

5. GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

In the early days of the rising in Hampshire, Wiltshire and Berkshire, there was a good deal of sympathy with the labourers. The farmers in many cases did not object to the destruction of their threshing machines. One from Market Lavington went so far as to say that "nearly all the Wiltshire Farmers were willing to destroy or set aside their machines." Their motives were mixed. Some sympathized with the cause of higher wages - provided their own rents and tithes were reduced in compensation. Others, especially those who had leased machines from contractors, were willing to sacrifice them, to save farm buildings and contents from destruction.

Fortune had so far smiled upon the rising, and there was some hope of success. In places where the decline of the labourer had been watched for years without pity or dismay, magistrates were now calling meetings to consider their circumstances, and there was evidence that they were aware of the desperate condition of the poor. The following article¹ called for labourers to be paid at 10 shillings per week:

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THE MAGISTRATES acting for the
 DIVISION of DEVIZES, having, at a Meeting
 held on the 23d instant, resolved,
FIRST—That they would not accede to any Demands
 made by any Persons, urging such Demands in a tumul-
 tuous and riotous manner.
SECONDLY—That when order and quiet should
 have been restored, and not till then, they would apply
 themselves to remedy such grievances, as might be alleged,
 and to adopt the best means in their power, to secure a
 just and proper amount of Wages to Labourers.
 (Observing now with great satisfaction, that most pa-
 rishes in this neighbourhood have preserved a loyal and
 peaceable behaviour; and that in others good order has
 been re-established; they hereby strongly recommend to
 all Landowners and Occupiers of Lands in this Division,
 to ADVANCE forthwith the AMOUNT of WAGES
 to their LABOURERS: so as that every able bodied
 Labourer shall receive for his full labour, wages, at the
 rate of ten shillings weekly.
 EDWARD POORE,
 GEORGE WATSON TAYLOR,
 T. G. BUCKNALL ESTCOURT,
 WADHAM LOCKE,
 THOMAS SCOTT,
 T. H. S. BUCKNALL ESTCOURT,
 ERNLE WARRINER,
 WILLIAM HEALD LUDLOW.
 Devizes, 29th Nov. 1830.

DEVIZES

¹ Devizes & Wiltshire Gazette 2 December 1830

However, the same edition carried the response from land occupiers which certainly did not enhance the labourers' situation.

THE Magistrates acting for the Division of DEVIZES, having, at a Meeting held at Devizes the 29th of November, 1830, strongly recommended to the Occupiers of Land in their Division, to advance the amount of their Labourers' wages to ten shillings per week, the OCCUPIERS of LAND in the said Division and Neighbourhood, humbly request that the Proprietors and Tithe owners, will openly and candidly declare what REDUCTION they intend to MAKE to their Tenants, without which they cannot possibly accede to their wishes. (Signed)

S. Smith	Wm. Ellis
R. Jenner	Jeremiah Harris
Edmund Hitchcock	George Milson
Richard Bar	E. Parsons
Wm. Tinker	John Bishop
Wm. Stansbury	Thomas Potter

Unhappily the day of conciliatory measures was a brief one. Two facts frightened the upper classes, represented by the Whig Ministry and Lord Melbourne at the Home Office, into brutality. One was the spread of the rising, the other the scarcity of troops. As the movement spread, the alarm of the authorities inspired a different policy, and even those landowners who recognized that the labourers were miserable, thought that they were in the presence of a rising that would sweep them away unless they could suppress it at once by drastic means.

The Whig Ministry took over on 22nd November and Lord Melbourne succeeded Peel at the Home Office. The change was marked by a more resolute intervention in the suppression of the disturbances. The day after taking office Melbourne issued the proclamation offering rewards for information. It was followed two days later by a circular letter to magistrates, instructing them to act more energetically in enrolling constables.

In Wiltshire, the Yeoman Cavalry was mobilized and this was supported by Special Constables. These were recruited through newspaper notices like the following which appeared in the Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette.

DEVIZES, DEVIZES GREEN, &c.
ALL Persons willing to take upon themselves the duty of **SPECIAL CONSTABLES**, (either on horseback or on foot), for the preservation of the Peace, are requested to apply immediately at the Town Clerks Office, for the purpose of being enrolled and sworn. **W. W. SALMON, Town Clerk.**
 Thursday, 25th November, 1830.

Large numbers of Special Constables were sworn in Devizes and Marlborough and also in other counties.

Conciliatory methods consequently ceased; the upper classes substituted action for diplomacy, and the movement rapidly collapsed. Little resistance was offered, and the large numbers of armed and

desperate men melted down into groups of weak and ill-fed labourers, armed with sticks and stones. There were very few incidents recorded in Wiltshire following the climactic simultaneous defeats of the mobs at Tisbury and Heytesbury on 25th November. On 28th Colonel Mair wrote from Salisbury that *“the labourers are returning to their work and everything is becoming tranquil”*.

By 4th December *The Times* correspondent in Wiltshire and Hampshire reported that quiet was restored, that the peasantry was cowed, and that men who had been prominent in the mobs were being picked out and arrested every day.