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## *The Economics of Privateering: Capital Dispersal in the American War of Independence<sup>1</sup>*

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When Marx described the methods of primitive capitalist accumulation as "conquest, subjugation, robbery, murder — in a word, force",<sup>2</sup> he had in mind the dispossession of the peasantry, the ransacking of America and Asia, and the slave trade. However, these were not the only ways in which resources were forcibly redistributed in the critical period of capitalist development; rather were they the ones which confirmed his conviction that the "naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation"<sup>3</sup> which he thought the essence of capitalism was the product only of class and racial domination. Another form of redistributive violence was privateering, an aspect of war which did at least cover the nakedness of exploitation with the veil of patriotism. Marx, who had so much to say about class warfare and the conquest of what he called "barbarian and semi-barbarian countries",<sup>4</sup> offered little comment on war among the "civilised countries" as a means of transferring resources during the process of primary accumulation, presumably because mere enrichment did not amount to accumulation if it did not also bring the separation of the

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<sup>2</sup> *Capital*, Volume I (Everyman edition, J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., London, 1930), p. 791.

<sup>3</sup> *The Manifesto of the Communist Party in Four Classic Texts on the Principles of Socialism* (Unwin Books, London, 1960), p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p. 19.

labourer from the means of production. The European merchant or nation impoverished through spoliation could not match in pathos the exploited colony or proletariat.

Rosa Luxemburg, writing specifically on capital accumulation, does no better than Marx. Recognising the peaceful way (where the appropriation of property by the capitalists occurs so imperceptibly that it takes "the keen dialectics of scientific analysis" to detect it) and the way of "blustering violence",<sup>5</sup> she observes only the plundering of the non-capitalist modes of production. The international conflicts that she acknowledged were those of her day, the clash of fully-developed capitalist countries on the road to destruction, not the wars of the XVII and XVIII century nations engaged in primary accumulation.

Sombart was more consistent in his evaluation of violence as a means of building up capital, making no distinction between the looting of Asian victims and the robbery of European ones.<sup>6</sup> Although he excluded the booty of the medieval robber baron, who showed only contempt for commerce (the function of *Pfeffersäcke*), he accepted more modern forms of robbery, including both piracy and privateering, as genuine contributions to the development of capitalism. Keynes would have agreed, attaching as he did great importance to the bullion captured by Sir Francis Drake as a factor in both the short-term prosperity of England and her long-term economic development.<sup>7</sup> Extravagant claims for the beneficial effects of windfalls and their aid to class formation carry, however, little conviction in the absence of evidence of the use to which they were put. The £ 42,000 invested by Elizabeth I in the Levant Company (cited by Keynes) represented only a small fraction of the bullion brought home in the *Golden Hind*, worth possibly as much as £ 1,500,000. Eagerness to assume that the profits of robbery were used productively or furthered the aims of capitalism must be tempered by the recognition that they may well have been diverted from those more advanced along the capitalist road. The Spanish bullion appropriated by Drake would no doubt otherwise have passed through the hands of Genoese bankers, archetypal capitalists. Moreover, the delights of banditry encouraged or condoned by government are never unalloyed, as F.C. Lane indicated in two articles he published in the early 1940s demonstrating the national opportunity cost of state violence.<sup>8</sup>

It is not the object of this article to argue that war in general or privateering in particular furnished for economic development an access to capital that has

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<sup>5</sup> *The Accumulation of Capital* (Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., London, 1951), p. 452.

<sup>6</sup> *Der Moderne Kapitalismus* (Verlag von Duncker und Humblot, München und Leipzig, 1924), Volume I, Book 2, Chapter 44.

<sup>7</sup> *A Treatise on Money* (Macmillan and Co., London, 1930), Volume II, p. 156-157.

<sup>8</sup> 'National wealth and protection costs' and 'The economic meaning of war and protection' (Reprinted as Chapters 22 and 23 in the author's collected papers, *Venice and History*, The John Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1966).

been neglected by historians. On the contrary, in seeking to show that, while privateering did indeed lead to the amassing of fortunes by some (but, incidentally, separating others from their instruments of production), it did not promote capital accumulation on a national or class scale, the thesis advanced here casts doubt on the efficacy of any sort of violence as help for capitalist growth or economic progress. Because among capitalists and would-be capitalists there are those who use disreputable methods, it does not follow that such behaviour contributes to class formation or assists the transition from feudalism to capitalism. The implication is that capitalism owes more to the expansion of peaceful commerce than to force.

I

Privateering is the right granted to a ship's captain by a royal letter of marque or commission to attack and seize the shipping of the king's enemies specified in instructions accompanying the commission. In this section of the article its costs and benefits are discussed. The second section demonstrates that profits were widely dispersed. Perhaps, as the third section endeavours to show, the dispersion was less than would appear at first sight from the number of beneficiaries entitled to participate in the rewards. None the less, they were fragmented enough to thwart rather than promote capital accumulation. The final section addresses itself to the question of the extent to which they were used productively. It is argued that, although they did sometimes finance trade, they were not an essential source of capital and, in any event, were frequently drained away into real estate and government stock. The evidence for the arguments advanced is taken from Guernsey history and almost entirely from the period of the American War of Independence. In that war letters of marque authorising the seizure of ships belonging to the rebellious colonies were issued from 27 March 1777. In August 1778, June 1779 and December 1780 they were extended to cover the shipping of France, Spain and Holland respectively as those countries became belligerents. Neutral ships trading with them were subject to search and the confiscation of all warlike stores (interpreted widely) in their cargo.

The economics of privateering is not unlike that of hunting. Success attracts more and more hunters and the game becomes scarce. As the quarry gets ever more elusive, the ranks of the hunters are thinned. In the American War of Independence the number of privateers fitted out in Guernsey and Alderney (a smaller island that forms part of the Guernsey bailiwick) rose and fell as follows: one in 1777, thirty-two in 1778, thirty-five in 1779, eighteen in 1780, fourteen in 1781 and six in 1782.<sup>9</sup> Although the pattern of prize taking did

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<sup>9</sup> 'List of Privateers fitted out from the Islands of Guernsey and Alderney during the late War' (MS in the Priaulx Library).

not conform to this, with the number of captures fluctuating (93 in 1778, 31 in 1779, 54 in 1780, 8 in 1781 and 38 in 1782),<sup>10</sup> the element of chance in privateering and the heterogeneity of the prizes somewhat diminish the significance of the incongruity.

Guernsey privateers formed, of course, only one group among many. The merchants of the sister Channel Island of Jersey threw themselves into the hunt with equal enthusiasm, as did some of the British ports, such as Liverpool and London. On the other side in the war the coastal towns of France, particularly St Malo and Dunkerque, and of New England enjoyed privateering successes that rivalled or surpassed the tally of the Guernseymen. Countries whose commerce was being destroyed could and did organise convoys. This was expensive and did not give complete protection, amply demonstrated in July 1779, when British and Channel Island privateers took eight prizes (one falling to the Guernsey lugger *Swallow*) in a convoy of eighty-eight.<sup>11</sup> None the less, the convoy system did help to reduce the incidence of loss and to discourage the activities of the corsairs.

The privateering vessel was usually small and inexpensive. The *True Briton*, a Guernsey cutter, cost £ 500 and one of the 32 shares into which it was divided was an investment of only £ 15.12.6. The agents or *armateurs* of this, whose responsibility was the fitting out and management, were Daniel Vardon Jr. and Louis Dunière.<sup>12</sup> Even cheaper was the prize converted to the purpose, e.g. the *Charming Nancy*, sent to Jersey in 1778 to be fitted out as a privateer.<sup>13</sup> As for burden, the cutter *Sprightly* (agents from July 1779 Peter Lihou and his nephew William LeMarchant), formerly the *Speedwell*, at 150 tons was average. Cutters and luggers, being fast and manoeuvrable, predominated, though there were privateers of as much as 300 tons.<sup>14</sup>

Apart from the cost of the ship itself, money had to be found for "sufficient bail" (as security against misconduct, e.g. collusion between captor and captive) to be lodged with the High Court of Admiralty in England, which issued the letters of marque, and for cannon and other weapons, and there were the running expenses of repair and maintenance, ammunition, provisions and other

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<sup>10</sup> H.C. TIMEWELL, 'Guernsey privateers' (*Mariner's Mirror*, LVI, 1970, 2, p. 199-218), p. 209.

<sup>11</sup> JOHN PERCY WARREN, 'Studies in the History of Guernsey' (Typescript, n.d., c. 1949) (Priaulx Library), p. 470.

<sup>12</sup> Daniel Vardon Jr. Account Book (Priaulx Library). All references to the *True Briton* and to Vardon and Dunière are from this source.

<sup>13</sup> 'Copie de Lettres appartenant à Peter Lihou' (Guille-Allès Library) All references to Peter Lihou are from this source. The letterbook is not paginated, but the letters are in date order and references can readily be checked by means of the date cited.

<sup>14</sup> H.C. TIMEWELL, *Loc. cit.*, p. 209.

stores. The armament was large in relation to the ship's size, with one gun for every three to five men, and a big complement was necessary in order to furnish prize crews. Typical was the *Swift*, whose captain was awarded a letter of marque in 1779 authorising attacks on Spanish shipping. She was 110 tons, was armed with ten 3-pound carriage guns and ten swivel guns, and carried a crew of sixty, one third of them landsmen. Exceptionally large vessels might have a hundred men or more.<sup>15</sup> However, while the armament had to be financed by the investors, the payment of the seamen could be charged to the profits (if any). The fifth article of agreement (May 1806) between the agent (Cartaret Priaulx) and crew of the *Speculation* bound the former to pay two shillings and sixpence a day to officers and two shillings a day to men, but only until the ship put to sea, and even those wages were to be deducted from their prize money.<sup>16</sup> The members of the crew were paid in a varying number of shares in the total amount of money allocated to the captain and crew from the profits of each prize. Other costs, too, might be shifted from the shoulders of the owners and agents. The third article of agreement of the *Speculation* made the supply of provisions, ammunition and stores the responsibility of the captain and officers, who were to be reimbursed (assuming they were successful on their cruise, the agreement being for three months) with "one fifth of the Nett proceeds of such Vessels whose Cargoes shall exceed the value of the Vessels," together with fifty pounds "for Cabin money, on all Prizes, whose Nett proceeds shall exceed the sum of One Thousand Pounds Sterling", on condition that they did not help themselves to the booty.<sup>17</sup>

Although the initial investment was relatively small, profits were precarious. Apart from the common risks to which sailing ships were subject, there was the possibility of damage or capture by the enemy and some scope for error which could be costly. Every prize had to be condemned, i.e. accepted as a legitimate capture, by an admiralty court, and sometimes neutral vessels were wrongly detained and had to be released with compensation.<sup>18</sup> Of the 43 Guern-

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 'List of Privateers' The furniture, stores and ordnance put on board the captured British transport *Annabella* (renamed the *Rising States*) by the Americans when they fitted her out as a privateer in 1776 were valued after her recapture at £ 613.2.7. The ship itself was put at £ 805. (David Syrett, 'The condemnation of the privateer *Rising States*, 1777', *Mariner's Mirror*, LVI, 1970, 2, p. 155-159, p. 158).

<sup>16</sup> Privateering papers of Miss E.F. Carey (Priaulx Library). Article 8 provided for the cessation of monthly wages to any seaman who was impressed for the Royal Navy. Compensation for death or loss of limb was £ 10 (Article 12). This was apparently usual for other ranks. Compensation for a captain was £ 20 and other officers £ 15. (H.C. TIMEWELL, *Loc. cit.*, p. 212).

<sup>17</sup> Privateering papers. The articles of agreement of the *Gull* made the owners responsible for guns, small-arms, ammunition and provisions. (Ibid, p. 211, but no date is given).

<sup>18</sup> E.g. a Lübeck ship (Captain Trioiff) taken by the *True Briton* in 1780. Cf. the case of the *Cathalina* of Schleswig (note 28 below).

sey ships engaged in privateering in the American War, no fewer than 15 are said to have been lost for one reason or another, more than a third of the total. One was wrecked, six captured and eight broken up. The lugger *Active* was wrecked after a profitable career that brought in four prizes of an estimated gross value of £20,656.16.5.<sup>19</sup> Such losses contributed to the decline in the number of vessels obtaining letters of marque in the later stages of the war. As the opportunity for profitable operation diminished with the reduction of enemy and neutral trade as the result of privateering, the incentive to make them good lessened.

Because of its aleatory nature privateering offered rewards that varied widely. While, with her eleven prizes, the *True Briton* was one of the most successful corsairs, her gross returns ranged from over £3,000 from the *Goede Verwagting*, a galliott captured early in 1781, to not much more than £200 for the lugger (*chasse-marée*) *Ville Dauray*, also taken in 1781. The former sold for £1,905 and her Mediterranean cargo (destined for Ostend) of wine and vinegar, olives and olive oil, raisins, cochineal and indigo for £1,097.8.7; the *Ville Dauray* sold for £95 and her cargo of salt for £146.10.6. A recapture (or reprize or reprisal), restoring the ship to the rightful owners, entitled the captor only to salvage, fixed at one-eighth of the value of the ship and its original fittings, plus the value of whatever the enemy had put aboard. In retaking the sloop *Hope*, seized by a French corsair on her way from Newry to Cork, the *True Briton* earned only £208.14.0.

An exceptionally rich prize in the American War was the *Perla* (700 tons), a Spaniard carrying gold and silver coin from Lima to Cadiz. This was seized in November 1779 by Lihou and LeMarchant's *Sprightly* and an English privateer, the *Shark*. A measure of her value is that she was insured for £60,000 as soon she was captured, and when she was moved the following year from Falmouth to London, the *Sprightly's* share was estimated for insurance purposes at £40,000. Even more impressive were the gross takings of the cutter *Resolution* (agents Henry and Nicholas Le Mesurier), estimated at £134,500 (a figure, however, suspect for reasons to be given presently),<sup>20</sup> chiefly the profit (£106,000 gross) from the sale of a French East-Indiaman taken in August 1779. At the other end of the scale the *Roebuck* earned an estimated £20 gross. That in itself was no mean feat for a rowing boat without a gun, but none the less with a letter of marque.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> J.P. WARREN, *Loc. cit.*, p. 467; 'Privateers: Elisha Dobrée's List 1777 to June 1779' (MS in the Priaux Library); 'Recapitulation of a List of Privateers fitted out of Guernsey & Alderney during the American Revolutionary War, with their force and number and prizes taken from the French, Americans, Spaniards, & Dutch in the years 1778, 9, 1780, 1, 2 ... Drawn up by Ferd. Brock Tupper' (MS in the Priaux Library)

<sup>20</sup> p. 395 below.

<sup>21</sup> 'Recapitulation of a List of Privateers'.

## II

Dispersal of capital took a number of forms. Although entry into the privateering business was relatively cheap and easy, the rewards were likely to be reduced sharply by incidental expenditure. Overheads could vary in magnitude from a few shillings for a legal document (such as a protest, e.g. a declaration before a notary public by a ship's master or agent disclaiming responsibility for damage to ship or cargo) or quarantine expenses, to hundreds of pounds for insurance, which in wartime was extremely high, anything up to 25% of the estimated value of the ship and its cargo.<sup>22</sup> More than a hundred pounds might go on securing an admiralty court condemnation. Vardon and Dunière had to pay their London agent, Bonamy Dobrée, £ 156.10.7 for the condemnation of the *Goede Verwagting*, about 5% of the total gross proceeds of £ 3,002.8.7. The condemnation of the cargo of the Spanish snow (*snaauw*) *St. Joseph* cost £ 33.13.5, likewise about 5% of the total proceeds from the sale of the cargo of silk and linen goods, salt, lead and wine, amounting to £ 587.12.0.<sup>23</sup>

Condemnation was not always a straightforward procedure, especially when it involved neutral vessels thought to be trading with the enemy. Masters of suspect ships were at pains to disguise their true destination. The captain of the Dunkerque galliot *Marchand*, seized in 1778, when France was still nominally neutral, by the Guernsey privateer *Hunter*, claimed he was on his way from Camarat to St. Domingo, but the captors were convinced that the galliot was in fact a French or American privateer operating between Camarat and Lorient.<sup>24</sup> Two similar cases occurred in the middle of the same year. The captain of the *Jeune Victoire* of Bordeaux declared his destination to be St. Pierre de Miquelon, the captain of the brig *Victoire* St. Domingo. The first was captured by the *Hero* and *Alarm* (agents Peter Lihou and Charles de Cartaret), the second by the *Hero* alone.<sup>25</sup> Neither captain was believed. Sometimes the skipper destroyed, threw overboard, or hid his papers. This posed a considerable problem for the captor. The absence of ship's papers, while it aroused an admiralty court's suspicions, was not regarded as sufficient evidence of fraud.

The destroying of papers is doubtless a matter of strong suspicion — but that *alone* has never guided a condemnation — it is the suspicion attached to this circumstance which has induced the Court to order further proofs of the Cargo, and though it is to be feared that men will be found to swear to falsehoods and that the further proofs will ultimately be deemed complet — yet upon reflection, what

<sup>22</sup> Peter Lihou letterbook 1780.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, n.d. (at the end of the book).

<sup>24</sup> 'Manuscript Records of Isaac Dobrée, Notary Public' (Guille-Allès Library).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*; Peter Lihou letterbook. The similarity in name seems to be coincidental.

can the Court do more? We cannot expect them to condemn upon mere suspicion — and the oaths brought in due form, are of necessity taken as proofs — unless refuted by circumstances which will render those oaths disbelieved.<sup>26</sup>

One way of “rendering oaths disbelieved” was to bribe or coerce members of the captive crew to reveal the real destination or, indeed, other sought-after information. When the *St. Joseph* was sold in June 1778, one item on the expense account was 210 livres tournois for “sept matelots espagnols pour déclarer que le Navire allé (sic) à la Virginie”. That amounted to rather less than £ 10 sterling. When in November 1778 Peter Lihou suggested to his nephew and partner in England “a genteel present” to the captain or officers of the *Perla* for information about the possible concealment of money aboard their ship, he had no doubt a more handsome reward in mind. Coercion was cheaper, but attracted attention. In June 1778 the captain and mate of the *Jeune Victoire* alleged before Isaac Dobée, a notary public of St Peter Port, that a Swedish sailor had been forced to disclose the whereabouts of the ship’s papers.

Even with an uncomplicated case like the *Goede Verwagting* the gross proceeds were substantially reduced by the payment of legal and incidental expenses. Out of the original three thousand odd pounds the net sum for distribution among owners and crew came to £ 2,108.10.11¼. Costs of administering the prize thus took nearly 30% of gross takings. Expenses tended to absorb a proportionate and therefore, since they were not graduated, relatively more burdensome share of the less valuable prizes. The total expenses incurred in disposing of the *Villa Dauray*, which brought in £ 231.18.10 gross, amounted to about 25%. The sale of the cargo (beef, salmon, butter and cheese, beer and potatoes) of the *Rotterdam*, a brig captured by the *True Briton* and the *Tartar* of Alderney, involved an outlay of £ 119.7.9 that accounted for over 14% of the total earnings of £ 814.0.5. This prize shows another way in which resources forcibly transferred by privateering could be dissipated. Two corsairs were engaged in the action: £ 302.8.5½ went to the owners and crew of the *Tartar* and £ 328.3.2½ to the owners and crew of the *True Briton*. When the lugger (*chasse-marée*) *St. Jacques* was taken by three Guernsey privateers, the *Swallow*, the *Dragon* and the *True Briton*, the *True Briton*’s share of the proceeds came to a mere £ 144.1.6. The *St. Joseph* was captured by two Jersey privateers, one of them the *Charming Nancy*, and the total expenses incurred in disposing of the cargo amounted to £ 92.7.7, i.e. about 16% of gross proceeds of £ 587.12.0. This gave the owners and crew of the *Charming Nancy* a net payment of £ 350.7.2½ out of the total net proceeds of £ 495.4.5, the balance of £ 144.17.2½ going to the other privateer, whose contribution to the capture was judged less valuable.

Eight of the eleven prizes of the *True Briton* paid the owners and crew a

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<sup>26</sup> Brock and Le Mesurier to Cartaret Priaux & Co. 25 July 1800 (Cartaret Priaux Papers, Priaux Library).

total of £ 5,329.7.4 (including the fifth of the value of enemy ships sold to which the captain and lieutenants were entitled<sup>27</sup>), made up as follows: *Assumption* £ 381.15.2; *Concordia* £ 1,691.17.0; *Rotterdam* £ 328.3.2½; *Goede Verwagting* £ 2,431.1.9¾; *Hope* £ 190.0.6; *Ville Dauray* £ 172.1.7; and *St. Jacques* £ 144.1.6. With the eighth prize, the *Cathalina*, expenditure exceeded returns by £ 9.13.5¼.<sup>28</sup> Of the total the owners received £ 3,276.7.5¾. That was net profit. Total disbursements between 1 September 1780 and 1 September 1781 (during which period all eight were taken) amounted to £ 4,166.5.1¼, excluding capital depreciation, which, given the original cost of the *True Briton*, must have been slight. A return of £ 3,276 over and above an expenditure of £ 4,166 gave a clear profit of almost 80% in a year. The 19th century historian of Guernsey, Ferdinand Brock Tupper, whose figures for total takings of Guernsey privateers in the American War have so far been accepted almost without question, put the gross proceeds of the *True Briton* at £ 22,557,<sup>29</sup> and so there is a considerable discrepancy between his figure and the computation above of only a third of that amount (approximately £ 7,400, expenditure plus net proceeds). Although allowance must be made for three prizes not listed here, including the *Conception*, taken by the *True Briton* and the *Surprise* on a voyage between Bilboa and Caracas in July 1780, and the fact that in some cases the prize money was shared with other privateers, it looks as if Tupper's estimates are to be treated with some caution.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, even with the lower figure, it is plain that privateering, like robbery (which it strongly resembled), could be highly profitable in the short run. Like robbery again, it was, because of the high costs of disposing of the goods (to say nothing of the risks), not nearly as profitable as violent expropriation might appear to be to the unreflecting.

A capture by two or more privateers was by no means uncommon. Indeed, sometimes they hunted together in twos and threes. This caused no problem

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<sup>27</sup> See p. 385 below.

<sup>28</sup> *Assumption* — cargo and ship; *Concordia* (a Lübeck ship captured on a voyage from Petersburg in Virginia to Bordeaux) — cargo only (which was hemp and sold for £ 3,176.3.7, so that, as the owners and crew of the *True Briton* received only £ 1,691.14.0, there must have been more than one privateer involved); *Rotterdam* — cargo only (as above); *Goede Verwagting* — cargo and ship (as above); *Hope* — reprize, salvage only; *Ville Dauray* — cargo and ship (as above); *St. Jacques* — composition of net proceeds unknown. The *Cathalina* was, despite her Dutch skipper, a neutral. The prize was not condemned, though the cargo of wheat was sold (for unstated reasons) by her captors.

<sup>29</sup> 'Recapitulation of a List of Privateers' It is Tupper who assigns eleven prizes to the *True Briton*.

<sup>30</sup> The amount earned by the owner of 3/16 of the *True Briton* between July 1781 and October 1782 was £ 867.4.6, and that gives a total net profit of £ 7,037.16.0 (excluding the captain's and officers' fifth of each ship sold). With costs at 20% of gross profits, this still falls short of Tupper's figure. Yet he seems to have got the *Perla's* prize money more or less right.

if they were all managed by the same agent, as sometimes happened.<sup>31</sup> If not, it was likely to increase expenditure on lawyers, legal proceedings, maintenance of prizes in port (perhaps for months on end), possibly demurrage<sup>32</sup> and security against fraud by other claimants. With the involvement of more than one privateer there was ample room for dispute about the allocation of the prize money. The attacker who forced the victim to strike her colours was not necessarily the one to effect the capture. In 1778 the *Providence*, on a voyage from Martinique to Bordeaux, struck to the *Tartar*, but it was men from the *Hero* who boarded her. The mere presence of a privateer on the scene of a seizure gave it some claim to share in the proceeds, the justification being that the prize would not in all probability have surrendered to one corsair if it had not been simultaneously threatened by a second or third.<sup>33</sup> Thus the profits might well be shared between two, three or even more privateers. Very often the criterion for the division of the spoils was simply the number of men aboard each privateer concerned. The greater the number of men a ship had at the scene of the capture, the greater its share. This became a crucial question in the division of the wealth of the *Perla*, where the prize crew was composed of men from both captors, the *Shark* and Lihou and Le Marchant's *Sprightly*, which also supplied the prize master.

The dispute over the *Perla* was particularly acrimonious, protracted and fraught with treachery, and that added to the costs. In December 1779 Peter Lihou uncovered, or thought he had, a "scandalous scheme" by the agent of the *Shark* to have the prize removed to London on fictitious official instructions and under the escort of a Royal Navy sloop, commanded by an allegedly suborned officer, from Falmouth, where Lihou's agents were keeping an anxious watch on her. The following August the owners of the *Sprightly* had to agree to a 2% commission to their English agents in recognition of the peculiar difficulties of the case. By then £649.15.0 had already been spent. Not long afterwards the captured vessel, having passed a year at Falmouth, was at last taken to London at the cost of £393.10.9 in wages and rum money. It was Lihou, too, who grumbled about "fowl Proceedings" on the part of a Liverpool privateer when he had to share half and half the proceeds of a prize taken en route from St. Domingo in 1779.<sup>34</sup>

Mutual suspicion was aroused especially when the agents of one of the participants in a joint seizure wanted to unload the captive before it was con-

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<sup>31</sup> Cp. the capture by the *Alarm* and *Hero* referred to above.

<sup>32</sup> Vardon and Dunière paid over £400 demurrage on the cargo of the prize *Cathalina* (see note 28).

<sup>33</sup> Cp. the protest of 22 June 1778 by the agents of the *Hunter* regarding the brig *Sally*, which struck to the Jersey privateer *Hope* in the presence of the *Hunter*. ('MS Records of Isaac Dobrée').

<sup>34</sup> Presumably the *St. Mark* and *St. Philip*, taken by the *Alarm* ('Prizes taken by Guernsey Privateers', Manuscript in the Priaulx Library).

demned as a prize, so that its cargo might be preserved from loss or deterioration. Captured ships were sometimes in poor condition and they were particularly at hazard in the tidal harbour of St Peter Port. A common reason given for unloading was that salt had got wet and was threatening to damage bale goods. Sometimes obstruction had unfortunate results. Peter Le Mesurier, the agent of the *Tartar*, was prevented in 1782 from discharging the cargo of the prize *Grace de Dieu* by the owners of a Jersey privateer which had taken part in the capture, and the cargo was lost when the ship sank in the harbour.<sup>35</sup>

On occasion one privateer took over a ship already captured by another on the same side in the war. In 1778 Lihou and De Cartaret's *Hero* brought into St Peter Port a French brig, the *Amitié*, on which the captain of the *Hero*, William Scott, had found an English-speaking crew, claiming to be a prize crew but unable to offer any credentials, such as a letter of marque. Lihou (groundlessly as it turned out) suspected that the seamen were Americans posing as a prize crew to avoid capture.<sup>36</sup> In an excess of patriotism he hoped, in a letter to his London agent, that the "admiralty would give it up to us as an Encouragement for Privateers to do their Dury & Destroy the Enemy as much as possible." Knowing, however, that his case was weak, even though he was in possession of the prize, he expressed a willingness to arrive at an accommodation with the rival claimants, in fact to go halves. It appears that he had to settle for less, reimbursement of expenses and a fraction of the prize money.

The share of each privateer was subject to considerable division. The proceeds were distributed among agents, owners, captain and crew. The *armateurs* played an important part. It was they who were responsible through their agents in London for securing letters of marque and settling all the legal business in the disposal of prizes and for the *armement* (fitting out) and maintenance of the privateering ships. Their payment was charged to gross profits and usually took the form of a commission amounting to 3% of the total arrived at by adding together disbursements and the sums realised from the sale of ship and cargo. Peter Lihou's attempt in 1779 to have this increased in the case of the *Perla*, on the grounds that his presence was necessary in England and this would put him to additional expense, was, not unexpectedly, turned down by the owners of the *Sprightly*. Another charge on gross proceeds was the share of the sum obtained from the sale of an enemy (as distinct from a neutral) ship (excluding the cargo) which went to the captain and other officers, who together received 20% of the total (12% for the captain and 8% for the officers). What was left after these obligations were met was divided between the owners, who received two-thirds, and the captain and crew, who shared the remaining one-third.

Each member of the crew received an award which depended upon the

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<sup>35</sup> 'MS Records of Isaac Dobrée'.

<sup>36</sup> They were actually from the English transport *Achilles*.

number of shares he held in the crew's portion of the prize money. This could be as many as one hundred for the captain and as few as five for the most junior member. On the *Speculation* in 1806 the captain was given 100 shares, the sailing master 40, the mate 24, the carpenter 24, the boatswain 22, the gunner 22, the gunner's mate 20, the quartermaster 20, an able seaman 18 and a boy 10.<sup>37</sup> While the individual's number of shares was fixed before the cruise, the total number of shares naturally varied from time to time according to the size and composition of the crew when the prize money was distributed, in the case of the *True Briton* ranging from 718 to 773. When the proceeds of the salvage of the sloop *Hope* were divided up, the captain had 100 shares, the ship's doctor 47, six other men 204 among them (1 × 40, 4 × 36, 1 × 20) and the rest of the crew 422. There were 757 shares in the prize money from the *Goede Verwagting*. From the sale of this ship and her cargo the captain and crew received £ 702.16.11 $\frac{3}{4}$ , not counting the fifth of the money which came from the ship's sale. The portion allotted to the captain and crew from the proceeds of the *Rotterdam* (£ 109.7.8 $\frac{3}{4}$ ) was divided into 718 shares. Variations in the richness of the capture and in the number of shares issued meant that share values fluctuated widely from prize to prize. The 757 shares of the crew's portion of the proceeds of the *Goede Verwagting* were worth 18s./6 $\frac{3}{4}$ d. each; the 772 shares in the crew's portion of the profits from the prize *Ville Dauray* (£ 51.0.9) were worth 1s./3 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. each. No evidence has come to light about the number of shares in the crew's portion of the profits of the *Perla*, but a single share must have been worth pounds rather than shillings. For, in November 1780, Peter Lihou was drawing £ 6,000 to pay the crew of the *Sprightly*.

The rewards of ownership were not dispersed to the same extent, but were still considerably fragmented. In the case of the *Rotterdam* the owners of the *True Briton* received only £ 218.15.5 $\frac{3}{4}$  of the £ 814.0.5 gross takings from the sale of the cargo<sup>38</sup> and, because ownership was spread over a number of investors with different size shares, the individual profit was in some cases very small indeed. Five of the owners of the ship at that time possessed only 1/32 share each, thus receiving less than £ 7 of the net takings each. The gross proceeds from the richest of the *True Briton's* prizes, the *Goede Verwagting*, of £ 3,002.8.7, provided the owners with a return of £ 1,405.13.11 $\frac{1}{2}$ , giving the owner of a 1/32 share about £ 44. Certainly more substantial part-owners could enjoy over a short period a return in relation to investment that was quite startling. Nicholas Robilliard's 3/16 share of the *True Briton*, which cost him £ 93.15.0, gave him over the period July 1781 to October 1782 (sixteen months inclusive) an annual rate of return of almost 700%. The income he derived during these sixteen months, £ 867.4.6 $\frac{1}{4}$ , compared very favourably indeed with the profits that could be made from legitimate trade in peacetime. His average

<sup>37</sup> Privateering Papers of Miss E.F. Carey.

<sup>38</sup> See above p. 382 and note 28.

monthly income fell not far short of that enjoyed on average by an absentee West Indian landowner, John Pennant, during the period 1773-1775 from a considerably bigger investment, with shares in six ships of  $1/4$ ,  $1/4$ ,  $1/8$ ,  $1/8$ ,  $3/16$  and  $1/16$ .<sup>39</sup> However, his profit was a handsome rather than princely sum by XVIIIth century plundering standards, e.g. Clive's present of £ 200,000 from Mir Ja'far after Plassey. The rewards of privateering were typically a supplement to income rather than a windfall of such proportions as to alter radically the beneficiary's material circumstances. In a later war Hellier Dobrée received between 5 September 1799 and 24 March 1802 £ 382.13.9 as his share in the profits of the privateer *Resolution*, of which his elder brother Bonamy Dobrée was the agent, i.e. an annual average income of close on £ 150, a useful, but modest and uncertain, addition to his income as a rentier. The largest single payment was £ 115.15.4 in July 1800, the smallest £ 1.15.0 in February 1800. Income from other sources in 1799 amounted to £ 247, derived from £ 5,900 in 3% consols and interest on personal loans and a small annuity.<sup>40</sup>

### III

There can be little doubt that, although a vast array of individuals — owners, agents and seamen — was involved in the Guernsey privateering business, numbering several hundred people, the rewards of the majority were far from lavish. The tendencies described above for the profits to splinter were subject to countervailing factors that helped to reassemble the benefits into fewer hands than appeared at first sight. Take, for example, the agents. For one thing, they were as a rule part-owners of the ships they managed; and for another thing, being engaged in commerce, they frequently bought up for themselves part of the prize cargoes put up for sale, often in places (such as Guernsey) where prevailing prices were below average. As part-owners they were entitled to buy the same proportions of a prize's cargo as their share of the privateer, and they seem usually to have exercised that right.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, it was common for them to manage more than one privateer and, like other investors, to have shares in more than one. Louis Dunière and Daniel Vardon Jnr. earned not only their commission from the *True Briton*, but also their dividends as owners of  $4/16$  and  $6/16$  of the ship respectively. They were in the habit, too, of purchasing a large part of prize cargoes, certainly those of the *Rotterdam* and the *Ville Dauray*. Similarly Peter Lihou was both agent and part-owner ( $1/16$ )

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<sup>39</sup> J. LINDSAY, 'The Pennants and Jamaica 1665-1808; Part I — The growth and organisation of the Pennant estate' (Transactions of the Caernarfonshire Historical Society, 43, 1982, p. 37-82, p. 58).

<sup>40</sup> H. Dobrée Household Account Book (Dobrée File, Priaulx Library).

<sup>41</sup> Peter Lihou letterbook 18 November 1780.

of the *Sprightly* and had shares in two Jersey privateers, 1/16 of the *Charming Nancy* and 1/6 of the *General Conway*. In 1776 he bought tobacco captured by the *Hero* and the *Alarm*, of which he was the agent, and sugar and coffee and cotton seized by the *General Conway*, and in November 1780 he was considering putting in an offer, if the prices were right, for part of the cargoes of other prizes taken by the *General Conway*, brandy and lead. It was difficult to lose. If the price was high, the profits of capture were enhanced; if the price was low, the agents and owners added to their return by buying cheap and selling dear.

A ship's captain was well placed to make a smaller, but far from negligible, fortune. Captain Philip Durell of the *True Briton* made money from three sources. He was for a time a part-owner, with a 1/32 share; he possessed the usual hundred shares in the general distribution of the profits awarded to the ship's crew, giving him an eighth or more of the officers' and seamen's total share; and he was entitled to 12% of the sale of an enemy ship. From the *Goede Verwachting* alone he made well over three hundred pounds.<sup>42</sup> During the period July 1781 to October 1782 he earned a total of £577.7.5¼. This was a great deal more than the earnings of others who had a 1/32 share of the *True Briton* (£130.17.4), and even more than the earnings of those who owned a 1/16 (£311-£312). Naturally other members of the crew, even the more highly remunerated, could not match that sort of income. William Foster, the *True Briton's* doctor, earned £183.18.11½ between 1781 and 1783, not what could be called a comfortable salary given the conditions in which it was earned. The remuneration of others was more humble. Sixteen shares in four of the *True Briton's* prizes earned a total of £31.7.2; eight shares £16.3.10; seven shares £13.1.10; and five shares £10.2.4¾.

There was a long delay between the taking of the prize and the completion of all the formalities and the final distribution of rewards. The prize had to be condemned; ship and cargo to be advertised for sale; the sale to be held; the purchase money paid; and the claims of the interested parties to be settled. The usual terms of a sale held in Guernsey were a deposit of 20% payable in cash or bills payable in London at thirty days and the balance in ninety-day bills endorsed by respectable local merchants.<sup>43</sup> Hence it is scarcely surprising that sailors took advantage often of the opportunity, when it was offered, to sell their shares in advance, either to the owners or to investors who might themselves be agents or owners of other privateers, or to the investors' relatives. 428 of the 772 shares belonging to the crew of the *True Briton* in the proceeds from the *Ville Dauray* were sold in this way. Peter Lihou's hundred shares bought from the *Sprightly's* crew swelled considerably his profit from the rich

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<sup>42</sup> i.e. (in round figures) £193 from the sale of the ship (12% of proceeds), £90 from 100 shares at 18/6½ each, and £44 from 1/32 of the owners' profit.

<sup>43</sup> Peter Lihou letterbook 1 March 1779.

*Perla*. The articles of agreement for the *Speculation* in 1806 committed the ship's agents to buying a quarter of the officers' shares and a half of the other ranks' at the rate of ten shillings per share per month, as long as the vessel was at sea and still fully operational.<sup>44</sup> This seems to have been the going rate in the American War too. In 1778 Peter Libou, in search of a surgeon, was offering 20 shares (or up to 24 for a good one) which could be commuted to a minimum of ten pounds a month.

Thus the profits of privateering tended to be concentrated into relatively few hands, and what is more, they were appropriated by a small number of Guernsey families that were bewilderingly interrelated. Agents and owners were for the most part kinsmen, near or distant. There were some outsiders, including Daniel Vardon, who came from Normandy, and his partner Louis Dunière from Quebec, but both married into Guernsey families. The close-knit mesh of the Guernsey family was undoubtedly an asset in raising capital, appointing trustworthy agents in England, on the Continent and in America, and finding reliable skippers. On the other hand, the island's laws of partible inheritance compelled, generation after generation, the disposal of family property, particularly landed property, among numerous children, and fortunes were broken up as fast as they were made. This may have provided the incentive to restrict the circle of eligible marriage partners and to force the best families to look either to the professions, both on the island and in Britain, or to the sea for the income which exiguous estates could not provide. However, one cannot be sure that the explanation was not quite the opposite. It is not impossible that the Guernseymen clung tenaciously to partible inheritance just because there were other means of support, such as maritime enterprise, than dwindling real estate. This appears to have been the case in the coastal parts of Brittany, so close to the Channel Islands.<sup>45</sup>

To an early historian of Guernsey, Jonathan Duncan,<sup>46</sup> privateering was the source of the island's wealth in the XVIIIth century and the foundation of its commerce.<sup>47</sup> Guernsey became a smuggling entrepôt after its merchants began to sell captured French goods, especially brandies, to the English. His argument need not be taken too seriously, being not much strengthened by his estimate of a Guernsey mercantile marine on the eve of the American War of Independence of "only four or five rigged vessels and a few sloops and cutters",<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Privateering Papers of Miss E.F. Carey.

<sup>45</sup> THEODORE ZELDIN, *France 1848-1945, Ambition and Love* (Oxford University Press paperback edition, Oxford, 1979), p. 144-145.

<sup>46</sup> *The History of Guernsey, with Occasional Notices of Jersey, Alderney, Sark and Biographical Sketches* (Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, London, 1841).

<sup>47</sup> For the view that privateering could be economically stimulating rather than damaging cp. Regine Goutalier, 'Privateering and piracy' (*The Journal of European Economic History*, VI, 1, Spring 1977, p. 199-213), p. 200-201.

<sup>48</sup> J. DUNCAN, *Op. cit.*, p. 234.

despite three earlier periods of vigorous privateering. None the less, it does not lack plausibility. After the prosperous privateering of the American and French wars, Guernsey *armateurs*, at the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars, operated sixty-four ships, rather more than half of them over 100 tons burden, including a dozen over 200 tons. The most substantial of the shipping and trading businesses was that of Cartaret Priaulx and Co., with seven ships, two of them 375 and 321 tons respectively.<sup>49</sup> Priaulx had made money at privateering, and many of the other post-war agents can be identified with it in one way or another.

Ferdinand Brock Tupper estimated gross takings for 221 Guernsey prizes in the American War at £ 981,300, a figure which more or less agrees with that put to a British commission of inquiry by the Guernsey Royal Court in 1800.<sup>50</sup> An even higher total has been conjectured by a more recent historian.<sup>51</sup> If that million pounds had all found its way into commerce, it would have been a very large investment. Doubts, however, have been expressed above about the accuracy of Tupper's estimates, and the frittering away of the profits in legal and other costs and in distribution to a host of small claimants has been discussed in Section II. Now there is the further question to be considered, viz how far the large sums that entered the pockets of active traders were productively used.

Privateering was indubitably only one of a range of legal and illegal, peaceful and aggressive commercial and financial activities carried on by agents and owners of Guernsey vessels commissioned by the Crown to plunder its enemies at sea.<sup>52</sup> Tea, wine and spirits were purchased for clandestine sale in the English West Country. Sometimes a privateering cutter (being small and fast) did duty in the smuggling run to England.<sup>53</sup> There was, too, a long-established tobacco export trade, in defiance of French law, to Brittany,<sup>54</sup> and it is possible

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<sup>49</sup> *Almanach Journalier à l'usage de l'Île de Guernesey, et les îles voisines* (Guernesey, 1817).

<sup>50</sup> 'Recapitulation of a List of Privateers'; J. Duncan, *Op. cit.*, p. 249.

<sup>51</sup> H.C. TIMEWELL, *Loc. cit.*, p. 209. The highest figure given by J.S. Bromley ('Channel Island privateers in the War of the Spanish Succession', *Transactions of La Société Guernesaise*, XIV, 1949, p. 448) for the value of over three hundred Guernsey and Jersey prizes in the War of the Spanish Succession is £ 150,000. This is an additional reason for doubting Tupper's figure, even allowing for higher prices, more valuable cargoes and bigger ships three-quarters of a century later.

<sup>52</sup> R.P. CROWHURST, 'Profitability in French privateering 1793-1815' (*Business History*, XXIV, March 1982, p. 48-60) makes the same point about French *armateurs* and investors (p. 58). There are other parallels, too, between French and Guernsey experience, notably the haphazard nature of the returns (p. 55).

<sup>53</sup> E.g. the *Sprightly* of Peter Lihou in October 1780.

<sup>54</sup> JACOB M. PRICE, *France and the Chesapeake, A History of the French Tobacco Monopoly 1674-1791, and its Relationship to the British and American Tobacco Trades* (University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1973), Volume I, p. 130-133, 447-450.

that the tobacco seized on prizes was sold in this illicit trade. Peter Lihou certainly bought some. Gin (up to fifty pipes at a time) and tea (thirty or forty chests at a time) were obtained at Rotterdam; gin at Amsterdam; brandy at Barcelona; and tobacco from America (not, one might suppose, during the American War, but one cannot be sure).<sup>55</sup> Danish East India Company tea was bought at Copenhagen by collaborating merchants, each ordering twenty or thirty, or exceptionally fifty, chests.<sup>56</sup> Guernsey patriotism, so emphasised in the rush for letters of marque when profit could be combined with smiting the king's enemies, was no barrier to trading with them. In July 1780 Peter Lihou was planning to conduct his trade with Barcelona through a third party in Holland, using false invoices. The war between Britain and Spain was making it dangerous. It was after, and perhaps (though he was already importing it from Rotterdam) because of, the outbreak of war with the Netherlands in December 1780 that he began a trial importation of gin from Amsterdam.

Some of those engaged in these trades in war and peace can be identified as being or having been agents or owners — or both — of corsairs, and it is reasonable to suppose that some trading capital came from privateering. Indeed, a direct connection between smuggling and privateering can be established. Peter Lihou ordered tea from two Copenhagen firms (Arfwidson and John Brown) in anticipation of profits from the prize *Perla*, and this tea was offered to his "dealers" in England. The order to John Brown was in the range of eight to nine hundred pounds sterling and in November 1780 Arfwidson presented a bill for £ 671.12.11, excluding insurance and commission. Lihou had also been giving substantial orders to James Le Marchant in Rotterdam. In March 1780 he was instructing his London agent to honour two expected bills, one for between six and seven hundred pounds and the other between eight hundred and a thousand. When, towards the end of the year, William de Jersey, his agent, complained that Lihou was £ 5,000 overdrawn, the latter catalogued the profits he looked for from the Spanish prize if only de Jersey were a little more energetic in getting the case settled. However, the link between privateering and commerce should not be made too much of. Peter Lihou started buying tea from Christian Arfwidson long before he made money from privateering, as early as 1760; brandy from Gregory and Guille in Barcelona from 1770; gin from James Le Marchant in Rotterdam from 1771; tobacco from Virginia from 1773. His orders were certainly smaller in those early years (two or three hundred pounds at the most), but there is no way of telling what they would have grown to by the late 1770s in the absence of privateering income.

<sup>55</sup> Trading with the enemy under the flag of truce on the pretext of some humanitarian purpose seems to have been an American practice in earlier wars. (WILLIAM T. BAXTER, *The House of Hancock, Business in Boston 1724-1775*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1945, p. 94, note 13).

<sup>56</sup> Peter Lihou letterbook *passim*.

Not all the proceeds of privateering were employed productively. Jonathan Duncan thought that after 1815 the "vast fortunes accumulated during the war" found their way chiefly into 8% French government stock, and merchants "in some measure retired from commerce, and realised their floating capitals".<sup>57</sup> It cannot be doubted that, at a time of fashionable urban improvement, much money went into house building, demonstrated by an increase in the tax assessment of St Peter Port from a third of a million pounds in 1715 to almost two millions in 1800.<sup>58</sup> Another outlet for investment was the purchase of estates, in England as well as on the island,<sup>59</sup> or Guernsey *rentes*, those survivals of feudal dues payable in corn or commuted to money. Isaac Carey, a successor to Peter Lihou as the agent of the *Hero*, which took thirteen prizes during his management, with a gross value of £38,497 (if Tupper is to be believed), bought both a country house and, in 1787, a town house.<sup>60</sup> John Le Mesurier, who, according to one source, was the owner of eight privateers in 1782, which earned him £212,231,<sup>61</sup> was governor of Alderney, and some of his gains were devoted to public works there, the rest evidently going into houses and land in Alderney and Guernsey.<sup>62</sup> That his brother Henry, who had relinquished to him the governorship of Alderney in 1744 in exchange for land in Guernsey, used at least some of his wealth from privateering to promote business is shown by the request in his will to three of his sons to return "les sommes-que je leur ai prêtées pour les mettre dans le Negoce". His fortune, however, was scattered far and wide at his death. One third of the bulk of his estate went to his wife and two-thirds were split up among his ten children.<sup>63</sup> Trade and privateering were sometimes adopted for the express purpose of restoring lost landed estates. The Priaulx family, which lost the family fief in 1722, repaired its fortune in that way. Thomas Priaulx (1725-84) was the captain of his father's corsair *Marie* in 1745 and in the American War had substantial privateering interests of his own, his son Cartaret even more in the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars.<sup>64</sup>

Much money went into British and French government funds. Peter Lihou put considerable sums into 3% consols in 1779: £700 in February, £210 in April, an unspecified sum in June (the balance of his account with his London agent), £600 in July, £200 in September and £1,000 again in September.

<sup>57</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 262.

<sup>58</sup> J.P. WARREN, *Loc. cit.*, p. 484-485.

<sup>59</sup> H.C. TIMEWELL, *Loc. cit.*, p. 211.

<sup>60</sup> Tupper File (Priaulx Library).

<sup>61</sup> E.F. CAREY, 'Peter Le Mesurier, Governor of Alderney 1793-1803' (*Transactions of La Société Guernesiaise*, X, 1926), p. 56-57.

<sup>62</sup> Guernsey Wills (Greffé, St. Peter Port) 1780-95, p. 289. I am grateful to Mr. Brehaut of the Ecclesiastical Court for permission to examine these.

<sup>63</sup> Wills 1762-80, p. 417.

<sup>64</sup> Priaulx File (Priaulx Library).

Government funds were not necessarily regarded as permanent investment. For Lihou they were not only an investment, but also a speculation and savings that could be drawn on to remedy temporary shortage of liquid capital. In December 1780, having overdrawn his account with William de Jersey in anticipation of his profits from the *Perla*, he ordered his agent to sell £ 2,000 of 3% consols. Fourteen years before, in 1766, he had done the same thing, instructing his London agent to sell his *fonds* to pay Arfwidson. Moving money in and out of government stock was evidently a long-established practice. One finds a London agent complaining in 1760 to a Guernsey firm,

I find that most of my Corresponents (sic) put their money in the Stocks & transact busnness (sic) with other people when at the same time I am in advance for them, which I dont think is right, as it is not only incovenient but prejudicial being obliged to sell my own Stocks & frequently put it out of my Power to oblige my Friends & you in Particular, I am therefore determined for the future to make no more advance unless trifling & that to prevent my being streightened for money.<sup>65</sup>

Most Guernsey merchants, however, seem to have put their money into the funds as a fixed investment, turning themselves into rentiers. Charles de Cartaret, at one time partner of Peter Lihou, retired from business and set himself up as a gentleman (as he describes himself in his will). On his death in 1782 he left over £ 7,000 in 3% annuities "de Banque réduite ou consolidée" and 4% annuities "de Banque de l'Année 1777" to various nephews and nieces and grand-nephews and—nieces.<sup>66</sup> Thomas Priaux left the interest on £ 500 in 3% annuities to his sister. The rest of his estate was "partagée entre ma bien aimée femme et mes Enfants suivant aux Lois de cette Isle".<sup>67</sup> When Daniel Vardon died in 1793, he left his son-in-law William Kennet (another privateering agent) his money in the English public funds and only ten pounds to his son in America, whose debts had been, or were to be, cleared to the tune of £ 2,420.0.6. The rest of his estate comprised his house and garden.<sup>68</sup> His former partner, Louis Dunière did not die until 1823, leaving behind two houses and a considerable fortune in English and French government stock. With a generosity uncharacteristic of the Guernsey bourgeois he bequeathed £ 500 to the poor of the island and £ 900 to his servants. To some twenty relatives in Canada and Guernsey he left almost £ 19,000, capital dispersed indeed, though, as some of the legatees bore names well known in commerce and privateering, capital

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<sup>65</sup> Wm. Lemessurier to Cartaret Jersey & Co. 30 October 1760 (Cartaret Priaux Papers, Priaux Library).

<sup>66</sup> Wills 1780-95, p. 45.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 302.

to some extent reassembled.<sup>69</sup> Another *armateur* and shipowner of the American War, Peter Mourant, who died in 1828, left (apart from two legacies totalling £ 2,500) to his wife the estate of Candie House, with its extensive gardens, in one of the finest parts of St Peter Port.<sup>70</sup>

Even if one accepts that at least a proportion of the fruits of plunder was used productively, there remains the difficulty of determining its importance for the development of capitalism. One would suspect that the advantages accruing to the beneficiaries were outweighed by the losses inflicted on established commerce. Successful merchants on both sides of the conflict had their businesses impaired or even ruined.<sup>71</sup> The disastrous consequences could sometimes be lessened by the possibility that occasionally existed of the repurchase of prizes by the original owners. When James Le Marchant of Rotterdam bought at a public auction the *Goede Verwagting*, it may be assumed that he was acting on behalf of the vessel's owners.<sup>72</sup> It was not uncommon in the War of the Spanish Succession for the master of a captured ship to pay a ransom in the form of a bill of exchange drawn on the ship's owner or a reputable merchant.<sup>73</sup> In 1748 a French captain paid a ransom of 6,000 livres tournois (about £ 45) to escape from being taken as a prize, leaving his son with the corsair (the *Hannover*) as hostage.<sup>74</sup> There is no evidence that this practice survived into the American War of Independence, but if the experience of French privateering in the West Indies (where it was apparently "customary, as soon as a man hears that his vessel is taken to go directly to Martinique, and buy as much as he can of his own property in again")<sup>75</sup> is a guide, retrieval of property may not have been so rare. None the less, losses were incurred that were not recoverable. It is difficult to escape the suspicion that privateering is a rudimentary and peripheral economic activity, the pursuit of coastal towns that were either backward or, as the result of war, in recession. It is of some significance that it was associated with illicit trade.

The pillage of enemy shipping was designed to serve the interests of a nation at war, only secondarily the cupidity of private entrepreneurs. Its economic consequences were capricious, assisting perhaps the success of some merchants (to a degree impossible to assess when there are so many imponderables) but at the expense of other merchants and to the detriment of trade. It would

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<sup>69</sup> Wills 1818-28, p. 209.

<sup>70</sup> Wills 1828-36, p. 20.

<sup>71</sup> For the disastrous effect of Channel Island privateering on French commerce in the War of the Spanish Succession, cp. J.S. BROMLEY, *Loc. cit.*, p. 447.

<sup>72</sup> Daniel Vardon Jnr. Account Book.

<sup>73</sup> H.C. TIMEWELL, *Loc. cit.*, p. 203.

<sup>74</sup> Nicholas Dobrée Manuscripts (Priaultx Library).

<sup>75</sup> A contemporary witness quoted in GEORGE OTTO TREVELYAN, *The American Revolution* (abridged version, Longmans, London, 1965), p. 357, note 57.

not be inappropriate to conclude by citing a case which demonstrates the adverse effects of such violence upon capital accumulation and the importance of peaceful entrepreneurial talent in repairing the damage. Thomas Dobrée was an expatriate Guernseyman whose business suffered through the plundering proclivities of his compatriots. Born at Nantes in 1781, the son of a merchant who had migrated there and was sometime United States consul, Thomas was brought up by his Guernsey grandparents after his mother's death. At the age of eighteen he went to live at Hamburg, returning to France in 1801. It was only after a long struggle that he was able to restore his father's business, ruined by war and the depredations of corsairs. What makes his career of particular interest is that he became a pioneer industrialist, owning ironworks (*forges*) in Basse Indre, blast-furnaces in Brittany and collieries in the Vendée. Thomas Dobrée was not the beneficiary of redistributive violence, but a victim who yet succeeded in contributing to the development of industrial capitalism.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Dobrée File (Priaultx Library). It comes from an extract from P. Levot, *Biographie bretonne*, Volume I (Paris, 1852).

