The most remarkable feature of the Revolution of 1688 is the marked contrast between the perspectives of William and his Dutch advisers on the one side of the North Sea, and those of almost all his English and Scottish associates and adherents. The latter, like James II and his ministers, occupied themselves entirely with issues and developments in the British Isles. The intensifying crisis caused by James' policies, especially his campaign to pack parliament and his prosecution of the bishops, and the implications of the birth of a healthy Prince in June, virtually excluded from Englishmen's minds serious consideration of the detoriating situation in Europe. Those who asked William to intervene were assuming, as his associates had done throughout the latter part of Charles II's reign, that he was free to do so and that he would intervene willingly for the purpose of preserving the constitutional liberties of the kingdoms and the Protestant religion.¹

Few of William's friends and correspondents had any real understanding of the complex difficulties with which he had to grapple in terms of Dutch politics, or of the almost intractable problems which he faced in his lifelong mission of checking French aggression, and containing or reducing the power of Louis XIV.² To use a modern sporting analogy William's role resembled that of the coach of the defense in an American football squad, working out the means by which the elaborate and varied moves of his offensive opponents can be countered, while always ready to exploit their fumbles by opportunist attacks. In 1688 he shared the anxiety of his English associates that James was achieving his policy objectives, or some of them, but unlike them he had to relate developments in Britain to the gathering crisis in Europe. With a general war increasingly likely, William had to give as much attention to the courts of Berlin, Vienna and Madrid as to events in England: without their assistance no serious attempt could
be made to check the new aggressive moves which Louis was making in 1688. But although England would probably not become involved in the early stages of the war, William knew that even a neutral England would create difficulties, by capturing a significant part of Dutch trade and so reducing revenues, and increasing republican willingness to make peace on French terms3, and he could never dismiss the nightmare possibility that Louis would induce James to revive the alliance, concluded in the secret treaty of Dover (1670), that had led to the disasters of 1672 when the United Provinces had barely survived the combined offensive of France and Britain.

William's purpose in undertaking the Revolution of 1688 has to be related to the reasons of his earlier interventions in English politics. In each case he was primarily concerned to redress an unfavourable balance of power in Europe - in 1672-73 by neutralizing a hostile England, after 1676 more ambitiously to enlist England and its resources in the struggles against France. It was not the Crown but the control of decision-making which he wanted: before 1688 this naturally led him to uphold Mary's rights, but during the actual Revolution he would have accepted any of several constitutional outcomes, provided that he acquired effective control over the conduct of government. He would most reluctantly have accepted a Regency or Mary as sole sovereign. His preferred settlement would have given him sole sovereignty, but he accepted joint sovereignty because he received 'the sole and full exercise of the regal power' during their joint lives. Significantly the one proposal that William categorically rejected as unacceptable was the recall of James, on strict conditions that would not only have compelled him to rule in a constitutional manner, but would have made it difficult for the kingdom to enter the war against France.4

William's interventions in England necessarily involved the use of very different methods from those which he employed in other countries. In Austria, Brandenburg-Prussia and Spain he could concentrate on the sovereign and a few ministers and courtiers. In safeguarding or advancing his interests in England William had to give equal attention to unofficial or independent persons, to parliament when it was in session or one was in prospect, and even to what can be described as public opinion. Furthermore, while in most European kingdoms the stability of the political order could be taken for granted, sudden and dramatic changes frequently convulsed English and Scottish politics - the collapse of the Cabal ministry and its foreign and domestic policies, the Popish Plot, the Covenanting rebellions, the rise of the Whigs and their defeat after the Oxford dissolution of 1681, the Rye House Plot, James' abandonment of the Tories. At times the form of government was itself in doubt. During the Exclusion crisis of 1679-1681 William feared that Charles would buy himself out of trouble by conceding 'limitations' on the Crown, that would leave Mary with severely reduced powers when she became queen. In 1685 Argyll's and Monmouth's rebellions would have led to a usurpation, and a permanently
weakened monarchy, or even initiated a trend towards a republic - a danger which William seems consistently to have overestimated.\(^5\)

These constant changes and crises made it difficult for any observer abroad to make sense of English affairs, and impossible for William to rely on England as an ally against France. His first successful intervention in 1672-73 had the effect of increasing his difficulties later. This was because he ruthlessly exploited prevailing negative characteristics - popular and parliamentary suspicions of Charles and the Court, religious bigotry, greed for money and power, personal resentments.\(^6\) By playing on these he forced Charles to make peace in 1674, but the French exploited the same weaknesses, and used the same clandestine techniques in 1677-78, when they checkmated William's attempts to push Charles into joining the war against France and to get parliament to vote the necessary money. The defeat of William's intervention in English politics contributed significantly to the disastrous defeat which he suffered in 1678, when the states general forced a separate peace at Nijmegen and by doing so destroyed the Confederation of anti-French states. In the short term this humiliating failure outweighed the gains which William derived from his marriage, and induced in him a cautious reaction to invitations that he should intervene in person during the Exclusion crisis.\(^7\) Warily he declined to come over while the exclusionist parliaments were sitting. When he arrived in July 1681 he quickly discovered that there was no way in which he could persuade Charles, the Whigs and the Tories to unite in support of an active foreign policy.\(^8\)

Most of William's correspondents and self-appointed advisers had unacknowledged motives for their offers of friendship and service. Lord treasurer Danby expected to manage William. He helped negotiate the marriage to Mary in the short-term to reinforce his ministerial position, in the longer run to form around William and Mary a reversionary interest. Sunderland and Godolphin urged William in 1680 to come over, and even take a seat in the Lords, ostensibly to defend Mary's right but actually because their advocacy of Exclusion was failing to convince Charles and needed reinforcement.\(^9\) So far as we know Shaftesbury and the leading Whigs had no direct contact with William until their strength began to wane, but during his 1681 visit they tried to trap him into moves that could be interpreted as a commitment of support. Underlying Charles's gestures of support were the usual cynical and devious calculations. In 1679-1680 Charles seemed to be ready to form a system of alliances to check France, but the real purpose was to oppress opinion at home, and when after 1681 this was no longer necessary he reneged on his undertakings and disassociated himself from William, whom he rebuked as a warmonger. However in his last months Charles seemed intent on restoring friendly relations with William. In reality Charles brought William back into play, in terms of English affairs, only as a mean of checking James's increasing influence, and he characteristically imposed in advance a
restraint on William by simultaneously initiating a reconciliation with Monmouth.¹⁰

From William's angle, English politics became simpler when James succeeded. Unlike his brother James was straightforward, sincere and open about his intentions. Initially he surprised and alarmed the French by renewing the 1677 and 1678 treaties with the United Provinces. As Louis feared, William immediately attempted to improve the relations further, sending the English and Scottish regiment in Dutch pay to help suppress Monmouth's rebellion, and offering to come and take commands.¹¹ However, once the rebellion had been suppressed James became entirely absorbed in his systematic campaigns to obtain parliamentary repeal of the Test acts and the penal laws in religion. He could confer toleration on his catholic coreligionists for the duration of his reign by exercising his prerogative powers, but he needed to give it statutory form if his policy was not to be reversed in a protestant reaction when Mary came to the throne.¹²

It was logically essential for James to approach William and Mary in order to obtain their approval. He sent his quaker confidant, William Penn, to The Hague in November 1686 on this crucial mission.¹³ But then it had become clear that the king's canvassing of peers and members of the prorogued parliament was not producing sufficient results. William and Mary's agreement to commit themselves to James's policy of repeal could make a decisive change, so consequently James offered a substantial and deceptively attractive inducement. He authorised Penn to indicate that in return for agreement James would detach himself from Louis and join with the Dutch in checking further French aggressions.¹⁴ William could not accept this offer. His and Mary's consent would receive the widest publicity, as James used it to persuade others to follow their example, starting with Rochester and the Tories. But James's reciprocal undertaking, because private, could not be relied on. Certainly Louis would know about it at once and would quickly deploy all available forms of persuasion to nullify it, including offers of subsidies to James and bribes or 'presents' to his ministers, many of whom were already working in the interests of France.

There were other substantial reasons for refusing to concur with James's policies. It is important to realise that William was not a popular figure, or seen as a friend to constitutional liberties, until his propaganda machine began to influence public opinion in the build-up to the Revolution. Country peers and MP's in the 1670s, and Whigs after 1679, were influenced by contacts with William's republican opponents in Holland, and suspected him of sharing the absolutist ambitions of his uncles Charles and James.¹⁵ In 1676 some of William's friends among the opposition ranks warned him that if he made a bid to marry Mary he would be generally thought to have entered into the counsels of Charles, his Court and his minister Danby. Indeed William's visit to England to to seek Mary's hand, in October 1677, in disregard of this earlier advice, reflected his growing
It alarmed protestant opinion in both Britain and the Netherlands, but it should be noted that it was only in the former that a violent reaction was likely. The Revocation, combined with coincidental French commercial discrimination against Dutch traders and ship-
persecution. In December 1688 he ensured the safe departure of the papal
lution he had to take care to try to avoid becoming identified with acts of
princes in the struggle against France, so that during and after the Revo­
force in the Revolution. This had to be done with some care since William
depended absolutely on the support of Austria, Spain and German catholic
was freely passed by a parliament, and he was ready to authorize non­
enforcement of these laws:
Jews - could be treated as scapegoats in periods of tension or depres­
sion. By exploiting anti-popery opposition politicians like Pym and
Shaftesbury assured themselves of a mass following, while simultaneously
legitimating such opposition practices as inflaming public opinion.
In his personal attitudes and beliefs William did not resemble the
mythical figure of the Protestant Champion which later generations of
anti-catholic militaunts created and worshipped. He never approved of
religious persecution, and made this dislike explicit in his Declaration of
1688. He would have accepted repeal of the penal laws, provided that it
was freely passed by a parliament, and he was ready to authorize non­
enforcement of these laws.
But William had no choice but to play the anti-catholic game in Eng­
land, and even more in Scotland and Ireland where it was the main motive
force in the Revolution. This had to be done with some care since William
depended absolutely on the support of Austria, Spain and German catholic
princes in the struggle against France, so that during and after the Revo­
ution he had to take care to try to avoid becoming identified with acts of
persecution. In December 1688 he ensured the safe departure of the papal
Jacobus II
nuncio, a much-hated figure, and compensated the Spanish ambassador for the damage inflicted on his property by a protestant mob.22 Later he rejected radical pressure to give the informer Titus Oates a pardon that would have enabled him to resume his trade as a perjurer against catholics.23 William, however, could not honour the promises which he had given to the Emperor about the treatment of catholics. In the case of the defeated Irish jacobites he could not resist Whig and Irish protestant demands for their proscription and large-scale confiscations of land.24

During the actual Revolution a great deal of William's propaganda relied on exploiting anti-catholic assumptions and prejudices. Pamphlets and broadsheets designed for popular audiences concentrated very largely on religious arguments. This is seen most clearly in the manifestos aimed specifically at rankers in the army and seamen in the fleet. By emphasising specifically William's role as deliverer of the protestant religion the authors overcame the sentiment of loyalty which serving soldiers and seamen owed to their sovereign and commander in chief.25 Indeed religion was explicitly stated as the reason for his otherwise dishonourable desertion by the most notable defector, John Churchill, the future duke of Marlborough.26 More generally William's appeals to protestant sentiment succeeded in rendering totally ineffective James's attempts to rally his subjects - the concessions which he made (insincerely) in October, and then his appeals to patriotic feeling by depicting William as an alien conqueror with a foreign army.27

Some of the propaganda issued in William's name contained implications of violence which were intended to intimidate James and his remaining adherents. The crudest of all the charges made against James and his ministers had immediate and decisive effects. The story of the warming pan, to substantiate the charge that James had foisted a 'suppositious' son on the nation and his heir, gained acceptance because of the almost universal belief that catholics would use any means to ensure a catholic dynasty and the forcible reconversion of England - the burning of London in 1666, the plot to murder Charles in 1678, the planting of an impostor in 1688. Although William did not invent this story, he could not afford to neglect such an advantageous allegation: after initially joining the infant prince's name in the prayers said for the royal family in Mary's chapel, the order to omit it signalled doubts, and the allegations received great emphasis in William's Declaration.28

The allegation about the prince, and the countenance given to it by William and Mary, affected James with decisive effect. For him the birth of a male heir, who would displace his heretic daughters in the line of succession, was an answer to prayer, an act of divine intervention, a sign of God's approbation. Consequently his anxieties about the safety of his precious son, on whom the future depended, became obsessive. Fearing that if the infant fell into enemy hands he would be killed, or at least not encouraged to live, James soon concluded that his survival could be ensured only by shipping him off with his mother to France. He ignored prot-
ests by remaining loyalists that by putting his heir under the power of Louis he was voluntary mortgaging the future independence of the monarchy.29 Indeed the despatch of the prince to become a pawn in French hands not only antagonized many Tories, but contributed largely to the Emperor's and the king of Spain's decisions to accept James's effective deposition, and to recognise William and Mary's elevation to the English and Scottish thrones, despite the earlier assurances which they had received from William that he had no intention of claiming them for himself.30

Naturally William made great play in his Declaration about the threat not just to the protestant religion in general, but to the Church of England as an institution, from James's religious policies. William needed support from anglicans and Tories, and not just their acquiescence, in order to avoid becoming largely or exclusively dependent on the Whigs, and the whole radical wing of the party, as men who were republicans at heart, who turned to him only because they had no alternative. By concentrating pressure on the Church of England as an institution, ostensibly in order to compel it to accept religious toleration, James gave William the opportunity to widen his appeal. His purges of most Tories from the lieutenancy, the commission of the peace and the municipal corporations, were followed in 1688 by the instructions that all the parochial clergy were to read the Declaration of Indulgence from the pulpit, and so give it their apparent approval. By persisting with the criminal prosecution of the bishops, for protesting the illegality of the Declaration, James completed the alienation of the majority of both clergy and Tories.31 Most of the former merely acquiesed in the events of the Revolution, but William and his agents skilfully exploited the opportunity to convert the resentment of the politically active Tories into positive support.32

William capitalised on the width of bi-partisan support which rallied to him during the Revolution by making use of an Elizabethan device which, most significantly, Shaftesbury and the first Whigs had not been able to use during the Exclusion crisis. As they came in to join William Whigs and Tories were asked to subscribe to an Association. This bound them to him, and to his Declaration, and acceptance of a common declaration of purpose was subscribed by those who participated in the separate provincial risings.33 William's conduct during November and December 1688 was governed by his concern to preserve this union of Tories and Whigs, and with only partial and temporary success he was to try to perpetuate it by his formation of a mixed administration in 1689. By doing so he hoped to make it possible for himself to concentrate on the reduction of jacobite Ireland, and then on his main task of prosecuting the war against France.

During earlier European crisis - in 1672, 1678 and 1683 - William had to react to moves initiated by Louis. The difference in 1688 was that by his careful preparations in sounding English opinion and, through his agents, enlisting adherents William was ready to respond to the French
initiative - the invasion of Rhineland in September - with a much more adventurous and decisive initiative of his own in Britain. Louis aimed specifically at getting control of the ecclesiastical electorate of Köln, and at asserting fictitious claims in the Pfalz, but his overall objective was to intimidate the Emperor and the German princes into converting the Truce of Regensburg into a peace on his own terms. By this means he expected to destroy the League of Augsburg, so as to isolate each state and oblige it to deal with France on its own when Louis made his next set of forward moves, and when the long-awaited death of Carlos II opened up the question of the succession to Spain and its possessions.

The Revolution of 1688 represents the master-stroke in William's career, it was his one completely successful offensive action. By his success in gaining control of Britain and its resources William reversed the disastrous failure of 1678. Then William's inability to obtain the entry of England into the war had precipitated the break-up of the Confederation, plunging William into a period of weakness in the United Provinces, and years of reduced influence abroad. The Revolution and England's emergence as a principal ally against France encouraged the other powers to resist Louis and reject the specious peace offers which he made to them in and after 1689. It can be seen, therefore, as a pre-requisite for the establishment of anything resembling a balance of power in Europe.

With so much at stake it is not surprising that William behaved so unscrupulously in organising a general conspiracy against James and by exploiting anti-popery. He had behaved with an equal lack of scruple in 1672-1673 when he had used a network of subversion to force Charles to make peace. On both occasions the justification was self-preservation; in 1672-1673 the survival of the United Provinces, in 1688 that of the liberties of Christendom, that is the integrity and independence of all France's neighbours. Moreover the opportunities which William exploited so ruthlessly and successfully arose from the excesses of those whom he faced; in 1672-1673 Charles II, signatory of the infamous secret treaty of Dover, and the machiavellian Cabal ministers; in 1688 the literally blind folly of James II and the arrogance of Louis XIV.

Committed to a life-long defensive strategy, always conscious of the inferiority and unreliability of the resources on which he could call, William had necessarily learnt how to take full advantage of the few favourable opportunities which presented themselves. Usually William received unhelpful advice from the earl of Halifax, but his 1687 appraisal of the methods which William used got to the essential point:

"Your Highness hath your thoughts intent upon every new thing that ariseth in the world, and knoweth better than any body how to improve every conjuncture, and turn it to the advantage of that interest of which you are the chief support".

62
This is still the best explanation of William’s success in the Revolution of 1688.

Notes

1. The same insularity is seen in the jacobite propaganda, echoed by Lucille Pinkham, William III and the Respectable Revolution (Cambridge, Mass., 1954), that William was merely satisfying his life-long ambition to seize the Crown.

2. The only prominent exceptions were Sir William Temple, the Earl of Halifax and Henry Sidney.


7. I intend to develop the theme of French intervention in English and Dutch politics during 1670s and 1680s in an article for a volume edited by Jeremy Black on British international relations, to be published in 1988.


13. For Penn’s role as a political intermediary see J.R. Jones, "A Repre-


20. E.M. Williams, The Eighteenth-Century Constitution (Cambridge, 1960), 16. William spoke of "covering and securing of all such who would live peaceably under government, as becomes good subjects, from all persecution upon account of their Religion, even Papists themselves not excepted".


27. For example, Reflections on the Prince of Orange's Declaration (1688).


35. Dalrymple, Memoirs, II, appendix, part the first, 208.
Kroning Willem en Mary (21 april 1689)