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Comparative Counter-Revolutionaries

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The basic principle behind the research informing this paper on comparative counter-revolution, concentrating on France, Britain and Ireland, is the idea that counter-revolutionaries saw themselves in an international context as revolutionaries: they were consciously engaged in a struggle for the future of European civilisation as well as to protect the regimes and social orders within their own states. The paper discusses the key themes in counter-revolutionary ideology, exploring how local conditions in the various countries helped shape common counter-revolutionary ideas in each country. It argues that counter-revolution was a diverse, dynamic and agile intellectual movement.

The paper argues that the key intellectual themes of international counter-revolution were monarchy, religion, property, aristocracy and, perhaps seemingly counter-intuitively, democracy. In doing so, the paper builds on recent work on counter-revolution such as that of

e-France, volume 4, 2013, A. Fairfax-Cholmeley and C. Jones (eds.), *New Perspectives on the French Revolution*, pp.45-47.

William Doyle's and Amanda Goodrich's analysis of debates on aristocracy in France and America, and in Britain. (Doyle, 2009; Goodrich, 2005) France, Britain and Ireland provide a useful set of comparators given the differences and similarities between them, especially in religious and political terms. For example, Ireland and Britain had formally identical political systems, but the different religious make-up of their populations contributed greatly to radically different popular responses to the French Revolution. While British state-sponsored patriotism could expand to accommodate a large section of the reformers during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, Irish counter-revolution was hamstrung by religious tensions which meant that the most fervent supporters of the status quo were hostile to those they were trying to convince to reject 'French principles', and doomed to failure. There is a good case to be made that the counter-revolutionaries had a much clearer idea of the social and political implications of the growing popularity of the term 'democracy' than did their radical opponents, whose understandings of, and commitment to, the concept of democracy evolved more slowly than is often assumed.

The paper discusses the relationship between the Enlightenment and counter-revolution. It argues that instead of viewing counter-revolution as inherently linked with counter-enlightenment, it is much more profitable to see the disputes between revolutionaries and moderate counter-revolutionaries as disputes between self-professed adherents of the Enlightenment. At stake were the implications for political, religious, social and economic policy of differing understandings of the Enlightenment. Recent developments in the historiography of the Enlightenment, especially the emphasis on political economy, allow for counter-revolution to be integrated further into the main intellectual currents of late eighteenth-century Europe. By focusing on the more moderate elements of counter-revolution, including some who initially embraced the French Revolution, we can see the presence of a modernizing trend within counter-revolution, committed to the creation of commercial and religiously-tolerant societies, and at odds with their more traditionalist and religiously-inspired counterparts.

The paper argues that in order properly to comprehend the nature of international counter-revolution, we must think again about the

centrality that has been accorded to Edmund Burke. In doing so, it follows the insights of work such as that of William J. Murray on the French right-wing press, which demonstrates the speed with which ideological opposition to the Revolution developed. (Murray, 1986) In Ireland, Burke's work also fed into ideologically sophisticated pre-existing opposition to the Revolution in the conservative press. The term Burkean (like Painite) serves as useful short-hand but can conceal the chronology and development of counter-revolutionary ideology.

The paper concludes by raising the question of counter-revolution in the United States, and arguing for the necessity of investigating what can be learned by comparing the counter-revolution of monarchists in Europe to that of Republicans in America.

WORKS CITED

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