Chapter XVI

EUROPEAN STATES UNDER LATE MONARCHISM

I

The story of Eastern Europe during the eighteenth century is utterly different from that of the West. Russia and Prussia emerged as Great Powers, taking their place alongside Austria and France. Poland, in the second half of the eighteenth century, disappeared completely, swallowed by its neighbours: Prussia, Austria and Russia. The rise of both eastern powers is equally dramatic, even astonishing, as is the despotism in a new guise that they created, but Prussia started first - as Brandenburg, the territory ruled by one of the electors of the Holy Roman Empire.

Prussia could be said to have been moulded by three generations of Hohenzollern monarchs in accordance with the precept which Frederick William I addressed to his son, Frederick the Great (which could just has easily have been uttered by his grandfather, the Great Elector): "Have money and a good army; they ensure the glory and safety of a prince."¹ (Louis XIV, too, could - or rather, perhaps, should - have summed up much of what he wrote by way of instruction to his son in much the same words.)

The future of administrative systems at the disposal of government during the nineteenth century lay with the reforms of the 1790's in France and their systematic expansion by Napoleon. Before then, however, one administrative revolution had already been accomplished elsewhere in Europe. This was the creation of an entirely new kind of regime in Prussia, the work of Frederick William I and his son, Frederick the Great. The effects of that revolution underwent an eclipse for a decade or two after the death of Frederick, but were revived, amended, and exploited further, after the disaster of Jena, by Stein and Hardenberg.

The overblown picture of Frederick the Great's achievement, the work of nineteenth and early twentieth century historians (not all of them German) has perhaps been scaled down overmuch during the last fifty years. For example, the underground conflict between Frederick the Great and his ministers and officials forms the subject of one of the more important writings on his reign which have appeared in recent years.² But, significant as the long campaigns of bullying and spying on the one side, and subterfuge and conspiracy on the other, may be for the light it sheds on Frederick's character and the imperfections of the Prussian system, it adds to rather than detracts from the sheer impressiveness of the

¹ P.Gaxotte, Frederick the Great, G. Bell, 1941, p.20.
² H.C.Johnson, Frederick the Great and His Officials, Yale Univ. Pr., 1975.
whole achievement - and hardly warrants the titles of 'administrative stalemate' and 'bureaucratic anarchy' which occur as chapter headings.

One possible reason why the Prussian administrative revolution has not received the credit which has been accorded in recent years to other revolutions (financial, commercial, etc.), more or less contemporary with it is that it is still hung around with misconceptions and distortions. Prussia is usually credited with the invention of modern bureaucracy, but this both diminishes and exaggerates what was achieved. What Frederick William and Frederick the Great did was to construct a system of governmental rule which enabled them to mobilise and exploit a far higher proportion of the total resources of their territorial possessions than any previous monarchy had managed - or even considered feasible. The radical nature of the administrative reconstruction, its scale, and its implications for the future are, when examined in any detail, quite extraordinary. In terms of innovative social technology, it rivals anything accomplished since then in the way of administrative reform or economic planning.

The major role in the revolution in governmental administration which has been attributed to Frederick the Great goes well with the reputation he acquired through his military exploits, his territorial acquisitions, his literary associations and accomplishments, his extraordinary energy (demonstrated as much in the sheer volume of his writings as in anything else) - and his bad temper and autocratic behaviour. He did, it is true, make some adjustments to the administrative system he inherited, but it was his father - the unlettered, irascible, boorish Frederick William - who was the chief architect of the new Prussia.

King Frederick William I inherited a bankrupt kingdom and a 'household' administration as antiquated and ineffective as any in Europe. He left the kingdom with an income from the royal domains alone almost three times what it had been, a war treasure of eight million thalers, an army twice the size of what he had inherited, and which was regarded as the most efficient and best disciplined in Europe. The administrative system he developed, and which his son exploited, was the envy of other countries - Britain among them; Edmund Burke was especially impressed, and urged Parliament to model the country's financial system on Prussia's.

EvenFrederick William I, though, built on earlier foundations. His own father's reign was inglorious, compared with what came after, but the essentials of the system established under the 'Great Elector', Frederick William, were nevertheless retained.

There were three essential elements in the Prussian system founded by the 'Great Elector' in the seventeenth century: a powerful standing army, conciliation and alliance with the landowning class (the Junkers) in Brandenburg, which broke up the Brandenburg Estates (there was no general meeting after 1653), and subjection, by threat of military action, of the Estates which had formed the centres of opposition in the detached provinces on the Rhine and in East Prussia. Whether the achievement was the outcome of a master strategy
or of accident and opportunism (as in Cauten's account\(^3\)), a pattern of rule was formed out of which was modelled not only the kingdom of Prussia but, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the German Empire.

Towards the end of the Thirty Years War, Frederick William, the 'Great Elector', had inherited a realm consisting of a miscellany of territorial possessions which seemed on the point of falling apart. It was clear enough, at such a time, that the key to security lay in armed forces, but all the new Elector had were bands of ill-conditioned mercenaries and deserters from other armies who plundered and terrorised the lands they were supposed to defend. To create an army composed of disciplined, competent, troops, he had first to purge it of the rabble of Landsknechte. This he did, reducing its strength to a mere two and a half thousand men - negligible as a military force, but much less of a menace to the nobles and property owners in the Elector's own territories.

The next task was somehow to propitiate, subdue, neutralise or ally to himself the Estates in the different provinces, who had interests and privileges of their own to advance or protect, and who also controlled taxation. He did all this, but principally, and most significantly, he came to terms with the Junkers who had come to form the controlling element in the Estates of Brandenburg itself and who were his most intransigent opponents. A simple bargain was struck between the great landholders and the Elector by which they made over to him the sum of 530,000 thalers, payable over a period of six years, in return for the outright abolition of military and other services. Henceforward, they held their land as freehold and in absolute ownership. There was more. The Junkers were freed of the legal restrictions by which they had been bound in the past, were recognised as the only class authorised to acquire estates, exempted from the payment of taxes, and given absolute control over their peasants. "Finally, he recognised the authority of the Junkers in local affairs, while simultaneously commissioning them as his agents in all matters that concerned Brandenburg as a whole."\(^4\)

All these moves were incidental to the main purpose, which was to create an effective army. The force he managed to build with the money coming from the bargain struck with the Brandenburg Estates was modest enough, but proved invaluable as the foundation for the army of over 20,000 men he assembled when war broke out between Sweden and Poland in 1655: the war which saw the birth of the Prussian army, and with it the foundations of the Prussian state.

Like Louis XIV, the Elector was unable to break the old, venal, condottiere-like system by which a company was the property of the captain and a regiment of the colonel, but he did (again like the French) create a centralised supply system, and with it a kind of general staff, both of which did much to control dissident officers and regularise the line of command as well as improve provisioning and standardise equipment.

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His son Frederick, who got one of the titles of king handed out by the Emperor at the turn of the century, was not the man the Great Elector was; his chief distinction seems to have been to have made a fool of himself by imitating the pomp and ceremonies (and the extravagance) of Louis XIV. But at least the new state was kept sufficiently in being during the twenty-five years of war which filled his reign for his son, Frederick William I, to resume the state-building work the Great Elector had begun, and along much the same lines.

Frederick William I saw himself as constrained by much the same limitations as his predecessor, the Great Elector. He had served with the army in the wars which the ambitions of Charles XII of Sweden and Louis XIV had generated, and had become acutely aware that, with the army of the newly created kingdom dependent on foreign subsidies, its foreign policy would be largely controlled by the more powerful countries which chose to ally themselves with him. His first objectives, therefore, when he succeeded in 1713, were to build a large treasury and a large army - which was in fact hardly ever used during the twenty-seven years of his reign.

No doubt he was helped by his reign's coinciding with an unusually long period of European peace, but there is also no doubt about the energy and determination with which he set to work; he even began three years before his accession to the throne, being instrumental in getting committees appointed to investigate the administration.

One significant move, made early on, was to replace the old 'household' administration by a General Finance Directorate, relegating the Treasury (Generalfinanzkasse), previously the recipient of fixed revenues, to serve as an accounting department of the royal household. A still more radical reform was his jettisoning of the King's Council, the chief instrument of early monarchist government, as it had been of medieval kingship. There had been a Privy Council, which had been founded a century or more ago, largely in order to deal with the foreign affairs of an enlarged Brandenburg, but this had lost most of its business to individual councillors, special boards or commissions. Under Frederick William (and still more under Frederick the Great), the king took it upon himself to make all decisions in private (i.e., within his own apartment, or 'cabinet') and to issue instructions to cabinet secretaries for transmission to the General Directory - or, for that matter, to anyone else. "The king no longer ruled in council but from the cabinet."\(^5\)

Other moves followed in quick succession. The lifetime leases and mortgage arrangements by which the royal domains (amounting to a quarter of all Prussian territory) were managed, or farmed, were replaced by short-term leases, which made it easier to raise rents. The break with the 'poor man's Versailles' established by his father was more dramatic. Having made up his mind that, since Prussia 'could not be both Athens and Sparta,' it would have to be Sparta, he abolished, literally by a stroke of the pen, two-thirds of his court officials, reducing the expenses of the royal household by three-quarters in a couple of years. Dismissed officials were offered places in the army - army officers, in their turn, being given preference in appointment to civil administrative posts. Feudal dues, where they were still being exacted in his territories, as they were\(^5\)

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elsewhere in Germany, were commuted, knight's service being reckoned at 30 thalers. Excise duties were made uniform throughout the kingdom. A general land tax was levied - on the landholdings of nobles as well as of peasants.

The main consideration, to which all these reforms and innovations were directed, was the army, Frederick William's home ground. Once again following the Great Elector's lead, he paid off those officers he regarded as 'unworthy'- many of them being foreign mercenaries. The nobility was forbidden to take paid service elsewhere; later on, a cadet corps for sons of the nobility was established. Recruitment had followed the practice common to all European armies of being the responsibility of the captain of a company (elsewhere, it was the colonel of a regiment) who was given a lump sum for enlisting and maintaining his command up to strength. It was a system manifestly open to abuse, but the king had the whole kingdom divided into 'cantons', more or less equal in population size, each of which was required to supply a quota of men to a particular regiment. Recruits were almost exclusively peasants, but, although their engagement was long-term, peace-time service was for three months only in spring and autumn, leaving them free to work on the family farm for three-quarters of the year.

Military finances, and their administration, had in the past been dealt with separately from general, or civil, government; there was in fact a military tax, collected by local military tax collectors, dating from the Thirty Years War. To begin with, Frederick William handed over this responsibility to a board - the General War Commissariat - which supervised the commissariats in each province which, in turn, looked after the local tax collectors. It was this system of commissariats which, having been given fairly wide police powers, was relied on to enforce economic controls designed to encourage industry and manufacture. To some extent, the military administration operated more in towns, the civil ('General') administration in the countryside; the arrangement was rather more convenient than it might seem, because the peace-time army, although recruited in the countryside, was quartered in towns, as were the permanent regimental, quartermaster, and other military establishments.

Nevertheless, this dual administrative system of General Finance Directory and General War Commissariat bred increasingly disruptive conflicts, especially between subordinate and provincial officials, and the king eventually put an end to it by consolidating military and civil administration and finance under a single supreme board: the 'General-Oberstkriegs-und-Domanen-Dirекторium', (the 'General Directory'), which stayed in being at the head of the system (under the king, of course) until the end of the century.

The General Directory was divided into four sections, each concerned with a distinct set of territories (the divisions reflecting the territorial expansion of Brandenburg into eighteenth century Prussia) plus specific aspects of the country's affairs as a whole; thus one department dealt with frontiers and agriculture, a second with the overall national budget, a third with the Army. and the fourth with postal services and coinage. However, until the 1770's, no department had responsibilities - or even a separate existence - of its own, but merely prepared the business assigned to it for the General Directory to consider at its meetings, held on four days every week, with each section head acting as chairman in turn, reporting to the king after the meeting.
For the king held aloof from the whole administrative apparatus; indeed, both Frederick
William and Frederick the Great kept their civil servants safely in Berlin, some distance
away from Potsdam, and dealt with them by correspondence, through their secretaries.
They rarely saw their ministers more than three or four times a year. This was not the
only feature of the way the civil service was organized which make it quite distinct from
any which existed then, or since. Another was Frederick William's predilection for boards
and 'colleges'. What authority the General Directory possessed was vested in the group as
a whole; the ministerial chief of each of the four sections assembled the information
which concerned that section's territorial or functional remit and prepared reports only as
a preliminary to common deliberation in a full meeting of the General Directory; all
resolutions submitted to the king and all instructions, announcements or rescripts sent out
to subordinate bodies were issued in the name of the General Directory and signed by all
four ministerial chiefs. "One might be tempted," remarks W.L.Dorn, "to see in this
organization an approximation towards government by discussion, if one did not know
that discussion was confined to the application and never extended to the framing of an
administrative rule."6

It was the needs of the army that determined in large
measure the institutional framework, the level of economic activity, and even the social
organisation of Prussia. This assessment - made by G.P.Gooch and endorsed by Gordon
Craig,7 receives its most striking validation when it comes to what Gooch called the
'social organisation' of Prussia. What all three rulers - the Great Elector, Frederick
William I, and Frederick the Great - aimed at was the reinforcement of the established
stratification of society so as to fit their own purposes.

The Herrschaft which traditionally attached to nobility was taken as the model for
command in the army. Frederick William I had all young noblemen from twelve to
eighteen years old listed, and himself selected those who were to be admitted as officer
cadets. Initial resistance and evasion were met by stern methods; the king "was not above
sending police agents to round up his prospective officers and to march them to Berlin in
gangs."8

On the other hand, the partnership with the Junkers framed by the Elector in 1653 was
ratified by his successors. The economic and political rights and privileges of the nobility
were openly championed by Frederick the Great. Centralisation, in terms of the
subordination of all administrative authority to the king, stopped short at the boundaries
of Junker estates. Within them, the Landrat, nominated by his fellow Junkers, was
supreme. And even though Frederick had to admit bourgeois officers to make good the
losses of the Seven Years War, the officer corps was cleansed of this inferior material
during the last years of his life. A generation after his death, just over eight in a hundred
of the officer corps in the army which was sent to face Napoleon were non-nobles, and
most of them were in the artillery and subsidiary branches.

6 W.L.Dorn, "The Prussian Bureaucracy in the Eighteenth Century: II", Political Science Q., Vol. 47,
1932, p.76.
8 G.A.Craig, The Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640-1945, p.11.
As for the other classes, they too were assigned their functional roles in the state, the bourgeois to produce the weapons and the uniforms for the army and to pay the bulk of the taxes, the peasantry to supply the recruits. The burgher class had a monopoly of trade and commerce, and was aided by mercantilist policies and planned industrialisation. Peasants had hereditary tenure, at least on royal domains. Both Frederick William I and his son behaved towards both classes as though they had no justification for their existence apart from providing men and material for the state - and its army.

Under Frederick the Great, the principle of the General Directory's collective responsibility for all administrative affairs was brought to an end after the 1760's. He had already added three more departments - for Commerce and Industry in 1741, for Silesia in 1742, and for Army Supplies in 1746, all of them special ministries independent of the General Directory and subordinate to him in person. It was after the Seven Years War, however, that the biggest blow fell. Frederick decided that the position he and Prussia had now attained in Europe required a larger expenditure, and determined on an increase of two million thalers in tax revenue. The General Directory, although told not to discuss the merits of the demand but to suggest ways and means of complying with it, nevertheless responded by advising the king of the impossibility of increasing taxation on a country already in severe financial straits. Frederick took this as clinching evidence of how unfit for effective administration were ministers with collective rather than individual responsibility, and he set up a Regie for the collection of excise duties throughout the whole kingdom, with a Frenchman appointed at its head - "one of the most extraordinary acts of any monarch in the eighteenth century."9

For Frederick, appointing one man to head up the new system was a reasonable solution to the 'criminal delays' which the collegial procedure involved; the General Directory was becoming, in his view, a nursery of ministerial irresponsibility.10 There is something to be said for the collective wisdom - or at least experience - of the General Directory acting as a counter to the demanding and authoritarian conduct of affairs by the king, but Frederick had become altogether too 'Great' to stand any demur or hint of opposition from his underlings. Thereafter other detached ministries were formed for mining and for forestry, and special officers were appointed to oversee the government bank and the tobacco monopoly - all of them reporting directly to the king. He went on to order individual ministers not to concern themselves in the affairs of other members of the General Directory and reinforced this instruction by dealing with ministers individually. Although the General Directory continued in existence until 1806, the Prussian system after the 1770's was framed in terms of separate ministries.

The principle was broken for national administration, but collective responsibility was retained for the seventeen provincial boards. With these, too, Frederick dealt direct. The prime responsibilities of the provincial boards were financial, collecting taxes and the income from the royal estates, but they too became executive instruments of Fredrick's

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10 W.L.Dorn, ibid., p. 79
'enlightened despotism'; they colonized foreign settlers, established new industries and stimulated enterprise, but undoubtedly their stiffest task was internal colonization. Immigrants for the new settlements came from all over Europe, but first of all there were sandy wastes to be reclaimed, swamps and marshes to be drained, and all to be done in such a way that (according to an instruction by the king) 'not an acre of arable from which a family can sustain itself remains unoccupied'. The overall injunction was: "more colonists, more people, more industries, more commerce and greater production. The end in view was always to achieve that substantial 'plus' in revenues which the king never ceased to demand from them......There was not a phase of urban and rural life on which they did not issue regulating ordinances." In an extravagant extension of the old Polizeiordnungen (see above, p. ), they inspected the husbandry of peasants and the salesmanship of burghers, issuing reprimands wherever they encountered indolence or neglect. "Shiftlessness became a public offence."11

Most German states encouraged immigration in the eighteenth century, and for much the same reason: to increase tax revenue by promoting commerce, manufacture, and more intensive agriculture. They had learned this lesson from Colbert; all eighteenth-century governments in continental Europe were convinced mercantilists, seeing an increase of population as the necessary condition of increased wealth and thus of increased power - military power, of course. Nowhere was the policy more energetically and more successfully pursued than in Prussia. Even by 1740, a quarter of the population was said to be first or second generation immigrants.

The reasons for Prussia's success are self-evident. Immigrants everywhere were intruders, inevitably resented by the indigenous population, especially when the newcomers were made 'Freimeister' on the authority of the State and so freed from the old guild regulations. Only in Prussia was there an administration powerful enough and thorough enough to enforce the immigration measures. In the end, however, the real criterion of the effectiveness of a provincial board - as of the General Directory or the individual ministries, for that matter - was a progressive increase in the king's income from taxes.

We come here to the crux of the matter. The last thing which either Frederick William or his son set out to create was a bureaucracy, if by this is meant (as it certainly did in the eighteenth century) a system of rule by officials. What they wanted, and saw that they got, was a system of rule by themselves, and to this end fashioned an administrative system which was an instrument of absolute autocracy more nearly perfect for this purpose than anything achieved elsewhere, before or since. The system was founded on the assumption that the king was omniscient, omnicompetent, omnipotent:

"Prussian administration in the eighteenth century was rooted in the fiction that the king knows everything, that he can do everything, and does everything that is done. From Frederick William I onward all matters which were decreed by administrative bodies appeared in the form of royal orders issued by the king in person. The artisan to whom the royal guild statute was a solemn guarantee of his economic security; the peasant who received a marriage licence; the merchant entrepreneur who was exempted from payment

11 W.L.Dorn, ibid., pp.84-5.
of duty on importing a specified article, all of them received their privileges from the
king. When on Sunday the village pastor read a patent or an ordinance from the pulpit, it
was the king who addressed the assembled congregation, even when the document in
question had been issued only by a subaltern authority. This fiction was not merely an
administrative device which had taken possession of the popular imagination. Frequently
it was no fiction at all ... Frederick the Great was convinced...that the Prussian king, to be
able to construct and follow a rational system of politics, must be the actual head of all
the departments of the government."12

Even beyond that, he saw to it that he was the only person fully conversant with every
sector of governmental affairs, foreign, domestic and military. He, and he alone, was in
daily touch with all departments - by correspondence, of course, not in person. Even after
the Seven Years War, when the amount of public business was such as to defy any
attempt to attend to every aspect single-handed, the king still monopolised initiative and
control. He was infallible. Frederick never revoked an order and never admitted an
error.13 This in turn meant that all subordinates obeyed all instructions promptly and
fully - a principle which had of course to be repeated at all levels.

All kinds of steps were taken to ensure competence and, what was more important,
obedience. Officials were trained for their posts, and after 1770 nobody was appointed to
any office without having undergone a course of training for it and having passed several
examinations). This was supplemented by a system of annual reports on every official
below the rank of minister. Not surprisingly, "Every official was alive to the fact that his
entire future depended on favourable conduct reports. He was under no temptation to
display more independence of judgment or initiative than was compatible with perfect
submission to his superior."14

This was still not enough. Frederick instituted a private supervisory system of his own,
separate from the administration. A special agent of the king, a Fiscal, was stationed in
the General Directory and every provincial board, whose duty it was to observe how
instructions were carried out and report every infringement or irregularity to the king.
The accounts kept by everyone concerned with revenue or expenditure throughout the
whole kingdom were inspected by a Supreme Accounts Board attached to the General
Directory; for any error they detected they were paid, collectively, up to twelve groschen
by the offending official.

Extraordinarily detailed instructions were issued - some of them from the king's own
hand - concerning every step to be taken in the performance of official duties. All such
instructions were to be treated with the utmost secrecy, and all government work was

12 W.L.Dorn, "The Prussian Bureaucracy in the Eighteenth Century I" Political Science Q., Vol. 46, 1931,
pp.408-9.
13 C.B.A. Behrens cites a 'judicial catastrophe' for which the entire responsibility lay in Frederick's
interference in judicial proceedings and his obstinate refusal thereafter to admit of any doubt about the
wisdom of his decision. See her Society, Government and the Enlightenment, Thames and Hudson, 1985.
pp.111-115.
14 W.L.Dorn, "The Prussian Bureaucracy in the Eighteenth Century II" Political Science Q.,, Vol. 46. 1931,
p. 93.
performed in seclusion, all knowledge of what was going on being prohibited to the public at large.

So far as the king was concerned, the system paid off handsomely. The achievements are impressive on any reckoning, as the catalogue of them with which W.L.Dorn prefaced his three articles shows: "[The system] contrived to produce, on the economic resources of what was then the least prosperous section of Germany, a public revenue which was greater than that of Russia on the accession of Catherine II, with a per capita burden of taxation no greater than that of Austria and considerably less than that of France. It managed to support the army of a first-rate power on the resources of a third-rate state and at the same time accumulated a large reserve in the public treasury; it opened up the mining industry in Silesia and the Ruhr district; it carried through a project for extensive internal colonisation in urban and rural districts which added upwards of 300,000 inhabitants to the sparsely populated provinces of Prussia....it did much to introduce the improved British agricultural methods among the backward Prussian peasantry; it liberalised the craft gilds and adapted them to the needs of capitalistic industry while it endeavoured to execute, and not without success, a comprehensive scheme to industrialise an almost wholly agricultural country."\(^{15}\)

At the end of the Seven Years War, Prussia, which had had to fight the war in Europe more or less on its own, came off not too badly, but launched an expensive programme of agricultural improvement backed by his new regie for increased indirect taxes, their collection being modelled on the French tax-farming system at its most repressive. Land-taxes, on the other hand, were kept low, in accordance with the by now well-established Hohenzollern tradition of not giving the landowning nobility any cause for offence.

Even so, Prussia, the most admired 'benevolent despotism' of all, came to be in poor shape in the last decades of the eighteenth century, not so much financially, but - of all things - administratively. Things were changing even before Frederick II died, and there are indications that all was not as well as it seemed. The system produced - was designed to produce - enormous quantities of reports, memoranda, written instructions, rescripts, orders, minutes and correspondence; every official was buried in paper. Although junior and intermediate posts were filled by people who had received some training, there was no regular procedure for appointing senior officials and ministers; the king selected them, from candidates recommended by ministers, on the basis of a single interview; and the chances were that all candidates were strangers to him, because of the strict limitations he put on personal contact with officials.

The condign punishments which fell on transgressions and errors made their concealment imperative for the official responsible, hence the creation of the Oberrechnungskammer and the introduction of the system of Fiscals. They are themselves evidence of something like an enduring campaign being waged between the king and his officials over the concealment of errors and misdemeanours, and there were instances of systematic

deception, especially by Hoym, the minister responsible for Silesia - and Silesia was the province where, according to Frederick, things went as smoothly as a piece of music.

It could be argued, of course - as it has been - that Frederick the Great's reign sowed the seeds of the deterioration of the system under his successors, but this is no more than to acknowledge what was both the explicit and the implicit foundation of the Prussian scheme of things: the king's own person. It could be as justly argued that the disintegration could hardly have happened if Frederick William II had been half the man his uncle was.

Frederick the Great's despotism was directed towards his officials - just as his 'enlightenment' was reserved to his salon and his correspondence. When it came to the nobility, he yielded even the ground his father had won from them. After his death, in the last years of the eighteenth century, authority was surrendered to ministers and officials, who led the reform movement after the disaster of Jena and occupation by the French. It is hard to imagine either development within the framework set up by Frederick William I. It seemed as if absolutism, the creator of modern governmental organization, had become its victim - as Paul Frolich says it had.

II

When Peter the Great finally became Tsar in 1694 (twelve years after the proclamation of his accession to the throne, as a ten-year-old boy, along with his brother), Russia was an enormous country (although considerably reduced to the south-east from what it had been a century before by invasion by the khanates and Don cossacks). But it had only one seaport (Archangel in the far north, which was icebound half the year) and a population of 13 million - smaller than that of France. By the end of the eighteenth century, Russia was a major European power.

The rise of Russia began with Peter I's victory at Poltava in 1709, which not only put an end to Swedish invasions but won back the Baltic provinces lost a hundred years before, providing much easier access to Western Europe through Riga, and land on which to build a new capital.

Peter went on to reform central government and to institute some form of provincial and local administration. This last had been left largely to the wealthier landowners: the boyars. They had their own assembly in the boyar Duma, but were also represented, along with the church and state peasants, in the zemski sobor, which on occasion had been responsible for the election of the tsar. But politics in the main had been a matter of conspiracy, involving members of the extensive family claiming kinship with the tsar, and, on occasion, associations among boyars and also, more significantly, officers of the streltsy, the specialist troops armed with muskets and supplying the palace guard. In 1711, Peter created a governing Senate of ten, which became of central importance in administration and law, and in later years established twelve collegiate supervisory bodies to oversee foreign affairs, army, navy, state income and expenditure, and the like - all of which were converted into ministries by Alexander at the beginning of the nineteenth
century. Provincial reform followed, with fifty provinces designated, with a governor and officials who were actually paid salaries, instead of relying on 'pickings' - kormleniiia.

All this had to be paid for. Taxes were levied not just on mills and fisheries but on beards, beehives and bathhouses. By the end, tax revenues were five times as much as what they had been just before the beginning of his reign. Most of the money went - of course - to the army and for the navy he was determined to build, but his new capital was extravagantly expensive, in lives as well as money.

The building of St. Petersburg by serf labour quite possibly provided the model - and certainly a principal incentive - for the laws imposing state serfdom on the peasantry of northern Russia. But serfs were also used as a taxable commodity; the poll-tax instituted in 1718 was levied on the lower orders of the population, serfs (and slaves), state peasants and townsmen, even vagrants. The spread of serfdom, and the worsening of its condition, may well account for the fact that the population of Russia actually fell during his reign; some of that loss came from the flight of serfs and state-peasants beyond the Dnieper to join up with the Don Cossacks and others whose raids on eastern Russia provided them with much of their livelihood.

Peter's policies throughout his reign were meant to bring Russia into line with what he saw as 'western European' practice, to the point of actually creating a nobility. Titles were allotted to army officers and to principal members of his government and court, and also to provincial and lesser administrators. The rule of primogeniture was established for inheritance, ending the practice (followed by the tsars themselves) of choosing heirs or distributing possessions among them equally - or indiscriminately. And while princes and counts later shed their administrative responsibilities, and primogeniture was formally repealed after Peter's death, they clung to their titles.

Last, but by no means least, he reorganised the Church, with a synod replacing the patriarch as supreme authority, and exerted some control over its possessions. Not surprisingly, this provoked resistance, especially among the 'Old Believers', that section of the church which had taken against the reforms of church ritual and language (the reforms were, in fact, intended to restore what had been established practice under the Greek Orthodox Church) carried through in the mid-years of the 17th. century. Awkwardly enough, the Old Believers seem to have included most of the commercially and industrially active people in the population at large. The 17th. century schism lies behind much of the opposition to western ideas and fashions which persisted until the twentieth century.

It was almost forty years after Peter's death that a true successor was found in Catherine the Great - after, that is, she led a palace revolution to depose her husband, Peter III, who was murdered shortly after. During that interval, the ennobled gentry prospered and grew more powerful: a Supreme Privy Council, a Kabinet and then a Konferenitsya were set up, all composed of much the same group of powerful nobles, with the Council setting out fairly stringent conditions before accepting a successor Tsar. The primogeniture law was repealed, obligatory state service limited in duration (Peter had made it life-time), one son made exempt (in order to manage the family estate), and the ownership of serfs
reserved for them. The wealthier nobles, in short, formed an official oligarchy modelled on the lines of the Swedish constitution which Russia had helped impose in 1720.

The condition of serfs worsened: 'In fact, in 1741 serfs were omitted from the classes who were to swear allegiance to the new sovereign; and the criminal code of 1754 listed them only under the heading of property of the gentry.'\(^{16}\) The disorders and flights across the border into the Ukraine and the Khanates east of the Dnieper which had been endemic throughout the century (seventy-three peasant risings are known to have taken place in the eight years ending in 1769) culminated in the great revolt of 1773, led by a Cossack, Pugachev, and involving millions of serfs, peasants, mineworkers, religious dissidents, and non-Russian outsiders. This took two years to suppress, and was followed by some fairly half-hearted attempts at improving local administration and a further extension of serfdom in Central Russia and the newly acquired territories in the Ukraine and the Caucasus.

The daughter of a German princeling, Catherine had an enduring interest in the Enlightenment, referred to Montesquieu's Spirit of the Laws as her prayer book, corresponded with Voltaire, and undertook the task of establishing Russia firmly among the leading European powers. She did her best to improve and extend provincial administration, and made a determined effort to establish some kind of local administration, creating some 200 new towns to serve as their centres. But at the same time, she expanded serfdom, and extended it into the Ukraine.

She owes her place in European history mostly to her success in war, and in international politics, which for her seems to have meant the pursuit of warlike aims by other means. The First Turkish War gained the access to the Black Sea which Peter the Great had tried for without success. By 1792, Russia had also annexed the Crimea and the Second Turkish War extended her south-eastern frontier to what was regarded as her 'natural' frontier, the Dniester, holding off a Swedish attack on her Baltic possessions at the same time. Three years later, the partition of Poland was complete, with Russia taking the largest share.

The defeat of Napoleon's invasion in her grandson's time provides a fitting climax. It occurred just over a hundred years after Peter's victory at Poltava over Charles XII's invasion.

While the idea of revolution may be overdone, nothing less fits the change in the internal and external situation of Russia during the eighteenth century. The direction it took and who initiated it were the direct opposite of what happened in the revolution which came at the end of the century in France. A hierarchic order of nobility was imposed from above in the first case, and abolished in the second. Election - of a sort - to a ruling assembly - of a sort - was replaced by appointment to a council advisory to the emperor in Russia; this was reversed in the France of the 1790's. All Frenchmen were equal citizens after 1789; in Russia, virtually all peasants were made serfs during the course of the century - and so on. Even the tide of émigré nobles is matched in reverse by the

departure across the frontier of thousands of serfs and peasants, the state's appropriation of church property and the Civil Constitution by the affiliation of the Russian church to the state.

III

For almost the whole of the eighteenth century, whereas 'clergy, nobility and the professions were unsparingly criticised, absolute monarchy, sometimes little different from personal despotism, was rarely challenged, and was even regarded as the only medium through which radical reforms could be effected'.

It is in the light of such pronouncements as David Ogg's that one has to judge the references one still comes across to a widespread movement towards reform mounted by the 'benevolent despots' who ruled in Russia, Prussia, Austria, Spain and elsewhere during the last decades of the eighteenth century. On closer inspection, the evidential foundations for this become just as suspect - or ambiguous - as the 'drive towards centralisation' which is supposed to have preoccupied European states throughout the three centuries of monarchism. Outside of what was done in Prussia by Frederick William I and his son Frederick, and in Russia by Peter the Great and Catherine the Great, there was throughout the century very little change in the view governments took of their responsibilities and powers, or of the administrative apparatus they saw as relevant and feasible. What reforms there were seem - again - to have been inspired by the need to get more money.

Austria, for example, emerged from the Seven Years War with a public debt of three hundred million gulden, moving the young Joseph II to put his inherited fortune of 22 million in the hands of the Treasury. The Empress Maria Theresa, mindful of the administrative collapse and financial difficulties which the war had precipitated, looked for a substantial increase in revenue. This could only come from the great landowners and the church, especially in Hungary, where their entrenched position as the only groups represented in the Diet had led to their paying taxes at a far lower rate than elsewhere; it was the unprivileged classes - and not only in Hungary - who had paid for the war.

Joseph II's moves towards religious toleration soon after Maria Theresa's death and his becoming Emperor seem to have been a straightforward consequence of his policy of promoting agricultural and industrial productivity, and so increasing taxable income. He was quite open about this, and about its purpose: 'I recognise above all that our situation has greatly deteriorated after the last war through the excessive burden of debt, that our provinces are impoverished, and cannot afford to maintain the present military establishment, and that only the improvement of our agriculture, industry, trade and finance will make possible the upkeep and expansion of our military forces to meet future eventualities.' The appropriate remedies had been planned even before his accession as Emperor. Religious toleration, the central feature of his reforms as 'benevolent despot', came first. He stood, he had written, for freedom of belief 'in so far as I am prepared to

accept everyone's services in secular matters, regardless of denomination', granting 'the right of citizenship to anyone who is qualified, who can be of use to us, and can further industrial activity in the country.' The dissolution of the monasteries in the early 1780's was aimed in the same direction; their property, when 'secularised' provided the basis for a very useful Religionsfond, used to carry through a programme of practical instruction in the reorganised dioceses and parishes. The abolition of serfdom was decreed, at about the same time, in the belief - or hope - that raising the status of the peasantry would lead to raising the level of agricultural production. The same hope lay behind his abolition of the rights of guilds to restrict entry into trade and manufacture.

The reforms were in fact quite successful in attaining their immediate objective; the state's revenues rose by a third in seven years. But the eventual upshot was dire. The army was tripled in number, Joseph engaged in a series of moves seeking alliance with Russia in the hope of adding Bavaria to his dominions - which came to nothing. He then entered into an unsuccessful war with Turkey, in the hope of acquiring Serbia instead. The end of his reign left Austria still at war with Turkey, facing rebellion in Belgium and Hungary, and with armies from Prussia, Poland and Saxony on the northern borders.

IV

Spain, which had joined in the Seven Years War alongside France as late as 1762, suffered almost as much as its ally, but did rather better with its public finances. Under Charles III, who succeeded in 1759, Spain had its own spell of 'enlightened despotism', which lasted about the same length of time as Joseph's. Again like Austria, the first moves were against the Church; the Jesuit order was expelled, and the Inquisition put under some constraint. Thereafter, some effort was made to improve administration and the economic situation. Opposition from the great landowners prevented any great improvement in agriculture; most of the country in any case suffered under the much more severe tyranny of the climate. Industry did rather better, although this owed rather more to the self-help of communities and the small entrepreneurs of Catalonia and the north-east than to the mercantilist policies of the government.

What economic benefits Charles III's reign brought to the country went exclusively to landowners, merchants, and manufacturers. Still, the country was in rather better condition at the end of the reign than at its beginning. Entry into the American War along with France meant that it recovered some of its American territories in 1783, but war against Britain had meant the virtual suspension of trade with its colonies, and - what was worse - the loss of the treasure shipped from South America for the duration. Under the new king, Charles IV, and the start of the revolution in France, what 'enlightenment' there had been was abandoned, and every step taken to preserve Spain from contagion. In 1793, Spain joined the coalition against France - an immensely popular move - and even invaded Rousillon. The consequences for Spain were even worse than in the case of Austria's war with Turkey.
The Seven Years War, which in fact was the culmination of a serial war which had lasted for more than twenty years, worsened the financial situation of all the countries which had fought it. Even Britain and Prussia, which had been on the winning side, ended the war a good deal worse off so far as their public finances were concerned.

France, which came out of the Seven Years War the worst loser of all, was just as ineffective in its efforts at fiscal reform as it had been before. The government nevertheless took sides against England in the American War, and, though it came out on the winning side for once, emerged in deeper trouble than ever.

It was Italy, subjugated to a Spanish hegemony after 1558 and collapsing thereafter into a 'land of pomp and poverty', which, surprisingly enough, appears to offer some of the more promising examples of 'benevolent' - or at least 'enlightened' - 'despotism' in the latter part of the eighteenth century. In many Italian states, especially Lombardy, Tuscany and Naples, a number of academics and intellectuals who saw themselves as beneficiaries of, or even active participants in, the Enlightenment, joined the administration. They were subject at all times to their rulers, and had perforce to work through them, but something was done to correct the worst failings of the economy, the law, and even the Church; the landowning aristocracy, the worst offenders, of course escaped.

By 1790, when Leopold succeeded Joseph as Emperor, the reform movement was flagging even in Tuscany, where he had been Grand-Duke since 1765, and the revolution in France put paid to any revival. The revolution may have been welcomed by the intellectuals who had advocated or acted as agents of what reforms had been carried through, as it was at first in Switzerland, South Germany, Belgium, Holland and Britain by many commoners as well, but the army of the French which invaded Italy saw 'the Italian states as liberated or conquered territories, which offered resources and, occasionally, an "experimental field" for constitutional or administrative innovations or developments.'

They went the same way as the lesser states of southern Germany.

In England, after 1715, the Tories were excluded from ministerial positions for the duration of the reigns of George I and George II. But while the Whigs who supported those in power fully endorsed Locke's view that the purpose of civil government was to protect property, unequally divided though it was, there were others who declared their hostility to patronage, a standing army, and the political influence of money, and were at times prepared to consort with Tories in opposition to the Whigs who enjoyed the favour of the Court. There was, in fact, what came to be called a Country Party, in opposition to the 'Court Party' in power. "The balanced constitution might never have survived so long if the Country opposition had not defended the cause of 'liberty' when the Court was so often emphasizing the needs of 'authority'."
The Country party, Dickinson insists, had its own ideology, "which maintained that society and civil government could only be preserved by the patriotic actions and public spirit of men of property. Those who possessed a real and substantial stake in the country were the only true citizens and the natural leaders of those who were merely inhabitants..... Trade in money and shares, however, did not confer the rights of citizenship upon financiers, because their wealth was based on fantasy and speculation.... The landed interest undoubtedly resented the fact that taxes were levied on property, but not on the large profits made by successful financiers."  

The Country opposition looked for support mostly among independent country members, and from them it could not hope for enough regular attenders to defeat the Court party, which could rely on placemen and patronage. In time, it attracted some support from professed Whigs, who objected to the size of the standing army maintained in peacetime, and saw the patronage exercised by the Court a threat to the 'balanced constitution' idea; there were times, it seemed to them, as if corruption had made Parliament itself a dependency of the King's court.

'Ideology' - the concept was not invented until the end of the French Revolution (see Part 5) - is too strong a term for the different assortments of private interest, opinions, experience, and beliefs which infused the circumstantial postulates common among supporters of Court and those of Country. There was nevertheless enough common ground among members of the Country opposition to make repeated efforts to encourage constituencies to draw up instructions to their members to vote against Walpole's Excise Bill, for an enquiry into Walpole's past conduct, and for triennial parliaments (as against the seven years instituted in 1716). There were pamphlets urging the rectification of the enormous discrepancy in the number of voters prescribed for county elections as against borough elections (in which London and Westminster returned the same number of members as decayed boroughs like Old Sarum and Dunwich, where there were hardly any inhabitants left (whereas growing towns like Manchester and Halifax returned none). All these efforts came to nothing; nor was there any suggestion that the franchise might be broadened to include those without property. At the same time, there was a sizeable flow of publications and much speechifying about the need continually to reassess and, when necessary, readjust the balance between King, Lords and Commons, and between ministers supported by placemen and independent members of parliament. For the Country party, the prime purpose of the 'balanced constitution', founded on the constitutional settlement after the 'Glorious Revolution' was to defend property and safeguard liberty; for the Court party (the establishment Whigs), what the constitutional settlement itself rested on was the authority of the government and the obedience of the subject.

There were still Whigs and Tories, although their political creeds had become rather distant from those of the baptismal generation of James II's time. There remained a distinct inclination towards monarchism among Tories, as against Whig insistence on the limits of governmental authority - and on the duty of the subject to obey - imposed by the

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overriding need to safeguard the welfare of society, and the lives, liberties and property of its members. "While the establishment Whigs did not deny that all subjects possessed a natural right to their life and liberty, there can be little doubt that they were chiefly concerned to defend the rights of property.... It was assumed by the establishment Whigs and indeed by the vast majority of property-owners that the rights of property-owners could be securely protected only when men of substance exercised authority and governed the country.... The notion that the poor should have any voice in governing the country was regarded as pernicious and absurd."  

With the accession of George III to the British throne in 1760 came the end of the 'Whig supremacy' which had become almost institutionalised since 1715. The new king started off by making clear his intention to reassert monarchic authority, and to 'encourage piety and virtue, and prevent and punish vice, profaneness, and immorality'. All the ministers appointed by his grandfather had resigned on his death, in accordance with established custom in Britain (as elsewhere), and one of his first moves was to appoint his mentor, Lord Bute, as one of the secretaries of state, and, a year later, as his principal minister.

Steven Watson, in his summary account of the social and political structure in the 1760's, describes England as "a collection of corporations and groups, each with a life of its own, cohabiting with the ease of long experience within the framework of the Revolution Settlement". True, for more than two generations, the country had enjoyed increasing prosperity; the Seven Years War had brought it victory and even more colonial possessions than it had gained from its participation in previous European wars; the Stuart challenge to succession to the throne was safely past. While the prosperity - at least for the upper and middle orders of society - the cosiness of experienced cohabitation, even for those prosperous classes, was almost at an end, and the portents showed themselves almost at the start of the new reign.

While serious debate was reserved for foreign policy and war. "The perennial subject of debate" (in the House of Commons) "was the encroachment of the executive upon the independence of members". Unluckily for the King and his chief minister, a subject of debate combined both 'serious' and 'perennial' matters to give birth to 'the Wilkes affair'. Early in 1763, the King's speech, introducing the new session of Parliament, referred to the peace settlement which ended the Seven Years War as 'honourable to my Crown and beneficial to my people.' John Wilkes, a member of the House of Commons, called this a falsehood in his paper, The North Briton, (a title aimed derisively at Bute, a Scot, who sponsored a paper entitled The Briton). A general warrant was issued for the arrest of everyone concerned in the publication of The North Briton and the seizure of their papers. Wilkes himself was lodged in the Tower. When it came to court, Wilkes took his stand on the general ground of defending 'the liberty of all peers and gentlemen and, what touches me more sensibly, that of all the middling and inferior set of people'(emphasis added). The affair dragged on until the 1770's, the years punctuated with Commons debates, votes to expel Wilkes from the Commons, his escape to France in order to avoid

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imprisonment, and a number of riots in his support. Wilkes eventually won his case and regained his seat in the Commons.

Historians have turned the Wilkes affair into a minor constitutional crisis, but not until 1779 was there any sign of serious dissatisfaction with the structure of government and the functioning of Parliament. The Yorkshire Association was formed in that year to promote the expansion of county members of Parliament (heavily outnumbered by borough members, who were all too often the nominees of the great landlords), annual parliaments, and rigorous economy. The Duke of Manchester, Fox, the younger Pitt (and Wilkes) all joined committees in different parts of the country formed to present petitions on something like the same lines - although no other seems to have matched the Westminster declaration for adult male suffrage, complete separation of legislature and executive, and annual elections to parliament by parishes.

Nothing much came of it at the time. Even the final rough summary of the petitioners' demands contained in the resolution moved by John Dunning: 'that the influence of the Crown has increased, is increasing, and ought to be diminished' was, after its initial success, amended, sharpened, whittled down in a series of submissions until it was eventually voted out. It was also submerged - and this is also characteristic - by the occurrence of more disturbances, quite different in origin and, by this time, almost anachronistic. The Gordon riots consisted of a series of outbursts in London of mob violence, vandalism and looting, directed against catholics and prolonged because of the sheer ineptitude of magistrates and the absence of any civilian police force.

The petition did, however, stay in the political memory. It marks the first organised movement in support of parliamentary reform, a movement taken up by the Correspondence Societies which flourished in the 1790's until the excesses of the Jacobins, the war with France - and active repression by the government - put them out of action, for the duration of the war.

The whole period of twenty-four years from the accession of George III up to Pitt's installation as head of the executive ('Prime Minister', as he was entitled, for the first time) was one of contention - between factions, though, rather than political parties. Although there were sufficient interconnections among them to make up two groups, once again definitively labelled 'Whig' and 'Tory', they were a long way from the organised political parties they were to become in the next century.

There were troubles enough, apart from the Wilkes affair. Britain finished the Seven Years War with its national debt doubled in size. The weight of taxation within Britain, for the first years of the new reign, assumed an importance which it had for the most part lacked during the time of the first two Georges. Walpole had, it is true, run into trouble with an Excise Bill, but Excise was again an issue when the duty on beer was increased and excise on cider imposed - something which exposed every farmer with an orchard to the intrusion of excise officers. Both bore on the common people, who were also faced with higher food costs and tight-fisted employers of labour. Not surprisingly, riots and disturbances were endemic in London throughout the 1760's - by coal-heavers (Irishmen, for the most part, employed in unloading Newcastle colliers at Wapping), spinners,
hatters, weavers, joiners, even Thames watermen. Industrial unrest was no new thing, but on a number of occasions the rioters championed Wilkes (for no apparent reason apart from making common cause 'agin the government').

The Gordon riots, like those which had punctuated the life of London and some other cities throughout the century, rising to a peak in the 1760's, were an expression of the sheer desperation and frustration of the poor, much of it shared by the common people at large. The 'Glorious Revolution' of 1689 had been a coup d'état accomplished by leading members of the class of great landowners, and dedicated, as Locke had insisted, to the preservation of property: "To Locke the cost of the poor was 'a growing burden on the kingdom', due to 'relaxation of discipline and corruption of manners'; and he advocated seizing all the sound and idle poor up to the age of fifty to serve on His Majesty's ships, for the maimed and those over fifty be sent to houses of correction for hard labour and not too much comfort: those willing to work were to be sent to jobs lucrative for their masters."\(^{24}\)

Much legislation since then had been dedicated to multiplying the death penalty for crimes against property; there were 160 of them by the end of George II's reign. The Industrial Revolution, which began to make itself evident by the 1780's, brought greater prosperity to many of the 'middling sort', including skilled mechanics, but simply added to the miseries of unskilled labourers and the poor.

By the end of the eighteenth century, central control was nevertheless firmly established - so much so, in fact, that the troubles of 1793 and 1794 - bad harvests, a run on the banks, a 'Convention' held in Edinburgh in conscious imitation of the French revolutionaries, and an organised movement for radical reform with strong support outside Parliament (and some within it) - were surmounted with extraordinary ease. As against this, it is conceivable that 'central control' was hardly necessary; at all events, what positive measures of central authority that were initiated show up more as panicky reaction: in Combination Acts which prohibited the formation of trade unions and in the recruitment of an army of spies and informers, and a number of badly handled prosecutions of 'agitators', most of whom were discharged or received light sentences.

None of the confrontations and problematic situations matches, in the historical importance which has become attached to it, the dispute with the American colonies which ended in the War of Independence. Governmental power, the enactment of new laws, and the threat - sometimes the reality - of violence was enough to settle matters within the United Kingdom (which included Ireland after 1800). America was different - although the root cause and material facts of the dispute were much the same as obtained within the United Kingdom.

While Britain had done very well out of the Seven Years War, the country was heavily in debt. There were two obvious remedies, and Greville, the new chief minister, took them. The first was applied quickly and drastically: three quarters of the army (120,000 strong) were demobilised; not a shilling was spent on repairing the ships now back in Chatham, Portsmouth and Plymouth. These, along with other economies, like cutting expenditure on embassies abroad, helped to reduce total expenditure by almost a half in one year. All

this met with approval. But any recourse to the other kind of remedy, such as heavier customs and excise duties on wine and beer and the new duty on cider met with fierce resistance.

There was much greater opposition by the American colonies to increasing the return from existing taxes by a more determined effort to suppress smuggling, first of all, and then by raising the customs duty on sugar. The proceeds were also meant to go some way to meeting the cost of maintaining the seaports essential for trade and the troops needed to guard the western frontiers against Indians and to keep some check on the advance of new settlements towards territory still - nominally, at least - French or Spanish. (St. Louis and Pittsburgh were already attracting a number of 'pioneers' - and traders.)

None of this increased vigilance or higher customs duties made much impression on what was still seen as an overwhelming burden of debt, some of it doubtless the consequence of the war against the French in North America. It seemed entirely reasonable to ministers in London that the colonies should contribute. Hence the 'Stamp Act' of 1765: the extension to them of the stamp duties on papers required in official transactions, with a further extension to cover publicans' licences.

There were, of course, protests, as there always are against taxes, however necessary, however justifiable. They were louder and more organised than those made in England - but they were too far away to cause much alarm. After all, the people across the Atlantic were of the same ancestry; the minority of those of Dutch or French origin was probably greater in Britain than America. Even the elections to representative assemblies were conducted in much the same fashion: in 1758 'George Washington dispensed 66 gallons and ten bowls of rum punch, 58 gallons of beer, 35 gallons of wine, 8 quarts of hard cider, and more than three pints of brandy: and nobody objected'. But the point of the colonists' protests now was that they were made by people in virtually all the separate colonies.

Hitherto there had been very little concerted action; there had certainly been no call for it. Even during the Seven Years War, military action in America had been largely confined to Canada and the West Indies. Individual colonies had enough troubles of their own. In New England, farmers and small tradesmen were ready to applaud the accusations of 'grinding the faces of the poor' made against wealthy monopolists like Governor Hutchinson by Otis and Adams; in New York and Pennsylvania (where only 2% of men had the right to vote in elections to the assembly), the radical appeal was to settlers in the new lands of the west against the merchants and farmers on the coast. In 1764, the frontiersmen of Pennsylvania marched on Philadelphia, and Benjamin Franklin was commissioned to go to England to persuade the king to appoint a royal governor to the colony.

Other colonial legislative assemblies, at an anti-stamp congress, followed the Virginia assembly in declaring loyalty to the king as supreme head, but independent of parliamentary tax laws. It did undoubtedly help that objection to the Stamp Act, which

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principally hit the wealthier colonists, served to divert the discontent hitherto directed against wealthier, and leading, citizens. The basic formula of 'no taxation without representation', which invoked Locke's principle of a legislature's existence resting primarily on the defence of property, pointed to the legislative assemblies in America which could quite properly discharge that function. "in truth, the Americans were already' (in 1764) 'beginning slowly to feel their own separateness and to reject any sort of control..... The history of American grievances over the next ten years shows that as one was removed another came into prominence; none was the root cause of unrest, but all were symptoms, and once the threat of English interference had been roused, almost anything could be construed as a threat. The Stamp Act itself proved unenforceable. The stamps were burned by rioters." 

In 1766, to all appearances, Parliament gave way; The Stamp Act was repealed. But at the same time, (beforehand, in fact) Parliament passed a 'declaratory act' asserting its right to tax the colonies. The effect was to drive the more articulate colonists to a further refinement of their argument. Even though England's constitution recognised Parliament as the sovereign legislative authority, yet there were 'laws of nature' which put limits to this sovereign power - in particular the new duties to be imposed on the whole American coast and managed by a board of commissioners. And once again, in 1770, the English government, headed now by Lord North, gave way - and, once again, almost ruined the chances of reconciliation by using the phrase 'the colonists must lie at the feet of Great Britain'.

Still, for the time being, things got quieter, not least because the colonies found themselves again more at odds with each other, especially over western territories - and with the 'pioneers' who had settled there - than with England.

The end came in December 1773, with the 'Boston Tea Party,' an event more bizarre and insubstantial than any other casus belli known to history. The East India Company had been shown to be hopelessly in debt, and near bankruptcy. (People had been deceived by the riches displayed by the 'nabobs', as they were known - Company's men on their return to Britain; they were the fruits of the 'private enterprise' employed by them, mostly extracted from the rulers they had 'advised'.) Other rulers, mainly in central and southern India were now committing themselves to enterprises of their own, threatening to invade adjacent territories. The Company, therefore, was being forced to expand its military forces - at great expense - just at the time when it had already doubled its purchases of goods for export to England.

The Company crisis was sorted out by Lord North's government, after a fashion. But among the remedies, "North included an ingenious provision for disposing of their surplus stock of tea, tea which still came under the Townshend duties' (imposed on imports into America) 'and which was still regarded in America therefore as the drink of renegades. The East India Company was to pay the 3d. duty on its entry into America, but they were excused reimbursing the English customs for the 1s. duty which would previously have fallen on it. They were also permitted to send the tea direct to America,

26 J.Steven Watson, The Reign of George III, 1760-1815, p.186
instead of having it handled by middlemen in England. The consequence, it was said, was that tea would sell at 10s. a pound in America instead of the 20s. which it had fetched only a short while ago……..

'There was great excitement in radical circles in America. The smuggling centres of New York and Philadelphia (for Boston was now too well policed to smuggle in quantity) were outraged. All those in the trade who were not chosen as agents by the Company were also indignant... Yet the radicals aimed at preventing tea being landed for fear that once on shore it would be bought and drunk by most Americans. At Boston, where efforts to prevent the tea being accepted seemed likely to fail, it was thrown into the harbour.'

The incident could have been treated as a sort of jape (the raid had been carried out by men disguised as Indian braves), but it seemed to conservative members of the British government that lawlessness in Boston was being carried too far. Lord North ordered the port of Boston to be closed until the Company had been paid for the tea and the customs office compensated. More, the councillors (the upper house of the colony) were henceforth to be nominated by the Crown, trials might be transferred to England if the governor saw fit, and Boston was to provide barracks for troops.

In England, it was thought likely that other colonies, true to form, would be only too pleased to have their own ports profit from Boston's closure. But the suspicions aroused by the Declaratory Act (passed at the same time as the repeal of the Stamp Act) were revived not only by the suspension of the Massachusetts constitution and the closure of Boston's port, but by the passing of the Quebec Act, which, extending Canada southwards as far as the Ohio, barred any further expansion by colonial pioneers to the west.

Massachusetts armed its militia. General Gage, the commander-in-chief of the army in America, who had been appointed governor of the colony, ordered the confiscation of the arms stored at Concord. The Concord store was destroyed as the small force sent to confiscate the arm approached, there was a minor conflict at Lexington, followed by a series of skirmishes as the British retired, and the affair ended in June 1775, with the battle of Bunker's Hill. The American War of Independence had begun - although it was not until July 4 in the following year that the Declaration of Independence was approved by a congress of all the colonies (although Pennsylvania, Maryland, New Jersey and New York did so half-heartedly or only after several days).

It could be argued - in fact, it has been - that America was lost, just as the British empire is said to have been won - in a fit of absentmindedness. Alternatively, it was all too far away. Or, once the colonists brought Britain's traditional enemies, France and Spain, into the war, the long-term consequences for the navy of Grenville's parsimony, the shortage of trained troops (largely German mecenaries, anyway), the ill-judged backing given to American Indian attacks in the west, and Lord North's indecisiveness, the outcome was fairly predictable. At the end, there were 8000 French troops as well as 5000 Americans besieging Cornwallis in Yorktown, with a French fleet lying offshore; even in the eastern

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Atlantic, the combined fleets of France and Spain heavily outmatched the 38 ships of the Channel fleet.

The history of England in the eighteenth century provides a useful illustration of the truth of Isaiah Berlin's remark about solutions to social and political problems creating new situations which breed its own new needs and problems, new demands. The same period demonstrates in some detail the development of what became the basic institutional form of parliamentary democracy throughout the Western world. The triad of King, Lords and Commons that constituted the 'balanced constitution' at the outset began its gradual change into a dual system which installed itself first in England, and then, in the next century, in European countries and America, composed on the one hand of the government and its parliamentary supporters and on the other of those parliamentary members who opposed it.

Also, in a sense, the entanglement of real economic grievances, with equally real, though small-scale, cases of political victimisation is characteristic of the times. Incompatibilities tended to grow, and to reinforce each other. There is an inevitability about the making of the working class in England, just as in the case of the epigenesis of Whigs and Tories as political parties - and the American demand for independence.