

# Lord North's Attitude Toward the American Colonies

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## LORD NORTH'S ATTITUDE TOWARD THE AMERICAN COLONIES.

The object of this study is to show the attitude of Lord North and his ministry toward the American Colonies, especially during the time of the Revolution. It is often said that the King and his ministers intended to oppress America and that Parliament under the leadership of Lord North deliberately planned to tyrannize over her. It will be the endeavor of this paper to ascertain the policy of the government by tracing the struggle from the beginning. To do this it will be necessary to go back to the Stamp Act and follow the course pursued by the administration up to the resignation of Lord North. The material for this study is taken largely from the records of the speeches and debates held in the House of Parliament.

Up to the year 1763 no trouble had arisen with America. Sir Robert Walpole, prime minister under George I and also for many years under George II, had acted on the maxim "quieta non movere". Colonial affairs therefore, had been long overlooked or neglected. When it was suggested to him that he should raise revenue by taxing the colonies he said he would leave it to a bolder man than himself to venture on such an experiment. Nothing was done therefore, until George Grenville became First Lord of the Treasury in 1763;

a man, great, in doing but little in views, according to Horace Walpole. The two events which roused both England and America were the conquest of Canada and the placing of power in his hands, says the same authority. The first relieved the colonies from the danger from the north while the second taught them to "enter upon and discuss those problems of government the benefit of which happy nations had better enjoy than agitate".

The Seven Year's War closed in 1763 but left a great burden of debt on England. To raise revenue to help defray the cost of the war, Grenville proposed a tax on the American Colonies. He called together the agents of the different colonies then in London, in the winter of 1763-4, told them of his intention of placing a stamp tax on certain articles to help defray the cost of the late war, and asked if they had any better suggestion. They requested that the government do as it had done hitherto; let each Assembly, on His Majesty's request, vote a certain sum. This, however, did not please the Minister and on February 15, 1765 the Stamp Act was presented to the House of Commons.

It was not looked upon as a tyrannical act. Stamp

duties were levied in England, in time of need, and it was thought but fair that America should bear part of the public expense. Only a few spoke against it therefore: Nine years later, Burke, in speaking of the passing of the Act said,<sup>1</sup> "I never heard a more languid debate. The affair passed with so very little noise that in town you scarcely knew what you were doing. There scarcely ever was less of opposition to a Bill of consequence". The only portion of the debate preserved is Col. Barre's eloquent invective called forth by the remark of Grenville's that the colonies were "children of our own, planted by our care, nourished by our indulgence."

"They planted by your care",<sup>2</sup> exclaimed Barre. "No! your oppressions planted them in America. They fled from your tyranny to a then uncultivated, inhospitable country where they exposed themselves to almost all the hardships to which human nature is liable. They nourished by your indulgence! They grew by your neglect of them. They protected by your arms!! They have nobly taken up arms in your defence; have exerted a valor amidst their constant and laborious industry, for the defense of a country whose frontier was drenched in blood, while its interior parts yielded all its little savings to your emolument, and believe

<sup>2</sup> - Parl. Hist.

Vol. 16. pp 39.

1 - Speech on

"American Taxation. April 1774 - Parl. Hist. Vol. 16

me, remember I this day told you so, the same spirit of freedom which actuated that people at first will accompany them still.". The agents of Connecticut, Rhode Island, Virginia, Pennsylvania and the Carolinas presented petitions against the bill but were not admitted. The bill passed with a minority of not more than forty in the House of Commons. There was no debate or protest in the House of Lords and the bill was ratified by the commission, March twentey-second, to take effect the first of the following November. The preamble was as follows:

" Whereas, by an act made in the last session of parliament, several duties were granted towards defraying the expenses of defending, protecting and securing the British colonies and plantations in America, and

Whereas, it is first necessary that provision be made for raising a further revenue within your Majesty's dominions in America, toward defraying the said expenses, we, your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of Great Britain, beseech your Majesty that it may be enacted; that from and after the first day of November, 1765, there shall be raised, levied, collected and paid, through out the colonies and plantations in America, the following:"

There were fifty different articles to be stamped, such as books, dice, playing cards, newspapers, legal

*1- Statutes at Large  
Vol 26: - pp 189*



documents of all kinds, wills, mortgages, bonds, receipts, etc. The tax itself was not very heavy but the reason stated in the preamble roused the Americans. It was the why of the tax and the principle involved in imposing it rather than the tax itself to which they objected. Nevertheless it was not imagined by either side, that the bill would not be put into operation, and the several agents in London, Franklin among them, suggested names of men who might act as Stamp Distributors.

The Assembly of Virginia was in session when the news of the passing of the bill arrived. Patrick Henry, one of its members, immediately introduced resolutions asserting the rights of Americans to be identical with those of British-born subjects and declaring <sup>their</sup> the Assemblies were the only bodies with power to levy taxes. In Boston mobs attacked the Houses of Oliver, the secretary of the colony who had been appointed Stamp Distributor, and Story registrar of the Admiralty, and destroyed their furniture. One Sunday a minister preached a very inflammatory sermon and on the next day the mob maddened by liquor and excitement proceeded to the house of the lieutenant-governor Hutchinson. His family was compelled to flee for their lives and not only was the house with all its furniture

destroyed but also all of the lieutenant-governor's private papers, including many documents relating to the early history of the colony which could not be replaced. Throughout the northern colonies associations were formed called, "The Sons of Liberty" Part of their work seemed to be to intimidate the stamp officers who were nearly all persuaded or compelled to resign. Public meetings of protest were held in all the colonies. The stamps were either not unpacked or else seized and burned. In New York an agreement was made to import no more goods from Great Britain till the act was repealed. This was extensively signed in New York, Philadelphia and Boston. Combinations were also entered into to support American manufactures and to wear American cloth. By the first of November not a stamp was to be had. Benjamin Franklin was proprietor of "Pennsylvania Gazette" when the Stamp Act went into effect. He was in England, but Mr. Hall, his partner, issued the paper the first week under the heading of "Remarkable Occurences". The next week it came out under "No Stamped Paper to be Had". The next week it assumed its regular heading.

The Stamp Act was ratified in March 1765 but in May, the king disliking the prime minister and his colleagues decided to change the administration. After some hesitancy

the Marquis of Rockingham was appointed first Lord of the Treasury with the Duke of Grafton and General Conway as Secretaries of State. The objections in America to the stamp tax were a source of great <sup>and</sup> unpleasant surprise to the English people, but when parliament opened in the fall the new administration was seriously considering the repeal of the Act. This could be done without alienating any friends of the government, as the Rockingham Whigs had no love for the Grenville faction. When Conway proposed the repeal, he had in mind not so much the good of America as the good of England, for he drew an alarming picture of the results of the Act. All orders for goods had been cancelled and payment would not be made for those already received. Eight merchants who had orders for four hundred thousand pounds had received counter orders. Manufactures, at home, were in a most alarming condition. Nottingham had dismissed a thousand hands and other cities in proportion.

The Grenville faction contended however, that such yielding would only pave the way for more demands and that the authority and dignity of Parliament would be lessened. The supremacy of Parliament must be maintained they declared. Conway believed with them that Parliament should

be supreme but thought that it might be attained in a different manner. Both factions, therefore, were agreed in passing a declaratory act in which the power of Parliament, in all cases whatsoever was declared to be supreme. The members, however, divided on the subject of the repeal of the Stamp Act.

William Pitt, in the House of Commons, and Lord Camden, in the House of Lords, spoke in favor of the repeal not so much from a love of America as from a desire to see justice (as they conceived it) done to the Colonies. The former said the repeal was due to unrepresented subjects in gratitude for having supported England through three wars. If America should resist afterwards he would second a resolution to compel her with every ship and man in England. "We may bind their trade", he said, "confine their manufactures, exercise every power whatsoever, except that of taking money out of their pockets without their consent". He may have all the more gladly espoused the American cause because it carried him into further opposition against Grenville. After much debate the repeal<sup>2</sup> passed by a division of 250 - 122 after the Stamp Act had been in force little over three months. The levying of the tax had been prompted by no spirit of animosity and the disinclinat-

1 - Mahon's Jf 135-

2 - Feb. 1766.

ion of the Grenville faction for the repeal of the Act was not from a feeling of resentment toward the colonies but from an unwillingness to curtail the power and authority of Parliament.

The confusion and tumult incident to the passing of the act died down on the repeal and affairs between the mother country and her colonies seemed to have returned to their former calm. It has been said however, that there remained a pride and an irritability which only wise handling could have allayed. But wise handling seemed impossible at that time. The Rockingham government lasted but a year and then the King asked William Pitt to form a new ministry. He did so, making the Duke of Grafton, First Lord of the Treasury, while he himself accepted a title and entered the House of Lords as Earl of Chatham. Severe illness, however, in the next year prevented him from attending to any business and the Duke of Grafton was left at the head of the administration. The Lord Chancellor of the Exchequer was the brilliant, but erratic Charles Townshend and in spite of the strong disapproval of his colleagues, in 1767, he carried through both Houses, an act levying taxes on glass, paper, painter's colors and tea by import duty. The Duke of Grafton in his Memoirs says, "No one of the Ministry had authority sufficient to advise the dismissal of Mr. Chas. Townshend, and nothing less could have stopped

*1. Quoted in Mahon II Appendix pp. 18*

the measure; Lord Chatham's absence being, in this instance, as well as others, much to be lamented. To render the business as little offensive as possible, articles were thought of, which came within the description of port duties. A Board of Customs was proposed to be erected. "I was not aware of the mistrust and jealousy which this appointment would bring on, nor of the mischief of which it was the source, otherwise it should never have had my assent. The right of the mother country to impose taxes on the colonies was then so generally admitted that rarely any one thought of questioning it."

Townshend had promised his friends that he would reduce the land tax from four shillings to three and to meet the deficiency in the public funds he proposed the tax for America which it was estimated would bring in from thirty-five to forty thousand pounds annually. He did not intend to vex America but merely to relieve England. The preamble to this act was as obnoxious to the colonists as the preamble of the Stamp Act had been. The said duties were to be applied for charge of administration of justice and support of civil government in colonies where it was deemed necessary; the rest was to be paid into His Majesty's Exchequer and used by Parliament, as necessary toward defraying expenses

|- Parl Hist.

Vol.16. pp 375.

of defending, protecting and securing colonies. During the debate on the repeal of the Stamp Act, Franklin had declared it to be his opinion that the colonists would not deny the right to levy external taxes yet as soon as it was known that the Revenue Acts had been passed dissatisfaction was manifest and the people of Boston entered into associations to encourage American manufactures and to desist from importation of British goods. The Massachusetts Assembly addressed a circular letter to other assemblies "complaining of the Acts, urging opposition", and asking advice. This letter was exceedingly offensive to the home government which considered it an effort to undermine the power of Parliament. A demand was made of the assembly to rescind the motion on which the letter was based. Upon the refusal of the assembly it was promptly dissolved. The feeling of dissatisfaction and resentment grew and non-importation associations were formed in many colonies.

To teach the people that the authority of Parliament could not be easily set aside four regiments of soldiers were ordered from Halifax to Boston where their presence was a source of irritation and annoyance to the citizens. The irritation was increased by a motion originating in the House of Lords to revise an obsolete statute of Henry VIII

whereby all traitors were to be taken to England for trial. The motion prevailed, and although it was not enforced it hung as a constant menace over the people. Upon demand of Parliament the Assembly of Massachusetts had granted compensation to those suffering through the recent riots but had also granted a free pardon to all the rioters. This unexpected procedure highly incensed the home government which considered the act derogatory to its dignity and authority and promptly annulled the bill. Yet, neither the Revenue Acts nor the demands upon Massachusetts were intended as affronts to secure proper obedience and respect for Parliament.

The Acts had been in operation barely two years when it became plain to the Ministers, that considered either as a diplomatic or a financial scheme they were not a success. For the sixteen thousand pounds collected there was an expense of collection of fifteen thousand pounds. I In May 1769 we find the Duke of Grafton suggesting in a Cabinet meeting the repeal of all the duties. With the exception of Lord North, who had taken Charles Townshend's place as Chancellor of Exchequer, his colleagues consented. He wished the duty on tea to remain. It should be left he contended, on account of the insubordinate behavior of the colonists.



In the following January, the Duke of Grafton tendered his resignation as First Lord of the Treasury. The whole nation was in a ferment in regard to the Middlesex Election, and he probably did not care to stand the pressure brought to bear upon the administration. Many of his supporters resigned; the Marquis of Granby, Commander-in-chief, and John Dunning, Solicitor General, while Lord Camden, Lord Chancellor who had been requested to give up the "Great Seal" in favor of Mr. <sup>York</sup> ~~North~~ became a more decided opponent of the administration. Lord Chatham's reappearance in the House of Lords, in all his old time vigor was additional help to the opposition. Mahon says, "No sooner had Lord Chatham emerged from his retirement and raised his voice against the ministry than the ministry crumbled to pieces". Instead of turning to the chiefs of the opposition and making terms with them as many supposed he would, the King called Lord North, Chancellor of the Exchequer, to the position of the First Lord of the Treasury. He had been in Parliament since attaining his majority and had been named one of the Lords of the Treasury at the age of twenty-six. During the Rockingham ascendancy he was in retirement, but in 1766 he was named by Chatham as joint Paymaster of the Forces and in the following year succeeded Charles Townshend as Chancellor/

of Exchequer. He was a modest retiring man, not ambitious for popular favour. "I do not dislike popularity", he himself said in 1769, "but it so happens that for the past seven years I have never given my vote for any one of the popular measures".

In figure he was overgrown and ungraceful and was also very near-sighted. A few days before he became Prime Minister,<sup>1</sup> Burke thus described him,- "The Noble Lord who spoke last after extending his right leg a full yard before his left, rolling his flaming eyes and moving his ponderous frame, has at length opened his mouth". But if he was ungainly in form and awkward in gesture, he was ready at every emergency with a "flow of good sense and sterling information" and ever ready wit. "Unequal as he might be, to some at least of these (his opponents) in powers of eloquence he far surpassed them, and indeed all men of his time, in his admirable mildness and placidity of temper". As a public servant his character was above reproach and his actions at all times were those of an honorable gentleman. His first<sup>2</sup> speech in Parliament on the American question was in January 1770, a few days before he became Prime Minister. An amendment was offered to the Address of Thanks that a day

<sup>1</sup>-Mahon V  
pp. 255-

<sup>2</sup>- Parl.Hist.  
Vol.16. pp 719.

be set apart for the consideration of the "present discontents". Among the many "discontents" enumerated, was the American question. He spoke supporting the administration, ofcourse, and said that the charge of inconsistency of conduct toward the colonies was good only in so far as the faults of the previous administration were imputed to the present one. The present administration must not be blamed for its predecessors faults. A people, satisfied with their own government and submitting to ours, by various systems of various ministers has been wrought up to a pitch of opposition impatient of all government and will be satisfied with nothing less than a complete renunciation of our rights to impose taxes, for the support of the government. Lenient measures have been used in vain, so far; force may become necessary in some instances. Is this administration to be blamed if leniency and force have both failed? The contest might have been easily ended at first; it is now serious, for it is a struggle of sovereignty on one side and independence on the other. No minister will dare give up our supremacy over the colonies nor resort to arms except as a last resort. Judging from the above speech, Lord North seemed to have thought that the trouble

in America was the result of previous maladministration rather than that of deliberate disobedience on the part of the colonies.

On March 5, 1770, a petition of merchants and traders of London trading to America was read. The signers begged for relief from the conditions then existing, brought about by the non-importation associations of America. Lord North, true to the cabinet agreement of the previous year, when the Duke of Grafton was in power, then made his motion for the repeal of the Townshend Revenue Acts with the exception of duty on tea. In his speech he said, "Since the Townshend Acts have led to such dangerous combinations in the colonies, and to so much dissatisfaction among merchants and traders at home it is wise to consider the matter carefully. Yet the Americans have no reason to complain since the tea duty of three pence replaced a shilling duty. At the close of the previous session, I had agreed with the other ministers as to the expediency of sending out circular letters to the American governors promising to repeal on commercial principles parts of the Act that were disagreeable to the people, hoping by kindness to recall the colonists to their former obedience, thus to lessen contention without lessening the dignity of the

government. Indeed, I heartily wished to repeal the whole of the law from this conciliatory principle, if there had been a possibility of repealing it without giving up that just right which I shall ever wish the mother country to possess, the right of taxing the Americans". The colonies had not deserved the tenderness shown in the repeal of the Stamp Act but had become more violent; they had dictated instead of beseeching and the administration for its own credit could not gratify their desires, however much it might incline to do so. Should the duty be completely repealed, they would ascribe it, not to our goodness but to our fears. Then, thinking we could be terrified into submission they would make new demands. We repealed the Stamp Act to comply with their desires but it did not teach them obedience or moderation. Our lenity encouraged them to insult our authority. While they deny our legal power to tax them, shall we give up the power: "The properest time to exert our right of taxation is when the right is refused. To temporize is to yield, and the authority of the mother country, now unsupported, is, in reality, relinquished forever".

"There are those", he continued, "both in and out of the House who clamor against any interruption of trade

between England and America. But America will not injure herself to hurt us. She is already tired of the high prices their associations force them to pay. Our exports to America have fallen off, it is true; in 1768 they amounted to 2,378,000 pounds. In 1769 they amounted to 1,634,000 pounds, but they had purchased a double supply in the preceding year. For these reasons I am in favor of retaining our right to tax America, "but giving it every relief that may be consistent with the welfare of the mother country; and for these reasons I move, that leave be granted to bring in a bill to repeal as much of the said Act as lays duties upon glass, red lead, white lead, painter's colours, paper, paste-board, mill boards and scale boards of the produce or manufacture of Great Britian imported into any of his Majesty's colonies in America. Governor Pownall proposed an amendment that "tea" also be inserted in the motion for repeal, but it was lost by a vote of 142-204, and the original question was carried.

Before the news of the repeal reached America, an affray between the Boston mob and the British soldiers had occurred, in which the latter under great provocation had fired upon the former, killing five of the insurgents. The indignant city demanded the immediate removal of the troops and to quiet the tumult the regiments were removed,

though without orders to Castle William. The affair was called a massacre by the colonists and helped to embitter them against the English rule. The attitude of the government toward the colonies, at that time, is thus described in the "Annual Register". "The Boston Massacre, the subsequent riots, and the removal of the troops without governmental orders to Castle William, rendered the question, apparently, a serious one. The ministry, however, were very shy and tender upon 'this head' and seemed too wise rather to trust to a temporizing conduct with the colonies and the hope of profiting by their dis-union or necessity than to lay open a series of discordant measures, which however the separate parts might be defended, by the immediate plea of expediency at the time, could bear no critical test of inquiry when compared and examined upon the whole". The opposition was very active and presented many resolutions reviewing the former policy of government toward America, but they were all rejected. "There was nothing pleasant in the view of the conduct of American affairs and the administration aimed at getting rid of the discussion as soon as possible".

On the repeal of the duties, the non-importation associations were dissolved except with reference to tea.

That was still under ban. It was smuggled in, however, for it is<sup>1</sup> estimated that the Americans drank tea twice a day. The regular trade suffered, therefore. In April, 1773, after a lengthy examination into the East India Company affairs, resolutions were moved by Lord North, that, in order to assist the Company, a drawback be allowed of all duties paid on tea exported to British America. Under this provision tea had only a three penny tax and the government thought that two objects had been attained, the relief of the India Company, and the maintenance of tea in America which could not be objected to. Report, however, was circulated among the colonists that England was trying to oppress them and if they assented to this, other heavier taxes would be imposed. <sup>2</sup> Mahon also says, "One of the main causes of schism, was a general tendency at home to under-value and contemn the people of the colonies". <sup>3</sup> Dr. Samuel Johnson said, "They are a race of convicts and ought to be thankful for anything we allow them, short of hanging".

By the Act of 1773, the East India Company was permitted to export tea direct to the colonies, on consignment. The non-importation associations against tea were still in force and although the tax now, was only three pence, still, the principle of the taxing remained and efforts were

Franklin Works.  
IV. pp. 385.

1- "Tea Leaves"  
Introduction pp 70

2- Mahon VI 407

3- Quoted in "Tea Leaves"  
Int. pp. 7



made to prevent the landing. Boston, as usual was the leader and when three vessels appeared in the harbour one night, some of the dis-affected citizens, disguised as Indians, threw all the cargo, three hundred forty-two chests into the sea. This high handed proceeding was the occasion of a speedy message from the King to the House asking for its serious consideration in those matters "relating to the outrageous proceeding in Boston in the Province of Massachusetts Bay". On the fourteenth of the month after the House had been cleared, Lord North asked for a re-reading of the message. He said it involved two propositions: first, how to put an end to present disturbances, and second, how to better secure dependence on the Crown. Since the disorders had originated in Boston, it was impossible for commerce to be safe there, and it was necessary to find some other port where goods could be landed and the laws could give full protection. He hoped therefore, that a removal of the Custom House would be thought a necessary step, by the House. The landing being thus prevented, the port would be blocked. This was the third time the officials had been prevented from doing their duty. Although all the inhabitants of Boston were not guilty, yet it was no new thing, in cases where the authority of a town seemed asleep

Quoted in  
"Tea Leaves"  
-Int. pp-7.

Mahon-VI.  
-319.

(- Mar. 7, 1774.  
Mar. 7, 1774.

or inactive, for the town to be fined for neglect. Proceedings had been on foot since the first of November to deny the efficacy of the laws and the inhabitants had offered no resistance. Boston was the ring leader of all the riots and showed at all times a desire to see the laws evaded. The mob action was only the voice of the public meetings. The other colonies were more peaceably inclined but they were affected by the example of Boston, and so long as Boston led the way in disobedience she ought to be punished; nor would the Custom House be re-established until full restitution had been made the East India Company and His Majesty was convinced that in the future the laws would be obeyed. Lord North continues, "We must punish, control, or yield to them" and therefore I move that "leave be granted to bring in a bill for the immediate removal of the officers concerned in the collusion and management of His Majesty's duties and customs from the town of Boston, in the Province of Massachusetts Bay in North America; and to discontinue the landing, discharging, lading and shipping of goods, wares and merchandize at said town of Boston or within the harbour thereof". The Bill was opposed by Doweswell, Burke, and Charles Fox, who claimes that it was

unjust to punish a city without first having its defence, and also that restitution should have been demanded and refused before punishment was given.

On the 23 of March an amendment was offered that fifteen thousand pounds be demanded from Boston to reimburse the East India Company for the destroyed tea. Lord North was against the amendment, and said this was not the first offence for Boston began many years ago to endeavor to throw off obedience. But this was the first attempt on part of the government to punish. "I am by no means an enemy to lenient measures but I find that resolutions of censure and warning will avail nothing; we must, therefore, proceed to some immediate remedy, and America must be taught that we are in earnest. If necessary I should not hesitate to enforce obedience to laws, but hope that this law will not require military force. If the other colonies side in with Boston and non-obedience to Act brings consequences likely to produce rebellion; those consequences belong not to us but to them; not what we have brought on but what we have occasioned. "Let us continue to proceed with firmness, justice and resolution, which if pursued will certainly produce that due obedience and respect to laws of this country and security of trade of its people

Mar. 23, 1774.

Parl. Hist.  
Vol. 17  
pp 1170

which I so ardently wish for". The Bill passed both Houses and was not looked upon as unduly harsh or severe. Even Barre, the enthusiastic champion of America, said it was harsh though moderate and voted for it. The only adverse criticism was that restitution should have been formally demanded and refused before such penalties were inflicted. The relief of the administration was, no doubt, voiced by Lord North when he said that some measures must be adopted and that he believed the pending bill was the best measure in the present case".

While the Port Bill was pending, he brought in a Bill for regulating the government of Massachusetts Bay. The House resolved itself into a Committee of the Whole and was addressed by Lord North. He said that the executive power was wanting in America and it had become necessary to strengthen it. The force of the civil power was in the mob, who committed all kinds of depredations<sup>and</sup> engaged in all the riots. When the democratic part of a community shows contempt for obedience to laws, how is a governor to execute any authority vested in him? If he wishes a magistrate to act, he has not the power to appoint one who will or remove one who will not, for the council has that power and it is dependent on the democratic part of

Mar 28, 1774.

Parl. Hist.  
Vol. 17. pp 1192.

the constitution. For many years the civil magistrate in Boston has been inactive and the governor can do nothing of his own authority. Therefore Lord North proposed that the executive power be taken from the people and placed in the hands of the governor who would thus appoint sheriffs, marshals, provosts, etc. In this way, all irregular meetings or town assemblies would be done away with. The Minister said he was willing to hear any suggestions, but an immediate remedy was necessary.

After the Easter recess the Bill came in again, somewhat altered. The nomination of the Council was vested in the Crown and had no negative voice. Lieutenant-governor and secretary were not to be members unless appointed by the King. The opposition made a vigorous protest against annulling the Charter. Conway, Pownall, Dowdeswell, Burke and Fox, were much exercised. The latter, having just recently been forced to resign as one of Junior Lords of Treasury, could hardly be expected to uphold any course the government might take, along any line. Sir George Saville~~e~~ protested that charters should not be taken away except by a due process of law and then either as a punishment for an offense or for breach of contract.

Lord North replied that it was not political conven-

ience but political necessity which urged the measure. Subjects have been tarred and feathered; laws have been denied; obedience has been refused; ships have been burned,- something must be done. "Whatever the consequences we must risk something". The measure is nothing but taking the election of counsellors out of the hands of those people who act in defiance and resistance of laws.

In spite of the energetic protests of the opposition, the bill passed by 239 against 64. The debates in the House of Lords on this measure are not preserved, but a protest in seven articles was entered by eleven peers. They stated that before the Charter of Massachusetts Bay could be taken away, the legal offense of Massachusetts must be definitely stated, and fully proven after an impartial hearing of the defense. The appointment of the Council by Crown was unfair, rendered Ministers and Governors masters of every question and in all probability would not make the colonies any more ready to grant supplies. The authority of officers is so increased and strengthened that the colony is at the mercy of the arbitrary will of the governor and Minister. Among the names of the signers of this protest are found, Richmond, Portland, Rockingham, Ponsonly, Effingham and Craven. The bill passed however by a vote of 92 - 20 showing that the majority of the peers as well

of the Commons believed that the authority of Parliament should be maintained even by stringent measures if necessary.

Before the above bill passed, Lord North introduced another bill "For the impartial administration of justice in cases of persons questioned for any acts done, in execution of the laws, or for the suppression of riots and tumults in the province of Massachusetts Bay." If any person were indicted for murder or any other capital offense and it should appear to the governor that it was committed in the exercise of magistracy or in the aid thereof, and if it seemed probable that a fair trial could not be had in the province, then the offender could be sent to any other province or to Great Britian for trial. In presenting this bill Lord North said he hoped this would effectually secure the province from further disturbance. Vigilance and firmness would alone be required from his Majesty's servants.

The Opposition were very active in debate against this bill; Col. Barre especially. Alderman Lawbridge accused the Minister of desiring to enslave America as he would like to enslave England and trusted that America would resist it. Lord <sup>North</sup> replied with great moderation that he had no intention of enslaving America. He wished the measure to be thoroughly discussed and if bad, rejected. In

April 15, '74.

May 6, 1774.

spite of the activity of Burke and Fox the bill was passed by vote of 127-24 in the Commons and by 43-12 in the House of Lords.

Judging from the above enactments it would seem that it was the authority of Parliament rather than the best interests of the colonists that suggested them. In fact legislation was taken up primarily in the interests of England; the affect on colonial affairs was of secondary importance. Yet the government had no thought of tyrannizing and did not set itself to goad the Americans to madness. That it did so nevertheless, was the fault of its mistaken policy, not of its intention. An obstinate king, a short sighted minister and an unconcerned Parliament were the factors in widening the breach between the mother country and her colonies.



If, as Lord North had anticipated, Boston had been either sufficiently cowed, after the passing of the so called "Intolerable Acts", or had been left severely alone by her sister towns, affairs would have probably taken an altogether turn. Unfortunately, for England, however, Boston was supported by the neighboring towns both by sympathy and by food supplies. At the instigation of Samuel Adams, one of the chief agitators of the rebellious movement, a colonial congress was proposed for the next September. The other colonies were pleased with the proposition although the governors dissolved the assemblies which would have chosen delegates, irregular meetings were held and all the colonies sent representatives except Georgia. The Congress met in September and passed resolutions sympathizing with Massachusetts. It sent out a "Declaration of Rights", to the colonies, asserting that the colonists were entitled to all the rights and privileges of British born subjects and denying the right of Parliament to levy taxes. It protested against a standing army, made an enumeration and complaint of all the oppressive acts, and entered into a new non-importation agreement against slaves and teas especially.

Parliament<sup>1</sup> opened the last day of November, and the King in his address spoke of the daring spirit of resistance and of disobedience to the laws still in Massachusetts; of the encouragement given to it by the other colonies, and of the attempt to obstruct commerce by unlawful combinations. The Address of Thanks expressed "the abhorrence and detestation both of the Commons and the Peers at the daring spirit of resistance --- and assured His Majesty that they would co-operate in all measures upholding the supremacy of Parliament and the dignity, safty and welfare of the empire"<sup>2</sup>. Early in the session the Opposition had called for documents relating to American affairs but Lord North did not lay them before the House, however, till in January. They consisted largely of letters and papers received by the Earl of Dartmouth, secretary of Board of Trade and Plantations, from General Gage and other colonial governors in regard to the great disaffection existing in all the colonies, and described conditions in America from May to December, 1774. In reply to a rebuke, for delaying to bring in the papers before Christmas Lord North said that in the first place he had not had the necessary information, and in the second place he had been given to understand that an address to the King

<sup>1</sup>-Nov. 30, 1774.

<sup>2</sup>-Jan. 19, 1775.

from what the Americans called a Congress, but he, an illegal and reprehensible meeting, was of a conciliatory nature so as to make way for lenient measures. He had waited, therefore, until the Address had been received.

Before the papers were taken up and considered petitions were received from the merchants of London, Bristol, Glasgow and Norwich complaining of the great stagnation of business resulting from the various oppressive Acts and praying for the serious consideration of the matter by Parliament. These petitions together with similar ones from Liverpool, Manchester, and Wolverhampton were referred to what Burke called, a "committee of oblivion". Because Lord North objected to considering them at the same time with the American documents, he was most bitterly attacked by Burke and Fox in regard to the entire conduct who charged him with inconsistency and incapacity. They declared that the Acts of the previous session were "framed on false information, conceived in weakness and ignorance, and executed with negligence".

From the first of the troubles with America, Lord Chatham had been a staunch friend of the colonies and had given voice to his sentiments in no uncertain tone. Many times had he presented resolutions and made motions looking toward conciliation, but in vain. Parliament though

willing to listen to his eloquence was not willing to be guided by his reasoning. Even a Chatham, when in opposition could not hope to carry the majority in face of the ministry.

On the first day of February the Earl presented another plan for "settling the troubles in America and for asserting the supreme legislative authority and superintending power of Great Britian of the colonies." First, he declared the right of Parliament as the supreme legislative authority should be acknowledged by the colonies. Second, that although the Declaration of Rights had reference only to the consent of Parliament, not to that of the provincial assemblies, in the maintenance of a standing army, yet, to quiet "groundless fears" it should be declared that no such army could be lawfully employed to violate or destroy the just rights of the people. Third, no tax, tallage or any other charge for His Majesty's revenue should be laid without the consent of the provincial assembly. Fourth, The Congress at Philadelphia should be recognized as the legal assembly of the Americans, and be asked both to make an appropriation for the King and to acknowledge the supreme authority of Parliament. Fifth, the admiralty and the vice-admiralty courts should be restrained to their

ancient limits; and trial by jury in civil cases, where now abolished, should be restored; no person should be tried beyond the seas or in another province. Sixth, the Boston Port Bill, the Charter Bill and the Bill for changing administration of justice should be totally repealed. The ministry, however, was not willing to acknowledge that it had been mistaken in its previous Acts, neither was it ready to renounce for all time, the taxation of the colonies, and the Bill was therefore rejected.

During the discussion on the letters from America, which took place the next day, Lord North declared that means were used on both sides of the Atlantic to increase the seditious spirit and that there was an almost universal resistance among the colonies. This was the great barrier which separated the two countries and on this "ground of resistance" he raised every argument leading to a motion that in a joint address the King be urged to send more troops, and to restrain the foreign trade of New England, especially, the fisheries. But, whenever the supreme authority of Parliament was acknowledged, obedience paid to the laws, and due submission rendered to the King, then, their real grievances, when properly presented, would be

redressed. He was in favor of more lenient measures with the other colonies as they were not so culpable but, "we must give up every claim of sovereignty or commerce or secure all". The motion passed and was carried to the Lords. Following out his plan, on the tenth of February, Lord North asked leave to bring in a bill for restraining the trade of Massachusetts Bay, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Rhode Island and the Province Plantations to Great Britian, Ireland, and West Indies. "Since America will not trade with us, we will not permit her to trade with any one else". "As Parliament had declared rebellion to be in the province of Massachusetts, that province should suffer by loosing its fisheries". He included the other colonies in the punishment because they were either ready accomplices or service imitators. As long as the great object, the Act, was not destroyed he was willing to alleviate its rigour and so would make it only temporary, for a year or two, and was also willing that persons might be exempted on recomenf-ation of the governor.

The Opposition urged in debate on this bill that the trade thus ruined could never be restored; the innocent were punished with the guilty;

Feb. 10, 1775.

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four provinces would starved; there would be great danger of payments due to British merchants being withheld and all America would be irritated. Fox said, "You have now completed the system of folly! You had some friends, yet left in New England, but rather than not make the ruin of that devoted country complete, they are also to be involved in a common famine". Governor Pownall, at one time Governor of Massachusetts and a firm friend of the colonies, ridiculed the idea of a famine in New England as a result of the Act, for the different colonies were provision and grazing settlements. Instead of considering the ministry obdurate and cruel, he looked upon the bill as a commercial regulation and gave it his hearty support. The measure was carried, as was also a bill introduced the next month, for laying almost the same restrictions on the provinces of New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and South Carolina.

While these bills were still before the House, Lord North, in order to show that every possible means consistent with the dignity of the empire would be used to effect a reconciliation, in a Committee of the Whole House, presented a Bill for Conciliation. Although Parliament could never

give up the right of taxation, yet he thought, if America would propose means of contributing to the common defense the right might be suspended and the privilege conceded to the colonists of raising their own portion. He anticipated many objections to the bill, but felt it would be a test of American pretensions. His resolution was, "It is the opinion of this committee that when the governor, council, and assembly or general court of any of His Majesty's provinces or colonies in America shall propose to make provision according to the condition, circumstances and situation of such province or colony, for contributing their proportion to the common defense (such proportion to be raised under the authority of the general court or general assembly of such province or colony and disposable by Parliament) and shall engage to make provision also for the support of the civil government and the administration of justice, in such province or colony it will be proper, if such proposal shall be approved by His Majesty and the two Houses of Parliament, and for so long as such provision shall be made accordingly, to forbear, in respect of such province or colony to levy any duty, tax or assessment, or to impose any farther duty, tax or assessment, except only such duties as it may be expedient to continue to levy



or to impose for the regulation of commerce; the net produce of the duties mentioned to be carried to the account of such province or colony respectively.

There was much debate both in the committee and in the House when the bill was read. Some of the friends of the administration, Welbore, Ellis, Mr. Dundas, Lord Advocate of Scotland, and others objected, because it was contrary to the spirit of the address to the King. Consequently Lord North was compelled to speak several times in defense of his bill, before his friends. Of the Opposition, Mr. Burke and Mr. Fox were especially bitter. The latter accused the Prime Minister of insincerity; of attempting to gratify the Americans by seeming to yield a point, and, at the same time, to please the advocates of British Supremacy by asserting the supreme power of Parliament. In defense, Lord North said, 'it was very probable the resolution would not be accepted by the Americans, as it certainly did not grant all their claims, but it was just, humane, and wise, and those who were just wise, and serious would, he thought, think it worth their attention. "I have been charged", he continued, "with throwing out deceptions to gentlemen, here, and with laying a snare to our fellow-subjects in America. Whatever may be

the reception those propositions may meet, I feel that I have done my duty, fairly and consistently".

Colonel Barre, charged him with the "low, mean and shameful policy" of attempting to divide the generous union of the Americans, in which they had stood together in defense of their rights and liberties. He also declared that should the Americans refuse the overtures, which My Lord knew they would, then they might expect to suffer a ten-fold vengeance at his hands. In justification of his course the noble Lord protested, "Is it foolish, is it mean, when a people heated and misled by evil councils, are running into unlawful combinations, to hold out those terms which will sift the reasonable from the unreasonable, distinguish those who act upon principle from those who wish only to profit by the general confusion and ruin? If propositions that the conscientious and the prudent, will accept, will at the same time recover them from the influence and fascination of the wicked: I avow the use of that principle, which will thus divide the good from the bad and give aid and support to the friends of peace and good government".

Burke called the bill a "shameful prevarication" in the ministers. The colonies are called upon to pay a tax not specified and if the amount granted did not suit Parlia-

ment, all was lost. He likened the ministry to Nebuchadnezzar who ordered his wise men not only to interpret, but also to relate his forgotten dream. "I am", he continued, "for the reconsideration of the Resolution until it can be brought to some agreement with common sense". After much further debate the measure passed by a vote of two hundred seventy-four to eighty-eight. Gibbon gives an interesting account of the discussion:- <sup>1</sup>"We go on with regard to America, if we can be said to go on; a conciliatory motion of allowing the colonies to tax themselves was introduced by Lord North in the midst of lives and fortunes, war and famine. We went into the House in confusion; every moment expecting that the Bedfords would fly into rebellion. Lord North arose six times to appease the storm, but all in vain, till at length Sir Gilbert (Eliot) declared for the administration and the troops all rallied under their proper standards". <sup>2</sup> Lord Chatham wrote to his wife of the passing of the bill as follows:- "Lord North was, in the beginning of the day, like a man exploded and the judgment of the House during two whole hours was that his lordship was going to be in a considerable minority. Sir Gilbert turned the tide. Lord North is thought to have made a

<sup>1</sup>- Letter quoted  
in ~~Parl. Hist.~~ *Adolphus II*  
Vol. 18 pp *20* 194

<sup>2</sup>- Adolphus  
Vol. II pp 194

wretched figure in the House". In just what particular he made a "wretched figure" the noble earl does not say. The majority was certainly a very good one and the plan of the bill contained no radical defects, for it neither compromised the dignity of the empire, nor required abject submission from the colonies.

The American question was a highly interesting one and since the Opposition claimed to be a devoted friend of British rights in America it was necessary for that faction to propose means of conciliation which they could vouch for as more acceptable to the Americans. Accordingly, the next month, Edmund Burke presented his now famous "Resolutions on Conciliation with the Americans' Colonies". He made no mention of Congress but declared in general terms the propriety of considering the subject from the point of expediency rather than from the point of authority, of repealing the recent obnoxious Acts and of leaving to the various Assemblies the right of taxation. A long and animated debate followed, in which the propositions were vigorously combated. Lord John Cavendish, Alderman Sawbridge of London and Fox were the chief supporters of the measure. It was lost however by a vote of two hundred seventy to seventy-two. No more bills relating to America were passed  
Mar. 22, '75.

that session, although petitions in regard to American commerce were presented by the merchants of London and Jamaica, and propositions for conciliation were presented by Mr. David Hartley, one of the members for London. In May a "Representation and Remonstrance of the General Assembly of the Colony of New York" was brought up but not considered. Lord North paid a tribute to New York, and said he would gladly do everything in his power to show his regard for the good behavior of that colony, but the honour of Parliament required that no paper should be presented to that House which tended to call in question the unlimited rights of Parliament. When the question of the repeal of the Quebec Act came up, he said he would be in favor of arming the Canadians, if it became necessary to reduce the refractory colonies. He ventured to affirm, however, that the dispute with America was not so alarming as some people apprehended; he had not the least doubt it would end speedily, happily, and without bloodshed".

Had the noble lord's conciliatory bill been brought forward earlier and the restraining Acts of the session been annulled, the Americans might have felt that England was sincere in her efforts to be just toward the colonies. As it was, the engagement at Lexington had occurred before

the adjournment of Parliament and the Battle of Bunker Hill speedily followed it, putting to an end, at once, all hopes of a peaceful settlement of the difficulties. Having laid down the principle that Parliament and the King were supreme, the Prime Minister could scarcely do otherwise than he did. He was pledged to uphold the government, and in his mind there was no other way except to force the colonies to obedience.

Parliament adjourned in May and did not meet again until in October. In the meantime, George Washington, had been appointed Commander-in-chief of the Continental Armies, as the American forces were called, and had proceeded to surround Boston, thus rendering inactive its ten thousand British soldiers. Lord North's conciliatory proposition had been rejected by Congress; expeditions were made against Canada, and offensive operations were begun in all the colonies. During the summer Congress sent a petition, known as the "Olive Branch" to the King's Most Excellent Majesty, but received no answer as it had been framed by a body meeting not only without his permission but also against his strict injunction. Thus the breach widened daily, and the greater part of the British people upheld the

King in his determination to "maintain rights of the Crown and authority of Parliament." <sup>1-</sup> A semi-official note sent over by Lord North shows the spirit of the people:- "The temper and spirit of the Nation are so much against concessions, that if it were the intention of the administration, they could not carry the question". The members of the Opposition saw the situation and acknowledged it. The Marquis of Rockingham, one of the Whig leaders, in writing to Edmund Burke said, "Violent measures toward America are adopted and countenanced by a majority of individuals of all ranks, professions, or occupations of this country". The London magistrates were an exception, however; In August the King issued a proclamation for suppressing rebellion and sedition in America and preventing traitorous correspondence, but the usual form of respect were with-held when it was read at the Royal Exchange.

In the opening Address to Parliament, the King spoke of a "desperate conspiracy" and "general revolt" in America. "They have raised troops and are collecting a naval force; they have seized the public revenue, and assumed to themselves legislative, executive, and judicial powers. It is the part of wisdom, to put a speedy end to these disorders by most decisive exertions." He desired an

1- Mahon VI  
pp 65

Parl Hist.  
Vol.18. pp.695.

increase in the land and naval forces and added, "In testimony of my affection for my people I have sent to the Garrisons of Gibraltar and Port Mahon, a part of my Electoral troops, in order that a larger number of the established forces of this kingdom may be applied to the maintenance of this kingdom." This action on the part of the King called forth much censure and animated discussion in both Houses, for the Opposition laid great stress on the unconstitutionality of employing foreign troops without the consent of Parliament. The motions brought forward however, declaring the action illegal met the usual fate of Opposition measures. During the discussion on the Address of Thanks, Lord North was taken to task by one of his supporters, William Adam, for not proceeding with more vigor. The minister thanked the honorable gentleman for the candor with which he had spoken and pledged the House he would proceed with more activity. His conciliatory plan which had been objected to by Mr. Adam was necessary to put England on a proper footing with America. However, the Americans had refused the offer, their intention was not seen and every exertion of force was justifiable till they should become obedient to the government. "There is no intention to oppress them, but to establish in America the most just, mild and equitable government.



I have as great veneration for liberty as any man; and, I hope Americans are too brave and worthy of their ancestors to hesitate a moment in their choice between slavery and war, but in the present instance there is no question of slavery. I wish to God it were possible to put the colonies on the same footing. (as formerly) Surely America will not without money, without trade, without resources, continue to prefer a ruinous war with Great Britian to the blessings of peace and happy dependence upon her". The Address of Thanks that finally went up to the King lamented the rebellion, desired to reclaim rather than to subdue, the refractory colonies, but, as moderation seemed to be in vain wished for most "decisive exertions". It was a satisfaction to Parliament to hear that persons should be authorized to grant pardons and receive submission.

The estimates for army and navy, for the year 1776, caused a prolonged discussion. The force to be sent to America was twenty-five thousand men with a flett of seventy-eight sail under Admiral Shuldham. When the matter came up in the House, the Opposition demanded a detailed explanation of the condition and position of the army then in the colonies. This the ministry refused to give except in a general way, and it was surely justified in

declining to make public the plans of campaign. During the debate, a review was taken by both factions of the cause and progress of the American dispute and the probable outcome. In order to provide for the increased expense the land-tax was raised to four shillings in the pound, instead of three. In the course of the debate on the subject, Lord North said, "It is true, taxation was the original question with the Americans; the dispute now, is much higher." He had no doubt, but still, some mode would be adopted by which a contribution would be obtained from America and brought into the public treasury. When his Majesty's ministers said that the idea of taxation was abandoned, it was never intended more than abandoned for the present; taxation was but a matter of secondary consideration when the supremacy of the legislative authority of the country was at stake.

Late in November, Lord North,<sup>2</sup> brought forth a bill for prohibiting all trade and intercourse with the colonies during the existing rebellion, for repealing the Port Bill, and the Restraining Acts of the previous session and to enable His Majesty to appoint commissioners and to issue proclamations as needed.<sup>3</sup> He explained the necessity of restraining the Americans from all trade during the present

<sup>1</sup> Parl.Hist.  
Vol.18.pp.936.

<sup>2</sup> Nov.20,1775.

<sup>3</sup> Parl.Hist.  
Vol.18.pp.992.

rebellion and the justice of removing the restraint in any colony when disaffection had ceased there. The Boston Port Bill and other acts of the previous session were framed on other grounds and for other purposes; the restraining bills were civil coercions against civil crimes, and since war was in progress, were incapable and others necessary. Yet, the new provisions should be so framed as to open the door to peace on its first approach. He was ready to repeal the Charter Bill but could not, while the right to make it was denied; the bill for the administration of justice was only a temporary affair, for three years - two of which had already expired - besides, we do not repeal it, as the country is in actual war, and martial law takes the place of civil. The minister further declared that he was ready to repeal the tea duty, also, on the same grounds and would suspend every exercise of right of taxation if the colonies would point out any mode by which they could share England's burdens and give aid in the common defense. The commissioners should not only have the power to grant pardons but also should inquire into the matter of the real grievances in the different colonies. Then, because he had been reported as tired of the affair and willing to give up the struggle into other hands, he said that he had no other

end in view but the public service and would conduct that always with an eye to the public good. The quarrel with the colonies about taxation was begun before he became minister. When he entered upon his duties, the colonies were already taxed and were disputing the right which England was determined not to yield. He was bound to see the matter through, and if, the colonies chose war, though peace was the point of view he retained, then, war it must be. But, he would not give up the conduct of the business to any one else unless the King dismissed him on the majority of the House asked his removal.

Such were, undoubtedly, his sentiments and since the matter was on hands, he was determined to see it through. The debate on the measure was long and acrimonious. The Opposition brought in its usual objections; commissioners had too much power, the innocent were punished with the guilty; the fact that peace was offered in one hand and war in the other would only irritate Americans and cause them to doubt <sup>the</sup> sincerity of Parliament; and trade and manufactures at home would be ruined. It was a stubborn fight. Motion after motion was presented, amendment after amendment was offered, only to be voted down, and when persuasion failed, personalities were indulged in. Cavendish declared that

the ministry from a "mere childish , sottish obstinacy to hold their places were risking their heads and plunging the nation into certain ruin". In spite of its efforts, however, the Opposition on the final vote was able to count only sixteen against the one hundred twelve on the side of the government.

After the Christmas recess, Parliament took up the treaties with the Duke of Brunswick, Landgrave of Hesse Cassel and Prince of Waldeck in regard to hiring their troops. In defense of the action Lord North said that as reducing America to the proper state of obedience was the great object of the Parliament, it was desirous to use speedy and effective measures. Men could be obtained from the German princes cheaper and could be more quickly gotten together than through the ordinary recruiting system. The princes perceiving England's need had made most exacting terms. They were to be paid at the rate of ~~thirty~~-six Dollars a soldier and the pay was to begin sixteen days before the time of marching. Each of their Serene Highnesses was to receive, also, a yearly sum above the pay for troops and the payment of such a sum was to continue one year from close of service of troops. Under this arrangement about seventeen thousand soldiers were to be added to the

British Army in America. The disgrace that attaches the German princes in this selling, the blood of their subjects cannot be wiped out, but the British Ministry is also to blame in being willing to enter into so nefarious a transaction. The Opposition made a strong protest against ratifying the treaties and in the House of Lords the Duke of Richmond, one of the leaders, in a lengthy speech, moved the presentation of an Address to the King to countermand the march of German troops and for a suspension of hostilities in America. His motion was lost, however; Mr. George Grenville, afterwards the Duke of Buckingham, probably expressed the attitude of the more conservative members of the Opposition. He said he had no doubt of the right of Parliament to tax America and therefore concluded in coercive measures, although he was far from approving all the steps of the administration. But the main point rested on this alternative: shall we abandon America, or shall we recover our sovereignty over that country? The expense, to be sure, is heavy and the terms are hard, but if we do not consent to relinquish all our pretensions at once, we had better make one effort more. If that miscarries we should, in that event, be little worse off than if we

henceforth desist from all further pretensions."

During this session, the Earl of Dartmouth, Secretary for Colonial Affairs, resigned. The Annual Register says, "It is not known whether he was disgusted with the unhappy state of American affairs or whether a more inflexible character was needed". At any rate, the office was filled, by Lord Sackville, and the Earl took the Privy Seal formerly held by the Duke of Grafton. The latter had been Lord North's immediate predecessor as the Head of the Ministry, and up to this time had remained with the administration, but now, perceiving the King's determination to force the American's to obedience, he resigned a keeper of Privy Seal and went over to the side of the Opposition. His defection did not seriously cripple the government, however; neither, did it materially strengthen his new allies.

As the session drew to a close many efforts were made by the Opposition to block the ministerial path, and all sorts of resolutions and motions were offered. However they were all systematically rejected. The administration and the American system were so closely interwoven that there was no possibility of overthrowing the one without causing the fall of the other, so firmly was the system

*Annual Register 1776 - pp. 93*

supported. The Opposition, though not strong in members, was quick in discovering faults and exposing errors; but in spite of the hammering the Ministry had the mass of the people behind it.

Before Parliament opened again the colonies had declared their independence and showed a determination to uphold their rights. In England their "Declaration and their known overtures to France were deemed", says Lecky, "the climax of insolence and ingratitude" and the popularity of the war reached its height in the years of 1776 and 1777. As the war advanced, the damage to commerce was felt, the attempts made to destroy the dock-yards increased the bitterness, and a general feeling prevailed that the government should be supported. In addition, the Opposition in Parliament was weak in numbers and divided in forces, having the Duke of Richmond as leader in the House of Lords and Edmund Burke in the House of Commons. It realized the situation but was powerless and for a time many of the Rockingham Whigs withdrew from the House whenever the American question came up. Such action demanded justification, however, and in the Annual Register of 1777, their reasons are given :- "All opposition to the measures of government", it was said, "particularly with respect to American affairs was not only vain and fruitless, but from

July 4, 1776.

/- Lecky VI.  
pp. 71-70.

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the overbearing force which supported the minister on every question, it was worse: it became frivolous and contemptible. It was impossible to save a people against their will and the minority had for a succession of years, repeatedly apprised and warned the nation of the danger attending the ruinous measures then pursued and of the fatal precipice that must terminate that mad career in which they were blindly and desperately driven". This proceeding, on the part of the Opposition gained them no new friends and only showed forth their mortification and chagrin. The secession was a short one, however, and even then not perfectly observed. Fox, one of the foremost opponents never joined it, but remained to annoy the adherents of the government. That he did so is evident from a letter of the King's to Lord North, in which the latter is advised to, "push on business as much as possible while the author of "noisy declamation" is absent".

In accordance with the measures of the previous session, Lord Howe had been appointed Peace Commissioner with power to receive submission and grant pardons. He arrived in America with re-enforcements for his brother, General Howe, the British commander in the colonies, shortly after independence had been declared. Efforts were immediately made to bring his mission before the people and the in-

habitants of Long Island went over to the King's side at once. Franklin, John Adams and Edward Rutledge of South Carolina, were the delegates to Congress who as private gentlemen conferred with Lord Howe, but the conference came to naught, for the latter would not acknowledge the independence of the colonies, and the former would treat on no other basis. Late in August the British overcame Washington's forces at Brooklyn and a few weeks later entered New York City, which was held as <sup>the</sup> center of operations. The American army retreated slowly through New Jersey and finally took up winter quarters just across the Delaware River in Pennsylvania.

Parliament opened the last day of October, earlier than usual, and was in session until the sixth of the next June, an unusually long sitting. Although British Armies in America had been successful, yet the results had not been proportion to number of troops and much complaint was indulged in by the Opposition. Lord North again declared it to be, and that it ever had been, the wish of the administration to bring the matter to an early issue and to avoid bloodshed. But as long as the colonists insisted on their independency it was impossible to think of revising or of repealing any obnoxious acts. What else

could a man in his position say or do? A nation does not quietly give up its possessions at the demand of its rebellious subjects. It demands obedience first, and then offers redress of grievances.

During the latter part of the year, England was alarmed by the repeated efforts made to <sup>destroy the</sup> different dockyards. After much search the incendiary was discovered, a workman in the yards, known as "John, the Painter". It was also discovered that he was in the employ of Silas Deane, the American representative in Paris, and that a plan had been concocted to destroy all the arsenals. As a result of this discovery, the first business after the Christmas recess was the consideration of a bill presented by Lord North for enabling the King to detain and secure persons charged with or suspected of high treason, committed in North America, or on the high seas or of piracy." Fox declared it was a key to the designs of the ministers to spread dictatorial power over the whole country. "Who knows", said he, "but that the ministers in the fullness of their malice, may take it into their heads that I served on Long Island under General Washington. What would it avail me in such an event to plead an alibi; to assure my old friends that I was never in America, or on any sea but between

1 - Parl. Hist  
Vol. 19  
pp 11

Dover and Calais; and that all my acts of piracy were committed on the mute creation? All this may be true, says a minister, or a minister's understrapper: you are for the present suspected, that is sufficient". In the final reading, however, Fox and his supporters could only muster thirty-three votes against the one hundred twelve in favor of the measure.

In May, the discussion of new debts in Civil <sup>Lists</sup> ~~History~~ came up, and opened up an opportunity for the Opposition to display its powers of reproach and invective. The debts amounted to more than six hundred thousand pounds; caused, partly by the war in America, for many of the loyalists driven from their homes, had no means of help, except through the bounty of the Crown, but caused chiefly by the ill regulated state of the ~~Royal Household~~. In spite of the efforts of the opponents of the government, the House of Commons discharged all the debts and granted to the Crown a yearly sum of one hundred thousand pounds besides. In the course of his speech on the Budget, Lord North said that the government had taken every step which was likely to recall the colonists to a proper sense of the duty they owed to the mother country. Our moderation has increased their insolence, our tenderness, their disobedience and what arose from sentiments the most

May 14, 1777.

indulgent and affectionate on our part has been interpreted to spring from motives which never existed. There is a very great majority of the nation at large, who are for prosecuting the war against the rebellious subjects in America until they shall acknowledge the legislative supremacy of Parliament or be compelled to do it. For various reasons, military operations were not undertaken till late in the summer but were as successful as most sanguine could expect. We have now every reason to expect that the present will effectually put an end to the distracted state of that country, by compelling the obstinate to a due submission to the laws and by affording protection to those from compulsion have been forced into measures they secretly abhor.\* In another speech on some question he lamented the necessity of laying new taxes and the expense of the war which created the necessity. "The equity of compelling America to contribute toward lightening those burdens they were originally the cause of, was a popular opinion within these walls", he said, "long before I entered office and it is still a prevailing opinion. But whatever motives of propriety, expediency or concession, on our part might have induced us to waive the exercise of that right, the ground of contest has long since shifted. It is no longer a question

\* Parl Hist.  
Vol. 19. pp. 242.

1-Parl. Hist. Vol. 19.  
pp 262 .

whether we shall tax them or let them tax themselves, but simply whether America is any longer to form a part of the British Empire". If the House should think that object no longer worth contending for, he himself, he said, had not a single desire or wish of his own to gratify. The minister carried the House with him and when Parliament closed in June, the Opposition had accomplished nothing in reference to the American War.

Before Parliament opened again, General Howe had taken possession of Philadelphia and General Burgoyne was entering the colonies by way of Canada. He was defeated at the Battle of Saratoga in September but the news of it did not reach England till the first of December. It came like a thunder clap but there was no despondency nor depression and fifteen thousand troops were immediately raised by private means. In both Houses, however, lengthy motions, leading to lengthy debates, were made by the Opposition on the State of the Nation! Lord Chatham re-appeared, after an absence of nearly two years, spoke bitterly against the conduct of the American affairs, and made a motion that General Burgoyne's instructions be considered. John Wilkes, author of "No. 45", a pamphlet upbraiding the administration, and a favorite of the Middlesex voters, moved the the Declara-

tory Act be repealed. Lord North in answering him said, "I can assure the honorable gentleman that he is mistaken if he thinks a partial repeal will content America. The Navigation Act and every other restrictive act must first give way to their unreasonable demands and with them the sovereignty of this country. Propositions for treaty and for conciliation may become necessary, but the moment for making them will depend on circumstances and circumstances must arise out of the state of war, from the domestic situation, and from the disposition of both countries". Just before Christmas, when the length of the Christmas recess was being discussed the Opposition made a frantic effort to shorten the time so that Parliament could be ready to meet any emergency that might arise. Lord North, however, saw no reason for shortening the period. He hoped that the campaign had produced events which would enable England to enforce a conciliation on a true constitutional basis. After the holiday recess, when all the results of the past campaign and the intended measures would come up together for consideration, he would then move the House to consider what concession might be properly made a ground of treaty and he trusted that his endeavors would be effectual in bringing about a permanent peace between the two countries.

Fox was most bitter against his lordship and said that the Americans would receive no treaty coming from him, as they suspected, detested and despised him.

The antagonism of the opposition was increased by the knowledge that American commissioners were at Paris endeavoring to gain French help and when Parliament opened after the recess the minister was pressed to inform the House whether a treaty of friendship had been made by France and America. He gave no definite reply until the seventeenth of February, although under date of January thirty-first, the King wrote to him saying that a "speedy declaration of war by France was very probable". His Majesty expected a vigorous attack from the Opposition for on the thirteenth of January he writes, "What is still more material to be settled is the plan, on which the administration is to repel the different attacks when Parliament meets, as to calling for paper, proposing inquiries etc." He was not disappointed for as soon as Parliament opened a motion was made to consider the raising of troops without the consent of Parliament and Lord North was attacked as having acted unconstitutionally in accepting them. He ably defended himself, however, and declared that such action on the part of the people was evidence that the war was a



popular one. A motion proposing an Address to the Crown on the employment of savages in America was made by Burke, and Fox moved that no more of the "Old corps be sent out of England". Scathing criticisms were also made on General Burgoyne's instructions and the distribution of the forces in America.

Before the Christmas recess, Lord North announced his intention to bring forward a conciliatory measure. He had also signified his willingness to resign his position whenever the nation saw fit. Whether this was the result of the repeated hammering of the Opposition or of his personal disinclination for the place, it is hard to tell. At any rate, he had so expressed himself to the King, for in a letter of January thirty-first, His Majesty says, "I should have been greatly surprised at the inclination expressed by you to retire, had I not known that however you may now and then despond, yet, you have too much personal affection for me and sense of honor to allow such a thought to take hold on your mind". The Opposition however, had no such scruples, and <sup>2</sup>George Grenville declared that His Majesty should call to his council a man whom the Americans could revere and the nation could trust. In reply Lord North

<sup>2</sup>- Mahon VI.  
Appendix 53.

2 - Parl. Hist.  
Vol. 19. pp. 723.  
~~Vol. 19. pp. 723.~~  
~~Vol. 19. pp. 723.~~

said he was willing to resign the disagreeable task to whoever was thought better qualified and was content to accept it.

On February the seventeenth, according to his promise he brought forward his bill for Conciliatory Measures with America and said that from the beginning he had been uniformly disposed to peace. The coercive acts had seemed necessary at the time, though they had produced effects he had never intended. He had proposed a conciliatory measure before the sword was drawn, but by a variety of discussions, a proposition originally clear and simple was made to appear so obscure as to go damned to America. The Americans conceived it as a scheme for sowing divisions and for introducing taxation worse than any former mode. His idea had been not to draw any considerable revenue by taxation or by any other way, but he had thought the Americans should contribute in a low proportion to the expenses of the country. He himself, had never taxed her, however. He had found that country taxed when he unfortunately came into the administration. His principle had been to keep any discussion of the subject out of Parliament and, therefore, had thought it not advisable to repeal either the tea tax, but on the other hand he had not taken particular pains to enforce

the act. The Act granting the East India Company a drawback on the whole duty here and thus selling tea cheaper there was a regulation he had not thought it possible for America to complain of. But, the ill-affected there, and persons concerned in a contraband trade had endeavored to represent it as a monopoly and had excited the people to a tumult. As he had never meant taxation in his last Tea Act, so, now he had no such thing in mind in his conciliatory Proposition but merely the means of union and of good agreement between the two countries: Therefore, in what he was going to propose he was uniform and consistent. The events of war in America had turned out very differently from his expectation. The great force had been sent to America but to little purpose and he must confess himself as extremely disappointed.... He might be asked if his sentiments had always been such with regard to taxation and peace and why he had not made his proposition at an earlier date. To these he would answer that his opinion had ever been that the moment of victory is the proper time for offering terms of concession. Although the King's arms had not been uniformly victorious yet the nation was still strong and vigorous and its resources far from being exhausted, had strength to pursue war with vigor to a happy terminat-

ion. But, however, when he reflected upon the uncertainty of events which had hitherto disappointed his expectations, and in the case of the utmost success of our arms, the terms he was about to propose would be substantially the same, he saw no reason for prolonging the war, with its effusion of blood and its immoderate expense. His concession arose from reason and propriety, not from necessity. The country was in a condition to carry on the war much longer. He submitted the whole, however, with regard to the propriety of his past and present conduct to the judgment of the House.

He moved to bring in two bills. One for the removing all doubts and apprehensions concerning taxation by the Parliament of Great Britian in any colonies. The tea duty was expressly repealed, and after the passing of the act, neither King nor Parliament would impose any duty, tax or assessment except as it might be necessary for the regulation of commerce. The second bill gave the commissioners, to be appointed, full powers to treat with Congress or any of the American generals or any of the provincial assemblies. They could accept almost any terms of reconciliation short of independence. The speech occupied two hours and was characterized as both eloquent and able. The impression made on the House, is described by a contemporary,\*

\* *Annual Register* - Year 1778, pp 133.

probably Burke, in the Annual Register. "A dull melancholy silence for sometime succeeded to this speech. It had been heard with profound attention, but without a single mark of approbation to any part, from any description of men, or any particular man in the House. Astonishment, dejection, and fear overclouded the whole assembly. Although the minister had declared the sentiments that he expressed that day had been those which he had always entertained, it is certain that few or none had understood him in that manner; and he had been represented to the nation at large as the person in it, the most tenacious of those Parliamentary rights which he now proposed to resign, and the most remote from the submissions which he now proposed to make". To quote from Mahon: "There was not a single class or section of men within the walls of Parliament to which the plan of Lord North gave pleasure. The Ministerial party were confounded and abashed at finding themselves thus required to acknowledge their past errors and retrace their former steps. Some called out that they had been deceived and betrayed. In general, however, the majority acquiesced in sullen silence. On the other part, the Opposition were by no means gratified to see the wind, according to the common phrase, taken from their sails. They could not, indeed, offer any resistance to proposals so consonant to

1 - Mahon II pp 216

their own expressed opinions, but they took care to make their support as disagreeable and damaging as possible". Fox accused the Minister of waiting to make his propositions until France was ready to acknowledge the independence of America and so prevent the acceptance of the measures of the colonies. His lordship, however, used to having reflections cast upon his motives by the Opposition, bore all the taunts with his usual good nature, and the bills passed without any opposition.

A few days previous to this he had carried through the House a resolution for the loan of six million pounds, and so by these two means he had prepared the country either for peace, or for continued war, with America. Since the path was not clear for his successor, he repeated his wish to resign, and suggested that Lord Chatham take his place. He was not alone in desiring to see the great Earl again in power, for Mahon says,\* "Throughout the country indeed, there now began to prevail a great and growing desire that Lord Chatham be restored to the head of affairs, to avert a war with the House of Bourbon, or to make that war triumphant as the last, and to preserve, if yet it could be preserved, the unity of the empire". Even Lord Mansfield, his old time opponent, declared that the

\* Mahon

Vol.V.pp 212.

vessel was sinking and that Lord Chatham must be sent for. So, while the people expected, the Opposition urged and Lord North begged, the King absolutely refused, declaring he would give up his crown rather than call to the Opposition for help.

On the same day that the King wrote the above, Lord North announced to Parliament the declaration of war by France and proposed an Address to the King assuring him of their support. An amendment was offered hoping his Majesty would remove from his counsels those persons who did not have the confidence of the people. Although, in the course of the debate, Lord North declared that the interests of the country and his own pride determined him not to quit the ship of state, till he could see her safe in harbor, yet, one of the subsequent letters from the King indicates that he had again spoken of resigning. The King says, "Your now always recurring to a total change of administration obliges me to ask you one clear question. If, I will not, by your advice, take the step which I look on as disgraceful to myself and destruction to my country, are you resolved - - -at the hour of danger to desert me?" Lord North evidently agreed to remain in office for in a letter, the next day, the King says, I

\* Mahon VI.  
Appendix pp 59.

\* March 23, '78.

cannot return the messenger without expressing my satisfaction at your determination not to desert at this hour, which indeed, I always thought your sense of honour, must prevent".\*

The Opposition continued to make his position as unpleasant as possible while the re-appearance of Lord Chatham after an illness in the House of Lords and his sweeping denunciation of the administration gave additional weight to the complaints. His death in May, however, removed the hope of the Opposition, but the King, who lately had looked upon the "Great Commoner" as a "perfidious man" was little grieved and wrote to Lord North April 8th, "May not the political exit of Lord Chatham incline you to continue at the head of my affairs?" The war with France was the subject the opponents of the government seized greedily and kept constantly before the people. Had it not been for the criminal mismanagement of the administration, they declared, the country would never have been embroiled in a war with her old enemy while so unprepared. The fact that a French fleet had been permitted to sail unmolested toward America was used to great advantage. In the course of the debate he was reproached for not guiding and controlling all the inferior departments. He retorted that he knew no

\*Mahon VI.  
Appendix  
pp 60.

/-Parl.Hist.  
Vol. 19.  
pp. 1172.



such person as a "prime minister". He, himself, was the First Lord of the Treasury and was answerable only for what came in his department. He stood responsible, as one of His Majesty's cabinet council but not as that animal called a prime minister. The Opposition continued to be active, and in spite of his protestations laid all blame on him. Fox brought forward a motion for inquiring into the instructions and actions of General Burgoyne, and there were debates on the condition of the navy. David Hartley, member from London, introduced, many times, resolutions for stopping the American War and when they were unfaillingly defeated he took a sturdy stand against the prorogation of Parliament. As a sort of compromise it was prorogued till July the fourteenth, but later, further prorogued till November twenty-sixth. During the recess, Attorney-general Thurlow was made Lord Thurlow and was appointed Lord Chancellor while Solicitor-general Wedderburn became Attorney-general.

When Parliament met again and from that time on the American war did not occupy as prominent a place in the deliberations of the Houses as formerly. The forces were maintained but the attention of the nation was turned toward France and her movements. In March, Fox moved resolutions of censure against the administration for not sending

*1- Parl. Hist Vol. 20. pp 331*

re-enforcements to Lord Howe at New York, and charged Lord North with an act "of public perfidy" in exceeding the conciliatory propositions he had made in 1775.<sup>2</sup> The minister retorted that he was at liberty to alter his opinion upon a change of circumstances. The conduct of France had brought about the change and he felt that he was fully justified in accomodating his conduct to the existing circumstances and exigencies of public affairs. The House also evidently believed that he was so privileged as the vote stood 135-209 in favor of the administration. Later in the month during the debate on army extraordinaries<sup>3</sup> Fox accused the ministry of declaring that the nation was no longer bound by the offers made by the peace commissioners since America had rejected the terms and he asserted that such a breach of faith in the ministers confirmed him in his opinion that their conduct was a series of falsehood, treachery and deceit.<sup>4</sup> Lord North replied that the statement had originated in America, but he, himself, believed that Great Britain was not formally bound to grant all the concessions made by the commissioners as they had been rejected, but, he did believe in those concessions England had renounced forever, her right of taxation over America. Later in the session when accused of desiring unconditional submission the

~~1 Parl. Hist. Vol. 20 - pp 331.~~

2 Parl. Hist. Vol. 20 - pp 336.

3. Parl. Hist. Vol 20 - pp 360

4 " " " " " 363

minister said that he never had intended to enslave America but the question now was whether all connection should be renounced with America or wheter she should be preserved to Great Britain. Considering the importance of the colonies, he felt certain, that after ages would certainly applaud the nation for the efforts put forth. He had never once thought of overturning the liberty of America: his sole view had been to assert the just and natural rights of the country.

In June the Opposition brought forward a motion for peace with America. Lord North declared that reconciliat-  
ion with America was devoutly to be wished, and did not believe there was a man in the Kingdom who did not anxiously pray for it. We offered peace but they would enter into no treaty unless we acknowledged their independence or recalled our fleets and armies. We can do no more: it lies with America now to make the advances. When she does so the King's servants will encourage them and do all they can to bring the dispute to an honorable conclusion. The arguments by the ministry seemed so weighty that the motion was negatived without even division. However firm the prime minister may have been before Parliament, in a determination to prosecute the war he seems to have been very doubtful before the King of gratifying results, for in a

letter dated the same day as that on which Sir William Meredith made his motion for peace, the King says, "No man in my dominions desires solid peace more than I do, but no inclination to get out of the present difficulties, which certainly keep my mind very far from a state of ease, can incline me to enter into the destruction of the empire. Lord North frequently says that the advantages to be gained by this contest never could repay the expense . I own that any war, be it ever so successful, if a person will sit down and weight the expense, they will find, as in the last, that it has impoverished the state enriched: but this is only weighing such events in the scale of a tradesman behind the counter. It is necessary for those whom Providence has placed in my station to weigh whether expenses, though very great, are not sometimes necessary to prevent what would be more ruinous than any loss of money. The present contest with America, I cannot help saying, is the most serious in which any country ever engaged. Step by step, the demands of America have risen. Independence is their object, which every man not willing to sacrifice every object to a momentary and inglorious peace must concur with me in thinking this country can never submit to.

Should America succeed in that, the West Indies would follow, not in independence, but for their own interest they must become dependent on America: Ireland would soon follow, and this island reduced to itself would be a poor island indeed". So, whatever may have been the private opinions of Lord North, he permitted himself to be guided by his royal master for whom he had a sincere attachment.

Troubles thickened about him, however, for the same month Spain declared war against England, vindicating her action by issuing a manifesto in which it was asserted that Spanish ships had been plundered; Spanish flag had been insulted, and Spanish subjects in Louisiana had been killed by Indians at instigation of England. When Spain's action was known in the House of Commons, Burke and Barre were exceedingly bitter. <sup>2</sup>The former arose and entered upon a scathing ~~philippic~~ philippic against the ministers, and their conduct of affairs. The Speaker finally interrupted him wishing to know if he had a motion to make, and Burke passionately declared he could make a very proper one - an impeachment of the minister. Many of the members immediately cried out, "Move! Move!" and much confusion resulted. When quiet was restored he moved for a consideration of the "state of the nation", but his colleagues begged him to withdraw it so

1 Parl.Hist. Vol.20. pp 876.

2 Parl.Hist. Vol.20. pp 895.

that one could be brought in against the minister and he did so. Nothing, however, was accomplished by the Opposition during the session. Later in June, when the bill for augmenting the militia was before the House, Fox declared the official conduct of the ministers had been so infamous and prejudicial to interests of country that the times were ripe for bringing them to punishment. When Lord North arose to speak, he answered some of the many insinuations thrown out that it was time for him to resign. ' "I was always determined never to resign as long as his Majesty thought fit to accept of my poor services and till I could do it with honor. Could I have resigned with honor when America first resisted? I answer, no. Could I have resigned with honor in the prosecution of the American War while the event of war was yet pending? No. Could I have resigned with honor when France interfered and acknowledged American independency? Most certainly not. And ought I to resign at this period, or could I do it with honor to myself, or discharge my duty to my country, now that we have the united force of the House of Bourbon to contend with? My language has always been uniformly the same, never to resign till a fit person was brought out to succeed me. It is well known that I accepted my present

situation with great reluctance; and that I have remained in it much against my own judgment and liking; that I feel in the same manner at the instant I am speaking and when the period arrives that I can resign with honor to myself and consistent with the duty I owe to my sovereign and my country, I shall quit my present office with singular satisfaction". Was the question, however, so much one of resigning his post, as it was of adopting a different policy?

A few days before the meeting of Parliament the next November, Earl Gower, Lord President of the Council, resigned, saying that ruin must be the consequence of the present system of government and he feared that even a coalition as a remedy would prove too late. When Lord North made the announcement to the King he said that he had been at one disadvantage in remonstrating with the earl on his course because he himself, held, and had held, for three years, just the same opinion.

Parliament opened the twenty-fifth of November, 1779, and plunged immediately into lengthy debates on the "Address of Thanks"; the "State of the Nation"; and the condition of Ireland. Little was said on the American

question, partly, because little had happened of interest and partly because the Houses were taken up with considering questions nearer home, such as the bill for economical reform, contractor's bill, bill for remedying abuses in public expenditure, the unrest in Ireland, and late in the session, the Lord George Gordon riots and their results. During that tumultuous time the Ministry and Opposition acted together in a common defense and when the petition of the rioters was under discussion there was more of discourse than of debate, on the subject, for Lord North, Fox, and Burke spoke on the same side. In both factions the sentiment grew that, perhaps, the union might be permanent<sup>a</sup> one and both Lord North and Marquis of Rockingham made tentative proposals to that effect. The Opposition modified its tone in regard to an acknowledgment of independence of the insurgent colonies but demanded that the government support some of <sup>its</sup> their bills up before the House, such as the contractor's bill and bill for economical reform. The king, however, would listen to no such propositions, and the matter was dropped. Early in September Parliament was dissolved and an election called for.

The new Parliament met the last day of October, 1780,



with little change in the parties. The Ministry for a time, at least, had the ascendancy for ninety thousand men were voted for the navy and thirty-five thousand for the army exclusive of mercenaries. The total supplies granted for the year 1781 exceeded twenty-five million pounds. In his opening address the king complained of the aggressions of France and Spain but referred with pleasure to the successes of British arms in the Carolinas and Georgia for the scene of war in America had shifted to the southern states and Charleston had been captured in May. The subject of the American War did not come again into consideration until toward the end of the session when Hartley and Fox made fruitless efforts to restore peace. William Pitt, the second son of Lord Chatham, first addressed the House at that session and in him the colonies discovered as warm an advocate as they had possessed in his father.

Before Parliament opened again in November, the fortune of war had changed. England lost the gains made during the previous year in America and Lord Cornwallis with six thousand troops besieged in Yorktown by both American and French forces was compelled to surrender, October 11, 1781. The news arrived in London, two days before the meeting of Parliament, and Lord George Germaine, as first

Secretary of State carried it to Lord North. <sup>1</sup> He said, when questioned how the minister took the news; "As he would have taken a cannon-ball in his breast. He opened his arms, exclaiming wildly, as he paced up and down the room for a few minutes, 'O God! it is all over'; words which he repeated many times under the deepest agitation and distress". When Parliament opened the King spoke of the loss of the forces in Virginia but said nothing of discontinuing the war. In December, he wrote to his minister saying that the "getting a peace at the expense of a separation from America was a step which no difficulties could get him to consent to. However, the hopelessness of the war pervaded the minds of all and there was a strong growing sentiment against its continuance. Late in February, General Conway, who had the respect of all parties as a gallant soldier and patriot moved an Address to the King entreating His Majesty to put an end to the war. Lord North, <sup>2</sup> in answer said the war in America was not to be carried on by armies marching to and fro in the country but that a line of posts was to be maintained instead. The division on the question, however, showed that a change in administration must soon take place for the measure was lost by only one vote and Fox gave notice that the question would be brought up again.

The dissatisfaction was expressed not only in Parliament but also among the merchants of London. That city had always been opposed to the war and now sent in a voluminous petition against it. On the same day, Conway renewed his motion and finally<sup>1</sup> carried it without a division, as well as one for carrying the address to the King. His Majesty answered in a guarded tone that he would take measures most conducive to restoring harmony between Great Britain and her revolted colonies. Early in March, fearing lest His Majesty and his ministers might not be of the same mind as Parliament as to ending the war, the general carried through the House another motion declaring that the Commons would consider as enemies those that advised any further prosecution of the war in America. Mr. Rigby, an adherent of the administration hitherto, doubtless expressed the sentiment, not only of Parliament but of all the nation when he said he had given up the idea of preserving sovereignty over America for the same reason that he had given up the war, -<sup>1</sup> because he could not help it, there was nothing else to be done and he was<sup>2</sup> tired of the war.

The next day during a further discussion<sup>3</sup> Lord North remarked that the Opposition seemed very anxious to get into

1 Parl.Hist. Vol.22. pp 1102.

2 Parl.Hist. Vol.22. pp 1099.

3 Parl.Hist. Vol.22. pp 1108.

office but until the different members could come to some settled agreement he would stay in to prevent confusion in the state. With this view he was determined not to go out of office till he should receive his royal master's command or the sense of the House expressed in the clearest manner, pointed out the propriety of withdrawing. And then because Fox had insinuated that he remained in office for sake of its pecuniary advantages, he exclaimed, "As to the emoluments of office, if they were forty times as great they would not compensate for the anxiety and vexations incident to the situation aggravated by the uncandid treatment I have frequently met in the House". On March the eighth, Lord John Cavendish, moved resolutions of censure on His Majesty's ministers from the following considerations: (1) The money voted and debts incurred since 1775 exceed the sum of one hundred million pounds. (2) During the above period we have lost the thirteen colonies of America (except the posts of New York, Charleston, and Savannah) the newly acquired colony of Florida, many of our valuable West India and other islands, and those that remain are in most imminent danger. (3) Great Britain is at present engaged in an expensive war with America, France, Spain, and Holland without a single ally. (4) The chief cause of all

~~1 Mar. 15, 1782. Parl. Hist. Vol. 22. pp 1170.~~  
~~S. Mahon VII. Appendix. pp 52.~~  
 1 Parl. Hist Vol 22 - pp. 1114

these misfortunes has been the want of foresight and ability in His Majesty's ministers". The motion was lost, however, by ten votes, and when it was brought up again the next week it was negatived for the lack of nine. Certain of success,<sup>1</sup> Fox gave notice that it would be again brought before the House.

On the seventeenth, the King wrote,<sup>2</sup> "Sorry to find that the majority did not exceed nine. It looks as if the House of Commons were going lengths that could not have been expected. I am resolved not to throw myself into the hands of Opposition", and then the King intimates that rather than do so he would first<sup>3</sup> abdicate. He was compelled, however, to accept Lord North's resignation and on the twentieth of March, 1782, His Lordship announced in the House of Commons that His Majesty's ministers were no more, and with much dignity and pathos thanked the House that had supported him so long. <sup>4</sup>"A successor of greater abilities, of better judgment and more qualified for his situation was easy to be found", he said, "but a successor more zealous for the interests of the country, more anxious to promote those interests, more loyal to his sovereign and more desirous of preserving the constitution whole and entire,

1 March 15, 1782. Parl.Hist.Vol.22.pp.1170

2. Mahon VII. Appendix.pp.32.

3. Mahon VII. pp 141.

4. Parl.Hist. Vol.22. pp 1214.

he might be allowed to say, could not so easily be found". With real regret the King parted with this devoted minister and was forced to call members of the Opposition into office. Lord Rockingham succeeded Lord North as First Lord of the Treasury; Lord Shelburne and Charles J. Fox became Secretaries of the State; Lord Camden was made President of the council and the Duke of Grafton again took the Privy Seal. Under the new regime, much against his will the King gave assent to a measure passed by the House of Commons to conclude peace or a truce, with the insurgent colonies. Before peace was formally declared, though, Lord Rockingham died. He was succeeded by the more able Lord Shelburne and a provisional treaty was effected between England and America; the terms of which, however, were not concluded till peace was also made between England and France.

In Paris, in September, 1783, the final arrangements were made. Considering the fact that England without an ally fought against three nations, the terms outside of the loss of the colonies, were exceedingly advantageous.

Since this study is concerned chiefly with the motives that actuated Lord North during his administration it will be necessary to look more carefully at his position.

1. May, 1782.

The opinion is sometimes expressed that he and the King deliberately planned to harrass the American colonists and that they can be called very truthfully tyrants. It is hoped that the above sketch of Parliamentary proceedings has shown such not to be the case. As he himself said, "America was already taxed when he came into office and there were very few who did not believe that England had a perfect right to tax her colonies at any time and for any purpose. He with the other ministers held the same opinion and while he was in favor of repealing the Townshend's Acts since they were obnoxious to the colonists, he insisted that the duty be left on tea, as maintaining the just right of England to tax the Americans, yet he was in favor of granting it every relief possible. As time passed, however, and the colonists became more turbulent the minister felt that it was his duty to his country to force the disobedient ones into submission and to a proper respect for the laws of the country. The so-called "Intolerable Acts" were the result of the belief that he was called upon to act the disagreeable but necessary part of the stern parent in the hope that early correction would check the disobedient tendencies of the child. The continuation of the war was but the legitimate outcome of such an attitude. Few men in his

position would have done differently, since he had the hearty approval of the King and the active support of the people. The great majority of the nation, in the early years of the war, believed that the struggle was a just one and carried it on gladly. Moreover, what minister would stand idly by and see a part of a great nation tear itself from the mother country and not lift a hand in protest? Would not his own nation be the first to condemn him for negligence? When he saw it was necessary to make conciliatory propositions he did so, but unfortunately for the nation he made them too late and by his lack of foresight lost to his country thirteen colonies. He is often blamed for being insincere and for carrying out a policy contrary to his convictions. He was sincere in his belief that Parliament had a right to tax the colonies and that she was justified in attempting to enforce that right. A man however may have any number of settled convictions but may be compelled to admit the inexpediency of attempting to put them into practice. In 1775 the prime minister had stood for the taxation of the colonies; in 1778 he renounced that right. He, himself declared that he was at liberty to alter his opinion upon a change of circumstances. The conduct of France had brought about the change and he was



fully justified in accomodating his conduct to the existing circumstances and exigencies of public affairs". It is the wise man who changes his mind.

The great accusation against him, however, is the one of carrying on the war while he was convinced of its impolicy and inexpediency. There can be no doubt of his private opinion for in the fall of 1779, writing to the King to announce Earl Gower's resignation he said that he himself held the same views in regard to the ruinous course pursued by the government and had held them for the past three years. Why then did he not resign is the very natural question? Any one who reads the correspondence between George III and his chief adviser will appreciate the situation. Lord North had a sincere attachment for his sovereign and when that sovereign begged and entreated him to remain in office he did so, sacrificing his convictions rather than amoy his master. It has been well said that his loyalty and personal attachment to the King was stronger than his patriotism. Whether such a course was justifiable or not is open to question. His resignation three years later was the result of the loudly expressed disapproval of the House of Commons. The American War had entangled the nation with France and Spain and caused the

rupture of friendly relations with Holland. As the forces had to be divided it was impossible to carry on as victorious a contest with the three nations as victory-loving England desired. Rather than diminish the glory of the former victory over France she was willing to give up all her claims to the American colonies. To do so she demanded a new ministry and Lord North was compelled to yield to the clamor. Throughout his administration of twelve years he did not achieve for himself a "high or a distinguished reputation as a statesman". He often erred in judgment and was mistaken in policy but among all his short comings he cannot be accused of purposely originating harsh measures to harass his fellow-subjects.

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