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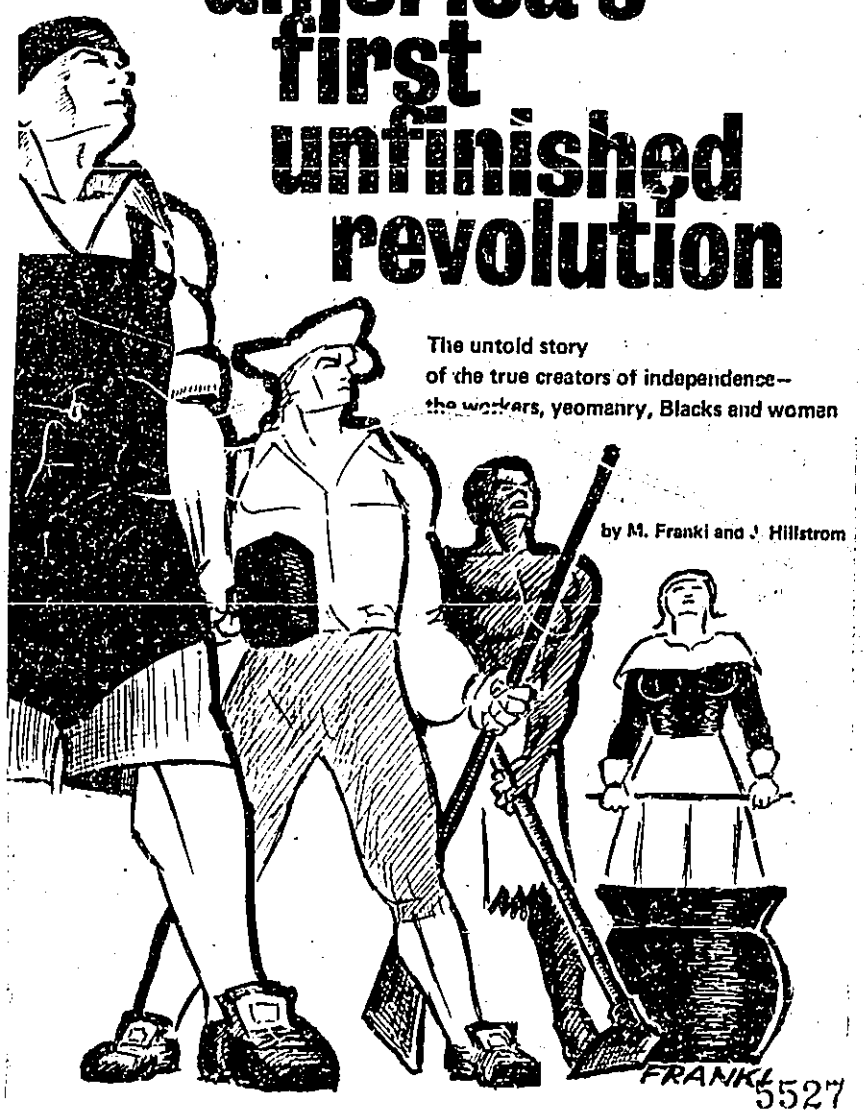
america's first unfinished revolution

The untold story
of the true creators of independence—
the workers, yeomanry, Blacks and women



by M. Franki and J. Hillstrom

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A NEWS AND LETTERS PUBLICATION

$1.00

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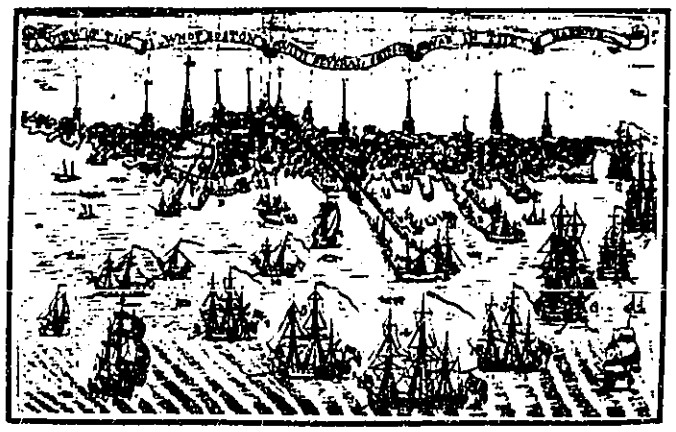
A News & Letters Pamphlet
Published by News & Letters Committees
1900 East Jefferson, Detroit, Michigan 48207
1976



Boston in 1773—center of colonial trade . . . and revolution.

". . . the American war of independence sounded the tocsin for the European. . . ."—Karl Marx

Introduction

The bicentennial year of the Declaration of Independence impels a return to its contradictory origins which, at one and the same time, raised the first banner of national freedom of any of the colonies in the world, and yet left the revolution in so unfinished and truncated a state that, in embryo, can be seen the totality of the crisis of today's world. There is a lot to be gained from a review of the past, especially since when it comes to the masses in revolt, the full story has yet to be told. To grasp the untold tale, it is necessary to look at it with eyes of the American revolution-yet-to-be.

It is with this in mind that we are proud to print this pamphlet by two Marxist-Humanists, M. Franki and T Hillstrom, who trace, in the dialectics of liberation, the specificity of the mass forces in the act of revolution. The modern-day "patriots," liberal as well as reactionary, extol the George Washingtons, Thomas Jeffersons, John Adamses as "the Founding Fathers," wrap themselves in the American flag to use as the hallowed platform from which to shroud the near-annihilation of the Indians*—the only true native Americans whose land this was. These "patriots" rail against today's freedom

*"The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black skins, signalized the dawn of the era of capitalist production. The idyllic proceedings are the chief moments of primitive accumulation."—K. Marx, *Capital*.

fighters as "subversive" exactly as George III railed against those of 1776 as "sedition mongers." The present authors, on the contrary, focus on the actual mass forces who both sounded the tocsin of revolution and laid their lives down for revolutionary democracy. We see come alive the working people, male and female; the Blacks, free and slave; and, yes, the native Americans from whom we learned both the strength of unified action and the ways of guerrilla fighting. (At least one founding father, Benjamin Franklin, held that* up as model for our need to act *as nation* rather than as 13 separate colonies.)

With *America's First Unfinished Revolution* we become witnesses of new forms of organization—Committees of Correspondence—as they emerged out of the town meetings. Once these letter writers began, on the new ground of "The Boston Pamphlet," to attend the town meetings in multitude, these became totally transformed *from* town meetings of rich colonial merchants *to* people's self-participatory organs of dual power—the engines of revolution.

Tons of textbooks and "histories" have systematically distorted America's revolutionary history and, in place of genuine historic mass actions, presented "leaders" who reduced the liberating ideas which gave action direction to "constitutional acts." It took over 125 years before a Sam Adams, the Chairman of the Boston Committee of Correspondence and major author of the "Boston Pamphlet," was restored to his full stature. But even then the Committees of Correspondence were presented as if they had been adjuncts to Sam Adams' "personality," instead of the articulation of the forces from below that, before 1772 when the Committees of Correspondence were created, were struggling to make themselves heard.

For example, 1770, the year of the infamous Boston Massacre, was not the beginning, but the culmination of the laborers' struggles against the British Redcoats who tried moonlighting by taking away the colonists' jobs. These class struggles also against the rich American merchants have yet to get their full due. It took two full centuries *plus* both the African Revolutions of the 1960's and the Black Revolution in this country (not to mention another decade after the mass March on Washington during the alleged Camelot days of the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Administration), before the Smithsonian

*The Iroquois Confederacy which so attracted Benjamin Franklin as a union of many tribes was hardly the model he used as a human relationship in a communal way where not only men were free but so were women. It would be centuries before "civilized" women gained what these supposed "savages" enjoyed--voting rights and not the minimal ones we have today, but actual veto over war powers of Chiefs.—See *This Land Was Ours* by Virgil Vogel.

Institute finally "discovered" *The Black Presence in the American Revolution.* Even with that booklet we hardly see Crispus Attucks as more than the first to die for freedom. But in fact this Black freeman, in whose veins also flowed Indian blood, *led* the attack on the British Redcoats, led it unarmed. Another five years would go by before open rebellion would unfold that would not stand still until independence was finally won from Britain. At least in one crucial respect John Adams was right and ahead of his times, and that was his recognition that the American Revolution was present *before* the war, *before* the Declaration of Independence was written—and (he might have added, but didn't) *defaced.*

It is hard to believe but it was 1970 before the first full study of the Committees of Correspondence—*Revolutionary Politics in Massachussetts* by Richard D. Brown—was first published. But, just as the biography of Sam Adams deals with the Committees of Correspondence as adjunct, so this first comprehensive culling of 1,000 pages of letters and another 1,000 pages of minutes of the Committees of Correspondence meetings, presents the revolutionary role of the towns as well as of Boston outside of an all-national, much less international, context. Moreover, it has nothing much to say of America's militia, i.e., native guerrillas. And yet, contrary to those who credit either Mao in the 1930's or Castro in the 1950's with "inventing" guerrilla warfare, it is actually in the United States where it was a mass movement. In this respect, it is the Tories, though as cynics and jesters of course, who first discerned the vision of the common man's new-world "fantasies." Thus, Moore's "Diary of Revolution" records:

"Down at night a bricklayer or carpenter lies
"Next sun a Lycurgus, a Solon doth rise."*

The common laborers or farmers, hidden behind trees or walls, who aimed their rifles at retreating Redcoats, before and after Lexington, and not only in New England but throughout the colonies, were what made possible the victory against Britain. It is in the present pamphlet that you will see the soldiers, of whose lack of discipline George Washington so complained, assuring "his" victories because they were fighting it as a *revolutionary* war. It is no accident that in 1961 Frantz Fanon reminded revolutionaries that, though weaponry is important, "it so happens that the liberation of colonial countries throws new light on the subject. For example, we have seen during the Spanish campaign which was a very genuine colonial war, that Napoleon, in spite of an army which reached in the offensives of the Spring of 1810 the

*Quoted by Vernon Louis Parrington in *Main Currents in American Thought,* which gives a more rounded view of colonial America than the "strict" histories.

huge figure of 400,000 men, was forced to retreat. . . . the Spaniards, inspired by an unshakeable national ardour, rediscovered the famous methods of guerrilla warfare, which, 25 years before, the American militia had tried out on the English forces" (*The Wretched of the Earth,* p. 51).

What is of utmost importance is not the fact that the method of modern guerrilla war originated in the United States at birth rather than in China or Cuba in mid-20th century. *What is decisive is how deeply it is rooted in the people—the relationship of the guerrilla fighter to the broad masses—and the underlying philosophy of freedom. Only then does it equal dialectics of liberation.* Otherwise it can be used for reactionary purposes, as indeed the Confederate Army did against the Union forces in the Civil War. What made the American guerrilla a genuine revolutionary instead of a mindless terrorist was, precisely, what the Tories, American as well as British, complained against as "the lowest Mechanicks discuss the most important points of Government with the Utmost Freedom."

The point we wish to make here is that this pamphlet is the only one where the readers will get a *total* view of the human forces of the American Revolution, whether they take on new forms of organization, like the Committees of Correspondence *when* people begin flocking to the town meetings and outvoting the "gentlemen merchants," or new forms of fighting, like guerrilla warfare *when* General Washington wasn't exactly winning the war while the unregimented yeoman army were delivering hammer blows to the Redocats, or a Tom Paine (whom John Adams had the gall to call "a filthy little atheist") pronounced, "My country is the world," thus extending nationalism to internationalism.

Take the question of Women's Liberation, an idea whose time has first come in our epoch. This, indeed, is why our age can shed the highest illumination on what was hardly noted in 1776. Yet, in embryo, it did begin then, and we are not just referring to Abigail's letters to John Adams on the needed freedom for women. They were not known in her time, or much later for that matter, and not because the John Adams-John Quincy Adams and their heirs kept these letters hidden. No, into the 19th and even 20th centuries, historians were telling the historic tale as *his*-tory, squeezed into the Procrustian bed of mid-Victorian male chauvinistic context, burying totally *her*-story as it was lived in the revolutionary period. Thus, when a woman, Black woman at that, wanted to fight in the revolutionary war she had to bind her breasts and pretend to be a man, as Deborah Samson Gannett did. Though she served for three years and was wounded twice with the

Fourth Massachussetts Regiment, her story would never have been known had she not applied for pension. Indeed it is hardly known today, though in 1830, after her death, and though she married after the war, her soldier's pension was given to her husband who survived her.

Women historians are now finding the written and unwritten records, and are righting some distortions of history perpetuated by male historians. And we also hear of the working women for, though they had no vote, the women of the revolutionary period were often self-supporting and occupied positions we today rarely ever have open to women, as is the case with printers. Yet one of the early copies of the Declaration of Independence was printed by a woman printer-publisher, Mary Catherine Goddard. But to this day, women historians, as men historians, present women "as women" and not in the role of revolutionaries on a *world* revolutionary road. Thus, the last quarter of the 18th century is particularly rich in lessons for our day, including that of Women's Liberation. 1776, which, as Marx noted over a century ago, sounded the tocsin for 1789, was sounding the tocsin of revolution not only for both America and France but was heard as far as San Domingo as well.* When in 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft penned the first Women's Manifesto–*Vindication for the Rights of Women*–, she was writing neither as wife to husband, as was Abigail Adams, nor a statement for women (but not for the most radical wing), as was Olympe de Gouge in the French Revolution. Mary Wollstonecraft wrote for revolution and belonged to a small radical club in London that numbered among its members Thomas Paine and one of the greatest of the world's poets, William Blake, who did not divide philosophy from revolution or from art or literature as he dedicated his fiery poems to the American and French Revolutions as well as to women liberationists, though he called them *Daughters of Albion* and *Mary*. It was he who warned Tom Paine that the British would arrest him if he did not escape.

In a word, this was not just the age of the American Revolution. *It was the age of revolutions*–American and French; industrial and political; intellectual and social. Just as, on the eve of 1776, the Committees of Correspondence didn't just disappear but merged into the mass revolutionary movement which had a life of its own, so 1776 was also the publication date of Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* which created a revolution in

*That the Smithsonian Institute, in 1972, discovered a *Black Presence in the American Revolution* to be not only American but Caribbean as well, tells how international is our Black Revolution.

political science with its labor theory of value. And, while this view of labor as the source of all value didn't reach the stage of theory until then, it was as early as 1729 that Benjamin Franklin's "A Modest Inquiry into the Nature and Necessity of Paper Currency" anticipated that theory of labor value. By 1807 these revolutions reached the highest philosophic expression in Germany with Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind.* But it wasn't clear until Karl Marx discovered his new continent of thought and proletarian revolution that the Hegelian dialectic was the source of all dialectics. In holding that Hegelian dialectics was the source of all dialectics, of liberation in life as in thought, Marx's historical materialism illustrated how this dialectical articulation of a genius was, in fact, the articulation of common people's struggle for freedom, transformed into method.

From *America's First Unfinished Revolution* the road opened for the next needed revolution. The seeds for it were laid as the first revolution ended and the John Adamses turned against the French Revolution and became Federalists while a Sam Adams not only welcomed the great French Revolution and became anti-Federalist, but distrusted the American Constitution and fought for a Bill of Rights. Tom Paine who had remained an unrepentant radical (Jacobin), held that "Reason, like time, will make its own way." But by the mid-19th century time had long run out and the inevitable irrepressible conflict erupted. The Civil War, which finally put an end to slavery, also remained unfinished as not only the Freedmen did not get their promised 40 acres and a mule, but capitalism sank into imperialism.

On the 100th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation the *News and Letters Committees* published *American Civilization on Trial*—Black Masses as Vanguard. There it was shown that, what, for American capitalism, was the triangular trade for slaves, rum and molasses, was, for the Blacks—African, West Indian, American—the triangular ever-live development of ideas of liberation which led to actual freedom. Today it must be made total. The totality of the crisis makes it imperative.

When we look at our epoch,we can see that the movement *from practice** of the past two decades has produced a new generation of revolutionaries. We can start with workers' battles against Automation which had resulted in the famous wildcat strikes of the 1950s and the Montgomery Bus

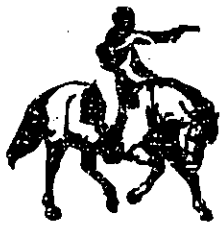
*See Part I, "From Practice to Theory" and Part V, "The Problems of Our Age: State-capitalism vs. Freedom" in *Marxism and Freedom*—From 1776 Until Today. Also see Ch. 1, "Absolute Negativity as New Beginning: The Ceaseless Movement of Ideas and of History," in *Philosophy and Revolution.*

Boycott which initiated a new Black Revolution in the United States. Or we can turn to the East European Revolutions against Russian totalitarianism, beginning with the East German in 1953, through the Hungarian in 1956, to the Czechoslovak in 1968 and the Polish in 1970. What is crystal clear, the world over, including China where the Sheng Wu-lien youth challenged Mao, is the emergence of de-centralized, informal, rank and file committees, councils of workers, Blacks, native Americans, Women Liberationists, youth turning away from vanguardist parties to lead which mislead and searching for a philosophy of liberation that is inseparable from the actual revolution.

Again, whether we look at the high point reached by the youth in Paris, 1968, with its near-revolution, or the abysmally low death-points perpetrated by the Nixon-inspired massacres in 1970 in Kent, Ohio and Jackson, Mississippi, against the massive American anti-Vietnam war youth movement and the Black Revolution, the fact is that the forces for revolution are present everywhere. But the crucial question today is not *if* a revolution is needed, but what comes *after*. This is the point of the political-philosophic maturity that our age represents, the very high stage of reason that the forces of revolution have reached. Instead of going in only for the destruction of the old, they want to make sure they will not have a new set of masters to replace the old ones, as they have seen in Russia and China. Now we are confronted with a conflict *between them* for global power on the same state-capitalistic ground as characterizes the United States and Japan, West Europe and the Middle East.

The reality of this bi-centennial year is stifling, exploitative, imperialistic, and so totally crises-ridden that a question mark hangs over the very survival of a civilization that is hemmed in by nuclear bombs. It must be uprooted, and totally new foundations laid for truly human relations. Toward that end we must first of all clear our heads and create a unity of philosophy and revolution. In no other way can a classless society emerge. As one step toward that arduous labor we are contributing this pamphlet, where a study of the past becomes a step toward the revolution-to-be.

THE NATIONAL EDITORIAL BOARD,
NEWS AND LETTERS COMMITTEES



I. The Gathering Storm

Ebenezer McIntosh, shoemaker, leads 2,000 men, mostly manual workers and unemployed, marching with almost military precision. Only yesterday, these had been split into two large rival gangs, the North End and the South End gang, battling each other over trifles. Now, united, they are making their way to the home of Andrew Oliver, newly appointed royal government stamp distributor under the hated Stamp Act. They reach his home. He is not there. They proceed to demolish his furniture and properties . . . (Boston, 1765).

•

Some 3,000 armed men, mostly farmers, have gathered on the Common; another 10,000 are reported on their way, having heard rumors that Boston was under attack by British troops, with fighting already going on in the streets and naval bombardment from ships' batteries. The vast assembly, bristling with rifles and revolutionary spirit, quiets down and Judge Danforth, an old man, speaks in his low voice . . . (Cambridge, 1774).

These are but two of the many instances of resistance to British rule, and bracket the period of escalating conflict which culminates in the full colonial revolt and the Declaration of Independence.

• • •

Out of the misnamed French and Indian War (1754-63), which in fact was the French and British War over control of the land that was Indian, two new revolutionary phenomena appeared: 1) the recognition by the Indians that this land of theirs was being relentlessly expropriated, which erupted in revolts such as those led by Chief Pontiac (1763-66); and 2) the lessons learned by the colonists on *how* to oppose British rule. . . . from survival and collective appeals to guerrilla warfare and self-sufficiency.

Chief Pontiac himself was a great philosopher of Indian self-sufficiency, as well as a great warrior and unifier of many tribes. He forged an alliance of the northern Algonquin tribes—Ottawa, Ojibwa, Shawnee, Delaware, Mingo, Wyandot and Iroquois—and this united force defeated in battle and captured eight of the ten British forts in the West. The two exceptions—Pittsburgh and Detroit. The Indians retained possession of the forts until 1766, when they were returned to the British through "negotiations."[1]

Benjamin Franklin so admired the achievements of the Iroquois nations and their confederate government that he referred to them as a model for uniting the colonies. In 1751, Franklin wrote, "It would be a very strange thing if Six Nations of ignorant savages should be capable of forming a scheme for such a union and be able to execute it in such a manner that it has subsisted for ages, and appears indissoluble; and yet that a like union should be impractable for ten or a dozen English colonies to whom it is more necessary and must be more advantageous, and whom cannot be supposed to want an equal understanding of their interests."[2]

In addition to these forces of resistance, there were slave revolts and all sorts of other pressures by the Blacks, from petitions to court cases to runaways. Among the most significant, five years before the actual revolution, was the bare-handed attack of Boston citizens led by Crispus Attucks which resulted in the infamous Boston massacre of March 1770, in which he and four other unarmed civilians were killed by British troops. Attucks (besides Black he was of Indian stock—Ahtuks, his mother's name, means "little deer") is always mentioned as the first to die for the cause of American freedom, but it is almost never revealed that he was also the leader of that Boston crowd, a runaway slave, a seaman of 20 years experience—and by no means "rabble" as characterized by John Adams.[3]

[1] Tebbel, John, *The Compact History of the Indian Wars*, Tower Publications, Inc., New York, N.Y., 1966, p. 47ff.

[2] Vogel, Virgil S., *This Country Was Ours*, Harper & Row, New York, N.Y., 1974, p. 48. See also, Morgan, Lewis H., *Ancient Society*, Charles H. Kerr & Co., Chicago, Ill.

[3] Franklin, John Hope, *From Slavery to Freedom*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, N.Y., 1947, pp. 127-128.

At infamous Boston Massacre, March 1770, Crispus Attucks, a Black and leader of bare-handed citizens attacking British troops, was first to die for the cause of liberty.

This, of course, is hardly the first instance of Blacks in rebellion. In 1739, in North Carolina, slaves from the Stono Plantation kill two of their guards, arm themselves and are joined by others. Crying "Liberty!" and marching with flags flying and drums beating, they head toward Spanish Florida where the governor has promised freedom to slaves fleeing the English Colonies. Only ten reach Florida—the rest are caught and executed.[4] Nevertheless, the depth of their passion for liberty stamped them as the first fighters for total freedom. Precisely because they were the most oppressed, their passion for freedom was deepest.

Slave rebellions and conspiracies laced the entire slave period up to the Civil War. Almost 300 have been reported and recorded.[5] How many others occurred can only be speculated. A conspiracy of silence surrounded the

[4] Ibid., pp. 80-81.
[5] Aptheker, Herbert, *Negro Slave Revolts in the United States*, International Publishers, New York, N.Y., 1939, p. 21.

slave system. It is well to remember that by the time of the American Revolution, Blacks constituted the largest single immigrant group. Brought here by force, and numbering some 500,000 out of a total population of 2,600,000, they represented nearly one-fifth of the people—a higher percentage than today. Their presence was everywhere, including the militia.

The militia was a system of military training derived from the ancient practice of Anglo-Saxons in England. All men were expected to train and be prepared to defend the land. In the colonies, men in a wide age range trained anywhere from a few days to a few weeks. Presumably all were subject to it. But it soon became, in fact, more and more a poor man's organization. A system of substitution arose allowing the more affluent to escape by paying others to take their place.

In this situation, it was inevitable that Blacks would soon "substitute" for the rich. The great bulk of slaves, of course, were excluded, though even here some did train—without guns.[6] As a result, when the colonial rivalry of France and England burst into the misnamed French and Indian War, Blacks fought alongside the colonists in their militia units, supporting the regular British troops.

The war itself reorganized colonial relationships in America. Colonials from many provinces fought together with the British to defend their communities against the French and Indian forces. The benefits of inter-colonial cooperation that the colonists learned were to be extended by them to their struggles against British domination.

This growing recognition of the importance of independence was nurtured by the town meetings of Massachusetts. Of the many institutions created in the colonies, none was more distinguished from both England and the rest of the colonies than the Town Meeting. As against England's, which were severely restricted to the upper class, New England's Town Meetings were loosened enough to allow everyone, "free or not free, foreigner or inhabitant" to attend.

Though officers were still likely to be affluent members of the community, these often had just recently achieved their wealth. Even those who were middle class were still untainted by upper class pretenses. Though women, Blacks, and the poor were not included, it was still an institution of considerable democracy for its time. There were provisions for annual elections, rotation of officers, decisions by majority rule, open debates,

[6] Quarles, Benjamin, *The Negro in the Making of America*, Collier, New York, N.Y., 1964, pp. 45-46.

speedy redress of grievances, the responsibility of officials and popular participation in all facets of local government.

These tendencies in the colonies were running in direct opposition to the changed mood toward more control in England following the British and French War for possession of the new world. To be sure, Navigation Acts had been passed as far back as the 1650s to regulate trade and commerce according to the principles of mercantilism, based on buying raw materials cheaply from the colonies and selling finished products dearly to them. Colonists were required to use only English ships to transport their goods. Later acts added more restrictions. To keep colonists unskilled where possible, some economic activity—hat making, for example—was prohibited.

The colonists disembowled the laws by engaging in wholesale smuggling. So widespread did this early form of rebelliousness become that the English tried to defuse its importance by holding it to be the result of their policy of "salutary neglect."

This policy was reversed after the end of the struggle for imperial supremacy which Britain won over France. Burdened by the enormous debts of the conflict and the new financial responsibilities of empire, Britain decided to enforce the old principles. Chancellor of the Exchequer George Grenville, to satisfy both King George III and English traders, imposed a series of new taxes and sought to enforce neglected ones.

The culmination of Grenville's policies in the Stamp and Quartering Acts of 1765 unleashed a fury of protests. The Stamp Act required stamps for all newspapers, legal documents and many other business instruments, with the money raised to be used to pay for the upkeep of British troops in the colonies as dictated by the Quartering Act.

Radical elements in several ports, including Boston, Newport, Philadelphia and New York, organized as the Sons of Liberty. They marched in public demonstrations, burned stamps and attacked and intimidated stamp agents. Instead of condemning Boston for its resistance, the whole of the Massachusetts townspeople supported the action.

When 17 of the 23 members of the House in Massachusetts were listed in the *Boston Gazette* as friends of the Stamp Act and purged at the elections, the impetus for opposing oppressive imperial dictates was given.

No one expected or completely planned the tumult that followed the Stamp Act. Although the earlier forms of resistance—slave uprisings, smuggling, impressment riots and others—foreshadowed what was to happen, the full sweep and scope of the Stamp Act riots were unprecedented. It is

the true beginning of the pre-revolutionary stage of development.

It is precisely such deeds by the workers, farmers and slaves, the natural revolutionaries, that we now turn to the prime propulsive forces of the American Revolution. This all culminated in the event which the nation honors in its Bicentennial—the Declaration of Independence. Yet the American ruling class has so systematically rewritten the past that it has muted or mutilated the role of these essential forces to exalt the elite like the Adamses, Henrys, Jeffersons and Washingtons of the time. They have taken the slaves' brandished torch and immobilized it atop a statue of liberty.

The direct action, the "praxis" of the deeper layers of the population of colonial America, the "passions-from-below," became a more profound source of theory, principle and philosophy than the formal positings of those steeped in formal studies. The most socially creative activities were those that sprang from the workers, farmers, Blacks and others of the disaffected masses. Their boldness, heroism and imagination relentlessly rode over all obstacles to expand the empire of freedom and thereby found a new nation based on new principles of government.

Nothing could be more simplistic than the anarchist notion—often masquerading as "Marxism"--that the American Revolution was the product of an *undifferentiated* revolutionary "people," or even "proletariat." The intellectual and organizational struggles of men like Otis, Dickinson, Paine[7] and others were *inseparable* parts of the total movement. Their ideas and efforts were developed, delayed or demolished, depending fundamentally on their grasp of the spirit of the living movement. In turn, the living movement itself was nourished, delayed or detoured by their work.

If it is petty bourgeois to fawn before the "people," it is bourgeois to exalt the elite. Not John Adams, George Washington and Thomas Jefferson are the heroes, but Sam Adams, Thomas Paine, and above all, the many revolutionary acts and committees that arose to express the powerful passions from below; though led by merchants, it was by such revolutionary elements as Sam Adams. These, which were the real engines of revolution, the real human motive forces in the creation of the nation, have been buried in deliberate efforts to conceal the truth of the American revolution.

[7]Not seen in the mountains of historical works are the international repercussions of the revolution-to-be in America. Thus, even when a Thomas Paine is mentioned as English, it is only from the point of view of what he learned from the English Revolution of 1668. Tom Paine certainly went beyond not only 1688, but also 1776 to 1789-1792, writing *Age of Reason* and *Agrarian Justice*. Karl Marx also saw it as precursor of revolutions in the 19th century.

The truth is a living, fluid, dialectical relationship between the masses and the revolutionary intellectuals and organizations. It is this dialectic which best illuminates what John Adams himself called the "engine"[8] of the revolution, the Committees of Correspondence.

Boston became the central forge for the unity of the colonies because of the objective and subjective developments in that city. Of all the major cities in the colonies, it alone had undergone a serious decline, falling from 3,000 houses around 1720 to 2,000 by 1776. The end of the French and Indian War and the British reinstitution of mercantilist policies depressed Boston's economy; it could support only half its population.[9] Its working class, therefore, was the most explosive of all social elements.

And first among those who helped forge unity were the workers' demonstrations led by Ebenezer McIntosh.[10] Far from being a "mob," as invariably described by chroniclers of the time as well as contemporary historians, they were productive members of the community. They included a variety of skilled and unskilled workers: shoemaker, Ebenezer McIntosh; cordwainer, Benjamin Starr; leather dresser, Isaac Bowman Apthrop; shipwrights, Henry Swift, John Blight, William Blight; sailmaker, Sephaniah Bassett; ship joiner, William Bovey; caulker, William Larribee; ropemaker, Thomas Rice; hatter, Samuel Richardson; housewright, Ichabod Simpson; chaisemaker, George Hambleton; distiller, John Corbitt; barber, Benjamin Wheeler; bakers, Cornelius Abbot, Henry Gardner, Thomas Stimpson; laborer, Thomas Smith. Children also participated, including those of John Blight, Hambleton, Swift, Richardson, Bassett and Simpson.[11]

Their destruction of appointed stamp agent Andrew Oliver's properties was the opening shot of the pre-revolutionary decade. A few days later the

[8] Brown, Richard D., *Revolutionary Politics in Massachusetts: The Boston Committees of Correspondence and the Towns, 1772-1774*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1970, p. vi. This excellent work of scholarship by Brown has greatly facilitated our own analysis.

[9] Erlanger, Stephen J., "The Colonial Worker in Boston, 1775," U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, New England Regional Office, Regional Report 75-2, p. 4. Much valuable information of the life, living and labor of the Boston workers of this period is compressed in this monograph. It also confirms the conscious role the workers played in compelling the move to independence.

[10] Morgan, Edmund and Helen, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, Colliers, MacMillan, New York, N.Y., 1963, pp. 101-170.

[11] Zobel, Hiller, B., *The Boston Massacre*, W.W. Norton Co., New York, N.Y., 1970, p. 37.

Workers forging anchor in blacksmith shop. Laborers such as these played primary role in compelling movement to independence.

same working class elements devastated the home of Tory official Thomas Hutchinson, another rich colonial official: Oliver resigned his position as the crown's stamp agent before he officially held it. Hutchinson, with a long public service record and highly regarded by many, lost his esteem, never to regain it.

In Newport, Rhode Island, similar mass actions catapulted another worker, John Weber, to fame. He had been hired by merchants to lead demonstrations against the stamp agents. The massive response to Weber's leadership compelled actions that went far beyond what the merchants had bargained for, and the "levelling" spirit of the demonstrations threatened even them. When Weber refused to be "called off," the merchants, after months of unsuccessful efforts, got rid of him by having him imprisoned.

Such mass actions, essentially working class, spread up and down the colonial seaboard. So effective were they, that in some cases the mere threat of such actions produced the resignation of the stamp agents.

The Blacks were, as always, in the forefront of this activity. When Hutchinson's house had been vandalized, Governor Bernard wrote that ". . . boys and negroes began to build bonfires in King's Street and blow the

dreaded whistle and horn that sent the Boston mob swarming out of taverns, houses and garrets."[12]

But then as now, Blacks faced racism—even from bold demonstrators against the system. Bernard describes how "General" McIntosh kept careful order and control over his troops and "allowed no allegedly disorder-prone Negroes to join the 2,000 paraders."[13]

Blacks were not so confused. Not only were they engaged in street actions, but they expanded their freedom struggle into the legal arena. Massachusetts' slaves were attempting to "bring an action of trespass in the local courts against their masters, to challenge the entire legal concept of slavery."[14] There were many such efforts. One was that of Jenny Slew who brought charges against a John Wipple of Ipswich, Massachusetts. She won the "sum of four pounds lawful money of this province."[15] Such efforts, however, were slow, expensive and largely individual in result.

But Jenny Slew was not only Black—she was also a woman. Triply oppressed, as Black, woman and worker, she served not only as the vital link between them all, but also as vanguard transmitting to one the special urgencies and understandings of the other.

The records on women are as scarce as those on Blacks. But it is clear that women participated in many phases of life and were far less segregated than now. The predominantly rural society required all of their abilities. There, as well as in the urban centers, their names crop up in one economic activity after another. Women were more active in work outside the home, which included jobs today restricted to males, like printing.[16]

This activity leads to further developments in the early 1770s. Phyllis Wheatly, a Black woman born in Africa, brought to America as a child slave, sold to a prosperous Boston tailor, educated and nurtured by the schools and revolutionary environment of Boston, produces and has published a book of poetry in 1773. It is the *second* such publication by *any* colonial woman.

It is here too that Abigail Adams demonstrates that even the women of the upper classes, educated, sheltered and segregated as her lower-class sisters

[12] Miller, John C., *Sam Adams*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 1936, P. 65.

[13] Maier, Pauline, *From Resistance to Revolution*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, N.Y., 1972, p. 70.

[14] Collections of Massachusetts Historical Society, 5th Series, III, pp. 432-437.

[15] Querles, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

[16] Erlangher, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

are not, can be thrust forward by the revolutionary surge. Two of her most trenchant observations are made in letters written from Boston to her husband John at the time of the first Continental Congress in 1774:

> I wish most sincerely there was not a slave in the province. It always appeared a most iniquitous scheme to me—fight ourselves for what we are daily robbing and plundering from those who have as good a right to freedom as we have.[17]

Surely the direct drive of the Blacks for their own freedom at this time not only inspired the observation but also compelled the move to the first significant feminist statement to emerge:

> I long to hear that you have declared an independency. And in the new code of laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make I desire you would remember the ladies, and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the husbands. Remember all men would be tyrants if they could. If particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies, we are determined to foment a rebellion and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice or representation.[18]

What is remarkable here is not only the manifestation of the Black and feminist dimension. The *relation* and *sequence* of struggles—Black then women—anticipate the same relation and sequence that will repeat itself before the Civil War and again in our own time. In both early periods they augured profound changes.

The women's struggles, therefore, were seldom separable from those of the men of the pre-revolutionary period. The colonial struggle that is shaping thus finds them together engaging the British power. The chief exception seems to be largely with the women of the upper classes, where the distinction of sex and economic roles was especially sexist.

One incidant, for example, records that when the British introduced troops into Boston in 1768, women would bump into the soldiers and then cry "Rape!" with the aim of rallying the townspeople against the troops.[19] The evidences increase as the revolution nears.

[17] Bergman, Peter, *The Chronological History of the Negro in America*, Harper & Row, New York, N.Y., 1969, p. 49.

[18] Booth, Sally Smith, *The Women of '76*, Hastings House, New York, N.Y., 1973, p. 89.

[19] Lomask, Milton, *The First American Revolution*, Farrer, Strauss & Giroux, New York, N.Y., 1974, p. 34.

So deep were the Stamp Act upheavals that the middle classes began to finally shed their traditional timorousness and began to take bolder stands against British control. They organized a Stamp Act Congress, more or less official and more or less subversive, which drew 27 delegates from nine colonies together in New York in the fall of 1765. They met for two weeks, succeeded in putting together several appeals to the British Parliament, then adjourned.

More significant, however, was their sponsoring and supporting an even more subversive organization—the Sons of Liberty. Throughout the colonies, various committees of action had materialized which served as links between the middle class elements of merchants, lawyers and ministers and the working class elements of seamen, shoemakers and others. The membership in most was predominantly middle class, but Boston's seems to have been primarily working class. These committees often functioned in secrecy, exploited direct actions, and generally coordinated activity against the Stamp Act.

Inter-colonial Sons of Liberty cooperation reached the point of influence by the end of 1765 that the governors in almost all of the colonies were paralyzed and the regularly constituted governments were dissolving.[20] The militia could not be turned to because they were also in opposition to the Stamp Act. By the beginning of 1766 the Sons of Liberty committees began to consider a "General Congress" of all of the colonial committees to create an open, united revolutionary organization of the colonies! This did not get beyond the talking stage, however, and when the British repealed the Stamp Act in March, the Sons of Liberty faded in strength.

In New York, however, opposition to British rule was moving to open rebellion. Governor Cadwallader Colden had ordered Fort George to prepare for extensive defense, which infuriated several thousand townspeople who converged on the fort on November 1, 1765. They "knocked at the gate, placed their hands on the top of the ramparts, called out to the guards to fire, threw bricks and stones against the Fort and notwithstanding the highest provocation was given, not a word was returned to the most approbrius language." Major James, the officer in charge, later testified to Parliament that had he fired he could have killed 900. He did not, knowing that had he done so, 50,000 more would have assembled from New York

[20] Morgan, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

Molly Pitcher fired cannon at Battle of Monmouth
in New Jersey during Revolutionary War—and there
were many unknown Molly Pitchers in the American Revolutionary struggle.

and New Jersey and overwhelmed the fort. General Gage wrote to England that had they fired from the fort, it could have meant the beginning of civil war.[21]

The Stamp Act ferment catapulted Sam Adams onto the center of the historic stage. With great skill, imagination and boldness, he helped to fashion a revolutionary force that transformed America. Well born, bred and educated, Adams tried his hand at several businesses but failed in all of them, and discovered his natural talents were most excitingly challenged by

[21] *Ibid*, p. 254.

politics.

Adams was 25 when he and some friends launched a newspaper, the *Independent Advertiser*, published from 1747 to 1775 and filled largely with his own conception of politics influenced profoundly by the philosophy of John Locke. He excoriated the town gentlemen and country squires who had "an itch for riding the 'Beast of the People'."[22] Unrelenting attacks against bureaucracy, tyranny, slavery became the focus of his energies. He developed a fondness for mixing with dockworkers, merchant seamen and other laborers who frequented the waterfront taverns. The practice would acquire major importance. To him is often attributed the successful merging of McIntosh's South End gang with the North End gang and their consequent destruction of Oliver's and Hutchinson's properties. The central fact is that while the heroism of James Otis and Patrick Henry was largely of an individual nature, Adams' was more social, moving boldly toward the masses. He plunged deeply into direct action, consulting and collaborating with the ever-ready workers of Boston. He helped reverse the usual middle class attitude of revering the masters and reviling the masses. It was this reversal by the middle classes—through Sam Adams—of joining with the masses and their direct actions which produced the Stamp Act Riots, the Sons of Liberty, and the British repeal of the Stamp Act the following year.

It was this policy which most clearly symbolized Sam Adams. On this he developed refinements and elaborated tactics. And it was the success of this which won more and more middle class converts to the revolutionary cause. They revealed their approval by electing him to the Massachusetts House of Representatives, placing him in open leadership of the majority, radical Whigs, where he would further make life unbearable for Governors Bernard and Hutchinson, successfully driving both out of office.

Into this volatile mix, a final element would be added which would make revolution inevitable. The revolution, as Marx observed, is often propelled by the "whip of the counter-revolution." The British, arrogant with their new world power, annoyed by their own equivocations, decided to be "firm." They passed a Quartering Act (1768), which sent General Gage and his troops into Boston. He reported that as to "Government in Boston," there was "in Truth very little at present." It was "under a kind of Democratical Despotism."[23]

[22] Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 20

[23] Zobel, *op. cit.*, 103.

Blacks were being courted on both sides. Even as Jenny Slew was suing for her freedom, a Boston Town Meeting voted on May 26, 1766 to consider steps "for the total abolishing of slavery from among us; that you move for a law, to prohibit the importation and purchasing of slaves for the future."[24] The observer and reporter was John Adams. An officer of the troops, on the other hand, is reported as remarking to slaves, "Go home and cut your masters throats; I'll treat your masters, & come to me to the parade; & I will make you free ... & if any person apposeth you, I will run my Sword through their hearts."[25]

Blacks and workers engaged in the first real skirmishes of the coming revolution. The tension between the townspeople and the "bloody backs" escalated, especially since the troops were in competition for jobs. Finally, the inevitable—a fracas; troops fire and five colonialists die, including Crispus Attucks. It is 1770 and the Boston Massacre enflames the townspeople.

Under the prodding of an enraged assembly and Sam Adams, Governor Hutchinson, who succeeded Barnard as governor in 1769, defuses the situation by removing the troops from the city.

The idea of resistance grows from the actual practice of resistance by the people in public demonstrations and the polls. Furthermore, after such an idea did occur to the radical representatives, it certainly could never have been implemented had the townspeople not given their mandate. Just who "the people" were that made up the potentially revolutionary force was clear to Governor Hutchinson, who wrote: "It is the lowest part of the vulgar only who have not yet been taught that if they are to be governed by laws made by any persons but themselves or their representatives they are slaves."[26]

On the heels of the repeal of the Stamp Act, however, the British imposed another series of taxes on glass, lead, paper and tea imported into the colonies, and set up customs offices to enforce obedience to the acts. Called the Townshend Acts, after Chancellor of the Exchequer Charles Townshend, they were immediately met with colonial resistance. And in June of 1767, Parliament suspended the New York assembly for failure to approve adequate provisions for the quartering of British troops in the colony, raising furious protests from colonists who charged that if Parliament could do this to New York it could do it to all colonies, thus depriving

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 48.

[25] *Ibid.*, 102.

[26] Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

them of their rights as free men.

Again resistance centered in Boston, which rallied widespread colonial opposition in the form of non-importation agreements, whereby merchants refused to import goods from England until the Acts were repealed. They were so effective that imports were cut by 60 percent. It was Boston's opposition to the acts which led to the quartering of troops there that became involved in the Boston Massacre of 1770, which in turn speeded the practical repeal of the Townshend Acts in that same year. Only the tea tax was retained to maintain the principle of Parliament's right to tax the colonies, a principle the colonists were contesting with every effort made to impose it.

The two years between the repeal of the Townshend Acts and the creation of the Committees of Correspondence in 1772 are described as uneventful by virtually all reports. It is an interpretation which fails to consider the importance of thought as an activity. Not only did Sam Adams write 40 widely-distributed articles in this period which challenged British economic and political supremacy over the colonies, a group of orators also arose to speak out on the practical issues of the day and the paramount right of the colonists to control their own government. Far from merely rejecting the right of Parliament to tax without colonial representation, the colonists were transcending this level to challenge the very right of Parliament to govern them at all.

Heretofore, the Massachusetts townspeople saw themselves as English citizens possessing rights guaranteed them under the British Constitution, and clashed with a Parliament which insisted the colonists were not citizens, but subjects who should consider themselves fortunate to participate in government at all. Now they were challenging the very nature of British government, rejecting the concept that political leaders were on a higher level than the citizens, and insisting that they should be true servants of the people.

These were the ideas of government which solidified in the minds of the Massachusetts colonists in the so-called quiescent period 1770-1772, and flared out at the first objective development which officially contradicted that concept. It came in 1772 with the Civil List Act, whereby public officials in the colony, primarily judges, would be paid lucrative salaries by the crown. Obviously this was a ploy to separate the administration and judiciary from popular influence, encouraging office holders to serve the wishes of Britain against those of the colonists.

II. The Committees of Correspondence

In Boston, the workers, poor and politically weak, responded eagerly to the ideas of economic liberty and political freedom. They often seized the leadership from the more conservative merchants in enforcing boycotts, organizing demonstrations and provoking incidents. Merchants protested that "the lowest Mechanicks discuss upon the most important points of Government, with the Utmost Freedom," but there is no question that it is precisely this role of the workers which proved to be essential in fully developing the revolutionary spirit in the colonies.[27]

For that matter, even the children knew of class consciousness, especially when unemployment became widespread in Boston. Thus, colonial children scrawled in their copybooks: "By the sweat of thy brow, thou shalt eat thy bread." The merchant class did not tolerate "unions" or "combinations" of workers, and apprenticeship, like indentured service, lasted seven years. Whereas the working class may not have known statistics such as the richest ten percent of the people controlled 65 percent of the wealth, they knew the practice of class oppression against themselves. And the most important fact is that they broke the rule of the merchants, without which there would have been no revolution.

[27] Erlangher, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

For Sam Adams, the Civil List Act provided him with the opportunity he had been patiently waiting for. At the Boston Town Meeting held November 2, 1772, he moved:

> That a Committee of Correspondence be appointed to consist of twenty-one Persons—to state the Rights of the Colonists and of this Province in particular . . .[28]

Passed unanimously. That they sensed its importance is revealed by the remarks of one of the participants: "We are brewing something here which will make some people's heads reel at a very moderate age."[29]

The idea was not new. The English Dissenters of the 1730s had used committees of correspondence in their stuggles against the authorities; so had colonial clerics of the 1750s and '60s. However, it is more likely that for Adams the Stamp Act riot experiences were more significant, when he had been in communication with members of the Sons of Liberty in other colonies. When they pressured him for a more formal intercolonial communication system, he had discouraged the idea, fearing it to be premature and that it might inhibit local initiative.

What was new in Adam's application of the idea was a) using the established system, the town meetings, to erect the new structure, and b) moving to involve the small farmers, the "yeomanry."

The paramount activity of the Committee and first on the agenda was the preparation of a statement on the condition of colonial rights and the numerous violations of such rights by the British Parliament. This statement, prepared by men appointed for their experience in writing against British imperial oppression (Greenleaf on a free press, Appleton on Negro slavery, Sam Adams, Quincy and Otis on political freedom, plus others), was approved at the Boston Town Meeting of November 30, 1772. Entitled, "The Votes and Proceedings of the Freeholders and other Inhabitants of the Town of Boston, in Town Meeting assembled, According to Law," it is commonly referred to as the Boston Pamphlet.

The genius of Sam Adams was actually what was produced from below at the town meetings, which he and Otis and the others, *as a group writing*, articulated in the Boston Pamphlet. This articulation became the turning point in town meetings, which now had a totally new ground for functioning. It was a turning point for the Boston Committee, which became in fact the Massachusetts Committee.

[28] Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 48.

Running throughout the pamphlet was the basic thesis of the rights of freemen. It stripped the British Parliament of its pretense to perfectly represent the "life, liberty and property" rights of the colonists. Whether or not they had "property" life and liberty were absolute rights of all freemen and could not be abridged by any legislative body without the consent of these freemen. The whole structure of government and the sovereignty it commanded derived from these inviolable and unalienable rights of the *individual* freemen.

The Boston Committee obviously reflected the growing popular recognition that the horse and the rider are not the same—and that the colonists had been the horse too long!

The Massachusetts towns responded speedily to it. Of 260 towns and districts, a majority had answered within six months. Nothing like this kind of give and take had ever ocurred before. All were equals, travelling—as was the popular expression then—on the same "bottom." Committees of Correspondence spread rapidly throughout the countryside.

Inspired by the overwhelming responses, the Boston Committee selected a subcommittee of writers to reply to communications received from the towns. Group authorship of the Committee was retained. Moreover, all replies were presented to the whole Committee, who held complete control of the correspondence, mailed out by the Committee Clerk, not the authors.

As local committees of correspondence were formed in the towns, the necessity of forming report committees was seen. There were grievance committees designed to discover and formulate complaints, as well as committees of vigilance whose function it was to maintain a surveillance over constituents' rights. The report committees were subordinate to the correspondence committees and *all committees were subordinate and answerable to town meetings.*

Throughout the year 1773 correspondence from the towns demonstrated two points of consensus: 1) that Parliament, although acknowledged as the highest legislature of the empire, was limited by "inviolable constitutional safeguards," and 2) that sovereignty lay not with Parliament or the General Court, but with the people organized in the towns.

Governor Hutchinson had challenged the Boston Committee's right to deal with such government issues (Town Meetings should consider only local matters), charging that the Pamphlet was advocating an "Emperium en emperio"[30] (a government within a government). While there were formal

[30] *Ibid*, p. 72.

denials of the charge, this is precisely what was taking place in increasing tempo.

The Committees spread not only horizontally but vertically as well. A petition of the Boston Committee quickly found its way to the House of Representatives of Massachusetts and shortly ended as one of its resolves—all in record time. The reason for this rapidity: key members of the Boston Committee, like Sam Adams and Thomas Cushing, were also officials in the House, holding key posts and therefore able to expedite legislative matters.

The structure and function of the Boston Committee was thus enlarging itself and enveloping larger structures as well. Where Sam Adams had hesitated earlier in extending the Sons of Liberty organizationally, he now eagerly proposed the extension of committees of correspondence "among the several Towns in every Colony"[31] to Richard Henry Lee of Virginia.

The small towns, by no means just adjuncts of Boston, began taking the initiative in many new developments and became links to the many petitions of the Blacks. Only two months after the formation of the Committees, Medfield, a town in Suffolk County, instructed its House representatives to seek the abolition of the slave trade. Shortly afterward (April 1773), a circular appeared signed by four slaves, which was being circulated throughout the Committees.

The document bears examination as an example of the powerful propulsive force that was surging from slaves, mechanics, seamen and others:

> The efforts made by the legislative of this province in their last sessions to free themselves from slavery (sic!), gave us, who are in that deplorable state, a high degree of satisfaction. We expect great things from men who have made such a noble stand against the designs of their *fellow-men* to enslave them. We cannot but wish and hope Sir, that you will have the same grand object, we mean civil and religious liberty, in view in your next session. The divine spirit of *Freedom* seems to fire every humane breast on this continent, except such as are bribed to assist in executing the execrable plan.[32]

If the colonists, plumbing the concept of natural rights, exposed its narrowness as practiced by the British bureaucracy, the slave's concept of freedom exposed the colonists' own crimped conception of it. *Here, clearly,*

[31] *Ibid*, p. 124.
[32] Strick, Lisa W., *The Black Presence in the Era of the American Revolution 1770-1800*, Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C., 1973, p. 17.

BOSTON, April 20th, 1773.

SIR,

THE efforts made by the legislative of this province in their last sessions to free themselves from slavery, gave us, who are in that deplorable state, a high degree of satisfaction. We expect great things from men who have made such a noble stand against the designs of their *fellow-men* to enslave them. We cannot but wish and hope Sir, that you will have the same grand object, we mean civil and religious liberty, in view in your next session. The divine spirit of *freedom*, seems to fire every humane breast on this continent, except such as are bribed to assist in executing the execrable plan.

We are very sensible that it would be highly detrimental to our present masters, if we were allowed to demand all that of *right* belongs to us for past services; this we disclaim. Even the *Spaniards*, who have not those sublime ideas of freedom that English men have, are conscious that they have no right to all the services of their fellow-men, we mean the *Africans*, whom they have purchased with their money; therefore they allow them one day in a week to work for themselves, to enable them to earn money to purchase the residue of their time, which they have a right to demand in such portions as they are able to pay for (a due appraizment of their services being first made, which always stands at the purchase money.) We do not pretend to dictate to you Sir, or to the honorable Assembly, of which you are a member: We acknowledge our obligations to you for what you have already done, but as the people of this province seem to be actuated by the principles of equity and justice, we cannot but expect your house will again take our deplorable case into serious consideration, and give us that ample relief which, *as men*, we have a natural right to.

But since the wise and righteous governor of the universe, has permitted our fellow men to make us slaves, we bow in submission to him, and determine to behave in such a manner, as that we may have reason to expect the divine approbation of, and assistance in, our peaceable and lawful attempts to gain our freedom.

We are willing to submit to such regulations and laws, as may be made relative to us, until we leave the province, which we determine to do as soon as we can from our joynt labours procure money to transport ourselves to some part of the coast of *Africa*, where we propose a settlement. We are very desirous that you should have instructions relative to us, from your town, therefore we pray you to communicate this letter to them, and ask this favor for us.

In behalf of our fellow slaves in this province,
And by order of their Committee.

PETER BESTES,
SAMBO FREEMAN,
FELIX HOLBROOK,
CHESTER JOIE.

For the REPRESENTATIVE of the town of [illegible]

Slaves petitioned for freedom in pre-revolutionary period in Boston.

was the revolutionary mass acting not only as Force but as Reason. They further declared:

> . . . as the people of this province seem to be actuated by the principles of equity and justice, we cannot but expect your house will again take our deplorable case into serious consideration, and give us that ample relief which, as *men*, we have a natural right to.

It was not lost on the colonists. A year later, the colonists of this region will take the giant step towards abolitionism.

In any case, the year 1773 saw the Committees spread throughout the colonies. Virginia had set up an 11-man standing committee for intercolonial correspondence including Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson and Richard Henry Lee, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Hampshire, and South Carolina had formed provincial Committees by July 8. "By 1774, the Boston Committee of Correspondence was in communication with more than 300 towns in Massachusetts alone besides carrying on an inter-colonial correspondence with Sons of Liberty as far south as Charleston, South Carolina."[33]

Through its connections with Benjamin Franklin in London, the Boston Committee got its hands on incriminating letters written by Governor Hutchinson. While they essentially exposed his authoritarian conceptions—not new—what infuriated the colonists was this evidence that he had proposed and plotted the attack on individuals, their charters and their democratic rights. When the Boston Committee distributed the letters throughout the Committees, Hutchinson was finished. His usefulness to Britain now destroyed, he asked to be relieved of his post.

Though the British had repealed both the Stamp Act and the Townshend Act, they had retained a small tea tax, as a matter of asserting the principle of Parliament's right to tax and to affirm its supremacy. By itself, the tax had failed to raise enough opposition to be repealed. Now, the great monopoly, the East India Company, faced bankruptcy. It had vast stocks of unsold tea to dispose. Because of its valuable hold on India, Parliament decided to help it. The result was the Tea Act (May 10, 1773) which it tried to make palatable to the colonists by removing all export duties on the tea shipped there and by permitting the Company to sell directly to agents, instead of through middle men. Thus it could sell the tea at prices lower than the smuggled tea of Holland. The small import duty remained but, since this

[33] Miller, *op. cit.*, pp. 268-269.

had failed to raise any great fury, it was not expected that there would be any difficulty with the new plan.

To be noted, not Boston but the patriots of the other regions were first to express serious concern. This underscores the spontaneous quality of the emerging revolution: that even the active Bostonians could fail to detect an explosive issue as it shaped up.

The basic story of the Boston Tea Party is familiar to most school students. No attempt need therefore be made here to detail the events. It is enough to note that the colonists were even more aroused over the favoring of a monopoly than by the small, sneaky tax.

What is new, however, is that the mass meetings that had preceded the final action were of unprecedented size. Hutchinson admitted that he couldn't have broken up such mass meetings. So many townspeople were present at one, he said, that "no other Posse except the meeting itself would have appeared."[34] The crucial night of December 16, 1773, more than 8,000 assembled to try to have the captain return the tea to England. When he refused, at a signal from Sam Adams—"This meeting can do nothing more to save the country."[35]—men disguised as Indians appeared. Thirty to sixty "Mohawks," divided into three groups, methodically emptied 342 chests of tea into the bay. It took three hours. No one was ever specifically charged with the offense and it has remained a mystery to this day as to who was exactly involved. Some believe that "most alleged participants were artisans."[36] Hutchinson reported that they were "lower ranks of people," "journey-men, tradesmen," "rabble not excluded," ". . . yet there were divers gentlemen of good fortune among them."[37]

Anticipating powerful counter-blows from England, the Boston Committee increased its communication with other towns and in particular with port towns to prevent any dividing and conquering of the colonial opposition. It was all for "the glorious purpose of rescuing the present and the future Generations from ignominious and debasing Thraldom."[38]

[34] Larabee, Benjamin Woods, *The Boston Tea Party*, Oxford Press, New York, N.Y., 1964, p. 105.

[35] *Ibid.*, p. 141.

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 143.

[37] Griswold, Wesley S., *The Night the Revolution Began: The Boston Tea Party, 1773*, The Stephen Greene P., Brattleboro, Vermont, 1972, p. 65

[38] Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

Boston Tea Party, December 16, 1773

Rumors spread that the tea vandals might be sent to England for trial. The Boston Committee drafted plans for a mutual protection agreement. It was never used: so many patriots had sprung up as a result of the tea party that the diminishing agents of English authority would have been unable to enforce any reprisals.

The countryside charged forward, *exceeding even Boston in its thrust.* More than eighty towns *initiated* contact with the Boston Committee; twenty were completely new responses. More than a dozen formed their own local committees of correspondence. Many proposed a more radical boycott than Boston. Charlestown set up a committee of inspection to enforce the boycott of tea and to buy up all the tea at cost in order to destroy it all by fire. *It urged the Boston Committee to follow suit.*

The mobilization that was taking place was not merely one of Mass and Force. Inevitably, Reason itself was undergoing changes. Where originally the concept of "Balance," in referring to the British Constitution ever since the Revolution of 1688, stood for the equilibrium maintained between the King, Lords and Commons, the people at the Town Meetings, in the

Committees of Correspondence, in the "Body," began to espouse a new conception which shifted the emphasis to the "Balance" between the rulers and the ruled. It was this balance, they argued, which had been upset by the arbitrary actions of the British ministry. It was the ruled, not the rulers, who were basic to this balance.

What was occurring, then, was a new fusion of town and country, of ruled and ruler, of intellectual and activist, of philosophy and revolution, of spontaneity and organization. *Obviously a social revolution was taking place, with the Boston Committee at its center.* The action by Medfield shows the profundity of the social change. A year earlier, it had moved against the slave trade, a concession to the Blacks which all were preparing to take—including the Southern colonies. Now (January, 1774) it moved against slavery itself:

> . . . it is incumbent upon us to bear testimony against that Iniquetous practis of enslaving the affricans--it appears at first view Greatly absurd for us to plead for Liberty and yet patronize the most Cruel Servetude and Condage—the poor affricans when taken from all that is dear to them in their native soil have not the least shadow of Liberty Remaining they have nothing they can Claim as their own their time is Entirely Devoted to the service of their absolute Lords—their Bodys are at their Disposal to be bartered and Traded from man to man as the senceles Beasts their children (if any they have) are born in a state of abject servitude than which nothing can be more repugnant to Liberty for which we so universally Contend—we wish to maintain Constitutional Liberty our selves and cant endure the thoughts of its being withheld from the same flesh and Blood for no other reason that we can Conceive of but because the God of nature has been pleased to tinge their skin with a Diferent Couler from our own if we would look for Liberty our selves we conceive we ought not to continue to enslave others but immediately set about some effectual method to prevent it for the future.[39]

The conception of liberty had co-existed uneasily with the conception of property. Now, it was breaking through the old limits. Liberty, clearly, predominated over property. Who better to destroy property's place than the slave? And when a motion was made to exclude unpropertied towns-

[39] *Ibid.*, p. 174.

people from some of the crucial mass meetings that were taking place, the speaker was shouted down with cries from the floor that "if they have no property they had Liberty, and their posterity might have property."[40] These, the slaves and the unpropertied, were advancing the conception of liberty.

Where even a Sam Adams was conscious only of Locke as "philosophy," thus burdening the concept of liberty with that of property ("life, liberty and property"), the plebians, the yeomen, the craftsmen, the farmer knew what "economic status" meant. Thus, even when they were with the merchants, and they were fighting as one in the revolutionary struggle, *their* consciousness of class divisions was such that the emphasis they placed on this "life, liberty and property" was an individual *right*, expressed in *collective* work through the Town Meetings or Committees of Correspondence, and as a whole checking on the writing of the pamphlet and following up with activity when they saw the shift was from merchant to worker initiative. Finally, even in respect to their own leaders like Sam Adams and James Otis, it was not individual but *group* authorship that created the Boston Pamphlet. As a ramification of that, it was also outside of Boston, and not only in Boston, that the articulation of the revolutionary ideas and their concretization matured.

It was inevitable, therefore, that the British bureaucracy, losing the battle of Reason, should now fall back on force to salvage something out of the shambles of its power. The strategy was to crush the resistance in Boston, the seat of rebelliousness. A series of punitive acts were passed, which the colonists labeled the Intolerable Acts. A Port Bill (March, 1774) closed the Boston port until the tea was paid for. Another act imposed rigid royal control over offices that had been responsive to the electorate. The Massachusetts Charter itself was revoked, and the town meetings had to be approved by the Governor before they could be held. A new quartering act permitted the quartering of troops in *all* the colonies and in all *occupied* dwellings (earlier, it had been only in taverns and deserted buildings). It was as close as they could get then to a military dictatorship.

The news of Parliament's revoking of the Massachusetts Charter aroused the province like nothing else the administration had done before to maintain its authority in the colonies. Towns which had formerly been uninvolved in the resistance now threw in support. Social and political Tory

[40] Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 207

leaders of the provincial towns who had once enjoyed popular influence were now met with majority opposition.

The tyranny of the Intolerable Acts contrasts with the "largesse" dispensed in the Quebec Act, approved by the British Parliament at this time. It extended the Canadian boundaries south to the Ohio River; accepted the old, centralized, authoritarian French administration which tried civil cases without benefit of jury; and gave the feudal, caste-structured Catholic Church a privileged position. It meant that just over the hill, so to speak, just beyond the settled areas where many of the colonists expected that they might be moving, a way of life was being favored by the British government, their government, which went back to the days before the Cromwell revolution, when corrupt, Catholic popery ruled through absolute Kings.

The Intolerable Acts, far from repressing the national movement, spurred it forward. The Boston Committee, inspired by the appearance of the "Body" (i.e., body of the people), enters its most spectacular period. It calls a meeting of the neighboring towns for the beginning of May. There they learn that almost *all* the colonial governments on the continent have expressed their solidarity with Boston and their readiness for "preserving the Liberties and promoting the Union of the American Colonies."[41] The meeting sends out a circular urging "All should be united in opposition to this violation of the Liberties of All."[42] They hint at a total suspension of trade with Great Britain as a colonial answer to the Intolerable Acts.

They move toward a new policy of non-importation, in which merchants will countermand their orders for their fall supplies from England. The merchants balk. Some even go so far in their opposition that they tender their respects to the disgraced Hutchinson and welcome the new governor, General Gage! Such vacillation is not new. They had backed off from a full confrontation after the Stamp Act. But the Boston Committee, though itself filled with many of the same class of men, is *imbued with a spirit and philosophy which transcends their narrow class interests.* They realize it is the "yeomanry whose Virtue must finally save the country."[43] They propose a new plan of boycott which places the responsibility for its execution in the hands not of the merchants but of the farmers: the Solemn League and Covenant (hereafter: SLC) will enforce a boycott of British goods by a

[41] Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 186.
[42] *Ibid.*, p. 186.
[43] *Ibid.*, p. 190.

non-consumption agreement rather than a non-importation agreement, as they had done during the Stamp Act. Those who refuse to sign the Covenant will have their names published "to the world,"[44] an invitation, of course, to the more revolutionary populace to enforce the discipline and check the errant merchants.

Some of the merchants, recollecting the violence that had been used against Hutchinson and Oliver, make a desperate attempt to "annihilate" the Boston Committee, what one top Tory, David Leonard, had called, "foulest, subtlest, and most venomous serpent ever issued from the egg of sedition."[45] At the town meeting of June 1774, they mobilize their forces to censure the Boston Committee. It is a crucial battle, with debates raging for two full days. When it is over, the motion is beaten "by a great majority."[46]

Support for Boston is overwhelming. Grain, livestock, and cash pour in from all directions. Unity is taking shape in "praxis." The Boston blockade, the SLC, the counter-revolutionary thrust of the Tories to "annihilate" the Boston Committee—all galvanize support from the city, the countryside, and from throughout the colonies.

Nor is the support the mindless, monolithic one, enamored of current vanguardists. The Boston Committee, for example, fails to win a vote of confidence from the towns for the SLC. The moves being made toward a colony-wide congress, the First Continental Congress, is the most common reason for not following the Boston Committee all the way on its SLC. Already, the imminent Congress circumscribes the Boston Committee, which is at the peak of its powers as a "dual government." At the same time, the Congress begins to become a reality *because* of the drive of the Boston Committee for a severe secondary boycott. And precisely this bold conception, based on the yeomanry, smokes out the last covert opposition and makes the emergence of the First Continental Congress possible and necessary.

The middle classes were caught between the powerful passions from below and the bullying British bureaucracy from above. They were moving toward the masses and could not stop even now for their own salvation's sake.

Workers were especially hard hit by the closing of the Boston port. It

[44] *Ibid.*, p. 192.

[45] Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 264.

[46] Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

is reasonable to expect that they pressured the Boston Committee to allocate funds to create jobs. This was done, and men were set to repairing streets, building houses, ships and a brick factory.

This then was the revolutionary temper of Boston and Massachusetts, which produced the outpouring of armed men at Cambridge on September 2, 1774, described at the beginning of the pamphlet.[47] The assembly learned that Boston was not under attack. After listening to a speech from Judge Danforth, they returned to their homes. The Boston Committee was not directly involved in all this. But so widespread had the revolutionary temper become, so deep the social revolution, that it was already making unnecessary much of the particular functioning of the Boston Committee. *Spontaneity and organization had become so intertwined that they had elevated the social level of existence to a whole new plateau.* The First Continental Congress, Provincial Congresses, new Committees of Safety and Inspection, democratically re-organized militia, restructuring the whole of the old governmental infra-structure—all were replacing much of the functions of the Boston Committee. No organization—or state—withered away more graciously than did the Boston Committee by the end of 1774. Its leading members were now dispersed to the four winds, disseminating the seeds of the Boston Committee on a continental and, even, world-wide arena.

[47] *Ibid.*, p. 277.

III. The 'Body' and the Militia

As we have seen, so much has been written and said about the Boston Tea Party that it has congealed into another lifeless episode. Force and Mass are declared to be its essence, and no more need be said. But here as elsewhere the myth makers must be exposed. Inseparable from the Force and Mass, and far more significant, was the emergence of the "Body," the shortened term for the "Body of the People." It was originally applied by royal officials to what they considered "a majority of the people" or the "greater part of the people." Its usage was similar to that applied to the "Crown" or the "King's Person." The "Body," in fact, soon began to replace even the "Crown" in importance.

The Town Meetings were also being superceded. It is easy to see why. Boston had a population of some 15,000 in 1773. A town meeting would allow only 2,500 of the populace to attend. The mass meeting, the "Body," preceding the Boston Tea Party, was over 8,000. And several such meetings had taken place within a short period of time, each one increasing in size. No restrictions existed; *all* could attend. Men and women, Black and white, young and old, rich and poor, *all* constituted the Body. The "philosophy" of the time had not the slightest implications of the far reaches of this

profound social phenomenon; even Sam Adams, who saw farther than most, was still locked in Locke's concepts. But it should be clear that the Body was transcending such limited civic structure and was reaching for the ultimate: freedom, direct democracy, the full participation of all individuals, the restoration of the unity of the individual and society.

The same is true of the colonial militia, whose heroic actions produced the most original *world* concept of guerrilla warfare. The enemy, though belatedly, did recognize that something far superior to the Redcoat and his arms existed in the colonial workingman. This ordinary working man, in his work clothes and carrying his rifle, or the farmer with hardly more than a slingshot and hidden in a tree on the familiar grounds of his land, could knock out a well-armed and trained Redcoat.[48]

What the British and perhaps George Washington himself considered "a rabble in arms," what had begun to function before the declared revolution—those working men and their hunting rifles, inflicting losses on the British regulars—was in fact a guerrilla army which both preceded and saved Washington.

When Washington takes command of the New Englanders, the new Continental Army, he writes privately of them: "... their officers generally speaking are the most indifferent kind of People I ever saw ... I dare say the Men would fight very well (if properly Officered) although they are an exceedingly dirty and nasty people."[49] More revealing of the great divide separating Washington and the New England militiamen is his scornful assessment of their courage and the close relationship between the officers and soldiers:

> ... It is among the most difficult tasks I ever undertook in my life to induce these people that there is, or can be danger till the

[48] See Winston Churchill's *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples*, Volume 3, *The Age of Revolution:* "The Americans were operating in their own country by their own methods. Each man fighting mostly on his own initiative, hiding behind bushes and in the tops of trees, they inflicted severe casualties upon some of the best regiments that Europe could muster. The precise drill and formations of Bourgoyne's men had no effect." (p. 197) "He (Clinton) found himself faced, not with a regular army in the field, but with innumerable guerrilla bands which harassed his communications and murdered Loyalists. It became evident that a huge army would be needed to occupy and subdue the country." (p. 204).

[49] Kollenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

> Bayonet is pushed at their breasts; not that it proceeds from any uncommon prowess, but rather from an unaccountable kind of stupidity in the lower class of these people which believe me, prevails but too generally among the officers of the Massachusetts part of the Army who are nearly of the same kidney with the Privates. . . .[50]

He presses to increase floggings from an already excessive 100 lashes to 500. When he catches New England officers cutting the hair of privates or performing other menial tasks, which he considers unbefitting the "dignity" (read: aristocratic, upper class) of officers, they are tried and convicted.[51]

It is important to examine further that one aspect of the New England social revolution was the restructuring of the militia system within the context of the Declaration of Independence. They had systematically weeded out the officers of the old system and democratized it to the point that officers were elected by their own ranks. Many of these new "officers" were former blacksmiths, shoemakers and other workers. They were not "officers" as Washington conceived them. Behind his pretentions to create a disciplined army out of the New England forces, Washington was in effect *suppressing the social revolution that had surfaced so magnificently around Boston and the Committees of Correspondence.*

None saw, and least of all George Washington, the commander who wanted just as great and disciplined an army as the British, the crucial significance of both the flexibility and creativity of the militia in fighting the guerrilla war. For example, Francis Marion, the well-known guerrilla fighter of South Carolina, had Negroes fighting with him when Washington was quite double-tongued on the question. When Washington finally accepted them, because he was on the verge of losing the war, he hardly recognized their leadership qualities. At the end of the Revolutionary War, however, one company of Massachusetts militiamen called the Bucks of America, all Negro including its commander, was accorded honors.

It has been customary to hail the perseverance of Washington. His winter of discontent, Valley Forge, has been transformed into a variant of Christ-on-the-cross, with Washington and his troops suffering for the cause they embraced. The rank-and-file soldiers surely did suffer, but Washington's aristocratic conceptions and practices assured that his suffering, if any, was minimal. He commanded in luxurious comfort. The fact is that Washington,

[50] *Ibid.*, p. 153.

[51] *Ibid.*, p. 219.

Flag of "Bucks of America," all-Black Boston regiment of troops and officers who fought with colonists against British tyranny during Revolutionary War.

the southern slaveholders and the conservative merchants were responsible for the deterioration of the revolutionary struggle to the dismal plight of Valley Forge. As a result of Washington's policy to create a traditional, disciplined European-type army, he had come into conflict with the revolutionary masses. They refused to support his reactionary conception of an army which would reinforce the old, aristocratic class relations. The result is that he was never able to command an army that went beyond 20,000, despite the fact that there were upwards of 200,000 colonials involved in the fighting during the eight-year period of the Revolutionary War.

Up to the outbreak of armed conflict, violence had been minimal at the social class level, since most of the revolutionary ground had been won earlier without the need of violence. The colonists had easily isolated their enemies, the Tories, through their activity in the Town Meetings, Sons of Liberty, Committees of Correspondence and the "Body." But once the resort to arms began, the violence became protracted.

This was not the result merely of the British force of arms; it was as

much the determination of the nascent ruling class of merchants and slaveholders to replace the British bureaucracy as rulers. They wanted to defeat the British, but were also determined to prevent the masses from gaining too much power. And so the war dragged on, in sharp contrast to the initisl siege of Boston which routed the British forces when the colonials were not saddled with power maneuverings.

While the mass of the colonists failed to support Washington in his outmoded military and class conceptions, they were ready to fight and die to prevent a British victory. The militia which Washington so disparaged was always there at critical battles to prevent major disaster. As one European general observed, "The Americans lose 600 men in a day and 8 days later 1200 others rejoin the army, whereas to replace 10 men in the English army is quite an undertaking."[52] This inexhaustibility and capability of patriot forces, especially in the South and West where they successfully repulsed British efforts to militarily split the colonies, were certainly as important in the final victory as Washington's "continentals," if not more so.

The oppressed continued to advance their struggle despite conservative opposition. Blacks like Peter Salem and Salem Poor distinguished themselves in the early fighting at Breed's Hill (Bunker Hill). Among Washington's first steps on being placed at the head of the new army was to dismiss the Black soldiers. It was an incredibly stupid move, for the British were quick to exploit it by promising freedom to Blacks that joined them. Thousands did flee to the British, and Washington was thus threatened by the very men who had fought on his side. It took only a few months for him to correct the stupidity that the slave system had instilled in him. By the beginning of 1776 he had reversed himself and was permitting the enlistment of free Blacks. In the end, a total of 5,000 Blacks fought in the revolutionary armies on all fronts, with none of the racial segregation that poisoned almost all later wars. This Black presence more than anything else made inevitable the abolition of slavery in New England during (Vermont abolished slavery in 1777) and after the war.

[52] Jensen, Merrill, *The Founding of a Nation,* Oxford University Press, New York, N.Y., 1968, p. 587.

IV. The Declaration of Independence

In practice, then, before it was put to pen, the colonists of Boston and Massachusetts had achieved near independence. Out of their social revolution had come the proposal and drive for the First Continental Congress. Now, with its convening (September 1774), the revolution faced the central challenge of all revolutions, the second negation. The first is the destruction of the old, which had been for all practical purposes accomplished; the second is the building of the new to replace the old government, the task the colonists now turned to.

As they came through New York, on their way to Philadelphia, John and Sam Adams were disheartened. The Sons of Liberty had been decisively defeated by the conservative merchants. A Philip Livingston alluded pointedly to them as "Goths and Vandals."[53] Philadelphia was no better. John Adams was treated as though he had leprosy; he walked the streets in solitude, "borne down by the weight of care and unpopularity."[54] Sam Adams reported that there was "a certain degree of jealousy in the minds of

[53] Woodward, W.E., *George Washington*, Blue Ribbon Books, Horace Liveright Inc., New York, N.Y., 1926, p. 314.

[54] Harlow, Ralph V., *Samuel Adams*, Henry Holt & Co., New York, N.Y., 1923, p. 251.

some, that we aim at a total independency, not only of the mother country, but of the colonies, too; and that, as we are a hardy and brave people, we shall in time overrun them all."[55]

The First Continental Congress approved three of the major aims of the Bostonians. First, they approved the "Suffolk Resolves," a set of proposals which declared that colonists owed no obedience to a government that had imposed the Intolerable Acts and should train and prepare themselves to resist with arms as long as such acts remained in effect. It was another one of the steps materializing independence before it was declared. And this, not by one city or two, one state or two, but by *all* the colonies combined (Georgia would join later).

The second action defeated a "Galloway Plan" which would have continued to subject the colonies to Parliament's domination. Its defeat dealt a major blow to the conservation force (Galloway later left to join the British).

Third, they accepted the "Continental Associations," essentially a form of Sam Adams's Sacred League and Covenant, which called for an end to the import and export of goods to Britain, enforced by committees in every colony, city and town. It was the Bostonization of the colonial movement; the committees of correspondence had been nationalized—up to a point.

The Congress was filled with conciliationism. Too many of the delegates still hoped to win some form of reasonable concession on their demands *within* the structure of the empire. John Adams deplored going over ground long covered in Massachusetts, and later noted:

> Gentlemen in other colonies have large plantations of slaves and the common people among them are very ignorant and very poor. These gentlemen are accustomed, habituated to higher notions of themselves, and the distinctions between them and the common people, than we are. And an instantaneous alteration of the character of a colony and that temper and those sentiments which its inhabitants imbibed with their mother's milk, and which have grown with their growth and strengthened with their strength cannot be made without a miracle. I dread the consequences of this dissimilitude of character, and without the utmost caution on both sides and the most considerate forbearance with one another, and prudent condescension on both sides, they will certainly be fatal.[56]

[55] *Ibid.*, p. 236.

[56] Kollenberg, Bernhard, *Washington and the Revolution*, MacMillan Co., New York, N.Y., 1940, p. 108.

They were mired in parliamentary maneuvering with men philosophically closer to the colonial Tory than to the revolutionary masses of Boston. The people of Massachusetts, reported a correspondent of Adams, were asking each other anxiously, "what is our Congress about, they are *dozing* or amusing themselves".[57] he believed it was making the Tories saucy and Whigs disheartened. New Englanders would storm Philadelphia, disperse Congress and set up a military dictatorship.

The refusal to face the issue of independence was straining the bonds of the Congress. It appoints a committee (1775) to explain to the people that Congress has no intention of declaring independence. Sam Adams threatens a split. He will create a New England Confederation, independent of both Great Britain *and* the colonies.[58] It is the most extreme step yet envisioned. It will mean that the social revolution formed around the Boston Committee will stand on firmer ground, though they may also have to stand *alone* against the might of Britain. Sam Adams' threat begins to dislodge the obstacles to independence.

But even greater than his threat was the beginning of armed conflict. British troops extended a probe of arms into the Boston countryside, and on April 19, 1775, exchanged fire at Lexington and Concord with "Minutemen" ... the colonial militia. The American Revolution begins, the irreversible struggle for independence is locked with that "shot heard 'round the world." Nearby, Sam Adams, now hunted along with John Hancock by the British under an official arrest warrant, exclaims, "Oh! what a glorious morning is this!" [59]

This first fusillade, in which more than a hundred fell dead, soon developed into a year-long siege. The fury and rage of the embattled farmers and Bostonians included the near massacre of the British troops as they left Concord to return to Boston; the defense and defeat—though moral triumph—at Breed's Hill (Battle of Bunker Hill); conquest of Fort Ticonderoga; transport of its heavy artillery over miles of rugged terrain; and the final expulsion of the British out to sea, never to return. Nothing that followed ever sustained the boldness and bravery of this siege.

The declaration in deeds was meant for more than the British, it was

[57] Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 341.

[58] Jensen, *op. cit.*, p. 587.

[59] Kurtz, Stephen G., and Hudson, James H., eds., *Essays on the American Revolution*, W.W. Norton & Co., New York, N.Y., 1973; article by John Shy, "The Military Conflict Considered as a Revolutionary War," p. 148.

meant for the Congressmen. One of them, rich, powerful, master of hundreds of slaves, a relative non-entity as a patriot, slightly experienced in military matters and a confidant of conservatives, got the message; he began to appear at sessions of the newly convened Second Continental Congress (May 10, 1775) in full military dress. It was George Washington, and his uniform was his most revolutionary statement up to this point.

Still, the Congressmen delay any formal statement of independence. The hesitation in taking the ultimate step of separation from Mother England was not only the result of left-over loyalties and selfish pecuniary motives. It also stemmed from a failure to listen to the message clearly given by the people, who in their practice in the battlefields of the countryside and streets had already declared independence. Colonial merchants did not want to lose trade privileges enjoyed under the British flag and this element served to delay a formal declaration. Also, fears were expressed by many delegates that anarchy or despotism would replace British authority.

But the concrete fact was that the masses of Massachusetts had created an army, and appeals were pouring in to Congress to adopt it. The question was: who would lead it if it were adopted? John Adams took the initiative, and approved the slaveholder from the South, George Washington. "This appointment," he said, "will have a great effect in cementing and securing the union of these colonies."[60]

It did that. Conservatives, rich landholders, slave owners, wealthy merchants, the upper class in general could be assured with Washington in the central position that the patriots' cause would not turn dangerously into a social revolution, that the power and properties of the rich would not be disturbed.

Sam Adams, "The Man of the Revolution,"[61] as Thomas Jefferson later described him, agonized. Though he had been successful in having Congress adopt the New England forces as a basis for a Continental Army, he began to "Hamlet-ize" himself. He now began to think he was unfit, because of age and lack of ability, to be employed in "founding empires."[62] He was right, but not because of his age, 53, nor lack of ability, but because the Congress *was* being built to found an empire. He was surrounded by pretenders-to-power, hustlers; it was a destructive setting for a revolutionary

[60] Sears, Louis Martin, *George Washington*, T. Crowell Co., New York, N.Y., 1932, p. 85.

[61] Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 343.

[62] Harlow, *op. cit.*, p. 286.

formed by the social revolutionary impulses of Boston.

Now, at the pinnacle of power, the enemy was no longer the foreigner he had fought; here he spoke, dressed and strutted about as a true patriot. These "patriots" obstructed the ties that had bound him with the yeomanry, Blacks, workers and others of the natural revolutionaries. Now, when he most needed the *direct influence* of such workers, he had to grapple with the problems alone. Republicanism, representative government, fell short of the revolutionary reality when "The Wheels of Providence seemed to be in their swiftest motion."[63] Few had gone as far as he in pen, podium or "praxis." The later philosophies of Hegal and Marx superceded Locke because Sam Adams had taken Locke as far as he could go.

Meanwhile, the idea of independence could not long be denied. In his pamphlet *Common Sense*, Thomas Paine articulated what was already known by every American foot soldier: that it is absurd to insist upon loyalty to the nation you are fighting as your enemy. By the spring of 1776 many colonial legislatures instructed their delegates to the Continental Congress to support a vote for independence. On June 7, 1776, a committee including Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Roger Sherman and Robert R. Livingston, was appointed by the Continental Congress to draft a formal declaration of independence.

For all the forces of action, of ideas, of deepening those forces that mean to carry through the revolution against the middle class leadership—including the best of them like Sam Adams, and before the complete counter-revolution within that revolution that found its expression in the Constitution—the banner that was raised to the world was the Declaration of Independence: *All men are created equal.*

Whether it was in England itself, or as far away as Haiti, where a young group of Haitians, including Henri Christophe who had participated in the revolutionary siege of Savannah and later fought for his country's independence; whether it sounded the tocsin for the great French Revolution as Marx saw in the 19th century or became an inspiration for Latin American revolutions, nothing so stirred the American colonists, nothing so stirred the international spirit of the age as the Declaration of Independence.

What most people did not know, however, was the retreat from that universal declaration. Primary author Jefferson (the father of mulatto children whom he kept as slaves) capitulated to the southern pressure to which he

[63] Ibid., *p. 286.*

belonged by omitting the following original paragraph attacking the British King's slave policy in the colonies from the final draft of the Declaration of Independence:

> He has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither. This piratical warfare, the opprobrium of *infidel* powers, is the warfare of the *Christian* king of Great Britain. Determined to keep open a market where MEN should be bought and sold, he has prostituted his negative for suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or to restrain this execrable commerce; and that this assemblage of horrors might want no fact of distinguished die, he is now exciting these very people to rise in arms among us, and to purchase that liberty of which *he* deprived them, by murdering the people upon whom *he* also obtruded them; thus paying off former crimes committed against the *liberties* of one people with crimes which he urges them to commit against the *lives* of another.[64]

Along with the retention of slavery was also the total disregard of women's rights. It wasn't only that what Abigail wrote to John Adams was unknown by anybody and unheard by John, it was an actual manifestation of the unfinished revolution.

At the same time, it would be totally wrong to think that this victory of the merchant and slave-owning class left intact the same type of "balance of powers" which the colonists had brought from England. Quite the contrary. The first national revolution against the imperial domination of another country was successful and did establish new ground for world humanity as a whole.

Massachusetts did move to declare slavery illegal in 1783; 5,000 slaves did gain their freedom through participation in the American Revolution. And of the many more thousands that fled—either to Florida where the Indians gave them refuge, or to Britain which promised them freedom but betrayed that promise, or to Canada or the West Indies—these became the very beginnings of the next historic stage for the struggle for freedom:

[64] Franklin, *op. cit.*, pp. 128-130.

abolitionism. Indeed, from among the Blacks who fought in this revolution would come those who became founders of the abolitionist movement, like Prince Hall.

This cannot, naturally, whitewash that first incompleted American revolution. Indeed, imbedded in the fork-tonguedness of the Constitution is the ambivalence and contrediction which later brought about both the Indian and Civil Wars. It remains today as the demand upon this generation to once and for all complete the revolution as a social revolution. The next American Revolution will not stop half way.