

Sons of Liberty. Led mostly by members of the middle ranks—shopkeepers, printers, master mechanics, small merchants—these Sons of Liberty burned effigies of royal officials, forced stamp agents to resign, compelled businessmen and judges to carry on without stamps, developed an intercolonial network of correspondence, generally enforced nonimportation of British goods, and managed antistamp activities throughout the colonies.

BRITISH REACTION

In England the Rockingham Whigs (who had been critical of the policies of George III and Grenville) were now in charge of the ministry, and the government was prepared to retreat. Not only were these Whigs eager to disavow Grenville's policies, but they had close connections with British merchants who had been hurt by American economic boycotts. In February 1766, Parliament repealed the Stamp Act.

Despite the British government's attempt to offset its repeal of the Stamp Act by a declaration that Parliament had the right to legislate for the colonies "in all cases whatsoever," after 1765 the imperial relationship and American respect for British authority—indeed, for all authority—would never be the same. The crisis over the Stamp Act aroused and unified Americans as no previous political event ever had. It stimulated bold political and constitutional writings throughout the colonies, deepened the colonists' political consciousness and participation, and produced new forms of organized popular resistance. In their mobs the people learned that they could compel both the resignation of royal officials and obedience to other popular measures. Through "their riotous meetings," Governor Horatio Sharpe of Maryland observed in 1765, the people "begin to think they can by the same way of proceeding accomplish anything their leaders may tell them they ought to do."

The British government could not rely on a simple decla-

ration of parliamentary supremacy to satisfy its continuing need for more revenue. Since the colonists evidently would not stomach a "direct" and "internal" tax like the stamp tax, British officials concluded that the government would have to gather revenue through the more traditional "indirect" and "external" customs duties. After all, the colonists were already paying duties on molasses, wine, and several other imported products as a result of the Sugar Act. Consequently, in 1767, led by Chancellor of the Exchequer Charles Townshend, Parliament imposed new levies on glass, paint, paper, and tea imported into the colonies. Although all the new customs duties, particularly the lowered molasses duty of 1766, began bringing in an average yearly revenue of \$45,000—in contrast to only \$2,000 a year collected before 1764—the yearly sums that were raised were scarcely a tenth of the annual cost of maintaining the army in America.

Convinced that something more drastic had to be done, the British government reorganized the executive authority of the empire. In 1767–68 the government created the American Board of Customs, located in Boston and reporting directly to the Treasury. It also established three new superior vice-admiralty courts—in Boston, Philadelphia, and Charleston—to supplement the one already in operation in Halifax, Nova Scotia. In belated recognition of the importance of the colonies, it created a new secretaryship of state exclusively for American affairs, an office that would cap the entire structure of colonial government. At the same time, the government decided to economize by pulling back much of its army from its costly deployment in the West and by closing many remote posts. The army was now to be stationed in the coastal cities, where, according to Parliament's Quartering Act of 1765, the colonists would be responsible for its housing and supply. Not only did this withdrawal of the troops eastward away from the French and Indians contribute to the chaos in the western territory, but the concentration of a standing army in peacetime amid a civilian population

blurred the army's original mission in America and raised the colonists' fears of British intentions.

By 1768 there was a new determination among royal officials to put down the unruly forces that seemed to be loose everywhere. Amid the ministerial squabbling of the late 1760s, some officials were suggesting that British troops be used against American rioters. Revenue from the Townshend duties was earmarked for the salaries of royal officials in the colonies so that they would be independent of the colonial legislatures. The colonial governors were instructed to maintain tight control of the assemblies and not to agree to acts that would increase popular representation in the assemblies or the length of time the legislatures sat. Royal officials toyed with more elaborate plans for remodeling the colonial governments. Some proposed that the Massachusetts charter be revoked; others, that royal councils, or upper houses, be strengthened. Some even suggested introducing a titled nobility into America to sit in these colonial upper houses.

DEEPENING OF THE CRISIS

In the atmosphere of the late 1760s, these measures and proposals were not simply irritating; they were explosive. After the Stamp Act crisis, American sensitivities to all forms of English taxation were thoroughly aroused. With the passage of the Townshend duties, the earlier pattern of resistance reappeared and expanded. Pamphleteers and newspaper writers again leaped to the defense of American liberties. The wealthy, cultivated Philadelphia lawyer John Dickinson, in his *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania* (1767–68), the most popular pamphlet of the 1760s, rejected all parliamentary taxation. According to Dickinson, Parliament had no right to impose either "internal" or "external" taxes levied for the sole purpose of raising revenue. He called for the revival of the nonimportation agreements that had been so effective in the resistance to the Stamp Act.

Following Boston's lead in March 1768, merchants in colonial ports again formed associations to boycott British goods. Despite much competition among different groups of merchants and jealousy among the ports, by 1769–70 these nonimportation agreements had cut British sales to the northern colonies by nearly two thirds. The colonists encouraged the wearing of homespun cloth, and in New England villages "Daughters of Liberty" held spinning bees. By now more Americans were involved in the resistance movement. Extralegal groups and committees, usually but not always restrained by popular leaders, emerged to intimidate tobacco inspectors in Maryland, punish importers in Philadelphia, mob a publisher in Boston, and harass customs officials in New York.

Nowhere were events more spectacular than in Massachusetts. There the situation was so inflammatory that every move triggered a string of explosions that widened the chasm between the colonists and royal authority. Forty-six-year-old Samuel Adams, with his puritanical zeal, organizational skill, and deep hatred of crown authority, emerged as a dominant political figure. It was later said that 1768 was the year Adams decided on independence for America. Given the events in Massachusetts during that year, it is easy to see why.

In February 1768 the Massachusetts House of Representatives issued to the other colonial legislatures a "circular letter" that denounced the Townshend duties as unconstitutional violations of the principle of no taxation without representation. Lord Hillsborough, the secretary of state of the newly created American Department and a hard-liner on controlling the colonies, ordered the Massachusetts House to revoke its circular letter. When the House defied this order by a majority of 92 to 17 (thereby enshrining the number 92 in patriotic rituals), Governor Francis Bernard dissolved the Massachusetts assembly. With this legal means for dealing with grievances silenced, mobs and other unauthorized groups in the colony broke out in violence. Boston, which was rapidly

becoming a symbol of colonial resistance, ordered its inhabitants to arm and called for a convention of town delegates—a meeting that would have no legal standing. Attacked by mobs, customs officials in Boston found it impossible to enforce the navigation regulations and pleaded for military help. When a British warship arrived in Boston in June 1768, emboldened customs officials promptly seized John Hancock's ship *Liberty* for violating the trade acts. Since the wealthy Hancock was prominently associated with the resistance movement, the seizure was intended to be an object lesson in royal authority. Its effect, however, was to set off one of the fiercest riots in Boston's history.

Hillsborough, believing that Massachusetts was in a state of virtual anarchy, dispatched two regiments of troops from Ireland. They began arriving in Boston on October 1, 1768, and their appearance marked a crucial turning point in the escalating controversy. For the first time the British government had sent a substantial number of soldiers to enforce British authority in the colonies. By 1769 there were nearly 4,000 armed redcoats in the crowded seaport of 15,000 inhabitants. Since the colonists shared traditional English fears of standing armies, relations between townspeople and soldiers deteriorated. On March 5, 1770, a party of eight harassed British soldiers fired on a threatening crowd and killed five civilians. The "Boston Massacre," especially as it was depicted in Paul Revere's exaggerated engraving, aroused American passions and inspired some of the most sensational rhetoric heard in the Revolutionary era.

This resort to troops to quell disorder was the ultimate symptom of the ineffectiveness of the British government's authority, and many Britons knew it. The use of force, it was argued in Parliament and in the administration itself, only destroyed the goodwill on which the colonists' relation to the mother country must ultimately rest. Indeed, throughout the escalation of events in the 1760s, many British ministers remained confused and uncertain. "There is the most urgent

reason to do what is right, and immediately," wrote Secretary at War Lord Barrington to Governor Bernard in 1767, "but what is that right and who is to do it?" English officials advanced and retreated, pleaded and threatened, in ever more desperate efforts to enforce British authority without aggravating the colonists' hostility. In the winter of 1767-68 the British responded to the disorder in Massachusetts with a series of parliamentary resolutions in which they condemned Massachusetts's denial of parliamentary supremacy and threatened to bring the colonial offenders to England for trial. Yet strong minority opposition in the House of Commons and the ministry's unwillingness to bring on further crises made these resolutions empty gestures. The government was now only waging what one Englishman called "a paper war with the colonies."

By the end of the 1760s, British plans for reorganizing the empire were in shambles. Colonial legislatures and royal governors were at loggerheads. Colonial papers daily denounced Britain's authority, and mobs were becoming increasingly common in the countryside as well as in city streets. Customs officials, under continual intimidation, quarreled with merchants, naval officers, and royal governors. The customs officials' entanglement in local politics made efficient or evenhanded enforcement of the trade acts impossible. What enforcement there was thus appeared arbitrary and discriminatory, and drove many merchants, such as the wealthy South Carolinian Henry Laurens, who had earlier been contemptuous of the Sons of Liberty, into bitter opposition.

The financial returns to the British government from the customs reforms seemed in no way worth the costs. By 1770 less than £21,000 had been collected from the Townshend duties, while the loss to British business because of American nonimportation movements during the previous year was put at £700,000. It was therefore not surprising that the British government now abandoned the hope of securing revenue from the duties and labeled the Townshend program, in Lord