

COLONIAL RESISTANCE TO BRITISH RULE 1763-1776

REACTION TO THE NEW COLONIAL POLICY

Parliament previously had dealt hardly at all with colonial administration, mostly from a fear of increasing the power of the crown. George III overcame this fear, partly by patronage and bribes, partly because of the sheer necessity of the case, and “King in Parliament” proceeded to try and reorganize colonial administration. In seeking to bring the colonies under a “due subordination” to the mother country, the crown tried to bring the colonies under a strict system of administration in place of the old, slipshod ways. In addition, the effort to secure a tax revenue antagonized colonial merchants who saw the British monopoly of colonial trade as a substantial, however indirect, contribution to the empire.

THE FIRST PROTESTS

Before the French and Indian War was over, attempts made to enforce the revenue laws brought friction. In 1761 the Boston merchants employed a brilliant young lawyer, James Otis, to protest the legality of the writs of assistance. The courts upheld the writs and applied them in all the colonies. Public opinion crystallized in favor of Otis’ arguments that the writs were a tyrannical invasion of the ancient rights of Englishmen.

Another case, the Parsons’ Cause, also alarmed England as the colonists denounced the British government and defended the rights of the colonists as British subjects. In the Parson’s Cause, Anglican ministers appealed to the Privy Council, the King’s advisors, to disallow a Virginia law that, in effect, reduced their salaries. When the Privy Council disallowed the act, the ministers sued to recover back pay. The jury, swayed by the protests of Patrick Henry against the rights of the Privy Council to disallow colonial laws, defiantly awarded the ministers only one penny in damages.

THE GRENVILLE PROGRAM, 1763-1766

More immediately responsible for new colonial policy than George III was George Grenville who became Prime Minister in 1763.

THE PROCLAMATION OF 1763

As an immediate consequence of the war, the British were forced to settle the problem of Native American policy in the territories west of the Allegheny divide. The westward migration of white settlers aroused the Native Americans who struck back in Pontiac’s Rebellion in 1763. British officials were responsible for pacifying the Native Americans, regulating the fur trade and establishing government in the former French territories.

The Proclamation Act of 1763 1) created a Native American reserve west of the Allegheny divide, forbade settlement west of the proclamation line, and required the removal of settlers already there. 2) The Act required the licensing of Native American traders, and 3) forbade private purchase of land from the Native Americans.

The Act offended settlers, traders and land speculators and aroused a storm of protest in the colonies. Powerful groups of land speculators and migrating settlers caused a breakdown of the Proclamation. The line was then moved westward bit by bit to accommodate land speculators. Settlers ignored the law and carried American settlement to the west of the mountains in three areas: 1) the Pittsburgh area, 2) the Watauga valley in eastern Tennessee, and 3) the fertile Blue Grass region of central Kentucky, where they were led by Daniel Boone.

THE GRENVILLE TAX PROGRAM

George Grenville's program to raise greatly increased revenue from the colonies to finance military garrisons for defense against the Native Americans and to relieve the British upper class of part of their tax burden. To collect revenues 1) measures were begun to prevent smuggling. The British resorted to use of ship patrols, writs of assistance, strengthening of the customs service, and provisions for trial of accused smugglers without the benefit of juries. 2) The Sugar Act of 1764 replaced the original one passed in 1733. Although the tax was cut in half, the increased provisions of enforcement of the tax was designed to create revenue. 3) The Currency Act (1764) prohibited the further colonial issue of paper money. 4) The Stamp Act (1765) levied an internal revenue tax in the form of stamps to be purchased and affixed to specified documents and publications such as newspapers. 5) The Quartering Act (1765) required the colonial legislatures to supply barracks and part of the cost of maintaining 10,000 British troops in the colonies.

OPPOSITION TO THE REVENUE MEASURES

All of these acts were resisted, but the most attention was centered on the Stamp Act because it affected the most people, especially those previously untouched by Britain's mercantile regulations, in many acts of ordinary life, and it was to be collected in coin, always scarce in the colonies.

Public opinion against the tax was aroused by the Virginia House of Burgesses when Patrick Henry won the passage of the Virginia Resolves condemning the Stamp Tax as a violation of their rights to be taxed only by the consent of the colonial legislatures. Patrick Henry believed the taxes should be ratified by "direct representation" and not by "virtual representation." Other colonial legislatures took similar action. Massachusetts called the Stamp Act Congress (1765). This Congress, the first one called only by the colonists, met in New York City and was attended by delegates of nine colonies. It phrased its resolutions in a respectful tone, but it nevertheless firmly denied that Parliament could not tax anyone not represented in it, and asserted that the colonists were not represented there.

Mobs broke out in various places. The Sons of Liberty, organized, and by threats, by tarring and feathering, and by burning the stamps forced collectors to resign. Non-importation agreements were similarly enforced against British goods. But the most effective weapon of protest was almost universal defiance of the Act; by the end of 1765, it had been set aside. Parliament, confronted with the choice of sending an army to enforce the act or repealing it, chose the later. First, however they resolved in the Declaratory Act (1766) that they had the power to legislate for the colonies in all cases whatsoever. They clearly intended with equal force by the colonists

THE TOWNSHEND PROGRAM

When the Rockingham ministry, which had presided over the repeal of the Stamp Act, was ousted, it was replaced by one headed by Charles Townshend. He sought favor with the influential land owners by cutting the land tax, replacing the lost revenue with new taxes on American trade. When he died in 1770, he was replaced by Lord North.

THE TOWNSHEND ACTS

1) Townshend suspended the New York Assembly for failure to vote supplies for British troops. Townshend singled out New York for punishment as an example to the other legislatures who had not voted for supplies to be given to British troops. 2) Duties were levied on colonial imports of glass, lead, paint, paper, and tea. These external taxes were presumably acceptable to the colonials. 3) Another measure created a board of customs commissioners and gave them authority to issue the writs of assistance to prevent smuggling.

COLONIAL OPPOSITION

The Boston merchants organized another boycott against British imports in protest and other colonies joined them, especially in the northern colonies. In Boston, Samuel Adams made himself leader of the protest. Adams stirred the Massachusetts legislature into issuing the *Circular Letter* denying the right of

Parliament to levy external taxes. In Pennsylvania John Dickinson wrote his influential *Letters from a Farmer* attacking external taxes. The colonists had admitted Parliament's power to levy regulatory duties, but denied its right to raise revenue from them if it was not used for the protection of the colonies. Samuel Adams also aroused the "liberty boys" who mobbed and tarred and feathered the customs collectors. Adams spread his stories in the newspapers of imaginary atrocities by the British troops what had been stationed in Boston to protect the customs agents. When the "redcoats" were badgered and attacked by a mob of "liberty boys" they fired into the crowd and killed several persons. To keep resentment against the British, Adams publicized this incident as the "Boston Massacre" (1770).

Because of all of the problems, Lord North recommended and Parliament repealed all the Townshend duties except the tax on tea. The colonists felt they had won a second major victory.

THE PERIOD OF CALM, 1770-1773

After the repeal of the Townshend duties a period of relative quiet and prosperity ensued until the colonists were aroused by the Tea Act. An example of the prosperity of the time is shown by the trade dollars made by the colonists in their trade with Britain. In 1768 the amount of goods traded had a value of \$8 million, and by 1772 the value of the trade was \$20 million. This period of quiet disturbed some colonial leaders, such as Sam Adams and Patrick Henry, who may have already resolved for independence, but knew how few people were in agreement at that time. They and others managed to keep Britain's offenses in the public eye. In 1772 they organized the Committees of Correspondence throughout the colonies to spread propaganda against the royal government, to exaggerate British mistakes, and to defend the rights of colonists.

CONSEQUENCES OF THE TEA ACT OF 1773

This measure was passed by Lord North to save the British East India Company from bankruptcy. This company had among its stockholders several influential members of the British Parliament and the royal family itself.

THE TEA ACT

The Act 1) relieved the East India Company of all taxes on tea, except the one levied by the Townshend Acts, and 2) permitted it to sell its tea directly to American retailers. The Company previously could not compete with smuggled tea and immediately antagonized the merchants most of who dealt in tea, smuggled or legal, and were now frozen out of the trade. The most high profile merchant who was now frozen out of the trade was John Hancock.

The merchants then joined those who had continued to resist the British. Everywhere, except in Boston, the dutied tea was turned over to the East India Company without real disturbance. However, in Boston, with the influence of Adams and Hancock, the tea was to be destroyed so it would not profit Britain. This led to the Boston Tea Party in 1773.

THE COERCIVE ACTS (INTOLERABLE ACTS) (1774)

Lord North and George III decided not to back down to colonists again and used a policy of coercion against Massachusetts. The policy was to be carried out by four Acts passed by Parliament: 1) The port of Boston was closed pending payment of damages for the destroyed tea. 2) The Massachusetts Government Act revoked the charter and subjected the colony to severely restricted self-government there. 3) A third Act provided that accused royal officials be tried outside Massachusetts. 4) a quartering Act required the Massachusetts legislature provide lodging and food for additional British troops to be stationed there.

THE QUEBEC ACT (1774)

The Quebec Act brought out strong anti-Catholic prejudice of the colonists and led to charges that it was a preliminary step to establishing the Anglican Church as the only church in North America. This law 1)

extended the boundaries of Quebec to include the territory north of the Ohio and east of the Mississippi Rivers; 2) recognized the legality of the Catholic Church in Quebec and placed it on equal legal status of the Anglican Church; and 3) gave political rights to Catholics.

The Quebec Act antagonized the American Protestants who feared it might be, according to rumors, an initial step to enforce the authority of the Anglican Church (which was little different from the Catholic Church) over the Protestants. The Act recognized both freedom of religion for Catholics and the French law in civil cases, law which did not provide for trial by jury. The ever powerful interests of land speculators feared that the law would hinder sales of land in the West, and fur traders did not welcome the control over their activities by royal officials at Montreal.

THE FIRST CONTINENTAL CONGRESS

The colonists, aroused by the Coercive Acts and the Quebec Act, headed a call of a rump session of the dissolved assembly of Virginia and chose delegates to meet in the First Continental Congress in Philadelphia in September, 1774. Instead isolating Massachusetts as intended, the Coercive Acts aroused all the colonies. Members were chosen by the assemblies or by local Committees of Safety,

The Continental Congress, with representatives from every colony except Georgia, turned out to be more radical than most colonial leaders expected. It passed 1) the Suffolk Resolves, which declared the Coercive acts null and void and encouraged forcible resistance. As part of this the Congress approved for the "preparations for the defense of the rights of the colonists;" 2) the Declaration of Rights and Grievances, which stated the American position of freedom from parliamentary taxation, while accepting trade regulation; 3) the Continental Association, a non-importation, non-exportation agreement, which also created a network of local committees to enforce its provisions, in effect, a coercive law passed by a body with no authority whatsoever. The delegates then resolved to meet again the following May, if their grievances against Britain had not been resolved.