

## Chapter 1

# The First Secession Movement: In Defense of Antient English Libertyes, 1763-1776

Lacking as it was in those mad, tumultuous actions that have characterized other revolutions, the American Revolution has always seemed to be an extraordinary affair. To the historian, George Bancroft, the Revolution was “achieved with such tranquility that conservatism hesitated to censure.” To the Tories, the opponents of the Revolution in America, it was a rebellion without cause, “the most unwanton and unnatural rebellion that ever existed.” In Daniel Leonard's opinions “the Annals of no country can produce an Instance of so virulent a Rebellion, of such implacable madness and Fury, originating from such trivial Causes.” As Hugh Swinton Legaré recalled it, “there was nothing in their [the colonists'] situation to excite the passions of vulgar men. There was [sic] none of the atrocities by which other nations had been goaded into the fury of civil war—no patrician insolence—no religious persecution—no bloody prescription of the wise and brave.”<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, one might well ask why was there a revolution at all? The colonists were not an oppressed people in the literal sense of that word. They had not experienced any legendary tyranny which had so often led a desperate people to rebellion. If anything, the colonists, next to the English themselves, were perhaps the freest of any subjects in the eighteenth-century world, a point of pride of which the colonists often boasted. And this freedom, it was agreed, was directly attributable to the excellence of the British Constitution. As Peter Thacher remarked in 1776, “Englishmen have been wont to boast of the excellence of their constitution . . . that it contained whatever was excellent in every form of government hitherto . . . devised.” Going even further, Charles Lee called the English government the best on earth. More than any other form of government, he added, “it appears to me most calculated to reconcile necessary restraint and

natural liberty, and to draw the line between them. It is the government I was born under, I am happy to live under, and would willingly die to preserve.”<sup>2</sup>

Politically, the colonists enjoyed a large measure of self-determination. In all of the colonies there had developed bicameral legislative bodies. While not intended, they had, in the course of their development, gained substantial powers. Theoretically, these local assemblies were only supposed to play a passive role, passing acts and voting funds which the governor, the kingpin of imperial authority, deemed necessary. In practice, however, the assemblies became dominant, claiming the right to determine their own sessions and to appoint their own officials. Crucial in this “quest for power” on the part of the local assemblies was their control of public funds which accrued to them through their power to fill the post of treasurer. As a result, the powers of the colonial governors were considerably diminished as they not only lost control of public funds but patronage as well, an essential ingredient in colonial politics. As one contemporary put it, “every governor had two masters: one who gave him his commission, and another who gave him his pay.”<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, the political system in the colonies was open and responsive. Although elite groups ruled in every colony, according to the time-tested hierarchial conception of society based on a natural division between ruler and ruled, politics were nevertheless popular to the extent that suffrage was widespread and the elites had to withstand public scrutiny in offering for re-election since most political posts were for one year terms. “Generalizing across the variety of statutory provisions and practices of the various colonies, it seems safe to say,” writes Bernard Bailyn, “that fifty to seventy-five per cent of the adult male white population was entitled to vote—far more than could do so in England.” Although there were property qualifications for voting, usually the forty-shilling freehold requirement which the colonies inherited from England, they did not restrict suffrage greatly, as evidenced by Governor Thomas Hutchinson's remarks about voting in Massachusetts. Hutchinson, who was no democrat, was aghast at the Massachusetts law that allowed “anything with the appearance of a man” to vote. Even after this traditional requirement was found wanting and increased, it still did not significantly restrict voting.<sup>4</sup>

As for internal class conflict, once thought to be the mainspring of revolution, most recent studies suggest that “class struggle and the demand for democracy on the part of unprivileged groups was not widespread.”<sup>5</sup> To the contrary, the colonists, who enjoyed a high standard of living, benefitted from an expanding economy which provided social mobility and economic opportunity. Summing-up years of research on the social structure of revolutionary America, Jackson Turner Main was surprised at the extent of social mobility and economic opportunity available. “It is clear,” he concluded, “that revolutionary America produced enough wealth to save even its poor from suffering, to permit the great majority to live adequately, even in comfort, and to enable a few to live in real luxury. Even more remarkable “was the ease and rapidity with which the poor man could become economically independent, and the remarkable oppor-

tunity for the man of modest property to become rich.” It was this combination of abundance and mobility, moreover, which minimized social conflicts in revolutionary American society.<sup>6</sup>

Recently compiled data on colonial-revolutionary wealth reinforce the claim of colonial prosperity. According to estimates of total and per capita wealth for New England and the Middle colonies by Alice Hanson Jones, colonists had achieved “a rather high level of living at the close of over 150 years of economic development.” For the Middle colonies (Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Delaware), total private wealth was estimated to be 33.5 million pounds in local currency or 82 pounds per capita. In pounds sterling, the corresponding figures would be 9.7 million pounds and 48 pounds per capita. Translated into American dollars at 1792 prices, total private wealth was \$99.1 million dollars and per capita wealth equaled \$218. For New England, the provisional estimate of per capita physical wealth is 36 pounds local currency for 1774 or \$933 in 1969 dollars. When free men only are included, per capita wealth increases to around \$4,500 in 1969 dollars, a considerable sum then and today. As Jones notes, these income estimates imply a high level of living, “probably the highest achieved . . . in any country up to that time.”<sup>7</sup>

Behind this general economic prosperity lay the growth of the colonial economy itself between 1720 and 1775. Although not uniform, economic growth was steady, averaging about 0.5 per cent per year (compared to an annual growth rate of 1.6 per cent for the period 1840- 1960). Several important factors can be singled-out to explain the growth of the colonial economy. First, there was the rapid increase in population, about 35 per cent per decade between 1720 and 1776, with total population increasing from 466,000 to 2,500,000. Growth in population was important because it made possible the expansion of economic output as more land was brought under cultivation. In Pennsylvania, for example, an increase in population of 13 per cent between 1720 and 1750 resulted in a 120 per cent increase in exports of flour, bread, and wheat. Second, there was the rise in prices of such commodities as tobacco, rice, and indigo from the Southern colonies and fish, meat, grain, and lumber from the Northern colonies. As a result of rising prices, the colonists were able to accumulate a pool of capital for investment from sales of their products which cost more than the goods they purchased in return. Third, there was the minor contribution of improved technology in the form of improved hand tools, increased horsepower, and irrigation practices. Finally, there was the growth of an overseas trade market and the concomitant development of a colonial shipping industry.<sup>8</sup>

Taken together, estimates of colonial wealth and data on colonial economic development “tend to refute the idea that the colonies were economically exploited, to the disadvantage of the inhabitants, by the mother country Britain.” Once thought to be a major source of friction between England and her colonies, the Navigation laws or acts of trade are now seen as more of a benefit. In Marc Egnal's opinion, the colonists were fortunate in their links with an industrializing nation. Because of improvements in technology and business organization, Brit-

ish manufacturers were able to increase output (particularly after 1745) and maintain low prices.” The result for the colonists was a significant increase in their standard of living. These figures also tend to suggest that “whatever it might have been, the American Revolution was not a rising of impoverished masses—or merchants.”<sup>9</sup>

In sum, at the beginning of the revolutionary crisis in 1763, the colonists were well-off economically and enjoyed a high standard of living. While there were manifestations of class conflict and social-economic discontent (inevitable in any society), demand for widespread change was muted by the prevalence of social mobility and economic opportunity. At the same time, the colonists exercised a large measure of political freedom and self-determination. Moreover, imperial-colonial relations were largely satisfactory. As Alden Bradford recalled this period in 1818, “there appears not to have been any special causes in operation . . . to produce any dispute between the colonies and the parent country.” In fact, “at the time of which we speak, and just previous to the controversy,” he remembered, “the attachment of the people here to the government and people of England was never more sincere and ardent.”<sup>10</sup>

Within thirteen years, however, the colonies would declare their independence from the British Empire. As we now know, the precipitant in this remarkable turn-about was the British decision to reform and re-structure their empire in 1763. In that year, Great Britain, after a long and exhaustive war with France and Spain (1754-1763), stood master of the North American continent. It was a great achievement to say the least, the more so because it came at the expense of the French, the long-time rival of England. Not only did it place Great Britain in the enviable position as the world's greatest power, but it also meant that the colonies in North America would remain English, a fact of no small importance when it is considered that they could just as easily have come under French or Spanish influence. What the subsequent history of North America would have been in that eventuality no one can say for sure, but certainly the development of the colonies would have been altered significantly and perhaps for the worse. No small wonder, then, that Englishmen at home and in the colonies rejoiced at this significant victory.<sup>11</sup>

Yet, the war had been a costly one. In 1760, the English national debt stood at 133,000,000 pounds. Three years later, that figure approached 140,000,000 pounds and was likely to increase even further in view of the need to maintain a defense establishment in North America. In addition to financial problems, an enlarged and expanded empire also brought with it nagging questions of defense, organization, and administration. How would the new lands be governed? Who would protect them from the French and Indians who stood ready to reassert control over the vast territory they had so recently lost? More important, who would pay for their administration and defense? This last issue was particularly acute since Great Britain was already burdened with high taxes and a huge national debt.<sup>12</sup>

Faced with these difficult and costly problems, Parliament enacted a series of measures between 1763 and 1774 that would provide for the defense of the colonies in America, establish government in the newly-conquered areas, and raise the money needed to pay for these vital services. The first step in this plan of imperial reform was the Proclamation of 1763. Issued on October 7, 1763, it established the provinces of Quebec and East and West Florida in North America. Its more famous provision was that which prohibited colonial settlement beyond the Appalachian mountains. The rationale behind this restriction was two-fold: to prevent the dispersal of the colonists on the seaboard and to respect Indian claims to these western lands. Continued western migration, it was argued, would only lead to conflicts with the Indians as a result of unfair trading practices and land frauds which would inevitably accompany migration. As Francis S. Philbrick has rightfully noted, "the Proclamation had little if any effect upon the development of the West. It has interest as an attempt to affect it, and for its failure."<sup>13</sup>

To help defray the expense of civil administration and defense, Parliament enacted the Sugar Act on April 5, 1764. According to the terms of this act, the duty or tax upon molasses imported into the colonies was affixed at three pence per gallon. Since this duty seemed to discriminate against the West Indian sugar planters, Parliament compromised by raising the duty on foreign sugar imported to the colonies from 5 shillings to 17 shillings per hundred-weight. Also, higher duties were placed on imported wines, coffee, indigo, pimento, and some other products. The income to be generated from these duties was estimated to be 45,000 pounds. Another important feature of the Sugar Act was an effort to suppress smuggling in the colonies which was rampant. According to one estimate, 700,000 pounds worth of merchandise was illicitly brought into the colonies representing a loss to British merchants as well as a loss in revenue. To remedy this situation, therefore, the customs service was made more effective by the addition of new regulations. Complementing these changes in the customs service were others that enlarged the powers of the Admiralty Courts and instructed the Royal Navy to aid in the enforcement of the acts of trade.<sup>14</sup>

Since the revenue from the Sugar Act would not be adequate to meet the full cost of colonial defense and administration, Parliament next levied a stamp tax. Such a tax had been in force in England since 1694 and in 1760 some 290,000 pounds had been raised in this fashion. The chief merit of the stamp tax was that it involved relatively small collection costs in contrast to other taxes which required elaborate and expensive bureaucracy for enforcement. Thus, on March 10, 1764, Thomas Whately, joint Secretary of the Treasury, presented to the House of Commons a series of resolutions designed to raise additional revenue. The fifteenth resolution called for a stamp tax. A modest tax, amounting to only 1 shilling per head in the colonies, it was expected to return monetarily 60,000 pounds annually.<sup>15</sup>

Unlike previous legislation that had been passed since 1763, the Stamp Act was met by widespread opposition in all of the colonies. The crucial issue was

that of taxation. Did Parliament have a right to tax the colonies? The colonists' answer to this question was a decided no. Leading the way was Patrick Henry of Virginia who, in May, 1775, shattered the relative calm of the Virginia assembly with treasonous remarks about George III and the British government for which he later apologized. At the end of his speech, however, he introduced seven resolutions, which, in effect, denied Parliament's claim of taxation without representation and upheld the colonists' right to resist any such measure. Although only four of the resolves were adopted by the Virginia assembly, colonial newspapers printed the text of all seven.<sup>16</sup>

Despite the drama surrounding Henry's resolves, they did not announce any new principles or represent a shift in colonial thinking. Indeed, throughout the whole controversy, the colonists resisted attempts to tax them on the grounds of the British constitution and their rights as Englishmen. In a remonstrance against the Sugar Act, for example, the Massachusetts Assembly said that "said Act essentially affects the Civil rights and commercial interests of the colonies." Concerning the Stamp Act, the South Carolina Assembly instructed its agent in London, Charles Garth, to oppose it because such a measure was inconsistent "with the inherent right of every British subject, not to be taxed but by his own consent, or that of his representative." Reiterating this ancient claim of no taxation without representation was Thomas Fitch of Connecticut. "By the constitution, government, and laws of Great Britain, the English are a free people. Their freedom consists principally if not wholly in their general privilege, that 'no laws can be made or abrogated without their consent by their representatives in Parliament.'" <sup>17</sup>

Given widespread opposition to the Stamp Act, which culminated in the Stamp Act Congress of October, 1765, Parliament decided to repeal the Stamp Act. To avoid the appearance of giving in to the upstart colonists, and to remind them that it was still supreme, Parliament passed the Declaratory Act of 1766 which upheld the right to bind them in all cases whatsoever. Imperious as it was, the Declaratory Act did not solve the pressing need for revenue. On June 12, 1767, therefore, there emerged a bill levying duties on glass, paper, paint, and tea imported to America. Known as the Townshend Revenue Act, it became law on July 2, 1767. Along with this revenue act came another which established an American Board of Customs Commissioners at Boston which, it was hoped, would make enforcement of the acts of trade more effective and efficient. Again, however, American resistance was such that it forced repeal of all duties except that on tea. That duty, as in the case of the Declaratory Act, was left as a reminder of Parliamentary supremacy.<sup>18</sup>

The final measures passed by Parliament in their program of imperial reform were the Tea Act of 1773 and the Quebec Act of 1774. The Tea Act was a response to the financial difficulties of the British East India Company. Founded in 1603, the company grew in wealth and power as a result of its monopoly of the English trade to the Far East. By 1760, it was, along with the Bank of England, one of the most powerful institutions in England. The cornerstone of its

trade was tea, which accounted for over 90 per cent of its profits. For one, the duty on tea had reached such a high level as to encourage smuggling, thereby affecting its sales. Also, the stockholders, despite declining sales, voted to increase dividends. The result was a deficit of over 400,000 pounds sterling in 1767. By 1772, the company was in eminent danger of failing as it owed the British government more than 1,000,000 pounds.<sup>19</sup>

The essential problem was a prodigious surplus of tea, soon to reach 18,000,000 pounds. If this surplus could be sold even at a lower price, the Company's difficulties would be solved because it would be relieved of charges on interest and storage which were oppressive. After much debate about where to dispose of the surplus tea and whether or not to maintain the Townshend duty, Parliament passed the Tea Act of 1773 on May 10, 1774. The fateful decision was made. The East India Company would sell its tea in America and the Townshend duty would be retained.<sup>20</sup>

The American response, as in the cases of the Sugar and Stamp acts and the Townshend duties, was one of defiance. To accept the tea would be an admission of Parliament's right to tax, which the colonists had vehemently denied since 1764. So, on the night of December 16, 1773, 30 to 60 people, some roughly disguised as Indians, others with soot on their faces to disguise their identity, boarded the tea ship. After forcing the customs officers off the ship, the well-organized colonists began their work. By 9:00 p. m., less than three hours after they had begun, they had completed the destruction of the tea.<sup>21</sup>

The British response to this destruction of crown property was swift. Branding the act as outrageous and the logical consequence of earlier concessions, the Ministry adopted a policy of coercion. As of June 1, the port of Boston was to be closed to shipping the exception being a few coasting vessels bringing provisions and fuel for Bostonians. This restriction was to remain in effect until full restitution had been made to the East India Company and others who had suffered property damage in the tea riots. If that were not enough punishment, Parliament also passed an Administration of Justice Act and the Massachusetts Government Act. The first of these bills authorized the governor to send to England for trial all officers accused of crimes committed in the execution of their duties. The second one provided that members of the Governor's Council were to be appointed by the King and to serve at his pleasure rather than being elected.<sup>22</sup>

In the tense atmosphere of the summer of 1774, Parliament enacted the Quebec Act. Approved on June 22, 1774, its aim was to provide more effectual government for the province of Quebec. In the place of an elected assembly and English law, which the English had offered in 1763, it was now proposed to govern through an appointed governor and council. The Act also recognized the Roman Catholic Church and French Civil law. Although the Proclamation of 1763 had made a start in this direction, that plan had not proved successful. In the first place, the colonists were still settling beyond the Appalachian Mountains despite the proclamation of a boundary line. In the second place, the act of

1763 had been based on the presumption that the area would become English through extensive migration. After ten years, however, it was obvious that Quebec would remain French.<sup>23</sup>

To the British, the measures passed between 1763 and 1774 seemed reasonable and justified. After all, the war against the French had been undertaken in defense of the colonies. It only seemed fair, therefore, that the colonists contribute to their own defense, especially since they could afford to pay the additional taxes levied. As the British reminded the colonists, they were not being asked to shoulder the entire national debt of England, but only the expense of colonial defense and administration. Besides, the British reasoned, Parliament did have the right to regulate colonial affairs in the best interest of the Empire.<sup>24</sup>

To the colonists, however, the measures enacted after 1763 seemed arbitrary and threatening as seen in their determined resistance to the Stamp Act, the Townshend duties, and the Tea Act. Unlike other legislation, they argued, the new acts passed since 1763 represented a dangerous innovation in the nature of the Empire. Instead of regulating trade, which they admitted was Parliament's right, these new acts were aimed at raising a revenue by direct taxation in violation of English rights. More than that, they represented an attack on the British constitution, a point underscored by Samuel Adams in a letter to Arthur Lee, "With regard to the grievances of Americans," he wrote, "it must be owned, that the violation of the essential right of taxing themselves is a capital one. This right is founded in nature. It is unalienable, and therefore belongs to us exclusively . . . The least infringement of it is a sacrilege."<sup>25</sup>

In denying Parliament's right to tax, the colonists raised the fundamental question that brought on the Revolution, namely, the nature of the British Empire. The British, conceiving the empire to be one unit, were attempting to keep the colonies in a subordinate status. In fact, while the new laws and regulations passed since 1763 were designed to reform the imperial structure and raise a revenue, they were also intended to reduce colonial freedom of action and bring the colonies under stricter control of Parliament. The colonies, it was noted, had long been going their own way with the result that they demonstrated neither a firm loyalty to the King nor thought of themselves as part of the British Empire. "It's to be feared in general," wrote General Thomas Gage in 1765, "that the Spirit of Democracy, is strong amongst them."<sup>26</sup>

This complaint was an old one. In 1638, for example, George Donne, son of the poet John Donne, called attention to the need for greater order and authority in America. In Virginia, he observed, "it is A question undecided . . . whether the inhabitants acknowledge you their Kinge [sic]." To restore order and obedience, he recommended, among other things, that Charles I select more aggressive governors who would see that the laws were passed. The need for closer control was also the subject of a letter from Governor Dinwiddie of Virginia to William Pitt of June 18, 1757: "I am convinced," Dinwiddie stated, [that] if alterations are not made in the present constitutions of the colonies . . . it will be impracticable to conduct his majesty's affairs with that spirit which the emer-



gency requires.” To effect this, Dinwiddie advocated “a general mode of government under his Majesty's immediate directions, and a coalition of the whole.” Despite such attempts to govern the colonies more closely, however, efforts at unifying the Empire were not successful until after 1763. Then, no longer preoccupied with wars abroad or domestic troubles at home, England was able to reassert its authority.<sup>27</sup>

The colonists, on the other hand, had a different view of the Empire. As they viewed it, the Empire was a world-wide political system based on mutual allegiance and a harmony of interests and in which the colonies were equal partners. In taxing them, Parliament not only violated the ancient principle of no taxation without representation, but worse than that, denied them that equality of condition in the Empire which they thought was due them as Englishmen. As Richard Bland commented, “under our English government all men are born free, are only subject to laws made with their own consent, and cannot be deprived of the benefit of those laws without a transgression of them.”<sup>28</sup>

Knowing all of this, however, does not explain the Revolution in America. It does not tell us why there were two views of the Empire and the British constitution. Nor does it tell us why the acts passed between 1773 and 1776 by the British seemed so threatening to American liberty. Why did the colonists feel compelled to declare their independence from a political system they had so recently praised? What was it that formed a revolutionary mentality and provided the logic of rebellion? To understand the colonial response, it is necessary to probe the mind of the colonists and discover the beliefs and assumptions that governed their political outlook. Only then will it be possible to understand the origins as well as the nature of the American Revolution.

As we now know, thanks to the work of Bernard Bailyn, Caroline H. Robbins, H. Trevor Colbourn, J. G. A. Pocock, Gordon S. Wood and others, the colonists in America were influenced to a high degree by a radical strain of English political thought. While Enlightenment ideas, the common law, and Puritanism were all prevalent in the thought of the revolutionary generation, they did not in themselves form a coherent intellectual pattern. What brought these disparate strands of thought together, and charged them with revolutionary meaning, was the influence of another group of ideas inherited from the classical republicans or the Commonwealthmen of seventeenth-century England and the opposition writers of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth-centuries.<sup>29</sup>

Among the seventeenth-century progenitors of this radical social and political thought were such famous writers as John Milton, author of *Eikonoklastes* and *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, both published in 1649; James Harrington, “the foremost of the republican theorists” and author of *Oceana* (1649); and Algernon Sidney who epitomized resistance to tyranny (and died in the process) and whose *Discourses Concerning Government* (1698) became “a textbook of revolution.” Lesser figures included Edmund Ludlow, Marchamont Needham, Henry Neville, William Sprigge, and Henry Stubbe.<sup>30</sup>

As opponents of Stuart despotism, which they viewed as being fatal to the ancient constitution and that balance of power between the Kings, Lords, and Commons that had safeguarded the rights of Englishmen, they sought means by which to check the growth of prerogative power and to maintain the rule of law. As such, they favored constitutional devices which limited the exercise of power in a state, be it, by the people or the king. Neville, for example, proposed to limit the King's power to declare war as well as his control over the armed forces. In addition, he also called for measures that would lessen his control over financial affairs and the creation of peers, all of which gave the king undue power.<sup>31</sup>

In this sense, Neville and other republican theorists were influenced by the idea of a mixed or balanced state inherited from the writers of antiquity—Aristotle, Polybius, Tacitus, Livy, Cicero—and from the republican theorists of the Italian Renaissance, most notably Machiavelli. The latter, in reviving the study of the classics and the ancient republics, served as a connecting link in the transmission of classical republican thought to England. There, such writers as Sir Thomas More, John Ponet, Sir Thomas Smith, and Sir Walter Raleigh kept alive republican notions of government including the concept of a mixed constitution. Later, in the great dispute between king and parliament of the seventeenth-century, the theory of a mixed state became a weapon in the hands of the king's opponents as it placed limitations on power and because it afforded a justification for resistance.<sup>32</sup>

Although the classical republicans identified with the people and their rights, they were not democrats. “Democracy was seldom or never discussed save as an anarchic condition.” Universal manhood suffrage was anathema to them. “That servants, fishermen, laboring men and 'rabble' should exercise such a privilege was never conceived by them.” To the contrary, they believed “that the propertied, the educated, well-born, and responsible members of society, should regulate its affairs.”<sup>33</sup>

As an actively advocated program for the reform of government in England, classical republicanism perished on the scaffold with Sidney in 1683. In fact, republicanism in England only found expression during two periods of the seventeenth-century “when circumstances suggested a possibility of implementing theories, and when, in the same context, authoritarian philosophers, by offering very different solutions to the problems of statecraft, provided stimulus to rebuttal and counter-proposal.” The first period comprised the tumultuous years of the English Civil War, 1645-1660. The second occurred during the Exclusion crisis of the 1680s provoked by the birth of a son to James II and the possibility of continued Stuart rule. Despite the rising tide of anti-royal sentiment during these years, the institution of monarchy was itself too hallowed to be dispensed with as most Englishmen could not imagine themselves without a king. “More renowned than numerous,” the classical republicans nevertheless influenced another group of writers who carried on their notions of government, society, and politics.<sup>34</sup>

While the colonists identified themselves with these seventeenth-century heroes of liberty, they felt closer to the second generation writers “who modified and enlarged this earlier body of thought, fused it into a whole with other, contemporary strains of thought, and, above all, applied it to the problems of eighteenth-century English politics.” Composed of a heterogeneous cluster of malcontents from the far left . . . as well as from the far right, this group of opposition writers included John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, “those spokesmen for extreme libertarianism,” and publishers of the *Independent Whig* and *Cato's Letters*; Benjamin Hoadly, the liberal Anglican bishop and author of *The Measures of Submission to the Civil Magistrates Considered* (1705) and *The Original and Institution of Civil Government Discussed* (1710); Robert Viscount Molesworth whose *Account of Denmark* (1694) “detailed the process by which free states succumbed to absolutism”; and Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke who quoted wholesale from *Cato's Letters* in the *Craftsman* and warned his readers “of the dangers of incipient autocracy.” Following these free-thinking publicists were Richard Baron, “literary heir of Thomas Gordon”; Thomas Hollis, “that extraordinary one-man propaganda machine in the cause of liberty,” and James Burgh, author of *Political Disquisitions* (1774), all of whom carried the dissenting tradition up to the Revolution itself and applied them to the Anglo-American controversy of 1763 and after.<sup>35</sup>

Although widely separated in point of time, both of these groups of writers shared similar ideas about government, society, and politics. Their key concepts were natural rights, the contractual basis of society, and pride in England's liberty-preserving constitution. Above all, however, they were concerned with liberty and its preservation at a time when freedom seemed to be on the decline. In their view, the end of government was the preservation of liberty. Liberty they defined as “the Power which every Man has over his own Actions, and his Right to enjoy the Fruit of his Labour, Art, and Industry.” Government itself was formed so “that every member of society may be protected and secured in the peaceable, quiet possession and enjoyment of all those liberties and privileges which the Deity has bestowed upon him.”<sup>36</sup>

Liberty, however, did not consist in “living without all restraint.” That would be anarchy, “with each man doing what was right in his own eyes, running amuck and ultimately dissolving all social bonds.” In this sense, government was an essential restraint on the lust and passions that drove all men. Without it, “the strongest would be master, [and] the weakest [would] go to the wall.” In return for protection and security, therefore, the people gave up some of their liberty for the better ordering of the whole and elected rulers to govern them but only so long as the rulers promoted the public interest or good of the whole. Government, thus, was a contract between ruler and ruled. If, and when the people's welfare was abused, their ultimate sanction was the right of revolution.<sup>37</sup>

Although “the skeleton of their political thought was Lockean [and] concerned with unalienable rights and the contract theory of government,” the sub-

stance was far different in that it was preoccupied with the evil effects of power upon liberty. Power, they knew, was a corrupting and aggressive force and liberty was its natural victim. It was endlessly propulsive, always tending "to expand itself beyond legitimate boundaries." "Power," said Jonathan Mayhew, "is of a grasping, encroaching nature . . . It aims at extending itself . . . wherever it meets with no balance, check, control, or opposition of any kind." "Unlimited power," echoed *Cato's Letters*, "is so wild and monstrous a thing that however natural it be to desire it, it is as natural to oppose it; nor ought it to be entrusted with any mortal man, be his intentions ever so upright . . . It is the nature of power to be ever encroaching."<sup>38</sup>

Now, power in itself was not bad. It was natural as well as necessary. It had legitimate foundations "in those covenants among men by which, as a result of restrictions voluntarily accepted by all for the good of all, society emerges from a state of nature and creates government to serve as trustee and custodian of the mass of surrendered individual powers." What made power corrosive and malignant was the nature of man and "his susceptibility to corruption and his lust for self-aggrandizement." As Daniel Dulany stated in his *Considerations on the Propriety of Imposing Taxes* (Annapolis, 1765), "mankind are generally so fond of power that they are oftener tempted to exercise it beyond the limits of justice than induced to set bounds to it from the pure consideration of the rectitude of forbearance." Or, in Sam Adams' words, "ambition and lust of power above the law are . . . predominant passions in the breasts of most men."<sup>39</sup> That power "always and everywhere had had a pernicious, corrupting effect upon men [and nations]" was demonstrated in history which the classical republicans and opposition writers viewed as the inevitable rise and fall of free government. Like the human body, every civilization had its life cycle of birth, maturity, and death and carried within it the seeds of its own dissolution. In societies, decay and decline followed the growth of vice and internal corruption. Beginning with the rich and great, who became obsessed with grandeur, magnificence, sumptuousness, pomp, and vanity, it soon descended to the common people.<sup>40</sup>

There followed from these assumptions about power and history that the greatest threats to liberty were ministerial usurpation, social corruption, and a standing army, the one inevitably following the other. Once a nation became corrupt and reveled in luxury, it lost its vigor and will to resist. At that point, a ruler, realizing this lack of will among the people at large, would, through the use of a standing army, seize power and establish a tyranny. Robert Molesworth's *An Account of Denmark* (1694) established the general point that the preservation of liberty depended, in the final analysis, on the vigilance and moral stamina of the people. In Denmark, only one of many such examples, a corrupt and self-indulgent nobility had relaxed its vigilance and allowed a standing army which quickly destroyed the constitution and the liberties it had protected.<sup>41</sup>

If history proved the fatal effects of unrestrained power on liberty, it also provided examples of the converse, namely, the ability of the people to preserve