

⁴³⁸ Cook, 66-7. It is clear that Monro resisted French "meddling" as much as possible, going so far as to suggest that the *Préfecture de police* should not be entrusted with Millen's antecedents. Monro to Matthews, 17 June 1887, TNA HO 144/275/A60551.

alarm⁴³⁹). Second, although Le Caron had clearly revealed Millen's connection to the Clan-na-Gael, his evidence could never be "produced in a Court of Law," without fully compromising him;⁴⁴⁰ yet, if Millen were to be captured in flagrante delicto, the government's case would obviously have to rest to a significant extent on the evidence supplied by Anderson's spy. Third, even if the "most embarrassing" intelligence in Millen's possession implicated only Jenkinson, it also had (in that same court of law) the potential to tarnish the entire political police beyond repair. Monroe would have to act fast before the conspirators either got out of reach or decided to follow through with the threatened "display of fireworks;"⁴⁴¹ Millen would have to be confronted in the hopes that he would give up either the plan or, as he had done before, his confederates.

A day or two after the French police submitted the first report on Millen's movements to the British consul in Boulogne, Adolphus Williamson (now Monroe's official right-hand man⁴⁴²), who was in town as Monroe's official representative, met General Millen and his wife in the lobby of the Poilly Hotel. Williamson (accompanied by his own wife) was somewhat inexplicably joined by his "former chief and colleague" at the Yard, James Thomson, who, along with Mrs. Thomson, had already managed to strike up a friendship with the Millens.⁴⁴³ This somewhat surreal couples' retreat was anything but convivial however. Although in his memoir Anderson glosses over the incident, mentioning only that Millen eventually "went back to America in ignorance" of the clever ruse that had been perpetrated on him,⁴⁴⁴ in the report he

⁴³⁹ The Central News Agency had reported the existence of a Jubilee dynamite plot as early as June 15.

⁴⁴⁰ Monroe to Matthews, 14 June 1887, TNA HO 144/275/A60551.

⁴⁴¹ Memorandum by Anderson [signed by Monroe], 4 November 1887, TNA HO 144/1537/2.

⁴⁴² The former Chief Superintendent had been "promoted" in July 1886 at Monroe's request in order to help with the "secret work" at Scotland Yard. Although after that date Williamson's rank was practically that of Chief Constable, for reasons not explained in the official record his rank was not "officially recognized" by the Home Secretary until January 1889, after Monroe (by then Chief Commissioner) insisted on it. Unsigned Home Office memorandum, 1 December 1890, TNA MEPO 2/210.

⁴⁴³ Anderson, *Lighter Side of My Official Life*, 118. It is unclear who Thomson (who had retired from the force in the early 1880s) worked for, although Monroe later claimed the ex-detective was there at his behest.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 119.

wrote on behalf of Monro, Williamson is described as having been tasked with “interviewing [and] warning [Millen] that we were well aware of his character and projects [...] that we would make no terms with him [and] that [we demanded] an absolute disclosure and abandonment of his mission.”⁴⁴⁵

Millen refused to cooperate, and on 21 June, the day of the Jubilee, “he had all his luggage packed [...] ready for flight and [...] reported by letter” to the Paris emissaries of the Fenian Brotherhood and the Clan-na-Gael that the mission was now compromised, “attributing his failure to the close vigilance of the Police.”⁴⁴⁶ A report submitted by a *Commissaire* L. Tournon on 23 June seems to confirm much of that perception. While noting that the French police had been able to obtain the addresses of Millen’s correspondents in Britain with the help of a certain “*agent anglais* [Inspector Melville]” the report also describes the General as panicked and despondent: “*Il ne sort pas de son hôtel et c’est sa dame qui va à la poste pour lui tous les jours. Il a annoncé hier à son hotel qu’il partirait sans doute demain Vendredi et qu’il veut se rendre en Amérique. Je surveillerai son départ et j’en aviseraï l’agent anglais en temps utile.*”⁴⁴⁷

The “entire scheme was now rendered abortive,”⁴⁴⁸ but the farcical “plot” was far from over. Once in Paris, Millen returned to the Hotel du Palais, where “*l’agent anglais*” was patiently waiting to get into his good graces, something which he quickly managed to do by becoming a part-time French tutor to Millen’s two daughters, Kitty and Florence (who had come over with their mother). The girls did not stay long and by early July they were in London “on a visit at a friend’s house,” where on 13 July they received a package from their father. It contained “three

⁴⁴⁵ Memorandum by Anderson [signed by Monro], 4 November 1887, TNA HO 144/1537/2.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁷ Untitled report by L. Tournon, 23 June 1887, TNA HO 144/275/A60551.

⁴⁴⁸ Memorandum by Anderson [signed by Monro], 4 November 1887, TNA HO 144/1537/2.

letters addressed respectively to William O'Brien M.P., Matt Harris M.P., & Joseph Nolan, M.P.," – all of which served to "introduce [Millen's] friend 'Joseph Melville,' the name adopted by [...] [John] Moroney for the purpose of his mission."⁴⁴⁹ As Anderson already knew, John James Moroney was one of the men the Clan had sent over from New York to investigate the progress of Millen's work "and if necessary to supersede him." Here was evidence not only of leading members of Parnell's party being on friendly terms with a known Fenian (not that Anderson needed it), but, even more disconcertingly, of an ongoing dynamite conspiracy.

Moroney "appeared on the scene" on 4 August, the day he was first observed (by Special Branch detectives) meeting at the House of Commons with Joseph Nolan, the Nationalist MP mentioned in the General's letter of introduction; Moroney had obviously had access to the Millen girls' mail, although he never took the trouble to explain by what means. A second meeting took place the next day and Nolan "brought [Moroney] and [Michael] Harkins [one of Moroney's associates] into the House & it is believed they left at a later hour by the Members' Staircase."⁴⁵⁰ At this point Moroney decided to put an end to all this apparent scheming by using the strategy he had already deployed against Millen: instead of "waiting to seize [Moroney] in the execution of his designs," the Scotland Yard chief would "thwart him by placing him openly under strict Police observation." This was a confirmation of Harcourt's "picketing" model as much as it was an attempt at preventing the public airing of abhorrent details.

Questioned by Special Branch detectives on the purpose of his stay in London, Moroney claimed to be pursuing a patent for a new lightning arrester on behalf of a Pennsylvania railway company. It was a painfully weak alibi, and Moroney knew it; Moroney decided to make inquiries all the same but before the Pinkerton agency could confirm the fraudulence of Moroney's

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

credentials, the Clansman had already absconded to Paris where he was shortly reported (by Inspector Melville) to be in Millen's company.⁴⁵¹ He returned to London a couple of weeks later flush with new funds and took up lodgings, together with his mistress, at the recently opened Hotel Metropole, where upper-class mountaineers⁴⁵² could be seen rubbing shoulders with the Prince of Wales. More trips followed (including one to Ireland), but Moroney continued to be "picketed" and occasionally questioned by Monro's detectives, and by 9 September the spendthrift Fenian had finally decided he had enough. A surreptitious return to Paris followed where he again met with Millen and another New York comrade, and then a final journey back home to America. Monro had to let him go, but he could not resist having the last word; shortly after arriving in New York, Moroney and his mistress were "stopped at the Customs for attempting to pass dutiable goods," namely a large quantity of French lingerie.⁴⁵³ Millen too was now about to cross the Atlantic (for the last time as it would turn out), having put his revolutionary career permanently on hold. The farcical Jubilee Plot was appropriately over.

Back in London, however, Moroney's "subordinate emissaries" were now marooned in Islington with an ever-tightening police noose around them. Michael Harkins was the first to be arrested and found to be in possession of "a revolver, a pencil note giving the name & postal address of [Moroney's fictitious Philadelphia contact] & also a newspaper cutting relating to Mr. [Arthur] Balfour's movements."⁴⁵⁴ "Bloody Balfour," as the new Chief Secretary for Ireland was now known in Nationalist circles thanks to his unflinching support for Coercion, was in a sense the perfect Fenian target, but even so the evidence against Harkins was, at that point, unconvincing. Interestingly, that is not how Monro justified his decision not to charge him before

⁴⁵¹ "Proposed Distribution of [reward] amount [in the case of Harkins and Callan]," 10 February 1888, TNA HO 144/211/A48482.

⁴⁵² The hotel was the official headquarters of the Alpine Club.

⁴⁵³ Memorandum by Anderson [signed by Monro], 4 November 1887, TNA HO 144/1537/2.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

a magistrate; instead he once again invoked the need to avoid prosecuting “the agents of a plot where there was even the semblance of justification for asserting that in its inception the govt. was privy to it.” Although a mere pawn such as Harkins (who was illiterate) likely knew very little about the controversial origins of the conspiracy he was apparently involved in, the need to assert the legitimacy of the new regime at Scotland Yard, and its total break with Jenkinsonian tactics in particular, was evidently still the number one priority for the Assistant Commissioner. As he explained in the final paragraph of his Anderson-penned report,

To have permitted the plot to ripen, taking measure only to ensure the apprehension & punishment of the criminals, w[oul]d have involved comparatively little cost of thought or effort or money, while the result w[oul]d doubtless have impressed the public with a belief in the zeal & efficiency of the Police. But the policy I have adopted & steadily pursued, tho’ of course a thankless one so far as the public is concerned, will, I venture to hope, receive the approval of the government.⁴⁵⁵

Monro’s thankless prevention did not end there, however: one of Harkins’s known associates, a man who went by the name of Joseph Cohen (even though he was Irish-American), had been found dead at his lodgings in Lambeth Road a day before Harkins had been apprehended. The death had been the result of tuberculosis, but given Cohen’s company and the fact that police had had his place under surveillance, an official inquest was inevitable. It took place on 26 October at the Southwark Coroner’s Court before a crowd of puzzled journalists. Cohen’s former landlady – a certain Mrs. King – and Harkins were both publicly questioned by Monro on the nature of their connection to the deceased. In a move not without some tactical brilliance, the Assistant Commissioner decided that he would “impress the public” after all and be seen to be doing

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid.

nothing but “put[ting] an end to the plot altogether by publishing the details of it.”⁴⁵⁶ Cohen – Monro declared before his audience – was “an agent of the Clan-na-Gael, the object of which is to commit outrages in London and elsewhere,” while the head of the fearsome organization was none other than “General Millen, who was in London at the Jubilee, [...] his agent in London [being] a man named Melville [i.e. Moroney] [who] was in America now.”⁴⁵⁷

An even more detailed account followed in a communiqué released to the press the following morning which contained most of the (uncontroversial) facts that would go into the official report a week later. The impact was significant. Reminiscing many years later, Monro would note with a certain degree of glee how the day after the inquest “all the papers commented in a bewildered fashion on the inquest and what it means. Of course they did not know what it meant, and the Radical organs saw in it some deep political design to injure the Liberal Party. But what I wanted was to entice public attention [...] and I succeeded in so doing.”⁴⁵⁸ Some journalists complained that Monro’s public relations stunt likely pointed to a cover-up – “nothing like the whole of the circumstances were disclosed” noted one *Dublin Evening Mail* correspondent – but such criticisms proved rare and even the sceptics were ultimately convinced that “there is [...] indisputable evidence to prove the existence of a conspiracy [...] for assassinating men at the head of the Government [...] [and] to destroy [...] public buildings in London.”⁴⁵⁹

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⁴⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁷ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 27 October 1887.

⁴⁵⁸ Monro, Unpublished Memoirs (1903), 78, quoted in Clutterbuck, 261.

⁴⁵⁹ *Birmingham Daily Post*, 28 October 1887.

The “long and complicated inquiry”⁴⁶⁰ prompted by the Jubilee Plot truly came to an end only on 18 November when Thomas Callan (alias Thomas Scott) was picked up in Islington by a City Police sergeant as he was coming out of a barbershop in Goswell Road. Callan, the last of Harkins’ known associates (Monro believed there were “other [unnamed] agents [...] still at large”⁴⁶¹), had been trying to cut himself loose of the whole “operation” for some days but his failure to dispose of nearly twenty-seven pounds of dynamite ended up sealing his – as well as Harkins’s – fate. Both men were charged a few days later with “feloniously conspiring together to cause, by an explosive substance, an explosion in the United Kingdom of a nature likely to endanger life or cause serious injury to property,”⁴⁶² and sentenced, after a lengthy and highly publicized trial, to fifteen years imprisonment each.⁴⁶³

Despite this apparent success, the Metropolitan Police as a whole was now about to go through its worst crisis in nearly a generation. The first real cracks had already appeared over the summer of 1887 when Matthews and Warren found themselves at the heart of two concurrent scandals, one involving the wrongful arrest of a young seamstress for prostitution,⁴⁶⁴ and the other the execution for murder of a possibly innocent East End salesman.⁴⁶⁵ Neither arguably did

⁴⁶⁰ Memorandum by Anderson [signed by Monro], 4 November 1887, TNA HO 144/1537/2.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid.

⁴⁶² *Times*, 29 November 1887.

⁴⁶³ *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, 3 February 1888. Both would be granted an early release (Harkins in 1891 and Callan in 1893, respectively).

⁴⁶⁴ In June 1887 Elizabeth Cass, who had recently moved to London to work as a seamstress for a Mrs. Bowman, was arrested by a uniformed constable in Regent Street for suspected solicitation. She was found not guilty but the perjury of the constable who had arrested her, and the apparent incompetence of the magistrate who had chosen to let her go, triggered a minor political crisis that forced Matthews to order an inquiry into the affair. The inquiry ultimately exonerated both the policeman and the magistrate (although both were formally reprimanded), but gave the Liberal press (especially W. T. Stead’s *Pall Mall Gazette*) a cause célèbre with which to pummel what it perceived to be an increasingly corrupt, venal and Tory-controlled police force.

⁴⁶⁵ This was Israel Lipski who was arrested (incidentally on the same day as Elizabeth Cass – 28 June) for murdering his young neighbour Miriam Angel “out of lust” before unsuccessfully attempting suicide. The evidence in the case was notoriously patchy and circumstantial; Queen Victoria (who was known to take an interest in the trial that followed) probably spoke for a significant portion of the public when she privately expressed doubts regarding Lipski’s guilt, while W. T. Stead took up the case as further proof of police incompetence, championing Lipski’s innocence in the pages of the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Lipski was nonetheless found guilty after a jury deliberation which lasted only eight minutes, amidst accusations of xenophobia and institutionalized antisemitism (Lipski, like his

any widespread damage to the police's reputation, but both the Home Secretary and the Chief Commissioner were now legitimate targets where they had once been promising agents of change or at least honourable servants of Her Majesty's Government. Even to the moderate-Liberal *Lloyds' Weekly Newspaper* it was now "becoming only too evident that under the new regime of [...] Mr. Matthews and Sir Charles Warren [...] the Metropolitan Police force is degenerating."⁴⁶⁶

Such fears were only dramatically confirmed later that year thanks to a resurgence in militant activity among London's socialist and radical organizations, several of which now made it their mission to reclaim Trafalgar Square (the site of several consequential demonstrations during the Reform agitation of the 1860s) as the unofficial headquarters of London radicalism. Besides its symbolic value, the Square was also increasingly important as the newfound refuge for many of the capital's unemployed and homeless people,⁴⁶⁷ who, for militant socialists like John Burns and Henry Hyndman, constituted an ideal reserve army for the upcoming revolution.⁴⁶⁸

October saw a series of demonstrations of the unemployed take place all over the city with the largest ones reserved for Hyde Park and, naturally, Trafalgar Square. On the 14th,

supposed victim, was a Jew and a recent immigrant). Matthews could not help but be swayed by the controversy and postponed the execution (due to take place on 15 August 1887) for a week while reconsidering the verdict. To everyone's surprise, on 21 August Lipski, who had always professed his innocence, made a full confession to the murder (which he claimed had been nothing but a robbery gone awry), and was executed the following morning. Although this seemed to put the case to rest for good the *Pall Mall Gazette* of 24 August 1887 insisted that "the Whitechapel mystery will remain a mystery." In his 1984 study of the case M. L. Friedland has compellingly argued that Lipski may have made a false confession in order to avoid a (likely) life sentence. See M.L. Friedland, *The Trials of Israel Lipski* (London: Macmillan, 1984).

⁴⁶⁶ *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 10 July 1887.

⁴⁶⁷ It was during the late 1880s (partly as a consequence of the slump that had begun a decade earlier) that the term "unemployment" first came into use as a means to describe a structural issue of industrial capitalism which traditional terms like "idleness" appeared unsuited for. Many London trades were particularly affected by cyclical unemployment, a problem that was arguably compounded by recent changes to the administration of poor relief in the capital (in a way that made it harder for impoverished families to continue living together), and the severity of the winters of 1885-6 and 1886-7. See Jane Martin, *Women and the Politics of Schooling in Victorian and Edwardian England* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 33-4.

⁴⁶⁸ *Justice*, 2 October 1887.

socialist orators led a demonstration of about two thousand unemployed to the Mansion House (where they were refused an interview with the Lord Mayor) and then to Trafalgar Square, where such luminaries as William Morris, G. B. Shaw, Annie Besant and Pyotr Kropotkin gave speeches on the labour question and declaimed against the recent sentencing of the Haymarket anarchists in Chicago.⁴⁶⁹ The demonstrations continued almost on a daily basis after that,⁴⁷⁰ and by late October, after a series of clashes between police and demonstrators at Westminster Abbey, the Mansion House, Hyde Park and Piccadilly, it was becoming increasingly clear that a final (and likely extremely violent) showdown was all but inevitable.

Things hadn't always been this tense. As recently as 17 February 1886 the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) could still courteously inform the police "of a demonstration to be held in Hyde Park" and ask at the same time "that such steps may be taken as may be necessary to secure the orderly conduct of the meeting to avoid a repetition of the proceedings of the 8th inst" – the date of the West End riots.⁴⁷¹ For its part, the police could do little but take notice, given that – as Monro explained to then Commissioner Henderson – it had "no informants amongst English socialists, as having such informants [...] has always been discouraged by [the] Govt."⁴⁷²

Foreign socialists were of course another matter, as an incident from July that year seems to suggest. It centred on a two-sentence telegram sent pseudonymously from London (by a certain "Nemesis") to the controversial Dutch socialist Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis – then under trial for treason at The Hague – which forcefully warned that "vengeance" would follow should Nieuwenhuis be found guilty. Dutch authorities (having easily intercepted the telegram)

⁴⁶⁹ Richter, *Riotous Victorians*, 135-6.

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁴⁷¹ Unsigned note re socialist meetings, 17 February 1886, TNA MEPO 2/182.

⁴⁷² Note by Monro, 19 February 1886, TNA MEPO 2/182.

were eager to know if London could supply them with the identity of the sender and perhaps accommodate a warrant for producing the original telegram stub as evidence in court. As Monro was quick to point out, the means for unveiling “Nemesis” were, if somewhat farfetched, nevertheless conceivable: “I asked for the original telegram for the sake of the handwriting [and] if I get this I may be able to find out through an informant who the writer is, as it is in Dutch [and] the number of Dutch-writing people in London must be limited.”⁴⁷³ The original telegram was forwarded by the Postmaster General to the Home Office, but after some half-hearted deliberation, Home Secretary Childers decided that there was nothing to be gained from aiding the Dutch in this manner, and the request was summarily refused (under the excuse that accepting it would prove unconstitutional).⁴⁷⁴

Less ignorable was the fact that the old spectre of revolution seemed to be once again on the prowl in Europe. The Dutch authorities’ interest in the threatening telegram came on the heels of a massive riot in Amsterdam inspired in part by “popular hatred for a police force that for years had been brutally chasing socialists and putting down demonstrations.”⁴⁷⁵ In neighbouring Belgium, martial law had already been declared after widespread urban rioting in the second half of March 1886 had led to extensive looting and violence throughout the country. In Germany the highly proscriptive Anti-Socialist Laws were extended in April of the same year, while in America the ongoing trial of the Haymarket anarchists (universally believed to be innocent by those on the socialist left) stood out as an international symbol of capitalist injustice. Although liberal England appeared to be far removed from these foci of populist indignation, the international situation increasingly put the danger posed by “the mob” (especially in London) in a decidedly new light. *Times* editorialists declared that “the recent riots in Chicago [...] Belgium,

⁴⁷³ Monro to Lushington, 26 June 1886, TNA HO 144/172/A3793.

⁴⁷⁴ Memorandum by Childers, 1 July 1886, TNA HO 144/172/A3793.

⁴⁷⁵ E. H. Kossman, *The Low Countries, 1780-1940* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 316.

and Holland [...] cannot fail to make thoughtful people reflect seriously on the subject of popular disturbances,” and proposed schemes for containing riots with as little violence as possible.⁴⁷⁶

The Home Office too now appeared less attached to the notion of not interfering with homegrown revolutionaries, sanctioning the active monitoring of some militant socialists, especially those members of the SDF who, like Harry Quelch (editor of *Justice* – the party’s official organ), were “beginning to ask themselves whether, being condemned to die, it would not be better to die fighting like men than to be choked to death like rats in a sewer.”⁴⁷⁷ Quelch had been placed under surveillance in the autumn of 1886 after information had reached Monro (it is not clear how) that “some of the men connected with the Socialist agitation and meetings were being instructed in military exercises [...] at the house of a man Quelch, who is well known as [a] Socialist orator.”⁴⁷⁸

As plainclothes detectives (operating from adjacent premises) were easily able to confirm, Quelch’s house was merely a meeting place for a Dad’s Army of ten eager idealists who were more interested in arguing over drill rules than in storming palaces.⁴⁷⁹ To Monro and Warren, however, this was no laughing matter. Articles in *Justice* now openly advertised drilling classes taking place in Clerkenwell and Battersea, and for the Assistant Commissioner this was enough to cement the notion that “this ‘drilling’ is extending [and] however contemptible the movement may be in its inception, it may give us trouble if it is allowed to extend.” The “movement,” Monro went on, “means mischief, and the police may justly be held responsible for not checking it.”⁴⁸⁰ The Home Office had a somewhat less pessimistic view, with Matthews opining that “marching [...] can hardly be called a ‘military’ movement when it is performed by

⁴⁷⁶ *Times*, 30 July 1886.

⁴⁷⁷ *Justice*, 2 October 1886.

⁴⁷⁸ Report by Monro, 21 September 1886, TNA HO 144/183/A45225.

⁴⁷⁹ Unsigned police report, 24 September 1886, TNA HO 144/183/A45225/2.

⁴⁸⁰ Monro to Warren, 4 October 1886, TNA HO 144/183/A45225/4.

unarmed men,”⁴⁸¹ and Lushington (the Permanent Secretary) quipping that “the drilling of these men [...] is as little likely to be dangerous as Kalisthenics [sic] at Gorton or elsewhere.” Yet even they agreed that “[drilling] can have no reasoning unless in contemplation of a violent uprising of the people taking place some day [and] however far off this day may be [...] this drilling [and] even the announcement of drilling keeps alive the feeling – the unwholesome feeling – of the possibility of violence.”⁴⁸² The fad for drilling fizzled out by the end of the year (arguably not because of “picketing” by Yard detectives, although Monro acknowledged the socialists “may have got wind that they were being looked after”⁴⁸³), but the surveillance continued given that Matthews now desired “observation to be kept to ascertain whether the drilling is resumed to any appreciable extent & if so to obtain the names of those who conduct it.”⁴⁸⁴

It was not resumed to any appreciable extent, but neither was the surveillance put an end to. As Detective Sergeant John Sweeney of Section B would later recall in his memoir, for authorities the 1887 Jubilee marked not only a time of worrying about Fenian “fireworks” but also a “time of great anxiety” in connection with an apparent resurgence in left-wing radicalism.⁴⁸⁵ Although taking a “very active & discreet part in enquiries” connected to the case of the Islington dynamitards at that time,⁴⁸⁶ Sweeney also had the occasion to observe the activities of London’s “restless” revolutionaries:

They held frequent meetings; there was quite a small boom in the circulation of revolutionary publications [...] All this meant that numerous alarming reports reached the Yard [and] extra vigilance was exercised everywhere. All known Anarchists, Nihilists,

⁴⁸¹ Note by Matthews, 12 October 1886, TNA HO 144/183/A45225/6.

⁴⁸² Memorandum by Lushington, 12 October 1886, TNA HO 144/183/A45225/6.

⁴⁸³ Monro to Warren, 19 October 1886, TNA HO 144/183/A45225.

⁴⁸⁴ Note by Lushington, 27 October 1886, TNA HO 144/183/A45225.

⁴⁸⁵ Sweeney, 70.

⁴⁸⁶ “Proposed Distribution of [reward] Amount [in the Harkins and Callan case],” March 1888, TNA HO 144/211/A48482.

and other revolutionaries [...] were kept under the closest observation [...] We knew the addresses of most of them, and the places where they worked, when they did any honest work, and we kept watch on those places; [...] But when the Jubilee rejoicings were over we breathed more freely.⁴⁸⁷

The claim that all known revolutionaries were being kept “under the closest observation” may contain more than a grain of retrospective self-justification, but in the wake of the demonstrations of October 1887 the political department at Scotland Yard was increasingly being used to watch and even infiltrate socialist organizations as the overlooked but telling case of Alfred Oldland suggests. Oldland, a casually employed handyman, petty thief and active member of the Peckham branch of the SDF, was arrested on 18 October for “riotous conduct” and assaulting two police constables “in the execution of their duty” during a demonstration held in Hyde Park earlier that day.⁴⁸⁸ There was nothing remarkable about this, but Oldland quickly became somewhat of a cause célèbre in socialist circles, and a fund was soon set up by Stewart Headlam and Annie Besant (both prominent SDF sympathizers) with the purpose of providing bail money for their imprisoned comrade. This in turn raised eyebrows at the Home Office: Hamilton Cuffe (assistant to the Director of Public Prosecutions) demanded to know exactly who the troublemaker was and “[how] came Mrs Annie Besant and the Revd gentleman to bail such a man” (the implication being that even by socialist standards, Oldland was a thoroughly disreputable individual).⁴⁸⁹

Luckily for Cuffe the detectives of the political department knew all about Oldland, as a revealing report submitted by Inspector Pope of Section B (and countersigned by Section D’s Chief Inspector Littlechild) shows. The “Socialist Oldland” was in the habit of changing

⁴⁸⁷ Sweeney, 71-2.

⁴⁸⁸ Report by Inspector J. Allison, 19 October 1887, TNA MEPO 2/182.

⁴⁸⁹ Cuffe to Monro, 27 October 1887, TNA MEPO 2/182.

addresses quite often and “is a painter by trade but his occupation is home fitting and handyman [...] and is an indifferent workman.” More crucially, Sergeant Walsh (also of Section B),

has known Oldland for past 10 months [sic] and has had conversation [sic] with him in which he [Oldland] has made certain admissions respecting his being a member and one of the principals of the Peckham branch of the Social Democratic Federation, and the [Sergeant] was present on Sunday 23rd inst at a meeting of this branch at Western Road, Peckham at which Oldland took the credit of originating the meetings of the unemployed and the manner in which he assaulted the Police for which he was arrested.⁴⁹⁰

Although this report tells us two important things – that Section B and D worked closely together, and that far from not being involved in “any very active surveillance of left-wing groups,”⁴⁹¹ the political department at Scotland Yard was in fact an integral part of the authorities’ strategy for dealing with such groups – it does not tell us the exact extent to which the political police was deployed against non-Fenian radicals at this stage. Certainly the active policing of the demonstrations of the unemployed was overwhelmingly left up to the uniformed branch of the Metropolitan Police – often to highly controversial results.

By mid-October Warren (who, despite his Radical past, was growing increasingly impatient with democratic politics) had decided that the strain placed by demonstrators on the Met’s resources had reached a critical point and on 17 October the Chief Commissioner’s Office released a proclamation (subsequently posted throughout the metropolis) banning all meetings in Trafalgar Square for the foreseeable future. It was strictly speaking an illegal manoeuvre and only a couple of days later Matthews intervened in order to put an end to the ban, pending a final verdict by the Law Office. This decision aggravated Warren considerably and on 25 October the

⁴⁹⁰ Report by Inspector John Pope, 28 October 1887, TNA MEPO 2/182.

⁴⁹¹ Porter, *Origins of the Vigilant State*, 93.

Commissioner wrote Matthews a long, impassioned memorandum describing what he regarded as an untenable situation. While the inhabitants and business-owners of the area were “rapidly becoming terrorised,” the “mob” seemed only further goaded by the authorities’ recent volte-face:

Up till Saturday the mob were all turned off and met in Hyde Park, but both today and yesterday they have proceeded in organized crowds headed by a red flag through the wealthy shop-keeping parts of London, and, though no overt act of violence was committed, spread terror among the inhabitants who in many instances closed their shutters [...] They [i.e. the demonstrators], in a very great part, consist of the veriest scum of the population, and [...] although these gatherings may fluctuate [...] we are approaching the 9th November when the Lord Mayor’s Show takes place about which there is a strong view often expressed among some of these people.⁴⁹²

Warren was now preparing for war and he was not going to be burdened by any more Whitehall pieties. Metropolitan constables (two thousand of whom were daily needed to control the crowds in Trafalgar Square⁴⁹³) were ordered to focus their entire energies on containing the “reign of terror” (even at the expense of enforcing moral order⁴⁹⁴), magistrates were instructed to “abstain from expressing an opinion upon the conduct of constables,”⁴⁹⁵ while the Office of Works was curtly informed that Trafalgar Square was once again to be made “unavailable for [all] public meetings.”⁴⁹⁶ Matthews was incensed; Warren, it seemed, did not “fully appreciate the limits to

⁴⁹² Warren to Matthews, 25 October 1887, TNA HO 144/204/A47976-1to20.

⁴⁹³ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁴ Surveillance of known brothels as well as arrests of suspected prostitutes were temporarily suspended by direct order. Matthews to Warren, 30 October 1887, TNA HO 144/208/A48043.

⁴⁹⁵ Matthews to Warren, 30 October 1887, TNA HO 144/208/A48043. Warren had previously complained that magistrates were in the habit of making biased and detrimental remarks about the Force in court. Police Orders, July 19, 1887, TNA HO 144/208/A48000M.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid.

[his] authority as Commissioner of Police, or [his] relations to the Home Office.”⁴⁹⁷ The Commissioner doubled down by pointing out that Matthews had given his verbal consent to re-closing the Square, insisting, at the same time, that “I am in no way whatever under the direction of the Home Office; in some matters I am directly under the authority of the Secretary of State; in other matters I have my duties and responsibilities defined by Act of Parliament.”⁴⁹⁸

Warren *was* in fact “in the same relation to the Secretary of State as the Head of any other Home Office department,” Matthews lamely retorted,⁴⁹⁹ but by now the shutdown of the Square was a fait accompli. On 7 November, two days before the Lord Mayor’s Day, Warren received a missive from the Home Office instructing him that “a public notice may be issued warning the public that in consequence of the disorderly scenes [...] in Trafalgar Square and of the danger to the peace of the Metropolis from meetings held there, the Commissioner [...] gives notice that until further intimation no public meeting [...] will [...] be permitted [...] in [the] Square.”⁵⁰⁰

Thanks in part to the grim London weather, 9 November saw little unrest,⁵⁰¹ but the new ban on meetings in the Square (which was not to be lifted until 1892) predictably enraged socialist and anarchist firebrands as well as sections of Liberal opinion. The *Pall Mall Gazette* as always led the charge with a series of combative editorials (with titles such as “Sir Charles Warren: Usurper”⁵⁰²) in which W. T. Stead declared that “we have reached a crisis in the political history of the metropolis when something must be done and that, at once, to defend the legal liberties of the Londoner from the insolent usurpations of Scotland-yard.”⁵⁰³ Added to the indignation occasioned by Warren’s heavy-handed tactics was that elicited by the arrest of the

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁸ Warren to Matthews, 1 November 1887, TNA HO 144/208/A48043.

⁴⁹⁹ Matthews to Warren, 3 November 1887, TNA HO 144/208/A48043.

⁵⁰⁰ Lushington to Warren, 7 November 1887, TNA HO MEPO 2/182.

⁵⁰¹ *Birmingham Daily Post*, 10 November 1887.

⁵⁰² *Pall Mall Gazette*, 9 November 1887.

⁵⁰³ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 10 November 1887.

Nationalist MP William O'Brien (incidentally the same O'Brien mentioned by General Millen in John Moroney's letter of introduction) for inciting resistance to Balfour's Crime Act – an arrest which had already sparked protests at Mitchelstown, County Cork, to tragic results.⁵⁰⁴ Despite a long Liberal record of support for Coercion in Ireland, all Liberal converts to Home Rule were now up in arms about the "Mitchelstown Peterloo" – the first in what seemed like a possible series of "occurrences resembling those of our anti-reform days."⁵⁰⁵

However tenuous the link between Ireland and reform agitation may have been, it helped cement the notion that the police constables firing on civilians in Cork were really no different than those holding Trafalgar Square against all comers, and on 11 November the Metropolitan Radical Association announced its intention to organize a massive demonstration in Hyde Park on Sunday the 13th (with the knowledge that several contingents of demonstrators would have to pass through Trafalgar Square). The response was immediate and the event was endorsed by virtually all left-wing papers, from the radical *Reynolds's Newspaper* to the anarchist *Freedom*. A final attempt to broker a peace deal with the Home Office fell through on 12 November when a deputation of the demonstrators, led by prominent Liberals like Charles Russell and Cunninghame Graham, was turned away by the Home Secretary (who then re-affirmed the proclamation banning all public meetings in Trafalgar Square).⁵⁰⁶

As expected, Warren had spared no effort in preparing for the upcoming confrontation and by the following morning 1,500 Metropolitan constables and several hundred troops were already amassed in Trafalgar Square and the surrounding areas. A *Pall Mall Gazette* journalist described the scene in terms that seemed to conjure up some distant colonial unrest:

⁵⁰⁴ On 9 September 1887, O'Brien was ordered to appear before a magistrate in Mitchelstown and a supportive crowd shortly assembled around the heavily policed courthouse. Tensions flared up and the police ended up firing into the crowd, killing three and wounding several others.

⁵⁰⁵ *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 10 September 1887.

⁵⁰⁶ *Glasgow Herald*, 19 November 1887.

There were 100 men in single file along the parapet on each side of the Square, outside and inside 120 in double file; at the head of each of the steps leading into the Square stood 100 constables in fours, while 50 more covered the corners at each end, standing two deep. In front the face of the Square was held by fully 750 men standing four deep. The mounted police patrolled all sides of the Square in couples. Altogether there were 1,500 policemen in the Square; 2,500 were employed in breaking up processions and in reserve; 300 of the Grenadiers were behind the National Gallery until four, when they were brought out with fixed bayonets to line the parapet in front of the National Gallery. The First Life Guards were called out at four. Altogether Sir Charles Warren kept the Square clear for the Queen by employing 4,000 constables, 300 mounted constables, 300 Grenadiers, and 300 Life Guards. Altogether 5,000 men were on duty from twelve to six, for no other purpose than [...] trampling roughshod through the crowds.⁵⁰⁷

The trampling commenced at around twenty past three and lasted for nearly two hours, during which time successive baton charges by mounted and on-foot officers met with one concerted effort to force the Square, several attempts to resist the clearing effort, and a great deal of hooting and hissing. By 6:30, as the Life Guards began to move – “like a machine” – one final time through the Square, making sure all roadways were clear, the realization that Warren had triumphed over the more than forty thousand demonstrators became undeniable. This archetypal “Bloody Sunday” (as the *Pall Mall Gazette* took to calling it) had produced more than two hundred wounded on the protesters’ side (two of whom would subsequently die of their injuries) and nearly eighty on the police side.⁵⁰⁸ The following day W. T. Stead wrote to Gladstone complaining about the police’s brutality – “a brutality which I have never before seen in the

⁵⁰⁷ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 14 November 1887.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*; Richter, 145-7.

whole of my life”⁵⁰⁹ – but the GOM was now at pains to distance “the Irish question [...] [from] this question of Trafalgar Square meetings in all its phases;” Home Rule, he argued, would “suffer disastrous prejudice were it to be associated in any manner with those who make appeals with Metropolitan disorder.”⁵¹⁰ As a consequence the majority of the Liberal press (with the obvious exception of the *Pall Mall Gazette*) did not go out of its way in condemning police actions; Warren, the *Daily News* pointed out, had indeed exceeded his jurisdiction, and while the protesters in the Square had only tried to assert “what they thought their rights, [...] we cannot agree either with their principle or their method of action.”⁵¹¹

Deprived of mainstream political legitimacy (the Conservative press was unreservedly for law and order⁵¹²) the protesters’ cause gradually began to lose momentum and consequently Warren’s legitimacy was never really put into doubt by the public. Indeed less than a week after Bloody Sunday, the Commissioner’s office was complaining that “Sir Charles Warren has received so many letters conveying sympathy with the Police Force [...] that he is quite unable to reply to them individually.”⁵¹³ Yet, as the *Pall Mall Gazette* would later note, not without some justice, “[it] may be only a minority that distrusts the police and remembers Trafalgar-square, but it is a very blatant minority, which makes its existence felt on every beat throughout London.”⁵¹⁴

10 February – 17 August 1888: Monro vs. Warren

This was also a good time for members of the political department at Scotland Yard whose contribution in the case of the Islington dynamitards was fully recognized in early 1888.

As Monro explained in a memo to Warren (who had previously only read about the case in

⁵⁰⁹ Stead to Gladstone, 14 November 1887, quoted in Richter, 148.

⁵¹⁰ Gladstone to the Secretary of the Bermondsey Gladstone Club, 14 November 1887; Gladstone Papers, British Museum, Additional Manuscripts, folio 102, both quoted in Richter, 150.

⁵¹¹ *Daily News*, 14 November 1887.

⁵¹² *Pall Mall Gazette*, 14 November 1887.

⁵¹³ Unsigned note, 18 November 1887, TNA MEPO 2/182.

⁵¹⁴ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 9 October 1888.

newspapers) the operation of the previous summer had “entailed upon myself and all the officers under me, constant watching for many months, and the way in which all the officers employed have worked and assisted me in carrying out orders [...] especially [...] Chief Inspector Littlechild, Insp[ect]ors Melville & Quinn & Serg[ean]t McIntyre [...] is beyond all praise.”⁵¹⁵ The financial rewards granted (totaling £250) were modest compared to those dispensed in the similar Gallagher case of five years before, but they were nonetheless substantial and liberally dispersed; some Home Office mandarins complained that when police officers were being rewarded “for extra clerical work, I confess I think the system of rewards is being carried too far,”⁵¹⁶ while others wryly noted that “Callan and Harkins were traced down by a department of the Metr[opolitan] Police especially constituted to watch would be dynamiters and it is to be presumed that all the officers whom it is proposed to reward specially were appointed for this very purpose.”⁵¹⁷

Warren wholeheartedly endorsed the reward scheme but despite this apparent vote of confidence in Monro, the Chief Commissioner’s relationship with his Assistant was now beginning to break down completely. As early as 11 November the previous year Monro had begun making an impassioned case “for having an Assistant Chief Constable to aid in performing the work of the CID and Head Quarters [since] neither Mr. Williamson nor I ever had a moments [sic] leisure, and when either he or I go away even for a few hours, the work can only be done by the officers left at a sacrifice of time and labour.”⁵¹⁸ At the time the request had been politely ignored but after Williamson’s health began rapidly deteriorating in January 1888

⁵¹⁵ Monro to Warren, 10 February 1888.

⁵¹⁶ Note by Godfrey Lushington, 12 April 1888, TNA HO 144/211/A48482.

⁵¹⁷ Note by H. B. Simpson, 1 March 1888, TNA HO 144/211/A48482.

⁵¹⁸ Memorandum by Monro, 11 November 1887, TNA HO 144/190/A46472B.

(he was eventually diagnosed with “debility and fainting attacks”⁵¹⁹) Monro began reiterating his pleas more forcefully.⁵²⁰

The Chief Commissioner begrudgingly consented to the idea of appointing an Assistant Chief Constable but made it clear that he would make it as hard as possible for Monro to get exactly what he wanted. Ostensibly this was because Warren did not think the addition fully necessary, but the real reason, as he himself came close to admitting, was spite: “it [is] quite out of place,” the Commissioner declared in a letter to Matthews, “to make the Police Force suffer for the sake of the Irish Branch wh[ich] is really not part of the Police Force [and] I altogether [object] to Mr. Monro’s opinion being taken before mine [and] [...] if [anyone is] to leave 22 Whitehall Place [i.e. the Met headquarters] it should be those who [are] in the basement viz. the Irish Branch.”⁵²¹

An illustration of just how much Warren resented Monro’s duties as Secret Agent (the official, if slightly pompous, title assumed by the Assistant Commissioner in his capacity as head of the political department) is provided by the exchange of letters between them following Monro’s request for help in early February 1888. Characterized by passive aggression, conceit, and occasionally a certain degree of ridiculousness, this exchange also perfectly encapsulates the dysfunction which evidently still plagued the top of the Metropolitan Police hierarchy even after the changes brought about by the departure of Edward Jenkinson. It revolved, on the one hand, around Warren’s continued attempts to dismiss Monro’s “secret work” as inimical to the well-functioning of the force, and, on the other, the Secret Agent’s protestations to the contrary. Its highlight is the series of missives dealing with Monro’s own proposal for an Assistant Chief Constable and Warren’s eventual refusal to consider it.

⁵¹⁹ Note by Dr. Bond, 7 February 1888, TNA HO 144/190/A46472B.

⁵²⁰ Monro to Warren, 7 February 1888, TNA HO 144/190/A46472B.

⁵²¹ Warren to Evelyn Ruggles-Brise (Private Secretary to the Home Secretary), 16 May 1888, TNA MEPO 1/48.

The Chief Commissioner had suggested a certain, “very highly spoken of,” Mr. Fitzgerald for the job, but Monro was already set on his own candidate: Melville Macnaghten – an Anglo-Indian Old Etonian ex-planter whom he had befriended during his tenure as Inspector General of Police in Bengal. Macnaghten was in many ways the ideal Victorian placeman; supremely well-bred (his father had been chairman of the East India Company while his cousin, Baron Macnaghten, was a prominent Tory and Law Lord), “well-educated” but not university-trained, and above all, a gentleman “of the highest character” who knew how to deal with “a most turbulent set of natives.”⁵²² Warren objected to Macnaghten’s lack of “official, military or Police experience,” but agreed that he “may be appointed on probation for a period of 6 months,” so long as he was not going to interfere with “the Criminal Investigation work in [Metropolitan] Divisions”⁵²³ or draw a stipend from Police funds for the use of a horse.⁵²⁴

Matthews agreed⁵²⁵ and by late March Macnaghten had already been informed by Monro that the job was his. That might have been the end of it if not for a colourful little story now doing the rounds on the London (gentlemen’s) club scene. Macnaghten, it seemed, was not quite the tough-minded sahib that his friends had made him out to be; as Warren explained to the Home Secretary, “I have to state that after making further enquiry [...] I have just ascertained that Mr. Macnaghten was the subject of considerable excitement in India some years ago and it caused a good deal of feeling between Liberals and Conservatives not only in Calcutta but also in England.” The excitement referred to an incident in 1881 during which Macnaghten (as manager of his father’s sugar plantation) had been attacked and beaten by workers in his employ for reasons not entirely known. All the same, Warren argued,

⁵²² Monro to Warren, 19 March 1888, TNA HO 144/190/A46472B.

⁵²³ Memorandum by Charles Warren, 27 March 1888, TNA HO 144/190/A46472B.

⁵²⁴ Warren to Monro, 26 March 1888, TNA HO 144/190/A46472B.

⁵²⁵ Lushington to Warren, 22 March 1888, TNA HO 144/190/A46472B.

[without] going into the question as to whether Mr. Macnaghten did anything or not to irritate the natives into beating him, I have merely to point out that such action on the part of Hindoos in Lower Bengal is said to be most exceptional; and, without desiring to offer any opinion on the merits of the case, I have to state that I should not have recommended Mr. Macnaghten's appointment had I known of this occurrence [...] [and] I think [...] it is going very far to select a man who has no qualifications of any kind at the present time [and who] is the one man in India who has been beaten by Hindoos.⁵²⁶

Monro pleaded that “there was no blame attached to Macnaghten in any way” and that he was simply “the victim of an agrarian outrage [...] and the object of animosity on the part of an incipient ‘Land League’ in the [area],”⁵²⁷ but it was no use. Warren had already withdrawn his recommendation and it was now up to the Assistant Commissioner to communicate the embarrassing about-face (which was now public knowledge⁵²⁸) to his friend. No other candidates would be considered; Monro would have to make do with his ailing Chief Constable if he did not wish to give up “his duties as Secret Agent.”⁵²⁹

Tensions only worsened after Matthews called Monro to testify before a select committee into the admittance of strangers to the House of Commons (prompted by the circumstances in which the Islington dynamitards had been able to easily gain access to the premises and meet with a member of the House). Although the Assistant Commissioner had been summoned in his capacity as “the only man who had personal knowledge of the facts” of the case,⁵³⁰ a *Times* account of the committee hearings mistakenly reported that Monro was in charge of security at

⁵²⁶ Warren to Matthews, 31 March & 11 April 1888, TNA HO 144/190/A46472B.

⁵²⁷ Monro to Warren, 31 March 1888, TNA HO 144/190/A46472B.

⁵²⁸ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 9 October 1888.

⁵²⁹ Warren to Matthews, 7 May 1888, TNA HO 144/190/A46472B.

⁵³⁰ Note by Edward Leigh Pemberton (Legal Assistant Under-Secretary at the Home Office), 23 April 1888, TNA HO 144/212/A48606/3.

the Palace of Westminster. Convinced that the Assistant Commissioner and the Home Office were now actively conspiring to subvert his authority, Warren took this as a pretext to lash out with another impetuous denunciation:

I have to point out that Mr Monro is not in charge of the Police at the Palace of Westminster [...] [and] that although the Secretary of State may over-rule the Commissioner's opinion upon matters connected with the efficiency and discipline of the Police Force it does not appear that [...] he can take away from the Commissioner the responsibility which rests upon him by statute and [...] I conceive that the Commissioner, therefore is bound to bring to the notice of the Secretary of State [...] [that] the junction of the two functions of Secret Agent and Assistant Commissioner was only [...] a temporary arrangement to tide over an existing difficulty; [...] [the] Secret Agent as a matter of his existence must be an alarmist, his very being depends upon that [...] [and] moreover it is eating into the heart of the discipline of the Police Force having a system under which the Assistant Commissioner can go to the Secretary of State direct without reference to the Commissioner.⁵³¹

Matthews insisted that he was “quite satisfied with the way in which Mr. Monro discharges the duties of A[ssistant] C[ommissioner] C.I.D., and those of Secret Agent,”⁵³² and in this he was joined by the Home Office mandarins who had never in any case cared much for the Commissioner's overbearing manner. Lushington for example had complained of Warren's refusal to “recognize his subordination to the H.O.”⁵³³ as early as April 1887, while Evelyn Ruggles-Brise (private secretary to Matthews), Charles Murdoch (senior clerk) and Edward

⁵³¹ Warren to Matthews, 21 April 1888, TNA HO 144/212/A48606/3.

⁵³² Home Office to Warren, 2 April 1888, TNA MEPO 4/487.

⁵³³ Memorandum by Lushington, 18 April 1887, TNA HO 144/208/A48043.

Leigh Pemberton (Legal Assistant Under-Secretary) were all convinced that the Commissioner was badly blowing things out of proportion.⁵³⁴

Despite this apparent support, Monro was very much on his own in other matters. A case in point is provided by the thorny issue of arrest warrant procedure. On the morning of 10 February 1888, DS McIntyre of the Irish Branch had been despatched to the House of Commons with orders to arrest James Gilhooly (Nationalist MP for West Cork) for incitement to violence under the terms of the new (Irish) Crimes Act. Thanks to an imprecise description of the suspect, McIntyre had ended up arresting a different Irish MP (Patrick O'Brien), and, to make matters worse, had proved unable to produce the arrest warrant when asked to.⁵³⁵ Matthews initially denied that there had been any breach of privilege, insisting that the police had made an honest mistake, but the case of mistaken identity soon provoked an uproar in the House, with Irish and Liberal members insisting that the matter needed to be referred to a Committee of Privileges. Parnell declared that,

[...] if it had been an English Member who had been arrested, not only would the question have been treated as one of breach of Privilege, but the Government would have taken care, and the Detective Department would have taken care, to send a member of the Force who at least knew the hon. Member who was to be arrested. It is because there is an opinion abroad that Irish Members are to be treated like vermin that the Government would not take the trouble to see that the Irish Member to be arrested is the right man.⁵³⁶

He was soon joined by Gladstone himself who decried “this very grave matter of [the arrest of] a Member of this House on his way to or from the performance of his duty [...] by an officer of

⁵³⁴ Notes by Charles Murdoch and E. L. Pemberton, 23 April 1888, TNA HO 144/212/A48606/3; Begg and Skinner, *The Scotland Yard Files*, 117.

⁵³⁵ HC Deb, 13 February 1888, vol. 322, col. 264.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, col. 294.

police [who] proceeded without being in possession of the warrant.”⁵³⁷ The matter was not ultimately referred to a Committee of Privileges (although Matthews was later forced to issue a public apology to O’Brien) but neither was it referred to any other decision-making body or official.

Monro feared this legal uncertainty might be used against the police by high-ranking Radicals who were unfriendly to Scotland Yard (such as Charles Russell, “who was attorney General and may be so again”⁵³⁸) in order to push for a change in the law that would mandate police officers be in possession of arrest warrants before effecting any arrest – a situation in which “police action will be paralysed.”⁵³⁹ In this instance, however, it seems the Home Office entirely agreed with Warren that nothing needed to change; there was no “ruling [...] that the warrant must be in the possession of the officer arresting,”⁵⁴⁰ and save for “serious case[s] involving political considerations [...] Police are to act without warrant if they know [one] has been issued.”⁵⁴¹ As late as March 1890 Monro would continue to press the Home Secretary for legislative steps towards relieving “police of the responsibility of acting in violation of the law”⁵⁴² while effecting an arrest, but to no result. As Jenkinson had once found out for himself, the will to enact change – any change – was simply not there.

Owing to this institutional deadlock, as well as Warren's continued attacks on him,⁵⁴³ Monro began to feel his life had become “intolerable” by the summer of 1888.⁵⁴⁴ As a lengthy

⁵³⁷ Ibid., col. 286.

⁵³⁸ Monro, quoted in Home Office memorandum, 28 March 1891, TNA MEPO 2/186.

⁵³⁹ Monro, quoted in Ibid.

⁵⁴⁰ Warren, quoted in Ibid.

⁵⁴¹ Home Office memorandum, 28 March 1891, TNA MEPO 2/186.

⁵⁴² Monro, quoted in Ibid.

⁵⁴³ Warren to Ruggles-Brise, 16 May 1888, TNA MEPO 1/48; Matthews to Warren, April (?) 1888, TNA MEPO 4/487.

⁵⁴⁴ Monro, quoted in Martin Howells and Keith Skinner, *The Ripper Legacy: The Life and Death of Jack the Ripper* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1991), 93. The authors are here quoting from Monro’s unpublished memoir (written in 1903 as a memento for his children), which they discovered while researching the aforementioned book.

and emotional memorandum received by the Home Secretary in early June sought to explain, the embattled Assistant Commissioner had left “a high appointment in Her Majesty’s Bengal Civil Service” in order to take up “the specific duties of Head of the [CID]” and “to perform [them] with more effect than my predecessor.” He was no longer going to put up with Warren’s “aspersions on my personal character,” or his dangerous ideas which, if unchallenged, would soon restore “the despatch of public business which was condemned by the Commission [of 1878] and the defects of which led to the creation of the [CID] under the separate charge of a responsible officer.” Given the “extreme urgency” of the matter “as affecting the public interests [sic],” a “competent Committee” would have to look into the Commissioner’s actions “with the least possible delay.”⁵⁴⁵

Not only was there no committee, Warren’s powers only seemed to be increasing. On 17 August the Assistant Commissioner took the only step which he felt he had left and relinquished his duties as head of the CID. Among the main reasons stated in his official letter of resignation were the “insanitary” conditions of the CID basement office, the “status of A. C. C.I.D.” in relation to the Commissioner, the rules “that C.I.D. men should not be transferred on advancement” or promoted unless they served in uniform, and the Macnaghten incident.⁵⁴⁶ The resignation was immediately accepted but by some mysterious agreement (details of which do not seem to have survived in the public record) Matthews “made arrangements to enable [him] to have the benefit of Mr. Munro’s [sic] advice as to crime where it may seem desirable.”⁵⁴⁷ Exactly what this entailed is unclear but a couple of Home Office notes from later in the year briefly refer to Monro doing “provincial work” as an unofficial Section D inspector without,

⁵⁴⁵ Memorandum by Monro, 11 June 1888, TNA HO 144/190/A46472B.

⁵⁴⁶ Memorandum by Matthews, 17 August 1888, TNA HO 144/190/A46472C.

⁵⁴⁷ Matthews, speech in the House of Commons, quoted in *The Standard*, 7 November 1888.

however, going into any detail.⁵⁴⁸ Monro himself would later note in his unpublished memoir only that after his resignation as Assistant Commissioner, Matthews “retained me as Chief of the Secret Department,”⁵⁴⁹ without, again, going into specifics (it is, incidentally, telling that Anderson, as the new Assistant Commissioner, was not entrusted with this responsibility).

The exact nature of Monro’s new “secret work” may have been a mystery as far as the public was concerned, but the changes at Scotland Yard were anything but. Thus, on 3 September the Press Association announced that Robert Anderson was now the new Assistant Commissioner for Crime and that Monro had just “been appointed to an important post at the Home Office [and there] is reason to believe that [his] work will be of a character similar to that formerly performed by Mr. Jenkinson.”⁵⁵⁰ A month later, the *Pall Mall Gazette* took it a step further by publishing a lengthy and insightful editorial on the conflict between Monro and Warren and the state of the Metropolitan Police which, in its intimate knowledge of the facts (likely the result of another inside track into Scotland Yard), soon attracted the attention of the Home Office.⁵⁵¹ By that point, however, Warren had bigger things to worry about than his image in the Liberal press.

8 November 1888 – 7 July 1890: Scandal averted

Despite his earlier dismissal of Monro’s concerns regarding the legal limits of police action, the Chief Commissioner was now himself in a legal conundrum. As he explained to Ruggles-Brise on 4 October,

⁵⁴⁸ Note by GHT (?), 24 November 1888, TNA HO 144/222/A49500M; Murdoch to Lushington, 7 November 1888, TNA HO 144/189/A46281.

⁵⁴⁹ Monro, quoted in Howells and Skinner, 94.

⁵⁵⁰ *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 4 September 1888.

⁵⁵¹ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 9 October 1888. An excerpt of the article is included in the file dealing with the conflict between Monro and Warren in early 1888 (TNA HO 144/190/A46472B).

I am quite prepared to take the responsibility of adopting the most drastic or arbitrary measures that the S[ecretary] of S[tate] can name wh[ich] w[oul]d further the securing of the murderer however illegal they may be, provided Hm. Govt will support me. But I must observe that the S of S cannot authorise me to do an illegal action, & that the full responsibility will always rest with me & the P.C.s for anything done. All I want to ensure is that the Govt will indemnify us for our action wh[ich] must necessarily be adopted to the circ[umstance]s of the case.

Three weeks ago I do not think the public would have acquiesced in any illegal action but now I think they would welcome anything which shows activity [and] enterprise. Of course the danger of taking such a course as that proposed [...] is that if we did not find the murderer our action would be condemned & there is the danger that an illegal act of such a character might bond the Social Democrats together to resist the Police & it might be then be said to have caused a serious riot. I think I may say without hesitation that those houses could not be searched illegally without violent resistance & bloodshed & the certainty of one or more Police officers being killed; the question is whether it is worth while losing the lives of several of the community & risking serious riot in order to search for one murderer whose whereabouts is not known.

We have in times past done something on a very small scale but then we had certain information that a person was concealed in a house. In this matter I have not only myself to think of but the lives & position of 12000 men, any one of whom might be hanged if a death occurred in entering a house illegally.⁵⁵²

What specific past case(s) Warren was referring to we do not know, but all the same this letter tells us several important things: first, that illegal house searches had been performed by

⁵⁵² Warren to Ruggles-Brise, 4 October 1888, TNA MEPO 1/48.

Metropolitan Police officers in the past; second, that Warren still feared “the mob” and its socialist instigators as well as the opinions of “the public;” third, that Warren’s relationship with the Home Secretary had not necessarily improved following Monro’s departure; and fourth – and most obviously – that “the murderer” (known to the public only by a macabre letter signed “Jack the Ripper,” received by the Central News Agency on 27 September) was increasingly making a mockery of the police’s ability to tackle violent crime in London.

The Whitechapel murders were indeed universally regarded as the bane of the Metropolitan Police leadership (of which Matthews and Warren were the two most visible representatives), and when Warren finally resigned on 8 November 1888 (hours before the Ripper slew his fifth and final victim), the public sigh of relief stood in sharp contrast to the flow of support received by the Commissioner in the aftermath of Bloody Sunday. One provincial newspaper declared that “military organisation is a good thing for the police when they are called upon to guard Trafalgar-square or charge a mob; but the wisdom [...] of the serpent is the chief requisite in those who have to detect crime. The Whitechapel assassin perpetrates his atrocities on a pavement still echoing to the heavy tramp of the iron-shod constable.”⁵⁵³

More so than Jack the Ripper however, it was Warren’s irreconcilable conflict with the Home Office that ultimately brought about his downfall. Not content with airing his grievances in internal memoranda, the Commissioner had taken the bold step of publishing them in an article written for the November issue of *Murray’s Magazine*. It was highly polemical and, given the time of publication, unduly critical of crime detection and fixated with the dangers of “the mob.” The following excerpts embody the spirit of the entire piece:

The genius of the English race does not lend itself to elaborate detective operations similar to those said to be practised on the Continent. The free institutions of this country

⁵⁵³ *Leicester Chronicle and the Leicestershire Mercury*, 17 November 1888.

are happily quite against any natural training of the youthful mind towards real detective work [...] The system in vogue on the Continent has led to a different form of thought; there is a general system of Government espionage which stamps the mind of the people with mutual distrust, and which is reflected in the schools and institutions [...] Here the constable in cases of felony has scarcely more power than any other citizen – across the Channel the police are masters of the situation [and] the public give way before them [...] It is to be deplored that successive Governments have not had the courage to make a stand against the more noisy section of the people representing a small minority, and have given way before tumultuous proceedings which have exercised a terrorism over peaceful and law-abiding citizens, and it is still more to be regretted that ex-Ministers, while in opposition have not hesitated to embarrass those in power by smiling on the insurgent mob.⁵⁵⁴

The inappropriateness of these lines caused a sensation in Whitehall. Lushington reiterated his claim that “the Commissioner is and has long been out of hand [and] in a state of insubordination.”⁵⁵⁵ Matthews agreed, and under the pretext of an 1879 rule which prevented Metropolitan Police officers from publishing material that “may lead to embarrassment [...] unless the sanction of the Secretary of State has been previously obtained,”⁵⁵⁶ he publicly chided the Commissioner in the House of Commons.⁵⁵⁷ Warren “entirely decline[d] to accept these instructions with regard to the Commissioner of Police,” and resigned the same day.⁵⁵⁸

⁵⁵⁴ Charles Warren, “The Police of the Metropolis,” *Murray's Magazine*, November (1888): 578, 587.

⁵⁵⁵ Memorandum by Lushington, 7 November 1888, TNA HO 144/208/A48043.

⁵⁵⁶ “Home Office Minute,” 27 May 1879, TNA HO 144/208/A48043.

⁵⁵⁷ *Times*, 9 November 1888; *Pall Mall Gazette*, 9 November 1888.

⁵⁵⁸ Warren to Matthews, 8 November 1888, TNA HO 144/208/A48043.

Monro's "full vindication" had finally come,⁵⁵⁹ and he was now able to come back in from the cold – as Chief Commissioner no less. He also got to keep his "post of Chief of the Secret Department," although he later claimed to have asked "to be relieved of [such] duties, and [to have] declined to take any salary for performing them."⁵⁶⁰ Whatever his true feelings at the time, Monro certainly still regarded Irish republicanism as a threat to British security, noting, shortly after his return, that "there is certainly always more or less danger from Fenians."⁵⁶¹ Fenian-made "infernal machines" may still have been relatively easy to find in Ireland,⁵⁶² but the rise of Gladstonian Home Rule and its alliance with Parnellism, as well as the ever increasing fractionalization of the American "dynamite party,"⁵⁶³ meant that organised Fenianism was by now a thing of the past in Britain. Political debates on the Irish Question however had never been more heated.

On 18 April 1887 Robert Anderson's muckraking series of articles for *The Times* on "Parnellism and crime"⁵⁶⁴ had reached its infamous apogee through the facsimile reproduction of a letter, purportedly from Parnell, which appeared to excuse the Phoenix Park murders of five years prior. It read:

Dear Sir,

I am not surprised at your friend's anger but he and you should know that to denounce the murders was the only course open to us. To do that promptly was plainly ~~the only~~

⁵⁵⁹ Monro, quoted in Howells and Skinner, 94.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁶¹ Monro to Lushington, 10 January 1889, TNA MEPO 1/48. It is also worth noting that in December 1888 no fewer than 253 police officers were still "specially employed [in London] for the inside and outside protection of Public Buildings and the residences of H. M. Ministers." TNA HO 144/222/A49500M/7.

⁵⁶² One such device was found unexploded in a "house from which an eviction was about to be carried out" in Derygoolan, County Galway on November 18, 1889; as Colonel Majendie observed in an official report prepared for the Home Office, the bomb bore "a strong family likeness" to those used in the British dynamite campaign of 1883-85. Report by Colonel Vivian Majendie, 25 November 1889, TNA HO 144/230/A51038.

⁵⁶³ For more on the reasons behind the decline of Fenianism in America during the later 1880s see Gantt, *Irish Terrorism in the Atlantic Community, 1865-1922*, 184-6.

⁵⁶⁴ Anderson only publicly revealed his authorship of the articles in 1910.

~~ours~~ [sic] our best policy. But you can tell him and all others that though I regret the accident of Lord F Cavendish's death I cannot refuse to admit that Burke got no more than his deserts. You are at liberty to show him this, and others whom you can trust also, but let not my address be known. He can write to House of Commons.

Yours very truly,

Chas S Parnell

Although the Irish leader had initially taken the news of the publication with amusement rather than rage, the fact that the letter was a blatant forgery, as well as pressure from within his party, had forced him to denounce *The Times'* accusations in the House of Commons as "an audacious and unblushing fabrication."⁵⁶⁵ Opposition members accepted this as true (with Gladstone playing a particularly prominent role in defending Parnell's innocence), but on Government benches there was disbelief. If true, the letter promised to utterly shatter Home Rule for the foreseeable future.

Parnell had chosen not to sue, but a libel action brought against *The Times* by another (former) Nationalist MP, which finally came to court in July 1888, gave the newspaper's representatives a chance to repeat, and enrich (by means of yet another embarrassing letter), the allegations against Parnell. The Irish leader now demanded the matter be put before a select committee of the Commons, but for the Salisbury Government this was an opportunity to go on the attack. Instead of a select committee, a Special Commission of three judges was formed principally to investigate not the authenticity of the *Times* letters, but the links between Parnellism and (Fenian) crime. The highlight of the Commission's dramatic proceedings (which

⁵⁶⁵ F. S. L. Lyons, *Charles Stewart Parnell* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 388.

took place between September 1888 and November 1889)⁵⁶⁶ came shortly after, in February 1889, when the true author of the “Parnell letters” was finally revealed. His name was Richard Pigott, a disgruntled ex-Fenian and corrupt journalist who had forged and sold the letters (as genuine) to *The Times* for more than £1,700. Although insisting on his innocence during his questioning before the Commission, Pigott soon lost his nerve and admitted his guilt in a private meeting with Henry Labouchere (the Radical MP and ally of Parnell). After this, the *Times*’ case rapidly disintegrated and Parnell was able (albeit temporarily⁵⁶⁷) to emerge with his reputation unscathed.

The Parnell Commission remains a relatively minor episode in British political history but its importance in the history of the British political police can hardly be overstated. This is because it demonstrates, more than any other event of the 1880s, the extent to which the British government used, or at the very least colluded with, the Scotland Yard’s political department in order to advance its own political goals. It has already been noted that the author of the articles on “Parnellism and crime” was none other than Robert Anderson (at the time head of the Secret Service bureau at the Home Office). What must also be noted is that Anderson, by his own admission, had all along acted with the support of his friend (and then Assistant Commissioner) James Monro:

[...] as Mr. Monro was then responsible for the conduct of secret service work, I conferred with him before taking action, and we decided to use ‘The Times’ in the public

⁵⁶⁶ See John MacDonald, *Diary of the Parnell Commission: Revised from “The Daily News”* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1890).

⁵⁶⁷ In late 1889 the open secret of Parnell’s romantic relationship with Kitty O’Shea, the wife of his former ally, became public knowledge, when Captain O’Shea filed for divorce (naming Parnell as co-respondent). Over the course of the following year Parnell (now suffering from a pernicious type of kidney disease) saw his support within the National and Liberal Parties rapidly fade (having already been censured by the Catholic Church), and died in October 1891, less than a year after his triumph over *The Times*.

interest. ‘Spread the light’ was a favourite aphorism of the conspirators, and with excellent effect I enabled ‘The Times’ to ‘spread the light at that important juncture.’⁵⁶⁸

Although Anderson then went on to state that the Government had “refused to render any assistance to ‘The Times’ in its chivalrous crusade,”⁵⁶⁹ the facts of the case suggest that the Government had in fact attempted to throw everything it had at the embattled leader of the Irish Party. A parade of aggrieved landlords, members of the Irish constabulary and obscure informers (including Patrick Delaney, a onetime Invincible) was summoned before the Commission in the hopes of conjuring up a tangible link between Parnellism and Fenian outrage. The manner in which authorities wasted neither effort nor funds in trying to secure former Fenians as witnesses for *The Times* suggests that the forces behind the prosecution extended far beyond Scotland Yard and Printing House Square. P. J. Sheridan, one of the Invincibles involved in the Phoenix Park conspiracy who had managed to escape to America, was supposedly offered the staggering amount of £20,000 to testify against Parnell,⁵⁷⁰ but he eventually refused to cooperate. Thomas Clarke (a.k.a. Henry Wilson), one of the members of the Gallagher gang who was then languishing in Chatham Prison for his involvement in the 1883 dynamite conspiracy, was similarly approached by DCI Littlechild of the Special Branch. As Clarke (who, like Sheridan, decided to turn down the deal) later recalled in his memoir,

I was marched away and ushered into a cosy little room, where I found Mr. Littlechild sitting at a table in front of the fire [...] With a considerable lot of hem-ing and ha-ing Littlechild [...] [began saying] that there has been a Special Commission appointed by the

⁵⁶⁸ Robert Anderson, “The Lighter Side of My Official Life,” in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, Vol. CLXXXVII, January-June 1910 (New York: The Leonard Scott Publication Co., 1910), 364. This serialized version of Anderson’s memoir, published in 1910 by *Blackwood’s Magazine*, was reprinted in book form that same year by Hodder and Stoughton but did not include some of the more controversial passages of the original (such as that dealing with Anderson’s work for *The Times*).

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁰ Campbell, 313.

Government to investigate certain allegations that have been made against the Irish Parliamentary Party. These allegations are to the effect that there is a connection between that party and the Irish Revolutionary Party in America, and that the workings of the one party are made to serve the purpose of the other [...] Most of the Irishmen prominent in public life are to appear and give evidence before the Commission. In fact, everyone is anxious to go forward as a witness. Certain persons in London, knowing that you came from America in connection with the skirmishing movement, believe that you [Wilson] were in a position there to enable you to speak authoritatively on the subject. These persons have sent me down here to see you so as to give you an opportunity of also going forward as a witness before the Commission to say what you would wish to say about the matter.⁵⁷¹

Chatham Prison was also where John Daly (arrested with Patrick Egan in 1884) had just been visited by none other than Richard Pigott, who quite unlike Littlechild had no formal authority to do so (especially as Daly had not asked to see him).⁵⁷² More surprising than all this, however, proved the decision to call in Henri Le Caron to the witness stand – a decision which (given Le Caron’s unique value as an informant) could almost certainly not have been made singlehandedly by Anderson, his handler (although Anderson did later claim that Le Caron had volunteered to testify⁵⁷³). Le Caron had of course nothing to do with the infamous forged letters but he was in a supremely well-qualified position to attest to Parnell’s habit (especially before his 1881 stint in Kilmainham gaol) of privately indulging in revolutionary talk. This Le Caron did

⁵⁷¹ Thomas J. Clarke, *Glimpses of an Irish Felon’s Prison Life* (Dublin and London: Maunsell & Roberts Ltd., 1922), 28-9.

⁵⁷² Denis Grube, *At the Margins of Victorian Britain: Politics, Immorality and Britishness in the Nineteenth Century* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2013), 43.

⁵⁷³ Anderson, “The Lighter Side of My Official Life,” in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, Vol. CLXXXVII, January-June 1910, 366.

very well, but even so, he was a (handsomely) paid double agent and it did not take much effort for Parnell's counsel to successfully taint him with the whiff of the agent provocateur. It was only a few days after Le Caron's somewhat lacklustre revelations that Pigott took the stand, much to the chagrin of his former paymasters. Perhaps as important as Pigott's confession, however, is what he might have said had he not fled to Spain immediately afterwards only to fatally shoot himself in the head in a hotel room in Madrid.

Exactly how Pigott was so easily able to get out of the country given that two plain-clothes RIC detectives had been tasked with monitoring his every move,⁵⁷⁴ or how he had been granted access to Chatham Prison and to what end, no one in the Government seemed able to clarify. Opposition MPs naturally jumped at the opportunity of grilling the Home Secretary over these apparently nefarious irregularities. Tim Healy, the fiery Nationalist MP for North Longford, demanded to know how "Pigott, by means perhaps of false keys, or having a pass key, enters Her Majesty's prisons with as much freedom as an official there."⁵⁷⁵ Ironically, it was Sir William Harcourt (now a convert to Home Rule) who led the charge, declaring on the topic of Pigott's implied collusion with the Conservative government that,

It is not enough to say that Pigott went to see Daly. He would not have been admitted until some explanation of the purpose of his visit had been given. We have no need to seek an explanation what he went for. We know – and everybody knows – that Pigott went in to get Daly to swear away the character of the hon. Member for Cork [Parnell]. I want to know who sent him there and who allowed him to go on such an errand?⁵⁷⁶

⁵⁷⁴ The Irish journalist Andrew Dunlop who reported on the proceedings of the Special Commission later recalled seeing Pigott depart Anderton's Hotel in Fleet Street as his two plain-clothes "keepers" (whom he had spotted before) "remained at the door of the hotel. I quite realised at the moment," Dunlop added, "that Pigott would not be seen again in the witness box, and that the men who had charge of him did not prevent his 'escape.'" Andrew Dunlop, *Fifty Years of Irish Journalism* (Dublin: Hanna & Neale, 1911), 246.

⁵⁷⁵ HC Deb, 20 March 1889, vol. 334, col. 300.

⁵⁷⁶ HC Deb, 20 March 1889, vol. 334, col. 276.

Even more ironic however, was Harcourt's scathing attack on his former employee (and current head of the CID), who now stood accused of unlawfully appropriating (and in some cases returning) the sensitive missives sent to him by Le Caron over the years:

Who can trust a man who hands about official documents? We have had great reason to deplore the breakdown in some cases of the Criminal Investigation Department of the police, and I have always done my best to defend the Metropolitan Police, but if transactions of this kind are to take place, I shall be compelled to come to the conclusion that the Metropolitan Police can no longer be entrusted to the Home Office. For the Secretary of State to say that it was a proper proceeding for a man in Mr. Anderson's position to betray official documents is wholly unprecedented. If such a proceeding had occurred during the time of any of the right hon. Gentleman's predecessors, a man in Mr. Anderson's position would not have remained 24 hours in Scotland Yard. Then the Secretary of State has stated that these documents were the property of Le Caron. But who paid for them? Who was Le Caron? He was an informer to the Government – no doubt a valuable instrument; I say no more than that; but having got this valuable instrument, having expended upon him large sums of public money, you hand him over to the Times newspaper, and make him absolutely useless for the public service. You hand over your informer to the Times, and your head of the Criminal Investigation Department hands over confidential documents which – whatever the Secretary of State may say to the contrary – were, in my opinion, the property of the Secretary of State.⁵⁷⁷

⁵⁷⁷ HC Deb, 20 March 1889, vol. 334, col. 277.

Despite such interventions, and the extensive press coverage they received,⁵⁷⁸ the Home Secretary's replies remained laconic and evasive, and no one at Scotland Yard was taken to task over the shady dealings occasioned by *The Times*' "chivalrous crusade" against Home Rule. The only changes to befall the Metropolitan Police were, as usual, at the level of leadership. Thanks to Monro's return, Melville Macnaghten was finally given the position of Assistant Chief Constable at CID in June 1889, and, following Williamson's death in December that year, that of Chief Constable. Monro himself did not remain Commissioner for long, however. He had triumphed over his rivals in the Police hierarchy but he could still not go against the stolidity of the Home Office.

The crisis engendered by the London dockers' strike of August – September 1889 was handled remarkably well by the Commissioner. The excesses of Bloody Sunday were avoided when demands for the Met to arrange the stationing of troops (to be deployed against possibly riotous strikers) were turned down,⁵⁷⁹ and the credibility of the force was maintained – even John Burns was now willing to look over past abuses⁵⁸⁰ – thanks to Monro's refusal to turn his constables into a private army for the Dock owners. This, however, was achieved in the face of Home Office indifference (Matthews had gone on holiday as the strike entered its third week) and vacillation over how far to accommodate the employers' demands.⁵⁸¹

In November 1889 Monro once again attempted to reason with his Whitehall boss by highlighting the overtaxed state of the force in a brief but emotionally charged letter:

⁵⁷⁸ *Daily News*, 2 March 1889; *Glasgow Herald*, 6 March 1889; *Morning Post*, 20 March 1889; *Birmingham Daily Post*, 21 March 1889.

⁵⁷⁹ Joan Ballhatchet, "The Police and the London Dock Strike of 1889," *History Workshop* 32 (1991): 60.

⁵⁸⁰ When told that five hundred policemen were being despatched to reinforce security outside the Docks, Burns quipped that it would only mean "five hundred extra tanners for the strike fund." Quoted in Ballhatchet, 55.

⁵⁸¹ Note by Matthews, 30 April 1890; Monro to Lushington, 30 April 1890, TNA MEPO 2/226.

Again in Sept. I pressed for a decision owing to the occurrence of the strikes & the disturbed prospects of the winter. I have repeatedly declared that I could not face the winter with the inadequate force at my disposal & the result of all my representations is that at the end of Nov. with snow on the ground & the labour question as disquieting as ever I have received no addition to the force at my disposal. I appeal to your sense of justice whether this is now expecting too much of me & whether this is not putting upon me a responsibility which should not be placed upon me [...] I should wrong both my officers & myself were I not to say very respectfully but very strongly that I cannot for an indefinite period take the responsibility of continuing to overtax the powers of the Police as has lately been necessary.⁵⁸²

Matthews however refused to hear such pleas, just as he continued to refuse changes to arrest warrant procedure (in a manner that would have exempted police officers from the sort of legal complications engendered by the O'Brien case), or increases to police pensions in a way that would have granted all officers "a pension of not less than two-thirds of the pay for 25 years' service, without condition either of age or medical certificate."⁵⁸³ This last issue of pensions was particularly close to Monroe's heart,⁵⁸⁴ and he was undoubtedly incensed when the Home Secretary appeared at first to agree with his proposed reform, only to then turn around and insist (as part of the deliberations on that year's Police Superannuation Bill) that the amount payable to officers retiring after fifteen or twenty years of services should in fact be reduced. As the *Daily News* explained to its readers, "feeling that this reduction of existing rights would not be accepted by the men, and would not be looked upon by them as an adequate fulfilment of the promise given [...] to 'improve' their pensions [...] Mr. Monroe came to the conclusion that he

⁵⁸² Monroe to Matthews, 28 November 1889, TNA MEPO 1/48.

⁵⁸³ *Times*, 21 June 1890.

⁵⁸⁴ Clive Emsley, *The English Police*, 98.

should send in his resignation, and he did so,” on 12 June 1890.⁵⁸⁵ “Had I not done so,” he would later recall, “I should have felt myself to be a coward [and] I could never have looked my recruit in the face, and preached to him the duty of self-sacrifice.”⁵⁸⁶

August 1890 – April 1891, London and Rome

The new Chief Commissioner, Sir Edward Bradford, may have been another military man with a vast experience in enforcing *pax Britannica* in the more troubled regions of the Empire (notably India), but he had more in common with Henderson than with Warren, and he was generally thought to be a remarkably amiable man at the Home Office (although tellingly, Matthews does not seem to have taken to him⁵⁸⁷). Also unlike Warren, he had very little interest in the doings of the CID, and probably none (at least at first) in those of its political department.

Sections D and B (the latter now classed as a “clerical section”⁵⁸⁸) did not of course have much to do anyway following the debacle of the Parnell Commission, the collapse of Fenian “skirmishing,” and the waning of native socialist “insurrections” in London, but as a request from the Italian government received at the Foreign Office in August 1890 seemed to indicate, there were still plenty of foreign revolutionaries in Britain who needed watching. One such individual was Errico Malatesta, an Italian anarchist who had been imprisoned in his native country for subversive activities, and who was now hiding out in London waiting to surreptitiously return to Italy. Although the Italian authorities had their own spies amidst Malatesta’s confidantes in the British capital,⁵⁸⁹ key information still eluded them. Luckily enough, their British counterparts proved relatively obliging, and on 27 April 1891, Inspector

⁵⁸⁵ *Daily News*, 21 June 1890.

⁵⁸⁶ Monro, quoted in Howells and Skinner, 92.

⁵⁸⁷ Ruggles-Brise later wrote that Matthews “quarreled with Bradford, and if you couldn’t get on with Bradford you could get on with nobody.” Quoted in Begg and Skinner, 117.

⁵⁸⁸ Note by GHT (?), 24 November 1888, TNA HO 144/222/A49500M.

⁵⁸⁹ Nunzio Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism, 1864-1892* (Oakland, Edinburgh, Baltimore: AK Press, 2009), 264.

William Melville of Section D submitted the following report to his superintendent, Chief Inspector Littlechild:

I beg to report that the Italian Anarchist E. Malatesta has recently been residing at 112 High St. Islington. ~~I have received~~ Information has been recd [sic; alterations almost certainly made by E. Leigh Pemberton, legal assistant under-secretary at the Home Office] that about a week or ten days ago Malatesta and a most intimate friend of his named Consorti (another desperado) left this country en route for Italy, and supposed for Rome, for the purpose of fomenting disturbances on 1st May.

The few Italians in London who are aware of Malatesta's departure, are very silent respecting it, and with a view to deceiving any person who would give information to the Italian Government about it, handbills are being printed announcing that Malatesta will speak in London on 1st May. From this circumstance ~~my informant is of opinion~~ it is believed [sic] that Malatesta is gone to Italy on very important business.⁵⁹⁰

The report was then forwarded through the Foreign Office to the Italian ambassador in London, Count Giuseppe Tomielli, who was certainly very glad to get it; as he explained in a report to the Italian Foreign Minister a couple of days later, "I urge in a special way secrecy about the note from the Metropolitan Police, an exceptional document because it is customary for the English police not to investigate the political conduct of foreigners. And in any case, they do not communicate the information they possess to foreign governments."⁵⁹¹ Tomielli was right to note the uncooperativeness of the British government in cases of political crime (something which would remain relatively unchanged throughout the next couple of decades), but as the following

⁵⁹⁰ Report by William Melville, 27 April 1891, TNA FO 45/677.

⁵⁹¹ Report by Giuseppe Tomielli, 29 April 1891, quoted in Pernicone, 264, n27.

pages will show, investigating the “political conduct of foreigners,” far from being an aberration, was now about to become the very *raison d’être* of the British political police.

Conclusion

Organizationally, the British political police was defined by conflict during the first decade of its institutional existence. In the main this was a conflict between an earlier Victorian system of preventive policing (embodied by William Harcourt’s “picketing”) and a more intelligence-based (and arguably continental-style) system like the one favoured by Edward Jenkinson. This is however a highly simplified picture. As we have seen, Harcourt started his policing career as a pseudo-Fouché (in the words of Charles Dilke) in charge of a tentative “spider’s web of police communication” that was meant to compensate for what the Home Secretary regarded as the reduced capabilities of the Scotland Yard to tackle Fenian terrorism in Britain. It was during this phase of his career that Harcourt set about building the first real political police institution in Britain, namely Section B of the CID – the so-called Irish Branch. It was also during this time that he sought out the services of Edward Jenkinson, who at the time of his appointment to the Home Office was already the rising star, and in a sense the progenitor, of Irish counter-Fenian operations.⁵⁹²

The fact that Harcourt then turned against intelligence-gathering and surveillance and openly embraced the older, preventive model of policing (as exemplified by the public speech he gave in the aftermath of Dynamite Saturday) is a consequence of several factors including his personal idiosyncrasies (what Robert Anderson termed his “dynamite moods”), the continued “successes” of the Fenian dynamite campaign, and the political sensitivities in Westminster to

⁵⁹² A memorandum drafted in 1889 or 1890 for the benefit of then Chief Secretary for Ireland Arthur Balfour referred to the system of “‘shadowing’, or constant supervision of suspects in Ireland by the police [a] system [which] was practically initiated and established by Sir E. Jenkinson when Assist. Under Secretary for Crime to Lord Spencer in 1883.” Memo by Mr. Waters, 1889/90, TNA PRO 30/60//7.

matters of political policing (which, given Jenkinson's unofficial status, threatened to embroil the Government in a costly and untimely controversy). Harcourt's successor, R. A. Cross, refused however to roll back the advances made in intelligence-gathering at a time of “national evil” and so political policing remained in place albeit in a somewhat stunted and precarious state owing to the growing rivalries between Jenkinson and his detractors. Although such rivalries ostensibly revolved around the Commissioner's and Assistant Commissioner's opposition to the extra-legal methods promoted by Jenkinson (such as the use of mercenary informers and agents provocateurs) the spymaster's forced resignation in late 1886 did not ultimately bring about the end of extra-legality nor the triumph of “prevention.” James Monro, Robert Anderson and even Charles Warren all used extra-legal (and borderline illegal) manoeuvres in the pursuance of public security (as the events of 1887 aptly illustrate).

The story of how the political police actually came into being tells us several important things that have a bearing on its later development. First, that once the ball of institutionalized political policing was put into motion by Harcourt (for idiosyncratic reasons and to the unenthusiastic reception of the Scotland Yard leadership) it proved to have a self-propelling logic of its own which dictated that since Fenian bombings continued to happen in spite of the political police, the powers of the political police needed to consequently be increased. Given the Scotland Yard leadership's lack of vision (exemplified by Howard Vincent's decision to quit his post as Director in a moment of crisis), this logic allowed Jenkinson – a man who did have a more or less definite idea of what political policing should entail – to fill up the ensuing void; there was therefore no straightforward and wholesale adoption of “Irish methods” by an intimidated British administration. The second important thing we can deduce is that despite the intense and acrimonious rivalries engendered by Jenkinson's rise (as well as his failure to truly

stamp out Fenian skirmishing by 1885), the British political police did not crumble into dust, nor did it revert to the sub-institutional high politics still embodied by that quaint mid-Victorian vestige – the Home Office's Secret Service. Rather it moved forward on the path already set with the creation of the Irish Branch, thanks to something almost akin to institutional collective intelligence.

Thirdly, the political police of the 1880s emerges not as the product of a reactionary-colonial clique but as the creature of a liberal (and certainly Liberal) mindset. Harcourt, Spencer, Vincent (before 1884), Jenkinson, Lushington, Childers, and even Warren – all were either prominent Liberals or (as in the case of Lushington) sympathetic fellow-travellers. Their liberalism is of course not always easy to spot (especially if measured against the standard of a monolithic and uncomplicated Cobdenism) but it is there nonetheless. It is evident in Harcourt's modernizing impulses but also in his traditionalist resistance to the creation of new bureaucracies and institutions (hence the inchoate character of the Irish Branch and the port protection scheme) and in his misgivings about European "meddling." It is evident in Jenkinson's reforming zeal and his pragmatic approach to Ireland (exemplified by his early support for Home Rule). It is evident in Lushington's qualified admiration for "continental systems" of political policing and his circumspection about the threat posed by British socialism (which, his contempt for the SDF notwithstanding, he would not have been in complete disagreement with given his Radical past and strong support of trade unions⁵⁹³). Finally, it is evident in how the mainstream Liberal press chose to cover the topic of an emerging British political police: not with outrage, not even with worried contempt, but with a sort of detached (rarely enthusiastic) approval. Even the *Pall Mall Gazette*, otherwise the staunchest mainstream critic of the Metropolitan Police's "Tory"

⁵⁹³ Mark Curthoys, *Governments, Labour, and the Law in Mid-Victorian Britain: The Trade Union Legislation of the 1870s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 122.

leadership, could not but observe matter-of-factly and forlornly in the wake of Jenkinson's resignation that the spymaster had been "the man who has in his hands all the threads of the secret conspiracy of dynamitards [...] the soul and centre of what may be called [...] our Third Section."⁵⁹⁴ The liberalism of the political police was thus both modernizing and traditionalist, reactive and anticipative, outward-looking and anti-European – it was, in other words, the fluid liberalism of the late nineteenth-century "governing classes,"⁵⁹⁵ from which all the aforementioned individuals were drawn.

⁵⁹⁴ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 8 January 1887.

⁵⁹⁵ Joyce, *The State of Freedom*, 188, 265.

PART II

‘Surtout pas trop de zèle’

1892-1903

Introduction

The intense personal rivalries that had put the political police in permanent crisis mode throughout the 1880s did not continue into the new decade. Robert Anderson and Edward Bradford remained comfortably secure and unchallenged as the new head of CID and Chief Commissioner respectively. Lushington went on as permanent under-secretary (he would retire in 1895), while Henry Matthews briefly stayed on as Home Secretary until 1892 when he was replaced by the Liberal H. H. Asquith – a man who, much like the previous Liberal Home Secretary, had no great interest in matters of policing subversion. Subversion of course now meant something very different. Although dynamite outrages continued to occasionally disturb the peace of Irish cities (Dublin in particular¹), in Britain insurgent Fenianism was now more of a theoretical concern – a reality illustrated by the fact that the Irish Branch, reduced to a clerical section of the CID, was increasingly threatened with being further cut down to size. If its detectives were going to detect they would now have to act through the all-purpose Section D (once the inadequate ersatz of Jenkinson's network of informers). Section D's Chief Inspector, John Littlechild, was still the “brilliant and distinguished” head of the “political crime department at New Scotland-yard”² as far as everyone was concerned, but, unbeknownst to his superiors, he was now thinking of taking his talents into the private sector. The political police

¹ Whelehan, *The Dynamiters*, 128-9.

² *Daily Telegraph*, 5 June 1893.

apparatus (which remained grounded in gentlemen's agreements and shrouded in extra-legality) was thus once again ready for another strong-willed and opinionated administrator to bend it to his will. Like Jenkinson before him, he would not be a man with any appreciation of parliamentary and constitutional niceties; unlike Jenkinson, he would prove far craftier, his only real loyalty being to the British state as an ideal of imperial order.

The new threat to national security was not a movement which aimed specifically at overthrowing the British state, or parts of it, as Fenianism had professed to, but it was a movement nonetheless and it declared itself inveterately opposed to all states everywhere. In Britain it was overwhelmingly made up of exiled revolutionary socialists – or anarchists as many called themselves – who were opposed, on libertarian grounds, to the state-driven political revolution of Marx and his associates as well as to the gradualist reformism of non-Marxist socialists. They came from Western European countries (such as Italy, France or Spain) where strikes and workers' demonstrations (insofar as they were allowed to occur at all) often ended in bloodshed thanks to heavy-handed interventions by police and the military. They also came from parts of the Russian Empire where anything that smacked of democratic or (non-Russian) nationalist agitation invariably brought with it harsh prison sentences and one-way journeys to Siberia. Most were exiles of necessity not of choice and many dreamt (and frequently planned) to return to their homelands when the political atmosphere allowed it, or, ideally, in a moment of revolutionary crisis.

Some, such as Pyotr Kropotkin and Élisée Reclus were men of science with a fierce, if naive, love of humanity. Others, like Louise Michel and Errico Malatesta, were latter-day *enragés*, indignant grandchildren of the Radical Enlightenment who had failed to see their own revolutions materialize beyond short-lived revolts. Others still, like Henri Rochefort, were

dubious hangers-on wishing to *épater les bourgeois*, or desperate poets taking momentary refuge in a “*cercle d'études sociales*.”³ Most, however, were struggling artisans, apprentices, down-and-out day labourers, and petty thieves – precisely the *damnés de la terre* who still believed in revolution as a bloody war of attrition between the haves and have-nothings. These were men (and they were overwhelmingly men) who conceived of themselves as political “men of action” and who lionized the *propagande par le fait* of Ravachol (guillotined in 1892 for attempting to assassinate judges and lawyers implicated in the suppression of French anarchists) and Auguste Vaillant (guillotined in 1894 for exploding a bomb in the *Chambre des députés*).⁴ Their residences and clubs were scattered all across metropolitan London (Fitzrovia and Soho in particular), and they could also be found, in far less significant numbers, in some of the larger port cities like Liverpool and Glasgow. Their cultural and linguistic isolation meant they tended to keep to their own kind, and their ideological isolation from British socialism (which even at its most radical did not favour doing away with parliamentary democracy and the state) ensured that they continued to be regarded as permanent outsiders even by those who professed to sympathize with their condition (if not always with their ideals). There were, to be sure, some British anarchists (as the following few pages will shortly attest) but these were very rare indeed and insofar as they came to the attention of the political police it was for the praise, rather than the practice, of “tyrannicide.”



January 1892, Walsall

In January 1892 a strange story made national headlines. Three men had just been arrested in the West Midlands town of Walsall (followed by another three the following month)

³ Graham Robb, *Rimbaud* (Basingstoke and Oxford: Picador, 2000), 189.

⁴ For a full account of the influence of Ravachol and the importance of martyrdom in the self-mythology of nineteenth-century French anarchism see Jean Maitron, *Ravachol et les anarchistes* (Paris: René Juillard, 1964).

and charged under the Explosives Substances Act of 1883 for conspiracy to use “a machine intended to [...] caus[e] an explosion [...] for an [un]lawful object.”⁵ The accused were all described as anarchists, and the “machine” in question – iron moulds for a casting such as would be used for an improvised bomb – had been procured by one of them at the request of a London “comrade.” The purpose of the potential bomb was not initially clear; at the trial which followed the arrests it was submitted by the defense that it was to be “sent to Russia,”⁶ but, whether that was true or not, it certainly did not lessen the offence in the eyes of the jury. Only two of the accused were acquitted,⁷ due to lack of evidence; the rest all received harsh sentences of up to ten years with hard labour.

The “Walsall plot” marks an important moment in the evolution of political policing in Britain, mainly for three reasons. The first is that, despite its anticlimactic outcome, this incident effectively brought anarchism in the British public eye on an unprecedented scale. Whereas before the British press had reported on the continental anarchists’ activities with a sense of detached condescension, it now regarded the threat posed by these “enemies to society” as a very serious one indeed. In the wake of the Walsall trial a *Times* columnist argued that “[if] the anarchists are [...] resolved to force the world to take serious notice of their existence ... they little know the power of the civilization they defy,” and concluded reassuringly that “the fate of our domestic dynamiters [...] shows what a well-organized police can do, even against criminals who conduct their operations under specially favourable conditions.”⁸ This brings us to the second reason why the Walsall incident is important, namely that it revealed, as the *Times*

⁵ Reg. v. Charles and others, March 1892, p. 1, TNA ASSI 6/27/9.

⁶ *Times*, 22 January 1892.

⁷ Technically three, but only two actually stood trial for their supposed involvement in the plot. The third man, a Swiss inventor by the name of Joseph Cavargna was arrested on 19 January 1892 for being in possession of “a number of small egg-shaped bombs made to contain explosive” (TNA HO 144/243/A53582C/4). The bombs, however, turned out to be merely a novel, if unorthodox, means of culling the rabbit population of New South Wales, and had nothing to do with any political ideology.

⁸ *Times*, 7 April 1892.

columnist keenly observed, the uneasy balance between the methods of a “well-functioning police,” capable of combating a supposed international conspiracy of murderous fanatics, and Britain’s “specially favourable conditions,” an ironic reference to the policies of unfettered political asylum and overt policing in place at the time. This theme would dominate the government’s approach to the issue of politically motivated violence throughout the rest of the Belle Époque period.

The third reason has to do with the entirely plausible possibility that the whole thing had been nothing more than a set-up, masterminded by the Special Branch (Section D), and in particular its leading inspector, William Melville. No hard evidence exists to connect Melville to the instigator of the plot, but there are certainly a number of red flags that cast serious doubt on the notion of a legitimate bomb conspiracy. As Joseph Deakin, one of the accused, would later recall in his official trial statement, in the summer of 1891 he became acquainted with two French anarchists at the Walsall Socialist Club, technically the local chapter of the Social Democratic Federation, but a home to radicals of all stripes (including anarchists). The two Frenchmen, Victor Cails and George Laplace, were in Walsall trying to keep a low profile (Cails was wanted in France in connection with a May Day riot in Nantes earlier that year), but they quickly managed to befriend several of the “advanced” socialists, including Deakin and his associate Frederick Charles. Only a few months later, in October 1891, Cails received a letter in French from London signed by a certain “Degiani,” asking for a brass casting and enclosing a rough sketch of the same. Not recognizing the name, Cails wrote to the man who had arranged his stay in Walsall, a London part-time schoolteacher and translator by the name of Auguste

Coulon,⁹ asking for clarification. Coulon reassured Cails of the letter's veracity and clarified that the casting was in fact a mail order for the Russian revolutionaries (whose struggle against the czarist autocracy was a cause célèbre for all European socialists). This seems to have convinced not only Cails but Deakin and the rest of their immediate circle as well. The men had several moulds made at a local foundry, and wrote back to Coulon for further instructions. In December 1891, an Italian calling himself Jean Battola arrived from London to check up on their progress, but found the moulds "not suitable," and departed empty-handed. Although Deakin did not accompany Battola back to the train station, he later learned from comrades who had that "the police were watching them."¹⁰

The whole thing might have ended there, but in January 1892, Deakin was arrested in London almost immediately on arrival by Inspector Melville and his men; the charge was being in possession of a bottle of chloroform.¹¹ How the police came to know so quickly about Deakin's presence in the capital, or what Deakin was doing with a bottle of chloroform is not at all clear.¹² Deakin himself believed he had been set up by Charles, who was "very particular to know the time [Deakin] should arrive in London,"¹³ but refused to explain the origin or the purpose of the chemical,¹⁴ and the police on their part did not press the issue, "owing to other

⁹ Coulon taught French and English to the children of anarchist émigrés in a school set up for them in north Soho by the *grande dame* of French anarchism in exile, Louise Michel. See John Quail, *The Slow Burning Fuse* (St. Albans and London: Paladin, 1978), 107.

¹⁰ Deakin to C. Taylor (Chief Constable of Walsall Police), 15 January 1892, TNA ASSI 6/27/9.

¹¹ Under the provisions of the 1875 Explosive Substances Act, an arrest could be made "where it appears to a superintendent or other officer of police of equal or superior rank, or to a Government inspector, that the case is one of emergency and that the delay in obtaining a warrant would be likely to endanger life." Explosives Act 1875, 38 Vict., c. 17.

¹² Robert Anderson claimed in a memo that he had "received definite information that [the anarchists] were plotting robberies by means of chloroform to be used in drugging the persons they intended to rob" and that Deakin's possession of the substance was somehow tied in to that (Confidential Report, 19 May 1892, TNA HO 144/242/A53582/15). It is highly unlikely however that there was any concrete evidence behind this "definite information," otherwise it would have certainly been used against Deakin to secure an even harsher sentence.

¹³ Reg. v. Charles and others, p. 83, TNA ASSI 6/27/9.

¹⁴ In a report to Lushington dated 25 March 1892, Anderson claimed that "letters found on Cailles [sic], when arrested in the pending Walsall case, indicate that the bottle of chloroform found [on] Deakin was supplied by [John]

matters having turned up at Walsall,” as Melville later explained at the trial. Matters were indeed turning up at Walsall; having picked up Deakin, and then Battola, in London, the men of the Special Branch returned to Walsall to blow the lid off the whole dastardly conspiracy. The other four individuals implicated directly in the making of the iron moulds, including Charles – all members of the Walsall Socialist Club – were summarily arrested, and the trial was wrapped up before the winter of 1892 was over. Deakin received five years with hard labour; Cails, Battola, and Charles got ten. The other two suspects, John Wesley and William Ditchfield, were released due to lack of evidence.

Although clearly implicated by the evidence, Auguste Coulon was never brought to trial, and when formally questioned about his relationship to him, Melville curtly announced that, “I will not swear that I have never given Coulon anything to do for me ... [or that] I have not paid him any money,” adding that he had “paid lots of anarchists money.”¹⁵ How much money, and for what purpose, he failed to specify; when one of the defense lawyers urged the judge to press Melville to clarify the matter, the Attorney-General intervened to argue that the disclosure of such information was not necessary for the defence’s case, and furthermore not “in the interest of the public service.”¹⁶ The judge agreed, and Melville stepped off the witness box.

Melville’s strange half-admittance that he had in fact employed Coulon in the past did not go unnoticed however. Although the official version of events resolutely denied the use of *agents provocateurs*¹⁷ (as indeed it had to given the more than unsavoury connotations that phrase conjured up in the minds of the British public), it could not stem the tide of controversy. On the

Creaghe” (Anderson to the Home Office, 25 March 1892, TNA MEPO 1/54). Creaghe was an Irish-born anarchist doctor who at the time edited the *Sheffield Anarchist*. He later immigrated to the Americas, where he became especially active within the Argentinian and Mexican anarchist movements.

¹⁵ Reg. v. Charles and others, p. 84, TNA ASSI 6/27/9.

¹⁶ Sweeney, *At Scotland Yard*, 216.

¹⁷ When questioned in the House of Commons by the left-wing Liberal MP Cunninghame Graham on the possible use of agents provocateurs in the Walsall affair, Home Secretary Matthews resolutely declared that “the employment of [...] agents provocateurs was not only not sanctioned, but was forbidden.” *Times*, 19 February 1892.

anarchist side, there was little, if any, doubt that the Walsall plot had been entirely manufactured by the authorities. On 9 April 1892 David Nicoll, the editor of the London-based *Commonweal* newspaper (founded in 1885 by William Morris as an organ for the Socialist League, an anarchist-leaning SDF splinter group) published a damning indictment of what he perceived to have been the travesty of justice that had taken place in Walsall:

The Walsall Anarchists have been condemned—Charles, Battola, and Cailes [sic] to ten years' penal servitude, while Deakin has been let off in mercy with five. For what? For a police plot concocted by one of those infamous wretches who make a living by getting up these affairs and selling their victims to the vengeance of the law. Surely we ought not to have to warn Anarchists of the danger of conspiracies; these death traps; these gins set by the police and their spies, in which so many honest and devoted men have perished. Surely those who desire to act can do as John Felton did, when, alone and unaided, he bought the knife which struck down the tyrant. Are there no tyrants now? What of the Jesuitical monster at the Home Office, who murders men for taking a few head of game? What of the hyena who preys upon bodies of hanged men, and whose love of the gallows a few years ago won him the title of 'Hangman' Hawkins?—this barbarous brute, who, prating of his humanity, sends our comrades to ten years in the hell of the prisons. What of the spy Melville, who sets his agent on to concoct the plots which he discovers? Are these men fit to live?¹⁸

Nicoll reiterated his rhetorical threat against Judge Hawkins and Melville the next day, on 10 April, when he delivered a speech from the Reformers Tree spot in Hyde Park to a crowd of socialist and anarchist sympathizers. Unfortunately for him, two police officers also happened to be in attendance, and on 19 April Nicoll and Charles Mowbray, the owner and printer of the

¹⁸ *Commonweal*, 9 April 1892.

Commonweal, were arrested and charged with “inciting, soliciting, and encouraging certain persons unknown to murder the Right Hon. Henry Matthews, Secretary of State for the Home Department; Sir Henry Hawkins, one of the Justices of the High Court of Justice; and William Melville, inspector of police.”¹⁹ At the trial which followed in May, Special Branch Detective-Inspector John Sweeney²⁰ recalled hearing Nicoll declare that “that Jesuit Home Secretary Matthews, Inspector Melville, and Coulon are the principal actors [in the Walsall case], and two of them must die.” This account was corroborated by Inspector Francis Powell, who had also been in the audience that day, but refuted by every other witness (most of whom agreed that Nicoll had heaped abuse on Melville, Matthews and Hawkins but made no death threats against any of them). This might have worked to Nicoll’s advantage, but the fact that his threats had been published in print a day prior to his speech certainly did not. In a verdict which echoed that of the Johann Most trial a decade earlier, Nicoll received eighteen months with hard labour (the same as Most), while Mowbray was acquitted.²¹ That same month the police raided the office of the *Commonweal*, confiscating type but also “Nicoll’s papers, amongst them the evidence he was collecting as to the shameful proceedings of the police in getting up the Walsall plot,” as *Freedom*, another anarchist newspaper, claimed.²²

It is easy to see in such heavy-handed tactics evidence of a conspiracy to suppress the truth, but as far as the historical record shows, there was not much to suppress. As Melville’s

¹⁹ Trial of David John Nicoll, Charles Wilfred Mowbray, May 1892 (t18920502-493), *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, accessed 3 March 2014.

²⁰ Throughout the proceedings Sweeney and other Special Branch officers referred to themselves merely as “officers of the Criminal Investigations Department,” avoiding any references to the “political department” to which they in fact belonged, and which the public still overwhelmingly associated with counter-Fenianism. Given the secrecy still surrounding Section D this is not all that surprising.

²¹ Alex Butterworth argues that his “research in the Special Branch ledgers indicated Mowbray’s role helping organise the surveillance of anarchists” (*The World that Never Was*, 439), which would explain why the latter was so easily acquitted. It should be noted, however, that the ledgers, which were only made available to Butterworth in heavily redacted form (i.e. purged of all proper and/or family names), and as a result of a lawsuit against the Metropolitan Police, remain otherwise inaccessible.

²² *Freedom*, May 1892.

defiant, if telling, silence during the Walsall trial had shown, there was little need to cover up the implication that the uncovering of the 1892 dynamite plot had been more than mere serendipity for the police. Internally, it was well-known and accepted that informers had been used to bring the anarchists to justice. In a letter dated 1 July 1892, Chief Commissioner Bradford, recommended to then Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department Herbert Gladstone that the sum of £120 should be made available – “£60 from the Secret Service Fund to remunerate the informants and £60 from the Metropolitan Police Fund to be divided as gratuities amongst the officers of this force who were concerned in the [Walsall] case,” which Bradford described as “one of exceptional importance.”²³

Who were these individuals whose services were worth £60 (approximately £6,500 in today’s money), half of the remuneration sum for the whole case? Only two confirmed informants are known to have been involved in the Walsall case.²⁴ One was John McCormack, a Londoner, who on 4 February 1892 was arrested in Walsall for drunk and disorderly behaviour; he claimed that “he had been employed by the Scotland Yard and Walsall Police in getting evidence for the trial of the anarchist prisoners.”²⁵ When a reporter of the *Birmingham Daily Gazette* decided to investigate McCormack’s claim, it turned out, surprisingly, to be true; Walsall police authorities admitted that they had in fact employed McCormack but noted that “his statements were absolutely unreliable,” and that he was all in all “a disreputable scoundrel.”²⁶

²³ Bradford to Matthews, 1 July 1892, TNA HO 144/242/A53582/21. This sentiment was also reiterated by Home Secretary Matthews, who called it a case of “very great public importance,” noting also that “the credit of bringing the offenders to justice belong[ed] mainly to the Walsall Police.” (TNA HO 144/242/A53582/9)

²⁴ There is some suggestion that others were employed. Assistant Commissioner Anderson for example mentions being kept up to date with the whereabouts of Coulon – at that point still a potential suspect – by one of his personal informers, whom he nevertheless does not name. Matthews to the Chairman of the Watch Committee of the Borough of Walsall, April 1892, TNA HO 144/242/A53582/15.

²⁵ “The Walsall Anarchists: Precis of the Case for the Convicts (with Appendices) in Mitigation of Sentence,” p. 4, September 1895, TNA HO 144/242/A53582/28.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

Certainly Inspector Melville was quick to dissociate himself and the Yard from McCormack. The other known informant, whom Melville chose not to fully disown, was Auguste Coulon.

In his tell-all memoirs, published serially in the radical-republican *Reynolds's Newspaper* in 1895, ex-Special Branch DS Patrick McIntyre tapped into the residual controversy still surrounding the Walsall incident at the time to embarrass his former employers, particularly CID chief Robert Anderson, whom he held responsible for his dismissal from the Branch.²⁷

According to McIntyre, Coulon had written to the Yard offering his services (whether as a mere informer or as a provocateur, it is not specified); Melville accepted the offer; and subsequently “Coulon [...] became [Melville's] property – that is to say all information that Coulon supplied was taken possession of by Melville, who submitted it to Mr. Anderson, the Assistant

Commissioner of Police. Anderson would direct what action was to be taken in the matter [...]

And he in his turn was responsible to one man only, the Home Secretary.”²⁸ This was by far the most explicit indictment of Coulon by a (former) police officer, so much so that Coulon felt

obliged to respond to the accusations in a letter that *Reynolds's* published in a column entitled

“What Coulon has to say.” What Coulon had to say was not, however, very convincing. He

admitted to “offer[ing] [his] services to the ‘Yard,’ and [having his] offer ... accepted,” but

attempted to cast doubt on McIntyre's version of events by asking whether the latter had

“open[ed] the letter before handing it over to the senior officer (Melville)? Why not to

Littlechild, who was then in charge of the Yard Special Department [i.e. the Special Branch]?”

adding that “‘offered’ and ‘accepted’ were not sufficient proofs” for his duplicity.²⁹ In a sarcastic

retort to Coulon's letter, McIntyre noted his surprise at finding out that a man who claimed to be

²⁷ McIntyre claims that his downfall was precipitated by his becoming “very friendly” with the widow of a Northern Irish anarchist (and fellow native of Ballymena, County Antrim) around the time of the Nicoll trial. *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 19 May 1895.

²⁸ *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 21 April 1905.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

innocent of grassing for Melville should be “so well versed in the etiquette of the ‘Yard.’”³⁰ A decade later, when the controversy had all but died off, DI Sweeney also referred to Coulon in *his* memoirs as having “given the Scotland Yard [...] much assistance in bringing the Walsall Anarchists to book.”³¹

What this assistance actually consisted of remains frustratingly obscure; certainly there is nothing to demonstrate that it went beyond the mere act of informing, but even that scenario is shrouded in mystery. When Deakin had arrived in London in January 1892, Assistant Commissioner Anderson had been “led to believe that he was conveying a sample bomb to show to his co-conspirators.”³² If this was Coulon’s work, it was certainly lacking. And yet he was too valuable to shake off, either by virtue of what he knew or what he had done for the Yard. Anderson also noted how in February 1892 he “directed a strict search both of Coulon’s house and also of the Anarchist Club,³³ and that Coulon should be detained and brought to me at Scotland Yard.”³⁴ Coulon must have gotten wind of this somehow as he “had already absconded” when his house was searched, rendering the search predictably “fruitless.” No sooner was this order carried out, however, than Anderson received a telegram from the Chief Constable of the Walsall police, Inspector Charles Taylor, with the words “Do not arrest Coulon. Taylor.

³⁰ In an instance of supreme irony David Nicoll also wrote to *Reynolds’s Newspaper*, defending McIntyre (the man who had played a direct role in his arrest and prosecution only three years prior) against Coulon’s attempts at obfuscation. In a panicked attempt at retaliation, Coulon made an unsuccessful “application [...] for the issue of a criminal process for libel against ex-Detective-Sergeant McIntyre” (*Reynolds’s Newspaper*, 28 April 1895) only three days after the publication of McIntyre’s reply. Despite his exposure as an informer, Coulon remained on the Special Branch payroll until 1904 (probably as translator and “expert” on the anarchist movement) by which point he had received a sum of no less than £801 for his services. See Clutterbuck, 317-319, 424.

³¹ Sweeney, *At Scotland Yard*, 223.

³² Anderson to Lushington, 28 April 1892, TNA HO 144/242/A53582/15

³³ The Anarchist Club was located in Kingsland Road in what is today the borough of Hackney, and was frequented by anarchists of “the extremist type [who] made violent speech[es].” Peter Latouche, *Anarchy, An Authentic Exposition of the Methods of Anarchists and the Aims of Anarchism* (London, 1908), 43.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

Walsall.”³⁵ Anderson cautiously deferred to this advice; it was not the first time he had found himself out of the loop, and it would not be the last.

Ultimately, whether the Walsall anarchists were framed or betrayed is still a matter of contention; in his biography of Melville, Andrew Cook argues that the spymaster was definitely “at the bottom of [the plot]”³⁶ while Bernard Porter in his monograph on the early Special Branch insists that “the actual evidence for provocateuring is circumstantial in the extreme.”³⁷ Whatever the case may be (Porter’s more conservative evaluation seems the more likely), it does not change the fact that the Branch had only to gain from uncovering and foiling an anarchist plot on British soil. Only a month prior, in December 1891, four of its constables had been let go as a consequence of cuts introduced by the Home Secretary.³⁸ After Walsall, the Branch’s existence was secure,³⁹ Melville’s career was on the rise, and anarchism was now the new *bête noire* of the British political establishment.

25 April 1892, Paris

It was an average evening at Henry Véry’s restaurant, an aspiringly *bourgeois* yet unassuming *café* on Boulevard de Magenta. From behind the counter M. Véry tended to the three customers seated at the bar, while Mme. Véry sat at one of the tables with their young daughter and one of the waiters, who was also her brother. Further away, two young women sat at the very same table where only a month prior, the infamous anarcho-vigilante Ravachol had been

³⁵ Although Chief Constable Taylor had been involved in the surveillance and arrest of the Walsall anarchists, there is no evidence to indicate that he knew Coulon in any capacity; it is therefore possible that the telegram was sent at Melville’s behest.

³⁶ Cook, *M*, 98.

³⁷ Porter, *Origins of the Vigilant State*, 141.

³⁸ Bradford to Lushington, 24 December 1891, TNA MEPO 1/54.

³⁹ The Special Irish Branch (Section B) however would see a reduction of four constables in August 1892. Bradford to Lushington, 29 November 1894, TNA MEPO 1/54.

arrested,⁴⁰ his portrait now hung above the table like a hunting trophy. The man at the next table jokingly asked the young women, “Are you not afraid of being blown up, ladies?”⁴¹ A nervous-looking man, having just finished drinking his *p’tit verre à rhum*, was now heading for the exit, leaving behind a clunky briefcase resting against the base of the counter.⁴² This was about half past nine in the evening. By ten o’clock a substantial crowd had already gathered on Boulevard de Magenta, having suddenly been roused into fear and confusion by a powerful explosion. Monsieur Véry’s restaurant was now a jumbled mess of upturned tables, smashed-up chairs, and bloodied shards of glass; only the two cast iron pillars which supported the upper floor were left unscathed.⁴³ The message was loud and clear: Ravachol would be avenged.⁴⁴

May 1892, Club Autonomie, Windmill St., London

The Club Autonomie, where Deakin had been headed before being arrested on his arrival in London, had been set up in 1885 by the German anarchist-in-exile Josef Peukert as an alternative to the *Freiheit* group/newspaper of fellow countryman and revolutionary Johann Most, which up until that point had been the sole voice of German anarchism in London.⁴⁵ Its initial headquarters were at 32 Charlotte Street in Fitzrovia, central London, but were soon changed to 6 Windmill Street in Soho⁴⁶ to accommodate an expanding membership. The club premises were “very dingy, [and] badly furnished,” with only “a few rough benches, chairs, and

⁴⁰ Ravachol, whose terror campaign against prominent Parisian judges and lawyers had scandalized public opinion earlier that year, had been arrested at Véry’s restaurant on 30 March 1892 after police had received a tip-off from Mme Véry’s brother.

⁴¹ *Standard*, 17 November 1892, excerpted in TNA HO 144/485/X37842A.

⁴² *Le Petit Journal*, 11 April 1893.

⁴³ *La Justice*, 26 April 1892.

⁴⁴ The bombing of the restaurant took place only a day before Ravachol’s trial began at the *Cour d’assises de la Seine*, and was meant to intimidate the jury as much as punish Véry (who later succumbed to his wounds at the St-Louis hospital).

⁴⁵ Peukert and Most disagreed over ideological issues, but the whole German anarchist scene in London was notorious for its internecine squabbles, eventually leading to the so-called *Bruderkrieg* (“war between brothers”) of the 1880s. See Andrew R. Carlson, *Anarchism in Germany, Vol. I: The Early Movement* (Metuchen, NJ, 1972), especially Chapter X.

⁴⁶ Between them Fitzrovia and Soho housed the majority of London’s anarchist diaspora in the 1880s and ‘90s.

tables,”⁴⁷ but by anarchist standards it was quite presentable, and there was a certain homeliness to it that would have resonated deeply with homesick exiles; “a section of the house was set aside for singing,” another for dancing to the tunes of the house band,⁴⁸ and for the more intellectually minded comrades, there was a substantial library. It quickly became the home of a multicultural and multilingual anarchist enclave, serving both as community centre as well as a place for organizing political and educational activities. Melville noted how the Club was “a centre for forwarding anarchistic literature to the continent, but more particularly to Germany,” and how the anarchists would “meet their friends [there] and generally get assistance by means of subscriptions [with] funds hav[ing] frequently been sent from the Autonomie Club to various continental countries.”⁴⁹

Despite the police’s close watch of the Club, it functioned as the main hub for the London émigrés, especially the fresh arrivals who often had nowhere else to turn to. Such was the case with Jean-Pierre François, who had been arrested in Paris a day after the Café Véry explosion along with two other anarchists, as a possible accomplice in the attack.⁵⁰ There was no concrete proof to incriminate him,⁵¹ and the French *Sûreté* admitted that they did not “yet know that it was [François] and his accomplices that placed the bomb at Véry’s café,” adding that François was nonetheless “a member of an anarchist group capable of committing such an attack.”⁵² He remained in custody for several days until he was discharged by a Parisian *juge d’instruction*. Concurrently, François’ friend and associate in anarchy, Theodule Meunier, the man actually responsible for planting the bomb at Café Véry, was serving a two-week sentence

⁴⁷ Latouche, 63.

⁴⁸ Josef Peukert, *Erinnerungen eines Proletariers aus der Revolutionären Arbeiterbewegung*, 233, quoted in, Carlson, *Anarchism in Germany*, 336.

⁴⁹ Report by Melville, 24 May 1893, TNA HO 45/9739/A54881/2.

⁵⁰ *Le Petit Journal*, 27 April 1892.

⁵¹ Several witnesses testified that François had been dining at the Lejeune restaurant on rue Quincampoix the evening the explosion at Café Véry took place.

⁵² *Le Petit Journal*, 28 April 1892.

in the La Santé prison for illegally owning and discharging a weapon in public; Meunier supposed, quite rightly, that the police would not look for him in prison.⁵³

Sometime in early May 1892, François, whose newfound notoriety meant he now found it impossible to practice his trade as an ebony polisher in Paris, decided to look for work in London; Meunier followed him there in June. Shortly after their respective arrivals, François and Meunier made the obligatory appearance at the Club Autonomie. Meunier, a short, slightly-built, and somewhat hunchbacked young man,⁵⁴ with a serious and cautious disposition,⁵⁵ must have passed relatively unnoticed. François, on the other hand, stocky, tall and built like “a modern Samson,”⁵⁶ was harder to ignore. He often boasted loudly of his anarchist exploits (for which there was seldom credible proof), and was fond of making wild threats against the bourgeoisie. As soon as he stepped through the door at 6 Windmill St., he was acclaimed with boisterous shouts of “François! François!” by the French comrades.⁵⁷ He must have been undoubtedly pleased with such a grand welcome, but his penchant for self-aggrandizement would soon land him in trouble.

June 1892, Bow St. Police Court, London

In early June 1892 the *Sûreté* finally got a hold of some promising leads in the Café Véry investigation. As Gaston Fedé, one of the detectives working on the case, later explained in a deposition to British police, “a person of the name of ‘Bricout’ [sic] is amongst the persons charged with the offence – he is now in custody. He gave on or about 4th June [sic] some information as to the place where some dynamite was concealed.”⁵⁸ This was Jean-Baptiste

⁵³ *Le Petit Journal*, 11 April 1892.

⁵⁴ *Gazette des Tribunaux*, 27 July 1894.

⁵⁵ *Le Petit Journal*, 10 April 1893.

⁵⁶ McIntyre, “Scotland Yard,” in *Reynolds’s Newspaper*, 21 April 1895.

⁵⁷ Quail, 141.

⁵⁸ “The Examination of Gaston Fedée [sic] and Jules Pierre Marie Jolwell,” 18 November 1892, TNA HO/144/485/X37842A/.

Bricou, a Parisian carpenter and anarchist, and the cache of dynamite he had led the police to was the very same stuff that Meunier had used to manufacture the Café Véry bomb. Both Bricou and his girlfriend, Marie Delange, were arrested as accomplices in the explosion and now potentially faced the death penalty, but after being made certain “realisable promises” by the French police,⁵⁹ they were more than willing to cooperate. They gave up Meunier as the man who had placed the bomb at Café Véry, and implicated François as his accomplice.⁶⁰

In addition, the *Sûreté* now also had two testimonies which put François in a very bad light. The first was that of a certain M. Lauze,⁶¹ who claimed that on the day of the explosion François “was boasting, as he already had done before, that he was blowing up all Paris to revenge Ravachol, and that a blow would be struck that very night; but when asked, ‘Against whom?’ [...] he gave the vague answer, ‘Against all who were concerned with Ravachol’s trial; I will blow them all up till I am arrested.’” Lauze also recalled meeting François the day after the explosion and “convinced that he was the author (of the preceding night’s explosion), I congratulated him [...] as the author of the blow, and he did not deny it.”⁶² The second testimony came from François’ former landlady, Mme. Morland, who stated that François had told her a week or so before the explosion that “Véry will not profit from his reward [for the arrest of Ravachol]. Before long he’ll get what’s coming to him, or my name isn’t François!”⁶³ The testimonies did not invalidate François’ alibi, but they certainly made him out to be a direct accessory in the crime.

⁵⁹ *Les archives de la préfecture de police* BA/139, pièce 162.

⁶⁰ *Le Petit Journal* 10 April 1893.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 12 April 1893. The British press (e.g. *Times*, 2 December 1892) occasionally misspelled his name as ‘Lange,’ perhaps confusing him with Marie Delange, who had also testified against François.

⁶² “An Appeal on Behalf of the ‘Right of Asylum’ in England,” p. 2, 26 November 1892, TNA HO 144/485/X37842A/8.

⁶³ *Le Petit Journal*, 13 April 1892.

In late June, French authorities issued warrants of arrest for both Meunier and François, which were subsequently delivered to British police by the French ambassador to the Court of St. James, William Waddington. Sir John Bridge, the Chief Magistrate of the Bow St. Police Court was then able to inform the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department that under the eighth section of the second clause of the Extradition Act of 1870,⁶⁴ the two anarchists were now wanted men in Britain. Inspector Melville must have relished the opportunity to finally nab some real revolutionary desperadoes.

June-October 1892, London

Meunier and François were now in a precarious position, but not entirely hopeless. Both found lodgings in the anarchist redoubt of Fitzrovia: Meunier lived at 30 Fitzroy St.,⁶⁵ a building whose residents (and landlord) were all anarchists, while François, who was able to find a job with an M. Miller, furniture polisher of Wells St., rented a room in Pitt Street, off Tottenham Court Road.⁶⁶ A collection was started to help out the two, especially Meunier, whom the London comrades believed needed “to get away as soon as possible.”⁶⁷ That he did manage: before the end of the summer Meunier had left Britain, most likely for Argentina⁶⁸ (he would resurface in Britain two years later), leaving François in an increasingly paranoid state of mind. Although Mme François and the children were able to join him in London, they lived separately with a family in Soho; François himself frequently changed residence, and lived under the

⁶⁴ This section of the Act specified that a police magistrate or justice of the peace could issue a warrant for a foreign fugitive “on such information [...] and evidence [...] as would in the opinion of the person issuing the warrant justify the issue of a warrant if the crime had been committed or the criminal convicted in [...] the United Kingdom.” Extradition Act 1870, 33 & 34 Vict., c. 52.

⁶⁵ Cook, 106.

⁶⁶ *Times*, 2 December 1892.

⁶⁷ Report by French spy “agent Zéro,” one of several *mouchards* employed by the *Sûreté* to spy on the French anarchists in London. Quoted in Cook, 105.

⁶⁸ McIntyre, “Scotland Yard,” in *Reynolds’s Newspaper*, 21 April 1895.

assumed name of “Mr. Johnson.” He also quite literally slept with a revolver and dagger under his pillow. Such precautions, far from being unfounded, proved insufficient in the end.

The Scotland Yard received the files of Meunier and François sometime in the late summer of 1892, courtesy of Marie-François Goron, head of the *Sûreté*,⁶⁹ but the information and portraits contained therein were badly out of date. The French knew very well that they needed to at least feign deference to the Yard in order to secure the arrest and expulsion of the two anarchists, but that did not necessarily make actual cooperation between the two police forces more likely. The *Préfecture de police de Paris* maintained its own significant network of spies and informers in the British capital⁷⁰ which specialized in gathering information on the activities of the French anarchists. Acting on this information was a different matter, however, as most of these agents were simply clumsy amateurs at best.⁷¹ Having found out where François was lodging, one of them began snooping about the place in the most obvious manner “instead of communicating straight away with the London police [and] without waiting for the assistance of anyone acquainted with the locality.”⁷² Naturally François caught wind of this, and relocated immediately to the working-class borough of Poplar where the French *mouchards* could not practice their trade as easily. The frustration of the latter was palpable; in a written report to his superiors in Paris one agent contemplated whether it would not be possible, for the right sum, to entice the Yard into kidnapping Meunier and François, and have them both delivered to Paris on

⁶⁹ Goron had already co-operated with the CID while investigating the 1889 murder of Toussaint-Augustin Gouffé, a Parisian court bailiff whose body had been found in a trunk purchased in London.

⁷⁰ Constance Bantman has identified “three or four regular [French] agents at a time from the end of 1892 to the end of 1894.” Bantman, 117.

⁷¹ One French prefect called them “the dregs of society [who don’t] speak English and [who use] the trip as an opportunity for making merry.” *Les archives de la préfecture de police* BA/1509, quoted in Bantman, 120.

⁷² McIntyre, “Scotland Yard,” in *Reynolds’s Newspaper*, 21 April 1895.

the sly.⁷³ Whether this was simply a harebrained scheme or an attempt to embezzle funds is not certain, but nothing came of it in the end.

14 October 1892, the borough of Poplar, East London

Having received the news of the first real lead in the case, and its subsequent botching,⁷⁴ DS McIntyre recalled how “nearly all hope was given up of catching either [François] or Meunier.”⁷⁵ A series of impromptu, and legally unwarranted, raids of several anarchists’ houses in Soho produced nothing except the knowledge that Meunier had almost certainly fled the city by now and the worrying realization that “when you are entering back-doors and forcing windows, the occupant of the place may shoot you through the head with impunity.”⁷⁶ There was at least a place to start, however. Using a series of disguises (Medical Officer for Health and “Irish loafer” proved especially effective), bribes (a street urchin could be debriefed for only “a few pennies”), shadowing, and old-fashioned deductive reasoning, Melville and three of his men (McIntyre, Sergeant Michael “Jack” Walsh and officer Hester) managed to trace François’ steps from his initial address in Tottenham Court Road to his new one in Hind St., Poplar.

It was about 4 in the afternoon when the Frenchman, returning home with a bottle of “French oils” (it was laundry day)⁷⁷ was taken aback by the sight of four men waiting in front of his building. Melville spotted him immediately and announced in his typically flawless but accented French “*François! Je suis un inspecteur de police et je vous arrête!*” For his part, François “struggled very violently” and was only subdued by the collective effort of all four

⁷³ Cook, 106.

⁷⁴ Melville was a respected figure amongst French agents, and “would not in the normal course of events have revealed their identities to fellow officers in the Special Branch.” Cook, 95.

⁷⁵ McIntyre, “Scotland Yard,” in *Reynolds’s Newspaper*, 21 April 1895.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

officers. Mme François proved an equal challenge, charging at the police with her husband's fully loaded revolver, before she herself was restrained.⁷⁸

A hearing at the Bow St. Police Court followed the arrest, and François' lawyers submitted that "the French government sought his extradition for a political and not a criminal offence," which contravened Article 5 of the 1876 Extradition Treaty with France.⁷⁹ Chief Magistrate John Bridge was not convinced; the new testimonials obtained by the *Sûreté* in June (which had inexplicably taken several months to reach London) hinted strongly at François' complicity in the Cafe Very explosion. François denied all charges but could not repudiate the many empty boasts he had made in the aftermath of the incident. His innocence was of course not on trial in Britain, only the legality of his extradition, and as the Chief Magistrate explained "the motive of the offence is not political, but to revenge something done to Ravachol."⁸⁰ He ordered François be extradited; François appealed; the appeal was rejected. In late December François was back in France where he would stand trial for his involvement in the Cafe Very explosion the following year only to again be acquitted for lack of evidence. What his arrest and expulsion from Britain had shown was firstly that the Special Branch was quite capable of stealthily policing the foreign anarchists of London, and secondly that persecution for "political crime" was no longer unchallengeable as a reason for granting asylum. Secret policing was still far from uncontroversial however; Melville and his men were awarded a recompense of £15 for the arrest of François but the sum was kept secret as "some additional risk might follow [the officers] from a public expression of [...] appreciation of their conduct."⁸¹

1 December 1892, Tower Hill, London

⁷⁸ *Times*, 15 October 1892.

⁷⁹ *Times*, 17 November 1892.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ John Bridge (Chief Magistrate for London) to Home Secretary Asquith, 14 December 1892, TNA HO 144/485/X37842A/12.

Despite the legacy of Bloody Sunday, London's poor and unemployed did not lose all political will in the new decade. The East End was now increasingly becoming home to a growing colony of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe; a police report submitted to Chief Inspector Littlechild in March of 1892 noted that "the number of passengers which arrived at Tilbury Docks from Hamburg by the Perlbach line of steamers" between 1889 and 1891 amounted to 10,340 persons of which "nearly or quite 80 per cent [were] destitute Jews."⁸² The vast majority of these new arrivals were sweated into London's tailoring industry, and many of them were becoming increasingly receptive to left-wing ideas.

In late November 1892 British newspapers announced that "arrangements [...] have now been made in connection with [a] proposed midnight march of the unemployed through the streets of London." The participants were to "each [...] carry a lighted torch [and] at the stroke of midnight [begin] march[ing] as quietly as possible to [...] the heart of London."⁸³ Assistant Commissioner Anderson did not find the news particularly alarming, even though, as he noted in a report to Herbert Gladstone, "police [had] no accurate information on the subject." With Bloody Sunday only five years in the past, however, he felt he had to at least devise a coherent and proportional police response, should the event actually take place. In the same report to Gladstone, Anderson opined that a "torchlight procession would [...] be more or less dangerous [and it] would most certainly alarm a very large number of the inhabitants of the Metropolis."⁸⁴ Citing the precedent of 1887 when a similar event planned by members of the S.D.F. was declared illegal, he awaited further instructions from the Home Secretary as to how to adequately deal with the marchers.

⁸² Report by Inspector Roberts, 1 March 1892, TNA MEPO 2/260/122801/2.

⁸³ *Evening News*, 24 November 1892.

⁸⁴ Anderson to Lushington, 24 November 1892, TNA MEPO 1/54.

The march was allowed to take place; on the night of 1 December a crowd of nearly 500 people, many of them Jewish immigrants,⁸⁵ gathered on Tower Hill, and were promptly informed by City police that “no torchlight procession would be allowed.”⁸⁶ The marchers went ahead anyway, and “punctually on the stroke of midnight the procession [...] set off accompanied by fifty [City] policemen,” who were “planted [...] so adroitly [...] in twos and threes amongst the people that at any moment [...] they could have dispersed them.”⁸⁷ They proceeded through the city, singing “revolutionary songs.” No sooner had the crowd reached City limits, however, than it was intercepted by constables of the Metropolitan Police, who “as soon as [they] got well into their midst [began] driving [the marchers] east and west.” The latter, offering no resistance, simply “scampered off, followed by the police in every direction.”⁸⁸ Any possibility of a riot occurring had been avoided.

Anderson, however, was not at all pleased. In a report to Asquith, he decried the “violent speeches [...] and threats” made by some of the organizers of the march, which could not “altogether be ignored.”⁸⁹ The S.D.F. in particular, “in a state of quiescence for the past two or three years,” seemed to have “suddenly recovered,” which could only mean a future increase in the “gathering together of idlers and loafers.” To drive the point home, Anderson mentioned that even the anarchists were now “requesting permission to hold a meeting on the unemployed [sic] in Trafalgar Square.” As far as policing was concerned, it was “above all things necessary that there should be no want of preparedness.” He proposed that “a small reserve [of constables] must for some time [...] be regularly located on Saturdays and Sundays in the neighbourhood of Trafalgar Square” and asked the Home Secretary to “sanction a temporary augmentation of one

⁸⁵ *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 4 December 1892.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Standard*, 2 December 1892.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Anderson to Lushington, 29 November 1892, TNA MEPO 1/54.

hundred [men], which is the smallest number that would meet the requirements.”⁹⁰ Public order was back on the agenda.

11-14 January 1893, Grafton Hall Club and the Home Office, London

Unlike its seedier relation in Windmill Street, the anarchist club in Grafton Street, central London, was a “spacious, comfortable [...] house [...] the finest meeting place the foreign revolutionaries in London ever had.” It had over 500 dues-paying members and spanned two floors. Like the Club Autonomie, it had been set up by German exiles but gradually became a place for the “meetings [...] of French, Italian and other foreign comrades.”⁹¹ It was in the main hall on the first floor that such a meeting was held in the very early hours of 11 January 1893; two of the main items on the agenda were the situation in France, and the extradition of François. The “individualist” anarchists, such as the Italian *Libera Iniziativa* group centered on the figure of Luigi Parmeggiani,⁹² favoured a campaign of swift retribution against those who had persecuted François, and a renewed effort to spark an insurrection in the French capital. It is impossible to know how many informers were present at that meeting – the police were certainly aware that the Club was now the most obvious place “in which to look for any Anarchist who was ‘wanted’”⁹³ – but it is certain there was at least one.

Later that day, and again on the following, the Home Office received two letters from a certain S. Reuschel of Messrs. H. Hermann, hardwood importers of 11 Dod Street, London. In them, the author purported to describe the meeting that had taken place at Grafton Hall the day before:

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Rudolf Rocker, *The London Years* (Edinburgh, Oakland, Baltimore: AK Press, 2005), 14-16.

⁹² In contrast to the communist anarchists, the individualists scorned all forms of organization, including trade unions, and emphasized the primacy of the “individual act,” which invariably meant a violent attack against bourgeois society (either in the form of theft or assassination). Parmeggiani’s group, which numbered around eighty individuals, was the principal individualist organization in London, and functioned as much as a criminal gang as an anarchist group. See Di Paola, *The Knights Errant of Anarchy*, 63 ff.

⁹³ Sweeney, *At Scotland Yard*, 221

Sir [...] Being informed that the ‘Internationale’ intend to overthrow the present state of order here, in Berlin and Paris on the 15th inst., I consider it my duty to draw your attention to it [...] The anarchists will [...] blow up in the three named capitals a number of public buildings to such an extent as the world has never witnessed before [...] I [also] beg to report the resolution past [sic] at the meeting of the ‘Internationale’ which is to the effect that ‘with all power the brethren in Paris should be assisted by the ‘Internationale’ to bring about the revolutions in France [...] I must add that, as I am told, a great number of anarchists were against this resolution [...] Although I could not learn where and who the leaders of this section are, I have reason to believe that they can be found at Grafton Hall, as that place was accidentally mentioned by my informer, who with a great number of roughs has left for France via [the London] Chatham [and] Dover [railway].⁹⁴

Who this S. Reuschel was (it is unlikely that one of Melville’s informers would simply be giving away his intelligence to the Home Office), or whether his information was credible, it was impossible to ascertain. All Mr. Charles Murdoch, Assistant Under-Secretary for the Home Office, could do was to verify the sender’s address (it checked out) and pass the letters on to Anderson at the Yard along with the question of whether the French and German governments should be notified of this alleged anarchist plot. Without mincing his words, Anderson “concur[red] in thinking [Murdoch] should give the information to the French government,” but did not think it “fair to give copies of the man’s letters [as] his informant is an anarchist, and foreign governments are [...] very stupid in using information given them.”⁹⁵ Anderson decided to investigate the matter on his own, and after fully debriefing Reuschel, he was able to report to Under-Secretary of State Gladstone that,

⁹⁴ S. Reuschel to Asquith, 11 and 12 January 1892, TNA HO/144/485/X37842/3-4.

⁹⁵ Anderson to Murdoch, 13 January 1892, TNA HO/144/485/X37842/5.

[Reuschel's] informant is a Russian Nihilist whose acquaintance he made in London some time ago [...] I find no reason to doubt the good faith of the person who communicates this information and therefore I would wish that his name should not be disclosed to anyone. But yet I doubt the value of his statements [...] It seems improbable that his informant if really implicated in a plot of such a serious kind would speak of it this freely. Moreover I believe I should hear from other sources about any movement which is openly discussed by anarchists meeting at Grafton Hall. At the same time I am not prepared to say that there is nothing in it and I have directed inquiries to be made.⁹⁶

The French had already been informed by Her Majesty's Government in December of 1892 of an anarchist meeting which had taken place in Geneva early that month, where "intelligence was submitted from [the] London group of 'Individual Initiative'⁹⁷ respecting organization of explosions to take place in London on the occasion of extradition of François [and in] Paris [...] on his arrival there." This new intelligence seemed to give credibility to that previous report, but Anderson's scepticism proved well-founded. In the end, the conspiracy to blow up London, Paris and Berlin was either aborted, or, more likely, remained in the realm of wishful thinking. The rest of 1893 would prove far from uneventful, however, at least on the continent.⁹⁸

20 November – 8 December 1893, Barcelona and London

On the night of 7 November 1893, Spain experienced one of the worst terrorist attacks of the entire Restoration period. To avenge the execution of a comrade a few months earlier, an anarchist and bootlegger by the name of Santiago Salvador Franch threw two Orisini-type

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Probably Parmeggiani's *Libera Iniziativa*

⁹⁸ On 9 December 1893 Auguste Vaillant, another would-be avenger of Ravachol, exploded a bomb in the French Chamber of Deputies.

bombs⁹⁹ into the audience at the Liceo Opera House in Barcelona during the second act of Rossini's *Guillaume Tell*, killing at least twenty-five¹⁰⁰ and injuring scores. An immediate wave of repression followed: martial law was declared, many anarchists were arrested without charge (and some executed), and anarchist publications were declared illegal. In the aftermath of the incident, a Spanish newspaper observed how "notables of all political stripes lamented that Barcelona had now become a refuge for French, Italian and other foreign anarchists."¹⁰¹ To Spanish authorities it seemed not at all unreasonable, therefore, to seek the advice of that other reluctant refuge of European anarchy, Great Britain.

On 20 November Sir Henry Drummond-Wolff, the British ambassador to Madrid, received "a note [...] enquiring whether H[er] M[ajesty's] Gov[ernment] would be disposed to enter into arrangements for common international action against anarchists, [in which case] the Spanish Gov[ernment] were prepared to take the initiative and propose measures for carrying out the object in view."¹⁰² Wolff forwarded the note to London, but gave the Spanish a preliminary reply to the effect that such a bilateral effort would require the introduction of new legislation, and "all legislation of this kind [would be] regarded with the most jealous suspicion in [Britain]."¹⁰³ This line was subsequently echoed in the official reply by the Earl of Rosebery, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, which stated that,

[...] our laws are strong enough to deal with anarchism if directed against our own government. But they do not deal with abstract anarchism such as the announcement of general anarchistic principles, nor with anarchism as directed against foreign

⁹⁹ This improvised explosive device, made famous by Felix Orsini, the failed assassin of Napoleon III, was essentially a hand grenade activated by small protuberant capsules of highly explosive mercury fulminate, which would instantly break on impact.

¹⁰⁰ *El Dia*, 9 November 1893.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² Wolff to Asquith, 22 November 1893, TNA HO 45/10254/X36450/8.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

governments, unless it amounts to incitement to murder. Persons committing acts of violence abroad and fleeing to England would be extradited unless the offence were deemed political, and this I feel sure it would not be if the offence were anything like the bomb throwing [...] in Barcelona.

Home Secretary Asquith “entirely concur[red]” with the reply.¹⁰⁴ This fundamentally conservative “hands-off” approach, which conceived of political crime either as a continental aberration, or as a mere miscategorisation of ordinary crime, was by no means exclusive to the Whiggish Liberal establishment; it would remain in place throughout the Salisbury administration, and be reiterated in full force at the 1898 Anti-Anarchist Conference in Rome by the British delegation. More reform-minded voices existed (Anderson, Colonel Majendie), but in 1893 even they saw little need to fiddle with existing legislation; the worst an “English Ravachol” seemed capable of was smashing a jeweller’s window in Birmingham without even stealing any of the jewellery,¹⁰⁵ or shouting “The hell with the law!” in the streets of Manchester.¹⁰⁶ As for the foreign anarchists in London, they remained conspicuously abeyant.

10 December 1893, Trafalgar Square, London

“A bomb has burst in a theatre at Barcelona, and the English people are trembling even now [...] Well, I am one of those who welcome the affair as a great and good act [...] because of the death of thirty rich people and the injury to eighty others. Yes, I am really pleased.”¹⁰⁷ So stated an anonymous contributor to the 25 November issue of the *Commonweal*. It did not take long for the offending words to reach the police, and thence the benches of Parliament, where on 30 November they became the subject of a heated debate between Mr Charles Darling,

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ *Evening Telegraph and Star and Sheffield Daily Times*, 14 April 1893; *Glasgow Herald*, 28 January 1893.

¹⁰⁶ This was the case with one Mancunian anarchist, Albert Barton, who in October 1893 was “put in the dock and charged with using bad language.” *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General*, 3 October 1893.

¹⁰⁷ *Commonweal*, 25 November 1893.

Conservative MP for Deptford and Home Secretary Asquith. Asked whether the editor of the *Commonweal*, Henry Samuels, would be prosecuted for “incitement to murder,” as Most had been back in 1881, Asquith replied evasively that “the wisdom of taking legal proceedings in matters of this kind depends largely upon the circumstances of the particular case.”¹⁰⁸ Samuels would not be prosecuted, yet, ironically, it was in order to protest Asquith’s “suppressing [of] Anarchist opinions and misrepresenting [of] Anarchist principles”¹⁰⁹ that the *Commonweal* group decided to hold an illegal demonstration in Trafalgar Square on 10 December. As with the unemployed march of a year before, the police, “uniformed and plain-clothes,” took all precautions to “prevent any breach of the peace.”¹¹⁰ Loitering groups, many of which were gathered to harass rather than cheer the anarchists, were rapidly kettled and broken up. By 4:30 in the afternoon, the Square “had assumed its usual appearance.”¹¹¹

2 January 1894, Whitehall, London

Much like the anti-socialist laws of the 1880s in Germany, the newly-minted *lois scélérates*¹¹² were beginning to have a drastic and immediate impact on revolutionary activity in France. Publishing anything with an insurrectionary bent was now a crime *ipso facto*, punishable in most cases by the increasingly anachronistic retribution of expulsion. On 2 January the Under-Secretary of State received a report from Anderson on a Franco-Dutch anarchist by the name of Alexander Cohen, who had just arrived in London from Paris “having been expelled [...] by the French Police [...] in consequence of his writing on the recent outrage in the Chamber of

¹⁰⁸ HC Deb, 30 November 1893, vol. 19, cols. 103-4.

¹⁰⁹ “Anarchists & Trafalgar Square,” 5 December 1893, TNA HO 144/545/A55176/9.

¹¹⁰ *Times*, 11 December 1893.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² The first two of these “villainous laws,” passed in December 1893 within a matter of days of Vaillant’s outrage in the Chamber of Deputies, sought to criminalize all instigations, direct or indirect, against public order, and allowed for the preventive arrest of individuals suspected of belonging to anarchist organisations.

Deputies.”¹¹³ The frequency of such reports would only increase in subsequent months (and years) after similar gag laws were passed by other European governments (although none arguably as draconic as the *lois scélérates*), furthering some British politicians’ perception, especially within the Conservative opposition, that London was becoming, in the words of the Marquess of Salisbury, an “Anarchist laboratory.”¹¹⁴ Faced with such criticism, the Liberal government stood its ground, arguing that the “[current] law [wa]s sufficient,” and that the best line of defense would be “co-operat[ion] with other countries in any practical measures that can be devised for dealing more effectually with Anarchists and similar enemies of society” (this only a couple of months after refusing the Spanish government’s proposal for precisely such type of co-operation).¹¹⁵ It was evident that anarchism and Britain’s policy of asylum were quickly becoming the stuff of political football, but out in the real world, 1894 was proving to be an *annus mirabilis* for anarchist terrorism – “a very black twelvemonth,” as Special Branch DI Sweeney put it.¹¹⁶

15 February 1894, Greenwich Park, London

The “anarchist den” at 30 Fitzroy St. had been of interest to the police ever since Meunier had briefly lodged there in the summer of 1892;¹¹⁷ three days after a new anarchist outrage had left yet another Parisian cafe in ruins,¹¹⁸ such interest must have been greatly compounded, especially as Emile Henry, the perpetrator of that outrage, had been seen at that address “only a

¹¹³ Anderson to Lushington, 2 January 1894, TNA HO 144/587/B2840C/3214/393.

¹¹⁴ *Daily News*, 7 July 1894.

¹¹⁵ *Times*, 20 February 1894.

¹¹⁶ Sweeney, *At Scotland Yard*, 229.

¹¹⁷ *Times*, 16 February 1894.

¹¹⁸ On 12 February the “individualist” Emile Henry threw a dynamite bomb into the “upper-class” Café Terminus, near the Saint Lazare railway station, killing one and severely injuring twenty. Although his reasons for committing the act were varied and convoluted (having as much to do with a doctrinaire idealism as with his pathological personality and difficult family history), chief amongst them was a desire to avenge Vaillant, who had been guillotined in December of 1893. See John Merriman, *The Dynamite Club: How a Bombing in Fin-de-Siècle Paris Ignited the Age of Modern Terror* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2009).

few weeks [before].”¹¹⁹ Among the building’s more recent frequenters was also a twenty-seven-year-old journeyman tailor by the name of Martial Bourdin; in anarchist circles he was not a figure of any consequence (although he was related by marriage to none other than Henry Samuels, the notorious editor of the *Commonweal*), but on this dull and windy mid-February day, Bourdin was a man on a mission.

Around half past three in the afternoon, Bourdin left Soho¹²⁰ and headed towards Westminster Bridge, where he boarded the 379 tram running to East Greenwich station. In the left pocket of his heavy gray overcoat was a small brown-paper-wrapped parcel about the size of a brick. As he sat down on his seat he stared down momentarily at this mysterious package. Perhaps doubts were lingering in his mind as to what he was about to do, but at a quarter past four, the tram arrived at East Greenwich station, and Bourdin got off in a hurry, stopping only to ask the station timekeeper which way Greenwich Park was.¹²¹ By a quarter to five, Bourdin had reached the base of the zig-zag pathway leading up to the Royal Observatory; two park labourers were coming down just as he was going up; they noticed that Bourdin was carrying a small parcel and “walking very fast;”¹²² that would be the last time anyone saw him alive and well.

Around ten to five a loud boom, slightly less powerful than a cannon’s report, was heard all throughout the Park and as far away as Stockwell Street. Rushing towards the place of the explosion, two men, one of them a park-keeper, found Bourdin kneeling in a pool of blood at the

¹¹⁹ *Times*, 16 February 1894. Henry had indeed been in the house, but not that recently; his last confirmed presence in London was in December of 1893. Merriman, 134.

¹²⁰ Citing an unreferenced “French informer’s” report, Alex Butterworth has Bourdin walking out of the “International Restaurant near Fitzroy Square,” (*The World that Never Was*, 329) where he had supposedly just been lunching with Henry Samuels. However, the only known, roughly contemporary, account to give any mention as to where Bourdin was coming from on his way to Greenwich Park is Anderson’s memoir (published in 1910), in which the Assistant Commissioner claims the young anarchist had just “left his shop in Soho” (*The Lighter Side of My Official Life*, 176). Bourdin’s residence was located in Great Titchfield Street, Fitzrovia. *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 17 February, 1894.

¹²¹ *Times*, 27 February 1894.

¹²² *Ibid.*

first bend in the uphill pathway, the brim of his brown felt hat almost touching the ground; he was half-eviscerated and his left hand had been completely blown off; the only words he was able to mutter were “Take me home.” Although he was brought within a matter of minutes to the nearby Seamen’s Hospital, Bourdin bled to death “within ten minutes of his admission.”¹²³ The worldly possessions he had left behind were “a portion of a glass bottle [...] a metal watch [which had portentously] stopped at half past three, [...] a membership card of the Autonomie Club, two cards of admission to a masquerade ball in aid of the Revolutionary party, some documents relating to explosive ingredients, seven bills for food [...] £12 in gold and 19s. 6d. in silver.”¹²⁴ His lasting legacy, however, besides inspiring the twentieth-century’s first great spy novel,¹²⁵ would be the embarrassment his death ended up causing the Scotland Yard and the Liberal government. In the wake of the Greenwich Park incident, indignant questions began flooding the pages of British newspapers: How could an anarchist roam at will through the streets of London with a bomb in his pocket if his hiding place was well known to the police?¹²⁶ How did a young immigrant tailor of modest means come to possess the not unsubstantial sum of £13?¹²⁷ Was he merely a cog in a vast anarchist conspiracy that would soon unleash a continental-style wave of terror on British shores?¹²⁸ Why were London’s anarchist clubs allowed to exist in the first place, when their prime purpose was clearly to foment sedition and violent revolution?¹²⁹ Why was the British government so willing to give refuge to people who

¹²³ *Times*, 16 February 1894.

¹²⁴ *Times*, 27 February 1894.

¹²⁵ Joseph Conrad’s *The Secret Agent*, published in 1907.

¹²⁶ *Times*, 20 February, 1894; *St. James’s Gazette*, 16 February, 1894.

¹²⁷ *Times*, 27 February, 1894.

¹²⁸ *Times*, 16, 20, 22 and 27 February 1894; *Weekly Times & Echo*, 18 February 1894.

¹²⁹ *Times* 20 February 1894.

would gladly blow up all of Britain given half a chance?¹³⁰ Were the anarchists poisoning the water supply and spreading diseases?¹³¹

16 February 1894, Club Autonomie, Windmill St., London

The Scotland Yard received official notice of the explosion only on 16 February “not by telegram but by letter [...] for which an inspector was fined £4.”¹³² Anderson, however had been informed the day of the incident that “a French tailor named Bourdin had left his shop in Soho with a bomb in his pocket,” presumably by the Special Branch detectives who were keeping watch on the premises. Why was Bourdin not followed? According to Anderson, “to track him was impracticable. All that could be done was to send out officers in every direction to watch persons and places that he might be likely to attack.”¹³³ Whether such “impracticability” meant that the Branch agents simply lost track of their target, or something altogether more shadowy, the Assistant Commissioner failed to specify; what is certain is that on 16 February the Greenwich incident was threatening to snowball into a massive public relations disaster for the Yard. *The Times* declared that, “under what theory the police have been occupying all these weeks in mere ‘surveillance,’ and why they abstained two or three months ago, from casting their net over the whole club, is best known to Mr. Asquith.”¹³⁴ The “club” in question was the Autonomie, precisely where Inspector Melville – now *de facto* head of the Special Branch; Littlechild had retired the previous year¹³⁵ – and his men were headed.

Around nine o’clock in the evening the people inside the house at 6 Windmill Street heard the secret password knock being tapped against the front door; there was nothing strange

¹³⁰ *St. James’ Gazette*, 16 February 1894.

¹³¹ *Tit-Bits*, 14 March 1894, quoted in Porter, *Origins of the Vigilant State*, 103.

¹³² *Times*, 22 February 1894. The article does not specify which inspector.

¹³³ Anderson, *The Lighter Side of My Official Life*, 176.

¹³⁴ *Times*, 16 February 1894.

¹³⁵ Melville was not officially promoted to Superintendent until 1899; Littlechild had resigned in 1893, ostensibly for reasons of “ill health,” but he went on to continue working as a private investigator, resurfacing only two years later on the side of the prosecution in the Oscar Wilde trial.

about this as it was still quite early, and most members would only begin arriving later into the night. The door opened; outside, Inspector Melville stood surrounded by the full force of the “political department;” all were plain-clothed and “might have [passed for] members of the club,” save for Melville’s silk topper.¹³⁶ The officers immediately burst through the door, and began “taking possession” of the club premises. The clubbers present in the bar-room “were swiftly examined for arms, and then ordered downstairs into the large hall in the basement,” where Meville, sat inquisitorially at a desk, proceeded to “rigidly examine [sic]” them one by one. As the other club members, “not one English name in the whole gang,”¹³⁷ began arriving, they were “admitted” by Sergeant Walsh and led into the basement for questioning. By eleven o’clock “close upon eighty people had entered the club and been placed under arrest.”¹³⁸ One French anarchist attempted a scuffle with the officers, but was quickly subdued; the other “Autonomists” remained cooperative, and by midnight all had been released.

Tactically, the raid proved a success, demonstrating once again the Special Branch’s ability to mobilize surreptitiously, but practically it yielded uncertain results. No explosives were discovered,¹³⁹ and the only materials confiscated that night were “many batches of documents,”¹⁴⁰ one of which was a “manifesto couched in most violent language, printed on blood red paper, and headed, in large letters, ‘Death to Carnot!’”¹⁴¹ The pamphlet, written in French and dated 6 February 1894, began with a standard abuse-filled excoriation of the French regime, and ended ominously with the words “You had Vaillant’s head chopped off, and we’ll

¹³⁶ *Graphic*, 24 February 1894.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 17 February 1894.

¹³⁹ Two other, concomitant, raids were carried out that night, the first on Bourdin’s residence, where “explosives were found concealed in the room,” and the second one at 30 Fitzroy Street, which produced “nothing of importance.” *Pall Mall Gazette*, 17 February 1894.

¹⁴⁰ *Graphic*, 24 February 1894.

¹⁴¹ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 17 February, 1894. The anti-Carnot pamphlet was also mentioned by a *Times* article, which argued that such literature fell “within the law [against incitement to murder].” *Times*, 27 February 1894.

have yours, President Carnot! Long live anarchy!”¹⁴² French authorities were informed of its existence on 20 February when “representatives of the French police [met] in London [with] the authorities of Scotland Yard concerning measures to be taken for keeping the foreign anarchists [...] under constant surveillance”¹⁴³ What the other confiscated documents were or pertained to one can only speculate, as there is no official correspondence currently in the public record to refer to this or any other intelligence gained by the police in connection with the Greenwich Park incident or the raid on Club Autonomie. In fact, the only extant Home Office file on the 1894 explosion consists mostly of clippings from *The Times*’ coverage of the incident and the subsequent inquest into it.¹⁴⁴

23 February 1894, St. Pancras Cemetery, London

The government had of course good reason to pay attention to what the press, especially the Conservative press, was saying about the Greenwich Park outrage, as most of it was sharply critical of the authorities. *The Times* led the charge, arguing that “the police knew very little about the Anarchical movement in England until the affair of Greenwich Park,”¹⁴⁵ and that “the chief danger to be apprehended from [the Liberal-supported] international police seems to be that the foreigners might laugh at Scotland Yard.”¹⁴⁶ *St. James’s Gazette* proved slightly more conciliatory, proposing that “the police in London know these men, and know their meeting places; but their hands are tied” by a Liberal government which used “fine phrases and debating-society theories” to justify its irresoluteness.¹⁴⁷ Such suppositions must have only been

¹⁴² *La Lanterne*, 29 June 1894.

¹⁴³ *Times*, 23 February 1894.

¹⁴⁴ TNA HO 144/257/A55660. Although correspondence inside the file mentions the existence of 12 copies of an extensive report by Colonel Majendie on the explosion, accompanied by photographs of “metal cylinders” (perhaps the bombs found during the raid on Bourdin’s residence), none of these copies have apparently survived (or they have been misplaced).

¹⁴⁵ *Times*, 20 February 1894.

¹⁴⁶ *Times*, 22 February 1894.

¹⁴⁷ *St. James’s Gazette*, 16 February 1894.

strengthened by Asquith's maladroit reply that "I am not at the present moment in a position to give any information on the subject," after being questioned in Parliament as to why the Club Autonomie had not been searched before the explosion in Greenwich Park.¹⁴⁸ There was also the matter of Bourdin's funeral, which the anarchists threatened to turn into a rallying march. On this point, however, Asquith could not be clearer, as he explained on 22 February to Commissioner Bradford in a handwritten memo:

With reference to the proposed demonstration at the funeral of Bourdin tomorrow, I desire you to carry out the following instructions. The funeral is to proceed by the shortest [and] most direct route. No procession of any kind is to be allowed to follow the hearse. If any attempt is made, either at the starting place, or on route to form a procession, it must be at once prevented, and broken up by the Police. Only the mourning coach and the officials should be allowed to follow. At the cemetery no one is to be allowed to make a speech of any kind.¹⁴⁹

On 23 February, around noon, a large crowd assembled at the corner of Chapel Street and Marylebone Road in central London, where Bourdin's mangled body had been lying in state in a mortuary, for the entertainment of "morbid spectators."¹⁵⁰ Besides the anarchist contingent, the crowd also included "a large number of detectives"¹⁵¹ and, surprisingly, a great deal of working-class Londoners. As the *Daily News* observed however, these proletarians, "even the groups of the 'genuine unemployed' who assembled here and there, were utterly and demonstratively out of sympathy with the cause of Anarchy and the political or social use of dynamite."¹⁵² This spontaneous popular reaction against the anarchists quickly took quite an unsavoury turn, and

¹⁴⁸ *Times*, 17 February 1894.

¹⁴⁹ Asquith to Bradford, 22 February 1894, TNA HO 144/257/A55660/5.

¹⁵⁰ *Times*, 23 February 1894.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Daily News*, 24 February 1894.

“there was great uproar of hissing and hooting, as well as attempts to break through the line in order to wreck the mourners’ coach, [plus] every kind of insult and menace hurled at those inside it.”¹⁵³ Most of the crowd (pro and anti-anarchist) soon petered out, however, intimidated in part by the Met’s show of force but also by the cortege’s intentionally circuitous route. As the latter finally reached St. Pancras Cemetery, where the body was to be interred in an unconsecrated lot, the mourners¹⁵⁴ passed a “number of trustworthy officials from Scotland Yard,” standing by the gates, careful not to let in any potential troublemakers. Even the graveside itself was surrounded by “a strong force of police,” which was soon “reinforced.”¹⁵⁵ Although there are no specific figures to argue the case, it would not stretch the imagination to say that Bourdin’s funeral was perhaps one of the most heavily policed of the entire nineteenth century in Britain.

Meanwhile, robbed of a chance to scuffle with the anarchists, the hostile mob took its revenge on the one place which all British newspapers had identified as the *de facto* home of the alien revolutionaries: the house at 6 Windmill Street. Just as the funeral was being unceremoniously wrapped up in St. Pancras, a group of “turbulent young men, described as medical students,”¹⁵⁶ cheered on by bystanders, descended on the Club Autonomie and proceeded to tear down the building’s shutters and smash its windows.¹⁵⁷ In the days that followed, the Club began receiving its first hate mail, one writer threatening to “[fire] a bomb in your club, and I shall take care that there is a full household of you, and that your carcasses shall be blown sky high.”¹⁵⁸ In early March, the anarchist *Freedom* finally announced that the club

¹⁵³ *Times*, 24 February 1894.

¹⁵⁴ Principally Henri Bourdin, the deceased’s brother, and his wife Kate (who was also Henry Samuels’ sister-in-law). For more on Martial Bourdin’s family in Britain, see Michael Newton, “Four Notes on ‘The Secret Agent’: Sir William Harcourt, Ford and Helen Rossetti, Bourdin’s Relations, and a Warning Against Δ,” in *The Conradian* 32 (2007): 129-46.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ *Daily News*, 24 February 1894.

¹⁵⁸ *Morning Leader*, 26 February 1894.

was ceasing operation, ostensibly because of the “secret spy system, which has rendered the place useless and dangerous.”¹⁵⁹

26 February 1894, the Royal Hill Lecture Hall, Greenwich, London

The Greenwich Park incident did not linger for too long in the pages of the British press,¹⁶⁰ but whilst it did, it proved a fascinating mystery for the reading public. The most obvious question to be asked was naturally “Why? Why had Bourdin done what he had done? At the official inquest into the circumstances of his death, held on 26 February in a Greenwich lecture hall, Colonel Majendie opined that the anarchist “was facing the Observatory [at the time of the explosion]” given the position of his wounds and the spots where bits of his charred flesh were found. He also suggested that Bourdin could not have accidentally triggered the bomb by falling on it, “[as] the wounds would not have been of the penetrating character all over the body which they were;” it was also “quite evident that the explosive was not in the man’s pocket at the time of the explosion.”¹⁶¹ For these reasons, Majendie concluded, “[Bourdin’s] intention was the immediate use of the explosive substance [...] against the Observatory.”¹⁶² Despite its almost farcical nature, a plan to blow up the Royal Observatory would have certainly chimed in with most Britons’ perception of anarchists: “savages [and] enemies of humanity”¹⁶³ on the Right; dangerously misguided dreamers on the Left.¹⁶⁴ There is perhaps a grain of plausibility to this theory; in addition to being a government building, in 1894 the Observatory was also the recently designated *locus* of the Prime Meridian, and thus “the guardian of the point in space from which

¹⁵⁹ Supplement to *Freedom*, March 1894, p.12.

¹⁶⁰ One of the last references is from December 1895, when a victim of Jabez Balfour’s Liberator Building Society swindle “was found near the spot where Martial Bourdin, the Anarchist, met with his death by the explosion of a bomb, with a bullet wound in his head.” *The Cornishman*, 5 December 1895.

¹⁶¹ *Times*, 27 February 1894.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ Anderson, *The Lighter Side of My Official Life*, 176.

¹⁶⁴ Haia Shpayer-Makov, “Anarchism in British Public Opinion 1880-1914,” *Victorian Studies* 31 (1988): 500.

the worldwide tyranny of time, oppressor of the working man, was calibrated.”¹⁶⁵ It seems, however, far-fetched to consider a philosophical stance against “time discipline” as the prime reason for an anarchist outrage in the 1890s, when all other anarchist outrages of that decade were either acts of vengeance against figures of authority (judges, politicians, heads of state) or attacks on the perceived opulence of the bourgeoisie (as was the case with the Liceo and the Cafe Terminus bombings).

Excluding the possibility of the Observatory as the intended target, we are left with two other arguable scenarios: either the bomb was a result of an agent provocateur-engineered plot, or Bourdin was simply a middleman, delivering the bomb to its “rightful owner.” As far as the former goes, the evidence for provocation is entirely conjectural. Unsurprisingly, “among the anarchists themselves, rumours of provocation were rife [...] with the greatest suspicion focused on [the editor of the *Commonweal*,] Henry Samuels.”¹⁶⁶ David Nicoll, champion of the Walsall Six and ex-editor of the *Commonweal*, was convinced Samuels had engineered the whole thing at Melville’s urging;¹⁶⁷ so was the monthly *Liberty*, a more “moderate” anarchist publication which had been set up in contradistinction to the *Commonweal*’s insurrectionary agenda.¹⁶⁸ Unlike Coulon, however, Samuels does not appear to have left any paper trail in the Special Branch’s records, if indeed he served that organization in any capacity. There is nonetheless something particularly gripping about the melodramatic image of a ruthless and cynical double agent using a gullible younger man to carry out his self-serving evil scheme; this is partly why the myth of the Greenwich Park outrage as a tragic put-up job survived in the anarchist oral

¹⁶⁵ Butterworth, 330.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 331

¹⁶⁷ Porter, *Origins of the Vigilant State*, 131.

¹⁶⁸ Butterworth, 331.

culture of the 1890s, whence it would be transformed into literary fiction by the brilliant mind of Joseph Conrad a decade later.¹⁶⁹

The final scenario, according to which Bourdin was acting as a deliveryman is sadly not much more convincing than the first two, although it is what DS McIntyre suggested in his memoirs:

Bourdin was to get the bomb made for [...] two foreign Anarchists [...] for them to take back to use in Paris. His visit to Greenwich Park was therefore for a very simple purpose. It was for the purpose of handing over the bomb to the two Frenchmen, the spot being chosen as a safe rendezvous. The money found on the dead body of Bourdin had been supplied to him by the two. I know that the latter disappeared on the same evening that the explosion occurred in the Park.¹⁷⁰

If the popular press was preoccupied with the issue of Bourdin's motivation, the authorities were more concerned with that of the intelligence failure which had made the outrage possible in the first place. Anderson's excuse that tracking Bourdin had proved "impracticable" would not have earned him many points with the Home Secretary (especially as the latter's lack of quality information on the anarchists' doings constantly exposed him to Conservative attacks in the House of Commons). A tighter ship was needed in order to remain one step ahead of the revolutionists.

1 March – 12 April 1894, Paris and the Home Office, London

¹⁶⁹ Conrad had at least one reliable connection to London's anarchist enclave in the person of Helen Rossetti, who along with her sister Olivia had published an account of their anarchist years in 1903 (under the pseudonym Isabel Meredith) in which they advanced the theory that Bourdin had been set up by Samuels. See Michael Newton, "Four Notes on 'The Secret Agent': Sir William Harcourt, Ford and Helen Rossetti, Bourdin's Relations, and a Warning Against Δ," in *The Conradian* 32 (2007): 129-46.

¹⁷⁰ McIntyre, "Scotland Yard," in *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 28 April 1895. It should be noted that McIntyre was no longer with the Special Branch by the time the Greenwich Park explosion took place.

The British government's first move towards a more systematic method of dealing with "propaganda by the deed" was by no means revolutionary, but it did mark a surprising departure from the status quo. Seeing in the Greenwich Park fiasco an opportunity for implementing a much needed modernization of the Home Office's approach to "infernal machines", Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Explosives, Colonel Majendie, warned the Home Secretary on 1 March that "[given the] circumstances in connection with the recent explosion in Greenwich Park [...] and the knowledge that there are [...] many persons ready and willing to avail themselves of explosives [to] further [...] their anarchical designs [...] [w]e are trusting [...] very largely to 'luck' to relieve us of any sudden call for the disposal of a dangerous infernal machine." Paris, he argued, was many years ahead of London when it came to "neutralizing the effects of dangerous [explosives]" and for this reason a visit to the French capital would prove essential in allowing him "an opportunity of informing myself as to the precautionary measures adopted or under consideration in Paris for dealing with emergencies."¹⁷¹ Pitching a reform proposal to the Home Office by arguing Britain needed to be more in line with France was certainly a counterintuitive approach (even under a Liberal government), yet Majendie received the green light the very next day; whatever misgivings they may have had about the "continental system," the Whitehall mandarins must have agreed that "the Bourdin affair has to a large extent brought th[e] anxiety [about Britain's vulnerability to anarchist terrorism] to an acute point."¹⁷²

Despite having pioneered the concept of a civilian bomb squad more than a decade earlier, Majendie knew that his work (and that of his long-time colleague, Dr. Auguste Dupré) was no longer high up on the British government's list of security priorities since the lulling of Fenian activity. By contrast, the explosives unit at the *Préfecture's Laboratoire Municipal de*

¹⁷¹ Majendie to Asquith, 1 March 1894, TNA HO 45/9741/A55680/1.

¹⁷² Ibid.

Chimie had only recently risen to prominence thanks to the spate of anarchist attacks which followed in the wake of Ravachol's arrest, and the extent of its resources already reflected its importance to the French Ministry of the Interior. In the report submitted on 12 April to the Home Office, Colonel Majendie described admiringly a network of "four bastions [...] fitted up for the purpose of examining and opening infernal machines," maintained and operated by a body of specially trained chemists in constant direct communication with the *Préfecture*.¹⁷³ This was a far cry from the situation in Britain where no dedicated bomb disposal facilities existed, and where communication between the Explosives Inspectorate and the Scotland Yard was unduly slow. Majendie did not hope to have an exact replica of the French system set up at home, but he did suggest that, "mutatis mutandis [...] some points of the French system [...] call for prompt adoption." Firstly, communication between Majendie's Department and the Scotland Yard had to be "forthwith [...] in all cases where a package of really suspicious character is discovered," to which end he proposed "a complete telephonic system with the Home Office and through Scotland Yard." Secondly, facilities "for effecting a preliminary examination [of explosives]" would have to be constructed on premises "absolutely free from public intrusion [and] even public observance." There were not many locations in London ideally placed for such arrangements, but Majendie proposed Duck Island (one of the three islets in St. James's Park Lake), Hyde Park, and the Tower of London as sufficiently suitable.¹⁷⁴ Anderson and Bradford approved the plan almost immediately, and by November 1894, the facility on Duck Island was already "practically completed."¹⁷⁵

13-23 April 1894, London

¹⁷³ Majendie to Asquith, 12 April 1894, TNA HO 45/9741/A55680/4.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ Ralph Thompson (Under-Secretary of State for the War Office) to Lushington, 2 November 1894, TNA HO 45/9741/A55680/16.

A further change in the authorities' perception of anarchism was precipitated by another two relatively high-profile cases, which occurred in rapid succession during April of 1894. The first was the arrest of Theodule Meunier, the Café Véry bomber, who had successfully escaped extradition in 1892. Having recently returned to the British capital, on his way back to the continent, Meunier did not manage to remain incognito for long. On the evening of 13 April, around twenty past eight, he was spotted on a train about to depart from Victoria station by Inspector Melville, who had obviously learned well in advance where to look for him. After a brief scuffle which involved fifteen policemen and railway officials on one side, and Meunier aided by one of his friends (a Belgian named John Frank Ricken who was known to the police) on the other, the latter were subdued, arrested and brought to the Bow Street Police station.¹⁷⁶ As in François' case two years earlier, Meunier's claim that he was a "political criminal," and therefore could not be guaranteed a fair trial in France, did not carry much weight in court;¹⁷⁷ in June he was extradited to France where he was found guilty and sentenced to penal servitude for life.¹⁷⁸

The other case involved two Italian anarchists, Francis Polti and Giuseppe Farnara, who were arrested in connection with a plot to blow up the London Stock Exchange. Polti, an "illiterate and very enthusiastic" youngster¹⁷⁹ who had recently arrived in London from Italy to work as a waiter, proved easy prey for the Special Branch detectives, who soon became privy to his every move. Through shadowing Polti, they learned of his acquaintance with Giuseppe Farnara, a middle-aged veteran of the Italian "individualist" scene, who was known more for his

¹⁷⁶ *Illustrated Police News*, 14 April 1894.

¹⁷⁷ *Times*, 12 June 1894.

¹⁷⁸ *Times*, 27 July 1894.

¹⁷⁹ Sweeney, *At Scotland Yard*, 235.

skill as a burglar than for expounding social revolution.¹⁸⁰ Surprisingly, however, Farnara now appeared to be planning an outrage, and had co-opted the young Polti to help him. Wary of avoiding another Greenwich-style fiasco, the Scotland Yard immediately instituted a watch “by various officers [...] upon Polti and Farnara for a whole fortnight without intermission [the] men [being] even shadowed to the shops in the City.”¹⁸¹ In a strange echo of the Bourdin case, on the afternoon of 14 April Polti “mount[ed] an omnibus on the Surrey side of Blackfriars Bridge, going city-wards,” whilst carrying a small parcel. Seated next to him, however, were DI Sweeney and DS Maguire of the Special Branch, and by seven o’clock in the evening Polti was already in custody. The parcel he had on him contained only an iron casting, but the list of explosives and receipts linking him to Farnara found in his pockets, as well as the dangerous chemical compounds and anarchist pamphlets later uncovered at his residence in Warner Street, Clerkenwell, did not do him any favours.¹⁸² In addition, the manager of Mr. Cohen’s Works in Blackfriars Road, where the iron casting had been manufactured, had already informed the police “of the fact that orders had been given for the manufacture of bombs.”¹⁸³ Colonel Majendie’s report on the matter concluded that the iron casting was “made in a shape well known on the Continent, and designed with a view to a minimum of space and a maximum of destruction.”¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. DS McIntyre described Farnara as “simply an Italian brigand [who] only adopted Anarchism as a cloak to cover his depredations.” McIntyre, “Scotland Yard,” in *Reynolds’s Newspaper*, 28 April 1895.

¹⁸¹ Sweeney, 236.

¹⁸² Ibid., 239-242.

¹⁸³ This is in fact how the police came to learn about the existence of the “bomb” in the first place. The informant was subsequently awarded the considerable sum of £50 for his services, as much as all the officers involved in the arrest of Polti and Farnara. As Commissioner Bradford explained in a letter to the Home Secretary, “it has been usual in cases of political crime to grant special rewards, and the case in question was of such importance that I think the same course should again be followed.” Bradford to Lushington, 17 May 1894, TNA HO 144/259/A55860C/2.

¹⁸⁴ Sweeney, 243.

Polti admitted in a statement that he had purchased the chemical compounds and iron casting on Farnara's behest, but denied all sympathy with anarchism.¹⁸⁵ Farnara, in the meantime, had managed to abscond right before his accomplice's arrest, despite the police's increased vigilance. Raids in the Italian quarters of Clerkenwell initially produced nothing, but incidentally one of those whose residences were summarily searched, a fifty-four year old singing teacher named Federico Lauria, happened to be a spy working for the Italian government. Protesting his innocence to Melville, Lauria proved his credentials by supplying the now Chief Inspector¹⁸⁶ with much-needed intelligence on Farnara's most likely whereabouts.¹⁸⁷ On 22 April the latter was apprehended at an Italian lodging house in Stratford, East London; his surprise at having been so rapidly tracked down was not small – "You were well informed," he wryly conceded to his captors.¹⁸⁸ Once in custody, Farnara resignedly owned up to the purpose of the "infernal machine" found on Polti: "I did go with Polti to Blackfriars Road to order the bomb. If I had money I would have taken it to France or Italy; but having no money I meant to have it used in London at the [Stock] Exchange. England is the richest country, and at the Exchange there would be more rich people together than at any other place."¹⁸⁹ At the trial which followed, both of the accused were indicted under the third and fourth sections of the 1883 Explosives Act with unlawfully possessing explosive substances for a criminal object. Polti received a sentence of ten years with penal servitude, while Farnara, who pleaded guilty and re-

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 251.

¹⁸⁶ Melville had just been promoted to the Chief Inspectorship on 17 April 1894. Bradford to Kenelm Digby (Permanent Under-Secretary for the Home Office from 1895), 19 December 1899, MEPO 1/54.

¹⁸⁷ Di Paola, 133-134. Melville debriefed Lauria in his usual discrete manner, without disclosing his informer's identity to other Special Branch detectives. This was generally the practice, however, as Chief Inspector Donald Swanson explained in a report: "each officer has his own informers, and they are not generally known. The method is for the officers to compare with each other the information they may have received before action is taken." Report by Swanson, 27 June 1893, TNA HO 144/249/A54906.

¹⁸⁸ Sweeney, 250.

¹⁸⁹ Sweeney, 257.

affirmed his intention of wanting to “kill the capitalists [and] blow-up [...] all the *bourgeoisie*,”¹⁹⁰ received twenty years.¹⁹¹

If the arrest of Meunier had helped boost Melville’s public profile and rehabilitate the Yard in the wake of the Greenwich Park outrage,¹⁹² the Polti-Farnara case had far less comforting conclusions. First, it seemed to suggest that despite the government’s – and even some anarchists’ – reassurances,¹⁹³ it was perfectly possible for an outrage to be not merely planned in Britain, but directed against British institutions as well. Secondly, it spoke to the dysfunctional channels which connected the Special Branch to the upper echelons of government. Anderson, who, with rare exceptions, was in the loop only to the extent that Melville wished him to be,¹⁹⁴ had informed the Home Secretary of Polti’s arrest (and existence) only on 23 April,¹⁹⁵ ten days after the event, and then “only after a request [had been] made to the Commissioner of Police.”¹⁹⁶ As Under-Secretary H. W. Primrose explained in a note to Assistant Under-Secretary Murdoch, such a state of affairs could not be allowed to continue:

¹⁹⁰ *Standard*, 4 May 1894.

¹⁹¹ Having served his sentence, Farnara would be declared legally insane in 1909 (at the request and with the collusion of the Italian Ministry of Interior) in order to avoid “get[ting] him into the hands of anarchist sympathisers” (TNA HO 144/1711/A55860D/14). He would spend the remainder of his life in the Broadmoor Criminal Lunatic Asylum, where he would die in 1941 at the age of ninety-one.

¹⁹² Melville himself, keenly aware of the impact popular opinion could have on the stability of the “political department,” had tipped off journalists about his upcoming arrest of Meunier (Cook, 128). It is not clear how the Home Office felt about the press covering Special Branch operations, but it is telling that in one public record file, in the margin of a newspaper clipping of Polti’s arrest (complete with a detailed description of his confession), then Assistant Under-Secretary Charles Murdoch noted that “it is curious that so much information should get out [...] from what would appear to have been communicated by the Police.” Note by Murdoch, 23 April 1894, TNA HO 144/259/A55860/1.

¹⁹³ In an interview with *The Daily Graphic* one anarchist declared that “we [...] do not wish to do anything in England, because it is our refuge. It serves us by letting us alone” (*Daily Graphic*, 17 February 1894). The London anarchist press seemed to be equally willing to distance itself from propaganda by the deed. Even the usually incendiary *Commonweal* asked rhetorically “How many more lessons are required to teach us what not to do? Walsall proved how plots and conspiracies lead to failure; the Greenwich Park explosion proved how foolish and dangerous it is to meddle with compounds that one is not familiar with; Polti, again, has shown how risky it is to trade with shopkeepers.” *Commonweal*, 28 April 1894.

¹⁹⁴ According to Andrew Cook, “Melville was tight with information,” especially in his dealings with Anderson and Littlechild. Cook, 112.

¹⁹⁵ Anderson to Lushington, 23 April 1894, TNA HO 144/259/A55860/1.

¹⁹⁶ H. W. Primrose to Murdoch, 23 April 1894, TNA HO 144/545/A55176/26.

“whoever is responsible for this oversight [should be informed] that in future the [Home Secretary] desires that he may have immediate official information on all matters relating to the Anarchist movement, and not be left to obtain his news from the papers.”¹⁹⁷

May 1894, London

Asquith would continue to obtain most of his news on “social revolution” from the newspapers, however, as for the rest of his tenure as Home Secretary anarchist outrages remained almost entirely confined to the European continent. Nevertheless, the latter half of 1894 did see a marked increase in police surveillance of anarchists in London, as well as a heightened fear of a future outrage. On 1 May detectives searched the premises of one Henry Van Dierk, German anarchist and publisher of the self-deprecatingly titled *Der Lumpen Proletarier*, carefully “examining the walls and flooring, removing the stove, and emptying every drawer [...] trunk [and] bottle,” without however finding anything incriminating.¹⁹⁸ 1 May also marked the International Workers’ Day, and thus an opportunity for a show of force for anyone to the left of William Gladstone. A demonstration held in Hyde Park numbered at least three thousand participants, and included such luminaries as Keir Hardie, H. M. Hyndman, and William Morris. Although the event was for the most part peaceful, the few violent incidents which occurred tellingly involved attacks on several anarchist speakers by members of the audience; one anarchist was “hurled from his place, and [had his] flag torn to pieces,” while James Tochatti, the editor of *Liberty*, “was frequently interrupted with cries of ‘Shut up!’ and finally thrown to the ground by the crowd;” both escaped a potentially worse fate only through the intervention of “the large body of police in attendance.”¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ *Lancaster Gazette and General Advertiser for Lancashire, Westmorland, and Yorkshire*, 2 May 1894.

¹⁹⁹ *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, 2 May 1894.

The closest Special Branch detectives came to uncovering a new bomb plot was on 31 May when a “party consisting of Sergeants Walsh [and] Flood, [DI Sweeney] and three other officers, all under Melville, went to 54 Park Walk [in Chelsea],”²⁰⁰ the residence of Fritz Brall, a German anarchist known to the police for his keen interest in explosives.²⁰¹ Inside, detectives found a number of “bottles containing powerful acids, glass tubes, and other [chemical] apparatus,” implements for manufacturing coin, as well as a German-language “anarchist cookbook.”²⁰² They also discovered a “square hole” several feet deep, which Brall had dug into the floor foundation ostensibly for the purpose of keeping rabbits, but which Melville and his men judged far more useful as a “private storehouse” where the explosive substances could be conveniently stored and hidden from the police.²⁰³ On the face of it the mere possession of dangerous chemicals seemed sufficient to secure a prison sentence under the 1883 Explosives Act, but Justice Grantham, who presided over Brall’s trial at the Old Bailey proved to be less willing than Justice Hawkins to send down anarchists for *potential* acts of terror. In his defence, Brall claimed that the incriminating evidence was the property of friends, and that some of the chemicals found at his place were merely tools of the trade (he worked as a cabinetmaker); his story about the mysterious pit also checked out when his landlord’s wife confirmed she had seen rabbits in Brall’s apartment. While conceding that “the police were thoroughly justified in every

²⁰⁰ Sweeney, 267.

²⁰¹ Brall’s tendency to experiment with explosive compounds at home had alerted his former neighbours in Fitzrovia, who complained to police about the loud noises (as well as the “suspicious foreigners”) coming out of his apartment. Almost immediately after the Greenwich Park incident, Brall and his wife relocated to Chelsea.

²⁰² Sweeney, 269-72. This was Johann Most’s *The Science of Revolutionary Warfare*, published in 1885 during his American exile.

²⁰³ Sweeney, 269.

step they had taken,”²⁰⁴ Justice Grantham let Brall walk, much to the stupefaction of police who had “expected that he would be found guilty.”²⁰⁵

June-July 1894, Paris and London

On 24 June around nine o’clock in the evening, French President Carnot had just finished attending a banquet in his honour at a restaurant in Lyon, and was heading toward the city’s Grand Theatre for a showing of Racine’s *Andromache*. Whilst trying to make its way through a crowded street, the presidential open carriage was set upon by a young man holding a barely disguised dagger; without hesitation the man hurled himself over the carriage door whereupon he thrust the dagger into the president’s chest, leaving him unconscious, and let out a cry of “*Vive l’anarchie!*” before finally being subdued by the escort guards.

The assassin, a twenty-one-year-old Milanese baker’s apprentice named Santo Hieronimo (usually misspelled as Geronimo) Caserio²⁰⁶ had only recently arrived in France, and despite his unbending devotion to “the cause,” he did not claim to represent anyone but himself. The notion that a “lone wolf” could so easily murder not merely a judge or a reactionary *bourgeois*, but the president of the republic himself, was, however, hard to stomach for authorities and press alike, especially as it seemed to make a mockery of the *lois scélérates* passed a year earlier to subdue the anarchist peril once and for all.²⁰⁷ A few days after the assassination, *La Lanterne* alleged that “an international conspiracy against heads of state and certain political personalities” was to blame; the anti-Carnot pamphlet which Melville had found during the raid on the Club

²⁰⁴ Trial of Fritz Brall, June 1894 (t18940625-580), *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, accessed 24 April 2014.

²⁰⁵ Sweeney, 277.

²⁰⁶ *La Lanterne*, 29 June 1894.

²⁰⁷ Ironically, the French government’s first response to the assassination was to pass yet another, even stricter anti-anarchist law in July of 1894, essentially making anarchism itself a “thought crime.” It was only abrogated in 1992. “Loi n° 92-1336 du 16 décembre 1992 - Article 372,” <http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr>, accessed 18 April 2014.

Autonomie and forwarded to French authorities was proof that Caserio's plot had been hatched in London.²⁰⁸

The notion that London was now the headquarters of an international murderous conspiracy was not merely the gossip of French newspapers however; it was also what some politicians in Whitehall believed, especially within the Conservative opposition. If under Gladstone the Liberals had done everything to sell the "war of classes" to the British electorate,²⁰⁹ under the Earl of Rosebery they also appeared to be perfectly willing to harbour foreigners for whom said war meant not speeches and canvassing, but daggers and bombs. The first proposal for a new Aliens Bill was made on 6 July when the Marquess of Salisbury rose up in the House of Lords and delivered a speech criticizing the government's lax attitude to the immigration of "destitute aliens"²¹⁰ and political extremists, while suggesting that the Home Secretary should be reinvested with "the power to expel any [dangerous] foreigner," something he had not had since the Chartist scare of 1848. The new political exiles, Salisbury argued, were nothing like the old ones; the anarchists' "conspiracy of assassination" was worlds apart from the respectable struggles of Garibaldi or Kossuth. It was therefore vital for Britain's interests abroad that it should not be perceived by its allies as "the base from which the Anarchist operations are conducted."²¹¹

²⁰⁸ *La Lanterne*, 29 June 1894.

²⁰⁹ In a letter to his nephew Arthur Balfour, Salisbury described the Liberal ascendancy of the late Victorian period as "inspired by some definite desire for change: and [it] means business. It may disappear as rapidly as it came: or it may be the beginning of a serious war of classes. Gladstone is doing all he can to give it the latter meaning." Salisbury to Balfour, 10 April 1880, quoted in Bentley, *Lord Salisbury's World*, 72.

²¹⁰ Drawing on the report of the 1889 House of Commons Committee on the effects of immigration in London's East End, Salisbury argued that the unbridled influx of "destitute aliens" (most of whom were Eastern European Jews) was pauperizing the native working class communities of the capital and that consequently Britain needed to take inspiration from the legislation passed by the United States government in 1891, which had deemed inadmissible those immigrants who were not financially independent.

²¹¹ *Glasgow Herald*, 7 July 1894.

While conceding the merits of Salisbury's stance on "destitute aliens," and the fact that "we are hampered too much by traditional watchwords about Great Britain being an asylum,"²¹² Rosebery nonetheless refused to give any credence to the notion that Britain was naively harbouring dangerous criminals; if anything, the government's policy was preventing more assassination attempts from occurring:

What happens now is this. Men, criminals no doubt—men of bad character, come to these islands [...] They may when they are here meditate plots [...] against persons in [...] or [...] outside these islands. But they are under supervision while in this country, and under pretty strict supervision; and it is rare, I think, that we do not know what they have in contemplation. If they are contemplating crimes against people in these islands the law furnishes a sufficient remedy for dealing with them; but, if they are meditating crimes against people outside these islands, what is the remedy proposed by the Bill? It is to send them out of this country. It is quite obvious that they cannot assassinate persons outside these islands while they remain within them.²¹³

This reiteration of the Liberal approach to political policing differed very little from what Asquith had argued in the House of Commons a few days after the Greenwich Park outrage, with the notable exception that it emphasized the "strict supervision" the anarchists were supposedly under. Salisbury's bill proposal did not survive its second reading in the Lords, but it did prove a crucial point: as long as a Liberal government was in power, the doctrine of political asylum remained essentially unassailable; there was, however, ample room for concessions on the issue of non-political asylum. A decade later this lesson would lay the basis for Britain's first comprehensive immigration act.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ HL Deb, 17 July 1894, vol. 27, col. 127.

August – September 1894, London

“Strict supervision” was indeed the watchword for the men of the Special Branch during the closing months of 1894. In mid-July, following an incendiary speech by Thomas Cantwell, the new editor of the *Commonweal*, in which he had supposedly praised the assassination of Carnot and “solicit[ed] persons to murder members of the Royal Family,”²¹⁴ the police raided the anarchist newspaper’s office in Sidmouth Mews, Camden, for the second time in the past two years. Three weeks later they were still there. As ex-editor Henry Samuels complained in a letter to *Reynolds’s Newspaper*, “for three weeks the police have held possession of the office of the *Commonweal* [;] uniformed men and plain clothes ones from the Scotland Yard have received from the postman a number of letters addressed to me.”²¹⁵ Although the police’s “occupation” came to an end before the end of the month, the newspaper ceased publication shortly thereafter; given its already failing fortunes, it is likely that the operation was meant to deliver a *coup de grâce* to this once unofficial organ of London anarchism, as much as to update the police’s records.²¹⁶

Despite this apparent crackdown, the coming and going of continental exiles appeared to be on the increase. In reply to an inquiry made by the Austro-Hungarian government regarding some Bohemian anarchists who were thought to be *en route* to London, DS Maguire submitted a report on 10 August detailing the movements of two of the wanted anarchists, both ex-members

²¹⁴ *Morning Post*, 1 August 1894. Cantwell and one of his associates, a man by the name of Charles Thomas Quinn, who was already known to the police for his failed attempt to give a eulogy at Bourdin’s funeral, had made the seditious speech on 29 June during a meeting of the unemployed in Tower Hill. The actual words used in the speech were not reported in any of the press accounts or witness testimonies, but whatever they were, they caused the attendant crowd to turn violently on the two anarchists, who then had to be rescued by the police. At the trial which followed, Cantwell and Quinn each received a sentence of six months with hard labour. *Daily News*, 1 August 1894.

²¹⁵ *Reynolds’s Newspaper*, 5 August 1894.

²¹⁶ Occasionally, information on the anarchists could come from unusual sources. On 27 July 1894 the South Kensington (later Victoria and Albert) Museum received two anarchist pamphlets (one in French, the other one in Italian) which it then forwarded to the Home Office. H. B. Simpson, a Home Office clerk, noted that “they must have been sent by a fool or a lunatic,” but it is just as likely that the sender was a concerned, if somewhat confused, citizen. Note by Simpson, 28 July 1894, TNA HO 144/258/A55684/3.

of the Club Autonomie who “[did] not mix very much with the other foreign groups partly owing to their not having a knowledge of the language and also owing, it is thought, to the fact of them being very cautious men.”²¹⁷ Only three days later, the French government made a similar inquiry on the whereabouts of the anarchists Rosenberg and Talbot, asking for “immediate notice [to] be given to the French police” in case the former should leave Britain.²¹⁸ These two proved impossible to track down however; Anderson suggested that they were either not anarchists, or that they simply did not exist, “the French government hav[ing] been misled by some untrustworthy informant.”²¹⁹

From August until December more anarchists continued to join the ranks of the London colony. A precise number is impossible to deduce, but by mid-August, some British newspapers had begun circulating the notion that as many as four hundred anarchists had arrived in Britain within the span of a few days.²²⁰ Others argued that while that figure was likely an exaggeration, “certain members of [the Scotland Yard] [who proved] a little more communicative” than Chief Commissioner Bradford, had confirmed that the number of recent political refugees was a sizeable one indeed.²²¹ Rumours aside, the number of press reports on *individual* foreign anarchists arriving in Britain during this period is tellingly insignificant. Perhaps the most widely reported case was that of the stately Amilcare Cipriani, “by far the most interesting figure to be

²¹⁷ Report by John Maguire, 14 August 2016, TNA HO 144/587/B2840C/40a.

²¹⁸ Thomas Sanderson (Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office) to Lushington, 13 August 1894, TNA HO 144/587/B2840C/42a.

²¹⁹ Report by Anderson, 25 August 1894, TNA HO 144/587/B2840C/42a. Despite Anderson’s contempt for the continental police system, he may have had a point; the Préfecture’s informers “had a sorry reputation among the anarchists and across police services” (Bantman, 120), while the French police, its many successful investigations notwithstanding, was somewhat prone to wild goose chases. In early August for example, “Parisian police, accompanied by a Scotland Yard detective,” were looking for a “dynamite factory” supposedly set up by French anarchists in Birmingham. Needless to say, “it [was] found that there [was] not the slightest ground for the suspicion.” *Evening Telegraph and Star and Sheffield Daily Times*, 11 August 1894.

²²⁰ *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 15 August 1894; *Evening Telegraph and Star and Sheffield Daily Times*, 15 August 1894.

²²¹ *Glasgow Herald*, 17 August 1894.

met with in Anarchist circles,”²²² and who as both a hero of the Risorgimento and an anarchist, seemed to problematize Salisbury’s distinction between good and bad political exiles. Cipriani had arrived in London on 10 August via Brussels, “finding that France since the assassination of President Carnot has become an impossible place of residence for a conspicuous Italian Anarchist.”²²³ Equally, the Home Office files show only a handful of arrivals for this period, with most occurring on 24 September when five Italians arrived from Lugano, and one Belgian from Antwerp.²²⁴

Whether well-known like Cipriani, or utterly anonymous, all these men (and they were invariably men) had been expelled from their country of origin, and had chosen Britain as their destination, where, despite Melville’s fearsome reputation, they knew they would at least be afforded *some* liberties. In certain cases however they ended up there even if they did not wish to. This, for example, was the case with François Birdisol and Louis Antoine, two French anarchists who “had asked to be sent to Germany, but [found] their fares [had already been] paid to Dover, where they [subsequently] landed.”²²⁵

4 November 1894, Tilney Street, the City of Westminster, London

Despite the bombs, the raids, the parliamentary debates, and an increasingly censorious public opinion,²²⁶ 1894 had not proven to be an especially challenging year for British authorities as far as revolutionary anarchism went, certainly not on the scale that it had been for the French, Italian, and Spanish governments. The two attempted outrages by Bourdin and Farnara had

²²² *Illustrated Police News*, 6 October 1894.

²²³ *Illustrated Police News*, 29 September 1894.

²²⁴ Anderson to Lushington, 24 September 1894; H. Percy Anderson (Foreign Office) to Lushington, 24 September 1894, TNA HO 144/587/B2840C/47-48.

²²⁵ Report by Anderson, 19 September 1894, TNA HO 144/587/B2840C/52a.

²²⁶ Although the British mainstream was resolutely against the anarchists, there was also an increasing public fascination with their activities, as evidenced by the several “anarchxploitation” potboilers published in the early 1890s: *Hartmann the Anarchist* (1892), *Strange Tales of a Nihilist* (1892), *The Angel of the Revolution* (1893), and *Olga Romanoff* (1894).

ended in self-inflicted, unintentional death and miserable failure respectively. Before the year was through, however, police would be reminded that lack of success did not necessarily mean loss of faith for the proponents of propaganda by the deed.

On the night of 4 November a loud explosion shook the residents of upscale Mayfair out of their beds. As the constable who first reached the scene soon found out, an “infernal machine” had just exploded on the doorstep of Mr. Reginald Brett’s house in 2 Tilney Street. The only damages were the gaping hole, “large enough to admit the head and shoulders of a man,”²²⁷ left where the bomb had been placed, a slightly unhinged door, and a few shattered windows. Mr. Brett (son of Viscount Esher and former Liberal MP) had been attending a club meeting at the time of the explosion, while Mrs. Brett and the servants had easily managed to escape unharmed. Despite this rather undramatic result, the outrage was nonetheless the first time in the new decade that a bomb had come this close to claiming the life of an establishment figure, and within a matter of hours Colonel Majendie, Commissioner Bradford, and both assistant commissioners had arrived at the scene (which was then promptly cordoned off to keep out “crowds of eager inquirers”).²²⁸ Doubts were immediately raised as to the notion of Brett as intended target. His career as MP had been entirely unmemorable,²²⁹ and he was not known to harbour strong views on political radicals. A more plausible objective seemed the house only three numbers further down the street – that of Sir Henry Hawkins, or “Hangman Hawkins” as the *Commonweal* had once dubbed him, the judge who had put away the Walsall anarchists and, more recently, Polti and Farnara.

²²⁷ *Standard*, 6 November 1894.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

²²⁹ Brett would re-enter public life shortly thereafter, and go on to play an important role in various areas of government, from advisor to King Edward VII to chair of the 1904 War Office Committee Report, which drastically reformed the hierarchy of the British Army.

The report submitted by Colonel Majendie and Dr. Dupré on 8 November indicated that the bomb's main charge had been picric acid, "hitherto [...] used almost invariably by French Anarchists,"²³⁰ and in the absence of any forewarnings or witnesses to the event, that was just about the only clue as to the perpetrator(s)'s identity. In the days that followed, Special Branch detectives tried, to no avail, to locate any possible suspects. For a while newspapers reported that an arrest seemed likely, "[based on] information received at Scotland Yard [which stated that] the perpetrator of the outrage [was] without doubt in hiding on the Continent,"²³¹ but such reports proved premature. As DI Sweeney later recalled, "various anarchists were suspected by us, but we were never able to fix on any particular individual."²³²

1895, London and Paris

President Carnot would not be the last head of state to fall victim to an anarchist outrage, but by the mid 1890s the tide was beginning to turn against the "individualist" faction; the future, it seemed, belonged to the collectivist vision advocated a generation earlier by the First International anarchists: "monster unions embracing millions of proletarians."²³³ Although this new syndicalist vision had the advantage of positioning anarchism within the emerging political movement of the industrial working class, it also meant that anarchists now had to compete with, and in most cases be "hopelessly outpaced"²³⁴ by, the parties of reformist socialism. The anarchist colony in London was now increasingly under the sway of people like Errico Malatesta, Louise Michel, Rudolf Rocker and other avowed communists, leaving the advocates

²³⁰ *Standard*, 9 November 1894.

²³¹ *Star*, 1 December 1894.

²³² Sweeney, 281.

²³³ Pyotr Kropotkin, quoted in Michael Schmidt and Lucien van der Walt, *Black Flame: The Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism* (Edinburgh, Oakland, Baltimore: AK Press, 2009), 133-4.

²³⁴ Quail, 197.

of “individual will” in an increasingly uncertain minority.²³⁵ With the exception of Rocker’s organization of East End Jewish sweatshop workers along anarcho-syndicalist lines, however,²³⁶ the communist-anarchists found themselves shut out of the enfeebled post-New Unionist trades unions on the one hand and the decidedly reformist politics of the late-Victorian socialist revival (epitomized by the Independent Labour Party and, to a lesser extent, the SDF) on the other. Consequently, the anarchist movement as a whole had become “very dull and sluggish” by the end of 1895.²³⁷

Although there is no indication that the police knew anything about (or was even interested in) the ongoing ontological crisis of émigré anarchism, they must have nonetheless perceived, and welcomed, the change of pace it gradually brought about. The Special Branch had just been strengthened by the addition of four constables to “meet the emergency”²³⁸ which all the anarchist activity of 1894 had seemed to point to, but a couple of months into the new year, the only political cases Branch detectives had to work on involved merely the quiet surveillance of recent arrivals, usually on behalf of foreign governments.²³⁹ Not that there was much to surveil, as evidenced by DI Sweeney’s report on the movements of two Bohemian anarchists suspected of smuggling seditious literature into Austria-Hungary:

Alois Kubalck [...] and J. Petrick [...] have not hitherto been known to Police as having any connection with the anarchist movements. I find they are members of a Bohemian

²³⁵ Parmeggiani, the onetime leader of the Italian “individualists,” gave up anarchism in the 1890s to focus on his, not entirely legitimate, antiques business in Paris. Di Paola, 77.

²³⁶ See Rudolf Rocker, *The London Years*, especially chapter 16: “The Campaign against the Sweating System.”

²³⁷ Quail, 203.

²³⁸ Anderson to Lushington, 29 November 1894, TNA MEPO 1/54.

²³⁹ The practice of shadowing political radicals on behalf of foreign governments was not entirely legitimate, despite being tacitly condoned by the Home Secretary. When in 1897 the Spanish government asked to be kept up to date with the movements of a Cuban revolutionary recently landed in Britain, the reaction of one junior Home Office clerk was tellingly naive: “[The man] is not a criminal. Surely the English police cannot properly shadow a political exile at the request of a foreign government?” Note by H. B. Simpson, 14 August 1897, TNA HO 144/587/B2840C/92.

body who are known to hold extreme views, and who meet periodically at the Grafton Hall [Club] and at the Harmony Club, Fitzroy Square. Up to the present I am unable to connect these men with the printing, publishing, distribution, or transmission of any anarchist literature. However I have put a confidential informant in touch with them, and will make further enquiry.²⁴⁰

If any arrests were made, it was for mundane infractions to which anarchism was only marginally incidental. This, for example, was the case with Alfred Grandidier, a familiar face on the Fitzrovian scene, who was apprehended on 24 January for a burglary he had previously committed in France,²⁴¹ or Edward Leggett who “was charged²⁴¹ with travelling on the Great Eastern Railway without having [...] paid his fare,” something which he could not bring himself to do as “an anarchist [who] refuse[s] to recognise the right of a section of parasites calling themselves shareholders to make rules [...] over railways.”²⁴²

The Walsall case was briefly returned to the Home Office’s attention when on 3 February the Sunday edition of *Reynolds’s Newspaper* began publishing weekly instalments of ex-DS Patrick McIntyre’s “Scotland Yard: Its Mysteries and Methods,” wherein he alleged that “[in the] whole series of dynamite plots [...] the hand of the spy, or agent-provocateur, [was] clearly visible.”²⁴³ His “revelation” concerning the Walsall plot (namely that it had all been Coulon’s work) proved especially controversial, eliciting a furore from the ranks of the socialist Left, who now appeared more inclined to listen to the anarchists’ theories of a “British Third Section” conspiring to discredit the workers’ movement by any means necessary. On 21 May Keir Hardie wrote a letter to Asquith arguing that “[new] facts have come to light which seem to lend

²⁴⁰ Report by Inspector Sweeney, 23 January 1895, TNA HO 144/587/B2840C/54a.

²⁴¹ *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 24 January 1895.

²⁴² *Essex Newsman*, 6 July 1895.

²⁴³ McIntyre, “Scotland Yard,” in *Reynolds’s Newspaper*, 3 March 1895.

confirmation to a suspicion, entertained all along, that the prime mover in the alleged plot was a police agent,” and offering to prepare “a statement of all the facts of the case.”²⁴⁴ It is unlikely that Asquith would have agreed to review the verdict in the Walsall trial, but at any rate, he did not have to: in July the Liberals lost the general election, and Sir Matthew White Ridley became the new Home Secretary. When the report proposed by Hardie²⁴⁵ was finally assembled in September and submitted to the Home Office with the endorsement of Henry Wilson, the left-wing Liberal MP for Holmfirth, Ridley brushed it off with instructions to “say to Mr. Wilson MP that the S. of S. has again reconsidered the evidence in the case but regrets to say that after giving it his careful attention he has been unable to arrive at a conclusion different from that repeatedly expressed by himself and his predecessors in office.”²⁴⁶ There would be no lenience for the imprisoned Walsall Four.

The controversy surrounding London’s status as “anarchist laboratory” was kept alive thanks to a few sensational stories about the unmasking of a French informer,²⁴⁷ bogus bomb scares,²⁴⁸ an “imminent anarchist invasion,”²⁴⁹ and an attempted outrage on a Parisian financier. The last mentioned involved the mailing of a letter bomb to Baron Alphonse de Rothschild, which failed to hit its intended target when it was opened by Rothschild’s secretary (who suffered minor injuries as a result). The incident drew the attention of Scotland Yard detectives when French police, unable to track the sender of the deadly missive, put out an official

²⁴⁴ Keir Hardie to H. H. Asquith, 21 May 1895, TNA HO 144/242/A53582.

²⁴⁵ ‘The Walsall Anarchists: Precis of the Case for the Convicts (with Appendices) in Mitigation of Sentence,’ September 1895, TNA HO 144/242/A53582/28. The committee behind the report included several familiar names of British socialism: G. B. Shaw, William Morris, Michael Davitt, and Walter Crane. David Nicoll was also a member.

²⁴⁶ Note by Ridley, 18 September 1895, TNA HO 144/242/A53582/28.

²⁴⁷ This was a certain Eugene Cotin who, after being found in possession of a letter from the *Préfecture* instructing him to report back on the movements of a French anarchist, confessed (at gunpoint) to being in the pay of the French authorities. *Daily News*, 10 January 1895.

²⁴⁸ In August, for example, it was discovered that a London publisher had been “asked by a foreigner to lithograph a weekly paper in [...] Turkish,” which unbeknownst to the printers, contained “invitations to Socialists to combine together for the purpose of blowing up the English Houses of Parliament.” *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, 21 August 1895.

²⁴⁹ *Devon and Exeter Gazette*, 16 February 1895.

statement that “the plot had been organised in London.”²⁵⁰ Luckily, the would-be assassin was caught on a second attempt, sparing the Yard further embarrassment.²⁵¹

August 1896 – January 1897, New York, Antwerp, Brussels, Rotterdam, Boulogne, Glasgow and London

In early August 1896 the Home Office received notice from America²⁵² that four New York Fenians, all members of the Irish National Brotherhood,²⁵³ were on their way to Europe with the intention of planning a new dynamite campaign to be unleashed in Britain later that year. Although the threat of renewed Fenian violence was in itself cause for alarm, the circumstances surrounding this new plot proved especially awkward for the British government. Firstly, the news came on the heels of the recent pardoning and release from Portland Prison of four high-profile Fenians (Thomas Devaney, Thomas Gallagher, John Daly, and Albert Whitehead), all of whom had received life sentences for their involvement in the dynamite campaign of the 1880s.²⁵⁴ The possibility – unlikely as it was – that the New Yorkers might somehow link up with their recently pardoned comrades,²⁵⁵ and then succeed in committing an outrage, would have certainly been on the Home Secretary’s mind.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁰ *Evening News*, 7 September 1895.

²⁵¹ *Standard*, 6 September 1895.

²⁵² Despite a series of drastic cuts introduced in 1892, the Home Office’s Secret Service bureau, now headed by Major Nicholas Gosselin (Jenkinson’s one-time deputy), still managed to run a functional network of informers in America, which in the 1890s included “one secret agent, seven informants and two ‘sub-agents’ to [...] preserve anonymity between them” (Porter, *Origins of the Vigilant State*, 118). The ringleader of this American operation was Sir Harry Gloster Armstrong, a military man and future Consul-General in New York, who reported directly to Gosselin. David Fitzpatrick, *Henry Boland’s Irish Revolution* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2003), 339, n85.

²⁵³ The INB, a Clan na Gael splinter group, was led by William Lyman, an Irish-born New Yorker “who had worked originally as a plumber in Brooklyn but who later became wealthy through speculating in real estate and joined the US Republican Party.” Owen McGee, *The IRB: the Irish Republican Brotherhood, from the Land League to Sinn Féin*, 219.

²⁵⁴ Thomas Devaney, who had served thirteen years for his role in the 1883 outrage on the Tradestone Gasworks in Glasgow, was released on 17 August. Daly, Whitehead, and Gallagher, arrested in connection with Gallagher’s foiled plot of 1883, were released on 20, 22 and 28 August respectively.

²⁵⁵ Given the extremely harsh treatment they had received whilst imprisoned, none of the released convicts was in any condition to resume work for the insurrectionist-republican cause, assuming they would have had any interest in doing so. Gallagher who “looked very pale and thin and [...] in a very weak state,” had to be escorted by a nurse. Devaney referred to himself as a “child beginning to walk,” while Whitehead, shortly after his return to his native

Secondly, there was the matter of the identity of these new conspirators. Two of them, Edward Ivory and Thomas Haines, were obscure youths previously unknown to the Home Office; the other two however were inveterate insurrectionists of the old guard. One was John Francis Kearney, a disciple of Timothy Featherstone and one of the organisers of the 1883 outrage on the Tradestone Gasworks in Glasgow; he had managed to avoid arrest by fleeing to Hull and thence to New York. The other man was Patrick J. Tynan, the fabled "No. 1" of the Invincibles – the supposed *éminence grise* behind the Phoenix Park murders. Like Kearney, Tynan – ever the dyed-in-the-wool dynamitard²⁵⁷ – had previously escaped all attempts by British authorities to secure his arrest in connection with the terrorist campaign of the 1880s.

Finally, there was the Czar's European tour, which was scheduled to include a sojourn at Balmoral Castle toward the end of September. The Emperor and Autocrat of All the Russias was not normally regarded as a traditional enemy in Fenian circles (indeed the Clan na Gael had made overtures for cooperation to the Russian government as recently as 1886),²⁵⁸ but this new expedition was thought to have the backing of “Anarchists and Nihilists [who although not] specially interested in freeing Ireland from the British yoke, subscribed funds and dynamite for the leaders.”²⁵⁹ Naturally, given the circumstances, an attempt on the Czar's life could certainly mean an attempt on the Queen.

Skibbereen “went mad” and disappeared. *Evening Telegraph and Star and Sheffield Daily Times*, 18 and 28 August 1896; *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 26 August 1896.

²⁵⁶ Even if Ridley himself did not entertain this scenario, he knew that certain ultra-Unionist MPs within his party would interpret his decision to allow the pardon of the four Fenian prisoners on medical grounds as a sign of weakness. Indeed, only a few months later the matter would be brought up in the House of Commons by Sir Henry Howorth (Conservative MP for Salford South), who argued that “the explanation given by the Government to justify the release of the dynamitards [was] inadequate, and [...] calculated to encourage a recrudescence of that form of crime.” HC Deb, 22 January 1897, vol. 45, col. 359.

²⁵⁷ In his 1894 *The Irish National Invincibles and their Times*, Tynan offered a scathing indictment of Home Rule and Parnellists (the latter whom he considered morally responsible for the Phoenix Park Murders), and argued that Irish freedom could only be secured through violent insurrection.

²⁵⁸ Campbell, *Fenian Fire*, 214-215.

²⁵⁹ *New York Times*, 15 September, 1896.

By mid-August the conspirators had all disembarked at various European ports. Edward Ivory (travelling under the name of Edward Bell) checked in at the Midland Grand Hotel in London on 26 August and began inquiring at local chemist shops about the price of a “carboy of sulphuric acid.”²⁶⁰ Unable to procure the substance (the price was either too steep or the shop did not stock enough of it), Ivory left London for Antwerp in early September, picking up Tynan in Brussels along the way. In Antwerp, the two reunited with Kearney and Haines, who had in the meantime managed to transform a small rented house in the suburbs into a dynamite-making facility. For reasons that would never really become clear, the four soon parted ways however. On 8 September Ivory returned to London, and boarded a train for Glasgow, while Tynan made his way to the French Opal Coast, settling in Boulogne-sur-Mer on 11 September. That same day Kearney and Haines checked in at the Queen’s Hotel in Rotterdam.

Whatever his mission in Glasgow was, Ivory went to work straight away. On the 9th, the day after his arrival, he began calling on local Irish republicans, only to realize that the men he was looking for were either nowhere to be found or wasting away in hospitals and pubs; that afternoon Ivory sent a cryptic telegram to Tynan in Boulogne: “I am afraid the stock in Ireland are not good enough, as the cattle are a little too old. I’ve got an awful fear that my speculation in London will result badly for me; but if I am able to get a good line in stocks to-night or to-morrow I will be away before the wedding occurs.” Tynan wrote back on the 11th asking Ivory to “kindly join me and bring what you can; but do not bring any rotten material.” A day later Ivory also received a telegram from Kearney which boded decidedly bad news: “We are here. Come

²⁶⁰ Trial of Edward Bell, alias Edward J. Ivory, January 1897 (t18970111-146), *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0., accessed 11 May 2014.

right away. Business stopped. Wire Garth [Tynan].”²⁶¹ Ivory did manage to wire Tynan, but it was already too late.

On the afternoon of the 12th Glaswegian authorities received a telegram from London, and within a matter of minutes Ivory’s room at the Victoria Hotel was placed under surveillance by a contingent of Glasgow CID and RIC²⁶² detectives. When the order for his arrest came a few hours later, Ivory was already in custody at the Central Police Office for “inquiry as to contravening the Explosives Act, 1883.”²⁶³ Details of the incriminating papers and telegrams found in his possession (which he claimed to have found in a public lavatory) were immediately cabled to London; this was all the pretext the Scotland Yard required to tighten the noose on the whole conspiracy. In Antwerp, Special Branch detectives, overseen by Anderson himself, and in conjunction with Belgian police, raided Kearney and Haines’ suburban “laboratory.” The two had not been there for days, but the materials seized at the house made an impressive assemblage: “utensils of glass and china [...] clay moulds [...] a leaden vessel [which gave off] a suffocating vapour [...] phials containing nitro-glycerine [...] three demijohns filled with acids [and] a pair of trousers greatly burned by acid.”²⁶⁴ Almost concurrently Tynan was being placed under arrest in his hotel room at Boulogne-sur-Mer by two Scotland Yard detectives; a day after, Kearney and Haines were also picked up in Rotterdam. The success of the operation looked to be an almost unprecedented triumph for the Yard, and thanks to the help lent by Dutch, Belgian, and French authorities, a shining example of what could be achieved through international police cooperation. It was not long before cracks began to emerge in this shiny facade however.

²⁶¹ *Times*, 19 January 1897.

²⁶² The Royal Irish Constabulary had kept a permanent post in Glasgow since the beginning of the year in order to keep a watch on local Fenian societies. *Daily News*, 16 September 1896.

²⁶³ *Glasgow Herald*, 15 September 1896.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

The case against Tynan seems to have collapsed almost immediately. Whatever connection he may have had to the Phoenix Park murders, it was now legally useless to the British government,²⁶⁵ and despite Tynan's "more or less important admissions"²⁶⁶ (including his acquaintance with Ivory, Kearney and Haines), there was no concrete proof to demonstrate that the Irishman had devised any plans to take his support of dynamite from the theoretical realm into the practical. The Home Office made a last-ditch request for extradition to the French government on 24 September, explaining that while in 1883 Tynan's extradition had been demanded "merely on suspicion of [his] participation in the Phoenix Park murders [it was now being] requested after his condemnation for murder in default."²⁶⁷ The French were not convinced; Tynan lingered on in prison for three more weeks, and by late October he was reunited with his family in New York.²⁶⁸

Inexplicably, the evidence against Kearney and Haines proved equally flimsy in the end. Despite initial reports of "pockets [...] simply stuffed with documents, nearly all of a highly incriminatory character," including coded letters which supposedly revealed "plans [for an] attempt against the Queen of England at Balmoral and the Czar of Russia,"²⁶⁹ by early October Dutch authorities found it impossible to detain the two suspects any longer in the absence of "any legal grounds upon which they could either [prosecute or] grant extradition," which in this case, the Home Office did not even bother to request.²⁷⁰ By mid-October Kearney and Haines were in Amsterdam, boarding the steamer *Wenkerdam* to New York. Anderson could hardly

²⁶⁵ Leaving aside the facts that the only evidence to identify Tynan as "No. 1" was the confession of a long-dead informer, and that the French government had already refused Tynan's extradition in 1883 on the grounds that his offence was political and thus not covered by the Extradition Treaty with Britain, the statute of limitations in France at the time prescribed that "limitation is acquired ten years after the date of the last act of prosecution [which] in Tynan's case [was] the warrant of arrest [...] dated May 8, 1882." *Standard*, 21 September 1896.

²⁶⁶ *Daily News*, 16 September 1896.

²⁶⁷ *Standard*, 26 September 1896.

²⁶⁸ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 14 October 1896.

²⁶⁹ *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 20 September 1896.

²⁷⁰ *Standard*, 5 October 1896.

contain his frustration, as he later recalled in his memoirs: “One characteristic of the ‘Parisian accent’ that is so much cultivated by English people is the vulgarism of accentuating the final syllable of words; and at times I felt tempted to give vent to my feelings of annoyance at the collapse of this dynamite case by repeating [the] names [of Kearney and Haines] aloud in the Parisian fashion.”²⁷¹

The reasons for this puzzling outcome would only become apparent in November, during the remanding of Edward Ivory’s case to the magistrate at Bow Street Police Court, in preparation for trial. Hoping to prevent the complete disintegration of the case, the prosecution decided to call on its star witness at the hearing on 13 November – a certain Mr. Jones, whose “full name was communicated to the Magistrate alone.”²⁷² Jones, a native of County Armagh in Northern Ireland, had since 1890 been employed by Her Majesty’s Government to, as he put it, “make inquiries” in America. What sort of inquiries? This he candidly laid bare before the court:

I [...] opened a business of my own in New York City in October 1895, and remained there till September of this year. Amongst the persons whose acquaintance I made was a man named [...] William Lyman [the leader of the Irish National Brotherhood]. I learned the existence of a secret organisation in America [...] The name by which it is known amongst its members is the ‘United Irishmen’ [...] In connection with this organisation there are a number of what are called camps. There are several in the New York district [...] I received instructions to take steps to join this organisation, and I did so [...] I was initiated in September 1894. There were present on that occasion William Lyman [...]

²⁷¹ Anderson, *Sidelights on Home Rule*, 131.

²⁷² *Standard*, 14 November 1896.

John Francis Kearney, and Patrick Joseph Tynan [...] ²⁷³ I saw [Ivory] at [a secret] meeting in Chicago [in 1895]. We were admitted by the secret passport. ²⁷⁴

Jones followed this up with an impressive number of documents, including the “constitution and bye-laws” adopted at the Chicago meeting, which appeared to outline a policy of run-of-the-mill insurrectionary Fenianism complete with condemnations of “constitutional action” and references to “military companies [...] to be prepared for action in the hour of England’s difficulties.” ²⁷⁵ Jones’ testimony seemed to succeed in finally implicating Tynan, Kearney and Ivory in a dynamite conspiracy by showing that all three were members of a secret revolutionary society intent on unleashing a wave of violence on British targets. For Magistrate Vaughan this amounted to as good a reason as any to commit Ivory for trial: “Here is a man who goes to Glasgow. He has letters of introduction to people [...] They are connected with his organisation [...] He goes to Brussels. He meets Tynan. They are together at Antwerp, the very seat of the manufacture of the chemicals [...] intended to produce an explosion.” ²⁷⁶

The main problem with this approach to prosecution, apart from the inconvenient fact that Ivory’s link to the dynamite in Antwerp was purely conjectural, was that it relied exclusively on the testimony of an informer, and a Home Office informer to boot. For the Home Secretary, the risks involved in pursuing the case against Ivory far outweighed the benefits (which, since the release of Kearney and Tynan, were no longer easily discernible). As Anderson explained:

When I wrote to the Secretary of State, reporting the arrest of [Ivory], and informing him of the means by which it had been obtained, he formed the opinion that the fact of a confederate having given information to Government was a bar to prosecution. And he

²⁷³ *Morning Post*, 14 November 1896.

²⁷⁴ *Standard*, 14 November 1896.

²⁷⁵ *Morning Post*, 14 November 1896.

²⁷⁶ *Standard*, 14 November 1896.

remained unmoved by the clear proof I gave him that the informant had done everything in his power to check and thwart the execution of the plot.²⁷⁷

Ridley decided to bring the matter before Prime Minister Salisbury, who seems to have sided with Anderson. The trial would go ahead as planned, but it would not turn out as Anderson might have hoped. After nine days of testimonies from virtually everyone who had come into contact with Ivory during his stay in Antwerp and Glasgow, the Solicitor-General suddenly withdrew the charges on 20 January 1897, officially because “the delivery of the explosives at the house in Antwerp took place after [Ivory] had left Antwerp, and [there was] no legal evidence to show that the prisoner was cognisant of the delivering or of the ordering of the explosives.”²⁷⁸ Ivory was released, and by early February he was back in New York to a hero’s welcome. *The New York Times* observed sardonically that “the British government [had] spent \$100,000 on the trial which failed.”²⁷⁹

To Anderson the reason for that failure was clear: the unwritten rules behind due process, what he termed the “prize-ring rules,” prescribed that “everything must be done openly and above board [,] [a] legitimate principle in regard to crimes that are committed openly and above board, but utterly inapplicable to crimes such as [those of political conspirators].”²⁸⁰ To the Irish members of Parliament, however, the explanation was altogether different. As Michael Davitt (now a Nationalist MP for Mayo South) explained in the House of Commons on 26 March, the dynamite plot “had no real existence [and was] in fact the creation of disreputable agents of the secret service [;] the Home Office [had not made] any sincere effort to extradite from Antwerp

²⁷⁷ Anderson, *Sidelights on Home Rule*, 128-9.

²⁷⁸ Trial of Edward Bell, alias Edward J. Ivory, January 1897 (t18970111-146), *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0., accessed 11 May 2014.

²⁷⁹ *New York Times*, 24 January 1897.

²⁸⁰ Anderson, *Sidelights on Home Rule*, 127-8.

the alleged prime movers in the plot,” because, like Jones, they were in the pay of the government.²⁸¹

There was more to these allegations than the righteous indignation which all Home Rulers and Republicans alike felt at the machinations of a Tory government bent on preserving the Union at any cost, and it is entirely plausible that Jones was not in fact the only “disreputable agent” to be involved in the failed conspiracy. Kearney, for example, had likely offered his services to the Home Office as early as 1883, when after being cornered by British detectives in Hull he supposedly helped incriminate the ten men tried for the Glasgow explosions. It is impossible to know whether he was still performing such services thirteen years later,²⁸² but testimony given at Ivory’s trial by the owner of the inn where Kearney and Haines had been lodging during their stay in Antwerp described how after an impromptu meeting with a mysterious stranger the two Irishmen fled the city without even so much as packing their clothes.²⁸³ Only three days later the police uncovered the dynamite (but not the dynamitards) that was to prove the only material evidence of a plot to cause criminal explosions. William Lyman, the leader of the INB, was himself likely in the pay of Major Gosselin, who noted in a letter to A. J. Balfour that “[Lyman] [...] to whom I am very close [...] [has] absolute control of the revolutionary fund.”²⁸⁴ Even Tynan, for all his revolutionary credentials,²⁸⁵ is ultimately not

²⁸¹ HC Deb, 26 March 1897, vol. 47, col. 1487.

²⁸² Christy Campbell claims that Kearney “continued to send undercover reports” to Superintendent Williamson all throughout the early 1880s (*Fenian Fire*, 160) but it is not certain what the truth of this claim is since it is based almost entirely on allegations coming from within the Fenian movement itself.

²⁸³ Trial of Edward Bell, alias Edward J. Ivory, January 1897 (t18970111-146), *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, accessed 11 May 2014.

²⁸⁴ Gosselin, quoted in Owen McGee, “Keeping the lid on an Irish revolution: the Gosselin–Balfour correspondence,” *History Ireland* 15 (2007), accessed 11 June 2014, <http://www.historyireland.com/18th-19th-century-history/keeping-the-lid-on-an-irish-revolution-the-gosselin-balfour-correspondence/>

²⁸⁵ Despite the lack of evidence, certain high-ranking figures within the Irish Republican movement at the time seem to have accepted Tynan’s intimations that he was the notorious No. 1. Maud Gonne, for example, recounts in her autobiography how she and Arthur Lynch met Tynan in Paris, shortly after the latter’s release from prison. Whereas before she had berated Lynch for believing the gossip of “English papers,” she now felt certain that “Tynan was really the No. 1 of the Invincibles, a brave good Irishman.” Maud Gonne, *The Autobiography of Maud Gonne: A*

above suspicion. The publication in Britain of his 1894 incendiary book on the history of the Invincibles by the London house of Chatham and Co.,²⁸⁶ had been partially financed by Conservative and Unionist politicians, for whom such a book, given its wildly insurrectionist and anti-Home Rule tone, served as an excellent propaganda piece.²⁸⁷

Taking into consideration also the supposed “nihilist and anarchist” connection, much reported in the press at the time, but which, all things considered, seems to have had no basis in reality whatsoever,²⁸⁸ the 1896 dynamite plot emerges as perhaps the most suspicious of the entire decade in Britain, and the one most likely to have been the result of provocation. Whether such provocation was merely the isolated result of Jenkinsonian tactics, which the Home Office’s Secret Service was evidently still steeped in, or part of a wider effort (not to say conspiracy) to discredit Home Rule by any means necessary, one can only speculate.²⁸⁹ What is certain is that after the 1896 fiasco there were no more Fenian dynamite plots.

February-August 1897, Barcelona and London

In the early months of 1897 several progressive and socialist newspapers in Europe began circulating accounts of the flagrant human rights abuses at the infamous Montjuich prison-fortress in Barcelona, where dozens of political prisoners continued to be held following the

Servant of the Queen, edited by A. Norman Jeffares and Anna MacBride White (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994), 183-4.

²⁸⁶ Hoping to cash in on the controversy, Chatham and Co. put out a second edition in late 1896.

²⁸⁷ “T D Farrall’s purchase of P J P Tynan’s book: correspondence from Nicholas Gosselin to J S Sandars,” April 1905, PRO 30/60/13/2; “Secret Service Papers: Claims by T D Farrall for money owed to him by the Conservative and Unionist Party for arranging publication of P J P Tynan’s account of the Phoenix Park murders in America,” 1904-7, PRO 30/60/13/3.

²⁸⁸ The only reported name was that of Paul Rabinovitz, a Chicago Nihilist who had allegedly funded Tynan’s passage to Europe. Whatever the truth of that claim, it appears Rabinovitz disappeared shortly after Tynan’s arrest and was never heard from again. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 16 September 1896.

²⁸⁹ More than a decade later, John Mallon, the Dublin detective who had brought the Phoenix Park murderers to justice, argued in his ghostwritten memoirs that the 1896 dynamite plot had in fact been “a *gosling* [sic] plot that failed” (in reference to Gosselin, who was popularly known at the Home Office as “the gosling”). See Bussy, *Irish Conspiracies*, 161.

bomb attack on a Corpus Christi procession a year earlier.²⁹⁰ Most of these accounts were in the form of open letters written by the exiled survivors of the Montjuich *procesos*, and contained the sort of graphic detail that was guaranteed to outrage all but the most reactionary currents of opinion:

To All Good and Right-Minded People.

From you I hope for a little sympathy and justice.

They want to murder us.

After having torn the flesh from our bodies and the nails from our fingers; after compressing our heads and mutilating our testicles, they want us to disappear, so that we never might bear witness of these infamous proceedings.

Good and right-feeling people, do not let your attention be diverted from this ill-famed Anarchist trial [...] Rend this, honest men: They want us to sign a document by which we declare that we have not been tortured, and they have resolved to obtain these signatures from us by all means [...] In the name of all that you love in this world, save us from the power of our executioners! Aid us in our helplessness!

Thus ran the appeal of one Sebastian Sunyer, published initially in a German socialist newspaper and subsequently republished in *Reynolds's Newspaper*.²⁹¹ The response to these horrific revelations in Britain was almost immediate and by no means relegated to anarchist circles. The matter received an early cursory mention in the House of Commons thanks to Irish Nationalist

²⁹⁰ On 7 June 1896 a Spanish anarchist, possibly with the aid of several others, threw a bomb at the popular religious procession as it was leaving the Santa Maria church in Barcelona, killing twelve and injuring scores. The heinous character and destructiveness of this outrage, which far exceeded that of the Liceo bombing of 1893, elicited an immediate, and quite indiscriminate, response from Spanish authorities. Hundreds of radicals (ranging from moderate republicans to revolutionary anarchists) were summarily arrested and locked up in the medieval-fortress-cum-prison of Montjuich. Several dozens of them were court-martialed, many receiving sentences of up to twenty years with hard labour, while the anarchists believed to have been directly implicated in the outrage were executed. Individuals who were found not guilty (the majority of those tried) were nonetheless forced into exile.

²⁹¹ *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 2 May 1897. By contrast the *Times'* correspondent in Spain argued that "seldom [...] a more healthy prison and more happy-looking prisoners" were to be found than at Montjuich. *Times*, 26 July 1897.

MP Patrick O'Brien,²⁹² but it was only after the formation of the Spanish Atrocities Committee (SAC), which included Edward Carpenter, Walter Crane, Cunninghame Graham, Henry Burrows, Henry Salt and James MacDonald among others, that it was fully brought into public consciousness. Following a series of unsuccessful attempts to elicit an explanation from the Spanish ambassador in London, the SAC nevertheless managed to draw to its cause leading Liberal MPs like Sir Charles Dilke and Sir Frank Lockwood,²⁹³ and by late May it was preparing to hold a meeting in Trafalgar Square and submit a formal resolution to the Queen. The latter materialized in the form of a booklet stating the main points of the case against the abuses at Montjuich accompanied by a cut-out article from the Liberal-leaning *Daily Chronicle* which decried the "cruel survival from more barbarous times" of government-sanctioned torture.²⁹⁴ It was laid before the Queen in early June but given Her Britannic Majesty's refusal "to issue any instructions thereon,"²⁹⁵ it is unlikely that it left a positive impression. The Home Office proved equally unenthusiastic about appearing to give credence to the SAC's case; as Assistant Under-Secretary Murdoch explained in an official memo, endorsing in any way the views expressed in "The Revival of the Inquisition" (as the SAC resolution was provocatively titled) would amount to "an insult to the ambassador of a friendly government."²⁹⁶

Besides such diplomatic concerns, the British government was also wary of appearing lenient towards the persecuted Spanish anarchists for the very simple reason that many of them, now exiled, were likely contemplating making their way over to Britain, and despite an overall

²⁹² HC Deb, 22 February 1897, vol. 46, cols. 868-9.

²⁹³ *Revival of the Inquisition* (1897) [pamphlet published by the Spanish Atrocities Committee], TNA HO 45/9743/A56151C.

²⁹⁴ *Daily Chronicle*, 3 June 1897.

²⁹⁵ "Spanish Atrocities Committee," June 1897, TNA HO 45/9743/A56151C/3.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

slowdown in terrorist activity, anarchism remained a major security concern.²⁹⁷ This was all the more true on the eve of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, as the *Daily Mail* noted on 21 June: “during the last few days the whole of the route of the [Jubilee] procession has been laboriously examined by officers of the special branch of Scotland-yard, acting under the direction of Chief Detective-inspector Melville.”²⁹⁸ *Reynolds's Newspaper* also observed how “Mr. Anderson's Political Police Agency” was keeping a close watch on the “clubs in Soho and Fitzroy-square,” emphasizing “the number of private detectives who will be employed [during the Jubilee, which] will exceed the record in any previous year of English history.”²⁹⁹ As we can glean from the distinct tones of these two reports, in 1897 politics still very much coloured the British public's perception of the secret police (what for the right-wing *Daily Mail* was merely the special branch of the Scotland Yard, was for the left-wing *Reynolds's Newspaper* “Mr. Anderson's Political Police agency”); nonetheless, the very existence of such a police organisation was no longer an unmentionable embarrassment. The Special Branch was now a recognizable part of the British state, whatever attitude one chose to take towards it.

Compared to the Jubilee of 1887, the celebrations of 1897 were a resounding success from a security point of view. Despite the odd bogus threat,³⁰⁰ the London anarchists did not appear to have any “desire to disturb the few remaining years of life of a fat old woman,” as one

²⁹⁷ On 10 April an English anarchist watchmaker by the name of Rollo Richards was found guilty of having caused an explosion at the New Cross post office and was sentenced to seven years' penal servitude (*Pall Mall Gazette*, 10 April 1897). A little more than two weeks later, on 26 April, a bomb exploded at the Aldersgate Street (now Barbican) Underground Station, killing one and injuring sixteen others. This marked the first time in more than a decade that a terrorist attack had been unleashed on the London Underground (the previous instance being in 1883 at the height of the Fenian dynamite campaign), and although no suspects were identified by the police, Colonel Majendie believed (based on his study of the scene of the explosion) that the attack bore all the hallmarks of an anarchist outrage. Report by Majendie, 25 May 1897, TNA EF 5/10.

²⁹⁸ *Daily Mail*, 21 June 1897.

²⁹⁹ *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 13 June 1897.

³⁰⁰ One letter received by the Scotland Yard in April declared that “the Anarchist Committee [sic] [...] will blow up some of the royal persons that are coming in June” (Unsigned letter, April 1897, TNA MEPO 3/2767), while another, more cryptic missive addressed directly to Melville simply contained “the design of the Royal Standard, [an] ace of diamonds, an ivy leaf, and an Egyptian gold ring.” *Daily Mail*, 19 July 1897.

of their manifestos irreverently declared.³⁰¹ The matter of the Spanish anarchists however, refused to go away:

They had powerfully cut features, with dark peaked beards, and eyes full of restlessness and fire. There was no hurry, no nervousness, in their gait. It was a slow self complacent swagger, and as they moved towards the gangway, they flicked their cigarettes in the manner which English people are wont only to associate with the self-confident villain of the drama [...] The leader of the party [...] is a woman of about 35, tall, and so full in figure that she would weigh about 14 stone. She had a luxuriant head of black hair and olive complexion, [...] black bewitching eyes [and] a set of pearly white teeth.³⁰²

This is how a Sheffield newspaper colourfully described the twenty-eight anarchists who landed in Liverpool on the evening of 28 July, having been exiled from Spain and refused entry into France. If the press was attracted by the “exotic” element of this arrival (greatly emphasized by the incongruous presence of a woman,³⁰³ and the overall genteel appearance of the Spaniards),³⁰⁴ the police saw it as nothing more than a dangerous sudden swelling of the dynamitards’ ranks. In Liverpool the anarchists were received by no fewer than twenty detectives from the local CID who “accompanied” them throughout their brief stay there.³⁰⁵ Two days later the Spaniards had arrived at Euston Station in London, where, as DI Sweeney recalled, “a party from the Yard [...]

³⁰¹ *Reynolds’s Newspaper*, 20 June 1897.

³⁰² *Evening Telegraph and Star and Sheffield Daily Times*, 29 July 1897.

³⁰³ This was Teresa Claramunt Creus (1862-1931), a Catalan anarchist militant and early devotee of syndicalism. She remained in Britain until 1898 after which she returned to Spain where she continued to play an active role in anarchist politics, editing various newspapers and taking part in several strikes (most notably the general strike of 1902). See Temma Kaplan, *Red City, Blue Period: Social Movements in Picasso’s Barcelona* (University of California Press: Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford, 1992), 62 ff.

³⁰⁴ The *Daily News* noted that “the whole of the party presented a rather well-to-do appearance [and] they are mostly middle-aged, and seem to belong, at least the majority of them, to the better class” (*Daily News*, 29 July 1897). This perception, however, was purely the product of a popular stereotype which envisaged the typical anarchist as a cruddy, shockheaded bohemian; as Spanish police records reveal, the vast majority of the exiles headed for Liverpool (twenty three out of twenty eight) were in fact manual labourers and craftsmen (‘Filiación y antecedentes,’ July 1897, TNA HO 144/587/B2840C/72)

³⁰⁵ Chief Constable of Liverpool City Police to Kenelm Digby (Permanent Under-Secretary at the Home Office), 29 July 1897, TNA HO 144/587/B2840C/82.

met and shadowed them;”³⁰⁶ here was another “hardy, vigorous mob, capable of doing a great deal of mischief.”³⁰⁷ The only mischief the twenty-eight exiles seemed likely to commit, however, was telling the gruesome tale of their imprisonment to audiences at the German Communist Club, Freedom Club, and various other anarchist locales in the British capital.³⁰⁸ Chief Constable Macnaghten thought that the Spaniards could be easily apprehended “if necessity arose,” but given their situation excessive surveillance would only “give ‘bold advertisement’ and undue prominence to the wretched fellows,” quipping that “I think it was Talleyrand who once said ‘surtout pas trop de zèle!’”³⁰⁹

The Home Office was equally appalled by the unannounced, and unwelcome, visit of the Spanish anarchists as various internal despatches from that period reveal. Assistant Under-Secretary Murdoch thought the arrival of this “most undesirable crew” was proof positive that “this is becoming serious [;] there is no statutory power to stop these persons on arrival,”³¹⁰ a view with which both Ridley and Salisbury concurred. An “immediate and strong protest” was addressed to the Spanish Foreign Minister, the Irish-descended Duke of Tetuan,³¹¹ who assured Her Majesty’s Government that “there shall be no further shipments of anarchists to England.”³¹² There would in fact be further shipments of Spanish anarchists to England, but in early August

³⁰⁶ Sweeney, 278.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 279.

³⁰⁸ *Daily Mail*, 3 August 1897; Peter Latouche, *Anarchy*, 150.

³⁰⁹ Note by Macnaghten, 30 July 1897, TNA HO 144/587/B2840C/82; Macnaghten to Murdoch, 30 July 1897, TNA HO 144/587/B2840C/83.

³¹⁰ Minute by Charles Murdoch, 20 July 1897, TNA HO 144/587/B2840C/70.

³¹¹ Don Carlos Manuel O'Donnell y Álvarez de Abreu, second Duke of Tetuan, Grandee of Spain, ninth Marquis of Altamira and second Count of Lucena (1834-1903).

³¹² “Decypher from Mr Barclay [British chargé d'affaires in] San Sebastian,” 22 July 1897, TNA HO 144/587/B2840C/72.

1897 any possibility of a serious diplomatic row seemed entirely remote; the Home Secretary was willing to give the government in Madrid the benefit of the doubt.³¹³

Not everyone could be so easily pacified, however, and it was not long before the legacy of Montjuich returned to strike the Spanish government at its very core. On the afternoon of 8 August whilst taking time off from the affairs of state in the Basque spa town of Santa Agueda, the Spanish Premier Antonio Cánovas del Castillo was fatally shot in the head and chest by Michele Angiolillo, a twenty-six-year-old Neapolitan printer who, as he declared immediately after his arrest, wanted simply to “avenge the wounds inflicted on his comrades at Montjuich.”³¹⁴ Despite his proclamations, Angiolillo’s actual motivations, as with those behind most of the anarchist outrages of the 1890s, were probably somewhat more convoluted. It is telling that he had arrived in Santa Agueda from London (via Paris),³¹⁵ where it is possible he had come into contact with the twenty-eight anarchist *perseguidos*,³¹⁶ but equally important is that Angiolillo was suspected by some of his comrades of having been a police spy, and so perhaps had found that “in London [his] reputation followed him [, making his] life so unendurable that he was impelled [...] to the crime he committed.”³¹⁷ At any rate, the young Italian was happy to use the black legend of Montjuich as a pretext for striking at “religious ferocity, military cruelty [...] and the tyranny of power”³¹⁸ (while redeeming his reputation in the process).

³¹³ On 30 July Murdoch reported that the “S. of S. presumes that the questions [regarding the exiled Spanish anarchists] may be considered to be answered by the understanding of the Duke of Tetuan that no more of these persons shall be sent to this country.” Note by Charles Murdoch, 30 July 1897, TNA HO 144/587/B2840C/83.

³¹⁴ *El Dia*, 9 August 1897.

³¹⁵ Juan Avilés Farré, *Francisco Ferrer y Guardia: Pedagogo, Anarquista y Mártir* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, Ediciones de Historia, 2006), 81.

³¹⁶ The Scotland Yard believed Angiolillo had “attended [...] an Anarchist meeting in Trafalgar-square, when a Spaniard spoke of the torture of Spanish prisoners” (*Daily News*, 12 August 1897). In the wake of Canovas’ assassination, however, the Montjuich survivors unsurprisingly denied all knowledge of Angiolillo when questioned on the subject by the British press. *Daily Mail*, 10 August 1897.

³¹⁷ Report by Commissioner E. R. Henry on Italian proposals for closer police co-operation, March 1903, TNA HO 144/545/A55176/51.

³¹⁸ Angiolillo’s statement at his trial, quoted in Pier Carlo Masini, *Storia degli Anarchici Italiani nell’Epoca degli Attentati* (Milano: Rizzoli Editore, 1981), 115.

Fears that propaganda by the deed might be making a comeback³¹⁹ were tragically confirmed with the assassination of Cánovas, and whereas in 1894 European governments still believed it was possible to legislate anarchist terrorism out of existence, they now appeared to be at a complete loss as to what course of action might prevent yet another wave of “individualist” martyrs. In Britain, the situation on the continent precipitated renewed calls for a stricter control of immigration; writing in *The Times*, Colonel Howard Vincent described the unhindered movement of continental anarchists in the British capital as an “international scandal,” adding that “alone among civilized nations have we no power to expel foreigners holding, proclaiming, acting upon, doctrines the entire nation views with abhorrence.”³²⁰ Although this sentiment was widely echoed in the Conservative press,³²¹ the anarchist threat alone did not prove enough of an incentive for the government to re-introduce the failed Aliens Bill of 1894. Officially, surveillance was stepped up; Melville, in a characteristic self-promoting media stunt, turned up at Dover accompanied by “the special staff” of the CID to “watch foreign arrivals,”³²² while in London “foreign clubs, particularly those frequented by Italians,” were kept under “strict and persistent” watch.³²³ There was, however, little need for such measures. Despite the hysteria generated by Angiolillo’s *coup*, and his supposed connection to London’s anarchist colony, the latter found itself in an increasingly demoralized and inactive state; many of its newspapers had

³¹⁹ On 22 April of that year the anarchist Pietro Acciarito had made an unsuccessful attempt on King Umberto I’s life as the latter was attending a derby horse race. Immediately after the incident the Italian authorities rounded up several prominent anarchists in Rome and sentenced them to *domicilio coatto* (house arrest), the government’s preferred method for dealing with subversives. See Nunzio Pernicone, “The Case of Pietro Acciarito: Accomplices, Psychological Torture, and Raison d’État,” in *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 5 (2011): 67-104.

³²⁰ *Times*, 18 August, 1897.

³²¹ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 11 August 1897; *Standard*, 13 August 1897; *Evening Telegraph and Star and Sheffield Daily Times*, 20 August 1897.

³²² *Glasgow Herald*, 20 August 1897.

³²³ *Sunday Times*, 15 August 1897.

already ceased publication,³²⁴ while the ubiquity of informers and spies was leading many of “the [...] refugees [into] a state of mind closely resembling panic [...] every stranger they regard as a police spy.”³²⁵ It was precisely this panicky “state of mind” that formed the most potent weapon in the arsenal of the Special Branch, and as a *Sunday Times* correspondent keenly observed while visiting the revolutionary haunts of Tottenham Court Road and Soho, “the very significance of [...] police espionage [in Britain] is that it is not assertive – is, in fact, subterranean in its character.”³²⁶ This “subterranean system” was of course not the only obstacle the anarchists faced in London, but it undoubtedly contributed to keeping them quiescent, and more importantly it was “seen” to be doing so at sensitive moments (such as in the wake of an egregious outrage). So assured were the authorities of the anarchists’ quiescence, in fact, that the only impediment to a second demonstration of the Spanish Atrocities Committee in Trafalgar Square in mid August proved to be that the day had already been booked by the Spiritualist Society.³²⁷

The success of the British model, however, continued to remain elusive to foreign governments. In part this was a consequence of the unique social and political conditions which made the existence of a mass anarchist movement in Britain all but an impossibility, but equally important was the culture of secrecy with which the Home Office jealously guarded all matters of state security (notwithstanding the official policy of paying lip service to, and sporadic instances of, “international police cooperation”). This attitude extended not only to Britain’s European rivals, but to all international state actors. When in January 1897 the Uruguayan chargé

³²⁴ Even the firmly established *Freedom* found itself “compelled to publish [its issues for] June and July together,” owing to lack of funds. *Daily News*, 12 August 1897.

³²⁵ *Daily News*, 12 August 1897.

³²⁶ *Sunday Times*, 15 August 1897.

³²⁷ *Daily News*, 12 August 1897. The S. A. C. demo did go ahead on 23 August. Although not an anarchist meeting per se (many socialists, trade unionists, Radicals, and uncommitted passers-by were in attendance), the anarchists predictably drew the ire of a group of jingoist red-baiters who had to be “quieted by the police.” *Illustrated Police News*, 28 August 1897.

d'affaires in London made a request to Prime Minister Salisbury that he might be supplied with information on Britain's enviable counter-terrorist system "for the use of [the Uruguayan] government," the Home Office offered the following laconic reply, carefully avoiding any mention of political policing:

To be an Anarchist is not any offence against English law [...] If however Anarchists or any other men attempt to enforce their views by crime they are dealt with under the same law that is applied to criminals acting from other motives. The illegal use of explosives is dealt with in various sections of the Offences against the Person Act, 1861, the Malicious Injuries Act, 1861 and the Explosives Act, 1883. If this crime amounts to treason the criminal can be dealt with under the law relating to that offence.³²⁸

December 1897 – February 1898, St. Petersburg, Paris, and London

As several cases of the early 1890s show (most notably the arrest of Giuseppe Farnara in 1894), if genuine co-operation (or "information sharing" in modern parlance) occurred between the Special Branch and the spies of continental police organisations, it was nearly always in a secretive, arguably conspiratorial setting, and given the nature of espionage, this trend is not exactly surprising. More controversial, however, is that such shadowy co-operation could very well include the actual legal representatives of foreign police forces, as the arrest and trial of the Russian Nihilist Vladimir Burtsev demonstrate.

Burtsev, a thirty-three-year-old *Narodnaya Volya* militant familiar with the dungeons of the Peter and Paul Fortress and the harshness of Siberian exile, had managed to flee to London in 1891, where he devoted himself to émigré journalism and the study of Russian history and politics in the Reading Room of the British Museum. It was in that illustrious institution that Burtsev met Chief Inspector Melville on the afternoon of 16 December, and was subsequently

³²⁸ Note by H. B. Simpson, 25 June 1897, TNA HO 144/545/A55176/31.

taken into custody on charges of writing and publishing a “pamphlet encouraging certain persons [...] to murder His Imperial Majesty Nicholas II [and] endeavouring to persuade certain persons to commit that offence.”³²⁹ At the trial which followed in February 1898 it was revealed that the incriminating pamphlet, published in April 1897 in Burtsev’s *Narodovolets* newspaper, did indeed contain some fairly inflammatory “calls to action,” as exemplified by the following passage:

We are revolutionists not only to the extent of a direct rising of the people, but to the extent of military conspiracies, to the extent of nocturnal invasions of the Palace, to the extent of bombs and dynamite. The device under which we shall fight will be the re-establishment of the Narodnaya Volya party [...] On the question [of] what is to be done, Alexander III reigned happily for fourteen years and this is already the third year that Nicholas II has reigned not less happily [...] The fearful mistake which the Terrorist party made was that after their victory of the 1st March, they for a moment, stopped systematic terrorism, for a moment put their sword in its sheath.³³⁰

The fact that the most violent excerpts were paraphrased from the works of the late Sergey Stepniak failed to aid the defence’s case; Burtsev received a sentence of eighteen months with hard labour, while his Polish assistant and printer of *Narodovolets*, Klement Wierzbicki, got two months’ hard labour.

At face value the Burtsev case appears to be a fairly straightforward narrative of an impassioned (or fanatical, to his detractors) revolutionist paying a hefty price for letting slip a few careless references to “palace storming” and regicide in an otherwise inconsequential appeal to revolution; Most had suffered the same back in 1881, while the *Commonweal*’s Henry

³²⁹ Trial of Vladimir Bourtzeff, Klement Wierzbicki, February 1898 (t18980207-174), *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, accessed 5 June 2014.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*

Samuels had only narrowly avoided a similar fate in 1893. What sets Burtsev apart from Most and Samuels, however, is that his prosecution, while fully conformant with British law, was initiated and carried out entirely at the behest, and for the interest of, a foreign power – Imperial Russia.

Burtsev's article would almost certainly never have landed its author in a court of law, if not for the ever-watchful eye of the Department for the Protection of Public Security and Order – the Russian *Okhrana*. It was one of its veteran agents, and newly appointed director of the Department of Police in St. Petersburg – a man by the name of S. E. Zvoliansky – who first took notice of Burtsev's seditious essay, seeing in it an opportunity to finally take the pesky émigré down a peg or two.³³¹ Zvoliansky sent a copy of the incriminating article to his personal protégé³³² and head of the Parisian section of the *Okhrana*, Pyotr Rachkovsky.³³³ Rachkovsky had previously tried, without success, to lure Burtsev out of the safety of his London sanctuary by means of a textbook honey trap;³³⁴ if a new scheme were to succeed, it would have to work within the confines of the British legal system.

In late June 1897 Rachkovsky wrote a letter to Melville in London relating the details of Burtsev's recent activities, and asking whether there might be a way to bring the young Nihilist to justice. As his reply of early July of that same year reveals, Melville had already seen a

³³¹ Robert Henderson, "Vladimir Burtsev and the Russian Revolutionary Emigration: Surveillance of Foreign Political Refugees in London, 1891-1905," PhD diss., Queen Mary University of London, 2008, 188.

³³² Charles A. Ruud and Sergei A. Stepanov, *Fontanka 16: The Tsars' Secret Police* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 1999), 85.

³³³ Born in 1853 into an aristocratic family, Rachkovsky started his career as a secret agent in his early twenties, and by the mid 1880s he was directing the *Okhrana*'s operations in Western Europe out of the Russian embassy in Paris. Rachkovsky's reputation, however, stretched well beyond the seedy world of espionage, into the upper echelons of French political life (where he found natural allies amidst the imperialist-conservative faction of Jean Constans and Émile Loubet) and journalism (under Rachkovsky's influence, right-wing newspapers like *Le Figaro* and *Le Petit Parisien* came to espouse increasingly pro-Russian views). On at least one occasion, the Russian spymaster even moonlighted as Émile Loubet's chief of security, during the latter's term as president. See Jonathan Daly, *Autocracy under Siege: Security Police and Opposition in Russia, 1866-1905* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1998), 45-46.

³³⁴ Henderson, 104 ff.

translation of the *Narodovolets* article, and had not “discern[ed] anything serious in it.”³³⁵

Rachkovsky was an old, like-minded friend, however,³³⁶ and his opinion in a matter of this nature was worth deferring to:

[Since] you are writing to me about [this issue], I shall naturally not rely on the impression I have formed of it since, as you yourself well know, one cannot trust translators.

Where the question that you put to me is concerned, our laws are very strange. I do not think that our laws could punish the editor or managing director of a newspaper in which terroristic ideas, murder &c are advocated in a vague form, so to speak. It is a different matter if an article propagating such ideas identifies particular people; then we are dealing with a crime that is covered by English laws [...] If you found it possible to bring a case against Burtsev & Co., you could only go about it in the following way. Send the aforementioned newspaper to the Russian Ambassador in London, having marked in it the most relevant passages, and accompany it with a letter in which you insist on the need to prosecute the editor. Ask the Ambassador to bring this letter to the notice of our Foreign Secretary, who, in his turn, will send it to our Home Secretary. The latter will surely pass it on to me. As you see, one will have to act through the diplomatic channel. For myself I need hardly mention that I shall be happy to be of service to you and to get at these scoundrels, who essentially are neither more nor less than common murderers. I

³³⁵ Letter from Melville to Rachkovsky, translated by the latter into Russian, Okhrana Archive, Box no. 35, Index Vc, Folder 3, ‘Relations with Scotland Yard,’ Hoover Institute, Stanford, California. Quoted in Cook, *M*, 136-137.

³³⁶ Although Melville had only met Rachkovsky in 1896, during the Czar’s stay in Scotland (Cook, 133), it is likely that the two had already been steadily corresponding for some time before. Certainly Rachkovsky had been aware of Melville from as early as 1891 thanks to a report by one of the Okhrana’s spies in London which enthusiastically recommended the talents of the Special Branch’s rising star: “I have made the acquaintance of Inspector Melville [...] He has offered me his services complaining that his superiors at Scotland Yard act too feebly with regard to Nihilists. Do not pass up this chance, my friend, it will not come your way again.” Report by Leon Jolivard, quoted in Henderson, 136.

should very much like you to make the above-mentioned approach, because even if nothing comes of it, I at least will gain the opportunity to worry these fellows and drive them from one end of London to the other. Furthermore [the matter of] Burtsev & Co. [...] will make our Government turn its attention to them and, whether it comes to a court case or not, the matter will pass through my hands.³³⁷

Rachkovsky set to work immediately, and by early August 1897 the Russian Chargé d'Affaires in London had already written to the Foreign Office to complain about the offensive nature of Burtsev's article, setting the wheels in motion in precisely the manner Melville had predicted. The only thing the Chief Inspector failed to fully appreciate (much like Anderson a year earlier) was the controversial nature of the evidence at hand; his copy of Burtsev's newspaper had been acquired by the police through underhanded means and could not for this reason be admissible in a court of law, or so argued Sir Hamilton Cuffe, Director of Public Prosecutions.³³⁸ Unlike Anderson, however, Melville saw a way out: he simply had one of his DCs go to Burtsev's bookshop in Tottenham Court Road and legally purchase (albeit under an assumed name) two copies each of Nos. 1, 2 and 3 of *Narodovolets*.³³⁹ This seemed to satisfy Sir Hamilton, and on 16 December 1897 a warrant was issued for Burtsev's arrest.

Shortly after the conclusion of the trial, Rachkovsky wrote back to express his gratitude to Melville, emphasizing how the "success of the case has saved us from any inconvenience at a personal level."³⁴⁰ It is not certain what the "inconvenience" would have been in Rachkovsky's case (certainly he was too valuable to be demoted, much less dismissed, for failing to silence a

³³⁷ Melville to Rachkovsky, quoted in Cook, 136-37.

³³⁸ "Proceedings against publisher of Russian periodical "Narodovoletz". L.O.O.1029," 1897-98, TNA HO 144/272/A59222/4.

³³⁹ Trial of Vladimir Bourtzeff, Klement Wierzbicki, February 1898 (t18980207-174), *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, accessed 5 June 2014.

³⁴⁰ Rachkovsky to Melville, Okhrana Archive, Box No. 35, Index Vc, Folder 3, 'Relations with Scotland Yard,' Hoover Institute, Stanford, California, quoted in Cook, 138.

minor nuisance like Burtsev), but for Melville, things might indeed have taken an embarrassing turn were it to become known just how tangled up he was in the Okhrana's affairs, and this at the height of the Great Game.

30 April 1898, Holborn Restaurant, Kingsway Road, London

Judging by appearances alone, one would have been hard-pressed to detect anything dangerously subversive about the motley assembly of bohemians and progressive literati gathered in the sumptuous Council Chamber of the Holborn Restaurant on the afternoon of 30 April 1898. This was no ordinary society crowd however; it numbered, among others, “a dozen dangerous Anarchists, a ‘woman who did’,³⁴¹ (and suffered imprisoning for doing), a miscellaneous bunch of avowed free-lovers, two lady officials of a Rational Dress Society [...], two editors, two poets, a novelist of world-wide reputation, [...] a baby aged eighteen months,” and, unbeknownst to anyone but themselves, two Special Branch detectives.³⁴² The event they were attending was the first (and, as it would turn out, last) annual gala of the Legitimation League, whose minor yet *célèbre* cause was – as Ms. Lillian Harman, the League's president³⁴³ explained to a *Daily Mail* correspondent – “to educate public opinion in the direction of free love, and to create a machinery for acknowledging off-spring born out of wedlock, and to secure for them equal rights with legitimate children.”³⁴⁴

³⁴¹ Grant Allen's 1895 novel *The Woman Who Did*, described the plight of Herminia Barton, a middle-class unwed single mother struggling to raise her daughter whilst being shunned by polite society. The book stirred up a storm of controversy in the literary world of the 1890s, with several authors penning their own novels in response to Allen's – Victoria Crosse's *The Woman Who Didn't* (1895), Mrs. Lovett Cameron's *The Man Who Didn't* (1895), and Lucas Cleeve's *The Woman Who Wouldn't* (1895) being the most notable examples. *Punch* lampooned the controversy with a piece titled “The Woman Who Wouldn't Do.” *Punch*, 30 March 1895.

³⁴² Sweeney, 184.

³⁴³ Harman was the daughter of American radical Moses Harman (1830-1910) whose advocacy of feminism, free love, eugenics and anarchism (most notably in his provocatively-titled journal *Lucifer, the Light Bearer*) made him a perennial target of anti-obscenity legislation in the US, including the infamous Comstock Act of 1873.

³⁴⁴ *Daily Mail*, 16 April 1898.

That the Scotland Yard deemed such an occasion important enough to have two of its elite detectives infiltrate it seems, in retrospect, highly questionable but, given the anarchist connection, not entirely surprising. The Legitimation League had started off innocently enough in 1893 as a group devoted solely to advancing the rights of persons born out of wedlock, but gradually came to attract an assorted host of secularists, social libertarians, feminists, and anarchists, to whom discrimination against the illegitimate was merely a symptom of the social disease spreading behind the gloss of the Belle Époque. By early 1898 the League was openly voicing its support for eugenics, non-traditional gender roles, and free love through the pages of its official organ *The Adult*,³⁴⁵ and thanks to the work of its suave chief propagandist, George Bedborough, making significant advances in membership numbers. As some of these new members were also frequenters of anarchist clubs, the Yard officials soon began to suspect that there was “good reason for believing that Anarchistic proselytising took place [at the League’s] meetings.”³⁴⁶

DI Sweeney was assigned to penetrate the organization and submit reports on its activities. This he did conscientiously, and despite being star struck by Bedborough (a “man of fascinating personality [...] and of the most excellent manners”),³⁴⁷ Sweeney’s reports proved incriminating enough to draw the attention of the Public Prosecutor, who, notwithstanding certain reservations about appearing to tamper with free speech, decided to give the green light for the case against the League.³⁴⁸ Despite its risqué subject matter, *The Adult* did not feature particularly strong language, and certainly no death threats against politicians or heads of state.

³⁴⁵ For a full list of articles published in *The Adult* during its two-year run, see http://dla.library.upenn.edu/dla/pacscl/ead.html?q=the%20adult&id=PACSCL_RBCat_RBCatEP85Ad937897a&, accessed 17 June 2014.

³⁴⁶ Sweeney, 178-9.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 178.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 181.

The Legitimists did have a significant soft spot, however, in Bedborough's connection to a certain Dr. de Villiers, owner of the dubiously named Watford University Press (which was not connected to any legitimate academic institution). De Villiers was a confidence trickster and charlatan, but his real crime, as far as the authorities were concerned, was his having published Havelock Ellis' *Sexual Inversion* in 1897, a book which had been condemned as obscene in a court case.³⁴⁹ Given its subject matter, Bedborough had offered to buy up a good portion of de Villiers' stock of the book (otherwise commercially useless), and distribute it to League members. It might have taken Sweeney some time to figure this out if not for the fortuitous complaint sent to authorities by the concerned parents of a young League member who claimed to have received Ellis' book in error.³⁵⁰

Exactly a month after that lavish soiree at the Holborn Restaurant, a warrant was issued for Bedborough's arrest, which Melville gladly carried out, accompanied by no fewer than seven of his officers.³⁵¹ At the trial which followed in October, Bedborough pleaded guilty to charges of breaking the peace by publishing "obscene libels," and was entered into recognizances of £100 "to come up for judgment if called upon."³⁵² The price for being cleared with only a slap on the wrist was that he now had to end all association with and support for the Legitimation League, which he did (not without some remorse),³⁵³ leaving his fellow Leaguers and supporters in the Free Press Defence Committee (set up by Henry Seymour, Grant Allen, G. B. Shaw, Edward Carpenter and others to campaign for Bedborough's release) in a daze of anger and

³⁴⁹ Edward Royle, *Radicals Secularists and Republicans: Popular Freethought in Britain, 1866-1915* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980), 276.

³⁵⁰ Sweeney, 186.

³⁵¹ Despite Sweeney's assurances that Bedborough was a harmless, genteel intellectual, Melville "imagined that the man [...] must essentially be a manufacturer of bombs, or at least an Anarchist plotter himself" (Sweeney, 186-7).

³⁵² Trial of George Bedborough, October 1898 (t18981024-715), *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, accessed 17 June 2014.

³⁵³ Sometime after his release Bedborough declared, "I am a coward and I reverence more than ever the Bradlaughs and the Footes who have conquered where I have succumbed." Quoted in Royle, 277.

resignation.³⁵⁴ For them, as for all progressives, the incident marked a serious blow to the advance of the Freethinking cause,³⁵⁵ and spoke to the “scandalous one sidedness with which the laws relating to the sale of erotic literature are administered” – criminalizing works of scientific inquiry whilst overlooking the pornographic “*editions de luxe* [available] at huge prices [...] at almost any respectable shop.”³⁵⁶ It did not, however, seem to raise any questions on the police’s particular role in upholding and administering this moral double standard, and it is for this reason (as well as the stunting of the “growth of a Frankenstein monster [capable of] wrecking the marriage laws of our country”)³⁵⁷ that the Special Branch regarded the careful handling of the Legitimation League case as an unmitigated success.

10 September 1898 - January 1899, Geneva, Rome, and London

The first real (albeit ultimately inconsequential) challenge to Britain’s system of political policing came later in the year as a result of yet another gruesome, high-profile assassination. On the afternoon of 10 September, shortly after leaving the Hotel Beau Rivage in Geneva in the company of her lady-in-waiting, the sixty-one-year-old Empress Elisabeth of Austria was set upon by a shortish, burly looking man, and stabbed with a triangular needle file. Within the hour, the Empress was dead from suffocation (her right lung having been punctured), leaving public opinion across the world in a state of appalled disbelief. On hearing the news, the Emperor Franz Joseph declared his incomprehension “that a man could be found to attack such a woman, whose whole life was spent in doing good and who never injured any person,”³⁵⁸ while the socialist

³⁵⁴ Royle, 277.

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ *Reynolds’s Newspaper*, 12 June 1898.

³⁵⁷ Sweeney, 189.

³⁵⁸ Edward Morgan Alborough De Burgh, *Elizabeth, Empress of Austria: a Memoir* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippencott Co., 1899), 323.

L'Aurore described the assassination as “the act of an unthinking idiot [and] a stroke of bloody madness.”³⁵⁹

The assassin, a twenty-five-year-old French-born Italian named Luigi Lucheni, had attempted to flee the scene by making off for the vast and crowded Place des Alpes, but once apprehended by the police, he offered no resistance, and appeared to bask in his newfound notoriety. Despite his boasts of being a “most dangerous anarchist,”³⁶⁰ and a “conscientious communist,”³⁶¹ Lucheni was also a clearly disturbed individual, as attested by his erratic behaviour following his arrest,³⁶² his express wish to be guillotined,³⁶³ as well as the fact that the Empress Elisabeth had been only a last-minute substitute for his actual intended target (the Duke d’Orleans). In the end, the assassin did not get his wish: Lucheni was tried in Geneva, where the death penalty had been abolished, and received a sentence of life in prison.³⁶⁴ In countries where anarchist outrages had been a common feature all throughout the decade, however, the mood was decisively vindictive. In the wake of the assassination Alessandro Guiccioli, the mayor of Rome, noted how

The news fills me with a profound sense of horror and bitterness [...] To think the infamous brute was an Italian! What shame this brings once more on our disgraced country! And what a heavy burden for those who with their fanaticism and their ideological sophistry arm these [...] stupid, perverse animals who call themselves

³⁵⁹ *L'Aurore*, 11 September 1898.

³⁶⁰ Masini, *Storia degli Anarchici*, 118.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 247.

³⁶² After being apprehended, Lucheni, “in high spirits, [began singing] snatches of popular songs” (*Standard*, 12 September 1898), and a surviving photograph of him being escorted by two Genevan policemen shows the anarchist swaggering along with a disturbing grin on his face. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luigi_Lucheni#mediaviewer/File:Luigi_Lucheni.jpg, accessed 21 June, 2014.

³⁶³ In a letter to the Swiss President, Lucheni expressed a desire to be decapitated, and asked to be tried in the Canton of Lucerne, “knowing that in that territory, [the death] penalty is still in place.” Quoted in Masini, 118.

³⁶⁴ In 1910, Lucheni committed suicide by hanging himself in his cell.

anarchists, and for the governments who have treated this conspiracy of evil forces only with the most benevolent tolerance.³⁶⁵

In late September 1898 continental newspapers began circulating reports that a new high-level conference “with a view to joint measures against Anarchists [would] certainly be held shortly, probably in Rome”³⁶⁶ and on 29 September the Italian Foreign Minister, Napoleone Canevaro, confirmed the rumours – the conference would indeed be held in Rome, starting in November, and would include representatives from all major European powers and their allies. In Britain the news was not greeted with any degree of enthusiasm by the Home Office elite, many of whom had been in office long enough to remember the Spanish proposals of 1893 which the then-Liberal government had successfully finessed. The gravity of the recent situation, however, meant that a similar course of action was no longer an option. Queen Victoria was manifestly shocked and saddened by Elisabeth’s assassination, and in a rare interventionist stance, urged Prime Minister Salisbury to honour the Italian proposal.³⁶⁷ On 12 October Salisbury wrote to the Foreign Office outlining in broad terms what would form the basis of the British position at the conference in Rome:

The Swiss Minister asked me what the policy of Her Majesty’s Government would be with respect to the Conference [...] I replied that of course we sympathized very heartily with the objects the Government of Italy had in view [and that] we could not refuse to take part in [these] deliberations. But we should do so with no very sanguine hope of arriving at any important result. Improved police arrangements hardly require the deliberations of a congress to sanction them; and any proposals for legislative change

³⁶⁵ Alessandro Guiccioli, *Diario di un conservatore* (Rome: Edizioni di Borghese, 1973), 239-240.

³⁶⁶ *Standard*, 26 September 1898.

³⁶⁷ Queen Victoria to Salisbury, September 1898, quoted in Richard Bach Jensen, “The International Anti-Anarchist Conference of 1898 and the Origins of the Interpol,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 16 (1981): 326-327.

would be attended with many difficulties. In this country, and possibly in others, great objection would be felt to any attempt to meet the dangers of the anarchist conspiracy by restraining or encroaching upon the liberty of the rest of the community.³⁶⁸

The conference opened on 24 November in the majestically baroque Palazzo Corsini and drew together delegates from Austria-Hungary, Belgium, Britain, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Monaco, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Spain, the United Kingdoms of Sweden and Norway, Switzerland, and Turkey. Representing Britain were Colonel Sir Howard Vincent, known for his hardline Toryism and anti-anarchist crusading, the more moderately conservative Sir Phillip Currie (who had recently been appointed ambassador to Italy), and the Liberal Sir Godfrey Lushington, former Permanent Under-Secretary of State to the Home Office.

Given the firmness of purpose and sense of urgency expressed by the Conference organizers, it is somewhat surprising that the first order of business had nothing to do with combating anarchism, but rather with defining it. What the majority of delegates agreed on (by a margin of fifteen votes) was that anarchism was not to be considered a political doctrine, a notion which, as Sir Philip Currie duly noted in a report to Salisbury, betrayed not so much an ignorance of anarchism as the intention to “exclude anarchical crimes from the exceptions made by Treaties of Extradition in favour of political offences.”³⁶⁹ A working definition of what anarchism actually *was* proved much harder to arrive at however. The French argued that an anarchical act was one which had for its object “the destruction by violent means of any social organization,” while the Russians sought to expand this already broad definition by suggesting that “anarchists, whatever name they may give themselves [were] those whose acts have for their

³⁶⁸ Salisbury to the Foreign Office, 12 October 1898, TNA HO 45/10254/X36450/31.

³⁶⁹ Currie to Salisbury, 30 November 1898, TNA HO 45/10254/X36450/73.

object to destroy any social organization, whatever may be its form, by resorting to violent means or by provoking such means by the propagation of their theories.”³⁷⁰ The French proposal barely passed by a margin of only two votes, no thanks to the British delegation, which chose to abstain on the grounds that “so far as existing English law is concerned, a definition of anarchism is not needed and would be useless.”³⁷¹ To drive the point home, Currie read out a statement at the fourth plenary meeting on 3 December, in which he loftily proclaimed that, “We do not prosecute opinions. The only question with us is, is there crime or not? If the act is a criminal one, e.g. murder or incitement to murder, it is not more so because done out of anarchism. If it is not criminal, it would not become so because it is anarchical.”³⁷² Here then was the Liberal interpretation of political crime redux, with no mention of London’s “anarchist laboratory” or the “scandalous” British policy of giving refuge to anarchists decried by Colonel Vincent only a year earlier.

In the three weeks that followed, several other proposals were tabled, with the understanding that they would not be binding for those governments which chose to accede to them; all fell largely into two separate categories, reflecting the conference’s own bifurcate structure into administrative and legislative commissions, respectively. The first set of proposals highlighted the importance of formalizing and systematizing police co-operation in the struggle against anarchism, and urged the adoption of new methods of keeping track of lawbreakers (political and otherwise). To this end a subcommittee of police chiefs and other law enforcement representatives met to discuss the logistical aspects of expelling anarchists, and agreed that their respective governments would begin forwarding each other monthly reports on all expelled

³⁷⁰ Report by Currie, 1 December 1898, TNA HO 45/10254/X36450/68.

³⁷¹ Currie to Salisbury, 3 December 1898, TNA HO 45/10254/X36450/79.

³⁷² Ibid.

subversives.³⁷³ No specific details were set down, but Colonel Vincent believed “the results of these confidential meetings of heads of police will do good, if only by forming reciprocal friendships leading to greater cooperation.”³⁷⁴

More important, however, proved the almost unanimously accepted motion for the establishment of a continent-wide network of central agencies in charge of surveilling anarchists and sharing valuable intelligence,³⁷⁵ and the French suggestion for a universal adoption of Alphonse Bertillon’s updated system of anthropometrical identification of criminals.³⁷⁶ Also called the *portrait parlé*, this system combined meticulous descriptions of an offender’s physical appearance with frontal and profile-view mug shots, and had proven immensely successful in France, where it had been in use since the early 1880s.³⁷⁷ Germany and Italy proved especially responsive, with positive reactions also registered by the United Kingdoms of Sweden and Norway, Switzerland, Romania, Turkey, Denmark, and Portugal.³⁷⁸

The second set of proposals dealt with the legal side of the argument, and generally sought to facilitate the criminalization of anarchism in all its forms along the lines of the French *lois scélérates* and the Italian anti-anarchist laws. Typical of this set were proposals by Austria,

³⁷³ Jensen, “The International Anti-Anarchist Conference of 1898,” 332.

³⁷⁴ Currie to Salisbury, 20 December 1898, TNA FO 881/7179/30

³⁷⁵ “Rapport présenté au nom de la commission chargée de l’étude des mesures administratives,” p. 115, TNA HO 45/10254/X36450.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 122 ff.

³⁷⁷ By 1885 the Parisian Préfecture de Police had already amassed a sizeable collection of about five hundred *portraits parlés*. William G. Bailey, “Bertillon System,” in *The Encyclopedia of Police Science, Volume 1*, edited by Jack R. Greene (New York: Routledge, 2012), 92. In the 1890s the study of Bertillon’s system became mandatory for all police inspectors and penitentiary workers, with thirty lessons of two hours each needed to acquire a “perfect knowledge” of the *portrait parlé*. “Rapport,” p. 123, TNA HO 45/10254/X36450.

³⁷⁸ Despite its popularity throughout the 1890s, something which the Conference in Rome undoubtedly helped amplify, at least in Europe, Bertillon’s system quickly fell out of favour in the opening decade of the twentieth century thanks to the emergence of fingerprinting, which proved much more straightforward and practically infallible as an indicator of identity. The *portrait parlé* did, however, remain in use well into the 1930s in some European countries, notably France, Germany and the Scandinavian states (Jensen, “The International Anti-Anarchist Conference of 1898,” 334) and, accompanied by fingerprinting, helped lay the foundations for the modern police record. Ronald K. Noble, “Remarks by Ronald K. Noble, INTERPOL Secretary General at the 8th International Fingerprints Symposium,” p.3, *Interpol*, accessed 7 July 2014, [http://www.interpol.int/content/download/24989/344530/version/5/file/v6%20th%20Fingerprints%20Symposium_IPSG_04JUN14%20\(3\).pdf](http://www.interpol.int/content/download/24989/344530/version/5/file/v6%20th%20Fingerprints%20Symposium_IPSG_04JUN14%20(3).pdf).

Germany, and Russia that all anarchist literature and associations be suppressed, that no anarchist acts of a criminal nature be allowed to fall under the “political crime” clause of any extradition treaties, that press coverage of anarchist exploits be closely regulated (if not censored), that anarchist prisoners be kept in strict isolation, and that any anarchist attempt on the life of a head of state or any member of his or her family always be an extraditable offence and punishable by death.³⁷⁹ Despite their controversial character, these motions were ultimately carried (albeit in some cases only by slim majorities).³⁸⁰

The British delegation’s attitude to all this evinced the same reserved reluctance expressed by Salisbury in his letter to the Foreign Office on the eve of the Conference, and by Currie in his address to the fourth plenary meeting. As far as the proposals of the legal commission were concerned, it was clear that many, if not all, were utterly incompatible with the spirit of British laws, something which Lushington acknowledged by voting against the most disciplinarian ones (such as those advocating press censorship and solitary confinement for anarchist prisoners) while abstaining on the others.³⁸¹ Even the administrative proposals, for all their focus on practical police cooperation, fared no better. Having professed Britain’s sympathy for “the duty that all nations have to protect each other against criminal attempts,” Colonel Vincent, a man whose centralizing impulses and admiration for the French police system had made possible the creation of the CID two decades earlier, was nonetheless forced to admit that his Government would have “serious difficulty in recognizing, in a formal and official manner, a joint action [...] with the police forces of foreign nations,” adding that “our laws do not give us

³⁷⁹ “Commission chargée de l’étude des mesures législatives,” p. 128, TNA HO 45/10254/X36450; “Sixième Séance, Mardi, 20 décembre 1898,” p. 49, TNA HO 45/10254/X36450.

³⁸⁰ For example, the Russian proposal that any anarchist expelled from a host country should face immediate arrest and prosecution in his country of origin was passed by a margin of only two votes. Jensen, “The International Anti-Anarchist Conference of 1898,” 331-332.

³⁸¹ “Quatrième Séance, 7 décembre 1898,” p. 150, TNA HO 45/10254/X36450.

any power to expel either indigenous or foreign persons.”³⁸² As for the *portrait parlé*, it did not prove enticing enough to supplant the Scotland Yard’s own much-simplified version of Bertillon’s system.³⁸³ For his part, Sir Phillip Currie gave an official endorsement of his fellow delegates’ tendency to avoid committing to anything proposed at the conference by stating that the British delegation would better fulfill its mission if it abstained from voting altogether, and by reiterating the strength and efficacy of existing British laws.³⁸⁴ Careful not to play into any continental stereotypes of British haughtiness, however, Currie also added that Her Majesty’s Government would prepare two legislative proposals to be put before Parliament in the coming year; the first would expand the Explosives Act to make all explosive-related offences extraditable and cover “as much as possible [...] cases where a criminal explosion takes place outside, not just within, the United Kingdom,” while the second would strive to amend extradition law in such a way as to disqualify all murderers “either of heads of state or any other individual,” from claiming political criminal status (something which in practice was already the case, as the extraditions of François and Meunier had demonstrated).³⁸⁵

When the conference came to a close on 21 December, Britain was the only participating nation not to sign the final protocol, and yet ironically, also the only nation to draft any actual legislation along the lines suggested at the conference.³⁸⁶ Back in London there certainly was

³⁸² “Rapport présenté au nom de la commission chargée de l’étude des mesures administrative,” p.118, TNA HO 45/10254/X36450.

³⁸³ As early as 1893 the Home Office had expressed a keen interest in adopting Francis Galton’s new fingerprinting method of identification as the new MO for the Scotland Yard, but by the late 1890s Galton’s work was still in progress, and the Yard had to settle for a hybrid of watered-down Bertillonage and fingerprinting. Melville Macnaghten, *Days of My Years* (London: Edward Arnold, 1914), pp. 146-7.

³⁸⁴ “Cinquième Séance, Lundi, 19 décembre 1898,” p. 40, TNA HO 45/10254/X36450. As conference records reveal, several of the subsequent proposals were adopted by “nineteen votes, one abstention,” and given the early departure of the Luxembourgish delegation, the abstention was undoubtedly British. *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

³⁸⁶ The strong support expressed by continental delegates for many of the resolutions tabled at the conference ultimately failed to translate into any legislative measures. Perhaps the only practical consequences of the deliberations in Rome were the wider adoption of Bertillon’s *portrait parlé*, and the so-called “secret protocol” of

some support for the punitive measures proposed in Rome. Colonel Majendie had advocated an “international agreement [...] under which [anarchist terrorists] would be debarred from either shelter or sympathy in any part of the civilised world” as early as 1892,³⁸⁷ while Anderson’s hostility to the British “prize-ring rules” had only intensified since the 1896 dynamite campaign fiasco, as he made clear in a memorandum to the Home Secretary:

Indeed the proposed extension of the Explosives Act and its adoption by Foreign Governments will be of great value to this country. Had it been in place three years ago, it would have led to the conviction of all the agents in the last Fenian Dynamite plot. If the unreasonable objection of some judges to sentences of Police supervision is to influence legislation at all, it would seem to me that it should lead to the abolition of police supervision altogether. But the objection is not only unreasonable but ignorant.³⁸⁸

On the subject of expulsion, the Assistant Commissioner warned that “if the other European governments agree to expel alien anarchists and no powers for this purpose are obtained here, London will become an ‘asylum’ for these miscreants to an extent that must endanger the public peace.” His support for reform however stopped short of endorsing the plans for regulated surveillance and systematized cooperation with foreign police forces. In a moment of almost shocking candour, Anderson confessed that,

[...] in recent years the [British] Police have succeeded only by straining the law, or, in plain English, by doing utterly unlawful things, at intervals, to check this conspiracy, and my serious fear is that if new legislation affecting it is passed, Police powers may thus be

1904, signed in St. Petersburg by ten of the original participants of the 1898 conference which sought to revive discussion and enact some of the administrative measures proposed in 1898.

³⁸⁷ Note by Majendie, 28 August 1892, TNA HO 45/10254/X36450/1.

³⁸⁸ Memorandum by Anderson, 13 December 1898, TNA HO 45/10254/X36450/77.

defined and our practical powers seriously impaired.³⁸⁹ [If] the actual powers of Police in this country [become public knowledge], then the methods which successive secretaries of state have sanctioned, and which have been resorted to with such excellent results will be shown to be without legal sanction, and must be abandoned.³⁹⁰

Unregulated surveillance (often on behalf of foreign governments), the breaking up of peaceful marches, collusion with foreign agents, unwarranted raids, and possibly entrapment, did indeed strain the law, however liberally one chose to interpret it. Despite Anderson's extreme expulsionist stance (which the Home Office brass dismissed as "rather beyond the scope" of what Currie et al had promised in Rome)³⁹¹ and penchant for alarmism (his claim that he had recently broken up a London-based conspiracy for the assassination of the King of Italy was mocked as "far-fetched" by Bradford),³⁹² the CID chief's main point, namely that Britain's model of political policing could not possibly survive a legalistic revolution, would have undoubtedly resonated quite deeply with his superiors. With that in mind it becomes somewhat easier to explain why the promise to expand, or more accurately, tweak, the Extradition and Explosives Acts remained strictly a promise. In spite of the impressively researched and detailed draft bills,³⁹³ by 1902 the opportune moment to put them before Parliament had still not arrived, as Foreign Secretary Lansdowne put it in a reply to an inquiry made by German officials.³⁹⁴

While the British government was indeed facing more pressing concerns as the nineteenth century was drawing to a close (the Second Boer War being the most pressing), it is just as likely

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

³⁹⁰ Memorandum by Anderson, 14 January 1899, TNA HO 45/10254/X36450/92.

³⁹¹ Note by Digby, 15 December 1898, TNA HO 45/10254/X36450/77.

³⁹² Memorandum by Anderson [annotated by Bradford], 14 January 1899, TNA HO 45/10254/X36450/92.

³⁹³ "Extradition: Memorandum of Points still remaining for Consideration and Settlement," 1898-99, TNA HO 45/10254/X36450/72.

³⁹⁴ Marquess of Lansdowne to Sir Frank Cavendish Lascelles, 4 February 1902, quoted in Jensen, "The International Anti-Anarchist Conference of 1898," 329. The Germans were again slighted in August 1900 when a proposal to send several German detectives over "to study the English police system" was deemed "objectionable" by British authorities. Bradford to Digby, 2 August 1900, TNA MEPO 1/54.

that the draft bills were quietly allowed to gather dust in a Home Office archive for fear that enacting changes to existing legislation based on “external” suggestions could serve as a dangerous precedent for the further regulation of the police.

4 April 1900 – 10 December 1903: The End of an Era

A little over a year after the conclusion of the Rome Conference, the “anarchist conspiracy” did not seem to give any signs of weakening. On 4 April, as their train was about to depart the Nord Station in Brussels, the Prince and Princess of Wales were attacked by a Belgian youth who managed to jump on the footboard of the Royal carriage and fire two shots, both of which missed. As it soon became apparent to Belgian authorities, Jean-Baptiste Sipido – the sixteen-year-old would-be assassin – had pocketfuls of anarchist literature on him, although his motives for wanting to murder Prince Edward were decidedly unclear; he claimed to have acted as an avenger of the Boer cause, but according to testimonies extracted from Sipido’s friends, the outrage had been “merely the result of a stupid bet in a public-house, the stake being five francs.”³⁹⁵ Unfazed by the incident, Prince Edward decided to continue on his journey to Denmark, and expressed the hope that Sipido’s “youthful wrongheadedness” would be treated leniently, but to those who subscribed to the notion that anarchism was a dangerously organized terroristic cult Sipido’s attempt was cause for alarm. Belgian police chiefs were certain they had uncovered an anarchist plot engineered by a local socialist club (of which Sipido and his friends were members), a view which conservative currents of opinion were quick to embrace.³⁹⁶

Sipido’s ham-fisted attempt at martyrdom was quickly forgotten (although the news of his very lenient sentence was not at all well received in Britain),³⁹⁷ but nearly four months after

³⁹⁵ *Daily News*, 7 April 1900.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁷ *Standard*, 6 July 1900. In 1904, upon reaching the age of majority, Sipido was released from the reformatory prison at Ghent to which he had been confined as part of his sentence and by 1909 he had settled in Antwerp where

the incident in Brussels, on 29 July, Gaetano Bresci, a thirty-one-year-old, Italian-born weaver from Paterson, New Jersey, fired three shots at King Umberto I of Italy which did not miss their mark. The King, once a popular and forward-looking monarch,³⁹⁸ had recently awarded General Fiorenzo Bava-Beccaris the Military Order of Savoy, praising his handling of the bloody bread riots which had torn through Milan in May of 1898, and it is this perceived ignominy more than anything else which seems to have served as the final catalyst for the assassination.³⁹⁹ Like Sipido, Bresci had found himself embroiled not merely in a set of abstract beliefs, but in a chain of events with a decidedly colonial and international dimension⁴⁰⁰ which spoke to the rapid and violent emergence of what would shortly become the twentieth century.

In Britain, fears of an international assassination campaign continued to linger in the “official mind” at the Home Office. Despite the continued fragmentation and dissipation of the anarchist colony in London,⁴⁰¹ developments like the sudden arrival in London of a dozen exiled Spanish anarchists in May 1900,⁴⁰² and the gravity of “recent Continental experiences,” put the authorities on high alert.⁴⁰³ The anarchists however did not seem in a hurry to strike; over the next couple of years only three assassination plots were uncovered, all of which proved to be

he kept a small shop with his young wife. Having “renounced his anarchist ways,” Sipido now professed his “veneration” for King Edward VII whose portraits he avidly collected. He remained, however, under the close watch of Scotland Yard agents. *Le Nouveau Précurseur*, 9 March 1909; TNA HO 144/566/A61909/18.

³⁹⁸ Steven C. Soper, *Building a Civil Society: Associations, Public Life, and the Origins of Modern Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 173.

³⁹⁹ Masini, 149; Charles Perrone, “Bresci, Gaetano,” in *Encyclopedia of New Jersey*, edited by Maxine N. Lurie et al (New Brunswick, NJ: 2004), 97.

⁴⁰⁰ The drastically low wheat harvest of 1897 and the Spanish-American War of 1898 (which made the importing of American grain more prohibitive) led to a skyrocketing of wheat prices – from 225 lire per tonne in mid-1897 to 330 lire less than a year after. In early May 1898, strikes and demonstrations in Milan quickly escalated into a full-blown riot which was summarily and bloodily put down by the arch-reactionary Bava-Beccaris, leaving more than a hundred dead and several hundred wounded. See Martin Clark, *Modern Italy, 1871 to the Present, Third edition* (Pearson Longman, 2008), 127 ff.

⁴⁰¹ Quail, *Slow Burning Fuse*, 217-8. The *Liverpool Mercury* noted how “clubs which were rampant in the East End five years ago are now loyal institutions; houses in the vicinity of Fitzroy-square which harboured the associates of Bourdin are now tenanted by innocent folk, and all traces is lost of former underground rendezvous.” *Liverpool Mercury*, 4 August 1900.

⁴⁰² *Daily Mail*, 5 May 1900.

⁴⁰³ *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 3 August 1900.

bogus.⁴⁰⁴ The only actual outrage with a British connection occurred once again in Brussels in late 1902, taking everyone by surprise, and revealing once more the tenuous relationship between the Scotland Yard and its continental counterparts.

This was the so-called Rubino incident in which a forty-three-year-old Italian anarchist by the name of Gennaro Rubino (occasionally misspelled Rubini or Rubina in some English-language accounts) fired three shots at King Leopold II's cortege on the afternoon of 15 November as the latter was returning from a religious service at the Cathedral of Saints-Michel-et-Gudule. Luckily for the King, Rubino was a terrible shot, firing all three bullets at the wrong carriage and completely off-target.⁴⁰⁵ As Belgian police soon realized, however, the story of how the middle-aged Italian came to be in Brussels that day proved much more worrisome than the failed *attentat* itself. First of all, Rubino had come from London, where he had been living for the past five years, and where, until recently, he had been "kept under regular observation" by the Special Branch because of his anarchist sympathies.⁴⁰⁶ Even more disturbing was the fact that Rubino had bought the gun and ammunition used in the outrage with money given to him by one Hector Prina, a "subinspector of the Italian Police" and attaché to the Italian Consulate in London.⁴⁰⁷

As Melville explained in an official report,⁴⁰⁸ Prina had successfully approached Rubino in the spring of 1901 with an offer of employment. In return for a steady and not unsubstantial income (enough to buy a terraced house in Essex), the Italian Consulate would receive regular updates on the comings and goings of other Italian anarchists living in London. Convinced that

⁴⁰⁴ Herbert to Digby, 27 April 1900, TNA HO 144/545/A55176/32A; Bailey to Pauncefote, 7 August 1900, TNA HO 144/545/A55176/33; Boothby to Lansdowne, 31 December 1900, TNA HO 144/545/A55176/36B.

⁴⁰⁵ *Sunday Times*, 16 November 1902.

⁴⁰⁶ Bradford to Murdoch, 21 November 1902, TNA HO 144/668/X84164.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁸ Report by Melville, 3 December 1902, TNA HO 144/683/102620/2a.

Rubino's newfound career represented a "natural guarantee of his bone fides," Melville decided to "relax" the surveillance. Rubino's friends however grew increasingly suspicious; leaving aside his dubious habit of photographing houseguests on every possible occasion, Rubino appeared to be doing unusually well for a failed newsagent who was often out of work. By April 1902 his reputation was predictably in tatters, and during a "special meeting" convened at the German Communist Club in Charlotte Street, Rubino was formally charged with treason. He freely admitted his liaison with Italian police, but attempted to justify his actions by claiming that he had in fact been working as a double agent all along, feeding the Italian government bogus information while trying to ascertain who the real spies in the movement were. The comrades were not convinced; Rubino left the meeting unharmed, but as a broken, and now essentially friendless man.⁴⁰⁹ Having once professed his admiration for Canovas' murderer, Rubino now decided to redeem himself in the same manner – by assassinating a "tyrant." Given his Italian background it is unclear why he chose the King of the Belgians as his target (his testimony to Belgian police gave no specific justification), but as reports of the atrocities in the Congo Free State were just beginning to illustrate, Leopold II did arguably epitomize the absolute corruption of absolute power better than any other European monarch at the time.

Although British authorities bore little responsibility for Rubino's actions, the Home Office feared that the information described in Melville's report (which the Belgian government had already been made aware of) would "furnish effective ammunition for the people who look upon England as the hatching ground for Anarchist outrages and want to have measures taken here for suppressing Anarchist associations."⁴¹⁰ In reality the Belgians were all but grateful for Britain's apparent willingness to take on some of the most unsavoury subversives the continent

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁴¹⁰ Note by H. B. Simpson, 8 December 1902, TNA HO 144/683/102620/2.

had to offer. Only a year prior to Rubino's attempt, in October 1901, the anarchist Vittorio Jaffei (thought by Italian authorities to have been an accomplice of Bresci) had been promptly expelled from Antwerp with a one-way ticket to Dover in his pocket, much to the surprise and annoyance of British police.⁴¹¹ The Italians proved equally untrustworthy; as Sir Edward Henry, the newly appointed Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, observed in a report, the man sent to replace Prina in London, a certain Inspector Mandolesi, "has seemingly not profited by recent experience for leaflets are now circulated warning all Anarchists against [him]."⁴¹² A proposal made by the Italian Ambassador "that the Metropolitan Police should be instructed to work in co-operation with an Agent of his Government" was summarily dismissed as posing the "gravest risk" to the Special Branch's operations.⁴¹³ British authorities seemed more eager than ever to go it alone when it came to policing political extremism.

Changes were underway at Scotland Yard however. With the retirement of Anderson and Bradford, the nineteenth-century patrician mentality which had defined the CID since its inception appeared now increasingly anachronistic and vulnerable to Henry's reformist agenda.⁴¹⁴ Priorities were changing as well. On 31 May 1902 the defeated Boers had finished

⁴¹¹ "Deportation of Jaffei, an Anarchist from Belgium," TNA HO 144/668/X84164.

⁴¹² Memo by Henry, 16 March 1903, TNA HO 144/545/A55176/51.

⁴¹³ Ibid.

⁴¹⁴ Like most of his predecessors, Henry had cut his teeth in the Indian Civil Service, but unlike them he proved supremely qualified for leading a modern police force. He scored his first triumph in the early 1890s when, as the Inspector-General of Bengal, he pioneered the systematic use of fingerprinting for keeping track of recidivists, and in 1900 he was called to London to give evidence before the Belper Committee, which had been tasked with investigating the merits of both Bertillonage and fingerprinting. His performance proved impressive enough that after Anderson retired a year later, Henry became the new Assistant Commissioner. Two years after that, Sir Edward Bradford retired as well, and Henry was promoted to the Commissionership (with Melville Macnaghten taking over as Assistant Commissioner). This meteoric rise would prove entirely justified as in the years which followed Henry began a sweeping process of modernization (extending far beyond the use of fingerprints) which brought law enforcement in Britain firmly into the twentieth century. Tellingly, it was Henry who made possible the creation of the now iconic police box by systematizing telephonic communication between police and public (as well as between police divisions themselves), and who finally did away with the Scotland Yard's antiquated system of handwritten reports and laborious letter-book copies by introducing typewriters and carbon paper. See Colin Beavan, *Fingerprints: The Origins of Crime Detection and the Murder Case that Launched Forensic Science*, New York: Hyperion (2001), pp. 116-122, 145-155; Martin Fido and Keith Skinner, "Henry, Sir Edward, BT, GCVO,

signing the Treaty of Vereeniging, yet Britain was far from feeling confident in her imperial supremacy. Fears of a Franco-Russian alliance and of Russia's own increasingly aggressive policy in the East drove home the importance of a new centralized system for acquiring and managing military intelligence. As part of the work undertaken by the newly established Committee for Imperial Defense and the Elgin Commission,⁴¹⁵ the War Office was endowed with two new small intelligence-gathering departments: the MO2 and MO3 (the MO standing for Military Operations⁴¹⁶), tasked with handling foreign intelligence and counter-espionage, respectively. Given the hitherto sorry state of British military intelligence however (likened by military historian Spenser Wilkinson to "a man who kept a small brain for occasional use")⁴¹⁷ the problem of finding the right individual to put in charge of investigative operations was not a small one. Luckily for the government, there was at least one seasoned detective who could easily rise to the challenge.

On 1 January 1904, Walter Emden, the fourth Mayor of Westminster, paid tribute in a *Times* testimonial to the man he regarded as Britain's least well-known hero: after thirty-two years of "distinguished service [at] the direction of the special or political department of New Scotland Yard," Superintendent William Melville had apparently retired from public service in November of the previous year, leaving behind an impressive legacy of efficacious and evenhanded work "in the cause of humanity." As the Mayor went on to explain, "If prevention is better than cure, Superintendent Melville is the greatest of doctors [...] We know not, but might

KCB, CSI (1850-1931," in Fido et al, *The Official Encyclopedia of Scotland Yard* (London: Virgin Books, 1999), 117-19.

⁴¹⁵ The Royal Commission on the War in South Africa, established in 1902 and informally known as the Elgin Commission after its chairman the Earl of Elgin, was tasked with investigating the administrative and intelligence failings revealed during the Second War with the Boers. A year later in 1903 the Committee for Imperial Defense (chaired by A. J. Balfour) sought to expand that project by centralizing and streamlining the channels that linked the War Office, the Admiralty and the Foreign Office.

⁴¹⁶ MO3, renamed MO5 in 1907, morphed into MI5 two years into the First World War.

⁴¹⁷ Quoted in Christopher Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm: The Authorized History of MI5* (London: Penguin Books, 2010), 5.

in gratitude imagine now, what shocks to the civilized world, what public and private grief this one man may have saved us. If we are grateful for what has been done, we should be more grateful for what has not been done.”⁴¹⁸ In the end *le vil Melville* did have his fair share of admirers, at least forty-five of them, as attested by the list of members of the committee on whose behalf the testimonial had been submitted.⁴¹⁹ What even they failed to grasp, however, was that appearances very seldom told the full tale when it came to the Superintendent; his retirement was for all intents and purposes entirely fictitious (save for the £240 pension that he was now entitled to), and in reality Melville had simply been transferred to the War Office’s reconstituted intelligence unit, having been strongly recommended for the job both by the Home Office brass, and by his former boss, Sir Edward Bradford. Commissioner Henry agreed to let his star detective go, sharing in the belief that Melville was “shrewd and resourceful” albeit somewhat prone to “adventuring.”⁴²⁰ As for Melville himself, he was happy to change offices as long as he “got a suitable offer,”⁴²¹ which he certainly did. In return for a more than comfortable income (his Metropolitan Police pension would be supplemented by a salary of £440),⁴²² he was expected to “enquire into suspicious cases which might be given to me; to report all cases of suspicious Germans which might come to my notice; the same as to Frenchmen and foreigners generally; to obtain suitable men to go abroad to obtain information; to be in touch with competent operators to keep observation on suspected persons when necessary.”⁴²³ The days of

⁴¹⁸ *Times*, 1 January 1904.

⁴¹⁹ The committee included several Tory MPs and Church of England figures, as well as the German Ambassador, the Duke of Marlborough, Alfred de Rothschild, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (whose Lestrade arguably bears more than a passing resemblance to Melville).

⁴²⁰ Henry to Sanderson, 28 September 1903, quoted in Cook, 163-4.

⁴²¹ William Melville, “Memoir,” p. 3, TNA KV 1/8. This twenty-six-page autobiographical report, submitted by Melville on his actual retirement from public service in 1917, a year before his death, deals only with the years after 1904 and only in a very cursory fashion.

⁴²² In May 1904 Melville was once again honored for his years of service with a ceremony at Westminster City Hall in which he was presented with an illuminated address and a subscription-funded cheque of £2,000. Cook, 171.

⁴²³ Melville, “Memoir,” 3-4.

busting down the doors of anarchist clubs and debriefing foreign grasses in dark alleyways seemed to be firmly behind the ex-Special Branch leader, but although the Age of Melville may have drawn to a close, the threat of politically motivated violence remained ever-present.

Conclusion

Although the Home Office continued to play an important role in political policing throughout the 1890s, the decade ultimately saw a temporary consolidation of power in the institutional political police (namely Section D of the CID) and in particular its controversial superintendent, Chief Inspector William Melville. Whereas in 1887 Henry Matthews had been in charge of deciding which socialists were to be kept under surveillance and in what circumstances, in 1894 Asquith (a man without strong views on policing subversion⁴²⁴) found he had to rely on newspaper accounts in order to learn about the latest arrests of anarchists (much to the ire of his Home Office under-secretaries). Practically this meant that the active policing of anarchism in London and the provinces was often planned and directed by Melville himself, as several investigations reveal, chiefly that into the Walsall dynamite conspiracy.

The Walsall case in fact provides us with a near microcosm of Melville's style of political policing. First of all there were the informers, the most important of whom easily conjures up images of General Millen and other notorious Fenian double agents of the 1880s in their unscrupulous duplicity. That Melville was able to not only use a man like Auguste Coulon but to effectively “own” him (as both Patrick McIntyre's memoir and secret Special Branch payrolls attest) suggests that even more than Jenkinson before him, the Chief Inspector carried out his

⁴²⁴ By the mid 1890s Asquith had already run the gamut from Radical populist (as illustrated by his legal defence of Cunninghame Graham and John Burns following the Bloody Sunday riot) to Liberal Imperialist ready to sanction the use of troops against striking workers (as he did in 1893 when two coal miners were fatally shot at Featherstone in Yorkshire as a consequence). This earned him a reputation for duplicity and conservatism in left-wing and labour circles but there is no evidence to suggest that Asquith's anti-socialism in any way extended beyond that of the Liberal mainstream and his later (qualified) embrace of New Liberalism suggests he never quite became a full-blown reactionary (his hatred of women's suffrage notwithstanding).

spymaster duties with an impressive degree of ruthlessness and relish. Secondly, we have the extra-legality and secrecy which are aptly illustrated by Coulon's possible (though not wholly substantiable) role as agent provocateur, but more importantly by the fact that the Home Office and the Scotland Yard leadership seem to have been only marginally aware of what was happening in Walsall (Anderson's embarrassing failure to get a hold of the ever-slippery Coulon being a case in point). Thirdly, there is the careful manipulation of public opinion as revealed by Melville's conspicuous claim that he had "paid lots of anarchists money" for lots of reasons. Although we have no way of knowing the extent to which that claim was factual, the fact that it was accepted as true by the Attorney General and the presiding judge in the case, the press, and not least by the anarchists themselves, attests to Melville's talents as spin doctor – talents which would later prove essential in cementing the public image of "police espionage [in Britain as] not assertive – [as] in fact, subterranean in its character."⁴²⁵

Was such Machiavellian dissimulation the product of an Irish-colonial mentality (as some historians have indirectly argued⁴²⁶)? Given the broad focus of this work it has not always been possible to exhaustively dissect the character and personality of each individual actor but it nevertheless must be noted, even if only in this brief conclusion, that the notion of Melville's Irishness as a byword for an inherent reactionism is unconvincing. Melville was indeed Irish by birth (a native of Sneem in County Kerry) but as a recent biography has demonstrated, his early upbringing was that of a respectably poor Roman Catholic tenant farmer's son, not one steeped in Unionist politics or Anglo-Irish privilege. Fleeing his childhood home sometime in his late teens (for reasons unknown), the future superintendent of the Special Branch was by 1872, at the age of just twenty-two, already a constable in the London Metropolitan Police. The young Melville,

⁴²⁵ *Sunday Times*, 15 August 1897.

⁴²⁶ Porter, *Origins of the Vigilant State*, 193-4.

it seems, was likely a starry-eyed, teetotalling self-improver (he was fluent in French) who favoured collective bargaining rights for the police – a stance for which he was briefly expelled from the force. He gradually changed as he increasingly came into contact with the human awful wonder of London's most disadvantaged areas (where he was often on the beat) and the venality and corruption of the Metropolitan Police leadership during the 1870s (Melville's promotion to the newly-formed CID in 1879 came on the tails of the previous year's collapse of the detective branch under the weight of a notorious corruption scandal).⁴²⁷ It was the “grim net” of London then – “this prison built stark [with] the greed of the ages”⁴²⁸ – that created Melville the arch-manipulator and the *vil Melville* of anarchist demonology, just as it was London that created the political police itself.

That aside, it is important to keep in mind that Melville's presence at Scotland Yard was far from revolutionary and that in many ways the political police of the 1890s remained the bastard child of the post-Harcourt status quo (minus the endemic infighting). The methods deployed by Special Branch detectives – viz. shadowing, disguises, raids and house searches (with or without warrants) and especially the use of informers – were certainly nothing new. Neither was Britain's tenuous relationship with foreign powers in matters of political policing as demonstrated by the British non-participation in the abortive 1893 anti-anarchist conference and half-hearted participation in the 1898 Rome conference. That governmental attitudes to schemes for international police cooperation were motivated by the desire to preserve the secrecy surrounding the British model of political policing, not merely by a nineteenth-century version of Euroscepticism is, as we have seen, demonstrated by the internal official correspondence dealing with the anti-anarchist conferences. It is also evident in the official reply to the 1897 request

⁴²⁷ Cook, 15-32.

⁴²⁸ William Morris, “Pilgrims of Hope,” *The Collected Works of William Morris* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 372.

from the Uruguayan government for details on Britain's counter-terrorist strategy quoted above – and this is worth repeating: “To be an Anarchist,” the Home Office-prepared missive stated, “is not any offence against English law [...] If however Anarchists or any other men attempt to enforce their views by crime they are dealt with under the same law that is applied to criminals acting from other motives.”⁴²⁹ This is almost word-for-word what Sir Phillip Currie, head of the British delegation at the 1898 conference, described as the official British position on political crime before the other delegates.

There were of course some changes as well. Colonel Majendie was finally able to see through to fruition his plans for a French-style bomb-disposing compound (though only after the Greenwich Park explosion convinced the government of its desirability). The surveillance of British socialists was no longer deemed a priority – not so much out of fear of irking liberal opinion but because the native socialist scene now seemed endemically fragmented and hopelessly far from anything resembling the riots and drilling of 1887.⁴³⁰ Conversely, as the curious case of the Legitimation League demonstrates, groups associated – no matter how tenuously – with militant anarchism could easily find themselves infiltrated and broken up by legal (or rather legalistic) means. Although such apparent excesses of zeal were not deplored by the mainstream press, newspapers now tended to be somewhat more critical of “the political department,” especially when Scotland Yard appeared to be pathetically inept (as was the case in the aftermath of the Greenwich Park outrage), without however veering into any sustained critiques of political policing *per se*. As we have noted, the left-wing *Reynolds's Newspaper*, the independent *Sunday Times*, and the right-wing *Daily Mail* could, by 1897, all agree that the political police was an irreversible and ultimately legitimate part of the British state.

⁴²⁹ Note by H. B. Simpson, 25 June 1897, TNA HO 144/545/A55176/31.

⁴³⁰ Mark Bevir, *The Making of British Socialism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 82.

Whether this was truly the decade of “utterly unlawful things” (as Anderson claimed in his 1898 memo to the Home Office) remains debatable until more conclusive archival evidence comes to light. Certainly the extra-legality of British political policing never (with the exception of those very few cases where provocation by government-employed agents might have been at play) nosedived into outright illegality and even in those cases where the law was very clearly “strained,” it was strained in a manner that stressed the incongruity of the situation and, paradoxically, the lawfulness of the British political police system. To illustrate we need only think of the 1897 case of Vladimir Burtsev. Although the arrest of the unfortunate revolutionary was procured through extra-legal means by a representative of a foreign power for the exclusive benefit of his political masters, that representative – the infamous Pyotr Rachkovsky – was never able to secure in Britain anything like the vast network of patronage he had built up in France, the country where most of his operations were based.⁴³¹ Because, outside the uppermost echelons of the Home Office bureaucracy, British extra-legality was always safely buried in a hollow yet inviolable ur-liberal narrative of strict constitutionalism (“The only question with us is, is there crime or not?”⁴³²) and legal exceptionalism (“our laws are strong enough to deal with anarchism”⁴³³), the backdoor into the British political police did not ultimately lead very far even for those who were clever (and unscrupulous) enough to find it.

⁴³¹ Ben B. Fischer, *Okhrana: The Paris Operations of the Russian Imperial Police* (Collingdale, PA: Diane Publishing, 1999), 61.

⁴³² Currie to Salisbury, 3 December 1898, TNA HO 45/10254/X36450/79.

⁴³³ Foreign Office Reply to Cipriano del Mazo (Spanish ambassador to the UK), December 1893, TNA HO 45/10254/X36450/8.

PART 3

'Something very like revolution'

1904-1914

Introduction

After the splendid isolation and assuredness of the 1890s, the tumult of the twentieth century. In this part we will look at how the British government reacted and responded to the new types of political radicalism that were emerging during the Edwardian and post-Edwardian years. Although the peak of the “propaganda by the deed” campaign seemed to reach a new, global dimension after the assassination of both the Italian King Umberto I and the American President William McKinley within the span of just over a year, the anarchist colony in Britain was very much in decline. Instead, the new challenge for the government came from homegrown movements like the suffragettes, who after 1906 began advocating increasingly militant methods to advance their aims, and the labour movement, sections of which were becoming increasingly responsive to the advanced socialist doctrines emerging on the continent. Simultaneously, the problems posed by imperial unrest and the mounting wave of immigration from Eastern Europe were only further highlighted by spectacular and violent episodes involving foreign criminals (who were also actively involved in far-left and nationalist politics). At first glance, the response of British authorities to these new challenges appears to have changed very little when compared to the previous decade. The Home Office and the Scotland Yard continued to display the same circumspect conservatism in regards to strategies of containing grassroots political violence, all the while insisting that political crime was not a category recognized by British law. Change

was nonetheless forthcoming, and as we shall see later on, the decade preceding the First World War proved to have a profoundly transformative effect on the expansion and development of political policing in Britain.



14 March 1904, St. Petersburg

On 3 December 1901, in his first annual message to Congress, the recently instated twenty-sixth President of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt, had decried the assassination of his predecessor¹ by a “criminal whose perverted instincts [led] him to prefer confusion and chaos to the most beneficent form of social order,” adding that,

Anarchy is a crime against the whole human race; and all mankind should band against the anarchist. His crime should be made an offense against the law of nations, like piracy and that form of man-stealing known as the slave trade; for it is of far blacker infamy than either. It should be so declared by treaties among all civilized powers. Such treaties would give to the Federal Government the power of dealing with the crime.²

A little over a month after Roosevelt’s call to action it seemed like an international anti-anarchist crusade might finally become a reality thanks to a new Russo-German attempt to revive the project undertaken in Rome back in 1898. By early 1904, however, it was clear that the momentum for concerted action had mostly dissipated. Despite much lobbying by the Russian and German governments, in the end only nine of the twenty-one participants of the 1898

¹ On 13 June 1901 President William McKinley was fatally shot during a visit at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York. The assassin, a twenty-eight-year-old second-generation Polish immigrant by the name of Leon Czolgosz, was quick to profess his allegiance to the doctrines espoused by Emma Goldman and other American anarchists, and despite a history of mental illness, he was declared fit to stand trial and ultimately sentenced to death. Shortly before his execution Czolgosz declared that he had “killed the President because he was the enemy of the good people – the good working people,” and that he was not sorry for his crime. See Eric Rauchway, *Murdering McKinley: The Making of Theodore Roosevelt’s America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003).

² Theodore Roosevelt, “First Annual Message,” 3 December 1901, *The American Presidency Project*, accessed 18 September 2014, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29542>.

conference (Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, Denmark, Germany, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Sweden and Norway, and Turkey) agreed to reconvene for a new set of deliberations on the anarchist threat; all of them, except for the Scandinavian states, were either Russian or German allies.

The United States' official response to the Russo-German proposal did not appear to echo the enthusiasm of Roosevelt's speech. In the wake of Czolgosz's trial and execution, outrage over McKinley's assassination was quickly subsiding, and legal solutions appeared more practical if devised and managed by the Federal government without any interference from the Old World.³ Britain's response proved equally isolationist, if for somewhat different reasons; whereas the Americans preferred to ground their anti-anarchist legislation in the spirit of the Monroe Doctrine, the British continued to remain unconvinced that such legislation was needed in the first place. As in 1898, the government's circumspect approach would easily outweigh any fears about the "confusion and chaos" with which the anarchists appeared to threaten the established social order.

In fairness, there was more to Britain's non-participation than a stubborn refusal to alter the sacrosanct "spirit" of British law. Firstly, there was in fact little need for a harsh disciplinarian response to the continued presence of a now "practically quiescent"⁴ (and overwhelmingly London-based) anarchist colony in Britain. Secondly, Britain was not exactly on the best of terms with Germany,⁵ and still a few years away from signing the Anglo-Russian

³ In January 1902, the US signed a Treaty for the Extradition of Criminals and for Protection against Anarchism along with sixteen Latin American countries as part of the Second Pan-American Conference. That same year the New York Criminal Anarchy Act outlawed all anarchist propaganda, and only a year later, Congress passed a new Immigration Act which barred entry into the United States to anarchists and radicals advocating the overthrow of government. This provision would eventually be carried over into the Alien Immigration Act of 1917 and the Anarchist Act of 1918, which also allowed for the deportation of various subversives and revolutionaries.

⁴ Marquess of Lansdowne to Count Benckendorff, 17 June 1904, TNA HO 144/757/118516/3.

⁵ By 1903 the sense that the German Empire was increasingly becoming Britain's new arch-rival had already seeped into British popular culture as attested by Erskine Childers' hugely-popular *Riddle of the Sands: A Record of Secret Service*, which told the tale of a sinister German plot to invade the British Isles, and its foiling by a couple of dutiful yet daring Oxford old boys.

Convention which would finally ease some of the tension accumulated over nearly a century of playing the Great Game.⁶ Lastly, and most importantly, the provisions of the protocol signed in the Russian capital on 1 March (14 March in the New Style calendar) reflected the priorities of the Russian and German governments to an uncomfortable degree. Whereas the Rome Conference had dedicated many of its sessions to debating the definition of anarchism, the 1904 Protocol aimed at dealing only with practical administrative measures. Typical of these were proposals to “pass expelled anarchists across the frontiers by quickest routes to their own country,” and for each of the signatories to “establish a Central Bureau to collect [...] information as to anarchists in its own area, and their doings.”⁷ This latter proposal was on the face of it nothing especially controversial; a pan-European network of central bureaux forwarding each other valuable intelligence on the doings of anarchists had been a key administrative motion of the 1898 Conference, and one which had enjoyed nearly unanimous support. The 1904 version however went into considerable detail as to the responsibilities and obligations of these central bureaux:

The Contracting Powers agree that from the Central Bureaux notice shall be sent promptly:-

- (a) If an anarchist is expelled or quits the country (notice to be sent to the Bureau of the country he is going).
- (b) If an anarchist disappears from under observation (notice to be sent to all Central Bureaux)

⁶ Melville later recalled how “in 1904 there was severe political tension with Russia, and it was considered advisable to get in touch with Poles, Nihilists and other discontented Russian elements in this country.” Ironically, the ex-Special Branch Superintendent now found himself meeting in secret at London’s nihilist clubs with Polish nationalists, encouraging rather than subverting their plans for insurrection, even going so far as donating £10 to one of their propaganda funds. Melville, “Memoir,” pp. 8-9, TNA KV 1/8.

⁷ “Memorandum as to the Protocol of 1904 respecting Anarchist Crimes,” 13 July 1906, TNA HO 144/757/118516/15.

(c) If any anarchist plot is discovered

(d) If there are any important events bearing on the anarchist question to record.

Each Central Bureau shall be bound to reply to questions by another Central Bureau.⁸

As the official Home Office memorandum on the Protocol's proceedings made clear, such a level of close cooperation with foreign police forces would be utterly incompatible with the "arrangements under which the police in this country is conducted [which] do not provide the means of establishing any central bureau with formal authority over the whole kingdom."⁹ More importantly, as the same document confirmed, political policing in Britain was premised almost exclusively on "the private informer," ostensibly due to a lack of continental-style identity documents and domiciliary visits by the police. Should an informer's identity "leak out" as a consequence of intelligence sharing between the proposed central bureaux, he (and his ilk) would certainly be less inclined to inform in the future, and might even be "driven to some desperate act – as has happened more than once."¹⁰ Therefore, as Commissioner Henry explained in his usual forthright manner, "the action of English police in dealing with anarchists should not be fettered by hard and fast agreements with continental police authorities;"¹¹ there would be informal information sharing "as necessity arises," but nothing beyond that. As for the power to expel anarchists, the Home Office made it clear that it lacked that as well, although as upcoming developments were about to demonstrate, certain elements within the Conservative Party had far from given up on the idea that Europe's "refuse" had no place on British shores.

6 December 1904 – 3 February 1906, East London

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Home Office memorandum, 21 June 1904, TNA HO 144/757/118516/3.

¹⁰ Memorandum, 13 July 1906, TNA HO 144/757/118516/15.

¹¹ "Report by E. R. Henry – Draft for Approval," May 1904, TNA HO 144/757/118516/2.

On the afternoon of 7 December 1904 Henry forwarded a report to Home Secretary Akers-Douglas which illustrated the disastrous situation – “more acute [...] this year [...] than it has ever been” – of newly arrived East End immigrants.¹² The report’s author, Superintendent John Mulvany of the H Division, described the pockets of extreme penury and misery in his precinct in nearly apocalyptic terms:

These people have been coming in large numbers for some time past, they are chiefly of Russian nationality, ill fed and ill clothed, mostly without means of any sort. As recently as yesterday some three hundred of them congregated outside a synagogue at Fournier St., Brick Lane and threatened to break the doors open if they were not given bread; many are absolutely starving, they walk the streets by day and night, the shelters being full [...] Police precautions are taken to keep them in check and prevent damage but the evil is growing daily.¹³

The issue of ever-increasing Eastern European immigration into London (especially the East End) was of course not a new one, but if in 1892 it was relegated to the columns of *Justice* and the politics of hunger marches, by 1904 it had become very much the focus of a national debate on economic fairness, moral integrity and racial health.¹⁴ In order to address the concerns of newly formed anti-immigration pressure groups (which ranged from the explicitly anti-semitic British Brothers League to the more mainstream right-wing Parliamentary Alien Immigration Committee) a Royal Commission on Alien Immigration had been formed in early 1902 which over the span of forty-nine days heard evidence from no fewer than one hundred seventy-five witnesses. Its report, published in August 1903, concluded that while the flood of Jewish

¹² Note by Henry, 7 December 1904, TNA MEPO 2/260.

¹³ Report by Mulvany, 6 December 1904, TNA MEPO 2/260.

¹⁴ For more on how this debate was played out through the pages of the popular press see David Glover, *Literature, Immigration and Diaspora in Fin-de-Siècle England: A Cultural History of the 1905 Aliens Act* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

refugees into the British capital was not responsible for any “serious displacement of skilled English labour,” and was unlikely to cease anytime soon given the economic and social anti-semitism entrenched in Eastern European states with significant Jewish minorities (the Russian Empire and the Kingdom of Romania in particular), new regulations were nevertheless urgently needed in order to “prevent so far as possible this country being burdened with the presence of ‘undesirable aliens’ and to provide for their repatriation in certain cases.”¹⁵ The undesirability however was framed solely in terms of moral turpitude and/or proclivity toward regular, non-political crime¹⁶ – an interpretation that would be reiterated in the 1905 Aliens Act, which explicitly barred any “crime [...] of a political character” from the expulsion clause.¹⁷

Such a blatant re-affirmation of the status quo position on “political crime” may seem counterintuitive given that the previous Conservative attempt at pushing a new Aliens Bill through Parliament had been partly motivated by Lord Salisbury’s wish to rid London of the anarchists’ “conspiracy of assassination.” In 1905, however, organized anarchism was no longer what it had been during the *époque des attentats* of the 1890s. In London at least, “the movement” was now more or less relegated to the fringes of trade union politics, especially in areas associated with sweated immigrant labour, and it was thanks to a group of Jewish activists that the last significant anarchist club in the British capital opened its doors on 3 February 1906 in Jubilee Street.¹⁸ Anarchism had now become a function of a secular and radical version of

¹⁵ *Times*, 12 August 1903.

¹⁶ The six classes of “undesirables” mentioned in the report were convicted criminals, “idiots [and] lunatics, prostitutes, pimps, persons of “notoriously bad character,” and the completely destitute. *Times*, 12 August 1903.

¹⁷ “Direction as to custody of alien when certificate with view to expulsion has been given by a court,” December 1905, TNA HO 45/10330/134961.

¹⁸ Named the *Arbeiter Fraind* [Worker’s Friend] Club and Institute (after an eponymous Yiddish-language anarchist daily), it was a “big building, with a large hall, [...] a library [...] reading room [and] educational classes,” harkening back to the glory days of the Autonomie Club. According to the German anarchist Rudolf Rocker, who was one of the founding members, the house on Jubilee Street served not merely as a meeting place for anarchists, but as a community centre for left-wing and secular Jewish activists of all stripes who were otherwise alienated from native socialist parties like the S.D.F. (which thanks to its openly anti-Semitic and nationalistic leader came closer to

Jewishness, an expression of “a hidden Jewish menace of outsiders who could pass as insiders.”¹⁹ Although the issue of insidious aliens and criminality would continue to bubble through the pages of the conservative press, and would even make a spectacular return to the national forefront at the end of the decade (as we shall see later on), the establishment’s new “enemy within” was no longer to be found in the derelict tenements of the East End but in the respectable middle-class neighborhoods of London, Manchester, Birmingham and other British metropolises.

23 October 1906, Houses of Parliament, Westminster, London

On the afternoon of 23 October 1906 a group of thirty women boarded a train from Plaistow in East London for Westminster Bridge Station. By 1:45 p.m. the group, having now doubled in size, began to gather in front of the Houses of Parliament where, thanks to a timely wire from a “plain clothes man,”²⁰ a contingent of police officers from the nearby Cannon Row Police Station had been placed to “strengthen the approaches.”²¹ Initially the women – all members and supporters of the recently-formed Women’s Social and Political Union – expressed only the wish to petition members of the House of Commons with the “usual request to grant women the vote that session,”²² but after the Liberal whip confirmed what everyone in attendance already knew – that Prime Minister Campbell-Bannerman had no intention to consider female enfranchisement “for any session during this Parliament or at any future time,”²³ things took a decidedly more boisterous turn. Seizing on the propaganda value of the occasion,

espousing an English version of *Boulangisme* than an orthodox Marxist line), as well as many of the mainstream trade unions (whose anti-alien agitation was arguably at an apex in the years following the Second Boer War). See Rudolf Rucker, *The London Years*, 96-100.

¹⁹ Paul Knepper, “The Other Invisible Hand: Jews and Anarchists in London before the First World War,” *Jewish History* 22 (2008): 310.

²⁰ Telegram from Inspector A. Neville to Cannon Row Police Station, 23 October 1906, TNA MEPO 2/1016.

²¹ Report by Chief Inspector Scantlebury, 23 October 1906, TNA MEPO 2/1016.

²² Emmeline Pankhurst, *My Own Story* (London: Eveleigh Nash, 1914), 74.

²³ *Ibid.*, 75.

Ms. Mary Gawthorpe, one of the twenty women who had been allowed inside the Central Lobby,²⁴ climbed on top of the armchair next to the stern-faced statue of the Earl of Iddesleigh, and began addressing the crowd “viz. Votes for Women, Votes for Freedom, We are slaves etc.,” as Chief Inspector Scantlebury, head of the House of Commons police, dismissively put it. She was immediately pulled off the makeshift platform by the attendant policemen, and along with her comrades, discourteously removed to the Old Palace Yard, where “the poorer women who had come up from the East End” had been standing around for hours, waiting for news.²⁵ The sudden commotion revitalized the combative spirit of the “suffragettes” (an epithet coined by the *Daily Mail* which WSPU supporters were quick to reclaim)²⁶ and many began forming human chains around the “ringleaders” in order to prevent them being manhandled by the police. This they ultimately failed to do, but only after intense scuffles with reinforced numbers of increasingly roughshod PCs. By the early hours of the evening ten of the women – Annie Cobden-Sanderson (daughter of Richard Cobden), Annie Kenney, Adela Pankhurst and Dora Montefiore among them – were taken into custody and charged with “using threatening and abusive words and behaviour with intent to provoke a breach of the peace.”²⁷ All of them refused the offer to be bound over in the sum of £5, denying the magistrate’s “right to try their case [...] because they had no vote and consequently no voice in making the laws,” opting instead to serve a two months sentence in Holloway Gaol.²⁸

²⁴ Report by Scantlebury, 23 October 1906, TNA MEPO 2/1016.

²⁵ *Daily Chronicle*, 24 October 1906.

²⁶ By contrast the “able bodies [...] working quietly and unostentatiously for universal women’s suffrage,” were still referred to as “suffragists” (*Daily Mail*, 4 March 1907) although in other publications, *The Times* most notably, the two terms continued to be used interchangeably.

²⁷ Report by Inspector James Jarvis, 24 October 1906, TNA MEPO 2/1016.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

This incident did not mark the first example of the militant tactics the WSPU was to become notorious for in the years leading up to the First World War,²⁹ but it did confirm that such tactics could indeed put women's suffrage in the limelight far better than the pacifist methods of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies.³⁰ Conservative and Liberal newspapers alike continued to rail against "frantic women"³¹ and "shrieking sisters,"³² but to a public increasingly receptive to some notion of extending the franchise, the embarrassing spectacle of policemen roughing up and arresting a group of mostly "respectable" ladies (some of advanced years) had gone a step too far. When asked in the House of Commons by Keir Hardie to "secure [the] immediate release" of the ten convicted suffragettes, Home Secretary Gladstone initially insisted that he could not "interfere with the sentences,"³³ but only a month after their imprisonment the women were suddenly released from Holloway to the acclaim of their comrades who then celebrated their release with a festive dinner at the Savoy Hotel.³⁴ Within a matter of weeks a wave of new volunteers and financial contributions emboldened the WSPU even further,³⁵ and in early December a new series of protests erupted in the Central Lobby of Parliament, humiliating the Liberal cabinet once again and demonstrating the police's

²⁹ In October 1905 Annie Kenney and Christabel Pankhurst had kicked off the WSPU's soon-to-be-established practice of hijacking public events by interrupting Sir Edward Grey's address at the Free Trade Hall with shouts of "Will the Liberal Government give women the vote?" and assaulting policemen in order to elicit arrest. A few months later, in March 1906, Annie Kenney (part of a group of thirty or so women staging a sit-in in front of 10 Downing Street) managed to momentarily climb on top of the Prime Minister's car and address her fellow suffragettes before being arrested. Andrew Rosen, *Rise Up, Women! The Militant Campaign of the Women's Social and Political Union, 1903-1914* (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), 50, 64-5.

³⁰ In an open letter to *The Times*, the leader of the NUWSS, Millicent Garrett Fawcett conceded that the suffragettes' actions in Westminster "far from having injured the movement [...] have done more during the last twelve months to bring it within the region of practical politics than we have been able to accomplish in the same number of years." *Times*, 27 October 1906.

³¹ *Times*, 24 October 1906.

³² *Daily Chronicle*, 24 October 1906.

³³ HC Deb, 26 October 1906, vol. 163, cols. 518-9.

³⁴ *Times*, 26 November and 12 December, 1906.

³⁵ Pankhurst, 76; Martin Pugh, *The Pankhursts: The History of One Radical Family* (London: Vintage Books, 2008), 147.

continued unpreparedness.³⁶ The stage had now been set for an increasingly acrimonious and drawn-out confrontation between militants and the government.

13 February 1907 – 17 January 1908, London and Ashburton, Devon

The WSPU's strategy for 1907 debuted on 13 February at Caxton Hall in Westminster with the first of a series of Women's Parliaments, in which suffragettes from across the country came together to consider, among other issues, the provisions of the King's speech – delivered the day before – which had made it clear that “nothing [would be done] for women during the session ahead” by the “Men's Parliament.”³⁷ After unanimously carrying a resolution condemning the government's continued shunning of woman suffrage, and a motion to present the Prime Minister with same, a group of three to four hundred suffragettes marched over, hand-in-hand, to the Palace of Westminster and attempted to gain entrance to the House of Commons. Once again they were met by a number of constables from the Cannon Row Station (this time accompanied by a body of mounted police), who, finding that the women were “very determined [...] were compelled to use corresponding force to prevent an entrance to Parliament being effected.”³⁸ The scuffle went on into the evening, leading to grotesque scenes of armed men on horseback charging into a scattering crowd of already disarrayed and bruised women – a spectacle not witnessed in the capital since Bloody Sunday, and made more egregious by the police's subsequent insistence that “no brutality or unnecessary violence” had been used.³⁹ The significance of the event was certainly not lost on Emmeline Pankhurst, who later observed,

³⁶ *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 18 December 1906.

³⁷ Pankhurst, 81.

³⁸ Report by Supt. Wells, 19 February 1907, TNA MEPO 2/1016.

³⁹ Note by Henry, 19 February 1907, TNA MEPO 2/1016.

somewhat cynically, that “the [February] raid [...] gave the [WSPU] an enormous amount of publicity, on the whole, favourable publicity.”⁴⁰

A total of fifty-six women (as well as two men) were arrested on charges of “disorderly conduct and resisting police”⁴¹ and arraigned before Magistrate Bennett the following day at Westminster Police Court. Following the established pattern of choosing prison time over paying a fine, most of those arrested received sentences of up to three weeks in the first division of Holloway (where prisoners were allowed their own clothes and access to writing materials); as Christabel Pankhurst – arguably the mastermind behind the militant strategy, and in many ways the de facto leader of the WSPU⁴² – proclaimed from the dock: “There can be no going back for us [...] and more will happen if we do not get justice.”⁴³

A day after the trial, a new Women’s Enfranchisement Bill was introduced by W. H. Dickinson, the Liberal MP for St. Pancras,⁴⁴ and reached its Second Reading in the Commons on 8 March (with the Prime Minister’s nominal support no less); justice seemed possible at last – indeed likely. As with previous legislative efforts of this kind, however, reactionary elements on both sides of the floor proved too powerful to silence. Citing concerns about its undemocratic nature, which supposedly favored “a small-minority of well-to-do women,”⁴⁵ the Whiggish elite of the Liberal Party, encouraged by a growing anti-suffrage lobby,⁴⁶ proceeded to filibuster the Bill out of existence, and by mid March it was obvious that the status quo had once again carried

⁴⁰ Pankhurst, 84.

⁴¹ Report by Supt. Wells, 5 March 1907, TNA MEPO 2/1016.

⁴² Despite the new sense of purpose with which she had helped infuse the Union, Christabel’s overbearing, iron-fisted approach as lead strategist made her a controversial figure within the organization and ultimately contributed to the irreparable rift that would tear the organization apart in late 1907.

⁴³ Pankhurst, 83.

⁴⁴ HC Deb, 15 February 1907, vol. 169, col. 416.

⁴⁵ Henry Campbell-Bannerman, quoted in Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Suffragette: The History of the Women’s Militant Suffrage Movement, 1905-1910* (New York: Sturgis & Walton Co., 1911), 150.

⁴⁶ A Women’s Anti-Suffrage Society sprang up specifically to gather signatures against the proposed Bill, laying the groundwork for the future Women’s National Anti-Suffrage League (founded in July 1908).

the day. Owing to the Ladies' Gallery being kept closed throughout the debating of the Bill, the suffragettes' reaction to these developments had not immediately been made obvious, but this soon changed with the holding of the second Women's Parliament on 20 March.

Once again, the women of Caxton Hall adopted a resolution (denouncing the Government's sabotage of Mr. Dickinson's Bill) and voted to have it delivered to Prime Minister Campbell-Bannerman by a deputation of volunteers (led by the stately old-guard suffragist, and Rational Dress devotee, the Viscountess Harberton). This time around, however, the police – fifty constables, five police sergeants, and two inspectors – were waiting right outside the Hall on the orders of Commissioner Henry himself, and under the direction of Superintendent Wells, who was already convinced of the inevitability of “a demonstration [...] should the [women's suffrage] Bill [fail].”⁴⁷ Confronted with such a hostile assembly, the women remained nonetheless defiant in their plan to march towards the House of Commons and refused to disperse, at which point Superintendent Wells instructed his men to “break them up;”⁴⁸ what ensued was largely a repeat of the events of 13 February if only on a more dramatic scale. Those women who managed to evade the cordon in front of Caxton Hall – including a pugnacious contingent of mill workers clad in traditional Lancashire clogs and shawls – eventually found their way over to Parliament Square, where they were met by another “considerable band of suffragettes,”⁴⁹ as well as more than five hundred constables.⁵⁰ For the next three to four hours the women repeatedly tried to break through the line of policemen only to find themselves “taken round the waist and put back on the other side of the line again.”⁵¹ By ten in the evening it had become clear to authorities that the only way to completely disperse the remaining demonstrators

⁴⁷ Report by Supt. Wells, 5 March 1907, TNA MEPO 2/1016.

⁴⁸ Report by Supt. Wells, 3 April 1907, TNA MEPO 2/1016; *Daily Mail*, 21 March 1907.

⁴⁹ *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 21 March 1907.

⁵⁰ Rosen, 82.

⁵¹ *Daily Mail*, 21 March 1907.

(as well as the thousands of gaping onlookers) was to again send in “the cavalry;” eight mounted police “who had been conspicuous by their absence during the raids” consequently proceeded to make short work of “[clearing] the thoroughfares around St. Stephens.”⁵²

Despite the considerable number of arrests (seventy-six in all) and the brutality of the confrontation (which was on the whole “not so great as on [...] February 13”),⁵³ the 20 March demonstration ultimately failed in its intended purpose of “[carrying] a resolution from a hall to the Prime Minister,”⁵⁴ and suffered somewhat from the law of diminishing returns as far as publicity went; there would be no more “raids” on the House of Commons for the rest of the year. The Scotland Yard was only just beginning to take the suffragettes seriously, however, as a report submitted by Chief Inspector Walter Dew (who would shortly rise to international fame as “the man who caught Crippen”) on 11 April shows. In it, Dew describes his meeting with a certain Miss Meehan, whose recent letter to police had decried “the annoyance caused [...] by the suffragettes” holding their meetings next door to her in Clement’s Inn – a remnant of the old Inns of Chancery that had been sold off for residential development in 1903, and the place where the WSPU had lately set up shop, thanks to the generosity of recent converts to the cause Emmeline and Frederick Pethick-Lawrence.⁵⁵

Although it does not contain any revelations beyond the fact that the suffragettes were not perhaps the quietest of neighbours, Dew’s report does offer some valuable insights into how the Scotland Yard viewed the movement’s potential for political violence during the incipient phase of its militancy. The main concern appeared to be that the WSPU’s newfound support amongst

⁵² *Western Times*, 21 March 1907.

⁵³ Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Suffragette*, 154-155.

⁵⁴ Emmeline Pankhurst, *My Own Story*, 86.

⁵⁵ Partly because of their wealth and status, but also because of their initially unquestioning devotion to the Pankhursts, Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence and her husband – the only male member of the WSPU – quickly rose through the ranks to become “part of the small coterie which effectively ran the organization” (Pugh, 149). 4 Clement’s Inn remained the unofficial HQ of the WSPU until 1912, when the Pethick-Lawrences irrevocably fell out with the Pankhursts.

the upper and middle classes would in effect enable it to recruit an army of working-class foot soldiers in the poorer areas of the capital, a theory which however proved hard to substantiate despite Dew's own conviction that it was "quite correct." Miss Meehan, whose grievances proved to be of an entirely domestic nature, was for one "unable to give any information as to any persons hailing from East Ham or elsewhere who have been paid to join in the processions [and with] regards to the suggestion that regular drilling goes on in those offices [she explained] that what she means by this is that meetings are held and songs practiced." Despite the lack of evidence, Dew's suspicions were certainly widespread enough to land the suffragettes on the Special Branch's radar, even at this early stage. In charge of surveillance was DS Curry, who despite his "casual and discreet observation" of the Clement's Inn premises, likewise proved unable to "justify the conclusion that women of the lower order, with or without children, are drilled or receive instruction in connection with any organized procession of the suffragettes."⁵⁶

The WSPU leadership was indeed far from contemplating class warfare in the spring of 1907 given Christabel's increasing courtship of "high society" ladies and hostility towards the Labour Party (which her mother supported and acquiesced in),⁵⁷ and for the next few months militancy took a decidedly electoral turn thanks to the long series of by-elections faced by the government in the aftermath of its 1906 triumph. Hoping to humiliate the Liberals, Mrs. Pankhurst (as Emmeline was now invariably known in the national press) took her "suffrage forces in the field to [campaign for the] defeat [of] Government candidates."⁵⁸ On the whole, this strategy does not appear to have yielded much result as by the end of the year the Liberals had

⁵⁶ Report by Chief Inspector Dew, 11 April 1907, TNA MEPO 2/1016.

⁵⁷ Pugh, 155-6, 164.

⁵⁸ Emmeline Pankhurst, *My Own Story*, 86.

lost only three seats – all of them to Labour candidates⁵⁹ (to whom the WSPU’s anti-Liberalism made little difference). Occasionally, however, the suffragettes managed to disturb, or rather be seen to disturb, the expected outcome, as was the case for example in the Ashburton by-election of 17 January 1908 when the Liberal candidate Charles Buxton managed to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory by a difference of only 1,283 votes. Several WSPU campaigners, including Emmeline Pankhurst herself, had been campaigning there to “beat the Government [...] as a message that women must have votes next year,”⁶⁰ intensifying the acrimony of Liberal partisans in the wake of their candidate’s unexpected defeat.

When on the night of the election a group of young workers from a local clay pit wearing the red rosettes of Gladstone’s party spotted the suffragettes in the street, they jumped at the opportunity to retaliate against “those women [who] did it;” in the end Mrs. Pankhurst and her entourage had to be rescued from mob justice by local police (not however before being seriously assaulted by some of the men, who subsequently turned their anger on the local Conservative Club).⁶¹ Emmeline later recalled how “throughout all this disorder and probable crime, not a man was arrested, [in contrast] with the treatment given our women in London,”⁶² and what this incident serves to illustrate, besides the deep bitterness the WSPU – now itself a house divided⁶³ – was capable of stirring up in intensely partisan communities, is precisely the steep difference between what constituted political violence and the traditional – occasionally egregious – violence which merely accompanied political events.

21 June 1908, Hyde Park, London

⁵⁹ Chris Cook and John Stevenson, *A History of British Elections since 1689* (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, New York: Routledge, 2014), 288.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Worried that Emmeline and Christabel’s increasingly authoritarian stances were eroding any semblance of democratic control within the organisation, a group of about seventy WSPU members decided to break away in early September and form a rival organisation under the name of the Women’s Freedom League (Rosen, 92).

The culmination of the WSPU's "mild" militancy phase came in the summer of 1908 with the mass demonstration held in Hyde Park on 21 June which approximately thirty thousand suffragettes (including a delegation of French *féministes*) as well as an audience of anywhere between three to five hundred thousand people took part in.⁶⁴ Despite the general public's ambivalence – "not sympathetic [...] not opposed [but] simply indifferent," in the words of one WSPU organizer⁶⁵ – the gathering proved an unprecedented show of force for the partisans of woman suffrage, and gave the lie to claims by Prime Minister Asquith (Campbell-Bannerman had resigned in April due to ill health) that most British women were simply "watching with languid and imperturbable indifference the struggle for their own emancipation."⁶⁶ Taking inspiration from the massive reform demonstrations of the 1860s, the organizers of the Hyde Park event (the Pethick-Lawrences chief amongst them) employed no fewer than seven separate processions (featuring for the first time the iconic white frock and purple-white-green standards), thirty music bands, twenty platforms, and nearly a hundred speakers. Except for a few isolated instances of heckling by groups of loutish young men "who imagine that their cleverness is shown by guying whatever is going on,"⁶⁷ the heeders ultimately proved stronger than the hecklers, prompting even *The Times* to observe that while "there may be various opinions as to what this demonstration has proved [...] there can be no differences as to its magnitude, its organization, and its success."⁶⁸

Asquith however remained unmoved; on 23 June he wrote Christabel that he had "nothing to add" to statements made in May that any future electoral reform Bill would not automatically include female enfranchisement. Christabel in her turn warned that "it is evident

⁶⁴ *Times*, 22 June 1908; *Daily Mail*, 22 June 1908; *Times*, 20 June 1908.

⁶⁵ Helen Fraser, quoted in Rosen, 105.

⁶⁶ HC Deb, 27 April 1892, vol. 3, col. 1510.

⁶⁷ *Times*, 22 June 1908.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

[...] agitation by way of public meetings will have no effect in inducing the Government to grant votes to women, and to secure that reform militant methods must again be resorted to.”⁶⁹ What this new wave of militancy would consist of was not yet clear, but on 30 June the Government received an early inkling after one of the WSPU’s routine marches on Parliament ended, in contrast to the events of the 21st, in a night of brutality, chaos and gridlock. Angered at yet another unchallenged assault on their comrades by police, two suffragettes, Edith New and Mary Leigh, gathered up some stones in a bag, drove up to 10 Downing Street, and proceeded to smash as many windows as possible; as they were being taken away to the Cannon Row Police Station, Mary Leigh shouted that “it would be bombs next time!”⁷⁰ Bombs were still some way off in fact, but a pattern of symbolic and spectacular violence had now irrevocably been set in place. “We had exhausted argument,” Mrs. Pankhurst later recalled.⁷¹

23 January 1909, Tottenham and Walthamstow, Greater London

On the morning of 23 January 1909, Albert Keyworth, a seventeen-year-old office clerk at Schnurmann’s rubber works in Chestnut Road, Tottenham, had nearly finished performing the most important and dangerous part of his job: picking up the funds for the workers’ weekly wages from the London and South Western Bank in Hackney. He had just gotten out of the car, and was about to enter the factory gate when he was suddenly seized by two men in black overcoats and violently relieved of the £80 in his possession. A tussle ensued between the assailants on one side – two “foreign types” going by the names of Jacob and Hefeld – and Keyworth and two other men on the other, which the former two managed to eventually shoot their way out of, fleeing on foot. Alarmed by the sound of the shots, several officers from the

⁶⁹ *Western Times*, 24 June 1908.

⁷⁰ *Cornishman*, 9 July 1908; *Sunday Times*, 23 August 1908.

⁷¹ Emmeline Pankhurst, *My Own Story*, 116.

nearby Tottenham Police Station immediately showed up at the scene, and with the help of a Schnurmann chauffeur boarded the company car and gave chase.

Trailed by a group of locals eager to help bring the robbers to justice, the police quickly caught up with the two in Mitchley Road only to be firmly repelled by a barrage of bullets which took out the car's engine and mortally wounded a ten-year-old boy who had gotten caught up in the general excitement. The chase continued unabated, however, spearheaded by PCs Tyler and Newman, who by means of a shortcut, succeeded in intercepting Jacob and Hefeld, only to again face the deadly fury of their Mauser C96 pistols. Unarmed and caught unawares, Tyler was fatally shot at point blank range. The assailants then proceeded to shoot their way through the Tottenham Marshes, hijacking a series of vehicles in the process, including a tram car, a milk cart, and a horse-driven greengrocer's van. Remarkably, the police succeeded in keeping up with them all the way, and it was only after Jacob and Hefeld reached the banks of the River Ching that the frantic pursuit came, partially, to an end; too exhausted to climb over the tall wooden fence which bound the riverbank, Hefeld urged his partner to go on without him, and turned the gun on himself.

Jacob did temporarily evade his pursuers, running all the way to Walthamstow, in Essex, where he managed to force a woman and her children out of their small four-room house, barricading himself inside. The ruse did not last long; the house was soon encircled by a sizeable contingent of police officers from several stations in North and East London, who, after a botched attempt to get at Jacob through the window of the first floor bedroom, decided to storm the building through the front entrance. The sound of a shot coming from upstairs cut their plan short and within a matter of minutes Jacob was found splayed out on a bed, his face drenched in

blood, his hand still clutching a paper bank bag containing £5.⁷² Just who these trigger-happy desperadoes who had managed to terrorize scores of people in a manner more befitting a Wild West show than the humdrum rhythm of suburban London were remained largely a mystery, but not one without consequences.

What the police came to know for certain was that Paul Hefeld had recently been in the employ of Schnurmann “for a few days” (which suggests the idea for the heist was his),⁷³ and like his comrade Jacob (whose real surname was never made clear),⁷⁴ was a native of Riga, Latvia. Both men were recent immigrants and, according to at least one Special Branch inspector, had supposedly been “connected with various anarchist clubs in the neighbourhood,”⁷⁵ a fact which served to elevate the whole incident from mere botched heist to anarchist outrage. The names of these anarchist clubs as well as the nature of Jacob and Hefeld’s political beliefs were sadly never elaborated on in any official reports, and there is every indication that the Scotland Yard was caught completely unawares by this incident; as Assistant Commissioner Macnaghten later explained in his memoirs, “such a morning of sensational surprises might have been expected in Russia, but hardly within the generally pacific area of Metropolitan Police

⁷² Report by Supt. W. Jenkins, 7 February 1909, TNA MEPO 3/194. It is not clear whether the rest of the money was ever successfully recovered.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Although the press at the time occasionally gave Jacob’s last name as Lapidus (a practice perpetuated by modern accounts of the incident), the Special Branch seems to have been “quite convinced that the man’s name [was] not Lapidus.” *Times*, 27 January 1909.

⁷⁵ Herbert T. Fitch, *Traitors Within: The Adventures of Detective Inspector Herbert T. Fitch* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1933), 37. Special Branch DI Fitch also believed that Hefeld and Jacob had somehow been involved in a failed attempt to assassinate French President Armand Fallières in Paris on May Day 1907, a claim repeated by Special Branch DI Harold Brust in his own, ghostwritten, memoirs. This theory however is highly doubtful; an anarchist outrage did occur on 1 May 1907 in Paris when the Russian anarchist Jacob Law fired 5 shots at a cordon of cuirassiers charged with policing Labour Day demonstrators, but there are no recorded attempts on President Fallières’s life, and no evidence to connect Law to the Tottenham robbers. See Harold Brust, *I Guarded Kings: The Memoirs of a Political Police Officer* (New York: Hillman-Curl, 1936), 97.

[sic].”⁷⁶ In a charged post-Aliens Act atmosphere, however, fears of renewed anarchist activity could quickly converge with fears of Johnny Foreigner.⁷⁷

The Tottenham outrage gave the national press (especially Conservative-aligned newspapers) an opportunity to momentarily shift the focus in the debate on domestic subversion on something other than the increasingly hackneyed exploits of the WSPU, and “[restore] the question of immigration control to the national political agenda.”⁷⁸ The *Daily Mail*, and to a lesser extent *The Times*, led the charge with a series of exposés and editorials inveighing against the shortcomings of the Aliens Act, particularly the ease with which some of its provisions could be evaded,⁷⁹ and the Home Secretary’s arbitrary powers over its administration.⁸⁰ The incident also gave some of the Special Branch old guarders a chance to come out of retirement and seem *au courant* with the latest developments. Interviewed by the *Penny Illustrated Paper*, ex-DI John Sweeney reminisced about his days of chasing after Polti and Farnara and sleuthing the various anarchist clubs of London,⁸¹ while Sir Robert Anderson, writing in *The Times*, decried the “apathy of our Government toward the anarchist movement [...] due to a selfish sense of security,” and warned that “if [...] there should be even one more crime like that on Saturday, the

⁷⁶ Melville Macnaghten, *Days of My Years*, 269.

⁷⁷ Well before the Tottenham incident, British newspapers were dutifully sounding the alarm over alien beggars, alien burglars, alien bankrupts, alien lunatics, as well as the presence of “no fewer than three thousand eight hundred well known-Anarchists in London.” See *Daily Mail*, 19 February and 30 May 1908; *Sunday Times*, 9 February and 22 March 1908; *Times*, 7 March 1908; *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 23 January 1908. This attitude extended to government circles as well, an extreme example being William Melville’s proposal in 1907 for a “scheme of surveillance on all suspected foreigners around the country” – a scheme which the Home Office nonetheless declined, ostensibly because “the Police were not fitted for such duties.” Melville, “Memoir,” p. 24, TNA KV 1/8.

⁷⁸ Glover, 183.

⁷⁹ Citing the example of a Belgian recidivist, a Scotland Yard inspector explained how “the prisoner [...] easily managed to evade the Home Office order [barring his entry into Britain] by [journeying] from Ostend to the London Docks [under an assumed name] with £5 in his pocket [which] enabled him to pass without any trouble.” *Daily Mail*, 2 February 1909.

⁸⁰ The *Daily Mail* noted how “the Act defines an immigrant ship as one which carries more than twenty alien [...] passengers [and] Mr Gladstone [...] could at once reduce it to any figure he pleased. He did as a fact reduce it to two in the case of the port of Leith to deal with the case of the German gipsies [sic].” *Daily Mail*, 3 February 1909.

⁸¹ *P.I.P.: Penny Illustrated Paper and Illustrated Times*, 6 February 1909.

first business of [Parliament] would be to pass a measure to suppress the Anarchists.”⁸² Despite Anderson’s short-sighted fixation with the largely bygone “anarchist movement” (as he understood it),⁸³ his claim proved strangely prophetic in a way. Over the course of the next several years a string of incidents (some more dramatic than others) would put the Liberal Government’s patience to the test, and lead to an increase in the powers of the political police for the first time in nearly fifteen years.

29 June 1909, Westminster, London

The WSPU’s thirteenth session of the Women’s Parliament, held at Caxton Hall on the afternoon of 29 June 1909 did not promise to deliver anything out of the ordinary. The usual request to be allowed to submit a petition to the Prime Minister in person received the Prime Minister’s customary refusal, and was followed by the obligatory march on the Houses of Parliament – a fact which must have loomed large even on the mind of Mrs. Pankhurst herself, as she approached the line of policemen blocking the entrance to St. Stephen’s Hall (part of a force of three thousand officers sent to patrol the Houses of Parliament that day).⁸⁴ Presented by her “old acquaintance” Inspector Scantlebury with an official copy of Asquith’s refusal to receive her deputation, the WSPU leader realized that “the old miserable business of refusing to leave, of

⁸² *Times*, 27 January 1909.

⁸³ Despite the irrevocable decline of “individualist” terrorism certain strands of communist anarchism were nonetheless finding an outlet on the continent in the newly emerging revolutionary unionism known in France as *syndicalisme*. In 1906 for example the *Confédération Générale du Travail*, the largest trade union in France at the time, adopted its so-called Amiens Charter, a document co-authored by the anarchist Émile Pouget (a onetime frequenter of Club Autonomie), which consistently argued for the necessity of making trade unions the principal organ of class struggle against the capitalist state. A year later at the 1907 International Anarchist Congress in Amsterdam syndicalism once again headed the agenda - its only critics old-timers like Errico Malatesta for whom anarchy still meant popular insurrection, not the utopian prospect of a general strike. By 1910 it was clear, however, that whatever was going to survive of organized anarchism would have to adopt syndicalism as its *modus operandi*, a fact attested by the formation of the syndicalist *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* in Barcelona that same year, and the *Unione Sindacale Italiana* in 1912, both of which declared anarchism to be their ultimate goal. Echoes of syndicalism would also surface in Britain during the tumultuous events of the “great labour unrest.” See pp. 337-42, 355-61 in this work, and Vadim Damier, *Anarcho-syndicalism in the 20th century* (Edmonton, AB: Black Cat Press, 2009).

⁸⁴ *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 30 June 1909.

being forced backward, and returning again and again until arrested, would have to be re-enacted.”⁸⁵ It largely was, albeit without Pankhurst herself, who managed to get arrested right away for repeatedly slapping Inspector James Jarvis in the face, or Asquith, who had already quietly absconded in a “small motor car,” in the company of two Special Branch detectives.⁸⁶

The difference this time was that the suffragettes’ attack on the symbols of Government would no longer be an angry afterthought, but an integral part of the militant process. Employing the now “time-honoured method” of window-breaking,⁸⁷ several suffragettes wrapped stones in pieces of paper containing pro-WSPU slogans and chucked them at the “expensive plate-glass windows” of the Home Office, the Treasury, the Board of Education, and the Admiralty before being overwhelmed by the mounted police.⁸⁸ Whatever its intended purpose, the intensity of this new attack did not make the Government more receptive to granting suffragette prisoners political status, which of course would have proved technically impossible in a country where, in the words of Home Secretary Gladstone, “political offences were not in any way recognised by the common law.”⁸⁹

As the window-breakers soon realized, however, when the Government could not be intimidated into doing the right thing, it could still be embarrassed into making significant concessions. After refusing to obey the rules imposed on Second Division prisoners at Holloway, the fourteen women charged with defacing government buildings on 29 June began a hunger strike, and were released within a matter of days. The significance of the achievement was not lost on the WSPU leadership, with Christabel noting in a letter to A. J. Balfour that “they will never in future be able to keep us in prison more than a few days, for we have now learnt our

⁸⁵ Emmeline Pankhurst, *My Own Story*, 140-1.

⁸⁶ *Daily Mail*, 30 June 1909.

⁸⁷ Pankhurst, *My Own Story*, 142.

⁸⁸ *Daily Mail*, 30 June 1909; *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 30 June 1909.

⁸⁹ *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 28 July 1909.

power to starve ourselves out of prison.”⁹⁰ By August hunger-striking was already the norm for imprisoned suffragettes, creating a sense of martyrdom of “far greater magnitude than the martyrdom incurred by imprisonment alone.”⁹¹

1 July 1909, the Imperial Institute, South Kensington, London

Two hundred-odd high-ranking officials of the Indian Civil Service and members of the Raj aristocracy commingling in the sumptuous halls of the Renaissance-style Imperial Institute – at first sight the reception hosted by the National Indian Association on the evening of 1 July appeared to be the perfect picture of the “integrated, ordered, titular, transracial hierarchy” that underscored the mythology of the British Empire.⁹² Founded in 1870 by Keshub Chandra Sen and Mary Carpenter, the NIA represented the confluence of imperialist progressivism and patrician conservatism better perhaps than any other Indian association in the metropolis, a fact aptly illustrated by the career of one of its more prominent supporters, Sir William Hutt Curzon Wyllie. As governor-general of central India in the 1890s, Sir William had gained a reputation both as a typical Anglo-Indian upper-class gentleman and as an efficient administrator whose relief measures allowed the people of Rajputana to escape the brunt of the famine of 1899-1900; as political aide-de-camp to the Secretary of State for India from 1901 onwards, he appeared to be nothing if not a genuine Indophile and an indefatigable lobbyist for various Indian causes.⁹³

The vision of a “benevolent” imperial order increasingly had its fair share of detractors however. Throughout the 1880s and 1890s a series of revolutionary and staunchly anti-British societies had sprung up in India, especially in the Western Maharashtra region, which gradually

⁹⁰ Christabel Pankhurst to A. J. Balfour, 22 July 1909, quoted in Rosen, 121.

⁹¹ Rosen, 121.

⁹² David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 90.

⁹³ F. H. Brown, “Wyllie, Sir (William Hutt) Curzon (1848–1909),” *ODNB*, accessed 19 January 2015, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/37049>.

came to exert a not inconsiderable influence on groups of young, politically conscious Indian men,⁹⁴ many of whom, despite their aversion to Empire, felt they had to look to the British metropolis for opportunities to further their education and careers. Such was the case of Madan Lal Dhingra, the twenty-five-year-old scion of a middle-class Punjabi family who in 1906 was sent by his surgeon father to study civil engineering at University College in London. Like many of his generation, Dhingra quickly became disenchanted with the prospect of a lifetime spent in the service of the Raj, and soon began to take part in the political activities of the radical Indian diaspora that gravitated around the notorious India House in Highgate.⁹⁵ There he became versed in revolutionary theory and came to embrace the extreme philosophy of Shyamji Krishnavarma, the House's founder, who advocated a mix of Spencerian individualism, Blanquist insurrectionism and Hindu nationalism in the pages of his newspaper *The Indian Sociologist*.⁹⁶ Like many young foreign radicals who had found themselves swallowed-up by the human awful wonder of Imperial London, Dhingra was angry and eager to prove himself; unlike many of them, his target was not some faraway autocrat, but the British establishment itself.

Only days before the soiree at the Imperial Institute Dhingra had received an invitation to attend the event from the NIA's secretary, as well as a personal letter from Sir William himself, urging the young student to call on him at the India Office for a private tête-à-tête. As Dhingra was well aware, this unwanted attention was due to his older brother's attempts to rescue him

⁹⁴ A classic example was the *Mitra Mela*, a secret society founded in Pune around the turn of the century, which evolved into the *Abhinav Bharat* [Young India] Society (a deliberate reference to Mazzini's *Young Italy*) under the guidance of pro-independence luminary and Hindu nationalist Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, who in 1906 went to study law at Gray's Inn in London. See Prabhu Bapu, *Hindu Mahasabha in colonial North India, 1915-1930: Constructing Nation and History* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 95-96.

⁹⁵ Founded in 1905 ostensibly as a hostel for London's community of Indian students, India House (a small two-storey red-brick mansion) quickly became a hotbed of "seditionist" (i.e. Indian nationalist) activities thanks to the influence of its founder Shyamji Krishnavarma and his *Indian Sociologist* newspaper, which frequently criticised the British administration of India in unabashedly violent terms. Amongst the non-Indian frequenters of the House were various personalities of the socialist Left like H. M. Hyndman and Charlotte Despard.

⁹⁶ For more on Krishnavarma's philosophical system, see Alex Tickell, *Terrorism, Insurgency and Indian-English Literature, 1830 - 1947* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 135 ff.

from the grip of India House, a fact which he undoubtedly resented.⁹⁷ Instead of ignoring the invitation, however, Dhingra decided to make an appearance later in the evening around half past ten. Donning a simple dark lounge suit and blue turban, he was clearly not in his natural element,⁹⁸ but managed to strike up a couple of conversations and affect an amiable, if somewhat demure manner.⁹⁹ As the reception began drawing to a close around midnight, Dhingra – now in a decidedly excited mood – trailed the departing guests into the lobby. There he waited a moment or two for the crowd to disperse downwards and then brusquely approached Sir William, who had just finished catching up with some of his Indian friends. A “few words of conversation” were exchanged after which Dhingra pulled out a Colt revolver from his jacket and fired four point-blank shots in rapid succession taking out Curzon Wylie’s right eye and severely disfiguring his face. As the latter fell in a daze to the ground, Dhingra advanced forward and callously delivered the coup de grace. He then turned around and fired another fatal shot at Dr. Cowasjee Lalcaca (a leading figure of the Parsi diaspora) who, being closest to the victim, was about to rush to Sir William’s aid. With one bullet remaining in the magazine, Dhingra attempted to turn the gun on himself but was soon overpowered by two other men and subsequently handed over to PC Nicholls and DS Eadley of B Division, the first police officers to arrive at the scene.¹⁰⁰

As in the wake of the Tottenham outrage, the authorities were left in the embarrassing position of having to explain how a member of a known extremist organization was able to brazenly carry out an assassination – made even more egregious by the fact that the two victims

⁹⁷ *Times*, 5 July 1909.

⁹⁸ True to its orientalist narrative, the dress code specified that “visitors were expected to wear either evening dress or native costume.” *Times*, 3 July 1909.

⁹⁹ Trial of Madar Lal Dhingra, July 1909 (t19090719-55), *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, accessed 20 January 2015.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

were prominent representatives of the Anglo-Indian establishment – in the physical and symbolic heart of the Empire. Although initially there was no hard evidence to suggest the existence of a conspiracy, public opinion was inclined to place the blame on “extremist agitation [...] calculated to produce [an effect] on impressionable young men” rather than “some imaginary personal grievance,”¹⁰¹ a view echoed by the Prime Minister, who saw in the seditious pro-assassination pamphlet found on Dhingra after his arrest “a startling and emphatic piece of evidence as to the character and the methods of [this] desperate and determined [...] conspiracy.”¹⁰² Dhingra himself put all doubts to rest by reading out a statement at the conclusion of his trial which praised the virtues of political assassination in no uncertain terms:

I maintain that if it is patriotic in an Englishman to fight against the Germans if they were to occupy this country, it is much more justifiable and patriotic in my case to fight against the English. I hold the English people responsible for the murder of 80 millions of Indian people in the last fifty years, and they are also responsible for taking away £100,000,000 every year from India to this country. I also hold them responsible for the hanging and deportation of my patriotic countrymen, who did just the same as the English people here are advising their countrymen to do [...] Just as the Germans have no right to occupy this country, so the English people have no right to occupy India, and it is perfectly justifiable on our part to kill the Englishman who is polluting our sacred land [...] I wish that English people should sentence me to death, for in that case the vengeance of my countrymen will be all the more keen.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ *Times*, 8 July 1909.

¹⁰² *Times*, 3 July 1909.

¹⁰³ Trial of Madar Lal Dhingra, July 1909 (t19090719-55), *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, accessed 20 January 2015. His statement was condemned as misinformed and “fallacious” by Gandhi, but later praised by Winston Churchill as “the finest [words] ever made in the name of Patriotism.” Dhingra was sentenced to death and executed at Pentonville prison on 17 August 1909. See Rajmohan Gandhi, *Revenge and Reconciliation: Understanding South Asian History* (London: Penguin UK, 1999), chapter 8;

The Special Branch had been aware of India House since its opening four years before, and, if the recollections of one of its inspectors are to be believed, knew Dhingra himself as “a dangerous man, a travelling storm-centre [who had] openly and defiantly [...] avowed before Sergeant MacLaughlin of the Special Branch [...] that he hated the British Rule in India and meant to ‘kill somebody some day!’”¹⁰⁴ Despite “continued police warnings,” however,¹⁰⁵ no efforts were made to clamp down on the propaganda activities of Indian nationalists or to have Dhingra placed under continued surveillance. To some extent this was due to prevalent racial prejudices which dictated that “coloured men” were not capable of organized subversion unless they were “stirred up” by “anarchist leaders,”¹⁰⁶ but a more important reason was that despite the reforms introduced at Scotland Yard by Henry, the Special Branch remained in many ways the same small extra-legal unit it had been during the 1890s.

The first steps towards restructuring the “political department” had already been taken in late 1907 with a directive which formalized the de facto structure of the organization for the first time in more than fifteen years. Thus, Section B, no longer explicitly associated with Irish republicanism, along with Section D were responsible for monitoring the Metropolitan Police District, while Section C continued to remain in charge of home and foreign ports. The document also outlined some of the key duties of Branch officers, mandating the establishment of so-called “permanent patrols,” formed of constables “selected on account of their knowledge of foreign

Leela Dhingra, “Dhingra, Madan Lal (1883–1909),” *ODNB*, accessed 20 January 2015, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/71628>.

¹⁰⁴ Brust, *I Guarded Kings*, 103. Special Branch detectives began occasionally attending meetings at the India House as early as 1907, and a year later the Scotland Yard in conjunction with the India Office arranged for an Indian police officer to be sent over to London to help with the surveillance. His intelligence, though pertinent, was of limited value, especially in the light of the assassination that followed. Although the Indian Department of Criminal Intelligence (established in 1904) had its own agent reporting on the activities of India House, his intelligence proved likewise flawed, and, in a spectacular failure of communication, was not even passed on to the Scotland Yard. See Richard J. Popplewell, *Intelligence and Imperial Defence: British Intelligence and the Defence of the Indian Empire, 1904-1924* (London: Frank Cass, 1995), 128-130.

¹⁰⁵ Brust, 103.

¹⁰⁶ Fitch, *Traitors Within*, 41.

languages or other exceptional qualifications,” and instructing each officer to “make himself acquainted with the appearance, names and habits” of persons of interest as well as “where they lodge, who they associate with, the public houses they frequent, the places they visit, and from their past history learn their mode of carrying out their criminal operations.” Additionally, officers were also expected to keep notebooks with precise entries on “persons known [...] to give reliable information [...] persons on whom reliance cannot be placed [and] persons respectable by repute but known to be otherwise” (information provided by informers was deemed “necessary” but had to be “carefully weighed and used with judgement”).¹⁰⁷

Despite this change of pace, the Special Branch continued to remain short-staffed¹⁰⁸ and increasingly unable to cope with the challenges posed by a progressively diverse spectrum of political radicalism. The assassination of Curzon Wylie finally changed that by providing the impetus for an actual increase in manpower, and on 7 July 1909, six days after the tragic event at the Imperial Institute, Superintendent Patrick Quinn submitted a proposal to Commissioner Henry “with a view of applying to the Secretary of State for an augmentation of two second class Sergeants, and two Constables in Section ‘B’ CID.” The point-by-point justification for this request is perhaps the most elucidating description we have of what the British political police regarded as its main challenges in the years leading up to the First World War:

- (1) The increasing demands upon the Special Branch in consequence of the Indian agitation, involving personal protection to Statesmen whose lives are considered to be in danger through the presence in London of Indians of extreme views; the close supervision of Indians and the many enquiries required by the Indian Authorities [...]

¹⁰⁷ Police Orders, 24 December 1907, TNA MEPO 3/1760.

¹⁰⁸ In early 1909 Section B numbered one chief inspector, eleven sergeants, and sixteen constables, while Section D included only one superintendent and five inspectors. Section C was by now only a remnant of its former self with “9 vacancies [...] and [...] no intention [...] of filling [them] up.” Quinn to Henry, 7 July 1902, TNA MEPO 2/1297.

- (2) The large number of Russian, Polish, Yiddish and Anarchists of other nationalities, resident in London, involving enquiries regularly, and a measure of close supervision at times [...]
- (3) The careful protection of Their Majesties the King and Queen when the Court is at Buckingham Palace has also to be arranged daily.
- (4) Enquiries of a highly important nature made for some of the Governments Departments [sic] demand the services of Officers of the Branch.
- (5) The agitation by Suffragettes has necessitated the Prime Minister being specially protected by a Sergeant and Constable of Special Branch.
- (6) [...] other duties such as enquiries for the Irish Government, and enquiries into application for Naturalization which help to add to the work [...]¹⁰⁹

Quinn's request was approved by the Home Office on 12 July (reluctantly and on a temporary basis),¹¹⁰ and in accordance with the priorities set out in his list, the first operation of the reinvigorated Special Branch aimed at finally clamping down on the activities of India House.¹¹¹ Although Shyamji Krishnavarma had fled to Paris in 1907, the House continued to function under the leadership of the young law student Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (known for his intransigent ultra-nationalism) and publish the monthly *Indian Sociologist*. Savarkar, who had publicly proclaimed his admiration for Dhingra within days of the assassination, was now being

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ This initial augmentation of the Special Branch staff was approved for a period of six, and then twelve, months, at the end of which Quinn had to submit a report explaining whether and why the augmentation was still justified. Over the next five years Quinn submitted at least four requests to have this augmentation extended permanently; his wish was eventually granted on 27 July 1914. TNA MEPO 2/1297.

¹¹¹ Additionally, after consultations with Scotland Yard, a separate Indian Special Branch was set up at the India Office, headed by an officer of the Indian Police and reporting to the India Office's Judicial and Public Department. This unit, which eventually came to be known as the Indian Political Intelligence Unit, was fully operative by the end of July 1909. See Popplewell, 132; TNA, "Papers of the Secretary, India Office Political and Secret Department: Secret Service and intelligence matters," accessed 28 January 2015, <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/rd/ae98d26f-e3ce-4efa-b929-66340652431d>

closely watched, but in the absence of any evidence to connect him to any criminal conspiracy, the most the authorities could do to castigate him was to sabotage his plans of practicing law in the future.¹¹² The *Indian Sociologist* was, however, another matter. Undeterred by the gravity of Dhingra's act, the paper published the latter's "manifesto" in its July issue along with an article by Krishnavarma himself in which the notorious editor-in-exile waxed poetic on his fallen comrade's "martyrdom" and the virtues of tyrannicide. This was as good a pretext as the authorities were ever going to get for shutting down the publication, and on 19 July 1909, Arthur Fletcher Horsley, printer and publisher of the *Indian Sociologist*, was put in the dock at the Old Bailey for "maliciously and seditiously printing and publishing in a certain periodical [...] a certain scandalous printed article, being part of that periodical, the same being calculated and intended to stir up and erase discontent and unrest among His Majesty's liege subjects."¹¹³ Horsley, as his solicitor was quick to point out, was no admirer of Hindu nationalism and had agreed to publish the paper in error, without "exercising proper care in preparing the proofs which had brought him into his present position;" he pleaded guilty and was given four months as a first-class misdemeanant.¹¹⁴

Quinn might have considered this an open and shut case, but much to his chagrin it appeared that the *Indian Sociologist* refused to die. In mid-August 1909 a new issue came out, this time under the auspices of the erstwhile unknown Bakunin Press, seemingly confirming the notion that the anarchists were indeed stoking the fire of Indian seditionism. The owner-operator of this enterprise was a man by the name of Guy Aldred, a Londoner known to the Special Branch since 1907 as an occasional contributor to *Justice* and frequenter of the Jubilee Street

¹¹² *Times*, 15 July 1909.

¹¹³ Trial of Arthur Fletcher Horsley, July 1909 (t19090719-54), *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, accessed 27 January 2015.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

anarchist club.¹¹⁵ As the Burtsev affair of 1897 had demonstrated, however, the manner in which evidence was procured by the police in a case of seditious libel was vital to securing a guilty verdict, and taking a page out of his predecessor's book, Quinn had one of his detectives write Aldred "in an assumed name [...] for four copies of the incriminating number, enclosing stamps for same."¹¹⁶

Once legally obtained, the evidence proved damning; the August issue was in many ways even more inflammatory than the July one, containing not only the usual call to arms by Krishnavarma, but also an article by Aldred himself excoriating the "despotism" of British rule in India and accusing the government of "high treason" for allowing the Special Branch to trample on "the principles of a free Constitution."¹¹⁷ On 25 August Aldred was arrested for seditious libel against the King and the "administration of the laws in force in the [...] Indian Empire." At his trial, the following week, no fewer than five Special Branch detectives gave evidence against him, revealing that 1,500 copies of the August issue had been printed in total, out of which 1,000 had already been sent to Krishnavarma in Paris. Aldred did not contest the charges but insisted on making the point that he had taken on the task of publishing the paper "because he claimed the right of an enlightened race to have a free Press." The jury was not impressed; he was found guilty and received twelve months as a first-class misdemeanant.¹¹⁸ Although India House continued to survive for a short while after,¹¹⁹ the *Indian Sociologist* had now folded for good.

¹¹⁵ "Guy Alfred Aldred," TNA HO/144/22508.

¹¹⁶ Trial of Guy Alfred Aldred, September 1909 (t19090907-44), *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, accessed 27 January 2015.

¹¹⁷ *The Indian Sociologist*, August 1909, in TNA HO/144/22508.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ On 24 October 1909 Savarkar invited the still relatively unknown Gandhi (who had arrived in London days after the Curzon Wylie assassination) to give the opening speech at one of his India House dinners. The future founder of the Indian nation would later describe the event as "practically [controlled] by the extremist Committee," noting that "I accepted the proposal unhesitatingly so that I might speak to those who might assemble there on the uselessness

5 September 1909, Lympne, Kent

Surrounded by the tranquil scenery of the Kentish marshes the Prime Minister spent the first weekend of September 1909 away from the looming budget crisis in Whitehall, in the company of family and friends. Here, in the imposing rooms of Lympne Castle (tastefully restored by Margot's brother Frank in the Arts and Crafts style), Asquith could forget all about the fear-mongering of tariff reformers, and look forward to enjoying a round of "the only of our national games which I have habitually played."¹²⁰ As he was soon to discover, however, where the jeers and threats of Tory grandees could not reach him, the slogans of militant suffragettes could. Seizing on the rare chance of catching the Prime Minister out on a limb, far from his London praetorian guard, three WSPU "shock troops" – Jessie Kenney, Elsie Howie and Vera Wentworth – descended on the village of Lympne on the morning of 5 September with the intention of giving "old Squiff" (as the drink-fond Asquith was often nicknamed) as rough a time as possible. From morning prayer to golf course, the three women stealthily followed him wherever he went, attempting to harass him at every opportunity and occasionally creating scenes of an almost slapstick absurdity. As Jessie Kenney later recounted to the *Daily Mail*,

Undetected we stood close to the clubhouse [of the Littlestone golf club], and as the Prime Minister was descending the steps one of us sprang forward and caught hold of his arm. He turned and simply ran up the steps, and we ran after him. It was quite a chase and as he reached the top step one of my companions caught him in the doorway. He tried to push her away, but she was too quick for him and caught hold of his collar [...] Mr.

of violence for securing reform." A few months later, Savarkar was extradited to India for his alleged role in an assassination carried out by his brother Ganesh, and imprisoned (being released only in 1937). With its charismatic leader gone, and under increasingly intense scrutiny from the police, the India House slowly collapsed into irrelevance by the end of 1910. James W. Douglass, *Gandhi and the Unspeakable: His Final Experiment with Truth* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012), 31; Sumit Sarkar, "Savarkar, Vinayak Damodar (1883–1966)," *ODNB*, accessed 20 January 2015, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/47751>.

¹²⁰ H. H. Asquith, *Memoirs and Reflections, 1852-1927, Vol. 1* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1928), 308.

Asquith called Mr. Gladstone, who came rushing out [...] They [...] were trying to push us out, and we were endeavouring to get in. Blows were struck and Mr. Gladstone fought like a pugilist. [He] lunged out and we lunged out [until] we all came down the steps somehow [...] A man held us, and Mr. Asquith and Mr. Gladstone entered their car and drove away.¹²¹

Gladstone however was not amused; in a memo sent to his Permanent Under-Secretary, Charles Edward Troup, on 9 September, the Home Secretary asked indignantly, “Where did the Lympne gang come from?” and requested that Henry be consulted on the possibility of arranging a “special police organization for containing suffragette violence.”¹²² Such an organization already existed of course, but as Superintendent Quinn’s July report had made clear, suffragette violence still featured low on its list of priorities, ahead only of “other duties.” Change would have to be initiated with yet another, this time more substantial, augmentation of the Special Branch staff, even as finding a viable strategy for containing the WSPU’s insurrectionist tactics continued to prove elusive. As Henry explained to Troup a couple of days later: “[...] if we are to counter [the suffragettes’] plans at all successfully we should require quite a considerable addition to Special Branch. In view of the difficult nature of the duty, for tactical mistakes [to be made] by the police employed on it would only foster the agitation [and] we must employ men of experience and consequently of higher rank than constable.”¹²³ The Commissioner’s proposed augmentation tentatively included two inspectors, eight sergeants, and six constables, but due to the substantial cost involved (£3,000 per annum),¹²⁴ and the uncertainty of where the money would come

¹²¹ *Daily Mail*, 7 September 1909.

¹²² Memo by Gladstone, 9 September 1909, TNA HO 144/1043/183461.

¹²³ Memo by Henry, 11 September 1909, TNA HO 144/1043/183461.

¹²⁴ Note by Assistant Under-Secretary W. P. Byrne, 17 September 1909, TNA HO 144/1043/183461.

from,¹²⁵ it could not be approved right away. In the meantime, however, WSPU militants were already preparing their next coup.

17 September 1909, Bingley Hall, Birmingham

On the afternoon of 17 September Asquith was on the Birmingham leg of his nationwide speaking tour in support of the Budget League (formed by Winston Churchill earlier that year to counteract the propaganda of Walter Long's Budget Protest League), accompanied by a retinue of seventy supporters and surrounded by "precautions that might have sufficed to protect a Czar."¹²⁶ Arriving shortly before dark, the heavily-guarded Prime Minister was whisked away by train to the Queen's Hotel and thence to Bingley Hall, where almost nine thousand people were waiting for his speech. The huge building in Broad Street, which had played host to more than one significant moment in the history of the Liberal Party,¹²⁷ appeared to be preparing for a siege. At the request of the Home Secretary, who wished to "make impossible the roof climbing and stone throwing performances [seen] at Birrell's Manchester meeting,"¹²⁸ its glass-panelled roof had been covered in a makeshift tarpaulin armour, while two hundred stewards and six hundred policemen busied about its entrances making sure no gatecrashers or women¹²⁹ were allowed in.

¹²⁵ Using the Metropolitan Police fund was one option, but as Troup was quick to point out, "it would be impossible [...] to charge to the London ratepayer the cost of protecting Cabinet ministers all over the country." The augmentation was eventually paid for with moneys from the Imperial Funds which already covered the costs of Section D of the Special Branch (C and B being in the charge of the Police Fund for England and Wales, and the Home Office, respectively). TNA HO 144/1043/183461/1.

¹²⁶ *Daily Mail*, 18 September 1909.

¹²⁷ In November 1888, following the split with Joseph Chamberlain over Home Rule, William Gladstone used the venue to give an exacting two-hour long speech (which, thanks to Edison's newly-invented phonograph, became the first recorded political address).

¹²⁸ Memo by Gladstone, 14 September 1909, TNA HO 144/1043/183461/1. On 4 September five suffragettes had been arrested in Manchester for interrupting a pro-Budget meeting headlined by Augustine Birrell (the Chief Secretary for Ireland) by throwing "iron balls" onto the venue's glass-panelled roof. *Western Times*, 7 September 1909.

¹²⁹ The exception to this rule was a small contingent of one hundred and fifty members of local Liberal associations and the wives of attending MPs. *Western Times*, 18 September 1909.

At 7:30 p.m. Asquith made his grand entrance to “deafening cheers” and choruses of “For he’s a jolly good fellow,” and began making the case for the Budget as a “landmark of a new age and a more noble and effective Liberalism.”¹³⁰ Outside, however, there were already signs of unrest. Two women, one armed with an axe, the other with a hammer, had sprung forth from the crowds charging at the police, while across the street, from the window of an apartment in 12 King Alfred’s Place, three other women were shouting anti-government slogans and throwing “toy bombs” at the crowds below.¹³¹ This, however, proved to be only a diversion. Unbeknownst to the policemen struggling with this first batch of troublemakers, two WSPU guerillas – Mary Leigh and Charlotte Marsh – had climbed up the roof of a house in Cumberland Street facing the opposite side of the Hall, and had begun flinging roof slates into the street, hitting the top of Asquith’s brougham just as he was getting ready to leave. Although he escaped completely unscathed, a final symbolic indignity was awaiting the Prime Minister at the train station, where around 10:30 p.m. two women, having managed to penetrate the heavily policed platform, threw stones at the official train, hitting only the unoccupied rear compartment. By midnight the tally of arrests stood at eight.

The scenes at Bingley Hall predictably outraged the political establishment (prompting even Walter Long to express his sympathy with the Prime Minister)¹³² and served to drive home the notion that suffragette militancy had now reached a dangerous new stage of “open violence [and] stone-throwing.”¹³³ Responding to the WSPU’s critics in a letter to *The Times*, Christabel Pankhurst placed the blame for “the serious crisis which has arisen” squarely on the government

¹³⁰ *Western Times*, 18 September 1909.

¹³¹ *Daily Mail*, 18 September 1909.

¹³² *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 20 September 1909.

¹³³ Asquith, *Memoirs*, Vol. 1, 261.

and warned that it had “wantonly provoked a revolution.”¹³⁴ Hyperbole notwithstanding, the authorities were certainly now more inclined than ever to regard the suffragette threat as a grave and pressing one. Although the new augmentation of the Special Branch was fully implemented by late September,¹³⁵ its usefulness for containing the suffragettes was almost immediately thrown into question when approximately a week after the Birmingham fiasco, Margot Asquith received a letter warning her of the imminent danger posed to her husband’s safety by a section of radical suffragettes. The author of the letter, a certain Mrs. Moore of South London, herself a member of the Women’s Freedom League, had come to the conclusion that “the physical force [party was] getting out of hand,” and that the only way to avert an outrage against the Prime Minister was to inform the authorities of her comrades’ suspicious behaviour. As she explained to DI George Riley, “at least five women” (whom she refused to name) belonging to the WFL and the WSPU, had “given expression to their intentions to commit acts of violence,” and two in particular had even confessed to practising with a revolver [...] at [...] the shooting range at 92 Tottenham Court Road.”¹³⁶

Naturally, the knowledge that a potential assassination plot against the Premier had only been uncovered thanks to a tip-off from a conscientious suffragette did not bode well at the Home Office. Gladstone feared that “if things go on as they are, something very bad will happen,”¹³⁷ while Troup, in a memo to the Home Secretary dated 27 September, cautioned that “we have in fact prima facie grounds for believing [...] that there is something nearly amounting

¹³⁴ *Times*, 21 September 1909.

¹³⁵ As with the previous such alteration, the Home Office initially planned for it to be temporary “[until] the present troubles [have ceased],” only relenting after Henry insisted that “in view of the obviously non-deterrent nature of the punishments practically enforceable against these women, there seems no reason to anticipate any reduction in their activity in the immediate future.” The augmentation of one first-class inspector, nine detective-sergeants, and ten detective-constables was formalized on 2 October 1909. Troup to Henry, 22 September 1909; Henry to Troup, 27 September 1909; Police Orders, 2 October 1909, TNA MEPO 2/1310.

¹³⁶ Report by Special Branch DI George Riley, 27 September 1909, TNA HO 144/1709/425859.

¹³⁷ Gladstone to Edward Grey, 10 October 1909, quoted in Rosen, 127.

to a conspiracy to murder,” and wondered whether “all other precautions having been taken,” the time had not come to forcibly remove the by now commonplace “pickets at the entrance to the House of Commons [...] [regardless of] whether [it was] legal or illegal.”¹³⁸ In the end, the Permanent Secretary advised against the measure, but not out of any concern for its legality:

But the serious matter is that [if the pickets were removed] we should have to make known the facts leading us to believe that there is a conspiracy to murder the P.M. The prominence which would be given to this in the Press would probably act on the minds of these half insane women, and might suggest effectively the commission of the very act which we wish to prevent. Moreover, the removal of the pickets would be looked on by them as an act of violence and injustice, and would make them furious and more ready to commit such a crime [...] On the whole, therefore, it seems to me that the safer course is to leave the pickets alone for the present and redouble the police precautions for the remainder of the Session.¹³⁹

Despite such serious misgivings, and the government’s own increasingly harsh treatment of imprisoned suffragettes (which by now included forced feeding),¹⁴⁰ the rest of 1909 was marked only by a string of minor incidents of which the most flagrant involved a ginger beer bottle being chucked into Asquith’s empty car, and the attempted horse-whipping of Churchill in Bristol by a

¹³⁸ Memo by Troup, 27 September 1909, TNA HO 144/1709/425859.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ Introduced in August 1909 in response to the successful hunger strike campaign, forced feeding had become standard practice by the end of the year. Laura Ainsworth, one of the women arrested for involvement in the Birmingham protest, described the experience after her release from Winson Green Prison in the following terms: “I was raised into a sitting position, and a tube about two feet long was produced. My mouth was prised open with what felt like a steel instrument and then I felt them feeling for the proper passage [...] It was a horrible feeling altogether. I experienced great sickness, especially when the tube was being withdrawn. Twice a day morning and evening, I was fed in this way.” Despite intense criticism from suffragists of all stripes, Labour MPs, and independent Liberals, the government defended the practice as necessary to “prevent [the suffragettes] from committing the felony of suicide.” *Daily Mail* (Hull), 5 October 1909; *Daily Mail* (London), 28 September 1909.

young socialite with suffragist sympathies.¹⁴¹ Things appeared to be slowly heading for another deadlock, when on 30 November the House of Lords soundly rejected the proposed Budget three hundred and fifty votes to seventy-five, finally achieving what the suffragettes had always been hoping for – an end to the Liberal majority.

The Liberals' Pyrrhic victory at the polls in early 1910, which saw them gain the mandate by which the Budget could finally be passed but lose nearly a third of their seats to (mostly) Conservative-Unionist candidates, meant they now had to form a new Nationalist and Labour-propped minority government with Churchill as the new Home Secretary (Gladstone having been offered the governorship of the newly formed Union of South Africa). There were, however, encouraging signs that this would not be a "business as usual" government as far as votes for women went. In early January the Tory peer Victor Bulwer-Lytton (whose sister Constance had recently made headlines as one of the WSPU's most tireless campaigners) and the left-wing journalist Henry Noel Brailsford (whose wife Jane was also a committed suffragette)¹⁴² joined forces to form a nonaligned conciliation committee that would be able to devise a women's suffrage bill acceptable to MPs of all parties.

The bill eventually agreed upon by the committee's fifty-five members (twenty-five Liberals, seventeen Conservatives, six Irish Nationalists, six Labourites, and Brailsford) proposed to enfranchise the roughly one million women who possessed a household for which they were solely responsible, or "a ten-pound occupation qualification, within the meaning of the Representation of the People Act 1884."¹⁴³ This was a far cry even from the WSPU's

¹⁴¹ *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 31 December 1909; *Sunday Times*, 14 November 1909.

¹⁴² In early October 1909 both Constance and Jane had been arrested in Newcastle for taking part in the suffragette disturbances occasioned by Lloyd George's visit to the city, and released only a few days after (in contrast to the Birmingham suffragettes who now faced forced feeding in Winson Green Prison). Although Gladstone justified this action as necessary in light of the two women's "heart condition," Constance herself saw it as an example of blatant classism and "political snobbery." *Daily Mail*, 15 October 1909.

¹⁴³ Rosen, 134.

conservative suffragism (which sought to extend the franchise to “such women as fulfill the qualifications [of male voters]”)¹⁴⁴ but it was a start, and unlike Dickinson’s Bill of 1907, the Conciliation Bill (as it came to be known) seemed to have genuine across-the-board appeal. On 15 February 1910, Asquith received an open letter from WFL and WSPU representatives declaring that both organisations had “taken the first step towards a truce by deciding to refrain from a militant protest till the Government has had a fair opportunity of stating its intentions.”¹⁴⁵

The peace would not remain in pristine condition for long; as the year wore on, the Liberal triumvirate of Asquith, Lloyd George and Churchill began to make its opposition to the proposed Conciliation Bill more and more obvious. Churchill’s first major security challenge as Home Secretary would not, however, come from his traditional suffragist nemesis but from the “working people of England,” whose cause he had so convincingly championed on the campaign trail only months before.¹⁴⁶

8 November 1910, Tonypany, South Wales

The recently passed “People’s Budget” may have prefigured an “implacable warfare against poverty and squalidness”¹⁴⁷ for the progressive wing of the Liberal Party, but in many of Britain’s industrial areas the lives of a great deal of “the people” continued to be marred by falling wages, rising food prices, and systematic underemployment.¹⁴⁸ Nowhere perhaps was this more noticeable than in the coalfields of South Wales, where in late 1910 approximately thirty thousand miners of various pits in the Mid Glamorgan region (more than a sixth of the entire mining workforce) were engaged in a protracted and hopeless strike against their employers.

¹⁴⁴ *Times*, 21 September 1909.

¹⁴⁵ *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 16 February 1910.

¹⁴⁶ Winston Churchill, “The Approaching Conflict (The Coming Election),” 29 January 1909, *The Churchill Centre*, accessed 9 February 2015, <http://www.winstonchurchill.org/resources/speeches/110-the-approaching-conflict-the-coming-election>.

¹⁴⁷ David Lloyd George, speech in the House of Commons, HC Deb, 29 April 1909, vol. 4, col. 548.

¹⁴⁸ *Times*, 25 January 1910.

The strike had begun back in August 1909 with a relatively petty wage dispute between the workers of the Naval Colliery in the Rhondda Valley and the alliteratively named Cambrian Combine Colliery Company, a conglomerate which owned that colliery and many of the surrounding ones. The miners had demanded a rate of 2s. 6d. per ton of coal; the owners refused to go a penny over 1s. 9d. On 1 September the miners struck, setting in motion an unforeseen wave of sympathy strikes which by early November had paralyzed all the collieries of the Cambrian Combine. Meanwhile, up north in the Aberdare Valley, the workers at Powell Duffryn Collieries had also gone on strike in late October because of the management's refusal to recognize their de facto right of using discarded wooden props for firewood.¹⁴⁹

Despite the scale of the conflict, long-drawn-out strikes were not an uncommon occurrence in South Wales – the unsuccessful five-month strike of 1898 being only the most recent example – and initially there was little to indicate the tensions between workers and management would spiral out of control. Things took a turn for the worse, however, when on 2 November miners in the village of Cwmllynfell rioted over the importation of strikebreaking labour, sabotaging the local pit and driving the proprietors out of town. As the Chief Constable of Mid Glamorgan, Captain Lionel Lindsay, explained in a report to the Home Office, “the doctrine of lawlessness which has been preached in this valley for some time passed has made the rowdy element [...] rather more difficult to deal with than heretofore.” Fearing the worst, local magistrates had decided “that it was necessary to call in Military aid.”¹⁵⁰

The “doctrine of lawlessness” which Lindsay decried was the radical socialism which had begun to make inroads into the traditionally Liberal and Labour-supporting workforce of the region, chiefly through the influence of the South Wales Miners Federation (SWMF) whose

¹⁴⁹ George Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1961), 241-2; *Financial Times*, 2 November 1910.

¹⁵⁰ Report by Lindsay, 5 November 1910, TNA HO 144/1551/199768.

socialist wing was closer in thinking to syndicalism (a term which had recently been imported into the English language to describe the radical, anarchist-inspired methods of some continental trade unions) than to the doctrines of the Labour Party.¹⁵¹ Although strictly a fringe tendency at the purely ideological level, this uncompromising version of socialism could nevertheless find a receptive audience amongst union men who felt let down by their leadership,¹⁵² something attested by the fact that the leader of the Aberdare strikers was Charles Butt Stanton, a SWMF organizer whose emphasis on “direct action” and penchant for strong-arming the mine owners made him hugely popular with the rank-and-file.¹⁵³

Despite his ingrained anti-socialism and predilection for law and order, Churchill understood the importance of a tactful and commensurate response to the situation developing in South Wales, given especially the impendence of a new general election. He agreed to send a contingent of infantry and cavalry troops under the command of General Nevil Macready¹⁵⁴ along with a series of sizeable detachments of specially selected Metropolitan Police constables (eight hundred and two in total), but insisted that the military should only be used as a last resort should “the police reinforcements [be] unable to cope with the situation.”¹⁵⁵ Churchill’s message

¹⁵¹ Among the labour groups the SWMF supported financially were the London-based Central Labour College and the Rhondda-based Plebs League, both run by a small but committed group of ex-Ruskin College socialist dissenters, and dedicated to independent working-class education, and the dissemination of Marxist and syndicalist ideas. See G. D. H. Cole and Raymond Postgate, *The British Common People, 1746-1946* (Methuen: London, 1961), 483-4.

¹⁵² On the one hand William “Mabon” Abraham the Lib-Lab MP for Rhondda opposed industrial militancy on principle despite his trade unionist past, while on the other hand the leadership of the SWMF sought unsuccessfully to convince the striking miners to accept the owners’ conciliatory offer of an increased wage (that was nonetheless lower than the one they demanded). The widening chasm between the Rhondda miners and their presumed leadership was so obvious, in fact, that as early as 3 November the *Daily Mail* was warning of a “revolt of workers against [their] formerly trusted leaders.” See Robert Moore, *Pitmen, Preachers and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 37; Dangerfield, 241.

¹⁵³ Initially close to syndicalist agitators like Noah Ablett and Tom Mann, Stanton later moved closer to mainstream parliamentary socialism, and after the outbreak of the First World War drifted increasingly rightwards, eventually ending up in the jingoistic wing of the Liberal Party during the 1920s. See Leighton James, “Stanton, Charles Butt (1873-1946),” *ODNB*, accessed 12 February 2015, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/66802>.

¹⁵⁴ In total, Macready was given command over two hundred cavalry troops and five hundred infantry troops stationed in Cardiff, Swindon and Newport, as well as the contingents of Metropolitan Police.

¹⁵⁵ Churchill to Lindsay, 8 November 1910, TNA HO 144/1551/199768/6.

to the miners (as transmitted to Captain Lindsay) was that, while “their best friends here are greatly distressed at the trouble which has broken out, and will do their best to help them to get fair treatment [all] rioting must cease at once.”¹⁵⁶

Rioting only got worse, however. On 7 November strikers at the Glamorgan pit, near the town of Llwynpia, attempted to drive out the officials and stokers who were engaged in keeping the mining equipment functional, and were only pushed back after intense fighting which led to several local policemen being injured.¹⁵⁷ The violence erupted once again on the following evening when the now battle-hardened strikers decided to march through the nearby town of Tonypany. As the local butcher later recalled in a testimony to police:

I was protecting my premises from the violence of a mob of about five or six hundred people, consisting of men, women, and youths. The majority of the crowd were carrying mandril sticks [and] pieces of timber [...] from the Glamorgan colliery fencing. The rioting commenced about half past six p.m. and continued [...] until 9-45 p.m. I saw the arrival of the London Police at Pandy Square about 10 o'clock. A shout of “Police are coming” was given and the crowd quickly dispersed [...] The Police [...] marched down by my premises in a compact body; [but] after [they had] passed a crowd again assembled and broke the windows of several shops in the Square [...] The looting of shops continued and a body of London Police came from the Skating Rink and on their appearance [the crowd] flew in all directions. The Police remained about the vicinity of the Square and [this] enabled myself and other Trades people to partially secure our premises. Things assumed a normal condition [afterwards].¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ *Daily Mail* (Hull), 8 November 1910.

¹⁵⁸ “Statement of W. M. Wilkins,” 9 December 1910, TNA MEPO 3/200.

Similar scenes were concurrently occurring in Aberaman where between two and three thousand striking workers (some accompanied by their wives and children) were engaged in pitch battle with a contingent of Welsh police under the command of Superintendent Gill.¹⁵⁹ Although General Macready's troops were patiently waiting in the immediately surrounding areas for orders to "block the streets on the high ground and work gradually downwards,"¹⁶⁰ their intervention was in the end averted by the efficiency of the police in controlling the crowds. Churchill received the news of the worsening violence with alarm but urged Macready to stay the course and let the reinforced Met contingents subdue any future rioters with "vigorous baton charges [as this] may be the best means of preventing recourse to fire-arms."¹⁶¹

No fatalities occurred at Aberaman, but at Tonypany one miner, a man called Samuel Royce, was fatally injured by a blow to the head, likely delivered by a police truncheon (although conflicting evidence suggested it may have been a "stone thrown from behind"),¹⁶² further deepening the profound antipathy felt by the strikers towards the Liberal government. Over the following days, however, Macready's tactical shrewdness and political talents would manage to secure a fragile yet sustainable peace between miners and authorities (albeit without an end to the strike).

The first change of pace came once Macready became fully aware of the extent to which the opportunistic mine owners used with impunity the venality of the local police force to "carry out any schemes they pleased, such as the importation of 'blacklegs,' or fresh work in the pits, in

¹⁵⁹ "Report on the Disturbance at Aberaman on 8 November 1910," TNA MEPO 3/200.

¹⁶⁰ "Memorandum by General Macready on Certain Points Connected with the Strike in South Wales," TNA MEPO 3/200.

¹⁶¹ Churchill to Macready, 9 November 1910, TNA HO 144/1551/199768/10.

¹⁶² Unsigned report based on information supplied by J. F. Moylan addressed to Troup [undated], TNA HO 144/1551/199768/50. Moylan had been dispatched to South Wales by Churchill as a secret Home Office observer. It is not entirely certain what his actual function in government was although Dangerfield (*Strange Death of Liberal England*, 247) refers to him as a "Board of Trade investigator." See also Roger Geary, *Policing Industrial Disputes: 1893 to 1985* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 28 ff.

short any measure without consideration as to how it might influence the strikers.”¹⁶³ Even Captain Lindsay for all his seeming loyalty and professionalism seemed to Macready “a little nervous in throwing off [the] influence [of] the local magnates.”¹⁶⁴ Consequently, when a few days after the clashes in Tonypany and Aberaman rumours began to emerge that some miners were planning to set off a bomb, the General arranged to personally meet a delegation of the strikers’ leaders, including the socialist firebrand C. B. Stanton, to reassure them of the fact that his forces were not there at the behest of the mining interest but also to warn them that “if [bomb explosions] should occur, the affected area will pass practically into a condition similar to that of Martial Law.”¹⁶⁵ Macready then proceeded to set up a working intelligence-gathering network with the help of two War Office detectives sent over from London, which allowed him to remain one step ahead of the strikers’ plans, but also to avoid taking excessive precautions against potential outrages (rumours that miners were planning to bomb the house of a colliery manager turned out to be “totally unfounded [and] concocted by the mine owners”).¹⁶⁶

With the exception of the riot at Pennygraig on 21 November, which Macready regarded as merely “an ebullition against ‘blacklegs’ and imported police,”¹⁶⁷ there were no other major episodes of organised violence for the remainder of the conflict (which lasted for another eight months before the miners, deprived of funds and union support, were starved into accepting the terms of the Cambrian Combine).¹⁶⁸ The riots in early November, however, especially the one in Tonypany, set the tone for what would shortly become the great industrial unrest of the antebellum years – in less than a year five hundred Metropolitan police would again be sent to

¹⁶³ “Memorandum by General Macready on Certain Points Connected with the Strike in South Wales,” TNA MEPO 3/200.

¹⁶⁴ Macready to Churchill, 19 November 1910, TNA HO 144/1551/199768/96.

¹⁶⁵ Macready to Churchill, 16 November 1910, TNA HO 144/1551/199768/51.

¹⁶⁶ Note by Troup, 19 November 1910, TNA HO 144/1551/199768/80.

¹⁶⁷ “Memorandum by General Macready on Certain Points Connected with the Strike in South Wales,” TNA MEPO 3/200.

¹⁶⁸ Dangerfield, 246.

keep the peace between strikers and local authorities, this time at Hull – and created a “black legend” of callous military repression that would continue to haunt Churchill for the rest of his life.¹⁶⁹ They also seemed to suggest to the authorities that revolutionary propaganda, although essentially “un-British,” could easily find a receptive audience amongst working men in a time of crisis,¹⁷⁰ and it is telling that both Macready and Lindsay, despite their tactical differences, blamed “the doctrine of extreme socialism” for the extent and intensity of the rioting.¹⁷¹

18-24 November 1910, Westminster, London

By autumn 1910 all hope that the Conciliation Bill might be allowed to become law had been extinguished; having been rejected both by Lloyd George and Churchill as “anti-democratic” and pro-Tory, the Bill had passed its Second Reading in the Commons on 12 July by a vote of 299 to 189 only to then be “referred to a Committee of the whole House,” and thus allowed to quietly expire.¹⁷² On 12 November Sir Edward Grey, a suffrage reform sympathizer, was put in the awkward position of having to officially announce that the Bill would be given no further attention in parliamentary debates, and on 18 November Asquith confirmed that the new battle with the Lords would be decided at the polls before the end of the year. The Government, it was argued, had more pressing business to attend to in its final days than votes for women.

¹⁶⁹ As Stuart Ball has noted, after Tonypany, Churchill “was personally blamed for the bloodshed, which left a permanent legacy of hostility on the part of the trade unions and Labour Party [and] ‘Tonypany’ was a cry raised by hecklers up to the Second World War.” Stuart Ball, *Winston Churchill* (New York City: New York University Press, 2003), 40.

¹⁷⁰ This point is also highlighted by the fact that besides the presence of C. B. Stanton and other far-left SWMF organisers, the strikers also played host to foreign socialist agitators like the French Antoinette Durand de Gros, better-known as Madame Sorgue, who, as *The Times* noted on 15 November, “has been in the Aberdare district for some time [and will no longer] be permitted to address any more meetings in the locality.” Although it is hard to quantify the real support for revolutionary socialism in the Southern Welsh valleys at this time, it is nonetheless worth noting that in 1911 four syndicalists – Noah Ablett, John Hopla, Noah Rees, and Tom Smith – were elected to the SWMF’s executive committee, and that syndicalist literature like the 1912 pamphlet *The Miners’ Next Step* (which sought to build on the experiences of the 1910 strike) or *The Rhondda Socialist* periodical could claim a readership of several thousand before 1914. Roy Church, *Strikes and Solidarity: Coalfield Conflict in Britain, 1889-1966* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 61.

¹⁷¹ “Memorandum by General Macready on Certain Points Connected with the Strike in South Wales,” TNA MEPO 3/200; Lindsay to Churchill, 14 November 1910, TNA HO 144/1551/199768.

¹⁷² Rosen, 139.

The police had been expecting “militant action [...] in connection with the [Conciliation] Bill” for some time but given the line pursued by Troup and Gladstone that “leaving the pickets alone” would pre-empt criticism of the police and deter any would-be terrorists, Henry had decided to instruct his superintendents to follow a policy of quasi-appeasement towards any future demonstrators. In a memorandum dated 11 July he explained that suffragettes positioned so as to “cause annoyance” to cabinet ministers were to “be cautioned [...] and [...] requested to depart; [if] they do not leave they are to be further informed that Police [...] cannot allow them to remain; [if] they then remain, a reasonable interval from the time of cautioning being allowed, they may be arrested [...] if possible by an Inspector or Sergeant.”¹⁷³

That strategy failed spectacularly on 18 November when, just as Asquith was announcing the forthcoming general election, deputations of WSPU members were beginning to depart Caxton Hall for the Houses of Parliament in order to protest the Government’s sabotage of the Conciliation Bill. Although the first deputation of twelve women (which included Mrs. Pankhurst) was allowed to pass through the police cordon and “stand just outside the entrance to the House,”¹⁷⁴ all subsequent demonstrators were kept strictly at bay and treated with an increasingly egregious amount of violence. The elderly Mrs. Georgiana Solomon, widow of the influential Cape politician Saul Solomon, and a devoted WSPU militant, later recalled in a letter to Churchill,

I saw several of our members flung repeatedly, like myself, into the crowd rendered hostile by well dressed men in plain clothes recognised as policemen. [One] policeman made a rush at me [...] held and violently shook me while his helpers twirled round my arms as if to drag them from their sockets. Still worse, another caught me by the

¹⁷³ Memorandum by Henry, 11 July 1910, TNA MEPO 2/1308.

¹⁷⁴ *Times*, 19 November 1910.

shoulders and mercilessly pressed his heavy weight upon my back, crushing me down [...] I may add that I was [also] gripped by the breast, by no means an exceptional act, for – heart-breaking to relate – I am medically informed that younger women, women of an age to be my daughters, were also assaulted in this and other repellant and equally cruel ways.¹⁷⁵

As new delegations of suffragettes kept arriving from Caxton Hall with orders not to retreat,¹⁷⁶ the belligerence of the mob and law enforcement alike only intensified, leading to multiple women being attacked and molested, sometimes by uniformed policemen. By six o'clock in the evening one hundred and sixteen women and three men had been arrested. A picture snapped by a *Daily Mirror* photographer, which appeared on the paper's cover page the following day under the headline "Black Friday," seemed to sum up with ferocious precision the inhumanity of the previous day. It showed the figure of Ada Wright, a leading member of the WSPU, curled up on the ground with her head obscured by a broad-brimmed hat, holding a white handkerchief to her face. On her right a uniformed policeman is seen bending over her and shouting something, while on her left a man wearing a silk hat is hopelessly trying to shoulder off the intervention of another policeman; standing opposite, a youth in a cloth cap is looking straight down at the woman, frolicking about and grinning malevolently.

Authorities clandestinely attempted to suppress copies of the issue and ordered all negatives of the photo destroyed,¹⁷⁷ but the truth about the events of 18 November was now irrevocably beginning to emerge. The only way to avert a public airing of the abhorrent details, and consequently a pre-election public relations disaster, would be to drop all charges against the

¹⁷⁵ "A letter including a Statement re Nov. 18th, 1910," 17 December 1910, TNA HO 144/1106/200455/17.

¹⁷⁶ Elizabeth Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide, 1866-1928* (London: Routledge, 2003), 759.

¹⁷⁷ Crawford, 451.

arrested women, which Churchill promptly did on 19 November, all the while insisting on his innocence in the matter. The accusation made by the suffragettes and their sympathizers that the government had issued orders to needlessly delay arrests was dismissed as inaccurate; the Home Secretary's orders had been to arrest "as soon as any defiance of the Law had been committed," but Henry had "misunderstood" this instruction on account of the appeasing policy pursued by Gladstone.¹⁷⁸

Henry admitted to the mistake in internal correspondence¹⁷⁹ but publicly he was adamant that the police had acted with "restraint and moderation," and dismissed witness testimonies (which the women were only reluctantly beginning to come forward with) as "little more than hysterical complaints of violence." He conceded that "there may be grounds for the belief [...] that many [demonstrators] were indecently handled," but insisted that there was "no foundation for the suggestion that this was done by members of the Police Force dressed in ordinary clothes." Plain clothes men (including Special Branch officers) had indeed been in attendance, but they were "below a dozen" and had taken "no part in arresting or in restraining demonstrators."¹⁸⁰

A host of people did come to the defense of the suffragettes, from the London surgeon who described in a letter to *The Daily Telegraph* his firsthand impressions of how the women had been "pushed about in every direction by the police [and] tortured in other nameless ways,"¹⁸¹ to H. N. Brailsford, whose memorandum on behalf of the Conciliation Committee outlined in great detail, drawing on no fewer than one hundred and thirty-five witness statements,

¹⁷⁸ Minute by Churchill, 23 November 1910, TNA HO 144/1106/200455/3.

¹⁷⁹ In a handwritten minute addressed to the Home Office Henry explained that, "I informed [Churchill] that it was too late for me to instruct the men [that] arrests [were] to be effected as soon as possible [...] as they were already out on the streets." Minute by Henry, 29 November 1910, TNA HO 144/1106/200455/3.

¹⁸⁰ Memo by Henry, 25 March 1911, TNA HO 144/1106/200455/42; "Memorandum by Commissioner of Police on Allegations contained in Mr. Brailsford's Memorial of the 18th February, 1911," TNA HO 144/1106/200455/22.

¹⁸¹ C. Mansell-Moulin in *The Daily Telegraph*, 23 November 1910.

“the treatment of the women’s deputation by the Police,” urging the Home Office to open a public inquiry into the matter.¹⁸² The loudness of the government’s protestations and the incessant victim blaming – “the women,” Churchill explained in Parliament, “work themselves into a high state of hysteria [and] expose themselves to rough horseplay at the hands of an unsympathetic crowd”¹⁸³ – eventually drowned out the critics, however, and by mid-December the General Election had once again superseded all other political issues on the national stage. The WSPU and WFL leadership were now content to see the dropping of charges as a partial victory against “the policy of persecution,”¹⁸⁴ and resume once more the electoral struggle against the Liberal machine. The Bill, they believed, was not quite dead yet.¹⁸⁵ The truce would go on for another year but the authorities were by no means preparing for peace, and it is telling that the very first decision Henry made after the events of Black Friday was to draft a request for an augmentation of the Mounted Branch of the Metropolitan Police, which he felt “the events of the past year” completely justified. Experience, he noted, “shows that mounted men suitably employed are as effective as a much larger number of foot Constables in controlling a crowd.”¹⁸⁶

30 November 1910 – 3 January 1911, East London

Nearly two years after the Tottenham outrage had brought anarchism back into the limelight, London’s remaining anarchist scene did not appear to be capable of posing much of a threat to the safety of the British public. As the *Penny Illustrated Paper* explained in one of its popular lurid investigations into London’s “creatures of the night,” Soho’s old horrible crew of French and Italian bomb-throwers that had once hosted the likes of François, Bourdin and

¹⁸² “Treatment of the Women’s Deputations by the Police: Being a copy of a Memorandum forwarded by the Parliamentary Conciliation Committee for Woman’s Suffrage to the Home Office, accompanying a request for a public enquiry into the conduct of the police,” TNA HO 144/1106/200455/19.

¹⁸³ *Times*, 11 March 1911.

¹⁸⁴ Minute by Troup, 19 November 1910, TNA HO 144/1106/200455/4.

¹⁸⁵ Antonia Raeburn, *The Militant Suffragettes* (London: Michael Joseph, 1973), 157.

¹⁸⁶ Henry to the Home Office, 18 November 1910, TNA MEPO 2/1408.

Farnara now seemed to have been largely exchanged for an assorted company of Eastern European refugees, who, despite a penchant for using knives to settle their scores, appeared to be, for the most part, political innocents – Tolstoyans and sentimental Nihilists who became teary-eyed at “the thought of the torture of a human being.”¹⁸⁷ And yet there was still real danger lurking in the streets of London’s underworld.

Although the connections of the Tottenham shooters to anarchism had always been uncertain in light of their mysterious identities, a small but active colony of radical socialists from the western territories of the Russian Empire did call the streets of Tower Hamlets and Whitechapel home. These were men (and occasionally women) whose insurrectionary fervour had estranged them not only from the law but also from the social-democratic parties of their homeland,¹⁸⁸ and who, after seeking their fortunes in Western Europe or America, had chosen to settle in Britain where, despite the occasional intrusions of Okhrana spies and Special Branch agents, they could lead, or pretend to lead, ordinary workaday lives. Their scorn for political means and preference for “expropriation” placed them in the lineage of the “individualist” gangs of the 1890s, but their ideology was a confusing mix of revolutionary socialism, ethnic populism, and sheer gangsterism.¹⁸⁹ For British authorities it was anarchism pure and simple by virtue of its extremeness.

On 30 November a group of such recently arrived Russian anarchists rented several adjacent apartments in a complex near Houndsditch Street in Central London (an impoverished, largely immigrant area) with the intention of planning a jewelry heist. The jeweller, a certain

¹⁸⁷ *P.I.P.: Penny Illustrated Paper*, 20 August 1910.

¹⁸⁸ After the upheaval of 1905 the more radical socialist groups in Latvia broke off with the Marxist-dominated Latvian Social Democratic Workers' Party over the latter's willingness to take part in a “capitalist parliament,” and began to agitate for a “true liberation of mankind [which] could be accomplished only by means of a social revolution.” Paul Avrich, *Russian Anarchists* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 54.

¹⁸⁹ Maris Goldmanis, “Latvian Anarchism – The Story of Peter the Painter.” *Latvian History*. Last modified 5 January 2014, accessed 25 February 2015. <http://latvianhistory.com/2014/01/05/latvian-anarchism-the-story-of-the-peter-the-painter>.

Henry Samuel Harris, had his shop just on the other side of the complex, and his premises were easily accessible via the outhouse of one of the apartments, which abutted the shop. For the cash-strapped revolutionaries it was an opportunity too good to pass up. They set to work on the evening of 16 December but unfortunately for them the work of drilling through the back wall of the jeweller's shop proved noisy enough to immediately arouse the suspicions of Mr. Harris' neighbour, who then promptly alerted the police. Confronted with the presence of five City policemen demanding to inspect the premises, the robbers did not hesitate long before proceeding to shoot their way out of the building, fatally wounding three of the officers in the process. "In its savagery the outrage vied with the anarchical outbreak at Tottenham two years ago," noted *The Times* the day after, not yet knowing the whole truth about the perpetrators' identities.¹⁹⁰

The first clue as to the whereabouts of the gang came early next day when the police received notice that a dead body had been located at 59 Grove Street in East London; it was that of one of the robbers, George Gardstein, who, as a subsequent investigation would shortly establish, had been fatally hit by friendly fire during the escape and had died during the night after refusing to be taken to the hospital. In the back room of the same dwelling police also found one of Gardstein's friends, a certain Ms. Trassjonsky, who was very much alive, and busily disposing of a quantity of Gardstein's, presumably incriminating, documents and photographs. She was detained along with several others of Gardstein's acolytes, but to the disappointment of City and Metropolitan officers (the case was nominally under City control) no evidence could link any of the suspects to the events of 16 December. Questioning did, however, produce one major breakthrough: "the room in which the body was found, and that in which the woman was burning papers, were occupied by [three men] with whom [Gardstein] was associated, and who

¹⁹⁰ *Times*, 17 December 1910.

were evidently concerned with him in the Crime, and had taken him to their rooms after he was wounded.”¹⁹¹ The three men (all ethnic Latvians) were Fricis “Fritz” Svaars, William Sokolov aka Jakov Vogel aka Joseph, and one Jānis Žāklis aka Peter Piatkow but better known as Peter the Painter. As the owner of the Grove Street building was quick to point out, Sokolov was known to frequent a certain Betsey Gershon, a Russian-speaking immigrant dressmaker who lived at 100 Sidney Street in the East End.

By 2 January 1911, Svaars and Sokolov had reliably been traced to the location in Sidney Street where they appeared to have effectively barricaded themselves in the hope of evading their pursuers. That night Metropolitan and City superintendents met at the Arbour Square Police Station in order to figure out how best to apprehend these “desperate men [...] who would not be taken alive.”¹⁹² Rushing the building was out of the question given its steep and narrow staircase; a blockade was decided on as the least risky option, and by four in the morning the next day 100 Sidney Street had been quietly evacuated (save for the two outlaws) and sealed off from the rest of the neighborhood by a force of over 200 constables. The first shots were fired around 7:30 a.m. after the police made a last-ditch attempt to get the two men to surrender by throwing some gravel up at the window of their room. A police officer was almost instantly injured and it soon became painfully obvious that the Latvians’ guns “were far superior to our revolvers, of which at this time we only had a few.” Around 11 a.m. the Home Secretary received a phone call from the Home Office asking whether military aid might be deployed to help the embattled police officers; the troops, however – one Lieutenant, two NCOs and seventeen privates of the Scots Guards – were already on site returning fire. In light of the extraordinary circumstances

¹⁹¹ Report by John Stark (Chief Superintendent of the City Police), 23 December 1910, TNA HO 144/19780/3.

¹⁹² Report by Supt. J. Mulvany, 7 January 1911, TNA HO 144/19780/25.

Churchill felt it was his “duty to go and see for myself what was happening.”¹⁹³ Although he later claimed he “did not in any way direct or override the arrangements that the police had made,”¹⁹⁴ surviving footage of the operation in Sidney Street (Pathé’s first reel of British police in action)¹⁹⁵ shows the Home Secretary in his usual self-sure pose, conferring with superintendents and pointing at various things in a manner that certainly suggested active leadership to police officers and journalists alike.¹⁹⁶

About 1 p.m. plumes of smoke began to emerge from the roof of the besieged house (likely as a result of stray bullets hitting a gas pipe) and within the span of minutes the building’s upper floors were almost entirely engulfed by flames. Fire fighters from nearby stations arrived shortly thereafter but were immediately “stopped by the police from going nearer.” When one of the Station Officers “objected to this [...] an official informed me that the Home Secretary was in attendance and had charge of the operations [...] and [when I] spoke to the Home Secretary [...] I was told to keep my engines there [as] nothing could be done at present.”¹⁹⁷ The two desperadoes defiantly refused to be smoked out, however, and shooting continued for at least another hour. By 2:45 p.m. Churchill had left the scene, and much of the fire had subsided. Svaars’ body was found shortly after 3 p.m. “burnt beyond all recognition,” followed by Sokolov’s a few moments later.¹⁹⁸ The coroner’s verdicts were “suffocation by smoke during the conflagration,” and “bullet shot wound in head – justifiable homicide” respectively.

¹⁹³ Testimony by Churchill, 18 January 1911, TNA HO 144/19780.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ The video, which is just over three minutes long, can be streamed on the British Pathé website at <http://www.britishpathe.com/video/london-sidney-street-siege> (accessed 2 March 2015).

¹⁹⁶ *Daily Mail*, 4 January 1911.

¹⁹⁷ Testimony by Albert Edward Edmonds, Station Officer of the Bethnal Green Station (London Fire Brigade), 9 January 1911, TNA HO 144/19780.

¹⁹⁸ Testimony by Charles Graham Grant, Police Surgeon (H Division), 6 January 1911, TNA HO 144/19780.

Although the mysterious (and judging by his wanted poster, incredibly photogenic) Peter the Painter was still at large,¹⁹⁹ the deaths of Svaars and Sokolov, whom the authorities could now plausibly connect to Gardstein thanks to artefacts collected from the wreckage of the Sidney Street building, effectively marked the conclusion of the Houndsditch incident. Despite its ultra-violent and dramatic nature, the aftermath proved surprisingly anticlimactic; there was no raid on the Jubilee Street Club (supposedly a familiar haunt of Gardstein and his associates), no increased surveillance on other immigrant clubs, and no real attempt to understand what had motivated the two young Latvians to essentially commit suicide in such a public and spectacular way (an offer by Riga's Director of Criminal Investigations to come to London and convey "valuable information respecting the [Latvian] Anarchist band in London" was waved off by Henry as useless and likely to cause embarrassment to British authorities).²⁰⁰ Public outrage, however, erupted almost immediately after the events of 3 January, most of it directed at the already much-maligned Aliens Act, and to some extent at Churchill, who was criticized on the Left for being an irresponsible adventurer with no "knowledge of how to handle masses of men in [...] critical times,"²⁰¹ and on the Right for being a xenophile Liberal hypocrite.²⁰² More worryingly, the Sidney Street siege (as the event came to be remembered) also added fuel to the

¹⁹⁹ Although the controversy around the true identity of Peter the Painter has yet to be permanently settled, with some historians like Donald Rumbelow identifying him with Jacob Peters (one of Gardstein's acolytes who was later released due to lack of evidence), recent research by Philip Ruff in the declassified Soviet archives in Riga convincingly suggests that the mysterious "third man" was none other than Jānis Žāklis, an ex-member of the Latvian Social Democratic Party and an ardent supporter of "expropriation." It is not known how Peter the Painter (so nicknamed by his friends on account of his artistic inclinations) managed, unlike Svaars and Sokolov, to evade the police search or where he eventually ended up after his escape from Britain (Goldmanis, "Latvian Anarchism – The Story of Peter the Painter"). For Ruff's Latvian-language monograph see Filips Rufs [Philip Ruff], *Pa Stāvu Liesmu Debesīs: Nenotveramā latviešu anarhista Pētera Māldera laiks un dzīve* [On A Towering Flame to Heaven: The Life and Times of the Elusive Latvian Anarchist Peter the Painter] (Riga: Dienas Grāmata, 2012).

²⁰⁰ F. A. Campbell (Foreign Office) to Troup, 9 January 1911; Note by Henry, 10 January 1911, TNA HO 144/19780.

²⁰¹ Ramsay Macdonald, speech in the House of Commons, HC Deb, 22 August 1911, vol. 29, col. 2298.

²⁰² In a letter to *The Times* on 5 January 1911 the former Conservative MP for Bethnal Green, S. F. Ridley, accused Churchill of having taken "the leading part in opposing the passing of [the Alien] Act," and condemned the Home Secretary's "peeping round the corner at the efforts of the police and military" during the Sidney Street incident as "ludicrous." *Times*, 5 January 1911.

fire of anti-semitic agitation which increasingly appeared to no longer be the preserve of far-right populists and ideological racists.²⁰³

After Sidney Street the anarchist momentarily regained his status as folk devil, and thanks to the new medium of cinema the British public could now revel in Lieutenant Rose's valiant foiling of a dastardly anarchist plot to assassinate King George V or shudder at the thought that "aerial anarchists" might one day use zeppelins to bomb London out of existence.²⁰⁴ For a short while in early 1911 rumours that a real plot to assassinate the King was being hatched by Italian anarchists in Chicago were deemed credible enough by the Home Office to require the services of local Pinkertons, but investigations ultimately produced nothing of value.²⁰⁵ Anarchism as a credible political threat no longer existed.

21 November 1911, Westminster, London

Thanks to the Liberals' "torpedoing" of another Conciliation Bill²⁰⁶ in late 1911, the return of suffrage militancy "on a larger scale than on previous occasions"²⁰⁷ now seemed inevitable. Henry had already begun preparing his strategy as early as January when in a letter to Churchill he outlined – "[so] that the Secretary of State should know in advance the lines upon which I propose to act" – what he believed to be the suffragettes' main tactic (namely that of eliciting public sympathy by deliberately provoking the police), and argued, not very

²⁰³ An illustrating example is *The Standard*, once famous for its moderate conservatism and exemplary war journalism, which in the wake of the "siege" began publishing a series of exposés on "the inhabitants of the Ghetto" couched in a shockingly (and erstwhile completely atypical) anti-semitic language. "Problem of the Alien I-III," *Standard*, 25-30 January 1911.

²⁰⁴ *Lieutenant Rose and the Royal Visit*, directed by Percy Stow, London, UK: Clarendon, 1911; *The Aerial Anarchists*, directed by Walter R. Booth, London, UK: Kineto Films, 1911.

²⁰⁵ "Alleged Anarchist plot against King George V," 1911, TNA HO 144/1112/202225.

²⁰⁶ In a speech before members of the National Liberal Federation in November 1911 Lloyd George candidly declared that that year's version of the Conciliation Bill was still "grossly unfair to Liberalism," and would shortly be "torpedoed" by the Government's recent proposal to introduce a Bill expanding the male franchise (that could technically, but not realistically, be amendable to include female enfranchisement). The backlash from suffragists, including moderates like H. N. Brailsford, was immediate, and Lloyd George came close to supplanting Asquith as the new *bête noire* of the militant faction. F. M. Leventhal, *The Last Dissenter: H. N. Brailsford and His World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 85; Rosen, 152.

²⁰⁷ Henry to the Home Office, 26 January 1911, TNA MEPO 2/1438.

convincingly, that “the least embarrassing course will be for the police not to arrest too soon or defer arresting too long.”²⁰⁸ That strategy was made somewhat clearer a month later when the Commissioner requested the advice of Messrs. Wontner and Sons (solicitors to the Metropolitan Police), who suggested that police would do well to “abstain from roughness” and to effect arrests only in “cases of actual damage to property or serious assault [and always] under the direct instructions of an Inspector.”²⁰⁹ Henry accepted the gist of the recommendations and submitted the revised set of instructions to the Home Secretary at the end of February. The main course of action had in fact changed very little, the only additions being Churchill’s insistence on speedy arrests (“one rush, one arrest”) and the fact that Superintendent Wells (the man in charge of the force protecting Parliament Square) now had to officially “require police under his orders to act with the utmost moderation.”²¹⁰ As Troup resentfully noted “the women will find something to complain of in any conceivable course that may be adopted.”²¹¹

The real change came with the increased surveillance of suffragette meetings (although the WSPU barred men from membership, it allowed male sympathizers to attend “at homes” and formal events) which gave authorities the advantage of knowing well in advance about any future demonstrations. In early November alone, as the Conciliation Bill crisis was reaching a breaking point, at least three individual reports were submitted to Superintendent Quinn,²¹² including one on the 9 November meeting at Steinway Hall where Christabel Pankhurst announced that “on the 21st November, we intend sending a deputation [...] to the Prime Minister [and] the Chancellor of the Exchequer.”²¹³

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ “Memorandum re suffragettes,” 20 February 1911, TNA MEPO 2/1438.

²¹⁰ Henry to the Home Office, 4 February 1911, TNA HO 144/1119/203651/2.

²¹¹ Minute by Troup, 4 February 1911, TNA HO 144/1119/203651/2.

²¹² TNA HO 144/1119/203651.

²¹³ Report by Sergeant Arthur Randall, 10 November 1911, TNA HO 144/1119/203651/6.

The demonstration on 21 November would have been a tedious repeat of previous such events (save for Black Friday) if not for the intransigence of the WSPU's ultra-militant fringe, which, independent of the march on Parliament, but with the tacit consent of Christabel and her mother, met around 7 p.m. at 156 Charing Cross armed with hammers and "stones tied up in handkerchiefs" and proceeded to deface a number of buildings along the Strand and the surrounding area. Among their targets were buildings belonging to the Government and other perceived enemies, viz. the Home Office, Somerset House, the National Liberal Club, the headquarters of the *Daily Mail* and *Daily News*, but also buildings with little or no political significance like the Westminster Palace Hotel or an Aerated Bread Company tea shop. The window-breakers were all "led off – all very quietly done – no rough usage – no struggling," as Kate Perry Frye later recalled in her diary,²¹⁴ and over at the Houses of Parliament the police appeared to show the same restraint, speedily arresting those women who attempted to break through the cordon in front of the gates and conducting them to Cannon Row Station. Much to Troup's surprise the suffragettes had in fact little to complain about, and the authorities might have reasonably believed that they had won this round. For the WSPU, however, the propaganda value of this event was even greater than that of Black Friday; with the truce now gone the way of the Conciliation Bill, "the argument of the broken pane of glass" became "the most valuable argument in modern politics."²¹⁵

15 January – 18 June 1912, Aldershot, London, Manchester

²¹⁴ Kate Perry Frye, *Campaigning for the Vote: Kate Perry Frye's Suffrage Diary*, ed. Elizabeth Crawford (London: Francis Boutle Publishers, 2013), 79.

²¹⁵ Emmeline Pankhurst, quoted in Rosen, 157.

After the hot summer of 1911, which had seen a nationwide railway strike and two deadly confrontations between workers and armed troops,²¹⁶ 1912 appeared to be starting off with a winter of discontent as the Miners' Federation inched ever closer to declaring its own strike over the issue of a minimum wage.²¹⁷ An indication that homegrown socialist agitation now enjoyed a privileged position on the Home Office's list of security threats came on 15 January when the Assistant Commissioner forwarded Troup a copy of the latest issue of *The Syndicalist*, the monthly organ of the recently formed Industrial Syndicalist Education League,²¹⁸ whose chairman – the eloquent and unabashedly radical Tom Mann – had been on the authorities' radar ever since his active involvement in the Liverpool transport strike back in August.²¹⁹ The Permanent Secretary found the publication interesting, going so far as to praise one of the articles, “a history, from the syndicalist standpoint [...] of the Italian railway question” as “probably substantially true.”²²⁰ The only potential for subversion came from a seemingly theoretical discussion on industrial sabotage, and an “open letter to British soldiers” – the latter a heartfelt appeal to non-violence which had first appeared at the height of the 1911 agitation in the Liverpool-based *Irish Worker*. It began thus:

²¹⁶ On 13 August riots by striking transport workers in Liverpool had led to the intervention of Liverpool City Police and soldiers from the Warwickshire Regiment, causing two deaths and many more injuries. Only several days after, on 19 August, troops from the Worcestershire Regiment under the command of Major Brownlow Stuart attempted to quell a riot by striking railway workers at Llanelli in South Wales, killing two and injuring others. Both incidents illustrate that the moderating strategy of General Macready and the Metropolitan Police was still far from easily replicable by provincial authorities, but also the general gravity of this unprecedented situation. As the railway strike threatened to paralyse the entire country, affected areas passed into what General Macready had once described as “a condition similar to martial law” as Churchill instructed all local authorities that the army was now in charge of protecting railroads and strikebreaking labour, and that “the Army regulation which required a requisition for troops from the civil authority was [now] suspended.” Churchill, quoted in Barbara Weinberger, “Keeping the Peace? Policing Strikes 1906-26,” *History Today* 37 (1987): 32.

²¹⁷ Church, *Strikes and Solidarity*, 114-15.

²¹⁸ Macnaghten to Troup, 15 January 1912, TNA HO 144/7062.

²¹⁹ Joseph L. White, *Tom Mann* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), 179-80. The Home Office had already received copies of Mann's previous publication, *The Syndicalist Railwayman*, back in October 1911, and on 13 January 1912 Special Branch DS Fitch was sent to attend a meeting of the Industrial Syndicalist Education League in Battersea. TNA HO 144/7062.

²²⁰ Note by Troup, 17 January 1912, TNA HO 144/7062.

Men! Comrades! Brothers!

You are in the Army.

So are We. You in the Army of Destruction. We in the Industrial, or Army of Construction.

We work at mine, mill, forge, factory, or dock, &c., producing and transporting all the goods, clothing, stuffs, &c., which make it possible for people to live.

You are Working Men's Sons.

When We go on Strike to better Our lot, which is the lot also of Your Fathers, Mothers, Brothers, and Sisters, YOU are called upon by your officers to MURDER US.

Don't do it!

You know how it happens — always has happened.

We stand out as long as we can. Then one of our (and your) irresponsible Brothers, goaded by the sight and thought of his and his loved ones' misery and hunger, commits a crime on property. Immediately you are ordered to Murder Us, as You did at Mitchelstown, at Featherstone, at Belfast.

Don't You know that when You are out of the colours, and become a "Civy" [sic] again, that You, like Us, may be on Strike, and You, like Us, be liable to be Murdered by other soldiers.

Boys, Don't Do It!

"Thou Shalt Not Kill," says the Book.

Don't Forget That!²²¹

Despite reading it as a "direct incitement to mutiny," Troup thought the piece on sabotage was the more insidious given its "calculated [attempt] to suggest to English workmen the commission

²²¹ Tom Mann, *Memoirs* (London: The Labour Publishing Company Ltd., 1923), 289.

of acts of sabotage in furtherance of trade disputes,” but did not ultimately see any “possibility of taking action on this paper [unless] in [the] future Mr. Mann should go further and say what he means more plainly.”²²²

Mann did not need to go any further as on 25 February a young railwayman by the name of Frederick Crowsley took the train from Willesden to the garrison town of Aldershot where he managed to distribute some three hundred copies of the *Syndicalist*'s open letter amongst the soldiers there before being apprehended by military police.²²³ He was subsequently charged with “maliciously and advisedly [endeavouring] to seduce [...] persons serving in his Majesty’s forces by sea or land from his or their duty and allegiance to his Majesty”²²⁴ under the Incitement to Mutiny Act of 1797 (the first time in more than a hundred years the Act had been invoked),²²⁵ and released on bail to await trial. Less than two weeks after, the printers of *The Syndicalist*, the brothers Benjamin and Charles Buck (both committed socialists),²²⁶ and its publisher-editor Guy Bowman²²⁷ were also arrested at their printing shop in Walthamstow and charged with the same felony of incitement to mutiny.²²⁸ The next logical step now for the authorities was to apprehend Mann himself who was in Manchester on a speaking tour. Although he could not be held legally responsible for the material published in *The Syndicalist* (being only the chairman of the organization which sponsored the publication), Mann’s predilection for frank talk soon gave the prosecution all the ammunition it needed.

²²² Note by Troup, 17 January 1912, TNA HO 144/7062.

²²³ *Times*, 19 June 19, 1912.

²²⁴ Incitement to Mutiny Act 1797. 37 Geo. III, c. 70.

²²⁵ Keith Ewing and Conor Anthony Gearty, *The Struggle for Civil Liberties: Political Freedom and the Rule of Law in Britain, 1914-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 119.

²²⁶ In a report from 25 March 1912, Special Branch DI George Riley notes with some surprise that despite their political radicalism “both these men are married and have families who appear very respectable, and the children are being well brought up.” TNA HO 144/7062.

²²⁷ Although not borne out by any of the official correspondence concerning the *Syndicalist* trials, Bowman had in fact already come to the attention of the Home Office six years earlier when he had been expelled from Spain for anarchist agitation. TNA HO 144/757118516/46.

²²⁸ *Times*, 11 March 1912.

Addressing a meeting of the Workers' Union group at Pendleton Town Hall in Salford on 14 March, Mann did not shy away from discussing the recent arrests of his associates, and, as a plainclothes policeman who was in attendance later testified in court, "took up a [copy of] the 'Syndicalist' and read out the first three passages of the 'Open Letter to Soldiers' [saying that] he was pleased to take responsibility for that." What seems to have really sealed his fate, however, is the fact that Mann personally helped distribute copies of the incriminating paper in the building's hall after the talk, something which could easily be construed as active propaganda under the terms of the Mutiny Act.²²⁹ He was arrested six days later and tried in early April on the same charges as Bowman and the Bucks (who had already been found guilty on 22 March and given sentences of nine and six months' hard labour respectively).²³⁰ Despite some divided opinion at the Home Office over the necessity of prosecuting Mann – one senior secretary thought Mann's words were "not likely to spread disaffection among the lieges [and] scarcely [demanded] a case for prosecution"²³¹ – and the presiding Judge's own reluctance to find him guilty,²³² Mann's refusal to seek legal counsel, his insistence that "I did not publish the letter, but I do not differ from the letter,"²³³ and his general notoriety all worked against him; he was found guilty of felony and given six months in the second division.

The outrage over the government's perceived role in the *Syndicalist* prosecutions in left-wing and labour circles was manifested very early on (including in Parliament thanks to

²²⁹ "Rex v. Tom Mann – Evidence and Summing Up," 9 April 1912, TNA HO 144/7062.

²³⁰ Trial of Guy Bowman, Charles Ernest Buck, Benjamin Edward Buck, March 1912 (t19120319-45), *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, accessed 11 March 2015. It is worth noting that one of the solicitors on the defendants' legal team was a young James B. Melville, son of William, who very unlike his father was known as a vocal and active socialist (he had also been part of the defence team during the trial of Gardstein's acolytes in connection with the Houndsditch murders). He would later rise to the post of solicitor-general during the second MacDonald ministry.

²³¹ Minute by H. B. Simpson, 7 May 1912, TNA HO 144/7062.

²³² In a letter to the Home Secretary, Judge Bankes argued that if Mann "had been properly defended he would not have been convicted," and that "had the accused been a less prominent person than Mann I should certainly have bound him over." Bankes to McKenna, 18 May 1912, TNA HO 144/7062.

²³³ "Rex v. Tom Mann – Evidence and Summing Up," 9 April 1912, TNA HO 144/7062.

contributions by Labourites like George Lansbury and Radicals like Josiah Wedgwood), and only further compounded when on 18 June Frederick Crowsley was given an equally harsh sentence of four months with hard labour for his refusal to recant and promise he would not recidivate.²³⁴ By this time, however, Reginald McKenna, the new Home Secretary (a Whiggish Liberal in the Asquithian mould) had already been forced to concede not only to the undue harshness of the sentences, but also to the weakness of the prosecution's case against the four men.

The first issue which spoke to the unfeasibility of consistently enforcing the Mutiny Act in this way was, in the words of George Lansbury, the double standard involved in taking “proceedings against [Crowsley et al] for asking men not to attack their fellow men and no proceedings [...] against the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Dublin University,”²³⁵ Edward Carson, who at the time was engaged in recruiting and drilling his Ulster Volunteers. The second issue was that even for prominent left-wingers it proved exceedingly easy to not only repeat the message of “An Open Letter” without fear of arrest but magnify it. Thus, for example, on 31 March the Labour MP Victor Grayson told an audience of workers in Wigan to not be “bamboozled” by the recently-passed Minimum Wage Bill (which had successfully neutralized the miners' strike) and to “organize yourselves into one solid phalanx and pull down the wretched prison they put [Tom Mann] in,”²³⁶ while Keir Hardie at a Mayday demonstration in Hyde Park declared, “I say not only don't shoot, but don't enlist. What business have you with soldiering? Remember this, that the crime of shooting a German workman, who is also your comrade, is just as great as shooting a British workman here.”²³⁷

²³⁴ *Times*, 19 June 1912.

²³⁵ HC Deb, 28 February 1912, vol. 34, col. 1372.

²³⁶ Transcript of Victor Grayson' speech at Market Square, Wigan, 31 March 1912, TNA HO 144/7062.

²³⁷ “Labour Day – Hyde Park Demonstration” [excerpt from unnamed newspaper], TNA HO 144/7062.

On 29 March, “after consulting the judge and the Attorney-General,” McKenna urged the King to use his Royal prerogative of mercy in order to reduce the Buck brothers’ sentence to a month each in the second division,²³⁸ and on 20 May Mann and Bowman also received a mitigation of their sentences “in view of the fact that this is [their] first breach [...] of the provisions of a Statute under which it has not been necessary to prosecute for a very considerable period of time.”²³⁹ Crowsley (whose excessive sentence had shocked even the Home Office)²⁴⁰ was similarly favoured a week after his trial and ended up serving only one month in the third division. The government’s backtracking may have marked a recognition of the fact that it could not hope to simply throw the book at all forms of seditious talk without risking the credibility of its position on homegrown political crime (namely that there wasn’t any) or the alienation of its failing but still substantial support within the labour movement. It did not, however, suggest a less suspicious attitude towards high-profile socialist agitators (Mann would continue to be kept under surveillance after his release),²⁴¹ or a willingness to repudiate the Mutiny Act, which in the 1920s was to become “an important weapon in the response to the rise of communism.”²⁴²

13 July – 26 November 1912: A New Militancy

Although the wave of industrial unrest which had arguably peaked in intensity with the short-lived national coal strike in January²⁴³ continued to ripple through the rest of the year

²³⁸ Memo by McKenna, 1 April 1912, TNA HO 144/7062.

²³⁹ HC Deb, 30 May 1912 vol. 38, col. 1567. In addition, Mann was also released a day earlier (on 23 June) in order to pre-empt any attempt by his sympathizers to organize a demonstration for his reception. Minute by McKenna, 18 June 1912, TNA HO 144/7062.

²⁴⁰ Troup remarked in a memo that “we do not know [...] why the Judge passed a sentence so much more severe than was desired by the prosecution [but] the sentence will have to be reduced.” Memo by Troup, 18 June 1912, TNA HO 144/7062.

²⁴¹ “Report of Meeting addressed by Mr. Tom Mann at the Selly Oak Institute on Monday, November 4th [1914],” TNA HO 144/7062.

²⁴² Ewing and Gearty, *The Struggle for Civil Liberties*, 120.

²⁴³ David Powell, *The Edwardian Crisis: Britain 1901-1914* (London: Macmillan, 1996), 127.

(occasionally with violent consequences),²⁴⁴ over the latter part of 1912 suffragette militancy managed to quickly rise to the national forefront as a credible domestic threat. Following a series of dramatic events in March which saw a renewed and stepped-up campaign of window-smashing (and occasionally arson), a police raid on Clement's Inn, the arrest and imprisonment of Emmeline Pankhurst and the Pethick-Lawrences on charges of conspiracy, the flight of Christabel to Paris in order to avoid the same fate, and an ever increasing torrent of public opprobrium,²⁴⁵ the WSPU seemed to be entering a new phase in its evolution, one marked by pure hostility to anything that could be construed as supportive of the status quo.

The first major sign of this shift came in mid-July with two, this time legitimately alarming, attempts on senior public figures. The first occurred on the evening of 13 July when two "respectably dressed" suffragettes were apprehended in the vicinity of the Oxfordshire residence of Lewis Harcourt, Colonial Secretary and inveterate opponent of female enfranchisement.²⁴⁶ Although one of the women managed to wriggle herself free and escape police capture, her accomplice Helen Craggs (the daughter of a well-to-do chartered accountant) was promptly taken into custody along with the suspicious basket she had in her possession in which were found "[two boxes] of matches, four tapers, twelve fire-lighters [...] nine pick-locks [...] an electric torch [and] a glass cutter."²⁴⁷ She pleaded guilty to attempted arson and was released on a £1,000 bail;²⁴⁸ the only justification she gave for her planned outrage was that "I

²⁴⁴ This, for example, was the case at Rotherhithe where on the night of 11 June 1912 tensions over a strike by dockers led to Metropolitan Police constables charging into a hostile crowd and striking "right and left with their [rolled-up] capes in a brutal way and without discrimination." "Report to the [...] Secretary of State [...] in reference to the disturbances at Rotherhithe on the 11th June, 1912," TNA MEPO 3/217.

²⁴⁵ Rosen, 156-66.

²⁴⁶ *Times*, 15 July 1912.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁸ Although she was tried in October and sentenced to nine months' imprisonment, Craggs successfully staged a hunger strike for eleven days and was subsequently released. Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement*, 147.

[...] have taken part in every peaceful method of propaganda and petition [to] no avail, so now I have [...] done something drastic.”²⁴⁹

That same impulse to commit something drastic no matter the risks or the results manifested itself only five days later in Dublin during an official visit by Asquith when the battle-hardened Mary Leigh (who had pioneered window-breaking over four years prior) threw an axe at the ministerial carriage as it passed through Princes Street, failing to do any real damage besides leaving John Redmond with “a nasty cut on the eye.”²⁵⁰ Leigh fled the scene just in time but later that day she and three other women managed to sneak inside the Theatre Royal, where Asquith was scheduled to give his speech on Ulster and Home Rule, and set fire to a theatre box during the intermission; no one was hurt, and the women were all taken into custody. Leigh was later tried and given five years’ penal servitude, but like her comrade Helen Craggs, managed to secure an early release by hunger-striking, and by October all charges against her were dropped.²⁵¹

The government’s willingness to release committed hunger-strikers regardless of the severity of their offences (a strategy which prefigured the following year’s Cat and Mouse Act) did not, however, make militant suffragettes any less likely to resort to serious violence. This was partly due to the Asquith cabinet’s sustained opposition to the Conciliation Bill and the continued use of forced feeding (made all the more egregious by McKenna’s insistence that “no prisoners are now being forcibly fed”²⁵²), but a more important reason was the polarizing effect the new militancy had on the WSPU leadership.

²⁴⁹ Rosen, 169.

²⁵⁰ *Daily Mail*, 19 July 1912.

²⁵¹ Crawford, 339.

²⁵² HC Deb, 29 July 1912, vol. 41, col. 1656W.

After meeting with her mother and the Pethick-Lawrences (who had all been recently released from prison after a brief hunger strike) in Boulogne-sur-Mer in July, Christabel made it abundantly clear that not only was she not prepared to negotiate her authority over the WSPU but that she expected complete and unquestioning support on the issue of violence against property and government figures. Emmeline was prepared to support her brash and charismatic daughter, as she had many times in the past, but for Frederick and Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence it was all too much. As Frederick later recalled in his autobiography,

Broadly, the difference between us was this. I took the view that the window-smashing raid had aroused a new popular opposition, because it was for the first time an attack on private property; and that therefore before it was repeated, still more before graver acts of violence were committed, there was need for a sustained educational campaign to make the public understand the reasons for such extreme courses [...] Christabel took the view that such popular opposition as there might be was not essentially different from that which had over and over again manifested itself when other new forms of militancy had been inaugurated, and that the right method of overcoming it was to repeat and intensify the attack in early autumn.²⁵³

The Pethick-Lawrences could not accept the new orthodoxy, but neither did they wish to cause a new split within the movement to which they had devoted so much time, energy, and funds to. They chose to go out with a whimper instead of a bang, and by early October the Pankhursts had moved the WSPU to “palatial new offices” in Lincoln’s Inn,²⁵⁴ and began publishing a new weekly entitled *The Suffragette* to replace *Votes for Women* as the organization’s official organ. On 17 October the purge was formally announced in a meeting at Albert Hall, and although the

²⁵³ Frederick Pethick-Lawrence, *Fate Has Been Kind* (London: Hutchinson & Company Limited, 1943), 98-9.

²⁵⁴ Rosen, 173.

announcement might have raised a few eyebrows, no actual opposition materialized; there was no time for petty squabbling when suffragettes had “a great mission – the greatest mission the world has ever known” to attend to.²⁵⁵ In her most fervent call to arms yet, Emmeline Pankhurst urged her “forces in the field” to register their opposition to the government by all available means:

Those of you who can express your militancy by facing Party mobs at Cabinet Ministers’ meetings [...] – do so. Those of you who can express your militancy by joining us in our anti-Government by-election policy – do so. Those of you who can break windows – break them. Those of you who can still further attack the secret idol of property so as to make the Government realise that property is as greatly endangered by Women Suffrage [sic] as it was by the Chartists of old – do so. And my last word to the Government: I incite this meeting to rebellion.²⁵⁶

Support among the rank-and-file proved more or less unanimous, but outside Lincoln’s Inn there was little enthusiasm for Mrs. Pankhurst’s bellicose tone. For constitutional suffragists the militants’ new campaign of violence seemed completely counter-productive and largely to blame for the continued failure of the Conciliation Bill,²⁵⁷ while the public at large appeared to be increasingly less willing to tolerate the anti-political antics of the WSPU. When, for example, a group of suffragettes attempted to heckle Lloyd George during the formal opening of a village institute in his native Llanystumdwy on 21 September, the crowd came close to lynching the women, two of which “especially suffered, their clothing being torn and hair being dragged.”²⁵⁸

Although the incident revitalized Welsh suffragism, leading the Cymric Suffrage Union to

²⁵⁵ Emmeline Pankhurst, speech at the Albert Hall, 17 October 1912, quoted in Rosen, 176.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Millicent Garrett Fawcett, “Constitutional Suffragists and Sentences on Militants,” in *The Times*, 8 June 1912.

²⁵⁸ *Illustrated London News*, 28 September 1912.

declare its opposition to any government that refused to support votes for women,²⁵⁹ the WSPU took it as an unpardonable affront and used testimonies from victims, press extracts and traditional anti-Welsh stereotypes to depict the “tribe of Llanystumdwy” as a mass of bloodthirsty barbarians under the spell of a “medicine man” Lloyd George²⁶⁰ (having already declared war on Irish nationalists earlier that year for their refusal to support the Conciliation Bill).²⁶¹

The WSPU’s isolation from the mainstream of British politics was completed in late November at the Bow and Bromley by-election which saw the suffrage candidate, Labour’s George Lansbury (who despite his socialism had proved enough of a true believer in the cause of votes for women to earn Christabel’s endorsement), run a highly energetic campaign but lose the race to the Unionist candidate by a significant margin.²⁶² For Christabel the message was clear: “By their rejection of [Lansbury] the majority of the electors [have] ordered women to work out their own political salvation.”²⁶³ Just what that work entailed was revealed only a couple of days after the Bow and Bromley defeat, on the evening of 26 November, when WSPU militants in London, Nottingham, Ilkeston, Birmingham, Manchester and Newcastle surreptitiously damaged scores of postal pillar-boxes by pouring black ink, paraffin and “various acids” into them and attempting (unsuccessfully) to set some of them alight.²⁶⁴ Although the nature and scale of the damage made the operation more obnoxious than outrageous, the terms in which *The Suffragette* justified it left no room for doubt as to its intended purpose. “The Suffragists who have been

²⁵⁹ Peter Barberis, John McHugh and Mike Tyldesley, “Cymric Suffrage Union,” in Peter Barberis et al, *Encyclopedia of British and Irish Political Organizations: Parties, Groups and Movements of the 20th Century* (London: Continuum, 2005), 456.

²⁶⁰ Ian Christopher Fletcher, ““Women of the Nations, Unite!”: Transnational Suffragism in the United Kingdom, 1912-1914,” in Ian Christopher Fletcher et al, eds., *Women’s Suffrage in the British Empire: Citizenship, Nation and Race* (London: Routledge, 2012), 103-21.

²⁶¹ Rosen, 165.

²⁶² *Western Times*, 27 November 1912.

²⁶³ *Evening Post* (Wellington, NZ), 16 January 1913.

²⁶⁴ *Times*, 29 November 1912.

burning and otherwise destroying letters,” it proclaimed, “have been doing this for a very plain and simple reason. They want to make the electors and the Government so uncomfortable that, in order to put an end to the nuisance, they will give women the vote.”²⁶⁵

28 January – 30 April 1913, London

Initially, the authorities were inclined to treat the WSPU’s new campaign of coercion as just another episodic flare-up that would eventually run out of steam. When in early December a Special Branch report on a WSPU meeting held at the London Opera House a day earlier reached Troup’s desk at the Home Office, the Permanent Secretary thought, and McKenna agreed, that “[even though] there is plenty of incitement to break the law in the speeches [...] it is no use taking any notice of it.”²⁶⁶ That attitude remained unchanged a week later when a speech at a meeting in Wimbledon urged militants to attend the “political meetings [of] Cabinet Ministers [in order to] find out for yourselves what an easy matter is their destruction,”²⁶⁷ or after Ms. Marie Naylor (one of the WSPU’s “best London speakers”²⁶⁸) declared at a meeting on 20 December that “the Irish [...] blew up Clerkenwell Prison. That is the kind of thing you want to do.”²⁶⁹

Police reports (as well as the occasional anonymous tip-off)²⁷⁰ concerning various WSPU meetings continued to arrive at the Home Office all throughout January 1913 but they were similarly dismissed as containing “nothing much [...] except [...] threat[s] to resume

²⁶⁵ *The Suffragette*, 13 December 1912.

²⁶⁶ Note by Troup, 4 December 1912, TNA HO 45/10695/231366/2.

²⁶⁷ Troup and McKenna agreed that “it would be undesirable to prosecute, even if there were a reasonable prospect of success [as this] would give the remarks [...] which come very near an incitement to murder [...] a wider currency and might lead some half-mad woman to act on them.” Note by Troup, 11 December 1912, TNA HO 45/10695/231366/3.

²⁶⁸ Mary Blathwayt, quoted in Crawford, 442.

²⁶⁹ Report by Detective-Sergeant Thomas McGrath, 20 December 1912, TNA HO 45/10695/231366/6.

²⁷⁰ “Copy of circular from the Women’s Social and Political Union, forwarded anonymously to Scotland Yard in an envelope bearing the Manchester Postmark,” January 1913, TNA HO 45/10695/231366/11.

militancy.”²⁷¹ At the end of the month however things finally came to a boil with a campaign of destruction that went beyond mere mailbox vandalism. Flammable letters, explosives envelopes addressed to government figures, the defacing of golf greens with acid to make them spell out “Votes for Women,” a makeshift catapult used to launch clay pigeons at shopfront windows from the top deck of a London bus, the burning down of an orchid house at Kew and a refreshment kiosk in Regent’s Park, the cutting of telephone and telegraph wires, as well as some old-fashioned window-breaking²⁷² – all were unleashed in a nationwide two-week blitzkrieg at the beginning of February which took both government and public opinion by surprise and served to illustrate the genuineness of the threats uttered a month earlier.

The WSPU’s most triumphant coup to date came, however, on the morning of 18 February when several militants (possibly including Emily Wilding Davison),²⁷³ set off a bomb inside the house Lloyd George was having built in Walton Heath, Surrey, doing significant material damage to the premises. As an anonymous letter from one of the perpetrators (none of whom were ever caught) later explained, the exact day and time had been carefully selected to avoid any threat to life and limb,²⁷⁴ but that did not mean this spectacular strike against the hated Welsh Goat (as the promiscuous Lloyd George was often nicknamed) was not to be gloated over. Speaking in Cardiff the next day, Emmeline Pankhurst compared the emerging “women’s civil war” to the ongoing Mexican Revolution: “In Mexico,” she explained, “all the members of the Ministry except the Prime Minister [have] been arrested and imprisoned. We have not yet [...] got every member of the present Liberal Ministry into prison, but we have blown up the Chancellor of the Exchequer’s house.” Amidst uproarious cheers and chaotic interruptions she

²⁷¹ Minute by H. B. Simpson, 14 January 1913, TNA HO 45/10695/231366/10.

²⁷² *Times*, 31 January and 1 February 1913; Rosen, 189.

²⁷³ Crawford, 161.

²⁷⁴ The Lloyd George Papers (Parliamentary Archives), LG/C/10/2/25.

continued by praising the actions of the previous couple of weeks as “a very successful piece of guerilla warfare,” adding that “we are firmly convinced [...] that this is the only way of creating an intolerable situation” before proclaiming defiantly that “I have advised, I have incited, [and] I have conspired.”²⁷⁵

Although the speech contained nothing previously unheard in “the usual incitements to commit outrages”²⁷⁶ which were by now a constant feature of Mrs. Pankhurst’s public addresses, the image of a high-profile political agitator boasting with impunity of having advised and incited an outrage on a senior member of the cabinet proved too difficult to ignore for the Home Office. On 24 February Emmeline was arrested and charged at the Epsom Police Court under the terms of the Malicious Damages Act of 1861 with incitement to arson and sent to Holloway to await trial (having refused bail). She was released almost immediately after going on hunger strike but the wheels of a new crackdown were already in motion. Writing to the Home Secretary on 2 March, the Postmaster General, Herbert Samuel, pointed out that *The Suffragette*, as the official organ of the Union, was equally guilty of supporting and claiming responsibility for the recent spate of outrages against the Post Office, and wondered “whether the time has not come for the publishers and printers of this paper and for the Union to be prosecuted for illegal conspiracy [sic];” suffragettes might have proved difficult to punish but “the same considerations do not apply to the printers.”²⁷⁷

Samuel’s proposal was forwarded to the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Attorney General the next day but the authorities were in no hurry to bring down the full force of the law on the WSPU just yet. There remained first of all the matter of forced feeding, which tended to

²⁷⁵ *Morning Post*, 20 February 1913.

²⁷⁶ Minute by Troup re police report on WSPU meeting held at Essex Hall, 8 February 1913, TNA HO 45/10695/231366/22.

²⁷⁷ Samuel to McKenna, 1 March 1913, TNA HO 45/10695/231366/31.

make a mockery of the whole penal system and encourage whatever residual sympathy was still felt for the militants in progressive-liberal circles. Secondly, there was the issue of the public meetings held by suffragettes, which, ever since the renewal of militancy, tended to draw the ire of the public, or rather those sections of the public who made it a sport out of “surrounding a little band of about 10 or 11 women, howl[ing] and yell[ing] abuse and threats at them, str[iking] at them, clutch[ing] at them, [and] struggl[ing] to break through the police to get at them with the obvious intention of submitting them to gross personal violence and indignity.”²⁷⁸

The first issue was solved in mid-March with the enacting of the Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill-health) – popularly the Cat and Mouse – Act, which gave the Home Secretary the power to order the temporary release of hunger strikers and their subsequent re-arrest as soon as it was medically safe to do so. Mrs. Pankhurst herself (having been found guilty of incitement to commit felony and given three years’ penal servitude) soon became one of the first militants to be officially released under the terms of the Act on 12 April after staging a week-long hunger strike which left her dangerously emaciated. The second issue was addressed a month later with two measures which sought to severely curtail the WSPU’s ability to organize propaganda events. The first came on 16 April with instructions from the Home Office “that immediate steps should be taken to cut off the telephone communication of the offices of the [WSPU], as that body [...] now openly [advocates the] commission of crime.”²⁷⁹ The second was revealed in a letter from Henry to the WSPU that same day which informed the Union that given the “grave disorder” likely to be elicited by suffragettes meeting in a public place and “in view of the fact that it is the avowed policy of the [WSPU] to advocate the commission of crime, the Secretary of

²⁷⁸ W. H. Stoakley (editor of the *Wimbledon Boro News*) to McKenna re the disturbances occasioned on 2 March 1913 by a suffragette meeting at Wimbledon, 6 March 1913, TNA HO 45/10695/231366/35.

²⁷⁹ Troup to Sir Alexander King (Secretary to the General Post Office), 16 April 1913, TNA HO 45/10700/236973/1.

State [...] has directed me to instruct the Metropolitan Police to take steps as are necessary and within their powers to prevent such meetings being held.”²⁸⁰

With its telephone wires cut and its freedom of assembly all but suspended the only thing keeping the WSPU from being raided was the police’s apparent difficulty in finding “evidence as to who were the persons conducting the affairs of the Union and the printing of *The Suffragette*.”²⁸¹ The militants, in the meantime, appeared to be showing no signs of backing down; on 29 April, whilst using the public lavatory in Piccadilly Tube Station, PC Gasson came across a “brown paper bag filled with saw-dust and a quarter-pound cocoa tin lined with wadding” displaying the legend “Nitro glycerine; dangerous, call a Policeman.” The parcel (containing approximately 1 ½ lbs. of nitroglycerine) was then promptly taken by a Special Branch constable to the still-operational Duck Island facility (now under the supervision of Major Aston Cooper-Key, Chief Inspector of Explosives) and safely disposed of. No one claimed responsibility, but at the Home Office the operating assumption was that this was the work of the WSPU.²⁸²

Whether the incident on the 28th (the first attempted outrage on the London tube in more than fifteen years) provided any extra impetus for the authorities it is not certain, but by the end of April the necessary incriminating evidence against the Union had been “gradually obtained.”²⁸³ On the morning of 30 April a “large force, some in uniform and others in plain clothes,” entered the offices at Lincoln’s Inn under the direction of Superintendent Quinn, arresting six women – including the assistant editors of *The Suffragette* and Flora “the General”

²⁸⁰ Henry to the Acting Secretary of the Women’s Social and Political Union, 16 April 1913, TNA HO 45/10700/236973/2.

²⁸¹ Memo by Troup, 3 May 1913, TNA HO 45/10700/236973/2.

²⁸² “Explosive found in lavatory of Piccadilly Tube Station,” TNA HO 45/10700/236973/36.

²⁸³ Memo by Troup, 3 May 1913, TNA HO 45/10700/236973/2.

Drummond²⁸⁴ – and seizing “a great quantity of books and printed matter, including [...] the Union’s cheque-books and counterfoils.”²⁸⁵ The remainder of the raid proved a largely calm, “everyday affair,”²⁸⁶ consisting only of the taking of names and addresses by half-a-dozen or so “stalwart policemen,”²⁸⁷ but the operation was far from over. The following day, shortly after her return from France, Annie Kenney was arrested along with one of her suspected associates (one Godwin Clayton, who ran a chemist’s shop in Richmond), and hours later, the printer of *The Suffragette*, a man named Sidney Granville Drew, was likewise taken into custody.

The material found at Kenney’s apartment in Mecklenburgh Square proved far more incriminating than anything uncovered at Lincoln’s Inn the day before. It included a letter from Clayton which described his botched attempts at preparing some sort of substance or device which Kenney had requested of him, as well as several pages of suggestions (also by Clayton) for future outrages, including schemes for setting fire to a timber yard and “simultaneously smashing a considerable number of street fire alarms,” a list of “certain smaller Government offices [...] where something might be done,” and a meticulous description of a series of night-time break-ins at the National Health Insurance Commission building.²⁸⁸ All nine arrestees were charged with conspiracy at Bow Street Police Court on 2 May and all, save for the printer and one of the sub-editors of *The Suffragette* (who agreed to cease their involvement with the publication), were denied bail and then “driven away to gaol [...] amid the cheering and booing” of the crowds gathered outside the court gates.²⁸⁹

4 May – 14 July 1913, London

²⁸⁴ Along with Annie Kenney, Drummond was perhaps the WSPU’s most experienced organizer, known for her tireless agitation work as much as for her imposing physique and love of mock-military garb.

²⁸⁵ *Times*, 1 May 1913.

²⁸⁶ *The Suffragette*, 2 May 1913.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁸ *Times*, 3 May 1913.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

The government's new crackdown on the WSPU was not without political repercussions. Despite the militants' continued estrangement from the fold of not only the Labour Party but – thanks to Christabel – of “men's parties and movements” in general,²⁹⁰ the principle of female enfranchisement still enjoyed considerable support within the socialist Left, leading members of which now came together to publicly protest against the perceived unconstitutional measures taken by authorities. Reviving the non-aligned (albeit broadly left-wing) Free Speech Defence Committee, which had been formed around the time of the *Syndicalist* prosecutions to advocate for the prisoners' release, the impenitently pro-suffrage Radical backbencher Josiah Wedgwood, with the help of sympathetic Labour MPs and representatives of various socialist, suffragist and friendly societies from across the metropolis, immediately set to work planning a great demonstration in defence of “public liberty” to be held in Trafalgar Square on 4 May.

The meeting, which drew together nearly ten thousand participants and an audience of anywhere between ten to twenty thousand was an altogether impressive show of force, and, save for sporadic scuffles between pugnacious young men and the more than six hundred police officers present at the scene, a relatively peaceful event.²⁹¹ It made, however, no difference to the Home Secretary, and for the remainder of 1913 the government continued to pursue its line of zero (or near zero) tolerance for “incitement” and enforce the provisions of the Cat and Mouse Act (despite the latter's less than stellar record of putting a dent in the campaign of arson and other types of vandalism).²⁹²

The Suffragette did manage to remain in publication but not due to any degree of leniency on the part of the authorities; as official correspondence from early May reveals, the Home

²⁹⁰ Christabel Pankhurst, quoted in Rosen, 218.

²⁹¹ *Morning Post*, 5 May 1913; Minute by Henry, 19 May 1913, TNA MEPO 2/1556.

²⁹² As Andrew Rosen has shown, “the destruction attributed to suffragettes in May 1913 was more than double that of April, reaching a total of £36,475,” a figure which skyrocketed in June to an impressive £54,000. Rosen, 197-201.

Office was quite prepared to go to considerable lengths to ensure that the militant publication would not be smuggled into the country from abroad (the Netherlands being deemed the likeliest place of export). In a letter to the Treasury dated 8 May Troup explained that, “the Secretary of State would be glad if Their Lordships [the Treasury Commissioners] would instruct the Commissioners of Customs, in the event of any consignments of [*The Suffragette*] reaching [...] any [British] port, to stop the consignment and send two copies to [Scotland Yard].”²⁹³ The Customs Commissioners replied that they “had no legal authority to stop a consignment of [the publication] even if they knew it contained incitement to crime,” prompting the Legal Assistant Under-Secretary Ernley Blackwell to propose the compromise solution which would have allowed Customs to “telephone at once to [Scotland Yard] that a consignment had arrived & the address & send copies of the paper to the Commissioner who would then take what steps he could to prevent circulation.”²⁹⁴ McKenna agreed provisionally to this course of action, but given its doubtful practicability and the difficulties involved in actually carrying it out, he decided in the end that it would be best to simply allow *The Suffragette* to exist legally and return to its old publisher, the Victoria Press, albeit in an anodyne and self-censoring incarnation. For her part, Christabel (who intended to use the publication as a vehicle for her newfound ideas on sexual abstinence)²⁹⁵ found herself forced to accept this compromise after brief trials with other publishers proved unfeasible.²⁹⁶

²⁹³ Home Office to the Treasury, 8 May 1913, TNA HO 45/10700/236973/33.

²⁹⁴ Minutes by Ernley Blackwell and McKenna, 13 May 1913, TNA HO 45/10700/236973/33.

²⁹⁵ In July 1913 Christabel published the first of a series of articles on prostitution and sexuality in which she “combined essentially Victorian beliefs regarding sexuality, morality, and prostitution with a series of allegations of her own concerning the prevalence and pathological consequences of venereal disease.” Rosen, 203.

²⁹⁶ Dangerfield, 204-5.

If the general public's mounting anti-militant feeling²⁹⁷ and the lack of any viable alternative (short of actually granting women the vote) gave the government the impetus to stick to its guns, it nonetheless became increasingly harder to ignore the fact that whatever the strain put on the WSPU as an organization, militancy itself did not appear to be losing much momentum. On 7 May the militants nearly succeeded in pulling off a truly spectacular coup which would have pulverized the Bishop's Throne at St. Paul's along with anything in its immediate vicinity; the "very ingenious" (as Major Cooper-Key observed) timer which would have set off nearly a pound of nitro-glycerine failed unexpectedly however.²⁹⁸ The situation only appeared to be worsening after 3 June, the day when Emily Wilding Davison took her fatal (if likely unintentional) leap in front of the King's horse at the Epsom Derby, giving the WSPU its first real martyr. The arson campaign continued unabated, and by the end of the month some militants (namely the Men's Federation for Women's Suffrage and Sylvia Pankhurst's East End branch of the WSPU)²⁹⁹ felt confident enough to openly defy the authorities by making a show of numbers in Trafalgar Square (as part of a new "free speech" demonstration) and urging the audience to march on Downing Street to "at least let Cabinet Ministers hear our voices."³⁰⁰

²⁹⁷ Despite the fracas which often accompanied the WSPU's London meetings, public hostility was likely even more pronounced (and less discriminating) in the provinces. This was amply illustrated over the summer of 1913 during the so-called "suffrage pilgrimage," a nationwide propaganda tour undertaken by the NUWSS in support of the constitutionalist agenda, during which the suffragettes were frequently subjected to serious violence by hostile crowds (TNA HO 45/10701/236973/134). That this hostility was largely a product of the WSPU's ultra-militant campaign was beyond any doubt to local authorities. Reporting on a constitutionalist meeting in Cirencester, which saw a crowd of several hundred townspeople turn viciously on the handful of suffragettes in attendance, the local superintendent observed that "some two years ago Miss [Ada] Flatman of the Militant Section held several meetings [here] and was accorded a decent hearing, and I had no reason to suppose these people would be treated otherwise." Report by Supt. Edward Selwood, 15 August 1913, TNA HO 45/10700/236973/116.

²⁹⁸ *Morning Post*, 8 May 1913.

²⁹⁹ Constituted in late 1912 in the wake of George Lansbury's electoral defeat, the East End WSPU was from the very start imbued with Sylvia's socialist ethos but despite its genuinely democratic structure (as compared to the mother organisation) and non-sectarian stance (in addition to suffragism, it advocated for a range of popular left-wing causes), it did not shy away from embracing vandalism and arson as necessary to the militant campaign. Under pressure from Christabel, who had by now completely disavowed any association with Labourism, the group seceded from the WSPU in late 1913 and renamed itself the East London Federation of Suffragettes.

³⁰⁰ Sylvia Pankhurst, quoted in Report re Demonstration in Trafalgar Square, 30 June 1913, TNA HO 144/1558/234191/42.

Judging by the decreasing number of arsons, tensions began to ease off in July and August (when many WSPUers also went on vacation),³⁰¹ but despite pronouncements of victory from anti-suffragist quarters – “the militant Suffragette conspiracy no longer exists [...] It has been crushed by the Cat and Mouse Act” trumpeted the *Daily Mail* on 7 July³⁰² – Pankhurst loyalists were far from giving up the fight as illustrated by the events of 14 July, when Annie Kenney, now a fugitive “mouse”, was ambushed by a group of Special Branch men just as she was coming out of a meeting at the London Pavilion. With the help of other suffragettes and her three male “bodyguards,” Kenney managed to cause quite the scene (press reports suggested one policeman was “almost strangled”)³⁰³ before being rushed into a cab by two detectives.³⁰⁴ Ironically, it was precisely Pankhurstism (as defined by the doctrines of Christabel and Emmeline), not the Cat and Mouse Act, that was slowly proving to be the undoing of the WSPU, and by late July the toxic publicity elicited through the arson campaign and Christabel’s increasingly authoritarian and gender-separatist brand of feminism were considerably driving down the rate of new membership.³⁰⁵

1 October 1913 – 15 August 1914: The End of Militancy

Despite the difficulties involved in re-arresting temporarily discharged “mice” (especially high-profile ones like Annie Kenney), the most worrying aspect of the suffragette problem continued to be the ease with which arsonists managed to evade capture altogether. This was in part due to the “leaderless resistance”-type tactics of the arson campaign (which meant attacks were almost always impossible to predict for authorities), but also to the fact that for many militants getaways were made a great deal easier thanks to the WSPU’s sizeable (at the time)

³⁰¹ Rosen, 201-2.

³⁰² *Daily Mail*, 7 July 1913.

³⁰³ *Western Times*, 30 July 1913.

³⁰⁴ *Cornishman*, 17 July 1913.

³⁰⁵ Rosen, 212-3.

collection of automobiles. By contrast, the Metropolitan Police was sorely underequipped in this department,³⁰⁶ as attested by a memo submitted to Commissioner Henry by Basil Thomson, the new Assistant Commissioner, on 1 October 1913. In it, Thomson complained that “the WSPU have two cars [for the London area] which they use both for committing acts of incendiarism and for escaping arrest, and it has been useless to keep observation on the cars because as soon as they are out in the country they travel too fast for any conveyance that Police officers can obtain.” He proposed that two motorcycles should be acquired “for the use of the C. I. Department at a cost of from £50 to £70,” or, failing that, that Sergeant Smith from the Public Carriage Office (who owned his own motorcycle) might be allowed to join the Special Branch on a trial basis for the purpose of aiding in the surveillance of militants on the move.³⁰⁷ Henry agreed to the latter option, but as it soon became obvious, PS Smith’s battered old motorbike was hardly a match for the WSPU’s powerful engines.³⁰⁸

Besides the arson campaign, however, which appeared increasingly inefficient at annoying, never mind terrifying, the British public into submission, militancy had reached an impasse by the end of the year. The only people within the WSPU attempting anything new were in fact Sylvia Pankhurst’s band of East End socialist rebels, and even they were struggling to come up with an original scheme, as attested by a couple of police reports of meetings held in November. The first such report, based on firsthand information supplied by an informer, described a meeting held in the Bow district of East London on the night of 5 November, where speeches were given by all the usual suspects, viz. Sylvia Pankhurst, George Lansbury (who had recently been released from Pentonville under the Cat and Mouse Act – one of the few men to

³⁰⁶ Prior to the formation of its Mobile Patrol Experiment in 1919 (which evolved into the Flying Squad during the 1920s), the Metropolitan Police made little if any use of motorized vehicles in the course of everyday police work.

³⁰⁷ Memos by Basil Thomson, 1 and 13 October 1913, TNA MEPO 2/1566.

³⁰⁸ Report by Supt. Quinn, 6 January 1914, TNA MEPO 2/1566.

undergo the experience), Charles Lapworth (editor of Lansbury's *Daily Herald*), the composer Ethel Smyth, and the Irish socialist Sir Francis Vane (a real *rara avis* within the movement given his aristocratic and military background). The main topic at hand was the formation, under Vane's tutelage, of a "scheme for men and women to form themselves into drilling classes with the idea of protecting themselves against an armed force," the inspiration for which was provided by Carson's paramilitary Ulstermen who, despite their political reactionism, continued to stand out as the only extra-parliamentary political organization at the time to effectively use the threat of political violence against the supremacy of the Liberal government.³⁰⁹

As the second police report shows, the scheme for a "People's Training Corps" was actually approved by the East End WSPU a week later before an assembly of "between 250 and 300 men and women crowded in [the] small," but aptly-named, Ethical Hall in Libra Street, Bow. Despite a few contentious moments elicited by the quasi-patriotic language of the Corps' proposed oath of allegiance (which the internationalists objected to on grounds that they "[had] no country to defend"), support for the idea of "a police force of the people" that could withstand the attacks of the "governmental police" and protect Sylvia Pankhurst (now an "honorary colonel") from future attempts to re-arrest her, seems to have been more or less unanimous amongst the branch members.³¹⁰ Not so within the wider WSPU, where Christabel, now invested with a pontifical degree of infallibility,³¹¹ was adamant that "conflicting views and divided counsels inside the WSPU there cannot be."³¹²

The rupture between loyalists and leftists was formalized in mid-January 1914 after which the latter took on the name of the East London Federation of Suffragettes. Although the

³⁰⁹ Report by Detective-Sergeant John Bannon, 6 November 1913, TNA HO 45/10701/236973/139.

³¹⁰ "Report of proceedings at a meeting of Bow Branch of WSPU," 13 November 1913, TNA HO 45/10701/236973/140.

³¹¹ Rosen, 208, 221.

³¹² Christabel Pankhurst to Sylvia Pankhurst, 27 November 1913, quoted in Rosen, 219.

ELFS had always represented a minority view within the WSPU, the significance of this new split was amplified considerably less than a month later when the Pethick-Lawrences joined forces with some of Sylvia's socialists as well as the remaining moderates who had either been expelled from, or were still nominally attached to, Christabel's faction (which included Louisa Garrett Anderson, Evelyn Sharp, Henry Nevinson and others)³¹³ to form the United Suffragettes, an integrated umbrella (though left-leaning) group open to militants and constitutionalists alike.

The split may have accelerated the isolation and decline that the WSPU seemed destined not to recover from – in mid-January 1914, Beatrice Harraden, a disgruntled old guarder, wrote to Christabel that “never a week passes but that some one [sic] has been slighted, rebuffed, or dismissed” and that “the WSPU now has no speakers to rouse and educate the country”³¹⁴ – but it did not appear to put much of a damper on the eagerness of would-be arsonists; many of them were in fact now committed to upping the ante by experimenting with explosives and targeting increasingly significant edifices. On 1 March a bomb hidden underneath a pew went off inside St. John's Church in Westminster damaging a portion of the ceiling and some of the stained glass panels; the message, written on a half-charred piece of cardboard police found at the scene, urged “Mr. McKenna in particular and [...] every man in general [to] stop torturing women and give them their freedom.”³¹⁵ Following official WSPU policy, the bomb (a steel canister which had been filled with gunpowder and ignited by means of a candle) had been set off a good twenty minutes or so after the end of Evening Prayer, in order to preclude any threat to life and limb;

³¹³ Other members on the United Suffragettes committee were Lena Ashwell, George Lansbury, Laurence Housman, Gerald Gould and his wife Barbara, John Scurr, Mrs. Fred Whelan, J. Gillespie, Mrs. Ayrton Gould, Agnes Harben, Charles Grey, Mrs. Bernard Shaw (who served as vice-president), Mrs. B. A. Thomas, Mrs. Arncliffe Sennet, and Mr. and Mrs. Israel Zangwill.

³¹⁴ June Purvis, *Emmeline Pankhurst: A Biography* (London: Routledge, 2004), 250.

³¹⁵ Report by Major H. Coningham (Inspector of Explosives) re explosion at the Church of St. John the Evangelist, 2 March 1914, TNA EF 5/10.

such “restraint” did nothing, however, to assuage the public’s hostility and the government’s growing impatience.

After a spree of retaliatory attacks (most notably the infamous slashing of the Rokeby Venus at the National Gallery) following the re-arrest of Emmeline Pankhurst in Glasgow on 9 March and a series of equally troublesome incidents in April (which included the firebombing of two churches³¹⁶ and a counter-demonstration in Hyde Park to protest the Unionists’ “British Covenant” rally),³¹⁷ the Home Office decided to once again step up the pressure on the embattled WSPU. The first of a series of repressive measures was taken in late April and aimed at hampering (if not altogether banning) the publication of *The Suffragette*, which, despite its toned-down editorials, continued to publish reports on militant activity in terms which left little doubt as to its allegiance. Citing a litany of “actionable passages” from the publication compiled by the Special Branch at the request of Assistant Commissioner Thomson, McKenna advised the Director of Public Prosecutions to “take criminal proceedings against the printers and publishers of the paper,”³¹⁸ and on 13 May Stanley Drew, the owner of the Victoria House Printing Company, was back in court on charges of “soliciting, inciting, and endeavouring to persuade divers women, members of the [WSPU] and others to commit malicious damage to property.”³¹⁹

The Suffragette managed to go on all the same, and only eight days after Drew’s trial some of the original impulse of militancy seemed to have been momentarily recaptured thanks to the two-hundred-strong deputation sent to Buckingham Palace to “interview the King,” which, though it predictably degenerated in “several fierce scuffles” with the overwhelming body of

³¹⁶ *Daily Telegraph*, 3 and 6 April 1914.

³¹⁷ Far from being a comment on Unionism itself, the abortive demonstration held in Hyde Park on 4 April was meant to, first of all, punish Carson for his recent slighting of the suffragist agenda, and secondly, to showcase the double standard involved in allowing paramilitary Ulstermen to hold an open meeting in defiance of the government while denying militant women the same right in the name of public safety.

³¹⁸ “Actionable Passages in *The Suffragette*,” 23 April 1914, TNA HO 45/10701/236973/160.

³¹⁹ *Standard*, 14 May 1914.

fifteen hundred or so requisitioned policemen,³²⁰ seemed at least to suggest the possibility of an eventual rapprochement with the body politic. Just as the protest was about to unfold, however, a group of Special Branch detectives was finishing up raiding an apartment in Maida Vale, on the other side of Hyde Park, that was known to police as a WSPU safe house; five women were arrested on charges of conspiracy and taken in along with a revealing body of evidence which included plans for future arsons, “a large quantity of stones [...] a type-written sheet of paper referring to an ‘improved shrapnel grenade’ [and] a considerable number of lengths of [...] fuse [...]”³²¹ Two days later, Lincoln’s Inn was also raided (and “taken possession of”), producing a collection of similar artefacts (including a list of subscribers to the Union’s funds) and driving up the number of arrests to six.³²² The WSPU headquarters were hastily resettled to an office in Tothill Street (ironically located only a couple of blocks away from New Scotland Yard), but on 9 June (with Lincoln’s Inn still under police control) that venue too was summarily searched and stripped of any official documents and correspondence (although no arrests were made).³²³

Far from marking a return to (relatively) civil disobedience, the 21 May demonstration had in fact been the swan song of aboveground militancy, and despite the aggressiveness of the new crackdown, the authorities remained at a loss regarding the possibility of a cohesive strategy for quelling underground militancy once and for all. Writing to the Home Office on 10 June to report on the continued police presence at Lincoln’s Inn, Commissioner Henry asked – convinced that there was now “little hope of introducing legislative measures to strengthen our hands or cripple theirs” – that all telephonic communication be once again discontinued for all WSPU offices as a way to “hamper [the militants] a good deal & [show them] that the Govt.

³²⁰ *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 22 May 1914.

³²¹ *Times*, 27 May 1914; *Morning Post*, 3 June 1914.

³²² *Times*, 25 May 1914.

³²³ *Times*, 10 June 1914.

means to thrash them as far as it can.”³²⁴ Ernley Blackwell, the Legal Under-Secretary, replied that although “deprivation of telephones would of course inconvenience [the militants] [...] the actual work of organizing outrage is done from semi-private [phone-equipped] premises,” and, seeing the WSPU’s incoming correspondence was already being routinely seized, “it would strengthen [the militants’] hands” if the Home Secretary were to be seen to continue clamping down on basic freedoms by means of special warrants.³²⁵

McKenna deferred to Blackwell’s cautionary advice and declined to ask the Postmaster General to have the phone line at Lincoln’s Inn cut off, but there is every indication to suggest that he shared Henry’s vindictive frustration with the suffragettes. A day after receiving Henry’s memo, the Home Secretary declared in the House of Commons that militancy was “a phenomenon absolutely without precedent in our history,”³²⁶ and threatened to begin proceedings against all known WSPU subscribers in order to hold them accountable for the damage done by militants. Proceedings were never begun but the raids continued all throughout June, alongside a new spate of arson attacks on churches (including Westminster Abbey)³²⁷ and picture slashings.³²⁸ By late July, however, it was clear that the WSPU’s “harried rump”³²⁹ was drifting ever more into obscurity – on 23 June McKenna had warned “owners [...] of [public] halls of the [nefarious] consequences to themselves” should they choose to let to suffragettes³³⁰ – and struggling to keep *The Suffragette*, its last lifeline to the wider world, in circulation.

³²⁴ Henry to the Home Office, 10 June 1914, TNA HO 144/1318/252288/2.

³²⁵ Memo by Ernley Blackwell, 11 June 1914, TNA HO 144/1318/252288/2. G. B. Shaw gave voice to the sentiment of many suffragists (pro and anti-militancy) by quipping that “the Suffragettes have succeeded in driving the Cabinet half mad [...] Mr. McKenna [...] apparently believes himself to be the Tsar of Russia, a very common form of delusion.” Quoted in Dangerfield, 205.

³²⁶ McKenna, quoted in Jane Marcus, *Suffrage and the Pankhursts* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 315.

³²⁷ *Daily Telegraph*, 12, 13 and 16 June 1914.

³²⁸ *Times*, 4 June 1914.

³²⁹ Rosen, 242.

³³⁰ McKenna, quoted in Rosen, 237.

The wider world, however, was not arguably much on the minds of the WSPU's remaining leadership at this stage as attested by the cover of *The Suffragette's* final, 7 August issue which featured an impressionistic pencil sketch of a stylized battle scene with the legend "Worse than Women's Militancy." The only way in which traditional Pankhurstites conceived of the looming European cataclysm at this stage was either as a potential competitor for the government's attention, on par with James Larkin's strikers and Carson's militiamen, or as "God's vengeance" on the men who had "held women in subjection."³³¹ The government on the other hand was all too aware of the gravity of the situation and eager to minimize all distractions on the home front. The same day *The Suffragette's* "war issue" came out McKenna announced that imprisoned suffragettes who would "undertake not to commit any further crimes or outrages" would have their sentences remitted; three days later that offer was extended unconditionally to all jailed militants.³³² It was a gamble given the fate of the previous truce, but Christabel, her mother, and their remaining acolytes, now swept up in the general wave of jingoistic-martial fervour, dutifully accepted the olive branch and offered to suspend indefinitely what was left of the militant campaign. On 10 August Mrs. Pankhurst, not a month out of Holloway, declared emphatically, "What is the use of fighting for a vote if we have no country to vote in? With that patriotism which has nerved women to endure torture in prison for the national good, we ardently desire that our country shall be victorious."³³³

Conclusion

The first decade of the twentieth century may not have brought about a dramatic overhaul of the British political police, but it did mark the beginning of a period of rapid and transformative changes. The first, and perhaps most obvious, change was that unlike the two

³³¹ Christabel Pankhurst, quoted in Rosen, 247.

³³² Rosen, 247.

³³³ Emmeline Pankhurst, quoted in Raeburn, 238.

decades which preceded it, this period was not defined by one (perceived) cohesive strand of political extremism but rather by a series of disparate groups, each with its own potential (and justification) for organized, ideologically motivated violence.

Although British authorities continued to regard anarchism as a genuine political menace following the inconclusive Rome Conference of 1898, by the mid 1900s it no longer registered as the civilizational threat it had been during Lord Salisbury's third premiership, and by the end of the Edwardian period it had in fact been subsumed into the wider issues of immigration and racial identity as demonstrated by the Tottenham and Sidney Street incidents. By contrast, the rise of a new homegrown radicalism in the form of militant suffragism and a reenergized trade union movement, as well as of new forms of anti-colonial subversion, most notably Hindu nationalism, became more pronounced in the final year of King Edward VII's reign, challenging the established prejudices and practices of Scotland Yard officers and Home Office bureaucrats alike.

To what extent that challenge was successfully met remains debatable. On the surface the political police, viz. that opaque and often ad hoc structure which stretched out from the Home Office all the way down to the most junior detective-constable, changed very little. Strategies for containing politically motivated violence continued to remain a matter for the discretion of the Home Secretary and the Chief Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, and as several incidents from the half-decade before the First World War demonstrate, decisions made exclusively at the top could prove at best controversial (such as in the case of the Tonypandy and Black Friday riots) and at worst counter-productive (e.g. the much-spectacularized forced feeding of suffragettes). The Special Branch also largely continued operating along the lines set out during the early nineties by Melville and Anderson, relying on information gleaned from firsthand

observation, paid informants (where available), and the occasional tip-off by members of the general public. The fact that its chief superintendent for the period in question was Patrick Quinn, a man who along with Melville had been one of the original operatives of the Irish Branch back in 1883, further cemented that continuity with the past.

Beneath that unchanging facade however two distinct transformative trends can be distinguished. The first is the increasing acceptance after 1900 (by the political establishment as well as the public at large) of the legitimacy and usefulness of a British political police (embodied in the popular discourse by the Special Branch of the CID). This was in part the result of a developing mythology centered on the figure of the dutiful and patriotic “secret agent” (which the swashbuckling Melville had helped create at the height of his fame), but more significantly, it reflected the shift from the relative political stability of the Belle Époque to the chronic instability of the twentieth century. In a mental landscape “very like revolution,”³³⁴ where conniving Germans seemed capable of reaching British shores, where Jewish and Indian “anarchists” could rob and murder unsuspecting British subjects, where socialist trade unionists could bring a whole industry to a standstill, and where “hysterical” women could go about setting fire to private residences and churches with impunity, a detective force devoted to subverting the subverters was more than a tolerable embarrassment – it was an absolute necessity.

The other transformation came with the changing relationship between the Home Office and the Scotland Yard. On the Home Office side, it is important to note the increasingly active role played by the Home Secretary as well as some of his under-secretaries in matters of counter-subversion. That Asquith, during his tenure as Home Secretary, had once had to learn of the existence of an anarchist plot to blow up the London Stock Exchange from reading the

³³⁴ Basil Thomson, *My Experiences at Scotland Yard* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1923), 298.

newspaper would have seemed entirely unconscionable in 1914. Starting with Herbert Gladstone, and his strong-willed Permanent Under-Secretary C. E. Troup, the Home Office began to increasingly take the business of political policing in hand, a trend which arguably culminated under Winston Churchill who brought his famous penchant for brashness and derring-do to the job of defending the realm. Whitehall's new assertiveness did not, however, lead to a completely one-sided relationship thanks to Commissioner E. R. Henry's progressive zeal (his political conservatism notwithstanding) and strong leadership. Owing to his insistence on necessary reforms (which the Home Office rarely wished to find ways of paying for), the Scotland Yard (including of course the Special Branch) was significantly restructured and expanded by 1912, and despite continued shortfalls (such as the lack of a motorized police division before the War), it was under Henry that "the technological age came to the police with a vengeance."³³⁵

³³⁵ Martin Fido and Keith Skinner, "Henry, Sir Edward, BT, GCVO, KCB, CSI (1850-1931," in Fido et al, *The Official Encyclopedia of Scotland Yard* (London: Virgin Books, 1999), 117-19.

CONCLUSION

In the main introduction I set out to outline the arguments I would be pursuing throughout this thesis; in what follows I will proceed to re-evaluate them in light of the evidence presented over the preceding pages and address any outstanding questions.

1. Extra-legality

Although Robert Anderson wrote his “straining the law” memo in 1898, extra-legality was already a long-established feature of British political policing by then as several official documents attest. Thus, as early as 1881, following an unwarranted police raid on Johann Most's printing shop following the latter's arrest for incitement to murder, the Director of Public Prosecutions, A. K. Stephenson observed in a memo to the Home Office how “the police often necessarily in the proper discharge of their duties commit acts which are said to be illegal, inasmuch as there may be no statutable authority for such acts.”¹

Extra-legal practices continued throughout the 1880s, becoming firmly established during Edward Jenkinson's tenure as (unofficial) chief spymaster at the Home Office. While there, Jenkinson took charge of an intricate network of informers stretching on both sides of the Atlantic and used it towards subverting the activities of the Clan-na-Gael and other American Fenian organizations. On several occasions, as we have seen, this more than likely involved the use of agent provocateurs (such as Red Jim McDermott or Daniel O'Neill), arguably without the knowledge of the Home Secretary and Scotland Yard leadership but with the full cooperation of RIC and provincial police chiefs (the cooperation of Chief Constable Joseph Farndale in the operation that led to the arrests of Daly and Egan being a case in point). The rivalries generated

¹ Memo by A. K. Stephenson, 1 April 1881, TNA HO 144/77/A3385.

within the political police hierarchy partly by Jenkinson's style and personality led to the latter's downfall and the abandonment of his particular model of policing subversion, but not to the abandonment of extra-legality. As the events surrounding the Jubilee Plot of 1887 and the Bloody Sunday riot of the same year show, the willingness of Jenkinson's former rivals to act in an extra-legal manner – whether by colluding with Fenian conspirators in order to avoid the public airing of “most embarrassing” information or by unilaterally curtailing rights of assembly and free speech – was beyond doubt. Such methods were also arguably at play in less extraordinary cases as attested by Charles Warren's admission in late 1888 that “we have in times past done something [i.e. illegal house searches] on a very small scale but then we had certain information that a person was concealed in a house.”²

Despite the disappearance of Fenian terrorism as a credible threat to the mainland British state during the 1890s (notwithstanding the incongruous 1896 dynamite conspiracy), the decade saw the continued dominance of extra-legality in political policing thanks to the rising fortunes of Chief Inspector William Melville – superintendent of the Special Branch until his “retirement” in 1904. The network of informers and double agents that had once been the preserve of British counter-Fenianism was at least partly recreated under Melville's leadership, this time with the purpose of combating anarchist terrorism. The circumstances surrounding the 1892 case of the Walsall anarchists suggest that the old method of employing double agents and (possible) agents provocateurs in order to discourage and deter future conspirators as well as to cement the legitimacy of the political police remained in use to some extent, though less so than during the previous decade. This reflects the reduced threat that anarchism posed to national security during these years, and, more specifically, the evolution of British political policing away from a

² Warren to Ruggles-Brise, 4 October 1888, TNA MEPO 1/48.

proactive, interventionist approach to a more reactive one based on surveillance and intelligence-gathering.

Notwithstanding this change, the use of such extra-legal tactics as unwarranted raids and house searches, the aggressive clamping down on innocuous organizations (such as the Legitimation League) merely on suspicion of somehow being connected to anarchism, and collusion with agents of foreign governments were routinely used by Melville and the political police apparatus. Compared to the 1880s, however, the official record is overall scarce for this period, and with the exception of a few confidential reports on the movements of anarchists and a short, deliberately evasive autobiography, there is no known body of writings attributable to Melville. Ironically, more survives of Jenkinson's archival record even though the spymaster is said to have burned the bulk of his official papers shortly before leaving office. This is not surprising given that Jenkinson, who was often accused by his detractors of unaccountability, was nonetheless often in communication with his superiors; Melville, on the other hand, proved highly adept at keeping his bosses out of the loop as much as possible and, as we have seen, actively colluded with foreign police operatives like Pyotr Rachkovsky. The Burtsev case of 1897 is of course singular only to the extent that evidence of other similar cases has yet to surface in the historical record, but the disarming casualness and chumminess which characterized the correspondence between the head of the Special Branch and that of the Parisian Okhrana points to the likelihood that their (extra-legal) cooperation in this matter was not a one-off.

We should not, however, deduce from this and other similar developments (such as the occasional shadowing of European exiles by the Special Branch for the benefit of foreign governments) that the British political police was actually "a cell in a Europe-wide counter-

subversive [network].”³ Extra-legality may have been used at times (at a personal as well as an institutional level) to aid the counter-subversive efforts of continental police agencies but only to a very limited and self-interested (from the British perspective) extent. Equally important is to note that the means of “straining the law” did not remain unchanged after Melville's retirement. During the Edwardian years extra-legality was further defined by an increased centralization of power away from Scotland Yard and into the Home Office bureaucracy. Suffragette militancy was largely contained by extra-legal methods devised (or at least encouraged) by the Home Secretary and his aides. They included the violent break-up and then subsequent banning of pro-suffrage demonstrations, the confiscation of personal property (mostly during unannounced raids on the WSPU's headquarters), censorship of the press (such as the suppression of *The Suffragette* or of the *Daily Mirror's* “Black Friday” issue), the threatened prosecution of all militant suffragettes for encouraging terrorism, and the general clamping down on basic freedoms by means of special warrants.⁴ Similar methods were then used against the syndicalist and socialist agitation of 1910-12, in a manner that not only speaks to the changing nature of the threat (which certainly exceeded the anarchism of the 1890s in importance) but also to the increased centrality of the Home Office in the decision-making process. This is aptly illustrated by the interventionist approach which then Home Secretary Winston Churchill took in response to the labour unrest in the Rhondda valleys – an approach that included the deployment of several hundred troops and special constables and the covert use of intelligence-gathering.

2. The Importance of Individual Factors

The history of the early British political police is one dominated (for the most part) by strong and remarkable personalities which were often at odds with one another. This is an

³ Porter, *The Origins of the Vigilant State*, 144.

⁴ Memo by Ernley Blackwell, 11 June 1914, TNA HO 144/1318/252288/2.

important point to stress if we are to understand precisely why political policing took the shape it did when it did. We can concede, *pace* Porter, that the birth of political police institutions in Britain was to a certain degree the result of the importation of “Irish methods,” but not without underlining the idiosyncratic manner in which those methods were understood and applied by successive Home Secretaries and police officials. We have seen, for example, how Sir William Harcourt built up the first major political police institution in Britain (Section B of the CID) out of an inchoate “spider's web of police communication” before (unofficially) turning over the entire political police system to Edward Jenkinson, only to finally turn against intelligence-based policing altogether. The consequences of this change of heart were of course momentous but it is equally important to seek to explain why it occurred, and part of the reason is certainly Harcourt's unstable, often choleric, personality.

We have seen how Jenkinson's problematic (yet prescient) vision of a national, quasi-centralized, intelligence-gathering force of “men of tried capacity and judgment, who would deal with all local details”⁵ ultimately brought him into conflict with conservative members of the Scotland Yard leadership (even as the latter did not shy away from using Jenkinsonian methods themselves). Jenkinson's defeat in that conflict had drastic consequences for the course of political policing in Britain, and for that reason we have to consider the reasons why it happened. Partly it had to do with the fact that Jenkinson was a Home Rule Liberal with a pragmatic, if “politically incorrect” view of policing Fenianism, but equally important were Jenkinson's personal insecurities (exacerbated by his unofficial and unstable position in Whitehall) and his often abrasive manner towards his colleagues.

We have also seen how William Melville single-handedly created a new network of informers, double agents and even, arguably, agents provocateurs – a network which, as Special

⁵ Memo by Edward Jenkinson 4 January 1883, TNA HO 144/72/A19.

Branch Sergeant Patrick McIntyre would later recall in his memoirs, the Chief Inspector effectively “owned.” The key to understanding the manner in which this network functioned and the ends to which it was used is to keep in mind the Machiavellian-conservative worldview which made Melville see all forms of political subversion (violent or not) as something to be quashed by any means necessary (even those which required going behind his superiors' backs). The fact that the Special Branch superintendent was universally detested and feared by all adherents of revolutionary creeds (something reflected in their nickname for him - *le vil Melville*) may not surprise us, but it attests to his uniquely and ruthlessly crafty personality, and it is beyond any doubt that no other member of the British political police achieved the same level of public notoriety during the period discussed here.

Finally, we have seen how General Nevil Macready chose to deal with striking workers in South Wales in a manner that arguably exceeded his mandate (which certainly did not authorize him to declare martial law in any part of the country) but which ultimately succeeded in defusing an intensely treacherous situation. Macready, as the historical record reveals, was, unlike the Chief Constable of the Mid Glamorgan region, in some sympathy with the strikers and, generally speaking, a man of militaristic credentials but liberal impulses (despite his later controversial actions in civil-war-torn Ireland). Conversely, Home Secretary Churchill was a man of Liberal credentials but frequently of militaristic impulses – something which was reflected not only in his approach to the labour unrest in Wales, Liverpool and other parts of the UK, but also in his approach to suffragette militancy and his involvement in the notorious “battle” of Sidney Street.

Perhaps more important, however, than the weight of individual conviction and prejudice is that of interactions between specific historical actors as evidenced by the intense institutional

rivalries which brought about the fall of Jenkinson, Monro and Warren in the late 1880s; the failures of intelligence of the 1890s (particularly in the case of the 1894 Greenwich outrage and the 1896 dynamite conspiracy) which revealed the still-dysfunctional channels connecting the institutional political police (viz. the Special Branch of the CID) to the government; and the authorities' convoluted and often contradictory strategy for dealing with Edwardian radicalism (particularly militant suffragism and syndicalist-inspired agitation).

3. The Structure of the Political Police

In contrast to some of the theories discussed in the introduction, the evolution of early political policing in Britain did not exactly follow a teleological arc from less (“liberal”) to more (“illiberal”). In the 1880s the political police hierarchy saw a great deal of concentration of power in the hands of a few Home Office officials and police chiefs, and, as a consequence, a high degree of endemic infighting. In the 1890s the balance was tipped significantly in favour of the police and the power was concentrated, to a very significant extent, in the head of the Special Branch. A reaction then followed in the 1900s which saw the centralization of power back into the office of the Home Secretary and a handful of his under-secretaries. To illustrate this transition we only need recall that if in 1894 Home Secretary Asquith had to get his intelligence on London anarchism from the newspapers, a decade and a half later the strategy for dealing with WSPU militants was being prepared by Home Secretary Herbert Gladstone and his Permanent Under-Secretary, Charles Troup.

This is a highly significant point to make as it suggests that the strategy for dealing with political challenges to the state was never continuously devised and planned by the same group of people for the same set of reasons. Some of those reasons, as we have seen, were essentially modernizing in nature (e.g. the setting up of Sections B and D and of permanent patrols of

special constables), some were politically motivated (e.g. the use of the political police during the Special Commission on Parnellism and crime), while some were purely reactive and short-term (as illustrated by the tactics deployed against anarchist and militant suffragist agitation).

4. Popular and Official Perceptions of Political Policing

Was the political police in Britain an anti-liberal conspiracy at odds with the political class and the public alike? The answer emerging out of the present research has to be a decisive but qualified no. In explaining why that is, we must begin by unpacking the question in order to scrutinize each of its components. First, there is the matter of liberalism and the theory that before the First World War “liberal Britain [had come] to be policed more and more by men coming from outside the main liberal tradition.”⁶ If we take “the main liberal tradition” to mean the doctrines promulgated by the Victorian Liberal Party, then that claim becomes somewhat untenable. Sir William Harcourt was not only a mainstream Liberal; his ideological trajectory – from advocating Coercion in Ireland to supporting Home Rule – poignantly reflects the dramatic transformation undergone by his party over the course of the 1880s and highlights the fact that there was never just one liberalism at play in “liberal Britain.” Howard Vincent, the first and last Director of Scotland Yard and de facto head of Harcourt's early political police bureau, also started out as a Liberal despite ending his political career as a hardline Tory MP. Jenkinson was of course an unabashed Liberal whatever criticisms there are to be made regarding the ethicality of his policing methods, while Charles Warren, despite being caricatured as the embodiment of militaristic excess later in his policing career, remained devoted to Gladstone's party throughout his life (having at one point unsuccessfully run for Parliament on a Radical ticket).

Equally committed to liberal principles were Godfrey Lushington, who played a visible role in the workings of the political police throughout the 1880s and early 90s (serving also as a

⁶ Porter, 96.

British delegate at the 1898 anti-anarchist Conference in Rome), Charles Troup (a member of the Cobden Club⁷) and the succession of Liberal Home Secretaries (Gladstone, Churchill, McKenna) who played an active role in the suppression of organized radicalism during the Edwardian years.

Conservatives were also represented within the political police apparatus with the example of Lord Salisbury, who took an active interest in cases of a political nature throughout his years as Prime Minister, serving as an apt illustration. On the institutional police side in particular the impact of conservative ideas is perhaps at its most visible; individuals such as James Monro and Robert Anderson stand out as adepts of an uncomplicated, mainstream conservatism, followed, further down the hierarchy, by the likes of William Melville and those Special Branch detectives (such as John Sweeney or Herbert Fitch) whose sensationalized memoirs attest to their right-wing convictions. It is equally true, however, that not all Special Branch officers were dyed-in-the-wool Tories (the striking example of Patrick McIntyre attests to this) and that out of the aforementioned individuals only Anderson and Melville had any lasting influence on the structure and methodology of the political police in Britain. The point, therefore, is that if some of the men tasked with policing the politics of “liberal Britain” were unattached to the country's liberal tradition, most of the men who gave shape and direction to the political police overwhelmingly were.

The next issue that needs clarification is the extent to which political policing met with opposition from the political class in Westminster. Here it must be observed that if the political police was mentioned at all in parliamentary debates or political speeches it was usually as the focus of controversy and with the implication that it was being misused by the sitting government. Such criticism, however, was usually far from heartfelt. The case of Lord Salisbury – who was both a critic of expanded police powers and a keen overseer of the political police –

⁷ Anthony Howe, *Free Trade and Liberal England, 1846-1946* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 123.

has already been mentioned. An even more telling case is provided by the aftermath of the 1889-90 Special Commission on Parnellism and crime which brought the conduct of the Conservative government, particularly its use of the political police in supplying evidence for the case against Parnell, under strong attack from Liberal and Irish Nationalist benches with the charge being led, somewhat ironically, by Sir William Harcourt.

While serving as “head detective” the former Home Secretary had tacitly approved of Robert Anderson’s role as handler to Henri Le Caron, the government's highest-ranking spy within the Fenian camp at the time, and of the use of paid informers in the course of securing convictions against Fenian agents. In the wake of the Special Commission, however, the now pro-Home Rule Harcourt was keen to criticize Anderson for jealously guarding the information supplied by Le Caron and for turning the notorious double agent over to *The Times* to serve as an anti-Parnell witness.

Outside such opportunistic criticism there is little evidence of any principled and sustained opposition to political policing within the Whitehall establishment (i.e. the mainstream of the Liberal and Conservative parties) over the period considered here, and we can rightfully conclude, as Constance Bantman does, that “English reluctance towards political policing was by [1900] largely rhetorical.”⁸ As we have seen, the Home Secretary could easily instruct the head of Scotland Yard not to interfere with native socialist groups (presumably out of “liberal” correctness) only to then grant permission to the Special Branch to monitor and infiltrate such groups when it was deemed necessary (as the 1887 case of the SDF activist Alfred Oldland illustrates).

Equally slight is the evidence for public criticism of the political police. The nature of the historical record does not allow us to establish to what extent the policing of organised

⁸ Constance Bantman, *The French Anarchists in London, 1880-1914*, 129.

radicalism was the stuff of most Britons' daily conversations, correspondence or diary-keeping although, as at least one letter received by the Home Secretary in the 1880s seems to suggest, ordinary workingmen (even those of Liberal sensibilities) were in favour of a highly punitive strategy for dealing with Fenian terrorism.⁹ If, however, we take the national press as roughly representative of the opinions of the British public, we can get a relatively clear picture of the latter's perceptions of the political police.

One striking feature which emerges out of this research is that despite the authorities' studious reluctance to generate any public discussion of political policing, the British public as a whole would have been perfectly aware of the existence of a national political police. As early as 1884, in fact, Liberal newspapers could report matter-of-factly, and approvingly, on the appointment of Edward Jenkinson "as a sort of Minister of Police"¹⁰ and praise his work at the head of "the new detective army, the necessity for which has been made painfully evident by recent crimes."¹¹ Conservative papers too, while naturally suspicious of any Liberal schemes to reform policing, unanimously applauded the successes scored by British authorities against Fenian terrorists even in cases that were shrouded in controversy (as was, for example, the arrest of John Daly and Patrick Egan).

The relationship between media and police authorities during this period (a topic that would certainly merit its own monograph) was clearly far from uncomplicated and manipulation of the former by the latter was, as we have seen, not uncommon. The Scotland Yard and Home Office leadership used controlled leaks to the press during the early and mid-1880s in their battle with Jenkinson, and James Monro used the same technique in 1887 in order to defuse the politically explosive aspects of the Jubilee Plot controversy. In the 1890s William Melville also

⁹ J. H. Codger (a "Liberal and workingman") to William Harcourt, 16 March 1883, TNA HO 144/114/A25908.

¹⁰ *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 23 March 1884.

¹¹ *Glasgow Herald*, 14 April 1884.

became highly adept at using the media's thirst for sensationalized news in order to cement his public reputation (as illustrated by his 1894 arrest of a French anarchist – performed in dramatic fashion and in full view of a host of assembled journalists), prompting even Home Office bureaucrats like Assistant Under-Secretary Charles Murdoch to note that “it is curious that so much information should get out [...] from what would appear to have been communicated by the Police.”¹²

There was, naturally, criticism of the political police in the newspapers but it was almost always on grounds of not going far enough in clamping down on organized subversion and for “knowing very little”¹³ about the enemies of the British state (a case in point being provided by the many editorials criticizing the government and the Scotland Yard in the wake of the 1894 Greenwich outrage). Exceptions to this rule were to be found mostly in the “radical” press (whether Irish nationalist, anarchist or suffragist) and occasionally in the mainstream Liberal press (e.g. the *Pall Mall Gazette's* highly partisan coverage of the 1887 Trafalgar Square riots). They do not, however, warrant the conclusion that ideological criticism of the political police was a major feature of public discourse during the three decades preceding the First World War, and they warrant even less the notion that over the same period there was a “widespread feeling in Britain [...] of positive *pride* [sic] in [British] detectives’ lack of prowess.”¹⁴

Describing the police precautions put in place for the Queen's 1897 Diamond Jubilee celebrations, the *Daily Mail* noted how “the route of the [Jubilee] procession [had] been laboriously examined by officers of the special branch of Scotland-yard, acting under the direction of Chief Detective-inspector Melville,” while *Reynolds's Newspaper* observed how “Mr. Anderson’s Political Police Agency” was keeping a close watch on the “[anarchist] clubs in

¹² Note by Charles Murdoch, April 1894, TNA HO 144/259/A55860/1.

¹³ *Times*, 20 February 1894.

¹⁴ Porter, 63.

Soho and Fitzroy-square.”¹⁵ The difference in tone is of course obvious and explainable by the fact that the *Daily Mail* and *Reynolds's* represented completely opposite ends of the political spectrum (right-wing imperialism and republican Radicalism respectively); nevertheless it is equally obvious that neither paper saw fit to explain to its readers the meaning of a British “special branch” or “political police agency,” or to comment on the legitimacy of such organisations. By the late 1900s newspapers already treated the political police (as embodied by the Special Branch) as a regular and somewhat banal feature of the British state whose existence was certainly very far from being an illiberal unmentionable.

Aside from the clues provided by contemporary press accounts there is another important (if somewhat meagre) source of evidence on the British public's perception of political policing and that is in the number of people who actually played a constructive role in police investigations. If the “private informer” was central to the British model of political policing (as a 1904 Home Office memorandum argued¹⁶), then the anonymous (or not so anonymous) tip-off was at least as important. Indeed it can be rightfully argued that some of the highest-profile cases of political conspiracy that occurred over the period considered here only came about as the result of intelligence obtained not through detection or shadowing but through the serendipitous contributions of concerned citizens. The arrest of the Glasgow dynamitards and of the Gallagher gang in 1883; the arrest of Cunningham and Burton in 1885; the 1892 investigation into a possible anarchist plot to launch attacks in London, Paris and Berlin; the conviction of Francis Polti in 1894; the arrest of George Bedborough for obscene libel in 1898; the first Scotland Yard investigation into the activities of WSPU militants in 1907; and the 1909 investigation into a

¹⁵ *Daily Mail*, 21 June 1897; *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 13 June 1897.

¹⁶ “Memorandum as to the Protocol of 1904 respecting Anarchist Crimes,” p. 3, TNA HO 144/757/118516/15.

possible suffragist plot to assassinate the Prime Minister – in all of these the information provided by ordinary Britons played either a primary or at least significant part.

5. The Efficiency of the British Model and Britain's Relationship with Foreign Powers

Responding in 1904 to the proposals for a pan-European intelligence-gathering network of “central bureaux” advanced at that year's anti-anarchist conference in St. Petersburg, Chief Commissioner Edward R. Henry pointed out that “the action of English police in dealing with anarchists should not be fettered by hard and fast agreements with continental police authorities.”¹⁷ This, in a sentence, embodies the British government's attitude to cooperation with European powers in matters of political policing – an attitude that remained constant throughout the period discussed here.

The official explanation for this isolationism (set out by successive British administrations) was framed in ideological terms and premised on the notion that British law did not admit of the existence of a separate, political category of crime or of “unconstitutional” arrangements with foreign governments. An early example of this strategy can be seen in the way the 1881 prosecution of Johann Most for incitement to murder was used by Home Secretary William Harcourt to assuage European critics of Britain's “open-door” immigration policy and to avoid committing the Liberal Government to participation in that year's anti-Nihilist conference. Harcourt's stated justification for pursuing that course of action was a desire “to avert the pressure of Foreign Govmnts [sic] to alter our laws,”¹⁸ but as subsequent developments demonstrate, the real reasons were more complex and less clear-cut.

One reason was that Britain's extradition treaties with continental states often excluded political crime as an extraditable offence (ironically even as such crime was deemed non-existent

¹⁷ Report by E. R. Henry, May 1904, TNA HO 144/757/118516/2.

¹⁸ Harcourt to Queen Victoria, 9 April 1881, quoted in Porter, “The Freiheit Prosecutions, 1881-1882,” *The Historical Journal* 23 (1980): 848.

in Britain), leading sometimes to embarrassing standoffs between British authorities and their European counterparts. Such standoffs could come as a consequence of European criticisms of British immigration laws – which were almost universally decried on the continent as excessively lax and protective of those exiled revolutionaries who were thought to be fomenting sedition in their countries of origin. They could also revolve around attempts – usually successful – by European states such as France or Belgium to have their own political undesirables, particularly militant anarchists, expelled to Britain – the country that, thanks to its laws, would be least likely to send them back. Finally, they could also be engendered by European refusals to aid Britain in her pursuit of Fenian terrorists, as illustrated by the escape of Patrick J. Tynan from France to America – first in 1883 and then in 1896.

Such friction was by no means inevitable as several examples of cooperation attest, chiefly the participation of French police in the investigation into the 1887 Jubilee Plot, the 1894 arrest and extradition of Jean-Pierre François and Theodule Meunier (which set a precedent for politically motivated crime as an extraditable offence in Britain) and the cooperation between British, French, Dutch and Belgian police during the investigation into the 1896 dynamite conspiracy. Nevertheless the tension created by years of disputes over the legitimacy of British right-of-asylum policies gradually led the British government to become more and more entrenched in its legal isolation, as illustrated by its refusal to participate in pan-European strategies for stamping out organized radicalism. After resisting pressure from the Spanish government to take part in its proposed 1893 anti-anarchist conference, British authorities relented momentarily in 1898 (following the shocking and grisly assassination of Empress Elisabeth of Austria by an Italian anarchist) and sent a delegation to that year's anti-anarchist conference in Rome. Far from representing a true concession to cooperation with Europe,

however, the British participation in the 1898 conference actually cemented the status quo – one aptly embodied by Sir Phillip Currie's “we-do-not-prosecute-opinions” speech during the final plenary session and by the fact that Britain was the only participating nation not to sign the conference's final protocol.

As mentioned in the introduction, recent historians have been tempted to ascribe British isolationism to a stubbornly resilient liberal discourse that supposedly favoured English right over continental might, but what this research has shown is that international cooperation in matters of political policing does not seem to have genuinely been a party issue in Britain even as “cooperation with Europe” became a Liberal talking point in Parliament (especially in the early 1890s). As we have seen, the Liberal administrations of 1881 and 1893 ultimately had the same (oppositional) view of pan-European counter-subversive strategies as the Conservative administrations of 1898 and 1904. Whereas for Lord Rosebery British laws were “strong enough to deal with anarchism,” for the Marquess of Salisbury “great objection would be felt to any attempt to meet the dangers of the anarchist conspiracy” by changing British law.¹⁹

If the political establishment was opposed to systematic cooperation with Europe out of a declared desire to maintain Britain's legal independence, the heads of British police took the view that such cooperation would materially threaten the well-functioning of the national political police. We have already noted how Robert Anderson considered the plans for centralized intelligence-gathering advanced at the 1898 conference in Rome inimical to “straining the law” and thus inimical to the well-functioning of the British political police. Earlier in the decade the Scotland Yard chief had expressed a similar opinion by arguing against cooperation with French authorities in a memo to the Home Office and pointing out that “foreign

¹⁹ Foreign Office Reply to Cipriano del Mazo (Spanish ambassador to the UK), December 1893, TNA HO 45/10254/X36450/8; Salisbury to the Foreign Office (October 12, 1898), TNA HO 45/10254/X36450/31.

governments are [...] very stupid in using information given them.”²⁰ To these misgivings we can add those of Edward Henry who in 1901 declined an Italian proposal to have “the Metropolitan Police [...] work in co-operation with an [Italian] Agent” as posing the “gravest risk” to the Special Branch’s operations,²¹ and who in 1904 dismissed the plans laid out at that year’s anti-anarchist conference in St. Petersburg as fettering the English police.

Was such isolationism warranted? By modern standards it obviously appears regressive and counter-productive but given the nature of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century political radicalism in Britain (which bears little resemblance to today’s terrorist movements), the conclusion that British authorities were right to shun European proposals for a pan-continental counter-subversive strategy seems entirely justified. Not only were such proposals excessively punitive and centred on the policing needs of authoritarian and anti-democratic regimes like those of Germany and Russia, they also plastered over the weaknesses of continental policing systems (made painfully obvious by the string of high-profile assassinations of the 1890s, and particularly by the failed assassination of King Leopold II by Gennaro Rubino – an Italian double agent with a guilty conscience who had purchased guns and ammunition with money supplied to him by an unwitting Italian government official). More crucially, such proposals were fundamentally at odds with the extra-legality of the British system, i.e. the very thing which made the policing of politics in Britain appear unobtrusively efficient in the eyes of the public.

Whether the early British model of political policing was in fact efficient is of course debatable. On the one hand, its particular nature – hierarchical *and* fractured; institutionalized *and* beholden to individual will; non-partisan *and* subject to specific political agendas – led sometimes to inefficient or excessive responses to political threats, exposing government and

²⁰ Robert Anderson to Charles Murdoch, January 1893, TNA HO/144/485/X37842/5.

²¹ Memo by E. R. Henry, 16 March 1903, TNA HO 144/545/A55176/51.

police institutions, particularly the Scotland Yard, to public criticism and ridicule (as illustrated by the aftermath of the 1894 Greenwich outrage and the 1909 Tottenham outrage). On the other hand, the individuals who were most successful in shaping the structure and direction of the political police system were, by and large, competent enough (or skilled enough at dissimulating their incompetence) to warrant a widespread reputation for dogged energy and patient readiness (as embodied by William Melville's image in the press). The threat posed by Fenianism was, as we have seen, a serious one to British authorities, but despite (and arguably because of) the individual efforts of William Harcourt, Edward Jenkinson, James Monro, and Robert Anderson, by the mid-1880s Britain still lacked a cohesive, proactive strategy for containing it. Jenkinson's transatlantic network of informers and double agents did go quite a long way in sowing the seeds of self-doubt and paranoia within the Irish-American Fenian milieu, but it did not entirely paralyze its militant ambitions, and it ultimately dissipated shortly after the controversial spymaster's fall from grace.

Arguably, if the state of Irish Nationalist politics had not changed very considerably in the later 1880s, Fenian "skirmishing" would have still gradually been abandoned given its undeniable failure to extract any political concessions from the British government, but Irish Nationalist politics did undergo a dramatic (perhaps even tragic) transformation as the Parnellite decade drew to an end. The increasing opposition of the IRB to dynamite (much to the displeasure of hardline American Clan-na-Gaelers), the launch of a new agrarian Plan of Campaign, and the spectacular demise of the Irish Party's towering leader – all worked to fatally undermine insurgent Fenianism to a greater extent than the byzantine machinations of British spies. Britain's model of political policing may not have been wholly inefficient in its battle with

Irish republican terrorism, but the demise of the latter was ultimately more fortuitous than foreseeable.

After Fenianism, however, there were no more significant threats to national security until the so-called great (labour) unrest of the immediate pre-war years (and no more insurrectionary threats until the Easter Rising of 1916). Insurgent anarchism, as has been shown, may have frightened many a concerned citizen, especially through its association with mindless violence – the Fenians, after all, had had a definite, and arguably achievable political goal – and barbaric foreignness, but its very exoticism and ideological isolation from mainstream British socialism gradually eroded its revolutionary shock value as the 1890s wore on, and by the early 1900s it was clear that “propaganda by the deed” was very much a European, not a British, problem. Anarchism did make a short-lived comeback in the closing years of the Edwardian decade, but by then it had already metamorphosed into an aspect of the Alien Question.

Edwardian radicalism was, despite alarmist talk of revolution in conservative circles of opinion, not quite the civilizational threat either. Militant suffragettes managed to annoy a great deal of important (and not so important) people with their campaigns of harassment, arson, window smashing and pillar box destruction, but threats of revolutionary – as opposed to symbolic – violence (such as the supposed plan to assassinate Prime Minister Asquith in 1909) turned out to be abortive if not completely made up. Non-Irish anti-colonial nationalism, though increasingly a serious threat in parts of the Empire, failed to garner momentum in the imperial metropole after the spectacular assassination of Curzon Wylie in 1909 by an Indian Hindu radical. Even the great labour unrest of 1910-14, despite paralyzing episodes such as the national coal strike of 1912, was ultimately divorced from any genuine potential for a revolutionary syndicalist movement as shown by the fate of the embattled Southern Welsh miners (who in

1911 lost the strike against the owners of the Cambrian Combine after being deprived of union funding and support).

In the absence of a genuinely destabilizing threat to national security, and given the weight of contemporary public fears, being seen to be efficient becomes indistinguishable from actually being efficient. When, in other words, a great number of people fear the danger posed by lawless, and worst of all, *foreign*, anarchists, being seen to be subverting the subverters in an unobtrusive and “subterranean” manner (as one *Sunday Times* columnist described the approach of the British political police in 1897²²) becomes the mark of a ruthless and cunning performance in the service of public peace and order. As Walter Emden, Mayor of Westminster, explained in a 1904 paeon delivered upon William Melville's official (and fictitious) retirement from public service, “if prevention is better than cure, Superintendent Melville is the greatest of doctors [...] We know not, but might in gratitude imagine now, what shocks to the civilized world, what public and private grief this one man may have saved us. If we are grateful for what has been done, we should be more grateful for what has not been done.”²³ Letting these words set the tone for a final remark, I will conclude by saying that this thesis has aimed at providing a new, more complete history of both what was done and what was not done by the early British political police during its most formative and crucial years.

²² *Sunday Times*, 15 August 1897.

²³ *Times*, 1 January 1904.

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