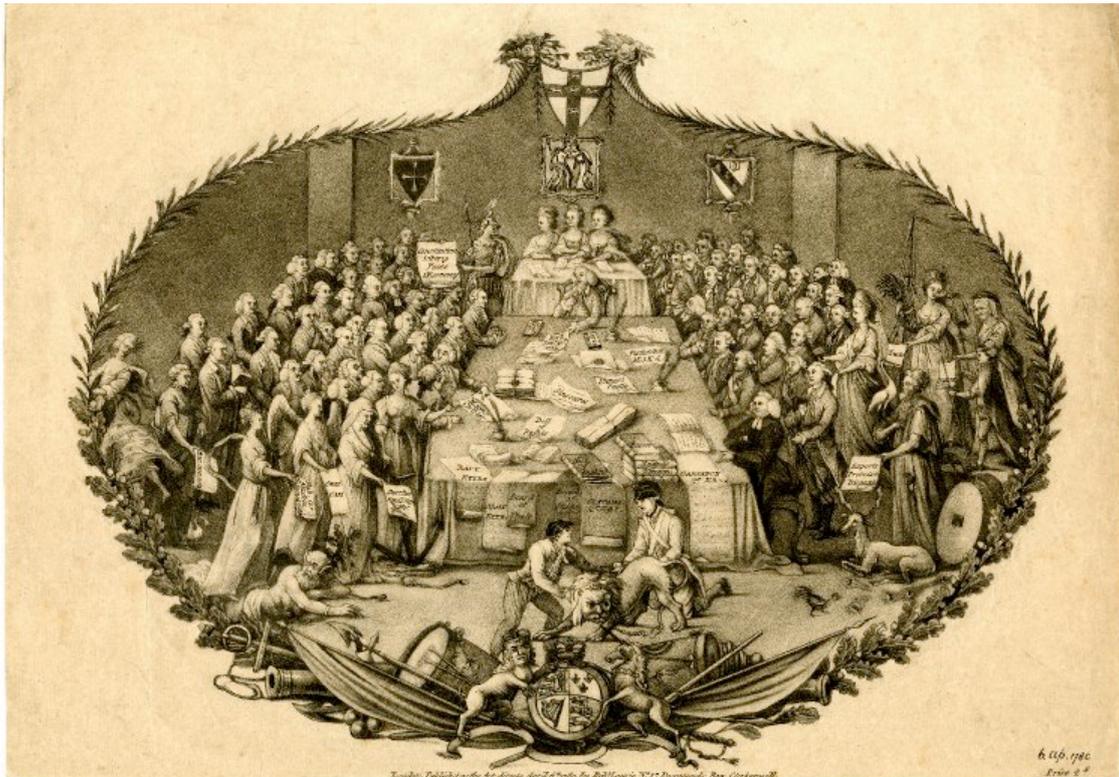


Lecture 3: Responses to the American Revolution

Structure of the lecture:

- key themes and ideologies
- impact of the American war and revolution
- association movement
- successes of economical reform
- faltering of parliamentary reform movement

Robert Laurie, 'Association Meeting at York' (1780), British Museum.



Divisions over the war with America:

England – 44,000 Englishmen were directly involved in petitioning or addressing the crown on policy towards America in 1775-78.
Nearly 6500 Lancastrians signed Lancashire's address.
In Norfolk 5400 signatures on an antiwar petition of 1778.

Frameworks for understanding this period:

1. Factions not parties within parliament: Rockinghamites, Shelburnites, Chathamites, Foxites.....

2. Patriots – American, English, Irish
.....

3. Ideologies and ideas = different debates about liberty

- James Burgh, *Political Disquisitions* (1774-5)
- Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (Jan. 1776)
- Richard Price, *Observations on the nature of civil liberty and the war with America* – sold out of its press run of 1000 copies within 3 days of publication on 10 Feb. 1776.

Historiography:

Isaac Kramnick
James E. Bradley.....
Ian Christie.....
J.G.A. Pocock.....
Kathleen Wilson.....

Reform associations:

- Yorkshire Association – petition of 1780 for economical reform, and petition for parliamentary reform of 1783
- Westminster association, Nottingham association, and the Society for Constitutional Information – 1780.
- John Jebb - Quintuple Alliance – planned autumn 1781 – radical planning body for London, Westminster, Southwark, Middlesex and Surrey.

Task 1: analyse these resolutions of the Corporation of London, 31 January 1782:

- Resolved, that the unequal representation of the people, the corrupt state of parliament, and the perversion thereof, from its original institution, have been the principal causes of the unjust war with America, of the consequent dismemberment of the British Empire, and of every grievance of which we complain.
- Resolved, that these grievances can never be removed until the right of the people to their constitutional share in the English government shall be re-established, by a fair and equal representation in parliament, and a frequent election of their representatives, according to ancient usage...
- Resolved that...[a committee of the Livery of London] do take the most efficient methods for obtaining a more equal representation of the people in parliament, and a frequent election of the representatives, according to ancient usage...¹

¹ E. Black, *The Association*, pp. 85-6.

Successes of the association movement:

- 1.....
- 2.....
- 3.....

Failures:

- 1.....
- 2.....
- 3.....
- 4.....

Brief summary of parliamentary activity:

1778

April - Sir Philip Jennings Clerke's bill for economical reform against contractors

1780

8 February – Sir George Savile introduced the Yorkshire petition.

22 February – Savile lost the motion for an account of pensions by a mere 2 votes.

23 February – Civil Establishment bill introduced by Burke.

8 March – first clause, abolishing the office of 3rd secretary of state, lost 201 to 208.

Early April - John Dunning's motion declaring that the 'influence of the crown has increased, is increasing, and ought to be diminished' 233 for; 215 against.

24 April - ministry defeated by 254 to 203 Dunning's motion for an address to the King against the dissolution of parliament until royal influence diminished.

1782

27 Feb – North failed to defeat an opposition motion for the immediate ending of offensive operations in America.

20 March – North forced to resign after a vote of no confidence and the Rockinghams, in alliance with Shelburne, came into office.

Crewe's Act – disenfranchises civil servants who worked in the revenue services

Clerke's Act and Burke's Establishment Act – reduce the number of placemen and pensioners in the House of Commons

May – William Pitt the Younger moved for a committee to examine the state of the representation. Defeated 161 -141.

1783

Feb – Yorkshire petition 10,000 signatures.

5 May – Wyvill and Pitt met to discuss Pitt's motion for reform.

May – new motion defeated decisively – North again a minister in the Fox-North coalition and Northites saw off Pitt's motion.

1784

16 Jan – after ordering distribution of the second report, the Yorkshire committee adjourned and never met again.

1784 election – certain strong Rockinghamites followed Wyvill and Sir George Savile rather than the marquis in the split over association and parliamentary reform.

1785

April – Pitt's last attempt – convinced Scottish reformers that nothing could be achieved.

Brief narrative background to the American war²:

Series of restrictions on trade and customs enforced by Britain since 1763 - British government under Grenville and then North attempted to reinforce control over the colonies to consolidate serious debts run up during Seven Years War.

In 1766 – Lord Rockingham, under pressure from British merchants, passed a Declaratory Act on the American colonies which proclaimed parliament's right to legislate for the colonies 'in all cases whatsoever.'

The demand for 'No taxation without representation' changed from having an economic meaning to a constitutional meaning. This shift was crystallised by Charles Townshend, chancellor of Exchequer in January 1767 who imposed his infamous duties on the colonies. He argued that the Americans had rejected internal taxation by the British parliament but were prepared to accept taxation of their external trade for imperial funds.

In 1769 most of Townshend's duties were abolished apart from one which symbolically demonstrated the legislative sovereignty of parliament, the duty on tea.

Boston Tea Party on 17 December 1773 = symbolic rejection not just of the duty but of British rule

North government imposed Coercive Acts 1773-4

1775 Royal Proclamation for Suppressing Sedition and Rebellion and the Non-Intercourse Act of March 1775 which excluded the New England colonies from trade with any area outside Britain, Ireland and the West Indies.

Outbreak of war on 19 April 1775

On 4 July 1776, thirteen of the old British colonies declared themselves independent.

² J. D. Marshall, ed., *The Eighteenth Century*, p. 329.

Further Reading:

- Stephen Conway, *The British Isles and the War of American Independence* (Oxford, 2000)
- Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England, 1715-1785* (1998)
- Isaac Kramnick, *Republicanism and bourgeois radicalism: political ideology in late eighteenth-century England and America* (1990)
- James E. Bradley, *Popular politics and the American Revolution in England: petitions, the crown, and public opinion* (1986)
- James E. Bradley, *Religion, revolution and English radicalism: non-conformity in eighteenth-century politics and society* (2002)
- J. G. A. Pocock, *Virtue, commerce, and history: essays on political thought and history, chiefly in the eighteenth century* (1985)
- Ian Christie, *Wilkes, Wyvill and Reform* (1962)