Moderation and innovation: Edmund Burke and economical reform

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Abstract

The movement for economical reform from 1778 to 1782 formed the foundation of the Rockinghamite Whigs' attack on Lord North's administration. It was based primarily on a reduction of crown influence, which the Whigs feared had recently grown to dangerous proportions, and a return to the principles of the constitution established with the Glorious Revolution in 1688. This paper investigates Edmund Burke's role in shaping that movement, as well as the way in which it affected him. Burke's belief in the danger of crown influence as well as his oratorical ability and political philosophy gave focus and direction to the movement. Additionally, economic-reform was a milestone in Burke's political career; it secured for him personal connections and raised him to greater prominence in the Commons. His views on reform in general and government's needs for popular support, which would receive much attention during the French Revolution, were also shaped by this episode. In the end, the death of the Marquess of Rockingham, the Earl of Shelburne's implementation of Burke's reforms, and the rising level of popular support for parliamentary reform caused Burke to abandon economical reform. That economical reform opened the door to further, more radical, reforms under the younger Pitt and in the first quarter of the nineteenth century was a bitter sting for a movement whose sole function was a return to the basic principles of the constitution and a moderation of the dangerous innovations that the Rockinghamites saw as eroding them.

Introduction

Between1760 and 1784 Great Britain underwent a series of convulsions that shook the foundations of its political system. The new reign of George III and the rebellion and subsequent loss of thirteen of its colonies placed such a strain on the nation that the resultant popular and political unrest was not surprising. It was in that period that the foundations of the British political party system were established, and parliamentary supremacy over the Crown – established in the Glorious Revolution of 1688 – was confirmed. The movement for economical reform played a central role in those developments by giving direction and form to the Marquess of Rockingham's party, as well as beginning the long process by which the political power in Britain shifted from the monarch to the House of Commons. Three bills, all of which passed in 1782, comprised the core of the Rockinghamite economical reform movement: Philip Jennings Clerke's Contractors Bill, John Crewe's Revenue Officers Bill, and Edmund Burke's Civil List Establishment Bill. The three bills attempted to reduce crown influence in and out of Parliament. Each was hotly debated, yet Burke's bill was the most contentious in that it established the right of Parliament to interfere in the personal affairs of the king. Although the practical impacts of these bills have been largely discounted by recent historians,[1] their primary effect was to lay the foundation for further reforms, which increased the power of the House of Commons relative to the Crown. Yet this was never the intention of the Rockinghamite

[1] See, Ian R. Christie, "Economical Reform and 'The Influence of the Crown', 1780," *Cambridge Historical Journal* 12 (1956): 144-154; Betty Kemp, "Crewe's Act, 1782," *English Historical Review* 68, no., 267 (April, 1953), 258-263; John Norris, *Shelburne and Reform*, (London: Macmillan and Co., 1963).

reformers. They desired a return to the classic Whig principles enshrined in the Glorious Revolution – a mixed government with a balance between the Crown, the House of Lords, and the House of Commons. The Rockinghamites believed that the distortion of these principles had been caused by what Burke called, "that corrupt influence, which is itself the perennial spring of all prodigality, and of all disorder," enabling the Crown to impose its will arbitrarily on the remainder of the government.[2] In authoring the economical-reform bills, Burke, Clerke, and Crewe acted to moderate or even reverse the changes they saw developing in the constitution, and their work to this purpose was shaped by the course of party politics, the influence of the Crown, the need for economy in the government, and the support of the people. Due to the breadth and scope of Burke's writings and correspondence, a detailed picture of his motives for economic reform is possible. Because of his position as the Marquess of Rockingham's personal secretary, those motives came to shape party policy. Additionally, an examination of the parliamentary debates on Clerke's and Crewe's bills shows the similarity of motives that bound together the authors of the Rockinghamite economical-reform movement.

Most of the attention that the movement has received from historians has focused on its effects, both immediate and long-term. In the short term the movement is criticized as ineffective and ill-conceived, whilst, in the long term it is hailed as a launch pad from which other, more effective, reforms sprung. In fact, this is undeniably true because, as will be shown, the practical enactment of the economical-reform legislation was problematic at best and the train of reforms that continued into

[2] William Cobbett, ed., *The Parliamentary History of England* (London: Bagshaw, 1806-1812), 1780, 21:2 (hereafter cited as PH (year), vol.:col.).

the nineteenth century certainly had roots in the movement. However, less work has been done on the motivations behind the movement than might be expected. Historians such as Sir Lewis Namier, Ian Christie, and Herbert Butterfield have done an exemplary job illustrating the political climate of the period but treat the motivations behind the economical-reform legislation rather briefly, simply describing them as a reduction of "crown influence". Yet, examination of the political philosophy behind the movement reveals an ironic disparity between the intentions of the Rockinghamite party and the effects, both short- and long-term, of their movement. For a movement whose ideology was based on a principle of small moderate change, to open the gates to greater reforms was quite frustrating, as is evident from the resistance of the remnant of the Rockinghamite party after 1782 to the reforms of William Pitt the younger.

In 1934, D. L. Keir laid the foundation for what would come to be known the Namier school by assessing the impact of the economical-reform movement, using quantifiable data.[3] His findings, as well as those of Namier, Christie, and Betty Kemp, criticized both the foundations and the effects of the economic-reform bills. By counting the Members of Parliament and their votes, they showed that the number of placemen in the House of Commons was neither as high as Burke thought before 1782 nor as low as he hoped after. Essentially, the Namierite school sought to discredit the movement and its authors. Yet, reliance to such an extent on the quantifiable data of seats and votes makes it too easy to overlook less tangible factors

[3] D. L. Keir, "Economical Reform," *The Law Quarterly Review* 50 (1934): 368-385; Sir Lewis Namier, *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1957).

that played upon the situation. Herbert Butterfield, in criticizing the quantitative technique of the Namier school, remarked that "those who use figures must carry their mathematics further and reckon on the amount of leverage which a small quantity might have in a certain situation of things."[4] The Namierites' strict adherence to a quantitative approach forced them to overlook the weight of contemporary perception of the events in the late eighteenth century. More recently, John Brewer addressed the intangible factors that the Namierites had overlooked. He refocused attention on the importance of ideology to the Rockingham Whigs and the way in which it laid the groundwork for future developments in the British political system.[5] Earl A. Reitan presented a clear, detailed narrative of the events of the economic-reform movement and illustrated its importance for the first government of William Pitt the Younger (1783-1801).[6]

Of principal importance in shaping the ideology behind the movement was Edmund Burke. Burke's rôle in the economical-reform movement has endured several interpretations over the past two hundred years. The Whigs portrayed him as a Rockinghamite hero defending the party and the constitution against the encroaching menace of George III, whose only desire was to increase the power of the executive. Thomas Macknight, for example, referred to Burke as the "selected

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[4] Herbert Butterfield, *George III and the Historians* (London: Collins, 1957), 217.

[5] John Brewer, *Party Ideology and Popular Politics at the Accession of George III* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 4-5.

[6] Earl A. Reitan, "The Civil List in Eighteenth-Century British Politics: Parliamentary Supremacy versus the Independence of the Crown," *The Historical Journal* 9, no. 3 (1966): 318-319.

champion" of the Rockinghamite connection.[7] Their interpretations of the economic reform struggle also tend to disregard the subtleties of the situation and uncritically accept the Rockinghamite propaganda. John Morley went so far as to condemn the "sordid and unpatriotic spirit of the monarch and the ministers who could resist proposals so reasonable in themselves."[8] More recent interpretations of Burke have succeeded in placing him in his proper roll within the Rockinghamite party but have failed to give adequate attention to the importance of the economical-reform movement. Too often it is relegated to a mere one-dimensional component of a greater event, such as the growing importance of popular opinion[9] or the British response to the American War.[10] An important exception to this rule is F. P. Lock's valuable biography of Burke. Lock covers the economical-reform struggle in great detail, but considers that "the most important legacy of these years [was] the changed nature of Burke's interest with India."[11]

Thus, two important issues have been neglected: the ways in which Burke shaped the course of economical reform and the ways in which economical reform shaped him. What were Burke's motivations for reform and were they based on financial or political considerations? How did the movement affect his views on reform in general? What effect did the episode have on the rest of his political career

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[7] Thomas Macknight, *History of the Life and Times of Edmund Burke*, vol. II (London: Chapman and Hall, 1858), 319.

[8] John Morley, *Edmund Burke: A Historical Study* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1867), 175.

[9] Bertram Newman, *Edmund Burke* (London: G. Bell and Sons, Ltd., 1927), 112.

[10] Conor Cruise O'Brien, *The Great Melody: A Thematic Biography and Commented Anthology of Edmund Burke* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 209-215.

[11] F. P. Lock, *Edmund Burke*, vol., I (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 491.

and his relationships with the leading political groups of his day? In pursuit of these questions the economical-reform movement must be examined in detail. Chapter one establishes the political climate in which the events took place. Chapter two investigates the other components of the Rockinghamite reform program. In chapter three Burke's reforms are examined in detail. Chapter four explores the political circumstances that allowed for the passage of the economical-reform legislation. Finally, chapter five considers the reactions to the legislation and draws one or two conclusions.

Chapter One: Foundations

The economical reform movement was a reaction to the events of the first twenty years of George III's reign. The movement was based upon three pillars. First, the political struggles and the attitude of the king between 1760 and 1782 gave shape to development of the Rockinghamite Whig party. The growth of an organized opposition was insrumental to the navigation of the economical-reform bills through parliament. Second, the financial crisis caused by the American War supplied the movement with a tangible basis that could appeal to members outside of the Whig opposition. Finally, the influence of the crown served as the target for the Opposition's attacks. For Burke, the reduction of this influence was the key to a restoration of the constitutional balance.

I

The accession of George III to the throne in 1760 was a watershed in the development of political parties in Britain. Great Whig families, such as the Walpoles and the Pelhams, had dominated politics during the reigns of the previous two Georges in such a way that George III felt that they had oppressed his forebears.[12] In reality this was largely a result of the voluntary political inaction of George I and George II; nevertheless, the impression that it left on the young George III was such that he determined to do away with "those unhappy distinctions of party" called Whig and Tory.[13] George III broke significantly with his predecessors, who

[12] Brewer, *Party Ideology*, 4-5.

[13] Quoted in Ibid., 47.

tacitly subscribed to the need for the hegemony of the Whig party, in his conception of political parties and his desire to participate actively in governing. He refused to submit to Whig domination and, by appointing Tories once again to the ministry, ended their long proscription from government.[14] However, his attempt to move beyond party distinctions caused such alarm amongst the factions of the Whig party that it had the opposite effect. In the reign of George I, the Whigs had splintered into several groups. When George III ascended the throne, the Marquess of Rockingham with the Duke of Newcastle (until the duke's death in 1768), William Pitt (elevated to the peerage in 1766 as the Earl of Chatham), the Duke of Bedford, and George Grenville headed the various factions. Of all these connections, the group led by Rockingham crystallized more readily into what became the foundation for the nineteenth-century Whig party. Though much of the Whigs' development was due to circumstances beyond the party's control, such as its removal from office and the Edgcumbe Affair in 1766, the efforts of Burke in this progress cannot be ignored.[15]

Following the Edgcumbe Affair, in which Rockingham attempted to draw support away from Chatham after the latter removed one of the former's allies from office, the Rockinghamites were much reduced in number – only about 54 members by 1768 – and deeply distrustful of the other factions of the Whig party.[16] Chatham's betrayal and acceptance of office as First Lord of the Treasury in 1766 led the Rockinghamites to view themselves as the only defenders of the constitution and

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[14] Ibid., 53.

[15] Frank O'Gorman, *The Rise of Party in England: The Rockingham Whigs 1760-82* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1975), 191, 262-265.

[16] Ibid., 191.

heirs of the Whig party from 1688. Burke's *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents*, published in 1770, reinforced this notion. He extolled a system of "honourable connexions" whereby men would refuse to sacrifice their ideals for a position in the government, even if this meant long years in opposition.[17] For Burke, it was only through the use of such connections that the influence of the Crown and the secret cabal of the King's Friends could be overcome.[18] Therefore, to maintain the purity of the Whig legacy the Rockinghamites were obliged to avoid negotiations with any of the other Whig groups since they all had the taint of corruption from their service to the king.[19] Yet even within the Rockingham connection differences of opinion could be found. On the issue of parliamentary reform, the majority of the party stood with the Marquess and Burke in opposition to it. However, two leading members of the party, the Duke of Richmond and Charles James Fox, supported the reform of parliament. Nevertheless, the Rockinghamites presented a united front on most of the major issues.

As a result of the diminishing numbers that this group suffered, its stance left open only one option for the foreseeable future: the opposition bench. To avoid relegation to the political wilderness, in *Thoughts*, Burke advocated political association amongst the opposition groups only when there was one group that would dominate the coalition, the Rockinghamites.[20] After splitting with Chatham in 1766,

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[17] Edmund Burke, *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1902), 376.

[18] Ibid., 346.

[19] Thomas W. Copeland, ed., *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke* (Chicago: University of Chicago: 1958), 2:100.

[20] Burke, *Works*, 295.

Rockingham followed this rule on party connections for the remainder of his life; the Rockingham party dominated the connections with the Association movement, refused to bend principles during the negotiations with Lord North in 1780, and received the lion's share of the cabinet placements during the coalition with Shelburne in 1782. The only exception to this rule was when the Rockinghamites' views were convergent with other groups. Such periods of unity within the Opposition were often tenuous at best and concealed greater differences. Yet, financial crisis and the issue of crown influence did unite the opposition groups under the banner of economic-reform.

II

The financial crisis resulted from the American War. Expenditure on the army and navy in 1776 totaled £3,462,282 and £3,227,055 respectively.[21] This grew to £7,661,421 and £7,803,285 in 1782, when Parliament voted to end the war in America.[22] Although disruption to trade with the colonies put a severe strain on the British economy, the main arguments from the Opposition focused on the rising costs of the war rather than its damaging effects. Lord Shelburne and his main supporters in the Commons, Colonel Isaac Barré and John Dunning (both members for Shelburne's Wiltshire pocket borough, Calne), attacked the increasing cost of the Army Extraordinaries, which was essentially a blanket term that allowed the government to dispose of funds without account. In December 1779, Shelburne

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[21] *Annual Register* (1776), 249-250.

[22] *Annual Register* (1782), 288.

compared the cost of the Army Extraordinaries during the current war, which had reached £1,469,923, with their cost in the wars of William III and George II, which had been at most £200,000 and £800,000 respectively.[23] After 1779 the cost of the Extraordinaries continued to climb and by 1782 it reached £3,280,053.[24] Additionally, it was believed that the Extraordinary funds were often used for purposes not connected to the army. The funds were given without account and in advance. Barré opposed the use of these funds, citing £40,000 that had been disbursed to Lord Cornwallis with no account.[25] Due to the overwhelming funds going towards the war and the prodigality with which they were spent, Shelburne, in 1780, proposed in the House of Lords a non-partisan committee to investigate what savings could be made. This was rejected, on the grounds that, as a financial matter, it belonged to the other House to establish such measures.[26]

On 18 February 1778, John Luttrell, a naval officer in the American War and a supporter of the Opposition until 1780, brought forward the most scandalous example of government's lack of accountability. In 1771, Parliament had granted £5,000 for upkeep of the *Dragon*, a ship in the royal navy; and a further £7,000 was allocated in 1772, £4,000 in 1774, and £7,000 in 1775. During the same period, £10,273 was spent on stores. Yet, as Luttrell pointed out, the ship "[remained] untouched, in a most rotten state, above Portsmouth harbor ... without having had any of those sums allowed for her repair by parliament, expended on her." Admiral

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[23] PH (1779), 20:1285.

[24] *Annual Register* (1779-82).

[25] PH (1778), 19:975.

[26] PH (1780), 20:1318.

Lord Mulgrave responded that the money was not necessarily intended for the purpose for which it had been requested, and it went to other naval purposes. That, he claimed, was a standard practice in the raising of funds. Upon hearing this, Burke threw the balance book at the Treasury bench and said that "[they were] treating the house with the utmost contempt, to present them with a fine gilt book of estimates, calculated to a farthing, for purposes to which the money granted was never meant to be applied."[27] With the adherence of France and Spain to the Americans' side in 1778 and 1779 respectively, the Opposition Whigs redoubled their attack on the wastefulness of continuing the war, claiming that the addition of an international dimension determined that the war would be lengthy and expensive.[28] By 1780 the military supplies had, in fact, climbed to £21 million.[29] However, in March of that year, although the Opposition did not yet realize it, an answer to their calls for economic accountability presented itself.

In 1780 North created a Commission for Public Accounts to investigate the system of public expenditure and promote economy in it. Two principal reasons frame his motives for this. First, he wanted to undercut the strength of the Opposition. His opportunity lay in the fact that, although the leaders of the Opposition claimed that the purpose of economical reform was to reduce executive influence, many of their supporters were more concerned with fiscal responsibility. Therefore, if North divided the two components of the movement, he would

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[27] PH (1777), 19:129-130.

[28] PH (1779), 20:823-827.

[29] *Annual Register* (1780), 257.

successfully undermine the strength of the Opposition Whigs. Second, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, North knew better than anyone the financial crisis that confronted the country. Therefore, he proposed the Commission in order to locate available funds and bring them to the ministry quickly.[30] The members of the Commission were to be appointed by North. The Rockinghamites objected on the grounds that enquiry into finances was the exclusive privilege of the Commons, and Burke mocked the idea that commissioners appointed by North would be impartial.[31] Colonel Barré demanded that the body be a *committee* to inquire into public accounts rather than a *commission*. The difference was that a *committee* would be composed of unpaid members of the House of Commons while a *commission* would be independent gentlemen paid £1,000 per year.[32] North, however, argued that an independent commission would be free of party entanglements and would not be restricted by their Parliamentary duties.[33] The protests of the Rockinghamites were to no avail, and between 1780 and 1787 the Commission presented fifteen reports on the finances of the kingdom, the first six of which had the most effect on the Rockinghamite reform movement.

The Commissioners selected by North were all highly qualified, capable men. Since military expenditure was to be examined North nominated Sir Guy Carleton, former Governor of Quebec and responsible for conducting military operations in North America. Thomas Bowlby, who was a Comptroller of Army Accounts, was

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[30] Reitan, *Politics*, 75; PH (1780), 21:278.

[31] PH (1781), 21:552-554.

[32] Sylvanus Urban, *The Gentleman's Magazine* 51 (London: E. Cave): 151.

[33] PH (1781), 21:552.

also nominated by North. However, the Opposition rejected Bowlby since he was a placeholder. James Tierney, who was connected to the Army Pay Office, appears to have taken his place. Thomas Anguish, account general of the Court of Chancery, and Arthur Piggott, Attorney General in Grenada, were selected for their legal background. From the mercantile professions Samuel Beachcroft and Richard Neave, both of whom had been directors of the Bank of England, were selected, as well as George Drummond, a prominent Scottish banker. After one year Tierney left and was replaced by William Roe, a customs officer.[34] Although the Opposition fought successfully against Bowlby and initially resisted Carleton's nomination, the expertise of these men was undeniable. Despite the early criticisms of Burke and Barré the reports of the Commissioners were compiled fairly and well presented.

The first report, on 27 November 1780, dealt with the Land Tax and the money that remained in the hands of its collectors. The collectors were divided into three types: those who received money directly from the subject; those who received public money from the Exchequer; and sub-accountants who received money from the second group. The Commissioners calculated, by way of tax receipts, that, on 14 July 1779, a cumulative total of £398,749 remained in the hands of the tax collectors.[35] The second report, presented on 31 Jan 1781, investigated the customs and excise collectors but found no large sums to report, a mere £4,412. The real money, however, was to be found elsewhere.

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[34] Binney, *Public Finance*, 11-13; Norris, *Shelburne*, 120-121; Reitan, *Politics*, 65-67.

[35] Commission of Public Accounts, First Report (27 Nov. 1780), *Journals of the House of Commons* 38:74-76, in D. B. Horn and Mary Ransome, ed., *English Historical Documents, 1714-1783* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957), 330-331.

The third and fourth reports listed the sums that remained in the hands of the former treasurers of the navy and the Paymaster General of the Forces. The former treasurers of the navy, George Grenville, Viscount Barrington, Viscount Howe, and Sir Gilbert Eliot, retained sums that totaled £76,793.[36] The former Paymasters-General of the Forces, which included Lord Holland, Charles Townshend, Lord North with George Cooke, and George Cooke with Thomas Townshend, held balances that totaled £377,788.[37] The problem, from the Opposition's point of view, was that these paymasters were able to retain large sums of public money and, by investing it, could enjoy the interest on the public's money. Large fortunes could be made this way and Richard Rigby was the most scandalous example. Rigby, member for Tavistock, had been Paymaster General of the Forces from 1768 to 1782. The Commission's investigation found that by 1779 Rigby had become extremely wealthy and accumulated a balance of £1,028,284. Although Rigby's was the largest, it was by no means the only balance.[38] The former Paymasters saw their retention of these sums as their duty; that it was profitable was simply a benefit.

J. E. D. Binney describes the complexity of the Paymaster's Office in *British Public Finance and Administration, 1774-92* (1958). As the system stood, if the Paymaster General of the Forces needed funds to pay for a certain number of buttons for troop uniforms, he would send a memo to the Treasury for the specified sum. The Treasury, lacking an intimate knowledge of the intricacies of button-manufacturing

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[36] Reitan, *Politics*, 77-78.

[37] Commission of Public Accounts, Fourth Report (9 April 1781), in Horn, *Historical Documents*, 332.

[38] Reitan, *Politics*, 85.

and its costs, would simply approve the sum and transfer the funds. The practical result of this system was that it allowed paymasters to draw more money than was necessary and use it for their personal advantage. This was simply common practice and indulged in by several holders of that office – though not by the Elder Pitt when he was paymaster between 1746 and 1755, which might lend insight to the opposition Whigs' different conception of public office. Additionally, when a paymaster left office, all of his books and papers were considered to be his property and he remained responsible for them. If any charges that had occurred during his time in office were processed late he would be responsible for those as well.[39] In fact, Burke quipped in his 1780 speech to the Commons on economical reform: "Death, indeed, domineers over everything, but the forms of the Exchequer. Over these he has no power."[40] These charges could be posted at any time and were often processed several years later. In order to prepare for these the paymasters retained large sums of money.

In their fifth and sixth reports the Commission suggested drastic reforms in the system of payments and tax collection. They advocated incentives for tax collectors to remit their balances early, as well as a rationalization of the offices in charge of payments. The balances would be held in the Bank of England and the responsibility for payments would remain with the office rather than with the minister.[41] The suggestions of the Commission were essentially an institutionalization of the work of governance, an attempt to change civil service from

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[39] J. E. D. Binney, *British Public Finance and Administration, 1774-1792* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), 153.

[40] PH (1780), 21:41.

[41] Commission of Public Accounts, Sixth Report (11 April 1782), in Horn, *Historical Documents*, 335.

a personal to a public activity. Although the Commission accomplished the second end of Lord North's original intentions, it also served to awaken the Members of Parliament and the people at large to the troubled state of the financial infrastructure and its need for reform.

III

The influence of the Crown caused a great deal of concern amongst the opposition Whigs and became the primary target for attacks against the government. The king had long held the right to pick his own ministers and reward loyal subjects with pensions and places in government. This right was based on constitutional precedent, and the Whigs had generally accepted it before 1760, partly because the first two Georges had been rather less active politically than George III proved to be and partly because they were the beneficiaries of such privileges. Whig theory maintained that the system of government needed to be balanced between the different powers of the state.[42] Influence, however, was not completely removed from this concept of balance. The Crown, House of Lords, and House of Commons each had specific functions: the waging of wars and diplomacy, judicial and legislative functions, and financial and legislative functions respectively. Additionally, each branch had the means to check the other branches. The House of Lords could block legislation from the Commons, the king could dissolve Parliament and use his influence and ability to create peerages to change the composition of the House of Lords, and the Commons could withhold financial support from the king.

[42] Burke, *Works*, 33.

Moreover, this balance had been consecrated in 1688. The Glorious Revolution had essentially been a reaffirmation of what was regarded as the "ancient constitution."[43] This constitution was an amalgamation of centuries of common-law statutes and, as such, was heavily based on property. For eighteenth-century Whigs, and Burke in particular, property was more than a simple physical holding; it was the basis on which the constitution, and thus, the government, was founded. Property, in addition to its inviolability, bestowed upon a person the right to rule. George Fasel asks, "When learning, leisure, and long political experience were the preserve of a few, who could rule but the 'sober, large-acred part of the nation?'"[44] This balance, centered as it was on property, was designed to support and protect the propertied classes.[45]

For eighteenth-century Whigs, the danger rested in the loss of balance and, as George III took a more active role, this was exactly what they feared had happened. They believed that by using the traditional tools of the Crown – placement of ministers in the House of Commons, selection of cabinet ministers, rewards for loyalty, and especially the use of the Civil List – executive influence had risen to dangerous proportions. Recent research has shown that this perception was largely false. In 1780, as Christie says, there "[were] a little under two hundred placemen [in

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[43] J. G. A. Pocock, "Burke and the Ancient Constitution," *The Historical Journal* 3, no. 2 (1960): 128; H. T. Dickinson, "Whiggism in the Eighteenth Century," in John Cannon, ed., *The Whig Ascendancy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), 38.

[44] George Fasel, "'The Soul that Animated': The Role of Property in Burke's Thought," *Studies in Burke and His Time* 17, no. 1 (Winter, 1976): 28-29.

[45] Dickinson, "Whiggism," 29, 34-6.

the Commons], as compared with the 250 of 1761."[46] Nevertheless, because of their erroneous assumptions, the Whigs feared "all manner of corruption."[47] According to the Whigs, the monarchy was limited by the laws of the realm and was only one piece of a balanced government whose primary function was the protection of property.[48]

John Stuart, the Third Earl of Bute, personified this corruption. Bute, a Scotsman, had tutored the young George III before his accession. George III greatly loved Bute, who became the king's trusted advisor even to the extent that other ministers felt that he monopolized the attention of the king. Complaining of the intrusive presence of Bute in the king's government, the Duke of Newcastle, toward the end of his ministry in 1761, complained that he was "never consulted, hardly informed, [and had] difficulties about common Things in [his] own Office."[49] The level of confidence that Bute commanded with George III earned him the moniker "the Favourite." Wildly unpopular for his alleged secret influence over the king, Bute, upon coming into office in 1762, commissioned the publication of a paper to gather support for his government. *The Briton*, edited by Tobias Smollett, was created to respond to the criticisms of the government that came from *The Monitor*, originally a Tory newspaper that, by the 1760s, had become a tool of the opposition Whigs.[50] It was the ministerial propaganda of *The Briton* that caused John Wilkes and co-author

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[46] Christie, "Economical Reform," 147.

[47] Burke, *Works*, 364.

[48] Dickinson, "Whiggism," 32.

[49] From a memorandum by the Duke of Newcastle, 15 July 1761, quoted in Brewer, *Party Politics*, 126.

[50] George Rudé, *Wilkes and Liberty: A Social Study of 1763 to 1774* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 20-21.

Charles Churchill to publish the first issue of *The North Briton* on 6 June 1762. The paper, whose primary goal was to be "a weekly antidote to the weekly poison of [*The Briton*]," consisted of a string of sarcastic and witty attacks on Bute and the government in general.[51]

Wilkes deplored the presence of a favorite, and claimed that the person who could be labeled such was nothing more than a "disgrace ... a load to the country who suffers him."[52] Burke concurred with this sentiment and claimed that "it is the unnatural infusion of a *system of favouritism* into a government which in a great part of its constitution is popular, that has raised the present ferment in the nation."[53] Bute's poor performance as a politician and his acceptance of the Treaty of Paris, which Wilkes believed had been dictated to Britain by the King of Prussia, intensified these criticisms.[54] Bute's unpopularity and inability to cooperate with the Whig factions ensured that any failures of the government would be squarely laid upon him. In fact even governmental failures after he left office in 1763 were blamed on his continued influence. Wilkes believed that the Earls of Egremont and Halifax, as well as George Grenville, remained in Bute's pocket after his resignation. Wilkes claimed, in the culmination of his attack on Bute – the famous No. 45 paper published on 23 April 1763, a week after Bute's resignation – "It therefore seems clear to a demonstration, that He intends only to retire into that situation, which He held before

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[51] John Wilkes and Charles Churchill, *The North Briton, XLVI,* numbers complete (London: 1772), 1:70.

[52] Ibid., 1:64.

[53] Burke, *Works*, 331 (emphasis in original).

[54] Wilkes, *North Briton*, 2:251-252.

He first took the seals; I mean the dictating to every part of the king's administration."[55]

Wilkes' vehement attack, which eventually led to his imprisonment, was taken up and given greater depth and eloquence by Burke and the Rockinghamites. The real issue lay not with Bute but with the power wielded by the king that allowed such unpopular, inept men to lead the government. Burke, with his characteristic sarcasm, lamented that the "king might appoint one of his footmen, or one of your footmen, for minister."[56] To the Rockinghamites, the kings choice of ministers ought to have been based on the wishes of the people (as expressed through the elections) and the opinion of Parliament. For several years after the fall of Bute, the ability of the king to choose ministers continued to affect the Whig factions adversely, resulting in unstable administrations. The succession of short ministries in the 1760s clearly portrayed this. The ministries of Grenville (1763-65), Rockingham (1765-66), Chatham (1766-68), and the Duke of Grafton (1768-70) all reflected George III's inability to find a minister who would submit to his direction; the length of Lord North's ministry (1770-82) and his place in the king's confidence were not unrelated. Yet, royal appointments to office were not the only means of Crown influence.

Lord North's long term in office excluded the Rockingham Whigs from the government. They had to bide their time until they had an issue with which they could successfully unite the Opposition groups for an attack on North's ministry. The king's abuse of the Civil List provided one such opportunity. The inception of the

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[55] Wilkes, *North Briton*, 2:247-248.

[56] Burke, *Works*, 316.

Civil List in 1698 was an attempt to resolve the tension between the House of Commons' claim to control of the nation's finances and the independence of the Crown. The monarch was permitted to use the funds from the Civil List as he saw fit for the maintenance of the government. This included the salaries of ministers, pensions, and the upkeep of the governmental buildings. Parliament granted to the king income from the hereditary revenues, temporary excise taxes, revenues from the Duchy of Cornwall, and the 4.5 percent duties from the West Indies, with the understanding that he could not spend over £700,000 per year without the permission of Parliament.[57] Under George II this arrangement was changed so that the amount of his Civil List would increase as the wealth of the nation increased. The Civil List Act of 1760, however, allotted George III a sum of £800,000 per year, which was technically higher than the amount that George II had received but inflation left George III with a Civil List significantly less valuable than that of his forebears.[58] In fact the king's spending averaged £908,563 per year between 1763 and 1769, surpassing his yearly income to such an extent that the Civil List was in arrears by £513,511. North, who was Chancellor of the Exchequer and leader of the House of Commons, managed to convince parliament to pay the balance in 1769.[59]

As Prime Minister, North was to be less successful. On 9 April 1777 the King's Message stated to the House of Commons that the Civil List was, once again, in arrears by £600,000. This time, however, Lord North requested that the Commons

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[57] Earl A. Reitan, "The Civil List in Eighteenth-Century British Politics: Parliamentary Supremacy versus the Independence of the Crown," *The Historical Journal* 9, no. 3 (1966): 318-319.

[58] Ibid., 320-323.

[59] Earl A. Reitan, *Politics, Finance, and the People: Economical Reform in England in the Age of the American Revolution, 1770-92* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 13.

increase the amount of the Civil List to £900,000 per year in addition to settling the existing arrears.[60] Whig opposition was led by Burke. He started with the premise that the object of the Civil List was royal dignity, the means £800,000. Then, after comparing the relative dignity of William III, George II, and George III, he came to the conclusion that since the first two maintained more dignity on fewer funds, the cause of the loss of royal dignity must lie in either mismanagement of funds or their use for increasing the influence of the Crown in Parliament.[61] His argument, however, overlooked the rising prices of the time; a comparison of the prices of wheat per quarter at Michaelmas between the 1760s and the 1770s shows an increase by 17 percent, which, if the same rate were applied to the Civil List would result in a new total of £936,000 per year.[62] In reality though, it was the function of the Civil List that Burke was really arguing against. The Civil List was used to fund such sinecures as the master of the Jewel Office or master of the Buckhounds, which were nothing more than nominal titles with a salary. As Reitan points out, "Those whose high birth entitled them to grace the presence of the sovereign might aspire to be groom of the Bedchamber (£500 per annum), lord of the Bedchamber (£1,000 per annum), or even groom of the Stole (£2,000 per annum)."[63] The Civil List also funded the "secret service" expenditure. Details of this were, as the name implied, undisclosed but contained several pensions given directly from the king. In reality the pensions were

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[60] PH (1777), 19:103.

[61] Ibid.,125-126.

[62] T. S. Ashton, *An Economic History of England: The 18th Century* (London: Methuen, 1955), 239.

[63] Retain, "Civil List," 322.

often given to nobles who had fallen on hard times and were awarded secret pensions to preserve their honor. However, the secrecy of such arrangements caused the Opposition to fear the worst. Such lucrative positions, as well as the pensions that were paid from the Civil List, were seen as a means for the king, in a sense, to purchase the votes of members of Parliament. Those members would then pass bills and keep his minister in office. The evidence the Whigs provided for this accusation was continuance of the North ministry despite the American War which grew more unpopular as its cost increased.[64] The number of sinecures paid for by the Civil List was relatively few, yet, because of their prominence, they came to symbolize the use of patronage for political purposes. Because of this, the Opposition began to argue vehemently against its unrestricted usage.

As a response to North's 1777 request for payment of arrears and an increase in the list, Lord Cavendish argued that the debts of the Civil List should be presented to Parliament annually, thus reducing the impact of a large lump sum and allowing Parliament to suggest means for economy in the royal expenditure.[65] According to his plan, the Commons would only intervene in the Civil List if it were in arrears. Rockingham stated that to grant an increase specifically for a failure of frugality was wrong in principle.[66] Charles James Fox elucidated the underlying agenda of Whig arguments: if Parliament was to be required to pay the balances on the king's debt it should be entitled to inquire into the details of the transactions.[67] In 1779, as the costs

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[64] PH (1781), 20:1298; *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 4:163.

[65] PH (1777), 19:105.

[66] Ibid., 165.

[67] Ibid.,137.

of the American War continued to climb, the Duke of Richmond proposed that the king ought to set an example of economy for the people and the various departments of state and voluntarily reduce his Civil List.[68] Eight days later on 15 December, Burke asked leave of the Commons to bring in a bill for the "better regulation of his Majesty's Civil Establishments."[69] He declared that the increased influence of the Crown was the cause of the present economic troubles and that "the government ought to have force enough for its functions; but it ought to have no more. It ought not have force enough to support itself in the neglect, or the abuse of them."[70]

The civil list, though, was not the only source of influence identified by the Opposition. Philip Jennings Clerke attempted to cleanse the House of Commons from the influence of contractors. These were merchants who would contract with the government to supply it with goods or services of different types. Wartime gave the contractors special importance as they were responsible for supplying the military with everything from food and rum to uniforms. The Opposition feared that these contracts were given to Members of Parliament in exchange for their support on certain measures since contractors were known to vote consistently with the government. Fox presented an oratorical dramatization of this fear, explaining how influence can quickly grow beyond the measure intended by the minister. "You know I gave you an advantageous contract, worth to you £20,000 therefore, I must have a sure vote in you;" the contractor, he went on, can then demand a more advantageous

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[68] *Annual Register, Or, a View of the History and Politics of the Year* ... (London: 1780), 72-73; PH (1781), 20:1257.

[69] PH (1781), 21:111.

[70] PH (1781), 20:1297-1298.

contract if the administration begins to come on hard times.[71] The Opposition assumed that these deals were always to the detriment of the nation – terms favorable to the contractor that squandered the money of the people. As evidence of such inordinate profits Shelburne cited "the contractors' splendid palaces, that stared you in the face in the counties all round the metropolis; the sumptuousness and expense with which they were known to live."[72]

Influence did not stop at the walls of Parliament either. John Crewe sought to attack influence "out of doors." The Revenue Office was responsible for the collection and management of the taxes from several departments including the customs, excise, stamps, windows and houses, and post office. Employees of the various departments would, it was feared, be forced to vote against their will. Any court candidate would have to be supported by the revenue officers lest those employees wished to lose their job. Thus the king, or First Minster, could be upheld against the will of the people. This hydra-like influence, with heads in civil list, Parliament, and the electorate, would have to be overcome if the purity of legislature was to be restored.

Yet the Whig interpretation of constitutional balance was not the only one. As we have seen, the Whig balance rested on the protection of the propertied classes and their right to rule. The independent country gentlemen, however, subscribed to a different view of balance. The independent gentlemen had a great distrust of party

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[71] PH (1780), 20:129.

[72] PH (1782), 22:1376.

organizations.[73] Balance for them implied a sovereign independent of parliament, and thus, party influence. As will be shown, their desire for an independent sovereign kept them from supporting the clauses of Burke's bill which interfered in the personal affairs of the king. Additionally, many of the country gentry had family roots in the old Tory party, which accounts for their distrust of the Whig families that dominated politics through party connections. Radicals, too, held a different view of the constitutional balance. For them, the dominant member of the government should have been a House of Commons that was truly representative of the population. This was the basis of the parliamentary-reform movement, which eventually gained currency in the country with the Association Movement calling for annual parliaments, the addition of one hundred knights of the shire, and the removal of rotten boroughs. These demands were both too extreme for the Rockinghamite Whigs and reflected an opposing view of the proper constitutional balance. On the issue of reform, Burke, like Rockingham, "[preferred] the shears to the hatchets."[74] Thus, the economical-reform movement designed to restore the constitution rather than restructure it.

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[73] N. C. Phillips, "Edmund Burke and the County Movement," *The English Historical Review* 76, no. 299 (April, 1961): 257.

[74] *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 4:163.

Chapter Two: First Attempts

Although the full-scale campaign for economical reform did not begin until 1780 the first shots were fired much earlier. Clerke's Contractors bill first appeared before the House of Commons in April 1778 and Crewe's Revenue Officers bill was actually an adaptation of William Dowdeswell's bill from 1770. A close examination of these bills will show that, like Burke's bill, they were designed not for innovation but for a restoration of the system of government. Their intention was to restore the House of Commons to its original purity – a task deemed "Herculean" by Lord George Gordon, who stated that "the cleansing of King Augeas's stable from the filth and dirt of 3,000 oxen ... was a mere play and pastime, compared to the arduous task of restoring this House to its ancient and original purity."[75] Lord Gordon spoke these words during the first debate on Clerke's Contractors bill; the uphill struggle over the next four years proved the truth of his words. Like Burke's bill, Clerke's and Crewe's bills could only succeed with support from the various Opposition groups in Parliament and the Country Gentlemen.

I

During the late eighteenth century, the Treasury Board supplied the needs of the government and the military by awarding contracts to various merchants. The First Lord of the Treasury or the Treasury Secretary distributed contracts as he saw fit and the details were concluded behind closed doors. During wartime these contracts became extremely important since the contractors were responsible for supplying the

[75] PH (1778), 19:1098.

army and navy with everything from uniforms to rum. Thus, as the American War continued, those who held contracts enjoyed a handsome profit. Because of this contractors were seen to be a well of influence. Ministers, it was feared, would grant excessively lucrative contracts to members of Parliament in exchange for support. The prosperity of contractors and the longevity of the American War became the proof of this corrupt symbiotic relationship. Contractors, therefore, were a clear target as they were generally disliked, especially by the independent Country Gentlemen. As Burke claimed, in a letter in April 1780, "they have a natural antipathy to inordinate gain in any Body and they are more disposed to the censure of abuses among Trading people than of those among any other description of Men."[76] Additionally, contractors came under fire from groups other than the Rockingham Connection. In 1778 Colonel Barré declared that "contracts ought to be open, and offered to the lowest bidder."[77] Clerke's Contractors bill, therefore, was designed to unite the Opposition groups and the Country Gentlemen against Lord North's administration.

On 13 April 1778 Clerke moved in the House of Commons "that leave be given to bring in a Bill, for restraining any person, being a member of the House of Commons, from being concerned ... in any Contract made by the commissioners of His Majesty's Treasury."[78] He argued, with the support of Colonel Barré and Gordon, that it was reasonable to assume that, since contractors "throve upon the

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[76] *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 4:218-219.

[77] Norman Baker, "The Treasury and Open Contracting, 1778-1782," *The Historical Journal* 15, no. 3 (Sept., 1972): 433; PH (1778), 19:1091.

[78] PH (1778), 19:1090.

spoil of their fellow subjects" and "[granted] away the money of others to enrich themselves," their vote in the Commons would be in their own interest rather than that of the nation. That the House was still pursuing measures of "force and violence" in America he gave as evidence of this. He cited also the contract for supplying the army in America with gold. North had originally offered this contract at 2½ percent which he later reduced to 1½ percent. Clerke asked: why not an original offer of 2 percent? An associate of Clerke, who was a merchant in London, had calculated that the profit arising from 2 ½ percent would amount to £46,000 which, when compared to the standard average profit of £11,500 from ½ percent, seemed to embody the "inordinate gain" that the Opposition and Country Gentlemen feared.[79] His focus on the minutiae of this contract belies a distrust not only of the system through which contracts were awarded but also of the ministers responsible for their disbursement. Like Burke, Clerke was motivated by fear of Crown influence. He established his bill on "Revolution principles" by invoking William's promise of a "free" Parliament. He recounted the bills from the 5th and 6th of William and Mary which had excluded "all commissioners of customs, excise, salt duties, &c. as being concerned in public money" from sitting in the House of Commons.[80] His goal then, was a restoration of the Commons to a more pure form by removing those who, he believed, were under the influence of the King and his ministers.

Although the bill passed its first and second readings by margins of twenty-one and nine respectively, it was defeated on 5 May 1778 by two votes on the motion

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[79] Ibid., 1088-1099.

[80] Ibid.

for going into a committee. The opponents of the bill argued primarily on two fronts. First, they perceived it as a personal attack on the contractors. Alderman Harley, a contractor, took affront at the bill and invited enquiries into his contracts "as he was conscious that, upon the most rigid investigation, his would bear the test."[81] North too, defended his part in the gold contract stating that any deals that he struck were for the benefit of the public. Earl Nugent attacked the bill on the grounds that to take away the right to represent fellow subjects without any proof of wrongdoing was contrary to principles of liberty. Secondly, George Wombwell, a supporter of North, identified one of the weaknesses of the proposed process. "Men inadequate to the accomplishment of the contract," he said, "would at all times bid lower than men of ability and reputation, and they would do much more injury by serving the public badly, than the difference of expense."[82] Significantly, none of the attacks on the bill denied the "inordinate gain" that accompanied contracting. Harley and North both defended their reputation but not the system itself. In fact, as Baker says, "neither Lord North nor John Robinson, the Treasury Secretary ... were fully satisfied with existing contract methods."[83] Earl Nugent even claimed – with an argument that would become obsolete in two years with the coming of Burke's bill – that "he could not suppose that contracts created any undue influence in the House any more than sinecure places (which bye the bye, he supposed no man on either side of the house would agree to exclude); and the legislature, by tolerating the latter, had determined it

[81] Ibid., 1090.

[82] Ibid., 1096-1097.

[83] Baker, "Open Contracting," 433.

to be no prejudice."[84] Although the government had a sufficient majority to defeat the bill, the margin was slim and the introduction of the bill had served one very important function. This was the first of the main "Economical Reform" bills to be introduced, and the government had failed to contradict one of the bill's main premises, the "inordinate gains." Such a close margin of defeat proved that the Opposition groups and the Country Gentlemen had the potential to override the King's ministers.

On 12 February 1779, Clerke reintroduced his bill. Although the core of his argument remained the same, he presented new evidence to support it. He noted that, although the contract for supplying hay to the army in America had been offered by advertisement to the lowest bidder, it had in fact previously been decided to award it, "as all other things had been given," to a "North Briton," Simon Fraser. Richard Atkinson and Mr. Muir, who held the rum contract, had also obtained a portion of the hay contract, incensing Clerke who accused them of not being satisfied with one contract. In addition, he claimed that part of the influence that his bill was meant to destroy rested beyond the walls of Parliament. Just as the Government could persuade contractors to vote with them in Parliament, contractors, he feared, could use their "power ... of making promises of provision" to influence the electorate. [85] Clerke's 1779 arguments were, thus, quite similar to the ones used in 1778, and once again they earned his bill a first and second reading.

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[84] PH (1778), 19:1095.

[85] PH (1779), 20:124-125.

Most of Clerke's supporters on the other hand slightly altered their arguments in light of the previous year's failure. An exception was James Luttrell who reiterated his earlier argument that "it could not be expected that those who fed on the continuance of war, would vote for its conclusion;" however, Charles James Fox and Sir William Wake proposed a subtle shift.[86] Fox spun a narrative of a dialogue between a contractor and a minister in order to demonstrate the casual form that influence could take. His rhetorical eloquence shifted the debate away from the battlefield of facts and figures – where the Opposition parties were considerably lacking in arms – and toward the fertile imaginations of the country gentlemen, who greatly disliked backroom deals and squandered money. Wake, an independent member for Bedford, took a different approach. Rather than peremptorily accusing contractors of corruption, he presented the argument that the bill would be doing a service to the contractors by removing the temptation that a £20,000 or 30,000 contract could create. He believed that this temptation might become "too much, and influence men to vote contrary to their real sentiments and to the interest of their country."[87] In this way, he attempted to make the argument less accusatory and more easily accessible to the independent members.

Yet for all their eloquence, the Opposition parties were unable to overcome the administration. North countered Clerke by replying that awarding contracts to the lowest bidder would subject the government to the oppression of greedy and selfish men. George Onslow was even able to turn Clerke's defense of the electorate around

[86] Ibid., 128.

[87] Ibid.

on him. He stated that such an "innovation" in the constitution would in fact harm the rights of the electors by encroaching on their possible candidates and narrowing their elective powers.[88] On 11 March the motion for going into a committee on the bill was lost 124 to 165. However, North immediately moved "that this House will, upon this day four months, resolve itself into a committee upon the said bill."[89] This was agreed to.

The following year, 1780, marked a milestone for the economical-reform movement. The year opened with Burke's lengthy speech proposing his plan for economic reform and, in April, John Crewe revived William Dowdeswell's bill to prevent Revenue Officers from voting; this will be explored in detail below. Finally, in 1780 Clerke's bill made its way through the House of Commons and onto the floor of the House of Lords. Unfortunately, *Cobbett's Parliamentary History*, *The Gentleman's Magazine*, and *Annual Register* contain no account of the debates whilst the bill was in the committee stage. However, on several occasions in the House of Lords the bill was said to have passed the lower House "unanimously" and Burke, in a letter dated 4 April 1780, confirmed this while he considered reasons why the administration let the bill pass.

> Sir Phi: Clark's (*sic*) bill on that matter passed through the house of Commons without opposition. In the beginning [the North administration] was determined to oppose it with all the strength of Government; but that Resolution was soon abandon'd. I do not know whether to attribute this change to the — [blank in manuscript] and want of System which distinguishes the present Ministers. Perhaps it might have been their flattering themselves that the regulations of the bill might be evaded ... It might have

[88] Ibid.

[89] Ibid., 129.

been that they felt themselves more materially pressed by the Establishment [Bill] that it was necessary to give up *something* to satisfye the people.[90]

With hindsight, however, it seems likely that North allowed the bill to pass through the Commons because he could be sure of a defeat in the Lords. This contingency plan had been laid out by George III in a letter to North on 12 February 1779.[91]

On 14 April 1780 committal of the bill was moved in the Lords and the resultant debate presents some of the most lucid arguments for and against it. Lord Stormont labeled the bill "cruel and unjust" citing the familiar argument that it operated on the assumption of vice rather than evidence. He also observed the impracticability of public announcements for government contracts that were meant to supply covert military operations.[92] The Earls of Hillsborough and Bathurst agreed that the bill was too easy to circumvent; they reasoned that if a contract were to be used for influence it could just as easily be granted to a friend or relative.[93] Several of the Lords agreed with Lord Chancellor Thurlow that, despite the Commons' recent approval of John Dunning's motion that the influence of the Crown was increasing, there was yet to be any substantial proof of the "influence" that was the foundation of the bill.[94] Furthermore, Lord Hillsborough noted that it was the duty of that House to correct any excesses in either branch of the government, which at this time he believed had manifested itself in a "delirium of virtue" that had infected the people

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[90] Correspondence of Edmund Burke, 4:218-219.

[91] W. Bodham Donne, ed., *The Correspondence of King George the Third with Lord North, From 1768 to 1783* (London: John Murray, 1867), 2:228-229.

[92] PH (1780), 21:416.

[93] Ibid., 416-420.

[94] Ibid., 435.

and the members of the lower House. They were "bent on reforming and amending the constitution on erroneous principle" and it was the duty of the Lords to "check and resist that ... rage and tempest of liberty," and in his experience, vices and human nature could not be hedged in by statutes.[95]

The Duke of Richmond countered two of these points. First, he claimed in response to the Hillsborough, past failures to limit vice and corruption did not preclude new attempts. In fact, they ought to inspire new attempts by learning from previous faults. Second he pointed out that for any given law there is a means to circumvent it and this fact should not deter one from passing such laws.[96] Finally, with an additional riposte he charged that since the Commons represented the people, rejecting a bill approved by them would drive the King away from the wishes of his subjects, a move he considered to be unconstitutional.[97] At the core of this last point lies the tenet central to many of the arguments used by the supporters of the bill. Early in the debate, the Earl of Coventry mentioned that since the bill dealt primarily with regulating the membership of the House of Commons and had been agreed to by that house, the Lords could not justifiably reject it. He added that, since the bill was based upon the wishes of the people, as presented in petitions, it would be "a very serious matter for their lordships to oppose [the] bill."[98] The Duke of Grafton feared that a rejection of the bill would cause a rupture between the two Houses and in time of war unity was more valuable than the contractors' seats in Parliament. Lord

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[95] Ibid., 416-417.

[96] Ibid., 451.

[97] Ibid., 455.

[98] Ibid., 416.

Camden also supported the bill, citing the evidence of history to prove its usefulness. Historically, he claimed, men in power had been apt to abuse power. In politics, account had to be taken for the weakness of human nature.[99] The most persuasive argument for the bill came from Shelburne. In response to the charge that the contractors were being persecuted without justification, he noted that the commissioners of the excise and customs were barred from sitting in Parliament and there was no negative connotation for them. Rather it was simply a component of the logical equation that had to be weighed when one considered either entering into a government contract or running for a seat in Parliament. To answer the charge that the bill would force the government to contract with "selfish" and dishonorable men, Lord Shelburne replied, "Good God, were there no merchants in the city, no monied men, no men of high reputation, who would accept of contracts, and discharge the duties of them with rigid observance, but members of parliament?" Lastly, he borrowed Wake's tactic. He stated that it was fitting and proper for a man to conduct his business in such a manner as to procure the greatest possible profit so as to provide for his family. Yet, it was also proper for the members of Parliament to apply this same principle to their country. Therefore, the bill was actually meant to be a relief to contractors rather than a punishment; no longer would they have to decide between their duty to their family and their duty to their nation. This bill would free them from that dilemma.[100]

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[99] Ibid., 443.

[100] Ibid., 422-428.

Despite the eloquent arguments put forth by a united Opposition, the bill was rejected by the Lords. In just under two months, on 2 June 1780, the Gordon Riots would cause a reactionary swing against reform and popular movements. This shift in opinion ensured a swift defeat when the bill was brought in again in 1781. After its defeat in 1780 the only hope that remained for the bill was a change of ministry. The arguments of Clerke, his fellow Rockinghamites, and their Shelburneite allies had amassed a considerable amount of support – the margins of defeat were usually quite slim – but it was not enough to counter the political clout of the King's ministers. Yet Clerke's bill was not the only one to suffer this fate; John Crewe attempted to sever the hydra's third head.

II

Unlike the bills of Burke and Clerke, which concerned influence within parliament, the Revenue Officers Bill attempted to reduce crown influence outside of Parliament. Because of its scope it has been described as the most "radical" of the economic reform legislation.[101] In many ways this was true. The bill proposed the disfranchisement of officers of the excise, customs, stamps, and salt. Loss of the franchise, however, was only to be temporary and would only be applicable while the individual remained a revenue officer. Thus, unlike the Contractors bill, which was only concerned with the eligibility of individuals to sit in Parliament, Crewe's bill was meant to effect a change in the electoral structure of the nation. In fact, as Betty Kemp notes, the radical nature of the bill "was expected to make it palatable to the

[101] Betty Kemp, "Crewe's Act, 1782," *The English Historical Review* 68, no. 267 (April, 1953): 258.

allies of the Rockingham Whigs outside parliament, who were invited to regard it as a measure of Parliamentary reform."[102] In effect, this was the closest to parliamentary reform that the Rockingham party was willing get. The extra-parliamentary allies of the Rockinghamites, specifically the Association Movement, called for the redistribution and addition of parliamentary seats in an effort to make the Commons more representative of the people. Crewe essentially sought the same goal but believed that all that was needed was a limitation of some of the government-controlled electorate. The majority of the party – excepting Charles James Fox and the Duke of Richmond – believed that the constitution needed no major alteration; all that was necessary was a restoration of its principles which could be effected by the reduction of crown influence. Thus, Crewe's bill, although the most radical of the economical-reform bills, was only moderately radical and the Rockinghamites' allies outside of Parliament had their eyes on much larger reforms than a modest restriction of the electorate.

In addition to being the most radical of the economic reform bills the Revenue Officers Bill was also the oldest. This is not very surprising since, according to Kemp, "dislike of revenue officers, of whom 90 per cent. were employees of the boards of customs and excise, was as old as their establishment."[103] Under William III the chief officers of the revenue had already been barred from sitting in Parliament and officials of the customs, excise, and post office had been disfranchised.[104] In

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[102] Ibid., 259.

[103] Ibid., 258.

[104] Ibid., 259; PH 16:834; 3 Will. And Mary c. 1.

1770 William Dowdeswell moved for leave to bring a bill into the House of Commons "for disqualifying certain Officers in the Revenues from voting for Members of Parliament." Dowdeswell, member for Worcestershire, had originally been an independent country gentleman but joined with Rockingham in 1765 as Chancellor of the Exchequer. During the Chatham administration he became Rockingham's leader in the Commons, an honor he held until his death in 1775. The excise, claimed Dowdeswell, which produced £100,000 under William III, had grown to produce £800,000 in 1770. Such an increase justified the disfranchisement of the lesser revenue officers, who, as employees of the government, were a source of influence that was damaging not only to the nation but also to the king. A king could not achieve a stable reign without the support of the majority of the people and, unless the House of Commons was made to be more representative of the people, the king would never be secure in his power.[105] Lord George Sackville, member for East Grinstead and a loose associate of the Rockinghamite party, supported the measure, claiming, in an argument similar to one that would be used to support Clerke's bill later, that such an act would liberate the subject from the decision between his bread and his honor. Sir George Cornwall, Herefordshire member and friendly to both the Rockinghamite and Shelburneite connections, also supported the bill on the grounds that the influence of the crown was the highest that it had ever been. [106]

Yet, despite the bill's historical precedent it was defeated by 75 votes. Those who opposed denied the growth of such 'influence' and criticized it as both

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[105] PH (1770), 16:834.

[106] Ibid., 838-840.

dangerous and unnecessary. Charles Jenkinson claimed that the law already restricted the "persuasion or dissuasion, in the voting for representatives in Parliament, under very heavy penalties." Lord Frederick Campbell feared the precedent that such a bill would set. The disqualification of a portion of the electorate was a very serious matter and if embarked upon frivolously there would be no telling where it would stop.[107] Dowdeswell's bill was thus lost. It had been presented during the period of concentrated Opposition attack on the administration's treatment of John Wilkes and the Middlesex election. Yet, although Dowdeswell thought the bill would "catch many persons," its appeal was not wide enough to incorporate the independent votes needed to overcome the administration. The bill would have to wait until another concentrated attack against the administration took place.

Ten years later in 1780 just such an opportunity arose. The economical-reform movement, despite defeats in 1778 and 1779, was at its highest point yet. By April Clerke's bill had passed the Commons and was about to be debated in the Lords. Burke had given his grand oratory on economical reform a few months previously and, despite the loss of two clauses, his bill had won an important victory on the Board of Trade clause in committee. If there was a chance for economical reform to succeed this was it. On 13 April John Crewe revived Dowdeswell's bill and moved for the committal of the third plank of the Rockinghamite economical-reform program, the Revenue Officers bill. The premise of the bill was the same as Dowdeswell's – to disfranchise the lower officers of the revenue for as long as they held their posts. The object of the bill, Crewe claimed, was two-fold: the reduction of

[107] Ibid., 835-840.

the influence of the crown out of doors and the restoration of the independence of Parliament.[108] This 'influence' was evidenced by John Rolle, an independent member for Devon. His father had represented Devon for two parliaments, as had his father before him. Nevertheless, his father lost his third election. A court candidate sent to oppose him won due only to the "majority occasioned by the great number of revenue officers, who had, by mandate from the minister, been forced to vote against him."[109] The revenue officers, in fact, already had no vote, claimed Lord Cavendish. Since it was "absolutely impossible for them to give their votes freely, and to the candidate to whom they in their conscience approved" there could be no harm done to the candidates by disfranchising them. On the contrary, just as Lord Sackville had argued in 1770, the bill would do the officers "an essential service."[110] However, the North administration, having already allowed the Contractors Bill to pass the House of Commons, was not willing to give up so easily on the Revenue Officers Bill.

The government's supporters attacked the bill as a vicious and unwarranted attack on the rights of the subject. Henry Dundas deplored the "essential service" that would make men chose between their right to vote or starvation. Such an attack against the rights of the subject represented nothing more than a violent innovation in the constitution.[111] Earl Nugent exclaimed that since 1430 the "franchises of the electors of Great Britain [had] stood on their present footing."[112] To disqualify such a

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[108] PH (1780), 21:403.

[109] Ibid., 411.

[110] Ibid., 405.

[111] Ibid., 404.

[112] Ibid., 406.

large group of men without any infraction or legitimate cause was unconstitutional. Although this was not entirely true, since we have seen that, under William III, adjustments to the electorate had been made, the arguments of Dundas and Nugent had an important effect. Seven days earlier, on 6 April, Dunning's resolution on the increasing influence of the crown had been passed in the Commons. Since his motion stated that the influence "ought to be reduced" it was presumed that any bill that came into the House claiming to reduce it would receive the support of those who voted for Dunning's motion. Yet the arguments of Dundas and Nugent carefully placed the Revenue Officers bill close to the camp of parliamentary reform. The Rockinghamites, after all, had allowed the bill to come close enough to parliamentary reform to woo their extra-parliamentary allies. This allowed the administration to label the bill a constitutional "innovation" which exploited the uneasiness that some independent members had with the bill. Sir Thomas Clavering, for instance, admitted to being one of the 233 members who passed Dunning's resolution yet was uncomfortable with the present means of influence diminution.[113] Disfranchising a portion of the electorate brought the bill too close to parliamentary reform and melted its wings. The bill was lost 195 to 224. As with the Clerke's bill, the events of June 1780 halted the progress that Crewe's bill had made. On 21 March 1781, the bill was debated briefly before being defeated by 133 to 86. Without a favorable ministry the bill had no foreseeable future.

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[113] Ibid., 410; Kemp, "Crewe's Act," 259.

Chapter Three: Burke and Reform

With Burke's famous speech on economical reform in February 1780 the movement reached full strength. He had carefully chosen the Civil List as the target of his attack in order to gather as much support as possible for his bill. However, the clauses of the bill were slowly eroded away in committee until Burke eventually abandoned hope. The examination of this episode shows Burke's first attempts at a practical system of reform. His previous theoretical work had now given way to concrete proposals. Yet his attempt at reform was plagued by constitutional issues and had to contend with the growing popular movement for parliamentary reform. Finally, his involvement with the Association Movement and reaction to the Gordon Riots evidenced his dithering thoughts on popular support.

I

By 1779 the American War had so deteriorated Britain's financial situation that the Opposition parties thought it time to act. On 15 December 1779 Burke announced his intention to bring forward a plan of economy. It was the privilege of the House of Commons, he maintained, to manage the finances of the nation and in that task they had been woefully negligent and were in danger of losing it. He noted that the House of Lords had debated the finances of the nation twice on 7 December when Richmond had moved for a reform of the civil list and Shelburne for a discussion of the cost of the Army Extraordinaries. The usurpation of this privilege by the House of Lords, he said, would be a contravention of the constitution and was only possible due to the neglect of the Commons. To this end he promised to bring

forward a plan that would reduce the influence of the crown and promote fiscal economy.[114] Reducing pensions and sinecures, abolishing the offices of certain placemen, and bringing the Civil List under parliamentary control would have the dual effect of saving money and reducing the amount of influence that the king wielded in the House of Commons.

Burke's plan focused on the carefully chosen target of the civil list. As we have seen, this had long been an area of contention for the Opposition. Lord Cavendish's call in 1777 for annual civil-list presentations to parliament and parliament's ability to intervene should the list come into arrears again was very much a basis for Burke's reforms. He had seen in the debates about the civil-list debt in 1777 that the list had the power to turn the independent members against the administration.[115] An attack on the civil list would also enjoy the support of the Shelburne connection. By 1779 the issue of parliamentary reform, as well as personal dislike between Burke and Shelburne,[116] had driven a wedge between the two main factions of the Opposition. On the issue of the civil list, however, the Rockinghamites were able, at least initially, to count on the full support of Shelburne in the Lords and his supporters, Dunning and Barré, in the Commons. Although this support and cooperation would dwindle as time increased (until its outright failure after July 1782), it was integral to Burke's choice of the civil list and his bill's early months in the Commons. In addition to the concerns about the levels of influence

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[114] PH (1779), 20:1293-1295.

[115] PH (1778), 19:103-168; Reitan, "Edmund Burke," 609; Reitan, *Politics*, 26,38,45.

[116] *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 2:211; 3:283; 4:xiii.

that emanated from this hated list, there was an underlying constitutional issue at stake: did fiscal superiority lie with the Crown or with the Commons?[117]

Burke gave his speech for an "economical reform" on 11 February 1782 to a packed House of Commons. The speech was an outline of his plan for reforms in the civil list and other establishments with the intent of securing the independence of Parliament and "Public Oeconomy." The speech actually outlined five bills that he intended to present to the Commons. The Civil List Establishment Bill was the centerpiece of his speech and the other aspects were eventually dropped, according F. P. Lock, when North argued that they ought only "to be introduced with the king's approbation."[118] In these proposals, he sought to consolidate the Principality of Wales and the Duchy and County Palatine of Lancaster under the Crown for greater efficiency and the reduction of influence. The Crown forest lands he wished to sell "for the public benefit" and to be rid of the handful of offices that accompanied them.[119] The core of his proposal, though, was based on the civil list and the offices and influence that went with it. He established five rules which guided his efforts at reform: legal holdings would remain untouched, rules of "equity and mercy" would be observed (which essentially meant that places and pensions would not abolished in order to embarrass a specific person or make a person financially destitute), legitimate services to the state would be maintained, funds would be set aside for rewards based on merit, and adequate sums would be retained for the "personal

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[117] Earl A. Retian, "Edmund Burke and the Civil List, 1769-1782," *The Burke Newsletter* 8, no., 1 (Fall, 1966): 606.

[118] Lock, *Edmund Burke,* 455.

[119] PH (1780), 21:25-28.

satisfaction" of the king.[120] The main parts of his bill addressed the reformation of the royal household, reductions in sinecures and pensions, the abolition of certain state offices, and establishing an order of payments to prevent the civil list from coming into arrears again.

The first area he attacked was also the most contentious: the Royal Household, the structure and organization of which, he claimed, was based on "feudal principles" and kept up only through neglect and the need for influence.[121] The present system allowed for large expenses to go unrecorded and encouraged all kinds of waste and extravagance. Therefore, the King's Household and table ought to be supplied by contract so that at least "you are sure to know the utmost extent of the fraud to which you are subject." The Great Wardrobe, too, was a pit into which money was thrown for no benefit to the nation. He also sought to abolish the Board of the Green Cloth, which had historically been responsible for the administration of the Household. Burke saw it as nothing more than a group of sinecures whose holders did a job that could be done by one man.[122] The Board of Works, he said, was as useless as it was expensive. Between 1770 and 1777 the Board cost almost £400,000 while its good works "[were] as carefully concealed as other good works ought to be: they [were] perfectly invisible."[123] The funds that paid for this convoluted maze of pomp, circumstance, and waste came from not one hand but

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[120] Ibid., 17-18, in his speech he actually established seven rules but admitted that they could be reduced to "two or three simple maxims;" Annual Register (1780), 96-97.

[121] PH (1780), 21:29-32.

[122] Ibid., 30; John Norris, *Shelburne and Reform* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1963), 177.

[123] PH (1780), 21:37.

three; "there [were] no less than three useless treasurers; two to hold the purse, and one to play with a stick."[124]

Outside of the Royal Household, Burke also found several deposits of influence and waste. The Mint, whose original function had been to convert bullion and foreign coin into British currency, had evolved into a group of sinecures whose job could more easily and efficiently be done by the Bank of England.[125] He sought to expedite the closing of accounts for paymasters and advocated the use of vouchers rather than maintaining large balances of cash in the hands of former paymasters.[126] In addition, pensions were one of the largest sources of waste that he found outside of the Household. He approved of the original function of the pensions, which was that of rewarding merit, and merely sought to limit them to £60,000 per year and transfer the responsibility of paying them from the Paymaster of the Pensions to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. He even allowed for the possibility that Parliament might increase this sum in the future if it deemed necessary. Likewise, he found pensions held for life to be acceptable on the grounds that they were given as property and, more importantly, that the holders could disapprove of the government's actions without the fear of losing their income.[127] He believed that pensions and sinecure posts, if granted properly and moderately, could be useful as a means of reward. In fact, on 7 July 1782, Burke wrote to Horace Walpole in an unsuccessful attempt to obtain for his son, Richard Burke, the sinecure position of the Clerk of Pells, which

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[124] Ibid., 36.

[125] Ibid., 38; Binney, *Public Finance*, 133.

[126] PH (1780), 21:41-42.

[127] Ibid., 45-49.

belonged to Edward Walpole (Horace's brother).[128] Edward was quite elderly and Burke, having resigned his post as Paymaster-General of the Forces after Rockingham's death on 1 July 1782, was in a position of financial uncertainty. Similarly, Burke left emoluments, which were the salaries paid to ministers who held positions in the government, untouched. He argued that "an honest and fair profit [were] the best security against avarice and rapacity."[129] Since "Kings are naturally lovers of low company [and] ... are rather apt to hate than love their nobility," emoluments also served to keep the nobility, and more respectable subjects of the nation, in the company of the king.[130]

Certain state offices also came under fire from Burke. Foremost was the office of Third Secretary of State which was primarily responsible for the colonial holdings, especially the American colonies. Before it had been created in 1768, the duties of this office had been performed by the Southern Secretary of State. Burke noted that, since then, the office of Southern Secretary had become similar to a sinecure position which "has not been shunned upon account of the weight of its duties." This opinion, as will be shown, was not based in fact.[131] However, the regrettable situation in America and the loss of the colonies were proof enough for Burke that the office of the Third Secretary had been mismanaged and ought to be re-absorbed by the Southern Secretary. The office of the Third Secretary, he claimed,

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[128] *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 5:10-14.

[129] PH (1780), 21:52.

[130] Ibid., 53-54.

[131] Although the Third Secretary had adopted responsibility for the colonial holdings, the Southern Secretary still dealt with France, Spain, and Portugal, while the Northern Secretary was concerned with northern Europe.

had only been created "for the mere convenience of the arrangements of political intrigue."[132]

Burke saved particular venom for the Board of Trade. The Board, he said, was a "bed of influence ...[and] no use at all." Not only did the board accomplish no work but its designated duties could easily be performed by other ministers and in fact had been, as the board was once abolished in 1673. Dennis Klinge notes that Burke's attack on the Board of Trade was somewhat peculiar. The other objects of his attacks were easily recognizable as useless by those outside the Rockinghamite party. The Board of Trade, on the other hand, was not completely useless. Even if the American colonies were lost, Britain's commercial interests elsewhere on the globe, particularly India and Africa, warranted the existence of the Board.[133] Klinge explores the scandal that erupted between 1777 and 1780 involving the Board of Trade, the African Company, and John Bourke. The episode reads more like a sordid mystery novel than a historical event. Essentially, the affair involved Bamber Gascoyne, one of the Lords of Trade, and his attempt to increase both his wealth and political influence in Liverpool by shifting the African trade from an open market to a closed market controlled by a joint-stock company (in which he happened to be invested). With the collapse of his plans he attempted to cover up his involvement and John Bourke, who had been elected to the African Committee for London in 1772, became implicated in the proceedings.[134]

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[132] PH (1780), 21:55-56.

[133] Dennis Stephen Klinge, "Edmund Burke, Economical Reform, and the Board of Trade, 1777-1780," *The Journal of Modern History* 51, no., 3, On Demand Supplement (September, 1979): D1185.

[134] Ibid., D1189-D1197.

Burke became involved in the situation in two ways. First, John Bourke, a London merchant, had been described by Edmund as "our common friend," and "my Kinsman and friend."[135] How closely the two were related is unclear but it seems that John was part of the "extended family of the Burkes." Regardless, Edmund admitted that John had been in some "troublesome Business" and tried to help him find his way out of it. He encouraged John to petition Parliament and claim that the present troubles were a result of the Board of Trade's dereliction of duty. On 26 May 1777, the House of Commons, preoccupied with the situation in America, postponed the proceedings on the scandal until the next session.[136] John was able to clear his name and continued to sit on the Board until July 1779.[137] Second, in 1774 Edmund became the representative for Bristol, a city heavy with maritime commercial interests. Were African trade to become a closed system controlled by a private company, his constituents would be negatively impacted. The sense of duty that he felt to his electorate demanded that he become involved in the ordeal.[138] What Klinge finds, then, is that personal interests played a significant hand in Burke's reforms. His familial connections and sense of duty to his constituents caused him to attack an institution whose level of "influence" and lack of utility were less pronounced than his other targets.[139]

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[135] *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 3:348; 4:461.

[136] PH (1777), 19:291-315.

[137] Klinge, "Board of Trade," D1197-1198.

[138] Ibid., D1191.

[139] Ibid., D1200.

Although the central tenet of Burke's bill was the reduction of crown influence, its stated purpose was "the better regulation of his majesty's civil establishments."[140] To this end, the most important provision of his bill was the establishment of an order by which payments were to be made from the civil list. The order was: (1) the Lord High Chancellor, the Speaker of the House, judges of the courts, and Barons of the Exchequer; (2) the Foreign Ministers; (3) the contractual suppliers of the king's household; (4) the menial servants of the household; (5) the pensions and allowances for the royal family; (6) the salaries for all persons serving in public office; (7) the pension list; (8) the officers of the court; and (9) salaries and pensions of the Lords of the Treasury. He placed the Lords of the Treasury last not as a punishment but rather as an incentive and guarantee that the civil list would never again accrue negative balances such as those in 1769 and 1777.[141] Balances were no longer transferable from year to year and deviation from the order was not allowed. In total, he estimated that the government, by his bill, would be shorn of 50 useless places which would effect a savings of about £2-300,000 per year. The monies saved were to be used for public services and payment of any debt that might accrue.[142]

His speech, clocked at about three hours and eighteen minutes, was regarded as "one of the best speeches that ever was spoken in that assembly."[143] When the House finally divided on Burke's original motion to be granted permission to bring in

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[140] PH (1780), 21:111.

[141] Ibid., 64-65.

[142] Ibid., 67-68.

[143] *Gentleman's Magazine* 49:97.

his bill, the only person willing to stand for the "noes" was Lord George Gordon.[144] Attempting to ride the crest of the rhetorical wave that his speech evoked, Burke attempted to rush his bill through its second reading and quickly resolve the House into a committee on it. Not only would a drawn-out process diminish the power of his speech but it would give North time to gather the strength needed to oppose the measure. After the bill passed its second reading on 2 March by 211 to 91, Burke tried to go into a committee the next day. However, by a margin of 35 he was defeated and the committee was set for five days later, Wednesday, 8 March.[145] This was a portent of the pattern of voting that would plague the bill.

On 8 March the House went into committee. Normally, during the committee stage a bill is reviewed and amended one clause at a time before it can be sent to the House of Lords for approval. Before the first clause of Burke's bill was considered, however, a debate over its constitutional basis took place. The argument put forward by Richard Rigby typified those of the administration as well several of the independent members. The areas of Burke's bill that were concerned solely with economy Rigby supported strongly, arguing that the rising cost of the war and the growth of the debt obviously needed to be dealt with. However, parliamentary interference in the civil list and the royal household were, to Rigby and several others, unconstitutional.[146] The civil list had been granted to the king by Parliament and was, thus, his private property to do with as he saw fit. Interference in the royal household

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[144] PH (1780), 21:73.

[145] Ibid., 150.

[146] Ibid., 179.

by Parliament could only soil the dignity of the crown and reduce it to a "pittance." The Opposition, however, had the full force of their rhetoricians in the House that day. Burke and Thomas Townshend argued that the very nature of the House of Commons lay in the regulation of finances. Dunning claimed that the civil-list money was a grant given by Parliament not for the personal enjoyment of the king but for the funding of the nation and as such was not private property and open to inquiry from the Commons. If Parliament had no authority over the civil list, Cavendish argued, the people were then slaves to the crown. Additionally, he invoked the doctrine of royal infallibility: any abuses in the application of the civil list could not be the work of the sovereign and could only be attributed to the king's ministers, and as such, were perfectly open to investigation. Charles James Fox took a different more extreme tack and implied that, if the wishes of the people were ignored, "the people would have recourse to other means of redress."[147] The debate, however, was left unresolved before the house examined the bill's details.

The first clause to be considered was for the abolition of the office of the Third Secretary of State. Lord Beauchamp stood to defend the office, claiming that it was responsible for more than just the American colonies and was indispensible to the empire. The abolition of the office, in addition to being unnecessary even harmful to the nation, would also set a dangerous precedent of a Parliament that ruled the King. Lord George Germain, the incumbent of the office, claimed that its destruction would produce a savings of only £5,000 at most. Beauchamp, a member of the court faction which strongly supported North, further pressed the issue that by removing

[147] Ibid., 182-190.

the king's ministers and regulating his funds the bill was attempting to reduce the king to a servile position under Parliament.[148] Despite the declaration of the Secretary of War, Charles Jenkinson, that the supposed "influence" of the crown had, if anything, decreased of late, Burke continued to pursue this point. He and Townshend reiterated that the loss of the colonies made the office a useless well of influence. On the constitutionality of his bill, he claimed that "the king was only a trustee for the public. Property and subjects existed before kings were elected and endowed with a portion of the former for the protection of the latter."[149] The social contract underpinnings to his statement would have been as clear to the eighteenth-century intellectual descendants of John Locke as they are in modern times. Nevertheless, he did not intend to reduce the king to a pittance, though he claimed that kings were "elected" and invested with power by the subjects. He believed that that power, once given, was due proper respect. Government, after all, was to have "proper force for its functions." When the House came to a division on the clause its opponents took the day by a slim margin; clause one was defeated 208 to 201.[150]

The defeat disheartened the Rockinghamites and cast a pall over the remaining clauses. The Earl of Fitzwilliam, Lord Rockingham's nephew, nicely captured the mood of the party: "If the next clause is thrown out, in my opinion the business is up, and the father should strangle his own child."[151] The desperation of

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[148] Ibid., 193-208.

[149] Ibid., 204.

[150] Ibid., 217.

[151] Lord Fitzwilliam to William Chaloner, quoted in Reitan, *Politics*, 50.

the Rockinghamites was evident in the debates over the clause for the abolition of the Board of Trade on 13 March. Burke unleashed his eloquence and his fury on the Lords of Trade, ridiculing them as useless and expensive. William Eden defended the Board, claiming that he had 2,300 volumes containing its work. Burke replied mocking Eden's volumes stating that they "would serve ... as a monument, under which both he and his clause might be buried, and form a funeral pile for them as large as one of the pyramids in Egypt."[152] So caustic were his attacks that Edward Gibbon later wrote that the "Lords of Trade blushed at their insignificancy."[153] Fox, who was renowned as a (not often successful) gambling man, made two bold moves in the debate. He called upon the Speaker of the House, Sir Fletcher Norton, to provide his opinion of the bill.[154] The Speaker had been a supporter of the government in the 1760s and early 1770s. However, the profligate waste of public money and what he perceived as a personal affront to himself by North shifted his support to the Rockinghamites.[155] He was known to be sympathetic to the cause for economical reform ever since his much discussed speech to the king in 1777 about the need for economy in the civil list. Winning the independent members of the House was the key to victory and the sway that he held with them was reason enough for Fox to solicit his aid. The Speaker, like many of the independent members,

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[152] PH (1780), 21:234-236.

[153] Edward Gibbon, *Miscellaneous Works*, vol., I, quoted in, Ibid., 237.

[154] Since the House was in committee on the bill the speaker, who is normally confined to impartiality, was already removed from the chair and thus, permitted to offer his opinion.

[155] Norton believed that by the government's promotion of a lawyer junior to himself was a breach of promise that had been made to him. See Sir Lewis Namier and John Brooke, *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1754-1790*, vol., III (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 216-217.

supported the proposed changes to the state offices and the need for economy in all areas of public finance. He also condoned some level of parliamentary control over the civil list. However, intrusion into the household was where his approval stopped; he could not agree to such an infringement of the independence of the king.[156] As shown above, independent gentlemen thought that constitutional balance required a strong and independent monarch. Fox's second move was to argue that the Lords of Trade should abstain from "voting themselves into office." By their abstentions the scale tipped just enough to allow the clause to pass, 207 to 199.[157]

By 20 March the prospects for the bill were not bright. The first clause had been lost, the second had been maintained only by a certain amount of chicanery by Fox, and the debate scheduled for that day concerned the most contentious topic of the bill. The clause for the abolition of the Treasurer of the Chamber and the Paymasters of the Household Burke regarded as the "pith and marrow of his plan." Since these offices controlled the household expenditure, their abolition was vital to an economical household restructuring. He pointed out that it was never his intention to restrict the monarchy (the Privy Purse, he reminded the House, would be left untouched), only to cleanse it of corrupting influence.[158] Nevertheless, the administration was set against interference in the household and, now that Speaker Norton had opposed it as well, the independent country gentlemen rejected it. The clause was lost 158 to 211.[159] As a result Burke gave up on the bill: "by rejecting this

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[156] PH (1780), 21:262.

[157] Ibid., 278; *Gentleman's Magazine* 49:150-151.

[158] PH (1780), 21:303-305.

[159] Ibid., 309.

fundamental point the whole is rejected."[160] The remaining clauses of the bill were subsequently defeated by decisive majorities on 28 April and 18 May.[161] On the 23 June the bill was officially thrown out. Although Burke carefully attempted to court the independent country gentry he was unable to overcome their aversion to meddling in the affairs of the royal household and the king's private funds.

The Commons instead chose to support Dunning. On 6 April 1780 he presented two motions which, although important for the eventual success of Burke's bill, allowed the Commons to adopt abstract measures rather than Burke's concrete proposals. His first motion, "that it is the opinion of this committee, that it is necessary to declare, that the influence of the Crown has increased, is increasing, and ought to be diminished," carried 233 to 218. His second, "that it is competent to this House, to examine into, and to correct, abusès in the expenditure of the civil list revenues, as well as in every other branch of the public revenue, whenever it shall appear expedient to the wisdom of this House so to do," passed without division.[162] Although Burke was frustrated by the defeat of his bill in favour of these abstract resolutions,[163] Dunning's motions established, by Parliamentary approval, both the need to check the influence of the king and Parliament's right to interfere in the king's finances, both of which were foundational to Burke's bill. Circumstances, however, needed to change for Burke to find success. Over the next two years the

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[160] Ibid., 309; *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 4:214-215, 240.

[161] PH (1780), 21:538, 622.

[162] Ibid., 347, 367.

[163] *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 4:240.

financial difficulties that were a result of the American War brought the question of economical reform back before Parliament.

The independent members enthusiastically supported Burke's attack on inefficient and wasteful government departments. However, the importance they placed on an independent monarch forced them to reject his attempts to regulate the royal household and establish permanent parliamentary control over the Civil List. Differing views of the constitutional balance led to the breach between the Rockinghamites and the independents, leading to the subsequent loss of Burke's bill. At all times Burke was trying to restore the balance to the constitution that he believed had been lost. In fact, later on in his life, in *A Letter to a Noble Lord*, he took pains to differentiate between innovation and reform: "it was, then, not my love, but my hatred to innovation that produced my plan of reform."[164] Moderation, he believed, gave his reforms the strength to endure; a temperate gradual reformation could adapt to the existing society and become a permanent fixture within it. Timing as well was important in the process: "early reformations are amicable arrangements with a friend in power; late reformations are terms imposed upon a conquered enemy."[165] Yet these rhetorically powerful lines hid a veiled fear of the masses' reaction if no steps toward reform were taken.

II

[164] Edmund Burke, *A Letter to a Noble Lord*, in Ross J. S. Hoffman and Paul Levack, ed., *Burke's Politics: Selected Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke on Reform, Revolution, and War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), 519.

[165] PH (1780), 21:12.

Burke's thoughts were torn between the need for support "out of doors" and his belief that popular support was unreliable. This remained unresolved until the later part of the 1780s, when it definitively swung against mass movements. Philosophically, he believed in the principle of representation – his reform bill had focused on removing influence from the Commons, thus restoring its representative nature. In his 1780 speech on economic-reform he compared the language of the people's request for reform, specifically the Yorkshire petition presented on 8 February 1780, to the King of France's address to his people for establishing "order and oeconomy" in the royal household, given at Versailles in January 1780. This allusion invested in the people a rhetorical form of power and legitimacy.[166] Also, on numerous occasions he noted that his Civil List Establishment Bill could only succeed with the continued support of the people.[167] He respected the power of the people as the foundation for a balanced British government, but he always favored representative government over pure democracy. His relationship with his Bristol constituents evinced this. The Bristol seat in Parliament, which he held from 1774 to 1780, was one of the few truly competitive seats in the country. His loss of it in 1780 hit him particularly hard.[168] The electors of Bristol leveled four charges at him in 1780: that he had neglected the affairs of the city, that he voted against Bristol's interest in legislation on the imprisonment of debtors, that he supported Irish trade,

[166] PH (1780), 21:8-11.

[167] *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 4:196, 210, 211, 219.

[168] Ibid.,221, 273.

and that he voted for the repeal of the anti-Catholic acts.[169] To the first and second complaints he responded in order to explicate his actions. For the last two though, he simply pleaded guilty; "his defense [was] simply that his actions [were] correct."[170] These deeds displayed his philosophy that a representative, once duly elected for a constituency, was then free to act as he saw fit. As the political expert, it was his responsibility to choose what he thought best for his constituents. If a representative failed to supply his electors with his political judgment, he betrayed them.[171] Part of the role of an MP was to weigh the voice of the people with the voice of prudence and reason.

In the broader political arena, Burke mostly followed Rockingham's lead in a tentative use of the support of the people. The Rockingham party essentially treated popular support in the same way that it treated other factions of the Whig party. Support from the masses was welcomed, compromise was not; popular support was seen as a tool to accomplish party ends. For example, the Rockinghamites nominally supported John Wilkes in his struggle against the government in 1764 when he was charged with libel and again in 1769 over the issue of the Middlesex election. Both times, the Rockingham support was only given as a means of using the popular influence of a demagogue to forward their ideas and discredit the ministry.[172] In a

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[169] James Contiff, "Burke, Bristol, and the Concept of Representation," *The Western Political Quarterly* 30, no. 3 (Sept. 1977): 333.

[170] Ibid., 333.

[171] Ibid., 332.

[172] *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 2:155.

similar move, the party decided to support the growing county Association Movement as a means of gathering support for economic reform.

Composed of country gentlemen, the Association Movement began in December 1779 as a response to North's costly prosecution of the American War.[173] Counties throughout the country established committees to present petitions to Parliament. Of the notable committees, including large ones in Westminster and Middlesex, the Yorkshire association eventually emerged as the leading group. Since the movement was composed of mostly country gentlemen, the committees voiced many of the concerns of the old country political faction, specifically, the independence of Parliament. The old country political faction – which by the 1770s had dissolved, creating several independent MPs – distrusted political parties in general.[174] Securing the independence of the House of Commons as well as tying it more closely to will of the people became their goal. In pursuit of this they adopted a strategy based on three reforms: "economical reform, triennial parliaments, and the addition of a hundred county representatives to the House of Commons."[175] The addition of county members would balance out the electorate and remove the favour that the boroughs enjoyed. The push for triennial parliaments was an attempt to overturn the Septennial Parliaments Act of 1716 and would – in theory – tie the MPs more closely to popular support. The economical-reform plank in the movement's agenda was quite similar to Burke's plan and the similarity drew the two groups

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[173] Ian R. Christie, "The Yorkshire Association, 1780-4: A Study in Political Organization," *The Historical Journal* 3, no. 2 (1960), 144.

[174] Brewer, *Party Ideology*, 29.

[175] Christie, "Yorkshire," 144.

closer.[176] On 8 February, just three days before Burke's speech on reform, Sir George Savile presented the Yorkshire Association's petition to Parliament[177] The petition focused only on the economic aspects of the Association's reforms and bore the mark of Rockinghamite involvement.

As the Rockingham party lent its support to the movement, tension began to emerge. The Rockinghamites refused to support any shape of parliamentary reform, such as the addition of county seats or triennial parliaments. To them, the reduction in the amount of Crown influence was all that was needed to rectify the imbalance in the Commons. Without the correction of influence, more frequent elections would only result in more corruption.[178] Because of this, Rockingham attempted to pressure the Rev. Christopher Wyvill, who had become the effective leader of the Yorkshire Committee, to abandon any radical leaning within the committee and pursue the more moderate and feasible course of economical reform.[179] Although initially successful in this, the defeat of Burke's bill in 1780 caused a schism in the Association Movement and allowed the more radical members to break free from the yoke of Wyvill and the Yorkshire Committee. The radical side of the Association Movement had always troubled Burke and the other Rockinghamites. According to Butterfield, the petitioning movements had always represented a veiled threat of violence if the

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[176] *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 4:211.

[177] PH (1780), 20:1371.

[178] *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 4:220.

[179] Herbert Butterfield, "The Yorkshire Association and the Crisis of 1779-80," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 29, 4th series (1947): 73, 91; Ian R. Christie, *Wilkes, Wyvill, and Reform: The Parliamentary Reform Movement in British Politics 1760-1785* (London: Macmillan, 1962), 125-126.

petitions proved ineffective, and there was even mention once, when the petition was presented to the Commons, of "'freeholders coming to the house with other instruments than parchment.'"[180] On 2 June 1780 this threat became a reality

The Gordon Riots were a protestant response to the 1778 Papist Act, which relaxed several of the restrictions placed on Catholics by the penal laws of William III. Lord George Gordon placed a call for all Protestants to accompany him on 2 June to march to Parliament and present the House with a petition for the repeal of the 1778 act. Gordon was an MP for Ludgershall and frequently voted with the Opposition. Namier notes that Gordon was mentally unstable and by 1781 his "[megalomanic] strain ... was more apparent than ever."[181] On Friday, 20,000 Protestants arrived, donned blue cockades, and marched to Parliament exhibiting "great decorum."[182] However, as the mob gathered in front of the doors to Parliament civility broke down, and the marchers began harassing the MPs and the Lords. The mob lashed out with physical violence, demands for oaths against Catholics, theft, and vandalism, as the MPs arrived at the House. Twice the mob attempted to break down the doors to Parliament. At some length Colonel William Gordon, member for Heytesbury and uncle to Lord George, came out from behind the doors and addressed Lord Gordon; "My lord George, do you intend to bring your rascally adherents into the House of Commons? If you do - the first man of them that enters, I will plunge my sword, - not into his, but into your body."[183] Eventually soldiers cleared the area

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[180] Quoted in Butterfield, "Yorkshire Association," 71.

[181] Namier, *History of Parliament*, 513-515.

[182] *Annual Register* (1780), 257.

[183] Ibid., 259; PH (1780), 21:657.

outside the Houses of Parliament but the mob moved throughout the city and burned and vandalized at least one chapel that evening.[184] The mob dispersed for the night, but reassembled again on Sunday and every day until Thursday. Several chapels and private residences were looted and burned, including the home of the MP who had proposed the 1778 legislation, George Savile. Distilleries and debtors were attacked (for obvious reasons) and King's-Bench and Fleet prisons, which were mainly debtor's prisons, were set ablaze in order to free the members of the mob who had been apprehended. When peace was restored and a survey taken, it was determined that 109 people had been killed by troops and guards, 101 killed by light horse, 75 died in hospitals, and 173 people were in custody. These statistics did not include those killed in fires or from drinking non-rectified spirits.[185] This effected a large swing in opinion in favor of the ministry, severely crippling the economical reform movement. This dark side of the popular movement deeply affected Burke, who believed that the Association Movement's commitment to parliamentary reform and the petitioners' radical demonstration were the primary causes for his bill's defeats in 1780 and 1781. Yet although the Gordon Riots had thus stemmed the flow of reforming sentiment throughout the country, they also had an effect that helped the movement. For the first time since 1766 the trees of the political wilderness of opposition began to thin for the Marquess of Rockingham. North's offer to Rockingham of a coalition in June 1780 was, in some ways, a precursor to the change of ministry in 1782.

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[184] *Annual Register* (1780), 259.

[185] Ibid., 262-263.

Chapter Four: Economical Reform Victorious

By the summer of 1780 the North ministry was in need of help. The passage of Dunning's resolutions in April and the relatively close margins by which the economical reform bills had been defeated meant that the North ministry needed to find a way either to prop itself up with more support in the Commons or to weaken the opposition. Following the Gordon Riots, North attempted to forge a coalition with Rockingham. However, stubbornness on the parts of both Rockingham and the king ensured the failure of the negotiations. Unable to form a coalition, North held an election in an attempt to strengthen his standing in the House of Commons. However, when the fortunes of war turned against the British, the House turned against North and the king was forced to accept Rockingham as Prime Minister. The economical-reform movement at last found victory.

I

The Gordon Riots provided North with the chance both to strengthen his standing in the Commons and to weaken the opposition. The split within the Whig factions was certainly not caused by the riots. The groups of the opposition were held together primarily by the issues of the American War, aversion to the North administration, and economical reform. With the faltering of economical reform in March and April the alliance began to remember its differences. Burke, for one, was quite resentful that the Commons had chosen to support Dunning's resolutions rather than his own. Dunning's resolutions were, after all, meant to be defeated.

Rockingham and Shelburne had come to an agreement that, after the defeat of the third clause of Burke's bill on 20 March, a resolution would be brought in to establish the principle of parliamentary control over the civil list. According to Thomas Copeland, "When this was defeated the whole Opposition was to secede from Parliament and issue an address explaining that their withdrawal was a protest against the corrupt influence of the Crown."[186] When Dunning's resolutions passed, the agreement between the two leaders of the main Opposition factions fell flat and left them with a philosophical victory and tangible defeat. What remained between the Rockingham and Shelburne connections was an acute difference of opinion over the issue of parliamentary reform.[187]

Shelburne, who supported parliamentary reform, had grown impatient with Rockingham's "selective intolerance:" Fox and the Duke of Richmond (and eventually George Savile) supported parliamentary reform yet remained in Rockingham's favour, while Shelburne and Wyvill were unable to achieve such status.[188] Shelburne attributed this to Burke's influence over Rockingham, thus deepening the breach between Burke and Shelburne. Prior to the outbreak of the riots Shelburne attempted to clarify what he thought was Rockingham's inconsistent position on parliamentary reform. At the beginning of June he demanded that Rockingham agree to certain terms, including parliamentary reform, as conditions for further cooperation (Christie notes that, although we do not have a concrete date, the

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[186] *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 4:217.

[187] Ian R. Christie, "The Marquis of Rockingham and Lord North's Offer of a Coalition, June-July 1780," *The English Historical Review* 69, no., 272 (July, 1954): 390-391.

[188] Norris, *Shelburne*, 132.

content and context of the demands place their proposal before the riots).[189] This Rockingham rejected on the grounds that the party was "not able to come to an immediate resolution in favour of a change of the ground-work of [the] constitution."[190] The breach between the two was so great that, by the end of the session, Shelburne had decided to withdraw from Parliament.[191] The differences over reform were exacerbated by the riots. Burke, Fox and Richmond were "mad for toleration" while "Lord Shelburne, Lord Camden and the Duke of Grafton [were] as strongly antipapistic."[192] In fact, Shelburne was one of the few peers unmolested by the rioters when they amassed at the doors of Parliament (whilst at the same time they denounced Burke as a supporter of Catholics and pillaged George Savile's house). Thus, while the riots did not cause the breach in the Opposition, they certainly aggravated it. However, it was the reactions to the riots that gave North real hope that he might be able to co-opt a portion of the Opposition to his administration.

In light of the chaos of the riots the majority of the Rockingham party, and the Marquess in particular, firmly backed the administration in the reestablishment of law and order. As Christie says, Rockingham and the Duke of Portland "alone of the groups in opposition [] took part in the full Privy Council summoned on 7 June" in response to the situation.[193] They also supported the imposition of martial law in order to restore the authority of the government. Shelburne, on the other hand,

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[189] Christie, "Coalition," 390.

[190] *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 4:227.

[191] Christie, "Coalition," 391; Norris, *Shelburne*, 135.

[192] Horace Walpole, quoted in Christie, "Coalition," 391.

[193] Ibid., 389.

opposed the use of the military in lieu of civil powers in the restoration of the peace, despite the fact that, as Norris says, "most of the magistrates were co-operating with the rioters." He deemed the Rockinghamites hypocrites for having often encouraged the expression of popular opinion only to quell it forcefully when it disagreed with their own. Along with his well-known support for Protestants and dislike of Catholics, his actions were regarded by some as treasonous.[194] Thus, due to his reaction to the riots, Rockingham was approached by North with the offer of a coalition. It was hoped that the agreement between the two on the restoration of law and order would lead to other areas of agreement; "at last," Christie remarks, "the eyes of the Rockinghams seemed open to the dangers of popular movements."[195] North, therefore, with the approval of the king, initiated negotiations with Rockingham on 29 June 1780.

Christie notes that, until the opening of the Fitzwilliam papers (which contained large deposits of manuscripts from both Burke and Rockingham), the only available source of information about Rockingham's role in the negotiations was an excerpt in Horace Walpole's *Journals*. His actions had been caustically criticized by Walpole as traitorous to his party and principles. However, the Fitzwilliam papers contain Rockingham's own personal account of the events, which, given the positive light in which North was displayed, is surprisingly objective. In a letter to the Duke of Richmond, dated 11 July 1780, Rockingham recounted North's claim that he had "a sincere desire to conciliate with [the Rockinghamites] and other parts of the

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[194] Norris, *Shelburne*, 133-134.

[195] Christie, "Coalition," 389.

opposition. Lord Shelburne was supposed separated, and that *he* was *out of this matter* (sic) [Shelburne having already expressed his plan to leave Parliament]," North also hinted that, although he was not committed to heading the Treasury himself, he doubted that the king would allow him to step down. Rockingham was favorable towards a coalition as long as three requirements were met. First, the royal veto on recognizing American independence must be waived. Second, in order to show Parliament the good faith and consistency of the Rockinghamites, certain measures that they demanded while in opposition must be agreed to: Clerke's bill, Crewe's bill, and the "*great parts*" of Burke's bill. Finally, Richmond and Fox should be Secretaries of State and Admiral Keppel should replace Lord Sandwich as the First Lord of the Admiralty.[196]

What began as a "negotiation" quickly became a presentation and subsequent rejection of terms. Coalition to George III meant allowing into small administrative offices only the "safe" Rockinghamites. Burke, Portland, and Thomas Townshend were generally perceived to be opposed to parliamentary reform and thus were regarded by the king as "real acquisitions." To Fox and Richmond, however, he completely objected. Fox, he mentioned, might be acceptable if bribed with a lucrative office, "he never having had any principle can certainly act as his interest may guide him." Richmond's "unremitted personal ill conduct" toward the king made him wholly unpalatable. On 3 July, after discussing Rockingham's terms with North, George III rejected every one: "it is absolutely necessary if any condition is to be attained, that those who come into office ... do not mean to be hampered by the

[196] Ibid., 394, (emphasis in original).

tenets they have held during their opposition. After receiving this news, Rockingham reciprocated the king's stubbornness and on 9 July refused to concede any of his demands.[197] Although Richmond and Keppel attacked the offer as insincere and nothing more than a ploy to divide the Opposition, there is no evidence for this. It seems that Rockingham's acceptance of the negotiations as an honorable attempt by North to strengthen the government was correct. More importantly, this evidenced the conservative nature of the Rockinghamite program. Rockingham, Burke, and the "safe" party members were willing to cooperate with the government as long as certain moderate concessions were agreed to, none of which were considered "parliamentary reforms." In fact, the Fox-North coalition in 1783 shows that after the passage of the economical reform bills and the end of the American War, there was less separating these two parties than one might think. Additionally, this reinforced the party doctrine that Burke had laid out in *Thoughts on the Present Discontents*; the Rockingham party adhered to its principles even when facing exclusion from office. Yet the same commitment to principle came to be perceived as stubbornness when the Shelburne and Pitt ministries attempted further reforms. The only real harm that seems to have come from the negotiations was the slight which Shelburne felt at being left out, a bruise which he nursed from the summer of 1780 through 1781.[198]

Unable to find strength through a coalition, North held an election in 1780 that, it was believed, would strengthen the administration's position considerably. John Robinson, North's electoral strategist, forecast a gain of twenty to thirty seats

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[197] Ibid., 398-400.

[198] Ibid., 404.

for the administration.[199] However, they were disappointed since the new House was quite similar in its composition to the previous one. The majority for the administration was tenuous and North feared that a shift in the fortunes of war or the unpopularity of the budget might swing the tide against him.[200] In addition, the problem of the Army Extraordinaries was once again acute, reaching £3.3 million in 1780, and the budget for that year climbed to £25.3 million.[201] Reitan observes that, by pressing the expense of the war the Opposition was attempting to "confront [the independent members] with a price tag on the war." North's uneasy majority was to receive its greatest blow on 25 November 1781 with the news from Yorktown. The turning tide of the American War was the grim reaper to North's administration. The Opposition had cited the cost and doomed nature of the war for years and its prophecies were beginning to come true. In December, Robinson calculated that the seats loyal to the administration only numbered about 249 while those for the Opposition amounted to 233.[202] The Opposition continued to press the financial issue as well as the mismanagement of the war. Fox moved for the removal of Sandwich from the Admiralty on 24 January 1782 and was defeated by a mere 22 votes.[203] General Conway, on 27 February, moved that offensive war be discontinued in

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[199] Reitan, *Politics*, 70.

[200] Ibid., 70; Norris, *Shelburne*, 135.

[201] *Annual Register* (1781), 268-272.

[202] Reitan, *Politics*, 88-89.

[203] PH (1782), 22:878.

America; the motion was carried 234 to 215.[204] The combined weight of the cost and fortunes of war turned the independent members against the administration. This defeat steeled North's determination to resign and, although George III finally accepted the need for a new ministry, North was kept on for the time being.

By March 1782 the Commission for Public Accounts had submitted six of its fifteen reports, advocating the need for economy and displaying for all of Parliament the inefficiencies of the current fiscal system. This was the atmosphere in which on 11 March North had to present his budget, projecting supplies totaling £24.3 million.[205] Four days later Sir John Rous, an independent member for Suffolk, moved for a vote of no confidence in the ministry. The motion failed by one vote and was cause enough for North to demand that the king let him resign.[206] The king, who had several times held North in office against the latter's wishes, finally acceded to his request. Although Rockingham, as the leader of the largest group in opposition, was the obvious choice to replace North, the king was adamantly opposed to that party and approached Shelburne in early March in hopes of creating a broad-bottomed coalition of opposition groups. Shelburne, however, refused and, after the events of 15 March, George was forced to negotiate with Rockingham, though he refused Rockingham a personal audience and the talks were carried out with Shelburne acting as a mediator.[207] Rockingham made the same demands as he had in the 1780

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[204] Archibald S. Foord, *His Majesty's Opposition, 1714-1830* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 361-362; PH 22:1064-1085.

[205] *Annual Register* (1782), 287-289.

[206] PH (1782), 22:1170-1200; Reitan, *Politics*, 92.

[207] Norris, *Shelburne*, 148.

negotiation with North. George III was willing to concede negotiations on American peace (independence he was not yet willing to grant), the Contractors Bill, the Revenue Officers Bill, and cabinet placements to be determined by Rockingham and Shelburne (with Lord Chancellor William Thurlow as his only required cabinet placement). Burke's bill, and especially the reform of the Household, had become the sticking point. The king refused to accept outside reform of his own household but Rockingham, encouraged by Burke, demanded parliamentary control of reforms. "If we let slip *Parliament*," urged Burke, "we let slip *all*."[208] This stumbling block was only overcome by the "negotiations" of Shelburne, who evaded the issue, allowing each to think that it had got its way.[209]

This episode marked what Keir referred to as the "end of the personal government system" to the extent that it had been used previously.[210] It did not mean that the king was excluded from government or had lost all influence; indeed, the Shelburne and Pitt ministries both benefited from the crown's support. However, it did mark a turning point after which the king's influence began to diminish. George III had been forced to accept a Prime Minister and cabinet against his will. More importantly, he was forced to accept the Rockinghamite Party on their terms. Thus, while this was certainly a triumph for economical reform, it was also a victory for the Whig's version of the constitutional balance. Echoing the events of 1688, parliament became the dominant member of the government. Additionally, in accordance with

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[208] *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 4:433-434.

[209] Norris, *Shelburne*, 150.

[210] D. L. Keir, *Constitutional History of Modern Britain, 1485-1937* (New York: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1938), 378.

Burke's party doctrine, laid out in *Thoughts*, the Rockinghamites dominated the cabinet: Rockingham became First Lord of the Treasury; Fox, Secretary of State; Lord Cavendish, Chancellor of the Exchequer; Admiral Keppel, First Lord of the Admiralty; Richmond, Master General of the Ordinance; Townshend, Secretary of War; Portland, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland; and Burke, Paymaster General of the Forces.[211] The cabinet weighed in favor of Rockingham, but Shelburne had one important ally – the king. By brokering the negotiations Shelburne was able to play both sides of the fence and tie his fortunes to the king rather than any group in Parliament. Unfortunately for him the political power of the groups in parliament was waxing and the influence of the king was waning. As a testament to this, after sixteen years in opposition the Rockinghamites were back in office and went about their duty of economic reform.

II

The new ministry was neither as solid nor as homogenous as Rockingham would have liked; its majority was slim and cooperation with the Shelburne connection was required. However, now that they were back in office the Rockinghamites were free to pursue programs developed while in opposition. Foundational to this was securing the support of the king and Parliament. The king's message to Parliament on 15 April 1782 conceded the necessity of a system of economy throughout the several areas of government.[212] Yet, given the slim

[211] PH (1782), 22:1238-1240.

[212] Ibid., 1269.

majorities in the House and the unresolved issue of Household reform the economical-reform legislation still needed some refinement.

John Crewe's bill had a relatively smooth passage through both the Commons and the Lords. The day after the king's message advocating reform, the bill was brought before the Commons. Crewe cited several instances in which revenue officers had been forced to vote against their will and noted that "if some had been bold enough to vote for the man of their choice ... they had been deprived of their bread." The Earl of Surrey agreed that the bill would serve to relieve men from the distasteful task of choosing between their integrity and their job. Those opposed to the bill presented their arguments but much of their bravado seemed to have vanished. Earl Nugent even went so far as to admit that in the present arrangement some revenue officers might be "disagreeably situated, between their inclination to vote for their friends, and their fear to give offence to their superiors." Nevertheless, he still opposed the bill on the principle that it was unjust to punish the innocent with the guilty. Bamber Gascoyne presented the strongest argument against the bill by turning the Rockinghamite's support for the American cry of "no taxation without representation" against them. This bill, he said was in direct opposition to that principle which was "a favourite idea of the present administration." The division of the House, however, showed the strength that the king's ministers could wield. There were large numbers of MPs who would vote with the administration simply because the king had given the ministers his authorization. Because of this, the bill passed its second and third readings, as well as the committee stage by a margin of around

seventy votes each time.[213] The House of Lords, similarly, passed the bill without much debate on 3 June. The Earl of Mansfield complained that unlike previous place bills the current one was exterior rather than interior and, thus, was restrictive of the rights of Englishmen. The Bishop of Peterborough returned to the argument that the bill was simply calculated to restore Parliament to its original principles of purity. Rockingham also entered the debate to note that the bill would destroy 11,500 votes that had been influenced by the crown. Upon division the bill passed with 34 contents to 18 not-contents.[214] The bill received the royal assent on 19 June.

Philip Jennings Clerke's Contractors Bill had a similarly smooth trip through Parliament. The day before Rockingham's new ministry took office the Commons resolved itself into a committee on the bill. Fox proposed two amendments to the bill. First he wished that the exception for publicly advertised contracts be removed. "No contractors whatsoever," he claimed, "should have a seat in Parliament." Second he moved that a clause be added to the bill that would make it retroactive, expunging all current contractors from the House. Both of his motions were accepted without a division.[215] After the Easter recess the House reassembled into the committee on the bill on 12 April. Earl Nugent offered a motion that would postpone the enactment of the bill. He requested that the bill take effect at the end of the parliament rather than the present session. The committee rejected his motion without a division and the bill passed the Commons on 19 April.[216] The House of Lords, however, proposed six

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[213] Ibid., 1336-1342.

[214] PH(1782), 23:95-101.

[215] PH (1782), 22:1211-1214.

[216] Ibid., 1333-1336.

amendments and requested a conference between the two Houses on the bill. Fox presented the Lords' amendments on 24 May, five of which were agreed to since they did not affect the principle of the bill. The sixth, however, proposed to exclude from the bill every contractor who sold to the government "such wares and merchandize as shall be of his own growth, production, or manufacture." This the Commons rejected as they believed that it would give "great opportunities for fraud and collusion, and opens a very wide door for evading the principle of the bill." The Lords agreed not to press the amendment and the bill passed Parliament on 30 May and received the royal assent on 19 June.[217]

Burke's bill would be less easily pushed through Parliament. Disagreements that had been glossed over during the negotiations now had to be confronted. Rockingham was placed in a precarious position. On the one hand, he tried to placate the king on the issue of Burke's bill: "Not a single article of the expense to be retrenched," he told the king, "touches anything whatsoever which is personal to your Majesty, or to your Majesty's royal family."[218] On the other, he was committed to the content of the bill. If it was to make it through Parliament, Burke's bill needed modification.

Thus several of the components of his 1780 bill that dealt with the royal household – the supply of the king's household by contract, the regulations on the Prince of Wales, and the abolition of the offices of Treasurer and Cofferer – were abandoned. Retrenchment in the Ordinance was given up since the office was now

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[217] (1782), PH 23:74-75.

[218] Quoted in Reitan, *Politics*, 98.

"filled by a nobleman [Duke of Richmond] whose regard for the public, and whose frugality in laying out their money, would render any regulation in the Ordinance unnecessary."[219] Burke planned to reduce the pensions list to £90,000 rather than the £60,000 he had planned in 1780, which would give the king slightly more freedom to disburse pensions. Additionally, in order to remove the secrecy from the secret-service expenditure, he also required that pensions be paid publicly at the exchequer. This would ensure that no subversive political influence could be extended through the use of pensions. The order of payments had also been changed slightly from the previous bill. The royal family was first rather than fifth in the new order:

> (1) the privy purse and royal family, (2) judges and courts and Speaker of the House of Commons, (3) ambassadors resident at foreign courts, (4) tradesmen's bills, (5) menial servants in the royal household, (6) pensions, beginning with the smallest, (7) salaries of all other places paid out of the Civil List, beginning with the lowest, and (8) salaries of the treasury board.[220]

The core principles of Burke's 1780 bill, however, remained intact. His intention was "*radical*, Systematick Oeconomy; a plan of prevention; the establishment of order and responsibility; the taking away corruption under the name of general and secret services; the permanent reduction of influence."[221] The bill was essentially the 1780 one, watered down in order to appease the king and the independent critics. With these changes came a reduction in savings. He estimated that these fell from £2-300,000 to about £76,200.[222] Nevertheless, the alterations accomplished their goal.

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[219] PH (1782), 23:122.

[220] Reitan, *Politics*, 101.

[221] *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 4:219.

[222] PH (1782), 22:1412.

During the 13 June debate on the bill, Robert Vyner, an independent member for Lincoln, said that his reason for supporting the present bill "was that he found that it paid more respect to the dignity of the crown than did the Bill which he opposed two years ago."[223] The bill passed the House of Commons on 20 June and received its second reading in the House of Lords on 3 July. It is significant that the bill was sent to the Lords as a "money bill" and as such was required to be amended or passed within thirty days or else it would immediately be sent to the king for approval. Much of the debate in the Lords, however, centered on the Marquess of Rockingham, who had passed away two days earlier.[224] The bill passed the house by 44 to 9 but the death of Rockingham made for a "melancholy triumph."[225]

The relative ease with which these bills passed through the House of Lords touches on the shifting nature of that house during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-centuries. In a similar fashion to the House of Commons, the Lords held a number of members who would support whichever ministers held the king's approval. Therefore, Rockingham and Shelburne could rely, to some extent, on the support of the Lords. Furthermore, they were able to persuade the king to create three additional peerages; John Dunning became Baron Ashburton, Sir Fletcher Norton became Baron Grantley, and George Rodney (who oddly, had little connection to either Rockingham or Shelburne but had an accomplished career as a naval commander) became Baron Rodney. These peers were created specifically to balance

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[223] PH (1782), 23:124.

[224] Ibid., 139.

[225] *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 5:6-7.

the desires of Rockingham and Shelburne to reward their supporters. William Lowe notes that these appointments marked a shift in the way peerage creations were used by George III. Prior to 1782, they had been somewhat isolated from short-term political influences. However, by the time of the Fox-North Coalition, the creation of (or refusal to create) peerages had become political currency.[226] Moreover, the loss of several sinecures, pensions, and other avenues of political favor at the hands of the economical-reform legislation meant that control over peerages had become all the more valuable.

These three bills were not the only reforms of the Rockingham party. Before Rockingham's death two more programs for reform were presented. Burke presented a bill for the regulation of his new office, the Paymaster General of the Forces, and Lord Cavendish proposed several reforms for the Exchequer and other offices. These two reforms represented a shift of direction for the economical-reform movement. While the first wave of reforms had focused on "influence" first and finances second, these bills reversed that order. With the reports of the Commission for Public Accounts as well as a faithful party of Whigs in office, "influence" could be passed over for a more progressive focus on finances.

The fifth report of the Commission for Public Accounts referred to the existing system in the Pay Office as "'not well calculated either for perspicuity or expedition' ... they made it clear that the system of accounting was more complicated than it need be or ought to have been."[227] Burke, therefore, set out to modernize the

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[226] William C. Lowe, "George III, Peerage Creations and Politics, 1760-1784," *The Historical Journal* 35, no. 3 (September, 1992): 587-589.

[227] Binney, *Public Finance*, 153.

system. Although he had originally been opposed to the Commission, he found that his fears that it would become a tool of North were unfounded; the information they put forth was both skillfully compiled and fairly presented. On 28 June the bill he brought before the Commons was largely based on the recommendations of the Commission. The books and papers of the paymasters were to become public property open to scrutiny and more importantly, able to be passed on to the succeeding paymaster. He required that money be kept in the Bank of England rather than in the hands of individual paymasters and, to prevent the accumulation of large balances in the hands of old paymasters, he stipulated that balances and responsibility for payments would remain with the office rather than with the individual.[228] Essentially this was an attempt to transform the civil service from a personal endeavor to an institutional one.[229] His bill passed the House of Commons on 2 July.

Lord Cavendish likewise proposed a series of reforms that followed the recommendations of the sixth report from the Commission and were meant to modernize the system. The report had identified several outdated and inefficient practices. It recommended the replacement of the outdated system of wooden tallies with an indented paper check. The practice of exercising an office by deputy was also identified as a problem.[230] The key points of his plan included: an improved system for the collection of the land tax; the consolidation of minor revenue boards; a switch from fees to salaries in the Pay Office and the Navy; a restriction of the use of

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[228] Ibid., 156-157; PH (1782), 23:134; Norris, *Shelburne*, 224.

[229] Reitan, *Politics*, 109.

[230] J. C. Sainty, "The Tenure of Offices in the Exchequer," *The English Historical Review* 80, no. 316 (July, 1965): 471-473.

Public money for personal gain – this was a long established practice of Paymasters including Lord Holland (Charles Fox's father) and Richard Rigby; and the abolition of useless exchequer offices.[231] Using the information from the sixth report, Cavendish was able to establish new salaries for the offices of the exchequer rather than a system of fees.[232] These reforms reflected the direction that economic reform would continue to take after Rockingham's death under Shelburne's guidance and even after the Fox-North coalition under William Pitt. Yet they were of a different breed from the bills that began the economical-reform process. And with the death of Rockingham, the "new direction" of economic reform would provide harsh treatment to the implementation of the original bills.

[231] PH (1782), 23:119-121.

[232] Reitan, *Politics*, 148.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

The practical implementation of the economical reform acts began to garner criticism from contemporaries immediately. Contemporaries in charge of executing the legislation as well as those commenting on its ramifications condemned the bills as either impractical or detrimental. Modern historians, too, have joined the movement's critics and pointed out several faults with both the foundations and effects of the legislation. Nevertheless, these bills and the struggle to navigate them through parliament marked a turning point in both British political history as well as the life of Edmund Burke.

I

Although Shelburne was indeed committed to reform, the task of making peace with the Americans absorbed most of his attention. Of the energy that he had left for reforms, the majority went to the implementation of the bills passed under Rockingham rather than the drafting of new reforms. However, he was able to prepare two programs for reform in the Customs Office and the Pay Office. The Pay Office he attempted to modernize by switching from fees to salaries, much the same as Cavendish had attempted in the Exchequer. He advocated the use of vouchers from the Treasury rather than allowing public cash to trade hands. Finally, he organized the papers of the Treasury, rationalizing their storage so that later ministers could access the material that they required.[233] In the Customs House, Shelburne co-opted the services of William Musgrave, who had been a member of the board of

[233] Norris, *Shelburne*, 199-215.

customs since 1763. Their goal was essentially the destruction of patent and sinecure offices.[234] Unfortunately, Shelburne's ministry fell before sufficient progress was made on his reforms and they would lie dormant until Pitt resumed them in the later part of 1783. The large part of Shelburne's reform efforts went, much to his chagrin, to the enactment of Burke's Civil List Establishment Act.

The implementation of Burke's act proved to be even more troublesome than navigating it through Parliament. As Burke had written the bill without any formal experience in office, it was mostly conceptual and based on guesswork. Shelburne wrote to the Duke of Grafton saying, "It is impossible to describe to you how provokingly my time is taken up with the nonsense of Mr. Burke's bill. It was both framed and carried through without the least regard to facts."[235] His seemingly erratic selection of offices to abolish left the Shelburne ministry with a knotted mess of empty jobs and office mergers. Concerning the reforms of the Household, Shelburne appointed Thomas Gilbert to head the effort. Gilbert had previously attempted a modest level of Household reform when he had been Comptroller of Accounts to the Treasurer of the Chamber. More importantly to Shelburne and the king, Gilbert had adamantly opposed Burke's insistence that parliament must oversee the reformation of the Household. Finally, and of special interest to Shelburne, Gilbert was a Member of Parliament for Lichfield which was "in the interest of Earl Gower whose support Shelburne was hoping to secure."[236]

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[234] Ibid., 222-223; Reitan, *Politics*, 123-124.

[235] Quoted in Reitan, *Politics*, 117; Binney, *Public Finance*, 119.

[236] Norris, *Shelburne*, 179.

Gilbert's hand guided the practical application of Burke's Household reform. The effect was a mixture of Burke's desire for reduced influence and Shelburne's for a modernization of the system. The payments and paymasters of the household were consolidated into one person who was also tasked with the management of the household, the newly created Superintendent of the Household and Paymaster of the Civil List. The superintendent kept his funds in the Bank and transferred them to the succeeding minster. Gilbert abolished all of the sinecure offices and prepared lists of those displaced so that they might receive compensation. Pensions were now required to be paid publicly at the Exchequer and, according to Burke's bill, had to be reduced to £90,000 per year. In order to reach this level Gilbert had to cut pensions drastically and, in doing so, received a cacophony of pleading petitions. Gilbert noted in his report several instances: Thomas Wilson – "has a wife and five young children in low circumstances," (pension: £33); Ralph Clayton – "36 years in service & 90 years of age," (pension: £30); Solomon Dayrolles – "desires no Salary & only the enjoyment of the Patent for his life, as it gives him the privilege of the play and opera house," (pension: £10).[237] Burke was furious at the way in which the Shelburne ministry handled his act. Its implementation, he said,

> was as mean and inhuman, as his was public and generous. He had aimed only at the destruction of parliamentary influence, and of sinecures for parliament men; but they had aimed their blows at poor inferior officers of twenty, thirty, and forty pounds a year, which all their dependence and support, after a life of service.[238]

[237] Quoted in Reitan, *Politics*, 118.

[238] PH (1783), 23:263-264.

In total Burke's act effected a savings of only £40,000; this fell far short of his estimated £72,000 and was even more disappointing when compared to his expansive 1780 plan.[239] In the end, Burke was frustrated by the implementation of his act and those who administered it were dissatisfied with its results. After the fall of Shelburne's ministry in April 1783, the Fox-North coalition planned to overturn some of Gilbert's actions on behalf of the act. However, in December of that year the coalition fell to the young William Pitt who carried on Shelburne's reforms as well as his disdain for Burke's bill.[240] Contemporaries, however, were not the only ones to criticize the bill.

Ian R. Christie, building on the work of Sir Lewis Namier, went so far in his criticisms of the movement to claim that "the Reformers stirred up a great deal of fuss about nothing."[241] He showed that the placemen in the House of Commons fell by over a fifth between 1761 and 1780 and the number of sinecures and court officials dropped by a third.[242] Additionally, John Norris observed that, when the Whigs found their way back into office in 1782 and began to enact reforms, they realized that the secret service and pension lists of the civil list were neither as dark nor as subversive as they believed in opposition.[243] Christie concludes that not only was the government not attempting to increase its influence in the Commons but it had actually let slip some of its more secure boroughs. At Dartmouth, for example,

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[239] Norris, *Shelburne*, 196.

[240] PH (1783), 23:583.

[241] Christie, "Influence," 154.

[242] Ibid., 146-150.

[243] Norris, *Shelburne*, 186.

though long considered a government borough, in the election of 1780 the governor of the castle, Arthur Holdsworth, was able to secure election for his candidate Lord Howe despite the latter's poor relations with the ministers of the current administration.[244] The very foundations of the movement were, therefore, by Christie's calculations, faulty. Yet the foundations were not the only area to be attacked by modern historians.

The effects of the economical reform movement have received more criticism than any other aspect. D. L. Keir notes that all three of the bills were too focused on the reduction of influence and paid too little attention to the practical implementation of their plans.[245] The Contractors Bill glossed over the complexity of open contracting. Goods to be sold were grouped together but given a separate price for each commodity. Thus, although a price might be lower for a certain type of goods, the overall price from that same contractor might be lower.[246] Additionally, it turned out that, in practice, the arguments of the North ministry against the bill were correct: circumvention of the measure was simple and widespread; contracts could easily be passed on to an MP's family or friends.

The Revenue Officers Bill fared no better. Betty Kemp condemns the bill as "incapable of achieving its object."[247] She shows that the contemporary estimates of the number of voters affected by the bill were woefully inaccurate. Earl Nugent had placed the number at around 40,000, Sir Watkin Lewes at 60,000, and Rockingham at

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[244] Christie, "Influence," 149.

[245] Keir, "Economical Reform," 370.

[246] Baker, "Open Contracting," 436.

[247] Kemp, "Crewe's Act," 260.

11,500.[248] By her calculations the full number of people employed by the entire revenue establishment in 1782 could not have been much more than 14,000, which, even if Rockingham's modest estimate were accepted, would mean that the vast majority of them lost their vote. To account for these numbers she posits that the estimates given by contemporaries were estimations based on those who would be disqualified, not those who were actually disfranchised.[249] She additionally observed that in the 1784 election the act was not detrimental to the government and only created a smaller electorate which, she believed, would be more easily corruptible.[250] Admittedly there are other factors that affect an election and to gauge the sincerity of an electorate from such a distance is fraught with peril. Nevertheless, the bill, like Clerke's, was bypassed. Offices could be bestowed on relatives and loved ones to much the same effect.

Both of Burke's bills proved faulty in application. The Civil List Establishment Act failed to regulate one of the most expensive sections of the civil list expenditure – the "occasional payments."[251] Even the stated purpose of the bill, the prevention of arrears on the civil list, failed. In 1784 £60,000 was needed to repay the debt on the list and £210,000 in 1786.[252] Granted, these amounts were smaller than the sums needed in 1769 and 1777 but the premise of the bill was to use the accumulated savings and order of payments to ensure that debt would be unable to

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[248] PH (1782), 22:1337, 1344; 23:101.

[249] Kemp, "Crewe's Act," 260-261.

[250] Ibid., 261-262.

[251] Binney, *Public Finance*, 272.

[252] Keir, "Economical Reform," 371.

accumulate. His reforms in the state offices were equally disappointing. The Board of Trade reappeared within three months and the Third Secretary of State returned in 1793.[253] The abolition of sinecures and places quashed some outlets of crown influence. However, like the other two bills, this was easily evaded. As noted above, the creation of peerages became a form of political currency.[254] In the younger Pitt's first administration it became evident that, with restrictions on the use of places and pensions (which could be distributed by the First Minister), the creation of peerages would have to be employed. Since the latter was a privilege of the monarch, in some respects Burke's bill had an effect antithetical to its purpose.[255] George III, in 1786 and again in 1805, found that he needed to expand the peerage as well as the Order of the Garter. In 1797 Burke even "accepted some of the blame 'for so disproportionate an increase of honors, by having deprived the crown and the minister of so many other sources of recompense or reward.'"[256] Even Burke's Paymaster Bill proved inadequate to its task. Within nine months the bill had to be repealed and replaced. The replacement was written by Colonel Barré during Shelburne's ministry but had to be enacted under the Fox-North coalition, after Burke resumed the post of Paymaster General, a humiliating ordeal.

On the other hand, Reitan notes that we must not forget to take into account the contemporary reactions to the movement. Charles Jenkinson claimed that "unless

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[253] Ibid., 371; Klinge, "Board of Trade," D1186.

[254] Archibald S. Foord, "The Waning of 'The Influence of the Crown,'" *The English Historical Review* 62, no., 245 (October, 1947), 493-494

[255] Reitan, *Politics*, 139-140.

[256] Quoted in Foord, "Influence," 494.

the bills wch passed last year for diminishing the Influence of the Crown are repealed ... the power that is left [will not be] suff't to protect the Ministers of the Crown from popular prejudice." William Eden stated that "Burke's foolish bill has made it a very difficult task for any set of men to form or maintain an administration."[257] Contemporaries gave the effects of the bills more weight than twentieth-century historians were willing to. We might do well to remember that governments are not always decided by numbers and minutiae can have an impact disproportionate to their size.

II

The evidence presented above demonstrates the ways in which Edmund Burke and the economical reform movement influenced one another. Much of Burke's motivation for reform was grounded in the ideas of the Rockingham party which included a conception of increasing influence grouped with economic waste. Additionally, personal factors, such as those that guided his attack on the Board of Trade, played a role in his attempts at reform. Of paramount importance though, was his belief in the growing influence of the crown. "What [he] bent the whole force of his mind to," he claimed, "was the reduction of that corrupt influence," financial economy was "but a secondary consideration."[258] This influence threatened to topple the delicate balance on which the mixed government of Britain was based.[259] For

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[257] Reitan, *Politics*, 106.

[258] PH (1780), 21:2; *Annual Register* (1780), 96.

[259] John Steven Watson in *The Reign of George III* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960) 247-248 footnote, has criticized such interpretations as those by D. L. Keir and Richard Pares that "Burke was only interested in curtailing influence and believed that executive efficiency was outside his interest."

Burke, the movement was critical in shaping his future career and attitudes toward reform. As shown above, the support of the people began as something that he was tentatively inclined to support. However, the Gordon Riots, the popular interest in parliamentary reform, and the loss of his Bristol seat turned him away from a belief in the support of the people. His views on reform in general became such that he shunned any further attempts at reform. Economical reform had, for him, been about the reduction of influence and the restoration of balance to the constitution. He believed that the reforms enacted under Rockingham were sufficient to restore that balance and was opposed to any continuing reformation. Finally, the movement had been a milestone in his political career. It had raised him to prominence within the Rockinghamite Party and secured for him friendships with the likes of Charles Fox and the Duke of Portland. Although strained after the death of Rockingham, these would play an important role in the latter part of his life. Additionally, his commitment to influence as the target of economical reform rather than finance, as well as his resistance to parliamentary reform, cemented the schism between him and the Shelburne connection. Most importantly though, the episode marked Burke's first foray into the world of practical politics. Up until this point his work had been based in the abstract world of philosophic speculation. It is in this movement that he entered the train of his hero, Cicero, and became a "philosopher in action."[260] His desire for practical reforms continued under the Fox-North coalition, with the East

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In a sense Watson is correct in avoiding a narrow reading of Burke's motives. However, he ignores several instances in which Burke claims that the reduction of influence was his primary motive.

[260] Burke, *Works*, 376; Reed Browning, "The Origin of Burke's Ideas Revisited," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 18, no., 1 (Autumn, 1984): 60, footnote.

India Bill in which Burke attempted to establish a balanced structure for the governing of all the territorial possessions in India. The bill would have greatly reduced the power of the East India Company while increasing the power of parliament. The king, however, saw in the bill the opportunity to rid himself of a coalition which he despised and pressured the Lords to defeat the bill.[261] Despite the fact that his attempted reforms were based on erroneous assumptions and proved faulty in application, their enduring impact on Burke cannot be denied.

The early part of the movement for an economical reform was grounded in an effort to preserve the constitution rather than reform it. However, the movement opened the door to a string of modernizing economic reforms that laid the groundwork for the parliamentary reform in the nineteenth century. It is not surprising that, when Pitt continued Shelburne's reforms with his Public Offices Bill, Burke and the more conservative Rockinghamites opposed him. Burke, upset with the methods by which Shelburne enacted his reforms, the loss of the East India Bill in 1783, and the people's support for William Pitt the Younger wrote a letter dated 22 June 1784 to William Baker that stated, "The people did not like our work; and they joined the Court to pull it down." He confessed that he was done with economical reform, that "for me to look forward to the event of another twenty years' toil – it is quite ridiculous."[262] He had applied himself to these tasks because, to him, moderate reforms were of a higher value and more permanent nature than drastic reforms. Whig interpretations in the nineteenth century attempted to portray Burke and others

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[261] John B. Owen, *The Eighteenth Century, 1714-1815* (Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield, 1975), 245-246.

[262] *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 5:154.

in the economical-reform movement as the champions of Whiggery against a tyrannical Crown. The Namierite interpretation, however, focused so intently on overturning the Whig interpretation that it drained the human element from eighteenth-century politics. To obtain a clear picture of the movement we must understand the ideologies that were involved. The bills of Burke, Clerke, and Crewe concerned themselves with the influence of the crown before anything else and, unlike the future of economic reform, looked backwards, towards the purity of Parliament that they saw enshrined in the 1688 revolution.

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