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The Origins of the British Expedition to the Carolinas, 1775-1776

William Leo Moran

College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences

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THE ORIGINS OF THE BRITISH EXPEDITION
TO THE CAROLINAS
1775 - 1776

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of History
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

By
William Leo Moran
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APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
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William Leo Moran
Author

Approved, May 1966

Ira Gruber
Ira Gruber, Ph.D.

W. W. Abbot
William W. Abbot, Ph.D.

Thad Tate
Thad Tate, Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT

At the beginning of the American Revolution, the major military activity was confined to New England. By the autumn of 1775, however, the King and his ministers had begun to look toward the South as a region in which their authority could readily be restored. This study is an investigation of the various factors which led the British government, in October 1775, to decide to undertake an expedition to the Southern colonies.

The major factor leading to the decision was the widespread loyalist sentiment in the South, of which the ministry was kept constantly aware by the reports they received from their governors on the scene. A second factor was the deficient state of the British Army in 1775 and the collapse of an arrangement by which the ministry was expecting to receive a loan of 20,000 troops from Catherine II of Russia to help compensate for the deficiency. A third factor concerned Britain's tenuous relations with the Bourbon powers. It was apparent to the ministry in 1775 that they must act as fast and vigorously as possible to put down the rebellion before France and/or Spain took advantage of their difficulties. A fourth factor involved domestic political considerations within Lord North's cabinet. A proposal had been set forth that a peace commission be sent to the colonies. There was within the ministry, however, a group of men who were pressing for vigorous coercive measures. They would not accept the idea of a peace commission if the British were not at the same time in a strong offensive position.

These four basic factors led to the decision on October 15-16, 1775, to send an expedition to the Carolinas where, it was expected, a loyalist uprising would occur upon the arrival of the British regulars and the authority of the King would be restored.

THE ORIGINS OF THE BRITISH EXPEDITION
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CHAPTER I

THE SOUTHERN GOVERNORS AND THE AMERICAN SECRETARY

Seventeen-seventy-five saw the final collapse of Royal authority in the Southern colonies. On April 20, Virginia's governor, Lord Dunmore, removed the gun powder from the magazine at Williamsburg and provided the overt act that set the Revolution in motion in Virginia. In June he retired to H.M.S. Fowey in the York River.¹ On April 4, Josiah Martin, governor of North Carolina, convened (and four days later dissolved) an Assembly whose leading members were meeting simultaneously as North Carolina's second "Provincial Congress." In June he took refuge in Fort Johnston and in July fled to H.M.S. Cruizer in the Cape Fear River, after which rebels burned the fort.² On June 17, Sir William Campbell arrived in Charleston to assume the governorship of South Carolina. Less than three months later he retired to H.M.S. Tamer, anchored appropriately in Rebellion Road.³ Sir James Wright remained in Savannah throughout the year, but

¹
Dunmore to Dartmouth, 1 May and 25 June 1775,
C.O. 5/1353/137-39 and 160-71.

²
Martin to Dartmouth, 7 and 20 April, 30 June, and 16
and 20 July 1775, C.O. 5/318/85-88, 97-101, 124-36, 141-44,
151-52.

³
Campbell to Dartmouth, 2 July and 19 September 1775,
C.O. 5/396/151-54 and 241-44.

by mid-summer he was referring to himself as "a mere Nominal Governor." In January 1776, he was placed under arrest by the rebels, and on February 11, he fled to H.M.S. Scarborough⁴ in the Savannah River.

During this period, as the governors' effective authority diminished to zero, they regularly wrote to the American Secretary, Lord Dartmouth, describing in detail the deteriorating situation in their colonies and their futile attempts to maintain the King's authority. Each man faced different conditions, but their dispatches to Whitehall all expressed the same theme -- the collapse of British authority in the Southern colonies. There was, however, another theme played in counterpoint to the first. It appeared with varying degrees of frequency and volume, depending upon which governor was writing the score, and in the case of Josiah Martin, it tended to dominate the composition. This theme, stated in its simplest terms, said that while the rebel faction had gained control, a sizeable portion of the population continued to remain "friends of Government." They had been intimidated into silence or, in some cases, into joining the rebel associations. If given a suitable opportunity

⁴ Wright to Dartmouth, 8 July 1775, in Georgia Historical Society, Collections, III (Savannah, 1873), 191-92; W. W. Abbot, The Royal Governors of Georgia, 1754-1775 (Chapel Hill, [c 1959]), 179; Louise B. Dunbar, "The Royal Governors in the Middle and Southern Colonies on the Eve of the Revolution: A Study in Imperial Personnel," in Richard B. Morris, ed., The Era of the American Revolution: Studies Inscribed to Evarts Boutell Greene (New York, 1939), 266.

these loyalists would flock to the King's standard, wrest control of the government from the rebels, and return their colony to obedience.

Certain factors of race, nationality, and geography in the South could give the ministry a not unreasonable hope that perhaps the loyalist element was stronger, and the rebels correspondingly weaker, in the Southern colonies.

The vulnerability of the Southern rebels because of the race problem was obvious to both sides. Slave insurrections were not new to North America,⁵ and if their slaves were to revolt, the rebels themselves would face a rebellion. Before the year ended Lord Dunmore was to declare free all slaves who would repair to the King's standard and join his newly-formed "Ethiopian Regiment."⁶ Governor Martin was to threaten a similar action.⁷ And Sir William Campbell was to relate the account of a free negro of Charleston who was executed by the rebels on the suspicion that he intended to organize a slave insurrection against them.⁸

One national element in America to which the ministry might look for support was the Scottish Highland immigrant

⁵ Herbert Aptheker, American Negro Slave Revolts (New York, 1943), 162-201, passim.

⁶ Dunmore to Dartmouth, 6 December 1775 - 18 February 1776, C.O. 5/1353/321-34.

⁷ Martin to Lewis Henry DeRosset, 24 June 1775, in William L. Saunders, ed., The Colonial Records of North Carolina, IX (Raleigh, 1890), 138.

⁸ Campbell to Dartmouth, 19 August 1775, C.O. 5/396/204-06.

population. The major areas of Scottish settlement in the rebellious colonies were in the Mohawk and upper Hudson valleys in New York and in the area of the upper Cape Fear River and its tributaries in North Carolina.⁹ Of these two areas, North Carolina had received more Scottish immigrants.¹⁰ Most of the Scottish immigration had occurred after 1763 and Highlanders continued to arrive during 1775.¹¹ Their recent arrival could work to Britain's advantage. Some of them still retained property in Scotland which would be confiscated if they joined the rebels. Additionally, the new land they acquired might be seized if they joined a revolt that was later put down. In 1745 a Scottish rebellion had been defeated by the British at the Battle of Culloden and the rebels had been forced to take an oath of loyalty to George II. While they might not give too much thought to the oath, they could remember that the rebel clans of 1745 had had their land confiscated and that it still had not been returned. Their previous efforts against the King had ended in defeat and if they were to fight at all, there were valid reasons this time for fighting for the House of Hanover rather than against it. Also, some of the Highlanders in

⁹ Ian Charles Cargill Graham, Colonists From Scotland: Emigration to North America, 1707-1783 (Ithaca, N.Y., 1956), 106; Duane Meyer, The Highland Scots of North Carolina 1732-1776 (Chapel Hill, 1961), 101. There were also considerable numbers in Nova Scotia, and some in Canada and southern Georgia.

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Graham, Colonists from Scotland, 189.

¹¹

Ibid., 185; Robert O. DeMond, The Loyalists in North Carolina During the Revolution (Durham, 1940), 51.

North Carolina had fought for Britain after 1745 and were now on half pay. They were subject to recall to service and would, of course, lose their rank and pay if they failed to appear. Additionally, not all of the Highland immigrants had been rebels in 1745, and at least one of the clans had a tradition of defending the House of Hanover.¹²

Plans for taking advantage of this potential loyalist support were initiated in London early in the year. In February 1775, Lieutenant Colonel Allan Maclean submitted to Lord North his plan for raising a corps of Highland emigrants in America.¹³ Maclean had served under Forbes and Amherst in the French and Indian War. He now proposed that he be authorized to return to America to recruit a regiment from among the Highlanders who had settled there. On April 3, the King issued to him a warrant which authorized large grants of land and a twenty-year exemption from quit rents for each of his recruits, and Maclean set out for the colonies to begin his recruiting project. At the same time the King sent secret instructions to Governors Tryon in New York and Martin in North Carolina, apprizing them of Maclean's mission and directing them to set aside a tract of land in each province of sufficient size to fulfill the

12

DeMond, Loyalists in North Carolina, 51-52; Meyer, Highland Scots, 151-55.

13

North to King, 17 February 1775, in Sir John W. Fortescue, ed., The Correspondence of King George The Third from 1760 to December 1783, III (London, 1928), No. 1597.

14
grants.

In the Carolinas there was a sectional clash which might work to the ministry's favor. The Low Country aristocracy of South Carolina had consistently refused to grant sheriffs, courts, and representation in the Assembly to the Upcountry settlers. In North Carolina, representation in the Assembly was heavily weighted in favor of the Tidewater region, and the officials in the Piedmont, appointed from New Bern, used their offices primarily for exploitation. In both colonies the grievances of the backcountry people had resulted in the Regulator movement in which the settlers had taken the law into their own hands in an attempt to remedy their grievances. In both colonies a force from the Tidewater was sent against them. Hostilities were averted in South Carolina, but in North Carolina a military force under Governor Tryon defeated the Regulators at the Battle of Alamance in May 1771, and several of their leaders were convicted of treason and hanged. After the Regulation disturbances had begun to subside in South Carolina, Lieutenant Governor William Bull, who headed the government during the interregnum between the departure of Lord Charles Greville Montagu in March 1773 and the arrival of Sir William Campbell in June 1775,¹⁵ followed

14

King to Tryon and Martin, 3 April 1775, in E. B. O'Callaghan, ed., Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New-York, VIII (Albany, 1857), 562-63; North to King, 3 April 1775, in Fortescue, Correspondence of George III, III, No. 1631.

15

Edward McCrady, The History of South Carolina under the Royal Government, 1719-1776 (New York, 1899), 705, 794.

a policy of conciliation and attempted to remedy the settlers' grievances.¹⁶ At the end of June 1771, Tryon, the coercionist, left North Carolina to assume the governorship of New York. He was succeeded in August by Martin who heard the Regulators' complaints with a more sympathetic ear. In 1772, Martin made a tour through the backcountry and came away thoroughly convinced that their grievances were justified.¹⁷ He advocated an official pardon for the Regulators, but the Tidewater-¹⁸ dominated Assembly refused.

Thus by the beginning of 1775, the head of the Royal government in North Carolina was no longer the man who had defeated the backsettlers in 1771, and in both colonies the current incumbents showed a sympathy to backcountry needs. In the vanguard of the rebel movement, on the other hand, were numerous members of the coastal element against whom the Regulators in both colonies had been struggling.

The most promising evidence of widespread loyalist sentiment in the North Carolina backcountry arrived at

¹⁶ John Richard Alden, The South in the Revolution, 1763-1789 (Baton Rouge, 1957), 152.

¹⁷ Tryon to the Board of Trade, 29 June 1771, in Saunders, ed., Colonial Records of North Carolina, VIII, 627; IX, 111; Martin to Hillsborough, 30 August 1772, IX, 329-33.

¹⁸ DeMond, Loyalists in North Carolina, 34-49, and Alden The South in the Revolution, 146-63, contain general accounts of the Regulator movement and the results of this sectional clash during the Revolution. More detailed accounts appear in John S. Bassett, "The Regulators of North Carolina (1765-1771)," in American Historical Association, Annual Report, 1894 (Washington, 1895), 141-212, and Richard Maxwell Brown, The South Carolina Regulators (Cambridge, Mass., 1963).

Whitehall on May 2, 1775, in a letter Governor Martin had written on March 10. "The people in the Western parts of this Province," he announced, were "withstanding for the most part steadily all the efforts of the factions to seduce them from their duty."¹⁹ To back up his assertion he enclosed copies of three addresses of loyalty he had received, one containing 195 signatures from the inhabitants of Rowan and Surry Counties, one from Guilford County containing 117 signatures, and one from Dobbs County containing 19 signatures.²⁰ The counties from which these addresses came had been the center of the Regulation disorders.²¹ The addresses denounced "all illegal and unwarrantable proceedings against his Majesty's Crown and Dignity" and expressed unswerving loyalty to the King. The petitioners from Rowan and Surry said that they spoke for many others as well as for themselves, and Martin added in his letter that the spirit expressed in the addresses was "spreading and diffusing itself fast in the Western Counties which are by far the most populous part of the Province."

Lord Dartmouth answered the Governor's letter the day after it was received. The spirit of loyalty among the

¹⁹

Martin to Dartmouth, 10 March 1775, C.O. 5/318/30-34.

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"Address of Sundry Inhabitants of the Counties of Rowan and Surry to Governor Martin," n.d., C.O. 5/318/41; "Address of Sundry Inhabitants of the County of Guilford to Governor Martin," n.d., C.O. 5/318/43; "Address of Sundry Inhabitants of the County of Dobbs to Governor Martin," 20 February 1775, C.O. 5/318/45.

²¹

DeMond, Loyalists in North Carolina, 49.

backsettlers could not be too much encouraged, he wrote, and he asked Martin to tell them that the King intended to issue a proclamation of general pardon to the Regulators in return for their support in the present crisis. He suggested that the Governor initiate the organizing of loyalist associations in the four counties. Dartmouth said he hoped that the dispute between Britain and the colonies could be settled peaceably but that they must be prepared for every eventuality, and with that in mind Martin should consider the practicability of organizing the loyalists into a force to support the government in the event that hostilities began. The leading figures in the loyalist element should be informed, Dartmouth said, that if hostilities were to break out the King would grant them commissions "suitable to their Rank and station" and every other advantage consistent with the rules of the Army. Dartmouth added that the King had directed him to acquaint General Gage with the situation in North Carolina. Gage was to be directed to send, upon application from Martin, "some able and discreet Officer... to concert the measures for carrying so essential a service into effect and if necessary to lead the people forth."²²

While Martin was eager to receive military assistance, he saw no particular need for the sending of an officer to take command of the loyalists. As Lord Dartmouth was to see shortly, the Governor felt perfectly capable of handling the enterprise himself.

22

Dartmouth to Martin, 3 May 1775, C.O. 5/318/52-53.

On the same day, Lord Dartmouth sent to General Gage extracts from Martin's letter and his reply, directing the General to follow his part in the instructions outlined in the letter to the Governor.²³ Three days later, on May 6, Dartmouth directed Edward Thurlow, the Attorney General, and Alexander Wedderburn, the Solicitor General, to "prepare a proper instrument" by which the King could grant a royal pardon to the Regulators, and he asked that they lose no time in accomplishing the task.²⁴

At the same time that he received Martin's letter, Lord Dartmouth received another from Lieutenant Governor William Bull of South Carolina. Bull had not been very optimistic about loyalist sentiment in his province. In the previous summer he had described the spirit of rebellion in South Carolina as being "universal."²⁵ But now he noted "the many headed power the People" had discovered its own strength and was becoming less and less amenable to direction by the men of property who had been behind the ferment in South Carolina. The aristocratic element had used the mob as a political tool, but now, as the people began to get out of their control, Bull implied that they were beginning to have second thoughts about their rebellious activities.²⁶

²³

Dartmouth to Gage, 3 May 1775, C.O. 5/765/407.

²⁴

Dartmouth to the Attorney and Solicitor General, 6 May 1775, in Richard Arthur Roberts, ed., Calendar of Home Office Papers of the Reign of George III, IV (London, 1899), No. 970.

²⁵

Bull to Dartmouth, 31 July 1774, C.O. 5/396/42-43.

²⁶

Bull to Dartmouth, 28 March 1775, C.O. 5/396/124-25.

On May 18, Lord Dartmouth received a letter from Lord Dunmore in Williamsburg. Dunmore described the situation there as going from bad to worse, but he noted that there were some people who foresaw ruin in the rebellious disorders and who looked forward to a triumph of lawful authority. There were more people with this view than dared to declare themselves, he felt, because they feared reprisals.²⁷

Five weeks later, on June 21, Lord Dartmouth received several dispatches from Governor Martin. In the earliest of these, written March 23, the Governor spoke of another source of loyalist strength in North Carolina. Among the King's loyal subjects in his province there were:

...a body of Highlanders whose principals have given me the fullest assurance of their loyalty and attachment to his Majesty and on which I am persuaded I could firmly rely.... I have no doubt that I could form a very useful and serviceable Corps out of the Highlanders in this Country.²⁸

Martin mentioned that he had requested a supply of arms and ammunition from General Gage and he declared that he would raise a battalion of Highlanders whenever the King wished. This proposal was followed by a request that Lord Dartmouth was to hear several times in the future. In return for raising a loyalist force, Martin asked that the Army commission he had resigned in 1769 be restored to him.²⁹ In another of the letters received from Martin on June 21, the

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Dunmore to Dartmouth, 14 March 1775, C.O. 5/1353/103-10.

²⁸

Martin to Dartmouth, 23 March 1775, C.O. 5/318/70-72.

²⁹

Ibid.

Governor repeated the assurances of loyalty he had received from the Regulators. He could, he announced, command their services at any time. That gave him the highest satisfaction, he said, because the backcountry was the most populous part of the province and with the support of that region, "I have the means in my own hands to maintain the sovereignty of this Country to my Royal Master in all Events."³⁰

While Martin felt he had the means in his "own hands" to maintain the government in North Carolina, Lord Dunmore was not as complacent about his prospects in Virginia. Three days after the arrival of Martin's letters, Dartmouth received Lord Dunmore's account of the tumult that had arisen when he had the powder removed from the magazine at Williamsburg. He had heard, he said, that men from the surrounding countryside were preparing to march on the city. If this occurred he intended to arm and declare free all slaves who would assist him in maintaining his authority. However, unlike Martin, Dunmore wanted troops as well as arms and ammunition. He thought that if the King would send a small body of fully-equipped troops, he could raise a force "from among Indians, Negroes and other persons" that together with the regulars could maintain the authority of the government. He mentioned that he had already written to General Gage requesting a small body of men, and to Admiral Graves asking for a large ship to cruise the Virginia rivers. A British military presence of two or three hundred

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Martin to Dartmouth, 20 April 1775, C.O. 5/318/97-101.

men, he felt, would induce many people who were now silent to support openly the government because they would no longer fear retaliation by the rebels.³¹

Lord Dartmouth answered Dunmore in two letters written early in July. In the first of these, written July 5, he promised to send 2,000 stand of arms, but told the Governor that he would have to rely on General Gage for any troops he desired. Although New England had been in armed rebellion for more than two months, Dartmouth was still cautiously optimistic about the South. "There is still some room to hope," he said, "that the Colonies to the Southward may not proceed to the same lengths with those of New England."³² In the second letter, he told Dunmore that the government was trying to do everything possible to encourage the loyalist element in the western counties of North Carolina. He increased the arms shipment to 3,000 stand and asked that a portion of it be sent to Martin. The governors themselves were to determine how to divide the shipment.³³

At the same time that Dartmouth wrote to Lord Dunmore, he wrote two letters to Governor Martin also. In the first of these he declared the government's intention to act firmly to reduce the colonists to obedience, but he added, in the same words he had used in the letter to Dunmore, his

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Dunmore to Dartmouth, 1 May 1775, C.O. 5/1353/137-39.

³²

Dartmouth to Dunmore, 5 July 1775, C.O. 5/1353/152-55.

³³

Dartmouth to Dunmore, 12 July 1775, C.O. 5/1353/156-58.

hope that the situation in the South would not deteriorate to the state it had reached in New England.³⁴ In the second letter he told Martin that 3,000 stand of arms with ammunition and other military stores were being shipped to Virginia, and that Dunmore had been instructed to send a portion of the shipment on to North Carolina. Dartmouth requested that the governor do everything possible to encourage the favorable disposition among the people of the western counties, and to this end he transmitted a Royal pardon, with one exception, for "all those who were concerned in the Rebellious Insurrections in 1770." Lord Dartmouth hoped that the general pardon would be an added inducement to encourage the back-country people to organize into loyalist associations to defend the government. The news of the arms shipment and the general pardon were no doubt received with pleasure by the governor. His personal ambitions received a setback, however. The King, said Dartmouth, had graciously received his offer to raise a battalion of Highlanders under his own command, but Army rules would not allow the restoration of the commission he had resigned in 1769. The command of the corps was to go to Lieutenant Colonel Maclean, in accordance with the plan the King had approved in April. The King, Dartmouth added, had complete confidence that the governor would give the lieutenant colonel all possible assistance and support.³⁵

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Dartmouth to Martin, 5 July 1775, C.O. 5/318/110-12.

³⁵

Dartmouth to Martin, 12 July 1775, C.O. 5/318/113-16.

On July 28, Lord Dartmouth received word from Governor Dunmore that conditions in Williamsburg had grown so bad that he had been obliged to remove to H.M.S. Fowey, moored in the York River near Yorktown.³⁶ In answering, Dartmouth told the governor that the prospect he had presented earlier of being able to raise a force sufficient to defend the government if he were supplied with some military assistance had been very encouraging, but as he now had been obliged to take refuge on the Fowey, the King had granted him permission to return to England if he wished to do so. However, Dartmouth said, he still hoped that with the supply of arms now on its way to Virginia, Dunmore would be able to maintain the government.³⁷

On the day before Dunmore's account of his flight to the Fowey reached Whitehall, Lord Dartmouth received three letters from Sir James Wright at Savannah. The governor commented that whatever resolutions might be agreed upon by the Continental Congress would also be adopted and put into execution without opposition in Georgia. Those who disapproved would remain silent, fearing retaliation if they voiced their beliefs. And why should they do otherwise, chided Wright, when they were receiving no support or protection from the government?³⁸ Wright also had some comments

³⁶

Dunmore to Dartmouth, 25 June 1775, C.O. 5/1353/160-71.

³⁷

Dartmouth to Dunmore, 2 August 1775, C.O. 5/1353/225-26.

³⁸

Wright to Dartmouth, 17 June 1775, in Georgia Historical Society, Collections, III, 183-85.

about the number of troops he felt would be needed to restore his authority in Savannah. He had been authorized to request one hundred men from the garrison at St. Augustine. That would have been sufficient twelve or fifteen months earlier, he wrote, but now a force of that size would only inflame the rebels and make the situation worse. At least five hundred troops would be needed now, and "unless our Neighbours [from South Carolina] are kept at home," it would be difficult to say how large a force would be needed.³⁹

In another of the letters received from Wright on July 27, and in later ones received on August 19, the governor gave evidence that much of the revolutionary activity in Georgia was being directed and carried out at least partly by rebels from South Carolina. The mouth of the Savannah River was being guarded, he said, by boats and armed men from South Carolina, and a number of the Georgia Liberty Boys had gone down to join them. They had, he reported, fitted out an armed schooner and seized six tons of gunpowder when it arrived on an incoming ship. The rebels in Charleston were intercepting his mail, and additionally, he had just discovered that a captain in the South Carolina rebel force was in Georgia recruiting men.⁴⁰

On September 10, Lord Dartmouth received five letters from Governor Martin. The first of these had been written

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Wright to Dartmouth, 17 June 1775, ibid., 187-88.

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Wright to Dartmouth, 20 June, and 8 and 10 July 1775, ibid., 189-90, 191-93, 194-95.

June 30. In it the governor related that he had sent his family to New York for their safety and left the Governor's Palace, taking refuge in Fort Johnston. Despite this turn of events, he still felt that if he were provided with the necessary implements of war, he had the manpower at his command to restore the authority of the government. The governor had fled the executive residence and taken refuge in a fort. Within two weeks he would flee the fort and seek safety on board one of the King's ships. Yet his visions of what he thought he could do as a military leader and his estimation of the size and strength of the loyalist element seemed to increase as his real authority declined. He could "collect immediately," he announced, "3000 effective men" from among the Highland immigrants. With that as the nucleus of his force, he would draw from the backcountry, "where the People are in General well affected, and much attached to me, at least two thirds of the fighting men in the whole Country." Their numbers would "exceed Thirty Thousand." While Martin was confined within the walls of Fort Johnston, his visions of personal military glory were becoming continental in scope. He now proposed to regain not just North Carolina, but the entire South. With the combined force of the Highlanders and the backcountry people:

...I could effectually restore order here and in South Carolina, and hold Virginia in such awe as to prevent that Province sending any succour to the Northward, added to which such a head made here against rebellion, would draw over to

it such multitudes of well affected Subjects of His Majesty from other Colonies who only want countenance to induce them to take an open part in favour of Government as would put it in my power to reduce to order and obedience every Colony to the Southward of Pennsylvania....⁴¹

Martin had stated at the beginning of this proposal that he could accomplish his grandiose plan if he were supplied with the arms he had requested from General Gage. However, after outlining what he hoped to do, he asked (if his plan were approved by the King) that he be sent directly from England 10,000 stand of arms with an appropriate supply of ammunition, six field pieces and other assorted battle equipment. This request was followed by another: in return for raising a loyalist force he again asked to be restored to the rank of lieutenant colonel that he had resigned in 1769.⁴²

The second of Martin's letters received at Whitehall on September 10 had been written on July 6. In it the governor spoke in general terms of the great potential of loyalist strength in his province and of the use that could be made of it both in North Carolina and in the neighboring colonies. In continuing to press his own cause, he added that because of his great influence in the colony, he could gather together a force larger than any other officer would be able to raise there. With this force he would be able to maintain the government in North Carolina, in any case, "besides doing

⁴¹

Martin to Dartmouth, 30 June 1775, C.O. 5/318/124-36.

⁴²

Ibid.

much more extensive service, if I am properly supported."⁴³

The theme of the three remaining letters received on September 10 was the need for speed. The people of New Bern had been threatening to attack Fort Johnston, and, as the commander of the garrison did not have enough dependable men to repel an attack, the governor had been obliged to abandon the fort, dismantle its guns, and take refuge on board H.M.S. Cruizer, anchored in the Cape Fear River. The governor indicated that time was on the side of the rebels and that every day's delay in arming the loyalists gave the rebels an additional advantage. Loyalist strength, Martin said, was "daily and hourly falling off, consuming and mouldering away before the Industry, and address of the Leaders of Sedition." The rebels had cut off to a large extent his communication with the backcountry. Nevertheless, he was sure the loyalists would be able and willing to make their way to New Bern whenever he were to notify them that he had received the necessary arms. Soon after Martin fled Fort Johnston, the rebels burned it down. Haste, the governor emphasized, was absolutely necessary, as the rebels were gaining ground very fast.⁴⁴

On September 11, the King directed that the arms shipment Martin had requested be sent. On the following day, however, the King was informed that Sir Jeffrey Amherst,

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Martin to Dartmouth, 6 July 1775, C.O. 5/318/137-40.

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Martin to Dartmouth, 16, 17, and 20 July 1775, C.O. 5/318/141-44, 149-50, 151-52.

Lieutenant General of the Office of Ordnance, doubted the usefulness and feared the risk of sending such a large quantity of arms to North Carolina unless a regiment of regulars could be sent at the same time.⁴⁵ It was decided therefore that the arms shipment would be sent first to Boston and from there to North Carolina in the company of a battalion of Howe's troops. Orders to this effect were sent to the Office of Ordnance, and the Admiralty was directed to arrange a convoy for the storeship.⁴⁶

On September 15, Lord Dartmouth informed General Howe of the plan and outlined to him Governor Martin's views of the loyalist strength in North Carolina.⁴⁷

At the same time Dartmouth also wrote to Governor Martin. He observed that, considering the fact that the governor had been obliged to seek refuge on board the Cruizer and then watch helplessly as Fort Johnston was burned, he thought he was too optimistic in his expectations of being able to raise such a large force. But, said Dartmouth, as he had spoken with so much confidence, the 10,000 stand of arms and the six light field pieces he had requested were being sent to General Howe. If the general thought Martin's

⁴⁵
John Pownall to King, 12 September 1775, in Fortescue, ed., Correspondence of George III, III, No. 1712.

⁴⁶
Pownall to King, 12 September 1775, ibid., No. 1714; Ordnance Order and Admiralty Order, both 12 September 1775, in Roberts, ed., Calendar of Home Office Papers of the Reign of George III, IV, Nos. 1385 and 1370.

⁴⁷
Dartmouth to Howe, 15 September 1775, in Peter Force, ed., American Archives, Fourth Series, III (Washington, 1840), 713-14.

suggestions practicable, in light of later intelligence, he was to send the arms, along with a battalion of troops under a regular officer, to North Carolina. Dartmouth noted again that it would be impossible to restore "the Military Rank you thought fit to sell," and told Martin that his commission as governor gave him sufficient power and authority to perform his role in restoring the authority of the government.⁴⁸

On June 17, Sir William Campbell had arrived in Charleston to take over the reins of government from Lieutenant Governor William Bull. Lord Dartmouth was hoping the change would bring more optimistic reports from South Carolina. "It will be a great satisfaction to me," he had written early in July, "to hear that...you found His Majesty's Affairs there in a better state than they are represented to be in the last letters I received from Mr. Bull."⁴⁹ Campbell's first letter from Charleston was received at Whitehall on September 14. He was sorry to report, he wrote, that his own experience was bearing out the reports of others about the rebellious state of the colony. People in all ranks of society had been led into sedition by "a set of desperate and designing men," and he could take comfort only in the fact that he could not leave the government in a worse state than that in which he found it. The new governor mentioned that he had written to Admiral Graves asking that a few ships be stationed along the coast of the Southern colonies. This, he said,

48

Dartmouth to Martin, 15 September 1775, C.O. 5/318/
157-59.

49

Dartmouth to Campbell, 5 July 1775, C.O. 5/396/147-49.

would check a brisk smuggling trade between the Americans and the Dutch, and also give encouragement to "the friends of Government here, who I am happy to assure Your Lordship are not a few, if they durst show their real inclinations."⁵⁰

On September 23, Lord Dartmouth received several more letters from Governor Campbell. One written on July 19 and 20 was particularly encouraging and seemed to bear out Martin's assertions about loyalist sentiment in the back-country. The violence and fanaticism of the rebels had:

...stirred up such a spirit in the back part of this Country which is very populous that I hope it will be attended with the best Effects. Several very respectable People from Camden and Ninety Six have been with me expressing their Loyalty and Affection to His Majesty in the strongest terms, and assuring me it is the Sentiments of some thousands in those Districts.⁵¹

Camden and Ninety Six had been centers of the South Carolina Regulation disorders.⁵² The governor told Dartmouth that he had encouraged the emissaries from the backcountry to cultivate the loyalist disposition among their neighbors and that he had promised them protection and reward whenever it was in his power to grant it. The rebel cause did not have the unanimity and widespread backing that its leaders wished the British to believe, said Campbell. Many people had been forced to sign the rebel rolls and actually disapproved of their activities. If an armed conflict should

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Campbell to Dartmouth, 2 July 1775, C.O. 5/396/152.

51

Campbell to Dartmouth, 19 and 20 July 1775, C.O. 5/396/168-71.

52

Brown, The South Carolina Regulators, 41, 61.

occur in South Carolina, the rebels would find themselves abandoned by many who had been intimidated into joining them in the first place. The rebels of his province were particularly vulnerable, the governor said, because, in addition to the disaffection of the people in the backcountry, their slaves outnumbered them five to one.⁵³ When these factors were taken into account, the rebel strength in South Carolina did not seem as formidable as it appeared at first glance. And the strength of the loyalist element seemed correspondingly greater.

In another of the letters received on September 23, Campbell said he had heard that the people of the backcountry were refusing in large numbers to sign the rebels' Association and that they were forming a party to oppose it. The governor had some words about Georgia also. The number of friends of Government there was great and it would not be difficult, he felt, to restore the authority of the Crown in that colony. Georgia's defection, he said, had been brought about entirely by the rebels of South Carolina.⁵⁴

A week later another letter arrived from Governor Campbell. He indicated a need for speed, commenting that the friends of Government in South Carolina were beginning to despair of ever receiving assistance from Britain. North Carolina and Georgia, he added, were "equally neglected,"

⁵³
Campbell to Dartmouth, 19 and 20 July 1775, C.O. 5/
396/168-71.

⁵⁴
Campbell to Dartmouth, 30 July 1775, C.O. 5/396/202-03.

equally abandoned." There were more optimistic reports from the backcountry, however. The rebels had intended to raise a regiment of horse there, but their efforts had been thwarted by the leaders of the loyalist element.⁵⁵ He enclosed a letter he had received from one of the leaders of the backcountry loyalists, Colonel Thomas Fletchall, in which he was assured of the loyalty of about four thousand people.⁵⁶ Also, the governor added, he had received an address from about three hundred Quaker families in the backcountry who were firmly loyal. He made another reference to the questionable strength of the rebels in Georgia. That colony, he said, had been "warped from its Duty by a very insignificant internal Faction," aided by rebels from South Carolina.⁵⁷

On October 9, Lord Dartmouth received another dispatch from Governor Dunmore. Since his last letter, the governor had shifted his moorings from the York to the Elizabeth River off Norfolk. He noted that he had just received a reinforcement of seventy officers and men from St. Augustine. This was a very small addition to his strength, considering the present state of his colony, he commented, but he added that he was sure he would be able to reduce Virginia to obedience within a few months if he were quickly supplied

⁵⁵
Campbell to Dartmouth, 19 August 1775, C.O. 5/396/
204-06.

⁵⁶
Thomas Fletchall to Campbell, 19 July 1775, in Historical Manuscripts Commission, Fourteenth Report, Appendix, Part X, The Manuscripts of the Earl of Dartmouth, II (London, 1895), 344.

⁵⁷
Campbell to Dartmouth, 19 August 1775, C.O. 5/396/
204-06.

with several hundred more fully equipped troops.⁵⁸

The day after the arrival of Lord Dunmore's letter, four more were received from Governor Wright. In one of them the governor related accounts of a local rector who had been forced to flee the colony because he had refused to observe a fast that had been directed by the Continental Congress, and of a local pilot who had been tarred and feathered for voicing loyalist sentiments. The governor added, however, that he did not believe these acts of violence were approved of by the people in general, "but only by some very Violent ones amongst them and the Mob."⁵⁹ In another letter the governor commented that the rebels were using every means of intimidation they could devise to compel people to sign their Association. Great numbers of those who had signed had done so out of fear.⁶⁰ Here was another indication that rebel strength was not as great as it appeared at first glance and that there was an undercurrent of loyalist sentiment that needed only a show of military force to bring it to the surface in support of the government.

⁵⁸
Dunmore to Dartmouth, 2 August 1775, C.O. 5/1353/
231-32.

⁵⁹
Wright to Dartmouth, 29 July 1775, in Georgia Historical Society, Collections, III, 200-201.

⁶⁰
Wright to Dartmouth, 7 August 1775, ibid., 204-05.

CHAPTER II

THE BRITISH ARMY AND THE GRACIOUS EMPRESS

One of Britain's major problems in 1775 was that the country simply did not have enough troops available to fight a war in America.¹ As the Solicitor General, Alexander Wedderburn, complained to Lord North in July, Britain seemed never to be sufficiently prepared at the beginning of an armed conflict.²

The prevailing opinion of the men involved in military administration in Great Britain was against any attempt to subdue the rebellion by the use of a military force. Ambrose Serle, secretary to Lord Howe, said that the idea was "in its nature absurd and improper," and in June General Edward Harvey, the Adjutant-general, wrote:

Taking America as it at present stands, it is impossible to conquer it with our British Army.... To attempt to conquer it internally by our land force is as wild an idea as ever controverted common sense.³

¹ Sir John W. Fortescue, A History of the British Army, III (London, 1902), 170; Rochford to Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, 1 August 1775, in Roberts, ed., Calendar of Home Office Papers of the Reign of George III, IV, No. 1070.

² Wedderburn to North, July 1775, in Historical Manuscripts Commission, Tenth Report, Appendix, Part VI, The Manuscripts of the Marquess of Abergavenny (London, 1887), 9.

³ "Paper in the hand of Ambrose Serle," [1774], in Dartmouth Manuscripts, II, 252; Harvey to General Irwin, 30 June 1775, quoted in Fortescue, A History of the British Army, III, 167.

Viscount Barrington, the Secretary at War, felt that the revolt could best be quelled by the use of a naval force. At the end of December 1774, he wrote to Dartmouth outlining his ideas for pacifying the rebellious colonies. "A conquest by land is unnecessary;" he advised:

...when the country can be reduced first by distress, and then to obedience, by our Marine totally interrupting all commerce and fishery, and even seizing all the ships in the ports, with very little expense and less bloodshed.⁴

Lord Sandwich, on the other hand, thought the Navy should remain in European waters and that troops should be used to quell the colonial dispute.⁵ The King, sincere in his belief that he was fighting to preserve the British constitution, intended to use every means at his command in the battle, including as large a land force as he could gather.⁶

The first word of Lexington and Concord reached London on May 28, and on June 10, General Gage's account of the confrontation was received at Whitehall.⁷ The cabinet met on

⁴ Barrington to Dartmouth, 12 November and 24 December 1774, in Shute Barrington, ed., The Political Life of William Wildman, Viscount Barrington (London, 1814), 140-42, 142-48.

⁵ Charles R. Ritcheson, British Politics and the American Revolution (Norman, Oklahoma, [c1954/]), 171; G.R. Barnes and J.H. Owen, eds., The Private Papers of John, Earl of Sandwich, First Lord of the Admiralty, 1771-1782, I ([London/], 1932), 46.

⁶ Examples of the King's attitude can be seen in: King to North, 15 February, 26 July, and 15 October 1775, in Fortescue, ed., Correspondence of George III, III, No. 1595, No. 1683, No. 1726; Memo in Dartmouth's hand quoting the King, 30 March 1775, in Dartmouth Manuscripts, II, 283; King to Sandwich, 1 July 1775, in Barnes and Owen, eds., Sandwich Papers, I, 63.

⁷ Peter Orlando Hutchinson, comp., The Diary and Letters of His Excellency Thomas Hutchinson, Esq. . . ., II (London, 1883), 455; Gage to Dartmouth, n.d., C.O. 5/769/192-95.

the fifteenth and agreed to augment Gage's force with troops from Great Britain, Ireland, and Canada; and on June 21 they voted to recruit a regiment of Canadians and to send regiments from Gibraltar and Minorca.⁸ In order to replace the troops from the Mediterranean, the King ordered three Hanoverian battalions to be sent to Gibraltar and two to Minorca.⁹

On July 25, Gage's dispatch describing Bunker Hill was received. In commenting on the battle the General added the opinion that "the Rebels are not the despicable Rabble too many have supposed them to be." They were, he said, fairly well equipped and trained, and they knew how to use the countryside to the best advantage.¹⁰ On the following morning Lord North wrote to the King that "the War is now grown to such a height, that it must be treated as a foreign war, & that every expedient which would be used in the latter case should be applied in the former." The King answered saying he was determined to persist in spite of any difficulties that might arise.¹¹ On the same day the cabinet met at Lord North's house and resolved that Britain must have a force of

⁸ Cabinet Minutes of 15 June and 21 June 1775, in Dartmouth Manuscripts, II, 316, 318.

⁹ King to North, 1 August 1775, King to North, 4 August 1775, Memorandum by the King, 5 August 1775, in Fortescue, ed., Correspondence of George III, III, Nos. 1687, 1689 and 1690.

¹⁰ Gage to Dartmouth, 25 June 1775, C.O. 5/769/231-37.

¹¹ North to King, 26 July 1775, King to North, 26 July 1775, in Fortescue, ed., Correspondence of George III, III, Nos. 1682 and 1683.

20,000 troops in America by April 1776, a number which Gage,¹² in the previous autumn, had said would be necessary.

When Lord Barrington heard of the cabinet's resolution, he wrote immediately to Lord Dartmouth:

Mr. Pownall having mentioned to me this day, that it was intended the force in North America should by next Spring be raised to twenty thousand regulars, I told him it was clearly my opinion, that no such number could be raised or procured for this purpose; and therefore ventured to recommend strongly, that no expectation of the kind should be given in the dispatches going out to the Colonies. General Harvey was present, and joined in this opinion....¹³

At the same time he wrote to the King, "I not only fear, but am confident, the proposed augmentation cannot possible be raised, and ought not to be depended on."¹⁴ Despite Lord Barrington's warnings, Lord North wrote to General Burgoyne on July 31 informing him, "in the Spring you will have 20,000 regulars or more," and Lord Dartmouth sent similar¹⁵ messages to Carleton and Gage.

In August Lord Barrington repeated his opinion that the recruits the government was expecting to raise would

¹²

Bernard Donoghue, British Politics and The American Revolution: The Path to War, 1773-75 (New York, 1964), 277; Gage to Dartmouth, 30 October and 2 November 1774, C.O. 5/769/150.

¹³

Barrington to Dartmouth, 31 July 1775, in Shute Barrington, ed., Political Life, 148-49.

¹⁴

Barrington to King, 31 July 1775, in ibid., 149-50.

¹⁵

North to Burgoyne, 31 July 1775, in Abergavenny Manuscripts, 9-10; Dartmouth to Carleton, 2 August 1775, in Dartmouth Manuscripts, II, 344; Dartmouth to Gage, 2 August 1775, C.O. 5/765/417-25.

not be obtained, and on the twenty-fifth, after reading two more gloomy reports on recruiting prospects, Lord North wrote to the King:

...it is the opinion not only of Lord Barrington but of all those, who are conversant in the recruiting business, that the number of recruits wanted can not be expected by the next Spring. The general notion is that we can not, by that time, depend upon raising above 5 or at the most, 6000 men.¹⁶

Lord North added that "the success of the War in America absolutely depends upon a considerable army being there early in the Spring," and that he feared it would be necessary "to have recourse to extraordinary methods of recruiting the Army."¹⁷ By "extraordinary methods," he meant the raising of independent companies by offering gentlemen a rank in the Army in proportion to the number of recruits they were able to gather. He felt there was no possibility of bringing the Army up to the required strength without encouraging the formation of new corps, and he was not sure the necessary¹⁸ force could be raised even by using that expedient. The practice of raising independent companies was unfair to the officers in existing regiments, and the King refused to allow it. He would not, he answered, "agree to the disobliging the

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Barrington to North, 8 August 1775, in Shute Barrington, ed., Political Life, 150-51; North to King, 25 August 1775, in Fortescue, ed., Correspondence of George III, III, No. 1699.

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Ibid.

¹⁸ Fortescue, ed., Correspondence of George III, x; North to Eden, 22 August 1775, in Benjamin Franklin Stevens, ed., North B. F. Stevens's Facsimiles of Manuscripts in European Archives Relating to America, 1773-1783, No. 458. ^{ad.} Archives

whole Army by giving them to every Young Man that pretends he can soon complete them," and, he added, the system generally produced "Men totally unfit to carry muskets."¹⁹

The ministry had promised the generals in America an army of 20,000 by the following spring, yet the opinion of Lord Barrington, General Harvey and "all those...conversant in the recruiting business" was that no more than five or six thousand troops could be raised. The only method of recruiting that might yield a larger number had been ruled out by the King. The King said that before he would consent to the raising of independent companies he wanted to see what results the "arrangements now just set in motion" would produce.²⁰ The arrangements to which he referred were the negotiations for Russian assistance that had been initiated by the Earl of Suffolk earlier in the summer.

On June 30, Henry Howard, twelfth Earl of Suffolk, the Secretary for the Northern Department, had written to Sir Robert Gunning, the British ambassador at the court of Catherine II, asking him to find out if the Empress would be willing to furnish Russian troops to be used in quelling the rebellion. This was a very delicate commission, Suffolk said, and he instructed the ambassador to "be very careful to do it inaffectedly, so as to give it quite the air of an idle speculation of your own, and by no means, that of a

¹⁹
King to North, 26 August 1775, in Fortescue, ed., Correspondence of George III, III, No. 1702.

²⁰
Ibid.

21
 proposition."

Gunning let some days elapse after the arrival of Suffolk's messenger so that he would not appear to be acting on instructions from London. Then, when he felt the proper time to approach the subject had arrived, he was unable to see the Empress because she was ill, so he brought up the matter in a conversation with her Foreign Minister, Count Nikita Ivanovich Panin. Panin received Gunning's proposal "with apparent cordiality," and said he would mention it to the Empress as soon as he could see her. On August 8, the day Gunning finally received Catherine's reply, he was able to send a very encouraging report to Suffolk:

...I have the pleasure of acquainting you that nothing could be more satisfactory. The Empress having ordered Mr. Panin to give to me the strongest assurances, and to express them in the strongest terms of her entire readiness upon this and upon every other occasion, to give his Majesty every assistance he should desire, and in whatever mode or manner he thought proper....²²

There could be no doubt, Gunning said, that if foreign assistance were necessary it could be obtained from Russia.²³ The next step was to make an official request for it, and on September 1, Suffolk directed Gunning to ask for an audience with the Empress and to deliver to her a letter from the

²¹
 Suffolk to Gunning, 30 June 1775, in A. Devrient, ed. and others, Sbornik Imperatorskago Russkago Istoricheskago Obshchestva, XIX (St. Petersburg, 1876), No. 251.
 Note: Documents from Sbornik are cited here according to Western calendar dates only.

²²

Gunning to Suffolk, 8 August 1775, in ibid., No. 256.

²³

Ibid.

24
 King. George III was later to complain that Catherine's
 answer was lacking in tact;²⁵ however, the same charge might
 be made about his letter to her. The King did not ask the
 Empress for troops at all, but rather said that he accepted
 the troops she had already offered, even though no official
 offer of troops had been made and Gunning had been specific-
 ally instructed to present the question with an "air of idle
 speculation of your own, and by no means that of a proposi-
 tion."²⁶ The King's letter was phrased in general terms and
 Gunning was given full powers to negotiate the specific
 terms of an agreement. Suffolk instructed him that the King
 wanted 20,000 fully equipped infantrymen, ready to embark
 for America as soon as Baltic navigation opened in the
 spring.²⁷

The gracious Empress had solved the troop problem. On
 September 5, Lord Dartmouth wrote to General Howe telling
 him that Catherine had "given the most emphatic assurances
 of letting us have any number of infantry that may be
 wanted," and in consequence of her generous offer the
 British had requested the use of 20,000 men.²⁸ Twenty

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Suffolk to Gunning, 1 September 1775, in ibid., No. 257.

25

King to North, 3 November 1775, in Fortescue, ed.,
Correspondence of George III, III, No. 1737.

26

George III to Catherine II, 1 September 1775, in
 Devrient, ed., Sbornik, XIX, No. 258; Suffolk to Gunning,
 30 June 1775, in ibid., No. 251.

27

Suffolk to Gunning, 1 September 1775, in ibid., No. 257.

28

Dartmouth to General Howe, 5 September 1775, in Sparks
 Manuscripts, No. 45, I, 12. Lord Dartmouth added that he
 hoped a sizeable number of British troops would be forth-
 coming as well.

thousand--an army of the same number that had been agreed upon in the cabinet meeting of July 26, and already promised to the generals for the coming spring.

On September 8, Suffolk dispatched another messenger to Gunning with a draft of a treaty and some additional instructions to be followed in the negotiations.²⁹ The need for the Russian assistance was becoming more and more obvious. Howe's army was losing men by disease and desertion, and in England the Army was forced to compete with the East India Company which was also recruiting men.³⁰ Lord North was facing the unpleasant possibility that it might be necessary to call out the militia so that the troops defending England could go to America.³¹ And on October 3, Lord Barrington wrote to him:

There are no more troops in England than are absolutely necessary for securing the peace and collecting the revenue.³²

Two days after Suffolk sent off the draft treaty, an ominous note was heard in Moscow. In an audience with Gunning, Catherine first asked him whether any progress had

²⁹ Suffolk to Gunning, 8 September 1775, in Devrient, ed., Sbornik, XIX, Nos. 259, 260 and 261.

³⁰ Pownall to Knox, 6 September 1775, in Historical Manuscripts Commission, Report on Manuscripts in Various Collections, VI (Dublin, 1909), 121. (Manuscripts of Captain H.V. Knox); North to King, 9 September and 19 September 1775, in Fortescue, ed., Correspondence of George III, III, Nos. 1708 and 1715.

³¹ North to Eden, 18 September 1775, in Stevens, ed., Facsimiles, No. 855.

³² Barrington to North, 3 October 1775, in Abergavenny Manuscripts, 12.

been made toward settling the dispute in America, and then, without waiting for his reply, advised that the British should not confine themselves to one single way of ending the rebellion, but try every available means--a broad hint that she favored conciliation.³³

On October 1, one month after the King had written his letter "accepting" the Russian troops, Gunning regretfully informed Suffolk that he could now "scarcely entertain any hopes at present that her Imperial Majesty will be prevailed upon to send troops to America." The Empress had received the King's letter and, although Gunning had not yet been given a final answer, Panin had informed him that "she showed much repugnance to the having her troops employed in America." She had numerous factors to consider, the Foreign Minister said: the great distance would allow the troops no communication with Russia, the number requested was excessive considering the state of the army after the recently ended war with Turkey, Russia's relations with Poland and Sweden were in an unsettled state, the Empress now felt that she had not given the matter sufficient thought when she made her earlier assurances, and, anyway, she had thought Gunning was referring to assistance against Spain. Gunning told Suffolk that he had lowered the request to 15,000 troops and that he would continue to work toward an agreement but that he had little hope that the Empress would change her mind.³⁴

³³
Gunning to Suffolk, 11 September 1775, in Devrient, ed., Sbornik, XIX, No. 262.

³⁴
Gunning to Suffolk, 1 October 1775, in ibid., No. 263.

Gunning's letter apparently reached London by October 15, because on that date Lord North, in his letter proposing the Southern expedition, wrote: "The late dispatches from Moscow, added to one of the intercepted letters from the King of Prussia, make it but too probable, that we shall be disappointed of our expected assistance from Russia...."³⁵

The intercepted letter from Frederick the Great to which Lord North referred could have been one of several letters that the Prussian King had written. The Count de Maltzan, Frederick's ambassador in London, informed his sovereign of the Anglo-Russian negotiations on September 15.³⁶ Frederick wrote to his ambassadors in Moscow, Vienna, and The Hague, as well as to Maltzan in London, expressing his firm opinion that the Empress would not consent to the British proposal. It was, he said, "bristling with so many difficulties" for her that he was sure she would never put her hand to such a treaty.³⁷

In addition to Frederick's pessimistic forecast about the outcome of the negotiations, there were in his letter to Count de Solms, his ambassador in Moscow, some observations

³⁵

North to King, 15 October 1775, in Fortescue, ed., Correspondence of George III, III, No. 1724.

³⁶

Maltzan to Frederick II, 15 September 1775, in Die Commission der Koniglichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Politische Correspondenz Friedrich's Des Grossen, XXXVII (Berlin, 1918), Footnote, 230.

³⁷

Frederick II to Count de Solms, Moscow, 26 September, to Baron de Riedesel, Vienna, 27 September, to M. de Thulemeier, The Hague, 25 September, and to Count de Maltzan, London, 25 September 1775, in ibid., Nos. 24 194, 24 195, 24 193 and 24 192.

on Russian politics which were an ill omen for British expectations. Recent events at Catherine's court seemed to indicate to Frederick that Panin's position was becoming precarious and that he might fall from power at any time. Prominent in the faction that wished to see his fall was Count Ivan Czernicheff.³⁸ Panin had greeted Gunning's proposal with "cordiality" and had advocated it in his talks with the Empress. Cordial relations with England was a basic part of the "Northern System" which he followed as Foreign Minister.³⁹ Czernicheff, on the other hand, had previously been Russia's ambassador to France and was later described by Frederick as "a creature of that crown."⁴⁰

That this news was known in London and that it further lessened British expectations of success in the troop negotiations is seen in a letter from William Eden, Suffolk's undersecretary, to Lord George Germain. Eden wrote: "...we have accounts of an expected change in the Russian ministry which are by no means flattering to our hopes."⁴¹

³⁸

Frederick II to Count de Solms, 26 September 1775, in *ibid.*, No. 24 194. Gunning made a similar observation on the possibility of Panin's imminent downfall in a letter of October 7, which although it could not have reached London by October 15, would have supported the news in Frederick's letter when it did arrive. Gunning to Suffolk, 7 October 1775, in Devrient, ed., *Sbornik*, XIX, No. 266.

³⁹

Bernard Pares, *A History of Russia* (New York, 1953), 277.

⁴⁰

Frederick II to Count de Solms, 12 October 1775, in *Politische Correspondenz Friedrich's Des Grossen*, XXXVII, No. 24 216.

⁴¹

Eden to Germain, 21 (?) October 1775, in *Historical Manuscripts Commission, Report on the Manuscripts of Mrs. Stopford-Sackville*, II (Hereford, 1910), 11-12.

With the prospect that Britain's foremost advocate in the Russian government was on the way out and that those who were friendly to her ancient enemy might replace him, one could hardly help agreeing with Frederick that the possibility of Russian assistance was highly unlikely.

CHAPTER III
BRITAIN AND THE BOURBONS

Britain's relations with the Bourbon powers affected, in two rather opposite ways, the actions she would be able to take in quelling the colonial disturbance. On one hand, she would be unable to send a large force to America if a European war seemed imminent and that force were needed to defend the homeland. On the other, if she did not act swiftly and decisively to restore her authority, the colonial disturbance would provide an inviting means by which an enemy could, in aiding the colonies, lower British prestige in Europe, hinder her commerce, and perhaps, if the colonies seemed strong enough, join them in open alliance against the mother country.

The year 1775 was one of superficial calm and underlying tension in Britain's relations with France and Spain. In the Seven Year's War France had lost not only her major American possessions but her place of preeminence on the Continent as well.¹ The extent to which her influence in Continental affairs had declined was illustrated in 1772, when Austria, Russia and Prussia partitioned Poland without

¹ Edward S. Corwin, French Policy and the American Alliance of 1778 (Hamden, Conn., 1962), 37-38.

the consent or even the knowledge of the French.² After the calamitous Treaty of Paris in 1763, the Duc de Choiseul, Louis XV's Foreign Minister from 1758 to 1770, set as a main goal of his foreign policy the recovery of French prestige and influence in European affairs. Implicit in this idea was the necessity that British power be reduced, and he intended to bring about France's resurgence at England's expense wherever possible.³ On May 10, 1774, Louis XVI acceded to the throne and two weeks later he appointed the Comte de Vergennes as his Foreign Minister. Though the scepter and the Foreign Ministry had changed hands, Choiseul's basic policy remained--the recovery of French prestige in Europe, wherever possible at the expense of England.⁴

Since 1761, the Bourbon thrones of France and Spain had been united in an offensive and defensive alliance, the Family Compact; Charles III, the King of Spain, was the uncle of the new French king.⁵ While French desires to diminish English power stemmed primarily from the outcome of the Seven Year's War, Anglo-Spanish interests collided as a result of several additional factors. With the fall of

2

Ibid., 45.

3

Ibid., 38-39; John Fraser Ramsey, Anglo-French Relations, 1763-70, A Study of Choiseul's Foreign Policy (Berkeley, 1939), 232.

4

John J. Meng, The Comte De Vergennes: European Phases of His American Diplomacy (1774-1780) (Washington, 1932), 31, 33, 38-39.

5

Ibid., 24, 42.

the French colonial empire, Spain and Britain had been left as the major land holders in the Western Hemisphere and they frequently clashed in that area. Their most important altercations occurred in 1764 over the rights of British logwood cutters in Honduras and in 1770 over conflicting claims to the Falkland Islands.⁶ In addition, English possession of Gibraltar, which had been captured by an Anglo-Dutch force in 1704 during the War of the Spanish Succession and ceded to the British by the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, rankled in Anglo-Spanish relations.⁷ Portugal added still another area of opposing interest. One of Charles III's greatest ambitions was the conquest of Portugal and the establishment of his rule over the entire Iberian Peninsula. He was forestalled in the pursuit of this goal, however, by an Anglo-Portuguese alliance, the Methuen Treaty, that had been in existence since 1703.⁸ Although maintaining peace in Iberia, Spain and Portugal had come to blows in January 1774, in Banda Oriental (Uruguay), an area over which both nations claimed sovereignty. When news of the clash reached Madrid in July, the Spanish government had dispatched large numbers of troops to the garrison towns on the Portuguese

⁶ Vera Lee Brown, Anglo-Spanish Relations in America in the Closing Years of the Colonial Era (1763-1774) (Baltimore, 1923), 358-67, 387-445.

⁷ Stetson Conn, Gibraltar in British Diplomacy in the Eighteenth Century (New Haven, 1942), 1-27.

⁸ Vera Lee Brown, "Studies in the History of Spain in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century," in Smith College Studies in History, XV (October 1929 - January 1930), 64.

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frontier.

While France was the greater threat to Britain, Spain was by no means to be discounted, and the danger from Spain was, if anything, more immediate because Spain already had a considerable armament in readiness.¹⁰

The ostensible reason for Spain's large force was the protection of her holdings in North Africa. In June 1773, the Emperor of Morocco had notified Charles III that he could no longer tolerate Christian settlements on the coast of his empire and in December 1774, he had laid siege to the Spanish garrison of Melilla. His actions violated a treaty the two nations had signed in 1767. With assistance from the navy, the Spanish forces maintained their position, and the Moors raised the siege in March 1775, asking that peace be reestablished on a basis of status quo ante bellum.¹¹ Although calm seemed to be returning to North Africa, Spain continued to make preparations for war--preparations far more extensive it seemed than those necessary to keep the Moors in check.

It was not expected that this armament would be directed against England, but with Spain and Portugal already at loggerheads in South America, there was a danger that it might be used against the Portuguese. If it were, under the

⁹
Ibid., 73, 75.

¹⁰
François Rousseau, Regne de Charles III D'Espagne (1759-88), II (Paris, 1907), 84; Brown, Anglo-Spanish Relations, 468-69.

¹¹
Rousseau, Regne de Charles III, II, 84-86.

present alliance system England would come to the aid of Portugal by the terms of the Methuen Treaty and France would come to the aid of Spain by the terms of the Family Compact; and a European war would result. With the colonial crisis becoming more and more serious, it was imperative that Britain avoid a European conflict. The King had expressed this wish to Lord North in the previous year when he had said that they must do everything possible to maintain peace with their neighbors while they settled their colonial problems.¹² And by March 1775, the possibility, some thought the certainty, that the Bourbons would either intervene directly in the colonial dispute or in some other way take advantage of Britain's embarrassment had already been the subject of discussion in both houses of the current session of Parliament.¹³

It was in this context of the worsening colonial situation, the ever-present fear of French intentions, war preparations in Spain, and hostility between Spain and Portugal which could result in activating the two opposing alliances, that an alarm was sounded from France.

From mid-March to late October 1775, Lord Stormont, the British ambassador to the Court of Louis XVI, was on leave in England. In his absence, Colonel Horace St. Paul, the

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King to North, 3 April 1774, in Fortescue, ed., Correspondence of George III, III, No. 1436.

¹³

Parliamentary Register (London, 1775), I, 17, 169, II, 24, 47-48.

charge d'affaires, conducted the work of the embassy and kept William Zuytlestein, fourth Earl of Rochford, the Secretary for the Southern Department, informed of events in France. In addition to reports from their official representative, the ministry received also a continuous stream of intelligence through the Secret Service. The British Secret Service functioned under the cognizance of the Admiralty, headed by John Montagu, fourth Earl of Sandwich.¹⁴ Its Continental headquarters was located at Rotterdam, and within France it had agents in Paris and at the ports of Toulon, Brest, l'Orient, and Dunkirk.¹⁵ The merchant marine also provided a source of intelligence. British ship captains were required to submit to the Admiralty reports containing news collected at each port of call and at each encounter with another vessel. These reports were evaluated by the Home Department of the Secret Service, and often contained useful information on the state of affairs in foreign ports.¹⁶

On April 3, St. Paul wrote to Rochford that there were "some machinations ... going forward in the French cabinet," and an intention to arm a number of ships "under the pretence of a fleet of exercise." He had heard, he added, that the

¹⁴ Francis P. Renault, Le Secret Service de l'Amirauté Britannique; au Temps de la Guerre d'Amérique 1776-1783 (Paris, 1936), 35.

¹⁵ Ibid., 55-65, 68.

¹⁶ Ibid., 44.

officers of the French Navy had been ordered to their stations.¹⁷ In another letter, two days later, he commented on the war preparations that were continuing in Spain, too great he thought to be intended solely against the Moors, and he speculated on the possibility of some combined operation by the Bourbons. In a train of thought not at all new to the ministry he observed: "France and Spain have not as yet forgotten their humiliations of the last war, and ... they will avail themselves of the first fair opportunity of taking their revenge."¹⁸

On April 17, St. Paul sent by special messenger two dispatches to confirm his earlier reports. The French were arming and provisioning nineteen ships of the line at Brest in addition to a separate fleet of twelve frigates and corvettes that had been announced as a fleet of exercise. The officers of the French Navy had been put on alert and the destination of the new fleet was being kept a profound secret. Perhaps, he speculated, they intended to act in some combination with Spain, or "may they not have America in view, and think this the moment to profit of our misunderstanding with our Colonies and attack us there?" "Everything bears the appearance of inimical intentions in this Court," he added, and he urged that Britain lose no time in preparing herself to meet this new threat of war.¹⁹ St. Paul's letters

¹⁷ St. Paul to Rochford, 3 April 1775, in George G. Butler, ed., Colonel St. Paul of Ewart, Soldier and Diplomat, II (London, 1911), 44-45.

¹⁸ St. Paul to Rochford, 5 April 1775, in ibid., 45-48.

¹⁹ St. Paul to Rochford, 17 April 1775 (two letters), in ibid., 78-81, 81-83.

corroborated an intelligence report Lord Sandwich had received earlier stating that there was "a very considerable armament at Brest."²⁰

In his dispatches of the seventeenth (which arrived in London on April 20), St. Paul mentioned also that he had heard that thirty or forty Spanish merchant ships had been pressed into service by the King of Spain for use as transports and that the Spanish government had purchased great quantities of gunpowder in Holland.²¹ Whether Spain was intending to resume the North African war, to move against Portugal, or to act in some combination with France, was of the utmost importance. On April 21, Rochford wrote to Lord Grantham, the British ambassador at Madrid, informing him of the news from France. If Spain continued to be armed, even though peace was established in North Africa, he said, it would be greatly alarming to England, especially in light of the activity at Brest. He asked Grantham to pay the strictest attention to everything happening at Madrid and to try to discover if there were "concerted plans" between Spain and France.²²

At the same time Rochford wrote also to St. Paul, at the King's direction, requesting that he inform Vergennes

²⁰
Sandwich to Rochford, 14 April 1775, in Roberts, ed., Calendar of Home Office Papers of the Reign of George III, IV, No. 1224.

²¹
St. Paul to Rochford, 17 April 1775, in Butler, ed., St. Paul, II, 78-81.

²²
Rochford to Grantham, 21 April 1775, in ibid., 93-95.

that England could not sit idly by while her neighbors were making "warlike preparations," without receiving assurances that the armaments were not intended against herself or her allies.²³

Before this letter was sent, however, another arrived from St. Paul completely contradicting his earlier letters. His intelligence sources had been incorrect, he said, and while it was true that a small fleet of frigates and corvettes was being made ready for a fleet of evolutions, it was not true that the French were arming nineteen ships of the line. The Minister of Marine, Sartine, had ordered a verification of the inventory left by his predecessor of the articles in the arsenal at Brest. All the equipment had been brought out on the wharves to be examined and this action had occasioned the report of a considerable armament in progress there. St. Paul acknowledged that it was somewhat humiliating to say one thing one day and the opposite the next, but added that in his profession "events of this kind must sometimes happen." "My dispatch yesterday threatened a storm, this day breathes peace," he commented.²⁴ When the King heard the news he wrote to Lord North expressing his joy that the threat of war had turned out to be a false alarm and complimenting himself on not having taken any precipitate actions.²⁵

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Rochford to St. Paul, 21 April 1775, in ibid., 92-93.

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St. Paul to Rochford, 18 April 1775, in ibid., 83-86.

²⁵

King to North, 21 April 1775, in Fortescue, ed., Correspondence of George III, III, No. 1646.

St. Paul's report was confirmed by intelligence Lord Sandwich received and passed on to Rochford on April 28 stating that French operations were now confined solely to fitting out a number of frigates for a fleet of exercise.²⁶ On May 3, St. Paul wrote that Vergennes had assured him that the only naval armament in progress was that connected with the small fleet of exercise being fitted out at Brest.²⁷

The threat of a large increase in French naval strength had receded, for the immediate future at least, but Rochford was still unsure of Spanish intentions and still fearful of the possibility of a Franco-Spanish combination. He felt that if France should arm in spite of Vergennes's assurances to the contrary, it would be as a result of the insistence of Spain. He cautioned St. Paul to keep a watchful eye on the conduct of Count D'Aranda, the Spanish ambassador to France, to see if he went to Versailles more often than usual and especially to discover if he had been having any conferences with French naval officials. "Spare neither pains nor money to get at his secret," Rochford told him.²⁸ Grantham's next dispatch from Spain brought favorable news. The Spanish arms build-up was indeed continuing, he reported, but he assured Rochford that it was intended to be used

²⁶ Sandwich to Rochford, 28 April 1775, in Roberts, ed., Calendar of Home Office Papers of the Reign of George III, IV, No. 1224.

²⁷ St. Paul to Rochford, 3 May 1775, in Butler, ed., St. Paul, II, 109-112.

²⁸ Rochford to St. Paul, 12 May 1775, in ibid., 127-28.

against the Moors. Spain had refused their offers of peace and intended to continue the war.²⁹

Throughout May and June there was little news from France, and St. Paul wrote several times that he had little to report.³⁰ Lord Sandwich informed Rochford that the French fleet of exercise was ready for sea but that no new orders had been received at Brest, and on June 21 St. Paul wrote that everything was very quiet in all the French ports.³¹ On the twenty-eighth he wrote again that there was little to report. He closed his letter by informing Rochford that a recent rumour of impending changes in the French ministry were unfounded and that none were likely to occur, "which gives me great pleasure," he added, "for a weaker Ministry than the present cannot be formed, and I am persuaded that at this moment they have not any plan whatever."³²

While calm seemed to have returned, the April war scare had emphasized the tenuous state of Anglo-French relations. St. Paul may have thought the French ministry weak and indecisive, but the King and his ministers felt, nevertheless, that it was imperative that relations with France be

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Grantham to Rochford, 8 May 1775, in ibid., 120-21.

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St. Paul to Rochford, 17 May, 24 May, and 7 June 1775, in ibid., 136-37, 141-42, 157-59.

³¹

Sandwich to Rochford, 7 June 1775, in Roberts, ed., Calendar of Home Office Papers of the Reign of George III, IV, No. 1224; St. Paul to Rochford, 21 June 1775, in Butler, ed., St. Paul, II, 168-71.

³²

St. Paul to Rochford, 28 June 1775, in Butler, ed., St. Paul, II, 194-97.

maintained on as friendly a level as possible during this time of troubles with the colonies. Their attitude was pointed up by the Plunkett Affair. A young British citizen named Rose Plunkett was confined by her brother, against her will, in a convent in France. The abbess of the convent refused to release her without an order from her brother, and her brother, who had since returned to England, refused to give the order. The young lady applied to St. Paul and he took up the matter with Vergennes. The Foreign Minister stalled for two months, giving evasive answers to St. Paul's repeated requests. Finally, becoming irritated, St. Paul wrote a peremptory demand for the lady's release. Vergennes, offended at his tone, protested to Rochford through the French ambassador in London. As a result, St. Paul received a letter from Rochford directing him, at the King's command, to assure Vergennes that he had not intended to offend him. Rochford added:

I cannot help observing that your letter has rather some expressions that would be very proper if we were upon the qui vive with the French Court, but their conduct to us at this moment requires a little moderation on our side.... 33

The possibility of French interference in the American disturbance assumed greater proportions when St. Paul wrote on July 12:

I have reason to believe that the French have contrived to send great quantities of merchandize

33
Rochford to St. Paul, 7 July 1775, in ibid., 201-03. Relevant correspondence on the Plunkett Affair is contained in ibid., 171-94.

to America, and am assured from good authority that they have already furnished to the value of 32 millions of livres which is safe arrived.³⁴

At about the same time that Rochford received St. Paul's dispatch, the Admiralty Office forwarded to him two letters from the Leeward Islands stating that arrangements had been made for the rebels to receive cannon and other implements of war from St. Croix.³⁵ Soon after, a letter arrived from St. Paul confirming an earlier intelligence report that six battalions of French infantry were to be sent to the West Indies.³⁶ Although St. Paul said these troops were to relieve those already there, Rochford asked him to make sure they were being sent as a relief and not a reinforcement.³⁷ Shortly after the report of French troop movements was confirmed, an intelligence report was received of the American rebels taking on French arms, ammunition, and supplies at Cape Nicola Mole, Hispaniola.³⁸

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St. Paul to Rochford, 12 July 1775, in ibid., 204-06.

³⁵

Lords of Admiralty to Rochford, 15 July 1775, in Roberts, ed., Calendar of Home Office Papers of the Reign of George III, IV, No. 1042.

³⁶

"Intelligence" June, 1775, in Dartmouth Manuscripts, II, 323; St. Paul to Rochford, 19 July 1775, in Butler, ed., St. Paul, II, 208-11.

³⁷

Rochford to St. Paul, 28 July 1775, in Butler, ed., St. Paul, II, 227-28. St. Paul answered that the troops were sent as a relief. St. Paul to Rochford, 2 August 1775, 246-49.

³⁸

"Paper in the Hand of John Robinson," 28 July 1775, in Dartmouth Manuscripts, II, 339; Philip Stevens to John Pownall, 3 August 1775, in Roberts, ed., Calendar of Home Office Papers of the Reign of George III, IV, No. 1074.

In addition to all this French activity, there was still the problem of Spain looming on the horizon. In mid-May the Spanish armament had been the subject of discussion in both houses of Parliament. The fear had been expressed that it was too large to be intended only for an expedition against the Moors, and that perhaps it would move against Portugal or Gibraltar. In the House of Lords, Rochford had replied to these speculations by saying that as far as he knew Spain's objective was North Africa.³⁹ The Southern Secretary was correct. The Spanish fleet, whose destination had been the subject of so much speculation and worry, arrived in the Bay of Algiers on July 1, and to the great surprise of Europe, Spain was defeated in its attack on the Moors. On July 17, two days after the first news of the defeat had reached Madrid, Grantham wrote to Rochford to send "...an account of the landing of the Spanish army near Algiers, and...to add that of their immediate unexpected repulse, and reembarkation, and of their being hourly⁴⁰ expected in the first Spanish port they can reach." The

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Parliamentary Register, I, 486, II, 141-45.

⁴⁰

Grantham to Rochford, 17 July 1775, in Butler, ed., St. Paul, II, 216-21. In order that the news of the Spanish defeat would reach London as fast as possible, Lord Grantham sent his account of it by a special messenger to the British embassy at Paris, and St. Paul sent it on immediately to London by another special messenger. Grantham's letter arrived in Paris on July 25 and St. Paul knew of the outcome of the Spanish expedition before the French court or even the Spanish ambassador had learned of it. St. Paul to Grantham, 29 July 1775, 222. The messenger had arrived in London with the news by 28 July. Rochford to St. Paul, 28 July 1775, 227-28.

immediate threat from Spain had been removed.

On August 6, a major intelligence report was received. Two French officers who had recently returned from America and were lodging in a London hotel had been "watched and pumped by a discreet and proper person employed by Lord Rochford."⁴¹ In addition to the information they supplied about the rebels' strength and equipment, the Frenchmen also had some comments on the foreign assistance that the Americans were receiving. There were, they said, at least two hundred French acting as artillerists and engineers in the rebel army, and more were expected to arrive from time to time. They added that during their stay in America seven French ships had entered various rebel ports to deliver ammunition and the rebels were expecting more from the French and Spanish islands in the Caribbean. France and Spain were standing by waiting, the officers said, for the day when the rebels would ask for their help. Rochford's spy also reported that one of the officers, Bonvouloir, had held two conferences with Guines, the French ambassador to England, and that the ambassador "had made him great offers of service," although the spy did not mention exactly what the offers contained. At the conclusion of his report, Lord Rochford's informant gave as his own opinion that the Frenchmen were in the pay of the rebels and that they had come to Europe with proposals to the courts of Spain and

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Pownall to Dartmouth, 5 August 1775, in Dartmouth Manuscripts, II, 349.

France or to execute some other commission on behalf of
 the Americans.⁴²

While French intercourse with the rebels seemed to be increasing, there were as yet no overt acts on the part of the government. During August, St. Paul's dispatches and the intelligence reports from the Admiralty indicated that all was calm in the French ports and that nothing of note had occurred at Versailles.⁴³ On September 15, however, Rochford informed St. Paul that he had received a report that the rebels had been sent thirty tons of gunpowder by the Governor of St. Domingo. He added:

If private men for the sake of profit had been engaged in such a business, it would not have caused the same sensation here, but it must easily occur to M. de Vergennes that when a French Governor acts in that manner, it cannot but convey very different ideas....⁴⁴

In reply to St. Paul's protest about this act of a French official, Vergennes denied the possibility that such a shipment could have been made. The officials in all the French possessions had been ordered not to give any assistance whatever to the rebels, the Foreign Minister

⁴² "Intelligence Report," Received 6 August 1775, n.d., in Stevens, ed., Facsimiles, No. 1301. (Submitted to Lords Suffolk, North, and Dartmouth.)

⁴³ St. Paul to Rochford, 16 August and 30 August 1775, in Butler, ed., St. Paul, II, 258-61, 272-75; Sandwich to Rochford, 9 August 1775, in Roberts, ed., Calendar of Home Office Papers of the Reign of George III, IV, No. 1224.

⁴⁴ Rochford to St. Paul, 15 September 1775, in Butler, ed., St. Paul, II, 283-84.

⁴⁵ said. Before Rochford received St. Paul's answer on the gunpowder issue, he wrote to him again about the French troops destined for the West Indies. He had heard, he wrote, that ten battalions were to be sent rather than six as St. Paul had earlier informed him, and, to add to the confusion, the French ambassador, Count de Guines, had said only three were being sent. He asked St. Paul to collect all the information he could get on the troop movement.⁴⁶ In reply, St. Paul assured him that only six battalions were involved, and that they were intended as reliefs, not reinforcements. He added that three of them had already been embarked and that the other three were scheduled to leave in about five weeks.⁴⁷

The rebellion in America appeared to be providing unlimited opportunities for French merchants. Earlier in the summer it had been learned that a number of Bordeaux merchants had formed a company for trading with the British colonies, and later a report had been received of two large French ships heavily loaded with military stores setting out from Cherbourg and bound for North America.⁴⁸ Rochford

⁴⁵ St. Paul to Rochford, 20 September 1775, in ibid., 286-88.

⁴⁶ Rochford to St. Paul, 22 September 1775, in ibid., 288-89.

⁴⁷ St. Paul to Rochford, 27 September 1775, in ibid., 289-92.

⁴⁸ Edward Bridgen to John Pownall, 27 July 1775, Robert Tomlinson to Lord _____, 16 August 1775, in Roberts, ed., Calendar of Home Office Papers of the Reign of George III, IV, No. 1059, No. 1092.

complained to St. Paul that it was impossible to believe that the French government was not aware of this ever-increasing illicit trade with the rebels and that large quantities of arms and ammunition were being sent to North America from France and the French West Indies. "We know for certain," Rochford commented, "the particulars of several cargoes loaded at Bayonne, St. Malo, and particularly at Bordeaux, from whence a ship was to sail about the beginning of this month with 300 casks of gunpowder and 5000 musquets with bayonets compleat for account of Americans...." Also, the Americans were carrying their products directly to France and investing the money they received there in arms and ammunition.⁴⁹

⁴⁹
Rochford to St. Paul, 29 September 1775, in Butler, ed., St. Paul, II, 292-93.

CHAPTER IV

LORD DARTMOUTH AND THE "HAWKS"

Along with the problems of troop procurement and the tenuous relations with the Bourbon powers, Lord North also faced a domestic political problem. His major difficulties in that respect did not stem from the Whig opposition which, although vocal in debate, was itself divided. The main opposition groups consisted of the Rockingham confederation, the supporters of Chatham and the City radicals. They were small in number and differed among each other, further lessening their effectiveness.¹ North's difficulties came rather from the opposite direction--from those in the government who were pressing for a policy of vigorous coercive measures against the rebels. They were important politicians whose support was necessary and they wished to see swift and decisive action taken to quell the revolt. The problem was complicated by the fact that Lord Dartmouth, who as American Secretary should have been the initiator of American policy, was in favor of a more conciliatory approach. While the coercionists were thinking in terms of forcing colonial sub-

¹
Donoghue, British Politics and the American Revolution, 127-46; G. H. Guttridge, "The Whig Opposition in England During the American Revolution," The Journal of Modern History, VI (March 1934), 1-13.

mission, he was hoping for a negotiated settlement arrived at by a commission.

The idea of appointing a commissioner to negotiate a settlement with the Americans was presented to the cabinet by Lord Dartmouth late in 1774. John Pownall drew up a bill which, in its final form, proposed that a high commissioner with wide authority be appointed and that he meet with an assembly of delegates from all the North American colonies. Pownall's plan, however, "carried so much the appearance of an American Parliament" that the cabinet refused to accept it, "...lest the Colonies...should make the regular convoking of such an Assembly the object of their demands, and thus become formed into a systematic combination which must lead to Empire."²

Nor was the King particularly interested at this point in a peace commission. When Lord North mentioned the subject in December, the King answered that he did not favor the idea because the Americans might see it as a sign of fear, and he did not "think it likely to make them reasonable."³ Lord North repeated the King's thoughts to Lord Dartmouth, saying "too great an appearance of lenity and concession"⁴ would have bad effects. The King was hoping that Sir Jeffrey

² "Proceedings in Relation to the American Colonies," 1774-75, written by William Knox, in Various Collections, VI, 258.

³ King to North, 15 December 1775, in Fortescue, ed., Correspondence of George III, III, No. 1563.

⁴ North to Dartmouth, [December 1774], in Dartmouth Manuscripts, II, 251.

Amherst could be persuaded to take command of the British forces in America. Amherst was to be given also the authority to accept peace proposals from the various colonies. They needed, the King wrote to Dartmouth, "some-one in America, unattached to any particular Province, ready to transmit the sentiments of those who wish well to English government," and Amherst in this dual role of commander-commissioner would "be a good succedanium to your original idea of a Commission."⁵ Amherst, however, refused to go to America. The King then wrote to Dartmouth at the end of January saying they "must do what is next best," leave Gage in command, send the best generals they could find to assist him, and give him "private instructions to insinuate" to any favorably disposed colonies "what the other would have been entrusted to negotiate."⁶

Since early December, however, some unofficial negotiations had already been in progress under the watchful eye of Lord Dartmouth. At the instigation of Thomas Villiers, first Baron Hyde, the chancellor of the duchy of Lancaster and a former member of Britain's diplomatic corps, Benjamin Franklin had met with two eminent London Quakers, David Barclay, a wealthy banker and merchant, and Dr. John Fothergill, Lord Dartmouth's physician, in an attempt to work out a basis for

⁵
King to Dartmouth, 28 January 1775, in Historical Manuscripts Commission, Thirteenth Report, Appendix, Part IV, The Manuscripts of the Earl of Dartmouth, Supplementary Report (London, 1892), 501.

⁶
King to Dartmouth, 31 January 1775, in ibid., 501.

settlement. On Christmas day, three weeks after his first meeting with Barclay and Fothergill, Franklin had the first of several conversations with Lord Howe for the same purpose. In both series of negotiations the idea of sending a commissioner was touched upon. In the meetings with Fothergill and Barclay, Franklin suggested either Howe or Hyde. Lord Howe suggested himself, adding the hope that Franklin would join him, "in some Shape or other, as a Friend, an Assistant or Secretary."⁷

By February 20, both series of meetings had ended with no positive results. Throughout the spring and summer the idea of appointing a peace commissioner receded into the background as the King and his ministers concerned themselves more and more with strengthening the Army and watching closely the movements of France and Spain. In June word of the outbreak of hostilities arrived, the cabinet voted to send troops from Britain, Ireland, Canada, Gibraltar, and Minorca, and the negotiations with Russia were begun. July brought word of Bunker Hill and the cabinet voted to have an army of 20,000 men in America by the following spring. Nevertheless, Lord Dartmouth continued to believe that "something should be held out to the Colonies."⁸ In August

⁷ "An Account of Negotiations in London for Effecting a Reconciliation Between Great Britain and the American Colonies," 22 March 1775, written by Benjamin Franklin, in Albert Henry Smyth, ed., The Writings of Benjamin Franklin, VI (New York, 1907), 318-99, 385.

⁸ "Proceedings in Relation to the American Colonies," 1774-75, written by William Knox, in Various Collections, VI, 258.

he wrote to Knox:

...tho' both sides will have a great way to go before they will be within the sound of each other's voice, it is not impossible that they may come near enough to shake hands at last.⁹

Although the American Secretary favored conciliatory moves, there was within the ministry a group of men who were advocating a policy of vigorous coercive measures. The Secretary for the Northern Department, Lord Suffolk, was perhaps foremost among those who pressed for a hard line. As one of the two "ancient" secretaries, Suffolk's opinion held great weight in cabinet councils. The American Secretaryship had been in existence for only seven years, and the boundaries of authority between it and the two "ancient" secretaryships -- Northern and Southern -- were not firmly laid down. The holders of the two older offices frequently interfered in matters that were actually the concern of the American Secretary. During both his terms as Southern and as Northern Secretary, Suffolk was particularly active in interfering in American affairs.¹⁰ In 1772, while he was Southern Secretary, he went so far as to recommend to the King measures which, had they been put into effect, would have abolished the American Secretaryship in all but name and transferred all its essential activities

⁹ Dartmouth to Knox, 6 August 1775, in ibid., 120.

¹⁰ Margaret M. Spector, The American Department of the British Government (New York, 1940), 66-76.

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to the Southern Department. Also, Lord Dartmouth's generally conciliatory and passive temperament allowed Suffolk a larger role in American affairs than he would have been able to assume had the post been held by a person of more vigor, determined to uphold the prerogatives of the office,¹² such as, for example, Lord Sandwich or Suffolk himself. In July 1773, and again in October 1775, shortly before the Southern expedition was set on foot, John Pownall complained to William Knox, his co-undersecretary in the American Department, that Suffolk seemed to be conducting most of the American affairs, and that Eden, Suffolk's undersecretary, knew more of what was happening in relation to America than he (Pownall) did.¹³ Suffolk's opinion was important in two ways. He was first of all, like the other coercionists in the cabinet, an important politician whose support North needed, and secondly, he had, through his own initiative and vigor, come to take an increasingly important role in the formulation of American policy.

Late in 1774 Suffolk recommended to Dartmouth that Gage be replaced and added: "It is idle to do things by halves, and never was there a busyness of a more serious nature that required a more vigorous exertion, and determined

¹¹ Suffolk to King, [7 August 1772], in Fortescue, ed., Correspondence of George III, II, No. 1112.

¹² Spector, American Department, 70.

¹³ Pownall to Knox, 23 July 1773 and 10 October 1775, in Various Collections, VI, 110, 122.

firmness."¹⁴ On January 20, 1775, speaking in the House of Lords, he declared that he was firmly convinced of the need for coercive measures and that it was "high time for the mother country to exert her authority, or for ever relinquish it." Great Britain, he added, "should never relax till America confessed her supremacy."¹⁵ After the news of the outbreak of hostilities reached London, Suffolk sounded almost elated. He wrote to Eden: "Now is the Time for men of real Talent, Spirit and Honour to appear gloriously!"¹⁶ In July he wrote again to Eden telling him the government must not "hesitate an instant to exert every nerve to crush the Rebellion."¹⁷

The opinion of William Eden, Suffolk's undersecretary, also held great weight in the ministry, even though he was not a member of the cabinet. Eden, like his superior, was pressing for strong measures. In September 1775, he went so far as to advise Lord North to remove the Secretary at War, Lord Barrington, because of Barrington's frequent, gloomy pronouncements on what he considered the impossibility of the ministry's projected troop buildup.¹⁸ Eden's pivotal

¹⁴ Suffolk to Dartmouth, 22 November 1775, in Historical Manuscripts Commission, Eleventh Report, Appendix, Part V, The Manuscripts of the Earl of Dartmouth, I (London, 1887), 370.

¹⁵ Parliamentary Register, II, 10-11.

¹⁶ Suffolk to Eden, 20 June 1775, in Stevens, ed., Facsimiles, No. 851.

¹⁷ Suffolk to Eden, July 1775; in ibid., No. 455.

¹⁸ Eden to North, 13 September 1775, in ibid., No. 853.

role in American affairs can be seen also in the fact that he, rather than Pownall or Knox, drafted the King's speech for the opening of Parliament and consulted with Lord Chief Justice Mansfield in putting it into its final form, even though the speech was concerned solely with the government's plans for putting down the rebellion.¹⁹

The Earl of Rochford, Secretary for the Southern Department, and Granville Leveson-Gower, second Earl Gower, President of the Council, also wanted vigorous and prompt coercive measures. In December 1774, Rochford had complained to Sandwich that Dartmouth had not presented to the cabinet any plan for quelling the disturbance. "I should think it only duty so to do, was there any dispute with France or Spain. I have been free enough to tell him so and press him to do it," he wrote.²⁰ Instead Dartmouth had brought forward Pownall's proposal for a peace commissioner which had met with rejection from the cabinet. In the House of Lords both Gower and Rochford expressed themselves in favor of "firm and decisive measures" against the rebels and Gower added that Britain must "exert and strain every nerve to make them submit."²¹

The Earl of Sandwich, First Lord of the Admiralty, also

¹⁹ "Minutes for the King's Speech to Parliament," n.d., in the hand of William Eden, in *ibid.*, No. 856; Eden to Germain, 3 October 1775, in Stopford-Sackville Manuscripts, II, 10-11.

²⁰ Rochford to Sandwich, 10 December 1774, in Barnes and Owen, eds., Sandwich Papers, I, 55-56.

²¹ Parliamentary Register, II, 15-16.

advocated a tough line. His position, as well as the split in the cabinet between Dartmouth and the war party, can best be seen in his response to Chatham's "Provisional Act for Settling the Troubles in America." After the bill had been read, Lord Dartmouth suggested that it be tabled for further consideration. But "the Earl of Sandwich rose, and instantly changed this appearance of concession on the part of administration." He made a spirited attack on the bill, "insisted that to concede was at once to give up the point," and moved that the bill be rejected without consideration. In the debate on his motion, Sandwich was supported by Gower who "declared in the most unreserved terms, for reducing the Americans to submission." Sandwich's motion was carried 61 to 32.²²

Lord George Germain was to replace Lord Dartmouth as American Secretary on November 10, 1775. Although he was not a member of the cabinet in the summer of that year, he was kept well informed of the government's actions through the correspondence he carried on with Suffolk and Eden. As well as receiving reports of government policy, he also offered his opinion in great detail on the methods he thought the government should follow in putting down the rebellion.²³

²²

Ibid., 17-33.

²³

Gerald Saxon Brown, The American Secretary: The Colonial Policy of Lord George Germain, 1775-1778 (Ann Arbor, /c1963/), 28; Germain to Suffolk, 16 or 17 June 1775, in Stopford-Sackville Manuscripts, II, 2-3.

By early October the government's military plans for America seemed to be working out satisfactorily. Gage and Graves had been replaced by men who, it was hoped, would act with more vigor, France seemed calm, Spain was recovering from the Algerian fiasco, and the King had accepted Catherine's "gracious offer" of 20,000 troops. Her not-so-gracious refusal was yet to come. With the prospect of having a large force in America under a more vigorous commander, the idea of a peace commissioner, negotiating from a position of strength, seemed more acceptable. On October 3, Eden wrote to Germain at Lord North's request, outlining the plan and enclosing a draft of the King's speech to be delivered at the opening of Parliament on the twenty-sixth which would contain the proposal. With the large force scheduled to be sent to America, "it is not unreasonable to look towards a good conclusion of the contest," he wrote, and Lord North:

...thought this would be best accelerated by giving a commission to some proper person with ample powers to settle everything in dispute with any Colony which either fear, interest, fickleness or duty, might bring to submission. ... His lordship, however, determined never to mention the thought till he could see a reasonable certainty of collecting a force sufficient to shew that he was proceeding on a system equal to the emergency, and not either holding out false lights of conciliation to this country, or seeking for a subterfuge from the difficulty.²⁴

The commissioner, Eden added, would have "authority to supersede all governors on the spot, to convene representa-

24

Eden to Germain, 3 October 1775, in Stopford-Sackville Manuscripts, II, 10-11.

tives, to settle a form of taxation..., to make some corrections in some of the Governments, to grant pardons, to open ports, &c., &c., &c." With Governor Martin's letters in mind, no doubt, he observed that the probability that the Southern colonies would take advantage of such a commission was "obvious." Eden concluded his letter with a request from Lord North that Germain undertake the commission. He was, North had said, "the fittest man in the kingdom" for the job.²⁵ Germain refused the offer, but the proposal of the peace commission remained in the King's speech. After Germain's refusal, however, it was decided that the role would be divided among several persons rather than being vested in a single commissioner.²⁶

By October 15, it was apparent that the expected 20,000 Russian troops would not be forthcoming. In his letter to the King proposing the Southern expedition, Lord North observed that some of those who advocated strong measures were "discontented & out of humour because they conceive that we do not mean to carry on this war with the spirit &

²⁵ Ibid.; One must question either Lord North's judgment of Germain or his conception of the role of a peace commissioner. Germain was as much a coercionist as Suffolk. Brown, American Secretary, 29. In June he had written that he thought the Administration should "adopt real offensive measures or...resign their offices." Germain to General Irwin, 29 June 1775, in Stopford-Sackville Manuscripts, I (London, 1904), 135.

²⁶ Germain to Eden, n.d., written between 3 and 21 October 1775, unpublished letter cited in Brown, American Secretary, 29, 191; Eden to Germain, 21/27 October 1775, in Stopford-Sackville Manuscripts, II, 11-12, Parliamentary Register, III (London, 1776), 1-4.

activity that it requires." They would not accept the proposal of a peace commission "unless they see that we are trying every possible method of collecting a large force; & unless they think we are determined to use it in such a manner as is likely to bring matters in North America to a speedy decision."²⁷ With the Russians no longer available, and the Southern governors emphasizing the strength of the loyalists in their provinces, an expedition to support them seemed a logical way to content the "hawks" and still keep the peace commission.

²⁷

North to King, 15 October 1775, in Fortescue, ed., Correspondence of George III, III, No. 1724.

CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

The idea of using a local force loyal to the invader was not new to British military thought. The British military historian, Sir John Fortescue, observed that it was a treacherous and perilous basis upon which to plan a campaign, but that nevertheless the British were strongly attached to the principle. He suggested that their pre-occupation with the idea dated from the one time it was done successfully--at the invasion of William III in 1688.¹

The idea of a move to the southward had been in the background of the ministry's thinking for some time. In June 1775, General Burgoyne had written that the force at Boston numbered approximately 5,200. That number, he said, was more than enough for the defense of the city, but not adequate for offensive tactics there. He suggested that the ministry use 3,000 troops for a holding operation at Boston and employ the remainder in an expedition "to touch and try the temper and Strength of Places by degrees to the Southward." An expedition of this sort, he thought, would put

¹
The Hon. J. W. Fortescue, A History of the British Army, III (London, 1902), 168.

the whole continent in a state of alarm.² In August, he recommended that the British force be moved from Boston to New York, "From whence," he added, "Winter Expeditions might go forward, to the Southern Colonys."³

On August 2, Lord Dartmouth wrote to General Gage the last letters he was to receive as commander of the British forces in America. Dartmouth set forth for the General's consideration several alternative plans of action that might be pursued. The Army might remain in Boston and continue the next campaign in New England, move to New York and conduct operations in the Hudson River valley, move temporarily to Halifax and Quebec, or perhaps embark part of the forces on transports and "make an impression in other places."⁴ On September 5, Dartmouth sent to General Howe the King's commands that he move the Army from Boston to New York before the winter if possible. Dartmouth added that one of the main advantages of moving to New York would be "the opportunity it may afford of employing a part of your Forces during the open part of the Winter in some sudden and unexpected enterprise to the Southward...."⁵

²
"Abstract of a letter from Major-General Burgoyne," [25 June 1775], in Fortescue, ed., Correspondence of George III, III, No. 1670.

³
"Extract of a letter from Major-General Burgoyne," 10 August 1775, in ibid., No. 1693.

⁴
Dartmouth to Gage, 2 August 1775, C.O. 5/765/417-25.

⁵
Dartmouth to Howe, 5 September 1775, in Sparks Manuscripts, No. 45, I, 10-11.

By September 15, the ministry had formulated the plan whereby a large arms shipment from England combined with a battalion of troops from Boston was to be sent to North Carolina, and General Howe and Governor Martin had been informed accordingly. Ten days later, John Pownall, writing in Lord Dartmouth's absence, sent to General Howe extracts of the letter Sir William Campbell had written on July 19 and 20, in which the Governor had discussed the widespread⁶ loyalist sentiment in the South Carolina backcountry. This loyalist support in South Carolina, Pownall observed, "may perhaps be a circumstance well deserving attention in any plan you may have in view for employing a part of your Force during the open part of the Winter in an Expedition to the Southward."⁷

Thus by mid-October the ministry saw the overall picture of the South in the following light: Lord Dunmore on board the Fowey had repeatedly declared he could reestablish his authority in Virginia if he were supplied with several hundred fully-equipped troops. In North Carolina, Martin had announced that he could collect immediately three thousand Highland immigrants and that he had the support of the backcountry from which he felt he could gather a force in excess of thirty thousand. While the Governor's estimates of loyalist strength might be unduly optimistic, North

⁶
Campbell to Dartmouth, 19 and 20 July 1775, C.O. 5/396/
168-71

⁷
Pownall to Howe, 25 September 1775, in Sparks Manuscripts, No. 45, I, 19.

Carolina was known to have a large number of new Highland immigrants who might be expected to remain loyal to the homeland they had only recently left. Martin had received some proofs of backcountry loyalty in the petitions he had forwarded to Whitehall earlier in the year, and the Royal pardon that had been granted to the Regulators in July might also be expected to re-enforce the loyalist sentiment there. In South Carolina too the backcountry seemed to be a reservoir of loyalist support. Campbell had talked with several emissaries from the backcountry who assured him of the loyalty of great numbers in their area, and one of the leaders of the loyalist element there had assured the Governor of the loyalty of about four thousand. Both Campbell and Wright had said the defection of Georgia had been brought about by South Carolina, and Wright had added that if South Carolina could be kept contained, Georgia could be subdued by five hundred troops.

All of the governors had intimated at one time or another that the rebels' strength was not as great as it appeared on the surface and that many people would support the King if they could do so without fear of reprisal. At the present, with no protection, their only recourse was to remain silent or in some cases to feign support for the rebel cause. All of the governors had emphasized a need for speed. Time was on the side of the rebels, they said, and inaction could only weaken the loyalist support. The quicker the government acted, the better would be their

chance of restoring the Southern colonies to the King.

While the Southern governors were chanting in unison about widespread loyalist support that needed only arms and a small body of regulars as the catalytic agent to set it in motion, the prospects for a significant increase in the size of the British Army appeared very dim indeed. After the news of Bunker Hill had been received, the ministry had resolved to have an army of 20,000 troops in America by the spring of 1776, and they had informed their generals in America accordingly. Yet, the Secretary at War had repeatedly said this would be impossible and predicted that no more than six thousand troops could be raised by that time. The bleak recruiting prospects had led the ministry to seek foreign troops, and Gunning's letter of August 8 seemed to insure the support of Catherine II to whatever extent the British desired. The ministry was so sure of the forthcoming Russian assistance that Dartmouth had informed General Howe on September 5 that 20,000 Russians would be on their way to America in the spring. However, when it came to putting quill to paper, the Empress demurred, citing many very valid reasons why it would be to Russia's interest to remain aloof from the conflict. Thus, by mid-October, the ministry was back where it had been before the Russian negotiations had been undertaken, with the prospect of at the most six thousand recruits available by the following spring.

Britain could not expect her embarrassment in the colonies

to go unnoticed by the Bourbon powers. If she were to become increasingly involved in North America over an extended period of time, Charles III might decide, after recovering from the Algerian fiasco, that the opportune moment for accomplishing his ambitions of aggrandizement in Iberia had arrived. He could attack Portugal with impunity if Britain were unable to come to her aid, and he might even launch an assault on Gibraltar.

France, the ancient enemy, could not be expected to ignore continuously a British predicament from which she might reap advantages. The reduction of British power was a major goal of French policy and the colonial rebellion held great potential for achieving that goal. By early autumn the French had begun investigating how they might use the dispute for their own ends. On July 28, the French ambassador in London, Count de Guines, had proposed sending an agent to America, and on August 7, Vergennes had informed him that Louis XVI agreed to the proposal.⁸ The agent's mission was to be two-fold, Vergennes said. He was to report fully the events he witnessed and the sentiments of the people with whom he spoke, and he was to assure the Americans that the French wished them well in their struggle and had no designs whatever on their lost province of Canada.

⁸
 Guines to Vergennes, 28 July 1775, in Henri Doniol, ed., Histoire de la Participation de la France a L'Etablissement des Etats-Unis D'Amerique, I (Paris, 1886), 154-55; Vergennes to Guines, 7 August 1775, in William Bell Clark, ed., Naval Documents of the American Revolution, I (Washington, 1964), 1357-58.

The French agent, Achard Bonvouloir, left London for Philadelphia on September 8.⁹

The British did not know of the mission of the French agent until November.¹⁰ They did know, however, that trade in arms, ammunition, and other supplies between French merchants and the Americans was constantly increasing. With French mercantile activity increasing, the possibility of some official act in the dispute increased as well. Two suggestions of official French activity had already been received. In August, Lord Rochford's informant had told him that one of the two French officers recently returned from America from whom he had gathered information had had two audiences with the French ambassador. The ambassador, the informant said, "had made him great offers of service."¹¹ That officer was Bonvouloir, the same man who was now returning to America as a secret agent of the French government. The other suggestion of official French activity was in the report Rochford had received in September stating that the governor of St. Domingo had supplied the rebels with thirty tons of gunpowder.

The increase in illicit trade between French merchants

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Doniol, Histoire, I, 138.

¹⁰

A.V. to Mrs. Tolver, 22 November 1775, in Dartmouth Manuscripts, II, 401. This letter, among the Dartmouth papers, is the earliest reference I have been able to discover of British knowledge of the mission of Bonvouloir.

¹¹

"Intelligence Report," n.d., received 6 August 1775, submitted to Lords Suffolk, North, and Dartmouth, in Stevens, ed., Facsimiles, No. 1301.

and the rebels, and the possibility of any official acts of interference by the French government could only indicate to the British a need for swift, decisive action in ending the rebellion. Time could only increase the opportunities for foreign interference. It would be well to act as soon as possible in America before France had an opportunity to become officially involved in the revolt and before Spain recovered from the Algerian fiasco and began to look enviously at Portugal while her ally was encumbered in North America. The war scare of April had emphasized the tenuous state of Anglo-Bourbon relations, and the superficial calm that existed during the autumn of 1775 could not be expected to continue for long.

Swift, decisive action was necessitated by the domestic political situation as well. Lord Dartmouth had consistently pressed for a peace commission, but Suffolk, Rochford, Gower, and Sandwich had been vociferous in their demands for a policy of vigorous coercion. A major expedition to the Southern colonies coinciding with a widespread loyalist uprising there would convince the coercionists that he intended to act with vigor and check any protests they might make that the government was acting from weakness in sending a peace commission.

At 2:00 p.m. on October 15, Lord North wrote to the King proposing the Southern expedition. He outlined briefly the reports of loyalist sentiment in the backcountry of North and South Carolina, mentioned Lord Dunmore's assertion that

he could retake Virginia if he were supplied with several hundred troops, and added the advice he had received from both Campbell and Wright that Georgia's defection had been brought about by the South Carolinians. Georgia, North said, would return to her duty as soon as South Carolina was subdued. He mentioned also an inherent weakness of the Southern rebels--their large slave population which might perhaps be incited to revolt against their masters in the way Lord Dunmore was already attempting to accomplish in Virginia. He was "certain," he told the King:

...that a very considerable number of the people in those provinces wish for a speedy accomodation of the disputes with Great Britain; that the leaders of Rebellion there have great difficulty to keep the others in subjection, & that a small force from home would quickly turn the scale.¹²

Lord North set five regiments (3,385 men) as the number of troops which would be necessary for the expedition, and he outlined several reasons why he thought they could be sent without endangering Britain. The regiments that were being brought back from Gibraltar and Minorca would have arrived before the expedition departed, he wrote. Additionally, by that time a part of the militia would be on active duty and would "certainly be able to answer all the purposes of domestic Police to which the regular forces are now applied." Also, he was hoping recruiting prospects would be better in the fall. On the subject of recruiting prospects, he added

¹²

North to King, 15 October 1775, in Fortescue, ed., Correspondence of George III, III, No. 1724.

the news already mentioned that the expected assistance from Russia could no longer be counted upon. With the Russian troops no longer available, their principal hope, Lord North said, lay in "making immediate use of the Force we have in our hands," -- the available regulars combined with the loyalist element in the South.¹³

Lord North expressed the fear that the Bourbon powers might take advantage of Britain's predicament if it continued for long and the realization that the superficial calm in Anglo-Bourbon relations could not be expected to last indefinitely when he added:

There are certainly now no preparations making in any foreign country, that indicate the least intention of attacking the British dominions in Europe, & even if any such design is harbour'd any where, the attack would in all probability not be made during the ensuing winter....¹⁴

Implicit in his statement was the idea that Britain must act swiftly and decisively to subdue the rebellion before her enemies had time to take advantage of her embarrassment.

The King was to open the next session of Parliament in eleven days. His speech for the occasion, which had already been drafted, was concerned solely with the American rebellion and contained the proposal of a peace commission.¹⁵

¹³

Ibid.

¹⁴

Ibid. Italics Lord North's.

¹⁵

Eden to Germain, 3 October 1775, in Stopford-Sackville Manuscripts, II, 10-11; "Minutes for the King's Speech to Parliament," n.d., in the hand of William Eden, in Stevens, ed., Facsimiles, No. 856.

William Eden had already written to Lord George Germain, at Lord North's request, asking Germain to undertake the commission.¹⁶ Lord North feared, however, that there would be objections from the "hawks" who had been consistently advocating a policy of vigorous coercion. They were, he told the King:

...discontented & out of humour because they conceive that we do not mean to carry on this war with the spirit & activity that it requires. The proposal of a Commission contain'd in the Speech will not go down with them unless they see that we are trying every possible method of collecting a large force; & unless they think we are determined to use it in such a manner as is likely to bring matters in North America to a speedy decision.¹⁷

The expedition to the Southern colonies would demonstrate his intention to act with vigor and check coercionist protests that he was acting from weakness in sending a peace commission. It would revive their spirits, adding stability to the ministry, as well as give alarm to the Americans.

If the orders to begin preparations were given immediately, Lord North said, the expedition would be ready to set sail before Christmas. Navigation in Carolina waters would be favorable at that time of year, and it would be a proper time for conducting military operations there. It might be possible, North speculated, for the expedition to reduce the

¹⁶
Eden to Germain, 3 October 1775, in Stopford-Sackville Manuscripts, II, 10-11;

¹⁷
North to King, 15 October 1775, in Fortescue, ed., Correspondence of George III, III, No. 1724.

Southern colonies to submission in time for the troops involved in it to join Howe for the Northern campaign. The loss of the Southern colonies would be a severe blow to the rebels, North observed, and even if they could not be completely reduced, much could be accomplished, such as plundering their homes, destroying their provisions, disarming their troops, and capturing their ring-leaders. Then the South could be left in the control of armed loyalists under the command of the governors. This armed provincial force, North thought, would be sufficient to keep the rebels quiet and prevent their sending any assistance to Washington in the North. An expedition to the South, where the Army would be aided by widespread loyalist support, would help, he wrote, to bring the conflict to "a prosperous conclusion."¹⁸

At 4:20 p.m. on the same day, the King replied, "Every means of distressing America must meet with my concurrence," and added that he would weigh North's proposal carefully and investigate the possibilities of obtaining the necessary troops.¹⁹ At 11:00 on the following morning the King wrote again to Lord North, saying that the difficulties that would be encountered in assembling the necessary troops would be more than outweighed by the advantages that could accrue from the expedition. He gave his consent to North's

¹⁸

Ibid.

¹⁹

King to North, 15 October 1775, in Fortescue, ed., Correspondence of George III, III, No. 1726.

proposal and ordered that the first attempt be made on
20
North Carolina.

The Southern expedition was under way.

CHAPTER VI

EPILOGUE

The King's letter of 11:00 a.m., October 16, another written later on the same day, and a third dated 16-17 October, set the expedition in motion and outlined the military preparations he wished to be undertaken.¹ On October 22, Lord Dartmouth outlined for General Howe the situation in Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia, and sent him the plan for the Southern expedition. He listed the troops and artillery that were to be dispatched from Britain, and added the King's command that Howe appoint one of the generals already in America to proceed to North Carolina to take command of the force when it arrived.

Dartmouth observed:

...there is good ground to believe that the appearance of a respectable force to the southward, under the command of an able and

¹
King to North, 16 October 1775, 16 September 1775, and 16-17 October 1775, in Fortescue, ed., Correspondence of George III, III, Nos. 1727, 1710, 1728. Note: No. 1710 is dated 16 September rather than 16 October. This problem was the subject of the following comment by Eric Robson in his article "The Expedition to the Southern Colonies, 1775-1776," in The English Historical Review, XXX (October, 1951), 535-60. "No. 1710 is dated 'Sept. 16th, 1775' in the original, but no expedition from England was then envisaged, and it clearly relates to the king's orders of October." I agree with Mr. Robson's conclusion that this letter is misdated and should actually read 16 October 1775.

discreet officer will have the effect to restore order and Government in those four Provinces.²

Five days later Dartmouth wrote to Governor Martin, enclosing a copy of his letter to General Howe and outlining the role Martin was to play in the expedition. On November 7, he wrote to the Governor again. Because of the shallow depth of the Cape Fear, he said, the ships of war would be unable to cover a landing of troops there. Nevertheless, the plan was to remain as before on the assumption that the troops would probably land unopposed and be joined immediately by many loyalists. If, however, the landing could not be accomplished without hazard and there was not a certainty that the troops would be joined immediately by a large body of loyalists, then "no possible advantage could attend any Effort in North Carolina," and the whole expedition was to proceed against Charleston.³ At the same time Dartmouth also notified Governor Campbell of the Expedition and enclosed copies of his letters of October 22 to Howe and November 7 to Martin.⁴

On the following day Lord Dartmouth wrote again to

²
Dartmouth to Howe, 22 October 1775, in Force, ed., American Archives, Fourth Series, III, 1135-37.

³
Dartmouth to Martin, 7 November 1775, C.O. 5/318/167-71.

⁴
Dartmouth to Campbell, 7 November 1775, C.O. 5/396/221-24. In his instructions to Governor Campbell, Dartmouth asked him to secure "with as much secrecy as possible, a proper number of Horses for the use of the Army." One might question how Campbell, in the hostile city of Charleston was supposed to obtain in secrecy enough horses for the invading British force.

General Howe. He commented on the shallow depth of the Cape Fear and the hazards of landing there without protection from the fleet. The commander of the expedition should be directed to confer with Martin on the practicability of a landing of all or part of the force, he said. If their decision was negative, the expedition was to proceed to South Carolina. He enclosed also copies of his letters to Martin and Campbell of the previous day.⁵

While preparations for the expedition were being initiated, several other events had been taking place. By October 21, Lord George Germain had refused Lord North's⁶ proposal that he assume the role of peace commissioner. It had been decided therefore to divide the role among several persons, and in the King's speech to Parliament on October 26, he spoke of authorizing "certain persons upon the spot" to grant pardons and to accept the submission of any colony that indicated a desire to return to its allegiance.⁷

It had originally been intended that the King would announce Catherine II's loan of 20,000 troops in his speech at the opening of Parliament.⁸ However, Gunning's account

⁵
Dartmouth to Howe, 8 November 1775, in Force, ed., American Archives, Fourth Series, III, 1400.

⁶
Germain to Eden, n.d., written between 3 and 21 October 1775, unpublished letter cited in Brown, American Secretary, 29, 191.

⁷
Eden to Germain, 21 [?] October 1775, in Stopford-Sackville Manuscripts, II, 11-12; Parliamentary Register, III, 1-4.

⁸
Eden to Germain, 21 [?] October 1775, in Stopford-Sackville Manuscripts, II, 11-12.

of his conversation with Panin in which the Foreign Minister had informed him of Catherine's changed attitude, and the intercepted letter from Frederick II had made it clear that there would be no assistance from Russia. As a result no mention of Russian aid was made in the speech, and the King referred instead in more general terms to "most friendly offers of foreign assistance."⁹ The offers to which he referred had come from Brunswick and Hesse Cassel, and an English agent was sent to Germany later in the year to negotiate treaties for military assistance.¹⁰

Catherine's official letter of refusal arrived several days after the King's speech. She repeated to the King the reasons against giving assistance that Gunning had already heard from Panin. Then she added, with perhaps a bit more frankness than was necessary, that she could not help:

...reflecting on what would result for our own dignity for these two monarchies and two nations of this junction of our forces simply to calm a rebellion that was not supported by any foreign power.¹¹

She felt, she told the King, that such a large foreign force would cause other nations to interfere in the rebellion and that the probable result would be an outbreak of war in Europe. Catherine implied that by refusing to supply troops

⁹ Parliamentary Register, III, 1-4.

¹⁰ Max Von Esling, The German Allied Troops in the North American War of Independence, 1776-1783, Translated and abridged by J. G. Rosengarten (Albany, N.Y., 1893), 16.

¹¹ Catherine II to George III, 4 October 1775 (23 September in the Russian calendar), in Devrient, ed., Sbornik, XIX, No. 265.

she was preventing a European war. And though she regretted not being able to grant the King's request, she said, she liked "to imagine that the disfavor will not be as great as it could appear at first."¹² After the King had read her letter, he wrote to Lord North expressing his indignation¹³ at the tone of her reply.

On November 10, three days after Lord Dartmouth's last letters to Martin and Campbell about the Southern expedition, there was a major reshuffle in Lord North's cabinet. Lord Rochford retired and was replaced as Southern Secretary by Lord Weymouth; Lord Dartmouth resigned the American Secretaryship and was made Lord Privy Seal; and Lord George Germain¹⁴ entered the cabinet as American Secretary.

While the preparations for the expedition were in progress, the threat of foreign intervention continued to worry Lord North. On November 12, he wrote to the King that he feared not only great discontent at home, but also the possibility of a foreign war unless Britain were able to assume a posture of vigorous offense in the next campaign.¹⁵

In the interim between the decision to undertake the Southern expedition and the time when the governors received

¹²

Ibid.

¹³

King to North, 3 November 1775, in Fortescue, ed., Correspondence of George III, III, No. 1737.

¹⁴

"Memoranda: Secretaries of State," November, 1775, written by William Knox, in Various Collections, VI, 256-57.

¹⁵

North to King, 12 November [1775], in Fortescue, ed., Correspondence of George III, III, No. 1760.

word of the plan, their letters to Whitehall continued to express the themes of their earlier dispatches. Governor Martin at first began to fear that the loyalist strength in North Carolina about which he had boasted so highly was beginning to wane, but by November he was again assuring the ministry of the loyalty of the Highlanders and large numbers of the backcountry people.¹⁶ Governor Campbell wrote several times of thousands of faithful subjects in the backcountry who needed only arms, ammunition, and a few experienced officers to lead them.¹⁷ Lord Dunmore told of many Virginians who were applying to him for protection and of even more who would flock to the King's standard if they were provided with arms and ammunition. In late October he sent an account of a little expedition he had made in the environs of Norfolk with a force of about seventy men.¹⁸ Governor Wright said that many Georgians would join the King's standard if they could be assured of proper support. He, as well as the other governors, continued to emphasize the urgent need for acting with speed before the rebels grew any stronger than they already were.¹⁹ They all implied

¹⁶
Martin to Dartmouth, 28 August, 12 September, 16 October, and 12 November 1775, C.O. 5/318/173-81, 198-201, 216-34, 236-43.

¹⁷
Campbell to Dartmouth, 31 August, 19 September, 19 October 1775, and 1 January 1776, C.O. 5/396/224-30, 241-44, 253-56, 277-81.

¹⁸
Dunmore to Dartmouth, 24 September, 5 October, and 22 October 1775, C.O. 5/1353/251-54, 300-302, 309-10.

¹⁹
Wright to Dartmouth, 23 September, 16 November 1775, and 3 January 1776, in Georgia Historical Society, Collections, III, 212-13, 221-23, 229-30.

that the loyalists would soon begin to drift away from the cause of the King in despair of ever receiving assistance.

On January 3, Governor Martin received Lord Dartmouth's letters of October 27 and November 7 announcing the expedition. As confident as ever, he asserted that the expedition would "be attended with all the success and good consequences that his Majesty has been taught to expect from it." And he again assured the ministry of the widespread loyalist sentiment among the Regulators and the Highland immigrants.²⁰

On January 15, Governor Campbell received the news, which, he said, gave him "inexpressible satisfaction." He had no doubt that the expedition would crush the rebellion in the South. But, he added, "I must here my Lord take the liberty of saying with great deference to Governor Martin's opinion that Charlestown appears to me to be the place where the first impression ought to be made."²¹

Lord Dunmore was not so deferential. He first heard of the Southern expedition not by a dispatch from Whitehall, but from Sir Henry Clinton who had been appointed by Howe to command the force and who stopped by on February 18, on his way to the Cape Fear. When Clinton told him of the destination of the expedition, the Governor was infuriated:

This Moment General Clinton is arrived, and to my inexpressible Mortification find he is ordered

²⁰
Martin to Dartmouth, 12 January 1776, C.O. 5/318/
244-46.

²¹
Campbell to Dartmouth, 23 January 1776, C.O. 5/396/
295-97.

by your Lordship to North Carolina, a Most insignificant Province, when this which is the first Colony on the Continent, both for its riches and power is totally Neglected....²²

Governor Wright first heard of the expedition on March 13, but he did not receive a full account of the intended operations until he joined General Howe at Halifax on April 21.²³

When General Howe received word of the intended expedition, his response differed markedly from those of the governors. He dispatched General Clinton with a body of troops in accordance with Lord Dartmouth's instructions, but he had great misgivings about the basic idea of an expedition to the South. It would have been better, he wrote, "to leave the Southern Provinces in the fullest persuasion of their security," and concentrate all the British military force against the rebels in the North. He was critical also of the Southern governors' attempts to raise loyalist support. Its end result, he felt, was to strengthen the rebels:

...it is to be presumed the Southern Rebels would have been less able to defend themselves had they not been roused by the conduct of their Governors, who have not, I fear, the power of suppressing them, or of re-establishing the interest of Government in any degree.²⁴

²²

Dunmore to Dartmouth, 6 December 1775 - 18 February 1776, C.O. 5/1353/321-34.

²³

Wright to Germain, 14 March, and 26 April 1776, in Georgia Historical Society, Collections, III 238, 243-44.

²⁴

Howe to Dartmouth, 16 January 1776, in Sparks Manuscripts, No. 58, 193-95.

The expedition to the Southern colonies was a fiasco, no more successful than Charles III's expedition to North Africa in the previous July. When General Clinton arrived at the Cape Fear on March 12, 1776, he discovered that the North Carolina loyalists had risen prematurely (in a much smaller number than Martin had predicted would appear) and had been defeated by the rebels at Moore's Creek Bridge on February 27.²⁵ The force from Britain, which had originally been scheduled to embark from Cork on December 1,²⁶ did not actually leave until February 12, and was not entirely arrived at the Cape Fear until mid-May.²⁷ At the end of May,

²⁵ The rising of the North Carolina loyalists and their defeat at Moore's Creek Bridge has been discussed fully by Hugh F. Rankin in his article, "The Moore's Creek Bridge Campaign, 1776," in The North Carolina Historical Review, XXX (January, 1953), 23-60. Mr. Rankin makes a major error in his discussion of the planning of the Southern expedition, however, when he attributes the decision to direct the expedition to North Carolina to the persuasion of Alexander Schaw (p.28). Mr. Schaw, who went to London as Governor Martin's personal emissary, did not arrive in time to participate in the initial planning of the expedition. The decision to direct the expedition first to North Carolina was made by the King and stated in his letter of 16 October to Lord North, accepting North's proposal that the expedition be undertaken. Martin to Dartmouth, 6 July 1775, C.O. 5/318/137-40; Alexander Schaw to Dartmouth, 31 October and 8 November 1775, in Dartmouth Manuscripts, II, 397, 399; King to North, 16 October 1775, in Fortescue, ed., Correspondence of George III, III, No. 1727.

²⁶ Dartmouth to Martin, 27 October 1775, C.O. 5/318/164-65.

²⁷ The military planning for the Southern expedition, the changes and delays caused by administrative red tape, lack of coordination among the governmental departments, and bad weather, and the actual military operations of the expedition itself, are discussed in an article by Eric Robson, "The Expedition to the Southern Colonies, 1775-1776," in The English Historical Review, LXVI (October, 1951), 535-60. Mr. Robson's account is marred, however, by fact that he seems almost as concerned with discrediting the work of Sir John Fortescue and other historians who had previously written about the Southern expedition as with relating the events of the expedition itself.

General Clinton proceeded with the expedition to Charleston and on June 28 an unsuccessful attempt was made to destroy the rebel fort on Sullivan's Island in Charleston Harbor. The battle was notable mainly for the lack of communication and cooperation between the naval force commanded by Sir Peter Parker and the land force under Clinton.²⁸ Throughout July the ships of war and the troop transports left at intervals, sailing northward to join Howe, and on August 2, the same day that word of the signing of the Declaration of Independence reached Charleston, the last of the British forces departed.²⁹

When the King read the report of the final outcome of the Southern expedition, he probably expressed the feeling of the entire ministry when he remarked to Lord Sandwich:

...perhaps I should have been as well pleased if it had not been attempted.³⁰

²⁸

Ibid., 555-59.

²⁹

Ibid., 559.

³⁰

King to Sandwich, 21 August 1776, in Barnes and Owen, eds., Sandwich Papers, I, 44.

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VITA

William Leo Moran

Born in Detroit, Michigan, August 19, 1938. Graduated from H. B. Plant High School, Tampa, Florida, June, 1956. Received B. A. from the George Washington University, Washington, D.C., August, 1963. Entered the College of William and Mary, September, 1964, as a graduate student in the Department of History.