

The Lancastrian Retreat from Populist Discourse? Propaganda Conflicts in the Wars of the Roses

Andrew Broertjes
University of Western Australia

*This article explores an aspect of the propaganda wars that were conducted between the Lancastrian and Yorkist sides during the series of conflicts historians refer to as the Wars of the Roses. I argue that by the end of the 1450s, the Lancastrians had abandoned the pursuit of the popular voice ("the commons", "the people"), instead treating this group with suspicion and disdain, expressed primarily through documents such as the *Somnium Vigilantis* and George Ashby's *Active Policy of a Prince*. This article examines how the Lancastrians may have had populist leanings at the start of their rule, the reigns of Henry IV and Henry V, but moved away from such an approach, starting with the Jack Cade rebellion, and the various Yorkist uprisings of the 1450s. The composition of this group, "the people", will also be examined, with the question being raised as to who they might have been, and why their support became a necessary part of the Wars of the Roses.*

In November 1459 what historians would later refer to as "the Parliament of Devils" met in Coventry.¹ Convening after the confrontation between Yorkists and Lancastrians at Ludford Bridge, this parliament, consisting mainly of partisan Lancastrians, passed acts of attainder against the leading figures of the Yorkist faction.² The Yorkists had already fled the country, retreating to Calais and Ireland, preparing for an extraordinary political comeback that would culminate in the coronation of Edward IV in March 1461. Such an event must have seemed distant at the end of 1459, in a

¹ The terms "Parliament of Devils" and "Coventry parliament" have become interchangeable in Wars of the Roses historiography. "Parliament of Devils" was a term used in the Coventry mystery plays as early as 1468. See M.H. Dodds, "The Problem of the 'Ludus Coventriae'", in *The Modern Language Review*, 9:1 (1914), p. 83. The use of the term as applied specifically to the Coventry parliament of 1459 does not seem to be contemporary, although reports of the parliament were circulated by John Bokkyng in a letter he wrote to John Paston and others in December of 1459, see N. Davis, R. Beadle and C. Richmond, ed., *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*, (Oxford, 2004). Vol. 2, pp.187-188. Friar John Brackley gave a slightly later report to Paston (24th October, 1460) that emphasised the viciousness of the Lancastrian lords, Davis *et al Paston Letters* II, p. 221. Of note in Brackley's letter is the reference to "parlyows writing", a possible reference to either the *Somnium Vigilantis* or similar. Contemporary (or very near-contemporary) references to the parliament can also be found in *An English Chronicle of the Reigns of Richard II, Henry IV, Henry V and Henry VI*, ed. J.S. Davies. Camden Society, (1856), p. 83; "Vitellius AXVI" in *Chronicles of London*, ed. C.L. Kingsford, Oxford University Press (1905), p. 170; *The Crowland Chronicle Continuations 1459-1486*, ed. N. Pronay and J. Cox, Richard III Society and Yorkist Trust, (1986), p. 111. The term "Parliament of Devils" has been used variously by J.R. Lander, "Attainder and Forfeiture 1453-1509" in *The Historical Journal*, 4:2, 1961, pp. 122; A.J. Pollard, *The Wars of the Roses*, (London, 1988), p. 25; A. Gross, *The Dissolution of the Lancastrian Kingship: Sir John Fortescue and the Crisis of Monarchy in Fifteenth-Century England*, (Stamford, 1996), p. 46.

² *Rotuli Parliamentorum ut et petitiones, et placita in Parlamento tempore Edwardi R> I> ad finem Henrici R. VII*, (New Haven, 1975). Vol. V, pp. 346-350.

parliamentary session that outlined in detail the treasonous behaviour of the Yorkist leaders. The significance of this particular session was the nature of the accusations levelled against the Yorkists, including the charge that they had deliberately sought out “the favoure of the peple”, a charge included in the document *Somnium Vigilantis* (“A Dream of Vigilance”). This charge has a greater significance than just the denigration of a group of failed rebels. I will argue that it reflected a broader retreat, a conscious decision on the part of the Lancastrians not to engage with the wider public, instead treating “the people” with suspicion and disdain. Moving away from such populist discourses formed part of a larger “propaganda war” between the Lancastrian and Yorkist factions that was occurring in the 1450s and early 1460s. This retreat stood in contrast to the efforts of the Lancastrian writers of previous generations, such as Thomas Hoccleve, and Lancastrian kings such as Henry V; efforts of a usurping dynasty to gain support for their claim to the throne, and then for a costly war against France. I will trace this progression through the *Somnium* and other texts in this period, including George Ashby’s *Active Policy of a Prince* and the final sections of Malory’s *Le Morte Darthur*, finding a dynasty that arguably ended its life holding a hostile regard for public opinion and populist politics.

Before conceptualising a Lancastrian retreat from populist politics, we must first consider what populist politics might have looked like in the context of the conflicts of the fifteenth century, and why such politics may have been necessary. The last twenty-five years have seen an increase in the work devoted to unravelling issues of propaganda and the manipulation of public opinion during the series of civil conflicts collectively referred to as the Wars of the Roses.³ What has been found is that these conflicts – firstly over the right to be part of the king’s government, then over who was to be king – seemed to accelerate the growth and distribution of propaganda.⁴ While propaganda had existed before as part of the post-Conquest English political process, the fifteenth-century conflicts drew a definite line. The flurry of bills that accompanied the political manoeuvres of the 1450s and the overthrows of Henry VI, Edward IV,

³ These include: A. Allan, “Yorkist Propaganda: Pedigree, Prophecy and the “British History” in the Reign of Edward IV” in C. Ross, ed., *Patronage, Pedigree and Power in Later Medieval England*, (Gloucester, 1979), pp. 171-192. Also see A. Allan “Royal Propaganda and the Proclamations of Edward IV” in *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 59, (1986). pp. 146-154. C. Taylor, “War, Propaganda and Diplomacy in Fifteenth Century England” in C. Allmand, ed., *War, Government and Power in Late Medieval France*, (Liverpool, 2000), pp. 70. H. Maurer “Delegitimizing Lancaster: The Yorkist Use of Gendered Propaganda During the Wars of the Roses” in D.L. Biggs, S.D. Michalove and A.C. Reeves, ed., *Reputation and Representation in Fifteenth Century Europe*, (Leiden and Boston, 2004), pp. 9-38; E.K. Harris, “Censoring Disobedient Subjects: Narratives of Treason and Royal Authority in Fifteenth Century England” in *Reputation and Representation in Fifteenth Century Europe*, pp. 211-253; J. Leland “Witchcraft and the Woodvilles: A Standard Smear?” in *Reputation and Representation in Fifteenth Century Europe*, pp. 267-288; M. Condon, “God Save the King! Piety, Propaganda and the Perpetual Memorial” in ed. T. Tatton-Brown and R. Mortimer *Westminster Abbey: The Lady Chapel of Henry VII*, (Woodbridge, 2003), pp. 57-99; R. Butcher, “Propaganda in the Prepared Parliamentary Speeches of 1455-1461” in *The Ricardian*, 14, (2004), pp. 37-53; W. Scase, “‘Strange and Wonderful Bills’: Bill-casting and Political Discourse in Late Medieval England” in R. Copeland, D. Lawton and W. Scase, ed., *New Medieval Literatures*, (Oxford, 1998), pp. 225-247.

⁴ C. Richmond, “Propaganda in the Wars of the Roses” in *History Today*, 42, (1992), p. 13; M. Hicks, *Warwick the Kingmaker*, (Blackwell, 1998), pp. 194-195.

Edward V and Richard III indicated that political groups advanced their cause not only through strength of arms, but also through strength of ideas.

These ideas were expressed through a range of media. Primarily during this period, that media was that of the bill, a category of document into which a number of sub-categories fell.⁵ C.A.J. Armstrong's work on the speed with which information could be disseminated throughout England, as well as internal evidence from the sources themselves, has also given us some idea about how these documents were distributed throughout the kingdom.⁶ Much of this information has come to the modern historian through the pages of various contemporary chronicles, as well as the diplomatic correspondence from outside England during key parts of the conflicts. These bills could be both official government "lines" over particular issues, or could form part of an alternative voice, distributed by non-government factions such as the Cade rebels in 1450 and the Yorkist faction throughout the 1450s.⁷

One question raised by historians is to whom these ideas were directed.⁸ It is a question that has proven difficult to answer. Certainly didactic material and ideas concerning "good kingship" had been circulating for centuries, but had been confined very much to the aristocratic classes. In the fifteenth century these ideas made a dramatic leap into the pages of vernacular chronicles – such as *The Brut* and the various London chronicles – and the bills that circulated around the Jack Cade rebellion of 1450.⁹ These documents indicate that a dialogue had begun with a centuries-old political class that was now assuming a new significance in the context of the dynastic disputes between York and Lancaster: "the people". References to this group appear in numerous accounts written during this period, often linked to specific political events. 'Gregory's Chronicle', when commenting on the first battle of St Albans in 1455, stated that upon the death of the Duke of Somerset: "The pepulle sayde that the Duke of Somersett was worthy to suffer that dethe."¹⁰ *An English Chronicle* records the discontent, or perceived discontent leveled against the unpopular duke of Suffolk in early 1450: "alle the peple of this lond and specialli the communes cride ayens the said duke of Suffolk, and said he

⁵ Colin Richmond identified three distinct types; newsbills, handbills and letters. Newsbills were defined as official documents, letters were exchanged between individuals, and handbills were documents "posted in public places, as well as circulated either by individuals or by groups, and which outlined grievance private or public." Richmond, "Propaganda in the Wars of the Roses", pp. 12-13.

⁶ C.A.J. Armstrong, "Distribution and Speed of News at the Time of the Wars of the Roses" in R.W. Hunt, W.A. Pantin and R.W. Southern, ed., *Studies in Medieval History Presented to Frederick Maurice Powicke* (Oxford, 1948), pp. 439-440.

⁷ For the Cade manifestoes, see I.M.W. Harvey, *Jack Cade's Rebellion of 1450*, (Oxford, 1991), pp. 186-191.

⁸ C. Ross, "Rumour, Propaganda and Popular Opinion During the Wars of the Roses" in R. Griffiths, ed., *Patronage, the Crown and the Provinces in Later Medieval England* (Gloucester, 1981), p. 15; I.M.W. Harvey "Was There Popular Politics in Fifteenth-Century England?" in R.H. Britnell and A.J. Pollard, ed., *The McFarlane Legacy: Studies in Later Medieval Politics and Society*, (Stroud, 1995), pp. 155-174; M. Hicks, *English Political Culture in the Fifteenth Century*, (London and New York, 2002).

⁹ I.M.W. Harvey, *Jack Cade's Rebellion of 1450*, (Oxford, 1991), pp. 186-191.

¹⁰ 'Gregory's Chronicle' in James Gairdner, ed., *Three Fifteenth Century Chronicles*, Camden Society: Oxford, 1965, p. 198.

was a traitour.”¹¹ These are only two of numerous examples that can be found within the vernacular chronicles of this period.¹²

The uses of the term “the commons” or “the people” within chronicle texts were quite vague. This ambiguity, however, may well have been deliberate. Philippa Maddern has argued that the juxtaposition of natural phenomena with political events within these texts was used as a subtle way of critiquing events and political figures.¹³ It can be argued that the term “the people” performed much the same function for medieval, city-based chroniclers. Using these terms provided an avenue for critiquing the ruling elites or certain acts without appearing to do so. Instead of recording that a king was incapable of ruling, the text would state that “the people” believed that the king was incapable. As a group, therefore, “the people” can be seen as both an actual group and as one constructed through text. And it was a group that was becoming increasingly important - both in actual events and in texts - in regards to political change in the fifteenth century. In the long run, it may well prove impossible to demonstrate who these “people” actually were, although a number of historians have tried. However, the sheer number of references within contemporary texts to this group makes it impossible to discuss fifteenth-century politics without referring to them.

Records of the opinions of “the people” or “the commons” appeared in other sources apart from the city-based chronicles. Reporting on popular opinion in the crucial month of October 1460, Margaret Paston wrote to her husband: “Ther is gret talkyng in thys contre of the desyir of my lorde of York. The pepyll reporte full worchepfully of my

¹¹ *An English Chronicle*, p. 68.

¹² While this list is by no means complete, it is important to note that references to “the people” and “the commons” do occur frequently in the chronicles of the period ranging from 1398 to the early 1500s. See *An English Chronicle*, pp. 13, 17-19, 21, 23, 30-31, 33, 55-56, 60, 62, 63-69, 71, 79, 87, 91, 95, 97, 99, 107, 109-110; ‘A Chronicle of the First Thirteen years of the Reign of Edward IV by John Warkworth’ in K. Dockray, ed., *Three Chronicles of the Reign of Edward IV*, Alan Sutton: Gloucester, 1988, pp. 24-27, 30-31, 34-37, 41, 45, 48; ‘Gregory’s Chronicle of London’, pp. 104, 108, 112-113, 159-160, 183, 198, 206, 214-215, 221, 228; ‘Julius B II’, pp. 19, 22, 24, 27-31, 33-36, 43-47, 49-52, 54, 56-61, 65, 67-68, 73-74, 76, 78, 82, 84; ‘Cleopatra C IV’, pp. 124-125, 127, 130, 147-148, 150-151; ‘Vitellius A XVI’, pp. 153-154, 156-162, 165-166, 173-174, 176, 181-182, 185, 190-191, 193-194, 196, 200-201, 203-204, 209, 213-214, 216-217, 227, 254; ‘Appendix III’ (‘Julius B I’), pp. 280-281, 285, 287-288; F.C. Hingeston (ed.) *John Capgrave’s Chronicle of England*, Longman et al: London, 1858, pp. 268-271, 275-276, 278, 282, 286-290, 293; *The Brut*, pp. 355, 357-361, 364-366, 380, 382, 392, 426, 429-430, 433, 435, 438, 443, 457, 461-462, 466-467, 470, 473, 476-479, 482-483, 486-489, 499, 506-509, 512-513, 516-519, 521, 523, 525-526, 530-531; H. Ellis (ed.) *Fabyan’s New Chronicles of France and England*, G. Woodfall: London, 1811, pp. 543, 619, 628, 638-639, 660, 678; ‘Robert Bale’s Chronicle’ in R. Flenley, ed., *Six Town Chronicles*, Clarendon University Press: Oxford, 1911, pp. 117, 121, 125, 130, 139-140, 145; A.H. Thomas and I.D. Thornley, ed., *Great Chronicle of London*, George W. Jones: London, 1938, pp. 84, 87-89, 94, 128-131, 133, 136-138, 156, 171-176, 181, 183-188, 192, 194-196, 199, 207-209, 211-213, 217, 223, 225-226, 229, 232, 234, 236, 239, 242, 244-246, 251, 253-254, 257, 259, 263-264, 275-276, 282, 288, 290-291, 295, 319, 323, 328, 333; ‘A Short English Chronicle’ in James Gairdner, ed., *Three Fifteenth Century Chronicles*, pp. 28, 61, 66-68, 73, 76. It should be noted that these citations do not include multiple references on each page.

¹³ P. Maddern, “Weather, War and Witches: Sign and Cause in Fifteenth Century English Vernacular Chronicles” in Anne Gilmour-Bryson (ed.) *A World Explored: Essays in Honour of Laurie Gardiner*, University of Melbourne History Department: Melbourne, 1993, pp. 83, 85.

lord of Warwyk.”¹⁴ In writing this letter, Margaret assumed an understanding between herself and her husband of the term “the pepyll”. By comparing these letters to the chronicles, we can understand that the term “the people” was being used and constructed by the authors of different kinds of texts, not just vernacular chronicles. There was a realization, too, that this audience existed, and could be a source of political support.

While references to the group known as the people or the commons occur frequently in relation to political events as constructed in contemporary sources, the question must also be raised as to who these people actually were. It has been shown how the group was constructed in a textual sense as a device employed by fifteenth-century writers to critique and comment on contemporary politics. This group was constructed as a political voice that sometimes ran counter to that of the “state” (the king and his supporters). But who were “the people”? Who were “the commons”? This has proved to be one of the most difficult questions in terms of determining a domestic audience for propaganda, whether Yorkist or Lancastrian.¹⁵ We can be fairly certain of a *perceived* audience that fifteenth century propagandists could target, but what of the actual as opposed to the perceived audience?

One of the main problems when dealing with sources from this time period is that they are all regionally based. We can determine the attitudes of certain people in certain areas, but not England as a whole. London, in particular, is an area that has been the subject of much focus, due mainly to the large number of London-based chronicle sources from the fifteenth century. Through the chronicles of the period, the commons of London have been presented as playing a key part in several episodes of political turmoil. Yet the participation of Londoners during times of political turmoil is as much a textual construction as anything else from the period. While the authorship of the chronicles is anonymous, we can be reasonably certain that Londoners wrote the chronicles.¹⁶ It is therefore possible that the actions of Londoners during political crises were heightened or given greater significance than they had in reality.

It is necessary, however, to draw the distinction between “textual” and “actual” importance. While there is some overlap, as discussed above, some sense of the actual groups can be gleaned. There was a longstanding relationship between London and the crown, based on a series of actual needs, both on the part of the crown, and that of the city. Finance was a key component of this relationship: “the king needed money and the Londoners wanted self-government which largely (albeit not completely) contributed to

¹⁴ N. Davis (ed.) *The Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*, Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1971, vol. I, p. 259.

¹⁵ Some attempts at answering this question include I.M.W. Harvey “Was There Popular Politics in Fifteenth-Century England” in R.H. Britnell and A.J. Pollard, eds., *The McFarlane Legacy: Studies in Late Medieval Politics and Society*, Alan Sutton: Stroud, 1995, pp. 155-174; C. Ross, “Rumour, Propaganda and Popular Opinion During the Wars of the Roses” in Ralph Griffiths (ed.) *Patronage, the Crown and the Provinces in Later Medieval England*, Alan Sutton: Gloucester, 1981, pp. 15-32.

¹⁶ Mary-Rose McLaren, *The London Chronicles of the Fifteenth Century: A Revolution in English Writing*, D.S. Brewer: New York, 2002, p. 15.

their ability to make money."¹⁷ The contribution of money from Londoners to the king's coffers was assumed, but not a given. In the crucial period of 1448-1460, the crown made twenty-one demands for money. On seven occasions, the city felt confident enough to turn them down.¹⁸ In addition to their financial support, Londoners could also be used as a military force by the crown. In the same way that financial support could be withheld, military aid could also be used as a bargaining chip, something that became crucial during times of civil conflict. At the battle of Towton, Londoners fought for Edward IV, not Henry VI.¹⁹ In times of political crisis, the assistance of London could be crucial.

What were these points of political crisis in which Londoners were supposed to have played a crucial part? The depositions of kings such as Richard II and Henry VI are two examples where certain actions taken before each deposition, such as the barring of Cripplegate in 1461, were instrumental to the successful usurpation.²⁰ Who precisely were the Londoners involved in these actions? Up to this point we have looked at the broad group of the commons or the people as a homogenous group, a textual construct of contemporary sources, and as a term of convenience for propaganda. Caroline Barron has contended that the later medieval city was *not* a politically homogenous body, despite what was presented in contemporary sources, recently arguing that London spoke with a "plurality of voices."²¹ Unsurprisingly, she found that the unenfranchised commons tended to be Yorkist, whilst the mayor and aldermen were Lancastrian.²² The reasons for this split may lie at the heart of the propaganda war that was being waged between the Yorkists and the Lancastrians from the mid-1450s onwards. As the decade waned the Yorkists understood the need to appeal to the commons, whereas the Lancastrians saw no need to appeal to a group that they perceived to be powerless. With their narrow support base amongst the nobility, the Yorkists had to appeal to groups outside the traditional political power structure. Did the appeal to the commons make this group "Yorkist", or was it their pro-Yorkist sympathies that made the Yorkist lords realise that "the people" could be used to shore up support for the cause? The possible alienation of the London merchants by the Lancastrian government, as argued by Bolton, was probably a contributing factor as well. Through comparing these two arguments, we can see that there were at least two separate groups, the textual and the actual, who may have been lumped under the general term of "the commons" during this period. Alternatively, what may be happening in these texts is the inflation of the

¹⁷ C. Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages: Government and People 1200-1500*, Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2004, p. 9.

¹⁸ Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 14.

¹⁹ Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, pp. 17-18.

²⁰ M. McKisack, "London and Succession to the Crown during the Middle Ages" in R.W. Hunt, W.A. Pantin and R.W. Southern, eds., *Studies in Medieval History presented to Frederick Maurice Powicke*, Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1948. pp. 87-88; *The Brut*, p. 531; "Gregory's Chronicle", p. 214; *An English Chronicle*, p. 109; "Vitellius AXVI", p. 173.

²¹ Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 4.

²² Barron, "London and the Crown 1451-1461" in J.R.L. Highfield and Robin Jeff, eds, *The Crown and Local Communities*, Cambridge University Press; Cambridge, 1981, p. 89.

interests of smaller groups into the interests of the kingdom as a whole. These groups, such as the wealthier merchants, were perhaps being presented as large groups (“the people”) in order to justify their own political ideologies and goals.²³

So what does this mean for the construction, and indeed the politics, of the London audience? It can be argued that some elements of the commons, alienated by Lancastrian policy, decided to side with the alternative political force in the land: the duke of York. The parallel argument is that the Yorkists, seeing that the Lancastrians had alienated part of the commons, decided to exploit this discontent and shape it to their own political ends. It is possible that these two arguments can intersect: that for various reasons each group recognised in the other a common goal: curtailing the power of or ousting the Lancastrian government. It is also significant that the various London chronicles tend to be pro-Yorkist.²⁴ A nexus was established between the politics of the powerful London merchants, the unenfranchised London commons, the London chronicles, and the propaganda of the Yorkists, certainly from mid-1460 onwards,²⁵ and possibly even earlier, as contended by Bolton and also McLaren, who argues:

After 1450 many, though not all, London Chroniclers also express a Yorkist bias. There are no extant London chronicles which express an explicitly Lancastrian bias after 1450.²⁶

It is more difficult to draw these conclusions for other areas of England. The historian can only see broad themes in terms of the attitudes and politics of the commons, such as the city of York’s support for Richard III during his reign, or the propensity of Kent to support popular revolt, most notably the Cade rebellion of 1450.²⁷ What seems certain is that the fifteenth century saw a growing dialogue between those who wielded power (the kings and nobility) and those who did not. The commons were, in the words of one historian, “growing political muscle” during this period.²⁸ What is important in terms of this study is that the period saw this political awareness acknowledged in both domestic and foreign sources. A domestic source such as *The Brut* noted that “mych of the peple of the Reeme were yn gret erreoure and gruching ayens the King”²⁹ in the early 1400s. This echoes the Milanese ambassador’s comment decades later that Edward IV’s marriage to Elizabeth Woodville “greatly offended the people of

²³ Particularly since these groups were likely candidates for readership of the chronicles, if not their authorship. See M. McLaren, *The London Chronicles of the Fifteenth Century*, p. 49.

²⁴ McLaren, *The London Chronicles of the Fifteenth Century*, p. 238.

²⁵ Barron argued that London did not “turn Yorkist” until June of 1460: C. Barron, “London and the Crown”, pp. 96-97.

²⁶ McLaren, *The London Chronicles of the Fifteenth Century*, p. 238. However, when one takes the implicit approach, it seems to be clear that texts such as ‘Gregory’s Chronicle’ do offer a muted Lancastrian stance.

²⁷ L. Attreed, ed., *York House Books 1461-1490*, Alan Sutton for Richard III and Yorkist History Trust: Gloucestershire, 1991, Vol. I, pp. 78, 250, 284, 296; I.M.W. Harvey, *Jack Cade’s Rebellion of 1450*, pp. 1-22.

²⁸ I.M.W. Harvey, “Was There Popular Politics in Fifteenth Century England?”, p. 156.

²⁹ *The Brut*, p. 366.

England.”³⁰ The actions of the king had provoked a reaction amongst “the people”.

It can be said that there are two groups when we talk about “the people” in the context of fifteenth-century English politics: the textual, and the actual. But how then did “the people” figure in the political discourse of the Lancastrian regime? From the usurpation of Henry IV, we can trace a line of thought that would indicate that the Lancastrians, at least up until 1450, appealed to “the people”, or at least presented the notion that doing so was important. This was evident in the source material appearing around the time of Henry IV’s coup. In the parliamentary record from the deposition of Richard II, we can see how the Lancastrian regime shaped the nature of their appeal and outlined the nature of their audience. According to the “Record and Process” the Cession and Renunciation of Richard II was read “first in Latin and then in English” to the estates of parliament.³¹ Parliament accepted Richard’s “resignation”:

Following this acceptance it was publicly declared that, as well as accepting this Cession and Renunciation, it would be of great benefit and advantage to the realm if, in order to remove any scruple or malevolent suspicion, the many wrongs and shortcomings so frequently committed by the said king in his government of the kingdom which, as he himself confessed in his Cession, had rendered him worthy of deposition, were to be set down in writing in the form of articles, publicly read out, and announced to the people.³²

This passage, which immediately preceded the thirty-three articles against Richard, is significant for the notion of a concern for an audience, or at least a perceived audience. The line about removing “any scruple or malevolent suspicion” regarding the deposition is an indication of a need to control the potential attitudes of a target audience. This process was to be achieved by reading the articles aloud to “the people”. Indeed, the phrase “the people” occurs frequently throughout the “Record and Process”. This suggests an attempt by Henry Bolingbroke to influence an audience by showing a transparency in the deposition process. It also demonstrates that this audience of “the people” was one that the new Lancastrian monarch was aware of. David Rollinson has argued that this was a significant shift in attitudes from Richard II’s regime:

Richard may have been keen to distinguish the culture of government from that of his subjects, and in doing so reinforced the sense of alienation from the wider community that Henry IV was able to exploit. In grounding his legitimacy in the

³⁰A. Hinds, ed., *Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts Existing in the Archives and Collections of Milan Volume I: 1385-1618*, His Majesty’s Stationery Office: London, 1912, p. 114.

³¹ C. Given-Wilson, *Chronicles of the Revolution 1397-1400: The Reign of Richard II*, Manchester University Press: Manchester, 1993, p. 172.

³² Given-Wilson, *Chronicles of the Revolution*, p. 172.

support of the *communes*, Henry of Lancaster also committed himself to using their language.³³

Awareness of the importance of the commons and grounding the Lancastrian political message in a language they could understand would continue during the first half of the fifteenth century.

This awareness became more overt in the reign of Henry IV's son. Prior to the ascension of Henry V, Thomas Hoccleve had written to the young prince, advising him that the wise prince "wynneth the peple's voice, for the peple's voice is goddes voice, menne say".³⁴ This advice formed part of a larger work, "The Regement of Princes", and contained similar ideas to a number of fourteenth and fifteenth century didactic tracts. The notion of the people's voice being the voice of God appeared in other texts as well. The poem "Advice to the Court", dated from the crucial year of 1450, advises: "ffor feer or for fauour of any fals man/Loose not the loue of all [th]e commynalte."³⁵ These terms were used either to critique rulers or to praise them, as Lydgate's "Epitaph for the Duke of Gloucester" demonstrates, speaking of Gloucester's "merit for comvne wele."³⁶ A similar statement appears in *An English Chronicle*, contrasting the duke of York and the duke of Somerset: "the comones of this lande hated this duk Edmond and loued the duk of York, because he loued the communes and preserued the commune profyte of the londe."³⁷ There seemed to be a construction through the chronicle and didactic texts of a need for the commons to be "loued" and needed by those in power.

Henry V had a particular need to appeal to "the people", beyond the requirements of a usurping dynasty.³⁸ The renewal of the Hundred Years War with France meant that taxes were being raised, parliament was meeting frequently and the political community of England needed to be won over in order to support a war that became not just an invasion, but also a conquest.³⁹ The quest for popular support can be seen in the propaganda of Henry during this time. The targeting of the London power brokers provides an example of the methods of dissemination. In a series of letters

³³ D. Rollison, "Conceit and Capacities of the Vulgar Sort: The Social History of English as a Language of Politics" in *Cultural and Social History*, 2005, 2, 2005, p. 150.

³⁴ Thomas Hoccleve, "Regement of Princes" in F.J. Furnivall, ed., *Hoccleve's Works Volume III: The Regement of Princes*, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co. for the EETS: London, 1897, p. 104.

³⁵ Robbins, *Historical Poems*, p. 203. This year saw the uprisings of the commons in the Jack Cade revolt and the murder of leading members of the Lancastrian regime including the duke of Suffolk, Adam Moleyns, James Lord Say and William Ascough. See "Vitellius AXVI", pp. 159-161; *An English Chronicle*, pp. 64-67.

³⁶ Robbins, *Historical Poems*, p. 183.

³⁷ Davies, *An English Chronicle*, p. 71.

³⁸ A problem that was arguably solved by his reburial of Richard II in 1413, one of the first acts of his reign. See P. Strohm, *England's Empty Throne: Usurpation and the Language of Legitimation 1399-1422*, Yale University Press: New Haven, pp. 114-118; J. Burden, "How Do You Bury a Deposed King? The Funeral of Richard II and the Establishment of the Lancastrian Royal Authority in 1400" in G. Dodd and D. Biggs, ed., *Henry IV: The Establishment of the Regime 1399-1406*, York Medieval Press: York, 2003, pp. 35-53.

³⁹ For the role of parliament and the political community, see G. Harriss, *Shaping the Nation: England 1360-1461*, Clarendon Press: Oxford, 2005, p. 593; C. Allmand, *Henry V*, Methuen: London, 1988, pp. 375-376; T.B. Pugh, *Henry V and the Southampton Plot of 1415*, Southampton University Press: Southampton, 1988, p. 178.

addressed to the mayor and aldermen of London, Henry maintained a controlled flow of information concerning the French campaign. These messages were to be disseminated to the widest audience possible. Many of the extant proclamations sent to London from France concern the gathering of “lordes knyghts and Squiyers” for military aid, and “alle maner of men, marchauntz, artificers, or other of what estat, degre or condicion, that euer they be” to provide material goods for the French campaign.⁴⁰ The letters that are addressed variously to the “Maiori, Aldermannis, & Comunibus”⁴¹ and to “[th]e Mair, Aldremen and Comunes”⁴² outlined the target audience. That the mayor and the aldermen would be addressed is not surprising, but the inclusion of the commons shows that Henry meant to include at least the common council⁴³, as broad a cross section of the city as possible. The letters outlined, between the years 1416 and 1419, the victories that Henry achieved in France. A typical missive reads:

Trusty and welbeloued, we grete you well, and do you to vnderstonde [th]at we been in good prosperite of oure persone, and so ben al [th]astates of our hoost, blessed be god...And aftur [th]at we hadde wonne our sayd toun of Louiers, we cam afore pount-de-larche, and bisieged it on [th]at oon syde of [th]e riuier of seyne, and vpon munday [th]e iiij day of [th]e mone[th] of Juill we gate vpon our enemys [th]e passage ouer the sayd riuier, and god of his mercy shewed so for vs and for our right that it was withouten [th]e de[th] of any mannes persone of oures.⁴⁴

Henry focussed on a popular kingship, and the notion of a dialogue with “the people”,⁴⁵ who were to be kept updated on the progress of the war in France. These dispatches were distributed at least through London. However, as Kirby remarked, “to keep London informed was to keep the country informed.”⁴⁶ Details from the war appear in many of the vernacular chronicles of the time. Indeed, it is significant that many of these chronicles have more detail concerning events like Agincourt than they do about domestic events that occurred closer to the time at which they were written.⁴⁷

Financing the war in France dominated English politics until the early 1450s. To address these domestic concerns, Henry faced the task of maintaining public enthusiasm for the

⁴⁰ R.W. Chambers and M. Daunt, ed., *A Book of London English 1384-1425*, Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1931. p. 64.

⁴¹ Chambers and Daunt, *A Book of London English 1384-1425*, pp. 73, 78.

⁴² Chambers and Daunt, *A Book of London English 1384-1425*, p. 82.

⁴³ This number fluctuated over the period, but could number in the hundreds. See Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, pp. 131-134.

⁴⁴ Chambers and Daunt, *A Book of London English 1384-1425*, p. 71.

⁴⁵ J.L Kirby, “Henry V and the City of London” in *History Today*, 26:4, 1976. p. 224.

⁴⁶ Kirby, “Henry V and the City of London”, p. 226.

⁴⁷ Chronicles that include detailed accounts of the various French campaigns include ‘Julius BII’, pp. 70-71; ‘Cleopatra C IV’, pp. 117-120, 122-126, 132, 139-141; ‘Gregory’s Chronicle’ pp. 109-112, 115-122

war, whilst at the same time carrying out the war in person. This meant that the most effective propaganda symbol the English government had, the king himself, was absent from England for long periods between the battle of Agincourt and Henry's death in 1422. The flow of information to the citizens of London was one way of ensuring the message got across. Henry also revived the tactics of Edward III by employing the church to disseminate news of the victories that had been achieved in France.⁴⁸ This was the later medieval equivalent of the "mass media", a way for kings to reach out to a national audience. Requests for prayers *pro rege* would be made to the archbishops of England and Wales, sometimes to bishops directly. These prayers "served to inform the country concerning the course of the French war and to encourage a spirit of service and sacrifice."⁴⁹ It is difficult, however, to determine their effectiveness.⁵⁰ However, the fact that these prayers *pro rege* were sent out demonstrates a regal concern for "hearts and minds."⁵¹

Processions were another way that Henry, while in England, could display himself to his subjects, now facing heavy taxation for the French war.⁵² His entrance into London after Agincourt was a high profile event and an opportunity for pageantry and propagandistic symbolism.⁵³ His extensive progresses through England in 1421, after signing the treaty of Troyes, were undertaken to ensure a reinforcement of the might of the English crown, whilst at the same time raising desperately needed money for campaigning.⁵⁴ The later 1420s also saw the proliferation of verses justifying Henry VI's claim to the French throne. John Lydgate in his poem 'On the English Title to the Crown of France' outlined for "the people" the events leading up to the invasion of France and Henry VI's assumption of the crown. This poem was an adaptation of an earlier piece by Laurence Calot that had been distributed through France.⁵⁵ Lydgate, however, had added his own prologue, outlining his reasons for adapting/writing the piece:

Trouble hertis to sette in quyete
And make folkys their language for to lette
Which disputen in their opynyons
Touching the ligne of two regions
The right, I mene, of Ingland and of Fraunce
To put away alle maner variaunce

⁴⁸ The church had first been used by Edward I to manipulate public opinion in his wars against the Scots and the French, see W.R. Jones, "The English Church and Royal Propaganda During the Hundred Years War" in *Journal of British Studies*, 19:1, 1979, p. 23.

⁴⁹ Jones, "The English Church and Royal Propaganda", p. 27.

⁵⁰ Jones, "The English Church and Royal Propaganda", p. 22.

⁵¹ H.J. Hewitt, *The Organization of War under Edward III 1338-1362*, Manchester University Press: Manchester, 1966, p. 161.

⁵² Harriss, *Shaping the Nation*, p. 592.

⁵³ *The Brut*, p. 380, Allmand, *Henry V*, p. 411.

⁵⁴ James Doig, "Propaganda and Truth: Henry V's Royal Progresses in 1421" in *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 40, 1996, p. 167.

⁵⁵ Griffiths, *The Reign of Henry VI*, p. 219.

Holy the doute and the ambyguyte
 To sette the ligne where hit shuld be
 And where hit aught justly to abide...⁵⁶

This prologue revealed, in a way few other pieces did, the intention behind the writing. Lydgate speaks of the “trouble hertis” of “folkys” which “disputen in their opynyons”. The in-text evidence demonstrate three points: that an audience existed for state propaganda; that this audience had opinions that could run counter to what the state might desire; and that it was the desire of the state to put away “alle maner variaunce” in regards to matters of state importance, such as Henry VI’s claim to the throne of France. The long-term effects of shaping public opinion, away from “variaunce”, would help achieve public acceptance of taxation accompanying the continuation of the war. Failure to do so could lead to public revolt.

From the time that Hoccleve penned his words of advice to the young prince Henry through to the reign of Henry VI, the Lancastrian dynasty recognised the need to appeal to popular opinion. Why did this desire and recognition for popular support change? What road did the Lancastrian dynasty take that led to the *Somnium Vigilantis*? The road seems to have been one of diminishing popularity, a cumulative total of attacks from populist rebellions and populist aristocrats such as York and Warwick. The start of this road seems to have been 1450. There are several reasons why this might have been the case. Firstly, the execution of the duke of Suffolk at the hands of vengeful sailors (after Henry VI overturned parliament’s demands for impeachment) demonstrated that the will of the commons – or at least the house of Commons – could not be so easily overruled.⁵⁷ Secondly, Lancastrian ministers such as Adam Molyens, William Ayscough and James Lord Say – who were responsible for Henry VI’s marriage to Marguerite of Anjou and the territory that had been lost in that exchange – were murdered by enraged mobs.⁵⁸ Thirdly, and most importantly, 1450 was the year of the Jack Cade rebellion, a widespread uprising amongst artisans and peasants in south-eastern England. These events contributed to a broad picture of a government losing control. In 1450, a bill that York wrote to the king stated, in part:

Please it youre Hyghnes tenderly to considere the grett grutchyng
 and romore that is vniuersaly in this youre reame of [th]at justice is
 nouth dewly ministrid to such as trepas and offende a-yens youre
 lawes, and in special of them that ben endited of treson and o[th]er
 beyng openly noysed of the same. Wherfore for gret inconueniens
 [th]at haue fallen, and gretter is lyke to fallen here-aftere in youre
 seid reame, which God defende, but if be youre Hyghnesse
 prouysion couenable be mad for dew reformation and punishment

⁵⁶ Wright, *Political Poems and Songs*, Vol. II, p. 131.

⁵⁷ Vitellius A XVI, pp. 158-159; Harriss, *Shaping the Nation*, p. 619.

⁵⁸ H.T Riley (ed.) *Ingulph’s Chronicle of the Abbey of Croyland with the continuations of Peter of Blois and anonymous writers*, H.G. Bohn: London, 1854, p. 411.

in this behalf; wherefore I, youre humble sugett and lyge man, Richard duke of York, willyng as effectually as I can and desiryng suerte and prosperite of youre most roiall person and welfare of this youre noble reame, councel and aduertise youre Excellens...I offer and wol put me in deuoure for to excecute youre comandementes in thes premises of such offenders and redresse of the seid mysrewlers to my myth and powere.⁵⁹

This bill provides clues as to the state of the popular opinion at this point, or at least popular opinion as York constructed it. York alleged that “grett grutchyng and romore” are universal throughout the realm, making the point that popular opinion was on his side. This opinion, according to York, held that justice was not carried out by the king and was not “dewly ministrid.” This accusation corresponded directly to contemporary concerns about the need of the king to carry out justice. York concluded by offering to assist the king in rendering justice to those who deserve it, thereby guaranteeing peace and tranquillity for the realm.

The perceived loss of control over England by the Lancastrian faction would only be compounded in the next few years, as the dispute between the Yorkist and Lancastrian factions moved from armed confrontations to open warfare. During this time, the tide of popular support seemed to shift and then reside firmly behind the Yorkists, leading to the Lancastrian turn away from the desire to obtain such popular support. There are several different theories why this might have been the case. It was clear from the events of 1450 that favourable popular opinion for the Lancastrian government had been eroded through high taxation for a failing war in France and the refusal to accede to the demands of parliament in relation to the duke of Suffolk. The 1450s also saw a shift in the favour of London merchants towards the Yorkist factions. Bolton has argued that this shift occurred as a result of Lancastrian policies such as the granting of wool licences to non-Staple members and foreigners.⁶⁰

The Lancastrian regime’s declining popularity in the 1450s is fairly well established.⁶¹ Far more significant was their own rejection of the need to win “the people” over. A poem from 1450 titled “Advice to the Court” pleaded with the Lancastrians:

ffor feer or for fauour of any fals man
Loose not the loue of alle [th]e commynalte!⁶²

This advice went unheeded as the decade moved on, eroded by popular revolts and the

⁵⁹ Davis, *Paston Letters*, Vol. II. pp. 49-50.

⁶⁰ J.L. Bolton, “The City and the Crown 1459-1461” in *London Journal*, 12:1, 1986, p. 16.

⁶¹ The best account of the decline can be found in J. Watts, *Henry VI and the Politics of Kingship*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1996. pp. 260-261.

⁶² R.H. Robbins, *Historical Poems of the XIVth and XVth Centuries*, p. 203.

Yorkist insurrection.⁶³ In many ways, the Lancastrian fear of “the people” was well-founded, yet there was little attempt made to win them back to the fold. The visibility of the king was reduced when Margaret moved the court from London to Coventry.⁶⁴ And in 1459, in the parliament of Devils, the Lancastrians provided strong evidence, in the *Somnium Vigilantis*, that they had not only abandoned the pursuit of “the people”, but were actively contemptuous for those who did: the Yorkists.⁶⁵

The Lancastrian distrust of “the people” was the most pronounced in the *Somnium Vigilantis*; a document that revealed the development of both the Lancastrian attitude towards “the people”, as well as the Lancastrian perception of Yorkist policy.⁶⁶ The authorship of this document is uncertain, although Margaret Kekewich traced the various arguments that had developed by the early 1980s, with Sir John Fortescue and Lawrence Booth emerging as likely candidates, possibly as part of a committee.⁶⁷ A possible committee structure for such polemical pieces is suggested in Fortescue’s later refutation of his pro-Lancastrian works: *The Declaration made by Sir John Fortescue, Knyght, upon certain Wrytinges sent oute of scotteland, ayenst the kinges title to the roialme of england*.⁶⁸ Discussing the process, Fortescue wrote:

There were also other wrytinges made ther by the aid late Kyngs Councell, and sent hedyr, to whiche I was not well willynge, but yet thay passed by the more partie of that Counceill. And over this there were made wrytinges there, some by myne assente, and som by my selfe.⁶⁹

The king’s council was responsible for the formulation of propaganda, the messages that would be sent out. Exactly who the intended audience for a message such as the *Somnium Vigilantis* may have been is debatable. Its inclusion in the parliament may have been intended to persuade representatives to approve the attainders, although most opinion on the matter tends toward the audience being Henry VI alone.⁷⁰ Bertram

⁶³ Confrontations or outright battles occurring in 1452, 1453, 1455 and 1459. J. Gillingham, *The Wars of the Roses: Peace and Conflict in Fifteenth-Century England*, Phoenix Press: London, 1981, pp. xiv-xv.

⁶⁴ “Vitellius AXVI”, p. 167; R. Griffiths, *The Reign of Henry VI*, pp. 777-778.

⁶⁵ D. McCulloch and E.D. Jones, “Lancastrian Politics, the French War, and the Rise of the Popular Element” in *Speculum*, 58:1, 1983, pp. 133-134.

⁶⁶ The *Somnium Vigilantis* presents a number of significant points. For the text, see J.P. Gilson, ‘A Defence of the Proscription of the Yorkists in 1459’ in *English Historical Review*, 25, 1911. pp. 512-526. For how the document defined Lancastrian views of government, see J. Watts, *Henry VI and the Politics of Kingship*, pp. 43-45.

⁶⁷ M. Kekewich, “The Attainder of the Yorkists in 1459: Two Contemporary Accounts” in *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 55:131, pp. 29-30. For a more recent refutation of Kekewich’s assumption of Booth’s involvement, see A. Gross, *The Dissolution of the Lancastrian Kingship: Sir John Fortescue and the Crisis of Fifteenth-Century England*, Paul Watkins: Lincolnshire, 1996, pp. 58-59.

⁶⁸ T. Clermont, (ed) *The Complete Works of Sir John Fortescue, Knight: Chief Justice of England and Lord Chancellor to Henry VI*, Printed for Private Distribution, Chiswick Press: London, 1869, p. 524.

⁶⁹ Clermont, *The Complete Works of Sir John Fortescue*, p. 524.

⁷⁰ Gross, *Dissolution of the Lancastrian Kingship*, p. 60; Watts, *Henry VI and the Politics of Kingship*, Kekewich, “The Attainder of the Yorkists in 1459”, p. 28.

Wolffe argued that the *Somnium* was probably written *after* the attainders, as a way of providing a retrospective justification.⁷¹

The piece was structured as a debate, in which the supposed point of view of the Yorkists was presented, only to be refuted by the Lancastrian defence. The supposed pro-Yorkist argument acknowledged that spoken word became a factor in the political discourse of the 1450s, and that this was the reason why the Yorkist viewpoint was being presented in the first place:

For because that it is hard to abolysshe a rumour that is oones taken in the wlgare voice, I wolle presuppose for the way of communicacion that they bene as ye reput thaim.⁷²

While the lines acknowledge the power of rumour, there is a subtle refutation of the source. “The people’s voice” was not employed here, merely a reference to the “wlgare”, or vulgar, voice. It can be argued that the two terms are interchangeable and that vulgar is not being used here in a derogatory sense.⁷³ It is possible that this was a sign that the Lancastrians behind the *Somnium* critiqued *how* the common voice was used by the Yorkists whilst engineering an attempt “to steal York’s propagandist clothes.”⁷⁴ It is probable, however, that the Lancastrians were outright dismissive of any notion that the common voice should run counter to that of the state. The “voice of the people” should be subordinate to that of the king, and no other.⁷⁵ But what if the voice of the people *did* stand in contrast to that of the state?

Article five of the “Yorkist” section of this piece is perhaps the most revealing in terms of this article. It states, in full:

Forthermore consyderynge the multitude of thennemies that in every syde environneth this Royame it were more need for to procure to have more heddes and lordis for the tucyoun and defence of the same than for to despose and destroy eny of thaim, *specially suche as stoden gretely in the favoure of the peple...*⁷⁶

This was one of the main tactics pursued by the Yorkists: appealing to “the people”. In the Lancastrian refutation of the “Yorkist” defence, this opinion is given:

⁷¹ For this view, see B. Wolffe, *Henry VI*, Yale University Press: New Haven, 1981, p. 321.

⁷² Gilson, ‘A Defence of the Proscription of the Yorkists in 1459’, p. 514.

⁷³ The use of “vulgar” as a derogatory term meaning “having a common and offensively mean character; lacking in refinement and good taste” did not emerge until the mid-seventeenth century. C.T. Onions (ed.) *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, (Oxford, 1972), p. 2374.

⁷⁴ Christine Carpenter, *The Wars of the Roses: Politics and the Constitution in England, c. 1437-1509*, (Cambridge, 1997), p. 145.

⁷⁵ See J. Watts, *Henry VI and the Politics of Kingship*, (Cambridge, 1996), p. 45.

⁷⁶ Gilson, ‘A Defence of the Proscription of the Yorkists’, p. 515. My italics.

As for the favoure of the peple thaire is no grounde of sure argument, for by cause hit is so variable and for the moost parte it groweth of oppynable conceytis, and not of trowith. Hit is a schrewyde consequence: The peple favoureth hem, ergo thay be good. Who so hathede rede in the olde storyes, he may be sufficiently informed of [th]e grete varyablenes of the peple and of thycertitude of thaire oppynions.⁷⁷

Having the favour of the people, according to this voice, means nothing.⁷⁸ This was a clever attempt to undermine one of the key areas of support claimed by the Yorkists.⁷⁹ The opinions of the people are presented as being variable, and “not of trowith”, in contradistinction to the presumably truthful Lancastrians. Debates of the truth in propaganda documents had developed during the fifteenth century. Unlike Henry IV, however, who identified those who spread rumours and sedition as being “untruthful”⁸⁰, the later Lancastrians castigated an entire class as being “untruthful”. In the opening section of the articles deriding the argument of the “Yorkist” defender, the writer stated:

Now for as much as that ye be so farre oute of youre selfe and so alienat from reason, me thinketh it be good in the way of charyte some what for to assay to reduce you, yf it may be, *to the lighte of trowthe*, and how be it that youre articuls ben knowen openly to be grounde in colourable deceyte and in seductius raysons...⁸¹ [my italics]

The appeal to “olde storyes” as a precedent for the unreliability of the people is significant, as the writer did not present this view as opinion, but as accepted wisdom. This part of the *Somnium Vigilantis* demonstrates how far the Lancastrian attitude to public relations had come. In 1411, Hoccleve urged the future Henry V: “Wynneth your peples voice, ffor peples vois is goddess voys, menne seyne.”⁸² In 1450, the poem “Advice to the Court”, although not a Lancastrian text, recommended: “Ffor feer or for faour of any fals man/loose not the loue of alle [th]e commynaltie.”⁸³ By 1459, the voice and opinions of “the people” – as outlined in the *Somnium Vigilantis* – were deemed to be untrustworthy and unreliable.

⁷⁷ Gilson, ‘A Defence of the Proscription of the Yorkists’, p. 521.

⁷⁸ Assuming, in line with the points above, that the voice of the people runs counter to the policies of the king.

⁷⁹ Harriss, *Shaping the Nation*, p. 647.

⁸⁰ T. Rymer, ed., *Foedera Vol. IV*, Gregg Press Ltd: England, 1967 (1740), p. 29; A. Broertjes, *Winning the People’s Voice: Usurpation, Propaganda and State-Influenced History in Fifteenth Century England*, Univ. of Western Australia, Ph.D. thesis, 2006. p. 190.

⁸¹ Gilson, ‘A Defence of the Proscription of the Yorkists’, p. 516.

⁸² Hoccleve, ‘Regement of Princes’, p.104.

⁸³ Robbins, *Historical Poems*, p. 203.

This point emerges more fully in the George Ashby poem “An Active Policy of a Prince” written for the Lancastrian heir Edward. Ashby was part of the embassy that had brought Margaret of Anjou to England in 1444, and had acted as her signet clerk.⁸⁴ The dating over the “Active Policy” has been a source of some contention, with claims of either 1463 or 1470-1471.⁸⁵ In terms of reflecting a Lancastrian disdain for the popular voice, the arguments over dates are somewhat irrelevant. The key section of the poem reads:

Put no ful truste in the Comonalte
Thai be euer wauering in variance.⁸⁶

It appeared that the Lancastrians had all but abandoned the contest for the favour of the people. Instead, a new model of kingship and political leadership was being offered: “Ashby’s prince is very much the new monarch: defensive, watchful, independent.”⁸⁷ As Watts pointed out, Ashby argued that numerous sections of the political community were to be treated with mistrust, including:

Traditionally rebellious areas like Kent, from evil barons, from pretenders, from those apparently reconciled, from disloyal servants, from the poor commons, from livery and maintenance, from his own kin and offspring and from rich lords.⁸⁸

This shift in Lancastrian thinking left this particular segment of the domestic audience open for the Yorkists to appeal to. The *Somnium* document acknowledged and defined an audience from the Lancastrian viewpoint, whilst confirming that such an audience was not merely acknowledged but actively cultivated by the Yorkists.

The final “echo” of this distrust can be found in what on the surface may seem an unlikely source: the *Morte Darthur* of Thomas Malory. There are a number of problems when assessing Malory in the context of this piece, not least of which are the disputes over his identity.⁸⁹ Malory was possibly part of court circles during the mid-fifteenth century. In terms of his political sympathies, Field noted that Malory may well have resented the factionalism of the 1460s, and it is possible that a certain Lancastrian bias

⁸⁴ J. Scattergood, “George Ashby” in *Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004), p. 619; C. Monro (ed.), *Letters of Queen Margaret of Anjou and Bishop Beekington and Others written in the reigns of Henry V and Henry VI* (London, 1863), p. 114.

⁸⁵ J. Scattergood, “The Date and Composition of George Ashby’s Poems” in *Leeds Studies in English*, New Series XXI, 1990, p. 168; M. Bateson, ed., *George Ashby’s Poems*, Oxford University Press for the Early English Text Society: London, 1965 (1899), p. v; M. Kekewich, “George Ashby’s The Active Policy of a Prince: An Additional Source” in *The Review of English Studies*, 41:164, 1990, p. 533. Scattergood favoured the earlier date of 1463, with Kekewich concurring with Bateson’s view that the poem was produced in either 1470 or 1471.

⁸⁶ M. Bateson, ed., *George Ashby’s Poems*, Oxford University Press for the Early English Text Society: London, 1965 (1899), p. 40.

⁸⁷ J. Watts, *Henry VI and the Politics of Kingship*, p. 43.

⁸⁸ J. Watts, *Henry VI and the Politics of Kingship*, pp. 42-43.

⁸⁹ For the various arguments see P.J.C. Field, *The Life and Times of Sir Thomas Malory*, (Cambridge, 1993).

was present in his work.⁹⁰ Taking this into account, the final passages dealing with Mordred's rebellion are perhaps the most significant in terms of dealing with a possible Lancastrian attitude towards popular opinion:

As Sir Mordred was ruler of all England, he let make letters as though that they had come from beyond the sea, and the letters specified that King Arthur was slain in battle with Sir Lancelot. Wherefore Sir Mordred made a parliament and called the lords together, and there he made them choose him king.⁹¹

Then, a little further on:

So fared the people at that time; they were better pleased with Sir Mordred than they were with the noble King Arthur, and much people drew unto Sir Mordred and said they would abide by him for better or worse.⁹²

Mordred is depicted as disseminating and manipulating information through the use of letters distributed through the kingdom, mirroring the tactics of the Yorkists during the propaganda battles of the 1450s and 1460s. What is more significant is the idea that Mordred has the favour of the people in his attempts to rebel against Arthur and subvert the natural political order. Could this be considered an extension of the Lancastrian disdain for "the people" that arguably runs through the *Somnium Vigilantis* and Ashby's work? Perhaps. Though there are certainly difficulties in a simplistic portrayal of Mordred as York/March and Arthur as Henry VI, it does seem clear that there is a critique of using "the people" as a means of opposing the crown, particularly as the lords of the kingdom have to be "made" to select Mordred as king. As with the viewpoint running through the *Somnium*, it is possible that "the people" are only critiqued when opposed to the monarch, their voice only legitimate when they stand with the state.⁹³

Is it possible, however, that too much is being read into these documents? One of the key difficulties in identifying a point at which the Lancastrians turned away from courting the popular voice is that the "propaganda programme" – most clearly delineated by Anthony Gross in *The Dissolution of the Lancastrian Kingship* – did not end in 1459.⁹⁴ Margaret of Anjou, the *de facto* leader of the Lancastrian faction, continued to write propagandistic letters to the London council, and Sir John Fortescue played a major role in the "programme" in the 1460s, sending treatises from Scotland attacking

⁹⁰ P.J.C. Field, *The Life and Times and Times of Sir Thomas Malory*, p. 173.

⁹¹ H. Cooper (ed.), *Le Morte Darthur: The Winchester Manuscript*, (Oxford, 1998), p. 505; also see E. Vinaver, *Malory: Works*, (Oxford, 1971), p. 707 for the Caxton version.

⁹² Cooper, *Le Morte Darthur*, p. 507; Vinaver, *Malory: Works*, pp. 708-709.

⁹³ As they do earlier in *Morte Darthur*, when Arthur becomes king: "wherefore all the commons cried at once 'We will have Arthur unto our king, we will put him no more in delay...'" Cooper, *Le Morte Darthur*, p. 11. This is perhaps another example of how "variable" the commons could be.

⁹⁴ Gross, *The Dissolution of the Lancastrian Kingship*, pp. 48-49, 61.

the Yorkist claim to the throne. If the Lancastrians had genuinely abandoned the popular voice, why were these documents still being issued?

To deal firstly with the case of Margaret of Anjou, who was responsible for the extant letters that were sent to the London council in 1460 and 1461. Margaret's letters seem to indicate an attempt to counter the propaganda of the Yorkists without actually appealing to "the people", focussing instead on the denigration of the Yorkist claim to the throne. One such letter accused York of:

extreme malice long hid undir colours imagining bi divers and many weyes and meaynes the detruccion of my lordis good grace, whom God of his mercy evur preserve, hathe now late upon an untrewre pretense feyned a tittle to my lordis coronne and roiall estate...⁹⁵

This letter reinforced the nature of the propagandistic discourse that had been played out over the previous years, and the rejection of the Yorkist message, which consisted of:

divers untrewre and feyned materes and surmises, and inspeciall that wee and my lordes said sone and oures shulde newly drawe toward you with an unsen power of straungeres disposed to robbe and to dispoile you of your goodes and haveurs.⁹⁶

As with Edward's letter, assurances were again given that:

ye nor noon of you shalbe robbed, despoiled nor wronged by any personne that at that tyme we or oure sayde sone shalbe accompanyed with or any other sent in our or his name.⁹⁷

Both of these letters reflect the deep insecurities besetting the Lancastrians since 1459. The fact that by 1460 and 1461 they needed to reassure a target audience that they were *not* going to go on a rampage throughout the kingdom reflects the success of the Yorkist propaganda drives that had placed the Lancastrians very much into the defensive in the public relations conflict. In this context, the sacking of St Albans by the Lancastrians was a public relations blunder of the highest magnitude, yet these letters seem to reflect a Lancastrian notion that people believed them capable of such acts because of what the Yorkists had said, rather than what the Lancastrians themselves had actually done.

The treatises that Sir John Fortescue issued from Scotland were concerned mainly with the Yorkist and Lancastrian claims to the throne. In his article "Politics and

⁹⁵ M. Kekewich, C. Richmond, A.F. Sutton, L. Visser-Fuchs, J.L. Watts, ed., *The Politics of Fifteenth Century England: John Vale's Book*. Alan Sutton from Richard III and Yorkist History Trust: Gloucestershire, 1995, p. 142.

⁹⁶ *John Vale's Book*, p. 142.

⁹⁷ *John Vale's Book* p. 142.

Propaganda in Fifteenth-Century England: the Polemical Writings of Sir John Fortescue”, Paul E. Gill argued that the writings Fortescue issued in the 1460s were directed at “the people”, as the arguments contained within works such as *Opusculum de Natura Legis Nature et Eius Censura in Successione Regnorum Suprema* were too intellectually flawed for the scholarly classes to take seriously.⁹⁸ While Gill flits around a definition of who “the people” may have been, I find it difficult to accept that predominantly Latin texts advocating the Lancastrian cause would have found much favour with “the people”, a group that had thrown their lot fairly decisively in with the Yorkist regime by the early 1460s, if not the late 1450s. If not the (presumably English) “scholarly classes” that Gill identifies, another possible target may have been a well-educated foreign audience.⁹⁹ This foreign audience could have been appealed to as a possible source for financial or militaristic aid given the fortunes of the Lancastrian court-in-exile, but may have been unfamiliar with the details of the tangled Lancastrian/Yorkist family tree. Fortescue’s later refutation of his writings, enforced by a triumphant Edward IV in 1471, probably *were* intended for “the people”, but only in conjunction with members of the upper aristocracy, the clergy, chronicle writers, indeed *anyone* who may have read or heard about the original pieces released in the previous decade.

Regardless of the intentions of Margaret of Anjou and Sir John Fortescue in issuing these messages, the audience that they directed them to could hardly be considered “the people”. The events of the 1450s and the Lancastrian decision to turn away from courting popular opinion is borne out in the *Somnium Vigilantis* and confirmed by the didactic tract that George Ashby wrote for Edward of Lancaster. What had begun as a populist regime that needed the voice of the people had turned into a regime that had decisively turned away from popular opinion, preferring instead to focus on the elites they assumed would help them win or, in the case of the 1460s, regain power. On the other side, the Yorkists had courted and won the popular voice, which would play a significant role in events such as the barring of Cripplegate in 1461. While the overall significance in this shift in Lancastrian policy may always remain debatable, it was the culmination of a new stage of political warfare in medieval England: the battle for the hearts and minds of “the people”.

⁹⁸ P.E. Gill, “Politics and Propaganda in Fifteenth-Century England: The Polemical Writings of Sir John Fortescue” in *Speculum*, 46:2, 1971, pp. 333, 338.

⁹⁹ For the potential foreign audience for Yorkist and Lancastrian propaganda, see Andrew Broertjes “Winning the People’s Voice: Usurpation, Propaganda and State-Influenced History in Fifteenth-Century England”, Univ. of Western Australia, 2006, pp. 61-62.

Author Biography

Dr Andrew Broertjes completed both his undergraduate and PhD studies at the University of Western Australia, specialising in late medieval English politics, particularly the Wars of the Roses. He has shifted field in recent years, and is currently completing a book about controversial US presidential elections."

In Memoriam of Philippa Maddern

My first experience of Philippa - or Pip as one called her within minutes of an introduction - came in 1998, with a now defunct first year medieval history unit. Enthusiastic from the start, she presented simultaneously a rigorous, intellectually enlivening approach to the topic, as well as a warmth and humour towards the students in her care. Throughout my undergraduate years, Pip was not merely a teacher, but a reassuring presence whose office door was always open. She became my honours supervisor, steering me through a difficult and challenging year, before going on to supervise my doctoral thesis. Still fairly wet behind my academic ears, I did not give much thought to an arrangement that would, barring certain times, mean both meeting and submitting writing every week. Only after a couple of years of conferences and meeting other postgraduate students, some of whom only saw their supervisors two or three times a year, did I fully appreciate the effort that Pip put into my work. I simply could not have finished the PhD without her. I later had the privilege of teaching with her in various capacities, and was still amazed at the time she was prepared to put into individual students, no matter what level they were at. She will be missed by everyone who had the good fortune to cross her path.